

# Debunking the Mayan New Age Doomsday Myth

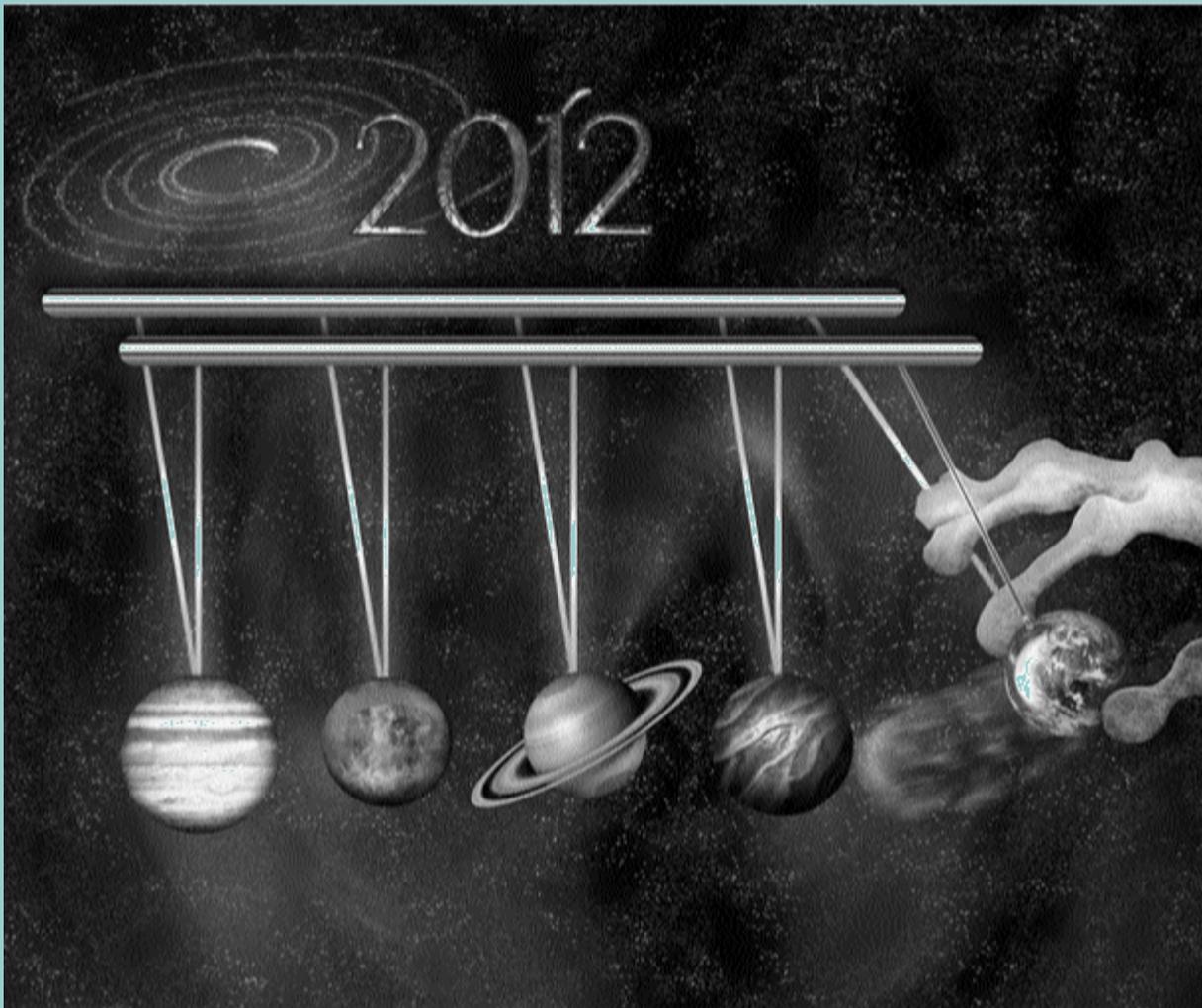
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What the Masons and Illuminati might do to make it appear that the Mayan calendar of events is true, is another matter! rwb

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The Mayan Apocalypse of 2012

## The Mayan Apocalypse of 2012

By Lee Penn

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Self-anointed doomsday prophets have come and gone for centuries. Now, they are back again.

The newest band of soothsayers is telling us that the world is going to end on or about December 21, 2012. Maybe the "end" will be destruction for mankind and the earth, or maybe it will be time for all of us to give up modern, Western ways of thinking and living, and to enter the long-expected New Age. One way or another, the apostles of this trendy apocalypse promise imminent upheaval for the world, a cosmic shift that will affect everyone on earth.

The New Age promoters of the 2012 doomsday prophecy got it from their interpretation of the Mayan calendar. Among their other achievements, the Maya Native Americans whose ancestral lands are in Guatemala, Belize, the Mexican states of Tabasco and Chiapas, the Yucatan Peninsula, and the western regions of Honduras and El Salvador developed a calendar which could accurately track the movements of the sun and the constellations over thousands of years. *Supposedly* (according to the Long Count of the Mayan calendar), the present world cycle, the Age of the Jaguar, began on August 13, 3114 BC, and is due to end on December 21, 2012.<sup>1</sup> With the end of this calendar cycle, the New Age is to begin.

If anyone believes this prophecy, I have some prime Pacific Ocean beach front property in Arizona to sell you.

### Missionaries of the Mayan Apocalypse

One by one, here are some of leading promoters of the 2012 Mayan apocalypse fad. They draw diverse conclusions from the imminent end of this Mayan era, but are united in their opposition to traditional Christian beliefs and practices.

## JOSÉ ARGÜELLES AND TERENCE MCKENNA

We can thank *José Argüelles* for popularizing this New Age doomsday notion.<sup>2</sup> In 1987, he published *The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology*, saying that the age would end in 2012. Argüelles claimed that the "Harmonic Convergence" of August 16-17, 1987 would be the beginning of humanity's 25-year transition into a new era, marked by increased global consciousness and a shift in the Earth's energy balance. In his 1996 addendum to *The Mayan Factor*, Argüelles claimed that the Harmonic Convergence had worked as intended, since 144,000 people had meditated at dawn on the two critical days in August 1987: "The call was answered. The sociopolitical makeup of human civilization began to change immediately following Harmonic Convergence."<sup>3</sup>

In *The Mayan Factor*, Argüelles says that the Maya offer us a "more advanced science"<sup>4</sup> than our own, since they were "galactic masters" who showed "with the greatest dexterity and ease how our annual cycles correspond with the galactic harmonic pattern."<sup>5</sup> He says: "That Classic Maya was a civilization unparalleled in its accomplishment and unique in the self-termination of its achievement is owing completely to the mission which it was its duty to fulfill. That mission, it seems, was to place the Earth and its solar system in synchronization with a larger galactic community. Once this purpose was achieved ... the Maya departed but not all of them."<sup>6</sup> Thus does Argüelles explain the sudden disappearance of classical Maya civilization: they had come to earth from the stars to synchronize the planet with the galaxy, and soon after this was completed around 800 AD, they returned to the stars using interdimensional travel.<sup>7</sup> While the Mayan star-people were on earth, their work was monitored by "Mayan star-bases, perhaps in the Pleiades, perhaps in Arcturus."<sup>8</sup> Argüelles says that when the current Mayan calendar cycle began in 3113 BC, Earth entered "the galactic synchronization beam."<sup>9</sup> We will leave this beam in 2012, and will then enter into the "final era of global regeneration" and "galactic synchronization."<sup>10</sup>



Writing in the 1980s, Argüelles expected "the new and culminating planetary paradigm," "a resonant unified field of planetary consciousness," to become "apparent by A. D. 1992."<sup>11</sup> From 1987 through 2012, the "Mayan sages" who left Earth almost 1,200 years ago are to return, and "the luminous wave-form of Quetzalcoatl will re-enter the atmosphere."<sup>12</sup> "The Mayan return, Harmonic Convergence, is the re-impregnation of the planetary field with the archetypal, harmonics of the planetary whole."<sup>13</sup> As a result of these changes, "by the time we reach the moment for galactic



synchronization our way of life shall be in every regard a modeling after the lifestyle of the Maya who preceded us in Central America."<sup>14</sup> (Is that a threat, or a promise?) At the critical moment, "as if a switch were being thrown, a great voltage will race through this finally synchronized and integrated circuit called humanity;" the "Earth itself

will be illumined;" and we will experience the "unification of the collective mind of humanity."<sup>15</sup> (The New Age mind-meld makes its appearance here.)

Argüelles, a Ph. D. art historian, has taught at Princeton University, the San Francisco Art Institute, the Naropa Institute, and several state universities.<sup>16</sup> He is the founder of the Planet Art Network, a 90-country network which seeks "the unification of artists planetwide for coordination and synchronization of planetary art events."<sup>17</sup> Argüelles says that *The Mayan Factor* "is the beginning glimpse of a galactic knowing, a science from the other side, a connection so vital and necessary for our survival and for our evolution that it begs careful study."<sup>18</sup> He describes himself as "a leading spokesman for the principles of art as awakened warriorship and the role of art as a dynamic agent of planetary transformation."<sup>19</sup> Since 1972, he has been a student of "Tibetan meditation master and artist, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche."<sup>20</sup> The introduction to *The*

*Mayan Factor* is written by Brian Swimme, a New Age cosmologist who is now on the faculty of the California Institute for Integral Studies. The book itself uses concepts taken at will from the I Ching, Robert Anton Wilson, the Hopi Indians, Hinduism, ancient Greek myth, ancient Egyptian religion, the Aztecs, UFO mythology, James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis, Arthurian myths, the hidden kingdom of Shambhala in Tibet, and anything else that caught Argüelles' fancy.

Another New Age leader to credit for the 2012 fad is **Terence McKenna**.<sup>21</sup> He had been an avid user of psychedelic drugs since the 1960s, and promoted use of "entheogens" for spiritual enlightenment until he died of brain cancer in 2000. McKenna opposed organized religion and monotheism, while praising Gnosticism and Teilhard de Chardin. He believed that the universe was designed to create newness, and predicted that innovation would approach infinity on December 21, 2012; after that time, there would be no more entropy (which he defined as "habituation"). McKenna's contributions to the 2012 literature include an introduction to John Major Jenkins's 1998 book *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012*, and his own 1992 work, *The Archaic Revival: Speculations on Psychedelic Mushrooms, the Amazon, Virtual Reality, UFOs, Evolution, Shamanism, the Rebirth of the Goddess, and the End of History*. Argüelles says that McKenna "contributed greatly" to his "understanding of the Mayan Factor, for he, too, by working with the I Ching had been drawn to things Mayan."<sup>22</sup>

#### WHITLEY STRIEBER AND ADRIAN GILBERT

**Whitley Strieber** has recently written a thriller, *2012: The War for Souls*,<sup>23</sup> about an invasion of Earth in December 2012 by reptilian aliens from a parallel universe. The invaders take human disguise and seek to rip the souls out of human beings. The date of this attack is keyed to the Mayan calendar and its apocalypse. At the start of the novel, Strieber offers a quotation a denial of God and an affirmation of human power from "The Master of the Key": "There is no supernatural. There is only the natural world, and you have access to all of it. Souls are part of nature."<sup>24</sup> The "Master of the Key" is the name that Strieber gives to a friendly, otherworldly entity that visited him in 1998 and gave him spiritual instruction and warnings about the future of the Earth; Strieber published *The Key* in 2001 about this close encounter. This same "Master" also inspired Strieber to co-author *The Coming Global Superstorm* (a book about sudden, man-caused climate catastrophe) with New Age radio personality Art Bell. Previously,

Strieber had written popular horror novels, as well as *Communion*, a bestselling (and supposedly nonfiction) account of his abduction by space aliens.

According to *Adrian Gilbert* (author of *2012: Mayan Year of Destiny*), on the day after the Mayan cycle ends, "22 December 2012, the Sun will be aligned, at the winter solstice, with a *star gate* at the center of our galaxy," the first occurrence of this phenomenon in 25,800 years.<sup>25</sup> He explains, "on 22 December, any person observing the Sun will also be looking directly toward the core of the Milky Way: the place where astronomers say there is a black hole with a mass some three million times that of our Sun."<sup>26</sup> Gilbert adds: "the purpose of the long-count Mayan calendar was to point to a marker date: a time when the Sun aligns with the southern star gate exactly at the winter solstice. This date, so clearly defined by the calendar, has all the hallmarks of an appointment with destiny. Whether that destiny is simply an earth in upheaval or a brief time of chaos before the emergence of a new world order is not clear. However, if we accept that the calendar was given to us by intelligent spirits who visited the Earth from outer space, then 22 December AD 2012 could be when they plan to return. That makes it a date with destiny that we should ring in our diaries."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, "this moment, when the Sun is located at the southern star gate and Orion, with its northern star gate, is dominant in the night sky, will, I believe, signify the termination of the tribulation prophesied in the book of Revelation and the true beginning of a new age. ... Let us be prepared then for major changes and accept that it is indeed the end of time as we have known it."<sup>28</sup> Gilbert offers his readers some suggestions for disaster preparedness, but leaves them with hope: "If we can but get through the prophesied period of chaos (whatever its cause), we can expect a new Golden Age to emerge. It is my fervent hope and belief that we will have awakened within us faculties that presently lay dormant."<sup>29</sup> On his web site, Gilbert lists his interests, which cover the map: "Christian mysticism, yoga, astronomy, astrology, physics, alchemy, sacred geometry, Gurdjieff/Ouspensky, psychology, tarot, prophecy, Mayanology, Egyptology, pyramids, Zoroastrianism, hermeticism, spiritualism, kabbalah and the quest for the Holy Grail."<sup>30</sup>

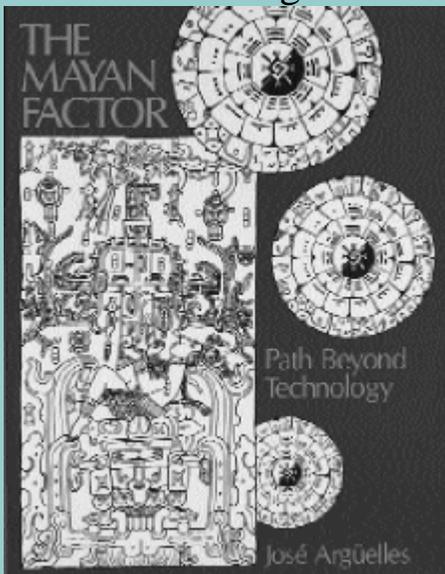
DANIEL PINCHBECK AND LAWRENCE JOSEPH

*Daniel Pinchbeck*, author of *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl*, seeks refuge from

present-day perils by finding hidden indigenous wisdom from exotic cultures: "I proposed that our Western knowledge system was severely limited because it denied the value of intuition, visionary, and psychic experience. ... I suggested we might take indigenous people seriously in their prophetic views of this current era, since they preserved access to those dimensions of the psyche that our society has systematically suppressed. ... the Classic Maya developed an advanced civilization, with a system of knowledge based on a study of astronomical cycles and exploration of nonordinary states of awareness. Mayan monuments indicate that they denoted a rare eclipse of the galactic center by the Winter Solstice sun on December 21, 2012, as the transition between world ages. Even if you are not inclined to give credence to ancient

prophecies, it is clear that humanity faces grave threats to its existence, and society must change or life on the planet may be at risk."<sup>31</sup> He adds, "2012 may represent the completion of an initiation process for the modern psyche. ...

Completing the circle, we can now overcome our alienation and materialism through conscious reintegration with a holistic worldview, accepting the limits of human knowing and the many dimensions of being that exist beyond the range of our physical senses. I believe that the only way we can avoid or at least mitigate the likely effects of imminent cataclysm is through a rapid evolution of collective intelligence."<sup>32</sup>



Pinchbeck's *Toward 2012: Perspectives on the Next Age* offer a collection of essays with perspectives that he says "could make the old practices of our greed-driven corporate culture obsolete, and begin to indicate a new path for humanity."<sup>33</sup> His writers' contributions are revelatory (but perhaps not in the way that Pinchbeck intended). The proposed solutions include: shamanic practices; Stanislav Grof's endorsement of "holotropic states" (which he has previously studied with the aid of psychedelic drugs); another writer's call for "Exorcising Christ from Christianity" an insight he reached after years of using marijuana, ayahuasca, and other "entheogens"; a Jungian essay that says, "the dark angel who wounds us is at the same time the Luciferian agent who is the bringer of light"; a call to again attain "galactic knowledge" by using "mind-expanding plants" as the Maya supposedly did; taking psychedelics and

practicing yoga (as the woman says, "While some scoff at the notion of seeking enlightenment through stretching and psychedelics, the reality is this stuff works. ... it's experiential and tangible, and it taps me into something big and juicy."); reviving Gnostic Christianity; and an avowal by a "tantric bodyworker" that when she enters a "heightened sexual energy state," the "Goddess steps fully into my body. I feel activated, alive, liberated, blissed out, and powerful."<sup>34</sup> In other words, we can save the world by indulging in sex, drugs, non-Christian meditative practices, and Gnosticism.

*Lawrence Joseph*, author of *Apocalypse 2012*, summarizes almost every available path to global disaster to make the case that the world is about to end, and that the Maya predicted it.<sup>35</sup> His menu of imminent doomsday perils includes killer diseases produced by rogue weapons designers, linear accelerator experiments that could run away and produce a miniature black hole, a life-destroying accident with nanotechnology, solar storms severe enough to fry the electronic grid and to create massive storms and quakes on Earth, a magnetic pole shift, asteroid strikes, super volcanoes, doomsday prophecies from Asian and indigenous religions, and efforts among Christian, Jewish, and Islamic radicals to set off Armageddon.<sup>36</sup> Joseph claims that he represents "no religious or political ideology nor have I, to the best of my knowledge, fallen under the influence of any individual or group with views relating to 2012."<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, he accepts the Argüelles/New Age view that the "Mayan ancients held that 12/21/12 would begin a new age ... The date thus portends a most sacred, propitious, and dangerous moment in our history, destined, they believed, to bring forth both catastrophe and revelation."<sup>38</sup> Joseph adds, "2012 is destined to be a year of unprecedented turmoil and upheaval," due to "a disturbing confluence of scientific, religious, and historical trends."<sup>39</sup> He says that on December 21, 2012, at 11:11 pm Universal Time [Greenwich Mean Time], the solar system will eclipse the view from Earth of the center of the Milky Way, "disrupting whatever energy typically streams to the Earth" from the center of our home galaxy.<sup>40</sup> This will "throw out of kilter vital mechanisms of our bodies and of the Earth."<sup>41</sup> (To inject a note of realism here: the center of our galaxy is 26,000-28,000 light-years from our solar system.<sup>42</sup> One wanders what real energy flow could be disrupted.) Meanwhile, all those who have ever lived on the Earth will have been reincarnated by 2012, in order to "fulfill the sacred mission of that year."<sup>43</sup> Joseph covers his bases when suggesting how to prepare for Doomsday 2012. He urges that we "beseech the Almighty's protection" and also

that "we must appease Mother Earth, cravenly and immediately."<sup>44</sup> Joseph ends his book with an incongruous call to pride of heart: "the mere act of preparing for the coming tumult will save us, perhaps physically, and certainly spiritually. Come what may, we will, in our hearts, be proud."<sup>45</sup> By coincidence, his Amazon.com blog in late April led with this statement attributed to a NASA scientist: "Barack Obama has only four years to save the world."<sup>46</sup>

Not all is peaceful among the 2012 soothsayers. Joseph's shamanic Mayan contacts are Carlos and Gerardo, two brothers who combine Tibetan and Central American religious practices, and who refresh themselves with papaya soy shakes at a Guatemala City vegetarian restaurant owned by Sonny Bono's brother. They dismiss archaeologists' criticism of classical Mayan civilization as cultural imperialism.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, they loathe Argüelles and his book, *The Mayan Factor*. Carlos said, "You want to accomplish something with your book? Stop Argüelles! He has followers all over the world. Half a million in Australia! The book that made him famous ... he wrote it without ever traveling to the Mayan world, without ever talking to the Mayan people."<sup>48</sup> Gerardo said, "we finally met with him several years ago and he promised to stop saying that he was talking about the Mayans. ... But then no one paid any attention to him, so he's back to claiming that his work is Mayan. Either way the damage is done."<sup>49</sup>



### Sony's Doomsday Film and a Spurious "Institute for Human Continuity"

While the New Age "Mayans" squabble among themselves, commercial doomsayers are hopping onto the 2012 bandwagon. Roland Emmerich, maker of *Independence Day* and other disaster movies, will release *2012* to the movie theaters in November, under sponsorship of Sony. His film tells of a planetary cataclysm that (as predicted by the Mayans) occurs in 2012; he then shows how scattered remnants of humanity struggle for survival in the aftermath.<sup>50</sup> The tag line for the movie advertisement plays on popular fears of social cataclysm and Establishment deceit: "How would the governments of our planet prepare six billion people for the end of the world? ... They wouldn't. ... Find out the truth."<sup>51</sup> To support the film, Sony has launched a viral

marketing effort,<sup>52</sup> centered on the illusory "Institute for Human Continuity."<sup>53</sup> Visitors to that site are given the opportunity to register for a lottery to be amongst the few taken to safety in time to survive the 2012 apocalypse, can see the "history" of this Institute, and can see doom-related news stories and predictions (related to super volcanoes, magnetic field disruption, galactic alignments, and the like). As of late April, 6.9 million people had supposedly signed up for the lottery. As a marketing effort, the "Institute" is clever and enticing; it shows what purveyors of propaganda and disinformation can do now.

Other media giants have joined in the effort to market Doomsday. The History Channel, a joint venture of Hearst, Disney-ABC, and NBC,<sup>54</sup> has been aggressively marketing shows about the imminent end of the world; for them, any theory will do, as long as it predicts apocalypse now. In late April, the History Channel site listed "Life After People," a fantasy about ecological recovery after the sudden extinction of mankind, as its most watched video.<sup>55</sup> They offered "The Apocalypse and Doomsday DVD Collection," including "Apocalypse: The Puzzle of Revelation" (featuring Nostradamus, of course), "Bible Code II: Apocalypse and Beyond," and "Doomsday 2012: The End of Days," featuring the New Age view of the Mayan calendar; in a special package deal, viewers can buy these three shows along with "Life After People."<sup>56</sup> All told, the History Channel site listed seven 2012-specific films for sale, and offered 97 movies related to "Apocalypse." It's the ultimate in consumerism: making the end of the world a saleable product.

## Flawed Glory: the Rise of Classic Mayan Civilization

When New Age enthusiasts propose classic Mayan civilization as an exemplar of holistic thinking, awareness of cycles, attunement with nature, and enlightenment, they are offering us a poor example indeed.

Mayan civilization reached its peak between 250 and 800 AD.<sup>57</sup> This is usually known among archaeologists as the Classic Era, a period that follows the gradual emergence of Maya civilization (the Preclassic Era, currently placed between 2000 BC

and 200 AD). Classic Era Mayan accomplishments included an astronomical calendar that could be used accurately over long periods of time, advanced mathematics, hieroglyphics, and intricate, massive public buildings that have survived centuries of disuse and abandonment in a hostile tropical climate. Some of these achievements in particular, the calendar and the use of zero in mathematics may have been inherited from the Olmec, a people that is said to have inhabited south-central Mexico from 1400 BC to 400 BC.

Historian Charles Gallenkamp describes the philosophy underlying the Mayan calendar and debunks the idea that a cyclical view of time is "liberating" compared to the Western, linear view of history: "No other people in history were so obsessed with the passing of time, and they labored tirelessly to understand its mysteries and control its awesome influences. Ultimately these endeavors led them to evolve a calendrical lore extending millions of years into the past and encompassing a profoundly complex philosophy. To the Maya, time was never a purely abstract means of arranging events into an orderly sequence. It was envisioned as a supernatural phenomenon involving omnipotent forces of creation and destruction, with all of its aspects directly influenced by gods who were believed to be either benevolent or evil. ... Moreover, the Maya viewed time as cyclical rather than linear, and events associated with specific calendrical cycles in the past were considered likely to repeat themselves when these cycles recurred a belief that fostered a strong emphasis on divination and astrology. It was a curious concept of time, and one that explains in part the power of the ruling elite and priesthood over the populace, who must surely have considered survival impossible without learned mediators to interpret the gods' irascible tendencies."<sup>58</sup> The Mayan time horizon was vast; some Mayan calendar inscriptions refer to times 90 million to 400 million years ago.<sup>59</sup>

The Mayan calendar is far more accurate than the Julian calendar that was dominant in Europe from the time of Caesar until 1582, and it is slightly more accurate than the Gregorian calendar, which has been used since 1582.<sup>60</sup> Under the Mayan computation, the earth orbits the sun every 365.2420 days 0.0002 days *less* than the 365.2422 figure computed by modern astronomers. But the Gregorian calendar computes the length of the solar year as 365.2425 days 0.0003 days *greater* than the astronomers' current figure. And the Julian calendar uses a solar year length of 365.25 days, so that its com



putation of the length of time that it takes the earth to orbit the sun is *too long* by 0.0078 days. (These differences may seem small, but over the centuries, they add up. As of 2009, the Julian "January 1" is equivalent to January 14 on the Gregorian calendar a 13-day gap).

The current era in the Mayan calendar runs from 3114 BC to the present, using the Long Count system.<sup>61</sup> However, it is not known to anyone in modern times what significance the ancient

Mayans gave to their "year zero" in 3114 BC. The earliest Long Count date found anywhere is 36 BC on a monument outside the Mayan region, and 197 AD for a monument within the Mayan area. The last known current Long Count date on a Mayan monument was in 909 AD, coincident with the collapse of classic Mayan civilization. The classical Mayan calendar has been out of use for more than 1,000 years and its first known use was three millennia after its "year zero."

Ancient Mayan cities were dominated by pyramids dedicated to the worship of the Mayan gods.<sup>62</sup> These ziggurats were built on a precise orientation, so that the tops of temples, or views from one temple to another, or shadows cast on the body of the temple would be aligned with movements of celestial bodies. For example, at Chichen Itza, there is a pyramid dedicated to the feathered-serpent god Kukulcan; on the days of

the spring and fall equinox, light and shadow create the illusion of a giant serpent undulating on the temple's northern staircase.

For most of its existence, the Mayan civilization is thought to have been divided among a multiplicity of city-states ruled by dynastic monarchies.<sup>63</sup> On average, each city-state covered about 2,000 square kilometers the equivalent of a zone about 27-28 miles square. These states were usually at war with each other, and the wars became frequent and intense as the civilization moved toward its collapse. Mayan rulers were from the archaeological evidence treated as gods. Mayan religion exalted the local monarchs; most surviving art deals with religious and dynastic themes; and Mayan cities focused on the local temples.



Mass mobilization of labor was essential to the expansion of these cities and the irrigated farms that supported them. As archaeologist Saunders reports, "between 200BC and AD 100, inhabitants of the Maya city of Edzna built a 12 km long canal, associated with seven smaller canals and several reservoirs. Altogether it may have taken 1.7 million work-days to create."<sup>64</sup> It takes little imagination to guess what the lot of these workers was, given the despotic and class-ridden nature of Mayan society.

Ecological historian Jared Diamond says, "All preserved ancient Maya writing, constituting a total of about 15,000 inscriptions, is on stone and pottery and deals only with kings, nobles, and their conquests. There is not a single mention of commoners."<sup>65</sup> The same is true for Mayan art.<sup>66</sup> Historian Charles Gallenkamp says, "Everywhere the nature of Maya society displayed a similar uniformity; a rigid class structure dominated by powerful priests and nobles in whom all authority resided. Leading the way before masses of illiterate peasants, these elite groups established the tenets around which the daily existence of the people revolved. Under their direction, life for the commoners was an endless round dedicated to cultivating the soil, public service necessary to construct, maintain, and enlarge the cities, and adoration of the gods through strict

observance of rituals, offerings, and sacrifices."<sup>67</sup> He adds, "each major city was governed by a *halach uinic* in whom supreme political authority rested ... So esteemed was his position that a cloth was always held up before his face to prevent anyone from speaking to him directly."<sup>68</sup> This despot was assisted by noblemen. "Abundant confirmation of their privileged status is seen in the aloof manner in which they are portrayed in sculpture and paintings, and the extreme disparity between the splendid costumes, jewelry, elaborate tombs, and other symbols of personal wealth displayed by the ruling hierarchy as compared with the meager possessions of the peasants. Furthermore, all knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, hieroglyphic writing, and the esoteric aspects of ritualism apparently remained entirely in the hands of the upper classes, leaving the vast majority of the peasants illiterate."<sup>69</sup> At the bottom of the social structure were slaves; the children of slaves inherited their parents' servitude.<sup>70</sup> Many noblemen used slaves as concubines.<sup>71</sup> Maya skeletons buried in the Late Classic period, just before the collapse of their ancient civilization, show that "peasants were smaller and less healthy than the aristocracy, suggesting that the latter had requisitioned more than its share of dwindling food supplies."<sup>72</sup>

Adrian Gilbert, a New Age supporter of Mayan apocalypse theory, puts a positive spin on the deprivation of the masses: "What we also know about the Maya is that they were nowhere near as materialistic as we are. All that most people owned was the clothes they stood up in and perhaps a few household utensils, weapons, or tools."<sup>73</sup>

Deformation of the body was part of Mayan culture. A history of the Maya says, "According to Maya ideas of beauty, it was highly desirable to be cross-eyed; thus a nodule of resin or a small bead was attached to a child's hair which hung between the eyes and conditioned the pupils to focus inward. Shortly after birth an infant's head was tightly bound to wooden boards in order to flatten the forehead, as this too was considered a mark of attractiveness, especially among the upper classes. Older children had their earlobes, septums, lips, and one nostril pierced so they could wear a variety of ornaments."<sup>74</sup> Among the elite and the peasantry, it was common to apply tattoos, to take on decorative body scars, and to file teeth to points.<sup>75</sup>

In some ways, the Mayan civilization was advanced; in others, it never left the Stone Age. Archaeologist J. Eric Thompson wondered in 1954: "What mental quirks ... led

the Maya intelligentsia to chart the heavens, yet fail to grasp the principle of the wheel; to visualize eternity, as no other semi-civilized people has ever done, yet ignore the short step from corbelled to true arch;<sup>76</sup> to count in millions, yet never to learn to weigh a sack of corn?"<sup>77</sup> The potter's wheel, which was used in the Old World 4,000 years ago, never appeared in Mayan culture.<sup>78</sup> Jared Diamond notes that "the Maya had no animal-powered transport or plows. All overland transport for the Maya went on the backs of human porters."<sup>79</sup> He adds that Mayan society lacked "metal tools, pulleys and other machines, wheels (except locally as toys), boats with sails, and domestic animals large enough to carry loads or pull a plow. All of those great Maya temples were constructed by stone and wooden tools and by human muscle power alone."<sup>80</sup> This "glorious" civilization was, *seemingly*, built on the unaided sweat of its laborers.

## Downfall and Depopulation

At the peak of ancient Mayan civilization, around 800 AD, ornate and populous cities covered the Yucatan and adjacent lands.<sup>81</sup> Within two centuries, the glory had departed; the cities were abandoned to jungle, squatters, and looters. Saunders describes a "population collapse in the central Petén highlands" [the northern part of present-day Guatemala], and notes that by 900 AD, "the millions who had lived there a century earlier now abandoned their homes."<sup>82</sup> This collapse has been ascribed to a variety of causes: overpopulation, severe droughts, deforestation and erosion, leading to agricultural failure and malnutrition, plagues, overexploitation by the nobility (leading to peasant revolts), recurrent wars among the Mayans, and aggression by outside enemies. By whatever means the collapse occurred, it was a true "Greater Depression." After 800 AD and centuries before the Spanish Conquest the Mayan population fell by 80-99%. (For example, the Mayan population in the Central Petén highlands may have been 3 million to 14 million around 800 AD; 30,000 were left when the Spanish army led by Cortés invaded in 1524-1535, and 3,000 remained by 1714.) Since the early 1700s, the Maya have partly recovered; estimates of the number of Indians of Maya descent now living in their ancestral territories range from 2 million to 6 million.

Gallenkamp summarizes the chain of disasters that befell the Mayan lands during the century before the Spanish conquest: "Everywhere militarism supplanted the creative endeavors of past centuries, and there was a marked disintegration in art, architecture, and intellectual pursuits. Uprisings, intrigue, and political assassinations had beset

nearly all of the Maya area, touching off smoldering enmities that the Spaniards quickly exploited to their own advantage. Like acts of punishment from the gods, a series of natural catastrophes overtook the Maya in the midst of these tribulations. Native chronicles record a severe hurricane that laid waste to vast portions of Yucatán sometime around 1464. Sixteen years later a devastating pestilence swept through the area," and a five-year plague of locusts left famine in its wake.<sup>83</sup>

Despite centuries of adversity, the Mayans have proven difficult to conquer and to subdue.<sup>84</sup> Their first contact with Europeans was in 1502, when Columbus captured a Mayan trading canoe during his last voyage to the Americas. Much of their territory was taken by the Spaniards between 1523 and 1545, but the Itzá people [who lived in what is now northern Guatemala] held out, keeping their old religion, until a Spanish army defeated them in 1697. Saunders says, "It was here that over two thousand years of independent pre-Columbian Maya civilization came to an end."<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, "in the Yucatan, during the years and centuries following their pacification, Maya slaves escaped their masters and took refuge in the countryside. Uprisings were inspired by shaman-priests who claimed to have received divine revelations from the gods, some of which were written down in hybrid Maya-Spanish documents known as The Books of Chilam Balam. Throughout the colonial period, the Yucatan Maya resisted their Spanish masters, making idols of their gods to be distributed throughout the region, creating underground religious movements, talking of prophecies of the end of Spanish rule, and sometimes killing Spaniards and their supporters."<sup>86</sup>

Mayan resistance to assimilation continued after the region became independent of Spain. In 1848, the Mayans of Southern Mexico revolted against their European-stock landlords. This poverty-driven insurgency took on religious and tribal overtones in 1852, when a wooden "Speaking Cross" made its appearance; this totem (aided by ventriloquists) began directing the Indians to fight for racial unity and spiritual redemption. Sporadic fighting the "Caste War" continued in Mayan lands until 1933, 85 years after the insurgency began.

## Mayan Religion: Human Sacrifice, Self-Mutilation, and Psychedelic Drugs

As with the Aztecs and the Incas, human sacrifice and bloodletting were integral to

traditional Mayan religion.<sup>87</sup> At the Temple of the Warrior in Chichen Itza, there is an altar that had been used for human sacrifice: the extraction of still-beating hearts from victims. Nearby is a stone idol holding a plate across its belly; this plate was the receptacle for the hearts of those who had been sacrificed. Such sites abound in the Mayan ancestral lands. After the victim's heart had been cut out and the idols' faces were anointed with its blood, "the corpse was thrown down the temple steps to a waiting priest who flayed it and danced in the skin, after which the onlookers ate the rest of the body, reserving the hands and feet for the officiating priests."<sup>88</sup>

A history of ritual sacrifice says that human sacrifice "appeared among the Toltecs, Zapotecs, Tarascans, Mayas, and other tribes and the Mayas were, if anything, even more ferocious in the practice than the Aztecs. Their art depicted scenes of preliminary mutilation, disembowelling, scalping, slow bleeding and other tortures before the actual sacrifice was made. Some sacrifices had their nails torn out, as illustrated in the murals excavated at Bonampak in the present day Mexican state of Chiapas, where figures are shown with blood spurting from the ends of their fingers. In the Yucatan peninsula on the south east coast of Mexico, the Ah Kin, whose name meant 'he of the Sun' presided over human sacrifices. The actual performance of the sacrifice was the task of the Nacom, who was aided by four old men known as Chacs. They held down the victim's limbs as the Nacom opened the chest and retrieved the heart.

The sacrifices were usually prisoners, slaves, or illegitimate children and orphans who were purchased specifically for this purpose. Animals, birds and insects were also sacrificed, and there was in addition, a bloodless practice in which flowers, rubber, or jade were offered. Even so, the fury of blood sacrifice was never far away, for like the Aztecs, the Maya practiced self-mutilation during rituals, using needles or the spines of the stingray to pierce their ears, lips, tongues, cheeks, or genitals to draw blood. The blood was afterwards spread over the idols of the gods. To preserve water, the most precious commodity in the Yucatan, sacrificial victims were thrown into a *cenote*, a deep natural well at Chichen Itza. The purpose was to produce rain to feed the cenote and, as additional inducements, copper, gold, and jade were also sacrificed. If the human sacrifice managed to survive the experience, it was believed that he had communed with the gods and brought back a divine message concerning the fate of the year's crops."<sup>89</sup> As late as 1868, clandestine human sacrifices continued among the

Maya either by removal of the victim's heart or (in an odd compliment to the ruling religion) by crucifixion.<sup>90</sup>

Archaeologist Nicholas Saunders adds: "for the Classic Maya, however, nothing was as potent as human blood in binding humans to the supernatural realm."<sup>91</sup> He adds that during the Classic Era of Mayan civilization, "artistic and hieroglyphic evidence suggest that Maya raiding and warfare were undertaken primarily to capture high-ranking warriors, preferably of royal blood, and ideally (if rarely), the enemy ruler himself. These individuals would then be sacrificed, their blood offered to the gods in acts of worship made possible by the valour and strategic competence of the victor. ... One interpretation of this kind of warfare is that, for the Maya, blood was the mortar that cemented the universe together, keeping its innumerable parts from falling away into cosmic, political, and social chaos. The gods desired blood, and it was the duty of Maya dynasties to supply it in a number of highly ritualised ways. ... As a sacred liquid, the blood of high-ranking individuals was spilt on special occasions to dedicate a new temple-pyramid, to designate a new heir, and to inaugurate a new king. The Classic Maya imagination, or at least that of their constantly bickering and competing royal families, knew no bounds when it came to inventing new ways of humiliating, torturing and finally dispatching their victims."<sup>92</sup> These means of torture as recorded on Mayan monuments included "yanking fingers out of sockets, pulling out teeth, cutting off the lower jaw, trimming off the lips and fingertips, pulling out the fingernails, and driving a pin through the lips."<sup>93</sup>

To complete the picture of a religion built on soul-corrupting practices, the Mayans used psychedelic substances to gain access to their gods. As Saunders reports, "Access to the supernatural was restricted to the Maya elite in rituals that stressed the multi-sensual experience of the world. Smoking cigars rolled from powerfully narcotic wild tobacco was one way of accessing the numinous, and is shown in Classic Maya art. Another was the ritual ingestion of hallucinogenic plants and intoxicating drinks. These included *balche*, an alcoholic beverage made from honey and tree bark, various kinds of hallucinogenic mushrooms such as the one called *xibalaj okox* or 'underworld mushroom', and perhaps also secretions of the poisonous *Bufo marinus* toad. The use of enemas to insert powerful narcotic substances into the body and thereby induce trance is found across Mesoamerica and South America. The Classic Maya seem to have shared this practice ... This visionary aspect of Maya religion is embodied in later Maya

times in the figure of the shaman-priest known as Chilam, who interpreted the words of the spirits and presented them as prophecies to his colleagues and rulers."<sup>94</sup>

These degrading religious practices were as might be expected part of a religious tradition that gave its adherents darkness and fear rather than light and hope. Gallenkamp says, "All misfortune and illness was viewed by the Maya as resulting from evil spirits or disfavor of the gods. Even today, witchcraft and dangerous omens are greatly feared ... Death was greatly feared by the Maya, despite their belief that worthy individuals those obedient to religious mandates and therefore favored by the gods would eventually reside in an eternal paradise located among the thirteen

heavens. Suicide, especially by hanging oneself, was looked upon as the greatest measure of personal sacrifice, an act ensuring the unqualified pleasures of immortality. Women who died in childbirth, priests, warriors killed in battle, and sacrificial victims could look forward to equally propitious rewards. ... Entrapped in uncertainty and superstition, the Maya constantly sought religious sanction through rituals, the construction of lofty temples, and the guidance of rulers and priests whose esoteric knowledge gave them insight into mystical realms. To achieve this assurance, no sacrifice of time and effort was too costly."<sup>95</sup>



Given the despotism, exploitation, cruelty, and spiritual darkness that were part of traditional Maya civilization, it is disconcerting to find that Robert Muller (a long-time globalist *bien pensant*, an early proponent of the United Religions Initiative, and a prominent UN official from the 1940s to the 1980s), repeatedly held up the Aztec, Mayan, and Inka civilizations as exemplars for ancient wisdom and future progress.<sup>96</sup> For example, in one of his "4000 ideas for a better world," which has been published on the Net and in book form, he proposed "the creation of a World Indigenous University, possibly located on the sacred indigenous grounds of the University for Peace. Such a University would study world-wide the linguistics of all indigenous people, their views and relations with the Earth, their spirituality and such remarkable cosmologies as the Maya, Aztec and Inka ones which were represented at the conference. The western

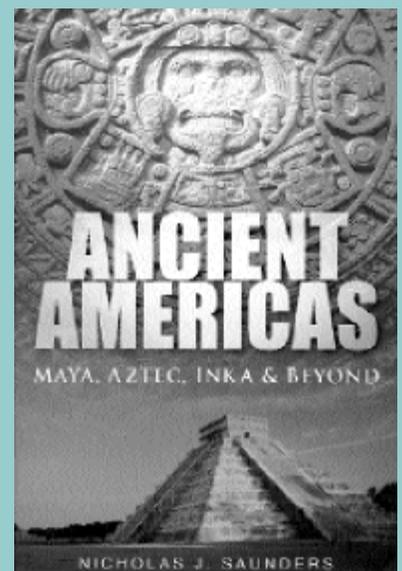
world is in dire need of an appropriate cosmology and could be inspired by them." Muller later said that this "Indigenous University" should have "a cosmological and philosophical life science Department where the remarkable cosmologies of the Mayas, Aztecs, Inkas and others would be studied, again for the benefit of the western world which does not have a holistic cosmology and philosophy of life and death at this moment, but has a scientific one a global spiritual Department to study the indigenous spiritualities and rituals derived from their intimate relation with nature and Creation." A year afterward, Muller listed these world views among the "great ancient cosmologies" whose wisdom should guide us now. If Muller thinks that the Maya, the Aztecs, and the Inka offer a good example, it is a fair warning that we may face some gruesome surprises if Muller's desired New World Order comes to pass.

### Three Reasons to Reject New Age/"Mayan" prophecies

**First:** *the New Age interpreters of Mayan tradition are not reliable spiritual guides.* A cursory overview of the lives and beliefs of José Argüelles, Terence McKenna, Whitley Strieber, Daniel Pinchbeck, and other prophets of "Apocalypse: 2012" show them to be "waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars ..." (Jude 12-13). They are apostles and prophets of the New Age movement, not of Christ. The beliefs and deeds that they propose to their followers would lead these adherents far away from the Light of Christ.

**Second:** *There is no reason to believe that Argüelles et al. are accurate in their understanding of Mayan civilization and tradition.*

\* Documentary information about classical Mayan civilization is limited in scope. All but four ancient Mayan books (made of bark paper covered with plaster) were destroyed by Bishop Diego de Landa between 1549 and 1578, in an effort to expunge the records of Mayan paganism.<sup>97</sup> The greatest of these book-burnings occurred at an *auto-da-fé* led by the Bishop in 1562. The four surviving books deal with astronomy and the calendar. Bishop de Landa also wrote a detailed account of Mayan society as he found it, the *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*. This book,



written in the 1560s and rediscovered 300 years later, provides much of the surviving information on pre-Columbian Mayan civilization and customs. (Yet here, I would hold that some skepticism is in order: the bishop's work might be akin to a history of American society that a Soviet scholar might have written for the Party after a Communist conquest of the US.) As Gallenkamp says, "Not one facet of Maya civilization is fully understood."<sup>98</sup> Under these conditions, detailed speculation about cosmic Mayan wisdom says far more about the beliefs and desires of the modern-day commentator than it does about the real Mayans of 1,000 years ago.

\* The New Age and esoteric commentators cannot agree among themselves *precisely* on the year when the Mayan calendar cycle begins, and on the day when it ends even though they say that this calendar is *extremely* accurate. For José Argüelles, the beginning date is "between August 6 and August 13, 3113 BC," and the end will be on December 21, 2012.<sup>99</sup> For Graham Hancock, the cycle begins on August 13, 3114 BC, and ends on December 23, 2012.<sup>100</sup> For Adrian Gilbert, the beginning is August 12, 3114 BC, and the end is December 21, 2012.<sup>101</sup> For Lawrence Joseph, the beginning was on August 13, 3114 BC, and the end will be on December 21, 2012.<sup>102</sup> Esoteric theorist Robert Bolton, who attempts to correlate the Mayan calendar with dates for the beginning and the end of the Hindu *Kali-Yuga* (iron age), places the beginning of the Maya cycle at 3113 BC, and ends the Maya cycle in 2012 or, perhaps, in 2087, depending on the computations used.<sup>103</sup>

\* The Wikipedia biography of José Argüelles makes a brief, devastating case against his apocalyptic claims, saying that "his works remain completely unsupported by any professional Mayanist scholar" and that his treatment of the Maya "merely co-opts an ancient tradition by recasting it in New Age terms, unknown, unused and undocumented among the Maya."<sup>104</sup> No archaeologists have found evidence that the classical Mayans believed that the world would end when the current Long Count cycle of the calendar ends.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, a royal inscription (made in 603 AD, on the Tablet of Inscriptions at Palenque, a Mayan city) shows that the king expected that on (the Mayan equivalent of) October 21, 4773, there would be a celebration of the 80<sup>th</sup> calendar cycle from his accession. King Pacal, at least, expected the world to continue long past 2012.<sup>106</sup>

\* Argüelles' writing sets a new standard for incoherence. Try to make sense of the following samples of his work: "The essence [sic] of information, then, is not its content but its resonance. This is why feeling or sensing things is so important. To sense the resonance of incoming information co-creates a resonant field."<sup>107</sup> "The Mayan Matrix, the Tzolkin or Harmonic Module, bearing the code of the galactic harmonic, informs all systems with a common regulatory resonance called the light body."<sup>108</sup> "In this total planetary endeavor, humans are the sensitive atmospheric instruments galactically utilized in a process whose objective is the transformation of the 'material field' of the planet. The end of this transformation is to raise the overall planetary field to a higher, more harmonic level of resonant frequency. In this way, the planet light body, the consciously articulated etheric sheath of Earth, is constructed."<sup>109</sup> "To talk about the interface of the infrastructure of DNA with the vibratory accommodations of the Earth is to evoke the purified spiritual intentions of a synchronized collective of human beings who understand that their responsibility to the planet is taking precedence over all other allegiances and concerns at this particular time."<sup>110</sup> Even Brian Swimme, the New Age cosmologist who wrote the foreword for *The Mayan Factor*, said, "his work has both the extravagance and muddiness of every fresh vision of reality, and this alone makes reading his book a challenge."<sup>111</sup> In C. S. Lewis' prophetic novel *That Hideous Strength*, there is a simpler explanation of nonsense such as Argüelles': "They that have despised the word of God, from them shall the word of man also be taken away."<sup>112</sup>

**Third:** *Mayan civilization and its spiritual traditions are not sources of beneficial spiritual understanding and wisdom* even if, by chance, the New Age promoters of "Apocalypse:2012" were accurately interpreting and transmitting Mayan tradition. Mayan religion relied upon human sacrifice and self-mutilating bloodletting, aided by drug-induced trance states. As such, it was a particularly degraded form of paganism, far closer spiritually to the cult of Moloch than to the Greco-Roman classical religions that prepared the Mediterranean pagans to receive the Gospel from early Christian missionaries. Mayan classical civilization, with its despotic, luxury-loving, egotistical ruling class, inequality between rulers and ruled, and cities dominated by temples of the state cult, seems to be an ancient anticipation of anything but an Athens of the Americas.

In short: if God were to break His 2,000-year precedent and tell mankind the date of the end of the current age, it seems most unlikely that this revelation would have been

granted to Mayan shamans or to their New Age interpreters.

### A Christian Perspective on the End of the Age

Given these arguments against "Apocalypse 2012" hysteria and faddism, what can an orthodox Christian reasonably believe and say about the end of the current age?

- \* Rejecting the New Age vision of "Apocalypse 2012" does not require Christians to assume that the current age will continue indefinitely. We do not have to be mindless optimists in order to reject the Doomsday message of Argüelles and his spiritual kin.
- \* The New Age people are right about one thing: the current age *will* end, at a time and in a manner that will catch most people by surprise. After a short period of great distress on Earth, marked by wars, tyranny, apostasy in the churches, persecution of the faithful, and natural disasters, Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead, and to establish his Kingdom. Warnings from Christ and the Apostles, recorded in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21, and elsewhere in the New Testament, give believers sufficient notice of what is to come.
- \* Although mankind must pass through great tribulation before the Return of Christ, the Scriptures provide abundant evidence that there *will* be people alive on Earth when Christ returns. The relevant verses are: Matthew 24:13; Matthew 24:39-41; Matthew 28:20; Mark 13:13; Luke 18:8; Luke 21:17-19; Luke 21:36; 1 Corinthians 15:51; and 1 Thessalonians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:17. If mankind were destined to become extinct before the Return of Christ, none of these verses would make sense. In other words, *there will not be an "extinction-level event"* before the Return of Christ, even though few people will have kept the Faith. What the Scriptures state, the Nicene Creed confirms: Christ "shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead."
- \* It is not for us to publicize a date for the Return of Christ, or to attempt to force His hand by setting up our own Armageddon. All that we are to do and it is quite sufficient is to pray the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven," and to live in accordance to God's will. Christ told us how to live in this way, and His teachings do not change, however near or far we are from the end of the age. As He said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."  
(Matthew 24:35)

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Lee Penn, a convert out of atheistic Marxism, attended Harvard university, was

inducted into Phi Beta Kappa in 1974 and graduated cum laude 1976. Lee is one of SCP's premier allies and associate writers.

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Recreation of Mayan Human Sacrifice in the film Apocalypto  
José Argüelles

Recreation of Mayan Warfare in the film Apocalypto