

Suite Apocalyptique

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Mittersill, Austria

Over the last year, I have spent a good portion of my reading time on NT Wright's *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series, a set of academic works in history, theology, and Christian studies. During this sojourn, I was impressed with a new way of reading so-called "apocalyptic" language in the Bible and other ancient literature. I realized that these fantastic-sounding passages (such as the ones found in Revelation, or Daniel) had certain concrete and practical meanings for the audiences of the time which weren't necessarily the meanings I'd been taught, and indeed that many current literal readings of such passages would never have been preferred by the original hearers.

Thus, my understanding of what before were complicated and gnarled passages became somewhat smoother, and I felt that I'd been given a tool for reading that kind of language that I didn't have before. Particularly when reading *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, and learning about what the content of the early Christians' hope of resurrection actually was, I became deeply moved, and felt compelled to respond personally in some way. So, I decided to write a number of songs that used this "apocalyptic" language, albeit in a way that I thought pointed more clearly towards the true hope of Christianity, rather than what readings of such language in recent decades or centuries would imply that hope to be. The true hope is, to state it in shorthand, the physical restoration to incorruptibility of our bodies and the presence of a kingdom and rule on earth that mirrors God's rule in heaven. (It should be obvious that this is something completely different than the "hope" of Christianity as many would seem to define it: the non-physical, post-mortem ascension of the righteous to some ethereal and spiritual location where a never-changing, Dantean bliss awaits us amidst overexposed hues).

The result of my work was a seven-song album written and recorded during a few weeks in the winter of 2007 while on sabbatical at Schloss Mittersill, in Austria (a community to which both I and this project are deeply indebted). Due to various instrumental, technical, and temporal constraints, the finished product is sparse, simple, and less than perfect. In fact, on a musical level, the recordings should be regarded as demos only, though I am quite happy with the result. It is, as I have decided to call it, *Suite Apocalyptique*: a concept album in seven movements with the above thoughts and ideas guiding both the music and the lyrics. Though a linear progress was not initially intended, it turned out that the songs, after having been written, begged to be put in order, and their current titles reflect this subsequent narrative arrangement. The first six songs form a sort of vision, and the seventh a response to that vision (the six-plus-one scheme being, I think, appropriate).

My hope is that the lyrical content as well as the mood of the music will promote reflection on what a peculiar and amazing hope defines the Christian faith, and indeed how attractive that hope is, despite what some have made it out to be. As such, the music is less for bare entertainment than for thought, and possibly even meditation.

This album is, essentially, my relating of a vision of momentous future events that will fulfill the Christian hope I described above. In this sense my purpose mirrors that of many passages from both Testaments, though my intent is to speak more clearly (while still figuratively) to a contemporary audience through the choice of different metaphors than dragons and beasts with ten horns and the like. Although, it must be said that the point of “apocalyptic” language is that certain events are so earth-shattering that they can *only* be described with reference to fantastic-seeming concepts, and so this methodology is borne out in my lyrics; but, I have decided to use words and phrases which might point listeners to a *new* understanding of the use of apocalyptic language in general, rather than allow stale and literal interpretations of Revelation to color the idea. To state all of the above more simply, what follows is how I think the Christian hope for the future should be understood, clothed in my own homespun apocalyptic garb! For a fuller and better explanation of the literary, theological, and historical underpinnings for this enterprise, please refer to NT Wright’s works.

The lyrics for the songs follow this introduction, but first, here is a poem which serves as an example of the concepts I’ve been talking about, and as an artistic introduction for the work. Read it, then listen to the album, perhaps glancing at the accompanying lyrics, and allow yourself to be captured by the vision of an indestructible life and world, where the lion does lay down with the lamb, and where we once again do walk with our God in the cool of the day. Amen!

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1 Corinthians 15:58

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Let rivers turn into waterfalls
 and their thunder as the hooves
 of a thousand horses
Let stars draw near
 and sing their shining songs
 of a thousand frozen skies
Let oceans surge with might
 and great pillars send to heaven
 of waters deep and pure
For the wondrous day has dawned
 and those of the LORD stand up
 and run on the earth with swift joyful strides!

Mvmt I: The Sky Darkens

Blood runs down streets dark and
Red cities burn
Retribution!

Mvmt II: The Body Sleeps

I'm not going to catch you this time
But you know I'll save you in the end
Sometimes you have to die
To know you'll come back to life

It's all been done
You'll be right back

What were you hoping for
A postcard heaven, cherubim?
All that's here is all that's real
And nothing less than physical

It's not your home
Just one minute now

No one makes it to life alive
No one makes it to life, darling

Won't you die with me
That's why you died with me

Ready or not here we come
We'll run like sparks amidst the trash
And you'll know what it's like to live
Since there's no more such thing as death

You'll be right back
Just one minute now

Mvmt III: The Heavens Stir

The void is empty save for stars that
Singing realize the wait is over now

They watch as a touch and a thought start transforming
No more empty, the change spreads inexorably

It crashes through the heavens, a tidal wave
Giving color to where there was only
Death and blackness, lifeless orbs spinning in
Deep space now a living lion that roars

The song comes alive

Soon the breath will reach us, a matter of
Time now till the stone will melt into
Flesh and blood that can now sing with the
Stars their song of unending joy

The song comes alive

Mvmt IV: The Earth Groans

Colder winds have never blown before
They come like arrows from a bow
Which, breaking with the strain of time,
Gives up and crashes through the sky

Down it comes through flashing sheets of rain
To wrap this curving broken earth
A signal! Now ends the refrain
Of Death and Hell we'll tell no more

But why does it hurt so?

Hotter flames have never burned before
They rush, the foaming crests of waves
Which, breaking over all the earth
Make ash the bonds of slavery

They race to me stood high up on the mount
Seared my flesh, building inside out
Remade, (the fire was my friend)
I soar down on wings of true life

A breath with true lungs
A sight with true eyes

Gather speed and advance, color

Flying over water sharp as knives
My voice calls out: Revitalize!
And movement stampedes in my wake
Complete, the journey we have made

Things as they should be

Mvmt V: The Birth Concludes

Everything is a portent weighing meaning
Love contained in a falling leaf
Now what are they saying, groaning, waiting
Ambiently, expectation stirs

Time bursts forth
A stallion's charge
And who can stand?
Who can stand?

Now is the fruit heavy to fall
Now is the axe so near the tree
Now is the pregnant hope revealing
Now comes the birth, immortality!

Burn the root
Change the world
For now have come
The living ones

So the world is made anew
And flesh put on that bears no shame
Love is inexorable
That clothes our lost and shattered frame

Victory!

Mvmt VI: The Sun Rises

I breathe at last, the work is done
Like shining glass, sea and sun
Are sharp and real, bright blades of love
Which grew to heal the wounds of

Night is over now
Night is over now
The sun is coming up

But don't turn away from the flames
These brilliant rays annul our shame
The fire burns, but we stand
For which we yearn is in our hands

When we touch the earth, it sings rejoicing
For the day has dawned, and we have returned
To ourselves as we were meant to be
To the world as it has longed to be

I breathe at last, the work is done
The shadow passed, and life begun

Mvmt VII: The Promise Holds

And so the vision fades, of earth and us remade, and
I again despair, the Light's no longer there

Can't let it go
Won't let it go

Beauty still survives, in the promise of new life, it's a
Dream worth dying for, to walk anew, upon those shores

Hallelujah

So naked though I am, and unable to stand
I will remember this, the future in my hand
I'm indestructible, I journey with the stars,
I wander all the earth, and heal its fading scars

Hallelujah