

> Perspective

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> FEMA's role in apocalyptic narrative

A briefing on web-based conspiracist and apocalyptic interpretations of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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> **Abstract:**

At least since the appearance of the X-Files movie, "Fight the Future", the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has been aware that it is a focus for conspiracist and apocalyptic scenarios. This paper draws on documents available on the internet to show (a) the kind of presentation FEMA receives when described in purely secular terms without accompanying apocalyptic identification, (b) a basic outline of the full scenario in which conspiracist and apocalyptic strands merge, with brief explanations of such ingredients as the New World Order, Y2K, Global Census and Identification System, and the Beast of Revelation, and (c) this scenario as promoted by one major Christian televangelist. Conclusions drawn include the need to take rhetoric of this type seriously, with recommendations encouraging (i) awareness of the delicacy of the situation, and (ii) a response which does not exacerbate the situation.

> **Note:**

This paper was written for a CMS-sponsored Conference held in Jerusalem in June 1999, at which millennial scholars from the US, Europe and Israel met with American and Israeli law-enforcement personnel to talk about how to guarantee maximal religious freedom during the pilgrimages of 2000/2001, while guarding against potential millennial violence.

0. Introduction

Did [the FBI at Waco] not know that apocalyptic beliefs should be taken seriously, that they were playing the role of the enemies of Christ?

--Nancy T. Ammerman, "Waco, Federal Law Enforcement and Scholars of Religion", cited in House of Representatives Report 104-749, p. 62 n. 446.

It is no longer news to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that they are at the focus for a number of conspiracist and apocalyptic scenarios. Last year's X Files movie, "Fight the Future", paid fictional tribute to this kind of thinking about the Agency when character Dr. Al Kurtzweil remarked:

FEMA allows the White House to suspend constitutional government upon declaration of a national emergency. It allows creation of a non-elected government. Think about that, Agent Mulder.

A Washington Post report of June 24, 1998 quoted an internal "public affairs guidance" memo from Maurie Goodman, FEMA's Director of Communications, in response:

While entertaining and somewhat humorous to the employees of FEMA, some moviegoers may not understand that they are watching a fictional portrayal of the agency.

Goodman added that while people generally think of FEMA personnel as emergency responders in disaster situations, some "believe we have a somewhat sinister role," and commenting "it is not realistic to think that we can convince them otherwise and it is advisable not to enter into debate on the subject."

Source: Al Kamen, "At FEMA, 'X' is for Exasperation", Washington Post, Wednesday, June 24, 1998 page A15.

See also: Jon Elliston, "FEMA's X File: 'Not for the Outside World'", Parascope, <http://www.parascope.com/ds/articles/femaXfile.htm>

Dr. Kurtzweil's comment in the movie lacks one crucial ingredient which is present in the present mix of conspiracist and apocalyptic fantasies -- the notion that the suspension of constitutional government in the US will take place in preparation, specifically, for the establishment of a single world government to be administered by the Antichrist.

Moreover, it is this ingredient which may turn simple mistrust of FEMA into a kind of sacred animosity: for it is here that FEMA ceases to figure as a merely human threat to an honored and beloved but nonetheless human edifice -- the Constitution of the United States -- and emerges as a chosen agency of ultimate Evil in the culminating drama of both human and supernatural history.

I contend that from FEMA's point of view this distinction is of utmost importance, because it is far easier for someone to override a natural reluctance to any kind of violence or illegality if they are strongly of the belief that in so doing they are obeying the revealed mandate of their Creator.

In this brief paper, I will draw on documents readily available on the internet to show (a) the kind of presentation FEMA receives in this literature when described in purely secular terms, without any accompanying apocalyptic identification, (b) a basic outline of the full scenario in which the conspiracist and apocalyptic strands merge, and (c) an example of this scenario as promoted by one major Christian televangelist.

1. A secular presentation of FEMA in conspiracist terms:

The following is an excerpt from a two-part document titled "Recent Info U.S. Concentration Camps" c1998, WorldNetDaily.com, attributed to Geoff Metcalf of KSFO, 560AM:

For several years now I have been getting all sorts of wild reports about "Government Internment Camps." I have generally dismissed these rumblings as classic right-wing paranoia, extrapolation of facts not yet in evidence, or creative writing. However, recently, additional information has been revealed which lends credibility to the myriad concerns which have been expressed. Hey, even paranoids get chased.

The U.S. Army director of resource management has confirmed the validity of a memorandum relating to the establishment of a civilian inmate labor program under development by the Department of Army. The document states, "Enclosed for your review and comment is the draft Army regulation on civilian inmate labor utilization" and the procedure to "establish civilian prison camps on installations."

[...]

In 1982, President Ronald Reagan issued National Security Directive 58 which empowered Robert McFarlane and Oliver North to use the National Security Council to secretly retrofit the Federal Emergency Management Agency to manage the country during a national crisis. In 1984 "REX exercises" simulated civil unrest culminating in a national emergency with a contingency plan for the imprisonment of 400,000 people. REX '84 was so secretive that special metal security doors were installed on the FEMA building's fifth floor, and even long-term officials of the Civil Defense Office were prohibited entry. The alleged purpose of this exercise was to handle an influx of refugees created by a war in Central America, but a more realistic scenario was the detention of American citizens.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

Under REX, the president could declare a state of emergency, empowering the head of FEMA to take control of the internal infrastructure of the United States and suspend the Constitution. The president could invoke executive orders 11000 through 11004 which would:

- 1) Draft all citizens into work forces under government supervision;
- 2) Empower the postmaster to register all men, women and children;
- 3) Seize all airports and aircraft;
- 4) Seize all housing and establish forced relocation of citizens.

FEMA, with a black budget allegedly provided by the Department of Defense, has worked closely with the Pentagon in an effort to avoid the legal restrictions of Posse Comitatus. While FEMA may not have been directly responsible for these precedent-setting cases, the principle of federal control was seen during the Los Angeles riots in 1992 with the federalization of the National Guard and during the siege at Waco, where Army tanks were involved in the final conflagration.

Source: <http://www.mt.net/~watcher/fema5.html>

See also: <http://www.totse.com/files/FA012/nwocreep.htm>

Note that while this document has no religious content, the "Watcher" site at which it is found is an overtly apocalyptic site, as the content following in section 2 below clearly shows.

2. The basic scenario uniting conspiracist and apocalyptic strands:

The following quotation illustrates the way this type of conspiracist thinking merges readily into Christian apocalyptic vision:

Look at who is the beneficiary of a potential infrastructure breakdown. Could it be... the NEW WORLD ORDER? This Y2K threat is the perfect excuse to implement FEMA, martial law, a GLOBAL CENSUS AND IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM, a GLOBAL SOLUTION to replace all the failed governments and economic institutions... and a global dictatorship under the Beast of Revelation 13.

Source: <http://www.mt.net/~watcher/y2kpage.html>

In this brief but telling quotation we have a rough index of the themes involved in this type of cross-pollination, each of which deserves a brief comment:

New World Order

President Bush may have originated the term "new world order" in his 1991 State of the Union message when he declared, "What is at stake is more than one small country, it is a big idea - a new world order... to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind... based upon shared principles and the rule of law" -- but something very similar can be found in Latin on the U.S. dollar bill. President Bush clearly liked the idea: but in the rhetoric of conspiracist thought it stands for world dictatorship, and in apocalyptic variants it is classically the Antichrist who is the dictator.

Y2K

Intensive press coverage of the "millennium computer bug" -- the global problem associated with two-year date fields in computer programs at the turn of the century -- has been widely "read" in apocalyptic circles as a "sign of the times", an indicator of the imminence of the end-of-the-world sequence of events as portrayed in Revelation: tribulation, rapture, and the reign of Christ over a "new" earth.

FEMA

FEMA has been the target of conspiracist suspicion from the extreme right for some time now: militia leader Mark Koernke issued a video shortly before the events in Waco took place in 1993. In it, he portrayed FEMA employees as members of the New World Order's shadow government and said, "Only 59 to 63 out of 3,060 actually deal with storms, disasters, hurricanes and nuclear attack."

Global Census and Identification System

It is commonly believed in contemporary apocalyptic circles that the "mark of the beast" which will be imprinted or implanted on the right hand or forehead of those who succumb to

the Antichrist according to Revelation 13: 15 will be a bar code, smart card or implanted National ID microchip:

These amazing, relatively simple biochip radio transceiver implants are battery-free, passive devices that will have everyone's unalterable, international 18 digit ID number electronically encoded into them. Once they have been injected under our skin, we will have been ELECTRONICALLY BRANDED for life! Liken it to a modern, electronic TECHNOLOGICAL TATTOO if you will.

Of course, most of us (especially Christians) will find such a surgically implanted government microchip unacceptable and repugnant. But it will be forced on us nevertheless. In fact many will be easily coerced into this new totalitarian system of identification because without accepting it no one will be permitted to buy or sell anything, anywhere in the coming cashless, global economy.

Source: <http://afgen.com/controv7.html>
See also: <http://omegaserv.com/DoTID.html>
<http://www.novia.net/~todd/rap32.html>

Those who carry the mark of the beast are destined to "drink of the wine of the wrath of God" and "be tormented with fire and brimstone", and the "smoke of their torment" will rise for ever (Revelation 14: 9-11).

Note also that any government proposals for a cashless future society tend to trigger the same chain of apocalyptic associations as proposals for a national ID or health care card.

Beast of Revelation

The Beast whose mark is described in Revelation is identifiable by the number 666:

Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six. --
Revelation 13: 18

This text has given rise to numerous ingenious numerological interpretations across the centuries, from the Emperor Nero to President Ronald Wilson Reagan -- note that each of Reagan's three names is six letters in length.

3. Scenario present in works of major televangelist:

The type of conspiracist / apocalyptic scenario outlined in the quotation above is not held only by small extremist groups and cults with obscure theological views: it is now an acceptable mainstream worldview, and can be found explicitly spelled out by some well-known figures.

The following quotation from Dr Morris Cerullo's book *January 1, 2000 ... The Day The World Shuts Down* (Morris Cerullo World Evangelism) illustrates the point -- linking Y2K, FEMA, and the Antichrist. Dr Cerullo is a well-known Christian televangelist whose worldwide mission includes a special "top secret Jewish world outreach project" designed to "reach into every Jewish home on the face of the earth with a witness of the Messiah!" [editor's note: I have edited some of Dr Cerullo's short paragraphs into longer units for ease of reading].

If the computer glitch that will cause so many computers to crash on January 1, 2000 A.D., is really as serious as it seems (and as so many computer experts have said it will be), and the entire world descends into chaos, it will be nothing like the riots in Los Angeles. Instead, it will be monumentally larger. Violence will spread into the streets of major cities all over the world as those elements of society that were only compelled to control themselves through threat of police action will suddenly find themselves unfettered, and they will begin a reign of terror that will dwarf anything ever witnessed in the history of the planet.

And he said "Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences: and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven." (Luke 21:8-11)

Could such an atmosphere of terror and anarchy be just the opportunity for one to come and say, "Peace, I am Christ?" Remember, Jesus said that many would come saying they were Christ, but He also warned us NOT TO BE DECEIVED! The world would be thrown into tumult and chaos and many would come and say they were Christ! Could this be just the opportunity the antichrist needs to ascend to world prominence?

Could some powerful world leader come on the scene and say, "Peace and safety if you follow me." Remember, the Bible says, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:3) It certainly would be a great opportunity for that enemy of Christ. He could step in and say, "We've got to have control of the world's food and water supplies, the world's energy supplies and all the weapons so we can restore order..."

Friend, this is not far-fetched. Even now in America, the world's strongest so-called democracy, we have a department of the government called the Federal Emergency Management Administration. Now while the name sounds benign enough, this is an organization that can completely take over all operations of all government agencies, whether federal, state, county or local, in an emergency. What that means to the normal person is this: if an emergency of sufficient magnitude strikes, FEMA can take over the entire operation of the government --this in America!

In addition, in a sufficiently serious emergency, the president of the United States can declare martial law. What this means is the democracy we know as the United States would be thrown out the window, and the president would become in effect a dictator, backed up by all the military might of the United States: the world's sole remaining military superpower.

This is not some pipe dream, it's FEDERAL LAW! That means if a sufficiently serious emergency hits the United States, your vote no longer counts. You could not go to the election box and vote out the president any more. You could not protest against his policies if he didn't want you to. If you were outraged, you would have no recourse. You would be silent or face the military machine of the most powerful nation on earth. And, dear friend, this is not something that was done in secret. These vast and flowing powers were granted to the president to keep the United States in order during an emergency.

Could just such an emergency be facing the world in the year 2000?

4. Conclusions

It is all too easy to dismiss this kind of rhetoric as high flown and extremist -- but in widespread multiple emergencies of the sort which Y2K computer problems (or public perception of the likelihood of such problems) are liable to trigger, apocalyptically inclined members of the public may be in a state of "semiotic arousal" (to use Dr. Richard Landes' term). If, after all, one feels one is living in the end times, the final days of "life-as-usual" on earth -- and thus perilously close to the Final Judgment as prophesied in Revelation -- one is liable to feel also that one may be called upon at any moment to fight as a soldier in the final battle of Armageddon on the side of good versus evil.. And if one's theology leads one to suppose that the FEMA agent at one's door is...

I do not wish to spell out the possible consequences, just to suggest that apocalyptic excitement may be a more powerful addition to the millennial brew than some pragmatic, down-to-earth emergency personnel might imagine.

Recommendations:

Emergency situations are by their very nature fast-moving, action-oriented, and inherently "unphilosophical" -- yet FEMA personnel may find themselves unexpectedly confronting some very delicate issues, touching on some of the most deeply felt areas of religion, patriotism and freedom.

The main requirements for the successful navigation of these areas, whether by administrative or field personnel, are (i) awareness of the delicacy of the situation, and (ii) a response which does not exacerbate the situation. The following may be of help:

- simple awareness of the possibility of encounter with citizens whose ideology predisposes them to view one's role in a negative apocalyptic context,

- some sense of the "larger picture" as portrayed in conspiracist and apocalyptic scenarios, and

- a willingness to avoid confrontation between one's own ideology, whether secular or religious, and a negative apocalyptic stereotype -- and in particular to avoid mockery or summary dismissal of the other's point of view

Note also that other U.S. Federal agencies -- along with the United Nations, the European Union, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg Group -- have been similarly identified as agents of the New World Order (and thus by strong implication of the Antichrist) in this way, most notably the ATF and FBI.