

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Apocalyptic Hope

A Time of Unveiling

Sunday, April 25, 2021

I believe this past year has been an apocalyptic time, though not necessarily in the way we might think. When the CAC staff first started speaking with me in the fall of 2020 about potential themes for the 2021 Daily Meditations, we were about seven months into the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing and staying home were the norm. The presidential campaign, with all its ugly rhetoric, was in full swing. Only half-joking, I suggested "apocalypse" as a theme! But the Daily Meditations editorial team took my idea seriously and transformed it into something broader, deeper, and much more accessible. We called this year's theme "A Time of Unveiling." For many of us, the word "apocalypse" conjures thoughts of the rapture, fear, a vengeful God, and violent and exclusive religion. It is an overwhelming judgment on Western Christianity that it is drawn to such beliefs. But despite its misuse, I'm convinced the biblical meaning of apocalypse is a helpful and ultimately hopeful framework.

A quick etymology of the word will help: *kaluptein* is the Greek word for "to cover" and *apo* means "un," so *apokaluptein* means to uncover or unveil. While we primarily use the word "apocalypse" to mean to destroy or threaten, in its original context, apocalypse simply meant to reveal something new. The key is that in order to reveal something new, we have to get the old out of the way. I begin my book *Eager to Love* with these poetic words from Neale Donald Walsch that put this quite nicely.

Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that. You cannot hold onto the old all the while declaring that you want something new. The old will defy the new; the old will deny the new; the old will decry the new. There is only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it. [1]

That's what apocalyptic literature does. It helps us make room for something new by clearing out the old—old ideas, old stories, old ways of thinking—especially if we've become overly attached to them. The goal of apocalyptic language, as used in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, is to shake people out of their reliance on conventional wisdom and undercut where we all operate on cruise control.

The most common mistake is to confuse apocalyptic literature with prophetic literature. They serve very different functions. Apocalyptic writing deconstructs the "taken-for-granted world" by presenting a completely different universe, similar to what a good novel or even a science fiction movie does for us. As the Buddhist heart sutra says it, "Gone, gone, utterly gone, all has passed over to the other side." It makes room for the reconstruction of a new vision of peace and justice, which is the job of the prophets. Yes, prophets do plenty of deconstruction too, but it is always to make room inside the mind and soul for vision, expansion, hope, and a future inhabited by God and not by fear.

References:

[1] Neale Donald Walsch, Facebook post, July 22, 2014.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi* (Franciscan Media: 2014), xiii; and

"A Time of Unveiling," *Four Steps to the Second Coming*, Day 1, presentation to Franciscan friars, November 25, 2020, video. Unpublished talk; used with permission.