



## Rapture Mania: Bizarre Beliefs and Epic Epiphanies

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Conspiracy theories have proliferated in recent years, partially due to the effects of algorithms in social media platforms that target people and affirm their existing beliefs and trick them into thinking those beliefs are more valid and ubiquitous than they really are. These algorithms also reward engagement, which means conflict, as the Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen has made clear. "Social media trains us to maximize conflict in public spaces, rather than what nearly all of our 'in real life' experiences have, which is to minimize it."

Some of the most bizarre conspiracy theories are held by QAnon believers who follow a rabbit hole of absurdity in believing misinformation and false ideas. Parody of these beliefs is well deserved, so it is funny that a parody movement has arisen called *Birds Aren't Real*, which posits that birds are actually drone replicas installed by the U.S. government to spy on Americans. Laughing at nonsensical madness is a healthy way to approach dangers posed by conspiracy theories and disinformation. But much more than rueful laughter is called for.

This essay deals with a subset of conspiracy theories that revolve around the belief in an End Times Rapture. This belief is a theological position held by millions of Christians, particularly within branches of American evangelicalism. This belief holds that a time is coming that all Christian believers who are alive, along with believers resurrected from the dead, will be "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air", in accordance with 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

### The Rapture Index

An online spokesman for beliefs in the Rapture created a curious "Rapture Index" about 30 years ago. This seems to be a clever but apparently dim-witted believer who created this Index, which finds correlations between a passel of superstitious ideas about the natural world and a supposed approach of End Times. This Index is a numerical assessment that tallies up incidences of natural disasters like Earthquakes, Famine, Droughts, Floods and Volcanic Activity, and augments them with measures of such things as increases in Liberalism, Civil Rights, Ecumenism and Financial Unrest, presumably because God hates these things. It strikes me as exceedingly odd that anyone could presume that a Supreme Being is making such things occur to herald an approach of the world going to hell in a handbasket!

Let's more closely examine this idea, and then consider the much more sensible and intelligent *Sustainability Index* that measures our progress toward achieving greater good goals and ensuring a healthy and propitious destiny for people in future generations.

If you Googled "Rapture Index" after an update in July 2014, you would have seen that it stood at 187, very close to its all-time high. The creator of the Index had recently added a point for the emergency declaration of severe drought by California's Governor Jerry Brown, and a point for "cold weather driving up fuel prices." Curiously, this category of "Oil Price/Supply" was already at the highest possible level, as if there isn't a probability that this parameter will get much worse as fossil fuels are used up in coming decades. The July 2014 update actually added a sixth point out of a maximum of five for the category of Israel, due to spiking violence in the Gaza Strip at that time. There, too, things could get much worse, so the Rapture-mad creator was really rashly exaggerating.

Any reading above 160 in the Rapture Index supposedly indicates that the world has exceeded the range of "Heavy

prophetic activity" and is in a "Fasten your seat belts" category. This Index not only measures incidences of natural phenomena, but also gauges trends in Famines, Plagues and even "Satanism", "Beast Government" and drug abuse. Apparently the first legislative actions to legalize recreational use of marijuana, in Colorado and Washington state, were sufficient grounds for judging the Drug Abuse category as being as bad as it could get, and this implies the end of the world is getting much closer. Curious and curiouser! And bizarrely absurd.

Mark Twain would have scribbled gales of laughter at the preposterously presumptuous suppositions contained in this end-of-the-world Rapture Index, for it is downright silly. It is ignorance, prejudice and nonsense. Ancient peoples attributed thunder, lightning, earthquakes, floods, famines, droughts and plagues to deities because they did not understand the true nature of physical causes of these phenomena. We now call such ignorance "superstition". We have long since learned how electrical charges between clouds and the Earth cause lightning strikes, and how movements of tectonic plates cause earthquakes and tsunamis, and how weather is affected by the jet stream high up in the atmosphere, and how infectious diseases are caused by germs and pathogens.

Charles Pierce wrote a book in 2009 titled *Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free*. In this book, he contended that a war against science and expert understandings is being waged in the United States, and that in the forefront of this war are giant profit-obsessed corporations, right-wing think tanks, front groups financed by people like billionaires in the Koch network, and politicians bought with huge contributions to election campaigns and lavish funding for promoting the goals of corporate lobbyists. Religious fundamentalists join forces with these "conservatives" when they deny evolution, oppose contraception, pass extreme abortion bans, give political support to politicians who oppose fairness doctrines, and take advantage of people's beliefs that Jesus will return in a sudden rapturous Second Coming.

Charles Pierce calls our nation "Idiot America" because people consider facts to be whatever enough people believe, and they regard truth to be found mainly in how fervently people believe these "facts".

No matter what religious dogmas say, the Earth will continue to orbit the Sun for another billion years or three, just as it has done for more than 4.5 billion years in the past. Any rationalizations that justify actions that threaten human survival are the ultimate in moral misconceptions and downright stupidity. Those who are enraptured by prophesies of End Times can be counterproductive and serve to undermine saner endeavors. Those who promote bizarre expectations of a Rapture event are gullible believers in ludicrous suppositions, and thus belong in the same category as crazy cult worshippers.

The Rapture Index website states: "The Rapture Index is by no means meant to predict the rapture, however, the index is designed to measure the type of activity that could act as a precursor to the rapture. You could say the Rapture index is a Dow Jones Industrial Average of end time activity, but I think it would be better if you viewed it as prophetic speedometer."

Ah, I see! Or do I? I think not! Those who prey on people's basest fears tend to cause our noblest impulses to be subordinated to those fears. Such people can thereby harm both general well-being today and the prospects of all people in future generations.

"When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called Religion."

--- Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

In *Is Religion a Delusion?*, Ryan McKay and Robert Ross wrote that, "While religion is a source of solace and comfort for millions", particular religious beliefs can be dangerous for the believer and/or for others. "As the pandemic raged in April 2020, churchgoers in Ohio defied warnings not to congregate. Some argued that their religion conferred them immunity from COVID-19. ... Some weeks later, the cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker commented on the dangers of evangelical religious belief in the coronavirus era. Writing on Facebook, he said: 'Belief in an afterlife is a malignant delusion, since it devalues actual lives and discourages action that would make them longer, safer, and happier.'"

"Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities."

--- Voltaire

Evangelical fear mongering is reminiscent of Don Quixote and his madcap tilting at windmills with comic absurdity, yet it is more nefarious because when people's fears are stoked, they can more easily rationalize anti-social policies that hurt others. Fears also tend to make people more accepting of injustices and ecological folly. Rapture dogmas are generally accompanied by reactionary social conservatism that attempts to obstruct progress, discriminate against women and gays, and enlist believers to help thwart fair-minded social change.

"A lie can travel halfway around the world, while truth puts on its shoes."

-- Mark Twain

### Something Actually Valuable: The Sustainability Index

It would be far more salubrious if no one believed the crazy suppositions contained in the Rapture Index, and if instead many people paid attention to meaningful measures like those set forth in an astutely focused SUSTAINABILITY INDEX. This barometer focuses on ecological, economic, societal and political factors that are directly correlated to the prospects of our achieving a sustainable existence. This Index makes much more sense than trying to quixotically gauge natural-event "Acts of God" or things like plagues or "Beast Government" to determine how close mythical End Times are getting.

The methodology used to assess the status of the sustainability of human activities has been inspired by the use in the Rapture Index of 45 specific measures. But the Sustainability Index uses 45 meaningful measures of the most relevant aspects of our activities to determine the status of the sustainability of these endeavors, rather than the 45 absurd measures used in the Rapture Index to project the approach of prophetic End Times. True measures can be crucial, while measures predicated upon ridiculous correlations are meaningless.

The Sustainability Index in effect takes into account 'Genuine Progress Indicators', which measure elements that are important to a good quality of life. Such indicators assess things that contribute to general wellness, healthy communities, greater fairness, fulfilling work, and authentic connections to others and the natural world. We would be able to see a more accurate picture of our aggregate actions if we choose to change our focus from current measures of Gross Domestic Product, which assess economic activities in a narrow quantitative way, to new measures focused on broad and beneficial outcomes. This would allow us to better focus our priorities and modify the negative impacts of our aggregate activities.

We could and should be taking steps to mitigate inequalities, reduce injustices, solve existential problems, build peace, stop rainforest destruction, protect wetlands, minimize the production of toxic wastes, mitigate global warming and anthropogenic climate disruptions, protect biological diversity, and educate and empower women so that the growth rate in human numbers will be stabilized in nations everywhere around the globe.

### A Living Planet Index

Early humans had a reverence for nature and the providential bounty of wildlife and natural ecosystems. In contrast, Western religions are founded on Creation myths that presume a different perspective that is pervaded by both anthropocentric and patriarchal hubris. The Bible teaches that God made the universe and human beings in six days, and that our purpose is to subdue the earth and "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the face of the earth."

A dominion theology interpretation of the Bible is being used to rationalize damages to Earth's ecosystems. Too often, these dogmas ignore responsibilities that should accompany our attempts to control and govern the rest of creation. This belief system has been joined by industrial economic doctrines that reinforce and rationalize competitive drives and greed in a ruthless assault upon nature, and upon the very foundations of human well-being. This shortsighted hubris has made it easier for us to become the single most destructive force on Earth, threatening the continued survival of almost every other species of life on the planet.

These attitudes are contributing to an insidiously severe biodiversity crisis. Many species of life have been driven to extinction already, and significant proportions of the remainder are endangered due to the impacts of our activities, including widespread habitat destruction, the overharvesting of forests, fisheries and wildlife, water pollution and air pollution, and the introduction of invasive species. These impacts are being made worse by rapidly growing human numbers and increasing needs and desires.

A "Living Planet Index" has been developed by the World Wide Fund for Nature, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Program. This Index provides a clear indicator of the state of biodiversity in the world. The Index has fallen significantly since 1970 in a global trend that reflects a degradation of natural ecosystems that is unprecedented in all of recorded human history.

The Living Planet Reports indicate that the abundance of vertebrate species has fallen by about 60% in the past 50 years. This stunning finding reveals that well over half of the population numbers of species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds and fish have been wiped out in just the past 50 years. The degradation of wildlife habitats and entire ecosystems is contributing to a collapse of fisheries and pervasive threats to many forms of life, including our nearest mammalian evolutionary ancestors -- chimpanzees, bonobos and great apes. Canaries in coal mines seem to be figuratively dying left and right!

The conservation of biological diversity should be "a common concern of humankind". For this reason, the U.S. should ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity, an international treaty that has been signed by more than 190 countries. We should also commit to reinvigorated global cooperation on sustainable development and the mitigation of climate disruptions. We should work together to reduce rates of population growth in developing countries, and try to stabilize human numbers on the planet by helping the poorest countries speed their demographic transition to lower birth rates. And forced-birth abortion bans must be prohibited.

The Earth is our only home. When we damage it, we harm our prospects. It is high time we began to heed these understandings!

#### The Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 Revisited

Images of natural disasters are seen with increasing frequency in the world news these days. Floods, tornados, hurricanes, heat waves and wildfires are occurring around the globe with record intensity. Many areas in the world are either being adversely affected by harsh droughts or experiencing unusually heavy and sometimes torrential rainfall. Record hot temperatures and "polar vortex" cold spells are causing people to talk about the weather even more than usual. Weather havoc seems to be the new normal, and instant coverage by the media of every development is magnifying the seeming epidemic nature of these adversities.

In addition, earthquakes and tsunamis shockingly kill people and cause extensive damages with seemingly unusual frequency, and impressive volcanic eruptions take place in Iceland or Java or Bali or Chile or other places around the Earth every year. It was all but raining cats and dogs in Hannibal Missouri the other day, prompting some religious folks to say that the end is near, as if it's as likely as not that a plague of frogs will come next.

Amphibians, unaware of human religious beliefs, are nonetheless being disproportionately driven toward eternal extinction due to human activities that cut down trees in temperate forests and rainforests, and destroy habitats and wildlife refuges, spew poisons into waterways and seas, and cause deleterious changes in living conditions on account of destabilized jet streams, extreme weather patterns, decreasing ocean alkalinity and rising sea levels. Thus, it could be accurately said, after examining evidence and drawing inferences from extrapolated trends, that frogs and other amphibians are being directly affected by the tragic biotic diversity-crippling impact of our obtuse activities.

What is happening? It's as if we are becoming strangers in a strange land. Some think that these are signs from the LORD. This essay explores this question, and associated ones, from the point of view of religious people, as well as from perspectives of scientists, philosophers, writers and artists. Close consideration is given to the "Rapture Index" and its warnings, and to the whacko preacher Harold Camping who made bizarre predictions in 2011 that the Biblical Rapture and the end of the world would take place later that year, for sure.

Sudden slippage along the boundary between the African, Iberian and Eurasian tectonic plates of Earth's crust generated a powerful earthquake in the Atlantic Ocean near the coast of Portugal on November 1, 1755. Terrible tragedy, angst and confusion followed this earthquake not far from Lisbon. The masses may have thought, "Suspicious circumstances, God!", especially because the devastation took place on All Saint's Day, when many faithful folks were in churches that collapsed on them, killing maybe a thousand worshippers.

Theologians and philosophers at the time speculated on the cause of the calamity, and many claimed that the earthquake was a manifestation of divine judgment and retribution because Lisbon had become one of the most opulent and decadent cities in Europe back then. Perhaps God was angry that the Portuguese navy fleet had helped Portugal become the first global empire in history, and Portuguese conquistadores had ruthlessly exploited native peoples and brought back large quantities of gold and silver from its far-flung colonies.

Some among the faithful wondered why God had struck the people of Portugal with such seeming merciless vengeance. Could it have been due to the fact that the Portuguese had slaughtered indigenous peoples in many foreign lands? Moralizing judgmental fundamentalists regarded the pleasures and indulgences found in Lisbon to be exceedingly sinful, and religious authorities during the terrible Holy Inquisition were still burning many Jews and heretics to death in Portugal, Spain and other countries at the time.

Voltaire wrote his famous short story *Candide* in 1759, in response to his disillusionment related to this terrible natural disaster. He was also acutely aware that other calamities were taking place in the world in those days, being right in the throes of the bloody Seven Years' War that killed about a million people in Europe and various European colonies around the globe between 1756 and 1763. Horribly daunting diseases were also common, and there were plenty of assorted grave inhumanities of human beings against others, among far too many that have taken place since time immemorial throughout recorded history.

Superstitious explanations for natural disasters exert powerful influences over people's imaginations. However, much better and more probable scientific explanations exist, and they have considerable advantages in providing us with more reasonable perspectives on how to actually mitigate the risks of natural catastrophes and to prepare for inevitable adversities. One main purpose of this essay is to investigate important lessons contained in this debate, and to advance knowledge that will be vital for people in the future.

"Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

--- The English writer H.G. Wells

When H.G. Wells wrote of education, he meant learning how to think critically and understand accurately. He certainly did not mean religious catechism or narrow indoctrination in conservative social, economic, political or religious dogmas. Alert, Texas and Florida textbook publishers!

"Fables should be taught as fables, myths as myths, and miracles as poetic fancies. To teach superstitions as truths is a most terrible thing. The child mind accepts and believes them, and only through great pain and perhaps tragedy can he be in after years relieved of them. In fact, men will fight for a superstition quite as quickly as for a living truth -- often more so, since a superstition is so intangible you cannot get at it to refute it, but truth is a point of view, and so is changeable."

--- Attributed to Hypatia of Alexandria, the revered "Lady Philosopher", circa 412 CE

### The Dangers of Being Gullible Travelers

John Fowles wrote in *The Aristos*: "The more absolute death seems, the more authentic life becomes." He points out that "the driver of a high-explosives truck who does not believe in a life after death drives more carefully than one who does." This casts a bright light on an important issue.

Those who believe in an End Times Rapture are inclined to accept less responsibility for the ecological health of our home planet. This is terribly wrong-headed. Bill Moyers wrote a provocative article in the Minneapolis Star Tribune in January 2005 in which he pointed out that many fundamentalist Christians believe that "environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded, but actually welcomed -- even hastened -- as a sign of the coming apocalypse." That attitude is madness! The full text of Bill Moyers' illuminating article is appended at the end of this essay for its valuable insights.

It is risky for everyone when millions of people gullibly believe that some sort of apocalyptic End Times are approaching, and that the return of Jesus Christ and a Biblical Judgment Day is coming soon. It is a form of dangerous ethnocentric supremacism to proclaim that a Christian God will reward faithful folks in a time of triumph for those who believe, but will smite the rest of humankind with catastrophic tribulation because of their skepticism or other "sins". I personally prefer a myth that would allow believers to crow about their faith without

consequentially threatening every other being on the planet with their judgmental condemnations of others to tribulations and suffering and death and eternal adversity!

"I've said many times that we can expect delusional beliefs to rise in proportion to the economic hardships we experience. That's exactly what's happening."

--- James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century*

Millions of people cling to narrow religious dogmas, and this is, in some ways, a barbarous waste of moral energy. John Fowles stated in *The Aristos* that such misguided thinking is "like keeping ramshackle water mills on a river that could serve hydroelectric dynamos." Much more positive outcomes could be achieved if these formidable energies, and the enormous amounts of time and money devoted to them, were to be redirected into more wholesome and auspicious channels. Let us begin to give more attention and concern to those things that really merit it, rather than harboring superstitions and expressing deep biases and creating needless conflicts.

Clearly we are not living in the best of all possible worlds. After all, there are many ways that our economic and political systems could be fairly and significantly improved. And we could certainly do a better job of protecting the environment by giving such a vital goal a higher priority. The corrupting influence of Big Money could be diminished in our political system, and this would lead to better prospects for workers and the general public and people in future generations.

Increasing extremes of economic security between the Few and the Many are contrary to the founding principles of our democratic republic. It is not acceptable to allow inequities to increase to more stark extremes in our economy and our legal system. We should stop allowing environmental injustices and intergenerational inequities to grow, because these unfair developments undermine our democracy and reduce the well-being of millions of individuals who are adversely affected.

Abraham Lincoln expressed the hope in his famous Gettysburg Address that the great American experiment in governance "of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Throughout history, democracies have ended by being overthrown in military coups or in authoritarian takeovers like that of Adolph Hitler after a suspicious fire damaged the Reichstag building in Berlin in February 1933. But there is another primary threat to democratic governance that is found in what we are experiencing in the U.S. today: the rise to ascendancy of oligarchy, or government dominated by a relative few. Oligarchy and plutocracy involve rule by the rich, who have unwarranted and undesirably excess influence in a political system enabled by institutionalized bribery, corporation-corrupted politics, violations of rules of law, and the undermining of the independence of the judiciary by shrewd partisans and ideological fundamentalists.

A society is much better off with fairly shared prosperity than with a narrower prosperity jealously hoarded by the influential few. It is immoral for privileged people to try to engineer a monopoly on leisure time for themselves while insisting that all workers either redouble their efforts or be fired.

We are foolishly allowing ourselves to be collectively distracted by far-reaching conflicts over whose jealous God is the true Almighty one. There are much more serious issues confronting us. Competing partisan theories about what form of "Santa Claus" generosity is best to achieve political ascendancy are causing political paralysis. Should we be providing more government benefits, or low tax rates for those with the highest incomes? Providing both, as we have been doing for many years, is a bad plan, because it involves irresponsibly saddling future generations with the burden of record-high national debt obligations.

Meanwhile we are figuratively fiddling while potentials for increasingly grave economic, social and environmental disasters rise before us. Important insights into these developments are contained in the Earth Manifesto essay, *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics*. Check it out!

#### Some Observations from Shaky Ground

I again recall the story of a series of powerful earthquakes that struck in a seismic zone that stretches south and west from New Madrid, Missouri back in 1811 and 1812. Harken back to these events, which caused the mighty

Mississippi River to flow backwards for a while. I love Henry Schoolcraft's poetic observations at the scary nature of these seemingly inexplicable events:

"The rivers they boiled like a pot of coals,  
And mortals fell prostrate, and prayed for their souls."

Religious people in the area felt that perhaps the devil had come, and some reckoned that the world must be coming to an end. It is ostensibly natural for people to think supernatural forces are directing their fates, and that salvation may lie in a foretold afterlife. Such superstitions tend to divert our attention, however, from focal points of concern that are really more important for our future well-being. We should be more aware of the avoidable risks we are collectively taking, and of the shortsighted and unsustainable nature of the lives we are leading -- and of the best ways we should be creating a better existence in the here-and-now by dealing fairly and effectively with these transcendent challenges.

Natural disasters of many types will happen again and again, so it is a *bona fide* good idea for us to be more sensibly prepared. We should make more committed efforts to reduce the probable damages and loss of life in earthquake-prone areas before earthquakes strike, doing this by strengthening building codes and investing in better emergency preparations. We should try to mitigate risks associated with widespread flooding by implementing zoning restrictions that prevent home-building and other real estate developments in flood plains and high risk flood zones. We should give greater consideration and priority to ecological precautionary principles that emphasize the value of resource conservation, pollution prevention, and forest protections. We should also heed warnings of scientists with regard to our profligate usages of fossil fuels and the large volumes of carbon dioxide and methane emissions that are being spewed into the atmosphere, for these are mindless indulgences that are causing ominous disruptions in the global climate.

Risks related to climate change are mounting, according to many studies, prominently including all of the assessments done by scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change -- risks like increasing threats to food supplies, sustainable existence and peace. These surely should not be denied or ignored!

The number of forcibly displaced refugees seeking safety in other countries around the globe is currently a record of more than 25 million people. And more than 100 million persons are displaced from their homes right now -- the highest ever in human history. Half of all refugees are children. The nations with the most refugees fleeing their home countries are Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan and South Sudan. We must recognize the foolhardy nature of letting states fail because the USA has abandoned them in pursuits of America First policies, and allowed unleashed global capitalism to make excessive profits -- and failed to prevent authority abusers from rigging outcomes in places ruled by authoritarian autocrats, like in Russia, China, Hungary, Turkey and other countries.

Our leaders in businesses, governments and religious establishments would be well advised to work together to protect the commons from depletion and harm, and to help facilitate constructive change. We should demand that these institutions act constructively and more fairly. These institutions serve people, so they should indulge less in manipulating the populace in ways that are contrary to the greater good. They should instead make more contributions to a sustainable future by encouraging the conservation of resources. The public should also insist that more effective ways be found to prevent our nation from getting into endless wars and costly military occupations, because such acts of aggression make everyone less safe. And we should support a commitment to people in future years by agreeing to ratify a farsighted Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

#### The Big News Story on May 22, 2011: Apocalypse Not Now!

The evangelical Christian Family Radio preacher Harold Camping told a flock of followers that the End Times Rapture would begin with a massive earthquake on Saturday, May 21, 2011. His church had sponsored thousands of billboards around the world to advertise this supposed beginning of the end of the world. Perhaps it would have been appropriate if the kooky 89-year-old radio preacher had had a heart attack and died on that date, proving conclusively that End Times will indeed come to us all -- though probably not for everyone at once in the way

predicted by charlatans like Camping. Slightly embarrassed at the error of his claims, Camping said in the wake of his wrong prediction that he was "flabbergasted" that the world had not ended. Ya think?

The great Mark Twain summarized my sentiments evocatively: "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."

Stand-up comedians and various humorists like Jon Stewart and Jay Leno had a field day with the absurdity of the exceedingly simplistic worldviews of those who fervently believe in Rapture End Times. David Letterman naturally came up with a list of the "Top Ten Harold Camping Excuses". Like, "At 89, I can't remember how to operate the toaster." Very funny! In any case, one clever humorist inquired whether, after the Rapture, "can I have your stuff?" LOL!

Harold Camping did finally die in December 2013, so I suppose he went knocking on the gates of Heaven, and hoped that God would see the passion behind his End Time predictions and overlook all the hardships he had caused other people with his crazed, erroneous, self-serving and delusional prognostications.

Many superstitious people believe that natural phenomena like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods and droughts are all signs of an approaching end of the world. This is patently ridiculous! Are these folks loony? These are physical processes in nature, not some expression of an angry God. Such events may cause calamities, but they are not the result of some deity suddenly smiting people who happen to be affected by these natural disasters. Lightning bolts, earth tremors and tsunamis are not manifestations of the inscrutable will of any wrathful God; they are a natural facet of the billions-of-years-long geophysical conditions on Earth to which all forms of life are extraordinarily adapted.

Similarly, diseases are not punishments by God, and the indignities of aging and the intensely poignant prospects of death are not repercussions of God's eternal vindictive punishment of Adam and Eve for their disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Instances of spontaneous remission of a terminal disease are not miraculous healings that happen because of the grace of God. They involve mechanisms within our bodies that are mysterious and almost miraculous in their own right. Healing in fact can be well encouraged by making healthy and transformative changes in behaviors and beliefs. I recommend two books that provide cogent perspectives on better approaches to achieving good health: Dr. Andrew Weil's *Spontaneous Healing*, and Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman's *Spontaneous Evolution*.

Modern scientific understandings give us overwhelmingly convincing physical explanations for natural phenomena. Still, superstitious minds cling stubbornly to archaic explanations and odd misconceptions about the world.

"Superstition is to religion what astrology is to astronomy; the mad daughter of a wise mother.

These daughters have too long dominated the earth."

--- Voltaire

Superstition and stupidity are not synonymous. The glamorous actress Marlene Dietrich once said that superstitions are habits, not merely foolish beliefs. They are surely curious habits. A vitally important aspect of this state of affairs is that superstitious people are exceptionally vulnerable to being ruled by fanatics, so they tend to become fanatics themselves. And such fanaticism can be excessively dangerous.

It turns out that we human beings have lots of bad habits other than superstitious beliefs. Many people indulge in debt-financed consumerism and shop for things they don't need even when they can't afford it. Most people choose priorities that are materialistic, or oriented toward narrow religious dogmas, instead of focusing their lives on more meaningful and wholesome spiritual and humanistic priorities. Many people choose to deny that human activities are causing far-reaching impacts and future-endangering risks of climate disruption. We are also generally ignoring the fact that risks are increasing due to rapidly increasing human numbers. These trends are having deleterious impacts on vital ecosystems upon which our well-being depends. The fact that prospects of all people in future generations are being undermined lends an urgent dimension to this wrongheadedness.

All superstitions that lead charlatans to predict an imminent Rapture event and a variety of terrible times of Tribulation are summarized in the preposterously presumptuous Rapture Index website. This compilation of statistics supposedly measures the speed with which we are "moving toward the occurrence of pre-tribulation



rapture." A more thorough analysis of the Rapture Index is made below, and a proposal is made for a much more useful, intelligent and necessary gauge: a Sustainability Index. Check it out online!

"Never has the world seen a society so possessed by material possessions and so consumed by consumerism."

--- Swami Beyondananda, *Spontaneous Evolution*

"You've got a shipment," Alexa relentlessly notifies anyone nearby. Curiously, such notifications can have the addictive effect of stimulating the reward centers of our brains, delivering another small dose of chemical substances like the neurotransmitter dopamine to a region of our brains known as the septal area. This brain structure lies just below the front end of our corpus callosums, and appears to be the most sensitive to reward stimuli. One rat in a scientific experiment responded to stimulus in this area of their brains by pressing a lever 7,500 times in 12 hours to receive presumably pleasurable electrical stimulation there.

Huge fleets of delivery vehicles deliver stuff these days, and Amazon and manufacturing suppliers are ecstatically profitable while demonstrating an incomprehensibly heavy footprint of fossil fuel depletion, carbon emissions, packaging waste and profligate consumption. Change must come!

### Voltaire, Harold Camping and Jonathan Swift

Voltaire was an 18th century Enlightenment writer and philosopher who was a strong proponent of free thought and social reform. He made many enemies by criticizing both the religious and political establishments of his day. He ridiculed religion, theologians, dogma, governments, intolerance, armies, and the philosophical optimism of the German mathematician Gottfried Leibniz, who had postulated that "this is the best of all possible worlds." Voltaire said that he had "never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: <Oh Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.> And God granted it." Ha!

Voltaire fought established religions and the suspiciously self-serving idea that kings have God-given divine rights. He felt that all people should tolerate the religious beliefs of others, for otherwise many fanatics get caught up in righteousness and hate and the perpetration of discrimination, violence and genocide. Superstition can figuratively set the whole world on fire, while in contrast insightful and enlightened philosophies could help quench these flames of extremism. "On the whole," Voltaire wrote, "the less superstition, the less fanaticism, and the less fanaticism, the fewer miseries."

If May 21, 2011 was Judgment Day, the judgment is in: those who prophesy Rapture End Times are simply making it up. Give us a break! The apocalyptic "prophecy industry" is big, it turns out, because people are eager for simplistic understandings, and many people are gullible or ignorant. Also, people who promote apocalyptic visions make lots of money by capitalizing on people's fears and insecurities. Harold Camping's Family Radio raised over \$100 million by using false prophecies and scare tactics. There is sure no scarcity of charlatans and fools and suckers and other gullible victims in the world!

Make no mistake about it: Harold Camping was one in a long line of self-aggrandizing, money questing, and attention-seeking religious folks who make prophecies that are really a form of religious fraud.

"Prophecy is a good line of business, but it is full of risks."

--- Mark Twain

Harold Camping had even startled Christendom by asserting some years ago that "the Church Age has come to an end". He advised the faithful to flee their churches, or else become one of the damned. The Holy Spirit, he claimed, can no longer be found in churches. Aha! Is that so? I'll be damned!

Sometimes it is valuable to seek literary illumination to more viscerally understand important issues. So here is one of my favorite perspectives on dishonesty and fraud, as seen by Jonathan Swift, one of the most famous satiric writers in the English language. He is best known for his masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels*, a fanciful satire on human nature that was published under a pseudonym in the year 1726.

*Gulliver's Travels* features a protagonist who makes four voyages to fictional exotic lands where people like tiny Lilliputians and giant Brobdingnagians live. "They (the Lilliputians) look upon fraud as a greater crime than theft, and therefore seldom fail to punish it with death; for they allege that care and vigilance, with a very common

understanding, may preserve a man's goods from thieves; but honesty has no fence against superior cunning; and since it is necessary that there should be a perpetual intercourse of buying and selling, and dealing upon credit, where fraud is permitted or connived at, or hath no Law to punish it, the honest dealer is always undone and the knave gets the advantage."

### Hope Glimmers on the Horizon

A televangelist once claimed that "Hope is in the end of days." This is absurd, folks! Hope is to be found in making this world fairer, safer and more sustainable, NOT in placing our hopes in another hypothetical world after we are dead. It is a flimsy and pathetic hope to rationalize personal hardships and extreme social inequities and ecological destruction in the real world, and to place our bets on an imagined heavenly afterlife for a select few in some alternate realm that has no good evidence whatsoever of existing.

A theological "end of the world" is a myth that can be best understood as a metaphorical parable rather than something that will actually occur. The end of the world will, in a literal sense, take place for each living thing when it dies. To confuse our own mortal end with an imagined God-smiting-the-world end for all human beings is a preposterous belief. It is a bizarre echo of the biblical fable of a global flood. Biblical literalists promulgated this belief, thinking that God really did cause it to rain for 40 days and 40 nights because 'He' was disgusted with mankind's wickedness and evil ways. In this story in *Genesis*, waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, covering all the mountain tops and drowning all living things except for those saved by 600-year-old Noah on an ark he'd built of gopher wood in accordance with God's specifications. Did even fishes and amphibians somehow die in the flood?! This global inundation in *Genesis* should really be seen as a parable, not an actual event.

Mark Twain ridiculed those who believe the Bible is literally true in *Letters from the Earth*. He had reckoned that even if it rained 10 times more heavily than ever before recorded on Earth -- say 10 feet a day -- for 40 days and 40 nights, it would just submerge every hill 400 feet high. "At last the Ark soared aloft and came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat, 17,000 feet above the valley ..." Ha! Mark Twain was quite the card. People who believe that the stories in the Bible are literally true, on the other hand, are rather crazy themselves.

Imagine a world in which rigid religious dogmas had less sway. After all, there is a deep truth in the observation made by Stephen F. Roberts: "I contend we are both atheists; I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours."

All nations and peoples should honestly support freedom of religion and a robust separation of church and state, and the Golden Rule and Live and Let Live fairness principles. Or else, as the Quran contends in 2:89 and 35:36, "the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers." ... "And for those who disbelieve will be the fire of Hell."

Imagine if even a small portion of the time and energy currently devoted to misguided theologies were to be dedicated to a study of good ideas -- like those found in the Earth Manifesto. Here's hope! I personally recommend such a grand re-allocation of priorities. Check out, for example, all the good proposals in *Common Sense Revival*, and in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online.

### This is What It's All About

Voltaire set up a reverberating contrast, in his famous short story about a young caricature of a character named Candide, between Dr. Pangloss, who professes the belief that "This is the best of all possible worlds", and the innocently simple-minded Candide, who suffers a shocking cavalcade of every imaginable type of hardship and calamity and being a victim of perfidy.

The "glass is half full" philosophical optimism of Dr. Pangloss has a contrasting "glass is half empty" counterpart found in philosophical pessimism. Profound, pervasive and sometimes seemingly random injustices occur in the world, along with circumstantial happenstances in life, and they can be rudely tragic and abruptly calamitous. This gives philosophic pessimism fertile soil for growth, and provides fodder for "confirmation biases" in despairing minds.

End-of-the-world believers invest their hopes in an illusion that they will enjoy a better life after the end of their one-and-only life on Earth in all of eternity. This is in actuality a kind of extreme desperation and a foolhardy abandonment of hope in life.

"Don't just complain about the weather, do something about it."

A valuable third mode of philosophic understanding gives sensible people a better kind of hope -- a hope that is capable of really changing the world in positive ways. This hope can contribute to our helping create a truly better life on Earth for everyone, sometime soon, and not only after we are dead. This philosophy is known as "meliorism". It recognizes that our world is NOT the best of all possible worlds, and that circumstances and conditions could be made significantly better for people alive today and for the prospects of those to be born in the future. Positive change could easily be effected by implementing overall win-win solutions that exist for almost every problem.

To achieve this better world, we should strive for fairer understandings, and give other people greater respect by collaborating together to boldly actualize this better world. The best solution to any problem is arguably to be found in the clearest and broadest understanding of the nature of the problem, and in the most accurate assessment of all the consequences of various courses of action.

Those who put their hopes in a fictitious end-of-the-world tend to be tacitly willing to accept the inequities and rationalized injustices of this world. This makes them ultimate philosophical pessimists whose worldviews and convictions and social "conservatism" generally work to oppose and obstruct and circumvent the better world that is within our grasp. Clarity of comprehension and the will to demand positive change and a fairer political system would help ensure that propitious changes would be made. The big challenge is to reconcile the competing goals of those who believe in selfish individualism and those who recognize the overarching value of healthier communities. Only by uniting in the commendable quest to achieve greater good goals will we be able to overcome the staunch opposition of those who are invested in the entrenched status quo.

Positive change is extremely difficult to accomplish. Why isn't it easy to achieve? Primarily because of those who stand in the path of such changes, including greedy wealthy people who jealously protect their privileges, and reactionary conservatives and people on the Religious Right who oppose adaptive change. What we think and believe affects our world in far-reaching ways, so we should evaluate our understandings more wisely, and we should focus our collective energies on goals that are fairer and more sustainable and more consistent with concepts of peaceful coexistence.

Some people choose to steep themselves in misconceptions, misunderstandings and denial. I prefer to seek a potential for more salubrious solutions, as recommended throughout the Earth Manifesto.

"Even the smallest person can change the course of the future."

--- Galadriel, a character in *The Lord of the Rings*

### A Digression on the Genesis of Beliefs

People's perceptions arise from three primary sources: (1) inherited instincts and propensities in our subconscious minds, (2) our memories and interpretations of personal experiences, and (3) our conscious thoughts. Neuroscientists, using EEG brainwave tests, have discovered fascinating facts about our brain activities and the various frequencies they operate in. These brain frequencies range from low Delta and Theta frequencies to higher ones in Alpha, Beta and Gamma waves. Children under the age of six years old are powerfully affected by influences that tend to program them because their brains operate only in the Delta and Theta ranges of brain wave activity. In these states, the brain has a hard time discriminating between truth and fiction, or thinking critically, or filtering out misperceptions. This is one reason why beliefs in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy and a personal God are easily inculcated in youngsters.

Church dogma, prejudices and fears can be easily implanted in the minds of young children because of this neuronal nature of their young brains. A main reason that many religions insist adult believers in their dogmas should reproduce without limit is to ensure a self-perpetuating supply of new believers. Opposition to contraception and abortion basically operates as one of the few good means for recruiting new adherents who will believe in mythical stories and absolutist doctrines. It is much easier to convince a young person than an adult, whose brain is

operating in higher brain frequencies, that there is absolute truth in improbable and ostensibly absurd myths and doctrines.

The only significant group of adults who convert to a different religious faith than the one they are born into is those who are "born again" believers. These people make radical religious conversions, and often do so in times of personal crisis or alcoholic interludes, or out of fear, intense inner turmoil, despair, or a powerful need to belong. During periods of fear, frustration and weakness, the brain operates out of reactive mind-sets, and higher frequency brain waves are suppressed.

### Origin of the Rapture Theory

With millions of Christian believers adhering to the dangerous and improbable idea of an End Times Rapture. One would expect this theory to be found in the Bible. But, not so! The Rapture theory was formulated from early prophecies in the Bible that concerned a Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, disciples of Jesus asked on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, "... what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, take heed that no man deceive you." This advice in Matthew 24:4 is pretty good! Verily I say unto you, Harold Camping and people of your ilk, stop deceiving people with your delusions, make-believe and fear mongering! (Note: Camping did stop, since he died in December 2013.)

The New Testament of the Bible says in Matthew 24:6-14 that there shall be wars and famines and pestilences and earthquakes, and false prophets, and that iniquity shall abound, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world ...; and then shall the end come."

A long line of charlatans and other false prophets have been purveying this idea of coming End Times. William Miller, for instance, was a Baptist preacher in the 19th century who used Bible prophecies to concoct a prediction that the world would end on October 22, 1844. Some of his followers in places like Hannibal, Missouri actually abandoned their crops and stores, put on long white robes, and gathered at Lover's Leap for the advent of the terminal spectacle, only to be ultimately disappointed. There are no reports that any of these gullible "Millerites" threw themselves off this promontory bluff, in emulation of an Indian maiden that local legends say had done long ago after she had been disappointed in love.

When Miller's predicted end did not actually come to pass in 1844, a "Great Disappointment" befell many believers who had given blind allegiance to this false prophet preacher. The Millerites were bewildered and disillusioned, and felt a sense that psychologists today would describe as "cognitive dissonance." When fervently held expectations are dashed, even though they are of terrible times involving tribulations and widespread calamities, it can lead believers to a state of disappointment, anxiety and confusion.

Generally, when such errors of belief are confronted with a sudden clear contradiction, people change their convictions. Not so for old Harold Camping! He was apparently too stubborn-headed, so he obstinately refused to admit the rash error of his alarmist certitudes and he merely changed his prediction of the date the Rapture would take place from May 21 to October 21, 2011. And guess what? That too did not come to pass.

If people seriously believed the end would have occurred on that date, shouldn't they have all partied until then like there would be no tomorrow? Hmm ... actually, the way we human beings are treating Earth's providential ecosystems, we ARE acting as if there will be no tomorrow! We seem committed to continuing to behave rashly in the face of growing indications that human numbers already exceed a sustainable carrying capacity and are entering stages of ecological overshoot. We also seem committed to adding huge amounts to the national debt to keep up the scheme of giving low tax rates to the highest income earners and the wealthiest people.

When the world did not end once again on October 21, 2011, Harold Camping should have recognized it as a revelation, and he should have admitted his delusions and deceptions, and devoted his Family Radio to more honest and auspicious purposes. This honorable course of action would have provided a measure of restitution for all the chagrin, hardship and harm he caused to his followers around the world.

"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

--- Matthew 23:24

Many observers had scoffed in 1844 when that other attention-seeking prognosticator, William Miller had made his outlandishly absurd claims, and the scoffing was even more widespread in 2011 after the Harold Camping debacle. In the wake of Camping's ridiculously nonsensical predictions, it would have been a good idea for the faithful to have pondered the probability that a 2,000-year-old book could possibly have greater foresight than modern scientists about likely future developments. Today, we have much more insightful understandings of the nature of the world than people did in ancient times -- and of the forces of causation. We also have much greater comprehension of the nature of real global threats that face humanity.

Some things are predictable. Others are not. The fate of the world is unfolding, one moment at a time. More than 2,000 years' worth of moments have unfolded since the supposed word of God was revealed in the Bible story. The ultimate outcome of this eternal unfolding of earthly existence will not resemble the archaic and simplistic caricature of End Times as predicted by religious authorities.

The Rapture is a cartoonish prognostication that can be seen to be a tidy little "sublapsarian" allegory of an apocalyptic vision of humankind fallen in the Garden of Eden and in eternally existential need of salvation because Adam and Eve disobediently tasted of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This Biblical parable also says that God wiped out all of humanity in a great flood because of their wickedness, except for a few of the elect on Noah's ark, and today the faithful await salvation by believing that Jesus will return for a repeat demonstration of God's wrath, and will spare them if and only if they dutifully believe.

Since people are enamored with prophecies, I'll make some. The world is not going to end. The number and the severity of natural calamities, however, will continue to increase as we crowd more people onto the planet while simultaneously squandering resources and ramping-up the amount of pollution and wastes we produce. There will be grave disruptions of normal weather patterns and sea levels, and they will intensify as greenhouse gases accumulate in the atmosphere. Eventually, humankind will become extinct, just like the 99.9% of all species of life that have ever existed. Hopefully, this will be far, far into the future!

The fossil record indicates that the average species of life throughout evolutionary history has survived for about 5 million years before becoming extinct. Our species has been around for about 150,000 to 200,000 years, so we have a really long way to go just to reach average. And we are likely to never make it even another 1,000 years unless we honestly begin to think longer term and act in smarter ways that are more truly consistent with the ecological greater good.

The Moody Blues sing about A Question of Balance: "I'm looking for a miracle in my life ...". A better balance is surely needed in human affairs, and good miracles are appealing and worthy of our hopes. Many religious hopes, however, are full of angry, jealous, vindictive, glory-craving gods and a passel of odd stories like the Biblical God's gruesome guilt-inducing sacrifice of "His" divine son, nailed to a cross, to atone for our sins. This salvation-promising, believe-it-or-else eternal damnation fable has been used by enterprising souls for centuries to take advantage of the faithful, and control them and gain their faithful obedience and monetary support. A prophesized Rapture event that features a cruelly violent, anti-well-wishing and terrible fate for almost all of humanity seems colossally inconsistent with the nice Bible advice: "Love thy neighbor."

It can be seen clearly that mankind has used God for many curious purposes, and that churches have strayed rather far from honorable spiritual roots. "Lord, Come Quickly", cries the faithful chorus, bizarrely hoping for an ultimate Pyrrhic triumph of their beliefs.

When we divert our attention and energies away from vitally important things by believing mythic prophecies of End Times, we insidiously undermine efforts to undertake smarter priorities that would help us comprehensively deal with the real dangers we collectively face. Divisive alarmism over fancied improbabilities is a form of dangerous distraction from the need to come together to reasonably cope with more real and urgent threats to our collective well-being.

"Rational, adj. Devoid of all delusions save those of observation, experience and reflection."

--- Ambrose Bierce in his sardonic *Devil's Dictionary*

Real Dangers, not Imaginary Ones

Rapture believers urge us to believe in exaggerated probabilities of a mythical catastrophic end of the world. This faith can contribute to a paralyzing "doomsday fatigue" and divert our attention from recognizing our need to address much more real existential threats to our well-being and survival.

The most serious global threats to humanity, other than a widespread nuclear war, are probably the potential for abrupt changes in the climate due to deforestation and anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. Climate disruptions are already contributing to intense floods, severe droughts, powerful tornados and cyclones and hurricanes, more heat waves and wildfires, shifting polar vortex cold snaps, crop failures, coral bleaching, melting glaciers, disappearing ice caps and inexorably rising sea levels. These damaging developments are not being caused by God or Allah or some divine being that is angry with us; we are doing this to ourselves! And we are not only doing it to ourselves, but to every unborn child to come, and to every species of life on Earth.

These are real dangers, not imaginary ones. The longer we delay making courageous efforts to deal effectively with associated issues, the more severe and costly the consequences will be, And the longer we delay, the harder it will become to solve the problems or adapt to changing conditions.

Bill McKibben, founder of the global climate campaign *350.org*, wrote a satirical article in 2011 about climate change deniers titled *Keep Calm and Carry On*. Since this editorial is well worth reading, I have appended it to the end of this essay, following the text of the aforementioned article by Bill Moyers. Read them both! Or for a cogent perspective, watch a compelling YouTube video by Stephen Thompson that contains the words to McKibben's op-ed that are spoken while real images of occurring natural disasters are shown.

As time goes by, things happen. Bill McKibben published a new book in 2019 titled *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* In his Introduction, he makes cogent arguments about causes for hope, and contrasting reasons for despair if we continue to foolishly march like lemmings toward a cliff of tragic fate.

High atop the Mauna Loa volcano on the Big Island of Hawaii, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been continuously measured since 1958. In the 64 years since then, the concentration of this greenhouse gas has increased from about 315 ppm to over 419 ppm in May 2019, and is now at the highest level ever in human history. Measurements made at the Mauna Loa Observatory are so sensitive that they show annual fluctuations as carbon dioxide is used up in the summertime by forests and plants in the northern hemisphere. It turns out that the majority of the world's forests are found on land masses in the northern hemisphere, so when it is summer there, robust photosynthetic activities cause the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to measurably diminish. This trend reverses during the winter in the northern hemisphere. The overall trend, however, has been a net increase year after year after year, due to the tens of billions of tons of carbon dioxide that we human beings are pouring into the atmosphere as a direct result of our combustion of fossil fuels and chopping down (or burning) of global forests.

Atmospheric carbon dioxide peaked at 421 ppm in May 2022, the highest level ever measured. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that this greenhouse gas concentration will ominously increase by the year 2100 from the current level to anywhere from about 550 ppm to over 950 ppm. The effects of such large increases will be to make climate disruptions much, much worse. They will also cause sea levels to rise significantly, flooding islands and coastal areas worldwide and causing millions more people to become environmental refugees. It would be eminently wise for all concerned for us to take smart and effective actions to prevent colossal surges of immigrants from increasingly desperate countries.

Scientists have been warning for years that global warming associated with these increases in greenhouse gases will cause more weather extremes. And sure enough, we're already experiencing epic episodes of flooding, intense storms, droughts, wildfires, and both unusually hot and cold weather in locales all around the Earth.

A global ecological collapse could result from "positive feedback loops" and "threshold effects" of human activities during the lifetimes of people alive today. It is downright stupid to ignore the warnings of scientists in this regard. We need to think ahead, and do a much better job of planning ahead. A prudent regard for the interconnectedness of Earth's ecological systems could help us begin to mitigate the extreme changes in weather patterns that our aggregate activities will cause.

This is crucial to our future well-being. The human race has doubled its aggregate demands on the natural world since the 1960s. Our global "carbon footprint" has increased by more than one-third in the past 12 years. We are using renewable natural resources at a rate 50% higher than they are naturally generated. Projections of current "business as usual" trends, which require the productivity of an equivalent of 1.7 planet Earths, reveal that we will need the equivalent of two planet Earths by the year 2030 to meet our aggregate annual demands. Obviously, there is only one planet Earth.

These trends are clearly unsustainable. It is foolhardy to damage Earth's providential ecosystems and rashly deplete resources with wanton wastefulness, and to hyper-stimulate our consumption through the shortsighted expediency of stimulative deficit financing.

We surely should be more willing to collaborate together to solve complex global problems, as Jeffrey Sachs cogently points out in *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*. Sachs provides some insightful, incisive and intelligent proposed solutions to global problems in this book.

Evangelism for protecting the ecological commons would be a far better way to direct our passions than obsessing over purported God-sanctioned religious supremacist triumphalism and a tumultuous end-times-rapture for believers, accompanied by a prophesized terrible condemnatory cataclysm for all others.

### Philippine Typhoon Shakes Up the Status Quo

A growing clamor is erupting about climate injustices involved in climate change. Poorer countries are suffering extremely costly damages for climate catastrophes like the devastating typhoon that killed thousands of people in the Philippines in November 2013 and the unprecedented power of the cyclone that blew across Vanuatu in March 2015. Threats of rising sea levels also disproportionately affect nations that are not big contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, like Bangladesh and many low-lying islands in the Pacific Ocean.

International climate change conferences have been taking place every year since 1995. They began after an international environmental treaty was signed during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. That treaty led to the creation of a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to "stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system".

Opposition by developed nations to doing something about this growing global problem is strong, so the challenge is enormous. Emotions are running high, especially within the Group of 77 developing nations, which was established in 1964 (it currently includes 134 countries). These nations are so poor that natural disasters are posing particularly severe hardships.

Poor developing countries have a good argument when they assert that richer developed nations have a moral obligation to shoulder more of the costs of climate disasters in their countries. These growing costs are related to intensifying typhoons, hurricanes, tornadoes, coastal flooding and wildfires, along with disappearing arable lands and creeping desertification. It is rich countries, after all, that have spewed the most emissions into the atmosphere in the last century, and have thereby contributed most to the mounting climate crisis.

To cope effectively with these challenges, many people fairly propose the creation of a climate disaster insurance fund. Others advocate a Green Climate Fund with at least \$100 billion in annual contributions. This is a modest amount, considering that Super Storm Sandy in the U.S. alone cost an estimated \$60 billion, and the hurricanes in 2017 caused more than \$300 billion in the U.S. The most sensible plan would be to require an assessment on all global sales of gasoline, coal and natural gas to finance such a fund.

Meanwhile, global emissions continue to rise. This is why the United Nations Environmental Program is warning that immediate action must be taken to reduce emissions enough to limit the rise in average global temperatures to 2 degrees Centigrade (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels. "That is the maximum warming that many scientists believe can occur without causing potentially catastrophic climate change."

Currently, the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide are China, the United States, India, Russia, Japan, Germany and Iran. A different picture emerges in a ranking of the biggest emissions when calculated on a per-person basis.

Qatar, Kuwait, Brunei, Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates top this list, and the U.S. is 12th, Russia is 22nd, Japan is 37th, China is 63rd, and India is 136th. And an even different picture would be revealed by an analysis of which countries have emitted the most greenhouse gases in the past 35 years, causing the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to increase from 350 ppm to over 420 ppm.

Some said that the Philippine typhoon must have been a sign from God, being that it came at the same moment that an international climate change conference was taking place in Warsaw, Poland. Whether God may have sent this message or not, Mother Nature is definitely experiencing more extreme weather events than usual, as judged by a sharp increase in the total annual costs of natural disasters in the past few decades. More people are also in harm's way on the planet than ever before, so increasing numbers of human beings play a distinct role in causing costs to spike.

Relatively poor developing countries make a convincing case that they should receive compensation from rich nations to help them adapt to climate shifts and make their economies greener, and to cover costs of damages caused by a warming climate. An even more convincing case can be made that green taxes and incentives should be put into place in countries worldwide to modify people's behaviors in salubrious directions. Such incentives should be structured to generate funding that will help protect rainforests, the "lungs of the planet" that, when in a healthy state, absorb some of the carbon dioxide we are rashly spewing into the atmosphere.

#### Climate Change Perspectives from Another Shrewd Religious Operative

Republican Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma once called the threat of catastrophic global warming "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people." In defending this contention, he asserted that "man-induced global warming is an article of religious faith." This is religious faith?

The Senator is a religious fundamentalist, and his eagerness to let his Christian religion inform his worldviews makes his opinions deeply suspect. He wrote a book charging that climate change is a hoax. Human influenced climate change is impossible, he declares, because "God's still up there." He cited the passage in Genesis 8:22 of the Bible to claim that it is "outrageous" and arrogant for people to believe that human beings are "able to change what He is doing in the climate". So Inhofe basically says he believes that spewing more than 35 billion tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year could not possibly have greenhouse-like effects.

Record heat affected the U.S. and many nations in Europe and elsewhere in July 2022, yet the U.S., Russia and Saudi Arabia are three Big Oil-corrupted nations that continue to stand in the way of taking adequate action on the climate — "a toxic trio fueled by ignorance and greed."

James Inhofe had become the chairman of the influential Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in January 2015, despite being the most notorious opponent of taking reasonable actions to mitigate the risks resulting from the aggressive burning of fossil fuels. He consistently marches lockstep with the far-right party line, and his climate change opinions deny scientific findings like those by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the vast preponderance of experts that reveal human activities are indisputably contributing to disruptions of normal climate conditions.

Many religious fundamentalists throw any sense of responsibility for the ethical stewardship of Creation to the winds by castigating climate change scientists. But their own fervent convictions are driven by narrow self-interest, not by attempts to honestly understand and deal with the real trends.

Senator Inhofe's motives are suspect in light of overwhelming scientific evidence that disruptions in the world weather patterns are being caused by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. His biggest campaign donors are oil, gas and electricity industries that benefit from large subsidies. These industries also profit by government allowing giant corporations to externalize costs of pollution and carbon emissions onto society. Senator Inhofe's conflicts of interest make his pious denial of the scientific consensus on climate disruptions extremely dubious and filled with hypocrisy. The League of Conservation Voters has given him the lowest possible score on issues related to the environment, and one journalist has called him "the dumbest man in the Senate." LOL!

"Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies."



--- Nietzsche

Senator Inhofe is one of the most reactionary members of a group that has been instrumental in conducting what journalist Chris Mooney has called "the Republican War on Science." A jury of objective observers would be obligated to conclude that Inhofe is a dishonest huckster. Sen. Ted Cruz, regarded as one of the shrewdest Republican politicians in the Senate -- and the most widely disliked -- has views that are influenced by his dangerously theocratic Christian Dominionist ideas, and he too is a crass political opportunist who distorts scientific knowledge and avoids responsible action.

Not a single solitary scientist atop Mauna Loa, all of whom are intimately aware of the ominous trends of increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, would agree with Republican politicians that there is no warming effect caused by spewing out billions of tons of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere each year. Not a single one of them would say it is a good idea to simultaneously cut down vast swaths of forests around the globe. Since trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through the process of photosynthesis, cutting them down diminishes the amount of carbon dioxide absorbed. Furthermore, carbon is released when wood decays or is burned.

Denials of human impacts on climate disruptions are very odd -- and highly irresponsible. It is as if faithful preachers and corrupt politicians have entered a large greenhouse and felt that it is warmer inside, and have then asserted with absolute certainty that the explanation for this phenomenon is not basic physics but that God, in all his marvelous glory and unfathomable purposes, is demonstrating great wonders and judgments by sustaining hot air in the greenhouse through His ineffably inexplicable will alone.

Mark Twain, if he were alive today, would be scribbling cynical gales of laughter at the colossal folly of climate change deniers and the corrupt politicians who are intent on keeping the United States a grudging head-in-the-sand follower on the global stage instead of a bold leader in smarter incentives for conservation, green energy alternatives, and protections of forests around the globe. We should be moving more assertively in a direction of independence from our addiction to fossil fuels for our energy needs, and we should be leading the world to limit greenhouse gas emissions and make sensible investments in efforts to adapt to risks of natural disasters that will be caused by the havoc of accelerating changes in weather patterns worldwide. A more thorough discussion of this critical topic is contained in *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot*, and in my essay *Evolving Climate Change Considerations 2022*.

#### Views on the Phenomenon of Denial

Surprising coincidences of occurrences sometimes take place. Consider this one. A famous book written in 1973 titled *Limits to Growth* was launched into the public consciousness with the then-surprising declaration that there are limits to resources. For some reason, this idea came as a shock to many people, and shrill denials soon ensued. By remarkable coincidence, doggone if 1973 wasn't the exact same year that the long predicted peak of oil production from domestic reserves took place in the U.S. Persons familiar with King Hubbert's prediction about Peak Oil production from U.S. domestic oil reserves will appreciate the sensational extent to which scientific expertise is often capable of triumphing over ignorance, delusion and self-serving denial. King Hubbert's calculations and forecast had been greeted with rancorous skepticism and derision in the 1950s.

Why is it that so many "conservatives" deny the costs and consequences of climate change? Why are these folks so susceptible, as if they have been brainwashed, to defending Big Oil and Big Coal interests, and to disputing the fact that unlimited emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere are causing far-reaching impacts and damages? The explanation surely involves the corrupting influence of Big Money donors!

These denials about human impacts on weather patterns around the world should be regarded as exactly what they are: an eagerness to allow cost socializing scams and to evade responsibility and avoid being faced with the inconvenient truth that we must honor the principles of the 1992 Rio Declaration, which specifically stated in Principal 15 of the Rio Accords: "In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent

environmental degradation."

The leaders of 190 countries attended the Rio Conference, and they all agreed by consensus to this "Agenda 21" Declaration on the Environment and Development. Smart actions and committed deeds are needed to match common sense agreements, and "Merchants of Doubt" and others who deny high scientific probabilities should not be allowed to spend enormous amounts of money to sow doubts about better courses of action! Let's retire the unconscionably corrupt Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, and pass real campaign finance reform, and enact effective measures to strengthen our democracy like those contained in the For the People Act of 2021 -- and act to reduce the amount of cost externalities being foisted on the public.

### Underlying Factors of Religious Doctrines

Almost every religion tries to appeal to its adherents by proclaiming the idea of a "life after death". This idea of an afterlife is a compensatory fantasy that has its roots in the circumstantial injustices of life, and in the fear of death. The belief in a life after death supposes that there is a system of absolute justice in the world, and that there will be a day of judgment by a God in this 'hereafter'. Human beings, especially those who are poor and downtrodden and powerless, have been persistently haunted by inequalities and frustrations that characterize existential reality, so they are especially susceptible to such beliefs.

What really should matter the most to people is not an imagined personal damnation or salvation in an improbable hypothetical afterlife, but a truer fairness to everyone in the real times we are alive. It is up to us to strive to establish greater justice in our world, and to oppose increases in inequality and injustice at the hands of power-abusing people who corrupt our economic and political systems to gain greater advantages for themselves. One might wonder if those greedy and heartless souls are actually possessed by some kind of devil.

"One consequence of our new awareness of death must be, and has been, an alarming growth of both national and individual selfishness, a Gadarene rush to enjoy the pleasures of the shops and senses before they close forever."

--- John Fowles, *The Aristos*

The truth of the matter is that each person, like every other animal on Earth, almost certainly has only one life. Death involves a total extinction of both body and consciousness. Most people accept the obvious fact that their bodies cannot survive death, yet they cling to hopes that some of the functions of the brain -- the most inaccessible and mysterious part of the body -- will survive death. Such religious explanations are simply not credible explanations of reality. I, I, I; eye, eye, eye; aye yie yie yie yie!

"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith", said Jesus before performing another supernatural miracle in Matthew 8:26. Today, supernatural miracles are in short supply, and seeing reality clearly is becoming ever so much a better plan than to have blind faith. And this would be more propitious than joining those who obstruct progress toward improving the general welfare, apparently to abjectly obey reality-twisting charlatans and con men and their enabling cultish sycophants. It is a pathological state of affairs that the real underlying motivations for these stubborn stances are driven by hyped up grievances, and are targeted to "own the libs" and inflict evangelical punishment on more liberal folks.

### An Interlude of Introspection into Heaven

Mark Twain poked serious and thought-provoking fun at the avowed characteristics of Heaven in his book *Letters from the Earth*. He was astounded by the fact that there is no mention at all of sexual intercourse in Heaven, even though it is one of mankind's chief preoccupations on Earth. No sex in Heaven! Mark Twain also expressed amazement that we tend to give great regard to creativity, entrepreneurial activities and intellectual achievements, and we have respect for work well done and take great pride in it, yet there curiously isn't a rag of these things in Heaven. Not that many people on our home planet enjoy playing the harp or singing religious songs in chorus, yet the Heaven conjured up by most religious authorities is filled with singing, praying and harp music. And Heaven is often pictured as having absolute peaceful harmony and equality, even though on Earth most people strive for distinction and superiority -- and elite groups are outraged by any presumption that someone else might be as deserving as they are.

## Psychological Perspectives

Sigmund Freud psycho-analyzed the human psyche. The way he saw it, the mind consists of three parts, or activities: the id, which is the obscure chaos of unconscious forces that are focused on primitive drives for security and sexual satisfaction; the ego, which is the province of conscious desires; and the superego, which attempts to control or repress the other two parts. The brilliantly insightful John Fowles noted a deeper and more modern facet of our psyches in what he called the *nemo*. This aspect of the mind encompasses feelings of virtual insignificance that lurk deep within us, and reveals a sense of insecurity, futility and ephemerality.

The *nemo* is a function of civilization and of the uniquely human ability to compare and hypothesize. The *nemo* drives us to seek importance, power, meaningfulness, a personal legacy, admiration, envy, or even to be feared. The *nemo* leads us either to conform to societal norms or to conflict by adopting a special style of life, an elaborate unique persona, a bohemian or counterculture or dandy affiliation, or even membership in a gang. *Nemo* impulses are partially the cause for so many people to worship fame and celebrity, and to compel us to strive to control others or feel a compulsive need to be right, or to partake in conspicuous consumption, madcap travel, or other extravagant indulgences.

"Nobody wants to be a nobody. All our acts are partly devised to fill or to mask the emptiness we feel at the core." ... "Belief in an afterlife is partly an ostrich attempt to cheat the *nemo*."

--- John Fowles, *The Aristos*

It has been more than 50 years since John Fowles penned the first edition of his observations about the *nemo*. During these years, scientific knowledge and understandings of the workings of the brain have advanced by synaptic leaps and bounds. One compelling insight provided by Michael Gazzaniga, a neuroscientist and professor of psychology, tells us that 98% of our thinking is done in our subconscious minds, beneath the interior radar of conscious awareness.

What's happening here, under the threshold of our consciousness, ain't exactly clear. We simply do not know our own minds. Our brains make decisions for us even though we are not consciously aware of them. Hormones and neurotransmitters affect parts of the brain like the amygdala, the province of emotions. Fear, worry and overwork tend to activate negative emotions that allow other people to manipulate insecure people, using things like job insecurities or amped up fears of immigrants or terrorists to get people to support agendas that are contrary to their own self-interest and the greater good.

To create a more secure world, we need to more incisively understand these things. Linguist George Lakoff feels that progressive ideas should overcome conservative frames and mindsets by utilizing a greater clarity of awareness of how social conservatives and religious fundamentalists subvert our democracy and undermine more ethical conceptions of what our proper courses of action should be to achieve common good goals. Lakoff's book *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century American Politics with an 18th Century Brain* provides provocative perspective and food for thought about how conservatives have been excessively effective in influencing our national decision making.

## Religion and Religious Worldviews

Fervently-held religious beliefs are badges or uniforms of self-identity in the primitive tribal recesses of our being. They provide people with ways to feel they belong. Hallelujah! "Sing out loud; sing along!!" People believe far-fetched ideas to stave off fears and insecurities, and to cling to hopes of a better life after this one as a reassuring compensation for the profound inequities, hardships and disappointments in this life. Our beliefs provide us with an expression of deep-seated spiritual impulses and longings. These beliefs are often far less about the true nature of the universe than the true nature of our selves.

In Exodus, the LORD expressed sympathy for "His" people, the children of Israel, in light of their sorrows and hardships at the hand of the ruthless Egyptian Pharaoh. So He told Moses that He had come down to deliver them unto a good land flowing with milk and honey. Surely, it occurs to me, the sighs and cries of today's over-worked, over-stressed and undercompensated workers are exceeding those of the children of Israel whose cries came up to God as echoes on account of their bondage in ancient times.

One wonders why it does not come to pass that God hears the groaning of workers today due to the increasing stresses placed on them, or the daunting angst of those who cannot find work when they need it to survive or are disabled. Is God not hearing those who have their unemployment benefits or food stamps cut at a time they are momentarily down and out?

Searching for keys to proper behavior in the Bible is fraught with perplexity. In Matthew 19:29, it essentially says that to inherit everlasting life, one must forsake houses, brethren, sisters, fathers, mothers, wives, children, or land for the sake of the name of God. Really?!

"And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

--- Matthew 19:24

Perhaps God just loves to play games. When 'He' sent Moses and his wife and sons to Egypt upon an ass to bring His people out of Egypt, he simultaneously hardened the heart of the Pharaoh so that he would not let the people go. Instead, the Pharaoh accused the people of being lazy, and made the taskmasters work them harder, and caused them anguish of spirit and crueller, more rigorous bondage.

God does not manifest Himself in burning bushes these days, but He sure does seem to be at his old heart-hardening ruses by making modern world rulers and rich people lack empathy and a willingness to accept greater responsibility for social fairness. A day of reckoning likely approaches, a day that will be gauged by humanistic criteria, not by a day of a Supreme Being imposing a harsh divine reckoning type of justice. This day will be one assessed by people, not by God making "great judgments", I reckon. Let's imagine asking our children, 50 years from now, how they think we have done in trying to ensure a positive legacy for them.

#### World Population Exceeded Three Billion in 1960 -- and Seven Billion in 2011

"And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them."

--- Exodus 1:7

Countries like India, Indonesia, Egypt, Mexico and Nepal have achieved sharp voluntary drops in fertility rates even at relatively low levels of socioeconomic development. These reductions have been accomplished by means of highly proactive national family planning efforts in the past few decades. Today, almost all advanced countries have fertility rates near replacement levels, and it is mainly in Africa and relatively poor developing nations where families still have an average of 4 or more children. Yes, right there in countries that can least afford their burgeoning human numbers!

A phenomenal worldwide shift in public family planning policy has led to significant declines in fertility rates in most nations. Human numbers, nonetheless, continue to grow because of a baby boom bulge associated with greater longevity achieved by modern medicine, sanitation and the Green Revolution. Fertility rates have deep underpinnings in family security and economic issues, but conservatives want to reverse progress toward lower birth rates, partially to replenish the declining ranks of religious adherents.

On the other hand, many developed nations are faced with a real conundrum as the average age of people in their societies rises. Old people rely for social security programs on transfer payments from younger people who work, so as numbers of old folks swell, it is going to be increasingly difficult to finance these social programs. Intergenerational conflicts are already taking place as it is, and they will intensify.

Population stabilization policies are integral to the overall challenge of sustainable development. In a salubrious twist of propitious correlations, efforts to slow population growth are mutually reinforcing with achieving economic progress and reducing poverty. Reducing population growth is also crucial for helping to protect the environment and limit unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Many religious people have a core conviction that God told humankind to be fruitful and multiply, so to them any step taken to prevent a pregnancy is a sin. This is an atavistic attitude, a throwback to a yesterday driven by an outmoded morality rooted in the desirability of high birth rates to get work done on the farm and to provide

security for parents in their old age -- and to fill the pews, and the coffers, of churches.

Today, high birth rates threaten to overwhelm Earth's ecosystems by speeding up the rate at which we deplete the natural resources that sustain us. Expanding numbers of needy and greedy people are also contributing to an insidious alteration of weather patterns, threatening to drive one million species of life to eternal extinction within the next century. This paradox is a conundrum that may confound us, but it is too important to ignore!

International conferences on population and development have helped increase awareness of the ecological and social challenges associated with rapidly increasing human numbers, and there has also been a more recent broadening of the focus of population concerns to include a much wider array of sexual and reproductive health services. These include counseling on responsible parenthood and reproductive health in countries worldwide, and on sexuality and the education and empowerment of women. In light of the vital importance of these programs, it is stunning how stubbornly Republican politicians in the U.S. are trying to cripple Planned Parenthood clinics, a zealous crusade that adversely affects poor women much more than women who are more affluent. Such stands are shameful. And when Christian religion-informed Republicans on the Supreme Court outrageously overturned a woman's right to choose to terminate a pregnancy in early stages, the U.S. took a step that is drastically contrary to necessary directions.

The empowerment of women should be expanded in all nations around the world to include guarantees of social equity, property rights, non-discrimination, fairer educational and job opportunities, access to microfinance programs, legal protections against both domestic violence and human trafficking, and greater assurance of rights of self-determination and reproductive choice.

#### Back to the Theory of the Rapture

The word Rapture itself is not in the Bible at all. The term comes from the Latin verb *rapere*, meaning "to be caught up or snatched up". The Rapture theory was invented by some preachers in Scotland who, between 1826 to 1830, "emphasized that the world's problems could only be addressed through an outbreak of supernatural gifts from the Holy Spirit." This idea was seized upon by a pastor named Edward Irving in about 1830, and he adopted his own interpretation of the biblical Scriptures to include a "pre-tribulation rapture."

It had come to pass back in those days that a teenage girl named Margaret MacDonald experienced paranormal visions and weird manifestations of prophecy. She was in a severely altered state of consciousness due to a dire illness in which she felt she was going to die. She later claimed to be a "prophetess", and sure enough she did die in 1840, at the young age of 25. The Anglo-Irish evangelist John Nelson Darby, an influential figure among the original conservative Plymouth Brethren, popularized a concept of a coming rapture by evoking one of Margaret MacDonald's visions of end times, extrapolating earlier myths to articulate his own eschatological views that included a pretribulation rapture. These Brethren also curiously believed that women should be silent in the roles they play in society. I suppose this makes the advice of a woman irrelevant to those faithful men who believe these bizarre things, so I appeal to the majority of others. Verily I say unto thee, let's get real.

In more modern times, a writer named Timothy LaHaye has created a popular *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic fiction. He has 16 best-selling novels in this series that deal with the end of the world. Total sales for the series have surpassed 65 million copies. This is sensational. Sure enough, there is a lot of profit to be made from pandering to the gullible! A main reason that the books have been popular is the brisk pacing of their plots and action, like a Tom Clancy novel. "People disappear and things blow up." On the other hand, some reviewers have called the series "almost laughably tedious" and "fatuous and boring."

Ironically, Tim LaHaye was on the island of Maui at the time of the devastating earthquake in Japan on March 11, 2011, and he used the opportunity to advance his theories by declaring that the earthquake proves the last days are upon us. That hogwash was right up there with Harold Camping's idiocies! Perhaps LaHaye should take a course in geology and plate tectonics to better understand the true causes of earth movements and tsunamis!

Today it is becoming increasingly clear that the world's problems could best be addressed not by a mysterious and miraculous outbreak of the supernatural, but rather by better understanding the real nature of challenges facing us, and by making concerted efforts to effectively and fairly address the underlying causes of problems. Sure,

let's enlist the passion and energies of our spiritual selves, but let's do it through rational and emotional understanding, not through studied ignorance!

### Zealotry and the Modern World

A Zealot is a follower who is zealous in the belief in a personal God. Judas of Galilee was one of the co-founders of the original Zealots. He led them in a principled resistance to submission by the Jews to the "heathen authorities" of the Roman Empire. The Romans had imposed a census on the people of the holy lands for the purposes of collecting taxes, and Judas and his followers revolted in 6 CE in opposition to these taxes. The Romans brutally suppressed the movement and killed its leaders. The Boston Tea Party incident is reminiscent of this episode, because colonial Americans at the time revolted angrily against requirements to pay taxes to the British on imported tea.

Today, we are having a new kind of tax revolt, one being orchestrated by billionaires like those organized in the Koch network. This group is supported by right-wing Republicans, libertarians, fiscal conservatives and Tea Party zealots. But it is a very different thing to object to paying taxes to a foreign government than to be unreasonably opposed to taxes that give support to common good goals at home, like affordable public education, an adequate social safety net, the maintenance of a sound infrastructure, and protections of the environment. Paying taxes is a matter of civic responsibility, not a worshipful obeisance to the wrong Lord, as fanatical zealots held 2,000 years ago. Nor is the payment of taxes a form of submission to oppressive rule.

Today, in fact, one of the most consequential problems is that corrupt abusers of influence have been doubling down on the Trickle Down scam by causing the U.S. government to borrow almost \$30 trillion since 1980 -- obligating every taxpayer in every future year to pay the interest expense costs on the money borrowed for the purpose of giving public funds to the highest earners and wealthiest people -- and to the gambling investors and speculators who are cashing in on this bonanza. These speculators reckon that the gig will never be up on this shrewd scheme, and they expect unending increases in corporate dividends, thank you.

The priorities for which we pay taxes and borrow so much money every year have become seriously skewed. We spend too much money on wars, munitions and foreign military occupations; we give giant corporations too much power and allow them to abuse the system by foisting costs and risks upon society and paying increasingly large amounts of tax-deductible compensation to their CEOs; we subsidize established industries at the expense of small businesses and smarter technologies; we subsidize Big Oil more than we support conservation and energy efficiency and alternatives to fossil fuels; we allow some public employees to gain overly-generous benefits; we let rich people rig the system using the power of their money to get historically low tax rates for themselves; and we allow the federal government to run huge deficits that mortgage the future and create riskily increasing levels of national debt.

We should become zealots for common sense and greater fairness, and for a more likely sustainable set of human activities, rather than being heedless zealots supporting low tax rates for millionaires and billionaires!

### Proposals for a More Sensible Approach to Solving Global Problems

The wise statesman Solon advocated a tax system in which tax rates on the richest people would be 12 times higher than taxes on the poorest people. It turned out that greater social justice created by that plan was not only more advantageous for the poor, but it also was better for the safety of the rich and the greater well-being of society. Social justice has distinctly far-reaching positive merits!

One of my intuitive theories is that increases in insecurity and the effective disenfranchisement of the majority of Americans is contrary to the greater good, whether or not it is good for making profits. I believe that the bigger the wealth gap between the super-rich and the majority, and the more pronounced the social injustices become in a society, the higher the costs become for police and prisons and the military to enforce the glaring inequities of the status quo.

Who should most appropriately pay these costs? It seems clear that those who benefit most from the way the system is structured should shoulder the biggest part of the tax burden. And, of course, it is wealthy people who benefit the most. Admirers of wise Solon say: let the poorest people pay 4% tax on their net incomes, and let the

rich pay 48%. Create a fair and progressive graduated rate scale for everyone in between the richest and poorest. By way of contrast, the federal tax on the lowest taxable incomes for 2021 was 10%, and the highest federal tax rate was only 37% on all taxable income in excess of \$523,600. The marginal tax rate had been at least 70% for more than 40 years before Ronald Reagan became president, so 48% is very reasonable.

The higher proceeds of this tax restructuring plan should be used to reduce federal budget deficits and to pay for the best plans outlined in the compendiums found in the *Earth Manifesto's Part Four: Overarching Considerations - Transformational Ideas and Enlightened Proposals*. The most important of these is contained in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

### A Digression on Boldness

I happened to turn on the television on 5/22/11 in a motel room where I had spent the night under very curious circumstances (that's a different story), and I chanced to catch a sermon by a smooth-talking mega-church preacher named Andy Stanley. He was evangelizing about being BOLD in sharing one's beliefs with others. The purpose for his slick and zealous advocacy of boldness was to urge his flock of followers to be BOLD in trying to convert others to a belief in his "Big Church" God. His sermon urged people to believe in the "word of the Lord" and to help save non-believers, "sinners" and assorted heretics from a terrible eternal fate in Hell.

Andy Stanley's observed: "BOLD is deciding to say something when it would be easier to say nothing. BOLD is taking advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. BOLD is creating opportunities."

I do believe in the power of boldness to achieve good ends. But a revelation was contained in this sermon: boldness needs to be properly directed! Pushing religious dogmas by proselytizing to non-believers can be real obnoxious, and it is not the best way to spend one's life. In light of the overwhelming probability that this life will be the only one anyone of us will ever have, in all of eternity, I say, "Guys, get a life!". Live and let live!

There are, of course MANY types of people in whom boldness is a hindrance, a vice or an outrage. For instance, it is undesirable for a broad spectrum of people to act with boldness -- like thieves, pimps, rapists, bigots, liars, domestic violence perpetrators, sports doping cheaters, absolute-conviction crusaders, pseudoscientific ideologues, facilitators of disaster capitalist swindles, and corporate crime enablers. Boldness in exploiting "too-big-to-fail" influence cost many trillions of dollars in bailouts in the decade beginning with the 2008 financial crisis, so we should act to prevent the excessive leveraging of boldness in speculation.

Boldness today by anti-tax zealots is especially harmful to society because these zealots champion low tax rates on rich people at the expense of vulnerable people and vital public services and a balanced budget and fiscal prudence and infrastructure maintenance and sensible protections of the environment. Their boldness harms the prospects of social fairness and the greater good, and of all people in the future.

Bold anti-tax activists are apologists for the best interests of the Few, and their actions tend to be "penny wise and pound foolish" as relates to society as a whole and things like smart investments in good public education, a stable climate, national infrastructure, and the interests of young people and our descendants.

Extreme religious conservatives have too much influence in politics today, especially when they stubbornly support right-wing politicians and help obstruct progress in many arenas. Religious fanatics also lead terrorist groups in the world that act outside the mainstream by mixing fundamentalist religious extremism with political ambitions and violent tactics.

The misuse of "holy books" to promote narrow prejudices, and to stereotype and demonize others, is a gambit as old as the written word. Too often in history, religious doctrines have been used as a means of scapegoating others or providing a rationale for persecuting them -- just ask any Jew, or gay man or lesbian woman, or oppressed female, or adversely-affected "infidel" agnostic. Or explore the history of any of millions of people who have been harmed by religious authorities or fanatics over the centuries.

If you ever hear anyone say, "God's will must be done", snap to attention. Consider the character of the person providing this interpretation concerning what God's will may truly be, and whether or not it is likely that such a judgmental proclamation is strongly correlated with profound prejudices in the speaker's views.

### Watch Out for Diatribes!

Why is it that the wealthiest people in the U.S. are paying nearly the lowest tax rates on earnings, dividends, capital gains and inheritances since 1929? Many rich people are not willing to share prosperity broadly, but now that we have backed ourselves into a corner by rashly indulging in record levels of deficit financing for wars and social programs and tax cuts, these eminences want austerity measures to be imposed and spread far and wide (except to themselves, of course, because they want to be spared from making any sacrifices or concessions.)

The needs for more federal revenues are substantial. These revenues should come from those persons who are ripping off the public treasury, and who can most easily afford to pay them without hardship. And they should be used for intelligently prioritized purposes that create sustainable development and protections of open spaces and the environment. They should also be used to dramatically increase the amounts of foreign assistance we have been providing to the poorest nations in the world, to help them slow the depletion of resources and cope with proliferating natural disasters, and reduce birthrates, which are two to three times as high as those in most European countries.

How could we be allowing taxes to be so low for those who can most easily afford to pay more? Even the rich would gain greater security with a tax system that is structured more progressively, and the vast majority of Americans and people in future generations would gain a greater degree of fairness.

How can we not snort out loud with incredulity when hearing the latest Republican plans on how to balance the budget? Sure enough, as always, Republicans proclaim that taxes should be slashed on corporations and the wealthy. It will all start to trickle down pretty soon, they claim, despite the fact that the experience of the last 40 years has been that this tactic results in wealth gushing upwards to the top 1% of people while the vast majority of workers, whose productivity has helped create this wealth, see and feel their prospects stagnate.

The Reagan, Bush and Trump tax breaks for the wealthy and CEOs and investors have come at the expense of other segments of society, like poor people and the middle class. Bravo for the success of wealthy people! But could you rich people relent just a little bit in your fervor to pay ever-lower rates of taxes? Unharden your hearts, and be more reasonable about the fact that it is better for all when a nation's wealth is shared more fairly and when the tax system is more progressive. It's pathetic that almost all the wealth engendered by significant productivity gains over the last 40 years has benefitted rich people -- and that so little, after inflation is taken into account, has gone to workers who are spending their lives struggling to make ends meet.

A bar chart on the cover of a book by George Tyler told the stunning story of how the growth in total employee compensation since 1985 has been less than 1% in the U.S., in contrast to increases of 64% in Australia, 154% in France, 194% in Germany and 220% in Denmark. Fittingly, the title of the book is *What Went Wrong? How the 1% Hijacked the American Middle Class ... and What Other Countries Got Right*.

Capital is triumphing over labor, and the blaring megaphones are in the hands of wealthy people in our political system. The ideologies of Reaganomics and Big Money-financed conservative think tanks have corrupted our politics. Governmental entities are too often in league with superrich people to concentrate the nation's wealth ever more narrowly in the hands of the few. This is not supposed to be how a democratic republic functions!

We have many overarching needs for money to be spent on greater good priorities at the levels of local communities, as well as at national and international levels. Smart and powerfully effective incentives should be implemented, and sensible regulations should be established to safeguard our financial system and the environment. Once we share the wealth somewhat more broadly, everyone will be able to better afford the higher costs that will result when we honestly address environmental issues and implement full cost accounting measures in our economy.

Billionaires and multi-millionaires must allow prosperity to be more fairly shared so that everyone has more money to be able to pay needed green fees that will cause fossil fuels to become more expensive. This will be appropriate to reduce pollution and environmental damages that are currently being externalized onto society. A carbon emissions cost should be included in the price of all fossil fuels, and it should be used to help finance a necessary global transition to more robust conservation measures, energy efficiency innovations, clean energy initiatives and renewable alternatives.



Those who oppose financial and business regulations want to move our nation in the direction of "pre-regulation" days when Captains of Industry were often accurately portrayed as ruthless "robber barons". Workers had few rights in those days, and big companies could despoil the environmental commons without any consideration for the detrimental impacts their activities had on people and other species of life on Earth.

Rich people should look at it this way: Since the need is increasingly important for us to collectively devote more funding to mitigating pollution and protecting the environment, now is the time for the wealthy to stop swindling us and to be less stingy so that we can collectively afford to make smarter investments in efficient uses of energy and to conserve resources, protect biodiversity, invest in future well-being, and have a radically reformed and more affordable universal health care system. Let it be!

### The Fix Is In

One of the main ways that the common good is torpedoed is by special interest groups rigging our system.

Consider the narrow Supreme Court ruling in June 2019 to overrule lower court decisions that prohibited unfair gerrymandering. One of the two cases involved gerrymandering in North Carolina, where Republicans had gotten 50% of the vote in the 2018 elections, and Democrats had gotten 50% of the vote, but Republicans won 10 of North Carolina's 13 seats in Congress. This corrupt outcome was a result of extreme partisan gerrymandering by Republican politicians in the state legislature, who had drawn district maps that were egregiously unfair to Democratic voters. This specific case was one of the two that the Supreme Court looked at in its review of the constitutionality of the practice of gerrymandering.

This ruling, by a 5 to 4 vote, was a blatantly refusal by partisan conservatives to act to prevent this system-corrupting form of highly discriminatory extreme gerrymandering. This district rigging leads to a radical over-representation of the rigging party, and an extremely unfair under-representation of the party being rigged against. Such corruption allows a minority of stubbornly uncompromising conservatives to deprive the majority of people of fair representation of their true best interests, and allows scheming Republicans to cheat and repress and betray the people, and undermine their best interests.

This broad betrayal of people's trust shines a harsh light anew on corrupt politics that have allowed Republican partisans to maintain an illegitimate majority advantage on the Supreme Court over more fair-minded patriots trying to defend our democracy from the negative consequences of treacherously partisan Republican rule.

Bottom line, the Supreme Court has doubled down on its wrongly decided *Citizens United* decision, which has allowed Big Money to broadly subvert decision-making in our democracy since 2010. These narrow partisan rulings, led by Chief Justice John Roberts, allow Machiavellian intrigue in campaign financing and the drawing of congressional district maps, thus adversely affecting outcomes of supposedly free and fair elections. We the People must demand that our representatives in all states require nonpartisan districting to limit partisan gerrymandering. The direct result of this ruling is to generally promote overweening power for domineering Republican politicians in the majority of "conservative" red states, and to allow them undue influence to fleece the public, push radically myopic public policies, undermine public health and safety, strengthen the power of rich people and giant corporations, sabotage protections of the environment, and undermine the common good.

Former Attorney General Eric Holder observed that the Supreme Court's partisan gerrymandering decision, in addition to the system corrupting *Citizens United* ruling, will cause the Supreme Court to have "entered a new political *Lochner* era. This decision tears at the fabric of our democracy and puts the interests of the established few above the many. History will not be kind in its assessment." (The *Lochner* era refers to a period in American legal history from 1897 to 1937 in which the Supreme Court played a judicially activist but politically conservative role.)

This wrongheaded ruling allows politicians to cherry-pick their voters rather than letting voters pick their representatives. One astute observer wrote, "What a surprise: the right-wing justices on the bench are okay with the GOP choosing their voters by slicing and dicing districts in the best possible way to keep their party in power." The most damning and damaging aspect of extreme gerrymanders is that they cause a deepening dangerous polarization of the populace that is facilitating harms to tens of millions of Americans.

When the Supreme Court's partisan Republican majority overturned lower court decisions that had thrown out gerrymandered district maps, it gave the lie to the Chief Justice's assertion that the high court is "apolitical". This ruling will allow political corruption to continue, and misrepresentation of the majority of Americans. This ruling "dealt a historic defeat to redistricting reformers when it ruled 5-4 along ideological lines that challenges to partisan gerrymandering could not be adjudicated under the U.S. Constitution, pushing the next battles over these maps to the states."

The second case under review in this decision dealt with congressional maps from a Democratic gerrymander in Maryland. The "conservative" Justices ruled narrowly that there was no workable standard to determine when such maps go too far, and thus allowed state legislatures to continue the corrupt practice of drawing congressional district maps to advantage incumbents in power. The fact is that Republican-appointed Justices have a majority on the Supreme Court only due to abuses of power by Mitch McConnell and Senate Republicans in refusing to let President Obama fill the opening left when Antonin Scalia died, and then ramming through the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh without a thorough vetting of his previous record and his lies to Congress in several widely analyzed instances -- and then illegitimately forcing Amy Coney Barrett onto the high court less than two weeks before the 2020 elections, while early voting was already underway.

By cynically siding with electoral corruption that allows a deep and pervasive culture of corruption to flourish in Washington D.C., and in the majority of state capitals across the country, "conservatives" on the Supreme Court are deeply betraying principles of fair representation, honesty, constitutional sensibility and the greater good of the people, and they are doubling down on allowing rich people and giant corporations to wield a powerful hegemony over the masses. Ironically, conservative judges on the Supreme Court, with their lifelong tenures, are sadly violating the oaths of office they took, when they solemnly swore to be impartial in deciding cases and to do equal right to the poor and to the rich.

See the big picture. Our founding system of checks and balances between the three coequal branches of the federal government was designed to prevent any future despot wannabes from imposing a long train of abuses and usurpations upon the people. Our collective security and well-being depends on strong checks and balances between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, and on a smart and fair balance between the federal government and the states.

Exceedingly unfortunately, Congress has failed to enact campaign finance reform that would prevent scheming politicians from corrupting our elections and national decision-making. They have thus let Big Money and Dark Money exert a subversive influence over our national policies and priorities by engaging in voter suppression and preventing millions of constituents who would be likely to oppose their abuses of power from being fairly represented at the ballot box. Congress has also abjectly failed to prevent state legislatures from corruptly gerrymandering congressional districts into bizarre contortions that result in twisted anti-democratic laws and regulations. This has not only allowed a minority party to deprive a majority of Americans of the right to fair representation but also let a ruthless winner-take-all faction to steal two presidential elections in the past 20 years with fewer votes than the popular vote winner — and three seats on the Supreme Court in the past 5 years. These nefarious outcomes have given extremely partisan "conservatives" domineering power over the people and an ability to deprive them of reasonable opportunities to enjoy their pursuits of happiness and the blessings of liberty and broadly shared health, security, well-being and general welfare.

There is great value in unity, peaceable coexistence through fair Golden Rule respect for others, widely shared general well-being, domestic tranquility, and the resulting blessings of social cohesion. It can be seen that self-serving divide-to-conquer politics leads to overbearing rule in favor of "winners", and makes losers of those in the disenfranchised and disrespected majority.

Remember history. Republicans won wave elections in 2010 due to a concerted effort by billionaires and Tea Party politicians galvanized by the Koch brothers to torpedo expanded healthcare, collective bargaining power of workers in labor unions, and protections of the environment. Voters were also riled up in reaction against bailouts made to stabilize the economy after the 2008 financial crisis and recession. These political gains were accomplished by internecine efforts to demonize Democrats and the first Black president in U.S. history. Soon thereafter,

Republicans began surgically executing some of the most severely partisan gerrymanders ever. We are still feeling the opprobrious effects of that scheme, because it coincided with redistricting done every 10 years after the decennial national Census, which allowed Republican politicians to seize excessive power in a majority of states just before political lines were drawn for an entire decade's worth of elections.

This process is being repeated after the 2020 Census, with Republicans again instituting discriminatory gerrymanders in many states to lock in their ability to rashly abuse power for another 10 years, due in part by the Supreme court's wrongly decided ruling on gerrymandering. This bodes ill for reform and democratic fairness and necessary action on issues like climate change that are crucial in the next 10 years.

### Religious Establishments Conspire with Government Establishments

Conservative Christian evangelicals today view politics as a means to promote their own narrow interests, rather than caring about the good of the whole. Christian political activists today seem to demonstrate a staunch opposition to the teachings of Jesus in their political efforts to side with powerful conservatives against the poor, the oppressed and the vulnerable.

Michael Gerson, one of the most influential evangelicals in America, provocatively wrote in 2019: "Evangelical Christians are tying themselves to an institution -- the GOP -- that is actively alienating college-educated voters, minority voters and younger voters. Evangelicals are thus entrenching a public perception that their movement consists of old, white Christians who want to restore lost social status through political power. Maybe this is because the perception is often accurate."

The perceptive Michael Gerson continues: "The moral consequences of being a loyal part of Trump's political coalition come into ever-sharper focus. During the 2016 presidential election, evangelical Christians could comfort themselves that it was possible -- just possible -- for Trump to grow in office and become something greater than the sum of his tweets. Doesn't someone whom James Dobson called a 'baby Christian' deserve a chance to grow up? Isn't that the essence of grace?"

"This argument was a small fig leaf when it was made. Now, evangelical Christians are naked before the world. Trump's cruelty (see the treatment of migrant children), his bigotry (see Charlottesville), his obstruction of justice (see any fair reading of the Mueller report), his vanity (see any time he speaks in public), his serial deception (also see any time he speaks in public) have become more pronounced and unrepentant over time. Can there be any question that reelection would result in Trump unbound?"

"At the same time, some evangelical Christian leaders have become more effusive in their praise of the president. More willing to defend the indefensible on his behalf. More dismissive of the importance of character in public life. In the process, evangelical Christian leaders have placed themselves -- uncritically, with open eyes -- into a political coalition that is inspired by ethnic nationalism. Such are the occupational hazards of calling good evil and evil good."

### Germinating Ideas Seeking Inclusion Somewhere in this Manifesto

"Here is inspiration", wrote David Hochschild, Chair of the California Energy Commission, one day after the Trump mob's attack on the Capitol: 'Great tumult frequently precedes great progress. I believe that can be the case for this moment.'"

On the first anniversary of the attack on the Capitol, it was not yet "the occasion it *should* be: a day when the nation comes together to repudiate Trump and his co-conspirators whose treacherous acts led to it. That's because Trump has divided America with his big lie. A new ABC/Ipsos poll shows that although 65 percent of Americans believe President Joe Biden's 2020 victory was legitimate, 71 percent of Republicans believe Trump's false claims that he is the rightful winner. The division in America over Trump's attempted coup and the attack has no parallel in our nation's history since the Civil War."

"Yet if we do not strengthen voting rights, and if Trump and his accomplices are not held criminally accountable, we are inviting another attempted coup. Next time, it could succeed."

After sensational public hearings conducted by the January 6 House panel investigating the mob attack temporarily

concluded in late July, it seem incumbent on the Department of Justice to make sure that all the co-conspirators actually will be held accountable.

The organization Faithful America observes that images of the January 6, 2021 insurrection against Congress remain seared in our minds -- and the threat to democracy posed by violent white Christian nationalism is still present and even growing., "Let's be clear: Last year's insurrection was a violent and deadly attack against all Americans. It was also an affront to our Christian values of love, truth, and justice."

### Antonin Scalia and a Riff on Malfeasance

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia once told an interviewer from New York Magazine, "I even believe in the Devil." The journalist, astonished, exclaimed, "You Do?" And Scalia responded, "Of course! Yeah, he's a real person. Hey, c'mon, that's standard Catholic doctrine! Every Catholic believes that."

The fact of the matter is that NOT every Catholic believes such stuff. But, as sure as shootin', there are a lot of diabolical activities going on in the world today, and they seem to be proliferating as politicians abuse power and corporate entities grab a mantle of personhood and stretch it into the most domineering force in history. Who is minding the store? Oh, right -- all too influentially, "conservative" Republican politicians. Under the rule of these anti-republican and anti-democratic puppet operatives, we are throwing open the gates to wealthy barbarians who are using scare tactics and blaming public misfortunes on immigrants and minority groups, and while we take our eye off the proverbial ball, these schemers are ripping us off, mortgaging the public treasury, and perpetrating colossal malfeasance and betrayals.

So here's the scoop. Dante Alighieri was an epic poet who wrote in exile from his hometown of Florence some 700 years ago, and in his great imagination, he wrote in *The Divine Comedy* of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. He consigned persons unrepentantly guilty of various vices and sins to one of Nine Circles of Hell in his *Inferno*. Dante regarded excessively greedy persons to be deserving of condemnation to the Fourth Circle of Hell, where avaricious souls are punished by being doomed to drag enormous weights around. This is consistent with the biblical saying that avarice is "the root of all evils". Medieval Christians saw sin as offensive to the spirit of love, but Dante went further and blamed avarice for ethical and political corruption in his society at the time.

The great poet created one of the most torturously amazing works of fiction in *The Divine Comedy*, and his Nine Circles of Hell get worse the deeper down one goes into the bowels of *Inferno*. There are worse villains than those who are excessively greedy. In fact, the very worst two circles of Hell are Circle Eight, the destiny of those guilty of fraud and maliciousness, and Circle Nine, the doom of those guilty of various forms of treachery, like that against their kindred, their guests, their benefactors and their country.

A reckoning is coming for greedy people who are maliciously cheating and treacherously betraying the American people. Interestingly, Dante defines the sin of excessive greed as both "spending without measure" and being excessively frugal toward others. He is the first to apply the classical principle of moderation (or the "golden mean") to criticize both excessive stinginess and desires for spending too freely (with prodigality).

### Overarching Worldviews

One of the classic debates in philosophy and religion is whether human nature is inherently good or evil. Various ways that people look at human nature lead to different worldviews and perspectives on reality. Those who assume that children are born bad and must be made good tend to embrace Strict Father worldviews, so they assume that the proper way to rule our societies is through strict discipline, harsh punishments and conservative politics. In contrast, people who assume children are born good tend to champion a Nurturant Parent worldview that values empathy, personal responsibility, overarching protections, fairness and progressive plans as being the best means to improve our societies.

The story about the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden is based on a male-domineering premise oriented around obedience, atonement for sins and feelings of guilt to keep people in line with Biblical commandments and injunctions. I personally find noble spiritual awareness that values love, compassion, Golden Rule fairness and empathetic understanding to be more socially redeeming than one based on in-group righteousness, absolutist religious convictions, a Manichean duality of good and evil, rationalized inequities, and domineering authority.

The entire constellation of Strict Father values is generally associated with judgmental people whose highest goal is to control and dominate others, regardless of the harms they cause in their pursuit of power. Such worldviews are correlated with social conservatism, religious fundamentalism and Christian Dominionism. Curiously, those who adhere to these worldviews tend to pick and choose passages in the Bible, or the Quran or whatever Holy book they subscribe to, and ignore other fair-minded caveats like these in Matthew in the Bible:

"Judge not, that ye be not judged."

"Why beholdest thou the mote that is thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thy own eye?"

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them ...".

I believe rational thinking, open-mindedness and passionate commitments to fairness are preferable to narrow-mindedness and clinging to beliefs in mental constructs like heaven and hell and an afterlife and eternal salvation and glory in some "hereafter". Beliefs that one holy book or another is absolutely true are irrational, just as convictions are that say the world will end according to ancient prophecy.

I strongly believe that a greater modicum of security and dignity for people in the here and now is a much better plan than stunningly empty promises of glory after we are dead!

### Cheerful Introduction

The following paragraphs are excerpted from the original version of this essay that was published in April 2010, when it was titled *An Interlude of Ridicule for the Rapture*.

A friend of my grandfather's was an old cowpoke who used to just *love* to sing '*Home on the Range*'. Yes, "Home, home on the range, Where the deer and the antelope play; Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, And the skies are not cloudy all day."

This old cowboy once caught my grandfather in a moment of angst and told him, "Cheer up, things could be worse." So my grandfather said he cheered up; "and sure enough, things got worse!" Ha! Sometimes that's the nature of woes. Stuff happens. And yet, I reckon that to be optimistic, and to see a glass as half full, is arguably better for one's mental health than when the proverbial glass is skeptically regarded as half empty.

There are many circumstances in which it is best for an individual, and for society as a whole, to see things accurately rather than being deluded as to the way they actually are. It can be risky to impose false ideas upon true realities. Sir Walter Scott wrote, "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!" When we deceive ourselves, or get caught up in some type of mass deception, the tangled webs we weave can seriously harm us and undermine the greater good -- and the prospects of our descendants as well.

### Images from a Film

A few years ago, I watched the 1991 film *The Rapture* that stars Mimi Rogers, the first wife of actor Tom Cruise. Rogers was the person who introduced Tom Cruise to Scientology, the cult-like "religion without a God". The film is barely a 'B movie', but it does provide an idea of how a sexy woman who is bored with her life (she worked as a repetitive-task switchboard operator) might be attracted to an excitingly promiscuous life in which she participates in erotic trading of partners. This indulgence caused her to feel guilty, confused, empty and vulnerable. Upon meeting some creepy evangelical types, Mimi Rogers' character snaps onto the belief in the Rapture and a judgmental God, so she retreats to the desert with her child to await the end. It is a strange film that develops and ends bizarrely when the woman kills her own daughter to send her on ahead to a bizarre mystical Promised Land, then apparently ends up alone in a desolate Hell. The film is possibly worth the time spent to watch it, if only to stimulate thinking about the whole idea of a "Rapture" and the conundrums that tortured souls experience in their adoption of such bizarrely misguiding beliefs.

### Personal Rapture Strikes Me on May 22, 2011

I had been lying for an hour on my favorite sandy Pacific Ocean beach in a pocket cove at the base of steep coastal cliffs on the afternoon of May 22, 2011, just one day after Harold Camping's ludicrous prediction that the world would end on May 21st. A generous sunshine was warming my skin, as well as the cockles of my heart. I was jotting

down some thoughts about radio preacher Camping and the folly and nefarious impacts of his erroneous prediction. The waves were rather tumultuous, though the day was otherwise calm. Theoretically, according to Camping, all of the elect people should have been caught up into the clouds already, and I myself should have been among the billions of nonbelievers embarking on a period of calamitous tribulation.

Sure enough! Suddenly, the powerful impulse of a big rogue wave caught me up as it rushed up the beach and cascaded over me, crashing into the base of the rocky cliff behind me. The impressive energy of the big wave was very scary, but the real danger was the force with which my head was glancingly bashed against the rock. The water soaked some marvelous insights I had been scrawling on pieces of paper, and almost swept them away to join my disappeared sunglasses. The regular rhythm of the crashing waves washes past my ears again as I recollect this unforgettable episode.

The real risk, Rapture believers, is not in a fear of mythical prophecies, but in ignoring real ecological dangers! It turns out that the people of Joplin, Missouri, which lies 312 miles southwest of my adopted home town of Hannibal, also had their own scary and devastating event on May 22, 2011. The town suffered a destructive direct hit by a powerful tornado that caught up about 8,000 homes and businesses in its path and killed more than 140 people.

A provocative political cartoon by Tom Toles appeared in the newspaper soon thereafter, on May 26. Three pigs are shown floating away on oddly square boats from the Joplin twister that roars in the background. The first pig sits in a sinking boat that is labeled "CLIMATE CHANGE ISN'T REAL". The second pig sits in a fraying boat that is labeled "IT WON'T COME SOON". A third pig sits in a newer boat labeled "IT WON'T BE THAT BAD".

Bill McKibben gives us pause for reflection in provocative commentary that can be read in Addendum Two at the end of this essay. His reflections on the many extreme weather events taking place around the world these days are well worth reading for their compelling perspective. I appeal to conservatives and apologists for the maximizing of corporate profit to responsibly come to their senses! People who support national policies that further concentrate wealth in the hands of the few, and allow expanded opportunities for corporations to damage the environment, wake up, and repent!

#### Reflections on Rogue Waves and Roguish Attitudes

Rogue waves are real phenomena. As to whether an angry God may have been trying to smite me for the sin of my dubiousness with regard to 'His' existence, as some might assert -- well, that is a significantly less certain thing. When Christopher Hitchens was dying of throat cancer, one unempathetic vitriol-filled critic declared that God was punishing him for his extensively articulated agnosticism. This judgmental declaration was much more a Rorschach-like reflection of deep prejudices of faithful believers than of some probable propensity of an all-powerful and all-knowing Supreme Being.

"There is a pleasure sure in seeing clear that even the naïve can enjoy, and even the blind can appreciate."

--- The underground Mole

Religious zealots might agree with this pithy observation by the Mole, though from my perspective, seeing a reality that is illusory has far less merit than seeing a more evidentially verifiable vision of the real world and our true place in it. I see some far-reaching good in a powerful, emotionally satisfying set of spiritual scriptures, but I also feel that our need is urgent for guiding myths that are vitally conducive to the greater good of all of humanity, not just to a self-selected few.

Humanity, inextricably enveloped in the whole web of nature's deterministic "laws", regards mystery and good fortune in circumstances, or alternatively, adverse circumstances, and chooses to have hope or despair, and to give thanksgiving or to utter curses at those three white-robed mythological goddesses, the Fates.

Richard Dawkins, in *The God Delusion*, weighs in on the absurdity of certain religious people blaming human sins for a terrible earthquake and tsunami that took place on December 26, 2004, which killed more than 225,000 people in Indonesia and Sri Lanka and a dozen other nations. Dawkins wrote, "What presumptuous egocentricity to believe that earth-shaking events, on the scale at which a god (or a tectonic plate) might operate, must always have a human connection. Why should a divine being, with creation and eternity on his mind, care a fig for petty human

malefactions? We humans give ourselves such airs, even aggrandizing our poky little 'sins' to the level of cosmic significance!"

Christopher Hitchens was a noted critic of established religion and an "antitheist" who said that a person "could be an atheist and wish that belief in God were correct", but that "an antitheist, a term I'm trying to get into circulation, is someone who is relieved that there's no evidence for such an assertion." According to Hitchens, the concept of a God or a supreme being can be a totalitarian belief that destroys individual freedom. He felt that free inquiry and expression and scientific discovery should replace religion as a means of teaching ethics and defining human morals, and advancing civilizing influences. His anti-religion polemic, *God is Not Great - How Religion Poisons Everything*, sold over 500,000 copies. Check it out in a SuperSummary study guide of this book, for an elaboration of fresh, acerbic and persuasive perspectives.

### Introspections on the Beach

Bill Maher made a seriously funny film titled *Religulous* in which he interviewed Mark Pryor, a Democratic Senator from Arkansas from 2003 through 2015 and an avowed evangelical Christian. Maher asked him in the film about the Ten Commandments and a talking snake in the Garden of Eden, and about whether Pryor believes in evolution. The Senator expressed the opinion that the Biblical story of Adam and Eve "coulda possibly been" true. In response to another question, Senator Pryor pointed out that, well, "You don't have to pass an I.Q. test to be in the Senate ...". A stunned and awkward silence ensued, with Maher arching his eyebrows in incredulity, as both participants soaked in the implications of this admission. Oh, that's precious!

Senator Pryor is a believer in the Rapture. He conveniently embraces evangelical certitudes in his conviction that Bible stories are true -- and in casting doubt on the scientific fact that life has been biologically evolving on Earth for several thousand million years. Let us consider for a moment whether evolution really "coulda possibly been" true.

Imagine lying on a blanket on a balmy day in April on the very same reddish sand beach on which the rogue wave had washed over me. Multihued and distinctly-layered chert rock cliffs form the base of coastal mountains that rise above the Pacific Ocean here in this spot on the west coast of North America. These dramatically-eroded cliffs jut up on the sea-facing side of coastal hills, creating a dramatic contrast to the vibrant beauty of April green hillsides speckled with many varieties of lovely wildflowers.

You might find an evocatively-weathered shell of some type of marine creature lying on the sandy beach. It is about three inches long and has a vaguely trilobite-like appearance with a broad head segment and five body carapace segments and a triangular pointed tailbone. Looking at it closely, belly-side up, you would see a small cavernous space that led from where the animal's head would have been, when it was alive, down through the protective shell that closely defined the space the creature's body had occupied. A set of foreleg structures protrude just below the spot where a mouth would have been, and three dual sets of thin-shelled legs extend down the right and left sides of the body.

As certain as we can be that we exist, Descartes, we can be equally sure that this fragile shell was a remnant of an animal that died in the not-so-distant past. This shell could be regarded as the remains of one of those "creeping things that creepeth upon the earth", which the Holy Bible tells us we should have dominion over.

An epiphany emanates from within the shell. Everything is hitched to everything else in this world, and all is connected back through time to origins that are unfathomably distant in time, and in form. The stories of geology may not be as richly textured in myth and morality as the tales of holy books, but they are unrivaled in their wide scope of comprehensibility and depth of evidence concerning the way that reality really is.

Much of the variegated rock in these cliffs consists of "radiolarian chert", a type of rock that has a fascinating genesis. Geologists tell us that it was formed during an eons-long process of biological precipitation of silicate-shelled creatures onto the bottom of the Pacific Ocean more than 50 million years ago. This lithified chert contains countless microscopic shells of single-celled marine animals called radiolarians, whose hard skeletons are composed of silicon dioxide. Geologists often carry a powerful lens called a 'loupe' to magnify and inspect rocks,

and they are able to actually reveal to interested observers the intricate structure of radiolarian shells in this ancient rock.

So many of these creatures died in sufficient quantities over a long enough period of time that they formed deep layers of silicate sediments on the ocean floor. Subjected to heavy pressure and heat, these sediments subsequently lithified into durable rock, and the layers have obviously been twisted, deformed and fractured in mute testimony to the powerful forces that affected the rock during tectonic plate movements and plate boundary subduction and uplifting that have fetched it up from far away, deep under the sea, to its current exposed place in the here and now.

These thoughts provide a vantage point from which we can picture ourselves -- *Homo sapiens* -- out on the tip of one evolutionary branch of the tree of life. Untold numbers of fossils that are more than a million years old have been found around the planet, and each one of them is a representative of some animal or plant that existed on the tree of life long before the twig of our species sprouted into existence. Every one of these fossilized fragments is as surely the remnant of a former living thing as was the fragile shell that sat inexplicably on the sand as these ideas materialized in this lovely spot.

The connectedness of our lives to the lives of other species of life, now and in an astonishingly rich and infinitely varied past, gives us pause to understand the extraordinary context of our existence. Many kinds of rocks are formed partially from the remnants of former life forms that lived long ago, including rock like marine limestone, marble, dolomite and chert. Our appreciation of this fact can help us better understand the world in which we live, and our relationship with it. Much can be learned by paying close attention to the world around us, as knowledgeable naturalists note.

Think about a compelling idea contained in the story, *Tall Tales, Provocative Parables, Luminous Clarity and Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez*: "An even more certain confirmation of the processes of evolution is found within each and every creature alive. It is in the genetic DNA of every form of life. DNA provides "an almost unbelievably rich gift to the historian. What historian could have dared hope for a world in which every single individual of every species carries, within its body, a long and detailed text handed down through time?" DNA recapitulates the entire evolutionary genetic code involved in the long transformative survival of every species of organism.

Here we are, creatures in the here and now, witnessing the evidence of these astonishing processes. Rock, once it is exposed to the elements, weathers away like butter melting in warm sunshine, or like a crumbling cake, when regarded from the perspective of the long sweep of geologic time. Rock appears hard and unchanging in the brief snapshot of time measured by a single human lifetime, but the action of the elements inexorably wears away entire mountain ranges. Occasionally, in a punctuation of the usual relative equilibrium, imperceptible changes like this are interrupted by a shocking interlude of rock-fall or earthquake movement. One of an infinite number of confirmations of this observation took place in March 2015, when a tall beautiful headland known as Arch Rock at the end of the most popular hiking trail in Point Reyes National Seashore crumbled onto the beach, dropping two people onto the beach far below, tragically killing a woman and injuring her companion.

Exposed rock is just the proverbial "tip of the iceberg" of all the rock beneath it. Once rock is exposed, it begins this process of weathering away relatively rapidly. As Bill Bryson provocatively points out in *A Walk in the Woods*, if the equivalent of one dump truck load of rock is eroded away by rivers from a large mountain every year, the whole mountain would be gone within 100 million years. Such is the power of inexorable change taking place over the span of unfathomably vast periods of time.

Tiffany Seeks Epiphany! We are so far far far from the primordial ooze, and yet, and yet, are we not still rather closely connected to it? And just as surely, we are composed of "stardust" ...

### One Thing to Remember

John McPhee writes in *Basin and Range* that if readers are going to remember only one thing from his book, it should be that the visible stripes of rock on Mt. Everest's face consist of marine limestone. This ancient rock in the highest mountain in the world above sea level was formed by the biological precipitation of calcium-shelled



marine organisms onto the bottom of the Indian Ocean many millions of years ago. These sediments accumulated into deep layers as the eons passed, and like the aforementioned chert, they were subsequently compressed and lithified into rock. Then, roughly 50 million years ago, the large island subcontinent of India began to crumple into the landmass of Tibet on the Eurasian tectonic plate, and the intervening seafloor rock was driven up, earthquake by earthquake, until it eventually became the highest mountains on Earth in the immense Himalaya Range. A devastating earthquake took place in the high mountains of Pakistan in October 2005 that killed 70,000 people; it was only one in an incomprehensibly long string of such events that has accompanied the crumpling uplift of these mountains. Another tragically destructive earthquake struck the Himalaya in Nepal on April 25, 2015.

Taking a page from John McPhee, if readers are going to remember only one thing from the Earth Manifesto, it should be that the figurative biological precipitation of our human actions downstream in time will affect life on Earth in unfathomably consequential ways, far into the future, and will likely drive countless numbers of species of life to eternal extinction. This will undermine the underpinnings of the providential bounty of Earth's ecosystems upon which our prosperity and well-being, and indeed survival, ultimately depends. The well-being of the human race is interconnected and interdependent with the health of natural ecosystems and biological diversity. To deny this, or to ignore its implications in the service of ignorance or shortsighted convictions or greed-driven profiteering, is a reprehensible form of recklessly imprudent madness.

An accompanying aspect of this dawning realization, now that we are aware of this almost certain probability, is that our overarching responsibility is clear: to collectively make smarter choices during our lifetimes to help limit the severity of these far-reaching outcomes. This may be an inconvenient truth, but we should neither deny it nor abdicate responsibility.

Any fair-minded person should support smarter plans and ecological precautionary principles that would help mitigate the destructiveness of our habitat-damaging, profligately wasteful, and climate disrupting behaviors, habits and activities. These goals can be affordably achieved, so it is incumbent upon us to devise ways to implement the best ideas to actually realize these goals.

#### Observations from the Earth Manifesto Essay, *Revelations of a Modern Prophet*

"Judgment Day is metaphorically upon us, but it is not the particular judgment by God of each person when they die, as is held by Christian eschatology. This judgment is a reflection of future generations looking back on the economic, political, social and ecological ethos of today, and judging that we have acted with obtuse selfishness and terrible shortsightedness and harmful ignorance and speculative stupidity."

"The metaphorical Judgment Day of modern times will be 'Biblical' in a fascinating and sad sense: Sure enough, all future generations will suffer, and they will do so for our sins. In this case, the suffering will be a directly tangible carry-forward of our shortsighted selfishness in squandering natural resources and polluting the planet, and in contributing to the destruction of habitats and alterations of the climate, and in causing many forms of life on Earth to be driven to extinction, and in saddling our descendants with enormous amounts of debt for generations to come."

"These sins are a form of obtuse lack of concern for the legacy that our actions portend. Unless we repent soon, will we suffer punishment in a speculative afterlife of eternal Hell for our wrongdoing? Or will it actually be mainly our children and our descendants who will be the ones to do the actual suffering, here on Earth?"

"I prophesy: There will be no End Times. There will be no Armageddon. THERE WILL BE NO RAPTURE. Hucksters who claim otherwise rank up there in religious fanaticism with the most extreme of domineering Iranian ayatollahs. Yes, there will be more hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, famines, plagues, droughts and species extinctions. These are natural events, with a little help from human beings in those cases where anthropogenic impacts influence outcomes. We curiously call such natural events "Acts of God". Oh, right, "and so it came to pass!" There will naturally also be more economic panics, recessions, depressions and wars; these are the consequences of human nature and greed and folly."

"We must not despair; we must instead act to create a more salubrious fate. We must not even think of welcoming ecological devastation as the Rapture crowd is apparently wont, according to Bill Moyers' powerful speech that he gave about the Rapture and the dangers that such blind beliefs pose to civilization."

Bill Moyers' speech in 2005 was so thought provoking that I have appended it below for all readers to consider.

Yours Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

August 1, 2022 (Evolving since 2010)

#### Addendum One - BILL MOYERS on THE RAPTURE

"There is No Tomorrow", by Bill Moyers, *The Star Tribune* - Sunday, 30 January 2005

(Bill Moyers was host of the weekly public affairs series "NOW with Bill Moyers" on PBS. This article is adapted from AlterNet, where it first appeared. The text is taken from the remarks that Bill Moyers made upon receiving the Global Environmental Citizen Award from the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School. George W. Bush was the president at the time.)

One of the biggest changes in politics in my lifetime is that the delusional is no longer marginal. It has come in from the fringe, to sit in the seat of power in the Oval Office and in Congress. For the first time in our history, ideology and theology hold a monopoly of power in Washington.

Theology asserts propositions that cannot be proven true; ideologues hold stoutly to a worldview despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality. When ideology and theology couple, their offspring are not always bad, but they are always blind. And there is the danger: voters and politicians alike, oblivious to the facts.

Remember James Watt, President Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of the Interior? My favorite online environmental journal, the ever-engaging *Grist*, reminded us recently of how James Watt told the U.S. Congress that protecting natural resources was not important in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. In public testimony he said, "after the last tree is felled, Christ will come back."

Beltway elites snickered. The press corps didn't know what he was talking about. But James Watt was serious. So were his compatriots out across the country. They are the people who believe the Bible is literally true --- one-third of the American electorate, if a recent Gallup poll is accurate. In this past election several million good and decent citizens went to the polls believing in the Rapture Index.

That's right - the Rapture Index. Google it and you will find that the best-selling books in America today are the 12 volumes of the "Left Behind" series written by the Christian fundamentalist and religious-right warrior Timothy LaHaye. These true believers subscribe to a fantastical theology concocted in the 19th century by a couple of immigrant preachers who took disparate passages from the Bible and wove them into a narrative that has captivated the imagination of millions of Americans.

Its outline is rather simple, if bizarre (the British writer George Monbiot recently did a brilliant dissection of it and I am indebted to him for adding to my own understanding): Once Israel has occupied the rest of its "biblical lands," legions of the antichrist will attack it, triggering a final showdown in the valley of Armageddon.

As the Jews who have not been converted are burned, the messiah will return for the rapture. True believers will be lifted out of their clothes and transported to Heaven, where, seated next to the right hand of God, they will watch their political and religious opponents suffer plagues of boils, sores, locusts and frogs during the several years of tribulation that follow.

I'm not making this up. Like Monbiot, I've read the literature. I've reported on these people, and followed some of them from Texas to the West Bank. They are sincere, serious and polite as they tell you they feel called to help bring the rapture on as fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

That's why they have declared solidarity with Israel and the Jewish settlements, and backed up their support with money and volunteers. It's why the invasion of Iraq for them was a warm-up act, predicted in the Book of

Revelations where four angels "which are bound in the great river Euphrates will be released to slay the third part of man." A war with Islam in the Middle East is not something to be feared but welcomed -- an essential conflagration on the road to redemption. The last time I Googled it, the rapture index stood at 144 -- just one point below the critical threshold when the whole thing will blow, the son of God will return, the righteous will enter Heaven and sinners will be condemned to eternal hellfire. (Note from 17 years later, on 1/3/22: the Rapture Index stands at 185, close to its All-Time High).

So what does this mean for public policy and the environment? Go to *Grist* to read a remarkable work of reporting by the journalist Glenn Scherer, "The Road to Environmental Apocalypse." Read it and you will see how millions of fundamentalist Christians may believe that environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded but actually welcomed -- even hastened -- as a sign of the coming apocalypse.

As *Grist* makes clear, we're not talking about a handful of fringe lawmakers who hold or are beholden to these beliefs. The religious right backs nearly half our Representatives in Congress, and more than 230 legislators in total.

Forty-five senators and 186 members of the 108th Congress earned 80 to 100 percent approval ratings from the three most influential Christian right advocacy groups. They include Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Assistant Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Conference Chair Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, Policy Chair Jon Kyl of Arizona, House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Majority Whip Roy Blunt. The only Democrat to score 100 percent with the Christian coalition was Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who recently quoted from the biblical book of Amos on the Senate floor: "The days will come, sayeth the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land." He seemed to be relishing the thought.

And why not? There's a constituency for it. A 2002 Time-CNN poll found that 59 percent of Americans believe that the prophecies found in the book of Revelations are going to come true. Nearly one-quarter think the Bible predicted the 9/11 attacks. Drive across the country with your radio tuned to the more than 1,600 Christian radio stations, or in the motel turn on some of the 250 Christian TV stations, and you can hear some of this end-time gospel. And you will come to understand why people under the spell of such potent prophecies cannot be expected, as *Grist* puts it, "to worry about the environment. Why care about the earth, when the droughts, floods, famine and pestilence brought by ecological collapse are signs of the apocalypse foretold in the Bible? Why care about global climate change when you and yours will be rescued in the rapture? And why care about converting from oil to solar when the same God who performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes can whip up a few billion barrels of light crude with a word."

Because these people believe that until Christ does return, the Lord will provide. One of their texts is a high school history book, *America's Providential History*. You'll find there these words: "The secular or socialist has a limited-resource mentality and views the world as a pie ... that needs to be cut up so everyone can get a piece." However, "the Christian knows that the potential in God is unlimited and that there is no shortage of resources in God's earth ... While many secularists view the world as overpopulated, Christians know that God has made the earth sufficiently large with plenty of resources to accommodate all of the people."

No wonder Karl Rove goes around the White House whistling that militant hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers." He turned out millions of the foot soldiers on Nov. 2, 2004, including many who have made the apocalypse a powerful driving force in modern American politics.

It is hard for the journalist to report a story like this with any credibility. So let me put it on a personal level. I myself don't know how to be in this world without expecting a confident future and getting up every morning to do what I can to bring it about. So I have always been an optimist. Now, however, I think of my friend on Wall Street whom I once asked: "What do you think of the market?" "I'm optimistic," he answered. "Then why do you look so worried?" And he answered: "Because I am not sure my optimism is justified."

I'm not, either. Once upon a time I agreed with Eric Chivian and the Center for Health and the Global Environment that people will protect the natural environment when they realize its importance to their health

and to the health and lives of their children. Now I am not so sure. It's not that I don't want to believe that -- it's just that I read the news and connect the dots.

I read that the administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has declared the presidential election a mandate for President Bush on the environment. This for an administration:

(a) That wants to rewrite the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act protecting rare plant and animal species and their habitats, as well as the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires the government to judge beforehand whether actions might damage natural resources.

(b) That wants to relax pollution limits for ozone; eliminate vehicle tailpipe inspections, and ease pollution standards for cars, sport-utility vehicles and diesel-powered big trucks and heavy equipment.

(c) That wants a new international audit law to allow corporations to keep certain information about environmental problems secret from the public.

(d) That wants to drop all its new-source review suits against polluting, coal-fired power plants and weaken consent decrees reached earlier with coal companies.

(e) That wants to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling, and increase drilling in Padre Island National Seashore, the longest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world and the last great coastal wild land in America.

I read the news just this week and learned how the Environmental Protection Agency had planned to spend \$9 million -- \$2 million of it from the administration's friends at the American Chemistry Council -- to pay poor families to continue to use pesticides in their homes. These pesticides have been linked to neurological damage in children, but instead of ordering an end to their use, the government and the industry were going to offer the families \$970 each, as well as a camcorder and children's clothing, to serve as guinea pigs for the study.

I read all this in the news.

I read the news just last night and learned that the administration's friends at the International Policy Network, which is supported by Exxon Mobil and others of like mind, have issued a new report that climate change is "a myth, sea levels are not rising" [and] scientists who believe catastrophe is possible are "an embarrassment."

I not only read the news but the fine print of the recent appropriations bill passed by Congress, with obscure (and obscene) riders attached to it: a clause removing all endangered species protections from pesticides; language prohibiting judicial review for a forest in Oregon; a waiver of environmental review for grazing permits on public lands; a rider pressed by developers to weaken protection for crucial habitats in California.

I read all this and look up at the pictures on my desk, next to the computer -- pictures of my grandchildren. I see the future looking back at me from those photographs and I say, "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." And then I am stopped short by the thought: "That's not right. We do know what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world."

And I ask myself: Why? Is it because we don't care? Because we are greedy? Because we have lost our capacity for outrage, our ability to sustain indignation at injustice?

What has happened to our moral imagination?

On the heath, Lear asks Gloucester: "How do you see the world?" And Gloucester, who is blind, answers: "I see it feelingly. I see it feelingly."

The news is not good these days. I can tell you, though, that as a journalist I know the news is never the end of the story. The news can be the truth that sets us free -- not only to feel but to fight for the future we want. And the will to fight is the antidote to despair, the cure for cynicism, and the answer to those faces looking back at me from those photographs on my desk. What we need is what the ancient Israelites called *hochma* --

the science of the heart ... the capacity to see, to feel and then to act as if the future depended on you. Believe me, it does!

### Addendum Two - Keep Calm and Carry On

An editorial in USA Today on May 17, 2011 compared climate change deniers to the "birthers" who challenged President Obama's American citizenship, pointing out that they are "a vocal minority that refuses to accept overwhelming evidence."

Bill McKibben, founder of the global climate campaign 350.org and Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont, recently penned some satirical reflections about climate change and those who deny it. His words are quoted below, and can also be found in *Ecological Buddhism: A Buddhist Response to Global Warming*, a website with a provocative compendium of articles.

Keep Calm and Carry On, by Bill McKibben in 2011

Caution: It is vitally important not to make connections. When you see pictures of rubble like this week's shots from Joplin, Missouri, you should not ask yourself: I wonder if this is somehow related to the huge tornado outbreak three weeks ago in Tuscaloosa, or the enormous outbreak a couple of weeks before that -- together they comprised the most active April for tornadoes in our history. But that doesn't mean a thing.

It is far better to think of these as isolated, unpredictable, discrete events. It is not advised to try and connect them in your mind with, say, the fires now burning across Texas -- fires that have burned more of America by this date than any year in our history. Texas, and adjoining parts of Oklahoma and New Mexico, are drier than they've ever been -- the drought is worse than the Dust Bowl. But do not wonder if it's somehow connected. If you did wonder, you'd have to also wonder about whether this year's record snowfalls and rainfalls across the Midwest -- resulting in record flooding across the Mississippi -- could somehow be related. And if you did that, then you might find your thoughts wandering to, oh, global warming. To the fact that climatologists have been predicting for years that as we flood the atmosphere with carbon, we will also start both drying and flooding the planet, since warm air holds more water vapor than cold.

It's far smarter to repeat to yourself, over and over, the comforting mantra that no single weather event can ever be directly tied to climate change. There have been tornadoes before, and floods -- that's the important thing. Just be careful to make sure you don't let yourself wonder why all these records are happening at once: why we've had unprecedented mega floods from Australia to Pakistan in the last year. Why it's just now that the Arctic has melted for the first time in thousands of years. Focus on the immediate casualties, watch the videotape from the store cameras as the shelves are blown over. Look at the anchorman up to the chest of his waders in the rising river. Because if you asked yourself what it meant that the Amazon has just come through its second hundred-year-drought in the last four years, or that the pine forests across the western part of this continent have been obliterated by a beetle in the last decade -- well, you might have to ask other questions. Like, should President Obama really just have opened a huge swath of Wyoming to new coal-mining? Should the Secretary of State this summer sign a permit allowing a huge new pipeline to carry oil from the tar sands of Alberta? You might have to ask yourself: do we have a bigger problem than four-dollar-a-gallon gasoline?

Better to join with the US House of Representatives, which earlier this spring voted 240-184 to defeat a resolution saying simply "climate change is occurring, is caused largely by human activities, and poses significant risks for public health and welfare." Propose your own physics; ignore physics altogether. Just don't start asking yourself if last year's failed grain harvest from the Russian heat wave, and Queensland's failed grain harvest from its record flood, and France and Germany's current drought-related crop failures, and the death of the winter wheat crop in Texas, and the inability of Midwestern farmers to get corn planted in their sodden fields might somehow be related. Surely the record food prices are just freak outliers, not signs of anything systemic.

It's very important to stay completely calm. If you got upset about any of this, you might forget how important it is not to disrupt the record profits of fossil fuel companies. If worst ever did come to worst, it is reassuring to remember what the Chamber of Commerce told the EPA in a recent filing: there's no need to worry because

"populations can acclimatize to warmer climates via a range of behavioral, physiological, and technological adaptations." I'm pretty sure that's what they're telling themselves in Joplin today.

-----The End of Rapture Mania -----