

Rapture Repealed: A Nonviolent Understanding of Apocalypse

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Abstract

The Greek word for apocalypse means simply “uncovering” or “unveiling” and does not inherently carry connotations of violence, war, or catastrophe. Many verses in the Bible and the Qur’an, however, associate war or catastrophe with the apocalypse or “Day of Judgment.” Most of these scripture passages no longer make sense in the context of our modern-day understanding of the universe as revealed by science. Furthermore, the bellicose symbols found in scripture are more meaningful when interpreted as metaphors for the mystical experience or for an inner spiritual struggle.

In our modern world, politicians have been using religious and apocalyptic rhetoric in a misguided attempt to legitimize the use of military intervention. The belief in the inevitability of a violent apocalypse risks making war in the Middle East a self-fulfilling prophecy. Given the fragile environmental condition of our world, and the potential for economic collapse if an international religious war should erupt, humanity cannot afford to have a violent apocalypse, as it could result in unimaginable destruction and carnage, particularly if it involved the use of nuclear weapons. Such an apocalyptic tragedy would decimate our world to the extent that it would require decades, perhaps even centuries to rebuild. To avoid such a disaster, we must develop theologies that reject religiously motivated violence, re-interpret martial religious images, and equip moderate mainstream religious leaders to defend the allegorical or symbolic interpretation of scripture.

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“Coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory...;” that is how the 24th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew describes the return of the Christ, the Son of Man, (Matthew 24:30). The Apostle Paul elaborates on this image in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

“...for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangels call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will be raised first, then we who are alive, who are left shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” (I Thessalonians: 4:16, 17)

This image of the Righteous being raised to meet Christ in the air has become known as the “rapture.” Ironically, one cannot find the word rapture in Christian scripture, but it nevertheless has become a part of the evangelical Christian vocabulary.

The Gospel of Matthew further describes the end of the age as when “...the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken...” (Matthew 24:29).

In addition to these images found in Christian scripture, the Muslim Qur’an, as translated by Thomas Clearly (1993), describes the events of judgment day as follows:

...what you are promised will surely take place. That is when the stars are extinguished and when the sky is split open, and when the mountains are pulverized and when the envoys are appointed their time. To what days are these deferred? To the day of judgment. (p. 133)

Translator Michael Sells, (1999) in his book *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, conveys a similar image in his English rendering of the Qur’an, verses 1-4 of Surah 82:

When the sky is torn
When the Stars are scattered
When the seas are poured forth
When the tombs are burst open... (p. 52)

Anyone who endorses the worldview of modern science will find it impossible to accept a literal interpretation of such passages. For we know that beyond the sky is quite the opposite of heaven. Rather than a beatific realm of elision fields there exists a hostile void -- the vacuum of space. The stars, once thought to be fixed in their places in the heavens, actually are moving away from us at tremendous speed. Shining light years away, they could never literally “fall from heaven” as the Gospel of Matthew predicts. Yet 600 to 4000 years ago, the worldview that inspired the apocalyptic verses in the Qur’an and the canonized Christian gospels was the dominant creation paradigm.

A sixteenth century woodcut, featured on the cover of Daniel Boorstin’s book *The Discoverers* (1983), concisely illustrates this ancient worldview (see figure 1). It depicts a

flat earth, over which the sky is suspended like fabric on which has been placed the stars while the sun and moon are displayed as moving through the sky. To the lower left of the woodcut a shepherd on the horizon peeks under and through the fabric of the sky to behold the many cogs and wheels that run the machinery of the creation in which we live.

To people of the Middle Ages, the idea that the sky could split open and the stars fall from heaven was surely a frightening possibility. The age of science and the discoveries that would lead humanity completely out of the Dark Ages had yet to dawn. Let us not forget that the scriptures of the world religions were written well before Magellan circumnavigated the globe, before Galileo and Copernicus demonstrated how the sun's movement through the sky was an illusion, before Darwin conceived his theory of evolution by natural selection, before Hubble discovered the universe was expanding, and before Einstein theorized how time could speed up and slow down, and that gravity warps space! In contrast to our modern-day understanding of the universe, the prophets of old, believing in a now-obsolete worldview, ascribed miraculous cataclysmic events to the end of time when the earth was to be remade and righteousness restored.

In addition to being cataclysmic, apocalyptic scriptures are filled with martial images and bellicose symbols. In Hinduism, for example, the future messiah figure is Kalki, who believers take to be the 10th and final incarnation of Vishnu, the deity of preservation. According to D.V. Singh in his book *Hinduism: an Introduction*, Kalki is to come at the end of the present age “when moral excellence would no longer exist, the rule of law would disappear, and all would be darkness. Kalki's divine mission is to “save mankind and re-establish dharma or righteousness” and “usher in a golden age, a new era of purity and peace.” He is sometimes described as “riding a white horse ... blazing like a comet...” and “holding a flaming sword.” (Singh, 1991:55).

In the Christian scriptures, the return of Christ as described in Chapter 19 of the book of Revelation, uses a remarkably similar image:

Then I saw the heaven open, and behold a white horse! He who sat upon it is called faithful and true, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire ... from his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. (Rev. 19:11-15)

In both these messianic images, Hindu and Christian respectively, the sword lends itself to its traditional use as a symbol for that which separates good from evil, truth from falsehood.

Martial or militaristic images such as these date back at least 600 years before the advent of Christianity to Persia where lived the prophet Zoroaster. Zoroaster, also known by his Greek name Zarathustra, taught a highly dualistic philosophy. The world, he said, was created by two forces, that of Good called Ahura Mazda, and that of evil known as Angra Mainyu. It was as if the Earth serves as the battleground in the war between these powerful forces as the God of Good needed humans to help Him conquer evil (Gaer, 1963: 222). Such dualism was also found in Greek Gnosticism and in Jewish Essene theology where forces of light and darkness were seen as influencing human behavior in this terrestrial world (Davies, 1957:120-121; Allegro, 1982:111). Zoroaster taught that if we use evil against evil, we merely add to the evil; i.e., we play into the hands of the enemy, allowing evil to delude us into believing we are justified in committing evil in the name of good. He concluded that we must therefore strive to overcome evil with good, and thus prescribed the simple three-fold teaching -- "good thoughts, good words and good deeds" (Gaer, 1963: 227).

The dualistic view of good versus evil and light versus darkness also found its way into the Christian gospels as evident in the following passage from the Gospel of John: "...the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil, for anyone who does evil hates the light" (John 3: 19-20).

Misguided faith convincing us that committing evil is justified in the name of good often reinforces the belief that violence can play a redemptive role in an individual's life or in the spiritual identity of a nation. In monotheistic cultures, religiously motivated political leaders have used redemptive violence in their attempt to impose an order believed to be sanctioned by God. It comes to serve a sacrificial purpose, believed to free a person from evil or fulfill what is believed to be a sacred prophesy. According to theologian Walter Wink who bases his theory of redemptive violence on an ancient Babylonian myth, redemptive violence:

"enshrines the belief that violence saves, that war brings peace, that might makes right..."

What people overlook...is the religious character of violence. It demands from its devotees an absolute obedience unto-death...

The myth of redemptive violence is the story of the victory of order over chaos by means of violence. It is the ideology of conquest, the original religion of the status quo...

Religion exists to legitimate power and privilege. Life is combat. Any form of order is preferable to chaos. ...Ours is neither a perfect or perfectible world; it is theatre of perpetual conflict in which the prize goes to the strong. Peace through war, security through strength: these are the core convictions that arise from this ancient historical religion, and they form the solid bedrock on which the Domination System is founded in every society." (Wink, 2206)

Tragically, the great religions of the world, particularly the three Abrahamic faiths -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- have, at some time in their recorded history, engaged in redemptive violence. Four glaring examples are 1) the ancient Israelites believing that God commanded them to make war as they entered the land of Canaan which they believed was their "Promised Land" (Numbers: chapters 31-34); 2) the Christian Crusades - the battle cry for which was "God wills it," 3) the present-day jihadists in fundamentalist Islam, and 4) fundamentalist Christians who support today's Middle-East conflicts out of the belief that they are a necessary prelude to the return of Christ. This is not to say that all expressions of redemptive violence are the same, only to emphasize that the common underlying characteristic of redemptive violence is the belief that God has commanded or sanctioned its use. Throughout history when redemptive violence has reared its ugly head, it has shown itself to be a highly destructive ideology that sows the seeds for future animosity and violent conflict, even to the point of inviting volunteer suicide martyrdom.

Ironically, military intervention against redemptive violence is often counterproductive in that it 1) plays into the hands of the perpetrators, providing them the opportunity to fulfill their redemptive mission, 2) tends to strengthen rather than weaken the enemy, as siblings and relatives seek vengeance for the death of their family members, and 3) can result in a condition of low-grade perpetual war and continual violence as we have seen in the on-going conflict in the Middle-East and in the US led war in Iraq. The deadly effect of redemptive violence is exhibited in modern-day terrorism. It is now becoming recognized by both conservative and liberal political

leaders and commentators that confronting such motivations require a different set of strategies, strategies that emphasize cooperation between intelligence gathering and law enforcement over military intervention. (Will, 2006:6A). It also demands peace-building diplomacy and incentives that appeal to moderate factions within the countries and religious traditions involved in the conflict.

An Inner Struggle

Martial religious images that are found in religious writings, coupled with the belief in an obsolete and disproven worldview, lead to apocalyptic rhetoric by politicians and religious leaders who adhere to a literalist interpretation of the end of time. Before the first Iraq war, for example, politicians referred to Saddam Hussein as a “lawless man,” a phrase used to describe the antichrist in the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians (see II Thessalonians. 2:3-12). In his justification for the second Iraq war, President George W. Bush characterized the nation of Iraq as part of the “axis of evil,” with the conflict in Iraq being described simplistically as one of “good versus evil.”¹ The Reverend Jerry Falwell, in an interview on CNN, said that the US should “...hunt down and kill the terrorists in the name of the Lord.” Moreover, in several of his speeches, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the President of Iran, has spoken of the imminent return of the “Twelfth Imam,” an Islamic messiah figure who he claims will re-establish the nation of Islam, bringing to the world justice and peace (Heyking, 2005:1-2). Ahmadinejad has also called for the destruction of Israel, and has said that nations supporting Israel will be consumed in the “fire” of the Islamic Nation’s fury.

Given this rhetoric and the misguided beliefs that support it, there is great risk that the violent interpretation of the apocalypse will become a self-fulfilling prophecy, even to the point of believing a nuclear exchange is inevitable. Such a self-fulfilling prophecy is rooted in an antiquated fundamentalist worldview that ignores the discoveries of science. To counter this millennium madness, we must articulate an alternative nonviolent view of the apocalypse that explains how apocalyptic images should not be interpreted as literal prophesy to be fulfilled, but rather as metaphors for the inner mystical experience.

¹ For more discussion on the religious language being used by world leaders, see: “Iran, Bush and the second coming,” at www.perspectives.com/blog/archives.000376.htm.

Mystics are people who seek communion with the Divine so as to know God through direct experience rather than through outward signs or through the written Word. To the mystic, Divine Wisdom is ineffable. All scriptures, be they the Bible, the Qur'an, the Vedas, the Dhammapada or the Tao-Te-Ching, are but pale reflections of the Ultimate Reality (Prabhavananda, 1948: xii). Using meditative practices, the mystic experiences a higher state of consciousness, the light of which illumines his or her path along an inward journey of personal growth toward spiritual enlightenment. The prophesies, histories and parables found in the great world religious traditions are then understood for their archetypal, symbolic meaning.

Fortunately, a nonviolent interpretation of the struggle between good and evil as envisioned by mystics can readily be found in scripture. There are many significant examples of the benevolent use of martial symbols intended to serve as metaphors for this inner struggle. The Apostle Paul, in the 13th chapter of his letter to the church in Rome, calls upon his followers to “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12). He also characterizes his spiritual journey as an inner struggle or “war” between the “law of sin which dwells in my members” and the “law of God, in my inmost self” (Romans 7:14-23). The final chapter of the letter to the Ephesians makes ample use of martial symbols as the author calls upon his followers to wage this inner battle:

Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:14-17)

Victory in this inner battle is what enables a person to observe Jesus' teaching, “...love your enemies and do good to those who hate you...” (Luke 6:27 and 35), and honor the benevolent words of the Apostle Paul who, like Zoroaster, taught: “Do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Indeed, that Jesus, instead of imposing his heavenly kingdom through violence, is portrayed as offering himself up as a sacrifice to hatred and violence, demonstrates his message was meant to be the antithesis of redemptive violence, and perhaps even to put an end to it.

The Arabic word “Jihad” is commonly thought to mean “holy war.” Numerous scholars however, including Islamic commentator Faiz Rahman, explain that the primary meaning of Jihad connotes an inner struggle, asserting that it should never be used to condone modern-day terrorism.

The literal meaning of the Arabic word “jihad” ... is struggle...First and foremost, it can be an internal and personal struggle against temptation. Secondly, it can be a struggle to eradicate injustice from a society. Thirdly, it can be an armed struggle against aggression. (Rahman, 2005: 20)

Rahman goes on to say that “Muslims are categorically forbidden to be aggressors themselves, and even in war, they are forbidden to harm noncombatants” (Rahman 2005: 20).

It is quite apparent in the Qur’an that pagans are those who reject monotheism or adhere to polytheistic beliefs, and not Christians and Jews who are devout and follow a monotheistic tradition. Few people in the West are aware of the following inclusive verse in the Qur’an that appears to endorse the peaceful co-existence of Muslims, Jews and Christians.

Be they Muslims, Jews, Christians or Sabians, those who believe in God and the Last Day and who do good have their reward with their Lord. They have nothing to fear, and they will not sorrow. (Cleary, 1993: 9)

In addition, there is recent archeological evidence that suggests Christians and Muslims may have shared the same pilgrimage sites and prayed within the same structure, particularly with respect to the veneration of Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Shanks, Hershel. (2006: 50-51).

Nevertheless the Qur’an, like the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy in the Jewish scriptures, contain passages in which believers are called upon to slay their pagan enemies. With regards to the Qur’an, the historical context in which these verses arose is significant as Muhammad at the time was being persecuted in Mecca.

Many mainstream Christians however, while they accept the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy as canonized scripture, reject the bellicose message of such passages. Rather, they believe that, over the centuries, people of faith have matured in their spiritual understanding, social conditions have changed and humanity’s relationship with God has been transformed. This is not to say that God has changed, but that humanity’s conception of God has become more enlightened, realizing that the Supreme Being is a

God of mercy and compassion who chooses to transform humanity through love and sacrifice rather than through punishment and violence.

Mystics propose yet another solution to problems posed by bellicose scriptural passages. To the mystic, the command to “slay” means not to literally kill, but rather to cause a person to be “slain in the spirit,” which is a metaphor for being rendered egoless. To be “slain in the spirit” is to have abandoned one’s egocentric ways so as to forsake one’s selfish individual will and surrender totally to God. In surrendering so completely one is blessed with a state of mind free from insecurity, anger and fear, perhaps best described as the “peace of God that passes all understanding...” (Philippians 4:7).

Given the emphasis in Islam on peace, forgiveness, mercy and compassion, as well as the Qur’an’s assurance to Jews and Christians that they have nothing to fear on the Day of Judgment, transformative or mystical interpretations of bellicose verses in scripture can provide Muslims with a theological basis for accepting the jihadist passages in the Qur’an as an internal nonviolent spiritual struggle.

Those who warn of a nuclear apocalypse often speak of the “fire of judgment” that will consume the earth. This image finds expression in chapter four of the biblical prophet Malachi: “For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evil doers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of Hosts...” (Malachi 4:1). In the Christian gospels, Jesus also refers to fire. However, it is clear that Jesus used fire in a symbolic context. In chapter 12 of the Gospel of Luke, he is quoted as saying, “I came to cast fire upon the earth...” (Luke 12:49). It is somewhat amusing to consider how a literal interpretation of this verse would render Jesus to be a raging pyromaniac. But Jesus was speaking not of literal fire, but of the spiritual fire that awakens the seeker to the mystical experience and which descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost, transforming this first generation of Apostles as they embarked on what was to be a nonviolent ministry.²

² Christians who are reluctant to depart from a literal interpretation of scripture should consult Galations 4:22-26. For here, the Apostle Paul interprets the story of Abraham and the birth of his two sons as an allegory, ascribing symbolic significance to Hager, his slave, and Sarah, his barren wife. “For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present

Perhaps the most convincing argument supporting a nonviolent interpretation of the end times is the actual meaning of the word apocalypse. For the Greek word from which apocalypse is derived means “uncovering” or “unveiling.” Its linguistic derivation does not connote human-inflicted mass destruction. These metaphors of “veil” and “covering” are used by the Jewish prophet Isaiah who writes: “and the Lord will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations” (Isaiah 25: 7). The Apostle Paul makes further use of this metaphor when he describes the “veil” that lies over the minds of those bound by Moses and what Paul refers to as the “old covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:14, 15). The Apostle then explains that “...when a man turns to the Lord, the veil is removed... And we all, with unveiled face, are changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:16, 18). This use of the veil metaphor is also found in Hinduism as it relates to the concept of Maya or illusion. Maya is often depicted as a veil that shrouds the soul (Nikhilananda, 1949: 53). When enlightenment dawns, this veil is removed, enabling one to perceive reality from a heightened state of awareness free from selfish desire, unconscious assumptions, and personal bias.

The myth of the literal rapture served as a basis for the bestselling novel *Left Behind* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins released in 1995. In subsequent years, *Left Behind* inspired several sequels and a popular movie by the same name. The Gospel of Matthew contains verses that have helped perpetuate this myth. These verses describe the moment of rapture and read as follows: “Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (Matt. 24:40-42).

Hindu commentators have provided us with an insightful metaphorical interpretation of this passage. They apply their experience that each person possesses a dual nature. Using Western terminology, this dual nature can be described as a lower, psychological “self,” and a higher spiritual “Self,” (designated with a capital “S” in English translation) which in Indian philosophy is referred to as “Atman.” Each “self” co-

Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.” Thus, symbolic interpretation of scripture is exemplified in the Apostle Paul’s theology.

exists within everyone like two birds perched on the self-same tree, the lower bird enjoying the fruits of this life while the higher bird looks on as a witness (Nikhilananda, 1949: 297-300). Hindu writers assert that, in the gospel passage found in Matthew, the one taken and the one that is left are actually the same person (Tapasananda: 2002:10), for in the mystical experience, it is the lower self that is “left behind” as the higher spiritual “Self” ascends so as to experience union with the Divine. Such an interpretation, which views the verses in Matthew’s gospel as metaphor for an inner experience, is actually truer to the meaning of the word rapture, which Webster’s dictionary defines as a “state of being carried away with love, joy, etc.; extreme delight, transport, ecstasy.” It also is compatible with Jesus’ teaching that the “Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 12:21 KJV) as opposed to existing as a place above or outside of oneself.³

These examples present valid, albeit unorthodox, approaches to interpreting scripture to support a nonviolent conception of apocalypse, a conception that allows for the fulfillment of the apocalypse as ascribed to in various religious traditions without the occurrence of war. Such an apocalypse would consist of a shared, collective realization whereby the veil of ignorance that leads humanity deeper and deeper into darkness is lifted, freeing us from the delusions of anger, hatred and the belief that violence must inevitably be used to overcome evil.

Armageddon and the Mahabharata

In the Christian New Testament, the book of Revelation names Armageddon as the place where the great final battle occurs between the nations of the Earth near the end of time. It is during this battle that the Christ is to return for the purpose of saving the elect. While most interpreters see this ultimate battle as unique to the writer’s prophecy, the idea of a battle within which a heroic messianic figure plays a central role existed at least 500 years before the birth of Christianity.

There is a great Indian epic known as the Mahabharata, the center of which is a scripture known as the Bhagavad-Gita, which means “Lord’s song.” At this point in the Mahabharata, two huge armies have positioned themselves, ready to enter into a great

³ The revised standard version of the Bible translates this passage the last phrase of this passage as “the Kingdom of God is in your midst.” The original Greek text, as found in the Alfred Marshall Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, reads “within you.”

battle to settle a family dispute over who should rule the kingdom. On one side is King Yudhishtira who has lost his throne. His army is led by Arguna, the great archer warrior. Arguna is guided in his chariot by Lord Krishna, who in Hinduism is a divine incarnation or avatar.

The battle that ensues lasts 18 days and results in great carnage and destruction. It is, one could say, the “Armageddon” of the Mahabharata. Arguna and his army, with Lord Krishna by his side, emerge victorious, and King Yudhishtira is restored to his rightful throne.

After the battle, a sage named Narada appears to King Yudhishtira and asks: “Sir, through Krishna’s grace, the valour of Arjuna and the power of your dharma, you were victorious and you are sovereign Lord of the Land. Are you happy?”

Yudhishtira responds saying: “It is true the kingdom has come into my possession. But my kinsmen are all gone. We have lost sons that were dear. This victory appears to me but a great defeat....This terrible act of slaying our own brothers was the result of our sinful attachment to our possessions” (Rajagopalachari, 1990: 302). The concluding message of the Mahabharata then is quite clear, that victory in war is, in actuality, a great defeat for humanity.

Let us then take a lesson from this great Hindu epic, that we may not be deluded. If a modern-day Armageddon does occur, particularly if it involves a nuclear exchange as many religious fundamentalists predict, there will be no miraculous transformation of the Earth as envisioned in the book of Revelation (Ch. 21:2). There will be no descent of a New Jerusalem from heaven above, no idyllic Earth re-appearing before us. Rather, there will be destruction, massive carnage, disease and death on a scale that dwarfs Hiroshima, Katrina and the Asian tsunami. We would be left with a world that would take decades, perhaps even centuries to rebuild. Indeed, such an Armageddon would be humanity’s greatest defeat.⁴

In conclusion, if we are sane human beings, we have no choice but to pursue a nonviolent apocalypse which could be characterized as a collective, as well as individual,

⁴ During his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus rebukes one of his disciples for cutting off the ear of the slave of the high priest, saying: “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Clearly, Jesus is applying this proverb to his closest followers as well as to their enemies.

realization that enables our political and religious leaders to see beyond ethnic, religious and nationalistic divisions. In addition, we must assist all people of faith in developing theologies that reject redemptive violence, respect the discoveries of science, and equip moderate mainstream clergy and clerics to defend the symbolic interpretation of scripture. For the Greek word from which the term apocalypse is derived means “uncovering” or “unveiling,” and does not inherently imply calamity or violence. The use of apocalyptic language by political leaders is a misguided attempt to use religion to legitimize violence. Martial images and bellicose passages found in scripture are best interpreted as symbols meant to depict an inner struggle which, if sincerely undertaken, could free humanity from the destructive emotions of anger and hatred that give rise to religious intolerance and ethnic prejudice. To use the mystical language of enlightenment taken from the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Corinthians, the “veil” that covers our minds must be removed (2nd Corinthians. 3:16), that “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye” (1st Corinthians. 15: 51-52), that we may no longer “see in a mirror dimly” (1st Corinthians. 13:12), but ultimately behold the Glory of God in each of us “face to face” (1 Corinthians. 13:12), and in it, the unconditional love necessary for the reconciliation of humanity.

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Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical references are from the Revised Standard Version and checked against the Alfred Marshall Interlinear Greek-English New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).