

Apocalyptical beliefs and predictions essay sample



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Introduction

Apocalyptic beliefs and predictions of concrete dates of world ending may be regarded as the characteristic feature of Western civilization from its inception. The fears of Apocalypses were first inspired by Christianity with its prediction of Dooms Day and the punishment of all sinners. Later various evangelical movements and monastic orders predicted the precise date of Apocalypses, but ‘paradoxically’ it was never confirmed. In an anecdotic manner various religious sects had to make new predictions, explaining their mistakes by false interpretations of signs and Scripture.

The simultaneous fear and interest in world ending stirred human interest together with rising presentation of UFO and cosmic catastrophes in mass culture: movies, music etc. The genre of apocalyptic films became wide spread in Hollywood with such notable examples as After Tomorrow, Terminator and others.

Globalization fostered the process of integrating different primordial cultures and cults in New Age movement and various occult movements that now began using Mayan, African and other cultures’ eschatological beliefs to predict the world ending. Moreover, the transformation of astrology into wide scale commercial enterprise helped popularize these beliefs through mass media and internet. Relatively recent example of 2000 problem demonstrates, how certain predictions, based on scientific or pseudo scientific rationale may be aptly marketed and make real profits for movie makers, newspapers.

It seems that apocalyptic beliefs are fostered by commercial nature of our public space: mass media are constantly searching for sensations, movie-makers seek to shock their viewers and pseudo-scholars seek to earn money through distribution of their apocalyptic predictions.

Why do people believe in these predictions? In the first place, because world ending is a non-trivial thing. It stirs so much of primordial religious fear and adrenalin, because it stands in the row with such eternal questions as life, death and universe. The inability of people to completely understand these things and human fragility vis-à-vis destructive forces of universe makes it attractive for us to replace knowledge with some sort of religious beliefs and anticipations.

Not surprisingly that this domain of ignorance is populated by money-seeking and fraudulent sects and long crowd of mass culture representatives. In our globalized commercial world the primordial rituals and fears are thus united with anarchical laws of profit-making.

Present research paper debunks one of such predictions of world ending in 2012 that until 2012 is likely to dominate the segment of eschatological market.

It has been already widely distributed through the '2012' movie and wide outlets of mass media. In the Web enthusiasts opened various sites, focusing on this predictions and wide public chat on them. Our criticism is based both on rationality and scientific knowledge, as well as criticism of sensation-based economy of mass culture. No scientific confirmations, originating from

issue-oriented sciences, such as astronomy, physics, cosmology, were made concerning the validity of 2012 predictions.

Astrological interpretations of Mayan calendar should not be regarded as the source or genuine scientific inquiry. We hope that these things become evident in the course of the present discussion of 2012 world ending prediction.

2012 prediction: the sources of belief

2012 prediction includes two basic beliefs. The first one is cataclysmic belief of the world ending, based on Mayan Long Count Calendar, in which December 21 of 2012 is the end date of 5, 125 years-long cycle. The second belief is of transformative nature, originating from New Age view of spiritual transformation, waiting for Earth in the near future (MacDonald, 2007).

Various scientific scenarios are considered for the world ending prediction, including the collision with the passing planet, often referred to as Nibiru or Earth's consumption by black hole.

Mayan sources of world ending, as it was noted above, are linked with the end of b'ak'tun cycle of Mesoamerican Long Count Calendar that was used in Central America before the European conquest. Its use is often attributed to one of the most developed Mesoamerican civilizations – May civilization that gained its prominence in the period between 250 to 900 AD (Scherer, 369).

Mentioned Mayan calendar is not cyclical, in contrast to calendars used by contemporary Mayans. It had a linear nature with a 'zero date' of world creation, which in Proleptic Gregorian calendar corresponds to August 11 or

13, 3114 BC. The structure of Mayan calendar includes uinal – 20 days, 18 uinals – 360 days, called a tun. 20 tuns give k'atun and 20 k'atuns make b'ak'tun. Nowadays, the correlation between Mayan date of 13. 0. 0. 0. 0. with Western calendar is December 21, 2012, or in some interpretations December 23, 2012 (Malmström, 2003).

The completion of 13 b'ak'tuns Great Period, according to some accounts, had a crucial eschatological significance to Maya. According to Maud Worcester Makemson, an astronomer, who researched Mayan calendar as early as 1957, “ there appears to be a strong likelihood that the eral calendar, like the year calendar, was motivated by a long-range astronomical prediction, one that made a correct solsticial forecast 2, 367 years into the future in 355 B. C.” (Makemson, 1957).

Michael Coe was more categorical, when he asserted in 1966 that May predicted that the end of the thirteenth b'ak'tun signifies the Armageddon that will overtake all degenerate and sinful people and annihilate our universe. Such apocalyptic connotations of Mayan calendar later became popular among astrologists in 90s and to the present day.

Against this backdrop contemporary Maya, however, do not give much significance to 13th b'ak'tun. Classic Mayan inscription rarely notice the historical meaning of 13th b'ak'tun. Among notable examples one should mention Tortuguero Monument No. 6 and Chilam Balam (Braden, 2007).

Tortuguero Monument no. 6, located in Tabasco, Mexico is agreed by Mayanists as the reference to b'ak'tun 13. One of the best translations of the

inscription suggest that the god Bolon Yookte' K'uh will descend the Earth and will bring havoc, despair and other cataclysms to it (Mercier, 12).

However not too much is known about mentioned God, he/she is often mentioned in other inscriptions as god of conflicts, war, and underworld.

Another mentioning of 13th B'ak'tun is present in Chilam Balam, a corpus of Mayan prophetic histories, presumably created by jaguar prophet (Chilam balam) (Edmonson, 1982).

Maud Makemson's translation of the episode, where 13th b'ak'tun is mentioned goes as follows: ' Presently B'ak'tun 13 shall come sailing, figuratively speaking, and bringing the ornaments of which I have spoken from your ancestors' (Makemson, 1957). The translation continues with the following: " Then the god will come to visit his little ones. Perhaps ' After Death' will be the subject of his discourse." (Makemson, 1957).

Mentioned interpretations of Mayan calendar and archeological sites are widely used by modern spiritual movements and sects to validate their causes. As it is suggested by Sitler, such reference of new religions to ancient civilizations' views is often superficial and manipulative, bearing on the features of ideological appropriation (Sitler, 26).

New Age movements connect alleged Mayan prophecies with the perspective of global spiritual revolution against Western patterns of social life, based on money, material utilities and immorality.

New Age Narratives on 2012 are often interpreted as the sign of SETI communities' social disconnectedness: " Unable to find spiritual answers to

life's big questions within ourselves, we turn outward to imagined entities that lie far off in space or time—entities that just might be in possession of superior knowledge.'(Aveni, 51).

New Age interpretation of world transformation is often based on galactic alignment hypothesis according to which 2012 winter solstice would signify spiritual transformation, when solar ecliptic will intersect Black Road of Milky Way. According to some of New Age proponents, Mays created their calendar, based on preparation for crucial world events (Pinchbeck, 2006).

The similar New Age prediction were associated with 'timewave zero', a numerological formula, arguing that a universe has it teleological attractor that increases interconnectedness and leads to singularity in 2012, which may bring any possible and impossible changes (McKenna, 1993).

Debunking the 2012 end of the world prediction

The abovementioned background information suggests that 2012 prediction is based either on alleged Mayan predictions, or on astrological prognosis, based on the movements of planets, galaxies and transformations in solar system. Some of the analyses suggest that in 2012 the Earth may collide with Planet X (Nibiru) or comets.

While the collision or comet hypothesis may be scientifically validated, no strict calculations were agreed on scientific society concerning planets, comets moving trajectories that are dangerous to Earth. As far as Mayan alleged prophecies are concerned, even if it is the case the Maya predicted

catastrophe, this should not be regarded as the source of adequate scientific knowledge.

The belief in 2012 have found active followers among New Age movement, which representatives find inspirations in intuitive knowledge, stimulated by ‘widening consciousness’ drugs. Their occult methods of ‘scientific’ inquiry and direct manipulation to meet their ideological causes and mission should not be regarded as the source of adequate scientific information.

The only scientific argumentation for alleged 2012 cataclysm may be found in direct astronomical or geo-physical observations. As far as astronomical observations are concerned, the predicted events can not be seen in astronomical observations or anticipated in any other valid scientific way.

The latter is, for instance, suggested by authoritative organization NASA that compares 2012 predictions and fears with those connected with Y2K bug in late 1990s (NASA, 2009).

As far as Mayan alleged predictions are concerned, many scholars argue that Maya associated 13th b’ak’tun with celebration, rather than cataclysm. This is, for instance, argued by a renowned Mayanist scholar Susan Milbrath in her study of Maya astronomy and calendars (Milbrath, 1999).

As Mark Van Stone, another notable Mayanist scholar suggests, “ There is nothing in the Maya or Aztec or ancient Mesoamerican prophecy to suggest that they prophesied a sudden or major change of any sort in 2012”.(Van Stone, 2010). In the same vein, Schele and Freidel argue that Maya, “ did not conceive this to be the end of creation, as many have suggested ” (Schele and Freidel, 1990, 21).

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Another argument, contrasting interpretation of Maya views on 13th b' ak' tun' are often associated with Stela 1 at Coba site. It places the date in 20 units above b'ak'tun, the date which is 3 quintillion times as the age of the universe. This fact demonstrates that not Maya considered 5, 125 cycle to be of such importance.

As archeological analyses suggest, different Maya city-states used Long Count calendar in different often contradictory ways. In Palenque city state May believed that long cycle would end after 20 b'ak'tuns instead on 13, as suggested in 2012 prediction. Another notable example is that the monument, build for commemorating King Pakal the Great coronation, connects it with event that would happen 4000 after it and hence, it shows that not all Maya believed that the world cease to exist in 13. 0. 0. 0. 0 (Milbrath, 1999).

The debunking of 2012 belief is also made by Mayan wise men. For instance, Mayan elder Apolinario Chile Pixtun argues that 'apocalypse' concept has nothing to do with Mayan traditions and culture. According to this Maya, representatives of Western culture use myths of other civilizations, because they own ones are exhausted and hence, can not serve commercial purposes.

There is no denying the importance of the fact that this is really true. Christian apocalyptic tradition was extensively exploited in mass culture – in movies, popular music and mass media. It can not stir so much interest and religious fear as the myths of widely unknown and mysterious civilizations, such as Maya one (Stevenson, 2009).

Mayan idea of ‘balanced cosmos’, according to Aveni, is not presented in the West in its original form. In contrast, it is tied with American-style traditions of millennialism, New Age and wide-spread occult belief that ancient civilization possessed some sort of secret and intuitive knowledge (Aveni, 2009).

In the same vein, Mayan scholar and archeologist Jose Huchm suggested that “If I went to some Mayan-speaking communities and asked people what is going to happen in 2012, they wouldn’t have any idea. That the world is going to end? They wouldn’t believe you. We have real concerns these days, like rain” (Stevenson, 2009).

Moreover, Edmonson suggests that wide-spread translations of Maya inscriptions manipulate the text to interpret it as 2012 end of the day prediction. His translation has nothing to do with these eschatological beliefs: ‘...like the coming of 13 sail-ships. When the captains dress themselves, your fathers will be taken’ (Edmonson, 1982).

As far as galactic alignment interpretation is concerned, astronomers are also critical of New Age interpretation of these events. They argue that galactic equator is an arbitrary line, because it can not be determined where Milky Way begins and ends. Apart from this, it is argued that Sun’s precessional alignment takes place over a 36 year period, but not exclusively in specific year, as suggested by 2012 prediction proponents. According to this analysis, Sun convergence with galactic equator had already taken place in 1998 (Jenkins, 2009). It should be also added that there exist virtually no

archeological or historical evidence that may put any emphasis on equinoxes or solstices (Jenkins, 2009).

The hypothesis of Planet X collision with Earth in December 2012 was spread by New Age proponents in 1995. The knowledge of this event was presumably channeled by alien beings to New Age proponents.

No scientific validation of this hypothesis was ever provided. Moreover, from the mere logical standpoint a planet, being so close to Earth, could be seen to anyone looking at night sky in these days. To understand this no reference to astronomers is needed. Together with black hole consumption of Earth in 2012 this hypothesis may be attributed to rich imagination, rather than scientific facts.

To sum it up, no explicit scientific validation of 2012 hypothesis exists in scientific community. Hence, the only source of 2012 prediction popularity is activities of New Age proponents and mass media impact.

Modes of 2012 thinking

Modes of 2012 thinking may be searched within occult and spiritual tradition dating back to intuitive approach to religion. Millennialism and New Age movement that are popular in the United States may be regarded as the main sources and proponents of this world view. Its main characteristic is suspicion towards scientific knowledge and rationality. Belief and intuitive feeling are substitutes for knowledge and scholarship. However, often as in the case with New Age followers, various deciphering and interpreting methods are used to validate their belief. Often having nothing to do with

mathematics and astronomy, such spiritual doomsayers fabricate various formulae and codes.

The main approach that is used in this situation is manipulation. The only purpose is to adjust numbers to belief and prediction to make them look solid and scientifically grounded. Manipulation may go so far as doomsayers change their formulae, if the predicted date did not bring any catastrophes etc.

It should be noted, however, that wide public does not strongly believe in 2012 prophecies. Its interest to them is based on its sensational nature and wide circulation in mass media and popular culture. Moreover, 2012 prediction is often the source of interesting conversation between youngsters about the 'eternal' questions of death, life, future. It stimulates their thinking about things that go far beyond 2012 prophecies.

Conclusion

Present research paper showed that 2012 end of the day prediction has all chances to become another weird belief. No genuine scientific arguments and observations were found in the course of this research to validate the fears or anticipation of Apocalypses. The spread of 2012 belief among New Age proponents and various occult sects makes it suspicious from the scientific point of view.

The wide spread utilization of 2012 themes and motives in mass culture, including recent movies, makes it evident that the 2012 theme is used to make profits. 2012 belief has all features of sensational narrative, rather

than objective scientific inquiry. If we go so far as to treat Maya predictions as a source of real scientific knowledge, still there exist no agreement among major Mayanists on whether Maya predicted celebration or catastrophe. Moreover, it seems evident that interpretations of Mayan inscriptions are over-weighted with Euro-centrism in its most explicit forms.

Again, the question we have already posed, why do people believe in such things as 2012 prophecy? One may attribute to Freudian attraction to death or primordial archetypes of our consciousness, described by Young. Living in technological era people are still harsh opponents of science and rationality.