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The End is Near: Apocalypse and the New World Order

The end of the world, or of the current system of things, is an underlying tenet in most world mythologies. From the Christian standpoint, the apocalypse is a future event to come where judgment will be brought to God's greatest enemy, the same serpent which ruined the balance of creation in the Garden of Eden, and those who have aligned with its will. In the book of *Revelation* we experience a first-hand account from the apostle John who having left his physical form, ascended to heaven and witnessed for himself the glory of God and the wrath of his day. The account is given to us in the form of a letter to the seven churches established in Asia, where they are compelled to believe in all aspects of Christ's life if they were to believe at all. However, while the function of the Christian apocalyptic tale seems to be to instill the fear of God in the heart of his followers and reinstate the promise of resurrection of the dead, not all apocalypse myths are centered in the fate of the human world. A sharp contrast seems to be the Norse mythological account of Ragnarök, whose name itself means the “fate of the gods” in Old Norse.

While the account of *Revelation* was to reassert the teachings and godliness of Jesus Christ in the early stages of this new found religion, it could be argued that the pagan beliefs of the Scandinavian people were designed to power a way of life and overcome the fear of death, specially in a bellicose civilization such as they were. In *Sagas of the Norsemen*, it is said for the Norse people, “even death, the ultimate end, was already decreed and needed to be encountered with brave acceptance. To laugh in the face of death was one of the greatest achievements that a Norse warrior could perform, and such a warrior was long remembered by his peers” (128). It must have been of reassuring effect for the Norse

people to know that even the gods they revered and worshiped would eventually meet their end just as all men should, and that just as the gods, they were powerless to change the shape of things to come given that “although it was to bring their destruction, [even] the gods could not halt the onset of Ragnarök” (128). In this regard, the Norse tale of the end of the world “is starker than most” specially in contrast with the story of *Revelations*, in that instead of asserting the kingdom of God to come, Ragnarök is “unique in the loss of its gods” (Cotterell 250).

The cosmic vision and the sequence of battle between these two apocalyptic tales share certain similarities, but seem to be influenced by the natural phenomena or standing beliefs of the communities to which they belonged. A recurring theme in these two, is the ultimate enemy depicted as a serpent that must be vanquished. In the Messianic account of *Revelation*, “there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, [...] and the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan which deceiveth the whole world” (*Study Bible: King James Version*, Revelations. 12:7,9); here, the serpent is initially referred to also as a dragon, which would seem to incorporate aspect of Asian mythology into the Christian canon, as this letter was originally recorded for the benefit of the seven churches in Asia. Meanwhile, in the Norse account, it is the Midgard serpent which must be battled by a god figure, whom in this case, apart from being vanquished, also kills Thor with its venom, as foretold in the prophecy of Ragnarök found in the *Poetic Eddas*.

But the destruction is not annihilation. In both account, a new world order comes into being after the end of times. Also a recurring theme in world mythology, specially when compared to the Indian perspective of Brahma's recurrent dream. In the Christian perspective, the promise of resurrection of the dead is perhaps the strongest theme in the book of *Revelation*, Jesus himself promises all who hear his word he will give them to eat from the same tree of life which remains guarded in garden of Eden (*Study Bible: King James Version*, Revelations. 2:7), and his kingdom will

come, and death will cease to exist in the blink of an eye. While in the Norse apocalypse, and according to *Sagas of the Norsemen*, the sons of Odin and Thor, will remain alive, and even Mjollnir, Thor's powerful hammer will still be in their possession, and “these gods will rule the world anew and will tell one another tale of the old gods” and “the human world will be repopulated by two people, called Lif and Lifthrasir, who will have remained hidden in the ash tree Yggdrasill [...]. Thus the end will contain the germ of a new beginning, and the cycle will start again” (133).

Cosmic rebirth, or resurrection of the individual are the driving force underlying end of the world myths, always as a promise of reparation of a previous mistake, an explanation for the current way of things and a justification for our mortality. So recurrent is this ideology, that even in our modern world futurists already foretell of a time, when the exponential advance of technology, will give rise to a new world order where freedom from mortality and the body will give rise to a new human race with godlike powers of consciousness and fittingly the great hope will be realized: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (*Study Bible: King James Version*, Revelations. 21:4)

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