The Best Is Yet To Come...

The journey and discoveries never end. They only get better. Here is one subsequent line of ongoing development that deserves some special attention.

I mentioned earlier that around 1975 I began to read the essays of Bob Brinsmead. Then sometime in the early 80s Bob discontinued the Verdict Journal that he had founded. Over subsequent years I wondered what had happened to him. Sometime in the late 80s or around 1990 I wrote to find out what he was up to. He responded that he had taken a break from writing and had been concentrating on his Tropical Fruit World farm in New South Wales, Australia. Soon after that we (Bob, Julia Tyack, William Ferguson, and a few others) formed an online discussion group called JBAS (Joshua Ben Adam Society). This has morphed and sputtered and chugged along now for over two decades and is still going, though in a different form. We started out discussing historical Jesus research with Bob’s unique take on this such as expressed in his Scandal of Joshua Ben Adam essays.

In the early 90s I was also a student in a Masters program at UBC studying under Bill Rees, the father of the Ecological Footprint model and a leading apocalyptic prophet (known as Dr. Doom). At that time I had assumed that I had pretty much completely left my religion. I believed that I was a secularized modern.

At some point I brought up the Ecological Footprint model to Bob in the discussion group, trying to get him to see the viewpoint of environmental apocalyptic thinking. Too many destructive people were consuming too many resources and we were destroying the environment and all was heading for disaster. Bob would have none of it. He said that he did not believe such stuff. And he also mentioned that he did not believe that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet. This conclusion derived from his study of Old Testament justice and his discovery that God’s justice was not about punishment but more about mercy and liberation.

Bob had also moved in later years (Scandal of Joshua Ben Adam) to the discovery that the historical Jesus did not advocate payback but rather forgiveness.

Bob’s work along these lines and his comment that he did not believe that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet started me questioning my own apocalyptic views in the early 90s. I came to realize that while I had left the outer forms of my religion I was still holding at the very heart of my worldview a basic core of religious beliefs, those of apocalyptic mythology.

Apocalyptic mythology is the oldest system of religious myth and has been the most dominant theme of religious myth across history. It has infected all the major religions in both the West and the East. It structures the entire Christian belief system.

Apocalyptic states that there was an original paradise or golden age, that corrupt early people ruined the paradise, now all life is declining toward some catastrophic ending where the world will be purged and a new paradise inaugurated for the few enlightened elect ones. This template of themes has long shaped world religions and now also shapes many secular systems of belief like environmentalism. In environmental or green religion the apocalyptic template is evident in the belief that nature before humanity was a pristine paradise, but with the growth of corrupted humanity and human use of the environment the original natural paradise has been lost, and now all is declining downhill toward some catastrophic ending (environmental collapse). The salvation plan of environmentalism is that the world must be purged of most people (population control and reduction) and the few remaining people must return to primitive levels of existence in order to preserve the world in a more wilderness state. The world must be purged of modern technological, industrial society.

It was quite disconcerting to discover that I had not really left the core of historical religion but had only shifted to a secularized version of the same basic beliefs of apocalyptic mythology.

So thus began another major rethinking of my beliefs, especially the belief in apocalyptic. Bob at this time recommended that we read such material as Julian Simon’s Ultimate Resource. This book by itself qualifies to become a new gospel for humanity. Simon brilliantly sets forth the wonder of the creative human mind (the ultimate resource) and its ability to solve all problems that arise. And he showed how to discover the actual state of anything in life- by looking at the longest term trends and the overall status of any element of life. The evidence from such trends reveals that life, while not perfect, is improving on all fronts. There is no need for alarm over the state of the planet. Other similar works on the overall improving state of the world included Greg Easterbrook’s A Moment on the Earth, Bjorn Lomborg’s Skeptical Environmentalist, James Payne’s The History of Force, and others. All such research falsifies entirely the apocalyptic viewpoint.

Apocalyptic is right at the heart of the most serious error made by ancient people. They believed that there were threatening, retaliatory, and punitive spirits/gods behind life. This was how they explained natural disaster, accident, disease, and death. The gods were angry and were punishing them through such things. This retaliatory/punishment viewpoint became the dominant viewpoint of all early religion. It became the dominant way of defining deity. And those people added that the gods would someday soon (it would always be imminent) intervene to cause some grand apocalypse that would end life and even the world. Early on the apocalypse was believed to be a great flood (see Sumerian mythology, Wikipedia). Then later with Zoroaster the apocalypse became a great fiery ending or purging. And so that version has continued down through Hebrew beliefs and into Christianity.

This belief in some catastrophic ending of life has dominated human outlook like no other belief ever has. It was revised in the 18th and 19th centuries into a more secularized version known as Declinism or Cultural Pessimism (see Arthur Herman’s The Idea of Decline). And this Declinism perspective was then adopted by modern apocalyptic movements like environmentalism. All hold at core the same basic template of themes noted above.

The great tragedy of continuing to hold such primitive beliefs is that they cause immense damage to human consciousness and society. They stir the basest human fears and push people to engage harmful salvation schemes in order to try to escape the looming apocalypse. The damage is evident in such events as the chemical scares stirred by Rachel Carson. She used a very obvious apocalyptic narrative to stir panic over chemicals like DDT. Her scare-mongering led to the banning of DDT and the consequent unnecessary deaths of tens of millions of people, mostly children (see DDT FAQs at the Junkscience.com website). Note also the scaremongering over fossil fuels and catastrophic global warming that has led to anti-development movements that have harmed millions of people (e.g. the bio-fuels fiasco and the fuel poverty problems in places like Britain and Germany- see CCNet archives or Global Warming Policy Foundation reports for detail).

In my own report on apocalyptic mythology, titled Rise or Decline: The Actual Trajectory of Life (requested by the Global Warming Policy Foundation and available on their website), I traced something of the historical development of this mythology and its expression in modern environmentalism. I noted especially that Christianity was responsible for bringing apocalyptic into the modern world, via such things as 19th Century Declinism.

One still finds the apocalyptic outlook expressed everywhere. Even Stephen Hawking has suggested this theme in his own views on cosmology and the environment. Others, like Royal Astronomer Sir Martin Rees, have also expressed explicitly apocalyptic views. This is unfortunate because belief in apocalyptic has left many bright people looking foolishly like Chicken Little squawkers. Apocalyptic has a 100 percent historical failure rate. It is a complete distortion of life and the grand trajectory of life.

When I was doing my report for GWPF I came to the conclusion that apocalyptic was an ultimate statement of death- a grand final death of all life. It was an exaggerated expression of death, punishment, and retaliation. It became clear then that apocalyptic was essentially about retaliation. And this led to some interesting discoveries regarding Jesus and Christianity. It became clear to me that Bob was right that Jesus was not the apocalyptic prophet that many Christian scholars and historians had long claimed that he was.

And here we get to the most important thing to understand in regard to life and the meaning of life. The grand human story or narrative is most essentially about conquering the animal and leaving the animal in order to live as truly human. We are evolving away from our brutal animal past and toward a more human existence. Nothing defines the animal past more than retaliation, the brutal life of payback or revenge, and endless cycles of tit for tat violence. So the entire human story can be understood in terms of a retaliatory past and the human movement away from that past and toward a non-retaliatory future. The human adventure is about this struggle to overcome the animal in order to live as human. So if retaliation defines most fundamentally what it means to be animal, then non-retaliation defines fundamentally what it means to be human. In these features we get to the foundational differences between animal and human existence.

Nothing defines authentically human existence better than non-retaliation and its related features of unlimited forgiveness, all inclusive compassion, generous mercy toward everyone, and non-violence. These are elements of what we term unconditional love.

This is why I have repeatedly argued that the greatest error made by ancient people was to believe that retaliation defined the spirits behind life and in doing that they thus validated the continuance of retaliation in human existence. Their greatest error was to project animal retaliation onto God where it would become protected in the sacred and very hard to challenge or change (i.e. the belief in the immutability of God).

The historical Jesus tried to correct this retaliatory element in human thinking and life. At the very core of his gospel was his clear advocacy for non-retaliation. He stated at the very heart of his teaching (Matt.5:38-48) that we were not to retaliate but to love enemies. And if we did this then we would be just like God. Did you get that? We are not to retaliate because God does not retaliate, but forgives and includes all alike. This is the very core or central theme of Jesus’ gospel. It was a radical new theology and radical new ethic. And his new non-retaliation ethic was based on the non-retaliatory character of God. The ethic and the theology are vitally and fundamentally pair-bonded.

But Christianity subsequently rejected Jesus’ correction and reverted back to animal retaliation. Early Christians refused his central theme of non-retaliation and retreated to a payback or retaliatory view of God. This is notable all through Paul’s theology. And Paul taught emphatically that God would retaliate in a great apocalypse to punish all who did not believe his gospel. Paul made apocalyptic his overarching theme and Christianity thus became a religion of apocalyptic retaliation.

The Jesus/Christianity contradiction illustrates well the overall grand human narrative and struggle to be free of an animal retaliatory past and the inexplicable refusal of many people to accept that liberation. Such people want to maintain the primitive view of justice as payback, violent retaliation, vengeance, and punishment.

The key to get in all this- belief in apocalyptic is belief in retaliation. Apocalyptic is all about a grand final punishment, a grand final act of retaliation. They are one and the same.

Thus, the Christian adoption of a retaliatory theology is a stunning rejection of the gospel of Jesus. Jesus clearly taught non-retaliatory treatment of all people, including the worst- our enemies. He based this on the truth that God did not retaliate. So Jesus could not have been an apocalyptic prophet as most Christians have claimed. These two things are entirely opposite and cannot be merged or syncretised. Nevertheless, Paul tried to mix these opposites in places like Romans 12 where he stated that we were not to repay evil with evil, we were not to seek revenge but let God take revenge. Let God retaliate. Let God repay evil with evil and at a far worse scale than anything we could do.

Just pause a moment to get the absolute contradiction going on in all this. Paul says (Romans 12) that to take revenge against others is evil. To pay back wrong with similar acts is evil. Yet God will do so at a far greater scale. God will exact that very revenge which Paul called evil. Huh?!? It’s wrong for us to do so (take evil revenge, inhuman payback) but it’s all right for God to do so? What the.....? Ahhh, that’s the lunacy you get into when you try to merge and mix these profound opposites. We are to act humanely but God is not? God can do evil by taking revenge. Again...huh?

But this is just what Christianity has done. It has retreated from the great discovery of Jesus regarding non-retaliation and reverted back to a primitive retaliation theology. In doing so it has rejected the greatest insight and discovery of the historical Jesus. He made a fresh breakthrough to understanding what it meant to be truly human and how to live an authentic human existence. Christianity has reversed his endeavor to move forward into a more human world, a world of non-retaliation. To put it as starkly as possible, Christianity took a stance that was anti-Jesus, anti-human, and anti-freedom from our animal past. Christianity became the very opposite of Jesus and his message. Christianity, in choosing to maintain the belief in retaliation, has continued to embrace our animal past and enslavement to that past. Worse, it has made retaliation sacred by embedding it in the Christian God. That has only made it more difficult to change.

Non-retaliation or unconditional love is at the very heart of what defines the truly human. It liberates us, more effectively than anything else ever has, from the barbarism of retaliation thinking and existence. This is the key issue in the grand human narrative which is about leaving our animal past and moving toward an authentically human existence. It is all about freedom from retaliation in order to live a life of unconditional love, just as God is unconditional love.

And let me add that our discovery of these things came through such things as our work on apocalyptic mythology and grand narratives. We also saw the significant difference between the core non-retaliatory teaching of Jesus in places like Matt.5 and the rest of the New Testament teaching that advocated retaliation theology. Later reading of Q research (e.g. James Robinson and Burton Mack, among others) then only affirmed the conclusions that we had already arrived at through our own approach.

I have included this material here at the end because it deals with information that is critical to the human quest for meaning and purpose in this world. Nothing is more fundamental to understanding reality or life.

The historical Jesus made one of history’s most significant breakthroughs in his discovery that the essential nature of God was non-retaliatory, that God was unconditional love. Arriving at this discovery of God as unconditional love is to complete the historical trajectory of fully humanizing our understanding of God. This is important to our maturing human consciousness and our purpose on earth which is to humanize all of human outlook and all life. This is the very point of our existence, the very core of human meaning and purpose. The entire grand human story on earth has been about leaving our animal past and learning to think and live as authentically human. Non-retaliation has been the most important aspect of that to understand. The animal past was most fundamentally defined by the brutality of retaliation. So non-retaliation is the most important discovery that we can make in order to leave that past, to conquer it. In non-retaliation or unconditional love we discover what being truly human really means.

But this process of progress toward a more human existence has been endlessly aborted and derailed by payback thinking and mythology. This has hindered our progress in humanizing our thinking and existence. It is far past time to now fully complete the historical process and clean God up. This is to say, it is finally time to get clear that God is indeed, and always has been, incomprehensible unconditional love.