

LIVING WITH HOPE



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FOREWORD

Are we headed for an Apocalypse? This is the impression that many of us have as we consider the great disasters of our times and the wars and the hates that torment so many peoples. The correct response actually is “yes.” Christians believe that this world must come to an end, and science confirms this belief. This is why many people fearfully ask: “Master, when will these things happen and what will be the signs that they are about to happen?” (Lk 21:7).

Jesus said that we should not be afraid: “When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be afraid.” He also said, “there will be terrifying events and great signs in the heavens” (Lk 21:9, 11) “but not even a hair on your head will be lost” (Lk 21:18). Christians can be assured that God will come to their aid. Even non-Christians can be sure of this.

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1

An End or a Beginning?

The End of Times

WHENEVER one era ends and another begins, whether it be the end of a period of time or a political upheaval, some people begin to think in terms that could be described as millennial or apocalyptic.

Leaving aside Biblical and literary apocalyptic texts, there have always been some people who have proclaimed that a final period of affliction was coming which would inaugurate a new age. We only have to think of the Montanists in the second century A.D., the Cathars in the Middle Ages, and the fringe groups of our own times.

In his article entitled "Apocalypse Soon" which appeared in the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, the historian Paul Boyer wrote that "interest in Biblical prophecy, which was never all that common in America, has greatly increased." And this is also true outside of religious circles; the laity, especially those interested in ecology, speak extensively of the coming of some great catastrophic event.

A Definition of Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic predictions tend to be anxious and fearful. But it can be difficult to pin down exactly what is meant by "apocalyptic." I would propose that one should define this word in terms of a certain uneasi-

Standing on the Threshold

God's Plan Will Be Achieved

ESCHATOLOGICAL views, which are common towards the end and the beginning of the liturgical year in both the Ambrosian and the Roman rituals, create different problems. In this type of view, we notice most of all our cultural distance from some passages of the Bible, even though we understand their importance.

Chapter 21 in *Luke* is written under the influence, not only of Jesus' words, but also of the catastrophic events that happen to the Jewish people, starting with the fall of Jerusalem that seems to be an omen of the end of time. After two thousand years, it is obviously difficult to recreate the troubled atmosphere in which people lived then. Although we ourselves live in troubled times, every moment in history is different. It is therefore important that we put in the right context the warnings that Jesus gave to be vigilant, for the coming of the Kingdom was at hand. These warnings, still valid today, are about the theological, not temporal, imminence of the Kingdom; that means, for each one of us, the individual imminence in the mystery of our own death and, for the world, the imminence of God's judgment that awaits humanity.

In spite of the difficulties to which I alluded above, let us try and delve into the structure of the text and possibly into its meaning for today.

Inside the Mystery

How Chronos Devours His Children

THE way in which a Christian relates to time appears paradoxical at first sight: on the one hand, time is something precious, something dense, full, and on the other hand, something relative and light. It makes me think of Angelo Silesius' provocative statement: "Time is nobler than a thousand eternities." An enigmatic expression, indeed, but one that brings out the fact that, for a Christian, time is the fragile and precarious place in which he determines his own eternity.

The Christian concept of time is already strongly present in the New Testament through the relationship that is established between eschatology and salvation, between the closure of time that comes with God's judgment and the full meaning of the present moment. This concept is underlined incisively in the *Letter to Diognetus*, from the second century A.D., which reminds us that Christ's disciples live in their time, but are already citizens of eternal time: "Christians live in cities inhabited by Greeks and barbarians [. . .], they adapt to the local customs in food, clothing and any other way of life [. . .]. Any foreign land becomes their homeland, yet every homeland remains a foreign land. They dwell on earth, but are citizens of heaven."