



The New Environmental Priesthood

BY IAIN MURRAY

Religion plays a vitally important role in human life. This is especially true in America, and America's dominant religion has always been Christianity. In 2004, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 71 percent of Americans agreed with three central Christian statements: "prayer is an important part of my daily life;" "we will all be called before God on judgment day to answer for our sins;" and "I never doubt the existence of God." That figure was only 54 percent for self-identified liberals and 52 percent for self-identified liberal Democrats.

Liberal involvement with traditional religion has been falling for 20 years. In 1988, the last full year of Ronald Reagan's presidency, Pew found that as many white evangelical Protestants identified themselves as Democrat as Republican—33 percent each. By 2004, only 22 percent of such Protestants identified themselves as Democrats, compared to 43 percent as Republicans. Among Roman Catholics, affiliation with the Democratic Party fell from 41 percent as recently as 1994 to just 28 percent in 2004.

Human nature abhors a religious vacuum. The number of people who do not believe in any kind of higher power is small indeed. Other than the handful you might find at a gathering of nuclear

physicists or Marxist historians, in general, people feel the need to answer to some higher power.

Just as environmentalism has replaced Marxism as the central economic theory of the far Left, so too has environmentalism begun to replace liberal Christianity as the Left's motivating religious force. Were it not for the presence of powerful African American Protestant churches in the liberal alliance, environmentalism might have supplanted liberal Christianity already.

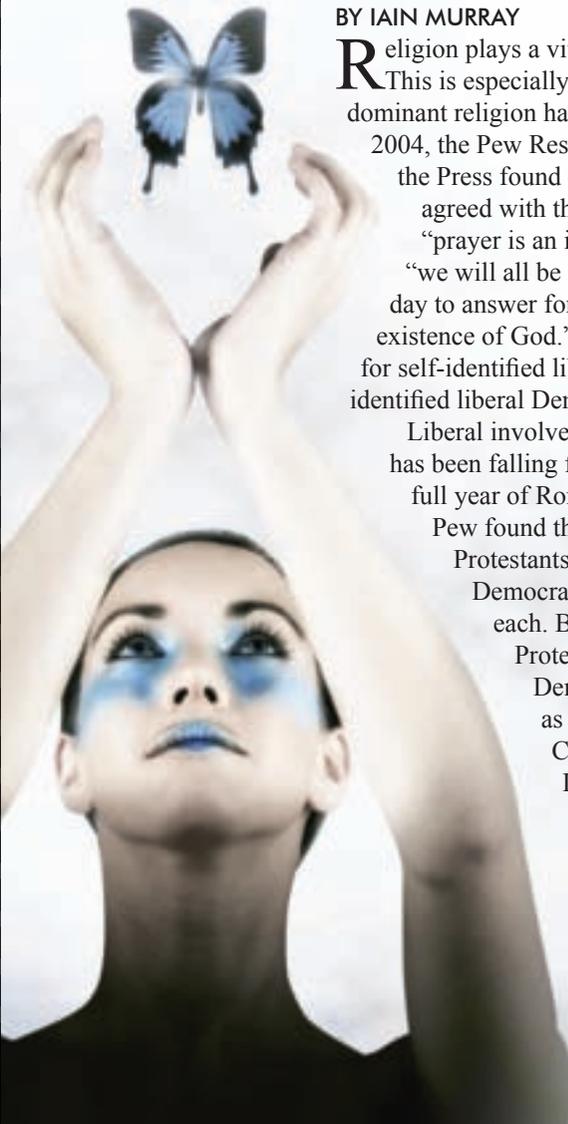
The causality works both ways: The environmental movement has taken on facets of religion. The movement's increasingly religious tone has attracted those who are thirsty for spiritual gratification yet averse to traditional religions.

There are two dominant mythical forces in the cosmologies of ancient Indo-European religions: the Weather God (Zeus, Jupiter, Thor) and the Earth Mother (Gaia, Ceres, Freya). The Weather God resides in the sky and lashes down rain, hail, and thunder on those who anger him. The Earth Mother gives her faithful followers her bounty, but when they fail her in some way, she retaliates with famine. Frequently, the two are married.

Today, both the Weather God and Earth Mother are central to the global warming issue. The atmosphere is to be protected at all costs, its avatar appeased by the closing of power stations and shutting down of internal combustion engines. Thus, his hurricanes are to be averted and his beneficent winds are to drive turbines. Moreover, the Earth is to be worshipped by returning to her simpler ways, with people shunning biotechnology and nuclear power. She will reward them.

These two gods are supported by a variety of hierophants and augurs. Shamefully, many of them

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are supposed scientists. A scientist who says that the atmosphere is warming, and cites certain physical processes, is still a scientist. A scientist who argues that people must take certain acts to avoid disaster has become a priest. It is no coincidence that words like prophet, seer, and sage, historically associated with religious figures, now are routinely applied to leading alarmist scientists. The leader of the movement, sermonizer supreme Al Gore, is even adoringly referred to by true believers as The Goracle.

Who makes up the rank and file of the clergy, the hedge-priests as it were? That is where the Internet comes in. The role of a priest is to reveal mysteries, to soothe the faithful. No one fits this description better these days than bloggers. When some new scientific finding comes out which challenges their worldview, the blogs vigorously defend the creed.

Take, for example, last December's release of a report by Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) that chronicled how no fewer than 400 academics working in the field of climate analysis had cast doubt during the year on the theory of man-made climate catastrophe. Despite the fact that the paper reported the researchers' own words, the bloggers acted to discredit the study and reassure the faithful that their creed stood unchallenged.

Taking their cue from The Goracle, whose office condemned the report on the grounds that "twenty-five or thirty of the scientists may have received funding from Exxon Mobile [sic] Corp," DeSmogBlog was first into the fray, calling the report "bunk." It contended that the list was made up of "deniers-for-hire." Forced to concede that many names were not on the usual environmental enemies list, the blog simply asserted that, "It seems fair to assume that this, too, is an ideologically driven document with no merit whatsoever, either as a piece of research or, even more laughably, a reliable comment on science."

Next up was *Grist* magazine, where Andrew Dessler dismissed the report with a wave of his priestly hand. He said that the report



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"provides a long list of names of people who disagree with the consensus, and I have no doubt that many on this list are indeed skeptics. The question is: does their opinion matter? Should you revise your views about climate change accordingly? Considering the source, I think we all know the answer to that." Dessler observed that physicist Freeman Dyson had made the list, but that just as you would not take a sick child to Dyson to heal, so too would you not take a sick planet to him either. The fact that no one has ever been in the business of healing planets does not matter.

The American Prospect's blog simply contended that Sen. Inhofe's staff were "still tirelessly plugging away at global warming denialism," blaming the messenger rather than confronting the arguments of the 400 academics. The blog also called the report "false" and "blatantly misleading." Former Clinton administration appointee Joseph Romm characterized the study as "recyc[ling] unscientific attacks on global warming." When *New York Times* environment correspondent Andrew Revkin, one of the few reporters to even-handedly cover the global warming debate, mentioned the Inhofe study on

his blog, Romm slammed him for legitimizing it, calling Revkin's coverage "amazing." Romm went on to suggest that Freeman Dyson was not a serious scientist, which is a bit like saying Tiger Woods isn't a good golfer.

The report was released on December 21, 2007. These many reactions were posted and disseminated to the faithful by December 22. No one needed to read the report to make up his mind. The priesthood did it for us.

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This article is excerpted from his new book The Really Inconvenient Truths: Seven Environmental Catastrophes the Liberals Don't Want You to Know About—Because they Helped Cause Them.