

AN OUTLINE OF APOCALYPTIC THEOLOGY

from Zoroaster to Al Gore

Robert D. Brinsmead

PREFACE

Over the span of a single life-time, we have been bombarded by an astonishing array of doomsday scares about the end of the present order of the world. Marxism came on the scene proclaiming the imminent end of the free-enterprise-world. After World War II, a coming nuclear winter dominated end-of-the-world fears until that scare receded with the end of the Cold War.

If there were thoughts we would then have a respite from these doomsday scares, the opposite proved to be true. The times seemed to spawn an endless array of new cataclysmic scares as if to satisfy the world's craving for stimulating anxieties to replace the tensions of the Cold War. Even before the Cold War ended, the climate prophets started proclaiming the imminence of a new Ice Age that would plunge the world into a world-wide famine. Not to be outdone by that scare, we had the scare of the *Population Bomb* in which, according to Paul Ehrlich, millions would perish of starvation before the end of the 20th century. Following Ehrlich, the Club of Rome's best-seller, *Limits to Growth*, unleashed a world-wide panic about a world running out of resources. President Jimmy Carter (1980) then commissioned the publication of his *Global 2000 Report*. It painted a very gloomy picture of what an over-populated, deforested, resource depleted world would look like within twenty years. None of this happened, of course. The world's forest reserves remained stable, oil and food resources improved enormously, and there were massive strides toward improving the human condition on so many fronts.

None of this human progress, however, put a dampener on the proliferation of new scares taking the place of the old ones, which like old soldiers, never die, but reappear in new forms. Witness this astonishing parade of one scare after another – the Acid Rain scare (which proved to be mostly aerial fertilizer for the biosphere), SARS, Mad Cow Disease, Swine Flu, the YK2 bug (what a boon that proved to be for the sale of up-graded computers!), and now the mother of all scares, cataclysmic global warming brought about by mankind's industrial emissions of carbon dioxide.

With a world failing to warm any further over the last 17 years and the warming scare somewhat receding, the merchants of doom now preach man-made disruptive weather disasters (floods, droughts, heat-waves, fire storms, hurricanes, etc.) to boost the declining warming fears. Or acidification of the oceans by man-made CO₂. Or the extinction of species by human impacts.

The merchants of doom become sad, glum and disappointed when evidence emerges that the world is not dangerously warming, or that the ice of the Arctic has witnessed more warming and melting in the past, or that the sea-ice of Antarctica has grown to record levels instead of receding, or that sea levels are not rising any faster than they have for the last 10,000 years, or that there is no pattern of increasing weather disasters either in number or intensity.¹

For some, declining environmental fears mean a declining career of financial patronage in the massive “global warming industry.”

To be sure, the environmental movement depends on stoking up the fires of one environmental scare after another. It keeps the money rolling in to support the NGOs that are always hungry for more funds to keep their shows on the road.

Many observers and reputable authors have pointed out how that in many respects Environmentalism has replaced Marxism as the major counter socio/economic/cultural force of our time. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Communism, many poured out of the Red movement into the Green one as if it was the new front for their war against the affluent, free-market West.

Historians and other commentators who identify Marxism and Environmentalism as secular “apocalyptic movements” are absolutely correct. Their apocalyptic features are even quasi-religious. Discerning authors such as Greg Easterbrook (*A Moment on the Earth*, pp.136, 451) and Michael Crichton (*Address to the Commonwealth Club*) are not alone when they point out the features of Environmentalism that are remarkably similar to Christianity. The same thing has been said about the apocalyptic features of Marxism.

What is especially significant is that both of these modern apocalyptic movements – Marxism and Environmentalism – were born in what used to be called “the Christian West.” The Environmental movement also receives most of its support, intellectually and financially, from the Western World, and especially from places where the Christian religion has been in significant decline.

This paper will argue that these modern end-of-the-world type of scares spring up in the soil of the West because they have their roots in classical Judeo-Christian apocalyptic. It is for this reason that this paper looks at the development of the original, classical Jewish apocalyptic that came to full expression around 165 BCE and later morphed into Christian apocalyptic in the first century of the Common Era.

THE STORY IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

The course of human history may not be shaped by rulers, political leaders or marching armies as much as it is shaped by its great story-tellers. These are story-tellers who

embody their ideas in grand narratives that sometimes capture the human imagination on a scale that can shape human culture and even change the course of history.

The founders of the Christian movement were story-tellers. Christianity began as an insignificant movement in lower class society, but it went on to capture the Roman Empire. It was able to profoundly shape Western culture because it embodied its theology in a grand narrative of the world that appealed to the Greco-Roman world.

Islam was stunningly successful because Mohammed was able to embody his ideas in a grand narrative that appealed to the Semitic culture of the Arab world.

Joseph Smith was a great story-teller. Mormonism would not have enjoyed its success in America unless it had embodied its ideas in its own grand narrative of the world.

Karl Marx revamped the Judeo-Christian narrative about the Fall of man at the dawn of history. Marxism would not have enjoyed its international success unless its revolutionary ideas were embodied in a grand narrative about mankind's Fall from the ideal world of communism at the dawn of human history.

Other story-tellers gave birth to the modern Environmental movement. Like Marxism before it, Environmentalism has embodied its ideas in a story re-vamping the old narrative of the Fall of man at the dawn of history. We are now told that the world that has to be restored is the ideal one that existed when mankind lived in harmony with an unspoiled natural world. This environmental grand narrative obviously resonates with an enormous number of people.

Within all of these grand narratives, there are story-tellers who embody their ideas in stories that live within the larger stories. These stories spawn movements within bigger movements or political parties within nations. This is how it was when the Protestant Reformation formed within the broader Christian World; or when the Labor movement was formed in Australia with its grand narrative of becoming "a light on the hill."

Mankind does not live by ideas alone, but by ideas that are embodied in stories. Ideas become powerful weapons when they are embodied in a grand narrative. To re-phrase an old truism, the story is mightier than the sword.

THE TWO MOST INFLUENTIAL STORIES EVER TOLD

The two most influential stories ever told are the story of the lost Paradise and the story of the Exodus of the Hebrews out of Egypt. Their impact does not derive solely from their being imbedded in Judeo-Christian scripture. They are what Jung calls "archetypal stories," meaning that they have become templates for re-telling them in a whole variety of ways. This is how these two stories are both very old and very new.

Whether these stories actually happened or to what extent they are myths makes no difference. Ideas that are embodied in story are no less powerful because the stories are myths. The old Greek legends about Achilles, Prometheus, Narcissus and others were no less winsome because they were myths.

There are many versions of the story about the lost Paradise at the dawn of history. The ancient Greeks had their story of a lost Golden Age. Within most nations and religious movements there are stories of a legendary period of the founding fathers, followed by a falling away from how things used to be. These stories inspire dreams of finding a way back to how things were at the beginning. Rousseau (1712-1778) dreamed about a return to the age of “the noble savage.” The Marxists dreamed of a return to the state of pure communism that they said existed at the dawn of human history. Environmentalism now dreams of a return to how things were when mankind lived a simple life in harmony with nature.

The archetypal story of the Exodus of the Hebrew people has also been re-enacted or re-lived again and again. The early Christian Church saw itself re-living the Exodus when it broke away from Judaism to begin the journey of the Christian movement. So did the Reformers when they made their exodus from Rome to begin the Protestant movement. The Pilgrim Fathers who set out from the Old World in the Mayflower to find their Promised Land in the New World of America fondly thought of themselves as re-living the story of the Exodus. So did the Boers in their Great Trek to South Africa. So did the Mormons in their journey from Michigan to Salt Lake City. So did Martin Luther King in the civil rights movement in the United States. So did the Liberation Theologians in South America who embodied their ideas in a new Exodus story.

The Hebrew dream of the Promised Land forms the template of the American dream, the African dream and all Third World dreams of a better life. The Exodus story is right up there among the greatest stories ever told because it is a universal story of the quest to improve the human condition.

THE EXODUS STORY

The story of the Exodus is overwhelmingly the dominant story in Hebrew history and Scripture. Hereunder we identify the main features of this classical, archetypal story.

(1) It is a story with a very unpromising beginning.

The story begins at a time when Egypt was building pyramids as monuments to its unrivalled political and religious power. Firmly under Egypt’s control and subjected to appalling conditions of slavery, was a minority group known as the Hebrews. They were descended from a tribe of shepherds, a class of people whom the Egyptians had traditionally despised. As the Hebrews recited for generations to come, “My father was a homeless Aramaean who came down to Egypt...But the Egyptians ill-treated us,

humiliated us and imposed cruel slavery upon us.” (Deuteronomy 26:5) One of the prophets likened the human circumstances of Hebrew beginnings to the state of a child that is helpless, filthy and abandoned. (Ezekiel 16:5) One could hardly imagine a more unpromising national beginning than this one.

(2) It is a story of a human progress.

When the Hebrews escaped from Egypt and settled in Palestine, it soon became apparent that the so-called Promised Land left a lot to be desired. Compared to the fertile lands along the Nile river to the south or the Tigris and Euphrates to the north, much of Palestine’s land was all too hilly, rocky, without any great river systems and subject to uncertain rainfalls. The territory was also infested with hostile tribes who were not inclined to put out a welcome mat for the refugees from Egypt. The Promised Land was more a potential than a realization. The Hebrews may have put a foot on some challenging real estate, but turning it into the Promised Land was to become a work in progress.

The early part of this historical journey was quite messy and marked by all too much violence and bloodshed which, unfortunately, the Hebrews undertook in God’s name. In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins has a field day finding things to ridicule about this God of the Hebrews. It is true that the vision of their God rose no higher than their vision of what it meant to be human – as it never does! Dawkin’s argument is like criticizing the American dream because the early Americans mistreated the Indians.

It is not until we come to the great Hebrew prophets (7th-8th century BCE) that the Exodus narrative unfolds into an astonishing vision of a truly human future for mankind. The theology and the ethic of the prophets are based on the Exodus narrative. Rarely has any literature of any age risen to the high moral and ethical vision of the prophets, or excelled the fury of their passionate protest against man’s inhumanity to man. With them, the Exodus demands liberation from every form of human oppression and injustice. It meant that the Hebrew people were obligated to treat others with the same kind of compassion and liberating justice that had been extended to them in the Exodus event. What mattered to the prophets was not observing religious rituals or offering sacrifices at the temple (to which they were either indifferent or even hostile), but becoming truly human in the practise of justice, mercy and regard for others.

This prophetic vision of the Promised Land meant creating a society in which no would be without food, clothing or shelter. It meant that no human being would oppress another human being. The prophets even dreamed of a land in which no one would be sick. (Isaiah 33:24) In an age when the average human life span was about 30 years, they dreamed how this would improve to 100 years. (Isaiah 65:20)

Finally, this vision of the Promised Land expanded to take in the world. In keeping with their growing consciousness of monotheism, their vision of justice and human compassion took on a world-wide scope. (Isaiah 19:5) The nations of earth would see the light and learn what it means to be truly human. (Isaiah 60:3: Micah 4:1-3) They would

beat their swords into plough shears and their spears into pruning hooks. "Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." The time would come when even the wild beasts would find a peaceful existence in a more humane order. (Isaiah 11-9) The prophets embodied some of this in flights of poetic imagery embellished with some traces of apocalyptic elements (mainly in the post-Exilic later prophets) but even then they generally remain within the reality of possibilities within the historical process.

In short, the Exodus story finally unfolds as a journey toward universal brotherhood and peace on this earth. It is a story of unlimited human progress toward an ever improving human condition. Even the environment is depicted as sharing in the benefits of this humanizing process. The goal of the journey is always ahead. It is never a story about going back to some better Golden Age in some mythical past. As one of the Hebrew prophets puts it, "Before us is a garden of Eden, and behind a desolate wilderness."

(3) It is a story about a journey within the historical process.

From beginning to end the Exodus grand narrative was about a journey within the historical process. It was not an allegory of a journey to another "heavenly" world as in the Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*. To be sure, the Biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt was embellished with some myth and poetic flair, but for all that, Egypt was real place with a real history. The Hebrew settlement in Palestine took place in real history. The violence and bloodshed of the early period in Palestine was also a real part of the historical process.

In the great Hebrew prophets, the Exodus journey always remained firmly set in this world with the goal of the journey seen as something to strive for within the historical process.²

THE JEWISH APOCALYPTIC STORY

The "Second-temple era" of the Jews began when they returned to their homeland after the great Babylonian exile in the 6th century BCE. Under the patronage of Cyrus the Great and his Persian successors, the Jews rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple. For two hundred years they remained under the mild and even supportive rule of this Achaemenian or Persian Empire. During this time the Jews largely abandoned their own Hebrew language and adopted Aramaic, the popular language throughout the Achaemenian Empire.

The religion of Cyrus and the Persian rulers who followed him was Zoroastrian. Zoroaster (or Zarathustra as he was called in the Persian tongue) was one of the truly great prophets or religious visionaries of the ancient world. He predated Moses, the OT prophets and the Buddha. He founded what was arguably the first world-religion, and one that was based on a universal and monotheistic vision. Zoroaster was the first great

spiritual teacher who put together a cogent apocalyptic teaching about the end of the world and the final battle between good and evil. The doctrines about heaven and hell found in Second-temple Judaism, Christianity and Islam had their origin in the religion founded by Zoroaster. So did the doctrine of the last Judgment and the universal resurrection of the physical body at the end of the world.

The Achaemenian rule lasted for about 200 years. Its influence on the Jews was so great that the popular language of the Empire eventually became the native tongue of the Palestinian Jews that included Jesus and his first apostles. It is also clear that during this Achaemenian period, Zoroastrian teaching exerted a strong influence on Jewish thinking. (See the Appendix, *Zoroaster and the Birth of an Apocalyptic Faith*)

By about 200 BCE, the Jews (as the Hebrews were now called) had abandoned the prophetic worldview based on the Exodus model. They began to develop another worldview that became known as *apocalyptic*. It's a Greek word meaning that something is "uncovered" or "revealed." What is being uncovered or revealed in apocalyptic is secret information about the end of the world.

(1) Apocalyptic was theology of despair.

During the Second-temple era the Jews suffered a series of setbacks and national calamities that crushed their hopes of realizing their national dreams within the historical process. They turned to another grand narrative to explain why the present age is hopelessly flawed. It was a "theology of despair" called *apocalyptic*

(2) Apocalyptic was based on the mythology of a lost Golden Age.

This "theology of despair" was based on the grand narrative about the Paradise that was lost through the sin of Adam and Eve at the dawn of history. Prior to this period when Jewish apocalyptic developed, this story which is featured in Genesis 3, received little, if no attention in Hebrew thinking. It played no role at all in the theology of the Hebrew prophets. It was as if this story of the lost Paradise lay unnoticed in the nest of Hebrew scripture like some cuckoo egg waiting to be hatched out as Jewish apocalyptic.

This raises the question of how a story so fundamentally at odds with the Exodus story (one is a story of human regression, the other of human progress) got to be included in Hebrew scripture. Did the early Hebrews know that the Genesis 3 story even existed? Did the Hebrew prophets know it existed?

We do know that the story of man's Fall in Genesis 3 is remarkably like an old Persian mythology about a Fall of man from an original age of light. This story was embodied in the teachings of Zoroaster. There is a lot of evidence indicating that apocalyptic thinking and other creation/Fall of man myths permeated the religious culture of the ancient world and pre-dated Zoroaster. The most we can say, therefore, is that Zoroaster appears to be the first among the founders of the great world religions to have advanced a well-developed apocalyptic faith. We also know that Judaism absorbed a lot of Zoroastrian

influences when it came under the sway and patronage of the Persian Empire in the Second- temple era. The deep influence of Zoroastrianism on the development of apocalyptic Judaism and apocalyptic Christianity is unquestionable.³ (See also the Appendix, *Zoroaster and the Birth of an Apocalyptic Faith*)

We cannot go into some of these intriguing literary questions here, but one thing is crystal clear: all the Jewish apocalyptic books of this era (Enoch, Daniel, Jubilees, Tobin, Ezdras, etc.) based their theology or worldview on the grand narrative of the Fall of man and the lost Paradise. These apocalyptic writings were very different to the writings of the great Hebrew prophets who had based their worldview on the story of the Exodus.

(3) Apocalyptic saw the world in terms of regression and inevitable decline.

The grand narrative of the Fall of man from the age of light was interpreted to mean that this present age was given over to the evil powers. Everything man now touches tends to become corrupted and short of its original purpose. Even the righteous remnant of humanity is consigned to live in a world that is ruled by evil powers that are sometimes depicted as wild, ravaging beasts (Daniel 7). This grand narrative meant that the national dreams could never be realized within the historical process. Until this historical process ended it could only be expected that things would become worse and worse. History runs downhill and everything is in inevitable decline. That, in essence, was the apocalyptic worldview – a kind of theological version of the second law of thermo-dynamics.

(4) Apocalyptic put its hope in an end to the historical process.

In Jewish apocalyptic (as in Persian apocalyptic before it), the only hope was for this present age to be swept away by a violent act of divine intervention. Apocalyptic put its hope in the arrival of a new age that would be created beyond the cataclysmic end of the historical process.

The word “apocalyptic” came from a Greek word which suggested that some secret plan for the end of the world and the age to come was “uncovered” or “revealed.” Apocalyptic not only claimed to reveal this catastrophic solution to the hopeless historical process, but it revealed ways people could prepare for it and even hasten its arrival. Some of these ways were innocent enough (like ritual baths or strict Sabbath observance), but some of them were fanatical and violent. For instance, during the horrific religious persecution inflicted on the Jews by the fanatical Greek king of the Syrian empire, Antiochus Euphianes, the idea developed that the suffering and martyrdom of the righteous could atone for the sins of the nation.

(5) Apocalyptic was fundamentally ahistorical and surreal.

Jewish apocalyptic was based on the account of a world at the beginning of time that never did exist. In despair of the present age, it turned its back on the present historical process and put its hope in the arrival of an end-time event that was as surreal as the Paradise on earth at the beginning of time. Borrowing from Persian apocalyptic, it set its

hopes on a future life rather than this present one (Daniel 12:1). Even the literature of apocalyptic was filled with lurid images of surreal animals and symbols that did not exist in the real world. It was a flight from this world into a mythical world.

(6) Apocalyptic was soaked in bloodshed and violence.

Jewish apocalyptic lost the high ethical and humanitarian vision of the Hebrew prophets with whom nothing was more important than the practice of mercy and justice - and nothing was more evil than man's inhumanity to man.

The apocalyptic books were generally written by anonymous authors. They forged the names of the sacred heroes of long ago such as Enoch, Abraham, Baruch and Daniel. These anonymous authors made it appear as if these great ones of the past had written these recent apocalyptic documents to accurately foretell, sometimes in great detail, events that were actually happening when the documents were being forged. (See for instance, Daniel 11:6-9) This created a false belief in the accuracy of their predictions. Apparently these apocalyptic authors thought that their cause was more important than literary integrity. Like all fanatical ideologues, they ultimately felt that their cause was more important than people.

Jewish apocalyptic was all about the process of history coming to a violent end. It not only saw this end as imminent, but prayed, hoped and worked to hasten its arrival. To use an analogy made famous by Albert Schweitzer, the apocalyptic mind-set not only waited expectantly for the wheel of history to turn, but it threw itself on the wheel to make it turn. The wheel turned and crushed these apocalyptic hopes.

In the older Persian mythology put forward in the teaching of Zoroaster, the sons of light and the sons of darkness would be locked in mortal conflict with each other until a great final battle at the end of history would deliver the sons of light and destroy the sons of darkness. Those who counted themselves on the right side demonized those on the other side. This aspect of Persian Zoroastrianism was absorbed into Judaism and, as we will see, it lived on within the Christian movement. Jewish apocalyptics produced a lot of hostility and sectarian violence – not just violence toward the national enemies such as the Syrians and the Romans, but violence toward those in opposing Jewish factions.

Apocalyptic inspired the Jews in the Maccabean period (170 BCE) to fight their Grecian oppressors with amazing courage and ferocity. At the same time, Jewish factions demonized and slaughtered fellow Jews in opposing factions. As very graphically described by Josephus, this kind of sectarian violence was still raging with incredible ferocity in the city of Jerusalem even while the Roman armies had the city under siege (69-70 CE). Yet the Jewish apocalyptic fanatics went on killing each other while they confidently expected a divine intervention to punish both Romans and their factional opponents.

What they proved has been demonstrated many times in history. Whatever starts in a hope for violence will end in violence. Jewish apocalyptic literature embellished its

vision of the end with frightful images of a fiery hell full of torments awaiting their national and factional enemies.

Apocalyptic demonstrated that those who go down this road of demonizing their opponents and proclaiming that they will soon be objects of the end-time vengeance, will not only hope they will be punished, but will become all too willing to start that punishing process. To demonize other people is to de-humanize them. No group of human beings can de-humanize other human beings without de-humanizing themselves. As Bertrand Russell once argued, those who elevate themselves above the rest of mankind will inevitably stoop lower than the rest of mankind. One brief story mentioned by Joseph Campbell illustrates this point:

“...the Maccabees [the Jewish apocalyptic heroes who liberated the Jews from Syrian rule] themselves then impudently assumed the titles of both the kingship and high priesthood, to which they were not by descent entitled, and there were perpetrated within that family a number of ugly betrayals and murders in subsequent struggles for the inheritance. The Pharisees, Hasidim, and others resenting these impieties rose presently in a revolt that was put down with the greatest cruelty by the reigning Alexander Jannaeus (r. 104-78), who crucified eight hundred of his enemies in a single night, slaughtered their wives and children before their eyes, and himself watched the executions, drinking and publicly disporting with his concubines.” (*Myths to Live By*, p. 185)

Jewish apocalyptic inspired a revolt against Rome (66-70 CE) that was never going to succeed. The city was reduced to a heap of ruins, its temple was completely destroyed, and about 800,000 Jews perished. It was not the kind of end-time that apocalyptic had hoped for, but for Judaism – especially for its priesthood and temple that never would exist again - it was the end of its world.

One might have thought that Jewish apocalyptic would never raise its sorry head again in another revolt against Rome. But it did just that about 60 years later in one final sally known as the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-136 CE). Bar Kokhba was an insurgent warrior, widely thought to be the messiah. He led his countrymen in one final, bloody assault on Rome. By this time Rome had lost all patience with the Jews. Not only was this military messiah and all his followers put to the sword, but thousands of innocent Jews were slaughtered along with them. Jews were totally banished from Judea. Thereafter any circumcised male found there was instantly put to the sword.

The only end of the world which arrived was the end of the Jewish nation and Jewish homeland for nearly 2,000 years. After the Bar Kokhba disaster, the rabbis, who were now in control of the Judaism of the dispersion, pronounced a curse on anybody within their community found promoting an apocalyptic teaching.

Was this to be the end of apocalyptic? Not at all. Another fledging movement eagerly took it up, having inherited it from Judaism. The movement was called Christianity.

THE CHRISTIAN APOCALYPTIC STORY

In the first century of the Common Era, Judaism was suffering from an apocalyptic fever. As one statement from the New Testament puts it, “the people were in expectation.” (Luke 3:15) John the Baptist heightened this end-time expectation with his preaching about an imminent, fiery end of the world.

The Christian movement began as a sect within Judaism. It did not abandon the apocalyptic expectations of Judaism, but re-worked and re-interpreted those expectations along Christian lines. As the German scholar E. Kasemann put the matter in a renowned 1969 statement, “Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology.”*

* Whether the historical Jesus was an apocalyptic teacher is another matter. Kasemann argued that he was not. So have many scholars since, including Robert Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar. But other scholars still cling to Albert Schweitzer’s 1906 thesis that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet. Kasemann, Funk and others who do not think that Jesus was apocalyptic, make observations along the following lines:

(1) The whole spirit and ethic of Jesus’ core teaching stood in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets. Some renowned thinkers of the last 200 years share this view of the historical Jesus.

Thomas Jefferson thought that the words of Jesus were “the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man.” (Letter to John Adams, October 12, 1813) “In the NT there is internal evidence that parts of it have proceeded from an extraordinary man; and that other parts of the fabric of very inferior minds. It is as easy to separate those parts, as to pick out diamonds from dunghills.” (Ibid., Jan 24, 1814) Commenting on Jefferson, Stephen Mitchell says, “Jefferson was morally shocked to realize that the words of Jesus had been added to, deleted, altered and otherwise tampered with as the Gospels were put together. . . all reputable scholars today acknowledge that the official Gospels were compiled, in Greek, many decades after Jesus’ death, by men who had never heard his teaching, and that a great deal of what the ‘Jesus’ of the Gospels says originated not in Jesus’ own Aramaic words, which have been lost forever, but in the very different teachings of the early church.” (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, p.5)

Ralph Waldo Emerson declared: “Jesus Christ belongs to the true race of prophets” Mohandas K. Gandhi said, “What then does Jesus mean to me? To me, he was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had.”

(2) Like the prophets before him, Jesus placed no value on religious rituals. He was opposed to offering sacrifices, and quoted one of the prophets who said, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice. Jesus made both temple and priests redundant.

(3) His teaching was wholly focused on living in this world in the here and now. As Leo Tolstoy put it, “We must first understand that all the stories telling how God made the world six thousand years ago, how Adam sinned and the human race fell; and how the Son of God, a God born of a virgin, came on earth and redeemed mankind; and all the fables in the Old Testament and in the Gospels, and all the lives of the saints with their stories of miracles and relics – are nothing but a gross hash of superstitions and priestly frauds. Only to someone quite free from this deception can the clear and simple teaching of Jesus, which needs no explanation, be accessible and comprehensible. That teaching tells us nothing about the beginning, or about the end of the world, or about God and His purpose, or in general about things which we cannot, and need

not know...it is only necessary to treat others as we wish them to treat us. In that is all the Law and the prophets, as Jesus said.”

(4) Literary scholars have demonstrated that the earliest writings about Jesus contained only a collection of his sayings. One of these was a document now called “Q” (from the German word *Quelle*), a source for much of what was written in Matthew and Luke. By careful analysis, scholars have found that this earlier “Sayings Gospel” called “Q” contains no Apocalyptic teaching whatsoever. Neither does another early “Sayings Gospel” bearing the name of Thomas. Among its 114 “Sayings,” there is not one word of apocalyptic. All these sayings of Jesus are focused on living in the here and now. Nothing is said about an imminent end of the world, the sweeping away of the present historical process or the life to come.

(5) The core of Jesus’ teaching was an insight that neither John the Baptist or even Jesus’ own followers could grasp, but it was something that the greatest spiritual teachers of all ages have realized – namely, that “the kingdom of God” is already present, nearer than your hands or breath. It is like leaven hidden in the dough, mustard seed springing up all over the place, treasure hidden in a field, or as one of the sayings in Thomas puts it, it is something spread out across the face of the earth. While people kept looking for a spectacular, visible arrival of the end-time kingdom, Jesus said that it was already present “in you” and in all the world. (Luke 17:20, 21) He invited people to celebrate its presence in the here and now by “eating and drinking” in open table fellowship. This attracted derision from his opponents who said he was “a friend of custom collectors [notorious cheats] and sinners” and “a glutton and a drunk.”

In the words of Robert W. Funk: “The kingdom of God was the world as Jesus imagined it...The gospel of Jesus is not mythological. The major mythic themes of the kerygma [message of the early church] and creed are missing from his pronouncements...The language of Jesus is exhaustively focused on the mundane, the ordinary, the non-mythological... [Jesus] does not appear to resort to anything outside the domain of his secular lifeworld: his message does not traffic in mythology at any level.” (*The Incredible Creed*, May-August 1997)

See also Mitchell’s comment on the presence of the kingdom in the teaching of Jesus: “Like all the great spiritual Masters, Jesus taught one thing only: presence. Ultimate reality, the luminous, compassionate intelligence of the universe, is not somewhere else, in some heaven light-years away. It didn’t manifest any more fully to Abraham or Moses than to us, nor will it be any more present to some Messiah at the far end of time. It is always right here, right now...When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God, he was not prophesying about some easy, danger-free perfection that will someday appear. He was talking about a state of being, a way of living at ease among the joys and sorrows of our world. It is possible, he said, to be as simple and beautiful as the birds of the sky or the lilies of the field, who are always within the eternal Now. This state of being is not something alien or mystical. We don’t need to earn it. It is already ours.” (Ibid. pp. 10-11)

We simply note that Jesus was the master story-teller. His teaching was embodied in stories. The stories he told lampooned and repudiated the apocalyptic mood and expectations of his generation. Patricia A Williams (*Where Christianity Went Wrong*) argues convincingly that this aspect of his teaching, along with his repudiation of the temple rituals and sacrifices, led to his condemnation and death. The gist of her excellent little book is that what Jesus was on about and what early Christianity was on about was not the same.

The Apocalyptic features of Christian theology and the great Creeds of the Church are plain to see.

(1) Christian Apocalyptic was also based on the myth of the lost Paradise.

Like Jewish apocalyptic before it, the Christian movement that developed after the death of Jesus based its theology squarely on the old narrative about the Fall of man from an original perfection. More than this, Christian apocalyptic teased out the implications of

the old narrative beyond anything attempted in Jewish apocalyptic. Adam's transgression was now viewed as separating man from God by an unbridgeable gulf. The whole human race was now viewed as in a state of alienation from its original state of perfection. The narrative of the Fall of man became embellished with the doctrine of *original sin*.

St. Paul, who is now regarded by many scholars as the real founder of apocalyptic Christian theology, put the matter clearly in his greatest NT letter:

“It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death...the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many....” (Romans 5:12-15)

One only has to read any standard Christian Catechism to realize that the narrative of the Fall of man as told in Genesis 3 is the real starting point that provides the framework for classical Christian theology. This same narrative of the Fall was the starting point for the great Christological debate between Arius and Athanasius in the 4th Century, as well as the starting point of the debate between Anselm and Abelard in the 10th Century. And if proof is needed how basic the old story of Genesis 3 is to the Christian story, then John Milton's famous epic, *Paradise Lost*, should put that matter to rest.

(2) Christian Apocalyptic also taught that the world was becoming worse and worse.

True to a worldview based on the narrative of the Fall of man, St. Paul called the age in which he lived “this present evil world.” (Galatians 1:4) He and his Christian contemporaries had nothing good to say about a world that “lies in wickedness.” It was irretrievably evil and awaited imminent destruction. The curse of the Fall of man was said to rest even on the natural world which “groaned in birth pangs” as it waited for its deliverance in the world to come. (Romans 8:20-22)

This kind of Apocalyptic gloom is difficult to reconcile with the outlook of the historical Jesus who constantly spoke about the goodness of the natural world - of carefree lilies and birds, life-giving sunshine and rain upon good and bad alike, the prodigious generosity of nature, and stories of life to be constantly celebrated in eating and drinking, music and dancing.

Just as Jewish apocalyptic had done for 200 years before him, St. Paul viewed the world and the human condition as in a state of rapid deterioration. That was also the view of those apocalyptic passages in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. The last book of the NT is fittingly called *The Apocalypse*. It borrowed much of its imagery from the Jewish apocalyptic book of Daniel, re-affirming as Daniel did, that the world would become worse and worse as the end of history approaches.

This kind of apocalyptic pessimism is hard to reconcile with the enormous strides the world has made toward improving the human condition since the first Century CE. At the time this gloomy Christian outlook on the world was being written, the average life-span was about 30 years, more than 90% of the population in the civilized world were

illiterate, a large section of even the Christian community were slaves and civil rights and democratic rights were non-existent. A forty-hour working week, workers' compensation, sick leave, social security, pensions for the aged? You would have to be joking! This was an age when nothing moved faster than a horse. There was no modern transportation, communication, refrigeration, scientific medicine, hospitals or universities. Urban centres had no running water, no sewage systems and nothing that we would consider basic standards of hygiene. The world and the human condition have improved beyond the wildest dreams of those early Christians who imagined that everything was in a state of inevitable decline.

(3) Christian Apocalyptic also taught that a fiery end of the world was imminent.

An imminent and fiery end of the world is a constant theme in Christian apocalyptic. "On that day the heavens will disappear with a great rushing sound, the elements will disintegrate in flames, and the earth with all that is in it will be burnt up." (2 Peter 3:10) St. Paul too spoke of an apocalypse Messiah returning with "flaming fire to take vengeance on those... who do not obey the gospel." (2 Thessalonians 1:8) The Apocalypse (or book of Revelation) speaks of "blood up to the horses' bridles," birds feeding on millions of dead bodies killed by a warrior Messiah, and as if that is not enough, a further lake of fire into which the great majority of the human race are going to be tossed for everlasting punishment. The so-called "Second Coming" of Christian apocalyptic is not portrayed as a pretty sight for most human beings on this planet. It is depicted in terms of unimaginable horror, bloodshed and violence on an unprecedented scale for the inhabitants of this world. Only the few Christian believers are destined to be rescued from this end-time holocaust. Christian apocalyptic ends in the portrayal of an orgy of human suffering beyond all human imaginings. It is even more difficult to reconcile this with the teaching of the historical Jesus ("love your enemies, do good to them that hate you"), or his final prayer for his murderers ("Forgive them, for they know not what they do.").

The first Christians thought and taught that the end of the world would take place within their lifetime. The first community of believers sold their possessions and lived from a common fund as they awaited the swift return of their Messiah. Paul advised the Church at Corinth it would be better not to marry in view of the shortness of time. Other Christians were like the American Millerites in the 1840s. Some of these gave up working for a living as they waited for the end of the world to arrive. As that first and second generation of Christians passed away, later church documents began to rationalize the delay of "the Second Coming." Christians were now counselled to marry and raise families. But from time to time throughout the history of Church, the sense of imminence of the end of the world was revived, and sometimes in fanatical movements which were an embarrassment to the Church.

(4) Christian apocalyptic was also about things outside of real history.

Like Jewish apocalyptic before it, Christian apocalyptic was all about things not pertaining to the real history of space and time as we know it. First of all, it was based on a myth about a primeval Golden Age that never existed and a Fall of man that never happened. Declaring the historical process as “this present evil world,” Christian apocalyptic focused its attention on a “heavenly Promised Land” and opted out of this world. Paul exhorted believers to “set their affections on things in heaven, and not on things on the earth.” Christian teaching was focused more on the life to come than this present life.

The Christian narrative of the Fall of man and the doctrine of *original sin* meant that humanity was inherently and essentially evil, by nature an enemy of God and a defiling influence on earth. Under the influence of this teaching, a God-pleasing life had to be based on self-loathing, the constant denigration of oneself as a miserable worm on the one hand and the constant flattery of God on the other. Given the exhortations to “love not the world neither the things of the world,” and to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts,” in the context of “original sin” this all tended toward a world-denying, man-hating attitude. Strong tendencies developed within Christianity in favour of asceticism, celibacy (even within marriage), misogyny and withdrawal from this world. Julian, “the Apostate” Emperor, lamented the triumph of Christianity within the Roman Empire with his famous one-liner: “O pale Galilean, you have conquered.”

The irony is that Christian theology and the great Creeds of the Church had nothing at all to say about the life-affirming teachings of Jesus who was by no means the pale Galilean of so much Christian asceticism. Apocalyptic Paul confessed that he had no interest in the historical Jesus. (2 Corinthians 5:16) He declared that his gospel came directly from his own heavenly visions rather than from any contact with anybody who had known the historical Jesus. (Galatians 1:11-19) In the apocalyptic theology of St. Paul, the real Jesus of history morphed into a cosmic divine man who came from another world, returned to that other world, and will come again as an apocalyptic warrior to destroy all of mankind who do not embrace Paul’s gospel.

The public execution of Jesus by the Roman authorities was a real event in time and space. Anyone viewing that Roman crucifixion of a man suspected of sedition (not a rare event in those times) might see this as the martyrdom of an innocent man. But Paul takes leave of this observable historical event. In his apocalyptic theology, this event becomes the supreme cosmic end-time drama which propitiates God’s wrath by making an atonement for human sin, thereby redeeming the world that was lost by the Fall of man at the beginning of human history. This illustrates what is meant by apocalyptic theology. The meaning of what would normally pass as just another tragic death is “uncovered” and “revealed” as the event by which sins can be forgiven and the fallen race can at last be restored to the lost Paradise.

This was not altogether a new teaching because, as we have seen, it had its precedents in Jewish apocalyptic which taught that the suffering and death of a righteous martyr could atone for national sins. Whether or not a blood atonement for human sin has any validity or reality is outside the concerns of this present paper. What is clear is that these kinds of

claims are a matter of faith that can neither be proven nor falsified by any kind of real-life observations.

Given apocalyptic Christianity's jaundiced view of "this present evil world" and its focus on the next life rather than this one, it should not surprise us that the Roman Empire suffered a general decline after it embraced Christianity as its official religion. In its first blush of enjoying some imperial authority, the Church set about burning books and destroying the great libraries of the ancient world. Discarding the best Greek medicine, the Christian world eventually began boring holes in the head of the sick to let the devil out. Spurning the best learning of the ancient world, Christian Europe lost the knowledge of architecture, art and commerce, setting its course toward the great Dark Ages. It was the rival Islamic culture that kept learning alive, developing universities and hospitals, preserving the knowledge of medicine, architecture and commerce while Europe stagnated.

(5) Christian apocalyptic has also been soaked in bloodshed and violence.

A movement whose central icon was Jesus of Nazareth may have looked like a lamb, but after as it secured the patronage of the Emperor Constantine, it soon began to speak and act like a dragon.

After Christianity was declared to be the official religion of the Roman Empire, dissent and heresy were pronounced capital crimes. Donatists, Docetists, Nestorians and Arians who entertained other interpretations of the Christian faith were not permitted to live. The four hundred year battle of orthodoxy against the Arian heresy was won more by political strategy and by the sword than by any theological arguments.⁴

Century after century there were Pogroms against the Jews. Their synagogues and books were often burned, and from time to time thousands of Jews were slaughtered in appalling massacres. Jews were sometimes made the scapegoats for the Bubonic plague which decimated the European population.

Alternative Christian communities numbering almost a million Albigensis or Cathari were put to the sword and wiped from the face of the earth in the reign of Pope Innocent III (1198 -1216). Then came the horrific bloodletting of the Crusades and the Inquisition. Instruments of torture such as the world had never seen before were invented in the interests of maintaining the hegemony of the Western Church. Laws were passed in 1231 ordering that heretics suffer death by fire. Never were so many human beings martyred for religious reasons, sometimes on the mere suspicion of having some false opinion or belief.

Even the Protestant Reformation did not put an end to the bloodshed and violence. Protestant Geneva burned at the stake the brilliant physician Michael Servetus because he questioned the doctrine of the Trinity. Anabaptists were drowned by the first Protestants for the crime of practicing adult rather than infant baptism. During the inglorious Thirty Year War (1618-1648), Catholics and Protestants engaged each other in an orgy of

bloodletting. When 10,000 French Protestants were slain in the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24, 1572), Pope Gregory wrote this congratulatory message to the king of France: "We rejoice with you that with the help of God you have relieved the world of these wretched heretics."

Religious persecution and intolerance did not even cease after the Pilgrim Fathers escaped from the religious persecution of the Old World to found a home in the New World. Alas, it was to be a freedom only for the right kind of Protestants. They soon set about flogging Quakers and Catholics out of their colonies, or conducting their infamous Salem Witch Trials.

Some scholars have wondered whether the Christian religion has killed more people than any other religion in the history of mankind.

Over the last two hundred years, however, a growing Christian consciousness has become acutely aware that intolerance and persecution is antithetical to the spirit and teaching of the historical Jesus - whose teaching had for the most part been pushed into the background by Christian theology and politics. Religious persecution also ceased because the development of liberal democracies and a more enlightened human consciousness rejects religious intolerance.

One great exception has been the Holocaust during the reign of Nazi Germany. In *Constantine's Sword*, James Carroll convincingly argues that two thousand years of Christian anti-Semitism prepared the ground for this final, bitter harvest. Carroll is very aware that the Nazism was not a Christian movement, but he makes the point that the Holocaust would not have happened unless the Catholic Church had turned a blind eye to what Hitler was doing to the Jews and unless the great majority of Lutherans had declined to protest. Carroll points out how a strong Christian protest stopped the Nazis from proceeding to euthanize those who were physically and mentally impaired; yet the same Christian community, with few exceptions, remained mute when the fate of millions of Jews were at stake.

As an Irish American scholar who was ordained to the priesthood in the Catholic Church, Carroll is grateful for the Church's apology to the Jews for centuries of inhuman treatment. He heartily approves that the Vatican has finally absolved the Jews from the crime of Deicide, that is, "the killing of God." Yet Carroll does not agree when the Church declares that its crimes against the Jews were an aberration of its true mission and character. In his view these crimes against humanity had their roots in the original theology of the first Christians.

"...Nostra Aetate implicitly raised the issue of whether, in its first generation, the Church had already betrayed its master." (p. 552)

"And sadly, the apology for sins against the people of Israel that Pope John Paul II offered in the momentous ceremony in St. Peter's on March 12, 2000, also avoided a direct confrontation with the source of the anti-Semitism... It was possible to hear that

apology as regret for behaviour that was inconsistent with the core Church teaching, instead of set in motion by it.”(p.553)

And what, according to Carroll, is the core teaching of the Church that set in motion centuries of violence, ending in the Holocaust? He points out that the church’s theology was centred, not in the life of Jesus, not in his teachings and not even in the resurrection. It was centred on Jesus’ violent death on the cross, a death that was planned by God for the reconciliation of the world unto Himself. According to Carroll, it was the Church’s theological spin that was put on the violent death of Jesus that from the time of Constantine turned the cross into a sword for the killing of millions whose only crime was that they did not believe in this kind of God nor in this kind of salvation. So Carroll reflects:

“Thinking of the Holocaust and all that led to it, what kind of God presides over such a history? But is that history’s version of a more ancient question? What kind of God shows favour to a beloved Son by requiring him to be nailed to a cross in the first place?” (p.23)

“The cross at Auschwitz puts the question baldly: Who is this God who requires human suffering and death as a proof of human subservience? What does it mean that the death and suffering of Jesus have been made the source of salvation?” (p. 56)

“Had Jesus come to promote suffering or to oppose it? Could the cult of the crucifix and related phenomena, like flagellant movements, be a surrender to the very powers of sickness, suffering, and death Jesus had intended to overcome? Could God, in other words, be portrayed as a bit too invested in the misery, not only of the Son, but of the rest of us? Is there a curl of sadism in the economy of salvation... This paradoxical and tragic idea of God’s mercy, bound to the cross, is profoundly violent.” (p. 288). Carroll suggests that the “violent theology of the cross” “sanctified” “the blood lust of the crusaders” on the grounds that “God, too, had blood lust.” (pp. 299, 582)

When this “violent theology of the cross” is placed in the context of the grand narrative of the Fall of man at the beginning of human history, then it becomes clear that we are dealing with a grand narrative that starts with the violence of mankind’s expulsion into a cursed earth, and ends with the violence of the Day of Wrath. According to the story, the penalty for one human transgression at the beginning of history was a life of hard labour, pain for a woman in childbirth and death at last for all generations to come. And as if that were not enough, the Christian religion added the final penalty of eternal damnation in hell beyond this present mortal life.

God’s love, however, was said to provide one sole door to salvation from the penalty of eternal damnation. The arms of the cross somehow reached back to redeem the lost Paradise and reached forward to a Paradise restored. According to Christian theology, the violent death of the Son of God was said to be of sufficient worth to propitiate God’s anger on account of human sin and to bring salvation to those belonging to the believing community called the Church.

What we are dealing with here is the Christian version of a very old apocalyptic myth about expulsion, separation, vengeance, angry gods and pay-back justice. In three massive volumes on *Primitive Mythology*, *Occidental Mythology* and *Oriental Mythology*, Joseph Campbell has demonstrated that the ancient world was awash with different versions of this same myth. He concludes the three-volume journey with this remarkable observation:

“Comparative cultural studies have now demonstrated beyond question that similar mythic tales are to be found in every quarter of this earth. When Cortes and his Catholic Spaniards arrived in Aztec Mexico, they immediately recognized in the local religion so many parallels to their own true Faith that they were hard put to explain the fact. There were towering pyramidal temples, representing, stage by stage, like Dante’s Mountain of Purgatory, degrees of elevation of the spirit. There were thirteen heavens, each with its appropriate gods or angels; nine hells, of suffering souls. There was a High God above all, who was beyond all human thought and imagining. There was even in incarnate Savior associated with the serpent, born of a virgin, who had died and was resurrected, one of whose symbols was a cross. The padres, to explain all this, invented two myths of their own. The first was that Saint Thomas, the Apostle to the Indies, had probably reached America and here preached the Gospel but, these shores being so far removed from the influence of Rome, the doctrine had deteriorated, so that what they were seeing around them was simply a hideously degenerate form of their own revelation. And the second explanation, then, was that the devil was here deliberately throwing up parodies of the Christian faith, to frustrate the mission.

“Modern scholarship, systematically comparing the myths and rites of mankind, has found just about everywhere legends of virgins giving birth to heroes who die and are resurrected. India is chock-full of such tales, and its towering temples, very like the Aztec ones, represent again our many-storied cosmic mountain, bearing Paradise on its summit and with horrible hells beneath. The Buddhists and the Jains have similar ideas. And, looking backward into the pre-Christian past, we discover in Egypt the mythology of the slain and resurrected Osiris; in Mesopotamia Tammuz; in Syria, Adonis; in Greece, Dionysos: all of which furnished models to the early Christians for their representations of Christ.” (*Myths to Live By*, pp.9-10)

The question that now begs for a clearer answer is this: Why did the Christian version of this very old mythology bring more bloodshed into the world than any of the other versions of the old myth? Why is it that Joseph Campbell, an authority on comparative mythology, was compelled to exclaim, “We have been bred to one of the most brutal war mythologies of all time.” (Ibid. p. 175) James Carroll (*Constantine’s Sword*) suggests that the violence is rooted in the violent theology of the cross, but he stops short of teasing out the logic of his startling observation.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the three great Western religions that share the same monotheistic vision. That vision has sometimes been expressed, as in the teaching of the Hebrew prophets and the historical Jesus, in terms of the fatherhood of God and the

brotherhood of man. This calls for the kind of justice that brings compassion, unconditional love for friend and foe alike and universal peace. Yet that same monotheistic vision of one single deity has brought with it a tendency to treat the perceived enemies of this single Deity as “our” enemies too. Or rather, that those who are not on our side are not on God’s side.

This idea that our enemies are also God’s enemies needs to be viewed against the background of the old Persian apocalyptic myth that has influenced the development of the three great monotheistic religions of the West. In this old Zoroastrian myth, the “sons of light” would be involved in a great cosmic battle with the “sons of darkness.” In this contest, those who are perceived as not being on the side of the one true God are demonized as if they are enemies of a true humanity and marked out for divine punishment.

This divide between “the children of light” and “the children of darkness” becomes even more starkly drawn in Christian theology. The one true God was said to be fully revealed in the one man Jesus Christ, and in no other. “God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death.” (Romans 3:25)

It was right here that the early Christians began the horrible process of demonizing everyone who did not accept their apocalyptic interpretation of the tragic death of Jesus. For the Christians, the issue was as simple as this: “Those who believe shall be saved... those who do not believe will be damned.” (Mark 16:16) End of story. According to the best loved passage in the NT, those who believe “shall have everlasting life,” but then follows the dark threat that those who don’t believe are already judged and condemned. By not believing, they just prove that their deeds are evil and they hate the light. (John 3:16-20) Another early Christian writer declared, “We belong to God, and a man who knows God listens to us, while he who does not belong to God does not listen to us.” (1 John 4:6)

St. Paul appeared to lose all patience with his fellow Jews who did not respond to his gospel, declaring bitterly that “wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” (1 Thessalonians 2:16) Again he wrote: “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that... obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

This kind of damnable fate was not only heaped on those outside the Christian faith, but true to vintage apocalyptic, it was heaped with even greater vehemence upon any person or group of persons within the Christian movement who had a competing version of faith. In this vein, Paul damned some Jerusalem believers for bringing another version of the gospel to his Gentile converts at Galatia (Galatians 1:9); and when some leading figures in the first church in Jerusalem questioned his credentials, he declared that they were “false apostles, deceitful workers and ministers of Satan.” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

There are passages within the New Testament that exhort Christians to shun or even refuse hospitality to those who have a different interpretation of the Christian

faith.(Romans 16:17; 2 John 10) One letter, written long after St. Peter was dead, even forges his name to vehemently attack other Christians as “false teachers” with “damnable heresies...cursed children, which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray...these are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever.” (2 Peter 2)

Some NT books launch their condemnation of other Christians by forging the name of Peter (as in the NT letters which bear his name), Paul (as in the letters to Timothy and Titus that bear Paul’s name) or John (as in the Apocalypse which bears John’s name). Most literary scholars today acknowledge that some NT books are forgeries (see Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged*). Other passages do not hesitate to denigrate their opponents by putting words of condemnation into the mouth of Jesus himself. A classical example of this is Matthew 23 which purports to be Jesus’ bitter condemnation of the Pharisees. We now know that these defamatory statements were written by an unknown author two-generations after the death of Jesus and in the post-temple era. Jewish Christians were then in contention with the Rabbinic Pharisees for the control of Judaism. The Rabbinic party eventually won out and expelled the Jewish Christians from the synagogues and from any future influence within Judaism. Matthew 23 reflects that bitter dispute around 90 CE rather than any personal dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The internecine strife of the early Christians demonstrates how they had betrayed the teaching of Jesus. His ethic of unconditional love, compassion, forgiveness and non-judgment of others was very different to a “Jesus” who bitterly denounced the Pharisees as the children of the devil who would be thrown into hell. The “Jesus” of the Fourth Gospel (the most virulent anti-Semitic book in the NT) calls his disputant Jews evil children of Satan. (John 8:44) The transformation of the non-violent Teacher of love for one’s enemies into the vindictive warrior Messiah who punishes his enemies is complete in the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine:

“Then I saw heaven wide open, and there before me was a white horse and its rider’s name was Faithful and True...His eyes flamed like fire...he was robed in a garment drenched in blood...from his mouth there went a sharp sword with which to smite the nations; for he it is who shall rule them with an iron rod, and tread the winepress of the wrath and retribution of God.” (Revelation 19:11-16)

“The winepress was trodden outside the city, and for two hundred miles around blood flowed from the press to the height of the horses’ bridles.”(Revelation 14:20)

As soon as these first Christians claimed to be in possession of the only truth by which mankind could be saved, they were headed down the long road toward the worst religious persecution that this world has ever seen. For it is not humanly or psychologically possible to start out saying that people who reject what we say are under divine condemnation without affecting our regard for them and finally ending up wanting to see them punished as God’s enemies and the enemies of mankind. As a couple of vindictive Old Testament Psalms put it -

“Do not I hate them that hate Thee? Yes, I hate them with perfect hatred.”(Psalm 139:22)
“Happy is he who shall seize your children and dash them against the rock.” (Psalm 137:9)

In the Apocalypse of St. John, the saints are represented as rejoicing in prospect of the imminent destruction about to fall on all those people not on their side.

To demonize others on the grounds of what they believe or decline to believe is to de-humanize them; and no group of people can de-humanize others without de-humanizing themselves. When the early Christians started to threaten people with eternal damnation unless they embraced their interpretation of the death of Christ, the intellectual brow-beating had already started. When the Church received the necessary political support, the compulsion of sword and fire was applied.

The grand narrative of Christian theology ends in the final solution to the problem of “this present evil world.” That solution is the Second Coming when the Christ who was put to death “for our sins” returns as an apocalyptic judge to remove the great mass of humanity from the face of the earth in one final holocaust. In this view of things, apocalyptic Christianity simply recycled Jewish apocalyptic which had re-cycled the old Zoroastrian vision about the final, terrifying end of the world from which “the sons of light” would be rescued and in which the “sons of darkness” would be punished.

The Christian world of today has largely moved on from the past history of this kind of religious intolerance. Claims about a one and only way of salvation through a one and only Saviour, along with claims that the Church alone possesses the keys to the kingdom of heaven, have been softened or re-interpreted to suit the demands of toleration in a global village environment. We who share this Western Christian tradition may see our own past being played out today by Islamic triumphalism. Well might we now recoil in horror from making arrogant claims of being in sole possession of the one truth for mankind. “Human beings are perhaps never more frightening than when they are convinced beyond doubt that they are right.” (Laurens van der Post)

A triumphalistic and intolerant Christianity has gone the way of the Holy Roman Empire. It is unlikely that it will lift its totalitarian head again. The reason we have spelled out its features is because apocalyptic has a way of being re-born in a new host. For example, when Jewish apocalyptic died out, it found a new home within the Christian movement. As the Christian movement has fallen into decline, apocalyptic has found a new home in other movements that appear to be social, political or environmental rather than outwardly religious. Yet when we scratch beneath the surface of these movements we find that they have simply re-jigged the old apocalyptic narrative that saturated the Christian West for centuries, and before that, saturated the culture of the ancient world. As Joseph Campbell says, these old myths remain like floating filaments in the air. The apocalyptic movements of our time are the crying babies of the apocalyptic Christianity.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL APOCALYPTIC STORY

1. The first thing that Environmentalism has in common with apocalyptic Christianity is that it shares the same old myth of an ideal age at the dawn of human history. According to the environmental narrative, the Golden Age was the world in its pristine wilderness state when primitive mankind – “the noble savage”- lived a simple existence in harmony with an unspoiled environment.
2. The second thing that Environmentalism shares with apocalyptic Christianity is that it is unrelentingly anti-human, teaching that humanity is a cancer of the earth, corrupting everything it touches even to the point of being to some degree responsible for great natural disasters such as floods, droughts, hurricanes, climate change and fire storms. It is almost as if the Augustinian doctrine of “original sin” and Calvinism’s doctrine of “total human depravity” lives again in this environmental dogma.
3. The third thing that Environmentalism shares with apocalyptic Christianity (and of course apocalyptic Judaism before it) is the belief that conditions in the world are becoming worse and worse. This pessimism about the declining state of the world is the hallmark of apocalyptic.
4. Environmentalism, in the best apocalyptic tradition – Persian, Jewish or Christian – demonizes its perceived opponents. As illustrated in the current climate change debate, it subjects the unbelievers (generally called “sceptics”) to ridicule, suppression, dismissal or loss of funding. This is not just a matter of regarding anyone sceptical of any aspect of the man-made global warming dogma as mistaken: they are branded as morally flawed and evil. Some environmentalists have called for Nuremberg-style trials or the incarceration of sceptics. The logical and inevitable end of demonizing people is to suppress them and to finally have them eliminated. Apocalyptic is disposed to end in violence.
5. All apocalyptic ideologies – whether Christian, Marxist or Environmental – end up making the ideology (the faith or the cause) more important than people or even more important than the things the environmentalism is supposed to protect. Environmentalism will plough ahead with renewable energy policies even in the face of the clearest evidence that these policies are hurting people. It advances its agenda even when this agenda slaughters wildlife (as in the case of wind turbines chopping up birds or growing palm oil for bio-fuel destroys the habitat of the orangutans).
6. Environmentalism has an apocalyptic view of a final end not unlike Jewish and Christian apocalyptic. It is a view that wants most of the inhabitants of the earth removed except for a remnant of humanity that are prepared to live in simple harmony with nature as primitive mankind is thought to have lived.
7. Environmentalism is more about controlling every aspect of human existence than caring for the environment. Given its jaundiced view of humanity, it does not trust human freedom. Given that all life is carbon-based, one of the most effective ways to control

every aspect of human existence is to control the consumption and emission of carbon/carbon dioxide. The end of this environmental program is a carbon police state. The spirit of environmentalism is totalitarian. It wants to suppress and destroy any voice of opposition and take total control over the way we live. As Vaclav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic puts it, "Today's debate about global warming is essentially a debate about freedom. The environmentalists would like to mastermind each and every possible (and impossible) aspect of our lives." (*Blue Planet in Green Shackles*)

(See the Appendix for a more complete coverage of the above points.)

THE ROOTS OF APOCALYPTIC MYTHOLOGY

Ernest Becker published an unforgettable little book that earned him the Pulitzer literary prize in 1974. Called *The Denial of Death*, the book is both passionate and brilliant, the fruit of Becker's life's work. There is no better way to state the thesis of this remarkable little book than to quote just a few of his arresting remarks:

"The fear of death is indeed a universal in the human condition." p. xvii

"The fear of death is natural and is present in everyone...it is the basic fear that influences all other, a fear from which no one is immune, no matter how disguised it may be." p.15

"This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression - and with all this yet to die" p.87

"Consciousness of death is the primary repression, not sexuality" p.96

"There will never be anything wholly secular about human fear. Man's terror is always 'holy terror'..." p.150

"...every society thus is a religion whether it thinks so or not: Soviet religion and Maoist religion are as truly religious as are scientific and consumer religion no matter how much they may disguise themselves by omitting religious and spiritual ideas from their lives." p.7

"...man as we know him [is] a hyper-anxious animal who constantly invents reasons for anxiety where there are none." p.17

Then comes a memorable quote that Becker sources from William James – a quote that encapsulates the issue:

“Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet” p.16

In Michael Crichton’s novel, *The State of Fear*, there is a Professor Hoffman who unloads with a rant against the fears the grips our modern society:

“...how astonishing the culture of Western society really is? Industrialized nations provide their citizens with unprecedented safety, health, and comfort. Average life spans increased fifty percent in the last century. Yet modern people live in abject fear. They are afraid of strangers, of disease, of crime, of the environment. They are afraid of the homes they live in, the food they eat, the technology that surrounds them. They are in a particular panic over things they can’t even see – germs, chemicals, additives, pollutants. They are timid, nervous fretful, and depressed. And even more amazingly, they are convinced that the environment of the entire planet is being destroyed around them. Remarkable! Like the belief in witchcraft, it’s an extraordinary delusion – a global fantasy worthy of the Middle Age. Everything is going to hell, and we must all live in fear. Amazing.” (p.455)

There is an elephant in the room of all these fears, yet this imaginary professor (who is really Michael Crichton) does not even seem to recognize that it is there. The elephant, of course, is the fear of death. This is the mother of all fears, the repressed “holy terror” that, to repeat the words of Becker, “constantly invents reasons for anxiety where there are none.”

Now that we have identified this elephant in the room, we may understand why the archetypal myth of Paradise has been re-cycled again and again. The story obviously grew from the human fear of death. Genesis 3 tells the story of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from their ideal Eden home. The story is designed to explain the origin of death. It gives the reason why death is preceded by a life of sorrow, pain in childbirth and a struggle for existence in an earth that is “cursed.” (Genesis 3:17) In answer to the primeval human question, Why do we have to die? the story replies that death is the punishment for human sin. Every culture in the cradle of human civilization, from Egypt to Mesopotamia and beyond, had its own version of this same story.

It is a crock of a story, and not just because it is so contrary to science and history. It is, of course, contrary to science because death was part of the natural order of things millions of years before the human species had arrived on the planet. It is contrary to history because the human condition has been constantly improving rather than degenerating as the story suggests. If the ancients had known something about the origin of species according to the science of evolution, they would have understood there could be no evolutionary progress without death. New forms of life replace and improve upon the old. What would human existence be like if there were no children? Yet without death the human population would soon cover the earth ten metres deep. But it is a real crock of a story because it turns what is natural and necessary into a matter of human fault and guilt. Death becomes some miserable kind of punishment or payback visited upon the

human race for one piddling offence. Or does Eve's curiosity, scepticism and quest for knowledge merit the ultimate Nobel prize?

The story mediates a worldview of vengeance, separation, and the worst kind of pay-back justice. Pay-back justice is that wretched thing that religion calls *atonement*, something completely foreign to the meaning of justice in the OT prophets and in the teachings of the historical Jesus.

Above all, it is a crock of a story in any version and in whatever way it is told because it ratchet's up the fear of death and creates this theology of despair called apocalyptic.

To summarize: the grand narrative upon which apocalyptic is based was born out of the fear of death. In trying to find a thanatology or a reason for death, the story stokes up the fear of death even further with images of vengeance, payback, separation, guilt and the despair of inevitable decline.

So the apocalyptic worldview is fatally flawed. It is not good for the world. It is worse for the human spirit.

A Grand Exodus Story with a Focus on Life

Returning to Becker, we find some stimulating comments about life in the midst of his book about death. Becker touches on the profound human yearning not just for life, but a life of more depth.

"This is the paradox [of man], he is out of nature and hopelessly in it; he is dual, up in the stars and yet housed in a heart-pumping, breath-gasping body...it aches and bleeds and will decay and die. Man is literally split in two" p.26

"...we are simultaneously worms and gods...gods with anuses...a god who shits" p.51, 58

"The urge to immortality is not a simple reflex of the death-anxiety but a reaching out by one's whole being toward life...the idea of God has never been a simple reflex of superstitious and selfish fear...instead, it is an outgrowth of genuine life-longing, a reaching out for plenitude of meaning" p.153

We have said at the beginning of this paper that the two most influential stories ever told are the stories of Paradise Lost and the Exodus of the Hebrews. The great OT prophets chose the better story as the foundation of their theology. Their worldview grew into a remarkable vision of universal brotherhood, justice and peace as if the whole earth would eventually become the Promised Land. It was a very humane vision because in their view of things the only real sin on earth was man's inhumanity to man. Such a vision grew out of their understanding of the story of the Exodus.

From the perspective of post-Enlightenment man, the Exodus story is essentially compatible with science and history. Like the beginnings of the Hebrews in Egypt, the beginning of the human race in Africa was not impressive and did not look too promising

at the start. The early migration out of Africa is a remarkable Exodus story. Like the early history of the Hebrews in Palestine, the early history of mankind was often brutal and bloody. Yet the human spirit has driven humanity forward, always seeking something better, not just in physical comforts but in something more and more humane. Human history, despite the setbacks on the long journey forward, has always been on gaining ground. It has been a trajectory of constant improvement. And the trend is accelerating.

The paradigm story of the Exodus puts the focus on life and the quest to find a better future. It is about going out, taking risks, conquering monsters and improving “the land” given to us. Hopefully we discover that the monsters to conquer include things that are within us. To start with, we inherit the genes of the entire animal kingdom. Anyone who reads Lyall Watson’s *Dark Nature* will not need Augustine’s doctrine of “original sin” to explain the darker human traits of band separation, xenophobia, predation domination and retaliation

We all have the opportunity to write our own Exodus story with all the possibilities of human imagination, discovery, ingenuity, creativity, living and loving. According to one OT wisdom saying, “Love is stronger than death.” A focus on living to humanize ourselves, our environment and to make this world a better place can be a much more powerful thing than the fear of death. In this context the reality of death becomes a useful motivator to pursue life with a more urgent passion to milk its opportunities to the last drop. Nothing worthwhile will ever be lost.

The core insight common to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths is that man - male and female - is made in the image and likeness of God. If there is any truth in that insight, then there are no horizons and no limits to the human potential. In the words of Freeman Dyson, it is “infinite in all directions.” As Ghandi said in a moment of inspired insight, “Never lose faith in humanity.”

In a complementary paper, (*From Retaliation to Unconditional Love*), Wendell Krossa portrays the human Exodus story as a journey from our primitive animal past to a growing awareness of what it means to live as truly human. It is therefore published on this website alongside our *Outline of Apocalyptic Theology*.

Appendix 1

APOCALYPTIC ENVIRONMENTALISM

Another Version of Paradise Lost

The first thing that the Environmental movement has in common with classical Christianity is that it shares the same old myth of an ideal age at the dawn of human history. According to the environmental narrative, the Golden Age was the world in its pristine wilderness state when primitive mankind – “the noble savage”- lived a simple existence in harmony with an unspoiled nature.⁵

This is all total myth, of course, because the life of pre-civilized man was dirty, smelly, short and brutal – with an average life-span was about 25 years. Besides being a world where mankind only had scant protection from wild beasts, it was a world crawling with killer parasites, bacteria and pathogens about which early humans had no knowledge at all. Mother Nature does not care what species live or die. Most forms of life on this earth live by making dinner out of other forms of life. There have been frequent die-offs and mass extinctions brought about by great natural disasters. “Mother nature is a vicious bitch” (Howard Bloom) and “a wicked old witch.”(Lyll Watson) She challenges us to adapt, innovate and ride the waves of change she throws at us, to harness her resources and milk her sources of energy for our own survival. If we tamely submit to her rule rather than build levy’s and shelters from her onslaughts, or fail to find medical remedies to kill her arsenal of deadly pathogens, then we perish at her merciless whim.⁶

There never was a time when this earth was in an ideal state. It has always been recovering from some mass extinction, ice age, earthquake, volcanic disruption, destructive weather event, infestation, plague or environmental disaster of some kind. For sure, humans have sometimes caused some damage too, but mere pin-pricks compared to the structural damage caused by meteor strikes, shifting continents that have pushed up great mountain ranges, volcanoes that have wiped out existing landscapes, moving tectonic plates that have caused massive earthquakes and destructive tsunamis, and a series of ice ages that buried productive areas of the earth under kilometres of ice.⁷

When humans first appeared on this planet, save for their big brains, they were in almost every other respect defenceless in a hostile, predatory environment in which almost every form of life had to kill or be killed. If the African homeland was anything like an ideal environment, why then did Homo sapiens migrate to Europe where it was inhospitably cold?

Myths aside, we have to question whether there was ever a time when the earth would have looked better and offered more congenial living conditions than at the present time.

Was there ever a time when the earth grew so much food for people to eat? Was there ever a time when humans lived longer, were better fed, clothed, housed, educated, travelled, entertained and had so many opportunities for self-development than now? For sure, the world is far from perfect. Too many people are still hungry and suffer unacceptable levels of poverty, but over-all, the human condition continues to improve for more people on this planet than ever before. We are even wealthy enough to worry about the environment and to invest in improving it. As Norman Borleng, the father of the Green Revolution in high-yield agriculture, used to quip, “Only a well-fed member of the First World could become a conservationist.”

No, there was never a Paradise on this earth, and there never was a time in some mythical past when human beings were better off than they are today. And yes, this earth is still potentially our Promised Land. As one of the OT prophets put it, “Before us is a garden of Eden, and behind a desolate wilderness.” There is no going back to something better; but humanity can always move forward to something better.

Another Anti-human Rant

The second thing that Environmentalism has in common with Apocalyptic Christianity is that it is unrelentingly anti-human. Humans are said to be the cancer of the earth that corrupt and degrade all that is pristine and natural.⁸ Man is said to be “a parasite,” “a locust-like blight on the planet” whose history is one of “ravaging this precious, beautiful planet.” “In this ultimate declinist vision, not only modern society but man himself will soon be finally, mercifully extinct. His frenzied destruction of his environment, his plundering of the planet, all come to an end; the meaningless chatter of *Zivilisation* ceases.” (Quotes drawn from Arthur Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History*, p.439-440)

It is almost as if Augustine’s doctrine of “original sin” lives on in this eco-cult of anti-humanism. That old Christian doctrine not only said that death is man’s fault (Romans 5:12), but also said that the curses and calamities of “this present evil world” are man’s fault too. (Genesis 3:16-24; Romans 8:20-22)

Al Gore now blames mankind for causing hurricane Katrina’s destructive impact on New Orleans, or more recently, superstorm Sandy’s damage in the New York region. When a large swathe of Australia was inundated with water from record-breaking rains a couple of years ago, the Greens leader Bob Brown declared that the coal mining industry should pay for causing the damage. Even President Obama has repeated Environmentalism’s claim that human activity is exacerbating the impact of droughts, floods, hurricanes, fire storms and other destructive weather events. Despite a plethora of studies showing there is no trend in either the frequency or intensity of destructive weather events over the last 50 years,⁹ Al Gore and a core of alarmist scientists keeping harping that human fingerprints are all over these natural disasters. This kind of worldview is not far removed from that religiously superstitious era when witches were regularly blamed for causing natural disasters.

Another Claim that the World is Going from Bad to Worse

We have already seen how the early Christians thought that the world and the human condition would continue to get worse and worse. They were locked into this apocalyptic worldview because they clung to the old narrative of the Fall of man. The environmental movement has been riding this same old wave of what Arthur Herman calls “cultural pessimism.” (*The Idea of Decline in Western History*)

It was 50 years ago that Rachael Carlson wrote her *Silent Spring* detailing how the world was about to be destroyed by man-made chemicals. It was 40 years ago that Paul Ehrlich’s *Population Bomb* and the Club of Rome’s *Limits to Growth* unleashed an environmental panic about running out of food and other essential resources. It was 30 years ago that President Jimmy Carter commissioned his *Global 2000 Report* that painted a gloomy picture of a world denuded of forests, running out of oil and suffering a fall in living standards – and all of this projected to take place by the year 2000.

Since these gloomy projections were made, world food production has trebled using less land, thereby returning millions of acres of surplus land to forestry. The known oil and natural gas reserves of the world are now beyond the wildest expectations of the industry a generation ago. And standards of living along with human longevity have continued to make remarkable progress.

The old apocalyptic narrative about the deterioration of the world and the human condition is a myth that has no basis in reality. Since *Homo sapiens* appeared on this earth over 100,000 years ago, the history of mankind has been a trajectory of relentless progress. While there have been some pauses or even setbacks in the march toward a better future, the over-all trajectory has been one of constant improvement. Far from slowing down, much less retreating, the upward trend is accelerating.¹⁰

Those who keep harping that there has to be some limit to growth in a finite world are like the man who in the 1930’s seriously proposed that we would soon run out of new kinds of music given that we only had eight basic notes to play with. Will the mind ever run out of new ideas? The world may be finite, but the human mind is “the ultimate resource” (Julian Simon) which is “infinite in all directions” (Freeman Dyson). The horizons of human possibilities will keep expanding and accelerating like the universe itself. If we are reaching any kind of end, it is only the end of the beginning.

Another Way to Demonize Others

Nothing demonstrates the quasi-religious nature of Environmentalism more than its tendency to demonize anyone who calls its pessimistic projections into question, especially its dogma about catastrophic, man-made global warming.

It was Thomas Huxley who famously said, “The improver of natural knowledge absolutely refuses to acknowledge authority, as such. For him, scepticism is the highest of duties; blind faith the one unpardonable sin.” With Al Gore and the IPCC coterie of global warming alarmists, however, unbelief appears to be the one unpardonable sin. They make the debate sound like a re-run of Zoroaster’s “sons of light” doing battle with the “sons of darkness.” It sounds all too much like religious believers demonizing the unbelievers all over again.

As we have already seen, it is not possible to go down this path of demonizing people on “the other side” without wishing them harm and finally doing them harm.

Lord Nigel Lawson said some years ago that there was a “whiff of McCarthyism” about the environmental movement. Others have called it was a whiff of Lysenkoism. These observations have been made because there has been a strong tendency to demonize anybody who expresses any doubt that global warming is both man-made and catastrophic. Those who question any aspect of Al Gore’s or the IPCC dogma have been subjected to ridicule and derision – and that’s just for starters. Next have come accusations that the sceptics are shills of Big Oil or receiving funding from the energy industry – accusations which in almost every case are both vacuous and laughable. Then come the suggestions that these so-called sceptics have no moral compass or have no regard for the precious earth. Conferences have even been convened so that psychoanalysts can throw light on whether these dissidents are evil or mentally maladjusted. If those who stick their head up above the parapet happen to be university professors or editors of scientific journals they risk being removed from their academic posts or lose their funding. Leading figures in the environmental movement have even called for Nuremberg-type trials or incarceration to punish climate change dissenters. One of them has seriously suggested that so-called sceptics should be sent to some kind of Russian Gulag for re-education. So what starts out as some *ad hominem* banter is ratcheted up to become some serious arm-twisting.¹¹

Another Ideology that Becomes More Important than People

Apocalyptic movements go down a path that makes their theology or ideology its “ultimate concern.” Whenever this happens, “the cause” or “the faith” becomes more important than people. In the case of Environmentalism, which is supposed to be all about protection of birds, animals and vegetation, the cause is not just more important than people (who are said to be the cancer of the earth anyway), but more important than those things it is supposed to protect.

For example, Environmentalism pushes its renewable energy agenda even when this means chopping up birds in wind turbines or destroying the habitat of orangutans in the push to grow palm oil for renewable energy.

As for any concern about hurting people, Green ideology pushes energy policies that if carried out would make it impossible for the Third World to escape from poverty. The

diversion of corn and other essential food crops to make motor fuel (a policy that achieves no reduction in greenhouse gases) is raising the price of food and pushing many Third World people toward starvation. This bio-fuel policy has widely been called “a crime against humanity.”¹²

Bjorn Lomborg’s *Copenhagen Consensus Center* has shown quite conclusively that the amount of money being spent on climate mitigation schemes would, if spent on real human needs, go a long way towards giving every person in the Third World clean water to drink, enough food to eat and protection from malaria and other killer diseases. That alone could save up to several million lives a year. Is the environmental cause more important than the lives of several million people? (See D. Weston. Allen, *The Weather Makers Re-examined*, page 271-273 for an excellent overview and summary of the CCC findings)

Billions of dollars are being spent on Green energy schemes that do nothing to improve the environment, but they are pushing more and more people into fuel poverty. In Germany alone, 600,000 homes have recently been disconnected from the electricity grid because the occupants can no longer afford a basic electricity amenity. More and more people in Great Britain are being pushed into fuel poverty and can no longer afford basic heating. Useless yet costly environment schemes are bringing hardship and suffering to all too many in First World countries. The cost of energy is threatening to de-industrialize Germany and Great Britain as more and more industries consider relocating overseas, especially to the US where energy costs are two or three times cheaper.¹³

Greenpeace and other environmental activists stick to their opposition to the genetically modified Golden Rice which has been enriched with Vitamin A. More than a million people per year in Third World countries suffer eye impairment and increased mortality due to a Vitamin A deficiency. It has been estimated that 670,000 children under the age of 5 die each year for the same reason. Research has shown that Golden Rice could make a huge contribution toward addressing this humanitarian problem. The rice has been proven to be perfectly safe. Despite its huge humanitarian benefits, the anti-GM ideology of the environmental activists has so far prevented its release.¹⁴

Against the best scientific advices, environmentalists insisted on a total ban on DDT even though the evidence at the time of the ban about 40 years ago indicated it would lead to the death of millions of people, mostly children, in Third World countries. It is now estimated that more than 20 or even 30 million people have died of malaria that could have been prevented by a judicious domestic use of DDT. When the panel of experts appointed to review the evidence found no scientific evidence to support the ban, it was imposed against their advices anyway. Questions are now being raised whether the real purpose of the total ban on DDT (which was recently rescinded by the UN) was imposed for the more sinister purposes of population control.¹⁵

All of this illustrates what can happen when an ideology becomes more important than people.

Another Ideology that Becomes More Important than Scientific Integrity

We have seen how apocalyptic Judaism and apocalyptic Christianity were willing to compromise literary integrity for the sake of a higher cause called “the faith.” In the same way, scientists and organizations that are committed to an apocalyptic worldview have not hesitated to cherry-pick the evidence, adjust the data, manipulate the records and massage their reports to support the case for *catastrophic anthropogenic global warming* (CAGW). As early as 1989, Professor Stephen Schneider, one of the leading AGW advocates, made this astounding admission: “To capture the public imagination, we have to offer up some scary scenarios, make simplified dramatic statements and little mention of any doubts one might have. Each of us has to decide the right balance between being effective and being honest.” (*Discover* magazine, October 1989)

The global warming alarmists could have taught Herodotus a thing or two about the art of exaggeration. In 2005 the *Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change* (IPCC) predicted there would be 50 million climate refugees by the year 2010. It is now almost 2013, but not one climate refugee has been sighted.¹⁶ The IPCC scandalously predicted that the glaciers of the Himalayas would disappear within thirty years. The organization has since been forced to withdraw the claim, admitting it was based on nothing but wild speculation.

A careful review of Tim Flannery’s book, *The Weather Makers*, has identified 78 instances of this kind of exaggeration plus 85 half-truths which could be labelled as “porkies” (See D. Weston Allen, *The Weather Makers Re-examined*).

One of the fathers of the CAGW movement is the venerable and lovable James Lovelock. He now very frankly admits that he, along with Al Gore and Tim Flannery, have been alarmists. “We were supposed to be halfway toward a frying world by now,” he wryly quips in a winsome moment of self-transcendence, but “it hasn’t happened.” “All right, I made a mistake.” He is even thankful that the sceptics have saved him and others from turning global warming alarmism into a religion. He singles out Lord Nigel Lawson (now Chairman of The Global Warming Policy Foundation) as one of the sceptics he has admired. Lovelock has recently settled down in a new home by the sea where Gore said buildings would be swallowed up under metres of water from rising sea levels. It just happens that both Gore and Flannery have also recently bought homes near the sea as well.¹⁷

The global warming alarmists have kept repeating their mantra that global warming in our time is unprecedented. Yet for most of the last 10,000 years the world has been warmer than it is now. It was certainly warmer during the long Holocene Optimum. It was warmer during the Roman Warm Period when Hannibal took his elephants over a pass in the Alps which is now closed by the ice. It was warmer in the Medieval Warm Period when Greenland had farms that are still covered in ice despite the recent warming. A coterie of Climategate scientists and the IPCC have tried to hide these facts because they lead to the obvious question, “Is it not reasonable to suspect that the same natural

variability that caused the warming in the past might be causing the warming at present?” “No, no,” they have said, “the current warming is unprecedented. It must be man-made.”¹⁸

Next we come to the oft-repeated claim that surveys prove that 97% or 98% of scientists agree with what the CAGW alarmists proclaim.¹⁹

Aside from the fact that science is not established by consensus or by any authority like a religious dogma, this claim about an overwhelming consensus is both a deception and an exaggeration.

First of all it is deceptive not to clearly define what area of the science enjoys this overwhelming consensus. There are still many areas of climate science which are not settled and not widely agreed upon. It is wrong to leave the impression that there is a consensus about aspects of the climate science that remain uncertain.

So let us identify the areas of the science that are reasonably certain and those areas that remain uncertain.

The part of the science that is reasonably certain (and enjoys an overwhelming consensus) is that carbon dioxide is one the greenhouses gases (water vapour being the main one) that by a process of back-radiation called “the greenhouse effect (GHE), keeps the earth warmer than it would otherwise be. Atmospheric physicists are able to calculate that a doubling of CO₂ in the atmosphere would warm the earth by about 1 degree Celsius.

There are hardly any sceptical scientists in the world who disagree with this GHE science. In other words, when it is claimed that 97% of scientists agree that CO₂ has this global warming effect, that includes 97% of the so-called sceptical scientists too – Richard Lindzen, Roy Spencer, John Christy, Michael Patrick, Bob Carter, William Kininmonth, just to name a few. These scientists have never denied that CO₂ has a warming effect. It is very dishonest debating tactic when the CAGW advocates leave the impression that they do.

Anyone who wishes to engage in an honest debate will want to define the points of agreement and the points of disagreement to avoid attacking a straw man. There is no disagreement on the basic science of the greenhouse effect (GHE). There is no argument whether CO₂ has a warming effect. It does.

The contention is whether the flow on effects called “positive feedbacks” will ratchet up that 1 degree of CO₂ warming, and if so, by how much? The issue is about the climate’s *sensitivity to CO₂*. The IPCC’s AR4 (2007) canvassed a range of opinions among its participating scientists and reported that when the feedbacks were taken into account, the estimated warming for a doubling of CO₂ ranged from 1.5 to 6 degrees. So there was clearly no consensus even among the IPCC scientists on the question of how much warming is likely to occur with a doubling of CO₂.

The sceptical scientists contend that the feedback effect of the extra water vapour and clouds will be “negative” rather than “positive,” Their calculations bring the amount of warming back to anything from 0.5 – 0.8 degrees.

In any case, this issue of *sensitivity* to carbon dioxide levels is not settled and enjoys no consensus of scientific opinion. As time goes on, it is looking more and more likely that the “positive feedbacks” of water vapour and clouds have been greatly exaggerated. And on balance, it is becoming more and more likely that the modest warming effects of CO₂ together with the fertilizing effects of higher levels of CO₂ atmosphere will green the earth and produce more food for both people and animals.

What is not acceptable is to have CAGW alarmists claim that the warming of the higher CO₂ levels will be catastrophic, and then claim that 97% or 98% of scientists agree on this point. They do not. To take the consensus that does exist for one part of the science and then use it as a blanket to confirm their CAGW alarmism is both wrong and deceptive.

One thing is now clear: world temperatures are not rising in lockstep with rising levels of CO₂. Al Gore’s thesis is falsified by the fact that world temperatures have remained flat for the last 17 years while CO₂ levels have kept rising. It is astonishing that the prophets of climate doom were able create a world-wide panic about an unprecedented global warming at the very time when world temperatures remained flat. The only thing that has been heating up is the apocalyptic rhetoric.

As world temperatures continue to go nowhere and the public panic about global warming subsides, the climate change activists are currently putting their focus on destructive weather events. In a past age of religious superstition, they used to blame witches, Jews or heretics for causing natural calamities. In our time, droughts, floods, hurricanes and fire storms are said to be getting worse and becoming more frequent because of mankind’s carbon dioxide emissions. Yet numerous peer-reviewed studies have shown that there is no trend in either the frequency or the intensity of these destructive weather events.²⁰

The way science has been used to support claims about mankind’s catastrophic effect on the climate lacks both accuracy and integrity. The Climategate scandal and the evidence of the IPCC’s bias toward attributing dangerous global warming to human activity indicate that the ideology has become more important than scientific integrity. When Ian Plimer encountered some Christians who were manipulating evidence about finding Noah’s Ark, he said they were “lying for Jesus.” We could say that climate change activists have been “lying for Gaia.”

Another Final Solution

Apocalyptic movements tend to think in terms of a final solution to what they see as the central problem that confronts the world. Arthur Herman (*The Idea of Decline in Western History*) shows that Hitler got caught up in an apocalyptic movement that supported Eugenics. It was sweeping the world long before the start of World War II. Hitler was the one person who was bold enough and stupid enough to carry it out. His “final solution” led to the Holocaust in which six million Jews perished.

We have seen how both apocalyptic Judaism and apocalyptic Christianity had their final solution to the problem of “this present evil world.” It was to be a world-wide Gehenna of unimaginable destruction for most of the inhabitants of this world – we might say an event that would go well for a few people but bad for the rest.

Most hard core environmentalists see no hope for the world with its present culture and institutions. They want to see civilization dismantled and the population of the world reduced to about 1 billion people. Only a catastrophic event of Biblical proportions could bring this about. We have to assume that most environmentalists would be too humane to support a program to bring about the elimination of five to six billion people. The whole idea of its stark brutality is too much to contemplate, but still there are hard core environmentalists who hope this could somehow happen and they say so quite openly.²¹ They are no worse than good Christian people who still cherish the hope that a cataclysmic event called “Second Coming” will put an end to the present order of things. The rest of us might hope that there is no one bold enough or stupid enough to lead the world down a path where all humans perish from the face of the earth except for a few eco-warriors who are prepared to live like “the noble savage.”

Appendix 2

ZOROASTER AND THE BIRTH OF AN APOCALYPTIC FAITH

The following outline has been drawn, for the most part, from three excellent and highly acclaimed publications about Zoroastrians: Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*; Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*; and S.A. Kapadia, *The Teaching of Zoroaster and the Philosophy of the Parsi Religion*.

Norman Cohn has written such an excellent *Afterword* at the end of his equally excellent book, that I will quote it here in full:

This book is concerned with a major turning-point in the history of human consciousness: it tries to describe how the destiny of the world and of human being came to be imagined in a new way, and how these new expectations began to spread abroad. A brief recapitulation of the main argument may not come amiss.

Until around 1500 BC peoples as diverse as Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Indo-Iranians and their Indian and Iranian descendents, Canaanites, pre-exilic Israelites were all agreed that in the beginning the world had been organised, set in order, by a god or by several gods, and that in essentials it was immutable. For each people, security – meaning fertility of the land, victory in war, stable social relations sanctioned by custom and law – was the outward and visible sign that a divinely ordained order did indeed exist.

However, that order was never untroubled, it was always threatened by evil, destructive forces – sometimes identified as flood or drought, famine or plague, inertia or death itself – but sometimes also as hostile peoples or tyrannical conquerors. In the combat myth, in its various formulations, the conflict between universal order and the forces that threatened and invaded and impaired it – between cosmos and chaos – was given symbolic expression. A young hero god, or divine warrior, was charged by the gods with the task of keeping the forces of chaos at bay; and in return he was awarded kingship over the world.

Some time between 1500 and 1200 BC Zoroaster broke out of that static yet anxious world-view. He did so by reinterpreting, radically, the Iranian version of the combat myth. In Zoroaster's view that world was not static, nor would it always be troubled. Even now the world was moving, through incessant conflict, towards a conflictless state. The time would come when, in a prodigious final battle, the supreme god and his supernatural allies would defeat the forces of chaos and their human allies and

eliminate them once and for all. From then on the divinely appointed order would obtain absolutely: physical distress and want would be unknown, no enemy would threaten, within the community of the saved there would be absolute unanimity; in a word, the world would be for ever untroubled, and secure.

Unheard of before Zoroaster, that expectation deeply influenced certain Jewish groups – as witness some of the apocalypses and some of the writings found at Qumran. Above all, it influenced the Jesus sect, with incalculable consequences.

In this book the story is carried only to the close of the first century AD – but the story itself has continued down the ages. And what a story it has become! Much theological speculation; innumerable millenarian movements, including those now flourishing so vigorously in the United States; even the appeal once exercised by Marxist-Lenin ideology – all this belongs to it. Nor is there any reason to think that the story is nearing its end. The tradition whose origins are studied in this book is still alive and potent. Who can tell what fantasies, religious or secular, it may generate in the unforeseeable future?

Zoroaster – the first prophet of an apocalyptic faith

Zarathustra (or Zoroaster as the Greeks called him) was born somewhere around 1500 BCE. He was reputed to have been miraculously born in answer to the prayers of a holy man and his equally holy wife. The evil spirit and seducer called Angra Mainyu who from the beginning was believed to be the enemy of God and man, was said to have fled in terror at Zarathustra's birth, only to return later to unsuccessfully tempt the man of God with the promise of rulership over the kingdoms of this world. The story has some striking parallels to the New Testament story of Jesus.

At the age of seven Zoroaster began his training under priestly care, and at the age of 15 (the age when manhood began in his culture) he became a priest in his ancient Iranian faith. At 20 years of age, Zoroaster began a period of wandering in search of the Truth. When he was 30 years of age, he went down into the waters of a river to draw water for a religious ceremony, and as he was coming up out of the water, he encountered a shining Being on the banks of the river. This supernatural Being conducted Zoroaster into the very presence of Ahura Mazda, the eternal Creator. This was the first of a number of times that Zoroaster was to commune with Ahura Mazda in vision.

By these visionary experiences, Zoroaster came to embrace and teach a worldview that in his age was entirely revolutionary. Its main features were as follows:

There are two primal, antagonistic spirits of the Cosmos. On the one hand there is the spirit of Ahura Mazda the Creator - the source of the order (asha) of truth, justice and all that is good. On the other hand there is a hostile spirit, an adversary, a counter-creator who is hostile to all that is good. His name is Angra Mainyu. This mythical figure is much the same as what the Devil or Satan came to be in the Christian religion.

Ahura Mazda created man in the environment of a perfect world, knowing full-well that Angra Mainyu would seduce humanity and bring decay and death into this perfect world. Ahura Mazda's plan, however, was to use the creation of man as a means to entrap his great adversary. Despite Angra Mainyu's apparent success in corrupting God's creation, Ahura Mazda's plan was to use humanity as his ally to finally defeat the enemy of all that is good. What all this meant was that this world was to be seen as the battleground between good and evil.

It was not John Milton in his great epic called *Paradise Lost*, nor Ellen White in her *Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, nor even St. John the Divine's *Book of Revelation* that first depicted this cosmic conflict between good and evil. Long before Moses or post-Exilic Judaism, and longer still before the Christian *Book of Revelation* came to be written, the Iranian prophet Zoroaster had essentially outlined the great cosmic war between God and the one whom Christians call Satan.

Zoroaster succeeded in transforming the old combat myth held by the Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Indo-Iranians, Canaanites and even the pre-Exilic Israelites into **an apocalyptic faith**. Zoroaster appears to be the first of the great prophets/religious founders to systematically outline the end of history. There would be a climatic battle between the sons of Light and the sons of Darkness, Truth and Error, Good and Evil. There would be a general resurrection of all who have lived upon the earth. There would be a Last Judgment, following which Angra Mainyu, his demon hordes and all humans who have followed his evil ways will be punished and finally annihilated (a second death) by a stupendous supernatural fire.

Following this there will be a "making wonderful" moment when the world will be miraculously transformed once again into that perfect world that existed in the beginning of history. The "saved" human race will then live forever in happy families (but without children) in a corporeal or physical existence in the restored Paradise (the Persian word for garden) on this earth.

"The idea that the present world is destined to end in a Last Judgment and to be replaced by a new, incorruptible world – that was wholly new... The ultimate origin of the notion that time will have an end does indeed lie in the visionary experiences of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster." Cohn, p. 231

"Zoroaster was the first to teach the doctrine of an individual judgment, Heaven and Hell, the future resurrection of the body, the general Last Judgment and life everlasting on earth for reunited soul and body." (Mary Boyce)

Boyce says that Zoroaster was the founder of the oldest creedal religion, and one that has been more influential than any other. This Iranian prophet preceded Buddha, Moses, Jesus or Mohammed. "Zoroastrianism itself is the oldest of the dogmatic, proselytizing world religions." (Boyce, p. 99) It was the first world religion to be based on ideas that were both universalistic and monotheistic.

Norman Cohn is no doubt correct when he says that the only Old Testament book that comes anywhere near Zoroaster's apocalyptic vision of the end of history is the book of Daniel. This was a very late book and the last to be included in the Old Testament canon. Daniel was an apocalyptic book written after the Jews had lived for two hundred years under the friendly rule of the Achaemenian (Persian) Empire. During that period, leading Jewish thinkers drank deeply at the fountain of the Zoroastrian religious tradition.

Significantly, the post-Exilic Biblical writers had no scathing comments to make about the Persian divinities as they did in respect to the Babylonian, Canaanite or Assyrian divinities. A large section of Daniel (chapters 2-7) was written in Aramaic, the universal language of the Achaemenian Empire- much as Koine Greek became the universal language in Greco-Roman times. Daniel's account of the great image with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay (Daniel 2) was taken straight out of a Zoroastrian teaching of a symbolic tree made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and a final mixture of iron and clay. Many key words throughout the book of Daniel have a Zoroastrian origin. Above all, scholars generally recognize that the last Judgment of Daniel 7 and its teaching of a bodily resurrection of all mankind in Daniel 12 show the unmistakable influence of the Zoroastrian faith.

Complementing this teaching of the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the body and the "making wonderful" of the restored Paradise on earth, Zoroaster had a clear teaching of "the intermediate state" between the moment of an individual's death and the general resurrection. Upon death, the soul of the departed was depicted as crossing a narrow bridge. Those weighed down by more bad deeds than good deeds would fall into the abyss of hell where they would suffer preliminary punishment as they awaited the Final Judgment and resurrection of the body. Conversely, the souls of those whose good deeds outweighed their evil deeds would enter the bliss of an intermediate state in the presence of God. Martin Luther was reputed to have quipped, "It would be a foolish soul who wanted to have his body back." Zoroaster, however, had a different view of the body. He taught that the happiness of the soul could not be complete until it was re-united with its body. This teaching sprang from Zoroaster's understanding that there was first a spiritual creation followed by its being completed in the creation of a material or physical form. It was a teaching that gave Zoroastrianism a high view along with a deep appreciation of the physical environment, including the importance of the human body.

Although Zoroastrianism was a confessional faith which faithfully preserved the original tradition with little change, there was some development of its theology subsequent to Zoroaster's time. One of these developments was in the matter of the ultimate fate of those who fell off the bridge into the punishments of hell. Zoroastrianism had originally taught that these lost souls would eventually be annihilated in the final punishment of a

merciful “second death.” (As if to anticipate the teaching of some Christian sects like the Seventh-day Adventists) But later Zoroastrian theologians began to conceive that even these fallen souls will have their evil purged from their nature so that they will join the host of redeemed humanity. Because they too are God’s children they will eventually realize the intended destiny of all who share in God’s nature. In this respect the Zoroastrians anticipated the “universalism” of Origen and a minority of Christian thinkers down through the ages who have taught that all of humanity will eventually be saved.

Moral Code and Ethics

The moral code and ethical ideals of Zoroaster were equal, if not superior in some respects, to the law of Moses. Zoroaster’s moral teachings are so excellent that they deserve to be placed alongside the writings of the great Hebrew prophets.

The law of Ahura Mazda enjoined an order consisting of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Love of neighbour demanded no less than this. Diligence was everywhere commended, and sloth in every place condemned. Love of neighbour demanded that the “sons of light” would refrain from slander, infidelity in marriage and non-payment of debts. Care and kindness toward others is enjoined under all circumstances.

Zoroastrianism had a higher view of women than the law of Moses in that it leaned more towards treating women as equals.

Other standout features of Zoroastrianism

* There was a great emphasis on hygiene that included water purity, body cleanliness and a separation from the contamination of dead bodies – all of which finds a counterpart in the law of Moses which came after Zoroaster.

* Zoroastrian ethics demanded a duty of care and kindness toward animals that is quite astonishing. Zoroaster taught that even animals have souls which would rise up on the Day of Judgment to accuse those who had in any way neglected or had been unkind and uncaring toward them. On the other hand, every small deed of kindness - to a dog, a goat or a cow - would not go unnoticed or unrewarded. While Zoroaster did not go as far as enjoining vegetarianism, he taught that no animal life should be sacrificed, even when hunting, apart from human necessity, and always with prayer and respect for the life of the beast. Hunting for pleasure was strictly forbidden. If the life of an animal was to be taken for human needs, it was to be done respectfully and reverently. A portion of the meat was given to the officiating priests, and no meat was eaten apart from reverence for the life that was sacrificed. In this matter of care and kindness toward animals, Zoroaster appears to express an even higher or more advanced state of human consciousness than is generally found in the Judeo/Christian tradition, with the possible exception of some of the sayings of Jesus.

* Zoroaster was vehemently opposed to religious fasting. In his view, fasting would weaken rather than strengthen the body that was needed to serve humanity as required by Ahura Mazda. The only kind of “fasting” that Ahura Mazda wants from his worshippers is not to abstain from food but to abstain from any an evil thought, word or action. It is interesting that a Hebrew prophet who lived under Achaemenian rule was also scornful of religious fasting. He declared that the only kind of fasting that was pleasing to God was a genuine love for humanity expressed in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and providing shelter for the homeless (Isaiah 58).

* The reason that the Zoroastrian faith was not written up until centuries later is that the old Zoroastrians believed that writing was an invention of the devil. The Zoroastrian priests rejected writing as an unfit medium to record the holy words of the faith. It is no accident that the earliest Zoroastrian scripture (Avesta) as in the form of some poetry only. In this, they perhaps expressed the beginnings of an insight that was later taken up and developed by the author of the fourth Gospel of the New Testament. This author teaches that the Word of God cannot be contained in any written book, but can only be incarnated in a human life. (See John 1) St. Paul too contends that a living faith in the new age of the Spirit transcends the textuality of any written document (Galatians 3 and 4; 2 Corinthians 3: Romans 7).

* Zoroastrians held to some quaint myths that were integral to their culture. Fire was a sacred symbol/sacrament of the divine presence. The evil one had corrupted fire by creating smoke. Smoke was associated with the demonic. Frogs were evil and were created by the evil one. So were lizards, snakes, scorpions and creatures that were regarded as repugnant. This helps to illuminate some passages in the NT Apocalypse that uses frogs, scorpions and smoke as portents of evil – another indication of the Zoroastrian influences on Christian literature.

There are other features of Zoroaster’s teaching that are a precursor of Judeo/Christian scripture. Notably:

* Zoroaster taught that there were 6 periods in the creation of the world – stage 1, the creation of the heavenly firmament, stage 2, the appearance of water, stage 3, the formation of the earth, stage 4, the creation of plants, stage 5, the creation of animals, and stage 6, the creation of man.

* The first man was called Yima. He was a Hebrew Adam and Noah all rolled into one person. Like the man in the Genesis story, Yima was told to cultivate the earth and is given dominion over it. Later he was told to build an enclosure to preserve the best animals and plants from coming destructive weather events. This clearly finds its echo in the Biblical story of Noah and the Ark. Yima became a powerful ruler under the blessing of Ahura Mazda, but then Angra Mainyu seduced him to become first proud and then disobedient. This was all part of the great contest between good and evil that was destined to be fought out on this earth. As we have already pointed out, we encounter this theme of the great cosmic war in the last book of the New Testament (*The Apocalypse* of St. John).

A Cosmic Saviour

At first Zoroaster hoped that he would live to see the “making wonderful” event at the end of history – just as St. Paul at first expected to be alive to see what the first Christians called the *Parousia* event. In other words, early Zoroastrianism was imbued with the sense of “immediacy” and “imminence” – always the mark of a genuine apocalyptic faith. For the most part, Zoroastrianism managed to retain this sense of the imminence of the end-time, or at least they were able to rationalize the delay of the apocalyptic event just as the early Christians managed to rationalize why their Messiah had not returned. When Zoroaster sensed that he was not going to live to see the “making wonderful” event of the end-time, he prophesied that Ahura Mazda would raise up someone like himself to lead humanity into the final battle between good and evil. A parallel story appears in Hebrew scripture when Moses, about to die, tells his people that God would send Israel a prophet like himself. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

Out of this hope that another Zoroaster-like prophet would arrive in the last days, Zoroastrians developed a belief in the coming of a cosmic Saviour called the Saoshyant – “the one who brings benefit.” According to this belief, he would lead humanity into the last battle against evil, using supernatural weaponry not unlike the warrior Messiah in the Apocalypse of St. John.

When Zoroaster died, it was believed that the seed from his sperm was buried in Lake Kasaoya (in Iran, of course) where it was guarded by 999,000 departed righteous souls. In the fullness of time, after conditions on earth would seriously deteriorate, a chosen virgin would go down to this lake to bathe and become pregnant with Zoroaster’s seed. Although the child would be fully human - the fruit of a union of both male and female - he would be endowed with supernatural powers and weaponry for the great final battle. In this sense also he would be a cosmic Messiah figure rather than a mere national Messiah of Jewish expectations.

Perhaps it is significant that Paul of Tarsus (a city renowned for being a centre of the Zoroastrian religion) elevated Jesus Christ above the status of a mere Jewish Messiah to become a cosmic Messiah of Zoroastrian proportions. The same thing could be said about the Apocalypse of St. John. It borrowed heavily from the Old Testament book of Daniel – which in turn borrowed heavily from the Zoroastrian faith. The reason why St. Paul was so successful in promoting a world-wide faith (whereas those who remained Jewish Christians were not) is because his Christ-figure was not just a Jewish Messiah, but a cosmic Messiah who fulfilled both Jewish and Iranian hopes. More than this, the Christ of St. Paul was a Messiah-figure who fulfilled the hopes associated with all the dying and rising divinities of the ancient world. As Joseph Campbell puts it, “We discover in Egypt the mythology of the slain and resurrected Osiris; in Mesopotamia Tammuz; in Syria, Adonis; and in Greece, Dionysos: all of which furnished models for the early Christians [led by St. Paul] for their representations of Christ.” (*Myths to Live By*, p. 10).

Being the first apocalyptic faith, Zoroastrianism provided the archetypal model or paradigm for Apocalyptic Judaism and Apocalyptic Christianity. Zoroaster lives on in many aspects of Western Christianity. It even lives on in secular movement that have sprung up from the soil of Western Christianity. As Cohn says at the end of his book, Zoroastrianism “is still alive and potent. Who can tell what fantasies, religious or secular, it may generate in the unforeseeable future.”

There is one intriguing thing that needs to be said about Zoroaster’s apocalyptic combat myth -

When it was taken up into Judaism and then Christianity it became (to use a phrase taken from Joseph Campbell) “one of the most brutal war mythologies of all time.” In Apocalyptic Judaism and Apocalyptic Christianity this old Zoroastrian battle between “the sons of light” and “the sons of darkness” came to be expressed by demonizing the differing “others” who were deemed to be on the wrong side of the spiritual conflict. Carried to its bitter end, this apocalyptic zeal for God led to an appalling amount of internecine strife, persecution of heretics and outright bloodshed.

It does not appear, however, that this kind of religious aggression toward the differing “others” was a feature of the Zoroastrian faith. The Achaemenian Empire (whose rulers were Zoroastrians) was generally tolerant of the indigenous religions within the Empire. Cyrus the Great and his successors were very supportive of the Jews rebuilding their temple in Jerusalem.

One final comment about the influence of the Zoroastrian religion on Judaism: In New Testament times, the most influential religious teachers among the Jews were the Pharisees. They were the for-runners of Rabbinic Judaism for centuries to come. Some historical scholars (though not all) believe that the word *Pharisee* originally meant a *Persian* or a *Persianizer*, indicating that this Jewish sect acquired the name because it embraced so many features of the Zoroastrian religion. It is certainly true that some of the major tenants of its faith - like its belief in the physical resurrection of the dead, the existence of heaven and hell as well as the existence of angels and demons - were all derived from the Zoroastrian religion.

Both the New Testament and the Jewish historian Josephus tell us that the powerful sect of the Sadducees were of a far more conservative bent. Clinging to the faith of pre-Exilic Judaism and rejecting the Zoroastrian influences that had penetrated Judaism, the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection of the dead or the existence of spirits and demons. The religion of the common people, however, embraced those Persian influences mediated to them by the Pharisees. It is clear that the popular religion of the Jews in the time of Jesus subscribed to the Zoroastrian view of a demon-haunted world. Many diseases, especially psycho-somatic illnesses, were ascribed to various kinds of demon possession. These popular religious beliefs about a demon-haunted world, along with belief in heaven and hell, a last judgment and the resurrection, were taken up into Christianity.

References

- ¹ See Matt Ridley, *Apocalypse Not* for a good overview of failed apocalyptic scares.
- ² One of the best presentations of the distinction between the prophetic and the apocalyptic worldviews is by Thomas Sheehan, *The First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity*.
- ³ See Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, for an excellent presentation of the beginnings of an apocalyptic faith in Zoroastrianism, and its profound influence of Judaism and Christianity. See also S.A. Kapadia, *The Teachings of Zoroaster*; Mary Boyce, *Zoroasterians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*.
- ⁴ Ian Guthrie, *The Rise and Decline of the Christian Empire*, pp. 66-75, 340.
- ⁵ See Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt's brilliant chapter, *The Gates of Eden*, in *Higher Superstition. The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science*, pp. 149-178.
- ⁶ Lyall Watson, *Dark Nature: A Natural History of Evil*; Howard Bloom, *Screw Sustainability* (Speech given at Yales University, May 7, 2005)
- ⁷ See Ian Plimer, *A Short History of Planet Earth*, for a sweeping view of cataclysmic natural changes that have taken place on planet earth before the arrival of humans.
- ⁸ See Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (which was published by the Sierra Club in 1971) for a very foundational environmental rant against humanity. See also Alston Chase, *In a Dark Wood: The fight Over Forests and the Myths of Nature*, for a detailed critique of the anti-humanism of Commoner.
- ⁹ John R. Christy, PhD, Alabama State Climatologist, The University of Alabama in Huntsville, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, 1 August, 2012; William Kininmonth and Bob Carter, *Cometh the Storm, Cometh the Climate Lies*, The Age, Nov. 8, 2012; Roger Pielke Jr., *Little Change in Drought Over 60 Years: A New Paper Out in the Current Issue of Nature*, November 15, 2012; Mark Morano (documentation), Scientists Reject Sandy/Climate Link, www.climatedepot.com/a/18238/Scientists-reject-SandyClimate-Link; Brendan O'Neill, *The 'Weather of Mass Destruction Crowd' Leaves Thought Back in Dark Ages*, *The Australian*, July 14, 2012; The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaption*, 2012
- ¹⁰ Julian L. Simon, *The Ultimate Resource*; Stephen Moore and Julian L. Simon, *It Gets Better All the Time*; Gregg Easterbrook, *A Moment on the Earth: The Coming Age of Environmental Optimism*; Bjorn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*; Matt Ridley, *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves*; Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think*.
- ¹¹ Google under "Climate Skeptics Should be Punished" for numerous articles on Nuremberg-style trials, re-education in Gulags, jail, burning houses of skeptics and other means of suppression; Brendean O'Neill, Pathologising Dissent? Now That's Orwellian, Spiked Online, 4 March 2009. <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?/site/printable/6320/>
Marc Morano, 'Execute Skeptics,' Shock Call to Action; www.climate.depot.com/a/1096/Execute-Skeptics-Shock-Call-To-Action-At-what-point-do-we-jail-or-execute-global-warming-deniers

¹² For an overview of the damage being done by the irrational pursuit of ill-conceived Green energy schemes, see Lawrence Solomon, *Green Power Failure*, Financial Post, May 11, 2012; *Britain's Green Policy Crisis*, The Global Warming Policy Foundation 12 October, 2011; *The West's Green Nightmare*, The Global Warming Policy Foundation, 4 April 2012; Maurice Newman, *Against the Wind – The pursuit of clean energy has relegated ordinary people to the status of 'collateral damage'*; Klaus Stratmann, Thomas Ludwig, Ulf Summer and Ruth Berschens, *Green Energy Transition: Germany Fears De-Industrialization*, Handelsblatt, 23 May 2012; Google “Biofuels a crime against humanity” for accounts of starvation of the poor, alienation of agricultural lands and destruction of habitat.

¹³ See footnote above

¹⁴ *The Golden Rice Project*, The Golden Rice Humanitarian Board. www.goldenrice.org

¹⁵ Robert Zubrin, *Merchants of Despair: Radical Environmentalists, Criminal Pseudo-Scientists, and the Fatal Cult of Antihumanism*.

¹⁶ Anthony Watts, *The UN “disappears” 50 million climate refugees, then botches the disappearing attempt*, April 15, 2011, www.wattsupwiththat.com/2011/04/15

¹⁷ *James Lovelock: I was 'Alarmist' About Global Warming*, The Global Warming Policy Foundation, 24 April 2012; Google “James Lovelock recants”.

¹⁸ See D. Weston Allen, *The Weather Makers Re-examined*, pp. 29,67-76, 97, 123, 141, 248, 277, 331 for a good survey of the peer-reviewed literature on the MWP. As more and more scientific papers keep appearing to support the world-wide extent of the MWP, the IPCC has abandoned its 2001 attempt to deny its existence and now avoids the term “unprecedented” when it talks about current warming.

¹⁹ Lawrence Solomon, *75 climate scientists think humans contribute to global warming*, National Post, December 30, 2010

²⁰ See above footnote 9

²¹ Robert Zubrin, *The Population Control Holocaust*; Google “Population reduction 90”.