

## APOCALYPSE IN OUR TIME

### II Thessalonians 2:1-12

*“Now concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ  
and our assembly to meet him,  
we beg you, brethren,  
not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited  
either by spirit or by word  
or by a letter purport to be from us,  
to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come.”*  
(II Thessalonians 2:1-2)

People out of their struggle and out of their faith  
have expected the imminent return of Christ  
ever since the day Christ ascended into heaven  
when two angels had to tell the disciples—  
as they looked up into heaven—  
that they were looking in the wrong direction.  
They to go to Jerusalem as Christ had directed them  
there to receive the Holy Spirit.

The Christians in Thessalonica were no exception.  
They were troubled and vexed by prophecies and predictions.  
of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once again today we have been overtaken by apocalypse.  
Since the word “apocalypse” enjoys a certain vogue  
not simply among Christians but those who are concerned  
about the environment and global disaster that awaits us.

It is well to attempt a definition of “Apocalypse.”  
It literally means “unveiling,” “revelation”—  
Specifically, the unveiling of a predetermined plan  
for the consummation and end of history.

Even for those who never read the Bible  
still the Bible's apocalyptic writings has entered the public mind  
as it gives witness of a great cataclysm  
and so, the term apocalypse has come to mean  
by derivation "the end of the world"  
and by implication, the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth.

The apocalyptic vision offers an unavoidable  
and accelerating struggle between good and evil powers  
of cosmic proportion ultimately culminating in a final battle  
"Armageddon" in which the good triumphs  
and establishes total supremacy in a new "world."

This vision is found not only in the Book of Revelation  
sometimes referred to as "The Apocalypse of John"  
but in various apocalyptic writings—  
from Daniel, as well as I Enoch and Book of Jubilees  
(pseudepigraph books that did not make it into the Hebrew Bible)  
as well as the Qumran Dead Sea scroll "War of the Sons of Light  
Against the Sons of Darkness"

--all written before John wrote on the Island of Patmos.

A modern example of apocalyptic writing  
that has been made into movies is "The Lord of the Rings."

In this apocalyptic vision of ends and beginnings  
"world" has been taken uncritically  
to refer to the physical universe, or less grandiosity, to human history.

But world is neither physical reality itself nor history  
though it has both a reality and a history.

When we use the word "world" we mean  
our limited "picture" of what reality is like.

Reality is far more complex picture than any picture we have.  
But it is by these shared pictures of the world  
that human beings communicate.

Ask anybody to close his or her eyes and tell you  
what they see when you speak the word “world.”

Chances are they will describe a globe spinning in space,  
with nowhere special to go except around and around the sun.

William Blake was already factually correct  
two centuries ago when he wrote: (*Milton*, Book I, 31)

*“As of a Glove rolling thro’ Voidness, it is a deception of Ulro.  
The microscope knows not of this nor the Telescope they alter  
The rations of the Spectator’s Organs, but leave the Objects untouch’d  
For every space larger than a red Globule of man’s blood  
Is visionary....”*

Blake calls our image of world visionary  
because it concerns not so much the physical planet  
as the meaning and direction of human life.

A spinning globe has no meaning and direction only eternal return.  
What is needed is an image of “world” which possesses  
both temporal movement and a call to transcendence.

So, let me imagine for you an alternative picture.  
Imagine “world” as a completed portion of a suspension bridge  
like they are building across the Saint Croix near Stillwater.

It is a bridge that spans the waters of an abyss.  
God himself has fixed the cables—  
that much is given to us as the irreducible minimum  
of the boundary of our lives.

We must live suspended over the void  
between eternity and eternity.  
And on these slim cables we are to build a bridge  
to fashion a “world,” to create a *cosmos*  
which means “order,” “form,” “adornment.”

We are to blaze a way to the other side  
where there waits for us a City, a New Jerusalem.

When early societies claim divine revelation  
as the source of these strands across the abyss  
as the substructures of our common building—  
they were acknowledging that the fact of the configuration works  
is a testimony that corresponds to the requirements of human life  
as that reality-itself has confirmed the wisdom of the effort.

Rilke, the wondrous German spiritual poet, understood this.  
*“So long as you catch what you yourself have thrown,  
all is skill and justifiable winnings;  
only when you suddenly become the catcher of the  
ball that an eternal playmate  
threw you, dead center, is precisely  
mastered trajectory, in one of those arches  
from God’s great bridge-building:  
only then is being able to catch an achievement—  
not your own, a world’s.”*

The world is not a figment of a poet’s imagination.  
Reality-itself understood in biblical terms  
is the creation which God creates and calls good.

This view offers a physical universe and orders life  
and all the other “givenness” which we encounter  
as the inescapable limitation and definition of our existence.

The “world” in biblical terms is not reality-itself  
but participates in it and is continually transforming itself.

This is a “world” filled with “principalities and powers”  
a transcendent “spiritual atmosphere”  
that dominate an age, a culture or civilization.

Its very invisibility is the source of its power.  
It hides behind ideologies, institutions and in seductive images  
that make its power felt.

We live in this world and we are left with the thinking  
that it is the *only* possible world, as reality-itself.

This world operates at a level which is both  
pre-rational and pre-ethical and sets the circumference  
within which reason and ethics are allowed to move.

In so far as such a world of shared perceptions  
preserves cosmos, an ordered life, we need to be grateful.

For we could scarcely function apart from it.

But in as much this cosmos is *man's cosmos*  
it is tainted with man's alienation, his own guilt, power-lust  
so "this world" becomes man's evil blown up large  
evil on a cosmic scale.

This cosmic evil ultimate origin is in man himself  
it is personified in the Book of Revelation as Satan, Devil, Dragon  
made to embody the spirit of the age.

Man, by intruding his own sin into the picture of "world,"  
has so distorted the world that all that can be seen is his own works.

He builds the bridge and does tolerably well.

As long as relative tranquility endures  
the bridge seems secure yet he ignores the abyss it hovers over.

Under the stress of human traffic oblivious to everything else  
there comes a tear, an unbuckling and a collapse  
as the Minneapolis bridge collapse, a few years ago  
to everyone's surprise and dismay claiming lives.

It is at such moment that we are given a glimpse  
of what is called in the Book of Revelation "the pit of the abyss."

It is the moment we realize the "world" is nothing more  
than a stop-over a temporary stop-over bridge which spans the deeps.

Those who return—I speak in images but of real things—  
many who fall through the holes never return—  
it is they who can describe the nature of the assault on culture  
and the prospects of its survival.

These are the visionaries, like John, who fell  
through the cracks of the Roman world of Nero  
to record a society's ills from the "other side."

The Apocalypse of Enoch written in second century BCE declares:

*“I saw in a vision how the heaven collapsed and was borne off....  
I saw how the earth was swallowed up in a great abyss..  
And there upon a word fell into my mouth and I lifted up my voice  
To cry aloud, and said: ‘The earth is destroyed.’”*

Our proper response should not to dismiss him as a fanatic  
proved wrong by history  
but to ask whether that time may not also have come upon us.

Apocalypticism arises when the cracks under our feet can be seen  
as it offers an awful perception of the end of our “world”  
and the vision of the coming of the new.

Ezekiel saw the cracks in his world  
staggering of the Kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE  
the end of its time as a sovereign nation now captive to Babylon.

Daniel saw the cracks in his world in 167 BCE  
as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a son of a general to Alexander  
sought to exterminate the Jewish religion.

Luther was the bell weather of the end of the middle ages  
and the birth of the modern age.

It is one thing to speak of the creation and destructions of “worlds”  
when what we are talking about are the periodic changes within history.

Margaret Mead said, once the Atomic Bomb fell on Hiroshima  
that time can be divide BAB and AAB (before and after the bomb).

But apocalyptic vision speaks of an absolute End to history.

This throws us into the controversy and confusion  
between prophecy and apocalyptic.

Prophecy completes the end of this historical epoch  
as the judgment of God and a new epoch that will appear in history.

Apocalyptic despairs of history and of this world  
and looks for a world to come  
which is built on different foundation.

But in fact the end keeps on not coming  
which brough apocalyptic into disrepute  
with all those but the oppressed.

D.H. Lawrence “Apocalypse” speaks of miners  
who in their desperate condition see the end of the world  
whereas, the owners of the mine  
see God in his heaven and that all is well with the world.

What is lost is the apocalypse has existential meaning  
that the end is at hand and all life  
must be reordered in the light of that “fact.”

Here we believe we live in the light of eternity  
the moment we let our lives hinge on God who makes  
our humanity manifest in Jesus Christ.

Liberation of “this world” has begun.

It is for this reason the Christian prays “thy kingdom come”  
not only for oneself but for all the world.

The Christian understands the apocalyptic  
is love translated into cosmic terms.

The goal of such a vision is the absolute consummation  
of God’s intention with all humanity who live in time  
does the visionary life of the Christian come into its own.

Here the Christian is freed from anxiety about the future  
and so, can live fully now.

Here the Christian is freed from the seduction of the present  
to live for the future of God.

We live with eternity in time.

We live in but not of the world,

Each new world is *terminus* to the old—j  
but not the *telos* (end of all worlds came on the cross  
“It is finished”) the coming of the kingdom of God—  
so making each new world in man’s image, not God’s  
calls Christians once more “outside the gates” (Hebrews 12:13)  
to be with those who found not place in that “brave new world.”

The Christian is moved to flee and to renounce the world  
not because he despises the world  
but because he hopes in the future of the world  
as proclaimed in God's promises.  
It is this hope that gives him  
a responsibility for the world and its future.

Grasping this apocalyptic vision that already prefigures  
the City of God which comes  
and to reach out to what is ahead  
the Christian must struggle continually to maintain  
the consciousness of a resident alien  
whose allegiance and citizenship are with God.  
It is because God loves "the world" that God calls  
Christians out of it, alienates them from it,  
frees them and sends them to proclaim  
similar deliverance to the captives "of this world"—  
all done in the name of that kingdom  
which always comes and has never yet come.

Such is the apocalyptic stance that is the permanent fate  
of the Christian, this side of Kingdom Come.

It is neither a delusion of fanatics  
nor an escape-value for emergencies.

The apocalyptic vision does not place the Christian  
already in the new world of God which is coming.

Instead, it places the Christian at the juncture of the ages  
in the time of crucifixion, bearing the cross.

The Christian is called to live "as if" his vision  
were not only a true potentiality but an emerging reality.

This makes the Christian at odds with the old reality.

It is for this reason the Christian  
is required to continual "dying to the world."

It is only in order that the Christian can become for others  
the instrument of their liberation to the old and dying world.

Here is the counsel of the New Testament  
for those who live in end times.

*“So death is at work in us, but life in you.”* (II Corinthians 4:12)

For though *“the form of this world is passing away”*  
(I Corinthians 7:31) and *“the whole world is in the power  
of the evil one.”* (I John 5:19), yet *“he who is in you  
is greater than he who is in the world”* (I John 4:4).

*“For whoever is begotten of God  
Overcomes the world. And this is the victory  
That overcomes the world, our faith.”* (I John 5:4)

Such is the promise of God given to us in this apocalyptic hour.

D-Day was the landing of the Allies on the beaches of Normandy.  
It was one of the decision battles of the WWII.

If Germany had pushed the Allies back into the English Channel  
than the war would have ended quite differently.

But they didn't and V-day...

Victory Day and came because the end was inevitable.

Christ has come and died for us and was raised from the dead.

D-Day is upon us. Decision Day. The is now in sight.

Christ is the end, the fulfillment of history.

We no longer live in expectation but in fullness of time.

The present is charged with eternity.

Every moment given in the name of Christ

is an open door to heaven giving a terrible relevance  
to all that we do in Christ's name.

V-Day, Victory Day, is already assured us in Christ.

The new thing God is doing on the last day

In addition to the decisive event of the cross

Is that the entire world will be changed into Christ's glorious body.

The battle of Good Friday is decisive for the war has been won.  
We live Good Friday...knowing Easter is coming!

