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CHURCH AND STATE

The Christian Right and the Rise of American Fascism

By Chris Hedges

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Chris Hedges is the former Middle East bureau chief for The New York Times, (born September 18, 1956) is an American journalist, Presbyterian minister, and visiting Princeton University lecturer. Presbyterian theology typically emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Scriptures, and the necessity of grace through faith in Christ. Local congregations of churches which use presbyterian polity are governed by sessions made up of representatives of the congregation (elders); The roots of Presbyterianism lie in the Reformation of the 16th century; the example of John Calvin's Republic of Geneva being particularly influential.

This is an article by Chris Hedges that no major publication would print!

OPENING STATEMENT BY CHRIST HEDGES: We must attend to growing social and economic inequities in order to stop the most dangerous mass movement in American history -- or face a future of fascism under the guise of Christian values.

Dr. James Luther Adams, my ethics professor at Harvard Divinity School, told us that when we were his age, he was then close to 80, we would all be fighting the “Christian fascists.”

The warning, given to me 25 years ago, came at the moment Pat Robertson and other radio and televangelists began speaking about a new political religion that would direct its efforts at taking control of all institutions, including mainstream denominations and the government. Its stated goal was to use the United States to create a global, Christian empire.

What Dr. James Luther Adams perhaps did not realize is that he was giving the same warning as is found in Revelation 13: 11, 12.

Revelation 13:11 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.

Revelation 13:12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

It was hard, at the time, to take such fantastic rhetoric seriously, especially given the buffoonish quality of those who expounded it. But Adams warned us against the blindness caused by

intellectual snobbery. **The Nazis, he said, were not going to return with swastikas and brown shirts. Their ideological inheritors had found a mask for fascism in the pages of the Bible.**

Notice how Dr. Adams puts it:

When the enemies of freedom come to “rescue” us from the regnant social chaos, they will not be wearing brown shirts and hailing der Führer; they will come waving the flag and clutching the Bible—seemingly innocent symbols of American culture.

Dr. James Luther Adams

He was not a man to use the word fascist lightly. He was in Germany in 1935 and 1936 and worked with the underground anti-Nazi church, known as The Confessing Church, led by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Adams was eventually detained and interrogated by the Gestapo, who suggested he might want to consider returning to the United States. It was a suggestion he followed. He left on a night train with framed portraits of Adolph Hitler placed over the contents inside his suitcase to hide the rolls of home movie film he took of the so-called German Christian Church, which was pro-Nazi, and the few individuals who defied them, including the theologians Karl Barth and Albert Schweitzer. The ruse worked when the border police lifted the top of the suitcases, saw the portraits of the Führer and closed them up again. I watched hours of the grainy black and white films as he narrated in his apartment in Cambridge.

He saw in the Christian Right, long before we did, disturbing similarities with the German Christian Church and the Nazi Party, similarities that he said would, in the event of prolonged social instability or a national crisis, see American fascists, under the guise of religion, rise to dismantle the open society. He despaired of liberals, who he said, as in Nazi Germany, mouthed silly platitudes about dialogue and inclusiveness that made them ineffectual and impotent. Liberals, he said, did not understand the power and allure of evil nor the cold reality of how the world worked. The current hand wringing by Democrats in the wake of the election, with many asking how they can reach out to a movement whose leaders brand them “demonic” and “satanic,” would not have surprised Adams. Like Bonhoeffer, he did not believe that those who would fight effectively in coming times of turmoil, a fight that for him was an integral part of the Biblical message, would come from the church or the liberal, secular elite.

His critique of the prominent research universities, along with the media, was no less withering. These institutions, self-absorbed, compromised by their close relationship with government and corporations, given enough of the pie to be complacent, were unwilling to deal with the fundamental moral questions and inequities of the age. They had no stomach for a battle that might cost them their prestige and comfort. He told me that if the Nazis took over America “60 percent of the Harvard faculty would begin their lectures with the Nazi salute.” This too was not an abstraction. He had watched academics at the University of Heidelberg, including the philosopher Martin Heidegger, raise their arms stiffly to students before class.

Two decades later, even in the face of the growing reach of the Christian Right, his prediction seems apocalyptic. And yet the powerbrokers in the Christian Right have moved from the fringes of society to the floor of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Christian fundamentalists now hold a majority of seats in 36 percent of all Republican Party state committees, or 18 of 50 states, along with large minorities in 81 percent of the rest of the states. Forty-five Senators and

186 members of the House of Representatives earned between an 80 to 100 percent approval ratings from the three most influential Christian Right advocacy groups – The Christian Coalition, Eagle Forum, and Family Resource Council. Tom Coburn, the new senator from Oklahoma, has included in his campaign to end abortion: a call to impose the death penalty on doctors that carry out abortions once the ban goes into place. Another new senator, John Thune, believes in Creationism. Jim DeMint, the new senator elected from South Carolina, wants to ban single mothers from teaching in schools. The Election Day exit polls found that 22 percent of voters identified themselves as evangelical Christians and Bush won 77 percent of their vote. The polls found that a plurality of voters said that the most important issue in the campaign had been “moral values.”

President Bush must further these important objectives, including the march to turn education and social welfare over to the churches with his faith-based initiative, as well as chip away at the wall between church and state with his judicial appointments, if he does not want to face a revolt within his core constituency.

Jim Dobson, the head of Focus on the Family, who held weekly telephone conversations with Karl Rove during the campaign, has put the President on notice. He told ABC’s “This Week” that “this president has two years, or more broadly the Republican Party has two years, to implement these policies, or certainly four, or I believe they’ll pay a price in the next election.”

Bush may turn out to be a transition figure, our version of Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck used “values” to energize his base at the end of the 19th century and launched “Kulturkampf,” the word from which we get “culture wars,” against Catholics and Jews. Bismarck’s attacks split the country, made the discrediting of whole segments of the society an acceptable part of the civil discourse and paved the way for the more virulent racism of the Nazis. This, I suspect, will be George Bush’s contribution to our democracy.

DOMINIONISTS AND RECONSTRUCTIONISTS



The Reconstructionist movement, founded in 1973 by Rousas Rushdooney, is the intellectual foundation for the most politically active element within the Christian Right. Rushdooney’s 1,600 page three-volume work, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, argued that American society should be governed according to the Biblical precepts in the Ten Commandments. He wrote that the elect, like Adam and Noah, were given dominion over the earth by God and must subdue the earth, along with all non-believers, so the Messiah could return.

This was a radically new interpretation for many in the evangelical movement. The Messiah, it was traditionally taught, would return in an event called “the Rapture” where there would be wars and chaos. The non-believers would be tormented and killed and the elect would be lifted to

heaven. The Rapture was not something that could be manipulated or influenced, although believers often interpreted catastrophes and wars as portents of the imminent Second Coming.

Rushdooney promoted an ideology that advocated violence to create the Christian state. His ideology was the mirror image of Liberation Theology, which came into vogue at about the same time. While the Liberation Theologians crammed the Bible into the box of Marxism, Rushdooney crammed it into the equally distorting box of classical fascism. This clash was first played out in Latin America when I was there as a reporter two decades ago. In El Salvador leftist priests endorsed and even traveled with the rebel movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador, while Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, along with conservative Latin American clerics, backed the Contras fighting against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the murderous military regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile and Argentina.

The Institutes of Biblical Law called for a Christian society that was harsh, unforgiving and violent. Offenses such as adultery, witchcraft, blasphemy and homosexuality, merited the death penalty. The world was to be subdued and ruled by a Christian United States. Rushdooney dismissed the number of 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust as an inflated figure and his theories on race echoed Nazi Eugenics.

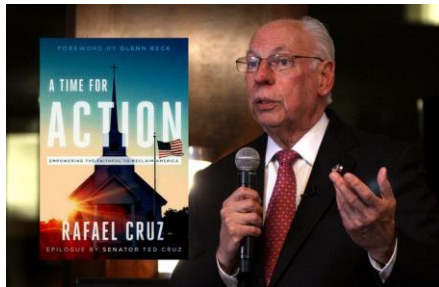
“The white man has behind him centuries of Christian culture and the discipline and selective breeding this faith requires...” **Rushdooney wrote.** **“The Negro is a product of a radically different past, and his heredity has been governed by radically different considerations.”**

“The background of Negro culture is African and magic, and the purposes of the magic are control and power over God, man, nature, and society. Voodoo, or magic, was the religion and life of American Negroes. Voodoo songs underlie jazz, and old voodoo, with its power goal, has been merely replaced with revolutionary voodoo, a modernized power drive.” (see *The Religious Right*, a publication of the ADL, pg. 124.)

“The history of the churches of Ethiopia and Abyssinia is especially significant. Amid the gloom of the Dark Ages, the Christians of Central Africa were lost sight of and forgotten by the world, and for many centuries they enjoyed freedom in the exercise of their faith. But at last Rome learned of their existence, and the emperor of Abyssinia was soon beguiled into an acknowledgment of the pope as the vicar of Christ. Other concessions followed. An edict was issued forbidding the observance of the Sabbath under the severest penalties. But papal tyranny soon became a yoke so galling that the Abyssinians determined to break it from their necks. After a terrible struggle, the Romanists were banished from their dominions, and the ancient faith was restored. The churches rejoiced in their freedom, and they never forgot the lesson they had learned concerning the deception, the fanaticism, and the despotic power of Rome. Within their solitary realm they were content to remain, unknown to the rest of Christendom.” {GC88 577.3}

Rushdooney was deeply antagonistic to the federal government. He believed the federal government should concern itself with little more than national defense. Education and social welfare should be handed over to the churches. Biblical law must replace the secular legal code. This ideology remains at the heart of the movement. It is being enacted through school vouchers, with federal dollars now going into Christian schools, and the assault against the federal agencies that deal with poverty and human services. The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is currently channeling millions in federal funds to groups such as Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing, and National Right to Life, as well as to fundamentalist religious charity organizations and programs promoting sexual abstinence.

Rushdooney laid the groundwork for a new way of thinking about political involvement. The Christian state would come about not only through signs and wonders, as those who believed in the rapture believed, but also through the establishment of the Christian nation. But he remained, even within the Christian Right, a deeply controversial figure.



New book by father of Ted Cruz calls on Christians to battle against the separation of church and state.

Dr. Tony Evans, the minister of a Dallas church and the founder of Promise Keepers, articulated Rushdooney's extremism in a more palatable form. He called on believers, often during emotional gatherings at football stadiums, to commit to Christ and exercise power within the society as agents of Christ. He also called for a Christian state. But he did not advocate the return of slavery, as Rushdooney did, nor list a string of offenses such as adultery punishable by death, nor did he espouse the Nazi-like race theories. It was through Evans, who was a spiritual mentor to George Bush that Dominionism came to dominate the politically active wing of the Christian Right. The religious utterances from political leaders such as George Bush, Tom Delay, Pat Robertson and Zell Miller are only understandable in light of Rushdooney and Dominionism. These leaders believe that God has selected them to battle the forces of evil, embodied in "secular humanism," to create a Christian nation. Pat Robertson frequently tells believers "our aim is to gain dominion over society." Delay has told supporters, such as at a gathering two years ago at the First Baptist Church in Pearland, Texas, "He [God] is using me, all the time, everywhere, to stand up for biblical worldview in everything I do and everywhere I am. He is training me, He is working with me." Delay went on to tell followers "If we stay inside the church, the culture won't change."

Pat Robertson, who changed the name of his university to Regent University, says he is training his students to rule when the Christian regents take power, part of the reign leading to the return of Christ. Robertson resigned as the head of the Christian Coalition when Bush took office, a sign many took to signal the ascendancy of the first regent. This battle is not rhetorical but one

that followers are told will ultimately involve violence. And the enemy is clearly defined and marked for destruction.

“Secular Humanists,” the popular Christian Right theologian Francis Schaeffer wrote in one of numerous diatribes, “are the greatest threat to Christianity the world has ever known.”

One of the most enlightening books that exposes the ultimate goals of the movement is *America’s Providential History*, the standard textbook used in many Christian schools and a staple of the Christian home schooling movement. It sites Genesis 1, which calls for mankind to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” as evidence that the Bible calls for “Bible believing Christians” to take dominion of America.

“When God brings Noah through the flood to a new earth, He reestablished the Dominion Mandate but now delegates to man the responsibility for governing other men.” (page 19). The authors write that God has called the United States to become “the first truly Christian nation” (page 184) and “make disciples of all nations.” The book denounces income tax as “idolatry,” property tax as “theft” and calls for an abolish of inheritance taxes in the chapter entitled Christian Economics. The loss of such tax revenues will bring about the withering away of the federal government and the empowerment of the authoritarian church, although this is not explicit in the text.

Rushdooney’s son-in-law, Gary North, a popular writer and founder of the Institute for Christian Economics, laid out the aims of the Christian Right.

“So let’s be blunt about it: We must use the doctrine of religious liberty to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God.” (Christianity and Civilization, Spring, 1982)

Dominionists have to operate, for now, in the contaminated environment of the secular, liberal state. They have learned, therefore, to speak in code. The code they use is the key to understanding the dichotomy of the movement, one that has a public and a private face. In this they are no different from the vanguard, as described by Lenin, or the Islamic terrorists who shave off their beards, adopt western dress and watch pay-for-view pornographic movies in their hotel rooms the night before hijacking a plane for a suicide attack.

Joan Bokaer, the Director of Theocracy Watch, a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy at Cornell University, who runs the encyclopedic web site theocracywatch.org, was on a speaking tour a few years ago in Iowa. She obtained a copy of a memo Pat Robertson handed out to followers at the Iowa Republican County Caucus. It was titled, “How to Participate in a Political Party” and read:

“Rule the world for God.”

“Give the impression that you are there to work for the party, not push an ideology.

“Hide your strength.

“Don’t flaunt your Christianity.

“Christians need to take leadership positions. Party officers control political parties and so it is very important that mature Christians have a majority of leadership whenever possible, God willing.”

President Bush sends frequent coded messages to the faithful. In his address to the nation on the night of September 11, for example, he lifted a line directly from the Gospel of John when he said “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.” He often uses the sentence “when every child is welcomed in life and protected in law,” words taken directly from a pro-life manifesto entitled “A Statement of Pro-Life Principle and Concern.” He quotes from hymns, prayers, tracts and Biblical passages without attribution. These phrases reassure the elect. They are lost on the uninitiated.

The Christian Right finds its ideological justification in a narrow segment of the Gospel, in particular the letters of the Apostle Paul, especially the story of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus in the Book of Acts. It draws heavily from the book of Revelations and the Gospel of John. These books share an apocalyptic theology. The Book of Revelations is the only time in the Gospels where Jesus sanctions violence, offering up a vision of Christ as the head of a great and murderous army of heavenly avengers. Martin Luther found the God portrayed in Revelations so hateful and cruel he put the book in the appendix of his German translation of the Bible.

These books rarely speak about Christ’s message of love, forgiveness and compassion. They focus on the doom and destruction that will befall unbelievers and the urgent need for personal salvation. The world is divided between good and evil, between those who act as agents of God and those who act as agents of Satan. The Jesus of the other three Gospels, the Jesus who turned the other cheek and embraced his enemies, an idea that was radical and startling in the ancient Roman world, is purged in the narrative selected by the Christian Right.

The cult of masculinity pervades the ideology. Feminism and homosexuality are social forces, believers are told, that have rendered the American male physically and spiritually impotent. Jesus is portrayed as a man of action, casting out demons, battling the Anti-Christ, attacking hypocrites and castigating the corrupt. This cult of masculinity brings with it the glorification of strength, violence and vengeance. It turns Christ into a Rambo-like figure; indeed depictions of Jesus within the movement often show a powerfully built man wielding a huge sword.

This image of Christ as warrior is appealing to many within the movement. The loss of manufacturing jobs, lack of affordable health care, negligible opportunities for education and poor job security has left many millions of Americans locked out. This ideology is attractive because it offers them the hope of power and revenge. It sanctifies their rage. It stokes the paranoia about the outside world maintained through bizarre conspiracy theories, many on

display in Pat Robertson's book *The New World Order*. The book is a xenophobic rant that includes vicious attacks against the United Nations and numerous other international organizations. The abandonment of the working class has been crucial to the success of the movement. Only by reintegrating the working class into society through job creation, access to good education and health care can the Christian Right be effectively blunted. Revolutionary movements are built on the backs of an angry, disenfranchised laboring class. This one is no exception.

The depictions of violence that will befall non-believers are detailed, gruesome and brutal. It speaks to the rage many believers harbor and the thirst for revenge. This, in large part, accounts for the huge sales of the apocalyptic series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. In their novel, *Glorious Appearing*, based on LaHaye's interpretation of Biblical Prophecies about the Second Coming, Christ eviscerates the flesh of millions of non-believers with the mere sound of his voice. There are long descriptions of horror, of how "the very words of the Lord had superheated their blood, causing it to burst through their veins and skin." Eyes disintegrate. Tongues melt. Flesh dissolves. The novel, part of *The Left Behind* series, are the best selling adult novels in the country. They preach holy war.

"Any teaching of peace prior to [Christ's] return is heresy." said televangelist James Robison.

Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, instability in Israel and even the fighting of Iraq are seen as signposts. The war in Iraq was predicted according to believers in the 9th chapter of the Book of Revelations where four angels "which are bound in the great river Euphrates will be released to slay the third part of men." The march towards global war, even nuclear war, is not to be feared but welcomed as the harbinger of the Second Coming. And leading the avenging armies is an angry, violent Messiah who dooms millions of non-believers to a horrible and painful death.

The movement seeks the imprint of law and science. It must discredit the rational disciplines that are the pillars of the Enlightenment to abolish the liberal polity of the Enlightenment. This corruption of science and law is vital in promoting the doctrine. Creationism, or "intelligent design," like Eugenics for the Nazis, must be introduced into the mainstream as a valid scientific discipline to destroy the discipline of science itself. This is why the Christian Right is working to bring test cases to ensure that school textbooks include "intelligent design" and condemn gay marriage.

The drive by the Christian Right to include crackpot theories in scientific or legal debate is part of the campaign to destroy dispassionate and honest intellectual inquiry. Facts become interchangeable with opinions. An understanding of reality is not to be based on the elaborate gathering of facts and evidence. The ideology alone is true. Facts that get in the way of the ideology can be altered. Lies, in this worldview, become true. Hannah Arendt called this effort "nihilistic relativism" although a better phrase might be collective insanity.

The Christian Right has fought successfully to have Creationist books sold in national park bookstores in the Grand Canyon, taught as a theory in public schools in states like Alabama and Arkansas. "Intelligent design" is promoted in Christian textbooks. All animal species, or at least their progenitors, students read, fit on Noah's ark. The Grand Canyon was created a few

thousand years ago by the flood that lifted up Noah's ark, not one billion years ago, as geologists have determined. The earth is only a few thousand years old in line with the literal reading of Genesis. This is not some quaint, homespun view of the world. It is an insidious attempt to undermine rational scientific research and intellectual inquiry.

Tom Delay, following the Columbine shootings, gave voice to this assault when he said that the killings had taken place "because our school systems teach children that they are nothing but glorified apes who have evolutionized out of some primordial mud." (speech Delay gave in the House on June 16, 1999)

"What convinces masses are not facts," Hannah Arendt wrote in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, "and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system which they are presumably part. Repetition, somewhat overrated in importance because of the common belief in the "masses" inferior capacity to grasp and remember, is important because it convinces them of consistency in time." (p.351)

There are more than 6 million elementary and secondary school students attending private schools and 11.5 percent of these students attend schools run by the Christian Right. These "Christian" schools saw an increase of 46 percent in enrollment in the last decade. The 245,000 additional students accounted for 75 percent of the total rise in private school enrollment.

THE LAUNCHING OF THE WAR

Adams told us to watch closely what the Christian Right did to homosexuals. He has seen how the Nazis had used "values" to launch state repression of opponents. Hitler, days after he took power in 1933, imposed a ban on all homosexual and lesbian organizations. He ordered raids on places where homosexuals gathered culminating with the ransacking of the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. Thousands of volumes from the institute's library were tossed into a bonfire. Adams said that homosexuals would also be the first "deviants" singled out by the Christian Right. We would be the next.

The ban on same sex marriages, passed by eleven states in the election, was part of this march towards our door. A 1996 federal law already defines marriage as between a man and a woman. All of the states with ballot measures, with the exception of Oregon, had outlawed same sex marriages, as do 27 other states. The bans, however, had to be passed, believers were told, to thwart "activist judges" who wanted to overturn them. The Christian family, even the nation, was under threat. The bans served to widen the splits tearing apart the country. The attacks on homosexuals handed to the foot soldiers of the Christian Right an easy target. It gave them a taste of victory. It made them feel empowered. But it is ominous for gays and for us.

All debates with the Christian Right are useless. We cannot reach this movement. It does not want a dialogue. It cares nothing for rational thought and discussion. It is not mollified because John Kerry prays or Jimmy Carter teaches Sunday School. These naive attempts to reach out to a movement bent on our destruction, to prove to them that we too have "values," would be humorous if the stakes were not so deadly. They hate us. They hate the liberal, enlightened world formed by the Constitution. Our opinions do not count.

This movement will not stop until we are ruled by Biblical Law, an authoritarian church intrudes in every aspect of our life, women stay at home and rear children, gays agree to be cured, abortion is considered murder, the press and the schools promote “positive” Christian values, the federal government is gutted, war becomes our primary form of communication with the rest of the world and recalcitrant non-believers see their flesh eviscerated at the sound of the Messiah’s voice.

The spark that could set it ablaze may be lying in the hands of an Islamic terrorist cell, in the hands of the ideological twins of the Christian Right. Another catastrophic terrorist attack could be our Reichstag fire, the excuse used to begin the accelerated dismantling of our open society. The ideology of the Christian Right is not one of love and compassion, the central theme of Christ’s message, but of violence and hatred. It has a strong appeal to many in our society, but it is also aided by our complacency. Let us not stand at the open city gates waiting passively and meekly for the barbarians. They are coming. They are slouching rudely towards Bethlehem. Let us, if nothing else, begin to call them by their name.

Chris Hedges spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has reported from more than 50 countries and has worked for The Christian Science Monitor, National Public Radio, The Dallas Morning News and The New York Times, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years.