

# The World Is About to End

## The Impact of this Apocalyptic Belief on History

### Class 3

William A. Reader

[Williamreader40@gmail.com](mailto:Williamreader40@gmail.com)

# What We Will Cover Today

- Secular Apocalypticism
  - The emergence of secularism
  - A secularized version of the Judeo-Christian historical narrative
  - “We can destroy ourselves” – the impact of the bomb
- Catholic Apocalypticism
  - Apparitions of the Virgin Mary
  - The Prophecies of St Malachy
- Jewish Apocalypticism

# The Secularization of Apocalypticism

Apocalypticism without God

# Two Types of Secular Apocalypticism

- Secular Apocalypticism was to appear in two different versions
  - The first was a secularized version of the basic Judeo-Christian narrative
    - The Millennial Kingdom becomes the revolutionary paradise
  - The second was the notion that man or a cosmic catastrophe could destroy the Earth and that would be it
- We will discuss each in turn

# A Note About Secularization

# Remote Origins of Secularization

- Secularization had its beginnings in the fact that Medieval (and also Modern) Christianity has what I call “paradigm alienation and leakage points” that constitute a source of alienation, disillusion, stress, and rejection
- These alienation and leakage points lead to what Conor Cruise O’Brien called “decrystalization”
  - Beliefs, values, and institutions formerly viewed with awe, pride, reverence, and love now become objects of derision, embarrassment, and hatred

# Paradigm Alienation Points

- Paradigm alienation points included
  - The inevitable contrast between its idealized beginnings depicted in Scripture and its current realities
  - Papal Supremacy
  - Stress on doctrinal orthodoxy
  - Prohibition of Usury
  - The unscientific “common sense” world-view depicted in Scripture

# Three Major Factors

- Secularization was also promoted by the following three factors
  - The Invention of printing
  - European Expansion
  - The development of modern science and technology
- The interaction of these factors gave rise to the concept of Progress
  - This concept in turn affected how science viewed its own history



# A New Wine in an Old Bottle

- As secularism and naturalism became the intellectual norm, the concept of a personal Antichrist as a major source of evil in the world mutated into conspiracism:
- Conspiracism – the idea that unhappy events or conditions in this world are the results of an evil conspiracy seeking either power or some evil end

# The French Revolution and Conspiricism

- The French Revolution posed problems for both its opponents and its supporters
  - The supporters of the *Ancien Regime* had to account for the fall of a divinely-sanctioned system to unruly mobs
  - The supporters of the Revolution in turn had to confront a supreme example of good intentions gone awry

# The French Revolution and Conspiricism - 2

- What supposedly solved the problem for both groups was the concept of an evil conspiracy
  - For the supporters of the *Ancien Regime*, the Revolution was the result of a conspiracy of Freemasons, Philosophes, Illuminati, and Jews
  - For the supporters of the Revolution, the failure of the Revolution to achieve its libertarian and egalitarian goals was the result of either a conspiracy of reactionary elements OR of a bourgeoisie which opposed egalitarianism

# The French Revolution and Conspiricism - 3

- Throughout history, some Christian theorists of the End Times maintained that either the Antichrist or the False Prophet would be a Jew, but this was a minority view
- Both the supporters and opponents of the French Revolution , however, were to see Jews as key players in revolutionary conspiracies
  - As a result, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Anti-Semitism was to become a component of both Right-wing and Left-wing conspiricism

# A New Historical Narrative

- Along with secularization and the concept of Progress , there also came a new secularized version of the Jewish-Christian concept of history
- In this concept, the concepts of a Garden of Eden, the fall of man, human struggle in a vale of tears, a time of tribulation and judgment, and, finally, a new idealized order of things are preserved but in a totally new dress

# Schema - 1

| <b>Jewish</b>            | <b>Christian</b>               | <b>Marxist</b>                   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Garden of Eden</b>    | <b>Garden of Eden</b>          | <b>Primitive<br/>Communism</b>   |
| <b>Punishment by God</b> | <b>Alienation from<br/>God</b> | <b>Oppression, Class<br/>War</b> |
| <b>Pagan oppression</b>  | <b>Roman persecution</b>       | <b>Capitalist society</b>        |
| <b>The Chosen People</b> | <b>The Church</b>              | <b>The Proletariat</b>           |

# Schema - 2

| <b>Jewish (cont)</b>         | <b>Christian (cont)</b>  | <b>Marxist (cont)</b>  |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>The Last Days</b>         | <b>The Last Days</b>   | <b>Final stage of Capitalism &amp; Imperialism</b>                                   |
| <b>The Last Battle</b>       | <b>The Second Coming</b>   | <b>The Communist Revolution</b>  |
| <b>The Messianic Kingdom</b> | <b>The Millennium</b>  | <b>The Dictatorship of the Proletariat</b>   |
|                              | <b>The Kingdom of God, following the final battle with Satan</b> | <b>Communism, following the end of class war and the withering away of the state</b> |

# Private Property as Original Sin

- Starting with Jean Jacques Rousseau, the concept of the institution of private property replaced the concept of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit as the source of man's woes
- This idea would be picked up by Marx, Engels, and others



# Antichrist in a New Guise

- As the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> centuries progressed, a secularized concept of the Antichrist(s) became popular
  - For the Nazis, the Antichrist(s) were the Jews
  - For the Communists, the Antichrist(s) were the bourgeoisie and the imperialists
  - For the Anarchists and Syndicalists, the Antichrist was the State

# The Revolution as Armageddon

- For the Communists, the Revolution and the following dictatorship of the proletariat was the analog of the Time of Tribulation
- The dictatorship of the proletariat would be followed by a Communist society governed by the maxim “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs”

# Destroying the Earth Without God

# The A-Bomb & H-Bomb

- The dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima created a mixed sense of joy and gloom
  - Joy over the fact that it would force Japan to surrender and thus end the war
  - Gloom over the long-range implications of the bomb – that others could get the bomb and that it could be used against us
- The fears that the A-bomb created were heightened by the H-bomb

# A New Secular Apocalypticism

- With the atom (and hydrogen) bomb and the Cold War, a purely secular apocalypticism became a major current in 20<sup>th</sup> century thought
  - Prior to nuclear weapons, the apocalypse was a cosmic event involving supernatural entities
  - Now the End-Time was something we could bring upon ourselves without God being involved
    - It could even be reduced to the absurdity of pressing a button on either the President's or the General Secretary's desk or even a technological malfunction

# Ecological Disaster

- With the publication of Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* and the rise of the Environmental Movement, the nightmare of ecological disaster came to the fore:
  - Water and air pollution
  - Ozone layer destruction
  - The greenhouse effect and global warming

# Other Possibilities for Disaster

- The realization that many asteroids cross earth's orbit, raising the possibility that the disaster that befell the dinosaurs could also befall us
- The realization that global warming, modern airlines, increased pollution, and the movement of tropical insects (and diseases) into temperate zones have created an ideal environment for the spread of epidemics

# Impact of Secular Apocalyptic Ideas

- Secular apocalyptic ideas have pervaded American thought and culture, giving us
  - The concept of a meaningless and even absurd doomsday
  - A mood of pessimism based on the idea that nuclear war or ecological disaster was inevitable
  - Ambivalent attitudes toward science and technology
  - Movements aiming to avert disaster by promoting peace and disarmament, ecological preservation, and reducing the human footprint on the environment



# Apocalyptic Novels & Movies

- The 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of many books warning of cataclysmic or gradual destruction as a result of human or natural causes
- The 1950s through the 1980s saw several novels and films relating to nuclear war

# A Note about Secular Apocalypticists

- Although secular apocalyptic ideas pervaded American literature, art, film, and popular culture, secular apocalypticists generally did not form groups or actively solicit members
- One exception was the Survivalists who anticipated the destruction of the current society via catastrophic occurrences – most likely nuclear war but also encompassing economic collapse, epidemic diseases, and environmental disasters

# The End of the Cold War

- The End of the Cold War diminished but did not end fear of nuclear war
  - One reason was the fear that “rogue states” (like Iran, Iraq, or North Korea) and terrorist organizations (like Al Qaeda) were seeking to get the bomb
  - Another was the fear that a failing state like Pakistan could lose control of its nukes

# Catholic Apocalypticism

# Catholic Apocalypticism

- Officially, Catholicism has eschewed speculation as to when and how the “end of days” will come about
  - Cites Jesus’ admonition – “But of that day and hour, no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Matt 24:36)
- Devotion to the Virgin Mary, however, has been a route through which apocalyptic belief has entered Catholicism via the back door

# Visions & Apparitions

- Damien Thompson distinguishes between a vision (something seen by a single individual) and an apparition (something seen and heard by several favored people)
  - Visions of Mary have occurred throughout Christian history
  - Apparitions of Mary essentially belong to post-Reformation Catholicism
- Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the apparitions have included messages of urgency for either all Catholics or all of humanity

# Some Apparition Characteristics

- Typically, Mary's apparitions have been to small peasant children
  - Generally girls entering puberty
  - Often, the favored recipient has lost a mother or a mother figure within the previous 8 weeks
- In the apparition, the Virgin imparts secrets and warnings of doom unless men repent or adhere to certain practices
- They often take place in societies where Catholicism is either under threat or has become the vehicle for nationalist aspiration

# The Core Message



- In the numerous apparitions that have allegedly occurred between the 1840s and the present, the core message is that Mankind:
  - Must repent of its sins immediately
  - Must show its love of Mary and her Son by prayer, especially the rosary
- There is also a warning that if this message is not heeded, some disaster will befall mankind



# Fatima

- On May 13, 1917, three children saw an apparition of Mary in the Cova da Iria near the town of Fatima, Portugal in which she asked them to come to the site at the same time on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month for the next six months
- While crowds began following the children, only they could see or hear the Virgin Mary
- In these monthly apparitions, the Virgin supposedly made revelations regarding the future and promised to perform a miracle on October 13<sup>th</sup> that would make everyone believe

# Fatima - 2

- On October 13, 1917, nearly 70,000 people followed the children to the Cova da Iria through a hard, steady rain
  - There the children claimed to see a vision of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus
  - The crowd saw something else: the Sun began dancing, whirling, and erupting a rainbow of colors, and then hurtling out of the sky toward the crowd, terrifying them. But in a matter of seconds, it reversed course and returned to its normal place in the heavens

# Fatima - 3

- As Mary had requested, a shrine was built on the site
- The two younger children, Francisco and Jacinta, died in the 1918-19 Influenza epidemic that swept the world
- The older child, Lucia, entered a convent and continued receiving apparitions until her death
  - In 1927, the Virgin Mary gave Lucia permission to reveal two of the prophecies she gave the children in 1917. But the third was not to be revealed until 1960

# Fatima - 4

- In the first prophecy, Mary said that the World War would end in a year; but that a worse war would eventually follow
  - The sign that this would happen would be “a night illuminated by an unknown light.”
  - On January 25, 1938, a stunning aurora borealis stretched across Europe with unprecedented brilliance

## Fatima - 5

- In the second prophecy, Mary warned that Russia would spread her errors throughout the world, promoting wars” and that various nations would be annihilated, but that if Russia is consecrated to her immaculate heart, Russia will be converted and there will be a period of peace

# Fatima - 6

- In 1944, Lucia wrote down the third prophecy and sealed it in an envelope. She gave it to the local Portuguese bishop with instructions that it wasn't to be opened or read until 1960. The bishop in turn gave the sealed envelope to the Vatican
- Needless to say, the secret Third Prophecy provoked all sorts of apocalyptic rumors and fears

# Fatima - 7

- On June 26, 2000, the Vatican released the text of the Third Prophecy
  - It consisted of two visions:
    - The first was a vision of an angel with a sword pointed at the earth and emitting flames, but they died out in contact with the splendor of Mary
    - The second was an image of the Pope passing through a city half in ruins and when he reached a cross at the top of the mountain where the city lay, he was killed by soldiers

# Other Alleged Apparitions

- Fatima, although it is the only one in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to which the Catholic Church has given official sanction, is just one of several alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary
- The two most publicized of these are the ones at San Sebastian de Garabandal, Spain and Medjugorje, Bosnia; but there have been other alleged apparitions as well



# Common Themes

- One theme that unites these alleged apparitions is a call to repentance
- Another is the idea that unless humankind changes its ways, it is in for a great chastisement
  - One subtext is the idea, present in Catholic thinking for decades, that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is under the power of the Devil and with its passing, Satan's influence will be greatly decreased
  - Another subtext is the idea that the Marian apparitions are preludes and warnings of the tribulations and end times to come unless mankind repents

St Malachy

# St Malachy

- Born in 1094 & Died in 1148
- First Irish saint canonized by a pope
- In 1139 on a visit to Rome, he fell into a trance and had a vision of all the popes who would ever reign and committed to paper a Latin phrase describing each of the future popes
- Malachy gave the list to the pope in 1140 where it got lost in the Vatican archives until it was published in 1595

# St Malachy - 2

- His list consisted of a 112 phrases – one for each pope
- What gave the list an apocalyptic flavor was that when you get to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the list gets very small
  - This helped foster the idea that the End of Days was fairly near

# The Last Popes

| <b>Latin Phrase</b> | <b>English Version</b> | <b>Name of Pope</b> | <b>Dates</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Pastor et nauta     | Shepherd and sailor    | John XXIII          | 1958-63      |
| Flos Florum         | Flower of Flowers      | Paul VI             | 1963-78      |
| De Mediatate Luni   | Of the Half Moon       | John Paul I         | 1978         |
| De Labore Solis     | The Labor of the Sun   | John Paul II        | 1978-2005    |
| Gloriae Olivae      | The Glory of the Olive | Benedict XVI        | 2005-12      |
| Petrus Romanus *    | Peter the Roman        | Francis I           |              |