

**LITTLE BOY, THE ANTICHRISTCHILD:
THE BEAST IN THE NUCLEAR AGE**

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(Resumen)

El presente trabajo intenta demostrar cómo el "anticristo" de John Divine está hoy presente en la bomba atómica. La bomba no sólo ha atraído la atención de líderes y empresas mundiales quienes la cuestionan y se preguntan "¿Quién puede luchar contra ella?" sino que además ejerce un control totalitario sobre el planeta. Al igual que el "corazón" de John, la bomba en un principio devolvió la paz a un mundo caótico, hizo innumerables promesas y dijo numerosas blasfemias antes de asumir el papel del dios de la era moderna.

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The Woman, the Beast and the Voice in the Wilderness

In 1964, Robert Mosely stalked, stabbed, raped, and murdered Kitty Genovese on a New York City Street while 38 people listened to her cries and did nothing. Some even pulled chairs up to their windows to watch the horror.¹ While this is a sad commentary on U.S. culture, it is a paradigm theological moment. It is the Parable of the Good Samaritan transplanted from Luke's Gospel into modern times. On a theological level, the cries were not merely those of Kitty Genovese but the cries of the eternal Other, the person in need. While Christianity since the time of Constantine has been a tool for the oppressing of gays, women, non-capitalists, and others, there is a persistent line of thought which advocates that Jesus' message was not as much a matter of orthodoxy as it is a matter of orthopraxies; it is not so much a religion of repentance as it is a religion of divine duty predicated on listening and responding to the voice of the Other. If this is true, to be a Christian is to follow the example of Moses, John the

¹ Quoted in Jane Caputi, "The Age of Sex Crime," *The Age of Sex Crime* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987) 160.

Baptist, and Jesus - to open up one's ears and listen to the voice of the eternal Other, to hear the voice in the wilderness; to understand the lesson of the Good Samaritan and respond to the cries of the Kitty Genoveses who fill history and our daily lives.²

While modern politically charged issues such as abortion and homosexuality receive tenuous and fleeting mention in the Bible at best, love for one's neighbor or *agape*³ love is mentioned 317 times in the New Testament in the original Greek, a document consisting of only 260 chapters.⁴ The great Judgement in Matthew's gospel, Jesus' final instructions before the Passion, underscores this point, as Christ tells his disciples that they will be judged on their treatment of the poor, the hungry, and those in need, for they are the returned Christ.⁵ When the issue surfaces in Luke's Gospel as the Parable of the Good Samaritan, it is Jesus' foreshadowing of the Crucifixion in which He will assume the role of the Other and the apostles will be called on to respond to the crisis. Thus, the Parable of the Good Samaritan is perhaps the clearest and most precise distillation of the Christian message. It is Jesus' instruction that first and foremost Christian praxis involves applying oneself to the crisis at hand. Throughout Christian scripture those who ignore the voice of the Other, such as Cain, Judas Iscariot, and Pontias Pilot fall out of favor with God. Those who do respond, such as the Good Samaritan, Moses, King David, Joshua, Amos, Christ Himself, the sheep of the Great Judgement, and the 144,000 who battle the Beast in Revelation, are rewarded. Consequently, Christian praxis, as theologian Enrique Dussel writes, "must be committed to the day-to-day liberation process of the people; it must seek to discover the ultimate eschatological meaning of that process."⁶

This message proliferates Christian scripture from Genesis to Revelation - more

² For an extensive discussion on this, see Enrique Dussel, *History and the Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976) 1-9.

³ The most important New Testament verb for "to love," *agapan*, refers to neighborly love, i.e., the love exemplified by the Good Samaritan who cared for the beaten Jew. The noun form is *agape* and the adjective is *agapetos*. In the Greek New Testament *agape* appears 117 times, *agapan* 141 times, and *agapetos* 61 times.

⁴ From the New World Dictionary-Concordance to the New American Bible (Collins World Press, 1970) 391.

⁵ This and all biblical references are from The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Expanded Edition, RSV, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Matthew 25: 31-41.

⁶ Dussel, 9.

than any other message and so much so that it appears to be the central idea in both testaments. Another perspective comes from Harvard Theologian Harvey Cox in his book *On Not Leaving It to the Snake*, in which he argues that Adam and Eve's sin in Eden was not so much a matter of disobedience to God as it was the sin of relinquishing power to the serpent and therefore allowing Satan to make their decision. This explains Satan's promise to elevate the first couple to godhood, for they did not respond to the crisis; they did not hear the voice of the Other as it presented itself first as the Creator and subsequently as the remainder of humanity. They chose instead to immerse themselves in their own egotism and pretend to be apart from the rest of humanity and in effect gods unto themselves.⁷ Dussel explains:

God...keeps on revealing himself (sic) to us as the Other who summons us. He is the first Other. If I do not listen to my fellow man in bondage, then I am not listening to God. If I do not commit myself to the liberation of my fellow man, then I am an atheist.⁸

Although the Book of Revelation was clearly written for the Jewish Christians of the first century who were being slaughtered by Nero and Domitian⁹, it does appear to contain a timeless message of hope for the faithful by way of a promise that Christ will return to restore order to a chaotic planet at the end of history.¹⁰ John nevertheless appears to be concerned with the message of Genesis that would be of

⁷ Dussel, 6.

⁸ Dussel, 7.

⁹ Among other points, the audience of the Book of Revelation is the subject of dispute. In biblical times, a prophet was not so much a soothsayer as he was a spokesman for the divine, and as Dussel says, one who perceives the present with inspired perspicacity. If John's Beast is seen as Nero, many of the symbols fall into place such as the number 666. As Hebraic and Greek letters have numerical equivalents, if the name Neron Ceaser is translated into Hebrew, and the numbers of each letter added up, the sum is 666. If the final "n" of Neron is dropped, or if the numerical letters of the Greek translation are added up, the total is 616, the number of the Beast that appears in some translations. Thus, it appears John's intent was not to warn future generations but instead to provide hope for his people in the face of a holocaust.

¹⁰ Father Richard Rohr, OFM, provides an elaborate interpretation of Revelation as a message of hope to the early Christians in the two-cassette sermon entitled *The Day of Yawah*, distributed by the Center of Action and Contemplation, Albuquerque.

prime concern to Cox and Dussel, i.e., the sin of relinquishing Free Will rather than responding to a crisis. Both Genesis and Revelation are dramas in which the Earth plays a major role as *Zoe* the mother of all living things.¹¹ John uses no less than ten motifs taken from Genesis as he warns the first Christians against committing the same sins as Adam, Eve, and Cain.¹² But this is not to say that John's vision is at all limited to biblical times. He appears to recognize that sin and apocalypse are not isolated historical events, but are matters of action or inaction in the face of crisis: while humankind fails in its first confrontation with the Beasts described in Genesis, it succeeds in the confrontation described in Revelation 14 when the faithful appear on a hilltop, ready to take direct action against antiChrist. John appears to be aware that anything less than direct action would be to recreate the Fall and the murder of Abel. Thus, apocalypse, from the Greek *apokalypsis* meaning "revelation" is the revealing of God - and a call to divine duty - through the voice of the Other.

Although presumably unwittingly, modern feminist writers such as Jane Caputi, Mary Daly, and Dianna E. H. Russell have placed Earth in a drama similar to that described in Genesis. They argue that the Earth - the mother of all living things, so to speak - is threatened with the ultimate rape, nuclear war. The Earth, then, has become the Other. The metaphor of rape works at multiple levels: on the microscopic level it is a photon crashing into an atomic nucleus, tearing apart matter, from *mater*, the Latin for "mother"; at the human level it is rape and killing of Kitty Genovese; on a global level it is the rape and killing of the Zoe or Earth.

A common reaction to the impending rape of the planet is much like that of the Genovese rape, to simply pretend it is not happening - a denial psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton calls "psychic numbing."¹³ While this is horrifying in and of itself, there are those such as members of the growing Born-Again Christian movement who are quick to associate nuclear war with the Rapture (when all believers are taken up into Heaven) and the Second Coming. Rather than being horrified by the threat of nuclear war, many of these people are in fact waiting with gleeful anticipation for the destruction of the

¹¹ Paul S. Minear, "Far as the Curse Is Found: The Point of Revelation 12:15-16," *Novum Testamentum*, 31, 1 (Jan., 1991): 25-26.

¹² The most insightful discussion I have yet to see on this comes from Caputi in "The Age of Sex Crime," chapter six of *The Age of Sex Crime*.

¹³ See Robert J. Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case Against Nuclearism* (New York: Basic Books, 1982) 3-10.

Earth.¹⁴

Consequently, the challenge facing the Christian in the nuclear age is unlike any in history. Today when superpowers and mediocre powers - not to mention small terrorist groups - possess enough nuclear weapons to destroy the world several times over - the cry of the Other is louder than ever as it is a cry from the planet and all its inhabitants, present and future. Those who choose to stay steeped in psychic numbing are those who relinquish their power to the Beast; they are the Adams, Eves, Cains, Pilates, and Judas Iscariots of the modern times. They are the physically alive but spiritually dead who have not been "born again of the Spirit"¹⁵ as they have not chosen to acknowledge their participation in the Body of Christ, in which injury upon one member inflicts debilitation upon the whole.¹⁶

While through the ages John's Beast is believed to have been Napoleon, John Paul II, Hitler, the Roman Catholic Church, and one retired nuclear engineer has calculated that the odds in favor of Mikhail Gorbachev being the antiChrist at 860 quintillion to one*, it appears that only Gorbachev and Hitler have had the power to deliver humankind to Armageddon and it is not likely that either one will ever be mistaken for any God, let alone Christ Himself - a deception that is necessary in the formula described in Revelation 13. The Bomb, conversely, has over the last 50 years assumed a Christlike role in human history and in doing so has achieved antiChristlike ends. It initially restored order to a planet torn by the chaos of World War II and was immediately regarded as a savior and healer.¹⁷ Since then it has become the great deceiver as it promulgates Orwellian reversals much like the great blasphemies John

¹⁴ Of the countless sources for this belief perhaps the most comprehensive comes from Hal Lindsey with C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970) 135-137. Other sources are Edgar Whisenant and Greg Brewer, *The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989* and Charles Taylor, *Watch World events 1989* also published by the World Bible Society, Nashville, Tennessee, 1988; and Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983).

¹⁵ Jesus instructions to Nicodemus as quoted in John 3:5-8.

¹⁶ Paul's instructions to the Corinthian followers of Christ that they have been saved through Christ and together comprise one body, i.e., the Body of Christ.

¹⁷ Harry Truman, *Memoirs: Volume I, Year of Decisions* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955); quoted in Mark Selden, "The United States, Japan, and the Atomic Bomb," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 23, no. 1, January 1991; 10-11; and Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985): 111-112, 156.

describes. It confuses Hell with Heaven, love with hatred, peace with war, and extinction of the species with eternal life. The Bomb is modern antiChrist and perhaps the most perfect representation of the Beast since Nero. In addition to being the "false Christ"¹⁸ it also opposes all that Christ stood for as it encourages the masses to either ignore the cries of the threatened Earth or actually cheer for the destruction.

The Ultimate Blasphemy

A feeling of doom and euphoria took hold of the United States during the Persian Gulf War. While the strife in the Middle East conjured in most Americans a national loyalty unseen since the end of World War II, a strong eschatological undercurrent persisted. Bookstores, especially those of a Christian bent, were flooded with requests for books explicating Biblical prophecy along the lines of Hal Lindsey's 1970 doomsayer *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Its publisher, Zondervan, a leading U.S. publishing house of evangelical literature, with the beginning of the war issued an updated version of John F. Walvoord's 1974 bestseller *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crises* with an initial order of 1 million copies, nine of which were ordered by the White House. Charles Dyer's book *The Rise of Babylon*, which argued that Saddam Hussein's plan to build a replica of the ancient city is a sign that the world has entered the end times, sold 180,000 copies in two weeks. Similarly, ratings for television shows in which televangelists preached about the impending apocalypse reached unprecedented peaks. The Gulf War might subside, argued Detroit televangelist Jack Van Impe, but would sooner or later reerupt into an all-out nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Battle of Armageddon, and the Rapture and the Second Coming could immediately precede or immediately follow.¹⁹

"It is a time to rejoice for Christians," one such preacher announced along the national airwaves. "We're going home."²⁰

Even though John of Patmos in all probability was more concerned with the fall of Rome during the reign of the Emperor Nero than the fall of Baghdad, the Bomb and

¹⁸ Carroll Simcox, "Is Anybody Good Enough to Be the AntiChrist?" *The Christian Century*, June 5-12, 1983; 582-583. Simcox points out how the Greek *antichristos* means not only *false Christ* but also *One who opposes Christ*.

¹⁹ John Elson, "Apocalypse Now?" *Time*, 137, 6 (Feb. 11, 1991): 88.

²⁰ David Neff, "Apocalypse When?" *Christianity Today*, 354, 18 (Dec. 17, 1990): 15.

Armageddon were an immediate association, for even President Harry Truman, upon first learning that Hiroshima had been bombed, remarked that it was with the "fire and destruction" prophesized in the Bible, while British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said that the Bomb was "the Second Coming in wrath."²¹ But something I find even more horrifying than that thought of nuclear war devastating the planet is the thought, as was demonstrated during that fateful winter of 1991, that a growing segment of the population was in agreement with Kurt Saxon, the father of the survivalist movement who in a documentary film made in 1988 said "I learned to love the Bomb and welcome the chaos which will come from it because I know that's all necessary to cull the degenerate urban masses so that we can finally get to the nuclear renaissance."²²

In the face of such a crisis it is easy to fall into what David Neff calls "escape hatch" eschatology,²³ i.e., the using of dogma as a means of avoiding, rather than confronting responsibility, but that is clearly not in line with Christ's message which equated the Second Coming with the comforting of the poor.²⁴ And while Neff argues that this line of thinking may tempt the world into a self-fulfilling Armageddon²⁵ and is consequently antiBiblical in nature, I would argue he does not go far enough.

While the purpose of this article is not to explicate Revelation, it nevertheless appears that this kind of longing for Armageddon is, on at least one level, akin to the blasphemous nature that is such an important part of John's Beast.²⁶ Just like the Beast, the Bomb came as an angel of light. The Bomb supplied immediate answers to global problems, first by presumably, as Truman mentioned in his *Memoirs*, saving the lives of at least half a million U.S. soldiers and twice as many allies who were set to invade Japan in November.²⁷ It also secured the United States' place as the first superpower and ensured U.S. citizens that they were safe from invasion, especially from the Communist nations, a worry Patton and Truman had been harboring over for at least

²¹ Weart, 102.

²² Quoted in Jane Caputi, "The Metaphors of Radiation" (unpublished); 12.

²³ Neff, 15.

²⁴ In the Final Judgement in Matthews' Gospel Jesus instructs the apostles that "whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me."

²⁵ Neff, 15.

²⁶ In Revelation 13:13-15 John writes that the Beast "deceives all who dwell on Earth," and "works great signs, like making fire come down from the heavens in the sight of men."

²⁷ Selden, 10-11.

ten years.²⁸

Thus, the Bomb immediately assumed the role of Jesus Christ and became the Prince of Peace. It logically followed that the promises would build from there, and not a few people envisioned the nuclear age as something like John's New Jerusalem, a paradise untouched by poverty, racial, ethnic, or religious tensions, or any of the evils promulgated by "Satan." *The New York Herald Tribune*, no more than three days after the bombing of Hiroshima, for instance, proclaimed that the Bomb could be a "blessing that will make it possible for the human race to create a close approach to an earthly paradise," while the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* proclaimed that "Imagination leaps forward to visualize the use of atomic power for man's comfort and enjoyment."²⁹ Furthermore, the Bomb was believed to extend its Christ-like role and provide ways of healing the lame and curing the terminally ill as forecasters told of "cancer curing isotopes." A 1947 photo montage in *Collier's* magazine pictured a paraplegic rising out of a mushroom cloud, leaving his vacant wheelchair behind. It seemed the Bomb would not only restore order but heal the sick and lame. University of Colorado historian Ira Chernus argued in 1986 that the Bomb in fact has become modern man's god in that it represents "awesome and limitless power, omniscience, eternity, and omnipresence."³⁰ But just as with the antiChrist Lindsey warns about the miracles soon gave way to terror and totalitarianism,³¹ and instead of opening the door to Utopia, the Bomb has held the Earth in mortal fear for almost 50 years.

But the situation in the latter quarter of the century is more complex. When a bumper sticker campaign begun by the World Peace Organization asked for Americans to "Visualize World Peace," Christian Churches such as the Assemblies of God countered with a campaign of their own that asked Americans to "Visualize World Judgement." A fine print reference beneath the block letters referred to a passage in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans concerning the coming "wrath of God." *The Final Shout: The Rapture Report 1989* was one of myriad fundamentalist Christian booklets foretelling of the Rapture, the moment when believers would be snatched away from their homes

²⁸ U.S. as superpower.

²⁹ Boyer, 112.

³⁰ Ira Chernus, *Dr. Strangegod: On the Symbolic Meaning of Nuclear Weapons* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986) 25-26.

³¹ Lindsey, 160-161.

and beds up into Heaven where they would ride out Armageddon.³²

In an interview with Frances Fitzgerald, for instance, the Rev. Tim LaHaye, a disciple of the Rev. Jerry Falwell, talked about how he envisioned the Rapture that would signal the beginning of the great Tribulation, which would end with the establishment of Jesus' New Jerusalem. "Who can imagine," he said, "the chaos on the freeways when automobile drivers are snatched out of their cars?"³³

The belief is that once the battle was over, the believers would return to Earth to enjoy 1,000 years of peace under a government run by Jesus Himself.³⁴ Consequently, Christians such as Lindsey, Billy Graham, Charles Taylor, and Oral Roberts, actively tried and instructed their progenies to facilitate the coming of a nuclear war. The influence of the movement was and continues to be powerful - *The Late Great Planet Earth* went through some 22 printings - more than 1.5 million copies - in less than two and a half years and has sold some 25 million copies to date. President Ronald Reagan won both his bids for president via landslides even though he was an outspoken proponent of Armageddon theology and hinted on the national television that he believed "the prophesies of Armageddon" were coming together in our time.³⁵

But as the close of the millennium draws nearer and the fundamentalist Christian movement grows stronger, this association becomes clearer. Even though the majority of the Earth's inhabitants might still be inclined to think of the Bomb as the returned Christ and more inclined to think of it as "the destroyer of worlds," as did its creator Robert J. Oppenheimer,³⁶ the fundamentalist Christian movement - a movement that is having an increasingly more powerful effect on public policy³⁷ as well as international politics - continues to approach the Armageddon question as a matter of *when* it's going to happen rather than *if* it's going to happen, essentially surrendering Free Will just as Adam and Eve did. Lindsey's scenario is especially vivid:

³² Lindsey, 137-138.

³³ Bill Lawren, "Apocalypse Now?" *Psychology Today*, 23, 5 (May, 1989): 42.

³⁴ Whisenant and Brewer, 31-32.

³⁵ Lawren, 42.

³⁶ Spencer Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988) 101.

³⁷ For a more extensive discussion on this see Kathleen M. Lee. "Waiting for the Rapture: The New Christian Right and its Impact on U.S. Public Policy," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 16, 2 (1991): 65-77.

As the battle of Armageddon reaches its awful climax and it appears that all life will be destroyed on Earth - in this very moment Jesus Christ will return and save man from self-extinction... history continues toward certain acceleration to the Return of Christ.³⁸

But this "appetite for the apocalypse" and especially the waiting for the Rapture is an example of what David Neff has dubbed "escape hatch theology"³⁹ and has had anti-Christian effects despite the professed devotion of those who embrace it. Escape-hatch theology, Neff writes, "can fuel a world-denying piety that wishes it were somewhere else than on the planet where God's providence has placed us" and in effect may "help bring on Armageddon." The danger then picks up on the very themes of Genesis and Revelation: The greatest sin is not one of action but one of inaction. The Rapture is indeed the opposite of *agape* love and eternal life - it is wishing that one's fellow humans be subject to instant obliteration at best and long, painful, lingering, death by radiation poisoning, a firestorm, and a nuclear winter, at worst. Research has shown that despite Ronald Regan's and George Bush's professed belief that "contained nuclear war" or "winnable nuclear war" are not oxymorons, nuclear war is more likely to produce a virtual Hell marked with radiation poisoning and mutated genes, than the New Jerusalem, and extinction of all species rather than eternal life.⁴⁰

During the cold war years, as Chernus and others have pointed out, this reversal took on deeper dimensions as the Bomb became the guarantor against itself through the principal of Mutually Assured Destruction or MAD.⁴¹ But this of course was not so much security as it was global insecurity in that it likened the United States and the Soviet Union to two men, each holding a gun to the other's head and each risking his life on the belief that the other would be too afraid to fire first. A person in this situation would hardly feel secure.

³⁸ Lindsey, 178.

³⁹ Neff, 15.

⁴⁰ Weart, 108-109, 382-383.

⁴¹ Chernus, 41; Michael Myerson and Mark Solomon, *Stopping World War III* (New York: U.S. Peace Council, 1981) 11-12.

"And the Whole Earth Followed the Beast with Wonder"

Of all the elements that make antiChrist, perhaps none is more important than the feeling of awe the Beast will evoke as it exerts totalitarian rule over the Earth.⁴² This is curious in light of the fact that since the bombing of Hiroshima, the Bomb has essentially dictated history, encouraging the world's inhabitants to surrender their Free Will to this mechanical and presumably inanimate machine. This appears to be happening on a variety of levels as the most powerful people in the world have chosen to shape history around the Bomb and the less powerful have either chosen to believe that war is out of their hands or that it is actually a promise of paradise rather than destruction, a reaction that each year gathers more momentum.

The nuclear arms race fed off of itself during the Cold War years as MAD appeared more as a creation of the Bomb itself than of international diplomacy. When the Cold War ended in 1991, the planet held some 52,000 nuclear warheads, 97 percent of them in the hands of the superpowers.⁴³ The mediocrepowers such as France, England, and China, meanwhile, clamored to fashion nuclear weapons of their own while smaller countries like Iraq and Korea channeled money away from their starving masses into nuclear research.⁴⁴ While at first it appears absurd to spend so much on something that will better not be used, a deeper meditation reveals that this was more commandments from the Bomb-God. The British rationale for joining the nuclear elite was, as Prime Minister Macmillan put it, "to eat at the top table," while the French saw nuclear weapons as symbols of independence, especially from the security umbrella of the United States and the United Kingdom.⁴⁵ Add to this the fact that the arms race is big business - the world's second biggest business after oil and - as the Persian Gulf War demonstrated, a tandem industry grossing some 130,000 million dollars a year.⁴⁶

⁴² In Revelation 13:7 John writes about the Beast: "And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation."

⁴³ Carl Kaysen, Robert S. McNamara, George W. Rathjens, "Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, 154, 47 (Nov. 21, 1991): 96.

⁴⁴ An excellent discussion on this matter is in "War and Poverty: Examining the Links," *Nuclear Times*, 9, 3 (Fall, 1991): 9-26.

⁴⁵ McGeorge Bundy, "Nuclear Weapons and the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs*, 154, 47 (Nov. 21, 1991): 82-86.

⁴⁶ Penny Strange, "It'll Make a Man of You," published in *Exposing Nuclear Phallacies*, ed. Dianna E.H. Russel, 108.

But despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and the Cold War, and Gen. Colin Powell's statement that in light of such developments "I am running out of demons, I'm running out of villains. I'm down to Castro and Kim Il Sung"⁴⁷ the world continues to follow the Beast in wonder. In November of 1991 the Democrat-controlled Congress - the supposed pacifist wing of the federal government - approved a 10 percent raise in spending on nuclear weapons, the same week that United States stepped up pressure on North Korea for fear that its nuclear weapons projects were nearing completion.⁴⁸ It appears the Bomb is every bit as indestructible as the Beast of Revelation who resurrects from a fatal headwound.

But these contortions of history - just like Hitler's rise - do not happen without the consent of the masses, and the Bomb is exacting that consent each day. Chernus reports that while 89 percent of the population believes their chances of surviving a nuclear war are, at best, no better than 50 percent, only 19 percent of those polled said they "frequently worry" about the Bomb.⁴⁹ A student interviewed by Edwin S. Shneidman seemed to sum up much of the national feeling concerning nuclear war when he said: "There is no use worrying about something over which one has no control. If it happens, it happens. If destruction comes, I'll accept it."⁵⁰ This sounds horrifyingly like the masses John describes in Revelation who apparently throw up their collective arms and say "Who is like the Beast and who can fight against it?"

This feeling of powerlessness and utter hopelessness may in fact be what is drawing so many to the American evangelical movements. While historically belief in apocalypse and coming golden age has been espoused most fervently by the poor,⁵¹ the evangelical movement in the United States is largely a middle-class phenomenon. What would people of one of the richest societies in history where the poor generally have houses and food (although I realize this too is changing) - have to gain through a destruction of the world? The answer is either that the bomb and visions of the end have

⁴⁷ Kaysen, 96.

⁴⁸ "N-Weapons Get More Bucks as Cold War Fades," *The Albuquerque Tribune*, (Nov. 21, 1991): A-1.

⁴⁹ Chernus, 54.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Chernus, 54.

⁵¹ Richard Erdoes provides a brief look on mass conversions, mass confessions and visions of the coming of the Man of Sin in the article "The Year 1000" taken from his book *AD 1000: Living on the Brink of Apocalypse* published in *Psychology Today*, 23, 5 (May, 1989): 45.

infused human consciousness to the point where people are seeking liberation at all costs, or, as Frank Kermode has argued in his book *A Sense of Ending*, modern humans are plunging into egocentricity and concocting "fictive concords" that "give meaning" to lives" and "humanize common death."⁵²

My feeling, however, is that it is both: Global destruction and the responsibility of sending the species and the planet into oblivion poses a monumental challenge to human consciousness. We escape the destruction by imagining all-out nuclear war as a great catharsis; we escape the guilt by assuming that we have been put at a special place in time and we are therefore choose to believe that the end will come whether we choose to participate in its dynamics. One bumper sticker distributed by nondenominational churches illustrates this very point. It reads "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven," simultaneously implying that all non-Christians will be damned while the "believers" will be freed of any responsibility regarding the future of the planet. Thus, there is no discounting the power of the evangelical movement. Since its first printing in May 1970, *The Late Great Planet Earth* has crystallized subconscious eschatological fears and has spawned hundreds if not thousands of copycat theories which might challenge Lindsey on a few details but nevertheless agree with his premise. While this swing toward the religious right might be easily explained as something that happens at the end of each millennium or with any disaster - human made or otherwise - of global magnitude,⁵³ it is nevertheless horrifying to consider that a growing segment of the population is not dreading nuclear war but is in fact hoping and praying for it.

A Personal Note: The Christian Challenge

In light of such fascination with both antiChrist and the end of the world, it is highly unlikely that any historic figure could actually suffer a fatal head wound, become dictator of the Earth, demand that everyone be branded on the forehead or right hand, and convince world inhabitants that he is in fact a god. Yet, of the countless ministers, priests, evangelists, and theologically concerned to whom I have spoken over the ten years or so that I have been concerned with this subject, this is the most common reaction: antiChrist cannot be a machine, an ideology, or a concept, it has to be a man. I find it unbelievable that despite the obscure formula John describes, that any person

⁵² Erdoes, 44.

⁵³ Kaysen, 96.

the least bit familiar with Revelation would not find a self-deifying dictator who is given control over the entire Earth - not to mention his effort to tattoo five billion people - at least a little suspect.

Although I believe there is a case for such an argument along the lines that Little Boy was the False Prophet and the Nuclear Ideology is the Beast of Revelation, I have long since decided against a point-by-point explication of John's vision primarily because I believe that John was a prophet by Dussel's standards⁵⁴ and rather than perceiving the future, perceived the present with utmost perspicacity. But this by no means is to assert that John was less mystically endowed than say the French physician and presumed prophet Nostradamus.⁵⁵ Rather, I believe it proves John's wisdom and his deserving of the title "Divine" - a title given because of his theological brilliance. For, as did Martin Luther King, Thomas Jefferson, Nelson Mandela, Cesar Chavez, Mary Daly, Jesus Christ, and others, he saw the oppression around him and saw through the horror into the deeper truths, into the root causes of global turmoil, namely the way in which a dictator is invited to rise to power by the widespread feeling among the masses that they cannot stop the inevitable. The mark of the Beast on the right hand or the forehead that John warns about is, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza reports, is his symbol for action or thought, or the lack of action or thought⁵⁶ and today that mark means to refuse to acknowledge the Beast or to refuse to act against it.

If there is an answer to antiChrist, and I believe there is, it resides in Paul of Tarsus' First Letter to the Corinthians, in which he instructs "you are the body of Christ," and Revelation 14 in which 144,000 faithful take on the mark of Christ and assemble to confront antiChrist directly. To wear the mark of Christ on the forehead and on the right hand is to battle the Beast through thought and act - it is to recognize that all humans are members of the same cosmological body and to battle the Beast via voting for antinuclear political leaders, refusing to pay war taxes, psychic activism, instilling in our children this same world vision, and other ways that I have yet to mention or consider. To allow the Beast to continue its reign or to help the Beast with its reign is to deny the Other and is therefore antiChristian.

⁵⁴ Dussel, 8-9. The advocate of Liberation theology writes: "Discovering the meaning of the present - note that I say the present and not the future - is called prophecy."

⁵⁵ Selden, 10-11.

⁵⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 167.

I do not believe it was a coincidence that the world entered the Nuclear Age on August 6, the day Roman Catholics traditionally celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration. For on that day, Christianity itself - i.e., the body of Christ - transfigured and being a Christian suddenly meant being antinuclear.