

October 16, 2020

The End of Times

I was raised by a parent who believed, like many fundamentalists and some evangelical Christians, that Jesus Christ will make a comeback at the end of time, called the Second Coming. And somewhere during this Second Coming there will be the “Rapture,” in which Christians will be snatched away to heaven. My dad put a bumper sticker on one of our cars that read, “In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned.” I never wanted to drive that car.

At almost any chaotic time in history, people start looking for signs of the end of times. They start anticipating the Second Coming. Some people think we are in such a time right now, what with all the hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, political unrest, the pandemic and so forth. There are other signs that are interpreted as fulfillment of prophecies, such as the establishment of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem and leaders behaving like Antichrists, which is really anyone who displays behaviors and values that are opposite of Jesus. All these events and signs supposedly lead to the Apocalypse.

But the story of Apocalypse is an old one—one of the oldest stories that humans tell. Not just Christianity but many religious traditions, like Judaism, Islam and even Buddhism, have a common apocalyptic narrative that arises in moments of social and political crisis, as people try to process unprecedented or shocking events. We need to understand it as such.

What seems unwise to me is when we allow apocalyptic beliefs to influence contemporary policy-making. When our relationship with the Middle East, with climate change and more, is based on religious interpretations of the end times promoted by the religious right, we are in dangerous territory. Given what is at stake, these are questions that should be front-and-center in our public dialogue, but, instead, they are strangely absent.

And we, who are progressive theologically, should be able to share a different interpretation of how all of God’s people should come together to solve some of our current problems. Let’s not be silent!

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