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Peace be with you!

We had another great week at the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute this summer exploring the theme of “The End of the World As We Know It?” Dr. Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler led our in-class learning as well as our community based learning experiences. We had lively and inspiring exchanges with one another and with folks from other religious traditions and from other parts of the world.

Though our theme originally played on the pop-culture view of the apocalypse with things like doomsday scenarios and zombies, the word “apocalypse” means “to unveil” or to pull back a curtain to reveal a deep truth about the world. In Christianity, the curtain is pulled back so that we might see our lives and the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. With that in mind, we spent the days in and out of the classroom exploring ways people experience the world through the lens of Christ’s crucifixion – as the gift and sign of God’s embodied abiding love for us. Our week included daily morning devotions about Jesus’ last words on the cross, evening worships led by talented local musicians, and several community-based experiences in the Twin Cities. We gained a glimpse at apocalyptic perspectives from other faith traditions by visiting Dar Al-Hijrah mosque in Minneapolis and by meeting with a Jewish scribe at Beth Jacob Synagogue. We experienced the practice of praying the Stations of the Cross at the Basilica of St. Mary’s. We also learned from people and organizations with an apocalyptic imagination, specifically Holy Trinity Lutheran’s Exodus Lending program and Pastor Kubisa’s work with former child soldiers in the Congo through the organization Let Africa Live.

Together we discovered the complexity and ambiguity of this idea of apocalypse. It is a contested word, as you will see as you read these essays. We expect our ACYTI participants to complete an academic essay as part of this experience for a few reasons. First, we want our participants to have a collegiate experience. This includes the hard work of having to articulate one’s thoughts in written form. Second, we believe learning to express one’s voice through developing and writing a coherent argument is empowering. Lastly, theological scholarship is an old and ongoing conversation. We want our participants to encounter an invitation into that conversation. We avoid controlling or cleaning up these essays because we want them to reflect this particular moment in time for these participants. We want them to always be able to go back and see and hear how they thought about our subject matter at this phase of life. We appreciate the creativity they bring to these essays.

I am always amazed at how intellectual, curious and funny the students are who sign up for this experience. Augsburg College is a better place for having these young theological scholars walk its grounds for one week this summer.

God’s peace,
Jeremy Myers
Associate Professor, Religion
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The End of the World as We Know It

Emily Hackerson, Rosemount, Minnesota

Some Christians believe the Bible prophesizes how the world will end in the far future, but it is very likely that this end might be closer than it seems. In the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is describing to his disciples what seems to be the catastrophic end to the world in the far future. However, countries such as the Central Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda are seeing these catastrophic events occurring today. Certain tragic events seem to parallel to the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. These tragic events include but are not limited to bloody wars, the Lord's Resistance Army and its ruthless leader, children being abducted and forced to kill for the sake of these "armies". These events in Central Africa seem so tragically close to events foretold in Mark's gospel. It is as if the state in which these countries constantly live in, is truly the end of the world as we know it.

"Jesus said to them: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he', and will deceive many.'" (NIV, Mark. 13:5-6). Jesus warns his disciples of the fraudulent claims they may hear, and telling them not to listen to what these imposters will try to preach in his name. These fraudulent claims of Christ-like divinity have been made by individuals in the on-going Central African conflicts. Joseph Kony, leader the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), has made such claims, using children's faith to lure them into joining his army. The advocacy program, *Invisible Children*, created to raise awareness of his man and his actions, calls Kony, "the self-appointed 'messiah' of the Lord's Resistance Army", and this self-proclaimed divinity is used to, "abduct, threaten, destroy, and murder in the name of his spiritual powers," (*The Worst*, 2014). These actions are conflicting with Jesus' instructions the Christian people, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (NIV, John. 13:34). Not to mention the Ten Commandments, "you shall not murder" and "you shall not steal" (NIV, Exodus. 20:13, 15). This fraudulent claim to divinity, foretold by Jesus in Mark chapter thirteen, plays out day by day as Joseph Kony deceives faithful Christian children into believing in his power and abilities. An article entitled "*We Are Killing in the Light of God*", describes how this man even tells the tens of thousands of children if they join him and they all pray hard enough he will keep them safe, despite the raping, pillaging, and killing he forces them to do (Rice, 2009). This man fraudulently calls himself the Messiah, but completely ignores the commandments placed by, and upheld by, God and his one and only son Jesus. He appeals to the faith these children have, and takes advantage of their associating "Messiah" with "good". The parallelism to Mark 13 sadly doesn't end with fraudulent claims of being the messiah.

The unmistakable similarities continue, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," (NIV, Mark. 13:7-8). The countries of Central Africa continue to be plagued with gruesome wars year after year, death after death. *The Human Cost of War in The Central African Republic*, an article published in Vice News, reports that following the 2013 coup 5,000 people are dead and over one million are misplaced ("The Human Cost of War in

The Central African Republic", 2015). Sure 5,000 and one million are both just numbers but one million people is more than the entire population in Washington D.C. These people have been separated from family members and killed by the unrelenting grip of war. The chaos continues to control lives in the Central African area, and the chaos takes lives with it. Continuing the themes of war, Mark 13:12 states, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death," (NIV). When a nation scares their children to the point they live in constant fear, it betrays that child's right to a happy childhood. An article *Extreme violence 'blighting a generation' in Central African Republic*, claims over two thirds of the child population experiences this betrayal to the point of suffering from PTSD (Jones, 2015). This tragedy occurs because brother betrays brother and start violent conflicts over issues that could be solved with compassion and cooperation. What example of peacekeeping does the future generations have to look up to growing up around all this violence?

The end prophesied by Jesus in Mark may seem a far off future event to the average Christian. Yet the people in Central African countries live the events of this "end" every day after the next. Similarities are evident in verses five and six "Jesus said to them: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he', and will deceive many,'" coinciding with leaders such as Joseph Kony making false claims of divinity. These unmistakable similarities continue in verses seven and eight, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," the proof to this similarity lies within the constant state of fear the children of these countries live in because of the constant state of war and violence these countries are ruled. The end may seem so far out in the future, it may not even cross your mind, but imagine living in a place where the events Jesus told his people mark the end happen every day. To them, it is the end of the world as they know it.

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The Modern Day Apocalypse in my Congregation

Margaret Breen, Minneapolis, MN

During our week at Augsburg College we studied the relevance of the popular culture references to the "end of the world" in biblical text, and a new take on the term "apocalypse". Presented to us by Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler, Ph.D. and adjunct professor of religion at Augsburg, we became familiar with the idea of Apocalyptic Imagination, which is, perhaps, a much less dismal take on the term. Apocalyptic Imagination refers to a timeline, which begins with a series of signs and symbols of this oncoming catastrophe, which are interpreted by prophets. Then in the middle of this timeline is the big event that can be labeled as the "apocalypse". Keep in mind that the true definition of an apocalypse based on its Greek roots is to "reveal, disclose, or bring to light". And perhaps the most frightening part of the apocalypse portrayed in the media today is that it is not truly the end of the world; it is the life after the catastrophe that is so terrifying. And this new society after the life altering event or realization is what is on the right hand side of the timeline. Where we are on this timeline is all relative to each individual story. It is also important to note that this revelation that can be classified as an apocalypse does by no means have to be a negative thing. Based on the true definition of an apocalypse, my congregation's support of teen homelessness acts as the main event in the pattern of the apocalyptic imagination.

Several years ago, members of my congregation, a small church just west of the Minneapolis/Edina border, became aware of the very prevalent, yet often ignored, issue of teen homelessness in the suburbs. In Edina and neighboring suburbs alone there are approximately 250-300 homeless youth at any given time and very little being done to support them (Agenda: Edina/Beacon). We became involved in the Beacon Interfaith Housing Initiative and explored their housing options at Nicollet Square in Minneapolis. According to the apocalyptic imagination, these first indicators were signs of the oncoming apocalypse and the members of my church were the prophets who interpreted these signs.

My congregation believed that it was a right of every child of God to have a safe place to sleep at night and we began working to make that possible for more members of our community. As is said in Isaiah 58:7 "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (*New Revised Standard Version*).

We believed we were called to help these youth on the street so we began to hold fundraisers, ask for donations and work with Beacon Interfaith Housing Initiative along with a variety of other congregations from around the area. The goal was to create small studio apartments for youth between the ages of 18 and 22 who were in need of a home. The ideal location was found; 66 West. An old TCF bank, the site is centrally located, with a mall, grocery store and pharmacy within a few blocks and well as a variety of transportation options, primarily buses, that can take the residents anywhere in the greater twin cities area. This was the beginning of our apocalypse.

However, there was still a lot of work to do before we were ready to enter the right hand side of the timeline. The people residing in the nearby office spaces and homes were very against the idea because they believed that the incoming swarm of homeless youth would bring trouble with them. They fought the effort every step of the way, and it was a struggle to try to get them to see where we were coming from. I am not sure that they ever understood our motives. More importantly was the issue of finance. The city of Edina allots \$100 million to affordable housing every year and Beacon applied for part of that grant specifically for 66 West as well as other private donors. Our congregation also raised money but no progress on the building could begin until funding was secured. While this was a frustrating time of waiting to see how it would all play out, we were still in the central position of the apocalyptic imagination and used our visions of the future to inspire us to power through. It was not until May 2015 that funding was secured when the Hennepin County Board approved \$500,000 in capital while the Edina City Council unanimously supported \$550,000 in capital for 66 West (Beacon Interfaith Housing Initiative, website). As of now, plans are being finalized and construction will begin shortly.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that an apocalypse in its true meaning signifies “reveal, disclose, or bring to light”. Additionally, the apocalyptic imagination begins with signs of the oncoming apocalypse, then the significant event that changes something about the prior life, and ends with life continuing on past the apocalyptic event.

At this time, I invite you to enter into your own apocalyptic imagination. Look for the signs and become a prophet. It is our job as Children of God to search out problems and find a solution. And so I hope you can find inspiration in the Bible, or elsewhere, to discover your own apocalypse. Also, when the next zombie movie is all the craze or deadly epidemic takes a creative turn, imagine what a smaller scaled apocalypse looks like in your life. Perhaps it is the hundreds of homeless people that surround you, or a civil war in a faraway country, or the abuse of human rights that you experience or observe on a daily basis. Whatever it may be, bring the issue to light and work to improve the situation to the best of your ability.

Galatians 5:13

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

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Media's Portrayal of the Apocalypse

Jacqueline Tomas, Blaine, MN

To the average person, the apocalypse may call to mind images of zombies and meteor showers. Movies and television shows about people rising up from the chaos are increasingly popular. However, these fictitious retellings of the apocalypse make it a taboo and cause people to feel uncomfortable taking a deeper perspective on the topic. While most people might agree they understand what the apocalypse is, very few have a formed opinion on the subject. The apocalypse is important to Christian faith because we are told Jesus will come again, and we seek God in heartfelt repentance and faith. However, the media's depiction of the apocalypse can become an unknown obstacle to people in that it simplifies the end of the world, often leading to us to isolate ourselves and potentially misinterpret what the apocalypse is supposed to mean from a biblical standpoint.

The content in movies are typically presented as potential reality. This leaves little room for people to interpret the apocalypse for themselves. A movie contains directors, actors and writers all focused on making a film that will sell. However, this focus on being a box office success means the messages in movies can often stray from the biblical messages. In some movies, the rapture is a popular subject because it makes for a great dramatic event, opposed to it being a meaningful spiritual event.

Movies commonly exploit the apocalypse for dramatic value, like in the comedy *Rapture-Palooza*. In this movie a scene shows Jesus, who comes down from the sky riding a unicorn, only to be accidentally shot with a laser beam by one of the main characters. While this movie and others like it offer much comedic value, they twist the meaning of biblical text, which can lead to misinterpretation by audience members. It's unlikely someone watching this movie would believe all these events to be true. However, just because a viewer does not believe it on the surface does not mean the portrayal and the messages in the story will not impact them.

Susan K. Perry, social psychologist and writer for Psychology Today, explains in the article, "How Movies Trick Your Mind," that movies can change the way you feel. When watching a movie that we consider to be an "engaging time-waster" our minds never stop working and "we can have what feel like real experiences." She continues to explain that our attitudes and perspectives toward the events happening in the movie can change unknowingly by the facial expressions and feelings the actors and actresses show. So while watching movies like *Rapture-Palooza* we may find ourselves beginning to view the apocalypse more as an implausible and pointless event than as a message from God.

According to an article by Jahnabi Barooah, out of Americans, "the majority (57 percent) only read their Bibles four times a year or less." An even smaller number of people read text in the bible about the end of the world. With very limited exposure to different perspectives of the apocalypse it is easy to understand why movies and media are able to shape our views. While movies and other parts of the bible seem to take a religious approach, a good portion of the

ones centered around the end of the world classify themselves as fiction and fantasy because apocalyptic themed movies tend to be thrillers instead of spiritual. Fiction is defined by Dictionary.com as “an imaginary thing or event, postulated for the purposes of argument or explanation.” Because this biblical event happens in the future, and are typically made for entertainment purposes, it is easy to understand why these movies are classified the way they are.

One of the most extreme disadvantages to watching movies about the apocalypse instead of reading from the bible is the loss of important messages and advice given through Christian scripture. The stories in the bible have no correct way to be interpreted without the luxuries of reading them and determining the meaning for yourself. When relying on media for the message, people can miss out on deeper context and how it applies to themselves. While visualization can let us get a better understanding of what text is saying, without being able to stop and think about the messages they can be easily overlooked. Tim Chaffey shares “God is capable of accurately relaying His Word to us in a way that we can understand. It is crucial that we interpret properly to determine the intended meaning rather than forcing ideas into the text.”

Fictional movies can get in the way of our faith by causing us to confuse what the apocalypse is, isolate ourselves from the idea of it, and misinterpret the meaning. Even with the bible, no one knows what the apocalypse will look like, when it will happen or how. However, by creating the understanding that movies are only a single perspective can open one's eyes to a variety of ideas. As Christians the future should be as important to our faith as the past is and by understanding our beliefs about the end of the world our relationship with God can be strengthened.

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Adam and Eve Committing the First Sin: The First Apocalypse

Camille Hanson, Richfield, Minnesota

In popular culture, an apocalypse is perceived as a global catastrophic event that destroys the planet, sometimes leaving a small number of humans behind to fend for themselves in the harshest conditions. This perception of an apocalypse is portrayed in movies like “Mad Max” and television shows like “The Walking Dead”. Some people believe the only apocalyptic event will be the return of Christ. In truth, an apocalypse is not the complete destruction of the world, but the disclosure of a new world. A world in which things are drastically changed and things previously hidden are revealed. An apocalypse is not always a cataclysmic event. It involves the unveiling and the revelation of new truths. Modern examples of apocalyptic events are endless. To name a few; The events of World War 2 and Nazi Germany, the Genocide in Rwanda and the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. While the world did not end following these catastrophic events, they all left an indelible mark on history. The events previously stated changed the landscape and created a paradigm shift that altered the course of human-kind. Apocalyptic events have been occurring since the beginning of time, starting in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis chapter 3, narrates the telling of the first sin. After the creation of human-kind, God instructed Adam and Eve not to eat, or touch the fruit of one particular tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. He gave them free reign of everything in the garden except the one tree and informed them if they ate from that particular tree they would die. Yielding to temptation the serpent presented to them, they disregarded God’s request and ate from the forbidden tree. The decision to eat from the tree was the first apocalyptic event. Life as Adam and Eve knew it changed forever. Their innocence was instantaneously relinquished, their eyes became open and the realization that they were naked propelled them to craft clothing out of leaves to hide themselves. Their decision changed the course of history and has shaped everything about the human race. For this act of betrayal, God punished Adam and Eve. If Adam and Eve had obeyed God, human-kind would have been immortal and remained in the Garden of Eden, forever in paradise with God. The consequences occupy all of chapter 3 of Genesis, verses 14-19 and ends in “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3: 19 NRSV). This act by God is the paradigm shift of man and woman which changed the world forever.

Adam and Eve, in eating the fruit, provide a prime example of a transition into a new world. This first sin has carried its effects over into a world where evil is observed and felt in myriads of ways. Ways that Adam and Eve never conjured preceding their disobedience. Because of this first sin, we now know of famine, war, genocide, thievery, rape, and many other human transgressions. Adam and Eve introduced these tragedies into the world when they abused God’s gift of free-will and handed over their trust to the Devil, who was represented by the serpent. The eating of the fruit is reflected in every person, because we too are given the choice between good and evil. Between the Serpent and God's wishes. Everyone bears the aftermath of this apocalyptic event within them.

A current example of how sin still manifests within people and within society today would be the repeated race-invoked hate crimes in the United States. Systematic racism has buried itself deep within our government and into our minds to ensure that minorities are continuously and undeniably oppressed. People have strayed from God's way and transformed their mindsets into that which is led by hate. God tells us "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, ESV). This should invoke in God's people to then love their neighbor and honor God's word by recognizing that we are all children of God and deserve to be loved in a way that Jesus Christ has taught us. Many members of the human race have fled from God's instruction and acted on heinous, ignorant ideas that the color of your skin elects the worth of your soul. But once again, we are all equal in God's eyes.

Another example of how the sin of Adam and Eve had been reflected onto generations after them would be the crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ. On the sixth day, Friday God created mankind in his likeness. On a Friday, thousands of years later, Jesus Christ gave his life on the cross and was buried in a tomb to atone for all of human-kind sins. When God spoke of death as a consequence of eating the forbidden fruit, it was not a physical death, but a spiritual death that was implied. This same idea is reflected in Romans during the telling of Jesus dying on the cross. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23, ESV). Due to the actions of Adam and Eve, and the spiritual death that they endured and passed onto their offspring, Jesus Christ had to die on the cross, so that we may reconciled to him again.

To reiterate, the original apocalypse occurred in the Garden of Eden. In the exact moment Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they disobeyed God and altered the course of humanity. Their disobedience was not without consequence. Adam and Eve were taken out of the garden and not able to recover the closeness with God that they were once gifted with on their own. To Adam and Eve, Christ was promised by God as the being who would come to crush the serpent's head, defeating the Devil, and lead us back to God.

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Christianity vs a Super Volcano, Regarding Eschatological Thought on the End of the World

Sam Swedzinski, Zimmerman, Minnesota

“What shall be the sign... of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3; Fickenscher). This is a question that has been asked and wondered for over two thousand years. The answer to this seemingly simple question, just like the answers to all questions about the end times, is a complex one that does not have a definite answer. Many different groups have very different theories as well. Christianity and the scientific community are an example of two groups that have many similarities and differences when it comes to their view on the end of the world events and perception regarding the apocalyptic worldview and imagination.

To fully explore this topic it is important to first know what apocalyptic worldview and apocalyptic imagination is. The word apocalyptic is defined as the unveiling or revelation of something. In many cases this is in reference to the end of the world, but other events can be seen through this as well. Christianity uses the term apocalyptic worldview as a way to view the end of the world. Commonly this is done with the help of the story of Jesus. Jesus' life gives prophecy and other references to the end of the world especially in the days before his death, in one case he says “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places” (Matthew 24:7; Fickenscher). This type of prophecy is commonly used to aid in the process of having a Christian apocalyptic worldview. In the scientific community it is very similar although instead of Jesus' words as the unveiled material it is commonly scientific reports and historical events. The next idea is that of an apocalyptic imagination. This is a process, or timeline, that easily shows the process of any apocalyptic theory. The rough idea of this begins with signs of the apocalyptic event that are interpreted by a prophet. These signs range from super volcano eruptions to prophecy presented in the book of Revelation. These signs are followed by the catastrophic event actually occurring. It then ends with a post-apocalyptic world that is different in every theory. These two ideas are important to fully understand the different ideas regarding the end of the world.

The Christian prophecy of the end of the world mainly comes from the book of Revelation and the testimony and prophecy of Jesus Christ. One example from the prophecy of Jesus, specifically regarding what will happen to the people that are already dead, is in John where it is said “for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out- those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil will rise and be condemned” (John 5:28-29, Fickenscher). This prophecy tells of how in the end times Jesus will raise the dead from their graves and send the ones who have repented to heaven and everlasting life and those who have done evil and not believed in God's son to be condemned. Now regarding the people that are living at the time of the coming will suffer plagues and other disasters after the repented left. It is heavily debated whether or not these are considered literally or in a figurative content. In the figurative context it is believed that they are punishment on God's enemies. In Revelation it also tells more about what life will be like for the evil and condemned that they will “be [put] in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:18, Fickenscher). In the apocalyptic imagination

these are the events that make up the apocalypse and the post-apostolic world. The prophecy and signs are how we learn about these events. In the book of Revelation the prophecy is a series of visions seen by John who is a prophet, in the imagination, Jesus is also seen as a prophet because he tells about the end of the world. When it comes to how Christians living today should view the end of the world it is said in the book of Matthew that “concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:26, "66 Bible Verses about End Of The World."). This verse brings comfort to many because it is usually interpreted that it's not worth worrying about the exact time when the only thing you can do to help yourself is repent from your sins with Jesus. The Christian view of the end of the world is one that is based on prophecy.

The scientific community has a wide variety of theories when it comes to the end of the world. One of the most common theories is that of a massive super volcano eruption. This eruption is expected to occur in Yellowstone National Park. The scientists such as the ones that work for the Yellowstone Volcano Observatory such as Dr. Robert B. Smith are considered, in the apocalyptic imagination, to be the prophets of the apocalyptic event, the explosion of Yellowstone. This exposition is predicted to be 1000 time more explosive than the Mt. St. Helen eruption. It is also predicted that 90,000 people would die instantly. Following this apocalyptic event the post apocalyptic world is expected to have ash all the way through the Midwest and a “haze of gas that could drape the country [and it] wouldn’t just dim the sunlight — it also would cool temperatures” (Yellowstone). This drop in temperature combined with ash fall is predicted to cause many crops to fail. This would cause an increase in food prices or a worldwide famine due to the amount of food the US exports to other countries. It would also cause transportation problems and contamination to water supplies. Many people that share this worldview regarding the eruption of Yellowstone references the timeline of past Yellowstone eruptions that it is likely to explode again in about 95,000 years. They use the past eruptions and measurements of the magma chamber and measuring of earthquakes that regularly occur in the park to find this number. Still, there is no way of knowing when exactly this is to occur. Some people that believe in this theory have built several shelters and other end of the world preparations to protect themselves. The majority of these predictions are based in science.

Some connect the two theories, pointing to the passage in Revelation that says “the fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night” (Revelation 8:12, Fickenscher). Many people interpret this verse as foretelling a massive eruption, creating a combined scientific & religious theory of the end.

Christianity and science have many similarities and differences on not only the theory and apocalyptic imagination but on the apocalyptic worldview of the people that believe in each theory. Between these two theories I believe the Christian theory is the more likely one. What causes a volcano to erupt? What determines how much force and magma are in that chamber? These questions are what cause me to believe in a higher power that controls these things. Many ask the question what shows us when the end of the world is, but I believe that we have

no way to predict because God is in control so why worry about it. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer... let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

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Apocalyptic Thought in Christianity and Islam: An Exploration of the "End of the World as We Know It"

Jeremy Carnicelli

We all have our own ideas on how the apocalypse is going to occur. Whether these thoughts are given to us or we've created new images in our minds on what it will be like; most apocalypse stories include three ideals: there is an unnatural force that disturbs/ruptures the world, the Earth turns to chaos, and people die. In the Book of Revelation, a multitude of unworldly forces are at play; the worthy are raised, the unworthy are left behind, and the earth is consumed by fire. The Islamic religion also has an idea of how this judgment will play out. I'd like to compare the Christian and Islamic version to show the differences and similarities between the two.

Every culture has its own definition on what something means; especially the word "apocalypse." According to *Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.* a writer and scholar for *Catholic Resources*:

In biblical terminology, an "apocalypse" is not an event, but a "revelation" that is recorded in written form: it is a piece of crisis literature that "reveals" truths about the past, present, and/or future in highly symbolic terms; the revelation often comes in dreams or visions, and usually needs to be interpreted with the help of an angel; it is usually intended to provide hope and encouragement for people in the midst of severe trials and tribulations" (Just).

To recap, an apocalypse is not an event but it is the revealing of truths about time in symbolic terms, usually explained by angels and prophets. As a Christian, I know most of the stories that tell of the second coming of Jesus of Nazareth. Many apocalyptic stories don't end very pretty. It's usually because we as humans failed God so badly that he needed to do something so catastrophic and unworldly that it wiped all the impure off the planet.

One of the most popular apocalyptic stories in both Christianity and Islam is Noah's Ark. The impure didn't do as God had asked of them so God chose Noah and his family to prepare an ark to keep safe all the animals of the world. After a long period of time the water dried up and they started life over again. The Bible and Qur'an share the story of Noah and the ark, but at the end of story, in the Bible, Noah gets drunk; the Qur'an doesn't tell of him getting drunk. The story of Noah and the ark could be an apocalyptic scenario that he and his family are now living in a post apocalypse world.

Another apocalyptic event that occurs in both the Bible and Qur'an is the life and death of Jesus or Isa. However, the events surrounding Jesus' or Isa's escape from our world is very different. The scene according to the Bible is as follows. "50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus'

resurrection and[c] went into the holy city and appeared to many people. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!' (Matthew 27:45-56, Bible, New International Version). The death of Jesus is one of the stories that makes Christians want to cry and feel glad at the same. It's a story of a man who is forgiving us of our sins and dying for us to do so. The aftermath of the situation is quite catastrophic: there's an earthquake and the dead came back to life. But it fits our three feature criteria. Earthquake-chaos, undead-unnatural force, and this one might be a little insignificant, but Jesus-people die. The story is different in the Qur'an. Jesus doesn't die; Judas takes his place. The Qur'an teaches that Isa has still not died a natural death and his reappearance on earth and subsequent physical death will mark the beginning of the true end of days.

Some Islamic scholars claim there are many signs pointing towards judgment day, including homosexuality. According to Islamic Scholar Imran Nazar Hosein, "Homosexuality (and lesbianism) would become commonplace, and that is now happening before our very eyes. Social acceptance and legal protection for this abominable sexual perversion is gaining ground." (*Ten Major Signs of the Last Day - Has One Just Occurred*). There are many Christians who also believe that homosexuality and society's willingness to accept homosexuality as commonplace will lead to the end of the world. Christians and Muslims who feel this way point to the stories of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a result of their society's sinfulness and sexual perversions. They seem to fight against the legalization of homosexuality as they are trying to prevent the apocalypse.

With the three apocalyptic features: an unnatural force that disturbs/ruptures the world, earth turns to chaos, and people die telling of an ending of the world as we know it, there are numerous signs that point towards the end. According to Daniel Burke, Muslim and Christian views of the apocalypse are remarkably similar, albeit with a different endings. "As in the Bible's Book of Revelation, Islamic tradition speaks of signs -- unnatural disasters, wars and moral decay -- that will portend the Last Days. And like Christians, many Muslims believe that Jesus, whom they call Isa, will return to defeat the Antichrist." Most Christians believe, based on apocalyptic readings of the book of Matthew, Isaiah, and the Book of Revelation, that wars between nations (Matthew 24:67a), famines and earthquakes (Matthew 24:7b), false saviors (Matthew 24:5), and the reestablishment of Israel (Isaiah 11:11-12) be signs that the end of the world as we know it is near. The Qur'an describes other signs (Sura 21:96, 27:82, 43:61) which include gross materialism, demographics where women outnumber men, and that Muslims will defeat Jews in battle; Muslims and Christians battle unbelievers together, then Muslims defeat Christians in battle. According to David Cook, "The only difference is the 'good guys' are Muslims, not Christians." (Barooah).

Further difference between Islamic and Christian views of the end of the world is that the Qur'an teaches that all people will be judged for their good and bad deeds. The Bible teaches that all people will be saved through the grace of God if they believe and are willing to receive God's grace. Muslims believe that after the "Hour," only Allah will remain. Christians believe that all believers will live peacefully with the triune God.

Some similarities are the three feature system: unknown force, death and chaos. Even though the two might have just those three beliefs in common there are actually a lot of similarities between Christianity and Islam. For example, many Christian churches still deny service to homosexuals and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. There are shared apocalyptic stories including the most significant termination of life through the floods of Noah's time. Some differences are how everyone is deemed as good and pure, in the Qur'an, and are deemed to be born wicked and sinful in the Bible. The end of the world in the eyes of Christians and Muslims could have already happened or it could be sometime in the upcoming future.

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Apocalyptic Thinking on Payday Lending

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Apocalyptic thinking has been going on for centuries. Perhaps surprisingly, many manifestations of apocalyptic thinking derive from biblical texts. In fact, several prominent theologians have argued that apocalyptic thought is the cornerstone of Christian theology, however, the apocalypse is not what you might think it is. The real definition of an apocalypse is a revealing, or a bringing forth of the truth. This definition is really different than the thoughts of the general populace. This revelation is key in understanding the concept of payday lenders.

Payday lending, or predatory lending is a business that is similar to what loan sharks do. The definition of a Payday Loan is "A type of short-term borrowing where an individual borrows a small amount at a very high rate of interest. The borrower typically writes a post-dated personal check in the amount they wish to borrow plus a fee in exchange for cash." A loan Shark is a moneylender who charges extremely high rates of interest, typically under illegal conditions. Most borrowers use payday loans to cover ordinary living expenses over the course of months, not unexpected emergencies over the course of weeks. The average borrower is indebted about five months of the year. Payday loans rely on the consumer having previous payroll and employment records. Legislation regarding payday loans varies widely between different countries and within the USA. So you can see why they would cause a problem in a world of faith, peace, and love.

We can compare this horrible business practice to the book of revelation, in the story, *The Great Whore and the Beast*. In this story, we meet with an imagery of a woman wearing a red and purple dress, sitting on a monster with seven heads, which is sitting on seven mountains in Babylon. In Revelation 17:9 the "seven mountains" is typically understood as the Seven Hills of Rome, this is because on some Roman coins, minted under the Emperor Vespasian, depicts Rome as a woman sitting on seven hills. Many Biblical scholars believe that "Babylon" is a metaphor for the pagan Roman Empire at the time it hunted and persecuted Christians, before the Edict of Milan in 313: possibly referencing some aspect of Rome's rule (brutality, greed, paganism). Some of these experts have interpreted the passage as a severe critique to the people in Rome who do the Emperor's bidding, interpreting that the author of Revelation was speaking of the Herodian's, and later, corrupt Hasmoneans, where the ruler of Jerusalem or Roman Judea exercised his power given to him by the Emperor, and was dependent on Roman wealth and power, like Herod the Great in the Gospel according to Luke.

Payday lending can be compared to the greediness, and cruelty of the Roman Empire through this story. Payday lenders crop up throughout the country, gladly using people for their own gain, allowing money to influence them. The greed of these institutions is legal in 27 states, with 9 other states allowing some form of short term storefront lending with restrictions. The remaining 14 and the District of Columbia forbid the practice. The reaches of these institutions are far flung, and they have a tight grip on anybody who uses their services. Now that the truth is revealed, how does the problem get resolved?

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has issued several enforcement actions against payday lenders, like violating the prohibition on lending to military members, and the aggressive collection tactics. The CFPB also operates a website to answer questions about payday lending. Some states have aggressively pursued lenders they felt violate their state laws. The action these states have taken is not enough to stop the cruelty, though. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, a small church in the heart of Minneapolis, has decided to speak up and act against these institutions. This church even tried to get the payday lending practices illegal in the state of Minnesota. Although their hard work did not come through for them in new legislation, and Payday Lenders are still allowed to practice in Minnesota, Holy Trinity did not give up. They, along with a few other churches started something called Exodus Lending: a lending program through the church that helps the victims of Payday lenders pay their debts to the Payday lenders. Exodus Lending is a loan, however, and the people who come to the program still have to pay the money they borrow back to the church, but with 0% interest rates, and no deadline for the money. Exodus Lending hopes to teach people about the greedy Payday Lenders, and how they are very much a part of the system that oppresses. Holy Trinity has an apocalyptic mind view on this world and the systems in it.

Apocalyptic thought is the cornerstone of Theology, and a Christian life. To keep and apocalyptic mind view on the world is important, and essential to living in God's world today and always. If we lose sight of the truth, we lose sight of God. Payday Lenders are just one evil that is in this world, and though an apocalyptic mind view, we can reveal the truth that is around us.

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Prophet vs. Prophet

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"I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled poets to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean" (Socrates). My interpretation of what Socrates is trying to say is that prophets don't really get why or how they know what is going to happen in the future. I believe he is trying to say that even though the prophets tell us prophecies, and they still are trying to process the information themselves. Today many modern prophets are almost always not a true prophet, they tell us what they believe is going to happen in the future, not what's really going to happen. In the bible, Daniel, the prophet, predicted that in the year A.D. 27 that Jesus would begin his ministry, and that in the middle of the 70th prophetic week Jesus will be killed. "After his death, the end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end" (Daniel 9:26). Daniel predicts that after Jesus is killed the end will come and it will be chaos until the world ends, but today many modern day prophets say something else. Modern prophets and biblical prophets both have similarities and differences and they both need to be examined.

One modern day prophet, James Atlas, believes that the world will not end from war but from Climate Change, not the world ending from chaos and war like Daniel predicts. Daniel thinks that we will have war across the world, and we will end up dying off. "Whether in 50 or 100 or 200 years, there's a good chance that New York City will sink beneath the sea. But if there are no patterns, it means that nothing is inevitable either" (Atlas). Atlas is trying to say that it could happen at any time, New York could be gone. Even if there are no signs to help anyone predict it, that does not mean nothing is going to happen, anything is possible.

Another modern day prophet, Billy Graham, believes that Jesus will come back and bring wrath to America for voting for Barack Obama, not Mitt Romney. Just like what Daniel predicts, Graham believes that the end of the world will be very chaotic and filled with war, but Daniel doesn't predict that Jesus will come back because of voting for someone. Graham believes that who we vote for will bring Jesus back. "It would turn the world upside down. Not only is the event prophesied astounding, it comes with a clear timeframe: any time now! For most of his career, though Billy Graham frequently warned that the end is near, he always maintained that the timing of the second coming was unknown. This is a crucial hour for our nation" (Schaeffer). Schaeffer believes that Graham thought that the end of the world could happen at any time, but he has no idea when. He goes on to predict that the end could happen in an hour, maybe a month, maybe even 20 years. There is no way to know what's going to happen or when the world is coming to a close.

The modern day prophet Kenton Beshore believes that a Rapture of some sort will happen. Just as Daniel predicts chaos, Beshore predicts warnings that the rapture will be destruction. "Christian groups who predict the "Rapture" phenomenon will bring about a Global Apocalypse before 2021. Traced back to ancient Biblical texts, believers claim warnings of the impending

Armageddon also signal the second coming of Jesus” (Rao). Beshore predicts that the Bible tells us that because of the horrible event that causes the end of the world, Jesus will come again to Earth. He goes on to say how some similar events have been charted in ancient history. Beshore believes that history repeats itself, this catastrophic event will sometime occur between now and 2021, and Jesus will come again between 2018 and 2028.

Daniel thinks the world is going to end from war, Graham thinks it's going to be God's wrath, Beshore believe in Rapture, and Atlas thinks the world is going to end from a Climate Change. There are so many different prophecies on how the world is going to end. We honestly are not going to know until it happens. Modern prophets and biblical prophets both have similar and different views on how the world is going to end. God is the only one who knows what is going to happen, we need to trust in His path.

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Identity of the Beast

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"This calls for wisdom: let anyone with the understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty six," (Revelations 13:18 NRSV). Who is the beast in the Bible? Is it a single being or many? In 1 John 2:18 it states, "... As you heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come," (NRSV). This passage refers to multiple "beasts", however the book of Revelation says it is a single person. This contradiction brings up more questions for me, such as: do other religions believe in an "Antichrist"? Is this idea of antichrist literal or abstract? In this paper I will explore the antichrist as an abstract idea, as well as showing other examples of the antichrist.

The antichrist should be viewed as an abstract idea because there are many arguments on who the antichrist is. When there are problems in the United States people often look at our leaders calling them the antichrist. However the definition of antichrist according to 1 John 2:22 "...This antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son." (NRSV). Therefore anyone who denies, or does not believe, in God is an antichrist. According to a United States study by Pew Research Center more than 20% of the US population is atheist; so should we call them antichrists? With this definition the antichrist should be multiple people, therefore we should use the term antichrists rather than the singular.

There are many different times the term antichrist has been used to describe a person. As mentioned previously many political leaders as well as other current event figures have been called "The Antichrist" by different parties of people. However there have been cases where people have self-proclaimed themselves as "the antichrists". One such person is Aleister Crowley who until his death in 1947 was named "the wickedest man alive". Aleister was one of many antichrists in the history of man.

There is a similar entity of the antichrist in the religion of Islam known as al-Masih al-Dajjal, or pseudo-messiah. However in the Islamic definition of al-Dajjal as one who attacks people in prayer and mosques rebelliously. So the Islamic antichrist is an abstract concept that is used to describe people who attack the Islamic religion. Also they are described as humans not devils which indicates there can be more than one al-Dajjal.

The antichrist should be viewed as an abstract idea because it is a multi-person definition that has been used throughout history to describe a person who the public dislikes or a person that self-identifies as an antichrist. Other religions view an antichrist as an abstract character who attacks their religion. It is shown in the Bible that the antichrist is a term that could be used to describe multiple people. Therefore the concrete description of the antichrist fades away for a more abstract idea of "The Beast whose number is 666".

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The Antichrist is the New Christ

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“And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand” (Mark 13: 21-23, ESV). In Mark 13 Jesus is being a prophet of sorts by having the apocalyptic mindset of the fact that bad will happen, and that people will lie when they claim to be Christ. One person claiming to be Christ is a man by the name of José Luis de Jesús. de Jesús was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico and he was the founder of the religion ‘Growing in Grace’. Since 1988 de Jesús has claimed many titles, some of them being the reincarnation of the Apostle Paul, ‘the Other’ which he said was a super being who would pave the way for Christ's second coming and finally in 2004, de Jesús proclaimed that he was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ (Fox News). You would think that most people would hear de Jesús’ message and know that it is bogus, but that is not the case. de Jesús and Growing in Grace has gained a following in the millions. de Jesús has made many controversial statements over the years, three of which stand out to me because the bible clearly disputes them. These beliefs of de Jesús’ that the bible disagree with are the idea that de Jesús is greater than Jesus Christ, the second being that there is no sin, Satan or hell, and lastly de Jesús claims that the antichrist is actually a good thing and to be praised.

When asked to compare himself to Jesus of Nazareth de Jesús said “I am greater than him, I teach better than him, and I will not die.” de Jesús then goes on to say that he does not perform miracles like Jesus of Nazareth did because he is here strictly to teach. So not only does de Jesús make an empty argument of himself being better than Jesus Christ, he even goes as far to claim that he will not die, he cannot die, but de Jesús did indeed die however on August of 2013 of liver complications. Many of de Jesús’ followers claim that he is not actually dead but in hiding instead, but de Jesús’ ex-wife has reported that de Jesús is dead. These are just the beginning of false claims made by de Jesús.

Perhaps the main reason de Jesús has been able to gain such a large following is because he preaches that there is no sin, hell, or Satan. According to de Jesús you need not have any morals or cares about what you are doing. de Jesús claims that all sin, as well as the devil were wiped clean when Christ died on the cross (Fox News). He believes that there is no hell and that if you follow de Jesús you will obtain heaven on earth because his followers are the elect and they will not have to wait for heaven. The bible makes it very clear that sin and hell are real, some of these truths are written in Matthew 5:29-30, Mark 9:43, 45 and 47. While de Jesús may claim to be the leader of an easy life, he is also the leader of a wrong life, this is proved by the ideas of the absence of hell, sin and Satan.

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 1:7, ESV). In 2 John 1:7 it is made quite clear that the antichrist is not a good thing and that it means that someone is not being Christ-like. If the antichrist is dubbed as a deceiver in the bible then why

in the world would any person try to claim to be the resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as call himself the antichrist? Well, according to de Jesús, up until now the antichrist has been wrongfully translated. de Jesús says that 'antichrist' actually means the new Christ, which he claims is himself. In Revelation 13 we learn that the horned beast appears and requires all like him to get the mark of 666 on their bodies. Well, de Jesús and many of his followers have 666 tattooed on themselves. If that isn't enough to know that de Jesús is an imposter then I don't know what is.

José Luis de Jesús is clearly a fake and though he has many followers, all you have to do is open the bible to know that what he believes, practices and preaches is false. The bible has the ability to disprove the ideas that anyone can be greater than Jesus, there is no hell, Satan or sin, and the antichrist is to be praised. We have been warned of false prophets and yet so many still accept them into their lives, by practicing the teachings of the bible and Jesus we can lead good and right lives and not fall short by believing in scammers like de Jesús.

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