

# **Voices: Are we living in ‘Apocalypse Now?’ Yes, we most certainly are.**

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One of the most iconic war movies of all time is the 1979 Academy Award nominee for best picture, *Apocalypse Now*. Set against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, the movie chronicles the story of a U.S. Army officer tasked with the assassination of a renegade special forces colonel who sees himself as a god.

The title of the movie is a metaphor for a journey into the self, and how, in the face of the horrors of war, the self easily darkens into an abyss as it becomes more and more separated from reality.

Upon hearing or reading the word “apocalypse” today, many immediately would associate the term with a whole litany of Bible prophecies describing dark, dystopian images of cataclysmic events marking the end of the world.

In light of our current coronavirus pandemic, some Bible prophecy and end times prognosticators no doubt would make the case this current global plague—along with what they would perceive to be an ever-increasing number and intensity of earthquakes, floods, famines, wars and rumors of war, and other so-called “signs of the times”—is but another indicator the apocalypse is now, or at least nigh, upon us.

So, is the end of the world really near? Is it already here? Are we living in “apocalypse now?”

My answer would be an emphatic, “Yes, we most certainly are!” But not in the sense most would interpret that answer.

# The meaning of “apocalypse”

Our English word “apocalypse” is a transliteration of the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which literally means “an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known.” It means “to uncover or reveal.”

Interestingly, the first word in the opening verse of the New Testament book of Revelation is that Greek word *apokalypsis*. The book launches with these words, “The revelation (the *apokalypsis*) of Jesus Christ ...”

But the word “apocalypse” can vary greatly in its meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. While we may not be living in *the* apocalypse—in a prophetic, biblical, end times sense of the word—we most certainly are living in *an* apocalypse ... or we should be.

Perhaps this current pandemic isn’t really about future, dystopian, end of the world events at all. Perhaps God is allowing us to go through this current pandemic period to “apocalyptically reveal” some things about ourselves and our world right now.

Perhaps God, right now, is attempting to “uncover or unveil” some “eye-opening,” previously hidden things, that long have needed exposure, things that long have beckoned for, if not demanded, our attention.

## Making apocalypse personal

As a theologian, I try to think through this pandemic period theologically. I am seeing God reveal a lot to me regarding my personal life and relationship with him.

With all the uncertainties surrounding us these days, what have I been trusting in and depending on most in my life? What “gods” have I been clinging to more than the one, true God? What idols have I erected in my

life that I've been looking to for my ultimate safety and security in life?

Where am I placing my ultimate hope for the future? Is it the government, the health care system, a vaccine? While I certainly love and support our government and heroic health care workers, and hope and pray for a vaccine sooner than later, have I been placing too much faith and trust in the "things of this world" that never fully answer life's biggest questions and never fully offer ultimate, eternal solutions?

In this time of greater personal isolation and its call for subsequent reflection and introspection, perhaps God has been "uncovering" for me that I have been taking too many things for granted in my life.

Having been forced to "social distance" from my kids, grandkids, friends, Sunday school class, church family and co-workers, what is God "apocalyptically revealing" to me about relationships that are most important in my life, relationships I should be investing in more and more right now to grow, nurture and develop?

## **Making apocalypse social**

During this pandemic period, what might God be trying to reveal to us about the state of our society right now?

I would echo the words of Nishta J. Mehra, a first-generation daughter of Indian immigrants and a high school teacher in Phoenix, Ariz. In the summer 2020 edition of *Rice Magazine*, she perceptively discerns:

"So for me to say that we are living in an apocalyptic age is not to invoke futuristic, dystopian imagery, but rather to argue that the current global pandemic is showing us a great deal about the brokenness of contemporary America; the inequality of our systems—particularly health care, the gaps in our infrastructure, the frailty of our social safety nets, our cultural

discomfort with uncertainty and grief.

“Populations that were already marginalized and vulnerable—indigenous and African American communities, the elderly who live in nursing homes, incarcerated Americans—are the ones who face the highest rate of COVID-19 infection. Unemployment is at a record high and food banks are struggling to provide assistance to citizens of one of the richest nations in the world.

“Our mythology of exceptionalism and insistence on rugged individualism have blinded ... ; the cost of this blindness is high ...”

So, are we living in an “apocalypse now” moment? I certainly hope and pray we are.

If *Apocalypse Now* is a movie metaphor for a journey into the self in the face of the horrors of war, what is our current “apocalypse now” moment—in the face of the horrors of a war against a pandemic—revealing to you personally about your own journey into the self?

Apocalypse doesn’t just refer to the *end* times, it speaks to the *now* times. God is in the business of constantly—apocalyptically—revealing and uncovering truths for us to see. What truths is he revealing to you and about you right now?

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