



# Left Behind

Religion, Technology and Flight from the Flesh



# **LEFT BEHIND**

**Religion, Technology, and Flight from the Flesh**

*Stephen Pfohl*

**CTheory Books / NWP  
Pacific Centre for Technology and Culture  
Victoria, Canada**

*Left Behind: Religion, Technology, and Flight from the Flesh*

© 2007 Stephen Pfohl and CTheory Books / NWP

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information, contact [ctheory@uvic.ca](mailto:ctheory@uvic.ca)

---

First published in Canada in 2007

Printed and bound in Canada

ISBN 978-0-920393-42-0

---

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Kroker, Arthur, 1945-

Born again ideology : religion, technology, and terrorism /  
Arthur Kroker.

Title on added t.p., inverted: Left behind : religion, technology, and  
flight from the flesh / Stephen Pfohl.

Also available in separate electronic versions.

ISBN 978-0-920393-42-0

1. Technology--Religious aspects--Christianity. 2. Technology--  
Social aspects--United States. 3. Christianity and politics--United States.  
4. LaHaye, Tim F. Left behind series. 5. Fundamentalism--United  
States. 6. United States--Politics and government--21st century.  
7. Covenant theology. 8. Terrorism--United States. I. Pfohl, Stephen J.  
Left behind. II. Title.

BL265.T4K76 2007

261.5'60973

C2007-900284-6

## **About the Author**

Stephen Pfohl is Professor of Sociology at Boston College where he teaches courses on social theory; postmodern culture; crime, deviance and social control; images and power; and sociology and psychoanalysis. He is the author of numerous books including *Death at the Parasite Café*, *Images of Deviance and Social Control*, *Predicting Dangerousness*, and the forthcoming volumes *Venus in Video* and *Magic and the Machine*. Past-President of the Society for the Study of Social Problems and a founding member of Sit-Com International, a Boston-area collective of activists and artists, Pfohl is also co-editor of the 2006 book *Culture, Power, and History: Studies in Critical Sociology*.



## **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to Clare Dunsford and to Arthur and Marilouise Kroker for your sustained engagement and editorial advice on the writing of this essay. Thanks also to Juliet Schor, Leslie Salzinger, Eva Marie Garrouette, Aimee Van Wagenen, Charles Samo, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Charles Derber for conversations encouraging the development of this work.



## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction: Born Again and Left Behind</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Preface: One Nation Under God</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. At the End of Time</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. Empire America: Left Behind in a Global Context</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>3. After the Rapture</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>4. Dispensational Theology: from Darby to LaHaye</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>5. The Theology and Biblical Politics of Tim LaHaye</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>6. Reading Left Behind: the Fascinations and Fear of End Times</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>7. The Gendering of Left Behind</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>8. Apocalyptic Technologies of Control and Resistance</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>9. In the Beginning</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>83</b>





## **Born Again and Left Behind**

Catastrophe is always just around the corner in prophetic theology, apocalyptic capitalism, and the panicky exigencies of cybernetic culture. From anxiety over endless war and skyrocketing fuel prices, to the perilous allure of viral marketing and consumer appetites set aflame atop pyres of foreign debt, the spiritual-emotional landscape of vast political sectors of the United States is today charged by a strange amalgam of eschatological religious fears and the fascinations of living technologically at the end of time. Indeed, for the millions of conservative evangelical Christians who comprise upwards of 40 percent of the current Republican Party electorate, “the Armageddon described in the Bible is coming soon. Chaos in the Middle East, far from being a threat actually heralds the awaited second coming of Jesus Christ. Oil-price spikes, murderous hurricanes, deadly tsunamis, and melting polar caps lend further credence” to the belief that we are living at the end of time.[1] But what exactly is this the end time of?

Is this the end time of the modern colonial world system and the militarized economic dominance of the Northwest? Is it the end time of the cultural toxicities of white supremacy and a masculine will to colonial domination over the earth? Or, maybe this is merely the end time of industrial and nation-based technologies of production and meaning? Not simply the end of geopolitical dominance by the global North or Northwest, nor the end of recent U.S. military-industrial-cultural initiatives aimed at securitizing its global hegemony. Perhaps it is, instead, the shocking eclipse and rapid-fire replacement of these historical regimes of power by something new, something more ephemeral, elusive, violent, and far-reaching — a new

## Left Behind

global empire of power and patriarchal coloniality, an empire fueled by technological production at the light-speed of information and consumption at the dark-speed of digital dreams?

Or, maybe it's worse than all of that? Maybe what today sparks such widespread American religious fear of sudden and total catastrophe is the virtual (if generally unacknowledged) realization that we could today be truly approaching the end time of nature, as we've known it. This is difficult to speak about in a sensible manner. It is to imagine a physical end time of the energetic systems of matter into which we are born and within which we live and die; an end time of the complex interdependent systems by which we are forever joined in a serpentine dance of life and death; the catastrophic end time of biological systems, social and cultural systems, and systems in the psychic realm, systems that rhythmically enfold in time; each flowing reciprocally into the other, becoming other, becoming sacred. Implosion, explosion— imagine the breathless, radiant, then silent end time of all of this.

While disastrous from an ecological perspective, from the towering viewpoint of prophetic theology, the end time of such complex systems signifies something else entirely—the dawn of unprecedented spiritual opportunity. This is because, from a fundamentalist Christian perspective, an elect cadre of humans are, by the grace of God alone, predestined to be *born again* out of complex materiality of living energetic systems into something far more simple and misleading— binary systems erected upon Manichean cultural phantasms of a God-given distinction between good and evil, truth and falsity, purity and impurity, the absolutely right way and the wrong. *Left behind* for the promise of heavenly transcendence are the finite and fleshy contingencies of our lives together, along with the rest of living nature.

From the eschatological vantage point of prophetic evangelical Christianity, this loss of nature may hardly be a loss at all. This is because human animal life, in all its material splendor and mystery, is said to beget little but evil. Corrupt, deceptive, and laced with erotic temptation, the earthy contingencies of actual human existence are viewed as the virtual wages of sin, the product of an original fall from grace. This, we are told, is our genesis— a need to be saved. And anytime now, it is said, will be the end

time of all this and the glorious awakening of what comes next— rapture, tribulation, Armageddon, Christ's second coming, and a new millennium of monotheistic peace and prosperity.

The texts that Arthur Kroker and I have here cobbled together attempt to analyze the apocalyptic religious mood of the United States in the early twenty-first century. We read this mood, not simply as an anxious collective response to lightning-fast changes in the technological organization of America's hardwired capitalist military economy and culture, but also as the effect of the nation's somewhat schizoid spiritual imagination of itself. Although the disasters, shocks, and nervous contagion produced and played for profit by the parasitic networks of global capitalism are clearly an aspect of this story [2], at its core lie disturbing religious bifurcations that have haunted America from the time that Puritan invaders first claimed this land their own. With the Puritans came an aggressive political theology that wed the sacrificial violence of colonial conquest to a religious vision of a people chosen by God to redeem the very world they laid waste to.

America's vision of itself as a nation blessed by God has provided strong spiritual support for bold and world-changing innovations in the areas of technology, governance, business, communications, imprisonment, and warfare. But this same vision has also long helped America to keep from common sight and collective memory legacies of a far grimmer sort. Baptized out of a popular U.S. cultural imagination of itself are the more troubling historical realities of genocide against indigenous peoples, the violence of slavery without reparations and the continuing market-based disenfranchisement of people of African descent, not to mention the theft of Mexican lands and territories once controlled by Spain in the Pacific and Caribbean, accompanied by a demeaning racialization of the inhabitants of these territories. Also blocked from mainstream religious discourse and symbolism is the recurrent historical alignment of the U.S. state—domestically and in foreign policy—with the interests of rich people and wealthy corporations to the detriment of the wellbeing of the American populace as a whole, not to mention a demonstrated U.S. willingness to use weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, to incinerate civilian populations and send messages of terror to its enemies the globe over.

## Left Behind

When telling a story of “born again” political theology and the apocalyptic fears it engenders, Arthur Kroker places particular emphasis on the bivalent character of dominant American religious sensibilities. According to Kroker, hegemonic religiosity in the U.S. oscillates between boundless optimism and panic; between optimism about God’s plan for America and about the redemptive effects of U.S. technological innovation—including cutting-edge military advances in the machinery of death and destruction—and recurrent tremors of panicky fear, rooted in a denial of historical actuality and a collective failure to both own up to and mourn the material consequences of practicing unexamined greed and a lust for imperial power. Religious optimism about the technological conquest of nature is fueled historically by a monotheistic desire to transcend or blast free of the complexities of the energetic matters to which we humans owe our lives. Rather than acknowledging and reverently repaying the debt we owe as bodily creatures to energetic systems of living matter, dominant forms of Christian theology teach that matter is tainted from its cosmological origin; first by chaos, and then a second time by original sin.

This makes fallen nature, and human bodies in particular, forever suspect and in perpetual need of a techno-theological makeover. Belief in this cosmology of tainted bodily life has long provided religious justification for a wide range of violent U.S. historical actions, beginning with the genocide of native peoples. American Indian cosmologies do not share the belief that human life is tainted by sin from its onset. The indigenous peoples of North America believe, instead, that—like other animals, along with rocks, plains, skies, and seas—we are participants in the animated materiality of the earth itself. For this reason, American native peoples often liken the mysteries of earthly creation to that which is simultaneously mother and father of us all. Beliefs such as this were anathema to the conquering Calvinists. Indians were forced to choose between the sacrificial cross and the sword.

Along with the cross came what Max Weber called the Protestant Ethic—a guilt-ridden belief in rational technological mastery as a sign of God-given dominion over both the planet and one’s individual soul. Along with the sword came unspeakable violence. But what if neither of these otherworldly options—a repressive work ethic or the ruthless oppression of supposed infidels—is faithful to the energetic material complexities of

life itself? What if both theological strategies remain haunted by what they fiercely disavow— the debt we human animals owe to others and to the complex field of living energetic matters from which life comes? This is to be haunted by gifts we refuse to acknowledge and for which we show little or no gratitude.[3] To reckon with the ghostly consequences of this refusal brings us to the second side of Kroker’s depiction of America’s bivalent religious disposition— *panic anxiety*.

Kroker likens the panicky and decidedly catastrophic mood of U.S. political theology to the raging resentment of Frederick Nietzsche’s “Last Man.” The Last Man is “he” who anxiously wills nothingness, rather than not will at all. This is a fearful and resentful man, a man steeped in envy and afraid of his own shadows. This man is plagued by guilt and made leaden by ambivalence. Dreaming of being in a heaven so pure that there’s nobody there at all, he arms himself with the latest technologies and clings to an aggressive, if perpetually disavowed, will to power over others. This man is disconnected what is really happening in the world. This man is really mixed up. He cuts himself off from the breathy pleasures and dangers of life’s passionate dance, enforcing an ascetic divide between heart and head, bowing before a erect tribunal of words shorn of vitality, joy, and wonderment.

The Last Man is a sheepish man. He hides himself away from the energetic movement of living matter; separating himself from intercourse with the world of which he is a part, denying the debts he owes others, particulars his mother(s).[4] Then, as if following in the footsteps of a would-be imperial herd, the Last Man reverses everything in his own defensive mind. But being desperate to cover every trace of his aggressive historical acts and abstractions, he remembers little or nothing of this reversal, at least not consciously. This makes the Last Man paranoid and always on-guard. In attempting to purchase a false distance from the world, the last man arms himself with machines. He tries to blast free from the interdependent actualities of life with technologies that extract a one-way street of profit without end. To justify the sacrifices he demands of others, the man uses religion and religiously tinged rhetoric and techno-science. And, despising himself for all of this, the Last Man races head first into the future, struggling obsessively to flee the finite vulnerabilities and vicissitudes of his own flesh.

## Left Behind

But the Last Man's story does not end with this flight. As Kroker suggests, this frightful shell of a man is today "born again" at the crossroads of apocalyptic American political theology and cybernetic technologies that fill his mind with promises of pure transcendence, pure phantasm. One promise after another, the end time of the Last Man is an anxious and panicky place to be. Martin Heidegger also figures in the troubling American "cosmological compromise" invoked by Kroker. Following Nietzsche, Heidegger offered a fateful diagnosis of the future of an unrepentant western will to (technological) power as a form of "completed nihilism." Nihilism begins in history with the violent theological jettisoning of human animal belongingness to the energetic wavelengths of nature. In the beginning, it is said, is not matter but the Word. This represents a willful denial of the impurities of human bodily participation in the world and the erection of a transcendent perspective perched above the world from a word's distance. Technological advances in the production of profit, policing, and combat, along with world-changing American Protestant theological-cultural justifications for these developments, have made nihilism a key player on the stage of modern world history.

Today, something worse may be occurring. Ours is an era marked by the omnipresent ascendancy of cybernetic technologies—information-based technologies that assume the form of fast-moving networks of looping communicative feedback. For Kroker, as for Paul Virilio, by moving at the speed of light, cybernetic technologies permit humans to accelerate beyond the haunted speed bumps of modern capitalist accumulation, disciplinary social control mechanisms, and military conquest. As such, new global technologies of cybernetic power are said to hasten the viral spread of nihilism, making the end time of completed nihilism only always a heartbeat away.

The intensified form of nihilism depicted by Kroker—life without meaning and a virtual proliferation of meanings without life—is accompanied by a preemptive global subordination of the poor by the rich. Whether engineered by the financial language of risk reduction and structural adjustment or championed by the disastrous military logic of preemptive warfare, this is clearly a troubling place to be for most everybody—unnerving, catastrophic, and electric.[5] It is awesome and shocking at the same time, simultaneously fascinating and fearful. The awesome or

of this political theology credits nearly all American advances in global technologies of control as something good or morally justified. In this, as David Noble has shown, technological progress is draped with a mantle of grace and associated with the spiritual redemption of fallen humanity and the restoration of Man's Edenic dominion over nature. Apocalypse now and forever! The panicky side comes about because none of this is really true and we know it, if only unconsciously. Technological domination over nature and other human beings comes at the cost of great guilt. In U.S. cybernetic culture, this guilt is leavened with heavy doses of historical forgetfulness, narcosis, and paranoia. Invisible enemies haunt American culture from the inside out.

To suppress the panic produced by this fateful fusion between the twisted strands of a faith-based will to technological dominance and a fearful flight into disembodied religious purity, leading vectors of American political theology press pedal to the metal, blasting full steam ahead into a perilous future. The end time of this future is now. For indeed, as Kroker provocatively demonstrates, the militarized techno-culture of the U.S. today oscillates between terroristic—even tortuous—displays of vengeful scapegoating and a rapturous (Gnostic-like) flight from the world of the senses into the realms of media-drenched ecstasy and biometric social control.

My analysis of the cultural allure of the best-selling *Left Behind* novels crosses paths with Arthur's vision of a "born again" American will to religiously justified empire. Each of our texts converge around that liminal zone in American society where economic, political, cultural, and military initiatives are underwritten by a taken-for-granted—if typically unanalyzed—religious covenant between the nation's hegemonic imagination of itself and the invisible hand of a supernatural father god warrior king. Together Arthur and my essays paint a partial picture of this invisible hand and the apocalyptic bio-political control mechanisms it engenders. In so doing, we hope to remind readers that to effectively challenge the exigencies of new American technologies of empire we must reckon, not only with the shimmering surfaces of U.S. media culture gone global, but also with the shadowy supernatural fascinations and fears that continue to exert such an uncanny influence on cultural politics in the United States.



## Left Behind

# Preface

## One Nation Under God

The United States of America is history's first formally secular republic. The U.S. constitution guarantees legal separation between church and state. This is one reason why America has long been viewed as a beacon of modern enlightenment, democratic governance, and scientific rationality. This is the sober and pragmatic America envisioned by the nation's "founding fathers," most of whom were deists. This is an America governed by "self-evident" rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This is also the America of "the Protestant ethic" described by Max Weber, an America that believed that "the rational and utilitarian uses of wealth ... were willed by God for the needs of the individual and the community." [1] In this America, enlightenment and religion stroll as cordial companions, each complementing the existence of the other. But this is only one side of a decidedly Janus-faced America. Since its inception, another powerful – and far less rational – religious spirit has split the nation's attention, bifurcating America's vision of itself and its place in world history.

The second American religious spirit is the intense, emotionally charged, and judgmental Christian spirit of a nation believing itself to be the divinely ordained agent of God's kingdom on earth. This is an apocalyptic religious spirit, a harbinger of God's imminent intervention into the course of human history. From the time of the American Revolution to the present, when political leaders invoke this second spirit to praise the virtues of freedom and liberty, the terms they use are "saturated with religious meaning." This is to speak of freedom in ways that transcend the human rights and

## Left Behind

democratic principles enshrined in the *Declaration of Independence* and *U.S. Constitution*. Here, freedom is drenched in biblical connotations and blood, an offspring of grace and the unerring authority of the Gospel. This suggests a special kind of freedom – not simply freedom from tyrannical rule and unjust authority, but freedom found in “the joy of conversion, and a liberation from the pain and sorrow of normal life.”[2]

Early in American history, this explicitly religious imagination of freedom became coupled with a righteous “theology of hatred.” This theology marched hand-in-hand with a ritual demonizing of the country’s enemies. Indeed, from King George to Saddam Hussein, one American enemy after another has been portrayed as being in league with the devil, or bearing the “mark of the beast,” a prophetic sign of the dreaded Antichrist depicted in the *Book of Revelation*. Pitted against these satanic adversaries, the second side of the American religious spirit conjures up an image of the United States as a nation chosen by God to champion the cause of the good in a cosmic eschatological battle with the forces of evil.[3] Ebbing and flowing as a force in history, the passionate second side of the American religious imagination exerted greatest influence in U.S. politics during the mid-nineteenth century and again in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In the early twenty-first century, the righteous Christian warrior ethos associated with this second American spirit is again ascendant in the “born again” political rhetoric of U.S. President George W. Bush. Bush’s many thinly-veiled references to God’s divine mission for America – in spreading freedom across the globe and fighting evil at home and abroad – have stirred millions of people to view his presidency in starkly religious terms. This is evident in the testimony of Hardy Billington of Poplar Bluff, Missouri. With his friend, the fundamentalist preacher David Hahn, Billington circulated a petition that collected 10,000 signatures inviting President Bush to make a 2004 campaign stop in their town. When word reached the White House about the petition, plans were made for Bush to travel to Poplar Bluff. Following the president’s speech to a crowd of 20,000, Billington declared, “To me, I just believe God controls everything, and God uses the president to keep evil down, to see darkness and protect this nation... Other people will not protect us. God gives people choices to make. God gave us this president to be the man to protect the nation at this time.”[4]

The religious aura surrounding President Bush and the righteous anger of his supporters surprised many of Bush's political opponents following the 2004 U.S. elections. Out of touch with the fateful second spirit of American religious culture – at least consciously – and viewing politics in more rational and “reality-based” terms, many otherwise thoughtful critics found themselves hard pressed to explain Bush's populist appeal. This is not entirely surprising. For the most part, the social biographies and religious trajectories of those who most oppose Bush set them apart from the everyday worlds of conservative white evangelicals. In addition, when Protestant, Bush's critics are far more likely to belong to shrinking mainstream white (Protestant) denominations or to African American or African diasporic churches, than be members of fundamentalist evangelical church-communities. Isolated on the supposedly more rational side of America's religious-social divide, many liberal or left-leaning critics are either unfamiliar with, or relatively inattentive to, a great deal of what has been going on among fervent members of the Christian right.

One thing that has been going on in conservative evangelical culture is the so-called *Left Behind* phenomenon – the publication and mass consumption of the best-selling *Left Behind* novels, authored by writers and political activists Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Although marketed beneath the radar of most secular readers, the *Left Behind* series has already sold in the vicinity of an astounding 63 million copies. This represents an unprecedented and an enormously influential conservative Christian intervention into contemporary American (popular) culture. This essay explores the social genesis and impact of the *Left Behind* books, the social technologies they deploy, and their accompanying media offshoots. In so doing, I hope to shed modest light on key elements of the religious imagination mobilized for political purposes by supporters of George W. Bush and Republican Party organizers.

The *Left Behind* books appear at a fateful moment in history, a time in which the future of humankind is marked, not only by the promises and anxieties of far-reaching global social and technological changes, but also widespread personal and spiritual insecurities, stemming from vast global economic restructuring and amplified social inequality.[5] The soul-shattering anxieties of this age are for many people magnified by

## Left Behind

unprecedented waves of global migration, the omnipresent threat of brutal terrorism and preemptive warfare, a rapid-fire breakdown in traditional forms of family life and gender roles, and the penetration of the market into even the innermost sanctums of everyday life. Within, or against, or perhaps simply to make mythic meaning of this troubled historical landscape, the *Left Behind* novels have captivated millions upon millions of readers with a prophetic apocalyptic tale of biblical End Times and the vengeful second coming of Jesus Christ.

Like a heat-seeking rocket targeting the vicissitudes of the flesh, the *Left Behind* phenomenon is a vibrant talisman of a worldview channeling important aspects of America's dominant religious imagination of itself. Signs depicting the fears and fascinations of a bold New World Order of ultramodern culture and power are on display everywhere in the *Left Behind* books – from terror and war in the Middle East, to paranoiac imaginings of mass death, total governmental control, and omnipresent technological surveillance. Stories of mesmeric manipulation by the electronic media, One-World corporate economic domination, reconfigurations of gender and sexuality, and struggles to save one's mortal soul are also woven into the novels that compose the twelve-volume *Left Behind* series.

To enter the world of *Left Behind* is to move perilously within the enchanted psycho-geography of America's dark and irrational religious second side. To read *Left Behind* is also to risk coming face-to-face with the violence of America's homegrown version of anti-modern extremism. Confronting the dangerous shadow side of American religious experience and practice is neither pleasant nor easy. It is, nevertheless, important that critical scholars undertake this challenge, if only to help put the brakes on a wide range of religiously-fueled technologies of exploitative empire-building – new global technologies of power that march zealously under the banner of "God Bless America." In engaging with this essay, I invite you to join me in this task.

# 1

## At the End of Time

At the end of time Rayford was born again. Alleluia! This was the end of time laced with uncertainties and worry, time marked by anxieties of the flesh. This was also the advent of a new time – time that was crystal clear and predestined, time that followed a tightly scripted path.

Rayford settled in front of the television and popped in the video. ‘Hello,’ came the pleasant voice of the pastor Rayford had met several times ... ‘My name is Vernon Billings, and I’m pastor of the New Hope Village Church of Mount Prospect, Illinois. As you watch this tape, I can only imagine the fear and despair you face, for this is being recorded for viewing only after the disappearance of God’s people from earth.’

‘That you are watching indicates that you have been left behind. You are no doubt stunned, shocked, afraid, and remorseful. I would like you to consider what I have to say here as instructions for life following Christ’s rapture of his church. That is what has happened. Anyone you know or knew who had placed his or her trust in Christ alone for salvation has been taken to heaven by Christ.’[1]

The man left behind with his television, videotape, and VCR is Rayford Steele, a central character in the *Left Behind* books, perhaps the most successful publishing venture of all time. Rayford is an airplane pilot. In the opening pages of *Left Behind* he is piloting a fully loaded 747 from

## Left Behind

Chicago to London. But the pilot's mind is elsewhere. Rayford's mind is on the "drop-dead gorgeous" senior flight attendant, Hattie Durham, "a woman he has never touched." Rayford is, however, thinking about touching Hattie, imagining the flames of an impassioned affair. "Maybe today. Maybe this morning, if her coded tap on the door didn't rouse his first officer."

Such thoughts were new to Captain Rayford Steele. He "used to look forward to getting home to his wife. Irene was attractive and vivacious enough, even at forty. But lately he had found himself repelled by her obsession with religion. It was all she could talk about." It was not that Rayford was against religion. God was okay with him and he even occasionally enjoyed church. "But since Irene had hooked up with a smaller congregation and was into weekly Bible studies and church every Sunday, Rayford had become uncomfortable." What happens next makes him even more uncomfortable. "Not sure whether he'd follow through with anything overt, Captain Rayford Steele felt an irresistible urge to see Hattie Durham right then." [2] He opens the cockpit door. Hattie is there and pulls him toward her. But it is not romance that greets Rayford. It is something far more amazing. The attractive senior flight attendant is clearly terrified. She informs her captain that dozens of people have suddenly disappeared throughout the cabin. Not only that, where once the missing passengers sat buckled into their seats, there was now only rumpled piles of clothing, eyeglasses, jewelry, contact lenses, hearing aids, pacemakers, dentures and dental fillings, shoes, and even surgical pins.

The twelve novels in the apocalyptic *Left Behind* series begin with a depiction of the Rapture. In the "twinkling of an eye," believers the world over – people who had genuinely accepted Jesus Christ as their savior – are suddenly transported into heaven. Also "caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air" are all children under the age of twelve. Even fetuses disappear mysteriously from pregnant women's wombs. CNN repeatedly shows slow motion footage of a woman's belly going from roundly pregnant to nearly flat. Cars crash and planes collide as their operators dematerialize. People vaporize in the workplace. Others disappear before the eyes of family members or friends. A groom is "snatched up" while placing a ring on the finger of his beloved. Nearly everyone vanishes from a memorial service in an Australian funeral home, including the corpse. The world plunges

into chaos. But for those left behind, this is merely the beginning.

This is also merely the beginning for mass market of readers who have to date purchased more than 63 million *Left Behind* novels. While the first several volumes had initial print runs of between 150,000 to 200,000, *The Indwelling*, the series' seventh book, and all subsequent volumes, rose to the top of best-seller lists compiled by *The New York Times*, *Publisher's Weekly*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*. Volume eight, *The Mark*, opened with an initial run of 2.5 million. Prerelease sales totaled 2.4 million copies eight weeks before the book's release. *Desecration*, the tenth book, was the biggest selling work of fiction in the United States in 2001, remarkably topping book sales at Barnes and Noble, Wal-Mart, and Target. Even more remarkable is that fact that Tyndale House, the publisher of the *Left Behind* series, reports that over a third of the books were sold by Christian bookstores, not included in the surveys that translate into mainstream best-seller lists.[3] In addition to twelve novels, the *Left Behind* series now also includes prequels, films, DVDs, graphic comic novels, a video game, and a host of related commercial spin-offs.

Overall, one in eight Americans have read the *Left Behind* books "and they are a favorite with American soldiers in Iraq." [4] LaHaye and Jenkins have also produced twenty-two volumes of *Left Behind: the Kids*, a children's version of the story. The books follow the lives of four teenagers, each, in one way, linked to the plot and characters in the original *Left Behind* novels. "In truth, the four kids were entwined in a web of connections they knew nothing about. Only the events of that night [of the Rapture], mainly the event late in the evening, Chicago time, would push them together, a strange mix of most different people and personalities." [5] Judd, "the runaway," steals his father's credit card and leaves home. At the time of the Rapture he is aboard the London-bound plane piloted by Rayford Steele. Judd's teenage libido is in full gear when he catches a glimpse of Hattie Durham, the hot flight attendant. Vicki, "the rebel," wears black boots, short skirts, and flashy tops. She is at odds with her sister and mother and her recovering alcoholic father too, each of whom is enthralled by the End Times sermons of the preacher at New Hope Village Church. Vickie stays out late, gets "stoned" the night the world changes, and sneaks back into the bedroom she shares with her younger sister. When she awakens, her family and other true Christians residing in her "trailer trash" environment



## Left Behind

have gone to heaven.

Lionel, “the liar,” is the son of Lucinda Washington, a devout Christian, an African American woman journalist and colleague of Buck Williams at *Global Weekly*. Lucinda and her husband Charles moved their family from Inner City Chicago to the suburbs to give their kids a better chance at life. Lionel begins his journey through End Times struggling with the accusations of his cousins that he is “acting white.” To appease his fervent Christian parents, Lionel takes after his uncle Andre – a “secret heathen” – and fakes belief in Jesus. Ryan, the skeptic, is a friend of Raymie Steele. Like Rayford, Raymie’s father, Ryan begins his story as anything but enthusiastic about religion. This, like everything in the world, changes “in the twinkling of an eye” and the four teens soon find themselves battling for God against the forces of the Antichrist, much like their Tribulation Force adult counterparts in *Left Behind*.

The blockbuster popularity of *Left Behind* is a big event in several realms – literature, consumer culture, and religion. In this essay I consider how *Left Behind* is eventful in yet another realm – the realm of global technopower. The *Left Behind* books read like fast-paced religious techno-thrillers. According to *The New York Times*, the series “combines Tom Clancy-like suspense with touches of romance, hi-tech flash and Biblical references.”[6] Weaving together several interrelated plots, the novels’ apocalyptic story unfolds across the globe and is interspersed with numerous sermons, prayers, and discussions of arcane biblical passages. The books are also jam-packed with images of technology.

The central plot in *Left Behind* involves a prolonged struggle between the Antichrist and the Tribulation Force. As a biblical figure, the Antichrist rules the earth for the seven years between the Rapture and the Glorious Appearing (Jesus’ second coming). The Tribulation Force is composed of a small band of left behind Christians. They set up headquarters in the New Hope Village Church in a suburb of Chicago. From there they battle the global forces of the Antichrist, trying to save as many souls as possible during the earth’s final days. Nicolae Carpathia, the Antichrist, reigns over “the most technologically advanced regime in history.” The courageous Tribulation Force parasites off Carpathia’s technological empire, deploying a wide array of hi-tech devices – computers, cell phones, televisions,

video cassettes, the internet, ready-for-anything SUVs, state-of-the-art jet planes, surveillance devices, and the latest in all kinds of digital gadgetry – to combat the seductive allure of the Antichrist and his dreaded “Beast System” of global social control.[7]

In depicting technology as a resource for combative believers, the *Left Behind* series departs from existing conventions in “rapture fiction.” Most previous works had “portrayed technology as the devil’s work.”[8] Nevertheless, the rebellious Tribulation Force is put in a paradoxical situation when attempting to turn the Antichrist’s technological advantage against him. The series’ Christian heroes are keenly aware that omnipresent technologies of televisual enchantment and surveillance are dangerous weapons in the Antichrist’s arsenal of power. Nevertheless, “to resist him they must use his own tools against him. The Tribulation Force takes regularly to the airwaves, knowing that they are playing on borrowed time and on borrowed bandwidth.”[9]

Although the Antichrist deploys a demonic mixture of technology and false religious rhetoric to control people the globe over, for those battling on the side of God, technology becomes an instrument of redemption and a weapon against evil. This is evident in the following exchange between Cameron “Buck” Williams, the heroic Tribulation Force journalist, and Donny Moore, a technological wiz-kid and committed Christian.

‘Donny,’ Buck said gravely, ‘you have an opportunity here to do something for God ...’

‘I don’t want any profit off something that will help the church and God.’ ...

‘Fine. Whatever profit you build in or don’t build in is up to you. I’m just telling you that I need five of the absolute best, top-of-the-line computers, as small and compact as they can be, but with as much power and memory and speed and communications abilities as you can wire into them.’

‘You’re talking my language, Mr. Williams.’

## Left Behind

'I hope so, Donny, because I want a computer with virtually no limitations. I want to be able to take it anywhere, keep it reasonably concealed, store everything I want on it, and most of all be able to connect with anyone anywhere without the transmission being traced. Is that doable?'

'Well sir, I can put together something for you like those computers that scientists use in the jungle or in the desert when there's no place to plug in or hook up to... And I can add another feature for you, too.'

'What's that?'

'Video conferencing.'

'You mean I can see the person I'm talking to while I'm talking with him?'

'Yes, if he has the same technology on his machine.'

'I want all of it, Donny. And I want it fast. And I need you to keep this confidential.' [10]

The *Left Behind* books and the historical social phantasms they suggest are symptomatic of dominant material and imaginary tendencies driving technological enactments of power on a global scale. These tendencies are shared by many of America's most influential social institutions and leaders. If for no reason but this, the books and their consumption demand the serious attention of scholars concerned with making sense of human history in the early twenty-first century. For those of you who have little or no knowledge of the *Left Behind* phenomenon, this may seem a surprising statement. Despite their enormous success, the *Left Behind* books remain virtually unknown to most present-day scholars of culture, history and power.

The astounding sales figures for the *Left Behind* books are less surprising for those with an eye on the religious beliefs of contemporary U.S. citizens. Indeed, in response to a *Newsweek* poll of December 2004, 55% of those

sampled, including 83% of all evangelical Protestants, indicated belief in the literal accuracy of the Bible. Two years earlier, when polled by *CNN/Time*, 59% of all Christians, and 77% of “born-again” fundamentalist and evangelicals, replied “yes” to the question, “Will events in the *Book of Revelations* occur in the future or not?” Moreover, when asked by *Newsweek* in October 1999, whether the world will end in an “Armageddon battle between Jesus Christ and the Antichrist,” 45% of all Christians and 71% of evangelical Protestants answered affirmatively.

Historians Paul Boyer and Mark Noll present related findings. Boyer estimates that “upwards of 40%” of all Americans “believe that Bible prophecies detail a specific sequence of end time events,” while Noll indicates that approximately one-quarter of U.S. church goers are “full-fledged end time believers.” Noll also notes that around 50 percent of those attending church make use of biblical symbolism to interpret news about events such as “holy wars,” major earthquakes, or tsunamis.[11] For Kevin Phillips, author of *American Theocracy*, all this suggests that, in “contrast to the secular and often agnostic Christianity in Europe, Canada, and Australia,” a large and politically influential minority of Americans share beliefs that resemble in key ways “the intensity of seventeenth-century Puritans, Presbyterian Covenanters, and earlier Dutch or Swiss Calvinists.”[12]

In what follows, I read the unprecedented popularity of the *Left Behind* series as symptomatic of a unique American historical coupling of otherworldly Christian religious beliefs and long-standing desires to blast technologically free of the flesh. This technological blast-off suppresses – or disavows – the reality of our systemic human animal connections to living energetic matter. Left behind is the possibility of more mindful material and spiritual attention to the realities of our global historical positioning within the general economy of life itself, reverence for our energetic relations to each other and the rest of the natural/ historical world.[13] This is a short sociological story of dominant aspects and dangers of our culture’s fateful religious and technological flight from the flesh. It focuses on the *Left Behind* novels because the popular or populist religious imagination underlying these texts is fatefully interwoven with key aspects of American culture’s vision of itself as a transcendent force for good in a relentless global struggle against evil.

## Left Behind

## 2

### **Empire America** *Left Behind in a Global Context*

The phrase “left behind” is particularly evocative of the schizoid or bipolar character of American politics and culture in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, for vast sectors of the United States, fear of being left behind – in education, scientific and technological advancement, bodily health, and economic prosperity – oscillates with the fascinations of sitting (militarily) on top of the world. In terms of educational proficiency, U.S. children today rank significantly lower than the children of other industrialized countries – particularly in reading and mathematics. To remedy this situation, the Bush administration, in conjunction with the U.S. Congress, initiated a program of national standardized testing and named it “No Child Left Behind.” But regardless of what is gained by such testing, for the majority of the nation’s public school children, left behind by this initiative is the opportunity to learn about the world and themselves in a nuanced and critical fashion. The time needed to educate children in this way now takes a backseat to teaching geared toward passing the required tests.

The phrase “left behind” is also in the title of a recent report issued by the Urban Institute, and edited by Columbia University Professor Ronald D. Mincy – *Black Males Left Behind*. This report details the deepening plight of African American males, especially “in the country’s inner cities” where “finishing high school is the exception, legal work is scarcer than ever and prison is almost routine, with incarceration rates climbing for

## Left Behind

blacks even as urban crime rates have declined.”[1] In addition to U.S. school children and African American males, America as a whole appears also left behind when it comes to such crucial matters as combating global climate change, nuclear weapons reduction, affordable health care and housing, the availability of meaningful employment for livable wages, forms of criminal justice that include more than the death penalty and the mass incarceration of the poor, and compliance with international treaties pertaining to the lawful conduct of war and the humane treatment of prisoners.

In championing the so-called global “war on terror” the United States also seems bent on leaving behind a wide range of previously secure civil liberties, as well the right to safeguard one’s privacy from unwarranted governmental surveillance and intrusion. But in the *Left Behind* novels and the biblical worldview that fuels them, the phrase “left behind” refers exclusively to the religious fate of individuals following the rapture of Christ’s true disciples into heaven. Why this preoccupation with apocalyptic religious imagery at this point in history? Over the course of this essay, I will examine historical antecedents to the widespread concern with “End Times” that is, at once, mined and promulgated by the *Left Behind* books. Indeed, the strand of fundamentalist Protestant theology articulated by the novels – dispensational premillennialism – has its roots in a period of enormous social change and uncertainty that bears more than a few uncanny resemblances to our own.

As an apocalyptic Christian imagination of End Times, dispensationalism originated in the United Kingdom during the heyday of the British Empire. Perhaps belief in apocalyptic prophecies foreshadows the end time of the empire as well. This will be discussed in greater depth later. At present, suffice it to note that, when most complicit with the wages of empire, alongside inner conversion and the anxious suppression of collective historical guilt, British “evangelicalism also emphasized outward conversion efforts by its adherents. As a result the nineteenth century saw a huge increase in foreign missionary activity, along with an upsurge of moral imperialism – belief in Britain’s duty to save the world – that abetted and reinforced the everyday patriotism of parades, naval reviews, music-hall songs, and saber-rattling literature. Initial enthusiasm for World War I ... marched in part to the stirring cadences of ‘Onward Christian Soldiers.’”[2] But less

than a half-century later came the end time of empire, and the beginning of what is today known as the “postcolonial.” This is an end time attuned to both a tragic past and open-ended future. It is also an end time that must reckon with the haunting awareness that the triumphant sound of “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” so close to the patriotic hearts of English evangelists, often resonated in entirely different ways with those colonized by the British Empire’s deadly amalgam of cross, sword, and crown. As Zine Magubane points out in discussing the responses of the indigenous peoples of South Africa’s to British evangelical missionaries, sometimes resistance “took the form of outright refusal to accept the gospel,” while at other times “refusal took more subtle forms, like avoidance, deferral, or laughter.”[3]

Historical connections between apocalyptic Christian imagery and the (sinful) wages of empire are important to remember a century later, when pondering the current revival of End Times imaginings by conservative U.S. evangelicals. It is also important to recognize the deep inroads right-wing evangelicals have made into key American social institutions, especially in the realms of popular culture, government, and the military. Yet, despite their manifest influence, conservative evangelicals still routinely lament being marginalized in the public realm by demonic legions of secular humanists, including those at the helm of the United Nations. In this, reality genuflects before prophecy believers’ fierce imagination of being suffering servants of a God-given future ready to burst the seams of history in the twinkling of an eye.

Shortly after its beginnings in imperial Britain, dispensational theology established deep roots in Protestant America. This was an America plagued with cultural anxieties and spiritual uncertainties, stemming from rapid increases in urbanization, mass immigration, and the rise of consumer culture. Beneath the surface, white American religious practices were also dogged by disavowed complicity with the genocidal wars waged against the indigenous peoples of North America and the far-reaching shadows of slavery. With urbanization and the immigration into the U.S. of large numbers of non-Protestants – particularly Catholics and Jews – the Protestant majority felt threatened by “the decline of traditional life and a loss of cultural security and control... Simultaneously, the rise of consumer culture destabilized traditional life as well. Mass manufacturing and mass



## Left Behind

marketing worked to transform and train desires for goods, for pleasure, and for gratification. Protestantism, which Max Weber argues helped to form the capitalist economy, now found itself at war with what it itself had created. With the expansion of visual and material culture, religion became a ‘marketplace’ where faith was a matter of advertisement and promotion as well as belief.”[4] During this time period, many taken-for-granted realities were undermined, particularly for small town, rural, and southern Protestants.

As Karen Armstrong remarks, “nothing was as it seemed. The American economy suffered wild fluctuations ... which were bewildering to people used to the routines of agrarian life. Booms were followed by depressions, which consumed huge fortunes overnight; society seemed controlled by mysterious, unseen ‘market forces.’ Sociologists also argued that human life was controlled by an economic dynamic that could not be discerned by the unskilled observer. Darwinists told people that existence was dominated by a biological struggle, unseen by the naked eye. Psychologists talked about the power of the hidden, unconscious mind. The High Critics insisted that even the Bible itself was not all that it claimed to be, and that the apparently simple text was actually composed of a bewildering number of different sources and written by authors of whom nobody had ever heard. Many Protestants, who expected their faith to bring them security, felt mental vertigo by this complicated world. They wanted a plain-speaking faith that everybody could understand.”[5] The uncertainties depicted by Armstrong resulted in widespread social anxiety and the “lust for certainty” that drove hardcore fundamentalist thought.[6]

The anxieties, uncertainties and lust for certainty experienced by earlier generations of Protestants ensnared in social change and the spiritual exigencies of empire, pale before the global scope and magnitude of changes taking place today. Today, urbanization fast-forwards into the pulsating electronic glow of information-based global cities, while immigration takes place on a planetary scale. Consumer culture is also ratcheted to extremes, intensified by the atmospherics of mass marketing, the digital simulation of everything imaginable, and seductive technologies of sensory captivation, capable of making a profit off even the innermost reaches of our bodies and minds.

The same is true of fundamentalism's lust for certainty. This too today is also ratcheted to extremes. Several other developments also energize fundamentalism's fearful – if fascinating – oscillation between being spiritually propelled toward End Times by the speed and global scope of unprecedented social change and the virulence of its history-stopping desire for absolute truth. Also pressing against the skein of the fundamentalist imagination are genetic technologies capable of desubstantializing human biology, replacing the finiteness of the flesh with infinitely interchangeable communicative codes; high-speed matrices of global transport and communications, capable of putting everybody in ethereal contact with everybody else all of the time; the computerization of more and more aspects of everyday life; and the return to center stage of the world history of peoples, cultures, and religious sensibilities long suppressed by the violence of colonial rule. The politically charged evangelical vision of the world articulated and consumed in the *Left Behind* books is symptomatic of an anxious lust for absolute certainty that is part and parcel of the present moment in history.

The evangelical vision of *Left Behind* stirs dreams of a God-ordained empire – a good empire of “liberty” and “freedom,” an empire rooted in the righteousness of “Old Testament moralities of tribal purity and sacred territoriality.”[7] Since the nation's inception, influential strains of U.S. evangelical culture have viewed America as a people “chosen” by God, a people blessed by a covenant with God. Yet, unlike other recent God-ordained “covenant cultures” – such as that which once cruelly guided Afrikaner-ruled South Africa – in the United States, a vision of our nation as “God's New Israel” has been kept in check by countervailing commitments to democracy and separation of church and state. That is, until recently. That this may be changing is one of the reasons I have written this essay.[8] Near the end of the final volume of *Left Behind*, after gazing out upon a massive river of blood set in motion by the righteousness of God's Word, Rayford Steele “wonders, isn't this the perfect opportunity to start rebuilding the country as, finally for real, a Christian nation.”[9]

This, of course, is fiction. More factual are the evangelical convictions of President George W. Bush. Although the White House refuses to answer questions as to whether or not President Bush has read *Left Behind*, in this essay I draw attention to important political and religious connections

## Left Behind

between President Bush and evangelical author Tim LaHaye. Bush routinely peppers his public pronouncements with religious imagery, often “double coding” his phrasings in ways that “signal” to attentive Bible readers that he shares “their private scriptural invocations.”[10] In accepting the 2004 nomination of the Republic Party, Bush used provocative religious language in declaring, “I believe that America is called to lead the cause of freedom in a new century.” Then, as if to dispel any doubts about whom it is who is calling America to lead this cause, the President stated, “I believe freedom is not America’s gift to the world. It is the Almighty’s gift to every man and woman.”[11] Bush is hardly alone among American politicians seeking to align public policy with the Word of God. As former Republic House majority leader Tom Delay once declared, “God is using me all the time, everywhere, to stand up for a biblical world view in everything I do and everywhere I am. He is training me.”[12]

The blurring of religion and politics in the rhetoric of George W. Bush, Tom DeLay, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and other U.S. political leaders is no secret. Neither is knowledge about the effects of righteous religious rhetoric when translated into public policy – whether in guiding U.S. military action in the Middle East, downplaying the dangers of global warming, or promoting “creationism” and “intelligent design” as alternatives to accepted scientific understandings of evolution. The political vision of End Times believers also plays a key role in efforts to establish heterosexual “covenant marriage,” to block gay and lesbian marriage, and in federally mandated “abstinence only” approaches to sex education and the prevention of AIDS, not to mention efforts aimed at re-criminalizing abortion, restricting stem cell research, and limiting access to birth control.

Far less known – at least to critical scholars – are the connections between faith-based Christian political crusades and a thriving American popular culture and publishing industry guided by the fascinations and fears of apocalyptic End Times. At the core of this popular culture and its industrial affiliates lay the *Left Behind* books. By directing a critical eye to the *Left Behind* series and, in particular to the ways the books imagine technology, I hope to shed light on this important, if shadowy, aspect of contemporary American power.

The remainder of the essay is organized in the following fashion. Section three provides an overview of the basic story told by the *Left Behind* novels and introduces the series' most important characters. Section four considers the theology that animates the books. The fifth section overviews the social biographies and religious politics of the authors of *Left Behind*. Section six discusses what is known about how readers make meaning of the books. Section seven explores the gendering of key themes and characters in the novels. Section eight returns to the intersection of religion and technology. It examines what the *Left Behind* books suggest about social phantasms guiding distinctively American technologies of power. The essay concludes with a discussion of "power-reflexive" approaches to technology that counter the demonic force of contemporary techno-power, while refusing fundamentalist Christianity's fateful flight from the flesh.

## Left Behind

# 3

## After the Rapture

In *Left Behind* the Rapture is followed by the mercurial rise of the Antichrist. As a legendary figure of apocalyptic human corruption and evil, the Antichrist (or anti-messiah) can be traced back to messianic beliefs of late Second Temple Judaism (from the third century B.C.E. to 70 C.E). Over the course of Christian history, although occasionally a symbol of internal spiritual decay, the Antichrist has largely been portrayed as a figure of external threat (either as a singular individual or dangerous collectivity). The persona of the Antichrist has been draped in polar images of dread and deception, fearful destruction and seductive fascination.[1] The Antichrist was an archetypal figure in medieval millenarian theology and pivotal to both Protestant and Catholic thought during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

In our own time, the Antichrist has figured primarily in the religious imagination of fundamentalist Protestants. In the *Left Behind* series the Antichrist is both charismatic and humble. Secular reason and science are this “great deceiver’s” calling cards. Shortly after first appearing in the narrative, the Antichrist arranges for peace between Israel and its neighbors. This is when things get really bad. The peace covenant is really a prophetic door into the Tribulation – seven catastrophic years of terror, war, devastating storms, earthquakes, floods, famine, disease, and unprecedented human suffering, all under the sign of the “wrath of the lamb.” Three-quarters of all people left behind after the Rapture die in terrible ways.

## Left Behind

Backed by one of the world's most powerful financiers, Nicolae Jetty Carpathia, the mesmerizing Antichrist, rules the world during the years of tribulation. Nicolae is an entrepreneurial businessman, political liberal, and advocate for global disarmament and peace. In a flash Nicolae is named President of Romania. About a week later he is asked to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. "Carpathia entered the assembly in a dignified yet inauspicious manner... Even from a distance, the man seemed to carry himself with a sense of humility and purpose. His presence dominated the room, and yet he did not seem preoccupied or impressed with himself. His jewelry was understated. His jaw and nose were Roman and strong, his piercing blue eyes set deep under thick brows." His captivating speech "displayed such an intimate knowledge of the United Nations that it was as if he had invented and developed the organization himself." [2] Almost immediately, Carpathia is proclaimed Secretary General. He soon renames his position, calling himself World Potentate.

Under Nicolae's inspired leadership the U.N. morphs into a One World Government called Global Community. The seductive Antichrist speaks nine languages and is pictured as "an inch or two over six feet, broad shouldered, thick chested, trim, athletic, tanned and blond." Nicolae is said to be as "handsome as a young Robert Redford" and is named "sexiest man alive" by *People* magazine. He is also a skilled hypnotist, able to erase the recollection of actual events and implant false memories. The mesmerizing Antichrist promises peace, but his actions bring death and destruction. Soon megaton bombs are dropping on global cities everywhere as the Global Community does battle with U.S. militia and an underground network of Christian resisters.

Carpathia relocates Global Community (GC) headquarters from its former United Nations facilities in New York to the reconstructed city of New Babylon in Iraq. In the Bible, ancient Babylon was an evil empire. At its center was the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar, the enemy of the Israelites in the Old Testament *Book of Daniel*. One night King Nebuchadnezzar had a puzzling dream that neither he nor his court astrologers could make sense of. With God's help, the prophet Daniel interpreted the King's dream of a beautiful statue with four distinct parts as an image of four successive empires in decline (Daniel 2: 31-45). In *Are We Living in the*

*End Times*, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins provide a contemporary prophetic interpretation of Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. LaHaye and Jenkins draw a chart depicting the devolution of four imperial world orders, the first being Babylon and the last Rome. They then connect passages from the *Book of Daniel* to passages they are believed to foreshadow in the New Testament *Book of Revelation* (12:3; 13:1; 17:3,7, 12-14, 16).

This leads LaHaye and Jenkins to conclude that the Roman Empire – history's final empire – is itself composed of seven stages, and that its final stage is yet to come. For LaHaye and Jenkins, this final stage is just around the corner. All the signs, it appears, are falling into place, including the establishment of a "New World Order" modeled on the ancient empire of Rome. This new order of global domination will be ruled over by the Antichrist, who will unify the world economically, politically, and in the realm of religion.[3] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have recently prophesied the emergence of a global empire of a related sort, although their vision of a "New Rome" is based on a far more material interpretive method.[4]

In the *Left Behind* series, the Antichrist rules the world for the seven years of tribulation from the reconstructed city of New Babylon in Iraq.[5] He is assisted by a variety of henchmen, including Pontifex Maximus Peter II (the former Catholic Archbishop Peter Mathews of Cincinnati, Ohio). Pontifex Maximus helps secure Carpathia's domination by overseeing the development of Enigma Babylon, a One World Religion that complements his boss's One World Government and One World Economy. Another member of Carpathia's staff is supreme commander Leon Fortunato. The buffoonish Fortunato replaces Pontifex Maximus as Nicolae's "False Prophet" and serves as the "great deceiver's" chief public relations officer. The mysterious Viv Ivins, a lifelong friend of Nicolae's, is another key GC operative. Viv oversees the development of an identity microchip, implanted under the skin of all citizens of the Global Community. Those that refuse the implant (a high-tech analog of the biblical "Mark of the Beast") are arrested and decapitated by guillotine.[6] Suhail Akbar, Chief of Security and Intelligence in the Global Community Palace, emerges later in the series as another dangerous villain.



## Left Behind

The evil rule of the Antichrist is contested by the Tribulation Force, a heroic band of believers, operating out of New Hope Village Church in a suburb of Chicago. This was Irene Steele's church before she was taken up into heaven. Associate pastor Bruce Barnes operates as the Tribulation Force's theological guide and spiritual leader.[7] Before The Rapture Bruce's faith had been more phony than real. But after witnessing so many people's disappearance, Bruce immerses himself in the study of biblical prophecy, testifying to his parishioners, "There is no doubt in my mind that we have witnessed the Rapture... Jesus Christ returned for his true family, and the rest of us were left behind." [8] Inspired by Bruce's teaching, Rayford Steele, Rayford's daughter Chloe, a former college student at Stanford, and Cameron "Buck" Williams, a renowned journalist and senior writer at *Global Weekly* news magazine, constitute the core membership of the Tribulation Force.

Buck was on board the Pan-Continental flight to London piloted by Rayford Steele when the Rapture took place. Shortly before, he had been in Haifa, where he'd interviewed Chaim Rosenweig, a scientific genius and "Newsmaker of the Year." Chaim invented a secret formula that transformed the deserts of Israel into a veritable Eden of flourishing vegetation. Buck also witnessed a squadron of Russian jets vaporized into thin air when attempting an attack on Israel. Had he been better versed in biblical prophecies, Buck would have recognized this as a sign of the earth's final days. Buck, Chloe, Rayford, and Pastor Bruce Barnes team up to combat the Antichrist and spread the gospel during the years of tribulation. Flight attendant Hattie Durham might have also joined the team, had she possessed greater faith. Instead, Hattie is seduced into becoming Nicolae Carpathia's personal secretary and ill-fated lover. Hattie becomes pregnant with the Antichrist's offspring and miscarries a "very premature, very deformed fetus" of "indeterminate" gender.[9]

Members of the Tribulation Force infiltrate Carpathia's global empire and create a network of safe houses for persecuted Christians. Rayford and Buck become double agents. Rayford accepts an offer to pilot Carpathia's Global Community One. Then, following Carpathia's buy-out of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe* and virtually all of the world's other news media, Buck becomes the publisher of the Antichrist's new *Global Community Weekly*. The multiethnic Tribulation Force also

includes the orthodox rabbi and scholar Tsion Ben-Judah. After completing an intensive three-year study of Jewish historical documents and the Old Testament, Rabbi Ben-Judah appears on CNN to announce his conclusion that Jesus Christ is the true messiah. Tsion converts to Christianity and replaces Bruce Barnes as the spiritual leader of the Tribulation Force after Bruce is killed when GC “peacekeepers” bomb a hospital where he is a patient.

Throughout the years of the Tribulation, Tsion broadcasts daily sermons of hope over the Internet to an audience of over one billion underground believers. Other members of the Tribulation Force include computer wiz Donny Moore and, following Donny’s death in an earthquake, his replacement, Dr. Floyd Charles. The team also includes several “secret agents” who infiltrate the Antichrist’s information technology headquarters. These Tribulation Force “moles” include computer expert David Hassid, the GC’s Director of Purchasing and Shipping, Chang Wong, David’s assistant, Abdullah Smith, a former Jordanian fighter pilot, and Mac McCullum, another pilot and member of Carpathia’s flight team.

Many strange and disturbing events take place during the Tribulation. None is more astounding than the televised assassination and subsequent resurrection of Nicolae Carpathia. In his new incarnation, Carpathia is now more demonic than ever. Satan now “indwells” or possesses the body of the World Potentate. In *The Glorious Appearing*, the series’ final volume, we arrive at the Battle of Armageddon and the second coming of Jesus. But the Jesus who returns hardly resembles the crucified Lord whose sacrifice blessed humankind with the divine gifts of love, peace and forgiveness. He is, instead, Jesus Christ the Warrior, Christ the Judge and Destroyer.

With heavenly hosts hovering in the sky, Jesus descends from above, landing atop the fabled Mount of Olives on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jesus immediately enters into battle with Carpathia and his satanic legions. Armed to its satanic teeth with a wide array of the most lethal of military technologies, Carpathia’s Global Community Army of Unity was mounting an all out attack on Jerusalem. “The siege was deafening. Jet engines, Jeeps, cars, trucks, Hummers, transports, armaments, munitions, rifle fire, machine gun fire, cannons, grenades, rockets – you name it.” But, suddenly, a dense and technologically disabling darkness descends upon

## Left Behind

and envelops the Antichrist and his Global Community Army of Unity. “The only sound was the clicking of weapons that would not fire. Nothing produced light. No headlights. No matches or lighters.”[10]

Perched atop his stalled Humvee, the brazen Antichrist is incensed. “‘Light,’ screeched Carpathia. But everything was dark. ‘Fire!’ he raged. Still nothing.” Next, there appeared a “brilliant multicolored cloud.” Then, the cloud opened, rolling back “like a scroll from horizon to horizon.” Christ makes his entrance, astride a white horse. “Jesus’ eyes shone with conviction like a flame of fire, and He held His majestic head high.”[11] Christ offers everyone a last chance to repent. But, foolishly, Carpathia and his followers attack. Jesus unleashes his Word, a fierce technology of righteousness. The Word violently splits open the bodies of the Antichrist’s demonic legions. “At that instant the Mount of Olives split in two from east to west ... All the firing and the running stopped. The soldiers screamed and fell, their bodies bursting open from head to toe at every word that proceeded from the mouth of the Lord as He spoke.”[12]

The apocalyptic landscape is littered with the “splayed and filleted bodies of men and horses,” as “that sword from His mouth, the powerful Word of God itself, continued to slice through the air, reaping the wrath of God’s judgment. The enemy had been given chance after chance, judgment after judgment to convince and persuade them... But except for that now tiny remnant of Israel that was seeing for the first time the One they had pierced, it was too late... The Unity Army had rattled its sabers, loaded its weapons, and made lots of noise. And Jesus had killed them all, with mere words.”[13]

## 4

### **Dispensational Theology From Darby to LaHaye**

The *Left Behind* novels are inspired by Dr. Tim LaHaye's reading of prophetic biblical texts. The theology articulated by LaHaye is today known by several names – dispensational premillennialism, premillennial dispensationalism, and, sometimes, simply dispensationalism. Concerned with events surrounding the second coming of Christ, several premillennial events are of particular importance to dispensationalism – the Rapture, in which God's "true church" is lifted into heaven; the return of Jews to their biblical homeland in Israel; seven years of catastrophic Tribulation under the rule of the Antichrist; and finally the Glorious Appearing, Jesus' second coming. When Christ returns, he promptly vanquishes the Antichrist in the Battle of Armageddon, thus beginning the Millennium – "a thousand-year period of peace, during which Christ reigns on earth. At the close of the millennium, a final uprising of Satan occurs, but with his defeat by Christ, eternity is established." [1] As suggested previously, each of these events are portrayed fictively in the popular *Left Behind* series.

Dispensationalist theology was first made popular by the nineteenth century Irish evangelist John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Darby was a tireless preacher, teacher and church organizer. Darby was also a "compulsive writer of letters, tracts, booklets, articles and books (some 52 volumes)." [2] As Tim LaHaye points out, Darby "did more than any other man to organize and popularize the view in both the United States and Great Britain." [3] Darby's prophetic interpretations of the Bible were

## Left Behind

not without precedent. Antecedents to dispensationalism can be traced to fourth century Christian thought and to the twelfth century prophecies of the Calabrian Dominican monk, Joachim Fiore (1135-1202). Joachim divided the history of salvation into several distinct eras and preached that the final era – the dispensation of the Holy Spirit – was rapidly approaching. Other antecedents to dispensationalism include the sixteenth century teachings of the English prophet Joseph Meade and the Puritan proclamations of Increase Mather a century later.

It was John Nelson Darby, however, who popularized the dispensational viewpoint. Born in England in 1800, Darby moved with his family to Ireland in 1815 to reclaim his kin's ancestral castle. In 1819 he graduated with highest honors as a Classical Gold Medalist from Trinity College in Dublin. Darby then pursued the study of law at Kings Inn in Dublin, passing the Chancery Bar in 1822. Despite his academic success, Darby's years of study were marked by soul searching and spiritual struggle. As a result, Darby abandoned his pursuit of law and was in 1825 ordained as an Anglican priest.

Darby's career as an Anglican was short lived. A short time after being ordained, Darby became outraged by what he perceived as religious laxity, theological error, and corruption in the Church of Ireland (and England). When convalescing from a broken leg in 1826, Darby began to study the Bible in-depth. This led Darby to discern distinct historical stages in God's actions toward humankind, something that set his theology apart from established church orthodoxy. An 1827 proclamation by his archbishop created further distance between Darby's viewpoints and those of his church. The archbishop demanded that all converts pledge an oath of loyalty to the English King in addition to the church. For Darby, the archbishop's edict threatened Protestant purity with the taint of secular politics. In 1834 Darby and other dissenters broke with the Church of Ireland to form what became known as the Brethren movement.

According to Darby, the Anglican Church was a troubled social institution. Refusing allegiance to the church, Darby and his fellow Brethren preached salvation by grace alone. They also urged believers to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Darby later participated in the Powerscourt Prophecy Conferences, sponsored by the Scotch-Anglican dissenter Henry

Drummond. Following these conferences, Darby became increasingly convinced that the second coming of Jesus was about to take place and that this would involve a succession of revelatory moments – the Rapture, Tribulation, and Glorious Appearing.

Despite their collective resistance to the established church, the Brethren often disagreed with each other about specific biblical prophecies. Fierce disagreements were voiced concerning the exact sequence of End Times. One particularly acrimonious debate pitted Darby against B.W. Newton, pastor of the Plymouth Brethren Church. At issue was whether the Rapture would, as Darby believed, be separated in time from the Glorious Appearing. Heated disputes about matters such as this led Darby and his followers to withdraw from the fellowship in 1845, forming a loose network of so-called “Darbyite” congregations.[4] For the remainder of his life, the energetic Darby would remain an ardent proponent of dispensational premillennialism.

Darby’s dispensational eschatology was rooted in a very specific interpretation of a variety of Old Testament and New Testament scriptural passages. Most are drawn from the *Book of Daniel* and *Revelation*, but other important texts include the *Letters of John* and St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Thessalonians*. At the core of Darby’s teaching was a belief that God’s actions in history are organized in terms of seven discrete eras, or dispensations, and that the seventh and final dispensation was rapidly approaching. This would begin with the Rapture, scriptural evidence for which Darby located in *I Thessalonians* 4: 16-17. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall arise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” For Darby, as later for LaHaye, the reference to being “caught up together” to “meet the Lord in the air” signified the ecstatic rapture into heaven of God’s true church. “Darby’s use of the rapture in his interpretation of dispensationalism was, in part, social critique. He used it to assert the existence of an invisible church, known only to God, that stood apart from institutional structures. Only with the rapture would the true church be known and the hypocrites left behind.”[5]

## Left Behind

As a mode of biblical exegesis, dispensational premillennialism gained considerable popularity in the United States following Darby's visits to America between 1862 and 1877. This was a time of great religious, political, and economic turmoil and uncertainty. Each of the country's major Protestant denominations (Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist) had long suppressed questions about their faith's savage complicity with genocidal wars against the native peoples of the Americas. In the years surrounding Darby's visits the churches were haunted by additional theological questions pertaining to slavery. Existing regional divisions in biblical interpretation were reinforced during the Civil War. Following defeat in the War Between the States, many white southern Protestants sought spiritual comfort during the "reconstruction" years by identifying with Old Testament images of Israel, God's chosen people. Like Israel, they imagined themselves surrounded by and suffering at the hands of godless enemies. "Under its own interpretation, the South was 'redeemed' by 1877, when the last northern troops withdrew following the stalemated 1876 presidential election." [6] It was in this troubled context that dispensationalism assumed its peculiar American accent, rising to prominence in Reverend Dwight L. Moody's large urban revivals and the popular Niagara prophecy conferences of the mid-1870s.

Darby's influence in American evangelical circles was solidified with Cyrus L. Scofield's publication of an annotated version of the King James Bible. Scofield's Bible cross-referenced the Old and New Testaments in ways that highlighted the prophetic interpretations of Darby. Following Darby, the *Scofield Reference Bible* identified seven distinct dispensational epochs in history. These included the dispensations of innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace (later renamed the dispensation of the church), and the millennial kingdom. [7] Scofield's popular Bible is estimated to have sold a total of over ten million copies and remains in print today. [8] The work's "innovative use of footnotes rather than a separate commentary intimately linked the biblical text with its prophetic interpretation. For many readers of Scofield's Bible, Darby's interpretation became indistinguishable from the biblical text; it became a part of fundamentalists' assertion of a 'common sense' understanding of biblical prophecy." [9]

As a system of theology, dispensationalism is often accompanied by a complex set of charts depicting the various stages of God's plan for humankind. The elaborate charts used to convey dispensational prophecies were particularly evident in the early twentieth century writings of Clarence Larkin. Larkin's book *Dispensational Truth* and other classic works in dispensational thought remain key components of the curriculum at such influential centers for Evangelical education as Dallas Theological Seminary, Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. In addition, dispensationalism has long proved adept at making connections between key biblical prophecies and contemporary historical events. Today, this is nowhere more evident than on the Webpage [raptureready.com](http://raptureready.com). Assembled by prophecy enthusiast Todd Strandberg, the Webpage includes a "Rapture Index" that tracks all sorts of natural disasters, crime, and prophetic indicators of the approaching apocalypse.

In 1970 a particularly popular version of dispensationalism appeared with the publication of Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the top selling nonfiction book in the U.S. during the 1970s.[10] Lindsey, who studied at Dallas Theological Seminary and whose work has been described as a kind of "Christian Zionism," argued that twentieth century history is replete with numerous signs of the approach of End Times. At the top of Lindsey's list was the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. Close behind was the occupation of Palestine by God's "chosen people." Lindsey also viewed Russia as the biblical Magog, an aggressor state that would attack Israel from the north:

Lindsey correlated biblical texts with the then-existing national powers to argue that the Soviet Union in collaboration with China and other communist countries, would bring about a nuclear holocaust that will fulfill scriptural prophecies. He sternly warned people to look out for the impending rise of a charismatic 'future fuehrer' as the Antichrist, the development of a one-world religion that would dupe people away from true Christianity, increasing tensions in the Middle East and a decline in U.S. power vis-à-vis Europe.[11]

To understand the importance of Israel to those sharing a dispensational worldview, it is important to recognize that prophecy believers make a distinction between two still-to-be-completed promises pertaining to



## Left Behind

“God’s program for salvation history.” The first focuses on Palestine. It involves God’s promise to bestow material blessings on the physical descendants of Abraham. The second focuses on the heavenly spiritual rewards that God will provide to every nation that acknowledges Jesus as its Lord and savior. “According to dispensationalists, neither phase of God’s program is yet complete.”[12] As such, dispensationalists are convinced that the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt, fulfilling God’s Old Testament promise to the Jews, before the realization of New Testament prophecies connected to Christ’s return to earth.

Dispensationalist belief is charged with complex religious and geo-political symbolism. One example involves the Temple Mount, the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, whose outer perimeter is known as the sacred “wailing wall.” This site is also of great significance to Muslims. Known as the Dome of the Rock, this “is where Muhammad ascended into heaven nearly 1,400 years ago, making it the third-holiest site in Islam, behind Mecca and Medina.”[13] Briefly seized by Israeli forces headed by General Moshe Dayan during the Six-Day War in June 1967, the Dome of the Rock was later placed under the control the Waqf, a Muslim administrative body. Following the return of the Temple Mount to Palestinian control, “Muslim authorities have usually allowed non-Muslims to come to Temple Mount, as long as they don’t move their lips in ways that suggest they are praying. As a result, the Temple Mount is one of the most explosive tinderboxes on earth. A visit to the site in September 2000 by Ariel Sharon inflamed tensions that soon erupted into the second *intifada*.”[14]

The Temple Mount/ Dome of the Rock is also the biblical location where Jesus is believed to have expelled greedy moneychangers from God’s holy house. Given the incendiary geo-political significance of the Mount/Dome’s sacred geography, it is important to note that Hal Lindsey once served as a (prophetic) consultant to both the Pentagon and Israeli government during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. This brought dispensational thinking to bear upon a pivotal aspect of U.S. politics and foreign policy.[15] While dispensationalists “were not happy about the secular character of the Israeli government and society, the developments they saw in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s filled them with enthusiasm and enhanced their messianic hopes. The mass emigration of Jews to Israel from Asia, Africa, and Eastern European countries was one cause for encouragement. This

was undoubtedly a significant development, they felt, one that had been prophesied in the Bible, and a clear indication that the current era was terminating and the events of the end times were beginning to occur.”[16]

With these things in mind, it is no surprise that Israeli Jews play an important, if contradictory, role in the *Left Behind* series. In addition to the pivotal figure of Tribulation Force leader Rabbi Ben-Judah Tsion, Old Testament prophets Elijah and Moses (Eli and Moshe) make a miraculous appearance. Standing before the wailing wall of the Temple Mount, they call upon their fellow Jews to at long last recognize Jesus as their Messiah. In the novels, as God’s chosen people, Jews are “protected from harm until the battle of Armageddon, at which point they must either except Jesus as their Messiah or die ..., be converted or slaughtered.”[17]

## Left Behind

## 5

### **The Theology and Biblical Politics of Tim LaHaye**

Tim LaHaye, the most influential contemporary proponent of dispensational theology, was born in Detroit, Michigan. LaHaye's gregarious father Frank died when Tim was still a boy. Frank's death left his family financially impoverished, if not poor in spirit. "I thought the world had come to an end," states Reverend Tim LaHaye in an account published in *Time*.<sup>[1]</sup> This tragic event proved decisive in the subsequent development of LaHaye's dispensational worldview. "My love for second-coming teachings, particularly for the Rapture of the Church, was sparked as I stood at my father's grave at the age of nine. His sudden death of a heart attack left me devastated. My pastor, who was also my uncle, pointed his finger toward heaven and proclaimed, 'This is not the last of Frank LaHaye. Because of his personal faith in Christ, one day he will be resurrected by the shout of our Lord; we will be translated to meet him and our other loved ones in the clouds and be with them and our Lord forever.'<sup>[2]</sup>

LaHaye worked as a teenager during the Depression to provide financial support for his family. He finished high school by taking evening classes, and later attended a Bible Institute in Chicago. In 1944, at age seventeen, Tim enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, serving in Europe as a machine gunner aboard a bomber.<sup>[3]</sup> After completing military service, LaHaye attended Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. Founded in 1927, Bob Jones was widely renowned as a leading – if unaccredited – center for fundamentalist Christian higher education. All students at Bob Jones were

## Left Behind

“obliged to take at least one Bible course each semester, to attend chapel, to adhere to a ‘Christian’ lifestyle, with strong rules governing dress, social interaction, and dating.” While at Bob Jones, LaHaye began his Christian ministry by serving as the pastor of a small church in nearby Pumpkintown, South Carolina. Tim also met and fell in love with Beverly Jean Ratcliffe, a fellow student at Bob Jones University, who was also from Detroit. Tim and Beverly dated for a year before marrying. During their courtship the LaHayes obeyed their university’s official “no touching” policy, a rule specifying that couples were at all times to maintain a physical distance of no less than six inches. LaHaye was later awarded the Doctor of Ministry degree from Western Theological Seminary.

In 1958 Tim and Beverly moved to San Diego. Tim assumed the duties of pastor at Scott Memorial Church in San Diego, where he would serve for twenty-five years. Under LaHaye’s guidance, the congregation at Scott Memorial grew exponentially from 275 to over 3,000 members. For some time, like other fundamentalist and dispensationalist Christians, Pastor LaHaye maintained a posture of relative disengagement from political life and from American secular culture. Following defeat and public ridicule associated with the 1925 Scopes trial, fundamentalists had for several decades withdrawn from the political sphere. They, instead, directed their energies toward building a strong and largely regional religious subculture in the southern U.S. The results were impressive. By the 1960s local evangelical churches were growing at a rate of 8 percent every five years, while membership in mainstream dominations declined precipitously.[4]

The withdrawal of fundamentalists from forays into popular culture in the second quarter of the twentieth century represented a departure from earlier efforts to use technologies of mass publishing and modern communications as vehicles for spreading the word about biblical prophecy. In the later nineteenth century, Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday led large urban revivals that brought the gospel beyond the walls of traditional churches. Moody and Sunday called for church ministries based on “business models,” in order to most effectively communicate the Bible’s message. A related call was issued in 1947 with the publication of Carl Henry’s *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Rather than withdrawing from mainstream culture, Henry urged fundamentalists to use new technologies of mass communication as a new kind of contemporary evangelism.[5]

Henry's book converged with efforts initiated by the newly founded National Association of Evangelists to produce what sociologist Christian Smith refers to as "engaged orthodoxy" – "a socially relevant form of evangelism that still held to the fundamentals of faith without smothering it beneath waves of defensiveness." [6]

Bolstered by an increasing strength in numbers and by the apparent success of early televangelism, by the later half of the 1970s fundamentalists had begun to reenter the battle against mainstream culture. Fundamentalists were also outraged by what they perceived as an alarming growth in secularism during the 1960s and by a string of "Godless" Supreme Court rulings, especially the *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. With this as background, the time appeared ripe for fundamentalists and prophecy believers to become political activists. LaHaye took the lead, arguing that "humanists would 'destroy America' within a few years, 'unless Christians are willing to become more assertive in defense of morality and decency.'" [7]

LaHaye quickly established himself as a prominent religious spokesperson within the extreme right wing of Southern California's political culture. Expressing concern about the evil character of the United Nations and the prospects of an emerging one-world government, LaHaye was a regular speaker at training sessions of the John Birch Society. LaHaye's activist ministry also helped make Southern California a hotbed of conservative Christian politics, preparing the grounds for Ronald Reagan's 1980 successful presidential campaign. "In the next dozen years, LaHaye built a veritable Christian empire: three churches, twelve elementary and secondary schools, a Christian College, an anti-evolution think tank called the Institute for Creation Research, the Pre-Trib Research Center to promote his views on how the world will end, and Family Life Seminars, a lecture program on sex, marriage and Christian living – all while writing dozens of books. *The Act of Marriage*, a 1976 best seller co-authored with Beverly LaHaye, is an explicit Christian sex manual, condemning 'petting,' abortion and homosexuality." [8] By 2002 over 2.5 million copies of *The Act of Marriage* were in print.

While less visible to the general public than other conservative Christian activists, such as Pat Robertson, James Dobson, Ralph Reed, or Jerry

## Left Behind

Falwell, in 2001, LaHaye was named most influential evangelical leader over the last twenty-five years by the Institute for the Study of American Evangelists.[9] Troubled by court decisions permitting abortion and restricting prayer in public schools, LaHaye founded the church-based political alliance Californians for a Biblical Majority in the later 1970s. This inspired subsequent Evangelical Christian efforts at political mobilization. As Reverend Jerry Falwell recalls, “I found out that he’d done something no conservative minister had ever done before: He’d organized hundreds of churches into a political bloc. At the time, I’d never heard of mixing religion and politics... More than any other person, Tim LaHaye persuaded me to begin thinking through my involvement.”[10]

In 1979, with Falwell, LaHaye was instrumental in founding the Moral Majority, serving for years as an original board member of this powerful conservative Christian organization. In 1981, with Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie, he helped found the enormously influential Council for National Policy. The highly secretive CNP is a unique coalition of ultra-conservative political activists, committed evangelicals, and wealthy donors. Its members have raised literally billions of dollars for right-wing Christian political causes. Notable billionaire donors include Coors Beer Company executive Joseph Coors, Texas oil baron Nelson Bunker Hunt, and Richard DeVos, the founder of Amway.

Other CNP members, whose names have been leaked to the press, constitute “a virtual Who’s Who of the far right,” including former Attorney Generals Edward Meese and John Ashcroft, Senators Jesse Helms, Lauch Faircloth, Don Nickles, and Trent Lott, Texas Congressmen Tom DeLay and Dick Armey, televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, Christian Radio Network founders Stuart Epperson and Edward Atsinger, as well as Gary Bauer, Oliver North Jr., Grover Norquist, Wayne LaPierre, and Phyllis Schlafly.[11] “The late Rousas John Rushdoony, the right-wing theologian who hoped to reconfigure the American legal system in accordance with biblical law, was said to be a member, as was John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute, who was co-counsel to Paula Jones in her lawsuit against Bill Clinton.”[12] Activities sponsored by elite members of the Council have included funneling dollars to assist Lt. Colonel Oliver North Jr.’s clandestine efforts on behalf of the Nicaraguan Contras during the 1980s, as well as the orchestrated attack on President Bill Clinton during the 1990s.[13]

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, LaHaye's public political fortunes receded temporarily. Following his appointment as Co-Chair of the "Jack Kemp for President" Committee, in 1988 the *Baltimore Sun* published a report suggesting that LaHaye's theological predilections were decidedly anti-Catholic. The *Sun* cited passages from LaHaye's 1974 book *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain*, that declared Catholicism a "false religion." [14] LaHaye resigned from his position in the Kemp campaign. Avoiding the limelight for a time, LaHaye directed his energies in a more traditional theological manner. Worried about recent attacks on the biblical tenets underlying dispensational thought, and inspired by the nineteenth century prophecy conferences that had sparked John Nelson Darby's vision, in 1992, with Dr. Thomas Ice, LaHaye convened a "Pre-Trib Study Group." In 1993 Ice and LaHaye founded the Pre-Trib Research Center in Arlington, Texas.

In 1995 LaHaye returned to the public eye with the publication of the first of the *Left Behind* novels. The incredibly popular *Left Behind* books would prove to be the most successful manifestation ever of a long-established tradition of evangelical mass publishing. LaHaye has authored or coauthored several other works of fiction, including the initial volumes of *Babylon Rising*, a new series co-authored with Greg Dinallo. Tim LaHaye has also written over fifty nonfiction books, including thirteen volumes dedicated to biblical prophecy. [15] The eighty year old former pastor is also the head of the American Coalition for Traditional Values and, with his wife Beverley – herself an author and influential spokesperson for the Christian right – a strident opponent of the evils of secular humanism, feminism, gay rights and other so-called "diseases" of our culture. [16] In 1979 Beverly LaHaye founded the 500,000 member Concerned Women for America. [17]

In 1999, under the auspices of the Council for National Policy, Tim LaHaye convened a committee composed of some two-dozen prominent fundamentalists to vet the candidacy of presidential hopeful Texas Governor George W. Bush. Calling itself the Committee to Restore American Values, the group was concerned that, despite "born-again" credentials, Governor Bush had failed to advance a sufficiently evangelical agenda. Meeting "behind closed doors, LaHaye grilled the candidate. He presented Bush with



## Left Behind

a lengthy questionnaire on issues such as abortion, judicial appointments, education, religious freedom, gun control and the Middle East. What the preacher thought of Bush's answers would largely determine whether the Christian right would throw its muscle behind the Texas governor.”[18] Impressed that Governor Bush shared the Committee's activist evangelical concerns, LaHaye expressed enthusiastic support for the candidate.

Due, in no small part, to a willingness to enter the popular culture of book publishing, Tim LaHaye is today an extremely prominent leader of the U.S. Christian right. LaHaye is also a notable contemporary exponent of premillennial dispensationalism. In 1992 LaHaye authored *No Fear of the Storm*, an exposition and defense of dispensational theology.[19] How close are we to the “end of times?” According to Reverend LaHaye, we are “just a miracle away.” Of particular importance to LaHaye and other dispensationalists is the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, along with Israel's victory over its Arab neighbors in the mercurial 1967 “Six Day War.” At the conclusion of the war, the Israeli flag was placed – at least temporarily – above the sacred Muslim Dome of the Rock. Seizing the Dome of the Rock – also the legendary site of Israel's ancient temple – was of particular significance for prophecy believers. According to LaHaye, the possibility of Israel rebuilding its ancient temple looms as a major sign that the final days are upon us.

For LaHaye, the return of the Dome of the Rock to Israeli control signifies “the most impressive fulfillment of Bible prophecy in twenty centuries! ... The fact that the last fifty years has seen a worldwide regathering and reestablishment of the nation of Israel – which is now poised in precisely the setting required for the revealing of the Antichrist and the start of the Tribulation – is God's grand indicator that many other current world developments are prophetically significant.”[20] Guided by LaHaye's vision, and crafted by writer Jerry B. Jenkins, the *Left Behind* books provide a dramatic fictional portrayal of LaHaye's theological vision. The novels also include numerous references to biblical “proof texts,” intended to ground the series' narrative in the literalness of God's word. According to LaHaye, the novels were inspired by a real-life incident that took place sometime in the 1980s. LaHaye was aboard a commercial airliner when he noticed a pilot flirting with an attractive flight attendant. The pilot was wearing a wedding ring. “LaHaye asked himself what would happen to

the poor unsaved man if the long-awaited rapture were to transpire at that precise moment.”[21]

The incident on the plane led LaHaye to imagine casting the prophetic message of End Times in fictional form. LaHaye made contact with Jerry B. Jenkins, a writer-at-large at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Within a short time their collaboration was underway. While the theology underlying the series is most closely associated with LaHaye, sentence-by-sentence the texts are the work of Jenkins. Before collaborating with LaHaye, Jenkins had already authored over one hundred books. Eleven of his works have been included on the *New York Times* best-sellers list. Jenkins is also a former vice-president of the Moody Bible Institute and founder of the Christian Writer’s Guild. Jenkins has also written nonfiction works on issues pertaining to marriage and family, earning him regular appearances on Dr. James Dobson’s *Focus on the Family* radio broadcast. In addition, Jenkins has also authored biographies of a number of well-known sports figures, including Hank Aaron, Walter Payton, Nolan Ryan, and Orel Hershisier, as well as a biography of Billy Graham. Jenkins is also the author of the nationally syndicated *Gil Thorpe* sports comic strip.

Rick Christian, LaHaye and Jenkins’s literary agent, had considerable difficulty in finding a publisher for the proposed multi-volume series. Despite the popularity of Hal Lindsey’s *The Great Planet Earth* two decades earlier, none of the major houses projected sufficient sales for novels depicting Christian struggles during End Times to justify a significant investment. “Finally, LaHaye’s nonfiction publishing company, Tyndale House, put up \$50,000, boasting that it could market the [initial] book well enough to sell half a million copies.”[22] The rest of the story is publishing history. To date the *Left Behind* books have brought over \$650 million to the coffers of Tyndale House Publishers, with sales growing from \$40 million to \$160 million per year. Authors LaHaye and Jenkins have earned in excess of \$50 million apiece.

## Left Behind

## 6

### **Reading Left Behind The Fascinations and Fear of End Times**

Who reads the *Left Behind* books? Under what circumstances are they read? And, what do readers make of these apocalyptic texts? The best answers to these questions are found in Amy Johnson Frykholm's *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*. Frykholm's work is based on in-depth interviews with persons who have read the novels. In addition to a "snowball sample" of thirty-five readers, most of whom are located in the Southeastern United States, Frykholm's research involved visits to churches and homes, as well as Bible study and Sunday school classes, where the *Left Behind* books were being discussed.

Amy Johnson Frykholm's parents each converted to evangelical Christianity during childhood. In *Rapture Culture* Frykholm describes how her own early life was shaped by evangelical church and family culture. When later drawn to feminist understandings of gender, Amy found herself unable to combine feminism with evangelicalism without being judged negatively by fellow church members. This led Frykholm to break with evangelicalism. Knowing that most consumers of *Left Behind* were ardent evangelicals, Amy struggled with how best to present herself when interviewing readers. At first she revealed little about her own religious background. This proved awkward when conversing with people for whom speaking about *Left Behind* represented an occasion for "witnessing." Frykholm soon adopted a different tactic. "With some hesitation," she declares, "I decided to try a new approach. At the beginning of the interview, I

## Left Behind

offered my own story in evangelism and separation from it. I expressed vulnerability and tried to reassure the interviewee that I had no intention or desire to denigrate readers of *Left Behind*. To my surprise this speech opened up the conversation.”[1]

Frykholm’s honesty enabled her to gain considerable insight into the reading practices of those who consume the *Left Behind* texts. When analyzing how people made sense of the books, guided by Eve Sedgwick’s method of “reparative reading,” Frykholm remained open to surprises (good and bad), attempting to avoid premature ideological or theoretical closure. Frykholm discovered that readers typically read and discuss the books in social networks, rather than as individual consumers. In the “church homes” they share with fellow believers, readers recount how discussing the novels strengthened their connections to others. Conversing about the books also allowed readers to express their views on various theological issues, with the books occasionally serving as an alternative source of religious authority, enabling readers to challenge the perspectives of their own clergy. Most clergy, it appears, are far less familiar with *Left Behind* than church members.

Whether uniting and dividing families, Frykholm found that reading *Left Behind* is inevitably a social act, mediated by the context in which reading and discussing the books takes place. This is not to deny the sensuous, emotionally charged, or even autoerotic pleasures that readers sometimes experience. Frykholm discusses this as well. Nevertheless, reading *Left Behind* ritually contributes to a collective religious sensibility that reinforces believers’ shared evangelical convictions. Nonbelievers also affirm social connections when reading the books. Although sometimes confused, or even irritated, by the dispensational pedagogy embedded within the texts, nonbelievers typically read *Left Behind* to connect with a believer who gave them or recommended the books.[2]

The churches observed by Frykholm where members exchanged and talked about the *Left Behind* books were varied. They ranged from a small white Presbyterian church in rural South Carolina to a large multiethnic and internationally oriented church located in its own strip mall, along with offices for a variety of local and global ministries. After reading *Left Behind* books, parishioners in the small South Carolina church started a

*Revelations* bible study group. This helped members acquire a biblically informed understanding of the events portrayed in the novels. Discussing *Left Behind* also deepened people's connections with each other as fellow church members and family. At the larger "international" church, energetic forms of worship were adorned by the sounds of a guitar, drums, trumpet, and singers. Prayerful words and song lyrics were projected on a large screen. This was a decidedly different church environment, but here, too, reading the *Left Behind* books was a collective enterprise, a ritual of social connectedness, blurring the boundaries between church and home.[3]

Most readers reported that the books affected them powerfully, although the meaning people made of the novels was neither uniform nor homogeneous. While often strengthening their existing beliefs, reading *Left Behind* also aided readers to better "visualize" mysterious biblical images, particularly those in the enigmatic *Book of Revelations*. Hence, in conjunction with other devotional technologies of Christian "world making" – prayer, Bible study, worship, listening to Christian music, tuning into Christian radio and television – reading *Left Behind* helped make the Bible come alive in believers' everyday lives.[4]

Other readers described their experience of the novels as simultaneously fascinating and fearful. For such people, the books provoked anxiety and doubt about salvation and whether they, or their loved ones, might be left behind. Reading the books was also an occasion for people "to castigate themselves for failures of courage, to fantasize about a life of adventure, to secure themselves in their evangelical faith, and to teach themselves how to handle various struggles in their own lives." [5] For other readers, the novels were infused with utopian impulses, even a desire to be raptured. As "dynamic objects" of interpretation, the *Left Behind* novels also frequently serve as guides for Christian action in a world where the Rapture could take place at any moment. For many readers the novels also promoted an urgent "need to witness to their neighbors, unsaved family members and friends. Witnessing – sharing their faith with others is the most potent form of action they can imagine." [6]

Promoting a desire to witness has long been an important aspect of dispensational theology and practice. "For dispensationalists, the truth of rapture and tribulation, of an apocalyptic future, has always been,

## Left Behind

in part, about evangelization. If the rapture is coming soon, then the unsaved need to know about it. They need the opportunity to accept Christ or reject him.”[7] Witnessing, however, may take different forms. For some of Frykholm’s readers witnessing was a silent act, a gesture as simple as purchasing, carrying around, or reading the *Left Behind* books in public. Small acts such as these may also lead to conversation, providing “an opening, a casual and non-threatening way to present their faith to others.”[8] Giving or sharing copies of the books with others is another common form of witnessing. Many people with whom Frykholm spoke gave copies to friends and family members. Some even gave them to strangers. One woman described buying “like twenty copies at the bookstore” and sending them to “everyone.”

An advertisement distributed by Tyndale House Publishers recounts how, after giving a copy to her stepdaughter, one reader actually purchased and gave away an astounding 500 additional copies. Tyndale House also claims that *Left Behind* has “brought thousands, perhaps millions, of people into the Christian faith.”[9] Nevertheless, while underscoring the books’ role in strengthening believers’ faith, Frykholm found little evidence (in either interviews or a sample of testimonial letters provided by Tyndale House) that reading actually led to conversion. As such, the “books do not seem capable of persuading the unpersuaded into a position more amenable to faith. The more powerful effect seems to be on the believer who finds his or her life profoundly touched and feels deeply and passionately the need to share the message.”[10]

## 7

### **The Gendering of *Left Behind***

One thing that struck Frykholm as particularly important was the indifference most readers expressed when asked about matters of gender in the *Left Behind* novels. As a feminist literary critic, Frykholm, of course, approached the books with a different set of concerns than the people she conversed with. Situating the *Left Behind* phenomenon within the changing history of American religious practices, Frykholm notes how *Left Behind* simultaneously “remains within” and departs from “the tradition of dispensational premillennialism.”[1] She also discusses differences with regard to representations of gender between dispensationalism and the wider tradition of fundamentalist evangelical thought, of which dispensationalism is an important but singular strand.

Most scholarship today recognizes that a virulent assertion of the spiritual superiority of masculinity is a key component of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism arose in the later half of the nineteenth century in response to sweeping changes taking place in British and American society. These changes included unsettling challenges to existing gender roles. For the most part, Victorian Christian culture pictured men as more worldly and women as more spiritual. Early fundamentalists rejected this view. They decried the effeminate character of mainstream Protestant churches, arguing that men were “divinely equipped” with a greater aptitude for religion and rational judgment than women. This supposedly made men better protectors of the Christian faith, as well as more effective public religious leaders.[2] Early dispensationalists also criticized the “womanish”



## Left Behind

and “weak” character of mainstream Protestant churches. But over time fundamentalist and dispensationalist imaginings of gender became more discordant, particularly in the realm of rapture fiction. This is also true when considering the depiction of gender in the *Left Behind* series.

In most fictional accounts of End Times, the term *rapture* carries intensely gendered resonances. While the word “rapture” does not itself appear in English versions of the Bible, the phrases “snatch up” or “caught away” are used to depict the “idea of God translating [or transporting] people from earth to heaven.” In Greek, the word used is *harpazo*. *Rapture* is the Latin translation. Nevertheless, as Tim LaHaye points out, rapture “caught on as the unofficial title of the event. Actually it may be a better translation than ‘snatch up’ or ‘caught away,’ because it suggests a joyous exaltation – which is not the case when a person is snatched away by a kidnapper or someone who plans to do him harm.”[3] After conducting a computer search on the term, LaHaye subsequently discovered that the word, rapture, is also often associated with “romances, love stories, and even erotica.”[4]

Frykholm concurs with LaHaye on this matter, noting that in rapture fiction, the term rapture typically connotes the “carrying off of a woman” – whether by ecstasy or force. In dispensationalist thought the connection between women and rapture is also symbolized in the “taking up” into heaven of “the Bride of Christ,” Christ’s true church:

Fictive narratives of the rapture played with this theme. In the stories that began to appear in the early years of the twentieth century, the ‘raptured’ were nearly always female. In fact the classic form of the rapture narrative is one in which a devout wife and mother is raptured from her home leaving behind her worldly and ungodly husband. This essentially domestic image of the rapture weaves together the ‘carrying off of a woman’ with images of female piety. The ‘raptured woman’ becomes Christ’s bride in heaven... This woman is immediately raptured while her husband or son, who fails to hear her warnings, is left behind when the rapture comes... Early rapture fiction punished the worldly man and exalted, but rendered irrelevant, the pious woman.[5]

For Frykholm, dispensationalism in general, and the *Left Behind* series in particular, extend and partially modify fundamentalism's typically virile approach to Christianity. In keeping with the precepts of patriarchal culture, women characters in the *Left Behind* novels are divided into two sorts. On one hand, there is the pious or good woman. She acts in accordance with faith, submitting herself to the will of both God and men. In *Left Behind*, on first impression, Chloe Steele appears to exemplify this figuration of blessed female purity. On the other hand, there is the bad or rebellious woman. This woman refuses her divinely ordained role as submissive wife and mother, acting, instead, in keeping with stereotypes of unruly female sexuality. In rapture fiction, women of this sort are often paired with the biblical image of the Whore of Babylon. They are "women who go off to seek their fortunes and end up as prostitutes in lives of faithlessness and decadence. They are women who leave the home, refuse domesticity, and pay a price with their souls." [6]

In the *Left Behind* series, Hattie Durham, the beautiful flight attendant, appears cast as the biblical Whore. Hattie shuns the advice of Rayford Steele and other members of the Tribulation Force, becoming first the secretary, then consort, of Nicholas Carpathia. The alluring and rebellious Hattie "exists in the novels as a warning of the dangers of women who refuse to submit to Christian male authority." [7] Until she finally converts to Christianity, Hattie's actions lead from disaster to disaster. After sleeping with Carpathia, she becomes pregnant and experiences a monstrous miscarriage. Later in the series, Hattie is attacked by a plague of locusts, then poisoned, and finally incarcerated in the notorious GC BUFFER (the Belgium Facility for Female Rehabilitation). Hattie's behavior also compromises the safety of the Tribulation Force. Despite Hattie's reckless behavior, the tribulation saints continue to pray for her and perform daring actions to rescue her from the throes of Carpathia's power.

Frykholm initially interprets gender imagery in *Left Behind*, whether consciously or unconsciously, as "a largely negative response" to contemporary feminism. [8] But this is not how the readers she interviews make sense of the texts. Readers describe characters, such as Chloe and Hattie, as "character types" rather than "gender types." Chloe is seen not as domesticated or submissive, but as "spunky" or "hard-headed." Hattie is perceived not as evil or whorish, but as "tragic" or "proud." While readers

## Left Behind

voice disgust with Hattie's actions and the fate that befalls her, most view her negative treatment in the novels as having little to do with her status as a woman. Her negativity, instead, is said to stem from the fact that she is an unbeliever.[9]

When interviewed, readers routinely discount – or reframe – matters pertaining to gender conflict, shifting focus to the novels' more general concerns with the apocalyptic battle between forces of good and evil. At times, those interviewed by Frykholm even appeared bewildered by her insistent questions about gender. Given the importance of gendered imagery to both fundamentalism and dispensationalism, the reasons for this disavowal are perplexing. To make sense of this anomaly, Frykholm modifies her initial interpretation of the *Left Behind* books. Despite “the hard-line antifeminist position of fundamentalist leaders,” Frykholm views the novels, in part, as responding to the “concerns and language of feminism.” In this sense, the women's movement is said to exert “an important, if subtle, effect on the [fundamentalist] movement.”[10] This is most evident in the novels' treatment of Chloe Steele. Unlike female characters in earlier rapture fiction, Chloe is not a one-dimensional figure of innocence. “Chloe is neither the domestic saint nor the martyred heroine... While she certainly would not say she is a feminist, [over the course of the novels, she shows herself to be] a strong, articulate, savvy businesswoman, and even though she says she submits to [her husband] Buck's authority, we rarely see examples of it.”[11]

The complexity of Chloe's character is revealed in the following excerpt from *Soul Harvest*. Chloe has become the CEO of an underground Christian commodity co-op, struggling to resist the economic and spiritual domination of the Antichrist. Chloe has also married Buck Williams and has recently become pregnant with Buck's child. As Chloe's husband, Buck decides that she will not be permitted to accompany him on an important trip to Israel. Chloe is angered by Buck's presumption that he can make decisions on her behalf. She responds to her husband in the following exchange.

‘I won't even be showing by then, Buck. I'll be three months along. You're going to need me. Who's going to handle logistics? I'll be communicating with thousands of people on the Internet, arranging

these meetings. It only makes sense that I show up.’

...

‘We’ll see how healthy you are in a few weeks.’

‘I’ll start packing.’

‘Don’t jump to conclusions.’

‘Don’t parent me, Buck. Seriously I don’t have a problem submitting to you because I know how much you love me. I’m willing to obey you even when you’re wrong. But don’t be unreasonable. And don’t be wrong if you don’t have to be. You know I’m going to do what you say, and I’ll even get over it if you make me miss out on one of the greatest events in history. But don’t do it out of some old-fashioned, macho sense of protecting the little woman. I’ll take this pity and help for just so long, and then I want back in the game full-time. I thought that was one of the things you like about me.’[12]

Drawing upon Margaret Bendroth’s analysis of the convergent appeal of fundamentalism to both men and women, Frykholm notes how Chloe simultaneously submits and asserts herself, “negotiating for a position that will allow her to be a Christian mother and Christian warrior.”[13] The attraction of fundamentalist thought is particularly strong in times of widespread social and cultural change. During such times, faith in the literalness of the Bible is also said to evoke a “more nuanced expression of manliness than the tireless virility demanded by the secular world.” While opposing “feminizing forces in religion and society,” the “nuanced” masculinity discerned by Bendroth and Frykholm, nevertheless offers heterosexual men a “romantic, passionate outlet.”[14] In the *Left Behind* books evidence for this is found when considering the series’ leading male characters, Rayford Steele and Buck Williams. Following the Rapture, each man manifests, not only a reinvigorated commitment to Christ, but also the ability to be in touch with his emotions and respond flexibly to the needs of the women in their lives.

## Left Behind

Rayford, like Buck, is generally portrayed as virile and heroic. But after the rapture of his wife and young son, in addition to becoming “born again,” Rayford becomes more emotionally sensitive and caring. He also displays a newfound domesticity and a sense of parental responsibility for his daughter, Chloe. When asked by his boss, Earl, to come to work at a last minute’s notice, Rayford declines. He politely informs Earl that he’s “in the middle of something” important. When Early inquires as to whether Rayford’s “got another deal cooking?” Rayford responds, “I’m cooking, but not another deal. I happen to be preparing dinner for my daughter.” At dinner, Chloe asks her dad why he took the time to prepare shrimp scampi, her favorite meal. Rayford replies playfully, “I just got in touch with my feminine side.”[15] Buck, who later marries Chloe, makes related adjustments in masculine style when responding to Chloe’s mixture of assertion and devotedness.

Despite its pronouncedly masculine rhetoric and theology of female submissiveness, the actual role of gender “within fundamentalism and, more recently, contemporary evangelism has always been more complex than the rhetorical stance of its leaders... Women were drawn to these congregations during times of social crisis, and there they found a network of female support unavailable in other cultural locations. The churches offered female-led Bible studies and female-only activities that provided women with social, emotional, and spiritual inspiration and a context in which their fears and anxieties could be expressed.”[16] While accepting less of a public role than men, women appear to find informal power and influence in a wide variety of everyday church activities, in missionary work, and the organization of church services. Perhaps as an informal trade-off for lesser public roles, women married to evangelical men are also able to demand men’s greater participation in family life than are women married to non-evangelical men.

Thus, despite advocating “a God-ordained model of marriage with male headship and female subordination,” many strands of evangelical Christianity also promote “an increasingly ‘tender’ Christian man, one much more able to express his emotions, engage in relationships, and openly communicate with his wife.”[17] As suggested above, in the *Left Behind* novels this modification of masculine privilege is revealed in the emotional reflexivity of Rayford Steele and Buck Williams. In this

way, the novels register “all the contradictions in gender identity that are present in the contemporary ‘Promise Keepers’ movement. As ‘servant leaders,’ men in the Promise Keepers are supposed to assert their authority as men, but they are also supposed to learn to be more expressive and emotional. They are supposed to learn to be better husbands and fathers through more attentive listening to their wives. While the Promise Keepers movement has been criticized as strongly anti-feminist, the responsibility that men bear for improving their relationships and humbling themselves suggests that this is a patriarchy of word more than deed. Like Rayford [and Buck], Promise Keepers seek a compromise between masculinity and the softening demands of Christianity.”[18]

Both the Promise Keepers and the dispensationalist *Left Behind* narratives offer gendered images of order in a world beset by chaos and social conflict. Women are blessed with informal power in the realms of family and church. On the other hand, men retain greater influence in the action-oriented public realm, but become softer and more emotionally responsive to their wives and family. This nuanced modification of gender roles occurs without presenting serious structural challenges to male privilege in its entirety. According to Frykholm, this exemplifies what Judith Stacey refers to as a “patriarchy of the last grasp” – a more flexible order of gender inequality in a world beset by unsettling forces of global social change in multiple realms – cultural, technological, and economic.[19] In this sense, the *Left Behind* books offer evangelical readers a projective screen to help make sense of changing gender roles and sweeping global transformations that threaten traditional notions of personal and religious identity.

As mentioned previously, many readers describe how the books help them to better “visualize” some of the Bible’s more abstract or arcane imagery. By suggesting one-to-one correspondence between biblical prophecies and contemporary social occurrences, the books also help readers to make visible the otherwise “invisible hand” of world historical power. This is a key aspect of the fascination and pleasure that the novels hold for readers. As a kind of “formula fiction,” the books enable readers to interpret the global complexities of contemporary culture, power, and history in keeping with the more simplistic mythic structures of Christian eschatology. As Frykholm notes,

## Left Behind

Readers of *Left Behind* often use this [religious] myth to speak to anxieties about the swiftly changing world of late capitalism. No matter what new information they receive – and that information appears to be more and greater every day – it can be sifted and sorted into myth. Disorienting and potentially frightening events begin to make sense. For example, ‘globalization’ has long been translated through the rapture narrative into the ‘One World Government.’ Since the early twentieth century, rapture narratives have described the consolidation of the world’s economic, political, and religious diversity into one totalitarian force. Through the figure of the One World Government with the Antichrist as its head, the rapture narrative has spoken to fears about globalization and the advancement of capitalism. It has expressed concerns about the possibility of totalitarianism inherent in the vast homogenization of capital.[20]

Readers interviewed by Frykholm use the *Left Behind* books to align their vision of life with biblical prophecies, whether in considering what to make of the World Trade Organization or United Nations, war in the Middle East, the seductive allure of consumer culture, the anxieties and promises aroused by new technologies, or the cosmic significance of the latest earthquake. With this in mind, the next section of this essay examines the relationship between religion and technology in the *Left Behind* books. What specifically do the many images of technology in the novels reveal about dominant social phantasms guiding distinctively American technologies of power at this time in history?

## 8

### **Apocalyptic Technologies of Control and Resistance**

The use of technology to command, control and communicate is pervasive throughout the *Left Behind* books. Much of what takes place in the novels, much of the plot, is advanced by characters communicating to, or spying upon, one another through a variety of technological means. Everybody is constantly trying to connect by cellular and satellite phones, speakerphones, e-mail, videotapes, intercom, radio, television, broadcasts on the Web, video conferencing, and by leaving messages on voice-mail and answering machines. Everyone is also always worried that communications are being tapped into by the Antichrist's vast surveillance operations. Carpathia is able to interfere instantly with media broadcasts anywhere on the planet, substituting his message and his image for what is being shown. News reports covering events that contradict GC's one-world religion, or expose Carpathia's treachery, quickly disappear from the screen. It is as if such dissonant events had never taken place.

Technological control of communications is a core component of the Antichrist's plans for world domination. "All banking, commerce, religion, and government will start and end right here," declares Nicolae Carpathia. "The greatest challenge in the ... world is in communications. We have already begun rebuilding an international network..." Rayford Steele, undercover as a "mole" within the inner circle of Global Community, interrupts Carpathia. "Communications is more important than people?" inquires Rayford. "More than cleaning up areas that might otherwise



## Left Behind

become diseased? Clearing away bodies? Reuniting families?” Nicolae responds as follows.

‘In due time, Captain Steele. Such efforts depend upon communications too. Fortunately the timing of my most ambitious project could not have been more propitious. The Global Community recently secured sole ownership of all international satellite and cellular communications companies. We will have in place in a few months the first truly global communications network. It is cellular, and it is solar powered. I call it Cellular-Solar. Once the cellular towers have been re-erected and satellites are maneuvered to geosynchronous orbit, anyone will be able to communicate with anyone else anywhere at any time.’[1]

The Antichrist, we are told, was unable to disguise his glee. “If this technology worked, it solidified Carpathia’s grip on the earth. His takeover was complete. He owned and controlled everything and everybody.”[2] Well, not exactly everybody. As indicated previously, the Tribulation Force also deploys a wide range of technologies in efforts to counter the Antichrist. Inside the cockpit of Carpathia’s Global Community jet, loaded with the latest state-of-art technologies, Rayford commands a hidden device that enables him to listen to the conversations of Carpathia and his henchmen in the plane’s interior. Later, “through the miracle of technology” and the “expert maneuvering” of Chang Wong (another mole working at Global Community Headquarters in New Babylon), the Tribulation Force secretly records and projects on “a big screen TV” an early morning meeting between Carpathia and his ten regional potentates. “[E]verybody in the Global Community assumed, because it was a closed-door session, it was also private.”[3]

The Tribulation Force uses many of the same information technologies as the Global Community when disseminating its message of hope and salvation. Buck Williams publishes *The Truth*, an on-line cyber-magazine, and Rabbi Tsion Ben-Judah communicates regularly to an audience of over a billion people via untraceable Internet broadcasts. For Tsion, religion and technology go hand in hand. “I envision thousands of technological experts creating a network of resources for believers,” Ben-Judah explains to Rayford, “informing them of safe havens, putting them in touch with

each other. We know we will lose many brothers and sisters, and yet we should offer what we can to keep the gospel going forth.”[4] “Tsion often expressed to Rayford his satisfaction with his new computer – a light, thin, very portable laptop that plugged into a docking station that gave him all sorts of handy accessories at home. It was the latest, fastest, most powerful machine on the market. Tsion spent every day communicating with his international flock.”[5]

Information technology also plays a crucial role in the survival of Christians during the years of tribulation. Christians who refuse to be implanted with Global Community microchips are forced to live in underground networks. When implanted under the skin, the tiny microchips, each bearing the insignia of the Antichrist, enable GC citizens to buy and sell commodities. But those who accept this “Mark of the Beast” (*Revelation* 13) are also forever subject to panoptic surveillance and electronic monitoring. Those who refuse the demonic implants are not only denied access to the market, they face beheading, decapitation by means of a Loyalty Enforcement Facilitator (or guillotine). To facilitate the survival of those who resist being incorporated into the Antichrist’s one-world system of religion, government and finance, Ken Ritz, an “economics expert” with a degree from London School of Economics, devises a “world commodity co-op” as a “lifesaver for millions of saints.”[6] The co-op enables believers to barter with each other for food, oil, and a range of other needed commodities. Following Ken’s death (he is declared a terrorist and killed by GC peacekeepers), Chloe (Steele) Williams assumes responsibility for the Internet-based global co-op.

This is but one of many ways by which the technologically savvy Tribulation Force subverts the diabolical power of the Antichrist, protecting believers and “harvesting” new souls for Christ. Indeed, heroic Christians not only use technology, they also “use it better and use it smarter. Inside the Antichrist’s empire, the best technological minds are actually Christians, hiding their identities to help the cause.”[7] But there are dangers, as well as advantages, to using technology in this manner. “The ability of believers to act depends on Antichrist first providing them with the necessary data... Believers are not strong enough to confront Carpathia directly, but move within *his* space, purloin *his* data to interrupt *his* schemes.”[8] For Glenn Shuck, this represents an allegory about challenges faced by contemporary

## Left Behind

evangelists, including LaHaye and Jenkins, when operating within the seductive terrain of technology-driven popular culture. Believers feed off a system designed to control them, attempting to subvert and even parasitically transform the system with tools made available by the existing structures of power.

They are, in a sense, parasites. Antichrist is not the only one who can infiltrate the enemy. Believers can also invade and use his technological dependence against him... Antichrist operates a superior surveillance network. Yet the same tools Antichrist deploys to tighten his grip on the world also make him vulnerable to the parasites gnawing at his flank... [T]he Tribulation Force utilizes the tools available to them to ... infiltrate Carpathia's 'always-on' network, deploying a legion of operatives wielding state-of-the-art laptop computers, secure cellular phones, and even, through the help of insiders within Carpathia's computer network, fraudulent identities certified by the Global Community's own computer databases.[9]

Shuck's analysis of the parasitic character of the Tribulation Force's engagement with technology is, by analogy, an inquiry into a dilemma faced by contemporary evangelists. Is it possible to maintain a distinctive Christian evangelical identity, while simultaneously depending on network-based technologies of communication that erase clear boundaries between the insides and outsides of virtually all social institutions and systems of belief? Previously, social institutions and beliefs appeared – at least to those most blessed by power – to be relatively fixed, stable and autonomous from other social institutions and beliefs. This distinctiveness is undermined by the emergence of *network society*, a concept Shuck borrows from Manuel Castells.[10] This is a society of technologically configured networks and nodes, a society of fast eroding boundaries and destabilized identities. Network society is ruled by digital rather than legal codes, governed by what is technologically possible whether legal or not. This is a complex society organized around fast flows of money, people, weapons, and things.

The technological extraction and circulation of information are core features of network society. "Like high waves pounding across a sandy

beach, information continuously erodes and reshapes our understandings of ourselves and our cultures. The network culture demands dynamism and flexibility. Permanence is not one of its traits. Not surprisingly, some groups feel 'left behind' when their cultural moorings are swept away in the ceaseless flows of information.”[11] Network society is also a society whose primary forms of power include not only fearful but fascinating forms of technological control; not only technologies of meaning and belief – backed up by threat, punishment, and militarized death – but also technologies of seduction and self-loss – backed up by magic, mesmeric enchantment, and terror. This is a society governed by both technologies of the word – the pale encasements of transcendental reason – and also by technologies of the senses – the energetic pulsations of bodies in motion and at rest.

The *Left Behind* novels do not explicitly use the term network society to denote the demonic technological force-fields of deceptive words and alluring sensations in which Tribulation Force members struggle for religious purity and salvation. Nevertheless, the world of tribulation depicted by LaHaye and Jenkins – a global society dominated by the Antichrist – resembles the most nightmarish kind of society to possibly emerge from a global circuit of power composed of profit-driven networks and nodes. Manipulative technologies of the word enable Carpathia and those loyal to the Antichrist to distort language to the point where peace becomes war, freedom constraint, reason blind obedience, religion secularity, and community the worship of the ego. But the power of persuasive rhetoric goes only so far. After Carpathia is assassinated and resurrected from the dead (by Satan) live on CNN, the GC accelerates its seductive use of image-intensive technologies of fascination as a supplement to its efforts to control words and discursive meanings.

As if taking a page from the playbook of Jean Baudrillard,[12] the Antichrist declares that, “despite its lofty goal of unifying the world’s religions,” the “Enigma Babylon One World Faith failed” because, ultimately, its tolerant, inclusive, and highly rational god proved too “nebulous and impersonal.” What is needed, declares Leon Fortunato, Carpathia’s publicist, is for the GC to go beyond rational persuasion in order to cultivate an “outpouring of emotion.” What Fortunato has in mind is something akin to old fashioned idol worship. The False Prophet recruits Guy Blod, an “outrageous and

## Left Behind

flamboyant” gay artist to construct a huge statue of Nicolae in New Babylon, and later orders life size exact replicas (simulacra) of the World Potentate erected in all major cities of the world.[13] The goal, it seems, is to seduce the senses of people made anxious and uncertain by the catastrophic events of the tribulation.

In addition to the captivating simulacra of Carpathia, the “lascivious” allure of television and the global entertainment industry is another tool in the Antichrist’s mesmerizing technological stockpile of weapons. Not long after global warfare and (super)natural disasters have knocked out much of the world’s electricity, television returns “full force” by means of the “astounding” technological power of the GC’s “Cellular-Solar networks.” What is broadcast may fascinate much of the population, but it horrifies the saintly Rabbi Tsion Ben Judah. In a sermon posted in his untraceable Webpage, Tsion decries the devilish enchantments of a sensate “entertainment medium” that now goes beyond all restraints, boundaries, and limits.

‘Our television accesses hundreds of channels from all over the world, beamed to it by satellite. Every picture on every channel representing every station and network available is transmitted into your home in images so crisp and clear you feel you could reach inside the screen and touch them. What a marvel of technology!

But this does not thrill me... I shall no longer apologize for my horror at what has become of the entertainment medium ... vile language or lascivious images... Stopping even to criticize them would have subjected my brain to poison... – final proof that society has reached rock bottom.

I am neither naïve nor prudish. But I saw things today I never thought I would see. All restraint, all boundaries, all limits have been eradicated. It was a microcosm of the reason for the wrath of the lamb. Sexuality and sensuality and nudity have been part of the industry for many years. But [we now] see not just simulated perversion but actual portrayals of every deadly sin listed in the Scriptures left us feeling unclean. Real violence, actual tortures and murders, is proudly advertised... Sorcery, black magic, clairvoyance,

fortune telling, witchcraft, séances, and spell casting are offered as simple alternatives to anything normal, let alone positive.

Is this balanced? ... Ask yourself if the message I write today would be allowed on even one of the hundreds of stations broadcast to every TV around the world? Of course not. I fear the day that technology will allow the Global Community to silence even this form of expression, which no doubt soon will be considered a crime against the state.’[14]

Tsion’s admonitions about the dangers of seductive technologies of sensory captivation closely resemble the admonitions of LaHaye and Jenkins in *Are We Living in the End Times?* “Who can deny that this world has gone crazy over pleasure?” ask the authors. “From topless dancers to Hollywood entertainment ... millions spend money they cannot afford on events that consume hours of their time and energy. The whole world is becoming addicted to entertainment, ...[turning] the Western world into a sex-obsessed cesspool of immorality ... just like that of the Tribulation. It is hard to believe that sexual immorality can get any worse than it already is – but it will.”[15]

Nevertheless, for both LaHaye and Jenkins and the tribulation saints in *Left Behind*, the power of technology – even its enchanting or fascinating aspects – is bivalent. It is, at once, demonic and an instrument of redemption. As Glenn Shuck remarks:

LaHaye and Jenkins – far from technophobes – are obviously fascinated by the power of new technologies, especially communicative technologies. Unlike many of their predecessors in prophecy fiction, LaHaye and Jenkins attribute positive roles to technology... Yet the authors also recognize that the same networks that support ... resistive [evangelical] activities also make the Antichrist’s rapid rise to prominence possible. For the authors, technology is a double-edged sword.[16]

The bivalent approach to technology taken by the *Left Behind* series – its “double-edged sword” – may surprise those who today view Christianity and technology as perpetually at odds. From debates about the ethics of

## Left Behind

stem cell research to divergent understandings of the nature of creation, contemporary culture is replete with numerous instances of conflict between religion and technology. Yet, over the longer course of history, this is far from the case. Although distinguishing *Left Behind* from earlier rapture fiction, the series' Christian affirmation of technology is hardly unique. Indeed, as David Noble has shown, for centuries Northwestern approaches to technology have been guided by an "enduring, other-worldly quest for transcendence and salvation." [17]

In *The Religion of Technology*, Noble demonstrates the continuing presence of deep-seated religious imaginings as an animating force behind our society's enchantment with various forms of technology and technological change. Behind such enchanted imaginings lies a dense web of ancient spiritual guilt – the guilt of failing to mime or imitate God – his image and likeness; the guilt of failing to obey the lawful dictates of God's Word; and the guilt of having fallen at the beginning of time from the Edenic garden of God's good graces. As such, while "today's technologists, in their sober pursuit of utility, power and profit, seem to set society's standard for rationality, they are driven also by distant dreams, spiritual yearnings for spiritual redemption." [18] Noble is also attentive to the "gendered construction" of the dominant Christian religion of technology, "tracing the ideology and institutions to their roots in the celibate, misogynist, and homosocial clerical culture, and to suggest that the legacy of this lineage persists in today's scientific milieu." [19]

Noble's important study documents the influence of millenarian and apocalyptic Christian thinking on the technological imagination of Northwestern society from medieval innovations in agriculture to state-of-the-art contemporary research in genetics, artificial intelligence, space travel, and military science. In this regard, it is important to note that thinkers as diverse as Joachim of Fiore and Roger Bacon, Giordano Bruno and Tomasso Campanella, Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle and Joseph Priestly, Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell, each explicitly ground their work in a Christian theology of redemption. Each links the technological domination of nature to the restoration of Edenic harmony, a reclamation of what was lost with Adam and Eve's fall from paradise. Many of these technological innovators also cite specific passages from the *Book of Daniel* and *Revelation* as inspiration for their efforts, the same passages cited by LaHaye and Jenkins.

This is also true for such giants of twentieth-century techno-science as weapons inventors Edward Teller and Livermore Lab's Lowell Wood, rocket pioneers Robert Goddard and Wernher von Braun, and the influential stewards of biotechnology and human genetics Theodosius Dobzhansky, Arthur Peacocke and Donald Munro. While scientists in the field of artificial intelligence typically claim a more secular basis for their labor, Noble points to unrecognized or unconscious theological longings nestled into leading AI scientists' pursuit of immortality and flight from this mortal coil. At issue is the historical triumph of religiously orchestrated "technologies of transcendence," knowledge-based forms of power that deny the reality of human immanence within nature, suppressing the systemic complexities of human-animal participation within the interconnected throes of living energetic matter.

Human immanence within nature – this is not our true destiny, declares the Bible! Technologies that have long dominated Northwestern society share the Bible's vision on this matter. What Noble calls "the religion of technology" informs us that neither people nor things begin in complex systems of living energetic matter. They begin with the Word. In the beginning, we are told, was the Word. And, in the end, there is the Word as well – alpha and the Omega Code, *St. John's Gospel* and *Revelation*. At the end of the *Left Behind* books, the last technology standing is the Word. Everything else is burnt to a crisp, vaporized by the Wrath of the Lamb, impaled by judgment spewing forth from the Word. The landscape is littered with the "splayed and filleted bodies of men and women," as Jesus descended from the heavens "shining, powerful and victorious... And the sword from his mouth, the powerful Word of God itself, continued to slice through the air, reaping the wrath of God's final judgment." [20]

Although LaHaye and Jenkins articulate technology's demonic as well as transcendent side, the evangelical triumph of technology over all things material in the novels is ultimately, absolutely, backed up by the apocalyptic technology of the Word. As a scholar of religion, Glenn Shuck worries that, like other forms of contemporary evangelism, the *Left Behind* books err in the direction of deifying technology. According to Shuck, the books come "perilously close to worshipping the Beast they seek to resist... Too often ... the authors suggest that the solution lies in who controls technology,



## Left Behind

ignoring the inherent qualities of technological tools... Although the Tribulation Force believes they are fighting Antichrist using his tools, ... they are tragically unaware that they are inside the Beast, co-participants in his infernal system. This tragic lack of awareness,” is said to represent “the central tension of the *Left Behind* novels.”

Shuck is concerned that, without a tragic awareness of the limitations of technology, contemporary evangelism will fall prey to a kind of fatalism or “bad faith.” This is particularly the case for versions of evangelism fueled by a prophetic imagination of predestined apocalypse. This kind of fatalism is glimpsed in the later part of the *Left Behind* series as technology-based attempts to intervene within the global drama of tribulation yield to an absolute acceptance of the Word’s inevitable triumph over the flesh and over the contingencies of human history. In this, “the delicate tensions the authors maintain throughout much of the series fall away as their anxious protagonists insist upon absolute certainty in a world that simply cannot give it.” Such insistence results in an abstract form of transcendence, one that “despairs of human possibilities for growth and change, while deploying an aggressive form of political rhetoric designed to bring forth the commands of God through naïve obedience to contemporary and controversial interpretations of ancient prophecies.”[21]

Other religious critics of *Left Behind* share Shuck’s concerns with the series’ drift toward absolutism and the inevitability of global destruction. The novels are also criticized for erroneously interpreting or being highly selective in their use of the Bible. Nonfundamentalist church organizations, including the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, have passed resolutions decrying the books’ apocalyptic scenario. Other theological writers have accused the series of encouraging “sadism, indifference to suffering, and a ‘lust for power.’”[22] Secular critics of the books, on the other hand, underscore politically conservative and fear-mongering aspects of the texts. While agreeing that such concerns are often justified, Amy Johnson Frykholm reminds us that readers should not be viewed as passive consumers, manipulated by the suggestive texts.

Frykholm emphasizes the creative agency of readers and the social contexts in which people interpret the *Left Behind* novels. This does not imply that interpretive freedom is unlimited. For prophecy believers, the “story of

rapture and tribulation” also has a “policing function. It binds readers, “consciously or unconsciously,” to highly specific religious “strictures of power and authority,” inducing conformity “to expectations placed on them from outside through fear, insecurity, and religious fervor.”[23] This limits readers’ interpretative imaginations, increasing the likelihood that people will make sense of the books in some ways but not others.

Interpretive constraints of this sort are not arbitrary. They are rooted in a literal approach to the Bible and symptomatic of the fearful flight from the flesh that is a hallmark of dominating Christian approaches to technology and power. Consider the following excerpt from *Glorious Appearing*, the last of the *Left Behind* books. The excerpt alludes to the *Book of Genesis* and to the putative transcendence of the Word over embodied human material and spiritual participation in living energetic nature. In closing this essay, I will reflect upon the sociological meaning of this excerpt and the biblical passages to which it refers. The text depicts a confrontation between Jesus, the Warrior King, and Satan. Rayford Steele witnesses the confrontation. “Reeling,” Rayford remarks that, while he “knew these things were supposed to happen, ... he ... never imagined being an eyewitness to all of it.”

Satan had been “indwelling” the flesh of Nicolae Carpathia, helping the Antichrist extend his global empire of power. Then, after seven years of tribulation, Jesus returns to earth and lays waste to the Antichrist’s army, striking down his enemies with the mighty sword of God’s Word. “With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire.” (*Revelation* 19) For many Christians, this violent figuration of Christ may seem somewhat surprising. This is hardly the Jesus who preached love, patience, and forgiveness, and who urged his followers to turn the other cheek when assailed by those who do them harm. “This doesn’t sound like compassionate Jesus, ... the suffering servant of Isaiah 53,” states Gary Frazier, a colleague of Tim LaHaye’s and founder of the Texas-based Discovery Ministries, Inc. “This is the Warrior King. He judges and makes war.”[24]

The punishing military technology of God’s Word leads Satan to change shapes. At first he assumes the form of a lion. Later he transforms into a “titanic, hissing serpent.” The monstrous serpent coils around the arms and

## Left Behind

legs of St. Michael the Archangel, “its tongue darting between shows of its elongated fangs.” St. Michael and the angel Gabriel are present at the Battle of Armageddon to assist the Warrior King as He vanquishes the devil. The voice of Gabriel rings out, “Lucifer, dragon, serpent, devil, Satan, you will now face the One you have opposed since time immemorial.” Jesus then orders Satan to kneel at His feet.

‘I have fought against you from shortly after your creation,’ Jesus said.

‘My creation! I was no more created than you! And who are you to have anything against me?’

‘You shall be silent.’

The angel of light appeared... Jesus continued, ‘For all your lies about having evolved, you are a created being.’

The creature violently shook its head.

‘Only God has the power to create, and you were Our creation. You were in Eden, the garden of God, before it was a paradise for Adam and Eve. You were there as an exalted servant when Eden was a beautiful rock garden. You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty... But you defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities... You deceived Eve into sinning. During the next millennia you attempted to pollute the bloodline of Adam... I lay at your feet all the suffering of mankind. The earth was created as a utopia, and yet you brought it into sin, which resulted in poverty, disease, more than fifteen thousand wars, and the senseless killing of millions.’[25]

# 9

## In the Beginning

It is important to recognize that the treacherous figure of the serpent in the opening pages of *Genesis* and the closing pages of *Left Behind* – the “exalted servant” of the Word, who sins by imagining itself as evolving alongside the Word in history – represented something else entirely to the neighboring peoples of Mesopotamia, against whom the monotheistic peoples of the Word distinguished themselves. For the other so-called pagan peoples of Mesopotamia, human existence came into being as a gift of nature and the serpent was a symbol of the divine gift-giver, the Great Mother. Nature – the cosmic serpent that gave birth to the world – was revered as the source of all life, the womb of life, the web of energetic materiality from which humans came and to which we returned. All of creation, including human animal creation, was believed to owe its life to this sacred serpent, the matrix of life in which all humans, animals, rocks, minerals, and vegetables participated. “The snake was first of all a symbol of eternal life (like the moon), since each time it shed its skin it seemed reborn. It represented cosmic continuity within natural change – spiritual continuity within the changes of material life.”[1]

This, of course, is not how the Bible and the *Left Behind* novels imagine the story. In these books the story is told in reverse. The Bible recognizes no Great Mother of life, no sacred serpent from which we come and to which we return. For the Bible the serpent is pictured as evil. It tells us that the serpent envies the Word. The Bible also tells us that the serpent sins by rebelling against the dictates of the Word, seducing a woman, Eve,

## Left Behind

to do likewise. According to the Bible, “In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him.” (*The Gospel of John* 1: 1-3) This is what distinguishes the people of the Bible from the animists they had once been and from their neighbors. The Bible denies the sacredness of living energetic matter and serpentine ways of the flesh.

The people of the Bible, people of the Word, rely on orderly transcendental technologies of the Word in their battle against the chaotic forces of Evil. They make use of everything in sight to glorify the Word’s triumph over time and the mortal body. The people of the Word no longer believe that life comes into being as a maternal gift of nature, for better or worse. For them life comes only from the Word. In the beginning, they say, God created heaven and earth by speaking. Before God spoke, “the earth was a formless void” and there “was darkness over the deep.” Then from God’s mouth came the Word. “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light... God said, ‘Let there be a vault through the middle of the waters to divide the waters in two.’ And so it was.” Then God spoke again and dry earth came into being, then seed-bearing plants, the lights in the sky, and every kind of living creature, whether in water, air, or on earth.

Then “God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image and likeness, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground.’” The serpent creeps along the ground. God made man master of the serpent, and gave him dominion over the rest of creation as well. And to facilitate man’s mastery, God gave man the power of naming, the power of using words, “and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name.” (*Genesis* 1: 1-26; 2:19) “Next would come ... famine and death by plagues until a quarter of the population of the earth that remained after the Rapture was wiped out.” Rayford’s “universal cell phone vibrated in his pocket... *Thank God for Technology*, he thought.”[2]

None of this is exactly true. Despite strong biblical words about these matters, we humans are never really at a word’s distance from nature, naming nature from above. We are, instead, situated within the relational fluxes of living matter, an immanent aspect of nature’s own energetic

history. Traces of this awareness, long suppressed by those who adhere to the literalness of the Bible, are revealed in the etymology of key words used in the Bible itself. In *Genesis*, the term used to depict the “formless void” that is brought into order by God’s Word finds its roots in the ancient Hebrew phrase, *tohu-wa-bohu*. This, in turn, is related to the word *tehom*, a term associated with the ancient Mesopotamian serpent goddess *Tiamut*. The name given by Adam to the “first woman,” Eve also carries resonances of the ancient serpent goddess. The Hebrew word for Eve is *Hawwāh*. It means “mother of all the living.”[3]

To follow this serpentine path of words – the meaning of which has become distorted in the history of literal interpretations of the Bible – is not to preach the gospel of secular humanism, so virulently opposed by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. It is, instead, to reconnect with a more holistic and material spiritual vision where “gods were not shut off from the human race in a separate ontological sphere” and where “divinity was not essentially different from humanity.”[4] It is to be attentive to the immanence of sacred revelations in the flesh, not simply to those that come from outside natural history in the shape of words alone. It is to recognize that we are participants in nature’s sacred evolution, even as we productively carve out a time and place for ourselves within nature by means of technology. Technology is a parasite. It is also a constitutive cultural practice, a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human. Technology cuts into, creates systemic boundaries within, and feeds off the energetic materiality of nature. Technology transforms the general economy of life into a network of restrictive economic games, games of survival at any cost, games of I win and you lose. This in itself doesn’t make technology good or bad, but it does make technology tragic. Technology is a tragic, if absolutely necessary, aspect of our human condition.

The tragedy of technology is that it temporarily differentiates its users from the rest of nature. It punctuates our relationship to nature, making the remainder of living energetic matter appear as nothing but a context or environment for who we are and what we do. Language, the technology of words, plays a part. Language is, perhaps, the most fundamental technology. Words are both a technology and a type of information. As informational technologies words are selective. Words code the varieties of living energetic matter that they seek to describe and render useful from

## Left Behind

a human point of view. As informational technologies words operate to productively differentiate their users from the world of nature from which human linguistic practice draws its energy.

From the technological perspective of words, nature becomes a referent, something outside us, a thing toward which our language points or directs attention. To declare “In the beginning was the Word” is to tragically misunderstand the living energetic matter of which we are a part. It is to recognize energetic matters, but only from the perspective of information, only from the perspective of technologically coded variety, only from the perspective of the parasite. This is the fundamentalist tragedy of onto-theology. It appears (in history) to technologically separate us from the world of which we are materially a part. This is alienation, a not so original sin. From the perspective of living energetic matter – our serpentine mother, matrix and host – things are infinitely more complex, and more real. That is, things are more real than that which is given to us by technology. Things are more real than the word. The world is more real than the word; and more fleshy, sensuous, and varied.

Technology productively transforms our relationship to nature from the inside out. Under the instrumental spell of technology, nature is ritually transformed from the source of life itself, appearing now to our eyes as if a resource destined to be gathered for useful human purposes. This does not mean that technology, no matter how artificial, no matter how tragic, is ever really outside of nature. It is not. No parasite is. No parasite exists independent of its host. No technology exists independent of the energetic matter upon which it depends. For better or for worse, cars are nature too. So are computers, televisions, air conditioners, game plans, smart bombs, corporate organizational structures, hypnotic media practices, Botox parties, and pills that alter our moods.[5]

This is true as well for the *Left Behind* books. As technologies of the Word, they are dependent – as is the Bible, the “God-given” text that inspires their authors – upon a complex and fleshy historical dance of energetic materiality. In the unfolding of this dance, the Word may play a leading role, but it never comes first, nor does it have the final say. The Word may periodically banish the serpent, but the serpent returns to devour the Word; or, better yet, the serpent returns to make the Word laugh. Then, the

serpent eats its own tale and the tragic story begins again, if in a slightly different register. Both the Bible and the *Left Behind* books are inspirational technologies of the Word. As such, each bears the scriptural scars of all linguistic technologies – of all ritual, social, and religious visions of transcendence. This is to acknowledge the complexities of wisdom lodged in the flesh, rather than to honor fundamentalist dreams of rising above the body and paying homage to the Word alone.

To refuse this acknowledgement is perilous. Nevertheless, such a refusal is a core feature of that “lack of tragic awareness” concerning technology which Glenn Shuck posits as “the central tension of the *Left Behind* novels.” In LaHaye and Jenkins’ apocalyptic tale, flesh and blood make a glorious appearance at the End of Time. Here we find bodies cowering in fear; bodies assaulted by the Wrath of the Lamb; bodies ripped open, made to suffer and bleed; lustful bodies with sinful desires in need of religious sexual repression; spiritually abandoned bodies left behind by the skyward flight of the Word. *Left Behind* conjures an envy-driven phantasm of the Word’s revenge against the flesh as wave after wave of righteous violence fuels the series’ tale of final judgment. Pushed aside are whole other planes of sacred technological imaginings of the body – imaginings that are at once immanent and intimate, charming and joyful, Christian and otherwise. This displacement constitutes an intense blind spot, not only in the novels, but also in the fundamentalist, dispensationalist, and political worldviews articulated by the books’ authors; and also a blind spot in readers who most identify with the story’s rapturous plotline and phantasms.

This is particularly unfortunate inasmuch as many of the novels’ key themes resonate significantly with other contemporary political and religious critiques of the unholy emergence of new global networks of power. The *Left Behind* novels imaginatively depict the network-based subordination of local economies and cultures to “a new world order” of global currency flows and rule by technocratic elites. The books also speak, if in a densely coded manner, to fears and anxieties of people living within the Beast of Global Empire. Here, people steeped in otherworldly religious beliefs see through a glass darkly at best. Here, those who believe in the Word are challenged, not merely by secular humanism, but by two other global forces as well. The first involves the technologically bolstered forces of empire – a strange amalgam of greedy corporate, state,



## Left Behind

and military vectors of hyper-masculine power. The second force is more life affirming and hopeful. This involves the insurrectional challenge of indigenous people the globe over, people long colonized – religiously and economically – by Trinitarian technologies of terror – by the cross, and the crown, and the sword.

In *Left Behind* the dictatorial Global Community bears all the prophetic signs of empire. It enforces its will to power by a ruthless combination of mesmerizing mass media idolatry, the debasement of rational language, and the calculated cultural orchestration of deception, anxiety, and fear. These things are backed up by omnipresent technological surveillance and the threat of preemptive military action. But rather than imagining global exploitation in terms of actual historical technologies of power – corporate-state-military domination, gendered hierarchy, and a continuing coloniality of power – the novels reduce world history to a transcendental struggle between good and evil, an otherworldly battle between the forces of God and Satan. And, rather than imagining just social change in terms of embodied resistance to and transformation of existing social institutions, *Left Behind* beseeches readers to look for apocalyptic signs of End Times and to be raptured from the flesh.

Resonating with many of the critiques offered by the *Left Behind* novels, but troubled by the flight from the flesh that the books envision as a solution, I ask you to consider a different sort of ethical-religious engagement with global technologies of power. Rather than fleeing the world by a fundamentalist embrace of transcendental technologies of the Word, I propose addressing the malaise of the new global order with a *power-reflexive* approach to social institutions, including institutions of religion. This approach begins with a tragic awareness of the limits of even the best of technologies. It involves something like a sensuous and earth-bound attunement to the material and spiritual effects of technology's power – attention both to what technology gives us and to what it takes away. To be power-reflexive about technology is to be vigilant about the complex ways in which we are attracted to, or repulsed by, specific technological arrangements of people and things. It is also to recognize that all technologies owe a debt to the sacredness of the living energetic matter from which we are born and to which we return.

The transcendent technological writings of LaHaye and Jenkins ask us to see the world with prophetic eyes cast upward toward heaven, and to read the world's history as signs of End Times to come. By contrast, I conclude with sacred words of a different sort – a meditation on apocalyptic dangers prepared by members of the Iroquois Nation and presented to a U.N. Conference on Indigenous Peoples. This meditation approaches questions of technology with animated spirituality and reverence for living energetic matter. Entitled *A Basic Call to Consciousness*, the document warns about what is really being left behind as Christian prophecy believers prepare for the Rapture.

In the beginning we were told that human beings who walk about on the Earth have been provided with all the things necessary for life. We were instructed to carry a love for one another and to show a great respect for all beings of this Earth. We were shown that our life exists with the tree life, that our well-being depends on the well-being of the Vegetable Life, that we are close relatives of the four-legged beings.

The original instructions direct that we who walk about on Earth are to express a great respect, an affection and gratitude toward all the spirits, which create and support Life... When people cease to respect and express gratitude for these many things, then all of life will be destroyed, and human life on this planet will come to an end... The Indo-European people who have colonized our lands have shown very little respect for the things that create and support Life. We believe that these people ceased their respect for the world a long time ago... The way of life known as Western Civilization is on a death path on which its own culture has no viable answers...

The majority of the world does not find its roots in Western culture or tradition. The majority of the world finds its roots in the Natural World, and the traditions of the Natural World, which must prevail... The majority of our peoples still live in accordance with the traditions which find their roots in Mother Earth... We must all consciously and continuously challenge every model, every program, and every process that the West tries to force on us... The people who are living on this planet need to break with the narrow concept of human

## Left Behind

liberation, and begin to see liberation as something that needs to be extended to the Natural World. What is needed is the liberation of all things that support Life – the air, the waters, the trees – all things that support the sacred web of Life.[6]

### **Notes to Introduction: Born Again and Left Behind**

- [1] Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*. New York: Viking, 2006, p. xii.
- [2] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: the Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Henry Hold and Co., 2007.
- [3] For a discussion of the psychic materiality of haunting, see, Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- [4] For a nuanced discussion of living energetic matter, see, Teresa Brennan, *Exhausting Modernity: Grounds for a New Economy*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- [5] For important historical connections between the logics of global finance and the logistics of global war, see, Randy Martin, *An Empire of Indifference: American War and the Financial Logic of Risk Management*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007.

### **Notes to Preface: One Nation Under God**

- [1] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958. p. 171.
- [2] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*. New York: Random House, 2000. pp. 83, 80.
- [3] *Ibid.* pp. 84-85.
- [4] Quoted in Ron Suskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 16, 2004. p. 64.
- [5] Stephen Pfohl, "New Global Technologies of Power: Cybernetic Capitalism and Social Inequality," in Mary Romero and Eric Margolis, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*. Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 456-592.

### **Notes to Chapter 1: At the End of Time**

- [1] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995. pp. 208-209.

## Left Behind

- [2] *Ibid.* pp. 1,2,3.
- [3] Bruce David Forbes, “How Popular are the Left Behind Books ... and Why? A Discussion of Popular Culture,” in Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds., *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. pp. 7-8.
- [4] Morris Berman, *Dark Ages America: The Final Phases of Empire*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006. p. 4.
- [5] Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, *Left Behind: The Kids, Vol. 1, The Vanishing*. Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, 1998. p. 62.
- [6] Excerpt blurb from the *New York Times* included in Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Assassins: Assignment: Jerusalem, Target: Antichrist*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999. p. i.
- [7] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Apollyon: The Destroyer is Unleashed*. Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, 1999. p. 61.
- [8] Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. p. 124.
- [9] Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 115.
- [10] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Nicolae: The Rise of the Antichrist*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997. pp. 45-46.
- [11] The data reported here are cited in Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*. New York: Viking, 2006. pp. 102, 253, 106. See also, Paul Boyer, “When U.S. Foreign Policy Meets Biblical Prophecy,” *Alternet*, February 20, 2003, [www.alternet.org/story/15221/](http://www.alternet.org/story/15221/); and Mark Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*. Grand Rapid, Michigan: Eerdmanns, 2002.
- [12] Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy*, p. 101.
- [13] My use of the term *general economy* is a sign of my debt to Georges Bataille. My ideas about energetic materiality indicate my engagement with the work of Teresa Brennan and Anthony Wilden. See, Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Vol. 1 Consumption*, R. Hurley, trans. New York: Zone Books, 1988; Teresa Brennan, *Exhausting Modernity: Grounds for a New Economy*. New York: Routledge, 2000; Anthony Wilden, *The Rules are No Game: The Strategy of Communication*. New York: Routledge, 1987.

## Notes to Chapter 2: Empire America

- [1] Erik Eckhom, "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn," *The New York Times*, March 20, 2006. p. 1.
- [2] Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy*, p. 225.
- [3] Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. p. 131.
- [4] Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 19.
- [5] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*, p. 141.
- [6] *Ibid.* p. 141.
- [7] Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy*, p. 128.
- [8] While this essay addresses the ascendant power and influence of conservative American evangelicals, it should be remembered that a great many Protestants, particularly those who belong to admittedly shrinking mainstream denominations, remain politically progressive. Later in the essay I will discuss criticisms of the *Left Behind* books by progressive theologians and churches. In addition, and in part as a reaction to the disproportionate influence of the Christian Right, over the last few years progressive religious leaders have made repeated calls for a more justice-oriented convergence between religious and political voices. See, for instance, Harvey Cox, "Old-time Religion," *Boston Sunday Globe*, July 9, 2006, p. E 1-2.
- [9] Cited in Craig Unger, "American Rapture," *Vanity Fair*, December 2005. p. 222.
- [10] Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy*, 206. See also, Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors* University of Chicago Press, 2002. pp. 30-31.
- [11] George W. Bush, cited in Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy*, p. 206.
- [12] Tom Delay, cited in Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy*, p. 216.

## Notes to Chapter 3: After the Rapture

- [1] Bernard McGuinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994. pp. 3-5.
- [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 246.

## Left Behind

- [3] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times: Current Events Foretold in Scripture and What They Mean*. Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale House, 1999. pp. 159-177.
- [4] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000. pp. 10, 20-21, 314-315. To refer to Hardt and Negri's interpretive model as more "material" does not imply that religion is absent from their analysis. Hardt and Negri depict St. Francis of Assisi as a figure of counter-empire, underscoring his opposition to "every instrumental discipline" and the "mortification of the flesh." Affirmatively, Francis is said to celebrate the virtues of a "joyous life, including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the field, the poor and exploited humans, together against the will of power and corruption." (p. 413)
- [5] For prophecy theologians, such as LaHaye, the fact that ancient Babylon is located in present-day Iraq is of great importance. LaHaye's reading of chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation contends that, for "unfulfilled prophesies" to finally be realized, Babylon must be rebuilt, so as to "live again" as "the Seat of Satan" during End Times. In this regard it is of great interest that Saddam Hussein, whom LaHaye describes as a "servant of Satan," was in the process of reconstructing Babylon before invaded by the United States and its "coalition of the willing" in 2003. For LaHaye, the so-called demonic "butcher of Baghdad, had long envisioned himself as "becoming the modern counterpart to his lifetime hero, King Nebuchadnezzar... Religiously, Saddam may give lip service to Muhammad and act like a devoted Muslim, but there is strong indication that he is actually a Satanist" with plans to build a "temple to Satan" in a rebuilt Babylon. This is not to suggest, however, that Hussein himself is the Antichrist. According to LaHaye and Jenkins, "he is little more than a cheap imitation of Nebuchadnezzar. He could well be, however, the forerunner of the one who we believe is soon going to emerge on the world scene to take control of the United Nations (or its successor), move the commercial and governmental headquarters of his world government to Babylon, and rule the world from what we call in our Left Behind novels "New Babylon." See, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times*, pp. 139-143.
- [6] The identity microchip imagined by LaHaye and Jenkins is a high-tech analog of earlier figurings of the demonic "mark of the beast." Others have also involved computer-based surveillance devices, such as the "666" mark that some prophecy believers associate with credit cards and social control in a cashless society. See, for instance, Mary Stewart Relfe, *When Your Money Fails: The 666 System is Here*. Birmingham, Alabama: Ministries Inc.,

1981.

- [7] In the novels, Bruce is given no racial identity. Or, by default, perhaps he is imagined by the novels' predominately white readership as white. But in both the film and graphic novels of the story, Bruce is portrayed as a passionate Black minister. In the films and graphic novels U.S. President Gerald Fitzhugh is also African American. This suggests a more complicated representation of race in *Left Behind* in its several incarnations than in the novels alone. As Amy Johnson Frykholm points out, in the books, despite the Tribulation Force's multicultural veneer, "true authority" is bestowed exclusively on white men. See, Amy Johnson Frykholm, "What Social and Political Messages Appear in the Left Behind Books?" in Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds., *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. pp.184-186.
- [8] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 198.
- [9] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Apollyon: The Destroyer is Released*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999. p. 78.
- [10] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing: the End of Days*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. p. 202.
- [11] *Ibid.*, p. 203
- [12] *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- [13] *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 258.

#### **Notes to Chapter 4: Dispensational Theology**

- [1] Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "How Did Left Behind's Particular Vision of the End Times Develop? A Historical Look at Millenarian Thought," p. 34.
- [2] *Ibid.*
- [3] Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2002. p. 145.
- [4] Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggles for Evangelical Identity*. New York: New York University Press, 2005. pp. 30-34.
- [5] Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 17.
- [6] Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical*



## Left Behind

*Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*. New York: Viking, 2006. p. 143.

- [7] Stanley J. Grenz, "When Do Christians Think the End Times Will Happen? A Comparative Theologies Discussion of the Second Coming," in Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds., *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. p. 109.
- [8] *Ibid*, pp. 35-37.
- [9] Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 17-18.
- [10] Hal Lindsey, with C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970.
- [11] Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "How Did Left Behind's Particular Vision of the End Times Develop? A Historical Look at Millenarian Thought," in Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds., *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. p. 63.
- [12] Stanley J. Grenz, "When Do Christians Think the End Times Will Happen?" p. 109.
- [13] Craig Unger, "American Rapture," p. 210.
- [14] *Ibid*.
- [15] Nancy Gibbs, "Apocalypse Now," *Time Magazine*, July 1, 2002. p.46. Lindsey's involvement with the Reagan administration was hardly an isolated event. During this time period Reagan himself delivered his infamous "evil empire" speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, while James Watts, Secretary of the Interior, when downplaying the future implications of environmental damage to the planet, commented, "I don't know how many future generations we can count on until the Lord returns." Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger betrayed a related apocalyptic vision when stating, "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 everyday I think time is running out." Quotes in Nancy Gibbs, "Apocalypse Now," p. 46.
- [16] Yaakov Ariel, "How Are Jews and Israel Portrayed in the *Left Behind Series*," in Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds., *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. p. 139.
- [17] Gene Lyons, "The Apocalypse Will be Televised: Armageddon in an Age of Entertainment," *Harper's Magazine*, December 2005. p. 88.

**Notes to Chapter 5: The Theology and Biblical Politics of Tim LaHaye**

- [1] John Cloud, "Meet the Prophet: How an Evangelist and Conservative Activist Turned Prophecy into a Fiction Juggernaut," *Time Magazine*, July 1, 2002. p. 50.
- [2] Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation*, p. 69.
- [3] Biographical information on LaHaye is drawn from Robert Dreyfuss, "Reverend Doomsday," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, January 28, 2004. [http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/\\_/](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/_/).
- [4] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*. New York: Random House, 2000. p. 275.
- [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21. See also, Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- [6] Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 203. See also, Christian Smith, *American Evangelism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago; University of Chicago press, 1998.
- [7] Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for Mind*, quoted in Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, p. 274.
- [8] Robert Dreyfuss, "Reverend Doomsday," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, January 28, 2004. [http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/\\_/](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/_/).
- [9] Craig Unger, "American Rapture," p. 204.
- [10] Falwell is here quoted in Robert Dreyfuss, "Reverend Doomsday," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, January 28, 2004.
- [11] Adam Price, "A Higher Frequency: How the Rise of Salem Communications' Radio Empire Reveals the Evangelical Master Plan," *Mother Jones*, December 2005. p. 50.
- [12] Craig Unger, "American Rapture," p. 217.
- [13] *Ibid.*
- [14] John Cloud, "Meet the Prophet: How an Evangelist and Conservative Activist Turned Prophecy into a Fiction Juggernaut," p. 52.
- [15] Bantam Dell publishers provided LaHaye and Dinallo with a \$42 million advance to develop the *Babylon Rising* books. The novels revolve around the adventures of an Indiana Jones-like archeologist and biblical scholar, whose

## Left Behind

global pursuit of biblical artifacts promises to reveal religious prophecies not addressed by the *Left Behind* books. See, Tim LaHaye and Greg Dinallo, *Babylon Rising*. New York: Bantam Books, 2003.

- [16] See, for instance, Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* New York: Random House, 2000. pp. 310-312.
- [17] Like her husband, Beverly LaHaye has also written works of Christian fiction. See, for instance, Beverly LaHaye and Terri Blackche, *Seasons Under Heaven*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999. In this novel a young child's life-threatening illness tests the marriage and faith of a quiet suburban couple, challenging them to strengthen or discover anew their faith in Jesus Christ.
- [18] Robert Dreyfuss, "Reverend Doomsday," *Op sit*.
- [19] Following the appearance of the first three *Left Behind* books, Tim LaHaye's *No Fear of the Storm* was revised and republished as *Rapture Under Attack*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1998. Earlier popular cultural depictions of dispensationalism include Hal Lindsey, with Carole C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth*; and the 1972 film *A Thief in the Night*.
- [20] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999. pp. 53-54.
- [21] Craig Unger, "American Rapture," p. 217.
- [22] *Ibid*, p. 218.

### Notes to Chapter 6: Reading Left Behind

- [1] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- [2] *Ibid*, pp. 40-65.
- [3] Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 40-41.
- [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 132-137.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- [9] *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 164.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

### Notes to Chapter 7: The Gendering of Left Behind

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 103

[2] See, for instance, Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to Present*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993; Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

[3] Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 2002. pp. 29, 30.

[4] *Ibid.* pp. 30-31.

[5] Amy Franklin Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 97-98.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[7] Amy Johnson Frykholm, "What Social and Political Messages Appear in the *Left Behind* Books? A Literary Discussion of Millenarian Fiction," in Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds., *Rapture, Revelation and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. p. 181.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 91-94.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

[12] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996. pp. 306-307.

[13] Amy Franklin Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 181.

[14] Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, p. 52.

[15] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996. pp. 154, 155, 156.

[16] Amy Franklin Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 99.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[18] Amy Johnson Frykholm, "What Social and Political Messages Appear in the *Left Behind* Books? A Literary Discussion of Millenarian Fiction," pp.

180-181.

[19] Amy Franklin Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 101.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

### **Notes to Chapter 8: Apocalyptic Technologies of Control and Resistance**

[1] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Soul Harvest: The World Takes Sides*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998. p. 68.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Armageddon: The Cosmic Battle of the Ages*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003. p. 290.

[4] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Remnant*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002. pp. 119-120.

[5] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Apollyon: The Destroyer is Unleashed*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999. pp. 256-257.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 204, 346-348.

[7] Amy Johnson Frykholm, "What Social and Political Messages Appear in the *Left Behind* Books?" p. 189.

[8] Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, pp. 174-175.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175, 176-177.

[10] See, Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 3 Vols. Vol 1, *The Rise of Network Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

[12] For an argument concerning the superior force of image-intensive seduction over the power of discursive reason see, Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990; and also *The Evil Demon of Images*. Sydney, Australia: The Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1987.

[13] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Indwelling: The Beast Takes Possession*, p. 60. It is hardly an accident that the self-absorbed Guy Blod and his small entourage of "clones" are portrayed as gay. For the authors, gays and lesbians are not only relegated to the realm of the "unsaved," they are pictured as a perverse and unnatural "abomination." See, for instance,

## Stephen Pfohl

Tim, LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?*, pp. 332, 337. The “audacious” Guy, like the masculine lesbian Verna Zee, is also described in stereotypical terms bordering on parody. Each either serves the Antichrist or functions as an obstacle to the divinely ordained mission of the Tribulation Force. In *The Indwelling*, Guy flutters his fingers in the air, makes catty remarks, waxes poetically about the beauty of the human form, and unabashedly declares, “I love new clothes.” (p. 66) In *Nicolae*, Verna, who competes with and is jealous of Buck, admires Carpathia and is prevented from revealing secrets about the Tribulation Force only when Buck threatens to inform her employer that she is a lesbian. Although these homosexual characters irritate the novels’ heterosexual Christian protagonists (Buck declares that Verna gives him the “willies” and David Hassad admits that tormenting the sarcastic Guy gives him joy), members of the Tribulation Force eventually end up praying for their salvation.

- [14] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Soul Harvest: The World Takes Sides*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980. pp. 324-326.
- [15] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* pp. 341, 332.
- [16] Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 202.
- [17] David Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997. p. 3.
- [18] *Ibid.*, For Noble, dreams of technological redemption date back to the “Carolingian age” of early ninth century. Of particular significance here was the introduction of the plow as a new form of agricultural technology.
- [19] *Ibid.*, p. 209.
- [20] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 208.
- [21] Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, pp. 205-206.
- [22] Theologian Marva Dawn is here quoted in Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 176.
- [23] Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 178, 187. Frykholm also provides a concise overview of a variety of religious, secular and popular culture analysis of *Left Behind*. See, pp. 176-178.
- [24] Frazier is quoted in Craig Unger, “American Rapture,” p. 206.
- [25] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, pp. 218-219.

**Notes to Chapter 9: In the Beginning**

- [1] Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991. pp. 58-59.
- [2] Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Nicole: the Rise of the Antichrist*, pp. 108-109
- [3] See, John A. Phillips, *Eve: the History of an Idea*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984; and Pamela Norris, *Eve: A Biography*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- [4] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1993. p. 9.
- [5] For elaboration of these ideas, see, Stephen Pfohl, "New Global Technologies of Power: Cybernetic Capitalism and Social Inequality."
- [6] "A Basic Call to Consciousness: The Hau de no sau nee Adress to the Western World," in *Akwesane Notes*. Rooseveltown, New York: Mohawk Nation, 1978, excerpted in Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991. pp. 191-193.



**Pacific Centre for Technology and Culture**

University of Victoria  
PO Box 1700 Stn CSC  
Victoria, BC. V8W 2Y2  
CANADA

Email: [ctheory@uvic.ca](mailto:ctheory@uvic.ca)