Introduction

The Apocalypse, in the words of Joachim of Fior, is "the key of things past, the knowledge of things to come; the opening of what is sealed, the uncovering of what is hidden." Yet from current biblical scholarship as well as recent literary analysis we understand that the Apocalypse appears as a coincidentia oppositorum, a revelation that conceals, and moreso than all the other revelations of antiquity. The Apocalypse, then, succeeds in hiding its own meaning, and bears a transcendental, secularized version, so its eschatology should be studied not only as the end of history, but also as the progression of events and signs accompanying the final dénouement. Indeed, at least since the French Revolution, secular Western civilization has associated the Apocalypse with an increasing preoccupation with political existence. In establishing this temporal range, Apocalyptic prognosis has spawned numerous gnostic political movements such as progressivism, utopianism, revolutionary Marxism, parliamentarism, fascism and democratic constitutionalism, something that brings to mind Bernard McGinn's admonishment that apocalypticism was called upon when public knowledge and public structures were endangered or implausible.1 Or we might also think of Shakespeare's idea of history as "a rehearsal of all the events of human tragedy." For these individuals, as for Augustine, Dante, Milton, Blake and Joyce, the Apocalypse focuses on the questions of justice and providence, of God's involvement in the affairs of men, and of man's responsibility for controlling his own destiny.

While recognizing the orthodoxy of political ordering toward an ideal state, most Apocalyptic literature fails to transfix the physical dimension of the blazing Apocalypse. Perhaps closest to this perception are the promises of Revelation—of life forevermore and of a heavenly city. From an Augustinian standpoint, it was in the City of God or a New Jerusalem

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that self-realization was to be lost or found—the "city" holding both meta-
physical and physical connotations—or better yet, the fusing of both poli-
tics and physicality into the rara avis of what may be termed "Apocalypt-
ic geopolitics." Furthermore, it may be agued that, in its contemporary
application, Apocalypse, while not "time-certain," has been molded into a
realm of "space-certain" and now defines geographic parameters as an
addendum to its political dimension. With this preamble we can turn to
the Apocalyptic undertones of the social pathology of California and the
urban megatropolis, the new Pacific Byzantium that is called Greater Los
Angeles.

The Millenarian Apocalyptic Geopolitical Crisis

Naturally, the element of time and history plays an important part in
the "Apocalyptic tradition" and the very idea of the End (be this a tech-
nological catastrophe and the death of civilization, a celestial disruption
or the resurrection of the saints and their thousand-year reign with Christ)
brings with it the duality of the hope of renewal and the fear of destruc-
tion. It is important to apply this concept without the benefit of a cosmic
timetable and calendar, for, as Jacques Ellul reminds us, "... the Apoca-
lypse is ahistorical. It proceeds according to a different historical course.
. . . The time of the Apocalypse, is, on the one hand, the intermediate time
(between the creation and the re-creation), and on the other hand, the
time of the end." Christianity began with the announcement that time
and history were about to end and as it developed from a Jewish mes-
sianic origin into a central political institution of late Imperial Rome the
Church had to grapple with its own foundational prophecy ("The King-
dom of God is at hand"), especially in Christian canon enshrined in the
Book of the Apocalypse. The close of the New Testament meant that
while John's vision was one of imminence and urgency (and hence one of
time) history was not to end on time. Here was a clash between two ir-
reconcilable entities: that of Eternity and Time, that of the Christ and the
Anti-Christ, that of the Alpha and the Omega (the proclamation which
opens the Apocalypse), and that of Prophetic Theological Radicalism
and Politics. Walter Schmithals asserts an extreme position in portraying
Apocalyptic eschatology as the removal of humankind from God's activi-
ties. "What happened in history has no significance theologically. . .
Apocalyptic pessimism toward history expels God from history... the
devil becomes the lord of this eon." Most scholars would temper such a

26-27.