



Of Gog and Magog: The Geopolitical Visions of Jack Chick and Premillennial Dispensationalism

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Abstract

This paper is a study of the geopolitical vision of Jack Chick, author of Christian cartoon tracts. In over 50 years of publishing, Chick has sold over 500 million tracts, making him a significant, if idiosyncratic, example of a creative Christian force shaping geographic imaginations. The paper outlines the basics of his theology, known as premillennial dispensationalism, and then illustrates how Chick has rendered the prophetic geopolitics of the future visible in his tracts. A discussion follows that tracks the policy implications of the premillennial dispensationalist geopolitical vision and how it has played out in American history. The conclusion notes that Chick's success is in part because of his selection of media, as the cartoon tracts structure the message that is mediated to recipients. Also, the paper calls for more research of religion as a structuring agent of geopolitical visions.

Key words: Jack Chick, Premillennial dispensationalism, Geopolitical visions, Cartoons, Fundamentalism

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“And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.” Ezekiel 38:15-16 (KJV)

“No one can resist a cartoon.” (Jack Chick, quoted in Weber 1999)

From Geopolitical Visions to Christian Tracts

The above statements are distant from each other both in time and in tone. The first statement is regarded by many as a prophecy given via a Hebrew priest from Jerusalem in the 6th century BCE and detailing the triumph of the people of Israel and their God over their worldly and spiritual enemies; the second quote is a statement of method by a Christian evangelist. However, the fusion of a particular interpretation of the first text with the medium described in the second has contributed to the production of a geopolitical imaginary with implications for several populations within and outside of the United States, including Catholics, Jews, Arabs, as well as for American politics and foreign policy. This has been accomplished through the cartoon tracts of Jack Chick and through other forms of popular culture associated with the theology known as premillennial dispensationalism.

Since O’Tuathail, Agnew, Dalby, et al. initially laid out the agenda of critical geopolitics, scholars of the sub-discipline have paid attention to the political contest over geographic imaginations, applying a “perspective and a metaphors of vision...that puts (other) visions in question” (O’Tuathail, 1996, 72). These geopolitical visions have been defined as “any idea concerning the relation between one’s own and other places, involving feelings of (in)security or (dis)advantage (and/or) invoking ideas about a mission or foreign policy advantage” (Dijkink, 1996, 11). That these are termed visions is not coincidence or postmodern grandiloquence; rather, it reflects a Foucauldian concern with the production of knowledge and its consequent modes of consumption. Just as O’Tuathail (1996) drew attention to the way in which Halford Mackinder’s geopolitical vision (1904) was embedded in visual culture at the end of the Victorian Age, other geopolitical visions are rendered cartographically or otherwise visual in an effort to facilitate their consumption by the masses or by political leaders. While geopolitical visions are by definition reductive in regard to the world they describe, these material visualizations are doubly so.

This relationship between places is often rendered cartographically, as in WWII newspaper maps (Cosgrove and della Dorra, 2005) and the famous Clash of Civilizations hypothesis (Huntington, 1993), but it is not necessarily so. Indeed,

with the proliferation of mass consumer culture since Mackinder's day, the ability to project geopolitical visions has disseminated out of the hands of the policy makers (if it ever did solely reside there) and into the hands of magazine editors, cartoonists, and movie producers, among others (Sharp, 1993, 1998; Dodds, 1998, 2003; Power and Crampton, 2005). Each medium of dissemination carries with it certain structuring elements that shape the messages contained within it. Cartoons in particular have been used extensively as a way of disseminating desired geopolitical visions among less-literate populations, either children (U.S. Government, 2005) or adults (Bovard, 2004). This bias in audience results from cartoons' unique blend of text and image, a hybridity that enables a wide audience to understand the narrative and for the visual to supplement the written word to greater effect.

Crampton and Power (2005, 247), although discussing cinema, illustrate the role of visual culture in constructing subjectivities and objectifying conflict areas: "It is useful to think about cinema and geopolitics in the terms of Mackinder's vision of the world as a 'stage' and international politics as theatre." Hence, geopolitics becomes narrativized, often into a good/evil dichotomy of places. This is especially true of the geopolitical visions of Jack Chick, whose proselytizing cartoon tracts have made him the world's most published living author² (Ito 2003). Most analysis of geopolitical visions focuses on those of elites, whether governmental or media. This paper will study the most banal of geopolitical media: the Christian tracts produced by Jack Chick, most often found in public restrooms, public phone booths, trick-or-treat bags, or other everyday places. The banality of his product does require his description by aficionados as the world's most published living author to be viewed as, at least in part, tongue-in-cheek, but it does not undermine the overall significance of his worldview and oeuvre.

These cartoon tracts are most often about the author's belief in a particular method of obtaining an afterlife, and his desire to help others discover that method as well. However, what appears to be a purely personal and theological message has geopolitical ramifications that resonate with foreign policy formation in today's United States. This paper will first provide background on Jack Chick himself and then outline the basics of his theology, known as premillennial dispensationalism. The remainder of that section will demonstrate how Chick narrativizes his geopolitical vision through his cartoons. The paper will then move on to a discussion of how the geopolitics of premillennial dispensationalism animate foreign policy debates in the United States, before concluding with a discussion of the role of popular culture in facilitating the advancement of this theology in policy circles. Through this, the author seeks to spark a new debate in political geography

² As of 2003, Jack Chick had published 142 different cartoon tracts, which had sold over 500 million copies in over 100 languages.

about the role of religion in geopolitics, which is too often limited to electoral correlations with party affiliation and Huntingtonian identity politics (e.g., MacAllister et al., 2002; West, 2005).

Drawing on Faith: Jack Chick and Premillennial Dispensationalism

The 83-year old Jack Chick has been churning out Bible tracts for over 50 years, but has refused interviews solidly since 1975. Born in a suburb of Los Angeles, Chick grew up surrounded by the evangelical fervor that has often dominated southern California. Nevertheless, he grew up irreligious, and served in the army on the Pacific front during the Second World War. He met his wife, Lola Lynn, in theater school after the war; it was not until he was on his honeymoon that he was converted to his faith by a revival radio show in Canada. With a fear of public speaking however, Chick was not well equipped for the rigors of traditional evangelism. When he learned of the Chinese Maoists' use of comics to spread propaganda (a lesson they learned from comics' wartime popularity in the United States – see Dittmer, 2007) he found his niche – a niche he would not abandon over the next half century (Ito, 2003). In the 1970s Chick took on an anonymous, and more adept, artist (later revealed to be a man named Fred Carter) and dabbled in a full-length comic book called *The Crusaders* until he was lambasted for the comics' storylines, in which the Catholic Church “orchestrated the Holocaust and [...] Jesuit secret agents tutored Marx, Lenin, and Stalin and assassinated Abraham Lincoln” (Gaddy, 2006, 91 – see also Figure 1). This anti-Catholic sentiment, popular among some (but not all) evangelical Christian groups for reasons that will be explained later in this paper, has not hampered his productivity. Today, he still produces three or four tracts a year but is also working on a movie that consists of a series of oil paintings scrolling past the camera to advance the narrative, as an eye would skim a comic strip (Ito, 2003).

Chick's theology is, as one might expect of someone who has made his living for 50 years as an evangelist, explicit and well developed. His biblical understanding is predicated on an interpretative frame known as premillennial dispensationalism, which is the dominant strand of thought within the evangelical Protestant churches of the United States. Premillennialism refers to the belief in Christ's initial return to set up an Earthly kingdom that will last 1000 years, with Christ returning again at the end for a final judgment. It has long roots in Christian history, and it stands in contrast to postmillennialism, which is the belief that Jesus will come only once, at the end of a millennium of peace (postmillennialism is distinctly in retreat in the United States in comparison to the vibrant growth of premillennialism). In the United States premillennialism has been growing in

popularity since its fusion to the doctrine of dispensationalism³, which was brought from the United Kingdom during the 1860s by John Nelson Darby and later popularized by Cyrus Scofield (Weber, 1999). Scofield, in a public relations coup, convinced the Oxford University Press to publish a version of the Bible with dispensationalist notes incorporated in the margins (Boyer 1992).



Figure 1 In these frames, Chick aligns the Vatican with the KKK and blames the Pope for both world wars. Chick’s anti-Catholic views have led him to be censured by *Christianity Today* magazine and to two of his comics being temporarily banned by Canada’s customs department (Ito 2003) (From “Squatters”:2004)

³ Although premillennialism and dispensationalism are separate concepts and belief in one does not require belief in the other, they are, in practice, generally found together.

Darby and Scofield advocated a division of biblical history into seven dispensations, or eras, each of which marks a different relationship between God and humanity, and in each of these humanity fails God. The dispensations are, in order: "Innocency (before the Fall), Conscience (Fall to the Flood), Human Government, Promise (Abraham to Moses), Law (Moses to Christ), Grace (the church age), and Kingdom (the millennium)" (Weber, 1999, 34). What makes dispensationalists a unique theological group is their belief that God has two different plans for two different peoples: the Jews as a chosen earthly people and the Christian church as a chosen heavenly people.

To Darby, the plan for God's earthly people had been revealed through a series of covenants with Israel: the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant, the law-oriented Mosaic Covenant, the royal Davidic Covenant, and a new Messianic Covenant. Until Messiah's coming, however, God's earthly people must suffer Gentile domination, prophesied by Daniel. This Gentile hegemony would end at the coming of Messiah, 70 weeks after one of the Gentile rulers issues a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to repair its broken walls. But when the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God suspended the prophetic timetable at the end of Daniel's sixty-ninth week and began building a new and heavenly people: the church (Weber, 1999, 35).

Further, dispensationalists believe that since God will not work with both peoples (the Jews and the Church) simultaneously, a Rapture will occur, in which the true believers of Christianity will be taken away, *before* the time of Tribulation (a seven-year period prophesied in the Book of Revelations and elsewhere in which the Antichrist will rise to dominate the earth before being destroyed by the second coming of Christ at the head of an army). After the Tribulation the nations of the world are judged, and Israel comes to enjoy its millennium kingdom on earth with Jesus as its theocratic ruler. Following that, the world comes to an end with the Jews taken up into heaven, with gentiles who have blessed Israel (Weber, 1999). Thus, dispensationalists do not believe in the Christian doctrine known as supersession, or replacement theology, in which the Christian church has replaced the Jews as the chosen people of God. They believe instead that Jews are on a parallel track with the Christian church, in God's protection, until the end of time itself.

Chick's tracts are substantially influenced by his belief in premillennial dispensationalism, although many of the values he espouses could be associated with the evangelical movement in general. It should be noted that most evangelical churches distance themselves from what they perceive as Chick's intolerance (Gaddy 2006). Nevertheless, the focus of most of his tracts is on traditional evangelical topics, such as the possibility of redemption through the sacrifice of

Jesus, God’s rejection of homosexuality, and the importance of family. Interspersed with this material, however, is a collection of individual frames and occasionally entire tracts that project his geopolitical vision. First, this paper will address topics not specific to the premillennial dispensationalist worldview, such as Islam, Arabs, and the United Nations, before showing how Jack Chick crafts a hybrid text/image narrative that weaves them together with the subjects of prophecy to create a premillennial dispensationalist geopolitics.

The Sons of Ishmael: Arabs and Islam

Arabs and Muslims (generally, but not always, conflated in Chick tracts) are traced in great detail in Chick’s work, even genealogically. Chick attributes the schism between Jews and Arabs in today’s world to the divide between Abraham’s

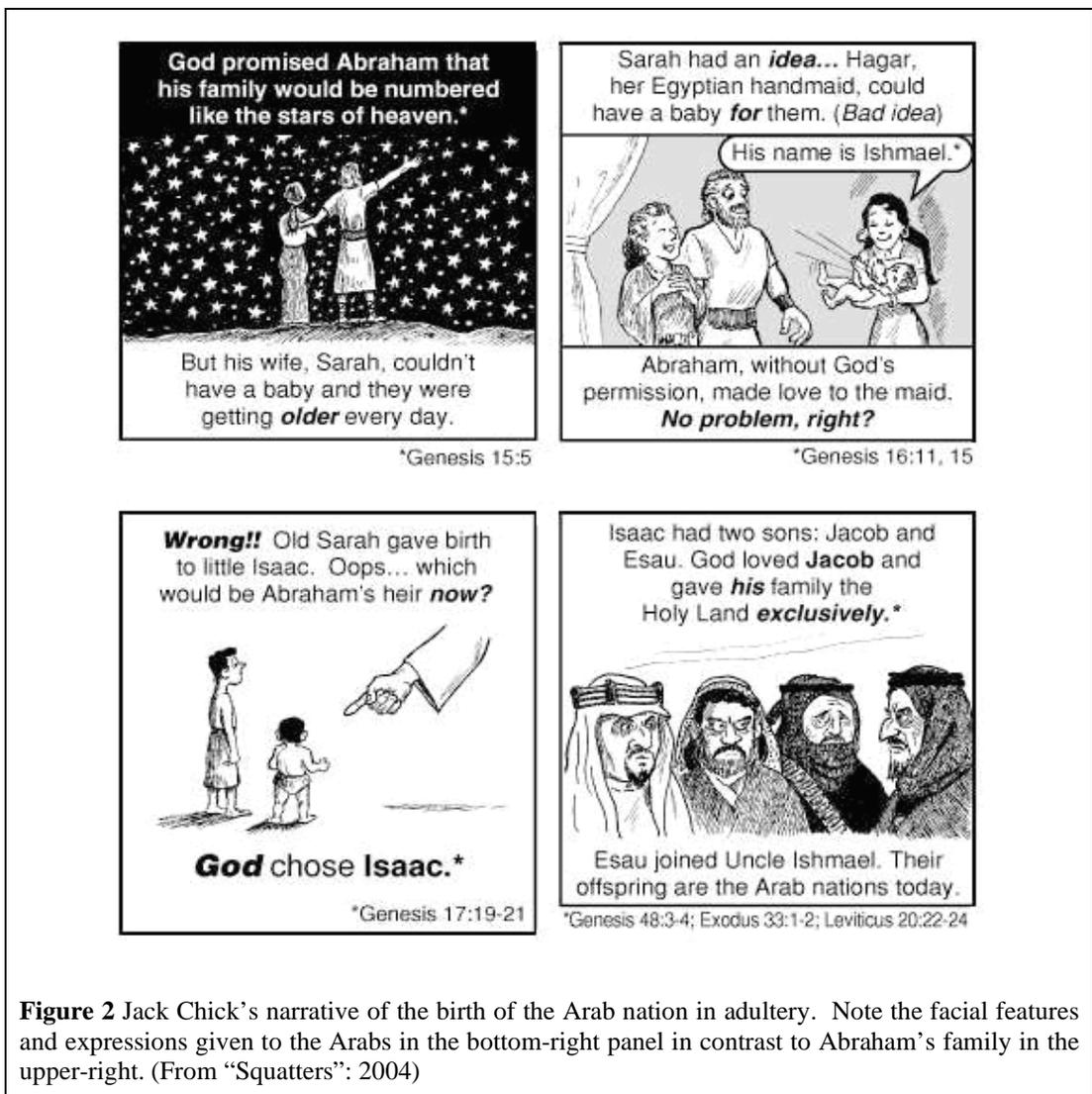


Figure 2 Jack Chick’s narrative of the birth of the Arab nation in adultery. Note the facial features and expressions given to the Arabs in the bottom-right panel in contrast to Abraham’s family in the upper-right. (From “Squatters”: 2004)

two children as told in the Bible. Ishmael, supposedly the father of today's Arabs, and Isaac, the father of Israel, were born of two different mothers. Ishmael is the son of Hagar, Abraham's handmaid, whom Abraham went to when it appeared that his older wife, Sarah, was infertile. Nevertheless, Sarah later gave birth to Isaac and God promised the Holy Land to Isaac. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau, despite being firstborn, was disinherited and thus God's promise flowed through Jacob to his 12 children, who are supposedly the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel (Figure 2).



Figure 3 Chick absolves Israel of guilt for the dispossession of the Palestinian population and repeatedly puts the Palestinians in opposition to God's will. (From "Squatters" :2004

Chick believes that this Biblical designation of God's Promised Land for the descendents of Jacob, combined with his dubious elision of Ishmael's descendents

and the Arab nation, is the reason that the Jews are entitled to the land of Israel today.



Figure 4 Abdulla, the suicide bomber, was raised by his grandmother because his mother died in childbirth and his father was in jail because his “heavenly robe” failed to detonate. He was promised 70 virgins in heaven by his instructor. (From “The Sky Lighter”:2003

Arabs and Muslims are also often portrayed in stereotypical attire such as robes and headdresses (Figure 3), and speak lines that would satisfy the most paranoid of Americans, such as “Only an ignorant fool would dare to speak against my religion! You should be trembling! You don’t even know what’s happening in your own country. Islam is the second largest, and fastest growing religion in America! And you people should FEAR US! We expect to have a Muslim flag over the White House by 2010. It will be the end of Christianity in America!” (“Allah had no Son” 1994). Further, this Islamic threat manifests physically as either Saudi princes kidnapping young blond girls into sexual slavery (“Kidnapped” 2004) or young impoverished boys turning themselves into suicide bombs at the behest of their teachers and family (Figure 4).

Towards a World Government: The United Nations

Another key player in the geopolitical vision of Jack Chick is the United Nations. In general, all attempts to “jump scale”⁴ and organize or cooperate on a global scale are seen as a step towards the destruction of the Christian community (Figure 5).

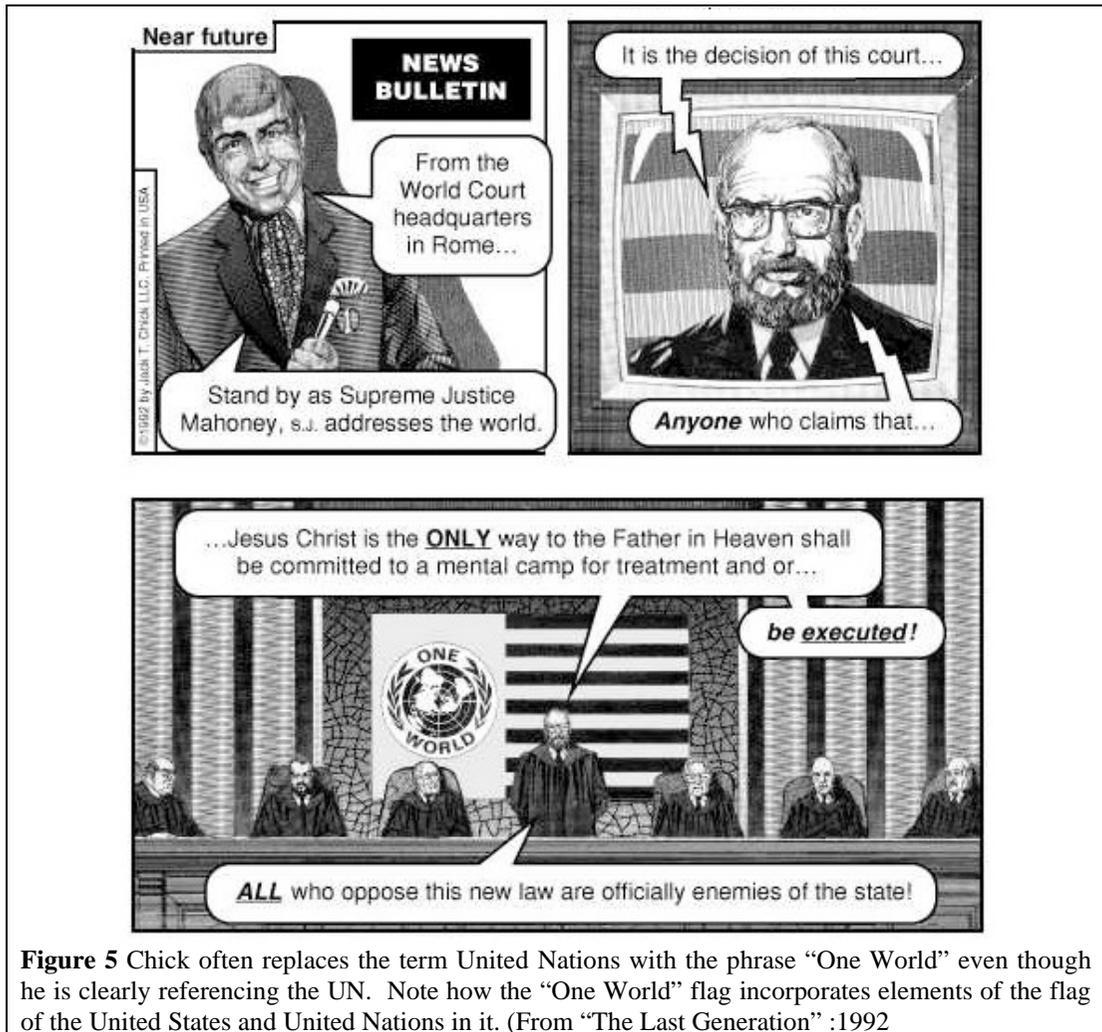


Figure 5 Chick often replaces the term United Nations with the phrase “One World” even though he is clearly referencing the UN. Note how the “One World” flag incorporates elements of the flag of the United States and United Nations in it. (From “The Last Generation” :1992)

In particular, the One World government is seen as promoting a degeneration of family values and the worship of a Mother Goddess. In the tract “The Last Generation” (1992), Chick details what will happen in the “near future”

⁴ “Jumping scale” in this sense refers to the attempt to solve local problems through collaboration with other localities having similar problems. For more on the politics of scale, see Kurtz 2003.



when the One World government has taken over. Christianity is outlawed and we watch as a boy named Bobby, indoctrinated by One World government schools and wearing a One World school uniform vaguely reminiscent of the Hitler Youth, turns in his family for being Christian (Figure 6). He is upset because the children at school make fun of him because his parents are still married. The government schoolteacher is a witch who is teaching her students to sacrifice dogs and cats for Halloween. When his parents send him to bed he threatens to turn them in for child abuse, for which the punishment is being sent to a concentration camp. This is more than just a desire to stop world government; it is fear of assimilation and theological compromise. This fear is also seen in his visible disdain for the

⁵ The Beast is a figure in eschatology that is sometimes associated with the Antichrist and sometimes represents a different figure; in Chick's tracks the Beast is usually a Vatican general.

ecumenical movement as abandonment of the Biblical literalism to which Chick ascribes (Figure 7).



Figure 7 This meeting in Satan's boardroom allows Chick to not only define the ecumenical movement as part of Satan's plan but also to claim that some high-ranking people at the United Nations are actually demons. (From "Bewitched" :2000)

These last two foci of Chick's attention, the United Nations and Catholicism/ecumenicalism are linked in their claims to universality. Both open up the possibility of authority (whether worldly or spiritual) being scaled away from the particular in favor of the universal, potentially leading to the destruction of the particular. While this is certainly disturbing for a theological group which has historically been a minority, it is particularly to be feared because this universalism confounds the prophetic expectation that specific roles in the Endtimes will be filled by specific countries, like the Arab States, Israel, the United States, Germany, and Russia. It is to this prophetic expectation that this paper now turns.

The Ezekiel Connection

The anti-Arab and anti-universalistic tenets outlined above, to a certain degree found in many evangelical Christian movements, have been grafted to an interpretation of the Bible that is particular to premillennial dispensationalists. In 1840, John Nelson Darby wrote that Gog, referred to in the book of Ezekiel⁶, was the contemporary state of Russia, which was “extending her power over the nations who will be found under Gog” (quoted in Boyer, 1992, 154). While not the first to make this interpretation of the Bible, it was Darby’s preaching that influenced John Cumming, the man who popularized Russia’s hypothesized role in the Endtimes with his book, *The End* (1855), published during the Crimean War.

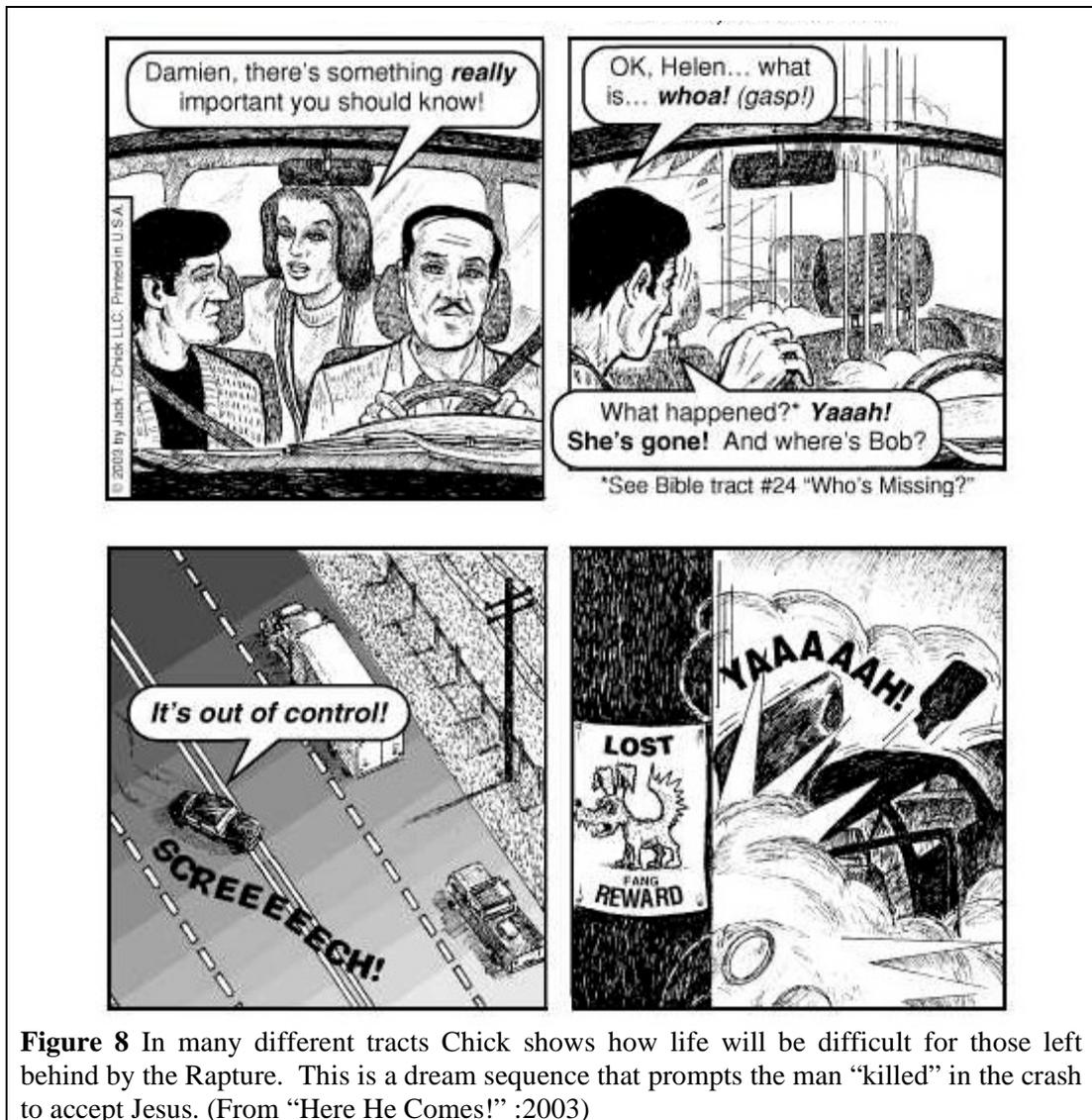
Those who found Russia in Ezekiel 38 rested their case in part on the phrase “chief prince” in verse 3, a translation of the Hebrew *nesi rosh*. The editors of the 1611 King James Bible rendered “rosh” as “chief,” but later scholars argued that it was a proper name and that the phrase should be translated “prince of Rosh”. [...]

[German Hebraicist] Gesenius, whose Old Testament lexicon of 1828 long stood as a standard reference work, viewed “Rosh” not only as a proper name but as an early form of the word “Russia”. In another step that would prove highly influential for prophecy interpretation, he also claimed that “Meshech” and “Tubal” were present day Moscow and the Siberian city of Tobolsk (Boyer, 1992, 154).

While certainly not an uncontested claim among scholars, the contention that Rosh was Russia made intuitive sense to many lay people not only because of the similarity in sound but also because Russia was definitively north of Palestine (as described in Ezekiel 38:15 – see the quote at the beginning of this paper) and in a position to attack the Holy Land. Scofield himself perpetuated the connection between Gog and Russia in his reference notes, published by Oxford University Press (1917, quoted notes are for Ezekiel 38):

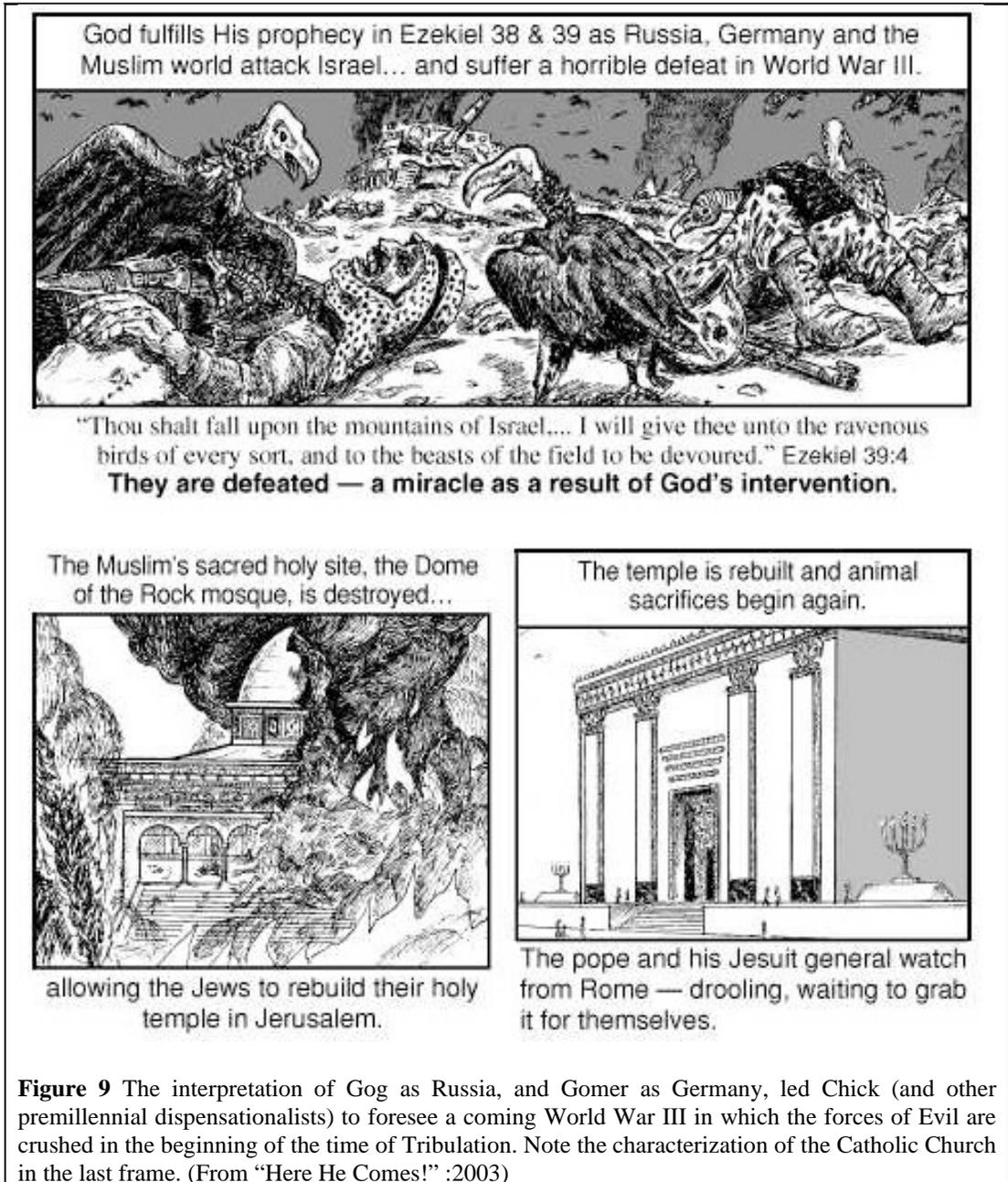
⁶ “And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I [am] against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts [of armour, even] a great company [with] bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: [and] many people with thee.” (Ezekiel 38:1-6)

That the primary reference is to the northern (European) powers, headed up by Russia, all agree. The whole passage should be read in connection with Zechariah 12:1-4; 14:1-9; Matthew 24:14-30; Revelation 14:14-20; 19:17-21, "gog" is the prince, "Magog," his land. The reference to Meshech and Tubal (Moscow and Tobolsk) is a clear mark of identification. Russia and the northern powers have been the latest persecutors of dispersed Israel, and it is congruous both with divine justice and with the covenants [...].



The proximity to the Holy Land was indicative, but the apocalyptic role of Russia was confirmed for the believers when Russia became the Soviet Union, an officially atheist state (Boyer, 1992). The reference in Ezekiel 38:5 to Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya as allies of Gog allowed for premillennial dispensationalists in

1981 to argue that an alliance between the Marxists in the Soviet Union and Ethiopia and the Islamic fundamentalists in Iran and the Arab world was nigh, signaling the beginning of the Endtimes. Although this is seemingly yet to happen, the story and the role of individual countries does not seem to change, at least in Chick's tracts.



The first step in the Endtimes would be the Rapture, in which true-believing Christians are taken away prior to the times of Tribulation inevitably following. Chick made clear in his cartoons that Christians could avoid all of the trouble

brewing in the world (Figure 8). The Rapture, though, is but the beginning of the chain of events foretold in the Old Testament. According to Chick, Russia, Germany, and the Muslim nations of the world band together to attack Israel in order to seize the Holy Land from God's earthly people. Protected by God (see the above discussion of replacement theology), Israel destroys the invading armies (Figure 9).

Chick's distrust of the Catholic Church is one of the key features that distinguish him from some other Evangelicals, who, although they are generally at odds with Catholicism over theological issues, view his anti-Catholic rhetoric as unseemly (Lindsay, 1994; Althouse, 2005). Indeed, for this his books were banned by Canadian customs for two years and the magazine *Christianity Today* has censured him (Ito 2003). In Chick's tracts, WWII is followed by the rise of the Antichrist to power as the Pope, aided by a Jesuit general ("the Beast" from Revelation 13:16-18). The Vatican emerges as the center of global political and religious authority (Figure 10). It is here that Chick's skepticism of the United Nations dovetails with his eschatological beliefs (indeed, it could be that his skepticism is caused by these beliefs, rather than simply being fear of religious and cultural assimilation).

However, while these machinations are ongoing, the Tribulation is being enacted on Earth. Chick describes it this way: "God pours out his wrath on an unbelieving and rebellious world" ("The Beast" 1988). "One third of the earth goes by fire. The sun scorches the multitudes. Water becomes undrinkable. Famine, death, and wild beasts are everywhere. The plagues continue and man still refuses to repent. Over one-half of the world's population is destroyed" ("Who's Missing?" 2003).

The end of the time of Tribulation comes with an eventual rebellion by the nations of the world against the Vatican's rule. The Vatican is burned, but the Beast escapes to Jerusalem. The Beast, operating as Satan's proxy, moves his armies to Jerusalem to destroy it and block the second coming of Jesus Christ (Figure 11). However, the second coming of Jesus to save Jerusalem and the Jewish people heralds the end of the Tribulation as Jesus's return with his army sparks the final battle between Good and Evil, or Armageddon (Figure 12). The battle concludes with the establishment of the rule of Jesus over the Earth for 1000 years (the "millennium" in premillennial dispensationalism). At the conclusion of this reign of peace, time literally comes to an end as Jesus sorts his subjects and enemies into his kingdom and the lake of fire, respectively, and the earthly world ends.

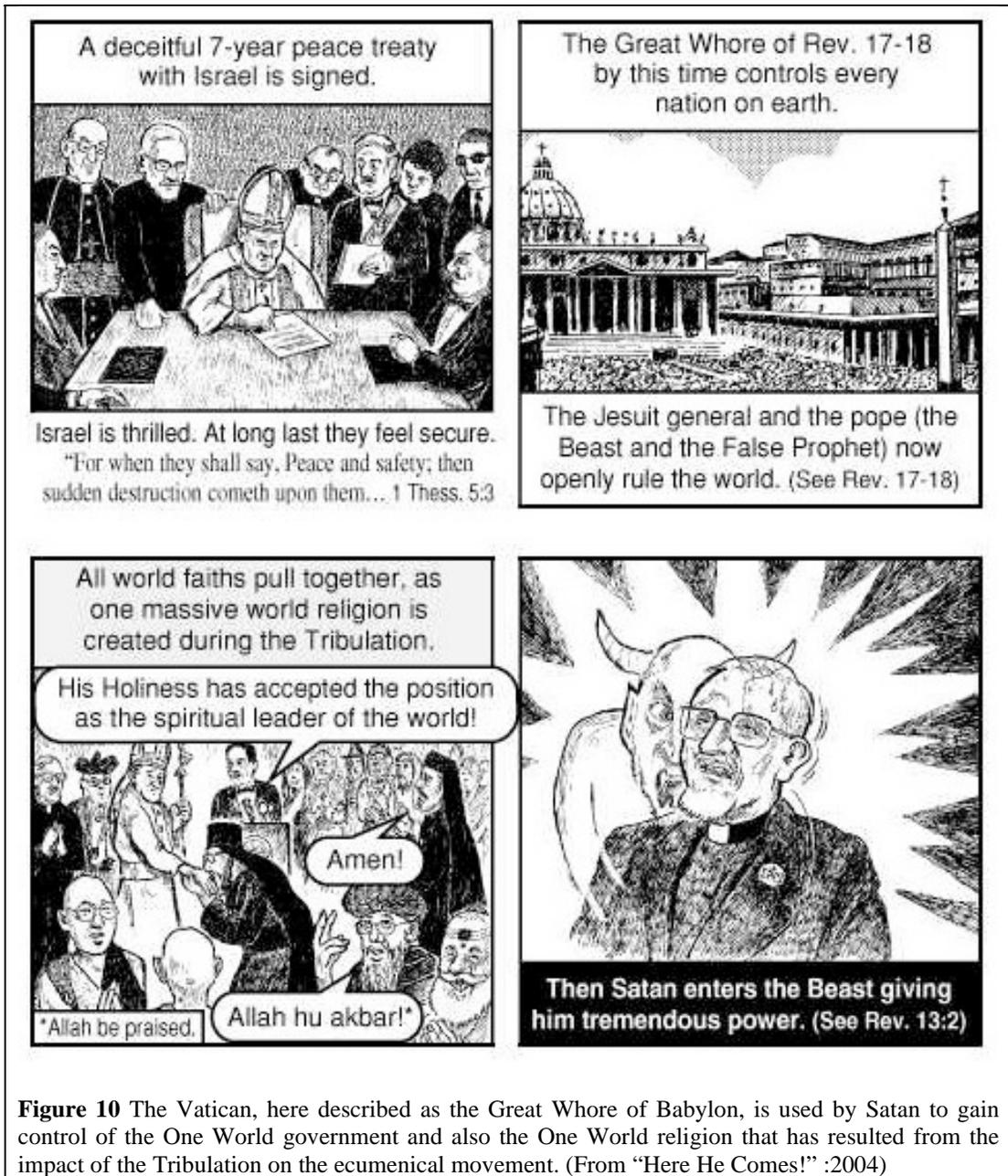
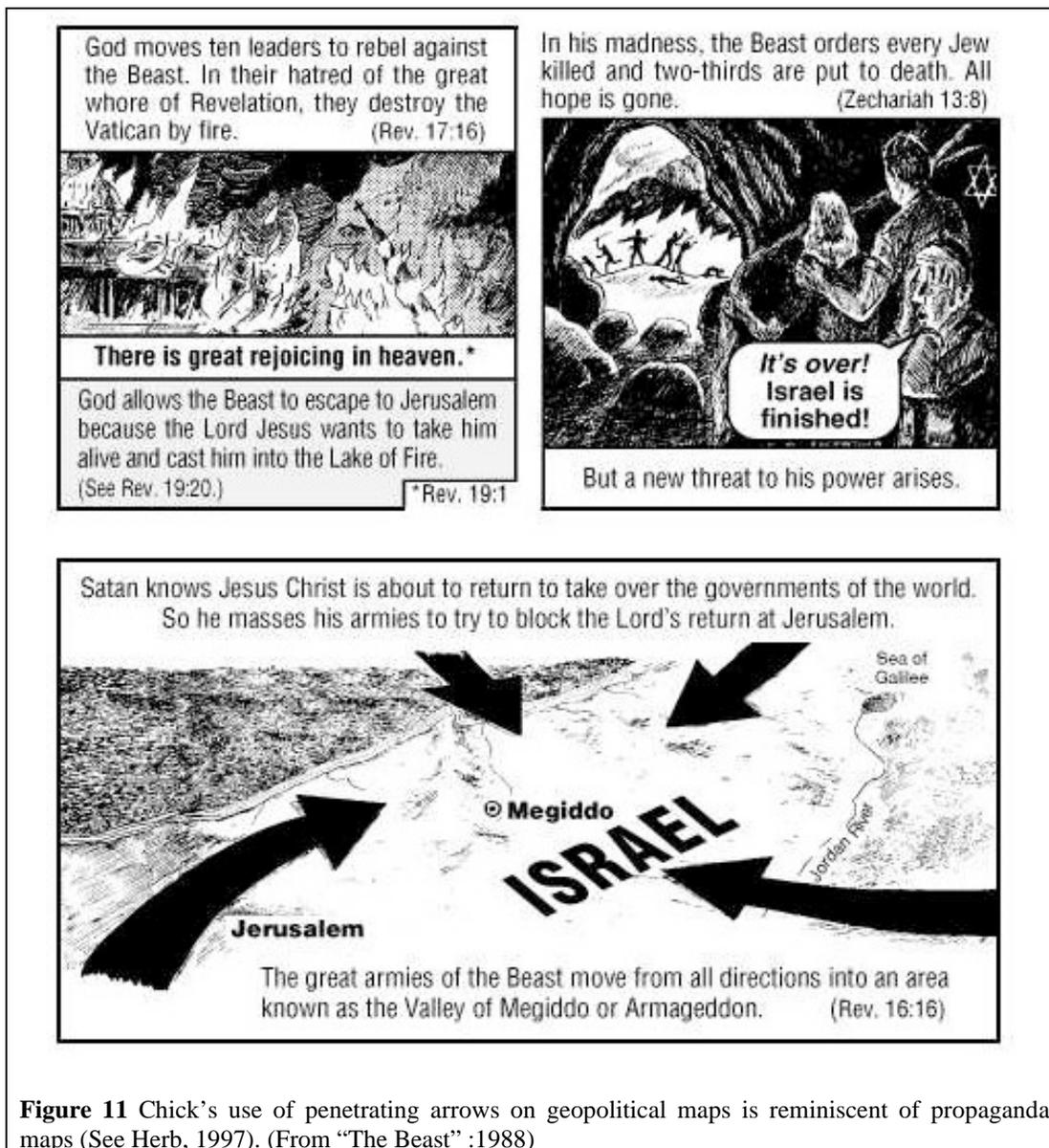


Figure 10 The Vatican, here described as the Great Whore of Babylon, is used by Satan to gain control of the One World government and also the One World religion that has resulted from the impact of the Tribulation on the ecumenical movement. (From "Here He Comes!" :2004)

From Bible Tracts to the White House: Prophecy in American Foreign Policy

Ezekiel tells us that Gog, the nation that will lead all of the other powers of darkness against Israel, will come out of the north. Biblical scholars have been saying for generations that Gog must be Russia. What other powerful nation is to the north of Israel? None. But it didn't seem to make sense before the Russian revolution, when

Russia was a Christian country. Now it does, now that Russia has become communistic and atheistic, now that Russia has set itself against God. Now it fits the description of Gog perfectly. (Ronald Reagan, speaking to James Mills of the California State Senate in 1971 (quoted in Boyer, 1992, 162))



From a secular rationalist perspective, it would be easy to look at the eschatology described in the preceding section and view it as tin-hat numerological conspiracy theory. However, as the above quote implies, the views of Chick and other premillennial dispensationalists are not the geopolitical vision of a fringe group, but rather a geographic imaginary that has had varying degrees of policy

influence over the course of American history. Indeed, millennialism was characteristic of the Puritans who came to America, and the geopolitical identity of

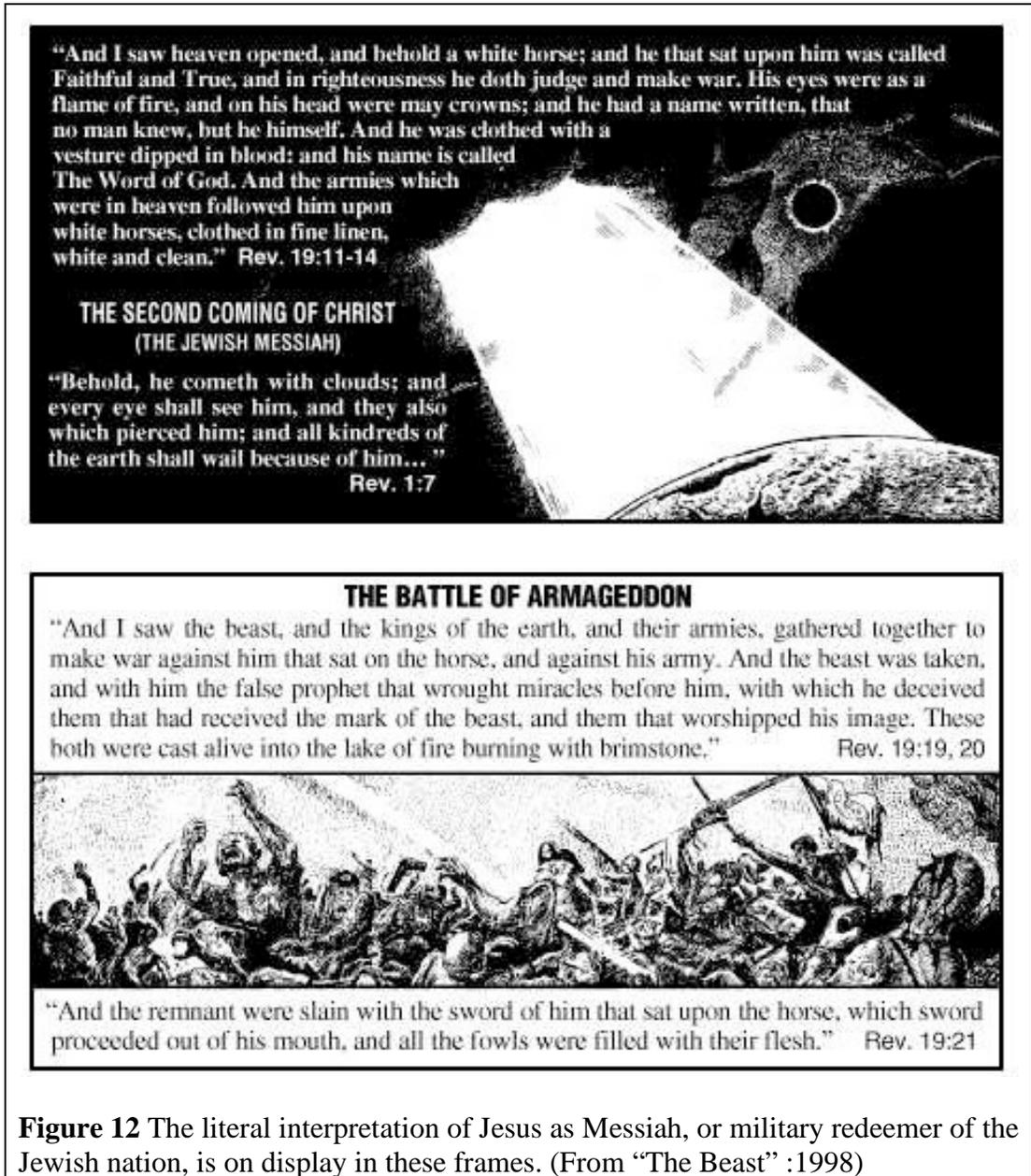


Figure 12 The literal interpretation of Jesus as Messiah, or military redeemer of the Jewish nation, is on display in these frames. (From “The Beast” :1998)

the United States as the “city upon a hill” (Winthrop, 1630) that would provide a beacon of morality and play a special role in God’s plan for the Earth is strong to this day (Tuveson, 1980; Cassara, 1982). The idea of millennial peace through

redemptive violence⁷ has been a continual theme in the security discourse of the United States, from the motto on the national seal (“*Novus Ordo Seclorum*” – the New Order for the Ages) to nuclear-tipped Peacekeeper missiles:

Confronting the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush often framed the conflict with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda and the pursuit of peace in religious terms: “We’re fighting evil” (or “the evil ones”), he pronounced on several occasions. Initially drawing on the rhetoric of theological absolutes, Bush presided over “Operation Infinite Justice” as a “crusade against terrorism.” In his remarks at the Washington National Cathedral on September 14, he stood in the pulpit to announce a world-scale purgation of evil, maintaining that America was called “to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil” (Jewett and Lawrence, 2003, 1-2).

Indeed, foreign policy crises have not only sparked religious rhetoric from presidents and other national leaders but are also tied to upwellings of apocalyptic views among the population. A 2004 Newsweek survey found that 36% of Americans believe that the apocalyptic Book of Revelation in the Bible is “true prophesy” (cited in Moyers 2005). Certainly that percentage does not reflect the number of people who are knowledgeable about the details of prophecy, but nevertheless it can be assumed that the thematic basics, on display in media such as Chick tracts, are familiar to many of them. By adopting the geopolitical vision of Jack Chick, or premillennial dispensationalism more broadly, believers have a framework through which to understand world events, thus aiding in the boosting of knowledge retention and overall interest in world events. As Herman (2000, 24) notes, “American premillennialists are also extremely well informed; they know far more about European political developments than many Europeans.”

The premillennial dispensationalist geopolitical vision does more than simply promote engagement with global affairs. There are several logical policy outgrowths of the vision that are worth noting. First, premillennial dispensationalists are strong proponents of Israel in a way that other Christians have historically not been. “Mainline” Christianity⁸, including Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and other Protestant groups, view the Christian Church as the new Israel referred to in the Bible, and therefore the fate of the state of Israel is

⁷ It should be noted that the notion of peace through redemptive violence is not solely the province of premillennial dispensationalists, but rather is common to many religious groups and even secular groups such as many Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries.

⁸ This is a dubious term given the growing strength of premillennial dispensationalism around the globe. See Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose (1996) for more.

not of theological concern. However, given the role of Israel in the Endtimes (as seen in the Chick tracts above), premillennial dispensationalists see the support of Israel as being equivalent to supporting God. Indeed, a tremendous amount of financial aid has been sent by “Christian Zionists” to settlers in the West Bank (Shindler, 2000), which the premillennial dispensationalists view as the gift of God to his Earthly people, the Jews (see Figure 2, again). Knowing that the premillennialists are a real source of political capital in the United States, the Israeli government even began to refer to the West Bank with Biblical terms such as Judea and Samaria. The impact of this group on American foreign policy is hard to measure, but three of the last five U.S. presidents have characterized themselves as “born again” Christians (Carter, Reagan⁹, and George W. Bush – see Welton, 2003). The perspective of premillennial dispensationalists on Israel is in a way paradoxical – they were partly responsible for the creation of Israel (Shindler, 2000), view that achievement as the fulfillment of prophecy, and are strong supporters of the state. Nevertheless, the more threatened Israel is by its neighbors, the closer the premillennialists sense the second coming of Jesus is.

A secondary result of the premillennial dispensationalist geopolitical vision’s favor of Israel is that the Christian Zionist lobby resents UN Resolution 242, which requires that Israel leave the Occupied Territories (Welton, 2003). This UN resolution just feeds the movement’s view of the United Nations as an agent of Satan, attempting to oust the Jews from the land that God gave them before uniting the world under one government in the Endtimes (Herman, 2000). While many conservatives in the United States oppose the United Nations because they see it as a check on American power, the premillennial dispensationalists have additional reasons to oppose the UN – not only is it seen as a restraint of American power, but it is seen as weakening America just as that power is needed to oppose Satan in the overarching battle between Good and Evil (Boyer 1992).

Another example of how the premillennial dispensationalist worldview has impacted geopolitics can be seen in international cooperation on environmental issues. Premillennialists, although not all of them, have often rejected cuts in resource consumption or concern over global warming, either arguing that God will provide ample resources until the appointed time of His return or that the world’s end is so close that we cannot ruin the Earth in the time left. Similarly, support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq was widespread among Premillennialists because of a widespread conviction that a massive war in the Middle East marks the beginning of the sequence of events that culminate in the end of the world. Further, many believe that references to Babylon in the Book of Revelation must be taken

⁹ Welton (2003) reports that Hal Lindsay, author of *The Late Great Planet Earth* and prominent premillennial dispensationalist, was asked to provide a National Security Council briefing on the possibility of nuclear war with the Soviet Union.

literally, and so Saddam Hussein's attempts in the 1970s to rebuild Babylon signaled his potential claim to the title of Antichrist (Boyer 2003).

Measuring the actual impact of premillennial dispensationalists on policy formation is of course a dubious business, as the psychology of decision making at the presidential level are of course well beyond the ability of academics to do anything but speculate¹⁰. Still, evidence can be seen in the connections between policy makers and lobbying groups, such as 2006 meetings between the White House and Christians United for Israel (Blumenthal 2006), an organization that describes support for Israeli territorial expansion as a "biblical imperative"¹¹. In this meeting, issues such as Iran's nuclear program were discussed, including the need to cut aid for Palestine and the need to give Israel a free hand in their conflict with Hezbollah. Of course, it is not necessary for actual American policies to be impacted in order for this group to have geopolitical significance. There are many ways to practice geopolitics, from personal financial donations for pro-Israeli causes to creating international networks of Evangelical support (financial or otherwise) via the Internet.

Endtimes Conclusions

This paper has endeavored to explicate some of the geopolitical ramifications of the religious doctrine known as premillennial dispensationalism. More importantly however, this paper has attempted to illustrate how the proselytizing of Jack Chick and those who purchase his cartoon tracts for distribution contributes to the "mise-en-scène" of the geopolitical vision that goes along with their theology. O'Tuathail (1996, 30) refers to the mise-en-scène as the "art of setting a stage scene or arranging a theatrical production."

To that end, the choice of cartoon tracts is important, and tactics like the distribution of tracts are likely factors in the spread of premillennial dispensationalist theology around the world (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose, 1996). The union of text and image inherent to the medium is amenable to cheap production and maximum literacy by people of different languages and literary abilities. In fact, the tracts are available in 117 languages, in part because of the ease of digitally modifying tracts for re-publication with different text. The visual production (choice of images, text, and perspective) of Chick's geopolitics is critical, for as some of the images included above show, there is a substantial degree of nuance to each image, packing a lot of detail into a small space (i.e., the

¹⁰ Even were the President to admit to such an influence, the pronouncement could be easily dismissed as pandering to Evangelicals.

¹¹ This quote comes from <http://cufi.org>, the home page for Christians United for Israel (last accessed 1/3/07).

facial expressions of the Arabs in Figure 2, the scar on the Beast's face in Figure 6). In addition, the use of cartoons enables Chick to create images that allow readers to fill in the details; to illustrate this point, imagine if Chick were to produce a movie of the Endtimes. The special effects budget would be enormous if a contemporary audience is to believe what it is seeing. Further, the image is much richer in the readers' imaginations than it could ever be on television or in a movie. All of this may seem like a great deal of attention to be paid to Bible tracts. However, it is important to remember the extensive distribution of his work; just because he works in a socially demeaned medium does not mean that he lacks social impact. Further, other extensions of premillennial dispensationalism into geopolitical discourse through the mass media of popular culture undoubtedly have an even larger impact. For example, the *Left Behind* book series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins has sold over 63 million copies in the past decade¹². The role of popular culture in advancing this geopolitical vision is a topic that deserves attention in the future.

To that end, this paper serves as an initial foray into the study of the geopolitics of Christian fundamentalism. As stated earlier, in political geography religion is too often seen as an electoral bias or simply a form of identity. However, as we have seen in this paper there is substantially more to premillennial dispensationalism than a sense of collective identity or an electoral tendency to vote Republican. Rather, with this affiliation comes a different, often anti-nationalist geopolitical vision through which all incoming information is filtered and comprehended. Despite the secular rationalist objections to this worldview, it should be noted that this geopolitical vision is long-lived and sufficiently malleable (Herman 2000) that it is likely to be perpetuated in the future.

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¹² In an example of their eschatological humor, LaHaye and Jenkins slated their most recent book, *The Rapture*, to be published on 6/6/06, a clear reference to the number of the Beast.

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