

apocalypse

Islamic views of social justice, explicated in English translations of works by Sayyid Qutb and Abul al-'A'la Mawdudi, were popular in the 1980s. After the Iranian revolution, the ideas of 'Ali Shari'ati, the Iranian thinker who had produced a body of thought founded on Islam and Marxism, circulated in the country. These ideas went beyond a condemnation of racial discrimination and also comprised a critique of class inequality and, later, of gender-based discrimination.

See also South Africa

Further Reading

William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, 2001; Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 1991; Muhammed Haron, *Muslims in South Africa: An Annotated Bibliography*, 1997; Abdul Kader Tayob, "Muslims' Discourse on Alliance against Apartheid," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 3, no. 2 (1990).

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Deriving from the New Testament's *Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelation*, the first work to bear such a generic designation, the term "apocalypse" refers to dire and violent happenings that presage the end of the world, and/or consummation of the divine plan, as well as to the end of the world itself. Scholarship in religious studies over the last 50 years suggests that apocalypse is a complex literary and social historical phenomenon that comprises three separate categories intimately related in history and individual religious experience: eschatology, social movement, and literary genre. The Islamic instance provides an instructive example of how these three modes or manifestations of apocalypse influence one another and then separate into self-contained categories once again.

Islamic eschatology is clearly apocalyptic in form and content, focusing as it does on ultimate judgment of the wicked and the good, another world, an end to time, and so on. In his trailblazing work *Muhammad et le fin du monde* (Muhammad and the end of the world), Paul Casanova recognized a distinct and characteristic eschatological vision in the Qur'an and identified in it two major relevant moments corresponding with the Meccan and Medinan phases of the Prophet's career. In the first, Muhammad expects the imminent end of the world and warns his audience about it, while in the second, the responsibilities of the newly formed Islamic community divert his attention from preoccupation with the world's end, which causes him to focus on the welfare of the community. The Qur'an nonetheless remains permeated with eschatological motifs and scenarios, and these are, perhaps somewhat unequally, spread over these two traditional periods of revelation. The end time of the world and the end time of the Muslim community or individual

are somehow conflated. Individual salvation or damnation replaces concern with the actual end of the world. The apocalyptic vision frames Qur'anic eschatology and conditions the entire text, regardless of specific topic or subject otherwise at hand. Key Qur'anic terms such as the hereafter (*al-ākhirah*), paradise (*al-janna*), and hell (*jahannam*) are pertinent markers of apocalypse as eschatology. Even more important is "the [approaching] Hour" (*al-sā'ah*), or "the Appointed Time," a phrase that appears 48 times in the Qur'an. The hour is inevitable (Q. 40:59) and cannot be delayed or hastened (Q. 35:12). Its time is known only to God (Q. 43:85). Nonetheless, the heavens and the Earth are even now "heavy" with the hour (Q. 7:187). The approaching event, however designated, is a prominent topic in both Meccan and Medinan suras, where, together with descriptions of paradise and hell, it ranks as one of major themes of the Qur'an. Among the most dramatic events associated with the hour, synonymous with impending occurrences referred to as *al-amr* (the cause), *al-wāqi'a* (the event), *al-qiyāma* (the resurrection), and *al-qāri'ah* (the calamity), are the following: the splitting of the moon (Q. 54:1), a massive earthquake accompanied by mass terror (Q. 22:1–2), disbelievers surrounded by clouds of fire (Q. 39:16), mountains crushed and scattered "like carded wool" (Q. 20:105; 27:88; 52:10; 56:5; 70:9; 101:5), the Earth illuminated by divine light (Q. 39:69), the presence of all previous prophets (Q. 39:69), the broadcasting of the deeds of all humankind (Q. 39:69), universal judgment and dispensing of justice (Q. 39:69), believers' entrance into paradise, and polytheists' abandonment by their gods (Q. 30:12–16). In addition, many hadith reports attributed to the Prophet speak of the nearness of the hour in greater detail, sometimes including specific dates. Such a focus in Islam's scripture is naturally and inevitably linked to those numerous messianic or apocalyptic movements that have been a feature of Islamic history from the very beginning, eventually emerging also from Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi traditions. The apocalyptic, messianic, and visionary-cum-experiential élan of the Qur'an and the hadith is such that numerous "Islamicate" individuals, groups, and movements continue to derive their identities and orientation in direct reference to it to the present day.

The early Islamic community has a remarkable affinity with the type of religious community (e.g., Qumran) classified in the literature as apocalyptic. The factions that emerged after the Prophet's death also employed and exploited the rhetoric of apocalypse: proto-Shi'is, with their multiple fissiparous developments, and their opponents. Muhammad's preaching was interpreted as involving the establishment of a saved community in an Islamic iteration of the Abrahamic theme of a divine remnant (*baqiyyat allāh*; Q. 11:86). Quite apart from the portents of the end found frequently in the short "hymnic" suras of the Qur'an, the hadith literature also portrays an urgent expectation of an end to history that must be faced by the community. A dramatic example of this is the "booth like the booth of Moses" hadith, which features the Prophet instructing two of the faithful not to bother making overly sturdy mosques of brick and wood but rather counseling them to use more convenient thatch structures because the apocalypse (*al-amr*) was

due to happen at any moment. In the history and development of subsequent apocalyptic social and military developments, there is remarkably scant concern with the Qur'an itself as a reflection or source of an apocalyptic ethos (see Cook).

A significant stratum of post-Qur'anic apocalyptic literature focuses on events in the five holy cities of Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and even Rome—something that may indicate a vision among early Muslim groups of the conquest of all Christendom in one triumphant gesture. Much apocalyptic and messianic lore is used as validation, sometimes post-eventum, for the major political dynasties of Islam, including the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Ottomans, the Safavids, and others. Likewise, groups and movements who disputed the authority of such triumphant religiopolitical powers all relied to one degree or another on a specific interpretation of Qur'anic *apocalypica*, especially with regard to eschatology and the centerpiece of Islamic religious authority: the institution known as *walāya*, a complex term that suggests numinous presence, devotion, and guardianship as well as political, moral, and spiritual authority simultaneously with allegiance to this same authority. Such apocalyptic historical movements include the Kharijis, the 'Uthmanis, the Kaysanis, the Qarmatians, the Khurramis, some of the activities of Hallaj (d. 922) and his followers, the Abbasid revolution (749–50), the Hurufis, the Nuqtawis, the Sarbadarids, the Ni'matullahis, the Shaykhis, the Babis, the Baha'is, the Mahdi of Sudan, the Ahmadis, the Iranian Revolution (1978–79), al-Qaeda, and others. So pronounced and pervasive is this feature of Islam that it stimulated various apocalyptic and messianic movements among Jews and Christians within the abode of Islam. It was not only the marginalized of Islamic society who sought to calculate the precise time of the end of the world and to offer descriptions, based on the Qur'an and the hadith, of the events that will accompany it, but also such prominent figures, among others, as Kindi, Ghazali, Suhrawardi, Ibn al-'Arabi, Ibn Taymiyya, Ahmad Sirhindi, Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi, and Ayatollah Khomeini. Of course, contemplation of such themes and imagery need not result in a political or historical vision, and many of the mystics of Islam offered a more purely existential and personal interpretation of such material.

There is almost a perfect fit between the contemporary theory of apocalypse (see Collins) and the Qur'an text (see Lawson, *Gnostic*). The Qur'an is as much about revelation as it is about God or His prophets, so it may be viewed as a kind of meta-apocalypse, one that is conscious of itself and in which it is, in fact, the main character of the revelatory communication. In the Qur'an, several interrelated subthemes are markers of the apocalypse as a literary genre. Perhaps the most important is the agency of the angel in the process of revelation. Some others include the interplay of duality and opposition (the *enantiodromia* of the church fathers), revelation, glory, justice, history and its periodization, story, otherworldly beings, and paradise. Typological figuration is a potent Qur'anic literary device by which the apocalyptic élan of the Qur'an is expressed, whether in relation to itself and its immediate audience or through taking account of previous religious history to demonstrate that Muhammad's

mission is of the same order of authority and vision as previous messages. In this way, the Qur'an functions as a commentary on previous scripture in much the same way that the New Testament functions as a commentary on the Old Testament. Apocalypse also involves an overall atmosphere or voice of urgency and intensity that characterizes both the delivery and reception of the revelation (see Lawson, "Duality")—the sense of being on the verge of something, as if waking from a dream, when the supralogical device of typological figuration engages with the imagination of the audience. Time collapses, the voice of the Qur'an is heard as the message of all prophets, and the impending reckoning is yet another in a cycle. This cyclical pattern of apocalypse is demonstrated in the Qur'an through the stories of several previous prophets and their communities. An excellent example is in the Qur'an's narrative about the communities of 'Ad and Thamud and their prophet Salih. In this story, there occurs a great mysterious scream or cry that is heard by 'Ad and Thamud symbolizing the irruption of the divine into the world to call it to account (see Stetkevych). It dramatizes the nearness of the overwhelming, divine power that is "closer than the jugular vein" (Q. 50:16) yet simultaneously utterly remote: "its like is not comparable to anything" (Q. 42:11; 112:4). In a fine example of serene self-consciousness, the Qur'an calls this the divine presence (*sakīna*, e.g., 48:4, 26; 9:40), a complex notion involving tranquility and the occasional aid of invisible hosts. It descends, according to the tradition, with the chanting of the Qur'an, and it is seen to have much in common with the descent of other powers and energies, such as the angels and the spirit mentioned in connection with the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*; Q. 97). The Qur'an presents an articulation and dramatization of many, if not all, of the themes and phenomena associated with the genre of apocalypse, and this category of religious expression and action was not only an integral part of the mission of the Prophet and the life of his movement but also a formative feature of various historical Islamic societies' major forms of thought, social rhythms, and political and spiritual institutions.

See also messianism; Qur'an; utopia

Further Reading

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