

The End of the World?

Christian apocalyptic and responses to climate change.

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*Delivered as the Gethin Abraham-Williams Memorial Lecture on Zoom,
20 May 2021. Revised for publication 8 June 2021.*

Introduction

I am extremely grateful to Cytûn for extending to me the privilege of delivering this year's Gethin Abraham-Williams Memorial Lecture. I had the pleasure of being Assistant General Secretary to Gethin for about eighteen months - a period characterized in the Cytûn office by the confusion every time Sasha shouted "Gethin!" and we would both respond!

Wales was privileged to have the service of an ecumenist as dedicated as Gethin for so long; we still greatly miss his wisdom and breadth of vision. Lecturing in his name is a real privilege. One of his virtues was being able to relate theology to the secular questions of the time. I am attempting here to do that for the biggest question of our time, the climate crisis.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge with grateful thanks the many conversations I have had which have helped me make those connections. In particular, two groups of people of which I have been part. Firstly, the members of the online course in summer 2020 entitled *Climate Crisis, Averting Chaos in a Warming World*, led by Feyzi Ismail at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. And secondly the Cardiff and Penarth United Reformed Church Pastorate Bible Study group, which has during 2021 been studying the Book of Revelation, led by our minister Revd David Dean. Both groups have helped to sharpen my thinking and improve this lecture. It goes without saying, though, that I alone take responsibility for everything that follows.

I date my passion for the environment back to 1978, when I was in the Sixth Form at Ysgol Gyfun Rhydfelen. One of my favourite places at the time was Cwm Nofydd - not the road of the same name in Rhiwbina but the small valley (cwm) itself that runs west of Coed y Wenallt. The valley bottom was a favourite spot for locals to have a picnic but the top part was beautiful and quiet, full of wild flowers and birds singing. The M4 was being built north of Cardiff at the time, and one day I was following the route past the construction site into the valley. And what a shock! The narrow wooded valley was now filled with rubble that had been unearthed during the construction of the motorway - it was a convenient place to dump it. I walked up the valley, tears rolling down my face as I looked at the devastation. There is a point where the waste ends, and the top part of Cwm Nofydd is now (ironically) a nature conservation area.

While travelling to and from school by bus I used to read. The book I was reading at that time was *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954-5). I really felt that I was living in Mordor - the desolate part of Middle Earth where Sauron lives and where all the beauty has been ripped from the land. I didn't know at the time, of course, about climate change or the biodiversity crisis - but I knew that destruction was all around me.

The climate crisis has caused many more people to see the devastation around them and feel that the end has come - and that sense is captured by the very name of Extinction Rebellion. The scientific narrative of demanding significant reductions in CO2 emissions by 2030 to avoid a disaster adds a date to what many now call an apocalypse.

Apocalypse and apocalyptic

What is termed apocalyptic writing is found in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The Greek word *apocalypsis* means “an uncovering or laying bare”, and metaphorically “a revealing or revelation” (Abbott-Smith, 1936, p. 50). It is the name of the final book of the Christian scriptures, usually translated ‘The Revelation of John’, but in Catholicism known as ‘The Apocalypse of John’. Because the Biblical and intertestamental apocalypses reveal scenarios of the end of the world, or the world as currently known, the English word came to mean a vision of such end times (Collins, 1990). And that is how I am using the word apocalypse. I know theologians will squirm every time, because for them apocalypse means a revelation, and the study of the end times is *eschatology*. But the word eschatology never appears in secular writing about climate change – the worst scenarios are always talked of as apocalyptic rather than eschatological.

The official bodies who report on climate change tend to phrase calls to action soberly and carefully, as in the press release launching the 2018 report from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC (2018a): “The decisions we make today are critical in ensuring a safe and sustainable world for everyone, both now and in the future,...The next few years are probably the most important in our history,” The Foreword to the report being launched (IPCC, 2018) was, however, more blunt – “Without increased and urgent mitigation ambition in the coming years, leading to a sharp decline in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, global warming will surpass 1.5°C in the following decades, leading to irreversible loss of the most fragile ecosystems, and crisis after crisis for the most vulnerable people and societies. ... Every bit of warming matters, every year matters, every choice matters” (Taalas & Msuya, 2018, p. 2). When governments claim to be ‘following the science’ on climate change, remember that this is the science that they claim to be following.

Movements such as Extinction Rebellion are even less willing to moderate their language. On the page headed ‘The Truth’ its website says (2021) “we are heading for extinction”. Here's how the September 2020 rebellion was promoted:



The title of this presentation by Extinction Rebellion is even clearer:



The apocalyptic fear was plain to see in the 'Rebellions of One' held during May 2021, with individuals stopping the traffic holding placards saying things like "I am terrified billions will die because of the climate crisis".

Greta Thunberg's Davos 2020 presentation was entitled *Averting a Climate Apocalypse* (Thunberg, 2020) - language that is very striking on the lips of a teenage girl.

Apocalyptic imagery has spread into academia, as in the podcast series *Political Economy for the End Times* (2020). Leigh Phillips (2015, p. 1) provides a good summary of such apocalyptic climate writing in his book *Austerity Ecology & the Collapse-Porn Addicts*, although his intention is to ridicule rather than promote it. Phillips draws on religious language (he doesn't like that either) to describe this mindset, for example he calls *The Breakdown of Global Capitalism: 2000-2030 - Preparing for the beginning of the collapse of industrial civilization* by ecologist Ramón Fernández Durán (2011) "an unremittingly disconsolate, secular *Book of Revelation*." We will come back to Durán and to the Book of Revelation shortly.

Christian apocalyptic

Christian apocalyptic is found not only in the Book of Revelation, but elsewhere in the New Testament as well. 2 Peter 3.7 recalls the devastation of the world by floods in Noah's time, and says *...by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless* (NRSVA). Apocalyptic sayings are attributed to Jesus in 'the little apocalypse', where horrific events precede the *day your Lord is coming* like a thief in the night (Matthew 24.42-43, NRSVA).

J.J. Collins (1990, p. 304) notes that "Christian theologians have often viewed [apocalyptic literature] with suspicion because of its obscure imagery and fanatical tendencies." The suspicions have sometimes been justified, especially in the case of modern fundamentalist use of this material. Most conservative Christianity has seen apocalyptic as a call for *individual* religious change and repentance, with no link to climate change. For example, the exposition of 2 Peter 3.7 (the verse about being destroyed by fire rather than by flood) by Simply Bible.com (2011), concludes, "From the flood to the fire people have been misled and have fallen from steadfast holiness. So during your short time on earth, look for the Lord's coming and repent; grow in holiness and grace; be on guard against error [meaning theological error] that might lead you astray."

But it is the Book of Revelation which lends itself most readily to linking apocalyptic imagery with climate change. Here is how chapter 8 describes the sounding of the trumpets:

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood, a third of living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter. [Revelation 8.7-11, NRSVA].

I do not believe that John on Patmos predicted the climate crisis, but you don't need to have too much imagination to see in this episode the wildfires of our day, acidification of the oceans, and pollution of drinking water, let alone the death of a third of sea creatures. Indeed, humanity has managed to kill two thirds of sea creatures since 1950 without the help of any angel (WWF, 2020). And then there are the locusts (Revelation chapter 9), flooding (12.15) and the disappearance of the islands (16.20).

When the fearsome city of Babylon (which represents Rome) falls in chapter 18, *the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves – and human lives.* (Revelation 18.11-13, NRSVA) [Incidentally, it is sometimes said that there is no condemnation of slavery in the New Testament. Isn't this the condemnation - that Babylon, the empire of the harlot, trades in people's lives?]

Not all Christian leaders link passages like these with climate change, however. As ABC News reported in 2008, "... evangelists like Ken Han, founder and CEO of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Ky., believe God – not man – is at work in recent weather phenomena. "There is earthly death payment for sin," said Han. "Because of sin, God doesn't hold the world perfectly together at times, and he uses certain events to judge a nation." ... When the world sins, "the whole of creation groans," according to Han's interpretation of a Biblical passage in Romans. Those groans are reflected in recent tornadoes and storms. "If you carefully look at events there are certain catastrophes," said Han. "But God is in control and it's not God's fault, it's our fault because we sinned against God." (James, S.D., 2008)

At the extremes some Christians may welcome climate change and the end, believing that the Book of Revelation also indicates that Christians (or at least the right kind of Christians) will be saved. The *locus classicus* for this is the Rapture Ready End Times News (2021), headed *Behold, I come quickly* (Revelation 3.11, KJV), and updated daily with the latest disasters (if you enjoy bad news, you can download the app on to your phone). Although the term 'climate change' rarely if ever appears on the site, many of the events reported are clearly linked to it. For example, one of the lead stories on 17 April 2021 was "Typhoon Surigae could become Earth's first Category 5 of 2021, heads towards the Philippines this weekend" Two items later the evangelist Franklin Graham warns that "God's judgement is coming" and that we need to "get on our knees and repent" – but it turns out that what he has in mind is not climate change, or indeed typhoon Surigae, but the result of the 2020 US Presidential election.

It becomes very tempting to ignore all this when you realize that the history of Christianity is riddled with false prophecies about the end of the world. Paula Clifford tells the story very entertainingly in her book *A Brief History of End Time: Prophecy and Apocalypse, Then and Now* (2016). For some, all these false prophecies of the past are enough reason to include apocalyptic accounts of climate change to the same category. It is important to note that this is not Paula Clifford's own view, as she also wrote a Christian Aid-sponsored book warning the churches of the gravity of the situation, bearing the significant (and apocalyptic) title, referring to Revelation chapter 8 quoted earlier, *Angels with Trumpets* (2009).

The desire not to be associated with extreme understandings has led more liberal, middle-of-the-road Christianity to choose to frame the climate crisis not in apocalyptic terms, but in terms of promoting changes to individuals' lifestyles. Lent courses promoted by mainstream churches in 2020 and 2021 offer many examples of this (e.g. Church of England, 2020; Joint Public Issues Team, 2020; USPG, 2021; but the York Course for Lent 2021 [Davis, 2021] is rather more challenging, referring openly to a climate "crisis").

Secular climate change apocalyptic and its critics

The evangelical Christian call to individual repentance and the liberal Christian call to lifestyle change have their secular equivalents. The website of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, PETA (2021), under the headline 'Fight Climate Change by Going Vegan' says "If you're serious about protecting the environment, the most important thing that you can do is stop eating meat, eggs, and dairy 'products'" (original emphasis). Friends of the Earth (2021) urges readers of its website to "Put the brakes on climate breakdown" by flying less, using public transport or switching to an electric car. WWF (2021) suggests readers of its site "Help take action on climate change now, by making a lifestyle change. Learn more about how changing your diet, how you travel and even what you buy can reduce your impact on the environment by taking part in our Footprint Calculator." Although all three websites also contain calls for policy changes by governments, the wording suggests that solutions to climate change lie to a large extent in the hands of individuals – or, as some Christians might put it, repent and be saved.

This secular individualistic approach is critiqued by a large number of writers, such as Elaine Graham-Leigh (2015), Leigh Phillips (2015) and Aaron Bastani (2019). As *The Guardian* (Beckett, 2019) comments in a review of Bastani's book *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto*, "You don't have to share his confidence about [technological solutions to current "terminal" environmental worries] to agree with his suggestion that the apocalyptic is a mode that the media and many of its consumers slip into too easily – sometimes for commercial or psychological rather than rational reasons..." Giorgos Kallis (2019, p. 97) in his book *Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong and Why Environmentalists Should Care* points out that appeals to individual responsibility can be exploited by the powerful – "Like with Malthus, those with power often single out a weaker group to limit in the name of the common good – be it the poor, the foreigners, those of different skin color, or the immigrants."

Thus Phillips and Bastani dismiss 'apocalyptic' concerns, arguing that there is no limit to growth or what the human race can achieve - we just have to believe. They are striking examples, in fact, of non-religious faith. I have to say that I find their books absolutely unbelievable - the best thing about them, in both cases, is the title. Things deteriorate markedly once you start reading the text.

Most secular writers accept the gravity of the situation, and also argue that individual change is not enough, only system change will do the trick. For example, Hill & Martinez-Diaz (2020), in an article entitled 'Adapt or Perish', call for a range of systemic changes in US-American administration, though they fall short of suggesting a change in the capitalist system itself. Others, such as Clark & York (2005) and Elaine Graham-Leigh (2015) see the situation in the same way as Naomi Klein - *Capitalism vs the Climate* (the subtitle to *This Changes Everything* (Klein, 2015) - although Penguin's paperback edition omits the subtitle). They argue that only the demise of capitalism can prevent catastrophic climate change.

However, none offer a blueprint on how to move from the current system to one in the future. They have a vision, rather than a plan – an apocalypse (revelation, vision) in the literal sense, therefore.

Common themes and counterpoints in Christian and secular apocalyptic

In Christian apocalyptic there is an additional danger, as Maggi Dawn says, summarising Robert Beckford (writing in a different context) – “a community can be disempowered if its people find too much solace in the promise of heaven, and rather than marshalling anger to right the situation they can accidentally end up colluding with the very system that visits injustice on them.” (Dawn, 2020, p. 177)

Concern about the theological propriety of apocalyptic is not new – in the 16th century Martin Luther was tempted to exclude Revelation (along with several other books) from his translation of the New Testament into German, though he did in the end include it; the modern translator from Wales, John Henson, however, does leave Revelation out of his *Good as New* translation (Henson, 2004).

In secular writing, Erik Swyngedouw (2010, p. 219) makes the interesting argument that capitalism, “for which the management of fear is a central leitmotif”, actually promotes apocalyptic imagery to depoliticize the climate issue, remove any hope of redemption [note the religious word!] and thus disarm activists. He thus views secular apocalyptic in exactly the way in which many liberal Christians view Christian apocalyptic – as a counsel of despair, counter-productive, and better ignored.

The reaction to Jim Bendell’s seminal paper (2020, originally published 2018) *Deep Adaptation* – which no academic journal was prepared to publish – shows the same trend. In Bendell’s own words in the Abstract, he concludes that “there will be a near-term collapse in society with serious ramifications for the lives of readers. The paper does not prove the inevitability of such collapse, ... but it proves that such a topic is of urgent importance. ... The paper offers a new meta-framing of the implications for research, organisational practice, personal development and public policy, called the Deep Adaptation Agenda. Its key aspects of resilience, relinquishment, restoration and reconciliation are explained. This agenda does not seek to build on existing scholarship on “climate adaptation” as it is premised on the view that societal collapse is now likely, inevitable or already unfolding. The author believes this is one of the first papers in the sustainability management field to conclude that climate-induced near-term societal collapse should now be a central concern for everyone, and therefore to invite scholars to explore the implications.”

One of the anonymous reviewers who rejected *Deep Adaptation* for publication said, “I was left wondering about the social implications of presenting a scenario for the future as inevitable reality, and about the responsibility of research in communicating climate change scenarios and strategies for adaptation. As the authors pointed out, denial is a common emotional response to situations that are perceived as threatening and inescapable, leading to a sense of helplessness, inadequacy, and hopelessness and ultimately disengagement from the issue...” (quoted by Bendell, 2018). Despite the concerns of the reviewer, however, Bendell argues that such apocalyptic warnings can be a call to action rather than to despair.

Which brings us back to the Book of Revelation.

The Book of Revelation

In the case of Hebrew and Christian apocalyptic, Jean-Pierre Prévost (1991, p. 18) says, “The apocalypses came into being at a time of crisis, or at least they perceive present history as critical and tormenting”. At one time, Biblical commentators believed that the Book of Revelation was written in the midst of violent persecution of the Christian church by the Roman Empire. The consensus view now is that it was written during the reign of the Emperor Domitian, a time of relative calm for Christians (Williams, 2002, pp 10-11). The book – especially the letters to seven churches in Asia Minor in chapters 2 and 3 – criticises those who compromised during the earlier persecutions, and urges all to face up to what may happen next. To generalise hugely (and it would take another lecture to unpack this), it is those times of calm which are often the most challenging. In an immediate crisis, adrenalin will get you through – as it has got so many people through Covid and its deprivations. It’s the thought of having survived one crisis and that another is about to hit that is really hard – after all, how do *you* feel about the idea of re-opening being reversed because of the Delta variant of Covid?

And it is perhaps the unremitting nature of the disasters in the Book of Revelation that makes it so under appreciated in the West. When the New English Bible (NEB) made the English Bible accessible in the 1960s, a helpful series of commentaries was published alongside it. The commentary on Revelation, by T.F. Glasson (1965), however, damns the book with faint praise. Writing from the Chair of New Testament in New College, London, he says of the apocalyptic chapters 6-16, “it must be admitted that these central chapters ... do not convey as much to a modern reader as chapters 1-5 and have not the same enduring value.” (p. 47), and of chapter 18 – that description of the fall of Babylon the Great – he says “There is hardly a phrase which is specifically Christian” (p. 101).

But readers elsewhere do find both enduring value and Christian content in them. As Wess Daniels (2019, p. 39) says, chapters such as these “are well known to the poor of Central and South America. Firoenza suggests that one reason these texts often lack power for us is because we are reading them from a position of power. Adopting a middle-class, privileged reading means we lack the experiences these texts are talking about, and so we read them out of context. Could it be that the people who feel particularly uncomfortable with the struggle in Revelation are the same people who experience discomfort acknowledging race, class, and privilege?”

From outside Christianity, Friedrich Engels (1883), co-worker of Karl Marx, evaluated the Book of Revelation in similar terms, quoting approvingly Ernest Renan’s saying that early Christian communities were not like “the parish congregations of our day; they were rather like local sections of the International Working Men’s Association” (p. 180). Addressed to small persecuted communities in the first century, the Book of Revelation envisaged a ‘system change’ and the downfall of the Roman Empire (especially chapter 18 describing the fall of ‘Babylon the great’), but the responses to its message by those who first heard it were necessarily individual, because they were people of little power or influence.

Apocalypse, anxiety, grief and courage

In our time, Giorgos Kallis (2019, p. 119) notes the contemporary role of religion in fostering among individuals a lifestyle that finds satisfaction with less material things, and this can inspire others. However, the capacity of those individuals to achieve the systemic change needed to avert disaster - just as it was in the first century - is limited.

In religious and secular apocalyptic organizations, this can lead to significant difficulties. Engels (1883, p. 181) notes that Christianity and socialism alike "come in the form of a variety of sects, and more so a series of conflicting individual perspectives - some clearer, some more explicit. more confusing, and the second is the vast majority..." In the 21st century, movements such as Extinction Rebellion exhibit a similar tendency to fall out and splinter into small groups.

As Bendell's reviewer noted, those involved in such movements can become distressed. The Climate Psychology Alliance (2020) says, "Climate anxiety is spreading and beginning to permeate therapists' consulting rooms. Many of climate change's 'canaries', those such as activists and scientists, are at times having to face unmanageable feelings of despair, anger and grief..." Writers such as Leigh Phillips (2015) blame the apocalyptic narrative for these feelings, but the Climate Psychology Alliance says "... we need to hold the tension between hope and despair, between complacency and alarmism, between action and reflection. When these tensions are successfully held a vision emerges which can attract an engagement that is both practical and creative."

Even the climate activists amongst Western Christians have generally remained shy of developing an apocalyptic vision. Operation Noah (a Christian charity campaigning for divestment from fossil fuels) made a brief excursus into apocalyptic language in November 2018, in discussing its relationship with Extinction Rebellion and its Christian wing, Christian Climate Action: "Children alive today in the UK will face unimaginable horrors as a result of floods, wildfires, extreme weather, crop failures and the inevitable breakdown of society, when the pressures are so great." (Operation Noah, 2018). The rest of its website, however, sticks to more conventional narratives: "While facing up to the serious effects of global warming, despair is not an option for Christians. We are called to faith and action in a trusting response to God. As Christians we can live in hope, despite the dangers that threaten us." (Operation Noah, 2021).

The email sent to supporters in preparation for Christian Aid Week 2021 said in its header that they could "help stop the climate crisis". But its worship material encouraged supporters to draw on "apocalyptic lament and hope" from the Hebrew prophets. One of the sets of sermon notes, by Hannah Malcolm, begins:

"We are entering an era of climate chaos. The news is increasingly dominated by extreme weather events. Anxiety, grief and anger related to climate breakdown are at an all-time high.

- Recent years have seen an increase in dystopia/ apocalyptic stories in popular culture, especially on television and in film.
- The prophetic apocalyptic texts in the Bible are part of the word of God. They can speak to us today, if we let them." (Christian Aid, 2021)

It would be interesting to know how many people used this sermon, as compared to the alternative, headed "Water, praise, love and joy".

As already noted, modern Christian avoidance of apocalyptic is largely a rich world phenomenon. In contrast, according to Engels (1894, p. 275), the early western Christianity which spawned the Book of Revelation was "a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and freed men, of poor people deprived of all rights, of people subjugated or dispersed by Rome." Similarly, concern by climate activists at the 'negativity' of apocalyptic language is also a rich world viewpoint. Kleres & Wettergren (2017, p. 516) reflect on the different meanings of 'fear' of climate change to northern and

southern activists interviewed during COP 21 – the conference which led to the Paris Agreement of 2015. “The quotes from the south ... differ from the pattern of northern activists by not picturing climate change as an abstract future threat. The source of fear is not imagined but present and acute.”

We do not yet know what will become of this world that fears climate change. We do know what became of those Christians who feared the Roman Empire. John Michael Greer (2017, pp 98-9) writing in *Dark Mountain 12*, makes the following important point: “the principal force that attracts people to a newly founded religion is the power of example. What transformed Christianity from a fringe cult surrounding a minor Jewish religious figure to a massive social and religious force in the Roman world, more than anything else, was the simple fact that so many of its early believers were prepared to ignore the collective consensus of their society and, if necessary, emulate the founder of their faith and die for their beliefs. There were plenty of other new religions in the late Roman world; most of them made comfortable compromises with the social and spiritual habits of their time; today they are remembered only by specialist scholars.” That is why chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation warn the seven churches to whom they are written of one danger above all – compromise with the Empire. Such apocalyptic Christianity did not lead to despair – it led to martyrdom, courage and heroism on an extraordinary scale; it led to Christianity (in its multifarious forms) becoming the largest religion on the planet for most of subsequent history.

So what happened to apocalyptic? We have already heard that it is alive and well amongst the poor and oppressed of today. But what of us middle class westerners? Greer (2017) has the answer. That apocalyptic, revolutionary, martyred early Christianity in the west over two thousand years, he says, turned into Anthropolatry – the worship of humanity. As we have heard, many who are genuinely concerned about the climate emergency – whether Christian, or – like Bastani – Marxist - believe that the humanity they worship can still find a solution. As Greer says, “That blind faith remains welded in place even as decades slip past, one supposed solution after another fails, and the stark warnings of forty years ago have become the news stories of today. Nothing is changing except that the news just keeps getting worse. That’s the simple reality of the predicament in which we find ourselves today. Our way of life, here in the world’s industrial nations, guarantees that in the fairly near future no-one anywhere on the planet will be able to live the way we do. As resources run out, alternatives fail and the destructive impacts of climate change pile up, industrial humanity’s blind faith in its own omnipotence faces a shattering disconfirmation” (Greer, 2017, p. 95) – or, we might say, faces an apocalypse.

So can today’s small fearful communities of the truly ecologically committed do what those early small fearful communities of Christians did? Cassegård (2015) believes that the failure of COP21 (the Paris climate conference) to do more, impelled in some of those disappointed campaigners who were there “what might be called a post-apocalyptic sensibility. By that I mean a sensibility that becomes dominant when people start to experience themselves as victims of a loss that they are powerless to prevent or that has already occurred. ... The post-apocalypse, then, doesn’t mean that things won’t get any worse. They may certainly grow worse. But while preventing that, people must also redress wrongs, help victims and do what they can in the ruins.... Since the apocalypse is socially and geographically uneven, issues such as justice and inequality are likely to become permanent features of environmentalist discourse. ... Lastly, recovery and salvage may very well become major

goals of much environmental activism, along with older goals such as preserving nature or limiting damage.”

As Vaclav Havel (quoted in O’Brien, 2010, p. 30) said (in an earlier context): “Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” O’Brien says that this hope “mourns the past, while it anticipates the future. Those who hope live ... ‘as if,’ as if the world was as it should be, as it could be. It is an act of defiance, one that exhibits freedom” (pp 33-34). It is exactly that post-apocalyptic reaction that Jim Bendell hopes to foster in his much misunderstood *Deep Adaptation* – adaptation is an active concept; he did not call his paper *Deep Despair*, it was his anthropocentric reviewers who despaired and tried to stop it being published.

Swyngedouw (2013, p. 12) suggests that climate apocalyptic is fundamentally different from the Biblical version. “Saint John’s biblical apocalypse ... found its redemption in God’s infinite love, while relegating the outcasts to an afterlife of permanent suffering. ... The environmental apocalypse, in contrast, ... is not immediate and total (but slow and painful), not revelatory (it does not announce the dawn of a new rose-tinted era); no redemption is promised (for the righteous ones), and there are no outcasts. Indeed, if the boat goes down, the first-class passengers will also drown.”

However, Swyngedouw may be misrepresenting climate apocalyptic. An interview with XR co-founder Gail Bradbrook ends thus: “... after a pause, she began to imagine a couple of scenarios: one dystopian, one utopian. In the first, humanity destroys itself, ‘and perhaps the universe learns something from that’. In the second, a truly global citizens’ assembly is established, humanity reunites, and we ‘use the sort of energy that has previously been used in a war to go into a rapid healing situation. It is all possible.’ She paused again, before adding: ‘I can’t think of anything else I would rather do with my life. It is such an honour to try. What else can we all do?’” (Taylor, 2020).

Durán (2011, p. 96) says “The catastrophe has the possibility to be a midwife to new times. ... It is time to think of the catastrophe as a new opportunity to intervene and transform reality. There is no other option than to live with it, taking advantage of it if that is possible while being aware of the tough times that are ahead.” This may confirm Leigh Phillips’s description (quoted earlier) of Durán’s work as a secular *Book of Revelation* - not, however, for its despair but for its call to action in the face of overwhelming odds. Catholic theologian J.J. Collins (1990, p. 304) says that “[Biblical apocalyptic writings’] value lies in their ability to envision alternatives to the world of present experience and thereby to provide hope and consolation.”

The Book of Revelation ends, after all the disasters, the millennium and the day of judgment, with this promise - a promise now heard in the West mostly at funerals - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them, they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with*

its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 21.1-4 & 22.1-2, NRSVA).

As Wess Daniels (2019, p. 124) says, “John tells his people (here in chapter 21) living under the Roman empire in the first century that God’s holy city is coming down right in the middle of that Roman city. God is dwelling with you in the midst of all of the pain, suffering, and oppression. You are called to be faithful even when you are being crushed. Be that holy city and a light to the nations. Come out of empire. Reject the practices of the imperial religion that lead to adultery. Have no illusions. Don’t be duped by the emperor’s sorcery. Be that alternative community – the multitude – that rejects the beastly economics of the empire, and follow the lamb that was slain. He will lead you to life and victory. This is happening right now, right here. You don’t have to wait. God is with you now. Now is the time of victory, so live as though that reality is here.”

Durán in his “secular Book of Revelation” describes the ‘new heaven and new earth’ like this: “The new economies ... will be based on re-usage, recycling and environmental sanitation of an urban-agro-industrial system in decomposition. This will involve recovering part of the pre-industrial and simple industrial technologies that have been displaced by the power and the complexity of a hyper-technological society. The technological remains of this society will probably continue to be used in a partial and declining form over time, Later in the mid- and long-term it will be essential to continue developing a simple technology that makes it possible to journey to eco-technical societies” (p. 106).

The first lecture I heard about the Book of Revelation was by Professor John Fenton in the University of Oxford. After the lecture one student asked him, “What then should we do? John Fenton's answer was "Join Greenpeace". So I did.

The Book of Revelation, Deep Adaptation and Greenpeace alike use the power of the imagination to see from afar a new day dawn and to work for its coming. The secular post-apocalyptic movement, Dark Mountain, also aims to release the power of the imagination and all the creative arts to help us cope with the grief and fear of the present day. Volume 19 of the series, *Requiem*, launched in April (Campbell, Pocock & McLane, 2021), includes in its name a recognition of the dark nature of the present age - inspired by the funeral held in 2019 for the first glacier in Iceland to disappear altogether, it is a requiem for extinct species, disappearing biodiversity and dying people.

Within Christianity, a similar desire for lament and action is growing, and I recommend the compelling volume edited by Hannah Malcolm (2020), *Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church*. We should note the title - grief AND courage.

This is not something new to the Christian faith, even here in the west. To me as a Welsh Christian, the name Dark Mountain reminds me of the hymn “O’er the gloomy hills of darkness”, written in both Welsh and English by hymn writer William Williams Pantycelyn during the 18th century Methodist revival in Wales. He knew plenty about gloomy hills of darkness - he rode over them every day from his ministry in Llandovery to his home in Pantycelyn. But it was not the darkness that Pantycelyn saw. He refers at the end of the hymn to the dawn breaking over “Immanuel’s land”. Immanuel is a name used in Matthew 1.23 to refer to Jesus, and means “God with us”. This earth (not some far heavenly realm) is Immanuel’s land, over which Williams sees the dawn breaking.

Between the two verses I have placed words from the 21st century Dark Mountain manifesto.

Dros y bryniau tywyll niwlog,
Yn dawel, f'enaïd, edrych draw –
Ar addewidion sydd i esgor
Ar ryw ddyddiau braf gerllaw:
Nefol Jiwbil,
Gad im weld y bore wawr.

O'er the gloomy hills of darkness
Look, my soul, be still and gaze;
All the promises do travail
With a glorious day of grace:
Blesséd jubilee!
Let thy glorious morning dawn.

“The end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world full stop. Together, we will find the hope beyond hope, the paths which lead to the unknown world ahead of us.”
(Kingsnorth & Hine, 2009).

Gwawria, gwawria, hyfryd fore,
Ar ddiderfyn fagddu fawr,
Nes bod bloedd yr euraïd utgorn
Yn atseinio'r nen a'r llawr,
Holl derfynau
Tir Emaniwel i gyd!

May the glorious day approaching
End the everlasting night
As the sound of golden trumpets
Marks the dawning of the light
O'er the borders
Of the great Immanuel's land!

(Williams, 1772; second verse in English re-translated from Welsh by GR)

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