

The Archetype of the Apocalypse

What ultra right Christians, the Islamic State, and Climate Change Deniers Have in Common

by Richard Stein

A couple of years ago, I walked out to the beach with an old friend who was visiting from India; it was a beautiful, warm day in January, right after a storm, and the air was crystal clear and the sea calm. As we sat and watched the waves, I said, “It's too bad you can't have a winter day like this anymore and not think about global warming.” He paused, then said, “I wasn't thinking about global warming.” After a good laugh, we changed the subject to how great it was for him to be back in California.

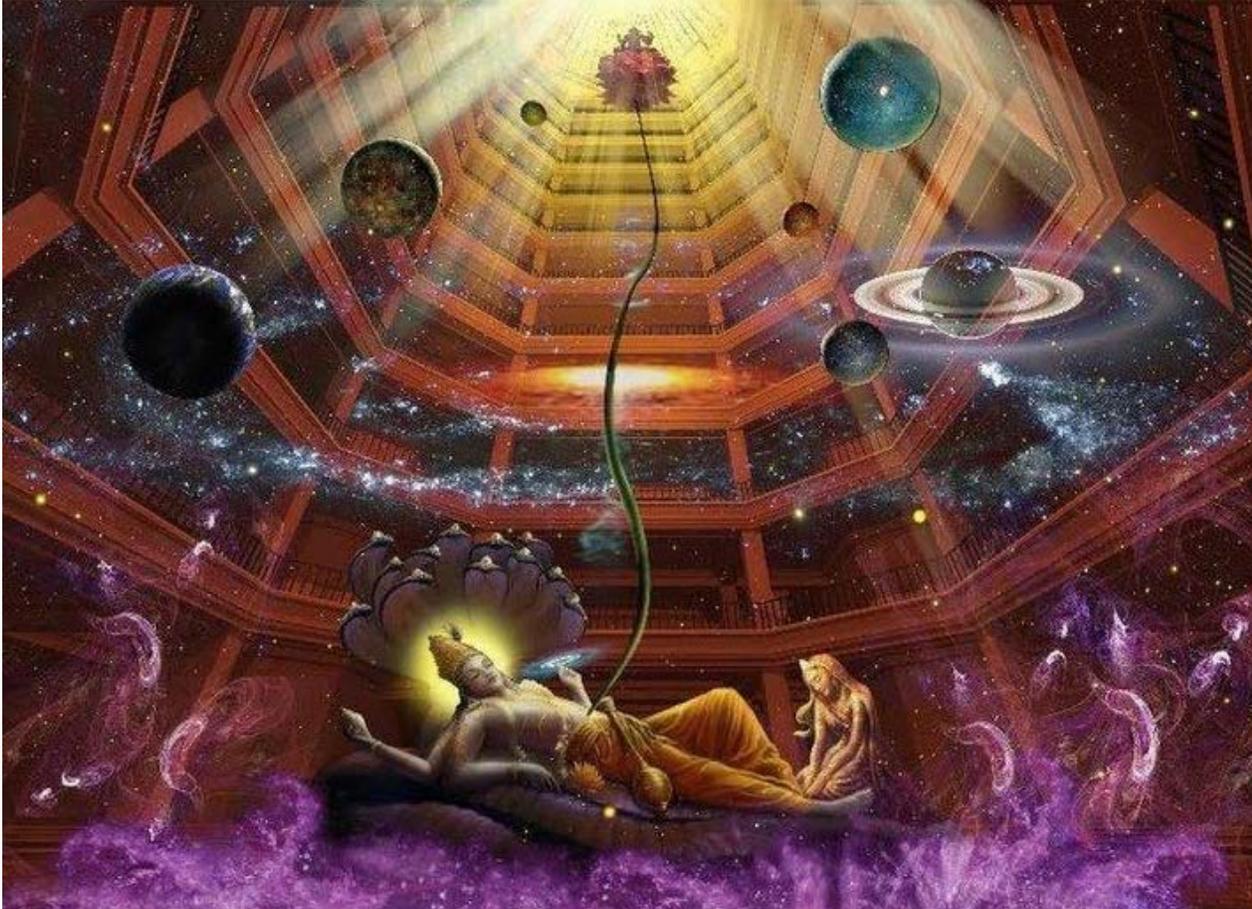
Ever since then, I've taken more careful note of how much we live in a doom and gloom thought machine, about everything from the environment, to the economy, to wars, pollution, and now, of course, the politics of the upcoming election (which seems to have been upcoming for the longest time.) I remember, when I was growing up in the deep South during the Cold war, the nonsensical fire drills to prepare for a nuclear attack. The local air force base in Montgomery was known to be on a Soviet target list, so

the Cuban missile crisis felt viscerally scary, even by today's color coded danger levels; and the fantastical idea that hiding under a wooden desk would somehow prevent me from being burnt to a crisp sowed the first seeds of my mistrust in the government.

In high school, we all read Animal Farm and Brave New World, but 1984 was the first such book to attach a specific date to the coming darkness. The violence of the Civil Rights movement, Viet Nam, and assassinations increased the feeling that we were heading into a time of great destruction. By the time I was in medical school in the late '60's, there was blood in the streets, and we all knew people who'd been sent off to fight in South East Asia. Like many of you must remember, there was something like a collective mood to the late '60's, on the one hand a dire sense of crisis, but on the other a hopeful expectation of renewal and social change. Behind this was the Cold War, with its ominous warnings about Mutual Assured Destruction and Nuclear Winter. It seemed that for the first time, humanity was in a position to destroy itself.

The ancient religions of the Near and Far East had their own mythologies for apocalypse, but it was in the hands of the gods, not the realm of human invention or insanity. In India, Vishnu had created the universe out of his navel, but would, at the end of time, withdraw it back into himself. He was linked with Yama, the god of death, who was known to the Persians as Yima. It is in pre-Islamic Persia that the god of death and destruction, who is also a redeemer to the faithful, takes on the features that will shape the religions of Abraham. Zarathustra believed that Ahura Mazda would overcome his enemy in a final battle, destroy all evil, and restore the order of the cosmos, joining together heaven and earth. This prophecy gave birth to the Messianic idea in Judaism and laid the seeds for the "Second Coming" in Christianity. Over time, with the ascendancy of monotheism in Western culture, the positive dominion of the god-image

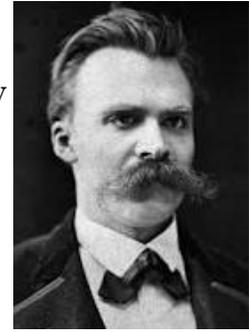
was ensconced in heaven, leaving the split off destructive aspects to the devil and hell. As long as things in the human realm remain stable and relatively tolerable, the god of light is protecting us, but when they go awry for too long, that belief is strained.



As we shall see, the archetype of the apocalypse took different forms in these religions, but the underlying assumption was that it would be up to the gods or God as to if and when this happened. The belief was:

“If God is not going to intervene to save us in time, then He will end time itself.”

Then something in the collective psyche changed. Forces building since the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the ascendancy of science led to the overthrow of this old structure. In Thus Spake Zarathustra, Frederick Nietzsche said publicly what many had been thinking in private. This old god-image was dead. But while his



“atheistic” position has received so much attention, the larger context of his message has often been overlooked. In part 3 of the Prologue, Zarathustra says:

“I conjure you, my brethren, REMAIN TRUE TO THE EARTH, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthy hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not.

Despisers of life are they, decaying ones and poisoned ones themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so away with them!

Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy; but God died, and therewith also those blasphemers. To blaspheme the earth is now the dreadfulest sin...”

The ongoing conflict between religion and science in society shows how epochal were Nietzsche's predictions about the passing of an age; the “despisers of life,” as he calls them, are still around in large numbers. And nothing really exposes this contempt for life on earth more than the religious zeal of organized, apocalyptic groups. In the brief time we have, I want to explore two of today's religious expressions of the Abrahamic apocalypse, and suggest an unconscious connection to a very real apocalyptic threat and anti-scientific belief system that has arisen in our times. The undeniable

reality of climate change raises the specter of a new kind of apocalypse, and the question of how much this is due to human activity. If God is dead, as Nietzsche proclaimed, then the destructive power once attributed to him is now in human hands. But before looking at the current situation, I'd like to review some historical background of the Abrahamic religions and their versions of the archetype of the apocalypse.

The Hebrew Bible

The earliest known Biblical scripture of this type is the Book of Daniel. Written during the Maccabean wars in the second century BCE, the first part of it refers to predictions that were supposed to have been made many centuries earlier but were now coming true. The Hebrew people had faced the flood, the bondage in Egypt, and then the Babylonian exile in the 7th Century BCE. In each case, they were rescued by “the outstretched hand” of God in these moments of crisis. During the time of Daniel, they were faced with persecution and the growing threat of the Assyrian empire. As things got worse, the promise of “the kingdom of God on earth” seemed more remote than ever. The building tensions led to two new forms of religious belief, expressed by the shamans of these desert tribes. The first was an apocalyptic vision of the end of time: if God does not deliver us in time, He will end time and the creation itself. This motif goes back to the Persian prophet Zarathustra more than a thousand years earlier, who is the main character in Nietzsche's literary masterpiece.



Zarathustra (aka Zoroaster in Greek) was born in 628 BCE



The word “apocalypse” in Greek actually means “revelation” in the sense of uncovering. What is revealed in the apocalypse is the voice of God, as spoken through his prophet. In the case of Judaism, it was ascribed to Daniel, while in Christianity it is Jesus Christ. In order to make space, so to speak, for this new teaching, the old one has to be destroyed.

The other emerging form of thought during this historic period was Gnostic. One of the basic beliefs of the early Jewish gnostics was that the god who presided over this creation is not the true god, but a demonic power. The only way out was to be rescued by “the real God” who would send his female counterpart in the form of Sophia to save us. These two streams of prophecy emerged in the century before Jesus, and *it seems quite possible that Jesus’ genius was to synthesize them in a teaching about the inner world. As he said: The Kingdom of God is within.* Obviously this psychologically difficult task did not succeed for the masses who flocked to early Christianity, especially after the new religion was adopted by Constantine of Rome for state purposes. Although variations of both visions were developed since then, outer events in the last century have revitalized them. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1946 led to a new understanding of early gnostic wisdom, at the same time that the explosion of the atomic bomb created fertile soil for the apocalyptic vision to re-emerge with renewed vigor.



Revelations

The Christian belief in the second coming of Christ dates to the early centuries

after Jesus, but the widespread form of it known as “the Rapture” is relatively modern. Beginning in England in the 1830's, it spread to the United States where it became popular in the 20th Century. The earlier version was a raising of the souls of the departed to be reunited with Christ in heaven, but in its later “pre-tribulation” form, the remainder of humanity is left to live through a terrible time on earth. As with much apocalyptic prophecy, it uses past predictions to bolster the belief in future ones, and anticipates a worsening of conditions for the faithful leading up to a final catastrophe.



Certainly the 1870's, when Nietzsche wrote “Zarathustra”, were a frightening and unstable time, with one of the worst economic collapses in Western history (the Panic of 1873). The difficulties which began then led in a generation to the Great War, which ended in catastrophe in 1918. It was in early 1919 that this prophetic vision was given famous literary expression by the poet William Butler Yeats:

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?





**YOU MUST
BE SIN FREE**

**PLEASE REPENT
Take No Chances!**

Otherwise
**YOU WILL BE
LEFT BEHIND!**

The Rapture is Imminent

**You MUST Repent Every Day of Your Sins
You MUST mean it with all your heart!**

- No Sex Outside of Marriage
- No Addictions (smoking, pot, drugs, etc.)
- No Pornography
- No Fighting, Anger, Dissensions or Hatred
- You MUST have forgiven EVERYONE

Do NOT get LEFT BEHIND!

JESUS CHRIST is coming for a SPOTLESS BRIDE!

For Special Prayers to Help You and Your Family Prepare, Please Go Here
<http://www.tribulation-now.org/rapture-prayers-for-purification/>

*A Massive
Earthquake / Tsunami
will Likely Precede
the Rapture*

*California & New York
will be Destroyed*

THIS IS IT!

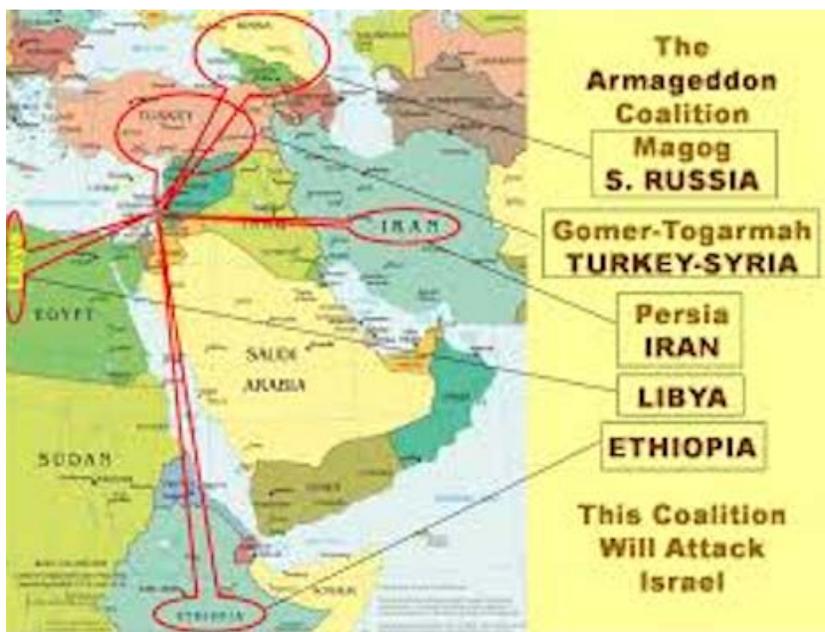
It is no longer shocking to learn that over half of Americans believe that the Rapture is real and will happen soon, and a quarter of those polled expect the return of Jesus by the year 2050. These staggering numbers contributed to the election of George W. Bush as the 43rd president, and have enabled a new and deeply disturbing myth at

the heart of American politics. One of the darker effects has been on US relations to the Middle East. American Evangelicals raise huge amounts of money for Israel, but to what end? They believe firmly in the end of days, and in the Book of Revelations' anticipation that this will arrive at a time when the “holy land” is united as Jewish territory, so it can be the center of the final holy war.



The battlefield will be on the plains of “Har Meggido,” (Hebrew for “strong

mountain,"); this name was translated into the Greek version of the New Testament as Armagheddon. Now in modern Israel, it was an ancient place on the trade route between Egypt and Assyria. In this collective belief, the land is very important, but not in and of itself, much less for the benefit of the people who live on it. This land is simply the place predicted by myth for the final destruction of earthly life. There are four groups run by Evangelical churches for followers to view the future battlefield where Russian tanks from neighboring Arab states will fight the Israeli army. The money raised by these churches and preachers does not go to the Israeli government or even to aid groups, but is solely for the purpose of strengthening and expanding the settlement movement. This serves two purposes: first it helps to expand the Jewish presence into historic areas meant to be part of a unified Israel, and second, this blocks any attempt to find a peaceful two state solution to the conflict. These same groups have enormous lobbying influence in the US Congress. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's 2015 speech to the U.S. Congress, which helped insure his re-election back home, was aimed at this part of the "conservative base" in the U.S. More recently, the US Congress passed the largest military aid package for Israel in history. Of course, the well-being of Israel or the Jews is not the primary concern of these pro-Israeli groups, because the Jews, as non-believers, are damned like the rest of humanity. There is a loop hole however, in that the Jews who accept Jesus at the end of time will go up in the Rapture, while those who don't, like everyone else, will live through the great 'tribulations' and perish. This is even portrayed in grade B rapture films as an Israeli soldier who "sees the light" and is lifted from the battlefield up into heaven.



Har Meggido



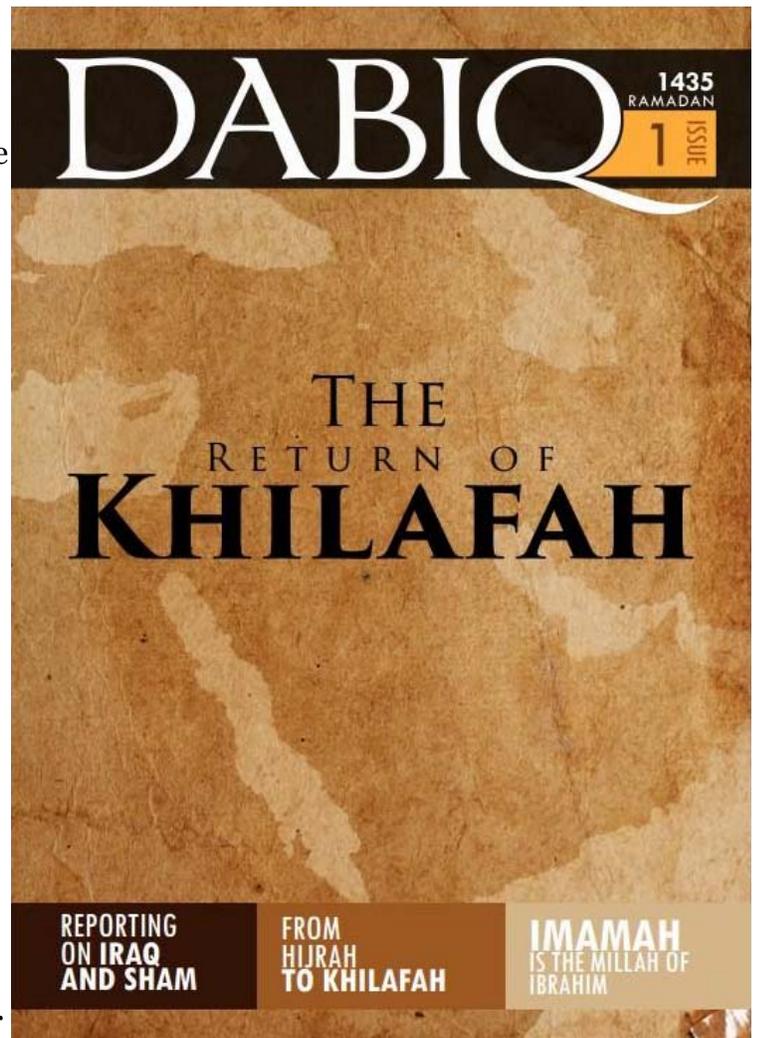
The Islamic State

Now we turn to the Islamic counterpart to this Christian apocalyptic myth. The fundamentalist Sunni groups who have spearheaded ISIS have their own version of this belief. As a more recent phenomenon, it is less well known to us in the West, mistakenly equated with Al Qaeda, and taken by some to be the result of American foreign policy blunders of the last and current centuries. Actually the belief system it is based on is much older than the Bible or the Koran, and its aims are far more otherworldly than its predecessor's political goals. Al Qaeda has specific geopolitical aims in this world, such as the expulsion of non-Muslims out of their Holy Land and the annihilation of Israel. What ISIS represents is an apocalyptic force within Islam, based on very literal belief in the early dictates of the Koran, including the establishment of a new Caliphate. But even

its goal to reestablish the Caliphate, or Muslim kingdom, is not an end in itself, but rather a means of bringing about the end of time, just like the Christian belief in Armagheddon.

Established in 2011, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, took advantage of the political chaos and civil wars in Iraq and Syria to claim territory and begin the fulfillment of prophecy. One of its first, and by its own estimation, most important conquests, was taking the otherwise insignificant town of Dabiq (population less than 4000) near the Syrian city of Aleppo. The town was the site of a decisive battle in 1516 between the Ottoman Empire and Mamluk Sultanate, but its real significance to ISIS is that it is the predicted site of an epic battle between Christians and Muslims leading to the end of this world. This makes Dabiq the Islamic version of Armagheddon, and serves the same function in their eschatology. Again, land and place are mere symbols in an otherworldly mystical scheme. (Graeme Wood, [The Atlantic Monthly](#), March 2015). “Dabiq” is also the name given by ISIS to their

online and print magazine which is used to recruit new followers.



(The day after this lecture was given, ISIS was driven out of Dabiq by Turkish backed Syrian rebels.)

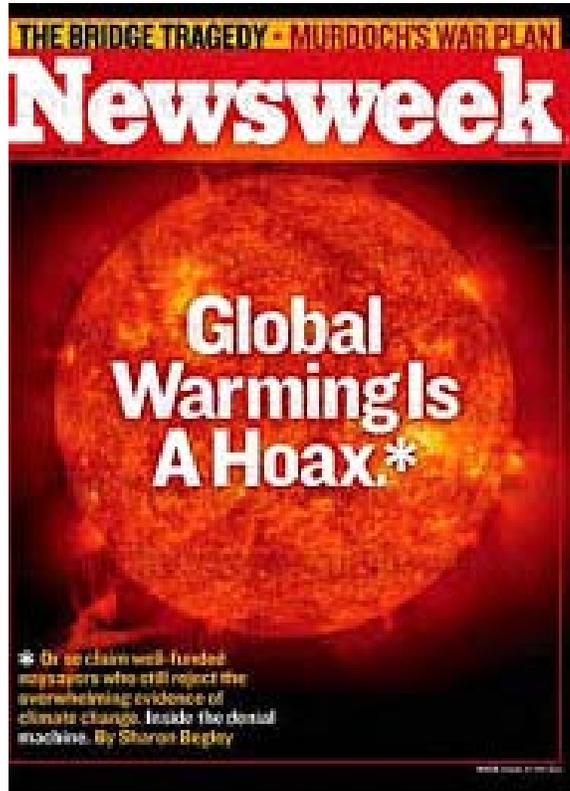
“Islamic Messianic Dreams Shattered as ISIS Defeated in Dabiq”



It seems obvious, looking at these two apocalyptic systems, the Second Coming in Christianity and the Caliphate in Islam, that the wars going on at this moment in the Middle East are driven in part by powerful belief systems which are rooted in the archetype of the apocalypse. Among other things, these wars have a huge impact on the environment. What is the carbon footprint of such a war? When there are such pressing issues as the population explosion, environmental pollution, and climate change, just to name a few, how can we tolerate the waste of resources and damage to each other as well as the ecosystem? This brings me to the enormous apocalyptic issue at stake in the current election (climate change) and how it effects the electorate. There is a tremendous underlying fear, both in those who see the disaster looming and those who deny it by

saying the science is inconclusive.

On the surface these secular denier groups (funded by the Koch brothers among others) insist on an apparently this-world, practical approach to reality. They seem a far cry from the eschatology of the religious thinking I've outlined above. But what they have in common is a fanatical belief in a monocular view of reality, even if it is at odds with their own survival. This does have some things in common with the religious fundamentalists' fantasy of an escape from earthly reality into a spiritual heaven. But what is the God they serve, whether they purport to be atheists or true believers in capitalism? If you think of a god as an archetype, then there must be an image and a dynamic pattern driving this belief system and the behaviors it generates. I suppose that they may expect to be wealthy enough to move to another planet after this one is used up, as in so many science fiction movies. Is this a materialist version of the rapture? If that is the fantasy, then they too are like Nietzsche's blasphemers of the earth, yet the god to whom they pray is neither Christ nor Allah, but money and power. This materialistic belief in the primacy of economic reality has become an abstract article of faith, and one of the drivers of this view of financial progress is consumerism by the general public. By participating in the need to spend, buy, and possess, we all share to some extent the guilt of this blasphemy against the ground of our own being. The irrationality of this stance, that making money justifies the destruction of the earth, is not that different from the sacrifice to the gods of old. Those who believe fervently in it seem as unconcerned about their own health and the future of the planet as the suicide bombers they fear.



As Zarathustra said:

*REMAIN TRUE TO THE EARTH, and believe
not those who speak unto you of superearthy hopes!
Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not.*

Purpose of the Archetype of the Apocalypse

I want to turn now from the destructive aspect of the archetype of the apocalypse to its purposive side. It may sound strange to the Western, scientific ear to pose this anthropomorphic sounding question, but to those of you familiar with Jung's archetypal approach it will make perfect sense to ask: what does it want, so to speak? As portrayed in the Hindu story of Vishnu withdrawing the whole of creation into his sleeping body, the archetype of the apocalypse is driven by a need for the destruction of an outworn paradigm to make way for a new creation. In the present state of affairs, there are many ways to frame the pairs of opposites at play in this epochal change; some speak of globalization vs. tribalism, the end of the patriarchy and the re-emergence of the feminine, whether the machines will save us or rule us, or whether we have come to the end of the road in terms of the power of the human intellect. A century ago, Western culture had to face the failure of the scientific mind to solve humanity's needs. The Great War brought crashing down the fantasy of a world order based on reason and Christian morality. What we can see now, from the other horrors of the twentieth century, is that they were just the beginning. The population explosion, the rise of consumerism, and the dark genius of military technology have added huge stress to an already faltering system. We all live in this "collective atmosphere", from more local cultural complexes driving identity politics to the enormous archetypal energies driving history.

Many years ago, while I was in analysis with Joseph Henderson, I asked him about Jung's rather dark view of humanity and his dire predictions about the future. Henderson said that it was hard for anyone who grew up in Europe at that time, and who lived through the horrors of the two World Wars, to have an optimistic view of the future. Joe spoke of his own childhood visits to San Francisco to see an aunt who lived

here, and how warm and relaxed the people seemed. When he came here again after WW1, the atmosphere was quite different.

This brief exchange turned my thinking to my own childhood experience of the segregated South. Growing up in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1950's and '60's, I was exposed to the complexities of segregation and the Civil rights movement from an early age. The rabbi of our synagogue had befriended Dr. Martin Luther King, who asked him to become his Hebrew teacher. But King had to come in through the back door of the temple to avoid unwanted attention. I was studying for my Bar Mitzvah with Rabbi Atlas and had a great respect for him. When he received national attention for supporting the bus boycott King was leading, it led to the end of his tenure as our rabbi.



Pitted against the civil rights movement was Alabama's four term governor, George Wallace. His racism and rabble rousing were put to rest, so it seemed, after his failed bid in the 1968 presidential election. It is an odd twist of fate that both King and Wallace were shot by assassins. King died a martyr of the Civil Rights movement. Wallace survived and found peace in the Southern Baptist religion; yet his influence on the collective psyche was co-opted by Nixon and a series of other backlash leaders. The

paradox of Wallace's turn to religion points us in the direction of how close and confusing the opposites are in the current political situation. And here we are today, after nearly eight years of a polarized Federal government, led by the first African American president, and facing Wallace's demagoguery in the form of another, perhaps far more dangerous reactionary figure.

The current political climate seems so rife with contradictions and paradoxes that I thought it might be interesting to look at a dream that Jung analyzed in five different places in his collected works. He called it the dream of the Black and White Magicians. It was told to Jung by a young theological student, and centers around the death of an aging king, so it can be seen as the end of an epoch, and the spirit of a virgin which is released from the grave in which he wants to be buried. It begins with the dreamer listening to an old man known as the White Magician, and the story unfolds like a dream within a dream. Jung tells it in the 3rd person.

Dream of the BLACK AND WHITE MAGICIANS

(a)

He was standing in the presence of a handsome old man dressed entirely in black. He knew it was the white magician. This personage had just addressed him at considerable length, but the dreamer could no longer remember what it was about. He had only retained the closing words: "And for this we need the help of the black magician." At that moment the door opened and in came another old man exactly like the first, except that he was dressed in white. He said to the white magician, "I need your advice," but threw a sidelong, questioning look at the dreamer, whereupon the white magician answered: "You can speak freely, he is an innocent." The black

magician then began to relate his story. He had come from a distant land where something extraordinary had happened. The country was ruled by an old king who felt his death near. The king sought out a tomb for himself. For there were in that land a great number of tombs from ancient times, and the king had chosen the finest for himself. According to legend, a virgin had been buried in it. The king caused the tomb to be opened, in order to get it ready for use. But when the bones it contained were exposed to the light of day, they suddenly took on life and changed into a black horse, which at once fled into the desert and there vanished. The black magician had heard of this story and immediately set forth in pursuit of the horse. After a journey of many days, always on the tracks of the horse, he came to the desert and crossed to the other side, where the grasslands began again. There he met the horse grazing, and there also he came upon the find on whose account he now needed the advice of the White Magician. For he had found the lost keys of paradise, and he did not know what to do with them. At this exciting moment the dreamer awoke CW9.1 ¶ 71

This dream is a complex and confusing play of the opposites. The old man dressed in black is the White Magician, while his opposite, dressed in white is the black magician. The young student is the innocent one trying to gain an understanding of the current situation, but only remembers the White Magician's statement that "For this we need the help of the Black Magician." The Black Magician proceeds to tell a story which illuminates the dilemma in a more mythical way. The old King, looking for a peaceful tomb in which to rest, has released the spirit of the virgin, who had been buried there years ago. Arising from her bones, this spirit turns into a black horse which fled into the desert and vanished. The Black Magician pursues the horse but also finds the lost keys of

paradise. Yet he does not know what to do with them, so apparently each of the Magicians needs the help of the other.

In The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, Jung discusses this dream in the context of the archetype of the Wise Old Man. He tells us that life inevitably brings us up against the conflict of good and evil, and **“that the unconscious life of the psyche is so inaccessible to our understanding that we can never know what evil may not necessary in order to produce good by enantiodromia, and what good may very possibly lead to evil.”** (CW 9, p. 215) The dream makes this point clearly by having each of the magicians dress in the color opposite their name. And it is the Black Magician who had to open the tomb of the virgin and chase after the horse, which seems like a symbol of the libido lost by the aging king. It is perhaps the resurrection of the lost virgin that is the source of renewal that the meeting of the black and white magicians will bring. Jung concludes his discussion by saying that this moral dilemma is inevitable if one “takes this path to the primordial religious experience.” But how to know which path is the right one. “It is like a still small voice, and it sounds from afar.”



This moral polarization of the opposites, the eternal drama of good and evil, is playing out in the current politics, and not just in the upcoming U.S. elections. It seems, like in the dream of the two magicians, to be the end of an epoch. I find myself pondering the role of this extreme opposition in its relationship to the archetype of the apocalypse. Are we in a time when the opposites have been so polarized, so distant from each other that “the falcon cannot hear the falconer,” that the collective ego-self-axis seems about to snap and the role of compensation in the unconscious has given way to some nightmarish paradox where everything has lost its meaning? The other possibility is that we are going through a collective dark night of the soul, and it is too soon to see what will emerge over time as a transcendent third, a totally new way of being in the world. My own view is that the new paradigm will have to be based on the equality and integration of the female principle. She is the earth mother, the rights of women and girls, a basis of integrity in men, and the divine feminine.

There is no way to accurately predict when an apocalypse will come, or in what form, or whether it will be a peaceful change of consciousness or a massively harsh and violent catastrophe; but there have been great prophets and poets who give us sound advice on how to prepare.

Yeats began to write “The Second Coming” at the end of WW1, in 1919. A year earlier, half way around the world, the Indian poet and yogi, Aurobindo Ghose wrote a prose poem entitled “The Hour of God.” Later known as Sri Aurobindo, his spiritual experiences and writings point in the direction of a new age of human evolution, one acknowledging the divinization of the earth and the centrality of the Divine Mother. I want to end by quoting part of his vision.

The Hour of God

by Sri Aurobindo

(1918)

There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism.

Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call.

In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow... But being pure cast aside all fear; for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the winepress of the wrath of God; but he who can stand up in it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand; ...even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected...

“I’m the Last Thing Standing Between You and the Apocalypse” Hillary Clinton

(New York Times, Oct. 11, 2016)



After the meeting of the black and the white, comes the Rubedo...

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