BEYOND THE END

The Bible in the Modern World, 49

Beyond the End

The Future of Millennial Studies

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PREFACE:
ON MILLENNIAL STUDIES, VESPERIAN SCHOLARS,
AND THE MILLENNIAL CLASHES OF THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Richard Landes

'Not being a millennialist, I don't understand these things', wrote my professor to me in reference to Bede's treatment of the endtimes in his *De temporum ratione*.[1] It was difficult for me, just starting out, to explain to him the difference between studying millennialism and being a millennialist. The famous story of Saul Liebermann introducing Gershom Scholem's work on mysticism with the remark 'Nonsense is nonsense, but the history of nonsense is scholarship' didn't help me much to elevate in his eyes what I was doing above the realm of antiquarianism (a history of losers who got it wrong). Like so many scholars who have been trained (and by temperament prefer) to ignore such issues, he somehow suspected that anyone who busies him or herself with such recondite topics was somehow tainted therewith.

And he may not have been entirely wrong (although I suspect that even in his aversion to the topic, he had also been somehow tainted). If millennialism is a form of 'outrageous hope', then the repeated hope among millennial scholars, that somehow their field is about to go mainstream and enter the larger discussion of motivating forces in (Western) history,[2] has something of a millennial quality to it. Certainly those of us at the Center for Millennial Studies (1996–2003) viewed the moment as propitious for such a 'mainstreaming' of a field which, when Norman Cohn wrote the founding document in 1956, was largely circulating among graduate students 'in

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1.   Bede, *De temporum ratione* 67–71, in *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (trans. Faith Wallis; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. 239-49; treated in Landes, 'Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography, 100–800 CE', in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (ed. W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), pp. 174-78.

2.   See the almost non-existent role of millennialism in Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped our World View* (New York: Ballantine, 1993).

samizdat'.[3] When asked what we 'millennial scholars' would do after 2000—itself a fundamental misunderstanding of millennialism in which the millennium marks the period of 'heaven on earth', not necessarily its advent—I would respond, 'study disappointment, including our own'. Indeed the sudden lapse of attention to millennial studies among funding institutions in the aftermath of 2000, *despite 9/11*,[4] meant that we were best equipped to study our own disappointment.

And now, in the introduction to another excellent collection of scholarship on the study of millennialism, we find again, as with so many other forms of millennial hope, that some of us believe that, at long last, '[t]here are promising signs that millennial studies is now being recognised by the wider academic community as a profitable pursuit that merits serious scholarly attention'.

From the perspective of millennial scholarship this seems like so modest an accomplishment. After all, those of us who have learned the characteristics of millennial dynamics—the outrageous hopes, the bitter disappointments, the cognitive dissonance, and the bumpy, sometimes disastrous, sometimes fruitful, return to 'normal time'—tend to see their signature in so many places. It's almost incomprehensible that others would insist that nothing of the sort of any significance is occurring in such phenomena as revolutions and totalitarian death cults. And coming in the wake of two potential milestones in the field of millennial studies, Catherine Wessinger's *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, and my *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience*,[5] the editors and contributors have good reason to think change might be in the air.

But such optimism may underestimate the nature and perdurability of the resistance. Partly this impermeability to millennial analysis comes from a reluctance, even distaste, for the peculiarities of the subject matter. Newport and Searle state the paradoxical dilemma succinctly: 'The echo of that old adage "Prophecy never fails" can be heard at many points in this volume and seems set to remain in the consciousness of those who come to the discipline in future decades for whom it will, in all probability, be maintained as a major concern'. In other words, don't even bother trying your hand at millennial studies if you can't address the issue of cognitive dissonance. And don't bother trying to identify millennial dreams in action—beyond the 'obvious' cases like the ones Norman Cohn studied (and until he did, even they weren't

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3. Comments of R.I. Moore about his experience in England.
4. See the collection of essays on the millennial dimensions of 9/11 at the CMS website: <http://www.mille.org/scholarship.html#apocislam>.
5. Catherine Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

obvious)—unless you can understand how, in Eugene Gallagher's words, the 'inchoate yearnings for a transformed world' can become 'passionate proclamations and programs for action'.

But allow me to offer my solicited advice to millennial scholars: don't hold your breath. The resistance to seeing the role of apocalyptic and millennial dynamics at work in anything but the most restricted forms will be with academics for a very long time. At work is a form of unconscious 'Augustinianism', a doctrinal position of denial *vis-à-vis* these issues with immense staying power. This denial (in Augustine's case a repression) of millennial phenomena derives from a combination of both the impact of the enduring passage of time (every one of our subjects of study has been or is going to be, *wrong*), on the one hand, and our own sensibilities (premium on getting it '*right*'), on the other.[6] The *vesperian* historiography that arises from this confluence of 'normal time' cognitive and psychological orientations has an enormous grip on the current scholarly imagination, even among anthropologists who have nearly direct access to apocalyptic sentiments.[7]

A fortiori, this Augustinian mentalité pervades medieval historiography, for example, among those who, off-record, rejoice in the comforting analyses that excuse them from having to think about these matters,[8] and on record, exclude them as much as possible from the serious discussion (as did Augustine). Thus, thirty-five years after Juan Gil first published his article on the imperial coronation of Charlemagne in the year 6000 Annus Mundi, few *medievalists* in the twenty-first century know, or have thought about, the Sabbatical Millennial Coronation.[9] And this discussion occurs despite the

6.   For an elaboration of these issues in a specifically medieval context, see Richard Landes, 'The Historiographical Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian History Medieval and Modern', *Speculum* 75 (2000), pp. 97-145; further explored in a more generic sense in Landes, *Varieties*, Chapter 3.

7.   Landes, *Varieties*, Chapter 5.

8.   Indefatigable blogger Jonathan Jarret describes a talk by James Palmer (see below, n. 9): 'A series of well-aimed kicks at the idea that there was a widespread belief in the years leading up to 800 that that was going to be year 6000 *anno mundi* and therefore the end of everything [*sic*], largely as expressed by Richard Landes [*sic*]…he also dismantled in passing a number of the pro-millennial arguments *which was a joy to hear… I think we all finished this paper remaining comfortably convinced* that 800 was a Carolingian high point*, not a year everyone spent waiting for the sky to fall on their heads* [*sic*].' Jonathan Jarret, '*Excellentissima et merito famosissima historica II*. Session 5. Trouble and Troublemakers', *A Corner of Tenth-Century Europe* (2009), http://tenthmedieval. wordpress.com/tag/documents/ (my emphasis). Granted this is not 'scholarship', but it does offer a valuable insight into an atmosphere that informs scholarship.

9.   See Juan Gil, 'Los terrores del año 800', in *Aetas del Simposio para el estudio de los codices del 'Comentario al Apocalipsis' de Beato de Liebana* (Madrid: Joyas Bibliográficas, 1978), pp. 215-47. For further treatment of the phenomenon, see Landes, 'Lest', and Wolfram Brandes, '"Tempora periculosa sunt": Eschatologisches im Vorfeld der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Grossen', in *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794:*

exhaustive scholarly gatherings, collections, and studies inspired by the advent of the 1200th anniversary of that European-defining event in 2000.

In a famous account of a meeting between positivist and postmodern historians, one of the former said, 'just so long as we get the story straight', to which one of the latter responded (with characteristic wit and obscurity), 'oh no, the point is to get the story crooked'.[10] In all millennial matters, the story is *always* and *profoundly* a crooked tale, a narrative about outrageous ambitions, bitter disappointments, and inevitably unintended consequences no matter how grand. So we historians need to *get the crooked story straight*.

Of course, that calls for empathy, for trying to get inside the head of people who really do believe (or are sorely tempted to believe) that the apocalyptic moment has arrived. I think that a Center for Millennial Studies could do far worse for logos than to have Odysseus lashed to the mast, listening to the sirens. We scholars have to listen closely to these voices, without being drawn into the shoals of apocalyptic madness,[11] navigating between the Scylla of joining the cult,[12] and the Charybdis of inflating one's insights into redemptive intellectual paradigms.[13]

One might argue, as Crawford Gribben has suggested in these pages, that it's dangerous to make one's definition too wide. After all, once one takes seriously the 'social science' definition of millennialism—a belief in the future (imminent) transformation of this world, now permeated by evil, soon to transform into a just and joyful world—one finds it covers an awful lot of movements, including secular forms like Nazism and Marxism, to non-Judeo-Christian forms like Islamism, to postmodern branches of cultural theory.[14]

Kirstallisationspunkt Karolingischer Kultur (ed. Rainer Berndt; Mainz: Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1997), pp. 49-79. The closest one comes to a serious discussion of these matters in any of the rich literature on Charlemagne since 2000 comes from James Palmer, 'Calculating Time and the End of Time in the Carolingian World, c. 740–c. 820', *English Historical Review* 126.523 (2011), pp. 1307-31. As for considerations of the coronation of 6000, the only historians to mention it at all, do so in order to dismiss it.

10. Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 3-4 (who notes the opacity of the comeback); discussed further in Landes, *Varieties*, pp. 67-68.

11. For an excellent example of such profound empathy without succumbing, see the work of Eugene Gallagher on David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, whose work is also featured in this volume.

12. As did Hitler who, sent by the Weimar Secret Police to spy on Anton Drexler's German Worker's Party (DAP), ended up joining and becoming leader; see Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), p. 82.

13. Louis Rose, *The Freudian Calling: Early Viennese Psychoanalysis and the Pursuit of Cultural Science* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

14. See Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, Chapters 27 (Nazism) and 35 (Global Jihad); Landes, *Varieties*, Chapters 10 (Marxism), 11 (Communism), 12 (Nazism), 14 (Global Jihad). On critical theory, see below.

In the end, one ends up seeing millennialism everywhere—democratic revolutions—and therefore, perhaps, nowhere meaningful.[15] Perhaps it's better for cautious historians (vesperians?) to avoid becoming too enthusiastic.[16] Perhaps it is better not to characterize the West as 'the most millennial culture in world history', and not to claim that 'modernity itself is a European millennial dream with a long genealogy'.[17]

But what if it is? And what if the secularization (and hence the concealment) of demotic millennial beliefs is one of the driving forces of both egalitarian revolutions, and of modernity? Certainly when one examines the case of Marx, the issue is explicit: opponents (even on the Left) attack him for being a millennialist (in the contemptuous German: a *chiliastische Schwärmer*). He defended himself by insisting that his historical work, with which he lays out his (eerily Joachite) schema of ages of history culminating in the great and transformative revolution, is 'scientific', not *chiliastic*.[18] Do we scholars want to accept this self-description and maintain a strict, *religious* definition of millennialism?[19] Or rather, as do the contributors to this collection, adopt a more flexible approach, one that views a whole range of 'legitimating techniques' beyond religious texts, as fodder for making millennial prophecies.[20]

Part of the problem here is that millennialism is *rightfully* considered a potentially dangerous delusion that we do not want to take too seriously. Indeed, most cultures defend themselves from the subversive, even tumultuous, threats of apocalyptic millennialism by ridicule and dismissal. After all, the history of the phenomenon is filled with false messiahs who led their followers down disastrous paths to not only their destruction,[21] but in cases

15. On the American Revolution, see Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought (1756–1800)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), on the French Revolution, Landes, *Varieties*, Chapter 10. For the dilemma facing anthropologists in making 'cargo cults' an essential element of Melanesian culture, and vice versa, see Landes, *Varieties*, pp. 128-35.

16. On vesperian historiography's unspoken motto: 'il faut dédramatiser l'histoire', see Landes, *Varieties*, pp. 79-80.

17. My phrases (*Varieties*, pp. 46, 144), critiqued by Gribben, this volume, pp. 1-19. When the young Marjorie Reeves said she wanted to work on Joachim of Fiore, she was told she'd destroy her credibility. Today, most medievalists, asked for *one* word to characterize the thirteenth century, the century that *followed* his death, would pick *Joachite*.

18. Landes, *Varieties*, pp. 310-11.

19. Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, does not have a chapter on Marx or Communism as millennial phenomena.

20. N.B., Gallagher's discussion of the validation techniques for the Mayan apocalypse, in this volume.

21. The theme of apocalyptic believers not planting or sowing crops and starving as a result reappears in widely divergent literature: Hippolytus, *In Danielem* IV.19, c. 200; Shabbatai Zvi's European followers, 1666; The 'Great Awakening' in the Northeastern

where they took power, the destruction of millions, even tens of millions of victims. It's not a pretty gallery of daffy and dangerous protagonists with whom millennial scholars have made their dent on the larger field: Tanchelm of Antwerp, Matthew of Münster, Shabbatai Zvi, Hong-Xiuchang, and, if we take it past the 'modern' divide, Hitler and Stalin. Active, cataclysmic apocalypticism is like fascism on steroids and crack cocaine: the dichotomy between us (saved) and them (damned) becomes so wide that it literally dehumanizes the enemy of the Endtimes.[22] Apocalyptic wars inspired by such thinking often contain genocidal memes.

On the other hand, if we become mesmerized by those who became addicted to millennial power and drove down totalitarian paths to carve out the perfect society from the body social, we may miss out on some of the more productive elements of millennial beliefs in action. Those who study the field with a wider set of lenses both emotionally and temporally (distinguishing between imminent and non-apocalyptic millennialism)[23] can discern a wide range of non-violent, non-paranoid forms of millennialism that inspire people to do deeds of great love as well as great hate.

Indeed, for every *active cataclysmic apocalyptic* movement, there are dozens of (smaller) *transformative demotic* ones, based not on sacred violence but on a transformation of the 'other' from enemy to friend, and a collective redemption that turns inflicted suffering into shared joy. Prophetic visions of warrior aristocracies voluntarily beating their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, apocalyptic imperatives to 'love thy enemy as thyself', announce the celebratory joy. '*Alle Menschen werden Brüder wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt*', wrote Schiller; words immortalized further by Beethoven, and now the Anthem of (what from the perspective of all earlier centuries could only be a millennial dream) the European Union.[24] Among other things, this is also the voice of the optimistic Enlightenment, which, one might argue (were one a lumper in these matters), represents the secularization of the demotic millennial idiom.[25]

Progressive, egalitarian movements embrace a demotic religiosity that believes in the dignity of manual labor, equality before the law, and the direct *personal* relationship of the individual to God.[26] Such demotic movements

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US, 1843–44; the Xhosa Cattle Slaying, in South Africa, c. 1856–57, etc. See discussion in Landes, *Varieties*, Chapters 2, 4.

22. See Charles Strozier, 'The Apocalyptic Other', in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence, and History* (ed. C. Strozier, D. Terman, J. Jones and K. Boyd; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 6.

23. See below, n. 33.

24. For a discussion of transformative millennialism, see Landes, *Varieties*, Chapter 1.

25. Landes, *Varieties*, Chapter 9.

26. On demotic religiosity, see Landes, *Varieties*, Chapter 9 and 'Economic Development and Demotic Religiosity: Reflections on the Eleventh-Century Takeoff', in *History*

tend to be remarkably dignified, even in their apocalyptic enthusiasm, and even more in their inevitable disappointment. Rather than 'up the ante' at the growing signs of failure (to the point of death and mega-death cults in some cases),[27] they deal with their cognitive dissonance at failed expectations with productive poise. For example, many such movements prize manual labor, and put a great deal of ingenuity to work finding ways to make that labor productive. If they had applied for patents when the office first opened in 1790, they would have multiplied the number of patents by orders of magnitude. The disappointment and 'return to normal time' in such demotic and transformative groups is marked by remarkable and productive technological innovations.

All the religious denominations Weber used to illustrate the 'Protestant Ethic'—Puritans, Quakers, Methodists, Pietists—represent powerful strains of this *demotic* religiosity,[28] which, when heated to apocalyptic temperatures, sets in motion dreams…of a kingdom of the saints *on earth*, a holy anarchy where there is *no king but God*.[29] Not every one of these surges of demotic enthusiasm, when disappointed, turned into a totalitarian death cult.[30] On the

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in the Comic Mode (ed. R. Fulton and B. Holsinger; New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 101-16. On transformative or progressive millennialism, see W. Michael Ashcraft, 'Progressive Millennialism', in Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, pp. 44-66, who goes from Joachite to Puritan millennialism and does mention Marx as 'violent progressive' (what I call 'active cataclysmic apocalyptic' aiming at a 'demotic, progressive millennium'). I would begin the strong European tradition with the Peace of God in the late tenth–eleventh centuries and the apostolic movements that followed: Thomas Head and Richard Landes (eds.), *The Peace of God: God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse and the Deceits of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), part IV, 'The Millennial Generation'. One could take it much farther back, in the case of Christianity to the 'realized eschatology' of the apostles who undertook the 'Great Commission' (a progressive pre-millennial project to spread the Gospel to the whole world before the *Parousia*).

27. Anna Geifman, *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Praeger, 2010).

28. For an excellent new translation and introduction, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Stephen Kalberg; New York: Oxford University Press, rev. 1920 edn, 2010).

29. See, for example, the 'Fifth Monarchy' movement of the English 'Civil War' of the mid-seventeenth century. In terms of Weber's thesis, instead of taking 'predestination' as a theological given and then analyzing the origins of the spirit of capitalism from its mutations, one might take predestination as an originally apocalyptic trope (among the 'chosen generation' of a demotic millennial movement) and the difficulties of subsequent generations as manifestations of long-term cognitive dissonance, dealt with not by seeking power and prestige, but through discipline and productivity.

30. From Hus to the Adamites (Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 1970], pp. 213-22; Taiping, *Varieties*, Chapter 8.

contrary, more 'productive' *reentries* into normal time often provide the building blocks of both technological prosperity and democracy. A look at the millennial politics of the English 'Civil War' detects the first appearance of a 'public sphere' of uncoerced discourse, a century before Habermas identifies its advent in continental eighteenth-century Europe.[31]

Rather than having disappeared with modernity, secularization turned down the apocalyptic flame and launched trans-generational millennial projects that had enormous long-term impact on major identifiable historical developments like Progressivism.[32] Instead of working in red- or white-hot apocalyptic time, early stages of secular millennialism tend towards more deliberation, take generations, and operate (relatively soberly) on demotic millennial premises. As Kant declared: 'Everyone can see that philosophy can have her belief in a millennium (*Chiliasmus*)…but her millenarianism is not wildly exuberant (*schwärmerisch*)', or in my terminology, not *apocalyptic*.[33]

The early modern period developed a wide range of such multi-generational millennial projects (including both the Rosicrucians and modern science[34]), that harnessed the *urgent* hope to a more disciplining yoke of longer-term expectations, scenarios in which one labored to prepare the world to bear redemptive fruit that would arrive, not in the lifetime of the laborer, but of a later generation. And when, after a century of laboring in the vineyards of the '*chiliastische*' Enlightenment, the laborers felt the time had come for the apocalyptic transformation, the 'sober' millennialism of Kant became the wildly enthusiastic apocalypticism of the French Revolution. In this sense, every one of us in modern civil society lives in a culture deeply

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31.   David Zaret, *The Origins of Democratic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

32.   Here Gribben's suggestion of more rather than less terminology is particularly relevant: analysts need to identify the workings of millennialism at various temperatures of apocalyptic. In her collection for Oxford, Catherine Wessinger uses the older definition of millennial to include apocalyptic, rather than adopt a distinction where millennialism designates the dream of a future perfect world *in the flesh*, in history, while apocalyptic designates both the sense that that transformation is imminent, and the scenario whereby the world goes from fallen to redeemed. Cf. Wessinger's terminological discussion (*Handbook*, pp. 3-25), with mine (*Varieties*, Chapter 1), and her use of apocalyptic as a synonym for 'catastrophic millennialism' (*Handbook,* p. 717), with the value of identifying a separate category for imminentist beliefs and scenarios (*Varieties*, Chapter 2).

33.   Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,' ¶8, in *On History* (trans. Lewis Beck; New York: Bobbs–Merrill Co., 1963); Landes, *Varieties*, pp. 244-46..

34.   David Noble, *The Religion of Technology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997). Multi-generational, transformative, millennial projects are a mark of the modern world, including the Muslim Brotherhood (which, in this case, builds to an active cataclysmic apocalyptic climax).

marked by demotic experiments, failed by millennial standards, immensely influential, even transformative, in their practical and unintended consequences.

Millennial studies is, without question, heady stuff. We can't penetrate the minds of these thinkers without empathy, and in so doing, we come very close to some of the most powerfully seductive grand narratives that any culture ever developed about the near future. The temptation to exaggerate the importance of one's own time marks many people, drawing them inexorably towards the apocalyptic maelstrom, or to use the language of astrophysics, towards the elongation that comes with the approach of the event horizon of a black hole.[35]

How does one get close enough to understand and still avoid getting sucked in? Some scholars maintain distance by viewing negatively the phenomenon they study, and in the case of Nazis,[36] or Jihadis, this is not too difficult. But there is something fascinating about millennial thought, its radical, probing nature, its startling semiotic arousal, linking things ordinary minds do not. William Blake is a millennial thinker, and anyone who takes pleasure in reading him participates in that mindset. And so, alas for those who like nice categories, there is no easy solution to a situation in which we (Western-trained) scholars are always-already millennial, trying at once to extract ourselves from our world without flipping into a denial that, like Jung's 'shadow', grows greater for being unconscious.

Real-World Stakes in Millennial Scholarship: Postmodern 'Others' vs. Islamic Apocalyptic 'Others'

The stakes involved here are not insignificant, nor merely 'academic', although they are most specifically academic. Right now, and since the '60s, much of the academic world involved with human subjects (Arts, Humanities, Social 'Sciences') has become absorbed by an interlocking series of theoretical paradigms and exegetical techniques (deconstruction, critical/ gender/queer, theory, postmodernism, post-colonialism) that have millennial

35. Osman Cakmak, 'Black Holes and Possible Depictions of the Judgment Day', *The Fountain* 58.4 (2007) <http://fountainmagazine.net/article.php?ARTICLEID=813>. I personally struggled with this temptation in dealing with the question of Y2K: Landes, 'Roosters, Owls and Y2K at Millennium's End', in Martyn Percy (ed.), *Calling Time: Religion and Change at the Turn of the Millennium* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 233-61.

36. On Nazis, see David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). David Cook, in doing research for *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), described how, after a day of reading the apocalyptic Islamic material he felt like he had to take a shower.

premises embedded in the core of their *theory*.[37] And as every effective millennial discourse must provide, postmodern theory has identified the 'source of our suffering', namely boundaries. And since those 'us–them' boundaries—between self and 'Other', 'male and female', one culture/ religion/ethnicity/nationality and another—have been constructed, we can 'free' ourselves (or at least, *resist*) by deconstructing.

Thus, the postmodern theories in their various avatars systematically transgress conventional boundaries, subvert 'hegemonic' discourses (including metanarratives), that must always-already inscribe an invidious dichotomy between 'us–them'.[38] Instead, liberation comes from the embrace of the 'Other' in post-colonialism, the *subaltern* 'Others' to whose narratives we are obliged to grant epistemological equality if not priority.[39] Redemptive performativity is, among other things, a way to speak of messianic behavior, of *tikkun olam*, of 'realized eschatology'.[40] And it all takes place in the

37. On the '60s as millennial, see Arthur Mendel, *Vision and Violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990/2000), Chapter 6. For a sympathetic account that argues that much of the 'theory' discourse concerns 'what has happened since the 1960s', see Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 3. A less sympathetic view considers the 'theorists' as the intellectual practitioners of revolutionary agendas from the '60s: Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted our Higher Education* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990/2008).

38. Foucault's always-already power relations are taken up both by Edward Saïd and Judith Butler. Saïd's critique of Orientalism was based on the appeal to an understood Foucauldian 'truth', that all previous political and intellectual relations were ultimately invidious: 'human societies, at least the more advanced cultures [*sic*], have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with the "other' culture" (*Orientalism* [New York: Vintage Books, 1979], p. 204). In so doing, he called on the intellectual culture that had gone the farthest to distance itself from that invidious 'othering' (the West) to jettison the intellectual tradition that had brought it to that point of intellectual maturity (see the critique of Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* [London: Penguin Books, 2006]). For a strong critique of this trend in theory, see Bruce Bawer, *The Victims' Revolution: The Rise of Identity Studies and the Closing of the Liberal Mind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012).

39. Rosalind C. Morris (ed.), *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For the historical argument about the importance of 'empathy' for the 'other' as a fundamental aspect of civilization, of overriding importance in today's global community, see Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to World Consciousness in a World Crisis* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

40. E.g, Jill Dolan, 'Performance, Utopia, and the "Utopian Performative"', *Theatre Journal* 53.3 (2001), pp. 455-79. On *tikkun olam*, see n. 46. On realized eschatology, as, e.g., C.H. Dodd used as a way to describe the apostolic effort to incarnate Jesus' redemptive behavior (as opposed to awaiting his apocalyptic *Parousia*), see, e.g., *The*

(relatively) non-apocalyptic framework of a progressive effort fundamentally to transform a cultural sensibility.[41]

Like many of their predecessors, including Marx, these latest secular millennialists tend to deny their chiliastic genealogy.[42] Indeed, the whole postmodern principle of 'incredulity towards Grand or Meta-Narratives' is a repudiation, among other things, of the greatest of them all—apocalyptic narratives about eschatological End of History.[43] So in principle, postmodernists and their offspring (the various 'theorists') have liberated themselves from apocalyptic and millennial narratives.[44]

And yet, when some descend from their philosophic heights into the caves of politics, they reveal millennial hopes untempered by any awareness of its dangers. Judith Butler, for example, openly embraces her utopian longings—for example, for Buber's and Magnes's 'bi-national state' for Israelis and Palestinians—as driving forces of her performativity.[45] She would, however, deny any relationship between her utopian desires and earlier apocalyptic movements that veered rapidly from transformative to cataclysmic, from egalitarian to totalitarian, even as she, when confronted with the disastrous implications of her millennial reasoning, declares herself proud of her

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Apostolic Preaching and its Developments (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), Chapter 2 <http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=539>.

41. Andreas Huyssen sees postmodernism, even with all its fads, as 'part of a slowly emerging cultural transformation in Western societies, a change in sensibility for which the term "postmodernism" is actually, at least for now, wholly adequate', in 'Mapping the Post-Modern', *New German Critique* 33, 'Modernity and Postmodernity' (1984), pp. 5-52 (7).

42. On Marx's denial of his own millennial thinking, see Landes, *Varieties*, pp. 310-11.

43. On the end of 'grand narrative', see François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (English trans.; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [original, 1979]). From a millennial perspective (where all millennial narratives are meta-narratives), such a belief that there are no valid meta-narratives is a secular form of Augustine's rejection of millennialism via a radical agnosticism, described by R.A. Markus, in *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

44. Of course postmodernists are far too sophisticated to fall into complete denial. For a fine example of the playfulness with which postmodern exegetes play with apocalyptic and millennial themes, see Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics*, 14/2, *Nuclear Criticism* (1984), pp. 20-31. (Note the pun on the 'sevens' of *Revelation*.)

45. For an analysis of the utopian/millennial underpinnings of her work, see above all Sari Roman-Lagerspetz, 'Striving for the Impossible: The Hegelian Background of Judith Butler' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Helsinki, Department of Political Science, 2009; online: www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/43963/striving.pdf?).

courage to think so daringly.[46] Her work deserves a thoroughly millennial analysis.[47]

   More broadly, I think only a millennial analysis of the post-60s (i.e. post-apocalyptic) Zeitgeist of the academy, especially where studies of humankind are concerned, can explain the current direction of consensus politics when dealing with Islamism. Take, for example, the following conundrum: In the entire history of Christianity, no nation that called itself Christian adopted a foreign policy based on the (apocalyptic) Sermon on the Mount; on the contrary, Christians often invoked Christianity itself as a *causus belli*. Now, however, *post*-Christians, people who by and large have contempt for religion, especially Christianity,[48] urge a 'turn the other cheek' policy of self-criticism and self-abasement *vis-à-vis* a profoundly hostile 'Other'.[49] As a colleague commented at a conference on apocalypticism in 2007, 'If the USA were attacked by a dirty bomb (nuclear weapon), I hope we'd have the maturity not to strike back'.[50]

   Indeed, I would argue that we need to understand our current cultural and even civilizational dilemmas in terms of the dysfunctional interaction between two almost mirror-opposite, vigorously engaged, activist apocalyptic millennial movements: the cataclysmic-imperial style of the Jihadis vs. the transformational-demotic of the progressive West.[51] On the one hand, we find

46. 'It may be that bi-nationalism is an impossibility, but that mere fact does not suffice as a reason to be against it' (Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2012], p. 30). In theory, perhaps…but in practice?

47. For Butler's use of *tikkun olam*, see her defense cited above (n. 46); for her embrace of Benjamin's 'messianic politics', see *Parting Ways*, pp. 99-113.

48. 'I hope that I've created an anti-religion memeplex, a sort of "inoculation" against the Religion Virus' (Craig James, *The Religion Virus: Why You Believe in God* [Ropley, Hants.: O Books, 2010). A close read of most attacks on religion (Hitchens, Dawkins, Dennet), indicates that much of their ire is directed at the kind of education they got from Christian religious authorities.

49. Noam Chomsky's response to 9/11—we were the terrorists—represents the most aggressive form of this form of self-abnegation (*9–11: Was There an Alternative?* [New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001]). For an analysis of this kind of response to 9/11, see Michael Prell, *Underdogma: How America's Enemies Use Our Love for the Underdog to Trash American Power* (Dallas: BenBella Press, 2011), pp. 21-35.

50. The conference produced the volume of essays cited above.

51. On the two types, see *Varieties*, Chapter 1. Active cataclysmic apocalyptic means that the believers are the agents of the catastrophic destruction to come, imperial means the millennial kingdom will be hierarchical (in this case the dominion of Muslims over infidel, *dhimmis*); transformative apocalyptic means the transition will take peacefully by a change of heart, demotic means the millennial kingdom will be egalitarian and non-coercive.

a war against a demonized apocalyptic 'other'—the infidel, especially the ones that have humiliated Islam (the West, and Israel)—who must be in some combination exterminated and subjected, on the other, a 'Great Peace' brought about by the embrace of the apocalyptic 'Other', no matter how queer,[52] even despite that 'other''s *apocalyptic* violence.[53]

Granted, tens of millions of Christians believe in cataclysmic apocalyptic scenarios every bit as destructive as the Muslim ones. But the dominant 'tribulation scenarios' are *passive*; they depend on divine intervention for the destruction.[54] This does not, of course, mean that such beliefs do not deserve close analysis: indeed, they can have cataclysmic impact on the policies of a nuclear-armed United States.[55] But in terms of apocalyptic *style*, nothing could be more opposed to the transformative embrace of today's progressives than the violent hatreds of apocalyptic Jihad.[56]

So while Butler herself might agree that she pursues utopian goals, she and other critical theorists apparently have no idea what kind of company they keep while dreaming their millennial fantasies in apocalyptic time. Deconstructing religion (us–them), and 'performing' spirituality (us–all), their cognitive egocentrism blinds them to more 'primitive' (by their own standards), more regressive forms of millennial behavior. Thus, compelled by her public moral life to choose between Hamas–Hezbollah and Israel as part of the 'Global Left', Butler has repeatedly sided (with reservations about their violence) with the these groups.[57]

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52.   I use this word in the way 'Queer Studies' uses it: '*Queer* acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' (David Halperin, *Saint Foucault* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995], p. 62. For a critique, see Bawer, *Victim Studies*, Chapter 4.

53.   On global Jihad as active-cataclysmic, see Landes, *Varieties*, Chapter 14; on the intense desire to destroy involved in this apocalyptic style, see Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism* (New York: Metropolitan Press, 1999).

54.   Glenn Schuck, 'Christian Dispensationalism', in *Handbook*, pp. 515-28.

55.   Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1992).

56.   There is nothing, even in the most violent Christian behavior, that approaches the behavior of Jihadis, e.g., at Beslan (Geifman, *Death Orders*, pp. 4-6, 156-61). The Christian 'public sphere' marginalizes active cataclysmic apocalyptic tropes, whereas one could argue that they dominate important elements of the Muslim public sphere.

57.   Original remarks at Berkeley in 2006: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=zFp_6J0e92Q#%21; commented by Michael Totten, 'The Anti-Imperialism of Fools', *World Affairs*, August 28, 2012; clarified by Butler in Berlin, 2010, 'Interviews with Judith Butler', *Aviva-Berlin*, October 2012; http://www.aviva-berlin.de/aviva/content_Interviews.php?id=1427323.

In this she participates in a much wider phenomenon, unfortunately familiar in the history of secular millennialism, namely the alliance between the radical/revolutionary Left and some of most regressive and violent strains of other millennial groups.[58] This tendency has a long and troubling place in the brief, three-century history of the secular Left, 'the socialism of fools'.[59] In a postmodern mutation of the zero-sum apocalyptic rule—*One person's messiah is another's antichrist*—the anti-imperial revolutionary Left has created the 'positive-sum' variant, *the 'Other's Antichrist is my Antichrist'*, even if that means me.

We have yet to gauge the full measure of the blow involved in this kind of postmodern salvific performativity—to the West, to the civil society that made this pacific, transformative millennial theorizing even possible, much less popular. But certainly one of the most distressing elements of our current *aporia* in the face of Islamism's challenge is the inability of observers to recognize the millennial and apocalyptic dynamics at work. Indeed, maneuvered by appeals to the highest principles, some Western human rights activists actually favor banning *Islamophobic* speech, a move that would make it impossible to identify regressive apocalyptic discourse even among the most active cataclysmic Jihadis.[60]

All this is performed in the name of a self-sacrificial redemption that only feeds the millennial monsters on the other side, 'monsters' that postmoderns somehow believe they've deconstructed into non-existence: 'We have met the enemy and he is us'. David Cook's book on *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic* was rejected by its first readers as 'hate speech', as if documenting the phenomenon among 'others' were the very act of hate, and as if, by suppressing that form, somehow the hate-speech on the 'other' side, no longer identified or decried, would disappear as well.

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58.   In 2006 after the Lebanon war, the German party *Die Linke* marched in a gender-separated demonstration with Hizbullah, shouting Jihadi slogans; online: http://tinyurl.com/d9lubnq. In 2009, at the onset of Gaza Operation Cast Lead, 'We are Hamas' signs appeared at rallies sponsored by the most 'avant-garde' of performers. See Josh Strawn, 'How Liberals Arrive at "We Are Hamas"', *Jewcy.com*, January 8, 2009; online: http://www.jewcy.com/post/how_liberals_arrive_we_are_hamas; Andrew McCarthy, *The Grand Jihad: How Islam and the Left Sabotage America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2010).

59.   Robert Wistrich, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

60.   See the reflections in the wake of the violent demonstrations against the Youtube video, '"The Innocence of Muslims": Alexandre del Valle, "Criminalisation of 'Islamophobia'": The Organization of Islamic Cooperation's legal jihad', *International Civil Liberties Alliance*, October 12, 2012; http://www.libertiesalliance.org/2012/10/11/criminalisation-of-islamophobia-the-organization-of-islamic-cooperations-legal-jihad/.

Retrospectively, I believe, millennial scholars will identify, as the greatest failing of this academic generation, the choice of global warming *to the exclusion of* global Jihad, as apocalypse-to-be-averted.[61] Indeed, given that our addiction to oil feeds both global climate and jihad warming, one would have thought the two natural companions in any empirically based, 'avertive' apocalyptic discourse.[62] Instead, scholars have shown remarkable resistance to understanding the millennial dimension of the revival of Islam in the 15th century AH (1979–2076), a revival that aims at not just re-awakening Muslim piety and zeal, but at completing the global task of imposing *Sharia* on the *kuffar* (infidels), and the extension of *Dar al Islam* globally through *Jihad*. Our political correctness here combines with our conceptual difficulties, to drive us towards a more 'satisfying' narrative about 'resistance to hegemony' rather than the harsh apocalyptic dualism of 'us–them'.[63] It's hard to imagine more problematic conditions in which a culture can deal creatively with so volatile a phenomenon.

On the contrary, right now, thinking people, led by millennial scholars, should be doing an extensive study of both the disguised millennial activity imbedded in theory-performativity, as well as the striking, protean, and violent performativity involved in the Islamic and revolutionary sanctification of apocalyptic terror.[64] Scholars show reasonable caution about such extended forays into millennial analysis of widespread rather than marginal phenomena. Identifying a hostile apocalyptic 'other' in Islamism carries with it all kinds of dangers, including both offending moderate Muslims, and arousing the kind of right-wing, 'my side right or wrong' apocalyptic reactions that illustrate the tragic past slaughters of millennial warfare.

These are the fundamental issues that this young generation, now coming into knowledge and power, must face. And the more finely honed their understanding of millennial and apocalyptic motivations and follies, the

61.   See Daniel Wojcik, 'Avertive Apocalypticism', in *Handbook*, pp. 66-89.

62.   On the paradoxical split between of global climate and jihad warming—roosters on the one are almost invariably owls on the other—see *Varieties*, Chapter 15.

63.   Talal Asad briefly outlines the (crude) religious explanation for suicide terrorism (applied Huntingtonianism), and then continues 'Yet another—more complicated—story can be told, one that doesn't lend itself so easily to the popular drama of a clash of civilizations' (Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2007], p. 9). He then proceeds to discuss the religious issues in terms of 'resistance to hegemony' without reference to apocalyptic passions or millennial (global hegemonic) ambitions. Butler makes the same mistake when she takes Jihadi opposition to Western imperialism as an indicator of anti-imperialism rather than a rival imperialism (above, n. 58).

64.   Cf. Robert Pape's functionalist analysis of suicide bombings as a resistance to 'occupation', with Geifman, *Death Orders*, or Nancy Hartevelt-Korbin, *The Banality of Suicide Bombing* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2010).

better that generation will be able navigate so perilous a cultural storm as the one that, I think, will come to define the first decades of the twenty-first century. In the past, civilizations (granted ones less committed to fairness than ours), have crumbled under the constant blows of a violent tribal honor it had thought domesticated centuries earlier.[65] What path this current thrash of apocalyptic religious and social cultures will take remains undecided. How well we protect the demotic millennial traditions and their fruits (the civil path of the modern West *including* postmodern theory) depends, in no small part, on our awareness of the stakes and dynamics at work in this, the first global millennium.

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65. Brian Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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Andrew Crome is a lecturer in the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Manchester. He has published on topics including early modern millennialism, Jewish–Christian relations in early modern England and apocalyptic thought in British science fiction. He is currently working on a book on the history of Christian Zionism and its links to national identity formation, as well as co-editing a collection on religion in the BBC television series *Doctor Who*. He holds a PhD in Theology from the University of Manchester. He previously worked as Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow at Trinity College Dublin, where he was affiliated with the Trinity Millennialism Project.

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Robert Glenn Howard is a professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His teaching and publications span several fields, including Communication, Folklore Studies, Journalism and Religious Studies. His work examines possibilities and limits of empowerment through everyday expression on the Internet by focusing on the intersection of individual human agency and participatory performance. Focusing on everyday expression in network communication technologies, his 2011 book *Digital Jesus* documents a grass roots religious movement using the Internet to prepare for the 'End Times'. His current work explores everyday online communication about individual healthcare choices. In 2012, Howard co-founded the Digital Studies Program at Wisconsin and currently serves as its director. He is also director of the Folklore Program at Wisconsin and editor of the journal *Western Folklore*.

Richard Landes is Professor of History at Boston University. Early work focused on cultural and religious changes in the period around 1000 CE. From 1996 to 2003 he directed the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University. Recent publications include *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2011), and *The Paranoid Apocalypse: A Hundred-Year Retrospective on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York University Press, 2011). He is currently working on two books: *While God Tarried: Disappointed Millennialism from Jesus to the Peace of God (33–1033)*, and *A Medievalist's Guide to the 21st Century*.

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Andrew Pierce is an Assistant Professor in Ecumenical Theology in the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin. A former Government of Ireland Senior Research Fellow, his current research focuses on the theological connections between modernism, ecumenism and so-called religious fundamentalism. With Geraldine Smyth OP he edited *The Critical Spirit: Theology at the Crossroads of Faith and Culture* (2003).

Joshua Searle is a graduate of Oxford (BA, MA), Prague (MTh) and Trinity College Dublin (PhD). His doctoral thesis examined interpretations of biblical apocalyptic texts by evangelicals in Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles'. As a member of the Trinity Millennialism Project, he was one of the organizers of a conference on the future of millennial studies, out of which several of the chapters of this volume arose. His articles have been published in international theological journals. He is now working as a researcher and translator at Donetsk Christian University in Ukraine.

Timothy Stunt is a graduate of Cambridge University and has taught history, for some forty-five years, in secondary schools in Britain, Switzerland and the United States. He was awarded a PhD from Cambridge University for *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–1835* which was published by T. & T. Clark in 2000. He has contributed over forty articles to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and has more recently published papers on the development and significance of the work of John Nelson Darby and Anthony Norris Groves. He currently teaches at Wooster School, Danbury, Connecticut.

INTRODUCTION

There are promising signs that millennial studies is now being recognized by the wider academic community as a profitable pursuit that merits serious scholarly attention. More than ever before, the horizons of academic engagement with millennial ideologies and their historical and cultural ramifications are being expanded over a multiplicity of disciplinary perspectives. Historians, theologians, literary critics and social scientists have all been able to establish a compelling unanimity in attesting to the vital historical significance and critical contemporary relevance of millennial thought. Thanks to such interdisciplinary efforts, millennial hope is now recognized as a vital aspect of the human condition and as a dynamic force that has motivated diverse world-historical individuals from Zoroaster[1] and Francis of Assisi[2] to Adolf Hitler[3] and Mao Zedong.[4]

The transformative efficacy of what Ernst Bloch called the 'utopian impulse'[5] is not merely one of the key aspects of human history; it is also a central fact of our own times. Millennial ideologies are prevalent not merely in esoteric millennial cults or doomsday sects; they are also at the heart of the foreign policy of world superpowers[6] as well as being central to some of the most powerful religious forces in our world today, most notably in evangelical Christianity[7] and fundamentalist Islam.[8] Millennialism, for better or

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1. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 29.

2. Richard Landes, 'Millenarianism and the Dynamics of Apocalyptic Time', in *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (ed. Crawford Gribben and Kenneth G.C. Newport; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), pp. 1-23 (2).

3. David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

4. Khiok-Khng Yeo, *Chairman Mao Meets the Apostle Paul: Christianity, Communism, and the Hope of China* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002).

5. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (5 vols.; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973).

6. Michael S. Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: Tauris, 2004).

7. Crawford Gribben, *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

8. Jeffrey T. Kenney, 'Millennialism and Radical Islamist Movements', in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (ed. Catherine Wessinger; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 688-715.

worse, is a decisive fact of our times. Thanks to advances made in the field of millennial studies, scholars engaged in a variety of academic pursuits now acknowledge, as Douglas Shantz notes, that 'apocalyptic and millennial ideas are far more central to western historical consciousness than was previously recognised'.[9] It is thus incumbent on the academic community to undertake rigorous investigations that can offer candid and critical appraisals of the nature and consequences of millennial belief.

The beginning of this present new millennium is an exciting time for millennial studies. The widespread recognition on the part of the academic community concerning the vital impact of millennialism as a decisive change-agent in the contemporary world makes this a particularly auspicious time for further examination of the essence and cultural impact of millennial belief in action. Yet despite a series of major recent publications,[10] the main features of the kind of millennial studies to come have not clearly appeared. Hence, notwithstanding the optimistic signs alluded to in the opening paragraph, it is necessary to sound an appropriate note of caution concerning the future of millennial studies. As with all academic pursuits, the quantity of published material is not always a good indicator of the health or strength of a particular discipline. The year 2000, for instance, saw a phenomenal rise in interest in things millennial. Much of this was rather short-lived and the result of popular enthusiasm unmatched by serious cultural and academic enquiry. The flurry of publications dealing with millennial topics and the popular interest generated in the build up to the year 2000 were not matched by a corresponding academic rigour and careful unpartisan appraisal of the salient cultural repercussions of millennial belief.

This volume aims to promote rigorous academic inquiry into the origins, nature and outcomes of millennial belief by recognizing that millennialism is much more than a passing fad determined by random numbers or arbitrary

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9.   Douglas Shantz, 'Millennialism and Apocalypticism in Recent Historical Scholarship', in *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880* (ed. Crawford Gribben and Timothy C.F. Stunt; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), pp. 18-43 (42). In this essay, Shantz introduces a helpful chronology of recent trends in millennial studies according to a first-, second- and third-generation typology. For a succinct summary of the ways in which millennial ideas have influenced the mainstream theological tradition, see Richard Bauckham, 'Millenarianism', in *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (ed. Paul A.B. Clark and Andrew Linzey; London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 565-69.

10.   Notable examples include Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*; Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert Glenn Howard (ed.), *Network Apocalypse: Visions of the End in an Age of Internet Media* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011); Mark Sweetnam and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Left Behind and the Evangelical Imagination* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011).

historical events and developments. Rather, as this collection argues, millennial belief is symptomatic of the perennial societal and psychological pressures that give rise to both millennial dreams and apocalyptic visions. This book is thus an attempt to come to terms with the question of where we are now in millennial studies. The old landmarks set by early pioneers in millennial studies, most notably by Norman Cohn's *Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957),[11] have now all but faded away as the discipline has adopted new methods and approaches. But while the classics of the past are quite evidently beginning to lose their near-canonical status, it is equally as clear that, as yet, no new authoritative texts have arisen to take their place. The field of millennial studies is littered with unanswered questions. Some of the old issues are coming into even clearer focus and new ones are arising with remarkable frequency.

This book arises out of a perceived need among those engaged in millennial studies to define clearly what these questions are and how they might best be posed and answered in interdisciplinary contexts. As such, this collection gathers together some of the most creative lines of enquiry currently being pursued and seeks to outline what the subject might look like over the next several decades. The unifying theme of the various contributions consists in the authors' focus on the future of this emerging field of academic pursuit from their respective disciplinary perspectives. With contributions from practitioners active in a variety of scholarly discourses, including history, theology, literary criticism, critical theory, biblical studies and hermeneutics, this volume aims not merely to elucidate current scholarly trends but also to expand the frontiers of millennial studies by offering an interdisciplinary approach to the study of millennialism, not as an esoteric concern of so-called millennial 'specialists', but as one of the defining issues of our time.

By emphasizing the interdisciplinarity of millennial studies, the editors recognize that millennialism is a diverse and multivalent phenomenon that will always resist attempts to explain it in the exclusive terms of one particular approach, whether this be psychology, philosophy, history, theology, literary criticism or any other discipline with a disciplinary stake. The broad scope of millennial belief requires an equally open-minded and comprehensive mode of enquiry if it is to be understood adequately in all its richness, diversity and complexity.

This volume, while jettisoning the unrealistic ambition to be an exhaustive examination of all the possible ways of examining millennial phenomena, sets itself the ambitious aim of provoking a new discussion in the debate concerning the place of millennial belief in the academy as well as in the

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11. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Mercury Books, 1962 [1957]).

broader cultural discourse. Some of the chapters address the issue of the future of millennial studies in broad, theoretical terms by mapping out the scholarly terrain and creating new ways of conceptualizing the means by which millennial studies can be used to elucidate aspects of contemporary culture. Others focus more specifically on particular issues of historical or theological interest which illuminate the possibilities, challenges and opportunities of future explorations in millennial studies.

The volume begins with Crawford Gribben's authoritative and comprehensive study of the history of millennial studies since the publication of Norman Cohn's *Pursuit of the Millennium* in 1957. The recent trends in the emerging field of millennial studies are introduced by Gribben, who uses his insights into these developments to forward some speculative but well-grounded conjectures and predictions concerning the potential direction of millennial studies in the coming decades. Gribben's chapter also contains a valuable critical discussion on the use of the term 'millennialism' in contemporary scholarship.

Andrew Crome's chapter uses a case study on the history of 'Judeo-centric' millenarianism in the early modern period in order to examine the role of different understandings of history in millennial studies. As well as raising concerns that research into early millenarianism could be misused to justify contemporary politico-theological movements, this chapter also raises the significant and problematic issue of the failure of prophecy and the historical validity of millennial belief. The echo of that old adage 'prophecy never fails' can be heard at many points in this volume and seems set to remain in the consciousness of those who come to the discipline in future decades for whom it will, in all probability, be maintained as a major concern.

In the next chapter, Timothy Stunt provides an important historical case study of the millennial beliefs of John Nelson Darby and the Powerscourt *milieu*. The premillennial dispensationalism of Darby continues to exert a decisive influence on evangelical eschatology in many parts of the world, particularly among Christian fundamentalists in the United States of America. With careful and original scholarship, Stunt helpfully uncovers the ways in which the millennial ideas of those associated with Powerscourt resembled and contrasted with those of Darby. This enables him to provide significant insights into the ways in which millennial thinking is shaped by circumstantial factors and subjective interpretations. Stunt's chapter thus provides an important historical context within which to situate current millennial belief and in particular that of dispensationalism.

Andrew Pierce offers a different perspective. In his chapter he notes how in 1907 Pope Pius X issued the encyclical letter *Pascendi Domenici gregis*, in which he defined and condemned the heresy of 'modernism'. Against the threat of modernism, Pierce observes, Pius enforced the return to a

'medievalism' (a term devised by the Irish-born modernist George Tyrrell, 1861–1909). Pierce argues that the extent to which millennial hopes and fears suffused the modernist crisis is insufficiently acknowledged in the current literature on the period. This lends strength to Troeltsch's famous remark that, at the end of the nineteenth century, things were quiet at the eschatological bureau. By focusing on the twin contested terms—modernist and medievalist—Pierce's chapter shows how the conflict between resisting and enforcing a return to the medieval suggests that matters were not as quiet as Troeltsch supposed. The chapter hence demonstrates the persistence of millennial belief as both a demonstrated past and very likely future phenomenon. In short the myth of the 'golden age', which is to be both reclaimed and reconstituted, never tarnishes, and scholars may hence reasonably predict that such belief will outlive the passing of any particular sequence of numbers to which chronology gives rise.

Jennie Chapman's chapter draws on the popular Left Behind series of 'rapture fiction' in order to uncover some of the tensions and inconsistencies at the heart of current premillennial dispensationalism. Identifying a 'fictional turn' in contemporary dispensationalism, Chapman examines the contradiction between the purported 'literalist' content of premillennialism and the fictional mode of the popular novel through which its message is propagated. The chapter concludes with the speculation that the 'fictional turn' will lead to the fragmentation and possible disintegration of popular dispensationalism and that this will have important implications for the future of millennial studies.

In his chapter on 'Mediated Apotheosis', Rob Howard considers the issue of authority in millennial interpretations against the backdrop of the massive cultural change triggered by the unprecedented expansion of new communication technologies, particularly the Internet. Developing the notion of 'vernacular authority', Howard provides a valuable model for future explorations of the ways in which millennial visions feed on the technology-driven transformation of human culture. Through a series of illuminating examples drawn from discussions on open web forums discussing millennial topics, Howard argues that the 'digital apotheosis' of contemporary culture provides scholars in millennial studies with a unique opportunity to understand the role of popular forms of millennialism in shaping contemporary religious discourses.

Joshua Searle's chapter explores the culturally transformative dimensions of millennial discourse and offers a theological reflection on the salient points of convergence between millennial studies and eschatological hope. While acknowledging the need to understand the darker aspects of millennialism, this chapter argues that future explorations in millennial studies should devote more attention to the positive aspects of human flourishing and

fulfilment that lie at the heart of millennial visions. This chapter proposes that the metaphor of the eschatological city, the New Jerusalem, provides a pertinent model for understanding the ways in which hope functions in millennial discourses.

Eugene Gallagher likewise considers the broader social impact of millennial ideas by focusing on the issue of authority in millennial interpretation and the question of how millennialists seek to establish the plausibility of their beliefs. Drawing on illuminating case studies of the Mayan prophecy and millennial belief in contemporary Adventism, Gallagher proposes a model for understanding the various ways in which millennialists attempt to establish the persuasiveness of their prophetic schemes. Gallagher argues that, despite the many problems and contradictions in millennial belief and notwithstanding the failure of millennial predictions and the inevitable resulting disappointment and disillusionment, millennialism *per se* will remain as an enduring feature of human experience. The millennial mind is resourceful and creative, maintains Gallagher, who concludes that millennial studies has an important role to play in understanding how the 'inchoate yearnings for a transformed world make the transition into passionate proclamations and programs for action'.

Remaining with the notion of hope, the final chapter, by Kenneth G.C. Newport, explores the ways in which the millennial mind adapts itself in creative ways in order to give hope for the future, even in the face of failure and dashed apocalyptic expectations. Taking up the notion that for the millennialist, 'prophecy never fails', Newport makes an important case concerning the exceptional versatility of the millennial mind. In spite of the apparent disproval of millennial predictions by historical time and experience, the versatility of the millennial mind is such that it is able to interpret even the most crushing disappointments as apparent stages in an inevitable progression of events that will eventually culminate in hope. This fact alone, concludes Newport, is enough to ensure the continued endurance of millennialism, even long after particular millennial prophecies have been apparently disproved or discredited.

This volume has three distinct reading audiences in mind. First, it aims to reach those who are new to millennial studies and who wish to understand the terminology and methodologies particular to this academic discourse. The collection also provides an example of the kind of research being pursued in a variety of disciplinary contexts. Secondly, the editors hope that this book will appeal to general readers seeking to understand the fresh and imaginative ways in which millennial worldviews influence the way people interpret culture. This work strives to achieve this aim by developing creative ways of conceiving the relationship between millennial hermeneutics and the interpretation of culture generally. As such, it is hoped that this volume will make

an original contribution to the broader ongoing debates concerning the cultural expressions of millennial belief. Thirdly, we hope that the work will be of interests to scholars who are already active in millennial studies. The research collected in this volume is original and offers new and creative perspectives from which to comprehend the current state of play in this exciting and emergent field of academic inquiry.

Although the articles of this volume are situated within the academic discourse of millennial studies and employ the vocabulary and conceptual frameworks specific to this field, the editors have striven to make the book as accessible as possible and to appeal to those who come from a variety of disciplines. The intentional multidisciplinary scope of this volume means that it contains new insights into millennial phenomena that will be of interest to historians, theologians, literary critics and, more generally, to all those interested in the relationship between intellectual ideas and their expression in culture in our time. Thus the editors hope that this collection will make a distinctive and original contribution to an ongoing, lively and vibrant discussion concerning the living relevance of millennialism as a culturally transformative discourse in today's world.

Joshua Searle, Trinity College Dublin
Kenneth G.C. Newport, Liverpool Hope University
May, 2012

Evangelicalism, Historiography and the Possibility of Millennial Theory*

Crawford Gribben

Since the publication of Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957),[1] millennial studies has established itself as an intellectual practice stretching across and beyond the normal boundaries of arts and humanities scholarship. Throughout this period, the transdisciplinary descriptive and analytical frameworks adopted within millennial studies have regularly been invested with an almost prophetic nuance, as scholars working in the field have extrapolated from historicized case studies the likely life-cycle of contemporary apocalyptic communities.[2] These predictive claims have been made possible by a move towards the development of a general theory of millennial ideas and ethics, which, as might be expected, has attracted the interest of law enforcement agencies concerned to monitor and police believers' movement into 'apocalyptic time'.[3] This general theory has been most recently fully and persuasively articulated in the essays in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* edited by Catherine Wessinger (2011)[4] and in Richard Landes's *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (2011).[5] These two volumes may do more than any others since

   1.   Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Mercury Books, 1962 [1957]).
   2.   See Michael Barkun, 'Project Megiddo, the FBI and the Academic Community', in *Millennial Violence: Past, Present and Future* (ed. Jeffrey Kaplan; London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 97-108, and other essays in the volume for examples and critiques of this trend.
   3.   Jeffrey Kaplan reported that the FBI had attended every meeting of the American Academy of Religion since 1998, and that attendees of the AAR conference in 2000 were invited to attend a simulated hostage negotiation; Jeffrey Kaplan, 'Introduction', in Kaplan (ed.), *Millennial Violence*, p. 5.
   4.   Catherine Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
   5.   Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The Pursuit of the Millennium to consolidate and codify millennial studies as an urgent interdisciplinary concern. Nevertheless it is not yet clear that this move towards a general theory of millennial studies is warranted, either by the evidence upon which this theory tends to draw or by the predictive claims it may be used to make.

   This chapter will document trends in millennial studies scholarship over the last three decades to argue the paradox that the subject has lost its popular cultural status and its scholarship has grown increasingly rarefied as the study of apocalyptic religion has become ever more vital to our understanding of the complexities and contingencies of the contemporary world and the threat of terror. It will interrogate the possibility of a general theory of millennial belief and behaviour in a survey and critique of existing scholarship and will suggest what may be more fruitful research themes for the future of millennial studies.

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Some people are prepared to go to unusual lengths for an immersion in millennial studies scholarship. In Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975), one of the most significant campus novels of the 1970s, the leftist wife of a sociology lecturer in a university in the south of England is discovered reading *The Pursuit of the Millennium* in the bath.[6] This placement of Cohn's text recognizes the extent to which millennial ideologies were influencing the radical and secular discourses of the period. But as the 1970s progressed, the scholarship of millennial studies lost its distinctive cultural niche. In Britain it all but slipped from public consciousness. In America things were rather different, as evangelical millennial believers such as Hal Lindsey reinvented the institutions that would propel them into the political spotlight and associate them with the presidential triumphs of the 'year of the evangelical' (*Newsweek*).[7] Such events drove the explosion of scholarly interest in religious fundamentalism in subsequent decades, and, as believers in a range of other established and new religious movements participated in 'the most intense burst of millennialism in American history',[8] interest was

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   6.   Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man* (London: Picador, 2000 [1975]), p. 76. The motif found a real-life counterpart in an anecdote contained in the prefatory material to the second edition of George M. Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1995 [1987]), a non-fiction tale of tensions (caused by millennial difference) among the faculty on a college campus: Marsden recounted being surprised to discover that his wife had been reading his book in the bath (p. vii).

   7.   *Newsweek*, 25 October 1976, pp. 68-78.

   8.   Richard Bauckham, 'Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* Revisited', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989), pp. 199-214 (201); Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in*

sustained. There were occasional nods towards scholarly activity in the *fin-de-siècle* mood that dominated the popular culture of the late 1990s. These included the *Times Literary Supplement*'s listing of *The Pursuit of the Millennium* among 'the hundred most influential books since the war' (1995).[9] Of note also is the lecture on apocalyptic thought presented by Madeleine Stowe's character in *12 Monkeys* (1995),[10] a film which considers the links between millennial studies scholars and law enforcement agencies that had become so controversial after the tragic dénouement of the siege of the Branch Davidian community in Waco, Texas (1993). Yet these public glimpses of millennial studies scholarship were exceptional. While British millennialism, with its leftist and radical leanings, seemed to evaporate, and American millennialism, with its extraordinary popularity, became increasingly identified with conservative evangelical politics (as seen, for example, in the Left Behind series), the discipline of millennial studies dropped from public view and made its most significant advances within the academy.

Throughout the last few decades, millennial studies has been developed across the arts and humanities disciplines. Following the conclusions of Rudolf Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* (1948–53)[11] and Ernst Käseman's argument that apocalyptic was the 'mother of all Christian theology', biblical scholars have continued to argue that the Christian faith was born with a distinctive attitude of hope.[12] Scholars in other disciplines have argued that the basic framework of Christian theology has never left that hope behind.[13] The case was put most famously by Jürgen Moltmann, whose *Theology of Hope* (1964) argued that 'from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, [the Christian faith] is eschatology, is hope… The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of the Christian faith as such.'[14] Moreover, this 'Christian eschatology', Moltmann

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the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 110-24; Michael Barkun, 'Millennialism on the Radical Right in America', in Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, pp. 649-66 (649).

9.   *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 October 1995, p. 39.

10.   *12 Monkeys*, dir. by Terry Gilliam (MCA/Universal Pictures, 1999).

11.   Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1948–53); English translation: *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1951–55).

12.   Ernst Käseman, 'Die Anfänge christlicher Theologie', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 57 (1960), pp. 162-85 (180). For a general survey of contemporary Christian eschatology, see Stephen Williams, 'Thirty Years of Hope: A Generation of Writing on Eschatology', in *'The reader must understand': Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (ed. K.E. Brower and M.W. Elliot; Leicester: Apollos, 1997), pp. 243-62.

13.   J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780–1850* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 3.

14.   Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 2002 [1967]), p. 2.

subsequently insisted, 'is millenarian'.[15] Scholars outside the religious disciplines were sometimes slow to consider the significance of these claims. Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957), the historical account that called attention to the enduring power of millennial belief, went on to become a classic in the field, but in popular terms its immediate impact was dulled by the decline of the utopian protest movements with which it had become associated.[16] Over twenty years after the publication of *The Pursuit of the Millennium* and despite its success, J.F.C. Harrison was still complaining that 'historical understanding of millenarianism does not come easily these days'.[17] But the historical study of millennialism has grown exponentially since Harrison made his claim, and often in dialogue with his account of *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780–1850* (1979). By the middle 1990s, Michael Barkun was able to report that 'the study of millenarian movements has moved from the periphery to the centre. No longer the exclusive domain of small coteries of specialists, it has come to be seen as a major category of social analysis', across the arts, humanities and social sciences.[18] And shortly after that, the editors of *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (1998) observed that the area had attracted more scholarly criticism 'over the past thirty years…than in the previous three hundred. This is true not only regarding [scholarship into] the origins of apocalypticism in Judaism and early Christianity, but also [into] the development of Christian apocalyptic traditions in Europe down to the modern era.'[19] One year later, in a themed issue of the premier scholarly journal of American historians, Paul A. Cohen described millennialism as one of the 'quintessential attitudes of Western civilization'.[20] Some theologians may continue to complain that eschatology is still the 'missing link in much contemporary theology', and find it still pushed to the 'sidelines of scholarly concerns'.[21] There is no

15.   Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 202.

16.   Bradbury, *The History Man*, p. 76; Bauckham, 'Moltmann's Theology of Hope Revisited', p. 201.

17.   Harrison, *The Second Coming*, p. 3.

18.   Michael Barkun (ed.), *Millennialism and Violence* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 1.

19.   John J. Collins, Bernard McGinn and Stephen J. Stein, 'General Introduction', in *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (ed. Bernard McGinn; 3 vols.; New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. ii, xi. The three volumes are arranged as follows: vol. 1—*The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins); vol. 2—*Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture* (ed. Bernard McGinn); vol. 3—*Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age* (ed. Stephen J. Stein).

20.   Paul A. Cohen, 'Time, Culture, and Christian Eschatology: The Year 2000 in the West and the World', *American Historical Review* 104.5 (1999), pp. 1615-38 (1628).

21.   Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (Dublin: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 5; Christopher Rowland, 'Afterword', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25.2 (2002), pp. 255-62 (256).

doubt, however, that the scholarship of millennial studies—like scholarship on the evangelicalism within which it has so often found a home—has moved from the fringes to the centre of academic enquiry.

In part, the new significance of millennial studies appears to reflect the cultural impact of concerns about the technological impact of the transition to the year 2000 and the subsequent and rather sudden visibility of competing, sometimes violent, but equally apocalyptic varieties of religious fundamentalism in the early years of the twenty-first century. In the United States, the most significant contribution to the scholarly literature was made by colleagues associated with the Centre for Millennial Studies at Boston University, a research centre established in the mid-1990s and directed by one of the most important voices in the discipline of millennial studies, Richard Landes.[22] In the approach to the year 2000, the Centre organized a series of conferences and public events designed to facilitate scholarly enquiry and to inform the wider public of that enquiry's results. A more partisan interest in millennial studies has been maintained by the Pre-Trib Study Centre at Liberty University, Virginia, directed by the popular evangelical prophecy writer Thomas Ice. The Pre-Trib Centre, the name of which identifies its commitment to defending dispensational (that is, 'pre-tribulation') premillennialism, has hosted a series of annual conferences attended by many of the leading advocates of American dispensationalism. These institutional networks are overwhelmingly North American. In Europe, there is little that can be compared to them, despite the establishment of the Centre for Millennialism Studies, based at Liverpool Hope University, and the Trinity Millennialism Project, based at Trinity College Dublin, and the colloquia these research centres have sponsored.[23] In Europe, as not in the USA, millennialism retains something of its marginality, both among academics and religious believers.

This imbalance in American and European scholarly and popular interests is reflected in the literature that has been produced on the topic. Most examples of millennial studies scholarship demonstrate very specific kinds of attention, and often have an American bias. This is especially true in the study of evangelical millennialism, with implications for millennial studies as a whole. Work in evangelical millennialism has often been particular, and until

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22. The Centre maintains a website at <www.mille.org>.

23. The colloquia have resulted in the publication of a number of conference volumes, including Crawford Gribben and Timothy C.F. Stunt (eds.), *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880* (Studies in Evangelical History and Thought; Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004); Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes (eds.), *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790–2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Expecting the End: Contemporary Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Baylor, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), as well as the present volume.

very recently scholars had not produced an overarching historical account of
the development and evolution of the phenomenon. L.E. Froom's *The
Prophetic Faith of our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic
Interpretation* (1948)[24] provided a broad chronological range of evangelical
case studies from the point of view of the Seventh-day Adventist convictions
of its author and publisher, but it is by now dated and unreliable in some
important respects. The best recent example of broad coverage has been
provided by the *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, a three-volume work edited
by Bernard McGinn (1998),[25] the non-narrative construction of which bal-
anced wide thematic, chronological and geographical concerns. In this
respect, the *Encyclopedia* was similar to *Prophecy and Eschatology*, a collec-
tion of essays edited by Michael Wilks (1994), to *Millennialism, Persecution,
and Violence: Historical Cases* (2000), edited by Catherine Wessinger, and
to *Christian Millennarianism: From the Early Church to Waco* (2001), a
collection of essays edited by Stephen Hunt that situated evangelical case
studies alongside others related to Roman Catholics, Seventh-Day Advent-
ists, and Japanese Buddhist 'cults'.[26] A series of narrative overviews, some of
them written from a distinctively evangelical perspective, did appear in the
later 1990s, but with evidently polemical purpose: Richard Kyle's *Awaiting
the Millennium: A History of End-Time Thought* (1998) and *The New Millen-
nium Manual: A Once and Future Guide* (1999), co-authored by Robert G.
Clouse, Robert N. Hosack and Richard V. Pierard, were published to warn
evangelicals off the hysteria surrounding the *fin-de-millennium*.[27] John M.
Court's *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian
Millennialism* (2008) provided a very sketchy history of early evangelical-
ism, offering nothing on reformation and discussing the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries in one chapter of eight pages before moving directly to
Edward Irving and his nineteenth-century contexts.[28] Contemporaneous
accounts were provided by Eugene Weber, in *Apocalypses: Prophecies,
Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (1999) and Frederic

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24.   L.E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers: The Historical Development of
Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1948).

25.   Collins, McGinn and Stein (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*.

26.   Michael Wilks (ed.), *Prophecy and Eschatology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994);
Catherine Wessinger (ed.), *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*
(Syracuse*:* Syracuse University Press, 2000); Stephen Hunt (ed.), *Christian Millennarian-
ism: From the Early Church to Waco* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

27.   Richard Kyle, *Awaiting the Millennium: A History of End-Time Thought* (Notting-
ham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998); Robert G. Clouse, Robert N. Hosack and Richard V.
Pierard, *The New Millennium Manual: A Once and Future Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker
Books, 1999).

28.   John M. Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian
Millennialism* (London: Tauris, 2008).

Baumgartner, in *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (1999).[29] Kenneth G.C. Newport's fine study of *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (2000) focused with good effect on particular case studies in the history of apocalyptic exegesis in the post-Reformation period but did not attempt to offer an overview of the area as a whole.[30]

Most studies of evangelical millennialism have adopted a specific focus. A number of scholars have published distinguished accounts of the development of evangelical millennialism within salient themes. Christopher Hill's account of *Antichrist in Seventeenth-century England* (1971) was followed by David Brady's *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18* (1983), Rodney L. Peterson's *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of 'Two Witnesses' in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1993) and Robert Fuller's *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (1995).[31] Philip Jenkins' *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (2000) examined evangelical millennial convictions within the context of contemporary concerns about 'new religious movements'.[32]

Other scholars have focused on the development of evangelical millennial theories within specific periods. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attracted most attention in the 1970s, though the focus of these accounts was generally on England. This approach was adopted by B.W. Ball's *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (1975) and by Richard Bauckham's *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth-Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation* (1978), while Paul Christianson's *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (1978) covered similar material to Katherine Firth's more expansive consideration of *The*

29.   Eugene Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Toronto: Random House, 1999); Frederic Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: Palgrave, 1999).

30.   Kenneth G.C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

31.   Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983); Rodney L. Peterson, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of 'Two Witnesses' in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

32.   Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645 (1979).[33] Scholars returned to early modern evangelical millennialism as the *fin-de-millennium* approached. Irena Backus's *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich and Wittenberg* (2000) appeared alongside two monographs by Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted, 1588–1638* (2000), a model elucidation of an important German encyclopaedist, and *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heirich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (2000).[34] My own study of *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (2000) is one of the most recent and comprehensive studies of the early modern period, but does not consider examples from North America and, in any case, is already partially outdated by new research, including impressive studies of the most significant eschatological theorists in early modern England, Jeffrey K. Jue's thorough and engaging intellectual biography of Joseph Mede (2006), Andrew Crome's pioneering work on Thomas Brightman (2009) and Warren Johnston's outstanding study of *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (2011).[35]

Evangelical millennialism in the eighteenth century has tended to attract less interest. James A. de Jong's *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640–1810* (1970) is a rare example of a study of the theology of the period.[36] Edward J. Ahearn's *Visionary Fictions: Apocalyptic Writing from Blake to the Modern Age* (1996) and Christopher Burdon's *The Apocalypse in England: Revelation Unravelling, 1700–1834* (1997) provide a helpful overview of the cultural

33.   B.W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth-Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay, 1978); Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

34.   Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse*: *Geneva, Zurich and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted, 1588–1638* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); and *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).

35.   Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000); Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven on Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2000); Andrew Crome, 'The Jews and the Literal Sense: Hermeneutical Approaches in the Apocalyptic Commentaries of Thomas Brightman (1562–1607)' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2009); Warren Johnston, *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011).

36.   James A. de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640–1810* (Kampen: Kok, 1970).

impact of millennial ideas, though their material is strongly directed towards discussions of English 'literary' writing.[37] North American contexts were addressed more explicitly in Ruth Bloch's *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (1985) and in *The Apocalyptic Vision in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on Myth and Culture* (1982), a collection of essays edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora.[38] W.H. Oliver's *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (1978) juxtaposes Anglo-American evangelical with Southcottian contexts, but was almost immediately overshadowed by J.F.C. Harrison's *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780–1850* (1979), which covered less of the same ground but provided an influential discussion of methodological concerns.[39]

Much of the other literature on evangelical millennialism in the nineteenth century has become dated, with the notable exception of David W. Bebbington's article on 'The Advent Hope in British Evangelicalism since 1800' (1988) and Timothy C.F. Stunt's exceptional prosopography, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–35* (2000), which, despite the geographical contexts signalled by its title, also provided a great deal of information on Irish evangelical thinkers.[40] Other Irish contexts were usefully surveyed in *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790–2000* (2006), a collection of essays edited by Andrew R. Holmes and the present author.[41] North American contexts have been well documented in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Paul E. Johnson, in *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (1978), provided a micro-historical consideration of the use and abuse of millennial ideologies. The excitements of the 1840s were described in Ruth Alden Doan's *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (1987), in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (1987), co-edited by Ronald L.

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37.   Edward J. Ahearn, *Visionary Fictions: Apocalyptic Writing from Blake to the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Christopher Burdon, *The Apocalypse in England: Revelation Unravelling, 1700–1834* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997).

38.   Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Lois Parkinson Zamora (ed.), *The Apocalyptic Vision in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on Myth and Culture* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982).

39.   W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

40.   David W. Bebbington, 'The Advent Hope in British Evangelicalism since 1800', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 9.2 (1988), pp. 103-14; Timothy C.F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–35* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000).

41.   Gribben and Holmes (eds.), *Protestant Millennialism*.

Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, and in Michael Barkun's *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (1986).[42] The investigation was continued in James H. Moorhead's *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (1978) and *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880–1925* (1999), which moved scholarly interests from evangelical to 'liberal' protestant religion.[43] But it is among conservative protestants that the millennial hope has most obviously endured. The importance of conservative contexts was demonstrated in Ernest Sandeen's *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (1970), which retains its position as a central text in the area, although many of its conclusions have been heavily qualified, not least by George M. Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (1980).[44] The work of Sandeen and Marsden was most important for its insights into the revival of millennial convictions among early twentieth-century fundamentalists. This culture continued to be investigated in Dwight Wilson's *Armageddon Now! The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel since 1917* (1977) and in Timothy P. Weber's *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1982* (1983).[45] The history of dispensationalism has itself been surveyed in C. Norman Kraus's *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (1958) and, in an important case study, in George M. Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (1987).[46]

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42.   Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (eds.), *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

43.   James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), and *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

44.   Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

45.   Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now! The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel since 1917* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977); Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1982* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

46.   C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958); George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

Marsden's history presented its institutional concerns within the context of the popular culture from which Fuller Seminary had emerged. Paul Boyer extended our understanding of that popular culture in rich, compelling and sometimes lurid detail in *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (1992).[47] Its British dimensions have been explored in *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (1997) and *Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church* (2004), by Damian Thompson, and its astonishingly successful literary ventures have been examined in Amy Johnson Frykholm's *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (2004) and the present author's *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (2009).[48] The political implications of dispensationalism have been examined by Grace Halsell, in *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (1986), A.G. Mojtabai's *Blessed Assurance: At Home with the Bomb in Amarillo, Texas* (1986) and Gershom Gorenberg's *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (2002), and, at a popular level, by Nicholas Guyatt, in *Have a Nice Doomsday: Why Millions of Americans Are Looking Forward to the End of the World* (2007), and by Michael Northcott, in *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (2004).[49] These texts have ranged throughout and at times beyond evangelical millennial cultures.

This eclectic range of scholarship combines to offer a series of conclusions. First, the historical variety of millennial belief across the trans-Atlantic world should challenge assumptions that eschatological fascination is no more than a reflector of modern American exceptionalism. Though they have often been dismissed as marginal to the Christian mainstream, apocalyptic

47. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

48. Damian Thompson, *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), and *Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Crawford Gribben, *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

49. Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1986); A.G. Mojtabai, *Blessed Assurance: At Home with the Bomb in Amarillo, Texas* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nicholas Guyatt, *Have a Nice Doomsday: Why Millions of Americans Are Looking Forward to the End of the World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007); Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: Tauris, 2004).

and millennial beliefs have frequently been central to the construction of the Christian faith in its many varieties of expression. But they have not always been central in ways that scholars expect. For, secondly, scholars of millennial studies have frequently drawn upon what they have assumed to be an historic vocabulary of eschatological terminology to conceptualize analytical approaches to millennialism across and far beyond the Christian tradition. Ironically, as my recent account of *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000* (2011) demonstrates, the most common analytical terms used in these studies of the evangelical millennial tradition—terms like 'premillennialism', 'postmillennialism' and 'amillennialism'—are actually of relatively recent origin.[50] The assumption common to each of the exegetical positions defined by these terms—the assumption that Rev. 20.1-10, however it may be understood, refers to only one period of one thousand years—has not been shared by all evangelical expositors. The variety of readings of Rev. 20.1-10 may therefore render these terms redundant. In any case, their use in studies of the earlier period is anachronistic: according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'premillennial' was first noted in 1846, 'postmillennial' was first noted in 1851 and 'amillennialism' does not have an entry at all. These terms cannot be used without proper qualification to explicate concepts across the history of evangelical millennialism, therefore—and neither can they be used to explicate concepts beyond the evangelical millennial tradition. Future millennial studies scholarship must reconsider the linguistic and conceptual assumptions that the existing literature has too often taken for granted and find new tools to facilitate its heuristic labour.

II

Some of the most useful attempts to provide a theoretical overview of millennial studies have attempted to avoid the use of the 'premillennial', 'postmillennial' and 'amillennial' terms. Ernest Lee Tuveson produced two studies, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (1949), which developed a general account of the phenomenon with a focus on the post-Reformation by distinguishing 'millennialists' (believers who adopt postmillennial, optimistic and gradualist theologies) from 'millenarians' (believers who adopt premillennial, pessimistic and radical theologies), and *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (1968).[51] These were followed by *Millennial Dreams in Action: Studies in*

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50. Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000*, pp. 10-16.

51. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), and *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

Revolutionary Religious Movements (1970), a collection of essays edited by Sylvia Thrupp, which had been prepared across the previous decade to set a scholarly agenda for the new directions pursued by millennial scholars throughout the 1970s.[52] Together with sociological work by Bryan Wilson, these texts provided the emerging discipline with a theoretical vocabulary that endured until the re-conception of millennial studies and the emergence of a general theory in the last decade of the twentieth century. This new approach to millennial theory was driven by careful investigations of contemporary phenomena: Stephen D. O'Leary's *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (1994) was followed by *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (1995), an interdisciplinary collection of essays edited by Malcolm Bull, and Richard Landes's landmark essay on 'Millennialism' (2004), which provided the emerging interdiscipline with its most succinct and compelling agenda to date.[53] Comprehensive theoretical overviews were provided by *War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth: Theories in the Apocalyptic* (2005), edited by Stephen D. O'Leary and Glen S. McGhee, a wide-ranging collection of essays that considered key themes in millennial scholarship alongside case studies that juxtaposed evangelical foci with others ranging from early Islam to Nazi and native American cultures.[54] This movement towards a general theory was brought to completion in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, edited by Catherine Wessinger (2011), and Richard Landes's *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (2011), which drew upon differing sets of conceptual tools to establish a transdisciplinary vocabulary useful for the description of millennial ideas and communities and, in the case of Landes, a description of their possible futures.

   One of the most useful contributions made by the Wessinger and Landes volumes may be their movement away from the 'deprivation thesis' that so many earlier studies had assumed. This often reductive interpretive paradigm had worked on the assumption that believers' move into 'apocalyptic time' could be explained by the social factors attending their circumstances—and, in its crudest form, argued that millennial ideas evolved in reaction to their contexts. The Wessinger and Landes volumes move beyond the 'deprivation

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52. Sylvia Thrupp (ed.), *Millennial Dreams in Action: Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970).

53. Stephen D. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Richard Landes, 'Millennialism', in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* (ed. James R. Lewis; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 333-58.

54. Stephen D. O'Leary and Glen S. McGhee (eds.), *War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth: Theories in the Apocalyptic* (London: Equinox, 2005).

thesis' and its associated anthropological, sociological and descriptive modes by adopting a more nuanced analytical approach. But their approach is not without some difficulties.

The first difficulty of the Wessinger and Landes approach relates to the authors' rather broad application of the term 'millennialism'. In its most careful usage, 'millennialism' has a very specific reference to Christian exegetical tradition, and draws upon the reception history of Rev. 20.1-10. Christian millennial writers, through the centuries, have argued that this passage justifies their belief in a specific eschatological framework in which a period of time with distinctive and perhaps unique characteristics is inserted between the second coming of Jesus Christ and the last judgment. The decision to use this very specific term structurally, rather than theologically, enables the discussion of a much wider range of religious ideologies, as we will see, though it runs the risk of being reductive—and certainly does not allow each religious tradition to be analyzed within its own conceptual framework.

The second difficulty with this method, which is particularly problematic in terms of the Wessinger approach, is its definition of the term 'millennialism'. First, the term is generally equated with 'apocalyptic', and often loses its specific function as pointing to an intermediate period as arguably outlined in Rev. 20.1-10. This might explain why one contributor refers to the debate as to 'whether Jesus himself was a millennialist prophet'.[55] This is not a debate among biblical scholars, who argue whether Jesus was a preacher of an imminent eschatology—there is no sense in this extensive literature that Jesus preached about a millennium per se. Secondly, the term is given a contestable definition. Wessinger's introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* defines millennialism as:

> belief in an imminent transition to a collective salvation, in which the faithful will experience well-being, and the unpleasant limitations of the human condition will be eliminated. The collective salvation is often considered to be earthly, but it can also be heavenly. The collective salvation will be accomplished either by a divine or superhuman agent alone, or with the assistance of humans working according to the divine or superhuman will and plan.[56]

What makes this definition so complex is its insistence on imminence. The term 'imminent' is used repeatedly in the pages following the definition itself. Curiously, Wessinger follows this definition with a description of premillennialism, which she approximates to 'catastrophic millennialism', and postmillennialism, which she approximates to 'progressive millennialism'.[57]

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55. Eugene V. Gallagher, 'Catastrophic Millennialism', in Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, pp. 27-43 (29).

56. Catherine Wessinger, 'Millennialism in Cross-cultural Perspective', in Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, pp. 3-26 (5).

57. Wessinger, 'Millennialism in Cross-cultural Perspective', p. 5.

The irony, of course, is that postmillennialism does not necessitate any belief in an imminent millennium, for, as W. Michael Ashcraft notes later in the volume, some groups 'anticipate that the coming Millennium will dawn slowly but surely'.[58]

There are also difficulties with the manner in which these definitions are used. Wessinger is careful to note that premillennialism should be described as 'catastrophic millennialism as a broader category that is not tied to Christian doctrines' and that postmillennialism should be described as 'progressive millennialism' in 'cross-cultural studies'.[59] But it is impossible to escape the fact that the Christian concepts which lie behind these competing models of millennial expectation are simply being re-named and imposed upon the eschatological frameworks of religious individuals and communities, which may have nothing at all in common with any of the varieties of Christian faith. And, as we have already noted, the conceptual frameworks which Wessinger here renames, which have emerged only relatively recent into the evangelical theological glossary, may not even be useful in describing eschatological theories within the history of Christianity itself. Ashcraft illustrates the limits of the existing analytical vocabulary when he notes that the millennial ideas of New England puritans were 'neither postmillennial nor premillennial, but some of both'.[60] These labels cannot be applied to describe much of the exegetical work of this period because they refer to prophetic paradigms which were much later developed, as their citations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggest. It is odd that scholars working in an area so attuned to religious difference should seek to give an account of those traditions using analytical concepts drawn from Christian and often specifically evangelical culture, and yet, as Massimo Introvigne notes, 'discussions on terminology are endless'.[61]

Richard Landes's work, meanwhile, has been developing a new language of millennial description for more than a decade, and his new proposals for a broader and more usefully heuristic terminology are outlined in his latest book, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (2011). Landes is well placed to guide readers through this perplexing intellectual terrain. As was noted above, Landes, a professor of medieval history at Boston University, set up and oversaw the development of the Centre for Millennial Studies, the premier academic collaboration for the study of events leading up to Y2K. Although he has done more than perhaps any other

58.   W. Michael Ashcraft, 'Progressive Millennialism', in Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, pp. 44-65 (44).

59.   Wessinger, 'Millennialism in Cross-cultural Perspective', p. 5.

60.   Ashcraft, 'Progressive Millennialism', p. 48.

61.   Massimo Introvigne, 'Modern Catholic Millennialism', in Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, pp. 549-66 (551).

scholar to establish the contours of the discipline, his writing in *Heaven on Earth* is often defensive. Landes argues that 'by and large historians do not like treating millennial movements', and that these scholars would recognize only a handful of his case studies as genuinely apocalyptic moments.[62] Nevertheless, *Heaven on Earth* builds on decades of scholarly work on the origins and evolution of a chronologically, geographically and religiously diverse selection of millennial movements.

Heaven on Earth insists on the importance of its subject. 'The study of millennialism as a historical force is the study of disappointment', Landes observes, 'and a study of how extravagant optimists have come to terms with their failed hopes'. He notes a 'key paradox' that 'although millennialism has always proven wrong in its apocalyptic expectations, it has rarely proven inconsequential or unproductive'.[63] This is why, he explains in his 'laws of apocalyptic dynamics', 'wrong does not mean inconsequential' and 'one person's messiah is another's antichrist'.[64] To demonstrate this thesis, *Heaven on Earth* offers the reader eleven case studies of millennial and apocalyptic movements. Landes's introduction makes clear that he has chosen to describe only non-Jewish and non-Christian varieties of millennial experience—which is a curious decision, given his acknowledgement that these religions are 'two of the most profoundly millennial religious cultures in world history' and his recognition that significant actors in the Taiping and Xhosa apocalyptic movements believed themselves to be the little brothers of Jesus, as well as the fact that Adolf Hitler and proponents of radical jihad have drawn explicitly on the Bible.[65] Nevertheless, *Heaven on Earth* wants to move beyond the focus that many of its readers might expect it to adopt, and to construct a grand theory of millennial belief and practice. And so, with expansive geographical and chronological range and deft analysis, Landes's book describes and draws lessons from examples of tribal millennialism (focusing on the Xhosa cattle-slaying and the Papuan cargo cults), agrarian millennialism (describing Pharaoh Akhenaten and Taiping), secular millennialism (analysing the French Revolution, Marx and Marxism, the Russian Revolution and Nazism) and postmodern millennialism (examining UFO cults and the course of global jihad), offering extensive additional information available on an associated website.[66]

Landes believes that the most controversial part of his argument will be his general theory of millennial behaviour. This general theory certainly has its limits—and not just in its sketches of the behavioural types of 'roosters',

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62. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 63.
63. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 45.
64. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 14-15.
65. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 84, 93, 362, 421.
66. <www.richardlandes.com/hoe> (accessed 14 August 2012).

'owls', 'bats' and 'turkeys'. Landes's writing is given to grand gestures: witness his claims that millennialism is 'the most protean belief in human history', that 'the West' is 'the most millennial culture in world history', and that 'modernity itself is a European millennial dream with a long genealogy'.[67] Behind this sweeping inclusion is, I think, the subtle danger of Landes's approach: by identifying 'millennial' structures of thinking and behaviour outside of the two religious cultures from which Western millennial theology emerged, he paradoxically runs the danger of simplifying and homogenizing an extraordinary and chaotic range of thinking and behaviour. By so reducing the complexity of the pattern, he can find it everywhere. There are dangers when a grand theory analyses a grand narrative.

Despite Landes's expectations of other scholars' concerns about his terminological creativity, nevertheless the most controversial element of his new book may actually be its description and analysis of radical Islam. Landes's wider scholarly contribution is sometimes driven by his commitment to Israel, and his description of one element of Israel's enemies seems inflected by this political presupposition. The most lively and urgent of the chapters in *Heaven on Earth* is the final chapter, in which Landes describes 'global jihad, the first major worldwide apocalyptic movement of the third millennium', which rides 'on a wave of unprecedented globalization, population mobility, and instant communication systems' and which 'constitutes potentially the largest, most powerful' and 'most problematic movement in the long and convulsive history of millennialism'.[68] He believes that the failure of secular scholars to recognize the motivating power of religious belief in the contemporary world explains in part the muddled reaction to the events of 9/11 and the ensuing 'war on terror'. And the chapter calls attention to what may be the most serious gap in the literature of millennial studies across the disciplines—the millennial predispositions of Islamism.

Landes's description of Islamism as a millennial faith is made possible by the trend in recent scholarship to identify millennialism in structural rather than theological terms. Although Landes uses the structural approach with real heuristic skill, at times it appears that he wants to read Islamism as a cipher for the religion of which it is one expression. 'Of all the monotheistic religions steeped in millennial and apocalyptic traditions…Islam has had the least amount of scholarly attention paid to its apocalyptic origins', he explains, and the work that has been done on it is dedicated to 'not bruising Muslims' self-esteem'.[69] Landes's vigorous reading of early Islamic history, in which 'violence became a sacred tool', allows him to argue the case that 'military jihad represents to Islam what the Pentecost does to Christians: it

67. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 476, 46, 144.
68. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, p. xii.
69. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 424-25.

gives the key to what a believer must do in the "middle time" between *now* and an ever-receding doomsday, how to spread the word as far and wide as possible before the Day of the Lord'.[70] For Islamist millennialism is an expression of a crusading moralism: 'Millennialism is above all a moral critique of the world, and its spread to believers invariably includes a moral message that, on the one hand, demands a sacrifice, but on the other, assures believers that they are the truly righteous'.[71] And the modern proponents of radical Islamism working for a worldwide caliphate are being driven by an eschatological system that is every bit as resilient and effective as that upon which have drawn the apologists of American resistance to it. The 'war on terror' has not been a clash of civilizations so much as a clash of eschatological systems, he suggests, a clash of competing millennial dreams, in which Western and Islamic expectations of the last days collide even as they dangerously reinforce one another. 'If the last two centuries have told us anything', he reminds us, 'it is how dangerous those who would perfect the world become when they seize power'.[72] And if *Heaven on Earth* is anything to go by, the transdisciplinary analysis of millennial ideology may have an important role in preventing that from taking place—even though, as Landes notes, the expositors of Islamist apocalyptic theology have at times drawn upon the predictive constructions of evangelical texts.[73]

<center>III</center>

This chapter has discussed the historiography of evangelical millennialism because, as we have noted, the most influential millennial studies theorists have drawn heavily on evangelical concepts to develop models for the eschatological thinking of other, sometimes quite different, religious traditions. We have noticed that key terms have been developed relatively recently within evangelical history and cannot be used to explicate evangelicalism millennialism historically, nor can they be used as a normative pattern against which other religious traditions, some of which arose entirely independently of Christianity, should be compared. Future work in millennial studies should build on the Wessinger and Landes contribution by prioritizing the development of a new language of description and analysis. Theological terms describing exegetical conclusions cannot be used as sociological or anthropological tools. While 'bats' and 'roosters' may not become central to the discussion as it moves forward, we do need more terms, rather than fewer, if we wish to understand the complex character of the ideas with

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70. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 429-30.
71. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 112.
72. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 7.
73. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 421-22.

which we are concerned. And we need to remember that the often chaotic character of the ideas with which we are concerned may be disguised by any decision to import analytical tools from other religious traditions and thereby work towards the standardization and homogenization of the movement into 'apocalyptic time'.

Perhaps future work in millennial studies should consider new methods. Even those millennial studies scholars who have rejected the reductionist assumptions of the 'deprivation theory' have tended to assume that millennial texts emerge out of their contexts. But if millennial studies were to adopt a 'linguistic turn', that relationship might be reversed. The emerging research of Joshua Searle has reversed the most common methods of reading texts and contexts by identifying the means by which millennial writing establishes and simultaneously complicates the contexts against which it should be read.[74]

Thirdly, future millennial studies scholarship should pay more attention to proponents of a violent and apocalyptically inclined Islamism. The discipline of millennial studies emerged in the aftermath of a volume on medieval history that set out to examine the links between 'Revolutionary Messianism in the Middle Ages and its bearing on modern Totalitarian movements'.[75] This degree of political and social commitment characterized *The Pursuit of the Millennium* and insisted upon the project it inaugurated. The millennial studies community needs to reconnect with this sense of urgency. Landes's work has exposed the apocalyptic nuances of so much of the violence of radical Islamism. Future work in millennial studies should highlight the utility of our transdisciplinary method in understanding the structures of one of the most serious contemporary threats to global peace—as well as the ideologies of those religious communities and political actors that draw upon alternative varieties of millennial expectation or apocalyptic violence to resist jihad.

Surveying the bewildering variety of expressions of eschatological hope and despair, it is tempting to retreat to the security of a general theory of millennial belief and behaviour. Norman Cohn was right: 'There is no counting the possible ways of imagining the millennium and the route to it'.[76] But neither should there be any shortage of methods of analysing these complex and often chaotic ideas. A general theory of millennial studies may be welcomed even as its possible shortcomings are observed. For, as long as the cultural and political stakes of millennial violence and apocalyptic terror remain high, we should remember the danger of allowing false prophets to determine the future of millennial studies.

74.   Joshua Searle, 'The Hermeneutics of Crisis: Evangelicals, Apocalypse and Conflict in the Northern Ireland Troubles' (unpublished PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2012).
75.   Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.
76.   Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. xiv.

HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS IN MILLENNIAL STUDIES: A CASE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM[*]

Andrew Crome

Given that millennialism is a subject firmly focused on the future, it can be easy to overlook the role that history plays for contemporary millennial movements.[1] This is not, of course, in terms of the history of the movements themselves (which is relatively well served),[2] but rather the ways in which they make use of historical precedents to justify contemporary beliefs. For the historian examining millennial movements, such uses of history are at one and the same time interesting and inherently problematic. Positively, they offer insights into the way in which groups construct self-understanding and interpret key events in their own religious history. Yet these interpretations also present difficulties. Particularly within Christian movements, the search for a stable history becomes a search for historical legitimacy; a quest to prove the antiquity (and thus validity) of certain eschatological beliefs. In this situation every interpretation of millennial history by the contemporary historian becomes potential ammunition in a polemic between supporters and detractors of a particular millennial viewpoint. In light of this, one may ask precisely how historians do approach the history of millennial movements. How have historians used their own positions on different millennial beliefs in writing eschatological histories? For scholars working in millennial studies, these are important questions, for they lead to a renewed awareness that historical work in this area is never conducted in an apolitical vacuum. Yet this realization means little on its own. To suggest ways in which history could be used in future work on millennial studies, it is necessary not only to

   1.   Despite the technical distinctions often employed between the terms 'millennial' and 'millenarian', I use them interchangeably throughout this piece.
   2.   Three recent surveys include Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World 1500–2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and John M. Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian Millenarianism* (London: Tauris, 2008).

analyse the political uses of history in the field up to this point, but to consider ways in which these could change in future.

The aim of this chapter is to explore some of these difficulties through a targeted case study of works examining a particular millenarian belief (Christian Zionism). To provide a snapshot of the ways in which the history of this belief has been used by those both within and outside of millennial movements, I will focus on the use of recent research in early modern history which has the potential to suggest historical antecedents to Christian Zionist positions. Christian Zionism itself can be broadly defined as a belief that God has both a covenantal obligation and a special care for the Jews that has led to their restoration to the Holy Land.[3] As a result of this, it is claimed that it is the duty of a Christian to support the state of Israel. Although this is usually a belief associated with dispensationalism, it can also attract supporters from other theological traditions. For some Christian Zionists, historical research appears to have highlighted the widespread and orthodox nature of a belief that in many ways directly prefigures contemporary eschatological positions. At the same time, their opponents have used research from the same period to support their own attacks upon Christian Zionism and to show that such beliefs were always held to be heterodox.

This chapter examines the uses of history made by those in both camps through a particular focus on early modern 'Judeo-centric' eschatology, focused on the return of the Jewish people to Palestine, as traced by Richard Cogley and in my own work.[4] In looking at the historical investigations undertaken by authors working on contemporary eschatology, I will suggest that the majority of writers have approached the historical record with what can be labelled a 'presentist' mind-set, in which the past is read through the lens of contemporary events. In contrast to this, I will argue that the historical orthodoxy (or heterodoxy) of millennial movements should not be the attribute by which we judge their validity. While history can help us trace the

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3. The central covenant promise is found in Gen. 17.7-8, but the promise that the Jews will remain a separate people with a covenant link to the land is seen to be reiterated throughout the Old Testament (i.e. Jer. 31.35-37; Ps. 105.8-12), which also appears to predict a full restoration to the land (i.e. Ezek. 37; Isa. 11.11; Jer. 33.31-40; Amos 9.14-15).

4. Richard W. Cogley, 'The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the "Judeo-Centric" Strand of Puritan Millenarianism', *Church History* 72.2 (2003), pp. 304-32 and '"The Most Vile and Barbarous Nation of all the World": Giles Fletcher the Elder's *The Tartars or, Ten Tribes* (ca. 1610)', *Renaissance Quarterly* 58.3 (2005), pp. 781-814; Andrew Crome, '"The Proper and Naturall Meaning of the Prophets": The Hermeneutic Roots of Judeo-centrism in Puritan Eschatology', *Renaissance Studies* 24.5 (2010), pp. 725-41 and 'Friendship and Enmity to God and Nation: The Complexities of Jewish–Gentile Relations in the Whitehall Conference of 1655', in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* (ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 749-77.

evolution of an eschatological position, we should not use the resulting history to 'prove' that the view we hold is valid because 'historically orthodox'.[5]

This use of history also raises a secondary issue that has caused difficulties for millenarians themselves. In examining the history of any millennial movement (and Christian Zionism is no exception here), it becomes clear that the movement's past is marked by failed expectations. Historical precedents are therefore something of a double-edged sword for believers: while it may support the orthodoxy of Christian Zionism to show that similar beliefs were common amongst Reformed scholars in the 1640s, the utility of such precedents is called into question when it is revealed that those same scholars believed in the institution of the millennium by 1660 at the latest. The question of how to deal with these historical disappointments is thus of vital importance for millenarians using those historical beliefs to bolster their own position. It is therefore important to ask how it is that millenarians can accept the conclusions of one group as valid while nonetheless rejecting the date they suggested. How might these responses evolve in the future, and how might historians respond to them? This question will be taken up towards the end of the chapter. First, however, the challenges facing historians in examining the history of millennial movements need to be addressed.

Tracing a Millennial Movement in History

In contemporary works examining Christian Zionism, a brief and general historical outline of the belief has been a near ubiquitous feature. This history usually follows a common path: the development of Hebraism and eschatological interest in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, through to the missionary movements of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and finally the development of dispensational Zionism in John Nelson Darby. For many writers these historical sections appear as a formality, serving to provide a brief background to the theological movement before reaching the more interesting areas of contemporary belief and practice.[6] However, as

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5. Given that this chapter criticizes those who make use of history to support their own eschatological opinions, it is only right that I state my own position and background at the outset. I write as a Christian from the Evangelical tradition, a former dispensationalist who has moved away from that form of eschatology to a more Anglo-Catholic understanding of both faith and the future. However, I have no particular axe to grind either for or against dispensationalism. I write primarily as a historian with an interest in seventeenth-century eschatology. My appeal in this paper is for greater historical clarity, rather than the ransacking of history for 'proofs' of our own preconceptions.

6. See, for example Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), pp. 69-84; Victoria Clarke, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 27-50; Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?*

Paul Wilkinson has recently noted, the historical studies presented in general works on Christian Zionism are often overly brief and simple, failing to take into account either the theological nuances of their subjects or the precise influence they exercised over later writers. Here it is argued that there should be a greater appreciation of the historical background to Christian Zionist thought, particularly developments in early modern theology that came to bear upon the evolution of modern eschatological positions. Only by taking this into account can a more rounded understanding of the phenomenon be achieved.

Yet tracing this history has proven difficult. Sometimes the problem has been one of terminology. For some, Christian Zionism could not exist before the foundation of the State of Israel;[7] for others, an awareness of the term's recent provenance (it came to prominence only in the 1990s) renders it obsolete in historical discussion.[8] When tracing the history of a millennial movement, debates on terminology often descend into little more than historical hair-splitting. However, it is not the terms that were used but the theological concepts that were applied that are important for understanding the background of millenarian movements. The theological concepts that are seen as important to marking out a distinct millennial movement vary from commentator to commentator. Indeed, they are often constructed so as to support a particular view of the past. Wilkinson, for example, provides nine separate categories that should be used to define a 'true' Christian Zionist. These include a firm distinction between Israel and the church in God's eschatological plan, a belief in a physical restoration of the Jewish people to Palestine and the national salvation of the Jews in Christ. While none of these are particularly surprising, Wilkinson then adds a further six requirements, including the belief in an any-moment pre-tribulation rapture, a literal pre-millennial reign of Christ on earth, the restoration of the Jerusalem temple and a seven-year tribulation period.[9] The difficulty with this definition is that it seeks explicitly to dismiss those outside of Wilkinson's own pre-tribulational dispensational position. This would exclude, for example, writers who clearly identify as Christian Zionist such as David Pawson,[10] and allows

(Leicester: IVP, 2004), pp. 26-80; Clifford A. Kiracoffe, *Dark Crusade: Christian Zionism and US Foreign Policy* (London: Tauris, 2009), pp. 45-60.

7.   Ibrahim Abraham and Roland Boer, '"God Doesn't Care": The Contradictions of Christian Zionism', *Religion & Theology* 16 (2009), pp. 90-110 (90).

8.   Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2.

9.   Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake* (New York: Wipf & Stock, 2007), pp. 13-14. The other two requirements for an accurate definition of Christian Zionism are, according to Wilkinson, the rise of the Antichrist and Christ's return to Jerusalem.

10.   Pawson eschews dispensationalism and self-identifies as a 'covenantal Zionist'; David Pawson, *Defending Christian Zionism* (Bristol: Terra Nova, 2008), pp. 22-23. This

Wilkinson to find 'true' Christian Zionism beginning with John Nelson Darby. The reasoning is clearly circular—Darby was a Christian Zionist because a 'real' Christian Zionist believes exactly as Darby did.

This definition can be contrasted to the nuanced interpretation set out by Stephen Sizer, who divides Christian Zionism into four 'distinct strands'. Of the four, one position is unique: 'covenantal premillennial' Christian Zionism, characterized by the acceptance that the Jewish people, when converted, remain a part of the church but must also be restored to the land. The other three positions are variants of dispensational eschatology, all built around the premise that God has separate promises for his earthly people (Israel) and his heavenly people (the church): 'Messianic dispensational' Zionism (focus on evangelization of Jews and a rebuilt temple in the Millennium), 'Apocalyptic dispensational' Zionism (focus on unfulfilled prophecy and approaching Armageddon) and 'Political dispensational' Zionism (major focus on defending the state of Israel and 'blessing' her through political support). Although Sizer recognizes that this is not an entirely stable taxonomy (believers might belong to one or more of these groups),[11] his definitions nonetheless offer a useful and nuanced guide to variant types of Christian Zionist belief. As Sizer's own study is historically focused (albeit centred upon the nineteenth century onwards), these terms are less problematic than many contemporary definitions. They therefore present a useful lens through which to examine the varieties of Christian Zionist eschatology.

It is Sizer's contention that the key break between dispensational and covenantal Christian Zionism is the division of God's promises between Israel and the church. The crucial change between puritan restorationist thought and dispensationalism was, in his opinion, the belief that 'the Jewish people would return to their land before or after conversion but would remain distinctly separate from the church'.[12] Indeed, a clear distinction between Israel and the church has often been made the *sine qua non* of both dispensational Christian Zionism and dispensationalism itself.[13] However, this distinction is far from a recent development. In highlighting this, the following historical survey aims to do two things. First, it aims to provide the

is not to mention Christians who hold to dispensational post-tribulational positions who are similarly excluded from the Christian Zionist fold by this definition.

11.   Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, pp. 254-57. In Sizer's later work aimed at a more general audience, he does not deal with the problem of definition, focusing purely on dispensational Christian Zionism (see Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church* [Leicester: IVP, 2007], pp. 13-15).

12.   Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, p. 34.

13.   Most notably in Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 40. See also Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham and London: University Press of America, 1992), pp. 28-30.

necessary historical background to understand the arguments that surround the seventeenth century in histories of Christian Zionism. Secondly, it aims to emphasize the importance of a thoroughgoing historical understanding when investigating millennial history, an important element in both the argument of this chapter and for the future of millennial studies itself.

That there was a general eschatological interest in Jewish conversion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is not in doubt.[14] This had developed over a long period of time. There had officially been no Jews in England since their expulsion in 1290. Hence, in sharp contrast to the flourishing Jewish community in Amsterdam or the conversion controversies in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain, there was no established Jewish presence to help the early modern Englishman form a realistic image of the Jewish people. The Reformation focus on the Old Testament fostered a growing Hebraism which led to both an interest in contemporary Jewish scholarship and the idealization of present day Jews as 'Israelites' in the biblical mode.[15] Nonetheless, there was little appreciation of the reality of contemporary Jewish life on the Continent. 'The Jews' were referred to as a homogenous group with no real awareness of individuals.[16] At the same time, a hope in an end-time Jewish conversion to Christianity was common, usually based around exegesis of Romans 11. Although Luther abandoned any possibility of Jewish conversion, and Calvin denied that Romans 11 had anything to do with the salvation of Jews *en masse*,[17] later expositors such as Theodore Beza and Heinrich Bullinger offered more sympathetic readings of the text. It was Beza's influence upon the 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible that led to the English gloss on Rom. 11.26 that 'the whole nation of ye Jewes thogh [*sic*] not every one particularly, shalbe [*sic*] joined to the church of Christ'.[18]

14. See Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978); Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Douglas Culver, *Albion and Ariel* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England 1485–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) and *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603–1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and Peter Toon (ed.), *The Puritans, the Millennium, and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1970; repr. 2002).

15. Katz, *Jews in the History of England*, pp. 108-109.

16. Although this trend was occasionally bucked—for example, polemicist and Hebraist Hugh Broughton (1549–1610) lived in Amsterdam and worked with several rabbis.

17. John Calvin, *A Commentarie upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romanes* (London, 1583), pp. 156-57. In all quotations from primary sources emphasis, spelling and capitalisation is as original unless otherwise stated.

18. *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), New Testament, p. 75l.

These beliefs were orthodox. The prolific preacher and writer William Perkins, for example, concluded that the world could not yet end, as the Jews had still to be converted.[19] However, this general conversionist attitude was undermined by a potentially more radical theology that focused upon the restoration of the Jewish people to Palestine. This was a concept that had found some expression in the work of twelfth-century Calibrian abbot Joachim of Fiore[20] and occasional radicals in the sixteenth century.[21] However, this radicalism was overtaken by a broadly conservative eschatology of Jewish restoration based around a division of God's promises to Israel and the church and the presupposition of a Jewish empire being formed in Palestine. In other words, this eschatology broke down the barriers of Sizer's distinction between 'covenantal' and 'dispensational' Christian Zionism. As this form of eschatology focused squarely on the role of the Jews in the end times, it can be labelled 'Judeo-centric'. My purpose here is not to detail the minutiae of the numerical schemes adopted by these commentators—a task which has already been undertaken elsewhere.[22] Instead, I will focus particularly on the Judeo-centric theme and the way in which it appears to anticipate particular elements of contemporary Christian Zionism. The degree of prefiguration present in seventeenth-century works becomes the essential question in contemporary historiography; by understanding the basis on which these debates are conducted, it becomes possible both to analyse the current historical argument and to suggest ways in which it might evolve in the future.

As the distinction between God's promises for Israel and his promises for the church is seen by many as the key element in Christian Zionist thought, the suggestion that a similar distinction was regularly made in the seventeenth century is the key area of potential controversy. One of the first writers to make this break was Henoch Clapham (1585–1614). His 1596 *Briefe of the Bible* aimed to set out an overview of the scriptures through the form of

19.   William Perkins, 'A Fruitful Discourse on the End of the World', in *The Workes of…M. William Perkins* (London, 1631), pp. 466-77 (470).

20.   See Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

21.   For example, Francis Kett (d. 1589), Ralph Durden, who styled himself as the new Jewish messiah and was considered insane (Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, pp. 188-91) and Roger Edwards who wrote a manuscript work in 1580 dedicated to Bishop Aylmer (London, British Library MS Lansdowne 353, fols. 192-230) and was promptly imprisoned in the tower.

22.   See Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2008) for a good general overview of eschatology in the period. For more detail on the Jewish theme, see Crome, 'Hermeneutic Roots'; Cogley, '"The Most Vile and Barbarous Nation"'; Cogley, 'The Fall of the Ottoman Empire'; Philip Almond, 'Thomas Brightman and the Origins of Philo-Semitism: An Elizabethan Theologian and the Return of the Jews to Israel', *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 9.1 (2007), pp. 3-25.

several brief poems and a general commentary on the key motifs he found within the text. One of the book's central themes was the essential continuity of God's promises to natural Jews and the future blessings he believed were in store for them. Based around both Old Testament land promises and Romans 11, Clapham argued that Jewish restoration would be more extensive than simple conversion. Here he turned to Acts 1.6, in which Jesus' disciples asked whether the resurrected Christ would 'restore the kingdom to Israel'. While many commentators had argued that the disciples asked an unwise question, Clapham disagreed: '[Jesus] is so farre from denying the Kingdome they dreamed of, as he doth plainly graunt it'. Indeed, 'If they dreamed that *Israel* should have restored to them a Kingdome not onely spirituall, such a dreame cannot be infringed: nay, read the Prophets attentively, and they insinuate a Kingdome not onely spirituall'.[23] Clapham used this Jewish restoration to argue for a movement of God's focus with respect to salvation. In the Old Testament period, the Jewish nation had been the locus of his saving activity. After Christ, this had moved to the Gentile church. Regardless, the movement was temporary. In the future, there would be a restoration of God's original salvific order: 'God will againe dwel amidst the Jews; and blessed shall such Gentiles be, as gather themselves unto them'.[24]

The chief popularizer of the idea of Jewish restoration to Palestine was Thomas Brightman (1562–1607), a fellow of Queens' College Cambridge and later a Bedfordshire minister. Brightman's commentaries on Revelation, Daniel and Song of Songs described the restoration in greater detail than any previous writer. Brightman believed that Jews would be converted (in two distinct stages—a minor and major conversion) and restored to the land. They would battle the Ottoman Empire ('the Turk') and the pope, before being given a supernatural victory through a spiritual coming of Christ.[25] Jerusalem would then become the political and religious centre of the world, with Jews outstripping Gentiles in their holiness and enjoying dominion over them.[26]

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23.   Henoch Clapham, *Briefe of the Bible* (Edinburgh, 1596), pp. 182-83.

24.   Clapham, *Briefe*, p. 183.

25.   This was not technically the second coming, but a 'middle' advent. Christ was to come spiritually before returning at some point in the future in judgment. As Brightman states: 'For hence we do understand, that there is a double coming of the Lord yet to come, one Spiritual, and that in an excellency, at the calling of the Jews, another corporal at the general judgement' (Thomas Brightman, *A Revelation of the Apocalypse* [Amsterdam, 1611], pp. 690-91).

26.   Brightman held a unique form of dual-millennialism in which he found two periods of millennial blessing in Rev. 20. Thus he found one millennial period running from Constantine's conversion until roughly 1300 and a second period running from that time until an unspecified point in the future (possibly 2300, although Brightman admits the period itself could be either longer or shorter). Brightman did not hold to a

Brightman's three commentaries, published posthumously from 1609 onwards, built their conception of the prophetic future on a radical distinction between the church and Israel. These distinctions were made in a slew of biblical allusions. Like the two pillars in Solomon's temple, Jews and Gentiles represented two distinct trajectories in God's plan of salvation history.[27] Like Rachel and Leah, Israel and the church were two separate elements of God's concern—with the Jews placed above the Gentiles. Thus the Gentiles had 'crept' into a marriage with Christ, supplanting Rachel 'of a more choyce and singular beauty'. This would ultimately be reversed.[28] The distinction that Brightman found was predicated on the argument that previous commentators had erroneously attributed prophecies that should be applied only to ethnic Israel to the church. These predictions, he argued, did not concern the Gentiles at all. 'The old Prophecies', he wrote, 'are not to be thought to receive accomplishment, either *in the first coming of Christ* or *in the calling of the Gentiles*; but that they do reach even unto the full consummation of the *Mysterie* [of Jewish restoration]'.[29] For Brightman, those who had previously attempted to interpret the prophecies of the Bible had ignored the obvious meaning of the text. Failure to appreciate the truth of Jewish restoration 'hath darkened (I will not say, perverted) the proper and naturall meaning of the Prophets in many places'.[30]

If this firm distinction between God's promises for Israel and the church, and the privileging of Jew over Gentile, were only to be found in Brightman and Clapham it would be an interesting, yet insignificant, footnote to the history of Christian eschatology. In fact, as has been often overlooked, it represented a vital component of later works that examined the question of Jewish restoration. Several early works by writers such as Thomas Draxe, Samuel Cooper, Giles Fletcher and Richard Bernard evidence the same split between Jew and Gentile,[31] which emerged forcefully in Sir Henry Finch's (c. 1558–1625) infamous 1621 work, *The Worlde's Restauration* [*sic*]. This well-known book used Brightman as a foundation upon which to build its controversial eschatology.[32] Finch concluded that 'Where *Israel, Judah,*

premillennial reign of Christ on earth, but a spiritual reign incorporated through the Jewish people in Jerusalem.

27.   Brightman, *Revelation*, pp. 120-21.

28.   Brightman, *Revelation*, p. 788.

29.   Brightman, *Revelation*, p. 339.

30.   Thomas Brightman, *A Commentary on the Canticles, or the Song of Solomon* (London, 1644), p. 1053.

31.   See Crome, 'Hermeneutic Roots'.

32.   Finch's work is, along with Brightman's, one of those most often cited in studies of Christian Zionism. For example, see Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, p. 29; Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake*, pp. 144-45; Culver, *Albion and Ariel*, pp. 101-24. Finch drew the wrath of James I and the condemnation of future Archbishop William Laud in a sermon before the

Tsion, Jerusalem, &c. are named in this argument, the Holy Ghost meaneth not the spirituall Israel…but Israel properly descended out of *Jacobs* loynes'. Both Jews and Gentiles, Finch argued, 'have their promises severally and apart' from each other.[33] This led him to conclude that there would be a glorious, restored Jewish kingdom based in Palestine. During this millennial period, Gentiles would be subservient to the Jews, who 'shall come to Jerusalem againe, be Kings and Chiefe Monarchs of the Earth, sway and governe all for the glory of Christ'.[34]

While certainly not as radical as Finch, the influential (pre-millennial) Cambridge theologian Joseph Mede (1586–1638) also based his ideas of Jewish restoration on the division of Israel and the church. Originally written in 1627, expanded in 1632 and published in translation by order of parliament in 1642, Mede's monumental *Clavis Apocalyptica* constructed a detailed hermeneutical key to help readers understand the prophecies of Revelation.[35] Mede argued that the Gentile church had replaced Israel in God's plan only on a temporary basis. The church had 'succeeded in the room of *Israel*, and is, as I may so call it, surrogated *Israel*; and in that place for a little while esteemed by God, untill, his old people againe [obtain] mercy'.[36] In other words, the Gentiles' position as foremost in God's plan was a temporary state of affairs. When the full number of Gentiles came in, the Jewish nation would once again assume primacy in God's design.

This line of thought continued and developed in the radical ferment of the Civil War. A clear example is found in Robert Maton's impassioned 1642 *Israels Redemption*, a book that had such an influence upon Protestants in the Netherlands that it drew a furious response from Alexander Petrie, the minister of the Scottish Kirk at Rotterdam. While Mede's influence upon Maton was obvious, it is essential to see that both he and Petrie understood that their argument revolved around the separation of God's promises for Israel and the church. In *Israels Redemption*, Maton argued passionately against those who allegorized prophecies, applying promises that belonged to Jews to Christians. It was madness to 'forsake the literall interpretation'[37] of prophecies of Jewish restoration, or to intermingle Jewish and Gentile

King. While Finch was imprisoned for a short while, he nonetheless resumed his position as Sergeant-at-arms after his release and was recommissioned by Charles I.

33. Henry Finch, *The Worlds Great Restauration or The Calling of the Jewes* (London, 1621), p. 6.

34. Finch, *Worlds Great Restauration*, p. 18.

35. For more on Mede, see Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2006).

36. Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation* (London, 1643), Part I, p. 72.

37. Robert Maton, *Israels Redemption, or the Propheticall History of our Saviours Kingdome on Earth* (London, 1642), p. 14.

prophecies for 'it cannot possibly be maintained, that the Jewes and Gentiles are as yet *one sheepfold*'.[38] Such conclusions frightened Petrie, who charged that Maton was reckless in ignoring the spiritual nature of Old Testament promises. 'It is a great mistaking of the prophecies', wrote Petrie, 'if we shall still make an opposition twixt Jewes and gentiles'.[39] Contrasting Maton's Judeo-centric approach with his own assertion that believing Jews and Gentiles now composed one body, Petrie concluded that '[my] doctrine throweth down the partition-wall, and [Maton's] opinion still holdeth it up, at least for 1000 years'.[40]

Responding to Petrie's attack, Maton grew fiercer in his defence of the idea of a separation between Israel and the church. He felt that Petrie's claim to interpret the prophecies consistently was inherently false. While Petrie claimed to interpret the prophecies 'properly' (that is, by their intended meaning),[41] Maton charged that he in fact spiritualized at will. For, 'we know that by our proper exposition of these prophecies, we doe make a just distribution of the word of God: that we give unto the *Jew,* whatsoever belongs unto the *Jew*; and to the *Gentile*, whatsoever belongs unto the *Gentile*'.[42] Using this method, he followed Brightman and Finch in arguing that the Gentile church was only temporarily at the forefront of God's plan: 'the substituted *Gentiles*…were in the *Jewes* stead to become Gods people in the vacancy of the Scepter [from Israel]'.[43]

One of the key elements of contemporary Christian Zionist thought—the split between God's promises to Israel and the church—was therefore a clear theme in eschatological thought by the mid-1640s. Of course, the point is not simply that the theme was there, but to ask whether it can serve as legitimation of modern (and future) eschatological viewpoints. Both for contemporary scholars, and for those in the future looking back at the way in which millennial movements have developed, the extent to which their history serves as support for their present validity will remain crucial. It is important, then, to have a sense of the practical effect of these beliefs as well as their theological basis. In the case of early modern Judeo-centrism, the political impact of these beliefs was brought home in the discussions surrounding the readmission of the Jews to England. The issue began to be seriously debated

38.   Maton, *Israels Redemption*, p. 38.

39.   Alexander Petrie, *Chiliasto-mastix. Or, The Prophecies in the Old and New Testament concerning the kingdome of our savior Iesus Christ* (Rotterdam, 1644), pp. 9-10.

40.   Petrie, *Chiliasto-mastix*, p. 69. The 'partition-wall' is a reference to Ephesians 2.14, where Christ is said to break down the wall separating Jew and Gentile.

41.   For the complexities of a 'proper' interpretation, the dominant puritan hermeneutic, see Crome, 'Hermeneutic Roots'.

42.   Robert Maton, *Israels Redemption Redeemed* (London, 1646), sig. E2ir.

43.   Maton, *Israels Redemption Redeemed*, p. 292.

in 1648, reaching a peak with the visit of the Dutch rabbi Menasseh ben Israel and the Whitehall Conference on Jewish readmission in late 1655.[44] While Timothy Weber has suggested that eschatological influences on politics are a relatively recent phenomenon,[45] the Whitehall conference shows that Judeo-centric thought could be translated into political action at a much earlier date. The Judeo-centric position on readmission often appeared confused: for the Jews were to be readmitted to England to fulfil prophecies that they were to be scattered to 'the ends of the earth'. When this prophecy was fulfilled, there would be nothing to hinder their return to Palestine—thus Jews must be admitted so that they might then leave. Debates therefore centred upon a number of eschatological questions, the most pressing of which dealt with the possibility that the Jews could be returned to their position as God's chosen people on earth. Edward Nicholas wrote of the predictions of 'prophets for the reduction of them to their own country, still owning them for his own people, a country, I say, lawfully theirs, by the donation of God himself'.[46] A personal friend of a number of Christian writers, ben Israel had been encouraged to visit by both the government and millenarians such as Moses Wall, John Dury and Henry Jessey. While economic reasons have often been alleged to have been behind the decision to call the conference,[47] a study of its records reveals that theological (and particularly eschatological) concerns were at the fore.

The question of whether the Jews had been granted promises distinct from the Gentile church was thus a key issue in these discussions. This led many speakers to speculate that the promise of Gen. 12.3, that God would bless those who blessed Abraham, was still applicable to his physical descendants. One line of argument at the conference therefore claimed that contemporary England was experiencing judgment for expelling the Jews in 1290, and that only through readmission could this be remitted: 'But if this be denied them, it is feared the Lord may shew his displeasure to be great against England'.[48] Thomas Collier, writing to exert influence on the divines in attendance, thus noted that God 'hath a special eye over them [the Jews]…and will take

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44. For more on Judeo-centrism at the conference, see Crome, 'Friendship and Enmity'.

45. Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 15.

46. Edward Nicholas, *An Apology for the Honorable Nation of the Jews* (London, 1648), p. 7.

47. Most famously in Lucien Wolf, *Menasseh ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell* (London: Macmillan, 1901), pp. xxx-xxxvi. See also Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism* (London: Zed Press, 1983), pp. 24-27.

48. [Henry Jessey], *A Narrative of Late Proceedings at Whitehall* (London, 1656), p. 7.

vengance [*sic*] to the full on all the nations that have afflicted them'.[49] In Cromwell's protectorate, Judeo-centric belief spilled over into political action. Although the Jews were not formally readmitted, the conference remains a powerful symbol of the effects of eschatology on the political landscape.[50]

This eschatological theme continued into the later years of the seventeenth century. John Owen (1616–1683), perhaps the most eminent puritan divine,[51] therefore accepted in the 1660s that a Jewish 'restauration into their own land, with a blessed, flourishing and happy condition' was 'acknowledged, as far as I can understand by all the world'. This included Owen, who while avoiding any direct millennial speculation nonetheless reasoned that, even once converted, Jews had a distinct set of promises: 'we acknowledge that the Promises mentioned, are not yet all of them actually fulfilled towards them'.[52] For some, however, the theme proved more controversial. Cambridge poet and theologian Henry More (1614–1687) and puritan grandee Richard Baxter (1615–1691) became engaged in a lively printed debate on the subject. Once again, the core question concerned a split between Israel and the church. Baxter, still influential at the time, had attacked the notion of a restoration of the Jews in his *Paraphrase on the New Testament*.[53] In responding to this assault, More wrote bitterly that God had a special care for 'his own *peculiar* People the *Jews*, who have suffered so great and durable Calamities and Severities of Affliction from Him, who yet is stiled the God of *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, and is said to have an *everlasting* Covenant with that People'.[54] What especially alarmed Baxter, as he admitted in 1691,

49.   Thomas Collier, *A Brief Answer to Some Objections…against the Coming in and Inhabiting of the Jews* (London, 1656), sig. A2r.

50.   The conference ended in confusion with no clear decision reached, other than that it was not illegal for Jews to settle in England, as they were expelled by the Crown rather than by an act of Parliament. Nonetheless, a small community of Spanish and Portuguese Jews living secretly in London eventually made themselves known to the government in March 1656 and were allowed to remain. Official readmission occurred only after the Restoration.

51.   He served as a chaplain to Cromwell and as vice-chancellor of Oxford University during Cromwell's Protectorate. He was highly influential, leaving a number of works (including his commentary on Hebrews) that remain in print today.

52.   John Owen, *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1668), I, pp. 248-49.

53.   Richard Baxter, *A Paraphrase on the New Testament with Notes, Doctrinal and Practical* (London, 1685), Sigs. Eee2r-v. Baxter argued that Palestine was in such a bad condition that any restoration to the land would bring shame, rather than glory, to the Jews.

54.   Phililicrines Parrhesiastes [Henry More], *Some Cursory Reflexions Impartially Made upon Mr. Richard Baxter: his Way of Writing Notes on the Apocalypse* (London, 1685), pp. 10-11. Emphasis in original.

was the radical separation of God's plans for ethnic Israel and his plans for the Gentile church. That the Jews 'should continue then [the millennium] in a Jewish Line and Peculiarity, distinct from the Catholick mixed Church, is a *wickedness*', he argued, 'contrary to the very nature of Christianity… For Christ came to take down the Partition Wall.'[55]

This overview has been brief and far from complete. Figures such as Thomas Draxe, Giles Fletcher, Thomas Goodwin, John Cotton and Increase Mather have been left unexamined.[56] Nonetheless, the aim of this section has not been to provide an exhaustive commentary on puritan eschatology. Neither has it been to show that Judeo-centrism was *the* orthodox form of eschatological belief in the early modern Atlantic world. Views on the subject varied too greatly between individuals and groupings to identify anything other than common 'strands' of belief.[57] Rather, this section has sought to highlight a particular theme in puritan eschatological thought: a Judeo-centrism based around the division of God's promises for Israel and the church, and the idea of a millennial state in which Jews would dominate and Gentiles be subservient. This form of eschatology undermines Sizer's distinction between 'covenantal' and 'dispensational' Christian Zionism, as it finds two of the key markers of dispensational Zionism as a powerful eschatological trend in the seventeenth century. Of course, this is not to suggest that contemporary dispensational Christian Zionism and the early modern theme identified here are the same thing. There are major differences, particularly surrounding the restoration of the temple (an idea always denied in Judeo-centric works),[58] the rapture and the concept of a seven-year tribulation (which are not expressed at all). Nonetheless, it is clear that on certain key points within Sizer's definitions, there are substantial overlaps between early modern and later dispensational eschatology. At the very least, this suggests that contemporary and future researchers working on Christian Zionism may find it fruitful to examine this theme as a key element in the formation of a distinctly *Christian* Zionist tradition. Similarly, historians of millennialism should be prepared to address the complex long-term evolution of contemporary eschatological movements and traditions. The future will be better informed if the past is taken fully into account. This is not to argue that

55. Richard Baxter, *The Glorious Kingdom of Christ* (London, 1691), p. 62.

56. For further reading on these figures see Cogley, '"The Most Vile and Barbarous Nation"'; Cogley, 'Fall of the Ottoman Empire'; Culver, *Albion and Ariel*; Crome, 'Hermeneutic Roots'.

57. Cogley, 'Fall of the Ottoman Empire', p. 305.

58. For example, Increase Mather commented that at the general calling of the Jews 'Some…will adhere obstinately to their old antiquated ceremonies, for which the Lord will be dreadfully provoked to cut them off' (Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation* [Boston, 1669], pp. 7-8). See also Brightman, *Revelation*, p. 541.

finding ideas that are similar to later Christian Zionist thought means that seventeenth-century eschatology was a direct precursor to contemporary dispensationalism. However, as the following section will show, this has not usually been recognized by scholars working on Christian Zionism. Histories of the subject have either all but ignored the period, or attempted to use history as *de facto* justification for contemporary beliefs. The fact that this theme has been overlooked is more than coincidence: it represents a particular philosophy of history that underlies the work of those both in favour of and opposed to Christian Zionism.

Uses of History in Contemporary Studies in Christian Zionism

I do not mean to suggest, of course, that there have been no attempts to examine the effect of seventeenth-century thought on the development of Christian Zionism up to the present day. However, the majority of these attempts have been marked by religious or political bias. It is therefore possible to trace three distinct trends in the historiography. The first sees in Judeo-centric ideals the noble stirrings of British support for Zionism. While the majority of Christians were steeped in anti-Semitism, Judeo-centrists were those who had already seen the suffering of the Jewish people and viewed a homeland as a necessity for their own survival. This often leads to the belief that there was some form of mystical link between England and the Jewish nation. Critics of the movement, however, adopt an approach that is diametrically opposed to this. For them, Judeo-centrism consisted of nothing more than the radical pronouncements of a handful of fringe clerics and writers. Those who wrote in support of it, far from being the friends of the Jewish people, were concerned (at best) with converting the Jews to Christianity and (at worst) with imposing British imperialism on the Middle East. Ironically, both of these positions are based on a similar philosophy of history—the idea that the validity of a particular millennial belief can be determined by its antiquity. They are, in reality, different sides of the same coin, both presuming some kind of link (positive or negative) between Judeo-centrism and contemporary Christian Zionism. A third approach, seen in critics of Christian Zionism such as Stephen Sizer, has been to accept the importance of Judeo-centrism but to allow little detailed examination of it in works on Christian Zionism; this is to emphasize its discontinuity with contemporary eschatological movements. While this is to some extent laudable, practically it leads to the same position as those who dismiss Judeo-centrism as an eschatology primarily of cranks and radicals.

This first approach is evident in a number of dispensational writers. Their works have often demonstrated the desire to latch onto any Christian support for a restoration of the Jewish nation to the land as unqualified evidence for

the historical validity of their doctrine. This kind of historiography has a long provenance in the subject. The first major work to examine the link between English interests and the restoration of the Jews, Barbara Tuchman's *Bible and Sword*, had the history it detailed (particularly in the updated 1984 edition) consciously framed by a pro-Zionist introduction, in which Tuchman claimed to find 'special significance for mankind' in England's historical fascination with the Jews.[59] Similar themes were clear in other works deliberately designed to make polemical points. Franz Kobler's 1956 *The Vision Was There*, for example, drew a straight line from the early modern period to the Balfour Declaration.[60]

This approach has been particularly prevalent, moreover, in more recent dispensational works. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem's official website, for example, notes that 'the Puritans of the 17th century, who gave us democracy in its present form (Oliver Cromwell) and the now famous Authorized Version of the Bible in 1611, were Christian Zionist by belief'. Although confessing that puritans would not themselves have used the term, 'their belief system would have branded them as Christian Zionists today'.[61] Similarly, Thomas Ice's 2004 presentation on the subject to the 'Pre-Tribulation Research Center' derided those who 'like to blame J.N. Darby and dispensationalism as the modern source of evangelical views [on Israel]', instead highlighting 'that love for Israel was well entrenched by Bible-believing Christians long before 1830'.[62] The early modern figures Ice quoted included both the orthodox and the heterodox without discrimination. For example, Francis Kett, burned by the Bishop of Norwich in 1589 for Arianism, was presented as a man suffering specifically for his Zionism. Kett was martyred, Ice suggested, for 'expressing views about the Jews' return to their land, an idea he claimed to have received from reading the Bible'.[63] The implication that Christian Zionists have continually been persecuted for their

59.   Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York: Phoenix, 2001 [1956]), p. ix. The 'presentism' of Tuchman's history here anticipates Gordon Wood's later criticism of her work: 'The desire to instruct has always subtly suffused her narratives, and in her occasional pieces it often emerged full-blown'. (Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* [New York: Penguin Books, 2008], p. 64).

60.   Franz, Kobler, *The Vision Was There* (London: World Jewish Congress, 1956), Part Two, p. 1.

61.   Malcolm Hedding, 'Position Statements: The ICEJ's Core Beliefs' (n.d.) <http://int.icej.org/about/position-statements> (accessed 15 October 2011). The claims that Cromwell was the father of modern democracy and that the AV was a puritan work are both highly questionable, to say the least.

62.   Thomas Ice, 'Lovers of Zion: A History of Christian Zionism' <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Ice-LoversofZionAHistory.pdf> (accessed 26 August 2010), p. 2.

63.   Ice, 'Lovers', p. 6.

faith is obvious. A broadly similar approach was used in Douglas Culver's study of early modern Judeo-Centrism, *Albion and Ariel*. While Culver did not self-identify as a Zionist, he was nonetheless keen to link together the theme of Jewish restoration and present-day Zionism. He wrote, he claimed, to 'demonstrate Victor Hugo's axiom that nothing can stop an idea whose time has come'.[64] Paul Wilkinson's recent study of Darby reflects the same theme. While ostensibly dealing with Darby's thought and rejecting any overarching continuity between the past and the present, in reality Wilkinson's project serves as an apologetic for his own brand of pre-tribulational Christian Zionism.[65] While Wilkinson's examination of the early modern development of Judeo-centrism is one of the most thorough available, his theo-political aims are never far from view. He therefore approaches the subject with two clearly defined objectives: first, to show that belief in a Jewish restoration was entirely orthodox throughout Protestant history and second, to emphasize that true (that is, pre-tribulational) Christian Zionism only came into existence with Darby.[66] While this initially seems at variance with the other commentators examined here, Wilkinson displays the same concern to support his political project through the use of history. His point is not that Christian support for the return of the Jews to Palestine is a new development in Darby, only that the pre-tribulational/dispensational aspect of the doctrine can be attributed specifically to the nineteenth-century commentator. Each of these writers therefore seeks to emphasize that projects to restore the Jews were existent in either embryonic or more fully developed form from the early modern period onwards. This allows dispensationalists to counter criticism from Reformed theologians by emphasizing the continuity of dispensationalism with traditional Reformed theology. As dispensationalist Randall Price concludes: '[regarding] the historical beginnings of Christian Zionism it is obvious that non-dispensationalists, and particularly those who were Reformed, contributed a social and political sway'.[67]

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64.   Culver, *Albion and Ariel*, p. 10.

65.   See above for the way in which Wilkinson radically narrows the definition of 'true' Christian Zionism. His defence is often taken to disturbing lengths, including the pointed implication that God killed anti-Zionist Michael Prior after 'his blasphemous statements…at the 5th International Sabeel Conference in 2004' (Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake*, p. 57). This claim is repeated in Pawson, *Defending Christian Zionism*, p. 154.

66.   Wilkinson aims to distance Christian Zionism from Catholicism, especially given that futurist eschatology developed amongst Jesuits such as Bellarmine and Ribera in the early modern period. Wilkinson is notably dismissive of Catholicism throughout. He approvingly quotes Dave Hunt's statement that the Catholic Church is 'the largest and most dangerous religious cult that ever existed' (Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake*, p. 33).

67.   Randall Price, 'Is the Modern State of Israel Prophetically Significant?' <http://www.worldofthebible.com/Bible%20Studies/Is%20Israel%20Prophetically%20Signific

It is important that we realize that these attempts to trace historical links by contemporary millenarians do not presume the full acceptance of seventeenth-century Judeo-centric eschatology. We might presume, for example, that the fact that Brightman envisaged the full restoration of Israel by 1696 would be problematic for his use as a source by contemporary Christian Zionists. However, for these writers there is no shame in admitting that Judeo-centrists were wrong in predicting dates for the Jewish restoration to Palestine, and indeed, that major issues were often misunderstood. While this might appear to be inconsistent, it is important to remember that writers such as Ice and Wilkinson are not looking for a full-fledged eschatology in their seventeenth-century forebears. It scarcely matters if details of the system are wrong. The key aim is rather to prove that the central theological concept of a return of the Jews to Palestine, and Christian support for this, has been accepted within the mainstream of the faith throughout Christian history. Particularly with the recent resurgence of Reformed theology in North American and British Evangelicalism (often with a marked aversion to premillennialism),[68] the ability to support theological positions by reference to puritan scholars such as John Owen re-enforces the orthodoxy of Christian Zionism.

Opposed to this, critics of Christian Zionism examining the history of Jewish restoration have been at pains to show the heterodox nature of the belief. This approach to the subject was first seen in Iain Murray's *Puritan Hope*, a book that used the postmillennialism it identified amongst its puritan protagonists to decry the contemporary church's fall away from Murray's particular form of orthodoxy, a growing 'disbelief in "Calvinism"…unbelief in the inerrancy of scripture, and then the gospel itself'. The answer to this problem, for Murray, was to return to the puritan zeal for 'right' doctrine and the word of God.[69] In dealing with questions of Jewish restoration, Murray was therefore keen to show that the puritans possessed a (postmillennial) missionary desire for Jewish conversion, while writing off hopes of a Jewish restoration to the land as a 'short-lived' millenarian excess.[70] In this way he was able to use history to attack both liberal theology and contemporary millenarians. In one of the more detailed retrospectives of the development of Christian Zionist thought, Victoria Clarke attempted to show the way in which Christian orthodoxy had always attacked Zionist belief. This led her to quote both orthodox Protestants and marginal millenarians together as if they

ant.pdf> (accessed 18 August 2010). This is a revised version of a paper Price presented at the 13th Annual Pre-Trib Research Center Conference in Dallas, TX, 6–8 December 2004.

   68.   Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism*, pp. 118-24.

   69.   Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1971), pp. 231-35.

   70.   Murray, *Puritan Hope*, p. 53.

had the same influence upon the development of eschatological thought. The eccentric separatists Thomas "Theauraujohn" Tany and John Traske were therefore placed alongside moderate (and highly influential) writers such as Mede and Brightman in her narrative.[71] Clarke's lack of familiarity with Reformation theology also caused difficulty when she labelled Theodore Beza a Jewish restorationist for a number of comments entirely typical of those who had no interest in a Jewish restoration to the land. These included Beza's statement that individual Jews had as much chance of salvation as Gentiles and his assertion that the 'covenant' is irrevocable,[72] a reference Clarke interpreted as referring to the land of Israel, but which Beza clearly referred to as the covenant of 'eternal life'.[73] A similar desire to paint the adherents of Judeo-centrism as a bizarre minority grouping is evident in early modern scholar Nabil Matar's work. Matar saw studies of Judeo-centrism as inherently linked to the 1967 Israeli occupation of Jerusalem. Scholars, he wrote, attempted 'to present a seemingly monolithic support for Protestantism's advocacy of Zionism'.[74] Matar provided a long list of writers who had examined the theme in the period when the subject first began to gain academic interest. 'The implications of…Restorationist literature have long crossed beyond the academic/theological boundaries to the world of *real-politik*', he wrote.[75] To an extent this can be clearly seen in works positive towards the Judeo-centric tradition, such as those by Culver and Ice. Yet Matar presumes that those he is writing against are overlooking historical evidence. Arguing that a belief in Jewish restoration had been wrongly portrayed as entirely orthodox by historians of millenarianism, he claimed instead that Judeo-centrism was an aberration and was always treated in the early modern period as a dangerous heresy.[76] This criticism was certainly not fair. No early modern scholar had denied that while a belief in Jewish restoration could be orthodox, there were certainly many who found the

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71.   Clarke, *Allies*, p. 34. Tany (1608–1659) believed that he was the King of the Jews and would be responsible for their return to Zion. He achieved notoriety when he set up tents on the bank of the Thames and burned the 'idols' of the nation—including a Bible. He also attempted to storm parliament single-handed, for which he was imprisoned but soon freed as a man who posed little danger. He died in a shipwreck off Holland *en route* to the Holy Land. John Traske (c. 1585–1636) was a former Church of England clergyman and separatist minister who became infamous for his 'Judaizing'—including following the Mosaic dietary laws and keeping a Saturday Sabbath. After imprisonment and torture he revoked his Judaizing and published a retraction.

72.   Clarke, *Allies*, pp. 29-31.

73.   See Beza's note in *The Holy Bible* (Geneva, 1599), New Testament, p. 67 n. 15.

74.   Nabil Matar, 'Protestantism, Palestine, and Partisan Scholarship', *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 18.4 (1989), pp. 52-70 (53).

75.   Matar, 'Protestantism', p. 55.

76.   Matar, 'Protestantism', pp. 53-55.

concept difficult. In fact, a chapter in an influential edited collection was dedicated to exactly this topic.[77] In a more recent work Matar adopted a different approach, contending that English theologians wanted the Jews to be restored to Palestine so as to form an outpost of English Christian civilization in the Middle East. This, he claims, would reverse the perceived failure of the English to capture Jerusalem in the Crusades.[78] The difficulty with this approach, as Cogley has pointed out, is that it fails to see that the Crusades were used as an example of the pope's insatiable lust for power in early modern England. Matar's opinion also ignores the fact that Jews were to be *superior* to the Gentiles in the restored kingdom. They could not, therefore, be subservient to the English.[79]

The temptation when examining the history of Judeo-centric belief and its political impact is to argue that the belief was either wholesale orthodox or heterodox. As stated above, however, it is impossible to make blanket statements about early modern eschatology. While some authors, such as Rosemary and Herman Ruether, have shown an appreciation of this nuance,[80] the majority of contemporary scholars writing on the theme have preferred to present a simplistic picture of early modern millennial thought. Indeed, many pay the historical roots of Christian Zionism lip service and move quickly past them. This is evident in works like Sizer's *Christian Zionism* and Clifford Kiracoffe's *Dark Crusade*, in which the early modern period is granted only the most cursory of examinations before being abandoned. In Sizer, for example, two pages of his historical chapter deal with the period from 1607–1800, compared to thirty-six pages on the nineteenth century. While this is understandable in works concentrating on a particular period or individual,[81] and part of the reason for Sizer's oversight is certainly issues of space, it is nonetheless unfortunate that the early modern theme is often treated in such little detail.

The irony of all this is that in arguments over the orthodoxy and heterodoxy of Judeo-centrism, scholars unwittingly play into the hands of those who wish to use history to support their own theological positions. For within

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77. A.R. Dallison, 'Contemporary Criticism of Millenarianism', in Toon (ed.), *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel*, pp. 104-14.

78. Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 167-83.

79. Cogley, 'Fall of the Ottoman Empire', p. 331.

80. Ruether and Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah*, p. 73.

81. Another short examination of the seventeenth-century background to Christian Zionism is found in Donald Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 24-33. In a targeted study which does not aim to provide a large-scale overview of Christian Zionism as a whole, a more limited historical study is understandable.

their historical works is the implication (explicit or not) that the antiquity of a doctrine can be used to establish its validity. All of these writers therefore argue (or fear) that Christian Zionism and early modern Judeo-centric beliefs are the same thing. This is made explicit in Donald Wagner's examination of the historical background of Christian Zionism in his 1995 *Anxious for Armageddon*. On reading Thomas Brightman's work, Wagner was quick to draw comparisons between the seventeenth-century preacher and contemporary popular prophecy writers. He recalled that 'As I read through these pages in their original Elizabethan English, I experienced a sense of timelessness. I felt that aside from the archaic language and style, I could be reading a volume written by Hal Lindsey, Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell'.[82] This claim was followed by the statement that Brightman was the 'first futurist premillennial dispensationalist whose writings are available to us today'.[83] Despite the worrying discrepancy with the details of Brightman's actual work,[84] Wagner's reading of Brightman has been followed by later authors, showing the importance of detailed primary research in discussing the development of belief and practice.[85]

The problem with these approaches is that they fail to see that the historical antecedents of Christian Zionism should not serve as a legitimation of contemporary eschatology. While it is understandable that Protestant writers would want to claim historical support for their doctrine from the puritan 'giants' of the faith,[86] it is nonetheless the case that the underlying philosophy

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82.   Donald Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995), p. 86.

83.   Wagner, *Anxious*, p. 87. Wagner's comment is incorrect on all three counts. Brightman was neither a futurist (in fact, he includes a 150-page excursus against Roberto Bellarmine's futurist eschatology in his commentary on Revelation), nor a premillennialist (see n. 26 above), nor a dispensationalist (although he does divide God's promises for Israel and the church).

84.   Wagner claims that he read a 'tract' named *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* published in 1585 that was held by the British Museum. Brightman's *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* was first published (in Latin) in 1609 as a 700-page commentary. Research and discussions with archivists at both the British Library and British Museum have failed to find any work published by Brightman prior to this.

85.   Wagner is followed in discussions of a 1585 tract by Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse* (Oxford: One World, 2006), p. 3 and the Ruethers (with the publication date listed as 1600, *Wrath of Jonah*, p. 73). While these are hardly major errors, they are nonetheless disconcerting.

86.   See Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, pp. 9-11 for the 'claiming' of puritan writers in support of one or another millennial position. There is some truth in David Pawson's suggestion that Reformed writers such as Sizer are uncomfortable with any suggestion that a Reformed epistemology may be responsible for Christian Zionism in any shape or form (Pawson, *Defending Christian Zionism*, p. 22). With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the extreme 'neo-Reformed' movement in popular Evangelicalism (represented by figures such as John Piper and Mark Driscoll) is keen both to distance

of history behind the majority of these studies represents an acceptance (or a fear) that history can be used as the foundation for a doctrine's respectability. This is a determinedly present-minded approach, looking at the early modern period through the lens of contemporary eschatological developments. Ironically, this has led scholars and Zionist writers alike to ignore the antecedents to contemporary eschatological beliefs that there are in early modern eschatology. Rather than examining the historical record in detail, it is approached as a book of proofs or denials for the writer's own position. A greater appreciation of the nature of early modern Judeo-centric eschatology in contemporary works, which saw them in their own context, would greatly enhance studies of Christian Zionism by allowing scholars to map genealogical histories of the belief. A detailed study of the way in which Judeo-centrism evolved, the influence it had on dispensationalism and the nature of the debates surrounding it in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would therefore prove invaluable to those attempting to understand the varieties of Protestant eschatological belief. It is essential that future studies of the theme take this into consideration.

The irony for many contemporary scholars examining Christian Zionism is that their works have begun to take on the characteristics of apocalyptic commentaries in their own right. Their studies aim to unveil the truth of a popular theological movement, either as a prophetic call to reform (Sizer, the Ruethers, Kiracoffe) or to act as a stirring call to arms for a persecuted group (Wilkinson, Pawson, Ice). On both sides, their texts express a longing for a return to a primitive Christian purity that they believe to have been undermined by either Christian Zionists or critics of dispensationalism. It is noteworthy that this is often seen in nationalistic terms. Thus Kiracoffe bemoans the way in which Christian Zionists have undermined a 'true' American foreign policy of cooperation with Arab nations: 'insidiously twist[ing] the American republic's traditional values of faith, hope, and charity into delusion, fear, and war'.[87] English evangelist Pawson, meanwhile, blames contemporary attitudes towards Israel in the UK for the loss of the British Empire and God's current rejection of the 'hedonistic' nation. The anti-Zionism of mainstream Christianity is the final proof, Pawson argues, that

itself from dispensational eschatology and show its own continuation with 'puritan' theology. See, for example, Driscoll, who in a sermon series preached to those applying for church membership, called pre-tribulationists 'wing-nuts, weirdoes, nut-jobs…eschatomaniacs, guys who love charts and graphs and "when is Jesus coming back?"… They're freaking out over the mark of the beast and the Antichrist and these people have canned goods and live in fear, clean their gun a lot, read Lamentations…' (Mark Driscoll, 'Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe. The Kingdom', Mars Hill Church, Seattle, 28 June 2008).

87.   Kiracoffe, *Dark Crusade*, p. 181.

'"Christian" England is a thing of the past'.[88] For writers who treat the tradition either positively or negatively, Christian Zionism therefore becomes a tool through which to build a primitivist conception of a past 'golden age' and reflect a yearning for a return to that time. In doing so, their works stop functioning merely as commentaries on apocalyptic themes and instead become apocalyptic artefacts in themselves.

The Future History of Millennial Studies

This snapshot of a contentious area of eschatological history has suggested that historical research in millennial studies is still often dominated by confessional positions. The belief that history can serve to legitimize present doctrine remains strong; that is, that evidence of a theology's existence in history can serve as justification for that doctrine's continued existence in contemporary culture. This is, of course, driven by the same concern displayed by early Protestants in answering the thorny Catholic question of where their church was before Luther. Thus we see scholars using the existence of Judeo-centrism to justify contemporary Christian Zionism or (at the opposite extreme) striving to show the essentially heterodox nature of all of Christian Zionism's antecedents. All history is read through the lens of the current situation—the 'presentism' so abhorred by Gordon S. Wood in his recent work on the uses of history, in which he describes it as a 'ransacking' of the discipline.[89] The problem with this kind of historical approach is that it is essentially dishonest. It adopts a narrow view and selectively takes what it needs from the historical record. What is worse, it is a use of history that discourages historians (confessional or otherwise) from looking in detail at particular millennial movements, for fear that their conclusions could be put to political or confessional uses. Sizer's reluctance to engage more fully with the pre-history of Christian Zionism in its Judeo-centric form is symptomatic of this approach. For finding developed, political, Judeo-centric doctrines prior to Darby could be seen to give historical legitimation to the contemporary movement.

What role, then, does history have in the future of millennial studies? I would like to suggest some ways in which scholars approaching Christian Zionism in the next decade, particularly from a confessional viewpoint, might attempt to engage with the subject's historical contours. First, we can expect to see an increased interest in the history of all millennial movements,

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88. Pawson, *Defending Christian Zionism*, pp. 153-56. See also his statement that we need only read Rom. 1 to see that God is 'angry with Britain' today, likely a comment on the acceptance of homosexuality.

89. Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 5-10.

including Christian Zionism. Writing in 1978, Mel Scult optimistically suggested that 'Millennial expectations are, at the present time, almost completely absent from mainstream Christianity. Because the end-time is now only calculated by people on the fringe, we have an unusual opportunity. It is relatively easy to distance ourselves from this particular myth system.'[90] We can no longer argue that this is the case—in fact, millennial expectations may be more conspicuously part of mainstream Christian culture (particularly in the United States) than ever before.[91] We can therefore expect more historians, motivated by their own experiences of millennial thought, to enter the field. These experiences may have been fostered through personal encounters with millennial movements or emerged through an interaction with millennialism in popular culture, and they may have formed largely positive or negative impressions long before an individual's historical research begins. With this in mind, it is vital that historians who hold particular millennial positions themselves stop searching history for a legitimation of their belief system.

Of course, it is never possible to approach history from an entirely objective space and it would be churlish to claim that I have done so here. There is no avoiding the inevitable subjectivity of all historical research. We cannot empty ourselves of ourselves when we approach the past—we are, after all, driven to our historical studies by our own interests.[92] Yet this should not give us free reign to use the historical record to support our own ideological prejudices. Rather we should be willing to treat the past as the past, not as a book of proofs for the present. This will, of course, involve recognizing both the alterity of the past and its inherent complexity. The dividing lines between orthodox and heterodox, particularly in the seventeenth century, were not always clear. In ignoring the essentially convoluted nature of historical eschatological systems, we become guilty of what Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan described as an abandonment of history 'in favour of tales that belong to morality plays but do not help us to consider the past in all its complexities'.[93]

Does this mean that eschatological history should be completely divorced from present interests? Of course not. The argument of this chapter is not that history should have no role in millennial studies other than blandly telling us 'what has gone before'. Indeed, tracing the backgrounds to contemporary

90. Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), p. xii.

91. Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism*, pp. 125-31.

92. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1-17.

93. Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (London: Profile, 2009), p. 37.

theo-political movements is essential to enhancing our understanding of millennial movements as a whole. We should therefore not be afraid of uncovering either antecedents of contemporary movements or sharp diversions from them in our historical studies. The key point is that we should not dive into a pool of historical sources *hoping to find such antecedents*. If we should happen to discover precursors of contemporary theologies, they should not be used to make any value judgment upon the contemporary movements they predate. For there remains a primitivist assumption that undergirds much of contemporary (particularly Protestant) historical thought, that links a doctrine's validity to its antiquity. But this is surely a fallacy. As Foucault noted, history teaches us 'how to laugh at the solemnities of the origin'.[94] Ironically, a search for the legitimation of present eschatological positions in the historical record is an anti-apocalyptic exercise. If a feature of much apocalyptic thought is a growing clarity, a revelatory unveiling as the end approaches, then the legitimacy of a doctrine need not be established by its antiquity—for we should expect new (and more correct) eschatological positions to emerge over time as prophecy becomes clearer. This is accepted by those dispensational scholars who are happy to find support for Christian Zionism in the seventeenth century while also denying the dates that were set by Judeo-centrists for the restoration of Israel. Indeed, this is the same impulse that allows writers such as Hal Lindsey to suggest a general 'season' when the rapture is likely to occur without breaching Christ's prohibition on predicting the day or hour of his return (and the same system that allows recalculation if he should be proven wrong).[95]

While I have been calling for a more nuanced usage of history here, the suspicion remains that this hope is millennial in and of itself. It is likely that many millennial movements of today will find themselves used in future as support for as yet unimagined streams of eschatological thought. This is, of course, not something that would be countenanced by contemporary dispensationalists, the majority of whom (while admitting the uncertainty of correctly identifying what unfulfilled prophecy refers to) still maintain that Christ's return will be within their lifetimes. The fact that some dispensational writers were convinced of the rapture's occurrence in 1988, or of Soviet invasions of Israel, can thus be laughed off as the work of over-active imaginations or prophetic misreading. This is hardly a new phenomenon. When proven wrong about his chosen year of 1697 for the downfall of the Catholic Church, Thomas Beverley was able to recalculate the date as 1698,

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94.   Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. Paul Rabinow; London: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 76-100 (79).

95.   Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 53-54; *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), pp. 161-75.

1699, 1700 and finally 1701 before his numerological speculations were cut short by his death.[96] Similarly, Harold Camping's constant adjustment of dates for Christ's return in 2011 shows exactly the same principle at work. As Leon Festinger showed over fifty years ago, apocalyptic thought has an endless capacity for surviving failed date-specific predictions and there is no reason to think that this will change. Other Christian Zionists will be content to intimate that the time of Israel's vindication (and thus the rapture) is near without setting any dates. While no-one may know the day or the hour of Christ's coming, political events can lead to certainty of its imminence: 'in general, that the time is near, we may safely conclude', wrote Increase Mather in 1669; 'unmistakably, for the first time in history, all the signs are coming together at an accelerating rate', concluded Hal Lindsey in 1981.[97] For future millennial movements, the movement of history in their own time will always be the unique moment at which prophecy appears to be reaching its climax. Their forebears will not be looked to for dates, but rather for concepts. What will therefore remain important for historically aware eschatological groups within mainstream Christianity is not whether past theologians guessed the correct date (which they indisputably failed to do), but rather that they can demonstrate some continuity in theological thought and the essentials of biblical interpretation with those held to be 'biblically orthodox'. Many theologians would baulk at this description for contemporary dispensationalism, but the fact remains that, for millions of Christians today, a firm distinction between Israel and the church combined with a grasp of dispensational eschatology remain the hallmark of orthodoxy. There is no reason to think that in the future the same will not be true for those movements that evolve out of today's dispensationalism. Critics from outside of these movements will likely invoke the fear of heterodoxy and, like the critics of Christian Zionism today, attempt to deny any historical legitimacy to them.

Returning to the immediate future, it would be desirable if both opponents and supporters of Christian Zionism could show at least some respect for one another through their use of historical scholarship and engage in meaningful dialogue in the spirit of Christian unity. Yet I strongly suspect that this hope will prove to be groundless. As Stanley Fish has pointed out, dialogue tends to assume that minds can be changed by the objective consideration of bare facts. This is an Enlightenment ideal that has no place for those who base their thinking on an external authority such as the Bible, which is placed

96. See Warren Johnston, 'Thomas Beverley and "The Late Great Revolution": English Apocalyptic Expectations in the Late Seventeenth Century', in *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (ed. Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 158-75.

97. Mather, *Mystery*, p. 37; Lindsey, *The 1980s*, p. 162.

above the ideal of objective reason; it relies on people coming to the table
with willingness for their beliefs to be changed.[98] Fish over-simplifies the
nuances of a high view of biblical authority, but he makes an important
point—when everybody in a debate is already convinced that they are right,
the debate itself ceases to matter. Nobody in the debate over Christian
Zionism is willing to have their minds changed—understandably so, when
real lives (body and soul) are seen to be at risk if the wrong answer is given.
Dialogue is unlikely to change someone's opinion on the interpretation of the
Abrahamic promises, especially with both sides fully aware of the arguments
of the other. This is hardly a new discovery—Protestants have been gloomily
aware of it since the arguments over how to interpret 'is' in the debate on the
Eucharistic institution at Marburg.[99] In a world in which Sizer thinks Wilkin-
son a heretic and Wilkinson returns the compliment, it is unlikely that open
dialogue would achieve anything at all (indeed, Sizer and Pawson have
resorted to attacking each other in Amazon book reviews).[100] A more realistic
hope may thus be civility and resistance to the temptation to demonize the
other side.

   All of this may seem like a bleak view of the future uses of history in
millennial studies. It may seem to present a field in which confessional com-
batants attack one another with gusto; to make the cynical assumption that
partisan uses of history by millenarians and their opponents will continue
without the potential for change. Yet while the viewpoint presented here is
pessimistic, the hope may yet remain that scholars of millennialism, if these
patterns do continue, will be alive to the dangers of misusing history and be
prepared to engage millennial movements on their own terms.

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   98.   Stanley Fish, *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
Press, 1999).
   99.   The Marburg Colloquy was a meeting of German and Swiss reformers held in
October 1529, with the aim of resolving doctrinal disputes between the parties. Agreement
could be reached on all areas, with the exception of the Eucharist. The debate revolved
around the interpretation of '*est*' in the phrase '*hoc est corpus meum*' ('This is my
body'—Mt. 26.26; Mk 14.22; Lk. 22.19; 1 Cor. 11.24). Luther took '*est*' to imply a real
presence in the elements, while Zwingli interpreted '*est*' to mean that the bread only
signified the body of Christ. For a relation of the debate through primary accounts of the
Colloquy, see Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Reformation in its Own Words* (London: SCM
Press, 1964), pp. 154-63.
   100.   See in particular Sizer's review of Pawson's *Defending Christian Zionism* at
<http://www.amazon.co.uk/review/R2SVGD114Z5F99/ref=cm_cr_pr_perm?ie=UTF8
&ASIN=1901949621&nodeID=&tag=&linkCode=> (accessed 14 September 2011).

TRINITY COLLEGE, JOHN DARBY AND THE POWERSCOURT *MILIEU*

Timothy C.F. Stunt

Millennial studies is concerned with eschatological expectations. Students in this field are interested in how people expect the future will unfold, but in reality this often means how people *hope* things will turn out, or what they *fear* will happen. On the other hand those who are most vocal on these future developments are inclined to exhibit an aura of certitude that plays down the element of hope and fear, especially when their declarations about the last days are, supposedly, based on oracular statements made by inspired prophets or authoritative texts. In this chapter we shall consider several figures who played a critical part in the development of the eschatological assumptions shared by large numbers of Christians during the last two hundred years. Inevitably my account will often be dependent on their discourse, which is liable to tell us about their perceptions rather than the reality of the world of which they were products. My hope is that by putting them in their intellectual context and by considering some of the social circumstances that may have contributed to their thinking, we may get beyond their discourse to some of the social and psychological forces that may have driven them more than they realized. I am aware that in doing this there is a risk of reverting to the over-simplified and deterministic model associated with deprivation theory, but that possibility may need to be faced when considering the future of millennial studies.

In 1835 a member of the Church of Ireland, who signed himself as 'Dionysius', wrote an anxious letter to the *Christian Examiner* saying that he had been invited by a 'pious and excellent clergyman of the Established Church' to attend the latest 'Powerscourt' Conference. Deploring the speculative obscurity of the subjects proposed for discussion, he strongly advised his fellow churchmen to avoid the occasion, which he dismissed as 'a mixed and crowded assembly of clergymen, and laymen, and females, and boys, where old and young are mingled together, where the great bulk of the meeting neither have studied nor could understand the subjects or their difficulties'. This judgment was based on his earlier experience 'when in the

splendid drawing room of Powerscourt House, I have witnessed the motley array of *soidisant* students of prophecy, collected around the amiable and excellent, but injudicious mistress of the mansion'. To underline this criticism he supplemented his letter with the text of the programme for the proposed conference—a programme that included such arcane topics as 'the measure of renovation of the earth in the Millennium', whether 'our present position is on the Father's throne', or whether we can 'discover Satan's designs in the church at large from a study of our own hearts; or, in our hearts, from his workings in the church'.[1] Some of the questions discussed two years earlier had verged on the esoteric,[2] but the organizers' taste for recondite obscurity seems to have gathered momentum by 1835. However, although Robert Daly's withdrawal at the end of the earlier conference had probably marginalized the event somewhat, it was still, as late as 1835, far from being an overwhelmingly 'Brethren' occasion, and there is little in that year's programme to suggest that anything along the lines of a 'dispensationalist hermeneutic' was a pre-assumption of the organizers. So perhaps even at this comparatively late stage, John Nelson Darby had still not quite assumed the position of dominance that he would later enjoy and which, with hindsight, historians have been inclined to attribute to him.[3] There is therefore good reason for us to look again at both him and some of his Irish contemporaries in these formative years.

In fact, the somewhat protean figure of John Nelson Darby would take on a variety of identities over the course of his long life. There was the restless seceder in Ireland, described by the Archbishop of Tuam's biographer as a 'Goliath of dissent'. There was the self-exiled wandering gentleman, warmly appreciated in France, Switzerland and Germany for his linguistic and social adaptability. There is the tenacious ecclesiastical controversialist whose disposal of his opponents could be savage and ruthless, and then there was the celebrated British biblical expositor whose dispensationalist hermeneutic, but not his ecclesiology, charmed (and continues to charm) many American evangelicals.[4] In each of these scenarios, his success seems to be related to a

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1. *Christian Examiner* NS 4 (September 1835), pp. 639, 641, 642.

2. For the subjects discussed in 1833, see W. Elfe Tayler, *Passages from the Diary and Letters of Henry Craik of Bristol* (London: Shaw, 1866), pp. 168-69.

3. E.g. H.H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren 1825–1850* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1967), pp. 96-97; F.R. Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (London: Paternoster Press, 1968), p. 110.

4. For a more extended analysis of these four identities of Darby, see T.C.F. Stunt, 'John Nelson Darby: Contexts and Perceptions', in *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790–2000* (ed. Crawford Gribben and Andrew Holmes; Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 83-98.

maverick element that was truly *sui generis*, so that others who modelled themselves on him did so at their peril.

Clearly the origins of this unusual man were highly complex, but more than one writer has suggested that if we could understand intellectual developments in Trinity College Dublin in the early nineteenth century we would be in a better position to assess both Darby's thinking and some of the attitudes against which he was reacting.[5] Some assessment of the mutual reinforcement that Irish Evangelicalism and Trinity College gave to each other has been made in Joseph Liechty's doctoral thesis.[6] Similarly, Floyd Elmore has considered the possible impact of some of the Fellows of Trinity College, in particular that of Dean Richard Graves (1763–1829), on Darby's thinking.[7] Building on their work, Gary Nebeker has sought to analyse Darby's later eschatology in terms of his rejection of the assumptions of some of his teachers.[8] The object of this chapter is to consider some of Darby's predecessors, contemporaries and successors at Trinity in the hope of identifying some of the variations in the thinking of a remarkable range of individuals and the context for their intellectual development—a context in which Trinity College may possibly be seen as the *fons et origo*. By the same token we shall, perhaps, be in a better position to evaluate some of John Darby's eschatological competitors and how wide a variety of prophetic pieties could emerge from a Trinity education at this time. Given the extraordinary place that dispensationalism (and the particular variety of premillennialism to which it has given rise) currently holds among a huge number of evangelicals, such an investigation is highly pertinent to any discussion of the future of millennial studies. Needless to say, an outsider, with no connection to Queen Elizabeth's College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, will leave others to decide whether this establishment can be treated as the putative

5. E.R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 90; D.N. Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and Eschatology', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980), pp. 179-94 (185), where the question is raised in the context of the uncertain relationship between anti-Catholicism and premillennialism.

6. J. Liechty, 'Irish Evangelicalism, Trinity College Dublin, and the Mission of the Church of Ireland at the End of the Eighteenth Century' (unpublished PhD thesis, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1987).

7. F.S. Elmore, 'A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby' (unpublished PhD thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), pp. 64-73, cited by G.L. Nebeker (see below, n. 8). Elmore appears to have used some of his findings in a popular presentation: 'J.N. Darby's Early Years' <www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Elmore-JNDarbysEarlyYears.pdf> (accessed 15 March 2011).

8. G.L. Nebeker, 'John Nelson Darby and Trinity College, Dublin: A Study in Eschatological Contrasts', *Fides et Historia* 34 (2002), pp. 87-108.

grandfather of dispensationalism, or indeed whether it has played a significant part in its ancestry.

Even before William Blair Neatby produced his eminently readable *History of the Plymouth Brethren*, biographers and interpreters of John Nelson Darby had been alluding to John Walker (1768–1833) and his 'separatist' followers as precursors of the Brethren.[9] The fact that Darby seems never to have made any reference to the Walkerites in his writing and the fact that Walker's secession occurred in 1804 when Darby was not yet four years old, are circumstances that probably warrant a *prima facie* questioning of this supposed link and a closer look at these 'separatists'.

For some years before his secession, Walker[10] had been something of an evangelical *enfant terrible*. In 1794, Archbishop Fowler (whom, with others, Walker would soon stigmatize in print as a 'baptized infidel') had inhibited Walker from officiating in the diocese of Dublin, but as one of the chaplains (together with the more moderate Henry Maturin) of the Bethesda Chapel, he epitomized the anomalous ecclesiastical identity of that chapel, in which he was able to associate with dissenters while still a minister of the establishment. His blistering condemnation of the Methodists, their defender Alexander Knox and others in and out of the establishment, had earned him a reputation for controversy, but he retained his Fellowship at Trinity College Dublin, where he was a respected (albeit unusual) classical scholar. When Walker decided that he could no longer be ecclesiastically associated with any institutional expression of the establishment, or indeed with any Christians who thought differently from himself, he decided to sever his connection with Trinity. The self-serving and somewhat two-faced provost, John Kearney, refused Walker's resignation (apparently 'with tears in his eyes') only to expel him publicly the next day.[11]

For a historian, writing some two hundred years after the event, the following that gathered around Walker is very hard to identify. Apart from Robert Lucas Chance, a glass manufacturer in Smethwick to whom William Burton dedicated the second volume of his edition of Walker's *Essays and Correspondence*, the identity of Walker's correspondents is shrouded in the anonymity of their initials. As one would expect of a movement known as 'Separatists', a principle concern was to keep 'themselves unspotted from the

9.   W.B. Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2nd edn, 1902), pp. 26-27.

10.   The fullest account of Walker is by Grayson Carter, 'Thomas Kelly and John Walker and the Revival of "Apostolic" Practices within Irish Evangelicalism', in *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c. 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 58-104.

11.   J.P. Mahaffy, 'From 1758 to the Close of the Century', in *The Book of Trinity College, Dublin, 1591–1891* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1892), p. 89.

world'; details of Walker's followers are consequently elusive. Walker's secession occurred in 1804 and any excitement arising from such an event probably subsided in the decade that followed. However, in 1816, the year after Darby was admitted to Trinity College, Dr Whitley Stokes (1763–1845), a Professor in the Royal College of Surgeons, who had been a Fellow of Trinity for almost thirty years, resigned his fellowship to join the Walkerite church.[12] Stokes was a significant figure in the college. On his own admission he had earlier been associated with Wolfe Tone and the Society of United Irishmen, but when he 'found that the object of [the society's] associates was not to be confined to effecting reforms by peaceful and constitutional means', he had withdrawn from the association.[13] Following the rising in 1798, when, inevitably, his former connections were held against him, Stokes had been barred from academic promotion for a while. However, this was regarded as a harsh decision, and Stokes had remained a widely respected figure in the college.[14] His resignation and secession, and his insistence that his son's education should not be contaminated by the influence of the Established Church, must have been a talking point in Trinity at the time. Darby, coming from a wealthy family, was a Fellow Commoner at Trinity, and there are no indications of his family sharing the sympathies of liberal patriots like Henry Grattan, John Philpot Curran and Charles Kendal Bushe, with whom Whitley Stokes was associated.[15] It is similarly unlikely that the earlier opposition of

12.   Norman Moore's account of Whitley Stokes's son William in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (*DNB*) (63 vols.; London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885–1900) said nothing of the father's secession from the establishment though he noted that William was tutored by John Walker. William's son and biographer referred to his grandfather becoming a non-conformist but gave no details of his association with the Walkerites. William Stokes, *William Stokes, his Life and Work 1804–1878* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1898), p. 20. L. Perry Curtis, Jr, alludes briefly to the matter in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) (ed. H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison; 61 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). It is possible that William James Stokes (1807–1881), one of the earliest Brethren at Aungier Street, Dublin, was related to this family, but I have been unable to find any evidence for such a connection.

13.   Wolfe Tone commented in his Journal (20 May 1798), 'With regard to Stokes, I know he is acting rigidly on principle: for I know he is incapable of acting otherwise; but I fear very much that his very metaphysical unbending purity, which can accommodate itself neither to men, times, nor circumstances, will always prevent his being of any service to his country, which is a thousand pities: for I know no man whose virtues and whose talents I more sincerely reverence. I see only one place fit for him and, after all, if Ireland were independent, I believe few enlightened Irishmen would oppose his being placed there—I mean at the head of a system of national education.' *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*… (ed. W.T.W. Tone; 2 vols.; Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1826), II, p. 489.

14.   Tone, *Life of Tone*, pp. 21-23.

15.   Tone, *Life of Tone*, pp. 25-26.

such men to the union, or their support for Catholic Emancipation, would have awakened much sympathy in the heart of the fifteen-year-old Darby. Nevertheless, Whitley Stokes's secession did occur shortly after Darby's arrival at Trinity, and we may reasonably assume therefore that there was, at this time, an increased public awareness of the Walkerites and their views.

It was, in fact, a writer in the *London Quarterly Review* who, in 1866, linked Darby with the Walkerites most strongly and claimed that 'the true date of the origin of this system [Darbyism] is 1808; its birthplace, Trinity College, Dublin; and its real parent, one of the Fellows, the Reverend John Walker'. Then, to prove his point, the writer filled more than three pages of his article with Walker's *Brief account of the People called Separatists* (published in 1821).[16] His claim, however, must be put in its context. The review was entitled 'The Plymouth Brethren and Lay Preaching in Ireland' and opened, not surprisingly (given the *London Quarterly Review*'s Methodist provenance), with the premise that the popularity of the lay preaching which characterized the recent Ulster Revival had its origin in the arrival of Methodism in the eighteenth century. As the reviewer was critical of the way the Brethren had 'seized the passing opportunity [of the Ulster Revival] and dexterously turned [the situation] to good account in the diffusion of their peculiar principles',[17] it suited him to identify the Brethren as a subsection of the Walkerites. 'The Christian public should know that the [Plymouth] system…claims as its parent one of the Fellows of Trinity College Dublin;… and the germ of the system, and all its essential features, are found in his [i.e. Walker's] writings, particularly in his Letters against Methodism, addressed to Alexander Knox, Esq., of Derry'.[18] In view of Walker's very high Calvinism and antinomian tendencies, the dangers of Darbyism could thus be brought home to the reviewer's Methodist readership.

A close examination of the considerable body of Walker's writings suggests that Walker's primary interests were linguistic, doctrinal and ecclesiological. In such matters his views became ever more precise and outspoken. His comments in the *Westminster Review* in 1824 on the *Greek and English Lexicon*, by the Unitarian minister John Jones, are not untypical: it is a devastating critique (all twenty-four pages of it!) but also amusing in a way one might not have expected. Recognizing the need of students for a good lexicon and the time Jones had spent on his, Walker exclaims:

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16.   'The Plymouth Brethren and Lay Preaching in Ireland', *London Quarterly Review* 27 (October 1866), pp. 1-37 (10-13). It should perhaps be pointed out that the first of the nineteen works being reviewed in this article was Walker's collected *Essays and Correspondence*, which included the 'Brief Account'.

17.   'The Plymouth Brethren', p. 4.

18.   'The Plymouth Brethren', p. 13.

> Would that we could infuse the doctor's active industry into a dozen of the crack scholars of Oxford or Cambridge! And, as we are wishing, we may as well add—would that we could infuse all their knowledge of Greek into Dr Jones! and then—would that he might *live a thousand years*![19]

The polemic is relentless and hardly 'other-worldly', but the passion of the author for accurate translation is unmistakable. One subject, however, in which Walker seems to have taken little interest was eschatology of any sort. His conditional wish for Dr Jones' longevity is the nearest thing to a millennial reference that I have found in Walker's writings. On the other hand we have Wolfe Tone's testimony that Whitley Stokes, even before he became a Walkerite, had 'made the prophecies and revelations his study' and had expressed more than once, sometime before 1798, his expectation that the Jews would return to Palestine and the Temple would be restored.[20]

An interest in the 'last days' was not typical of the generation of Walker and Stokes, who were both born in the 1760s and whose formative studies were complete before the guillotine became symbolic of the violence of the French Revolution. For them, the return of Christ held much less fascination than it did for those younger men who were born amidst all the uncertainties of revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe.[21] Some thirty years younger than Stokes but only five years older than John Darby was Hugh McNeile (1795–1879), who graduated from Trinity in 1815 at the age of 20. His career was expected to be in the law and at the time of his graduation he was hardly marked out as a man of piety. His *penchant* for the theatre was well known and on transferring to Lincoln's Inn he spent a good deal of time in the company of his wealthy bachelor uncle, General McNeile, who was widely considered to have adopted his young, gifted and attractive nephew, and whose fortune, it was assumed, the nephew would inherit.

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19. John Walker, 'Review of *A Greek and English Lexicon*…by John Jones… Published in the *Westminster Review* 2 (April 1824)', in John Walker, *Essays and Correspondence, Chiefly on Scriptural Subjects* (ed. William Burton; 2 vols.; London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman's, 1838), II, p. 598 (original emphasis). Jones replied in a pamphlet *An Answer to a Pseudo-criticism of the Greek and English Lexicon*, described by Walker, in his typically severe rejoinder, as a work of 'extreme scurrility' and as a 'foul object' which he intended to 'handle…as delicately as possible, and hasten to wipe our fingers, and dismiss it and the author for ever'. Walker, *Essays*, II, p. 617.

20. Tone, *Life of Tone*, II, pp. 479, 478.

21. We might compare Walker's lack of interest in matters eschatological with that of Peter Roe of Kilkenny (1778–1841), ten years his junior, whose biographer, while declaring his own premillennial beliefs (p. 439), recognized that Roe's age could have been a factor in his attitude: 'We believe that as we advance in years we become less inclined to engage in new controversies, or to give much attention to matters which at first may appear to us novel and strange'. S. Madden, *Memoir of the Life of the Rev. Peter Roe, A.M., with…his Correspondence, Diaries and other Remains* (Dublin: Curry, 1842), p. 440.

Enjoying the social life of Bath, London and other fashionable resorts, McNeile and his uncle spent some time during the summer of 1816 in the area around Geneva.[22] There they frequented the fashionable and literary circles that included in their number Lord Byron. It was at this time, when staying at Sécheron, that McNeile was taken seriously ill, and his life was considered to be in great danger. By chance, the Whig politician, Henry (later Lord) Brougham arrived at the Inn, learnt of McNeile's plight and 'prescribed for him some desperate remedy, in the success of which, he assured the anxious uncle, lay the only hope of his nephew's recovery'.[23] The young man's cure was dramatic but the human agent of the healing was hardly one to attribute it to divine intervention, and whether this was the occasion of McNeile's evangelical conversion is by no means clear.[24] It was some three years later that McNeile broke the news to his uncle that he was abandoning the law (and with it the political career that General McNeile had probably envisaged) and was seeking ordination. Appointed, in 1820, to the curacy of Stranorlar, he had occasion to meet the Bishop of Raphoe, William Magee, whose Episcopal palace was nearby and who would later ordain John Darby. In 1822 McNeile would marry Anne Magee, the Bishop's daughter, but already the doors to advancement were opening for McNeile. When visiting his uncle in London, he was asked to substitute for Gerard Noel at Percy Chapel with the result that Henry Drummond, who worshiped there when in town, heard the young man's eloquence and invited him to be the incumbent of Albury, of which he would be rector for the next twelve years. Thus it was that a man barely thirty years old came to be the chairman of the Albury Conferences in the later years of the decade.

From the start McNeile was noted for his eloquence, which, coupled with his good looks, made for dramatic and prophetic preaching, and he certainly was not lacking in confidence.[25] At the height of the Catholic Emancipation crisis he produced a pamphlet in which he presented himself as a latter day Jeremiah, the one lonely but faithful minister who was prepared to warn his people of the dangers of Roman Catholicism. His dismissal of his fellow ministers, some of whom may be clearly identified as moderate evangelicals, verges on youthful arrogance:

22.   Unaccountably the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1911) gives Florence instead of Geneva, and the mistake has been widely reproduced online.

23.   'Our Portrait Gallery No. xliv: The Rev. Hugh M'Neile, A.M.', *Dublin University Magazine* 29 (1847), pp. 462-71 (464). I have used this account to supplement the entry in *ODNB*.

24.   The connection is suggested in G.C. Boase's account in the *DNB* but John Wolffe in the *ODNB* says nothing of his time in Switzerland and, while referring to his conversion, gives no details.

25.   In 1825, when he had only been a minister for five years, he published a collection of his sermons, H. McNeile, *Seventeen Sermons* (London: Hatchard, 1825).

> But the teachers who have led you astray are men of a different stamp, men of activity, of zeal, of much profession: men who have talked about Christian experience, humility, and piety, and brotherly love, till they have gained an ascendancy over your affections. These are the men, who prophesy unto you smooth things, telling you of the great increase of vital religion, and the general improvement amongst all classes of society. They see not the revealed end of the great purpose of God in creation: neither do they recognize the revealed plan of God in allowing Satan to usurp the principality of this world, which was lost in the first man Adam, and shall be restored in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, at his coming again.[26]

In writing in this way McNeile was fully identifying himself with the participants of the Albury Conferences, as portrayed by Henry Drummond in his *Dialogues on Prophecy*.[27] In fact when a correspondent of the *Christian Observer* protested that the magazine had unfairly included McNeile with Irving and the Albury students of prophecy, the editor retorted with citations from McNeile's *England's Protest* where, he claimed, the author implied that any 'who doubt the justice of Mr. M'Neile's [*sic*] application and paraphrase of the inspired denunciations [of Jeremiah], are scoffers and infidels'.[28]

Anyone familiar with McNeile's later career in Liverpool will not be surprised to encounter at this early stage in his career such a deep fear of Catholicism.[29] As the son-in-law of the Archbishop of Dublin, he was almost bound to wave that particular banner, though we cannot say whether he had already adopted such a position when at Trinity, where, it should be remembered, Roman Catholics had been allowed to matriculate and take degrees as early as 1793 and where, only a year or two ahead of McNeile, no fewer than four Roman Catholics, formerly at Stonyhurst, had graduated before entering Lincoln's Inn, as he did.[30] But, given the anxieties of the Irish Establishment, we might expect that central to McNeile's interpretation of prophecy would be the identification of the Papacy with the Antichrist. Like so many of the earlier students of prophecy associated with the Albury Conferences, McNeile had no objections to the 'year-day theory' propounded by the historicist

26. H. McNeile, *England's Protest is England's Shield, for the Battle Is the Lord's* (London: Hatchard, 1829), pp. 32-33.

27. H. Drummond, *Dialogues on Prophecy* (3 vols.; London: Nisbet, 1827–29) where McNeile's contributions are given under the name of the Greek orator, Isocrates; see S. Halkett and J. Laing, *A Dictionary of the Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature of Great Britain…* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: Paterson, 1882), I, p. 624.

28. *Christian Observer and Advocate* 29 (1829), p. 719.

29. For McNeile's confrontational anti-Catholic career in Liverpool, see F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819–1914: An Aspect of Anglo-Irish History* (Liverpool: Newsham Press, 2003 [1998]), pp. 44-69 and *passim*; for some of Neal's sources for McNeile, see p. 77 n. 27.

30. See *DNB*, under Ball, Nicholas (1791–1865); Sheil, Richard Lalor (1791–1851); Woulfe, Stephen (1787–1840); Wyse, Sir Thomas (1791–1862).

pre-millennialists. According to this theory, the Little Horn of Daniel 7 and Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots of Revelation 17, could be identified as the Papacy. McNeile, the chairman of the Albury Conferences, would definitely have felt comfortable with the suggestion in Drummond's *Dialogues* that the assembly of the undefiled described in Revelation 14 included the workers of the Reformation Society in Ireland and the clergy in London who were prepared 'to preach against popery'.[31]

Identifying the historic Papacy as the Antichrist in this way had for hundreds of years been liable to affect religious historiography. This interpretation had been initiated in 1242 by Bishop Eberhard of Salzburg, when he thus referred to Pope Gregory IX, but plenty of others who had fallen foul of the religious establishment had similarly designated their persecutors as the Beast, or the Harlot. With the coming of the Reformation, such labels had become the staple currency of controversy with Roman Catholicism, particularly when the reformers claimed kinship with mediaeval dissidents like Jan Huss and John Wycliffe. With scant concern as to whether their teaching might have been heretical, Protestants were liable not only to hail almost any down-trodden mediaeval opponent of the Papacy as a precursor of the Reformers, but, more significantly for our purposes, to discover such opponents lurking in the pages of prophecy. Thus another Trinity graduate, George Croly, writing in 1827, could find the heretical Albigenses in his exposition of chap. 15 of the Revelation, maintaining that

> [By 1229] as a power the Albigenses had been vanquished, but as a church they had conquered… The Church of Christ, for the first time since the assumption of the papal supremacy, had taken that visible form which has never been extinguished. Yet it was still to be a victim; its 'sea of glass' was to be still 'mingled with fire' [Rev. 15.2]. The defeat of the Albigenses and the establishment of the Inquisition, placed the popedom within view of all the objects of its ambition.[32]

George Croly (1780–1860), fifteen years older than McNeile, had been ordained after graduating from Trinity; he settled in London, but for some years had difficulty finding a parish and lived as a writer, best known for his novel *Salathiel*.[33] His interest in prophecy may have been triggered by a brief

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31.   Drummond, *Dialogues*, II, p. 44.

32.   G. Croly, *The Apocalypse of St. John, or, Prophecy of the Rise, Progress, and Fall of the Church of Rome; the Inquisition, the Revolution of France; the Universal War; and the Final Triumph of Christianity. Being a New Interpretation* (London: Rivington, 1827), pp. 110-11.

33.   Philip Gosse reckoned that prior to his momentous reading of Mathew Habershon's *Dissertation on the Prophetic Scriptures* in 1842, Croly's *Salathiel* had given him 'some dim inkling' of the Restoration of the Jews. More remarkably, his son Edmund claimed that his father 'almost knew by heart' this 'apocalyptic romance' of several

venture into politics at the time of the crisis over Catholic emancipation,[34] but he was by no means alone in finding mediaeval opponents of Rome in the prophetic scriptures. More impressive and more comprehensive was the work of George Stanley Faber (1773–1854), who devoted half a century of his life to prophetic studies, beginning in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars with a full-scale exposition of prophecy based on the year-day principle.[35] Some twenty years later, in a further outline of the prophetic timetable entitled *The Sacred Calendar of Prophecy*, he insisted, at length, that the 'Two Witnesses' of Revelation 11 were the 'two Churches'—of the Albigensians and the Waldensians.[36]

It was Faber's readiness to manipulate historical materials to suit his theory that provoked a response from Samuel Roffey Maitland, who has an integral part in our analysis. Though not a graduate of Trinity, Maitland perhaps deserves, even more than any of his contemporaries from the University of Dublin, the epithet of 'an ecclesiastical loose cannon' in his propensity for controversy. He had begun life as a dissenter, but after a somewhat erratic education he had been ordained as an Anglican and his fascination with prophetic interpretation ran parallel with a keen interest in Christian mission work among the Jews. In 1826 he shocked the Protestant world by publishing *An enquiry*, which completely called in question the validity of the year-day theory.[37] He spent much of 1828 travelling in Europe where he took a constructive interest in the difficulties of Jews who had been converted to the Christian faith. On his return he published an expanded version of his earlier prophetic enquiry, but this time he focused on Mede's account of the year-

hundred pages. E. Gosse, *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse, FRS* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1890), pp. 376, 345.

34. For Croly, see G.D. Burtchaell and T.U. Sadleir, *Alumni Dublinenses* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1924); *ODNB*; and [Francis Jacox, pseud. 'Sir Nathaniel'], 'Dr Croly', *New Monthly* 101 (1854), pp. 284-90, where the author portrays him as an exact churchman 'after the mind and heart of good old George III' while insisting that Croly's 'peculiar views on prophecy…are dissonant enough from the harmony of the theological *Georgium sidus*', p. 284.

35. G.S. Faber, *A Dissertation on Prophecies, that Have Been Fulfilled, Are now Fulfilling, or Will Hereafter Be Fulfilled, Relative to the Great Period of 1260 Years; the Papal and Mohammedan Apostacies; the Tyrannical Reign of Antichrist, or the Infidel Power; and the Restoration of the Jews* (London: Rivington, 1806).

36. G.S. Faber, *The Sacred Calendar of Prophecy, or, a Dissertation on the Prophecies which Treat of the Grand Period of Seven Times and Especially of its Second Moiety* (3 vols.; London: Rivington, 1828), III, pp. 23-128. See also Rodney Lawrence Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of 'Two Witnesses' in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 244.

37. S.R. Maitland, *An Enquiry into the Grounds on which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John, Has Been Supposed to Consist of 1260 Years* (London: Hatchard, 1826).

day theory, rather than Faber's, as well as answering some of his critics, including Drummond's *Dialogues on Prophecy.* His brief *Attempt to Elucidate the Prophecies concerning Antichrist* appeared in 1831.[38] However, it was Faber's exposition of the 'Two Witnesses' in *The Sacred Calendar* that led Maitland to produce a large volume on the history and teachings (heretical he claimed) of the Albigenses and Waldensians.[39] The study of prophecy was now heavily embroiled in partisan ecclesiastical historiography. Increasingly, a vital part of Maitland's criticism of the year-day theory was that it had evolved to accommodate the accounts of men like Foxe the martyrologist, who had wanted to identify the Papacy with the Little Horn (Dan. 7.21) and the beast 'who made war with the saints' (Rev. 13.7). By questioning whether Albigensians or Waldensians (or Lollards, for that matter) could properly be referred to as 'saints', Maitland was entering a minefield of explosive topics, and, doughty controversialist that he was, he did not shrink from participating in an extended polemical debate over Reformation and pre-Reformation historiography.[40] Interestingly enough, although Maitland was clearly an ecclesiastical co-belligerent of the Tractarians, both Newman and Pusey were suspicious of him.[41]

Our interest in Maitland arises from his being effectively the first nineteenth-century pre-millennialist to interpret the last nineteen chapters of Revelation as unfulfilled prophecy. The influence of his futurist position can be found in the 1838 Donnellan lectures of one of Trinity's most distinguished scholars, James Henthorn Todd. In the dedication of his *Discourses*

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38. S.R. Maitland, *An Attempt to Elucidate the Prophecies concerning Antichrist* (London: Rivington, 1830).

39. S.R. Maitland, *Facts and Documents Illustrative of the History, Doctrine and Rites, of the Ancient Albigenses and Waldenses* (London: Rivington, 1832). The ensuing controversy lasted for decades and is a story in its own right. Waldensian documents, cited by earlier historians, had been deposited by Samuel Morland in the Cambridge University Library, but now were found to be missing. Accusations were made that they might have been forgeries, but some years later, Henry Bradshaw, the University Librarian, found them—a few shelves away from where they were supposed to have been in the first place. The discovery vindicated Maitland and Todd as the documents proved to be of a fifteenth-rather than twelfth-century provenance; see G.W. Prothero, *A Memoir of Henry Bradshaw* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1888), pp. 84-88.

40. Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 87-88, 49. Edward B. Elliott provoked a similar controversy when, in the *Horae Apocalypticae*, he identified the Paulicians as one of the Two Witnesses, thus suggesting that the true church had been composed of Manichaean heretics.

41. Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760–1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 278-79. See also A. Penny, 'John Foxe, the "Acts and Monuments", and the Development of Prophetic Interpretation', in *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (ed. D. Loades; Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 252-77.

on the Prophecies Relating to Antichrist in the Writings of Daniel and St Paul, Todd acknowledged the 'assistance [he had] derived' from Maitland's work.[42] Todd's latest biographer in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* describes him as 'a high-churchman (in doctrine rather than ritual)' while Dr Peter Nockles, who has carefully analysed the varieties of Irish high churchmanship and Tractarian positions, states that Todd was more strongly anti-Erastian than many of his fellows.[43] In fact, Todd is but one of several high churchmen who graduated from Trinity College in the early nineteenth century, and, when thinking of the earlier career of John Nelson Darby, we need to bear this parallel in mind.

When, in the 1860s, looking back to the 1820s, Darby recalled that at that time he disowned the name of Protestant and shared the Tractarian state of mind and walked in its system 'years before Dr. Newman…thought on the subject, and when Dr. Pusey was not heard of',[44] his words could have been echoed by a significant number of his fellow *alumni* from Trinity. Peter Nockles has shown how many of them in the early years of the Oxford movement expressed their delight that the exact churchmanship of their upbringing was being rediscovered in England.[45] Like the early Tractarians, their claim to embody the true catholic tradition made them fiercely opposed to the Roman Church and therefore sympathetic to *some* aspects of evangelicalism.[46] This ecclesiastical position, which several Irish churchmen shared with Darby, is all the more interesting when we find that, like Maitland, a number of these high churchmen (or as I prefer to call them, 'exact churchmen') rejected the year-day prophetic theory in favour of a futurist pre-millennialism. Although in 1830 Darby appears to have been clinging to the year-day theory when he reviewed Maitland's book in the *Christian Herald* somewhat critically,[47] he too settled for a futurist position soon after.

That such men saw this aspect of prophetic interpretation as more than a peripheral issue is well illustrated by Todd's brother-in-law, John Clarke Crosthwaite (1800–1887). Almost the same age as Darby, and a few years

42. J.H. Todd, *Discourses on the Prophecies Relating to Antichrist in the Writings of Daniel and St Paul* (Dublin: Rivington, 1840).

43. Peter Nockles, 'Church or Protestant Sect? The Church of Ireland, High Churchmanship, and the Oxford Movement, 1822–1869', *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), pp. 472-74.

44. J.N. Darby, 'Analysis of Dr Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*: With a Glance at the History of Popes, Councils, and the Church', in Darby, *Collected Writings of J.N. Darby* (ed. W. Kelly; Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill, n.d.), xviii, pp. 146, 156.

45. Nockles, 'Church or Sect?', pp. 466-71.

46. In his early career, despite his exact churchmanship, Todd had been one of the editors of the *Christian Examiner,* which was sympathetic to evangelicalism.

47. J.N. Darby, 'On "Days" Signifying "Years" in Prophetic Language', [1830] in Darby, *Collected Writings*, II, pp. 32-40.

older than Todd, Crosthwaite entered Trinity in 1817. An accomplished musician[48] and theologian, the gaunt and 'cadaverous' Crosthwaite was ordained in 1830 and was a Vicar Choral of Christ Church, Dublin until 1844 when he moved to a parish in the city of London, where he served as rector until his death. Like Todd and Maitland he contributed to the *British Magazine*, which he later edited, and in the pages of which he too challenged Faber on the subject of the Waldensians and Albigensians.[49] In a later work in which he vigorously opposed the Roman Church and dissociated himself from its latest convert, John Henry Newman, Crosthwaite saw the root of the problem in the church's readiness to listen to 'weak and vain and restless men…men fonder of poetry than of fact'. Interestingly (and perhaps a little unexpectedly), he points the finger accusingly at quite a mixed bag of culprits. He insisted that there could be

> no protection whatever against heresy of any sort or degree, in any Church where the figurative, and spiritual, and mystical, and allegorical modes of explaining away the inspired volume find toleration. Be it the School of Origen,—or the School of Meditation,—*or the Prophetical School, with its year-day hypothesis to evade the grammatical meaning of the text*, [my italics]—whether the tendency be to Romanism or Mysticism, to Presbyterianism or Neologianism—the principle of interpretation is the same, and the same want of reverence for truth,—gloss it over as men will—lies at the root and foundation of the principle, into whatever form of error the principle may be developed.[50]

Crosthwaite, like Maitland and Todd, and indeed as John Darby had been in the 1820s, was an exact churchman, but we must beware of making too facile a link between their ecclesiology and their futurist pre-millennialism, which seems to have been prompted, in the first place, by their abandonment of the year-day hypothesis. After all, there were plenty of high churchmen who were postmillennialists who expected the millennium to occur before the *parousia*. All the more fascinating therefore is the case of another, almost

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48. For Crosthwaite's musical competence, see John S. Bumpus, 'Irish Church Composers and the Irish Cathedrals', *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 26 (1900), pp. 133-34. For the more eccentric side of this unusual ecclesiastic, and his frequent use of the exclamation 'fiddlesticks', see *Dublin University Magazine* 85 (March 1875), p. 267.

49. *British Magazine and Monthly Register*…, 14 (1838), pp. 398-400; 15 (1839), pp. 37-43, 277-83.

50. John Clarke Crosthwaite, *Modern Hagiology: An Examination of the Nature and Tendency of Some Legendary and Devotional Works Lately Published Under the Sanction of the Rev. J.H. Newman, the Rev. Dr. Pusey, and the Rev. F. Oakley* (London: Parker, 1846), pp. vii-viii. For some recent discussion of Crosthwaite's criticism of Newman's hagiology, see F.M. Turner, *John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 491-94. Inexplicably Turner gives Crosthwaite's second name as Cross.

completely forgotten, and consequently very elusive contemporary of John Darby and John Crosthwaite, who graduated from Trinity in 1821 and who only became a high churchman in the 1830s.

William [de] Burgh (1801–1866) was only a few months younger than Darby, but he was sixteen years old when admitted to Trinity as a Fellow Commoner in October 1817, two years after Darby.[51] The de Burgh family had been associated with Ireland since the twelfth century, and in the later seventeenth century Ulysses Burgh had been the Bishop of Ardagh. His son Thomas (William's great-grandfather) had settled in County Kildare, where the family provided a series of Members of Parliament and numerous *alumni* of Trinity College. William's older brothers, Thomas and Walter, became the Dean of Cloyne and the Vicar of Naas, but he, the youngest, was the scholar of the family. Even before he graduated from Trinity, he was recognized among his fellow students as a reliable exponent of scripture, and some fifteen to twenty young men—not all Divinity students—would meet once a week at 7 o'clock in the morning in William Burgh's rooms for the study of the Greek New Testament. This occasion was effectively a time of exposition by Burgh rather than a group discussion.[52]

In 1832, more than ten years after graduating, de Burgh was appointed to be the Chaplain of the Dublin Female Penitentiary.[53] In 1836 he acquired the lease of land in Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire) on which he built a trustee Episcopal Chapel ('The Bethel'), where he was the incumbent for many years.[54] He was briefly minister of the Scottish Episcopal Church of St Mary's, Glasgow[55] before his appointment to the newly opened Church of St John the Evangelist, Sandymount, Dublin where he ministered from 1850 to 1864. In the course of these later years he had come to be identified with the Tractarian movement and the opening of his Anglo-Catholic church at Sandymount was the occasion of some protest. What William Burgh was doing in the ten years between graduation from Trinity in 1821 and his first appointment is more difficult to ascertain.

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51.   For William [de] Burgh's dates and family see A.P. Burke (ed.), *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Ireland* by Sir Bernard Burke (London: Harrison, 9th edn, 1899) and J.J. Howard and F.A. Crisp (eds.), *Visitation of Ireland* (6 vols.; London: privately printed, 1897–1918), V, pp. 35-40 <http://books.google.com> (accessed March 2011). Burgh's age at his admission is wrongly given as seventeen in *Al. Dub*.

52.   R.W. Harden, *St John's Monktown: The Story of an Irish Church* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1911) <http://www.chaptersofdublin.com/books/General/stjohns.htm> (accessed March 2011).

53.   *British Magazine* 2 (Nov. 1832), p. 330.

54.   Harden, *St John's Monktown*.

55.   *Scottish Magazine and Churchman's Review* 2 (1849), p. 233.

In 1826 he married and was living in North Dublin where his children were born prior to his move to Kingstown.[56] His first published work[57] in 1826 establishes his interest in millennial prophecy though his interpretation in this early work was historicist. On his own admission, it was in drawing up a chart to compare the chronologies of the earlier interpreters, like Mede, Faber, Frere, Cunninghame and Irving, that he 'he was at once struck, on the review of them all, with the surprising fact (thus made more conspicuous than it otherwise might have been) of the wide discrepancy between them'. As a corollary of this observation it occurred to him that if the scriptures were to be 'intelligible to every diligent and prayerful student of the Sacred Volume', the Bible must be 'its own interpreter' rather than being 'explained by the history…of a long period, extending over many centuries and therefore to be understood only by the learned reader'—who, in any case, appeared to disagree with many other learned readers.[58] Thus was born his futurist eschatology, which reckoned that all the prophecies in the Revelation (after the letters to the seven churches) were as yet unfulfilled—a position first outlined by him in publications of 1832 and 1833.[59] Although his growing sympathy with the Tractarians resulted in his prophetic views being considered (like those of Maitland and Todd) as crypto-popish (especially as he was abandoning the traditional position that identified the Papacy with Antichrist), William Burgh, as a young man, was highly regarded in the circle of earnest Christians associated with J.N. Darby.

In 1830 the young George Wigram, later a Plymouth Brother and close friend of John Darby, met William Burgh quite by chance ('till that time a perfect stranger'). On learning that Burgh had begun work on a Biblical Concordance based on the words in the original languages, Wigram immediately seized the opportunity of cooperating with this highly accomplished

56.   See Howard and Crisp (eds.), *Visitation of Ireland.* At least one of his children, Hubert, who later became a Roman Catholic priest, was baptized in 1834 in the Free Episcopal Church in Great Charles Street (formerly a Methodist chapel but re-consecrated as Episcopal in 1828).

57.   [William Burgh], *The Coming of the Day of God, in Connexion with the First Resurrection, the Reign of Christ on Earth, the Restitution of all Things, etc. A discourse on 2 Peter III, 11,12,13, by an Humble Expectant of the Promise* (rev. with some additions; Dublin: Richard Moore Tims, 2nd edn; London: Hatchard & Son; T Nesbitt, 1826).

58.   William de Burgh, *An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Dublin: Hodges Smith & Co., 5th edn, 1857), p. vi. In 1848 the family was granted the right 'to resume their ancient name of *de* Burgh'.

59.   William Burgh, *Lectures on the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ: with an Introduction on the Use of Unfulfilled Prophecy* (Dublin: R.M. Tims, 1832); and William Burgh, *The Apocalypse Unfulfilled, or an Exposition of the Book of Revelation: In a Course of Lectures Designed to Show the Importance of its Prophecies to the Present Christian Church* (Dublin: R.M. Tims, 2nd edn, 1833).

Hebrew scholar.[60] He later acknowledged that it was 'to his [Burgh's] instruction I owe *all* the knowledge of Hebrew I may possess'.[61] It is also clear from Wigram's account that this instruction must have occurred between September 1830 and March 1831. Their original meeting took place at Powerscourt, where Burgh had come 'to stay for a few days', and as he was already known for his interest in prophecy it seems quite probable that he was attending the first residential conference convened by Lady Powerscourt in September 1830.[62] William Burgh's association with some of the people who would later be Plymouth Brethren is unmistakable.

The Plymouth Brethren, as such, really only begin to develop a meaningful identity in late 1831.[63] We have to resist the temptation of reading back into their earliest experiences and thinking the more fully developed positions with which we have become familiar. One who succumbed to that temptation, some thirty years later, was William Kelly (1821–1906; Trinity College, 1836–41), an enthusiastic admirer of Darby, to whom he referred as the source of much distinctive Brethren teaching:

> On one ex-clergyman special honour was put by the Lord: for He was pleased to revive, (through him,) from the Scriptures, the mystery of Christ and the Church, the true character of our hope in the Lord's coming, the personal presence and operations of the Holy Ghost in the Church and the Christian.[64]

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60. For the details of their encounter and the conception of the project, see [G.V. Wigram], *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament Being an Attempt at a Verbal Connection between the Greek and English Texts…* (London: Central Tract Depot, 1839), pp. vi-viii

61. [G.V. Wigram] *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament: Being an Attempt at a Verbal Connection between the Original and the English Translation…* (London: Central Tract Depot, 1839), p. iv.

62. Theodosia, Lady Powerscourt, the second wife of the fifth Viscount, was a niece of Thomas Cherbury-Bligh, whose daughter, Fanny, George Wigram had married earlier in the year and the prospect of whose death in September was probably the cause of Wigram's arrival in Ireland. September 1830 is given as the date of the first Powerscourt Conference in a recently discovered contemporary listing of the conference discussions. This was the month when Irving was visiting Dublin, and Tim Grass has suggested that this may have been the occasion of Darby's discussion with Irving on the subject of ministries; see T. Grass, *Gathering to his Name: the Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006), pp. 26, 508-509; Crawford Gribben and T.C.F. Stunt (eds.), *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 67.

63. I have argued elsewhere that John Darby himself can only be said to have broken fully with the establishment two years later; see T.C.F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–1835* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), pp. 275-77.

64. W. K[elly], *God's Principle of Unity* (London: Morrish, n.d.). For Kelly's studies at Trinity, see E. Cross, *The Irish Saint and Scholar: A Biography of William Kelly* (London: Chapter Two, 2004), pp. 14-15.

One reader and critic took exception to this allusion to Darby. Frederick Whitfield (1827–1904)[65] is best known as a hymn-writer, but on his own admission he had been associated with Brethren for almost twelve years before his admission in 1856 to Trinity, from which he graduated in 1860.[66] He subsequently received Anglican ordination and a few years later published a highly critical reply to Kelly, in which he questioned whether Darby was truly the originator of these distinctive Brethren positions:

> I happen to know who this ex-clergyman is and I must now add, that all is not stated here. Long before this ex-clergyman [Darby] left the church, a clergyman, who now stands high in our Irish University, wrote and preached on all these subjects. He it was who first revived these grand and glorious truths. His books were purchased, and literally *devoured* by 'the Brethren'. So little were his views appreciated that he was *written down* in all the leading periodicals of the day. He was called a fanatic, a madman, a dreamer of dreams, and the like. A few godly ministers embraced his views, now held by hundreds in our church, and acknowledged by every well-taught Christian. The Brethren read them on all sides, and highly appreciated them. Here then was the first dawning of the light, and *not* where Mr. Kelly places it. The clergyman I allude to is the Rev. William de Burgh, D.D., Incumbent of St John's, Sandymount, Dublin, Donnellan Lecturer in the University of Dublin. Let the reader of this letter only read his publications and he will find all these views clearly set forth.[67]

65.   For Frederick Whitfield, author of the hymn 'There Is a Name I Love to Hear', see R.S.B. Whitfield, *Memorials of the Rev. Frederick Whitfield…* (London: Thynne, 1905). A much briefer but more accessible account is in J. Julian (ed.), *Dictionary of Hymnology* (2 vols.; London: Murray, 1907), II, pp. 1276, 1726. Julian gives his birth date as 1829, but his daughter, who in other respects appears to have known nothing of her father's early years, gives the date as 7 January 1827. This tallies with the TCD record which says he was admitted 11 January 1856 'aged 28'. The *Memorials* make no mention of his experiences with the Brethren, for which we are dependent on W. Reid, *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1875), pp. 12-14, 42-43. These details consist chiefly of citations from Whitfield's no longer extant *Letter to Rev. Osmond Dobree* (1863); see below (n. 67).

66.   G.D. Burtchaell and T.U. Sadleir, *Alumni Dublinenses 1593–1860* (Dublin: A. Thom, 1935), Supp. p. 125.

67.   There appears to be no extant copy of Frederick Whitfield's *The Plymouth Brethren: A Letter to Rev. Osmond Dobree, B.A., Guernsey, containing Strictures on Mr. William Kelly's Pamphlet Entitled 'God's Principle of Unity'* (London: J.F. Shaw & Co., 1863). The cited quotation is to be found in an extract from this 'truthful and telling pamphlet' reproduced in *The Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* 15 (1863), p. 197. There is at least one piece of circumstantial evidence for the truth of Whitfield's claim that Burgh's work was highly regarded among the Brethren. Thomas Lumisden Strange (1808–1884), who was still associated with the Plymouth Brethren in 1852 when he reviewed Elliott's *Horae Apocalyticae*, nowhere refers to the writings of Darby but alludes to his fellow futurists as 'those who with myself follow Mr. Burgh in his able commentary on this subject'. Thomas Lumisden Strange, *Observations on Mr. [E.B.] Elliott's Horæ*

As one would expect, in his published response to Whitfield, Kelly was dismissive of Burgh's influence among the early Brethren though he granted that Darby's arch-opponent, B.W. Newton, 'used to recommend Mr B.'s writings'. Kelly also claimed that Burgh 'was distrusted by intelligent men; among other reasons for this,—that having seceded, he rejoined the Establishment, on the same ground of tradition which is the basis of Tractarianism'.[68] Clearly we have to be wary of giving too much weight to claims made in the heat of a polemical exchange some thirty years after the event, but there are indications that William Burgh *did* secede for a time and then thought better of it. In 1833 he published a pamphlet arguing that, although he questioned the union of Church and State, there were no good reasons for anyone to secede from the established Church.[69] Some idea of Burgh's previous pilgrimage may be deduced from the following comment in the *Christian Examiner*'s review of his work.

> We believe that Mr. Burgh had to fight every inch of the road back from separation to the Establishment and we are glad to see the arguments that prevailed over the prejudices and hostility of a mind so acute and so well informed upon the subject. As might be anticipated, the arguments are those of plain common sense; and it strikes us as remarkable, that the views which he puts forward and which have been so long familiar to churchmen, should have escaped him during the progress of his mind through the various regions of dissent'.[70]

His earlier secession also sheds some light on his transition to a more Tractarian and finally Anglo-Catholic position, though we should also note that Darby, who had once been a very exact churchman himself and had not yet, in 1832, completely severed his connection with the establishment, was able to insist, when critically reviewing Burgh's books in the *Christian Herald*, that 'on all prophecy that is properly Jewish, it appears to me that Mr. Burgh has been favoured…with great clearness of apprehension'. Indeed Darby

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Apocalypticæ: Offered towards Refutation of the Historical System of Interpreting the Apocalypse (London: J.K. Campbell, 2nd edn, 1852), p. 62. For the Brethren phase in Strange's own fascinating pilgrimage, see T.L. Strange, *How I Became and Ceased to Be a Christian* (London: Trübner & Co, 1881), pp. 11, 12.

68. W. Kelly, *Brethren and their Traducers: A Refutation of Rev. F. Whitfield's Letter to Rev. O. Dobrée* (London: Morrish, 1863) <www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/3841?page=1936> (accessed 10 July 2010).

69. W. Burgh, *Dissent from the Church of England Shewn to Be Unwarrantable: In a Letter to a Clergyman* (Dublin: R.M. Tims, 1833).

70. *Christian Examiner* NS 2 (1833), p. 799. Burgh's earlier secession may explain the somewhat sarcastic tone adopted in a review of Burgh's *The Scriptural Observance of the 'First day of the Week' Considered in Reference to the Question concerning the Change of the Sabbath* (Dublin: Tims, 1828), where the reviewer refers to him as 'Mr Burgh', pointedly adding: 'we do not call him Reverend for fear of giving offence', *Christian Examiner* 6 (April 1828), p. 295.

later reckons that in this respect 'it appears to me that Mr Burgh is exceedingly clear, and may be always read with profit'.[71] Considerable as the differences between Darby and Burgh may have been in prophetic interpretation, their disagreements were far fewer than those dividing them from historicist proponents of the year-day theory, like McNeile, with whom they had both decisively parted company by the early 1830s.

In fact the links between high (or exact) churchmanship and Irish evangelicals are repeatedly apparent and may cast some light on another reference to the Powerscourt discussions. Among the several Irish high churchmen of this period, to whom Peter Nockles has drawn our attention, there were two members of the Monsell family who graduated from Trinity.[72] Charles Henry Monsell (1815–1851), a son of the Archdeacon of Derry was attracted to the Oxford movement, and although Nockles makes no mention of him, his older brother, John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811–75), probably best known as the author of the hymn 'Fight the Good Fight with all Thy Might', was also a moderate Tractarian.[73] I have been unable to establish the relationship between this branch of the Monsell family (of Limerick) and that of the Monsells of Tipperary, whose ecclesiastical tendencies are similarly elusive. However, it was this latter branch of the family that produced Richard William Monsell (c. 1816–1869), who was admitted to Trinity more than fifteen years after John Darby, in 1832.[74] Some two years later, as an eighteen year old, he began to associate with the Brethren in Dublin, and this involvement may have been the reason for his scruples about taking his degree from Trinity, which prevented him from graduating until 1841. Although in later years, when he was pastor of the Swiss congregational church in Neuchâtel,[75] he published a substantial criticism of the Brethren movement as established by Darby in Switzerland,[76] there is no doubt that Monsell was associating with Irish Brethren in the early 1830s. In his pamphlet he too affirmed the

71.   J.N. Darby, 'Review of *Lectures on the Second Advent* and *The Apocalypse Unfulfilled*', in Darby, *Collected Writings*, XXXIII, pp. 1, 9. For Darby's gradually developing convictions at this time, see T.C.F. Stunt, 'Influences in the Early Development of John Nelson Darby', in Gribben and Stunt (eds.), *Prisoners of Hope?*, pp. 65-68.

72.   Nockles, 'Church or Sect?', p. 470.

73.   *ODNB*.

74.   For R.W. Monsell, see *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* NS 1 (1869), pp. 342-44; *London Quarterly Review* 32 (1869), p. 264.

75.   Monsell had married the Genevan Jeanne Cesarine Wolff (1814–1889). For the piety of her family see *Letters of Asa Gray* (ed. J.L. Gray; 2 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), pp. 263-65.

76.   R.W. Monsell, *Le plymouthisme en Suisse: appel et avertissement à mes frères* (Neuchâtel: J.P. Michaud, 1848). The copy of this rare pamphlet in the Bavarian State Library, Munich, has only recently been digitized (February 2010) by Google.

presence of Anglicans among the Brethren at Powerscourt,[77]—a claim which Darby in his reply did not deny, but merely insisted that the occasion 'had nothing in common with the meetings of the "Brethren" as 'it was on the invitation of a single person, who received them and lodged them in his [*sic*] own house, a meeting the object of which was the study of prophetic questions'.[78] If Richard Monsell was from a high church background like the other Monsells, the varied ecclesiastical colouring of the Powerscourt discussions becomes still more evident.

Indeed it is tempting to find significance in the fact that in 1830 at the time of the first Powerscourt Conference, Darby was shedding his high church Anglicanism (in so far as he ever did) prior to quitting the establishment, while William Burgh was on the point of returning to the establishment where he would have a predilection for a more Tractarian position. As we noted earlier, it sometimes appears that a futurist eschatology is inclined to go hand in hand with a high church ecclesiology. This of course has been the repeated accusation of historicists who want to find an anti-Christian Papacy in the pages of prophecy and who claim that futurists like Maitland, Burgh, Crosthwaite and Todd were crypto-papists reviving the earlier exposition of Ribera, Lacunza and Lambert. There is one major stumbling block to this theory. When the radical ecclesiology expressed at the fourth Powerscourt Conference in 1833 became unacceptable to its chairman, Robert Daly (1783–1872; Trinity 1799–1803), he withdrew from the circle of prophetic discussion. Nevertheless, a study of Daly's contributions to the *Christian Examiner* (always signed R.D.) establishes beyond doubt that he too was a futurist by conviction even though he rejected some of the ecclesiastical corollaries that radical interpreters derived from their prophetic position.[79] Of one other thing we may be certain: no-one has ever accused Robert Daly of being a closet Roman Catholic or crypto-papist!

To conclude this excursus into the wide variety of positions (both ecclesiastical and eschatological) adopted by Darby's near contemporaries from Trinity, we need to consider briefly one further Dublin *alumnus* who is a key source for our subject. One of the earliest scholarly accounts of J.N. Darby

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77. 'Il y eut plus de ministres Anglicans aux premières réunions Powerscourt, qu'il n'y en avait à la première séance de l'alliance évangélique à Birmingham', Monsell, *Plymouthism*, p. 101.

78. J.N. Darby, 'The Church and its Friendly Subdivisions' (Geneva: Kaufmann, 1849), in Darby, *Collected Writings*, IV, p. 137. Darby's original was in French. In rendering '*sa propre maison*' as 'his own house' the translator was forgetting that the hostess was a lady!

79. For example, see *R.D.*, 'On Unfulfilled Prophecy', *Christian Examiner* NS 2 (1833), pp. 45-55. For Daly's identity as R.D., see Mrs Hamilton Madden, *Memoir of the Late Right Rev. Robert Daly, D.D., Lord Bishop of Cashel* (London: Nisbet, 1875), p. 202.

was written by George Thomas Stokes (1843–1898), for the *Contemporary Review* in 1885.[80] Unlike the earlier pieces on the Plymouth Brethren that appeared in the 1860s in the *London Quarterly Review* and the *British Quarterly Review*, Stokes's account was written just after Darby's death and is very much more dispassionate and far more concerned to place Darby in the context of his times. With considerable shrewdness Stokes noted that 'of no period are men so densely ignorant as of that which immediately precedes their own time' and he set out therefore to give examples of the 'avowedly Erastian principles' and the 'intense secularism pervading the Church some sixty years ago…of which men of this generation have no conception'.[81] Only with such considerations could his readers hope to understand Darby's development. Now Stokes himself was born more than forty years after Darby, and had only graduated from Trinity College in 1864. Yet he had made it his business to consult with others who were familiar with the earlier period. In particular he had repeatedly sounded out his old college tutor John William Stubbs on such matters 'specially as connected with this University'. Stokes was incurably a historian and was delighted to find that Stubbs was 'much addicted to the same kind' of 'historical studies to which I have ever been devoted'.[82]

When writing of the nineteenth century Stokes is aware of parallels with other periods in the history of the church. He recognizes the kinship between Walker's separatists and the Elizabethan Brownists, between the asceticism of Lady Powerscourt's letters and Tertullian's writings as a Montanist, and—perhaps most vividly—between the equestrian vigour of the Bishop of Waterford in hot pursuit of Whiteboy marauders and the hunting and military prowess of the fifth-century African prelate, Synesius.[83] Likewise, a few years later, when writing his commentary on *The Acts of the Apostles*, Stokes could draw his readers' attention, in his discussion of early Christian excitement after the day of Pentecost, to similar 'Plymouthist' manifestations, observing: 'Vast numbers of persons never recovered themselves from the

80. G.T. Stokes, 'John Nelson Darby', *Contemporary Review* 48 (October 1885), pp. 539-52. I can find no evidence for G.T. Stokes being closely related to the family of Whitley Stokes, though the latter's grandson (also named Whitley Stokes and a historian) has at times been confused with G.T. Stokes.

81. Stokes, 'Darby', pp. 537-38, 540.

82. G.T. Stokes and H.J. Lawlor, *Some Worthies of the Irish Church: Lectures Delivered in the Divinity School of the University of Dublin* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1900), p. 146. J.W. Stubbs (c. 1820–92) had been admitted to Trinity as a Pensioner in 1836: 'In fact there died with Dr. Stubbs a vast amount of knowledge and tradition connected with this College, which we shall ever lament in vain', p. 146.

83. Stokes, 'Darby', pp. 539, 544, and 542.

strain of that time (AD 1830) but remained all their lives in a state of dreamy disappointment'.[84]

Although Stokes was a high churchman he was less judgmental than many other writers in his account of these radical evangelicals. He notes that in the establishment there were admirers of the teaching of Groves's *Christian Devotedness*—a book, which he claimed was still valued in Tipperary in the 1860s. He grieves over Frank Newman's loneliness in the 'barren and dry land of scepticism' but he respects him as 'the apostle of reverent, conscientious doubt'.[85] Similarly although he is disappointed by the ultimately 'crushing and intrusive spiritual tyranny' of Darby's later position, Stokes honours his earlier ideals. When he says that in the 1820s 'the Church of God was nothing regarded, and Darby's soul was vexed thereat', one senses Stokes's sympathy and even admiration.[86]

When it comes to Darby's possible connection with John Walker, Stokes is more cautious than other writers. Rather than suggest a direct link between the two he stresses that the drawing room meetings for prayer and study of the scriptures were 'largely under the influence of separatist views'. Like the Walkerites, serious-minded members of the establishment were offended by political Protestantism and by the very infrequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. It was in this context that a high churchman like Darby could find common ground with evangelicals. Stokes clearly understood this and his account of his own upbringing helps us to understand why he was more sympathetic to Darby than to Walker.

> It may sound an extraordinary thing to say, but while I was brought up as an Irish churchman, I was also brought up as an Irish Church Methodist. I was taught my catechism, perhaps more carefully than many who are brought up without any connection with Methodism. I was taught to go to the Holy Communion, and to consider that the only one who was entitled to administer the Holy Communion was a priest of the Church of Ireland. I was taught to call the Methodist minister 'Mr.', and not 'Reverend'. I was taught to go to church regularly in the morning and then at five o'clock, to go to a [Methodist] preaching.[87]

With a significant strain of Methodism in his background, Stokes, as a churchman, respected Darby's exact churchmanship, but could not appreciate the rigid Calvinism with which Walker had unsparingly denigrated the

84. G.T. Stokes, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1891), p. 199 n. 2; for other references in the same volume to 'Plymouthism', see pp. 40 and 382 n. 2.

85. Stokes, 'Darby', p. 550.

86. Stokes, 'Darby', p. 538.

87. C. Dunkley (ed.), *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Wolverhampton, October 3–7* (London: Bemrose Son, 1887), p. 373. Stokes's remarks are found in a discussion following a symposium on 'The Devotional Life of the Church'.

Methodists and John Wesley's Irish protagonist, Alexander Knox. Far as Stokes' churchmanship may have been removed from Darby's later ecclesiology, we may trust his account, as it comes from the pen of one who had successfully and sympathetically penetrated the ecclesiastical world of Ireland in the 1830s.

Although in these, I fear somewhat discursive enquiries, we have considered only a few of the *alumni* associated with Trinity during more than half a century, the conclusions we may draw from them are of significance for the future of millennial studies. Yet to understand this we have to re-emphasize the importance of certain circumstantial factors that must inform our analysis of these men and their development. First, there is the inescapable fact that eschatology had a special charm for those who were born and grew up during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars—far greater than for their predecessors.[88] Secondly, we must recognize the importance of the ever-recurring debate on the place and status of Roman Catholics in Britain during the early years of the nineteenth century. Thirdly, we have to be aware that the issue of Catholic emancipation had a dimension all of its own in Trinity College. For those of the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland, the debate was liable to underline both their elitist sense of superiority as a faithful remnant and their anxieties arising from the possibility of change. Taken together these realities were capable of breathing new life into old and (one might have thought) exhausted topics like the identity of antichrist or the restoration of the Jews.

But what specific conclusions may we draw from our investigation of these Trinity *alumni*? First, we must recognize the eschatological spectrum that they cover. In all probability post-millennialists (who expected the millennium to be achieved before the return of Christ) were in the majority,

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88.   This was the starting point for Froom, when he listed 'The Galaxy of Interpreters of Prophecy From 1798 Onward'; see L.E. Froom, 'Nineteenth Century Old World Advent Awakening', in *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (4 vols.; Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946), III, pp. 263, 265, 270-71. W.E. Gladstone maintained that both Thomas Grenville and Archbishop Howley in the early nineteenth century had ascribed the growing seriousness among the upper classes to a reaction 'against the horrors and impieties of the French Revolution in its later stages'; W.E. Gladstone, 'The Evangelical Movement: Its Parentage, Progress, and Issue', *British Quarterly Review* 70 (1879), pp. 12-13. Expanding on one aspect of this phenomenon, a learned admirer of Gladstone, in 1901, focused on 'the increased attention bestowed on the study and interpretation of sacred prophecy'; G.W.E. Russell, 'The "Restored Apostolate"', in *The Household of Faith: Portraits and Essays* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902), p. 265. More recently, Ernest Sandeen has emphasized the 'special significance' of the French Revolution as a cataclysm that 'undermined the progressive and rationalist cosmology of the eighteenth century' and 'the spur it provided to further prophetic study'. Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 7. Cf. above, n. 21, where we observed a pre-revolutionary generation's lack of interest in matters eschatological.

but in that era such a position was still sufficiently commonplace for a person of that opinion not to feel the need to declare it. Preterists (who argued that the biblical prophecies had all been fulfilled by the end of the first century) were few and far between in Britain during the nineteenth century, but even for this category Trinity produced a pioneering exponent in the universalist Robert Townley, of Boston.[89] More numerous were the pre-millennialists (both historicists and futurists) who graduated from Trinity. McNeile and Croly, whom we have discussed, are but two of several historicists from Trinity cited with approval by Leroy Edwin Froom,[90] while in addition to Burgh, Daly, Darby, Crosthwaite and Todd taking a futurist stance, there are the many Brethren who not only were Trinity *alumni*, but also adopted a similar eschatology to that of Darby.[91] Clearly, however, there is no 'TCD eschatological stereotype'.

Secondly, the link between Darby (and those who would later be Brethren) and the followers of John Walker is an indirect one. The Walkerites were an important influence in the atmosphere of lay piety, so prevalent in Dublin during the formative years of Darby and other Brethren, but Walker's lack of interest in matters eschatological makes his contribution only *an element* in the biblicism we associate with Darby and the Brethren. G.T. Stokes is an important and reliable source in these matters and he carefully refrains from overstating the case.

A third point of importance that we have established is that before Darby had abandoned the historicist year-day theory and before he seceded from the establishment, another charismatic Trinity figure, William Burgh, had seceded and was espousing a futurist eschatology. We do not know whether he was associated with Kellyites or Walkerites but his teaching appears to have been appreciated by those who would become Brethren and he was associated with the Powerscourt meetings from the start. There is a delicious irony that the futurist Burgh was abandoning his earlier separatism and making the case against secession just as another futurist, Darby, was finally withdrawing from the establishment—a situation that may explain why Burgh's name has almost completely disappeared from the annals of the early Brethren, with whom he clearly had once shared a great deal.

89. Robert Townley (1816–1894), the author of *The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ: A Past Event* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1845) graduated from Trinity in 1841. Having served briefly at St Matthew's Liverpool, he migrated in 1848 to the USA, where he became a Universalist minister in Boston.

90. Other examples are: William Digby (1783–1866), Archdeacon of Elphin; Frederick No[w]lan (1784–1864); Isaac Ashe (b. 1802); Charles Caulfield (1804–1862), Bishop of Nassau; and Joseph Baylee (1808–1883).

91. These would include: John G. Bellett (1795–1864); John Marsden Code (1805–1873); Thomas Tweedy (1809–c. 1850); James Butler Stoney (1814–1897); and William Kelly (1820–1906).

These factual clarifications are more significant if we bear in mind two further contextual factors. The first is how young the Powerscourt participants were. The critic with whose remarks we began this paper disparagingly referred to 'females and boys' at the conference. In 1833, the decisive year when Daly withdrew from the conferences, Darby was thirty-three, Burgh was thirty-two, Code was twenty-eight, Stoney was nineteen and R.W. Monsell only seventeen. This, in turn, leads us to draw attention to the fact that, as late as 1835 (and probably even later), the Powerscourt agenda was still attracting non-Brethren participants from the established Church. With their youthfulness in mind, we should perhaps also re-examine the increasingly recondite nature of the topics chosen for discussion, which continued to be a cause for complaint from outsiders[92] but evidently had an attraction all of its own. Just as later, in North America, Darby's dispensationalism was popular with evangelicals who spurned his Brethrenism, so it seems that the early Brethren's apparent delight in obscurity could have a certain appeal for those who would shun their ecclesiology. Part of the attraction of the Powerscourt *milieu* appears to have been a somewhat elitist intellectualism, which was viewed with suspicion by the mainline evangelical movement. It is noteworthy that in 1832 (even before Daly's withdrawal from the Powerscourt Conferences), a reviewer in the *Christian Observer* was warning that

> If both Churchmen and Dissenters are not watchful, Protestantism will, indeed, before long 'succumb to Popery' in Ireland. One of our brightest hopes for Ireland is the remarkable revival of religion, which, through the mercy of God, has taken place among the clergy and laity, especially the former, of that country. Would it were without alloy; but the enemy has sown tares among the wheat; the mournful [prophetic] fancies which have torn the church of Christ on this side of the channel have crossed over to that; and if England has to lament the conferences of Albury, Ireland has to mourn over those of Powerscourt.

The writer went on to suggest that the 'wildness of speculation' of 'some of our millenarian friends' was playing into the hands of 'Popery and modern

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92.   A well-informed critic of the Brethren, writing in the *Eclectic Review*, observed less than five years later: 'Every page, indeed, of Scripture, as they represent it, appears full of enigmas and conceits. Deep mysteries and valuable truths are hidden in grammatical and verbal changes. Thus "the Son of the Father" means something very different from "the Son of God": and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (4.3) had a moral reason for saying…foundation of world…instead of…the foundation of the world. We might fill pages with frivolities of this nature; a natural result of the mystical fancy, that the literary composition of the Scripture was governed by a sort of divine grammar, which it is unlawful to explain as we explain the idioms of common writers.' *Eclectic Review* NS 5 (1839), p. 581 n.

liberalism'.[93] In retrospect the suggestion that the millennialists at Powerscourt were the 'allies of Popery and modern liberalism' is hard to take very seriously, and yet many participants in the millennial debate have proclaimed their opponents' 'guilt by association'—a favourite ploy of eschatological controversialists—by continuing to level the manifestly absurd charge of crypto-papism at the futurist wing of pre-millennialism.

This brings us to the crux of the matter under discussion. We have noted a remarkable range of eschatological positions emerging from a single institution, Trinity College Dublin, but when expositors could agree on an eschatological position, it was as often as not without a shared doctrinal or ecclesiastical identity. In noting their comparative youth and their appreciation of the esoteric, we are stepping away from the attempt to define millennial hopes solely in doctrinal or exegetical terms. Instead, we are explaining the roots of millennial thinking as much in terms of the millennialists' social, intellectual and psychological presuppositions as in their doctrinal or ecclesiastical interpretation of the scriptures. Out of an understandable concern to distance themselves from the 'deprivation theory',[94] those engaged in millennial studies may have been a little too inclined to take these expositors at face value.

Indeed 'deprivation' is too simplistic a word and it has been easy for its critics to show that many millennialists were not frustrated victims of poverty or exploitation; that they were not paupers marginalized on the fringes of society. To label such social explanations as deprivationist is to confine social ambition to economic self-betterment. Human needs and aspirations are more complex than that. They may involve an unconscious desire to live differently from the ways of one's upbringing; a wish to be valued for one's self rather than one's status; a yearning for a smaller and more personal

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93. *Christian Observer* 32 (1832), p. 813. The suggestion that men like Darby were aiders and abettors of liberal theology may raise a smile, but the dispensationalists' readiness to treat the gospels as Jewish rather than Christian teaching has been likened by some of their critics to the exegesis associated with the Tübingen school of criticism, which emphasized the antithesis between Petrine and Pauline Christianity. Sixty years after the Powerscourt Conferences, one Brethren writer recognized that there was some ground for the charge when he wrote: 'A dozen years before [F.C.] Baur's "Paul" (*Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi: sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre: Ein Beitrag zu einer kritischen Geschichte des Urchristenthums* [Stuttgart: Becker & Müller, 1845]) appeared, the truth thus attributed to him was discussed at the then celebrated "Powerscourt meetings" in Ireland!' Robert Anderson, *The Silence of God* (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1897), p. 72 n. 2.

94. For 'A Critique of the Causal Theory of Deprivation', see Stephen L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 35-46; cf. Stephen L. Cook, 'Reflections on Apocalypticism at the Approach of the Year 2000', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 49 (1995), pp. 8-9.

community. When we find wealthy Brethren like George Wigram deliberately rubbing 'a new coat against the wall to make it shabby' or Lord Congleton choosing 'a plain, deal [rather than mahogany] table…steel forks and pewter teaspoons' and a 'small iron camp bedstead',[95] we would be unwise to neglect the social and psychological influences that contributed to these phenomena. So in our millennial analysis we cannot afford to be dismissive of what I would call 'aspirational' (rather than deprivational) theory. The social uncertainty of the establishment in the late 1820s and early 1830s[96] was particularly acute for the Anglo-Irish, and this is more likely to be the shared component in the thinking of the various millenarians emerging from Trinity at this time. Perhaps the 'tie that bound' the enthusiasts at Powerscourt was an escapist element of intellectual elitism, which rejoiced a little too readily in being one of the chosen few to whom it was given 'to know the mysteries of the kingdom'.

Just as a preoccupation with eschatology is liable to give rise to an 'insider mentality' or even a 'siege mentality', so an obsession with the esoteric and the obscure can result in an elitist delight in being part of a heroic faithful minority. Mrs Oliphant was very perceptive when she identified, in the context of the Albury Conferences, the 'closer, exclusive fellowship with those who pursued the same study and adopted the same views'. Nevertheless, she also noted that the 'bond between them was rather that personal and exciting one which exists among a party full of anxiety for the restoration or election of a king—a patriotic band of conspirators, furnished with all the information and communications in cipher which cannot be given at length to the common mass—than the calmer link between theologians united in doctrine'.[97] Those pursuing millennial studies need to be as interested in the social and psychological mindset with which their subjects approach the last times as in their scriptural exegesis and ecclesiastical associations.

95.   Rowdon, *Origins of the Brethren*, pp. 63, 303.

96.   I have suggested some of the social anxieties felt by landowning churchmen that may have contributed to one of the more bizarre millennial manifestations in 1831 in T.C.F. Stunt, '"Trying the Spirits": The Case of the Gloucestershire Clergyman (1831)', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39 (1988), pp. 95-105 (102).

97.   M.O.W. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* (2 vols.; London: Hurst & Blackett, 2nd edn, 1862), I, pp. 225, 388-89.

THE MODERNIST MILLENNIUM

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Millennial studies concerns itself with a slippery subject. The End (together with its various prophets and their followers) has provided abundant evidence in support of Claude Geffré's claim that the genre of testimony affords language its most irreducible possibilities.[1] And, added to their subject's diversity and intrinsic capacity for linguistic creativity, students of millennialism also differ from one another over how best to characterize their field of study. Definitions of millennialism range from an intra-Christian engagement with the prophesied thousand years in the book of Revelation to a more general concern with utopian thought. Methodologically, this can prove challenging; millennial studies thus demand a flexible expertise and, the more embracing the definition of millennialism becomes, the more methodologically challenging that of the ensuing interdisciplinarity. Some treatments of millennialism suggest that there may exist some sort of connection between the specifically Christian and more general future-orientated interpretations of the present: for example, in his history of *Christian* millenarianism, John M. Court includes Plato's *Republic*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before,* Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and Andrew Niccol's movie *Gattaca* as millennial manifestations.[2] The nature of that connection, however, remains unthematized, and, in the absence of a more robust theoretical grasp of what constitutes the subject matter of millennial studies, a desire to broaden the field risks leaving itself open to allegations of dilettantism or incoherence. Indeed, for some it appears that this connection between Christian grammars of the millennium on the one hand and utopianism in general (or lack thereof) on the other, is of no consequence: Richard Landes, for example, has recently charted a wide range

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1. Claude Geffré, *The Risk of Interpretation: On Being Faithful to the Christian in a Non-Christian Age* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), especially pp. 79-94.
2. John M. Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian Millenarianism* (London and New York: Tauris, 2008).

of experiences that he considers to be millennial, and from which he has omitted Jewish and Christian examples.[3]

Pivotal to both trajectories in millennial studies is the philosophy of history. Millennialist rhetoric appeals to a dynamic inter-connection of past, present and future: in both its more and less tightly controlled expressions, millennial thought confronts us with a hermeneutical key to history. Yet it will be clear from what follows that this chapter is written from a perspective informed by a specifically Christian engagement with the mysterious purposes of creation. History is not simply one damned thing after another; the millennial hope is that a golden messianic age is coming, or that it has already come. Hence the eschatological tensions between Christians, some of whom (predominantly Catholic and Orthodox) tend to view church and Reign of God in terms of greater continuity than do others (who are predominantly Protestant). As a result, Catholic and Orthodox millennialists tend to identify church—or, more likely, The Church—with the Reign of God, thereby supernaturalizing institutional structures such as Tradition and ministerial forms. Protestant millennialists, on the other hand, tend to assume that the elect operate at a critical distance from institutions and structures. And whilst elect groupings often operate outside and in reaction to a mainstream body of opinion, this chapter is concerned with what happens when the elect coincides structurally with the mainstream.

This chapter explores the early twentieth-century modernist crisis in the Roman Catholic Church as an expression of a defensive millennial strategy to return to the philosophical stability of medieval Christendom.[4] The roots of that crisis stretch back into the nineteenth century, and into the politically beleaguered condition of the papacy as it reasserted the role of the papal magisterium under dramatically altered conditions. This context provoked a new, mandatory and ahistorical reading of tradition, which instigated approximately half a century of integralist Catholicism.[5] The first part of this

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3. Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

4. On modernism see, *inter alia*, Maurilio Guasco, *Il Modernismo: I fatti, le idee, i personaggi* (Rome: San Paolo Edizione, 1995); Darrell Jodock (ed.), *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marvin R. O'Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1994). The finest account of the theological issues raised in the modernist crisis remains that of Gabriel Daly, O.S.A., *Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

5. On the perduring legacy of integralism, see John A. Coleman, S.J., 'Catholic Integralism as a Fundamentalism', in *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective* (ed. Lawrence Kaplan; Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), pp. 74-95. As an

chapter, therefore, addresses the historical context from within which the anti-modernist campaign emerged. Anti-modernism forged a deeply doctrinal Catholic social imaginary: key elements in the anti-modernist campaign were papal teachings (the syllabus of errors *Lamentabili sane exitu*, the encyclical letter *Pascendi gregis* and the anti-modernist oath *Sacrorum Antistitum*) as well as papally sanctioned 'diligence' towards priests and religious in order to protect the faithful from the hydra of modernism. Part two of the chapter, therefore, examines these texts and their role in establishing integral Catholicism. Finally, part three of the chapter considers the deconstruction of anti-modernism by the Irish-born ex-Jesuit George Tyrrell in his essay *Medievalism: A Reply to Cardinal Mercier*.[6]

The events with which this chapter is concerned are continuous with other early twentieth-century articulations of religiously informed ambivalence, and in some cases downright hostility, towards aspects of the modern project: Pius X declared war on modernism; Karl Barth's disciples excoriated 'cultural-Protestantism' after the ethical shortcomings of Protestant liberalism in Wilhelmine Germany; in the USA, between 1910 and 1920, conservative Protestant theologians began to publish *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*; in France, despairing of what he saw, somewhat perversely, as the Catholic Church's sell-out to modernity, a neo-traditionalist route was charted by René Guénon,[7] whose manifesto, *The Crisis of the Modern World* (1927—and still selling well), denounced the metaphysical vacuum of modernity in favour of a return to the Tradition behind the decadent traditions that linger in the modern world.[8] No less than contemporary Ritschlians in Prussia searching for Christianity's essence, Guénon was on a quest, albeit to anywhere but Christianity, for his essence of Tradition—which he found in a synthesis of freemasonry, Hinduism and Islam. And, Guénon was not alone in his pilgrimage *ad fontes*: Mark Sedgwick's entertaining, yet also disturbing, account of this style of Traditionalism discloses a motley collection of religiously nomadic Europeans seeking Traditional green grass on the traditionally greener distant hills. It is curious, however, that Sedgwick's study

officially endorsed theology, integralism came to an end with the Second Vatican Council, 1963–65, and became thereafter the ideology of a variety of Catholic traditionalist groups.

6. George Tyrrell, *Medievalism: A Reply to Cardinal Mercier* (new edn with a Foreword by Gabriel Daly, O.S.A.; Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1994 [1908]).

7. See *The Essential René Guénon*: *Metaphysics, Tradition, and the Crisis of Modernity* (ed. John Herlihy with an Introduction by Martin Lings; Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2009). There is an excellent account of Guénon's continuing legacy in Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

8. René Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1927).

does not explore possible connections with an earlier generation of Traditionalists, with some of whom we will be concerned, below.

Not everything, evidently, was rosy in the gardens of modernity in both *fin-de-siècle* Europe and the United States. In each of the cases noted above, it is striking that the prescribed route of the jeremiads leads to safety *via* Tradition. In the case of Pius X and his circle of advisers, this is the neo-scholastic tradition of Thomas Aquinas; in the case of Barth, a more sympathetic engagement is required with the tradition of Protestant scholasticism; in the case of the early Fundamentalists, there is a concern to retrieve a tradition of reading scripture and doctrine without the assumptions of evolutionary historiography and historical-critical methods; in the case of Guénon, we are directed to the great primal tradition preserved only here and there in the religions (but not in the West). The answer proposed by modernity's various critics, it appears, involved some form of 'return' to the pre-modern, that is, to the medieval.

The Lure of the Medieval

Later interpreters of nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism easily miss the trauma that the loss of the Papal States represented for the contemporary papacy. Nor was it an isolated bereavement; the French revolution in 1789 had sent shock-waves through the Roman Catholic Church, and even under a new empire, that of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Church's eldest daughter continued to exhibit signs of profound instability as far as Rome was concerned. Some Roman Catholic thinkers, notably Félicité de Lamennais (1782–1854), began to imagine a papacy without Papal States: Lamennais grasped the extent to which the repressive regimes of the Papal States represented an embarrassment to many Roman Catholics located elsewhere than in Rome, and, in the face of the purely power-based *realpolitik* of the relations between stronger nation states (as embodied in the reactionary decisions of the Congress of Vienna), he began to outline a way in which the papacy could function as an international moral voice. To do so, however, would involve sundering the papacy from its temporal powers as well as accepting non-monarchical government in France, and that was more than most nineteenth-century popes and their advisers could tolerate.

In early nineteenth-century Rome, the political climate was consistently reactionary; liberalism, democracy and (Italian) nationalism were public enemies, even where such movements enjoyed obvious public support. A succession of popes, Leo XII (1760–1829; pope from 1823), Pius VIII (1761–1830; pope from 1829) and Gregory XVI (1765–1846; pope from 1831), were young men when the French Revolution had shattered the hitherto-natural union of throne and altar. All were staunchly ultramontane, identifying the cause of Catholic Christianity with that of the papacy.

In 1799, the German Protestant Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote his *Speeches on Religion*, which would become a manifesto of Protestant liberalism; in the same year, the man who would become Gregory XVI wrote the *Triumph of the Holy See and the Church against the Assaults of Innovators*, a book that would—like that of Schleiermacher—undergo successive reprintings. Schleiermacher saw the task of theology as that of facilitating dialogue between experience and tradition. Gregory XVI was less convinced of the value of such a dialogue; he took a particular dislike to certain cultural innovations, such as gas lighting and the railways—punning in French, he dubbed a *chemin de fer* the *chemins d'enfer*. Democracy and liberalism, it seemed, travelled by rail; though not, for now, in the Papal States.

Gregory's successor, Pius IX, turned out to be the longest occupant of the see of Peter; and, although initial indications revealed a degree of progressiveness in his thinking, his experience in the revolutions of 1848–49 succeeded in rapidly euthanazing any hint of liberalism from his regime. As the remnants of the Papal States turned against him, his hold on Rome was made possible only with support from the no less reactionary French emperor, Napoleon III. From 1850, therefore, Rome had resumed its default reactionary stance, culminating in Pius's 1864 *Syllabus errarum*, or Syllabus (i.e. list) of Errors.

The Syllabus of Errors is an extraordinary document, listing and condemning the errors that the modern age seemed hell-bent on affirming. Notoriously, Pius condemned the view that:

> The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization.[9]

In retrospect, the Syllabus—though a powerful symbol of reaction—was relatively powerless in its impact, certainly when compared with the impact of the anti-modernist campaign half a century later. It clearly indicated the papal magisterium's discomfort with what it perceived as liberalism, but it did not indicate why these expressions of liberal error were so badly wrong nor did it put in place the machinery with which to control the erroneous. This point is worth labouring, because there is in fact little to distinguish between the liberalism anathematized by Pius IX and the modernism attacked by Pius X: the difference derives simply from the degree of coherence attributed by Pius X to his opponents, which in turn relies on the coherence of his interpretation of Roman Catholicism.

The three errors named by Proposition 80, namely accommodation to 'progress', 'liberalism' and 'modern civilization', also highlight the extent to which Roman discomfort—both in 1864 and in 1907—concerned the philosophy of history. The very notion of progress suggested discontinuity

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9. *Syllabus errarum*, 8 December 1864, Proposition no. 80.

between past and present, with the present enjoying a greater normativity than the past, and with an even greater normativity reserved for the future that beckons. This flies in the face of any notion of an authoritative tradition that has been passed down from the past. Expressions of contemporary liberalism, from a papal point of view, included social democracy and historical-critical methods of reading doctrine and scripture; liberalism thus implied a critical (and perhaps superior?) reading of world and text that no longer privileged the readings offered by tradition. Finally, the notion of modern—as applied to civilization, though resonating more widely—invoked an implicit contrast with the medieval. It also carried echoes of Gregory XVI's disdain for 'innovators'. It is striking that later, in the preparations for the anti-modernist campaign, 'innovator' and 'modernist' were used interchangeably to denote those who had abandoned tradition in its proper sense.

To what extent is it fair to read papal disquiet with the modern as an expression of nostalgia for the medieval? The case may be made on two grounds, the first of which concerns the theorizing of the relationship between medieval and modern, and how this relationship is defined by the experience of the Enlightenment. Although Alister E. McGrath states that the Enlightenment had, until the Modernist Crisis, 'largely been ignored' by the Roman Catholic Church, the evidence in fact suggests otherwise.[10] Both 'Enlightenment' and 'modernity' are highly contested terms, and here I follow Louis Dupré's magisterial account of the 'passage to modernity'.[11] According to Dupré, modernity emerged from a coincidence of the nominalist *via moderna* with the rise of Italian humanism: this intellectual alliance sapped confidence from the medieval project of a grand synthesis of faith and reason. Modernity thus precedes the Enlightenment, though the Enlightenment in turn plays a crucial role in the development of modernity.

According to Dupré:

> The Enlightenment concluded a search for a new cultural synthesis begun at the end of the Middle-Ages when the traditional cosmological, anthropological, and theological one had disintegrated.[12]

Thus the Enlightenment presents itself as a defining crisis in a tradition that is attempting to *re*-enmesh faith and culture in a 'new cultural synthesis'; but the medieval cultural synthesis has unraveled irretrievably and its absent

10. Alister E. McGrath, 'Modernism', in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (ed. Alister E. McGrath; Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 383-84 (383).

11. Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

12. Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

presence now functions as a potent source of theological nostalgia. The forever-lost 'traditional' self-understandings of pre-modernity offered a more integrated and organic worldview—or so it appeared in retrospect to the culturally bereaved post-medievals. In distinguishing itself from medieval culture, therefore, modernity was sowing the seeds of nostalgia for a pre-modernity that would later take shape with varying degrees of sophistication and success.

Far from ignoring the Enlightenment, therefore, the Roman Catholic Church in the nineteenth century was pursuing a variety of coping strategies in a significantly altered context. One such strategy amounts to creative denial: ideological resistance to the definitive loss of Christendom as a unified political and cultural reality, on the part of successive popes, is a key element in the social imaginary of nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism. In privileging a return to the medieval, nineteenth-century popes appealed to a period in which a then-new conflation of the apostolic see of Rome with Christendom gained currency; this was an epoch in which Christendom equated with the Western, Roman, Latin, Church and in which the jurisdiction of the papacy trumped that of other contenders, thereby offering both a nostalgic prospect of restoration as well as shaping restoration-orientated Catholic imagineries.[13]

Internal theological pluralism marked the first half of the nineteenth century in Roman Catholicism, and a second direction from which Roman Catholicism felt the lure of the medieval may be detected in the apologetic efforts of a range of thinkers who articulated a distinctively Catholic response to modernity by reinterpreting medieval insights for a later context. This is the case, for example, in the selective medievalism of Johann Sebastian Drey's (1777–1853) apologetics or in the pneumatological ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838), who were together founders of the Catholic Tübingen school.

In France, after the traumas of the French revolution and Napoleon's domestication of the papacy, François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) launched an aesthetic *apologia* for Catholic Christianity. *The Genius of Christianity* (1802) commended Christianity in a romantic style similar to that of his Protestant contemporary Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion*. This romantic theology insisted that a holistic, organic worldview remained a credible possibility for Catholic Christians because of the doctrine of God's Spirit immanent in the cosmos. This typically romantic preference for nature over culture, however, pulled its advocates in a monistic direction, which tended to diminish its apologetic value in the eyes of religious authorities.

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13. See Brett Edward Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), especially pp. 9-41.

Chateaubriand's sentimental aesthetic stressed the sheer beauty of religion, particularly its medieval expressions; failure to believe in the Catholic religion, he insisted, involved a self-directed act of violence against the human hunger for beauty as a doorway to truth. With rather more political steel, on the other hand, French Traditionalists (a century ahead of René Guénon), such as Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), argued that post-Medieval Europe had taken a turn for the worse, and that it was still possible to correct this misguided trajectory. Democracy, enlightenment, liberalism: according to de Maistre, these labels concealed the fundamental reality of apostasy. Ballanche famously called de Maistre 'a prophet of the past'. Rather than taking comfort in notions of cultural progress, Divine Revelation, according to de Maistre, had been given at the beginning of time; the passage of time implied a fall from that sacred beginning. Tradition—together with its normative interpretation by a divinely provided oracle—provided our only return route to our revealed origins. Traditionalism thus offered potential elective affinities for ultramontane-leaning Roman Catholics. Other philosophical and theological ideas sought to establish themselves too—voluntarism, ontologism and fideism, for example—but the link between traditionalism and later, anti-modernist developments deserves special emphasis. Not only did it promote a totalized vision of Catholic identity in social and political terms, it located the template for this identity in the past, and particularly in its ultramontane retrojection of an idealized medieval synthesis.

Re-establishing Integral Christendom

The papacy of Pius IX yearned for a bygone era, but, apart from condemning liberalism and liberals, its lasting impact was surprisingly limited. When Pius was succeeded by Leo XIII, the papal office was in a fragile condition: at his election Leo was an elderly career diplomat, and some European newspapers, reflecting on his election, voiced the opinion that he might well be the last to wear the papal tiara.

Not so, however. Philosophically and theologically, Leo was an admirer of the great architect of the medieval synthesis, St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), thus disposing him positively towards one proposal in particular among the competing voices in contemporary Roman Catholic theological pluralism. Joseph Kleutgen, a German Jesuit and author of *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit* (1860–63), had argued that, in the thirteenth century, Aquinas had accounted for the relationship between faith and reason in a manner that was infinitely superior to any other proposal, then or since. The case for Thomistic supremacy, according to Kleutgen, rested on its defence of the freedom of faith: the human intellect must be free to accept God's offer of the gift of faith. Stressing freedom of the intellect enabled Kleutgen to draw

on several post-Reformation Thomists in constructing a *cordon sanitaire* around a Thomistic interpretation of post-Tridentine Roman Catholicism so as to protect it from all other proposals. These other accounts of faith and reason—whether offered by Protestants, Traditionalists, Ontologists, or Fideists—were guilty of compromising the free human intellect (and, thereby compromising the essential character of divine grace). The answer to modernity's challenges in the nineteenth century, according to Kleutgen, would thus come only from a return—metaphysically speaking—to the securities of thirteenth-century Thomism.

In meeting the challenges of restoring his own position, and, with it, that of the Roman Catholic Church, Leo was conscious of the need to ensure a far greater level of coherence in Roman Catholic theology. In 1879, his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* sought to 'restore' the tradition of Christian philosophy by establishing the theology of St Thomas Aquinas—as mediated by the post-Tridentine theologians of the Catholic Reformation—as the normative theological *lingua franca* of the Roman Catholic Church. Kleutgen drafted the encyclical: his vision of a restored Thomism—usually referred to as neo-Thomism or neo-scholasticism—would prove to be the key element in making possible the modernist crisis.

So it was that Leo's successor, Pius X, inherited a novel tradition of Roman Catholicism that was neo-scholastic *à la* Kleutgen; not only was it positively neo-Thomistic, it was also defined negatively against a range of neo-scholastic others: it was intrinsically anti-modern, anti-Protestant and anti-anything-but-neo-scholasticism. If inelegant, that final qualification of the regnant paradigm for contemporary Roman Catholic ecclesiastical self-understanding is nevertheless crucial for understanding the modernist crisis as it appeared to Pius and his advisors. Working from the secret memoirs of the Jesuit General at the time of transition between Leo XIII and Pius X, Luis Martín (1846–1906), David Schultenover has brilliantly reconstructed something of the paranoia and siege mentality that characterized the outlook of the contemporary papacy, drawing on cultural-anthropological insights into the Mediterranean mind.[14] Shamed by its loss of temporal power, Rome re-asserted its honour by expunging those that no longer fitted within its new and tightly defined self-identity. Non-neo-scholastic Roman Catholics, in short, presented a threat to neo-scholastic theological purity.

In 1907 Pius X issued two texts that were pregnant with consequences for Roman Catholic engagement with modernity. The first, in July, was a syllabus or list of errors, *Lamentabili Sane Exitu*; this was followed in September by the encyclical letter *Pascendi Gregis*. The 65 propositions listed for condemnation in *Lamentabili* were the product of a startled neo-scholastic

14. David G. Schultenover, S.J., *A View from Rome: On the Eve of the Modernist Crisis* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993).

reading of historical-critical accounts of Christian origins—and in particular of the work of the French exegete Alfred Loisy (1857–1940). Three years later, in September 1910, Pius produced a third and final text, *Sacrorum antistitum*, to accompany the syllabus and the encyclical; in this *motu proprio* Pius prescribed an anti-modernist oath which remained in force until 1967.

This campaign had not emerged from out of the blue. Since coming to office in August 1903, the papacy of Pius X had witnessed an increasingly public denunciation of 'new' science and 'new' philosophy. The Roman Jesuit journal *La civiltà cattolica* spearheaded the campaign against what the American sociologist Lester Kurtz later called 'deviant insiders'.[15] In Rome the leading theologian of the day was the French Jesuit Louis Billot, to whose neo-scholastic eyes anything that lacked Thomistic credentials represented the hostile incursions of Kantian epistemology. Billot embodied in himself many of the threads in the tapestry of traditionalist, anti-liberal French Roman Catholicism; his career would end because of his support for Charles Maurras's right wing *Action Française*.[16] His lectures and books poured belligerent scorn on some non-scholastic Catholic writers such as the philosopher and layman Maurice Blondel, the author of *l'action*; Blondel's then-collaborator, the philosopher and priest Lucien Laberthonnière, who had drawn a provocative contrast between Christian realism and Greek idealism; the layman Edouard LeRoy, a mathematician and philosopher whose essay on the nature of dogma had given Thomists a fit of the vapours; and the most vilified of the non-scholastics, the biblical scholar Alfred Loisy.

Loisy had ventured into the field of apologetics to defend Roman Catholicism against liberal Protestant historians who viewed the history of Christianity in terms of corruption or 'Hellenization'. Or so he claimed. In reality, however, the position that Loisy attacked as Protestant liberal historiography bore a remarkable resemblance to neo-scholasticism. Loisy's defence— which appealed to a distinctive reading of John Henry Newman's *Essay on Development*—was captured in his pithy utterance: 'Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, and it is the church that has come'. The eschatological vision of Kingdom has developed, and not been corrupted, into the church. Hence the title of Loisy's first little red book, *The Gospel and the Church*: vision and institution were distinct, but inseparable. The resulting apoplexy on the part of neo-scholastics reflects their philosophical difficulty in acknowledging either the reality or theological significance of historical change. Historical

15. Lester Kurtz, *The Politics of Heresy: The Modernist Crisis in Roman Catholicism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986).

16. See Michael Hutton's classic study of the impact of *Action Française*: *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics 1890–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

change need not trouble the elect when there is no discontinuity between Kingdom and Church.

Historical mutability, insofar as Billot grasps the concept, and its incompatibility with claims to absolute truth, are at the heart of his *De sacra traditione contra novam haeresim evolutionismi*, published first in 1904, and in new editions after the papal condemnations of modernism in 1907 under a new title *De immutabilitate traditionis contra modernam haeresim evolutionismi*. On one side stands the Church/Kingdom founded by Christ: always the same, *semper eadem*, the Church is maintained in the absolute truth of the tradition, which the Church alone may interpret according to the eternal philosophy of the Angelic Doctor, St Thomas. On the other side, Billot ranges the forces of heretical darkness; hence the force of his accusation of heresy—those that stray from the path of neo-scholasticism have no place in the Church. By the time of his book's second edition, Billot's prescription had been enacted by Pius X.

Reading *De sacra traditione*/*De immutabilitate traditionis* prompts echoes of the 1864 Syllabus of Errors; like Pius IX, Billot lists a number of different thinkers, drawn from different fields of study, to whose work he takes extreme exception. But there is a crucial difference; Billot not merely lists errors, he argues against them—and in doing so he appeals to the normative, totalized philosophical system established by Leo XIII.

When the axe fell in 1907, the encyclical *Pascendi* demonstrated the dependence of anti-modernism on neo-scholasticism. The errors enumerated in *Lamentabili sane exitu*—and, indeed, arguably those of the 1864 Syllabus of Errors—are shown to result from their incompatibility with a clearly defined—immutable and absolute—understanding of tradition. *Pascendi*'s mapping of modernism is a tragic masterpiece of creative projection. All of the errors that had rendered Louis Billot incandescent with fury in 1904 were now revealed to be intimately and intrinsically connected with one another: the lack of connection between the writers he had targeted was apparent, not real—the modernists were both cunning and deeply systematic in their self-understanding. 'Modernism', according to the encyclical, is the meeting place, or compendium, of all the heresies: it is based on agnosticism and vital immanence; it lacks an adequate grasp of dogma, preferring the vagueness of symbolism; and, ultimately, its reforming and apologetical concerns will destroy religion itself. This imminent catastrophe, according to the encyclical, is all the result of a philosophical *faux pas* on the part of the modernists: 'Their whole system, containing as it does errors so many and so great, has been born of the union between faith and false philosophy'.[17]

17. *Encyclical Letter, Pascendi Gregis, of our Most Holy Lord Pius X, by Divine Providence Pope, On the Doctrines of the Modernists* (Official Translation; London: Burns & Oates, 1907; Facsimile repr., Dublin: Carraig Books, 1973), p. 53.

With the benefit of a century's worth of both hindsight and scholarship, it is evident that the 'meeting place of all the heresies' was in the mind of *Pascendi*'s writer, rather than in the philosophical, ecclesiastical and political 'movement' that he claimed to observe. The narrow optic of Roman Catholic neo-scholasticism created modernism out of philosophical, ecclesiastical and political ideas that it did not like and which had been expressed by men and women who did not, in their turn, accept neo-scholasticism's monopoly on Roman Catholic identity. To some extent this explains the level of scholarly attention that has been attracted by the first part of *Pascendi*, in which the system of modernism is laid bare, rather than by the third part with its severe disciplinary prescriptions. Neo-Scholasticism provided a self-understanding with a strikingly philosophical and doctrinal social imaginery, and its account of its own opposition could be expressed only in the totalizing and theoretical terms of the encyclical's first part.

The centenary of the imposition of the anti-modernist oath provided an opportunity to review critically the prevailing scholarly emphasis on modernism's theorizing by anti-modernists, and to reflect further on the link between parts one and three of the encyclical and the connections between the theory and practice of anti-modernism. Charles Talar, one of Loisy's most significant commentators, has challenged the comparative neglect of part three of the encyclical, and in doing so has pointed to significant continuities between the condemnation of modernism and the condemnation of the *Sillon*, Marc Sangnier's Republican and left-leaning French Catholic movement. Talar highlights an important letter, written to Loisy by the scholarly Archbishop Mignot at the time of the condemnation of the *Sillon* in 1910.

Loisy evidently agreed with the Archbishop, and Talar synopsizes Loisy's observations in his own *Mémoires* as follows:

> In his [Loisy's] view, in creating a Modernist system *Pascendi* had intended to strike at the entire scientific movement of the time, *insofar as that posed a threat to the intellectual regime of Roman Catholicism*.[18]

The key to Loisy's judgment—and what makes the analogy work between the condemnations of both modernism and the *Sillon*—is the qualification following 'insofar'. Talar argues—and this point is implied in Loisy's diary—that the doctrinally focused neo-scholastic social imaginary did not see, or admit, the kind of difference that later scholarship allows between theoretical analysis on the one hand and socio-political prescription on the other. In tackling the heresy of modernism, the self-understanding of the intellectual regime of contemporary Roman Catholicism went beyond matters of doctrinal theology.

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18.   C.J.T. Talar, 'Swearing against Modernism: *Sacrorum Antistitum* (September 1, 1910)', *Theological Studies* 71 (2010), pp. 1-22 (13), emphasis added.

The totalized neo-scholastic self-understanding that emerged in the modernist controversy has been described as integralism or as integralist Catholicism. This designation emphasises the extent to which neo-scholasticism interpreted Catholicism as a whole, no single part of which could be called into question without causing the destruction of the whole.

The anti-modernist oath of 1910 is a declaration of obedience to an integralist, ultramontane and clericalist Catholicism. Having effectively identified the teachings of the encyclical *Pascendi* and the decree *Lamentabili* with the very essence of Catholic Christianity, the swearer of the oath concludes:

> Hence I hold most firmly and will continue to hold until my last breath, the faith of the Fathers in the *certain* charism of *truth* that exists, has existed, and always will exist in the *Episcopal succession from the Apostles*, so that not what might seem better suited to the culture of each age should be held, rather that the absolute and immutable truth first preached by the Apostles *should never be believed* or understood *in a different manner*.[19]

This was a vision of an ideologically hermetically sealed church, outside of which there was nothing of philosophical interest. But its existence was not simply a matter of theory; it impacted on how the church located itself in the physical reality of political space. The anti-modernist oath bears interesting comparison with the contemporary politics of Vatican foreign policy, which was then coping with the various challenges presented to the church's social and political presence by Catholic minority experience (in, e.g., the USA), by established and majority experience (e.g. as established in Spain by concordat in 1851) and by majority but anti-clerical experience (e.g. in France after the separation of church and state in 1905). Like the genre of oath, the concordat offered an objective statement of intent, together with clear, public signs to indicate that its enactment was being taken seriously.

In a stimulating essay on Vatican foreign policy and the origins of modernism, Gary Lease has analyzed the extent to which, in a post-Bonaparte context, Vatican reaction against political 'liberalism' anticipated the doctrinal analysis and disciplinary measures proposed by *Pascendi*. Vatican foreign policy still hankered after the status of establishment, and successive Cardinals Secretaries of State saw the instrument of a concordat as the ideal means to adapt establishmentarian longings to differing contexts. From a later perspective, Lease quotes from Cardinal Ottaviani's speech of 1953, which offered a remarkably blunt acknowledgment of the balance to be struck:

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19. For the text of the oath, see Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence*, Appendix 2, 'The Anti-Modernist Oath', pp. 235-36 (236), emphasis original.

> …in societies where Roman Christians are in the majority, the Vatican must support 'the idea of the confessional State with the duty of exclusive protection of the Catholic religion'; in a society, however, where Romans are not in the majority, the Holy See must claim 'the right to tolerance or to the outright equality of the sects'.[20]

Thus the oath ensured compliance with Vatican anti-modernism on the part of priests, religious and other ecclesial office-holders, whilst concordats sought to institutionalize a maximal influence for Vatican anti-modernism through the instruments of the modern state.

One cannot fault the coherence of the integralist, anti-modernist millennial vision, nor the energy with which its adherents attempted to iron out any crumpled patches that they detected in the seamless garment of Kingdom-as-Church. This programme of action, however, relied entirely on an identification of Roman Catholicism and neo-scholasticism. In one of two articles to *The Times* following the appearance of *Pascendi*, George Tyrrell hammered home this point with typical elegance, arguing that while Pius's encyclical 'tries to show the Modernist that he is no Catholic, it mostly succeeds in showing him that he is no scholastic'.[21] Tyrrell's development of this point concerns us in the next section.

Deconstructing Medievalism

By answering the encyclical in the pages of *The Times*, Tyrrell brought down the wrath of his church's authorities upon his head. He was denied access to the sacraments by his local bishop, and, when Tyrrell died in 1909, he was denied a Roman Catholic burial. Between his effective excommunication in 1907 and his death, Tyrrell composed a brilliant work of polemic, directed against the equation of scholasticism with Roman Catholicism, and against the ahistorical attempt to regain the safety of medieval Christendom. In his last years, Tyrrell referred to these nineteenth-century developments as the heresy of 'Vaticanism'; he grew increasingly wary of how the notion of doctrinal development, associated with the name of John Henry Newman, could easily morph from its initial task (accounting for continuity in the face of change between past and present experience) to a new role in which the present situation of the papacy could claim sole rights over the normative reading of the past over and against the claims of historical critics. Tyrrell's notion of 'Vaticanism' embodied development gone wrong.

20. Gary Lease, 'Vatican Foreign Policy and the Origins of Modernism', in Jodock (ed.), *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*, pp. 31-55.

21. Quoted by M.D. Petre, *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell* (2 vols.; London: Edward Arnold, 1912), II, p. 337.

Tyrrell's role in the modernist crisis is curious. He was not listed among the ranks of the erroneous by the Roman anti-modernists, who confined themselves largely to French and Italian writers. Having converted to Roman Catholicism in early adulthood, Tyrrell identified with nascent integralism under Leo XIII, and articulated his new religious identity in terms of a deeply romantic attachment to the Jesuits, which he joined hot on the heels of his conversion in 1879. Tyrrell persisted in his Jesuit vocation, despite serious anxieties on the part of his novice master, and, after working briefly in a parish, in 1894 he was dispatched to St Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst, as professor of philosophy. Here, his troubles began in earnest: due, ironically, to his devotion to Thomas Aquinas.

Tyrrell's conversion coincided with Leo XIII's imposition of mandatory neo-scholasticism. Tyrrell was positively enthusiastic about St Thomas Aquinas, and succeeded in making Thomas popular among his students. In the politics of Thomism, however, this proved an unwise move: each religious order had its preferred interpreter of Thomas, and the preferred approach among Jesuits was that of the post-Reformation Jesuit Francesco Suárez (1543–1617). By neglecting Suárez in favour of Thomas, Tyrrell found himself accused of turning his students into would-be Dominicans. Although Tyrrell wrote to Rome, seeking papal confirmation that teaching Thomism *à la* Thomas was what was required of him—he received an answer in the affirmative—the philosophical civil war at Stonyhurst was ended by the removal of Tyrrell from his chair after only two years, and his move to a new career in the Jesuit publishing ministry at Farm Street, London.

As a writer, Tyrrell came to wider public attention, and he became a popular preacher on retreats. Amongst his new circle of contacts was the philosopher Baron Friedrich von Hügel, into whose passion for historical-critical biblical studies Tyrrell was drawn. In addition to historical biblical critics, Tyrrell was also reading the works of Cardinal John Henry Newman; Aquinas and Newman would prove to be the most significant philosophical influences on Tyrrell throughout his career. As an official Roman Catholic writer, Tyrrell blotted his copy with an essay in 1899, entitled 'A Perverted Devotion', in which he criticized the overly cataphatic preaching of hell by some Roman Catholic missionaries. Eventually, Tyrrell was sent to a house owned by the Jesuits in Richmond, Yorkshire, where he had time and space in which to read and think. As a consequence, he developed increasingly complex relations with his superiors in order to secure the publication of his works, and, as his work grew more experimental, he relied on pseudonyms. The situation was intolerable to Tyrrell, and he made efforts to leave the order, with a view to working as a priest in one of a number of possible dioceses. In the midst of these negotiations, a portion of a letter of spiritual direction that Tyrrell had written to a professor in an Italian university was

published in the Italian press under the name of 'An English Jesuit'. Once Tyrrell acknowledged the work as being substantially his, the Jesuit General dismissed him from the order in February 1906.

Tyrrell was not, therefore, a professional philosopher or historian (like many of the French modernists were); he found himself in trouble for reflecting on the religious challenges of current philosophical and historical developments. To the extent that the historicity of changing religious traditions remains a theological hot potato, Tyrrell's writings continue to demand attention. He was deeply attached to Roman Catholicism—and remained so—yet he resisted the attempts of Vaticanism to reduce Catholicism to an ahistorical reading of Thomas. His religious order shows evidence—certainly in the English Province—of having had a realistic grasp of Tyrrell's intellectual and pastoral abilities, and of having protected him as best it could from the General and his staff in Rome. But the view from Rome did not include Tyrrell's possibilities in its integralist vision. Like Newman, with whom he is regularly compared, Tyrrell is a prose stylist of genius and a controversialist at heart, and in his controversy with Désiré Cardinal Mercier, the Archbishop of Malines in Belgium, he produced an effective and elegant deconstruction of Vaticanism.

In Mercier's Lenten Pastoral of 1908, Mercier had named Tyrrell as 'the most penetrating observer of the present Modernist movement—the one most alive to its tendencies, who has best divined its spirit, and is perhaps more deeply imbued with it than any other…'[22] There is no denying the cold fury of Tyrrell's response, nor its obvious notoriety as the challenge by priest of no fixed abode to a prince of the church. Part of Tyrrell's anger was undoubtedly personal: Mercier had been well-intentioned towards Tyrrell in his search for a diocese in which to work; but the tide was flowing in an increasingly anti-modernist current, and Mercier needed to demonstrate distance between himself and the evidently heretical Tyrrell.

Mercier's Pastoral was directed against the errors of modernism (although, as the Pastoral proudly acknowledges, Belgium faced no threat from this pernicious heresy). The pastoral explains Tyrrell's modernism on the grounds that Tyrrell had been—until the advanced age of 17—a member of the Church of Ireland, and therefore, a Protestant: hence, the Archbishop explained, Tyrrell's lack of obedience and his taste for subjectivity. Thomas Loome has observed that only a man as angry *and* as religious as Tyrrell could have written *Medievalism*, and this may well be true; but it is also important not to overplay the place of religious scandal and anger in this debate, because in *Medievalism*, Tyrrell's scandalous anger is consistently theologically focused. Tyrrell's essay was completed in six angry weeks, but the issues that he raises are those that have been at the centre of his theological reflection for years.

22. Tyrrell, *Medievalism*, p. 26.

To the accusation that he is a modernist, Tyrrell rejoins that such a judgment presupposes a medievalist church authority. Instead of engaging with contemporary culture, medievalism—or Vaticanism—denies that culture its validity by seeking to return church and society to an ahistorical, narrowly self-interested version of Christendom. Ecclesiologically, Tyrrell is making a remarkably blunt claim: Mercier is not merely colluding with the then-strongest party; that would simply have been opportunism. According to Tyrrell, the Archbishop is colluding in heresy. Medievalism, according to Tyrrell, amounts to the destruction of Catholicism itself. Medievalism claims to speak on behalf of the universal church, but in truth it has replaced its concern for universality with the centralizing pretensions of a single local church, namely that at Rome.

Two aspects of Mercier's case against Tyrrell receive firm theological attention. The first is that allowances can be made for Tyrrell's imperfect grasp of Catholicism, on the grounds of his Protestant origins. The second, and less populist, is Mercier's concern to align Tyrrell with the excommunicated German historian Ignace von Döllinger, who had denied the doctrine of papal infallibility at Vatican I in 1869–70. Tyrrell's response leads us back to the hermeneutically entwined issues of tradition and history.

Tyrrell has little difficulty in making light of Mercier's claim that Tyrrell was reverting to Protestant type. But there is another dimension to this issue that is more important to Tyrrell, and that concerns the breadth of religious life that Mercier now assigns to Protestant influence. The anti-modernists viewed Kant and Luther with equal horror as irremediably subjectivist, and subjectivity in matters of religion was undesirable in the church of Pius X. Ignore, however, what this says about Luther and Kant: Tyrrell is more anxious about what it implies about the Catholic theological tradition, and in particular about his beloved mystical writers, including the Jesuit's founder St Ignatius Loyola. If the Catholic tradition is misinterpreted reductively into a purely neo-scholastic construct, then the consequences will be the excision from Catholic religious life of all that would be considered under the category of von Hügel's 'mystical' element of religion. 'I learnt the "method of immanentism"', Tyrrell insisted, 'not from Kant, nor from the Philosophy of Action, nor from Protestantism, but solely from the *Spiritual Exercises* of the Founder of the Jesuits'.[23] But such talk of an interior life, to the anti-modernists, sounds suspiciously like a Kantian or Protestant infiltration of official Catholic orthodoxy. Tyrrell thus argues that Medievalism has diminished the Catholic religious tradition.

Mercier has two reasons for trying to paint Tyrrell into the same corner as Döllinger, whom he represents as a Protestant of some description for failing

23. Tyrrell, *Medievalism*, p. 105.

to accept ultramontanism's moment of triumph at Vatican I. First, Döllinger enjoys symbolic significance as the human face of disobedience to the Medieval turn; as Pius IX rid himself of the turbulent German priest and historian, so too, it is implied, Pius X must now rid himself of Tyrrell and his fellow travellers. Second, it was no accident that Döllinger's intellectual discipline was that of history, and that it was precisely as a historian, resisting an ahistorical reading of tradition, that he rejected Vatican I. On this basis—rather than their mutual alleged-Protestantism—Tyrrell is prepared to accept a certain intellectual kinship with Döllinger: 'Döllinger's acknowledgement of the irrepressible rights of history is shared by every true Modernist'.[24] In isolation at Richmond, Tyrrell's immersion into the findings of historical-critical biblical studies and church history had confronted him with the dark night of the soul, as his pre-critical religious imagination underwent radical and unwelcome restructuring; but this experience had also nourished Tyrrell's concern that the new context created by historical findings was one that needed to be addressed and not simply denied *a priori*.

Hence the extent to which the charge made by Tyrrell against Mercier is hermeneutical in character. Pius's Kingdom-as-Church is one in which the current pope functions as a theological oracle at the centre of a clericalist system, from whom philosophical and theological information emanates in the direction of the faithful *via* the episcopate—now reduced to 'ornamental nonentities', according to Tyrrell, under the conditions of medievalism. Tyrrell argued that tradition is interpreted by the church as a whole and not exclusively by one recently promoted part (or party) within the church. Under Pius, the church appeared to have received a hall-pass from history; Tyrrell is more resolutely Augustinian in his unwillingness to accept that the end, the *telos*, of the church is so clearly discernible as Medievalism supposes.

Tyrrell's *Medievalism* concludes with an *apologia* for a non-neo-scholastic Catholic Christianity, together with his justification for staying where he was, ecclesiologically speaking. He had no doubt but that the imposition of Medievalism, would, despite its pretensions to eternity, pass with time. And when it passed, Catholic Christianity would have to repent of its premature millennial integralism, and articulate a catholicity for something other than a golden age.

Conclusion

The anti-modernist campaign of Pius X presupposed—as did Traditional-ism—a modern fall from medieval grace. A return, of sorts, to this golden age was possible *via* neo-scholasticism: millennial hope thus rested on the

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24.   Tyrrell, *Medievalism*, p. 91.

deployment of the correct theological method. To a non-neo-scholastic, such as George Tyrrell, anti-modernism's medieval golden age was a time that had never been. Without decrying St Thomas's achievements, Tyrrell read Thomism as one attempt by faith to inculturate itself—it had resonated in the thirteenth century (after a shaky start), but other eras had to negotiate the hermeneutics of faith and culture for themselves. History brings real change to a tradition, and the mere repetition of certain cultural expressions denies the reality of change. Fidelity requires reinterpretation.

John R. Hall's recent phenomenological history of apocalyptic successfully demonstrates the extent to which it is necessary to reconfigure understandings of modernity to highlight its connection with apocalyptic.[25] A phenomenological reading of The End's recurrent appeal makes clear the way in which an end-time and its social reality are experienced as being qualitatively different from other times. The same, it might be argued, also applies where 'The End' is mainstreamed institutionally. Curiously, Hall notes Mircea Eliade's contention that the measurement and chronicling of history faced resistance in its emergence precisely because the objectivity of such history denied the symbolic, sacred rhythms of what Eliade famously called 'the myth of the eternal return'.[26] One suspects that Tyrrell would have sympathized with Eliade's notion of sacralized social resistance to history in his attempts to deconstruct Medievalism and its millennial hopes.

25.   John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009).

26.   Hall, *Apocalypse*, pp. 13-17. Hall is discussing Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959 [1949]).

Theorizing the 'Fictional Turn' in Popular Dispensationalism*

Jennie Chapman

It is now twenty years since Paul Boyer published his influential study of popular prophecy belief, *When Time Shall Be No More*.[1] Few working in millennial studies would disagree that Boyer's monograph remains a key text in the field, particularly for those concerned with popular premillennial texts and cultures. But since its publication in 1992, the cultural dissemination of popular dispensational theology has undergone a dramatic transformation. Many of the examples of end-times writing to which Boyer refers are non-fictional commentaries that typically interleave interpretations of various prophetic books of the Bible (Revelation, Ezekiel and Daniel being recurrent favourites) with pessimistic diagnoses of contemporary cultural malaise, identifying a diverse range of phenomena from gay rights to bar codes as signs of the coming end. While Boyer does look at a few prophecy novels, including Dan Betzer's 1985 rapture novel *The Beast* and Salem Kirban's paradigmatic *666*, these are outnumbered by non-fictional texts by the likes of John Walvoord, M.R. DeHaan, Pat Robertson, Mary Stewart Relfe and, of course, Hal Lindsey.

When the novels of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins entered the American mainstream imagination, however, the landscape of popular prophecy exposition described by Boyer altered irrevocably: the age of prophetic exposition through fiction had begun in earnest. This chapter argues that this shift to fiction, and the various and far-reaching consequences that have already begun to emerge in its wake, ought to constitute a key area of investigation in the future of millennial studies.

The Left Behind books have made a significant impact on American culture, and scholars who were initially slow to catch on to their importance—a few notable trailblazers notwithstanding—are now diligently picking their way through the series' cultural fallout. Important studies have been

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1.   Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992).

undertaken on the internal thematics of the texts themselves, examining, for example, how the novels' representations of Jews mobilize entrenched anti-Semitic discourses, or how the Left Behind children's series engages, and seeks to influence, ongoing debates about the place of faith—especially evangelical Christianity—in America's public school system.[2] I have considered elsewhere how Left Behind endeavours, with mixed success, to formulate a model of evangelical masculinity through its male characters.[3] These are all pressing concerns, but while the content of the Left Behind material is undoubtedly ripe for enquiry, less attention has been paid to an aspect of the books that is far more fundamental: their form. To my mind, one of the most notable consequences of the Left Behind phenomenon is that the primary medium for the dissemination of premillennial eschatology is no longer commentary or exegesis, or even the sensational non-fiction polemic epitomized by *The Late Great Planet Earth*.[4] Rather, it is the popular fiction novel. Though, as Crawford Gribben shows, Left Behind is by no means the first example of rapture fiction—such novels were appearing as early as the 1870s[5]—Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's novels have undoubtedly consolidated the shift in popular prophecy exposition from the nonfictional mode to the fictional mode. This development is amply illustrated by a statistic: as many prophecy novels were published in the decade since 1996 as were produced during the entire preceding century.[6]

Such is the prominence and influence of prophecy novels that they are now being cited as something akin to 'proof texts' in nonfiction commentaries. In LaHaye and Jenkins's prophecy guide *Are We Living in the End Times?*, for example, the authors make reference to moments in their Left Behind novels in order to corroborate their nonfictional observations.[7] That is to say, the

2. Lisa Lampert-Weissig, 'Left Behind, the Holocaust, and that Old Time Antisemitism', *Journal of Popular Culture* 45 (2012), pp. 497-515; Michelle Ann Abate, 'The Politics of Prophecy: The US Culture Wars and the Battle over Public Education in the Left Behind Series for Kids', *Research in Children's Literature* 2 (2009), pp. 1-27.

3. Jennie Chapman, 'Tender Warriors: Muscular Christians, Promise Keepers, and the Crisis of Masculinity in Left Behind', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 21.3 (2009), < http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art21(3)-TenderWarriors.html>.

4. Hal Lindsey with C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

5. Crawford Gribben, 'Left Behind, Prophecy Fictions and the Clash of Civilizations', in *Left Behind and the Evangelical Imagination* (ed. Crawford Gribben and Mark Sweetnam; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), pp. 49-68 (55).

6. Crawford Gribben, *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 145.

7. In *Are We Living in the End Times?* 19 out of 27 chapters begin with (frequently lengthy) quotations from one of the Left Behind novels with reference to a particular dispensational concept. Often these extracts are used in the same kind of way that academic writers cite sources as evidence for their claims.

authors point towards fictional material—fictional material that they themselves have created—not merely as illustration of, but verification for, their exegesis. This tendency towards a privileging of fictional material over other kinds of discursive production reflects the fact that, in the contemporary period, more people have learnt about dispensational eschatology (or, at least, LaHaye and Jenkins's rendering of it, which experts on the tradition complain departs in important ways from dispensational orthodoxy) through novels than through their churches.[8] It may also be reasonably assumed that for many such readers, novels like Left Behind will be their *only* encounter with dispensational print culture. Only a minority of Left Behind readers will go on to engage with classic dispensational exegeses such as the *Scofield Reference Bible*, perhaps assuming, not altogether unreasonably, that LaHaye and Jenkins's series tells them as much as they need to know. At the same time, many evangelical readers proceed to 'apply' the interpretation contained in the novels to their readings of the Bible, with the novels becoming a 'key' to understanding such complex, allusive and, indeed, elusive biblical books as the Revelation of St John of Patmos.[9] Still other readers come to rapture fiction *before* having read the prophetic or apocalyptic books of the Bible at all, setting in motion an inverted hermeneutical process whereby the code that allegedly cracks the puzzle is apprehended prior to the puzzle itself.[10] Placing the interpretive cart before the scriptural horse in this way almost inevitably produces an eisegesis, or 'reading in', of the scripture in question.[11] In this new era of prophecy culture, then, fiction precedes nonfiction as a repository of eschatological truth. We seem to be witnessing a classic example of the philosopher Jean Baudrillard's own apocalyptic vision, the

8.   See, for example, Mark S. Sweetnam, 'Introduction', in Gribben and Sweetnam (eds.), *Left Behind and the Evangelical Imagination*, pp. 1-14. Sweetnam dismisses much of the popular dispensationalist œuvre produced since the 1970s, which includes Left Behind as well as texts such as Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, as 'dispensensationalism', averring that 'it is exceedingly important that this sensationalizing mutation of dispensational essentials be clearly distinguished from dispensationalism proper' (p. 9).

9.   See Paul C. Gutjahr, 'No Longer Left Behind: Amazon.com, Reader-Response, and the Changing Fortunes of the Christian Novel in America', *Book History* 5 (2002), pp. 209-36. The article includes an analysis of reader reviews of the Left Behind series posted on Amazon.com, as well as more in-depth interviews with a selection of said reviewers.

10.   One participant in Gutjahr's study admitted that 'I had never read very much of the Bible previous'; another confessed, 'This is sad but I have never been a bible reader', while a third claimed that 'I am a believer because of this book'. Gutjahr, 'No Longer Left Behind', pp. 225-26.

11.   For an elaboration of the process of eisegesis (reading meaning *into* scripture) in contrast to exegesis (drawing meaning *out of* scripture), see Kenneth G.C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially Chapter 1.

'precession of simulacra', whereby '[t]he territory does not precede the map, nor does it survive it'. Rather, it is 'the map that precedes the territory'; indeed, the map 'engenders the territory'.[12]

It seems so obvious as to hardly need stating that the aforementioned shift to the fictional mode entails substantial implications for the future of millennial studies. Indeed, the questions that this transition invites are legion. What happens to exegesis when it is undertaken via the medium of the novel? Can the message remain unimpeded by the medium, or does it inevitably get lost in translation? How are the imperatives of exegesis and evangelism qualified by the requirements of popular genre fiction? Does the fictional mode undermine or at least problematize popular dispensationalism's claims to truth embodied in literalism? And how do readers of rapture fictions engage with these strangely liminal and hybrid texts—do they see them as emissaries of truth, flights of fancy, or something in between, or something different? What becomes clear from these queries is that fiction writing and its non-fiction counterpart do not by any means function identically. The implicit contract between text and reader is different for a novel than it is for a transcribed sermon or a biblical commentary.[13] The reader comes to each genre with a distinct set of expectations, formed by previous encounters with other examples of that genre. As readers, we *orient* ourselves differently to different forms. Two texts dealing with precisely the same subject matter will signify in profoundly different ways depending not only upon the writer's use of established conventions of form, genre, style and voice, but also extra-textual signifiers such as (in the case of physical books) cover art, author reputation, even the way it has been classified in the bookshop or library.[14] Taking these observations into account, the use of the popular novel as a vehicle for prophecy exposition cannot be unproblematic or inconsequential.

The fictional turn, as I will call it, has important ramifications for millennial studies. A central task of this discipline is to identify, trace, interpret and, where appropriate, theorize these consequences. As specialists in the study of how rhetorical, formal and narratological strategies work to influence the production of meaning, I would aver that literature scholars are particularly equal to this task. Therefore, as well as opening enquiries into some of the questions listed above, this chapter is also a plea to others in literary studies to bring their expertise to bear upon this project. Given that Left Behind and

12.   Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (trans. Sheila Faria Glasier; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981]), p. 1.

13.   See John Frow, *Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), especially Chapter 1.

14.   See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1997 [1982]); *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1987]).

its progeny remain as enduring fixtures in America's popular literature market, it is imperative that a better understanding of their dynamics is pursued. Here I argue that the novel as a form is at once a natural home for the prophetic narrative and an unstable, not to say treacherous, medium which may not be so easily moulded or appropriated as the authors of rapture fictions would believe or desire. A second concern is to understand the ways in which academics approach prophecy fiction, its authors and its audiences; here, therefore, some critical observations on the trajectory of prophecy fiction studies within the broader church of millennial studies is offered, with a view to identifying some of the strengths and shortcomings of the body of scholarship as it currently stands. In particular, it is suggested that a greater degree of attention to the 'bigger' questions of form and its effect on reading practices, and in turn the production of meaning, in a body of scholarship that has frequently been concerned with detailed close readings may add new and productive dimensions to our ongoing enquiries into this often fascinating— and frequently frustrating—body of popular literature.

Prophecy Fiction and the Problem of Classification

Our first issue as we move toward a more rigorous theory of prophecy fiction can be bluntly stated: What *is* prophecy fiction? Under even the most per- functory scrutiny, this categorization is by no means self-explanatory. The prophecy novel is a hybrid and a conundrum: it is a work of fiction that tells the 'truth'.[15] It is an action thriller that expounds upon the saving love of Jesus Christ. It is an enthralling potboiler in which the beginning is known from the outset. As Jason Dittmer and Zeke Spears observe, 'The *Left Behind* series can be read in many different ways, as how-to manuals for the proper Christian life, as a technophilic orgy of action and adventure, or as a form of evangelical proselytizing'.[16] If the texts with which I am concerned here defy the categories by which readers typically make sense of literature of all kinds, but especially fiction, then the question of how audiences extract meaning from them is an important one. What kind of cognitive work do these books require of readers in order for them to make sense? How do they draw upon an audience's prior reading experiences? What kind of training do those other reading experiences provide in preparation for reading the prophecy novel?

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15.   When referring to the biblical truths disseminated in prophecy novels, I use scare quotes to indicate that, for adherents to the dispensational tradition, the prophetic content of the stories carries the weight and status of biblical truth, while at the same time these truth statements cannot be classified as true in the objective and empirical sense of that term (i.e. in terms of observable, measurable and/or provable phenomena).

16.   Jason Dittmer and Zeke Spears, 'Apocalypse, Now? The Geopolitics of Left Behind', *GeoJournal* 74 (2009), pp. 183-89 (185).

What is clear from numerous studies of reading and readers is that there is no neutral or innocent position from which readers approach texts.[17] Rather, they bring to bear practices and categories—what Jonathan Culler calls 'competencies'—developed in the course of reading other texts.[18] Novels are approached as novels and read accordingly; so are magazine features, technical reports, screenplays, emails and so on. The difficulty that prophecy fiction presents to readers—and to academics, who are readers of readers—is that it does not perform in the ways to which readers of novels per se are accustomed. Therefore, it is not at all clear that specific competencies in novel reading are adequate, or perhaps even relevant, to a reading of such a hybrid, liminal, indeterminable text as the popular dispensational prophecy novel. This genre, I will argue, requires a different form of competency than that which is developed through encounters with nearly all other kinds of novels, be they literary or popular, romances or thrillers, sentimental or experimental, realist or postmodern. Put simply, the prophecy novel is not a 'novel' as most readers typically understand that category. The prophecy novel disrupts, exceeds and complicates its putative genre in important ways, some of which I will address in this chapter, but many more of which are left open to future studies. By formulating an understanding of the new competencies that these novels demand and (ideally) develop, we will add much to our knowledge of these most important objects of analysis in the field of millennial studies.

This task, however, is complicated by a number of factors. First, it is apparent that authors of prophecy novels have by and large not been troubled by the questions raised in this chapter.[19] Most perceive little controversy or cause for anxiety in the appropriation of the novel as a vehicle for exegesis and exhortation. In interviews, Left Behind authors LaHaye and Jenkins frequently assert that they are simply 'using fiction to teach biblical truth'.[20] The discursive formulation 'using fiction' is telling: fiction is merely a vessel in which content—in this case, 'biblical truth'—is contained. It is simply the most expedient method of delivering a message. Clearly, this marks a departure from the consensus view of works of fiction that perceives them as ends

17.   Karin Littau offers a useful overview of theories of reading in *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies, and Bibliomania* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006). See Chapters 5 and 6 in particular.

18.   Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 156.

19.   It should be noted that not all authors of prophecy fiction take such an uncritical approach. 'Postmodern' and/or 'literary' prophecy novelists, such as Brian McLaren, grapple more reflectively with the issues raised in this chapter, though it must be said that such authors constitute a small demographic among the producers of prophecy fiction.

20.   See, for example, Steve Rabey, 'Apocalyptic Sales Out of This World', *Christianity Today*, 1 March 1999; Lou Carlozo, 'Apocalypse Soon: "Left Behind" Series Picks Up Steam', *The Chicago Tribune*, 14 March 2002; José Cardenas, 'Christian Thriller Series Marches Onward to Mainstream', *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 2000.

in themselves.[21] Their form *is* their purpose; whereas in the case of prophecy fiction, it is ancillary and subsequent to it. More interestingly, the authors' particular turn of phrase here bifurcates form and content. No longer intrinsically connected and thus essentially inseparable, as most fiction writers would have it, form is not only decoupled from content; it is made inferior and subservient to it. Perhaps we could go so far as to say that it is rendered invisible. This becomes apparent when we consider prophecy novelists' blithe appropriation of the novel as a vehicle for the dissemination of prophetic 'truth'. There is little apparent acknowledgment that the form impinges upon the content in any way whatsoever. The novel is simply a medium, in the scientific sense of it being an entirely neutral, sterile environment in which matter is suspended but to which it remains impervious. Ironically, this fallacy has frequently been repeated in another form in the scholarship on prophecy fiction, particularly Left Behind, which all too often privileges the novels' content over their form, thus rendering the latter for practical purposes invisible or at least unremarkable.

Yet the fact of prophecy fiction's form *is* remarkable and may even be the most remarkable thing about what in other respects appears as a fairly simplistic body of writing. One of the essential qualities of fiction, for example, is that it is not, in an ordinary sense, true.[22] Perhaps the most obvious and pressing issue, then, as we embark upon the project of theorizing the fictional turn in prophecy exposition, is the claim of 'truth' that is central to popular prophecy fiction and which fundamentally differentiates it from other kinds of fiction. Importantly, the truth claims made by novels such as Left Behind are not limited to matters pertaining strictly to prophecy. For many readers the books also affirm earthly truths by inviting connections between the plots of the novels and contemporary cultural and political realities, in addition to biblical truths concerning eschatology, spirituality or soteriology, for example. As such, the designation of the books as fiction is problematized. Whether the scenarios outlined in prophecy novels do in fact transpire or not is not especially relevant. It is the fact that many readers approach them *as if*

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21.   I acknowledge that many works of literature have didactic purposes over and above aesthetics or entertainment: as an Americanist, the first that comes to mind is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). However, I would argue that few works in this category relegate form in favour of message to the extent that many prophecy novels do. Furthermore, most 'ideological' novelists, certainly in the contemporary period, are at most accused of surreptitiously 'concealing' their ideological positions in the folds of the plot (I am thinking, for example, of allegations levelled at *Twilight* author Stephanie Meyers that her vampire books are encoded apologetics for Mormon theology). On the contrary, the ideological objectives of Left Behind are quite blatant.

22.   See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985 [1984]), I. A number of other theorists have also meditated on the paradox of truth and—or in—fiction, some of whom are cited in the analysis that follows.

they were true—in a way that readers of most other kinds of fiction simply would not—that is of interest here, and which must provoke those of us studying these texts to consider whether the kinds of analytical methods we might ordinarily use to gain insights into fiction writing ought to be, and could be, modified to take this difference into account.

The ways in which prophecy fiction disrupts and defies the binaries that are often used to classify types of discourse or knowledge economies—truth/invention, fiction/nonfiction—are not only perceptible in the logic of the works themselves; they are apparent in the ways in which audiences describe their reading experiences, and evident in their explanations of what they 'do' with the content presented in prophecy novels like Left Behind. Paul Gutjahr's analysis of reader reviews of Left Behind posted on Amazon.com is especially useful in this context. The responses of readers to the books (some of which were followed up in more extensive interviews conducted by Gutjahr) are profoundly revealing of the problem of classification with which we are here concerned. In particular, they point to the kind of cognitive work readers must undertake in order to negotiate the books' liminal status as 'fiction that tells the truth'. For example, many respondents mention the pedagogical value of the books as one of their most prominent attributes. While being initially hooked by the exciting and engaging plot, many readers nonetheless invest the novels with strong pedagogical value, with a significant proportion of those surveyed using verbs associated with learning and cognition in their responses.[23] Yet Left Behind is for many readers far more significant than simply an educational aid: 'many of those in the follow-up survey spoke in a way that gave life-changing power to these novels in terms that are traditionally reserved for the Bible alone'. Significantly, Gutjahr indicates that the novels are elevated almost to the status of sacred text in their own right, in a way that has few precedents in—and potentially momentous consequences for—evangelical dispensational culture. This development is particularly notable when we consider the authority conferred upon the Bible by evangelicals, often to the exclusion of other sources of authority, such as the clergy. One problem, then, with a hybrid form that infuses (or perhaps confuses) 'truth' with fiction is that their utility as a means to biblical interpretation always carries the potential to mutate the texts into an *end* of interpretation in their own right—this is perhaps especially true of such phenomenally popular and culturally significant novels as Left Behind. The danger of prophecy novels is that they threaten to exceed their putative role as guides to prophetic scripture and instead become substitutes for it.

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23.   For example: 'I have learned to take verses in Revelations literally'; '[I can] comprehend exactly all that it [Revelation] has to say about the end times'; 'I GAINED A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE END TIMES AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION' (capitalization in original). Gutjahr, 'No Longer Left Behind', p. 225.

Yet the reverence with which many readers approach Left Behind is by no means the sum of their reading experience, which is in fact far more complex and contradictory. Readers' *cognitive* experience of the books as pedagogical and perhaps even sacred texts is mitigated by their *affective* experience of the books as titillating and exhilarating thrillers. According to Gutjahr,

> the most cited reason for enjoying the book Left Behind was just how engaging and fast-moving the plot was. Readers often coupled this excitement with its spiritual message, but even when they did so, they usually first mentioned the absolutely thrilling nature of the narrative.[24]

LaHaye and Jenkins's decision to appropriate particular generic conventions, especially those pertaining to the action thriller, has not escaped critical scrutiny. Mark Fenster suggests there is a fundamental and ultimately catastrophic dissonance between the way in which LaHaye and Jenkins *intend* their novels to signify in contrast to the way in which they may *in fact* signify. '[T]he correct response to reading the novels', he suggests, 'is to commit to Christ before the rapture; but if readers do so they will miss the action that propelled them through the novels'. Fenster's contention is that the series' representation of the Tribulation, via the conventions of the popular thriller, as a period of excitement as well as terror and of the characters as fallen, failed, but also profoundly heroic, may in fact work against the authors' purported designs insofar as it insinuates that being left behind might not be such a terrible fate after all, if one gets to experience the intrigue, adventure and exhilaration that characterizes the tribulations of Rayford, Buck and co. Engaging the sensational tropes of the action thriller genre, the authors risk 'mak[ing] the action and characters too attractive'; the act of 'divining and resisting conspiracy…too engaging'. This may in turn inadvertently discourage readers from making 'the proper religious commitment'.[25] In Fenster's view, the authors' use of the generic formulae that are required to make a complex eschatology legible to readers of popular fiction radically alters, perhaps even obfuscates, the very theology it is supposed to illuminate.

Though he makes a thought-provoking point here, I think Fenster's reading of the pleasurable dimensions of prophecy fiction is a little overwrought. Pleasure need not always come at the expense of pedagogy, and in many cases the latter is only made possible by some degree of the former. Furthermore, Fenster underestimates the genuine terror that the thought of being left behind inspires in many devout dispensational evangelicals, which would tend to nullify any envy that readers may feel for the protagonists' post-rapture escapades. I would argue more circumspectly that the uneasy

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24. Gutjahr, 'No Longer Left Behind', p. 215.
25. Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2nd edn, 2008 [1999]), pp. 225-26.

relationship between pleasure and pedagogy, between the requirements of genre and exegesis, calls attention to the complexity and multivalency of prophecy fiction as well as to the equally complex negotiations performed by its readers or, to revert to Culler's terminology, the competencies they must develop. Gutjahr's study shows Left Behind readers working to make sense of the hybrid genre in which the texts are situated and the different, perhaps competing cognitive and affective demands it makes upon its readership. For example, while readers are attracted by the aspects of the novels that are most associated with their fictionality, primarily their use of tropes common to thrillers and romances, they are nonetheless frequently troubled by the suggestion that they are 'mere' fiction. 'I believe that these books are not just great fiction, but PROPHETIC fiction. This stuff WILL happen!' states one of Gutjahr's readers. Another writes: 'I just hope that this series isn't seen as totally fictional, and I cringe when it is labelled so'.[26] What is notable in the language used here is the way in which the category of fiction is not simply disavowed but stretched and re-signified. For the first reader, 'prophetic fiction' has a different ontological status to other kinds of fiction, which in fact undercuts and countermands its very fictionality (because unlike the events depicted in 'ordinary' fiction, 'This stuff WILL happen'). The second reader similarly seeks to renegotiate the status of the books by positioning them both inside and outside of the sphere that encompasses fiction (they are perhaps partly but definitely not 'totally' fictional).

The problems of classification experienced by readers of Left Behind are not easily circumvented by scholarly readers either. Our analyses are inevitably inflected by the generic expectations we bring to the books. If we, as critics and scholars, approach the novels primarily as escapist fantasies, we will glean different meanings from our readings than we would if we contemplated them as devotional tracts. This difficulty in arriving at a critical consensus on precisely what books like Left Behind *are* culminates in further confusion about what they *do*. Michael Standaert, for example, concludes that the books are highly incendiary and profoundly dangerous because he works from the premise that they have been produced to operate, quite intentionally, as political propaganda.[27] This kind of analysis proceeds from the supposition that fictional works have the power to produce real-world effects; it also assumes that readers generally, with little critical reflection, accept—and act upon—the ideological 'messages' embedded in the story by the author. Yet prophecy fictions could equally be read as mere entertainment that permits readers to escape from the world, not become more engaged in

26. Gutjahr, 'No Longer Left Behind', p. 226.
27. Michael Standaert, *Skipping towards Armageddon: The Politics and Propaganda of the Left Behind Novels and the LaHaye Empire* (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2006).

its politics.[28] Positioning the texts in this way also has ramifications for the ways in which we perceive their operations in the world in which they are situated.

In many respects the question of what literature 'does' in the world is an age-old one, and hardly limited to rapture fiction. The relationships between literature and society, literature and culture, literature and politics, are fraught, complex and subject to ongoing and heated enquiry in the academy. It is my contention that texts like Left Behind dramatize, and therefore illuminate, the complex interrelationships aforementioned. Being neither fully fictional nor fully factual, mixing cultural criticism of the present with fantastic escapes into the future, occupying a liminal position between sacred text and story, Left Behind renders further complexities to our understanding of how readers use literature to ascribe meaning to their everyday lives and the world around them. In making this claim, I do not wish to suggest that a consensus must be reached on the matter of precisely what rapture fiction 'is'—in many ways the slipperiness of contemporary prophecy texts is what makes them fascinating, as well as frustrating, objects of study—but rather that scholars working on such writings could reflect more carefully and critically on the ways in which the frameworks they use to categorize the novels both inform and delimit the kinds of reading that are possible.

It's Only a Story: The Problem and Promise of Fiction for the Future of Millennial Studies

As fiction that tells the 'truth', prophecy texts trouble the boundaries that enclose the novel in its standard formulation. Indeed, the tantalizing promise of the prophecy novel is that it allows the dispensational expositor to have it both ways: to make explicit claims to prophetic truth ('these events *really* will happen') via a discursive genre that affords room for manoeuvre should those claims be disproved ('after all, it's only a story'). In this section I scrutinize further the slippage between truth and fiction that has underpinned my argument so far. Here, I want to examine more closely the ways in which prophecy novelists both exploit and are exploited by this ambiguity, and how it operates both to their benefit and detriment.

The difficulty of 'using' fiction to tell real-world truths has been well-documented by literature scholars. Terry Eagleton points to the paradoxical relationship between fiction writing and truthfulness when he states: 'You

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28. Christian Thorne pays particular attention to the commercial dimensions of rapture fiction that align it with entertaining, escapist 'techno-thriller[s]' such as the novels of Tom Clancy, suggesting that novels in this genre 'signal, on the part of U.S. fundamentalism, an unprecedented capitulation to pop culture'. Christian Thorne, 'The Revolutionary Energy of the Outmoded', *October* 104 (2003), pp. 97-114 (98).

cannot lie in fiction, because the reader does not assume that you are intending to be truthful… In another sense, however, fiction is incapable of telling the truth… Novelists and short story writers are like the boy who cried wolf: they are condemned to be perpetually disbelieved.'[29] Kaye Mitchell makes a similar observation: 'Neither lying nor truth-telling, fiction instead inhabits a kind of ontological no man's land'.[30] Robert Detweiler bluntly asserts that '[t]o write narrative is to indulge in trickery'.[31] It is not simply that novels by their very nature tend to resist the notion of a singular, universal truth in which popular dispensationalism is so heavily invested; more than this, they depend upon deceit as a means of creating narrative tension and conflict. Detweiler argues that successful stories entail a certain degree of deception on the part of the author—red herrings, plot twists, double bluffs and the withholding of information are required in order to maintain the reader's interest. Such ruses are perhaps doubly necessary in popular prophecy novels, where readers know exactly how the story will turn out even before they have opened the book. But in a genre so heavily invested not only in truth, but a monolithic, exclusive truth, the necessity of narrative deception is problematic insofar as it is not always clear where the 'truth' embedded in the biblically inspired content of the novels ends and the 'lie' of artistic license begins. The imperative to promulgate a totalizing version of eschatological truth is incommensurate with the more playful and conjectural imperatives which seem to be intrinsic to fiction precisely because the genre does not seek to make 'truth claims'.[32] As such, the rapture novel that succeeds as fiction is likely to fail as exegesis, while the novel that advances a successful exegesis is likely to fail as fiction.

Another problem and promise of fiction is that it rarely directly seeks, perhaps because it is not in fact able, to make demands on the real-world actions of its readers; indeed it cannot presuppose action on their part, as a direct consequence of reading, at all. It may work with a view to changing a reader's beliefs, values or perceptions—and there are many examples of such polemical fiction, from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*—but precisely how, and the extent to which it does this are thorny questions indeed. In other words, fiction does not and cannot extract obligations or promises from its readership. It is also arguable that fiction is inherently amoral, since its creators are not bound by the obligation, so crucial to other kinds of writing (news journalism, for example), to mean

29.   Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 89-90.
30.   Kaye Mitchell, *Intention and Text: Towards an Intentionality of Literary Form* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 72.
31.   Robert Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995 [1989]), p. 23.
32.   See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, II, p. 3.

what they say and to believe its veracity. This is what Mitchell means when she observes that 'literary utterances are perceived as "insincere", in a special sense of that term'.[33] I do not mean to impute here that LaHaye and Jenkins do not themselves hold the beliefs they espouse in Left Behind: my point is not about the authors as individuals but about the form itself, which arguably has prerogatives of its own, ones which may or may not be commensurate with evangelical standards of truth and morality. In other words, whether the authors of rapture fictions believe in the eschatologies they delineate is to some degree irrelevant, because the very structure of their chosen medium already, and necessarily, has a deeply suspect record where truth and sincerity, and perhaps morality itself, are concerned. Given that these separate but not unrelated axioms are at the very heart of conservative evangelical theology, some analysis of this paradox seems called for. I would open this enquiry by addressing the issue of 'truth' in its relation to the biblical literalism that LaHaye and Jenkins claim guides their exegesis, and in turn its realization in the fictional narratives delineated in Left Behind.

Whether or not dispensational expositors do in fact adhere to a literal hermeneutic (and many biblical scholars would challenge this premise), it remains the case that the tradition's most prominent proponents claim that literalism guides their interpretations. The imperative to interpret scripture according to its most obvious or plain meaning has guided the interpretations of dispensationalism's most important expositors. While a number of theologians have concluded that LaHaye and Jenkins's purported literalism is in fact extremely selective, the authors themselves nevertheless insist that their exegesis issues from the 'plain meaning' of scripture.[34] 'Anyone can understand the major events of Bible prophecy', write LaHaye and Jenkins in *Are We Living in the End Times?*, 'if they spend a little time comparing Scripture with Scripture and if they avoid the temptation to spiritualize anything that at first seems complex'.[35] In practice, however, Left Behind and other popular dispensational texts do 'spiritualize' certain verses. Defences for such deviations from the literalist script vary—Hal Lindsey, for example, justifies his modernizing of Revelation to include helicopters and hydrogen bombs by arguing that the book's first-century author lacked the vocabulary to describe such innovations.[36] LaHaye and Jenkins's explanation is rather more succinct:

33.   Mitchell, *Intention and Text*, p. 60.

34.   See, for example, Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004). Rossing argues that the dispensationalist hermeneutic is in fact rooted in a 'selective literalism' that facilitates a number of specious and, for her, deeply unethical and distortive, readings of the Bible.

35.   LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?*, p. 5.

36.   Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming: An In-Depth Analysis of the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1973), p. 9.

very simply, certain passages are 'obviously' meant to be read metaphorically or symbolically. In an interview for *Newsweek*, Jenkins refers to one of the instances where Left Behind diverges from the path of literalism. 'The Bible says Jesus is going to slay his enemies with a sword that comes out of his mouth', he says. 'We don't believe there's an actual sword in his mouth. The sword is his word.'[37] What is notable is that this verse's 'obviously' metaphoric character is asserted, and indeed assumed, rather than explained—the sword is metaphoric because the authors say it is metaphoric. LaHaye and Jenkins are unable to answer satisfactorily the question of what qualitative differences exist between 'clearly' figurative and 'clearly' literal biblical language, and how readers might go about making those distinctions in their own studies of the Bible (or indeed in their reading of prophecy novels). Instead, they must resort to the question-begging fallacy: as biblical scholar Tsion Ben-Judah tells one of his evangelical protégés in Left Behind, 'when the Bible is figurative, it sounds figurative'.[38] Leaving the manifest problem of circular logic aside, Tsion's assertion suggests that there are indeed passages which should *not* be taken literally—that there are recognizable instances 'when the Bible is figurative'.

The slippage between literalism and metaphor—which itself points to a more fundamental slippage between truth and fiction—is further exemplified in the authors' attempts to explain their position on the subject, which are frequently knotted with circumlocutions and contradictions. For example, Tim LaHaye describes Left Behind as 'a fictionalized story of real people'.[39] Elsewhere he states:

> You have to take Bible prophecy literally, just like everything else in the Bible. You have to teach people not to take [the series] literally just because it's in print. What we do is flesh it out with real life characters and they see how a literal experience could happen from this.[40]

These statements are notable for their logical discrepancies: characters in novels are 'real people'; novels depict 'real life' and 'literal experience'; the Bible should be taken literally but the series should not, even though it is based on a literal reading of the Bible. LaHaye's struggle to articulate his position and his ensuing entanglement in paradox and self-contradiction is, I think, telling. It reveals the extent to which the 'truthful' and the 'fictional' contents of the books are not so easily identified and separated. It also points

37. David Gates, 'Religion: The Pop Prophets; Faith and Fiction', *Newsweek*, 24 May 2004.

38. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Soul Harvest: The World Takes Sides* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1998), p. 386.

39. Cardenas, 'Christian Thriller Series Marches Onward'.

40. Jen Abbas, 'A Conversation with…Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye' (n.d.) <http://www.familychristian.com/books/jenkins.lahaye.asp> (accessed 28 August 2011).

to the larger difficulty of parsing the literal, the metaphoric, the fictional and the real in the world of prophecy and prophecy novels. Perhaps, rather than fiction acting as a scaffold in which the 'truth' is housed but unquestionably distinct from, as the authors would like to think, fiction pervades and inhabits biblical 'truth' in prophecy novels, the two discourses becoming insinuated with one another to such a degree that separation becomes impossible. It can be argued, then, that the literalism claimed by prophecy novelists can never be as comprehensive as they assert, simply as a consequence of the medium within which they present their exegesis. While a number of critics have suggested that the lapses in the authors' professed literal hermeneutic are simply a consequence of the debased, sensation-seeking propensities of popular dispensationalism, it is also apparent that the nature and structure of the novel further encourages, even necessitates, such an inventive approach. I would argue, in fact, that the insistence on biblical literalism and the 'plain, normal meaning' of language cannot be sustained by expositors who use the novel as their primary means of dissemination. In other words, fiction as a form cannot be neatly or unproblematically reconciled with a literalistic, 'plain sense' approach to scripture.

Connected to this fundamental discrepancy is the fictional mode's disruption of the notion, central to dispensational exposition, that language is a stable and reliable vessel for truth. In this respect prophecy novelists' chosen mode of representation is ironic given that it works so insidiously and effectively to undermine any claims of linguistic stability. This paradox is manifest in apparent misgivings about language that punctuate dispensational accounts on the subject: dispensationalists simultaneously appear to place great trust in the capacity of language to 'mean what it says' and strongly doubt its ability to do so. Underlying the literalist approach to reading scripture is an anxiety about the protean, elusive, unreliable nature of language itself and its propensity to turn against its human user to mean something other than that which is intended. There is a fear, then, about the indeterminacy, or perhaps overdeterminacy, of language—its capacity to contain proliferations of meaning that exceed and defy certainty, objectivity and irrefutability. The subtle calibrations of language cannot be tolerated—statements must be either literal and true, or metaphoric and false. We see this all-or-nothing logic at work in Charles Ryrie's assertion that 'If one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, *all* objectivity is lost'.[41] William Blackstone's pronouncement on the subject is couched in similar terms, and with a tangible note of anxiety: 'They tell us that Revelation is a symbolical book and therefore we cannot take its plain statements literally', he laments. 'Such reasoning is most fallacious and destroys all foundation for

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41. Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 82. Emphasis added.

conveying definite ideas by *any* language'.[42] It is telling that Blackstone gestures beyond the specific task of biblical interpretation to the interpretation of language in *any* context, including, presumably, fiction, in which metaphor is surely a basic component. This suspicion of and distrust towards figurative or metaphorical language generally is difficult to reconcile with prophecy novelists' appropriation of a discursive form in which such language is surely required. It may be that it is this conviction that metaphor cannot be harnessed to convey truths—this association of metaphor with deception, or at least obfuscation or equivocation—that contributes to the poor quality of writing that plagues many prophecy novels. The frequent charge that novels in this tradition are devoid of any metaphorical depth or complexity and tend instead towards prosaic description and exposition may be at least partly attributable to the longstanding hostility towards non-literalistic language in conservative evangelical traditions—a hostility which spills over from its origins in biblical literalism into other arenas of language use.

Yet it should not be assumed that the discrepancy between the literalism of the dispensational hermeneutic and the metaphoricity of the novel, or between the 'truth' of the Bible and the 'lie' of fiction, have been in any way prohibitive to aspiring prophecy fiction writers. In fact, rather than ignoring or denying this incongruity, many have found it highly conducive to their project. In particular, fiction makes available a unique means of evading the threat of prophetic disconfirmation. Nonfiction expositors such as Hal Lindsey put their own credibility and reputations on the line when they published their prophecy treatises—they spoke as themselves, from the assumed position of expert, and were thus accountable when the fickle hand of history steered events away from those predicted in these expositors' accounts of the future. But by displacing their doctrinal precepts onto fictional characters, prophecy novelists are afforded an *a priori* defence should an aspect of their eschatology be subject to critique or, as in Lindsey's case, disconfirmation, in the plea that their texts are 'only fiction'. This is a dangerous course of action, however: if they choose to take it, they risk undermining their project in its entirety, for it may not be possible to disown only some aspects of the narrative without rendering the rest suspect. Again, the question is raised of how separable the fictive elements of such novels are from the exegetical ('truthful') elements with which they are interspersed. Prophecy authors have a ready-made escape route should the threat of disconfirmation appear on the horizon, but its use is by no means cost-free: the author's status as expert and trusted authority is the likely price.

42. William E. Blackstone, *The Millennium* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1904), p. 39. Emphasis in original.

Conclusion: Containing the Beast Within

Rather than seeking to seal the gap between truth and fiction, then, author-expositors such as LaHaye and Jenkins rely upon it; indeed, the entire premise of biblical prophecy fiction requires that they do so. Rapture fictions can operate *only* in the liminal space between exegesis and invention. In this sense, one is tempted to label them as pseudo-postmodern: indeterminate, inchoate, hybrid, mercurial. By exploiting the hermeneutical space between exegesis and creative writing, however, rapture fictions undermine their own investment in the stability of language as a guarantee of truth. The very premise of certainty on which prophecy belief is posited is thrown into question by the exigencies of form. The inherent qualities of fiction, then, present a real challenge to prophecy expositors who want their message to be taken seriously while making use of the novel as a vehicle for dissemination. While the form proffers new opportunities, it also creates new problems. In turning to the novel as their means of communication, prophecy popularizers have made something of a Faustian pact. LaHaye and Jenkins certainly appear willing enough to exploit the slippage between truth and fiction in order to avoid falsifiable claims and to confect tension and excitement in a necessarily predictable narrative. In this respect, however, there is evidence that they have been *too* successful. The inherent playfulness of fiction has resulted in texts that are more complex in their significations than one might have anticipated, or indeed than the authors themselves may have intended. Both Amy Frykholm and Glenn Shuck have noted the ambiguity and multivalency that undercuts Left Behind's claims to certainty and singularity of meaning. Shuck argues that the series 'contains numerous tensions and uncertainties', while Frykholm describes readers of prophecy fiction not as passive and uncritical consumers of the authors' version of truth, but as 'active participants in the creation and use of dispensational premillennialism in contemporary life'.[43]

The textual indeterminacy that propels LaHaye and Jenkins's narrative is a double-edged sword: that which serves the novels in their role as entertainment plagues them in their role as exhortation. It would appear that the readerly agency that Frykholm attributes to Left Behind's audience has generated some misgivings on the part of the authors and publishers, evidence of which might be found in the proliferation of paratextual material such as guides, handbooks and commentaries, designed to support and supplement the original Left Behind novels. This commentary is extensive in its scope

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43.   Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast: The* Left Behind *Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 26; Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 26-27.

and largely produced by the authors themselves or their associates.[44] The sheer number of these guides may indicate only the publishers' acquisitive opportunism, but it may also reveal a deeper anxiety about the ways in which the books are engaged by readers. The authors claim to have an important message to tell about the future; their chosen medium, however, has its own agenda. Work undertaken with readers of Left Behind reveals a great deal of creativity on their part in negotiating the books in the contexts of their own circumstances, values, and perspectives. After all, such readerly irreverence is what fiction lends itself to—even popular, 'lowbrow' texts which lack the overt playfulness and undecidability of more self-consciously postmodern or literary novels, have been found to contain profusions of meaning which are assimilated by the reader in a plethora of ways. LaHaye and Jenkins's apparent need to instruct their audience in how to read their prophecy novels *correctly* indicates the authors' awareness, on some level, that the manner in which their texts signify cannot be circumscribed once the books are 'out there' in the world of active readers.

Paratexts such as *The Authorized Left Behind Handbook* attempt to corral and police the meanings produced by readers; to circumscribe the plurality and excess that is an inevitable feature of fiction. Yet, to use a dispensational axiom, the hour may already be too late: as other commentators have noted, the fictionalizing of popular dispensational prophecy has already led to the tradition's fragmentation.[45] The fictional turn has provided irresistible opportunities for authors to imagine a veritable plethora of apocalypses which posit multiple possibilities for the end of history and can no longer be said to consolidate into a cogent theology. The dispensational vision has thus refracted and, without wishing to dabble in prognostications that are in distinct danger of disconfirmation, it may be that what the fictional turn heralds is not popular dispensationalism's new dawn, but rather, the beginning of its end. As those interested in all things millennial know well, however, endings usually presage new beginnings. The fracturing of popular dispensationalism, aided and abetted by the fictional turn, opens new and exciting avenues of investigation as millennial studies presses forward into a future that remains essentially unknown, but whose contours might be discerned in the glimmers of the present.

44. This burgeoning subgenre includes Thomas Ice, Mark Hitchcock and Tim LaHaye, *The Truth Behind Left Behind: A Biblical View of the End Times* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 2004); LaHaye and Jenkins, with Sandi L. Swanson, *The Authorized Left Behind Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2005); LaHaye and Jenkins, *A Kid's Guide to Understanding the End Times: Bible Prophecy, the Rapture and How it all Turns Out* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004); LaHaye and Jenkins, *A Visual Guide to the Left Behind Series* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001); and LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001).

45. See Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 131.

DIGITAL APOTHEOSIS: NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND VERNACULAR AUTHORITY

Robert Glenn Howard

In the twenty-first century, the nature of religious belief is changing, and part of what is driving this change is new communication technologies. From incantations marked in the most ancient Akkadian cuneiform, through Martin Luther's deployment of the printing press, to the media empires of televangelists at the end of the twentieth century, communication technologies have repeatedly triggered massive cultural change.[1] Often religious expression, belief and authority have borne the brunt of that change. Much as communication technologies have often driven sea changes in religion, some of the most revolutionary religious discourses have been apocalyptic forms of millennialism.[2] The hopeful visions of this perfected apotheosis are still a powerful and vibrant resource of myth, symbol and belief. Scholars of millennial studies are being presented with a fantastic opportunity to document and analyze today's technology-driven transformation of human culture. To capitalize fully on this opportunity, however, researchers must focus more carefully on everyday religious expression. In this chapter, I suggest that the theoretical concept of *vernacular authority* can aid researchers in this task. A personal anecdote will illustrate the point.

Digital Apotheosis: New Communication Technologies and Vernacular Authority

Back in October of 1994, I was a graduate student looking for a paper topic about religious media for a seminar I was taking. Falling asleep with the television on late one night, I awoke in the early morning hours to witness a

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1. David Morley, *Media, Modernity, and Technology: The Geography of the New* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

2. Frank Lambert, *Inventing the 'Great Awakening'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970 [1957]).

sort of news show: *Jack Van Impe Presents*. During this show, Rexella Van Impe describes various news items from the previous week to her husband, Jack. Then Jack places them into the context of biblical prophecy. Each broadcast offers a special item for sale to support the purchase of the airtime. One such special item was the small budget film depicting a fairly typical End Times scenario: *Years of the Beast*.

Because I was interested in the function of religious media in the everyday lives of believers, I wanted to find people who had watched the film to interview. Contacting everyone, from UCLA's Campus Crusade for Christ to old family friends I had not spoken to in years, I could not find anyone who had even seen the film. I was even more interested to know who watched Jack Van Impe's regular shows. So I decided to post the following message to a common kind of Internet forum at that time: UseNet newsgroups:

> I am writing a paper for a college class on Jack Van Impe and his film Years of the Beast, has anyone seen it? Please write me with your comments and views on the second coming. Thanks![3]

Within days, I had received hundreds of responses and was corresponding with over fifty people. Somewhat unwittingly, I was swept up into a hidden community of Christians who were using the Internet to share information about their everyday understandings of premillennial theology they generally referred to as 'the End Times'. This previously hidden group of individuals fascinated me because they were intensely faithful about something I simply could not understand as conforming to basic rationality. I was even more intrigued because they were using what was, at the time, a highly technical new medium: the Internet. Trying to figure out who the leaders in this group were, I asked my new respondents, 'Who is the authority on this "End Times" stuff?' I was told to look at the books and shows of some media evangelists. However, almost all my respondents added some form of the significant caveat that 'no human can rightly know God's divine plan'.

Although media evangelists like Jack Van Impe, Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye, have exerted a large influence in this group, they claim to offer no institutionally authoritative interpretations. As Hal Lindsey famously put it, 'I am attempting to step aside and let the prophets speak'.[4] At the time, I thought I had discovered a new kind of digitally mediated church where nobody was in charge: a place where lived religion might be able to challenge

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3. Robert Glenn Howard <IZZY9MR@mvs.oac.ucla.edu>, 'YEARS of the BEAST', 30 October 1994 <news: bit.listserv.christia>.

4. Hal Lindsey with C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

reified institutional doctrine.[5] Over fifteen years later, I have come to realize I was quite wrong.[6] Instead, of nobody being in charge, *everybody* is in charge. Freed from institutions by the network communication technologies, a kind of digitally empowered vernacular authority has been quietly exerting itself since the dawn of the Internet age. As if in electronic fulfillment of Emile Durkheim's vision of the social divine realizing itself in communal action, I found a community in which the network itself had come to constitute a sort of digital apotheosis.

Contemporary millennialism online confronts researchers with a host of important questions. Does the empowerment offered by near instant access to the communication of others generally encourage the healthy exchange of ideas among those with powerful spiritual hopes for a new millennium? Or does it allow individuals to seal themselves off into ideological ghettos of the like-minded, potentially magnifying a dualistic worldview where those who will reign with God are pitted against unredeemable evil? Recent research suggests that the answer is some of both.

Scholars of contemporary millennialism are in an excellent position to engage these important questions. To do this, however, research must further broaden its focus on the authoritative texts of the past to include the expression of everyday individuals today. In the twenty-first century, the power of millennialism is no longer found only in the polished theologies of the charismatic minister, religious writer or televangelist. Instead, a vast sea of millennial theology emerges, grows powerful and wanes away in the electronic spaces created by network communication technologies, and this discourse is easily available to researchers willing to look. While historical studies of millennialism will always shed light on important issues, it has never been easier to engage the everyday millennialism in the lived spiritual lives of real people. Even more, individuals living their millennial hopes today are less influenced by the authority of religious institutions or charismatic leaders than they have been in past.

While centralized texts and leaders have long been the source of authority for prophetic movements of all kinds, today a new kind of diffused authority can undergird beliefs as they are created, maintained and recreated through online communication. While individual leaders, both through media and face-to-face contact, will continue to fuel millennial belief, the individual-to-individual contact made possible online is empowering everyday believers to act together without central leaders. In this sense, the Internet is amplifying a

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5. Robert Glenn Howard, 'Apocalypse in your In-Box: End Times Communication on the Internet', *Western Folklore* 56 (1997), pp. 295-315.

6. Robert Glenn Howard, *Digital Jesus: The Making of a New Christian Fundamentalist Community of the Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

diffuse and leaderless *vernacular authority*. The emergence of this authority necessitates looking more closely at the lived theologies of everyday people because vernacular authority diffuses the power of the millennial worldview into the idiosyncratic but not unconnected belief systems of everyday individuals without recourse to centralized sources of authority like books or leaders. Here, I briefly discuss some recent research that has emphasized approaching religion as it is lived by real individuals.[7]

Travel and communication technologies increasingly offer more freedom to more individuals as they choose among competing sacred traditions.[8] The concept of vernacular authority gives a name to the power of individuals acting together as their networked lives generate an aggregate volition which functions as a powerful authorizing force. In that situation, some individuals are choosing more extreme and sometimes self-destructive forms of religious belief.[9] In other cases, some individuals might seek out online communities that emphasize tolerance for diverse understandings of the divine.[10] In both cases, scholars of millennialism need to account for the increasingly individualized online movements that are occurring only at the level of lived religion. To demonstrate that need, I will briefly apply the concept to two diverse examples of online millennial expression. The first demonstrates ways in which this authority can account for how, in such an environment, individuals may place themselves into digital enclaves where ideas can be expressed without pushback from those who might disagree; the second suggests that this same authority can emerge to counteract a trend towards intolerance. In the end, network communication technologies (like all technologies) are not pre-determined. Instead they are the products of many humans acting together over time. And just as network communication media were created through this aggregated volition, so too can they be altered by it.

7.   Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Robert A. Orsi, 'Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion', in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (ed. David D. Hall; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3-21; Leonard Norman Primiano, 'Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife', *Western Folklore* 54 (1995), pp. 37-56; Leonard Norman Primiano, 'What Is Vernacular Catholicism? The "Dignity" Example', *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 46 (2001), pp. 51-58.

8.   Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1998).

9.   Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Howard, *Digital Jesus*.

10.   Brenda Brasher, *Give Me that Online Religion* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2001).

Communication Technology and Millennialism

At least since the emergence of mass-produced vernacular Bibles, individual Christians have been confronted with an increasing responsibility for interpreting the Christian message.[11] With the rise of secular governments, individual choice became a primary guide for religious expression in the United States, and with new communication and travel technologies, individuals have enjoyed a growing exposure to a vast diversity of religious ideas. Meanwhile, the counter-culture movements of the late 1960s and 1970s produced a whole generation of believers more oriented toward non-Western religious and spiritual ideas.[12] At the same time, increased immigration into the United States further expanded the diversity of belief. With the widespread adoption communication technologies during the information age, individuals have been granted even greater control over the ideas they access.[13] These technological and cultural changes have cultivated a more voluntaristic attitude toward spiritual involvement. As a result, religious commitment in the United States has grown more individualized and fluid.[14]

With this increased individualization, the authority for religious belief and expression has shifted further and further away from religious institutions. This shift has prompted researchers to consider religion more as it is 'lived' and less at the levels of institutional history, theology or leadership.[15] Researchers focusing on millennial groups, however, have tended to portray believers as mesmerized followers.[16] This perspective looks away from the

11. Robert Glenn Howard, 'The Double Bind of the Protestant Reformation: The Birth of Fundamentalism and the Necessity of Pluralism', *Journal of Church and State* 47.1 (2005), pp. 101-18.

12. Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

13. Thomas R. Lindlof, 'Interpretive Community: An Approach to Media and Religion', *Journal of Media and Religion* 1.1 (2002), pp. 61-74 (71-72).

14. Nancy T. Ammerman, 'Organized Religion in a Voluntaristic Society', *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997), pp. 203-15; Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Douglas E. Cowan, *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 195.

15. McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Orsi, 'Everyday Miracles'; Primiano, 'Vernacular Religion'.

16. Winston Davis, 'Heaven's Gate: A Study of Religious Obedience', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 3 (2000), pp. 241-67; Walter J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of Brainwashing in China* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Edgar H. Schein, *Coercive Persuasion: A Socio-psychological Analysis of the 'Brainwashing' of American Civilian Prisoners by the Chinese Communists* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971); Margaret Singer,

lived spirituality of believers and focuses on a leader or leaders who command powerful personal charisma.[17]

Even for individual believers, however, online millennial discourse can take on what historian Richard Hofstadter famously termed a conspiratorial or 'paranoid' style.[18] The paranoid style emerges when individuals describe the world in which they live in terms of fundamentally good and fundamentally evil forces. Daniel Wojcik has extensively documented this dualism in contemporary US evangelical Christian media that imagines mainstream society as 'irreversibly evil'.[19] Charles B. Strozier has found these tendencies in individuals based on interview and ethnographic data.[20] Catherine Wessinger has noted the 'stark perspective of "good versus evil", "us versus them", heightens the possibility that group members will conclude they are being persecuted'.[21] For the individuals who live their lives based on a dualistic world such as this, the adamant belief in the near return of Jesus Christ encourages them to imagine themselves as warriors in a mythic struggle against all who disagree.[22] Some online Christian millennial discourse exhibits these dualistic and self-sealing qualities. Insofar as this is true, the responsibility for these dualistic beliefs falls not on charismatic leaders or a mass media seeking to increase profits. Instead, it falls on the shoulders of the individuals living a dualistic spirituality.

In the online environment, this individual responsibility seems to be amplified. Paolo Apolito, a prominent researcher of technology and religion, has noted that this technological shift towards the everyday and the individual has 'marginalized the charismatic, shifting the focus as it does from the "gift" of direct relationship with heaven to the technical structure of the

Cults in our Midst: The Continuing Fight against their Hidden Menace (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2003 [1995]).

17. Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Janja Lalich, *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 15.

18. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008 [1952]), p. 39.

19. Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World as We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 140.

20. Charles B. Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994).

21. Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000), p. 271.

22. Robert Glenn Howard, 'Crusading on the Vernacular Web: The Folk Beliefs and Practices of Online Spiritual Warfare', in *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World* (ed. Trevor J. Blank; Logan: Utah State University Press, 2009), pp. 126-41.

procedures of vision and contact with the beyond'.[23] Combining the availability of a wider diversity of spiritual beliefs than ever before and the freedom to consume and express those beliefs outside of any institutions or religious leadership, individuals are more responsible for what they choose to believe.

In some cases, individuals must take individual responsibility for their choices to use the Internet to foster dualisms that isolate them into an enclave hostile to the mainstream cultures in which its participants actually live. Sociologist of religion Michael Barkun predicted the emergence of just this phenomenon when he suggested that 'those whose worldview is built around conspiracy ideas find in the Internet virtual communities of the like-minded'.[24] My own research has demonstrated in great detail just how the Internet can foster dualism and intolerance in the case of vernacular Christian fundamentalism.[25]

Other researchers, however, have pointed to the egalitarian potential of network communication as an antidote to this tendency. Sociologist of religion Brenda Brasher wrote that the very structure of the Internet encouraged communication that would foster tolerance for diversity: 'The wisdom Web pages and holy hyperlinks that are the stuff of online religion possess the potential to make a unique contribution to global fellowship in the frequently volatile area of interreligious understanding'.[26] This attitude is common among Internet communication researchers. Yale law professor Jack Balkin, for example, has famously argued that the ability to make links between Web pages discourages fragmentation by encouraging linking to pages with divergent content.[27]

In reference to the increased opportunities individuals have to express themselves online, Stanford Law Professor Lawrence Lessig has lauded a new vigor in communal, interactive and creative expression he terms 'read/write culture'.[28] Well-known communication and media theorist Henry Jenkins has made similar claims in his celebration of 'convergence culture'.[29] Harvard Law Professor Yochai Benkler is maybe the most vocal proponent of the idea that the Internet fosters healthy expression among everyday

23. Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 5.

24. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, p. 13.

25. Howard, *Digital Jesus*.

26. Brasher, *Give Me that Online Religion*, p. 6.

27. Jack Balkin, 'Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society', *New York University Law Review* 79 (2004), pp. 1-55.

28. Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), p. 28.

29. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 135.

people. He has argued for a sweepingly positive assessment of the Internet, describing it as 'a mechanism to achieve improvements in human development everywhere'.[30] For Benkler, network communication technologies have fostered a 'new folk culture' that encourages 'a wider practice of active personal engagement in the telling and retelling of basic cultural themes'. For Benkler, this practice 'offers new avenues for freedom'.[31]

Like so often is the case, the truth lies somewhere in-between these extremes. That fact offers scholars of millennialism a unique opportunity to explore how a revolutionary and potentially dualistic, intolerant or even violent worldview is being shaped by network communication technologies. To take up that opportunity, however, researchers need to consider ways to theorize how the individual-to-individual communication that characterizes the Internet can emerge into a powerful authorizing force for belief. One such theory can be seen to have its origins in the beginning of scientific approaches to the study of religion.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Emile Durkheim famously argued for the transcendent power of aggregate social action as it manifests in religious control. For Durkheim, 'society' can only know itself through ongoing cooperation: 'It is by common action that [society] takes consciousness of itself and realizes its position; it is before all else an active cooperation… It is action which dominates the religious life, because of the mere fact that it is society which is its source.'[32] For Durkheim, co-operative action emerges into the divine as it gives unified volition a social force beyond the experience of any one individual. This early form of structural sociology has itself forwarded the tendency among scholars of religion to focus on theology, leaders and doctrines. In the age of the Internet, however, Durkheim's social divine can be seen to emerge outside of and beyond the direct control of theology, leaders and doctrines. It is in this environment that a theory of vernacular authority becomes necessary.

Vernacular Authority and Network Communication

A theory of vernacular authority imagines both the individual agent 'living' her or his spirituality at the same time as it accounts for the power given to the imagined institutional and social structures that form themselves out of the aggregation of those moments of religious living. Vernacular authority

30. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) <http://yupnet.org/benkler/archives/8> (accessed 1 September 2008) (para. 2).

31. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, para. 46.

32. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (trans. Joseph Ward Swain; New York: The Free Press, 1915), pp. 465-66.

does this by deploying a dialectical definition of vernacularity that was central to the ancient meanings of the term.

The Roman Latin noun '*verna*' specifically referred to slaves who were born and raised in a Roman home. While the term is often associated with this 'home-born' meaning, it also carried with it the connotation of a specific kind of power. The *verna* was a native to Roman culture but was also the offspring of a sublimated non-Roman ethnic or culture group. In Roman society, most slaves were seized during wars, during the suppression of colonial insurrections or even through outright piracy.[33] The majority of these slaves did not read or write Classical Latin or Greek. Since any person born to a slave woman (without regard to the social position of the father) was automatically a slave, female slaves were encouraged to have children to increase the master's slave stock.[34] These *verna* could become even more valuable than their mothers when they were trained as native users of the institutional languages and could then engage in more technical kinds of work.

Vernacular power, then, came from a dialectical distinction: a *verna* was made powerful because she or he had native access to Roman institutional language and yet was explicitly defined as something which was separate from Roman institutions. In one of its earliest uses to describe expressive human behavior, the Roman philosopher and politician Cicero suggested that being vernacular was a means to persuasive power because of this unique position. In a work on oratory, *Brutus*, he wrote of an 'indescribable flavor' that rendered a particular speaker persuasive. This power was 'vernacular' because the speaker had learned it outside of Roman institutions.[35] Cicero understood the vernacular as alternate to what he and other Roman politicians saw as the institutional elements of persuasive communication available through the formal study of oratory, Roman history, literature and philosophy.[36] The 'vernacular' might support or oppose institutional power, but it is specifically and consciously the power of *not* being institutional. In this sense, it is a dialectical term because it is defined by its opposite.

This dialectical sense of the vernacular maps particularly well onto the contemporary examples of potentially revolutionary and often-new religious movements that have so-often given rise to powerful surges in millennial

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33. William L. Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1984 [1953]), p. 101.

34. Keith Bradley, 'On the Roman Slave Supply and Slave Breeding', in *Classical Slavery* (ed Moses Finley; London: Cass Publishers, 1987), pp. 42–64.

35. Bradley, 'On the Roman Slave Supply', p. 147.

36. Robert Glenn Howard, 'The Vernacular Web of Participatory Media', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25 (2008), pp. 490-512.

belief. Today, the individuals creatively engaging religious beliefs can choose among a massive array of millennial traditions from which to fashion their own worldviews. Given this lack of institutional leadership, vernacular authority can fill the power vacuum created by weakened religious institutions. Vernacular authority can do this by unifying people based on the shared idea that Jesus will return soon, and it can do this without any need for those individuals to navigate the typical constraints of a real world community (such as who to hire as a minister or what to put on the front of the church newsletter).

The concept of vernacular authority accounts not only for the lived nature of religion online: it also accounts for the social entity made authoritative by everyday believers' repeated choices to connect. With repetition over time, those choices accumulate to enact a larger shared volition. This aggregate volition is the vernacular authority, and that authority is magnified by the ability of individuals to locate and communicate with each other in online communities that place little demand on community members beyond their engagement with a particular worldview. While in some cases this might drive individuals to foster a shared intolerance, in others the social divine can seek to enforce tolerance among those who want to participate in its community. I will now look closely at two examples. In the first, individuals limit community participation to the like-minded. In the second, however, both millennial-leaning individuals and non-millennial Christians seek to maintain tolerance for each other in support of their online community.

RaptureAlert.com vs. RelevantMagazine.com

In the case of the amateur blog titled 'Rapture Alert', the aggregate volition of the participants limited the diversity of the discourse to those who shared a millennial worldview. In this case, a balance between individually produced blog-entries and carefully managed comments sections drew everyday millennial thinkers to a digital enclave of the like-minded where, together, they enacted their vernacular authority.

The blog was started by a forty-four-year-old retired police officer in the Southeastern United States, Michael G. Mickey.[37] With new posts daily, the volume the blog hosts is evidence of its popularity. A typical exchange begins with Michael posting a message titled 'A Rumbling in The Middle East'. This post generated sixteen responses. His initial post refers to a post from the previous day: 'In light of yesterday's commentary and the potential implications of recent events in the Middle East, I have to admit I got chills

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37. Michael Mickey, *RaptureAlert.com: The Blog* (2008) <http://rapturealert.blogspot.com/> (accessed 1 February 2008).

when I read of a magnitude 5 earthquake rattling Lebanon and neighboring countries today'.[38]

In the post from the day before, Michael recounted the recent killing of the leader of Hezbollah's 'second in command' in Damascus. As a result of the attack, Hezbollah issued a statement 'declaring "open war" on Israel'. Referencing a common interpretation of the book of Revelation, Michael asked, 'A prelude to Gog-Magog?' Then, citing Mt. 26.6, he placed this attack into the End Times narrative, writing 'The end times drama continues…'[39]

When the earthquake in Lebanon occurred the day after his first post, Michael wrote in the second: 'Just another earthquake here in the last days or a harbinger of things to come? Only the Lord knows but I'll bet the air in and around Israel could practically be cut with a knife right now.' The individuals frequenting the blog took the opportunity to enact their shared belief. 'Jo anna' wrote:

> WOW! I hadn't heard about this one yet. I heard about the 2 in Greece yesterday, but not this one. I've also been reading how lake Mead is drying up and then with the problems Georgia and Florida are having and the HUGE push about global warming! And of course all that's going on war wise in the middle east. My heart is racing at how close we could be to going home! I am so ready to be with Jesus and done with this place! Oh how I pray people accept Christ quickly before it's too late![40]

With the dialog started, Michael immediately responded: 'Amen, Jo Anna! A lot is going on and on a variety of fronts. Broadening the spectrum a bit, do you realize we have had FOUR campus shootings in the United States in one short week?' Then, ten different people in fourteen more posts considered nine different world events reported by various news organizations as other indicators that the millennial reign of Christ was soon to begin. These events included: Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin 'making threats against western Europe', 'FOUR campus shootings in the United States in one short week', and Lake Mead, a popular resort area in the Western United States, 'drying up'. The deliberation climaxed as one commenter wrote: 'I AM SO LOOKING FORWARD TO A FRONT ROW SEAT TO THE MAJOR BUTT KICKING SATAN IS GOING TO GET SOON!'[41]

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38.   Michael Mickey, 'A Rumbling in the Middle East', *RaptureAlert.com: The Blog* (2008) <http://www.blogger.com/comment.g?blogID=7527279812767969161&postID=410073931187569533> (accessed 15 February 2008).

39.   Michael Mickey, 'The Middle East: Back to the Brink', *RaptureAlert.com: The Blog* (2008) <http://rapturealert.blogspot.com/2008/02/middle-east-back-to-brink.html> (accessed 14 February 2008).

40.   Mickey, 'The Middle East'.

41.   Mickey, 'The Middle East'.

After this crowning expression of shared belief, a commenter suggested that they pray for those dead and injured in the Lebanese earthquake. That plan then developed into an agreement to pray for one of the commenter's relative's infant son who was having a biopsy the next day.[42] As this example makes clear, RaptureAlert.com is a good place for individuals sharing this particular millennial worldview to locate and engage in dialogue that is based on their shared millennial beliefs.

Unlike religious movements that use more institutional modes of social control, such as strongly authoritative leaders or clustering members into real-world communities, the members of this community are empowered to access a huge diversity of ideas from any geographic location they happen to inhabit. In this case, however, they use their power to create an enclave of like-minded millennial believers where seemingly unrelated events build into a dialogical crescendo of millennial hopes. While they are freer in a sense, their choice to engage in these sorts of enclaves also limits their freedom because it degrades their ability to engage in the larger discussions happening in the society around them that is not invested in a millennial worldview.

When individuals filter their understanding of history, theology, public events and other shared experiences through an ideologically specific enclave, they may become accustomed to holding values that the larger society around them rejects or simply cannot understand. This is commonly seen in some well-studied new religious movements like the Heaven's Gate group or the Peoples Temple. At Rapture Alert, however, individuals are geographically dispersed. As a result, they must physically inhabit locations governed by institutions shaped by worldviews that are largely not millennial or dualistic. If they are limited in their ability to speak and be heard in these public arenas, these individuals may become marginalized from the real world communities in which they live. While the digital enclave created by Rapture Alert presents one possible outcome of contemporary millennialism backed by online vernacular authority, a very different example demonstrates that this is not the only possible social configuration.

Young, media-savvy Christians are using all kinds of new technologies to create their own individualistic media worlds. Often, they seem more connected to these media-based communities than they are to those formed around local churches or specific Christian denominations.[43] Coming of age with network communication integrated into their lived spirituality, whole genres are being created by and for them, and many of those genres emphasize individual-to-individual communication. With access to dynamically changing opportunities for connecting with others online, these individuals

42. Mickey, 'The Middle East'.
43. Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

are exposed to a huge diversity of options for creating vernacular authority. While some may strive to reify those webs into closed ideological enclaves such as at Rapture Alert, others seek a community that brings people together who value the ability to exchange freely diverse systems of belief. Creating online locations for this free exchange of ideas, they transcend specific geography, ideology and denominational affiliations. However, in order for individuals to participate in such an open community, they must maintain tolerance for the diversity that their individualism fosters. In the following example, a discussion of the value of just this sort of tolerance emerged when individuals with a millennial worldview came into conflict with non-millennial Christians participating in the same online community.

A popular example of evangelical participatory media that strives to provide locations for open dialogue is the self-described 'user-driven counter-part' to the subscription-based periodical *Relevant Magazine* titled RelevantMagazine.com. The stated goal of the new magazine was to serve, 'twentysomething Christians' who 'want to break stereotypes, challenge status-quo and enact change through the media'.[44] After its debut, *Publishers Weekly* identified the magazine's accompanying website as, 'the first wave of what Christianity is going to be like in a post-denominational age'.[45]

The site describes itself as a 'faith-based, for-profit multimedia company' that has 'no affiliation with any denominations, organizations or other companies'.[46] It generates revenue by selling advertising space for products ranging from fair-trade coffee to Christian-oriented clothing. In addition to the institutional content, the site also hosts discussion forums that generate a significant amount of participatory content. With its participatory media, the site seeks to connect people to 'daily life' by creating an online location for everyday Christians to engage in fellowship. The site advocates for a non-denominational social aggregate emergent from the shared expression it hosts: 'The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus.'[47]

These 'genuine followers of Jesus' create their 'Church' in conversational threads of posts in its public forums on the site. In one of six broadly topical forums titled simply 'God', the posts range from theological subjects like

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44.   Relevant Media Group, 'FAQ', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/misc_faq.php> (accessed 1 August 2008).

45.   Gannett Company Incorporated, 'A New Generation Spreads the Word', *USA Today* (2004) <http://www.usatoday.com/life/lifestyle/2004-06-23-christian-mag_x.htm> (accessed 1 August 2008).

46.   Relevant Media Group, 'FAQ'.

47.   Relevant Media Group, 'Who We Are', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/misc_who_we_are.php> (accessed 1 August 2008).

'Generation X Christianity' to 'Free Will vs. Predestination'.[48] Here, when millennial believers tried to engage in dialogue based on their worldview, other users were drawn into a reflective discussion about what exactly constitutes open dialogue and tolerance in their online forum.

The dialog began when a newly registered user named 'murshac5' began a thread titled 'The rapture'. His post began:

> I'm just wondering what your view on Dispenatinalism [*sic*] is? to be honest I haven't studied it deeply enough to form a solid opinion, I just grew up being taught that there would be a Rapture… [W]hat's everyone's take on this? and why?[49]

This post was met with rejection from the largely non-millennial members of the forum community. Six consecutive posters rejected the possibility of the Rapture as a prophetic interpretation outright. As 'Owenboen' put it: 'Just to prepare you…most of us don't think there is a rapture'.[50] After this barrage of negative feedback, however, Murshac tried again. This time he managed to open a dialogue about millennial interpretations of biblical prophecy in general:

> So if there is no rapture of the saints, what do you suppose will happen…is there going to be a antichrist appearing at some point?… I know there are a ton of opposing views on all of this but I'm just curious since I hear The Rapture of the saints being preached and pretty much have believed it my whole life.[51]

Though there was one more negative response, the following eighteen posts constituted a largely even-toned and nondenominational discussion. Some twenty posts later, however, a new user named 'Jimmy777' joined, and his entrance threatened to derail the exchange. After expressing a strong belief in Rapture, Jimmy made a strongly dualistic assertion: 'In the last days people will hold on to a flawed system of beliefs that would deny the rapture. it is another signal that Jesus is coming back. Plus many in the last days will depart from the truth (this magazine for one).'[52]

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48. Relevant Media Group, 'What We Believe', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/misc_beliefs.php> (accessed 1 August 2008).

49. Murshac5, 'The Rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a> (accessed 1 August 2008).

50. owenboen, 'RE: The rapture?', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=60> (accessed 1 August 2008).

51. Murshac5, 'The rapture'.

52. Jimmy777, 'Re: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=20> (accessed 1 August 2008).

When Jimmy condemned *Relevant Magazine* itself for contributing to the 'many [people] in the last days [who] will depart from the truth', the users of the forum could be seen struggling to maintain their tolerance for his contribution to the discussion. At first, Krempel refuted Jimmy's accusation in a non-inflammatory way: 'This isn't fair. that's a gross oversimplification.' However, Krempel could not help adding a playfully obscene remark stating that some forum users sometimes: 'smoke pot, worship the devil, and jerk off to gay porn too'.[53]

Jimmy was offended by the joke, and soon the whole dialogue devolved into hostility. When Jimmy finally threatened to report Kremple to the Maryland police as a potential pedophile, the next sixteen posts represented the aggregate volition of the community rising to reject Jimmy. It was, however, too late for vernacular authority alone to adjudicate the dispute. The forum administrator made her first appearance in the discussion, posting to the thread:

> For you newbies, you have to remember that sometimes people say things in jest (and sometimes in poor taste), but please, if you have a concern ask for clarification publicly or privately, just please don't go postal on them before you realize that they were joking![54]

The term 'newbies' refers to those who are new users of the forum. In this case, the newbies were the two millennial believers. Here, millennialism's dualistic worldview had come into conflict with the less constrained worldview of the long-time forum users.

After the administrator's post, a relative calm ensued, and for the next thirteen posts the two millennial-leaning users, Jimmy777 and Murschac5, were not to be found. Then, however, another user with millennial leanings appeared: a user named 'Robbie Crawford' suddenly joined the discussion. First, Krempel referenced a discussion he had with another millennial-leaning Christian: 'It's just that I called what could be considered a "truce" with Robbie about three months ago after I lit into him. [A]nd then this guy [Jimmy777] comes along playing the douche card, and I just…had to play with him.'[55] Reflecting on the kind of behavior that creates hostile exchanges, Krempel drew the attention of this previous detractor: Robbie.

53. Krempel, 'RE: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=40> (accessed 1 August 2008).

54. amy kathleen, 'RE: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=60> (accessed 1 August 2008).

55. Krempel, 'RE: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008). <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=70> (accessed 1 August 2008).

Somehow, Robbie got wind of Krempel's new reference to their previous exchange and burst in on the new thread. Focusing on Krempel's claim that he 'lit into him' before he 'called a truce', Robbie used the example to engage the issue of whether the community they were sharing was fostering tolerant dialogue. Robbie questioned Krempel's characterization of the previous exchange: 'You lit into me? Christian message board claimer tough guys have got to be the gayest thing since George Michael, "I lit into him"… haha…what a pathetic clown…'[56]

Despite his homophobic comment, Robbie specifically accused Krempel of a behavior he feels occurs regularly and functions to curtail open dialogue on the forum. Robbie claimed that Krempel and other regular users goad their fellow Christians to 'stumble' by making them angry. Arguing it is an unchristian behavior, Robbie suggested that these regular users habitually 'band together' and conspire to verbally attack fundamentalist-leaning Christians by 'pushing their buttons' until they 'react in the flesh'. As Robbie described it:

> You all sit and stroke each others ego while you feel like feared pedantic ones because you caused a christian to stumble on a message board. Can you even see clear enough to realize how absolutely ****** lame that is? Do you understand what level that puts [you] people on?[57]

Responding to Robbie, Krempel denied that the progressive users of the forum are at fault for shutting down dialogue, writing: 'I think you overestimate the degree to which regulars on the board conspire together.'

Then he went on to argue that Jimmy deserved the harsh treatment he received because he came 'running through here like a bull in a china shop'. According to Krempel, Jimmy did not 'present himself as open to other POV's or even cordial in conversation'. Suggesting that a tolerant tone in Jimmy's remarks would have had a more tolerant reception on the forum, Krempel concluded: 'See, Robbie. People are accepted here. Even those with differing POV's. But it all hinges on one thing: approach.'[58]

Not quite able to leave it at that, however, Krempel finished his post by justifying his own belligerence as a response to Jimmy's intolerance: 'Seems to me that Jimmy was escalating this thing with his inflammatory rhetoric.

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56. Robbie Crawford, 'RE: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=80> (accessed 1 August 2008).

57. Robbie Crawford, 'RE: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=100> (accessed 1 August 2008).

58. Krempel, 'RE: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=100> (accessed 1 August 2008).

and frankly, i think what I said was ****ing hilarious'.[59] But Robbie was unconvinced: 'Don't kid yourself…you banded together and you pushed his buttons…just like I've seen you guys do to more people than I can count over the past couple years'.[60]

Then Jimmy suddenly returned. This time, he brought evidence in support of Robbie's claim that the progressives 'gang up on' the conservatives. He posted two private messages he received through the forum. The first was from Krempel. In it, Krempel attempted to justify his 'joke.' The second message was from the forum administrator Amy Kathleen. In that message, Amy Kathleen wrote to Jimmy:

> Krempel was joking and if you would have asked him in sincerity, he would have told you that. If you have that kind of concern about someone [being a child predator], you need to PM them and/or us moderators before threatening them with calling the police based on a silly comment that was meant to ruffle your feathers and nothing more. Does that make sense? I need you to work this out in a civil manner with Krempel. I am sure he had NO idea how badly you would take the comment. Please respond asap.[61]

Jimmy did not respond privately. Instead, he posted the two messages publicly and demanded civil discourse: 'How am i supposed to work this out when Krempel refuses to apoligize?'[62] At that point, Amy Kathleen gave up hope that civility would return and 'locked' the thread so that no one could post to it. In the final post as she shut it down, she remarked: 'We're done here. Take a step back and go before God. If you need to apologize, do it. If you need to let go, then do it.'[63]

In this exchange, vernacular authority is not deployed to support the dualism of a millennialism worldview. Instead, it struggles to enact tolerance even in the face of what it seems to see as a threat to that tolerance: 'fundies'. Even if a desire for tolerance is not always translated into a reality, these moments in the exchange are reason enough to suspect that heavy Internet users are seeking to use their individual-to-individual connections to explore the diversity network communication technologies are affording them.

Among the new generation of Christians growing up with network communication technologies fully integrated into their daily lives, there may

59. Krempel, 'RE: The rapture' (2008).
60. Robbie Crawford, 'RE: The rapture' (2008).
61. amy kathleen, 'RE: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=110> (accessed 1 August 2008).
62. Jimmy777, 'Re: The rapture', *Relevantmagazine.com* (2008) <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=391&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=110> (accessed 1 August 2008).
63. amy kathleen, 'RE: The rapture' (2008).

be a greater awareness of the diverse beliefs of others. While this diversity is at least a goal of some diverse users of RelevantMagazine.com, the community that has emerged in Rapture Alert uses its vernacular authority to limit its discussions to those that fit a millennial worldview. It seems that the vernacular authority generated online can both encourage and discourage a tolerance of spiritual diversity.

New Communication Technologies and the Future of Millennial Studies

Network communication technologies have fundamentally changed the lived realities of the individuals who engage them and this is just as true for millennial believers as it is for the rest of society. Transcending geographic limitations, individuals are empowered by these technologies to connect with specific other individuals of their own choosing. The millennial believers today no longer need to rely on charismatic leaders or religious institutions to enact the large communities of belief that scholars of millennial studies have long struggled to understand. That is not to say that theology, institutions and doctrines are to disappear. However, it does mean that the power of everyday believers has increased in relation to religious institutions, and this is particularly important for millennial studies. For millennia, religious institutions have resisted fully embracing the apocalyptic hopes that sometimes spring up from small communities into popular movements. Any near-coming end of all earthly institutions is, obviously, a threat to even those religious institutions that are founded on the millennial hopes stoked by ancient prophets. As the institutions that have the most to lose from new configurations of spirituality continue to weaken, individual empowerment through network communication may well fuel new and less predictable waves of belief. In the future, researchers of millennial studies will have much to offer the understanding of such online movements.

Further, the impact of online communication on millennial belief is not limited to strictly online communities. Many religious believers today use the Internet to enact and expand their spiritual worldviews in ongoing (and often quite mundane) daily behaviors of exchanging ideas online. For them, the Internet is just one element of their individually lived daily spirituality. As just one element, the Internet is still a potentially transformative one.

Because it couples easy access to new ideas with the ability to make individual-to-individual choices about what kinds of spiritual communities to engage, network communication technologies have no doubt empowered people with new levels of religious freedom. Individuals are freer to choose between compelling new forms of authority. Some may well look toward the institutional websites of churches or evangelical ministries. However, the

Internet has also enabled people to choose to connect with whole communities of others that share a specific ideology outside of the influence of strong leaders or institutional controls. Here, individuals are even more free to access aggregate authority, to create a social divine of their own choosing and thus more free to contribute to the potentially revolutionary movements that manifest in real world actions such as those born of millennial worldviews in the past.

To conceptualize more clearly how individual-to-individual network communication can grow into revolutionary new kinds of beliefs, the concept of vernacular authority names the aggregate volition emergent from many individuals choosing to connect repeatedly with many other individuals. In this definition, vernacular authority is, of course, not new. As Durkhiem recognized long ago, individuals acting together are an apotheosis of a certain kind. In the Internet age, however, the speed, size and scope of such social transcendence has been magnified. Seeking to understand digital apotheosis, the concept of vernacular authority offers a tool to researchers of millennial studies to help focus in on this power that has long lain beyond institutions. In an age when network communication technologies seem to be magnifying that power, vernacular authority must be considered as an important component of any contemporary millennial movement.

THE FUTURE OF MILLENNIAL STUDIES AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF HOPE: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Joshua Searle

'Hope', according to Richard Landes, 'is the key to understanding the apocalyptic mind-set'.[1] Drawing on this central insight, the aim of this chapter is to offer a theological reflection on the salient points of convergence between millennial studies and eschatological hope. Seeking to show how 'apocalypse transforms the object of fear into the site of hope',[2] this chapter will demonstrate a way of understanding how hope can be comprehended from the perspective of millennial studies. This field of research, I will argue, can be enriched and enlivened through a proper grasp of the nature and implications of the biblical narrative of hope from which many of the salient millennial discourses either are—or purport to be—derived. In the final reckoning, millennialism is not about carnage, hell-fire, violence, wrath and doomsday; rather it is concerned with setting forth an evocative vision of human flourishing and fulfilment. This chapter is thus directed towards the elucidation of a theology of hope with the aim of stimulating fresh thinking in the field of millennial studies.

The study of millennial belief in action can be a distressing experience. We need not read particularly deeply into history before we are confronted with the most appalling acts of power abuse, militancy and even genocide, allegedly inspired by millennial ideologies. The twentieth century in particular is strewn with the debris of shattered utopian visions which culminated in violence, terror and ethnic cleansing. Enlightenment notions of an inexorable principle of historical progress culminating in a new utopian golden age of reason were irrevocably discredited by the traumatic experience of the twentieth century, which witnessed two world wars, the odious spectacles of

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1. Richard Landes, 'The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography Medieval and Modern', in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050* (ed. Richard Landes, Edward Gow and David C. Van Meter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 243-70 (245).

2. Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 5.

mass murder, genocide, terrorism and the imminent threat of the nuclear self-annihilation of the entire human race. As a result, it is now affirmed that 'confidence in historical progress is probably gone forever'[3] and with it a loss of any confidence in millennial belief to deliver the promised New Jerusalem. Yet despite the widespread discrediting of utopian visions as dangerous delusions, millennial beliefs at the beginning of the twenty-first century, far from receding with the anticipated tide of secularization, remain (for better or worse) a decisive transformative presence in contemporary culture.

We are living in apocalyptic times. According to Jürgen Moltmann, the social and ecological convulsions in our age betoken 'nothing less than a crisis in human beings themselves. It is a crisis of life on this planet, a crisis so comprehensive and irreversible that it can justly be described as "apocalyptic"'.[4] In the wake of unprecedented developments in biotechnology, the emergence and expansion of international terrorism and the so-called 'clash of civilizations', the rise of religious fundamentalism, the appearance of strange and lethal diseases which devastate and destroy the lives of millions and for which there seems to be no apparent cure and now a major global financial crisis—all these and an innumerable host of other contemporary phenomena indicate that, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, 'humanity is approaching a zero-point of radical transmutation'.[5] Given the ominous threats that these unsettling developments seem to portend, together with the violent and genocidal history of millennial beliefs in action, it is hardly surprising that the emerging field of millennial studies has tended to consider the phenomenon of millennialism primarily under its baleful aspects. Hollywood has likewise contributed to the popular impression which treats 'apocalypse' as a synonym for 'catastrophe' or 'disaster'.[6]

Moreover, the ideological incarnations of millennialism have wreaked havoc on generations throughout human history. Twentieth-century history testifies to the diverse manifestations of apocalyptic eschatology and to the catastrophic consequences of misplaced millennial optimism.[7] Beneath the maniacal fantasies of Adolf Hitler and the callous brutality of Joseph Stalin, there lay varying degrees of an apocalyptic-eschatological conception of

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3. Glenn E. Tinder, *The Fabric of Hope: An Essay* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 19.

4. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 2005), p. xiii.

5. Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 336.

6. Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (London: Tauris, 2000), pp. 144-74.

7. Jürgen Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie* (Gütersloh: Kaiser-Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995), ET *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 167-68.

history.[8] Hitler believed himself to be engaged in an apocalyptic struggle against the Jews on behalf of Christian civilization.[9] As an important part of the programme of its brazen and systematic campaign to falsify German history,[10] the Nazi propaganda machine seized upon the notion of the 'Third Reich', which was made to correspond with the 'age of the Holy Spirit' alluded to by the medieval apocalyptic seer Joachim of Fiora.[11] Moreover, the apocalyptic undertones of the Nazi conception of the 'Final Solution' (*die Endlösung*) are unmistakably apparent.[12] As historians, theologians and literary theorists have pointed out, Hitler's concept of the thousand-year Reich was inspired explicitly by the millennial reign of the saints prophesied in Revelation 20.[13] Similar claims have also been made with regard to Communism, which some have argued was just as much a messianic, apocalyptic religion as it was a political ideology.[14]

More recently, the unimaginable terror of the Jonestown episode of 1978, which resulted in the mass 'suicide' of 918 people, provides us with a vertiginous example of the calamitous consequences which can ensue when a perverted utopian ideology, derived largely from esoteric readings of apocalyptic-eschatological texts, is abused by a charismatic leader.[15] Even

8. This thesis is powerfully articulated by John Gray in his *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

9. David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). Michael Burleigh's work, *The Third Reich: A New Study* (London: Pan Books, 2001), devotes considerable attention to the millennial aspects of Nazi ideology. See also Thomas Idinopulos, 'Nazism, Millenarianism and the Jews', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 40.4 (2003), pp. 296-302 (298).

10. This campaign was scathingly denounced by Georg Lukács in his 1936 essay on Thomas Mann, entitled 'Thomas Mann on the Literary Heritage', in Lukács, *Essays on Thomas Mann* (trans. S. Mitchell; London: Merlin Press, 1964), pp. 144-59.

11. Frank Kermode makes this connection in his *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 12-13.

12. Moltmann notes this association in the foreword to his *Das Kommen Gottes*, p. 11.

13. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (eds.), *Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 9; Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, p. 193; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists in the Middle Ages* (London: Random House/Pimlico, 1993).

14. This claim was made by Fritz Gerlich in his book *Der Kommunismus als Lehre vom Tausendjährigen Reich* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1920), in which he described Communism as '*ein Kind des neueren Chiliasmus*' ('a child of the new millennialism'). For a more recent account of the religious dimensions of Communism, see R.H. Crossman (ed.), *The God that Failed: Six Studies in Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Alistair Key focuses specifically on the messianic aspects of Marx's eschatological conception of history in his article 'Marx's Messianic Faith', in *Messianism through History* (ed. W. Beuken, S. Freyne and A. Weiler; London: SCM Press, 1993), pp. 101-13.

15. According to some accounts, the circumstances of many of these deaths might be more accurately categorised as murder. The theological convictions of Jones and the

more recently was the Waco disaster in 1993, when the charismatic leader, David Koresh, declared himself to be the Lamb of the Apocalypse and gathered together a band of followers who were convinced by his proclamation of the imminent fulfilment of the opening of the seven seals of Revelation 5. The fiasco culminated in a tragic conflagration between Koresh's supporters and federal agents that led to an inferno in which 76 men, women, children and infants were incinerated.[16] Jonestown and Waco were both (to varying degrees) underpinned by utopian, esoteric interpretations of apocalyptic-eschatological biblical texts, which transpired in tragedy. Moreover, behind the killing fields of Rwanda and Cambodia, and the sarin attacks on the Tokyo underground, it is claimed, were sinister impulses derived to varying degrees from an ideological substrate of perverted millennial zeal. All of these instances (as well as countless others) testify to what one theologian has called the 'tragic limits of millennial optimism'.[17]

Millennialism certainly has its dark sides. Although millennial visions can inspire human agents to heroic acts of compassion and self-sacrifice, their implied hermeneutic of absolute commitment also renders them vulnerable to conscription by dehumanizing ideologies. Put to the service of such ideologies, millennial belief can exacerbate what one theologian calls 'the self-destructive potentialities of human creativity'.[18] Future endeavours in millennial studies must thus be aware of one of the most singular paradoxes of millennial belief: that is, the extent to which millennialism provides an auspicious ideological habitat in which the most extravagant affirmations of human hope can coexist with the most fearsome expressions of inhuman terror and brutality.

The hermeneutic of absolute commitment implicit in millennial discourse can possess dangerous and absolutizing tendencies. In this connection Paul Ricoeur makes the pertinent observation that, 'evil and hope are more closely connected than we will ever think them'.[19] Yet it is precisely this mutuality between evil and hope which testifies to the necessity to consider the hopeful aspects of millennial beliefs in conjunction with the darker varieties of

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People's Temple are explicated in David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple and Jonestown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

16.   For a detailed, perceptive, unpartisan and sympathetic account of these events and the beliefs of Koresh and his supporters, see Kenneth G.C. Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The History and Beliefs of an Apocalyptic Sect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

17.   Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, pp. 167-68.

18.   Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (St Meinrad: Abbey Press, 1975), p. 44.

19.   Paul Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', trans. Robert Sweeney, in Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (ed. Don Ihde; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 402-24 (423).

millennial experience. Whereas some scholars writing from the perspective of millennial studies have focused on the violent manifestations of millennialism,[20] others have focused on the abstruse, esoteric and downright bizarre expressions of such thinking in various millennial UFO cults or have directed their studies towards comprehending the sensationalism of such phenomena as rapture fiction, exemplified in the huge commercial success of the Left Behind series.[21]

Although the proliferation of works which have elucidated the darker manifestations of millennial convictions have considerably enriched our understanding of the clear affinities between some expressions of millennial thinking and violence, egoism and psychotic illness, there remains a striking bias at the heart of academic probing into what one scholar calls 'the varieties of millennial experience'.[22] The imbalance consists in the relative neglect of the positive and transformative expressions of millennial hope in action. Aiming to redress this imbalance, the purpose of this chapter is to salvage serviceable raw materials from the smoke, dust and rubble of shattered millennial utopias out of which we can assemble a hermeneutic of hope. The aim throughout will be to trace the conceptual lineaments of an interpretive paradigm that will be of service to future explorations in millennial studies by opening up this emerging academic field to a new discursive world of creative possibilities inherent in the apocalyptic imagination.

So what would this hermeneutic of hope look like and what would be its salient characteristics? First of all the hermeneutic would be orientated towards eschatology. Eschatology is the grammar of human hope.[23] As such it supplies the conceptual resources through which utopian impulses are articulated and enacted.[24] Although often associated specifically with Christian

20. Michael Barkun (ed.), *Millennialism and Violence* (London: Frank Cass, 1996); Catherine Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000); John Walliss, *Apocalyptic Trajectories: Millenarianism and Violence in the Contemporary World* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).

21. Academic engagement with the *Left Behind* series has been a major focus of recent millennial studies. Leading critical works include Crawford Gribben and Mark Sweetnam (eds.), *Left Behind and the Evangelical Imagination* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011); Crawford Gribben, *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

22. Richard A. Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

23. Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), pp. 93-95.

24. Ruth Levitas, 'The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society: Utopia as Method', in *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (ed. T. Moylan and R. Baccolini; Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 47-68 (53).

theology, eschatology is a matter of decisive historical significance that extends beyond particular denominations and theological perspectives.[25] A proper phenomenology of the human condition recognizes that hope, as a conviction involving the will as well as reasons and feelings, inhabits every aspect of human motivation and action.[26] Hope initiates a process of existential transformation through which human subjects are beckoned to engage in creative acts of self-surpassing and self-transcendence and thereby to elevate themselves to new levels of being.

Yet far from being confined to existential conceptions of individual development, hope is invested with a potent culturally transformative efficacy. Hope has social consequences that can transform cultures and alter the course of world history. 'History from Abraham to Marx', observes John Howard Yoder, 'demonstrates that significant action, for good or for evil, is accomplished by those whose present action is illuminated by eschatological hope'.[27] The shaping power of apocalyptic eschatology as a change-agent of cultures consists in the imaginative vision it sets forth for social reconciliation and cosmic consummation. This vision speaks of the advent of a new era of boundless hope in which people will be invested with the power to see things anew in the light of the eschatological dawn. The emergence of the *eschaton* invokes the 'messianic idea' of a gradual yet inexorable unfolding of a radical principle of spiritual resolution in the course of history,[28] the culmination of which shall be a utopian golden age in which 'all that is in heaven and under the earth flows together in one laudatory voice'.[29] Despite its origins in the biblical texts, eschatology is therefore more than a 'merely' theological concept. It is a human and temporal category which transcends its original rootedness in the Old and New Testaments and can be just as active in 'secular' contexts as in a theocracy. Indeed, major world-historical movements such as the Enlightenment[30] and Marxism[31] provide striking

25. Despite the ubiquitous use of the terms 'apocalypticism' and 'millennialism' in the writings of many social scientists, the related word 'eschatology' is conspicuously absent from contemporary sociological analysis. In contrast, theologians continue to make widespread use of the term 'eschatology'.

26. John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Philosophical and Theological Approach* (London: SCM Press, 1982), p. 244.

27. John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), p. 71.

28. Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel from its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (trans. W.F. Stinespring; London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), pp. 7-12.

29. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue* (trans. David McDuff; London: Penguin Classics, 1993), p. 319.

30. The notion that theologians' Enlightenment visions of Progress were essentially secular appropriations of the Christian eschatological interpretation of history is affirmed by renowned historians and theologians such as R.G. Collingwood and Rudolf Bultmann.

examples of the ways in which apocalyptic discourses cannot merely survive but even flourish in putatively secular contexts.[32]

As the grammar of human hope, eschatology delineates a discursive world consisting of a vision in which a redeemed humanity marches forward in the light of a new dawn of promise and fulfilment. Every major world religion, including Judaism,[33] Islam,[34] Hinduism[35] and Buddhism[36] (notwithstanding

See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), pp. 56-73; R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 76-81. 'The historiography of the Enlightenment', remarked Collingwood, 'is apocalyptic to an extreme degree' (p. 80). Moreover, Lessing, one of the great exponents of the Enlightenment, read the apocalyptic writings of Joachim of Fiore and adapted his doctrine of 'three world-ages'. Essentially the only difference between the scheme of Joachim and that of Lessing was that the former referred to the third age as the age of the Holy Spirit, whereas the latter referred to the age of reason and enlightenment to describe the same period. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *The Education of the Human Race* (trans. F.W. Robertson; London: Anthroposophical Publishing Company, 1927), p. 85. Kant described Lessing's ideas as 'philosophical chiliasm'.

31.   The notion of a 'Marxist eschatology' is acknowledged by historians, philosophers, theologians and literary critics. See Nicholas Churchich, *Marxism and Alienation* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1990), p. 321; Ernest Tuveson, 'The Millenarian Structure of the *Communist Manifesto*', in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (ed. C.A. Patrides and Joseph Anthony Wittreich; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 323-41 (327).

32.   The apocalyptic hope of the Enlightenment was articulated by the Marquis de Condorcet, who looked to the future through his vision of *égalité* and saw a time 'when the sun will shine only on free men who know no other master but their reason'; A.N. de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (trans. June Barraclough; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1955), p. 197. Condorcet's Enlightenment vision was vigorously anti-Christian. He remarked that, 'the triumph of Christianity was the signal for the complete decadence of philosophy and the sciences' (p. 72).

33.   Moshe Idel, 'On Apocalypticism in Judaism', in *Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History and Life after Death of the Person in the World Religions* (ed. Peter Koslowski; Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), pp. 40-74; Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995).

34.   Mahmoud Zakzouk, 'The Islamic Doctrine of the Eschatological Completion of History and Eternal Life', in Koslowski (ed.), *Progress, Apocalypse*, pp. 89-100; see also, Medard Kehl, *Eschatologie* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986), pp. 81-90; Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *The Approach of Armageddon? An Islamic Perspective* (Fenton, MI: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2003).

35.   David M. Knipe, 'Zur Rolle des provisorischen Körpers für den Verstorbenen in hinduistischen Bestattungen', in *Der Abschied von den Toten: Trauerrituale im Kulturvergleich* (ed. Jan Assmann, Franz Maciejewski and Axel Michaels; Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), pp. 62-81.

36.   Charles Upton, *Legends of the End: Prophecies of the End Times, Antichrist, Apocalypse, and Messiah from Eight Religious Traditions* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis/TRSP Publications, 2005), pp. 29-31.

conspicuous differences both within and among these religions) has retained an apocalyptic-eschatological consciousness. Thus, despite fundamental differences in conceptions of historical development,[37] each variation manifests a certain commonality on the point of its orientation towards the transcendence of death and the possibility of the transfiguration of present circumstances into a greater state of existence.

Notwithstanding its universal appeal and relevance, it is undoubtedly the case that eschatology is most often associated with the biblical texts, particularly the apocalyptic passages of the Old and New Testaments. One of the loftiest conceptions of hope ever to have been produced by the creative exercise of the human imagination is to be found in the final book of the Bible, John's Apocalypse, in which is set out a distinctive depiction of cosmic consummation. The author plunders the prophetic scriptures, providing 'a glittering array of anti-types to Old Testament texts'.[38] The peaceful vision of human flourishing corresponds to the prophetic depiction of a lion lying down with the lamb—an evocative image of millennial hope symbolizing the reconciliation among the species in the natural world as the counterpart to human reconciliation.

As well as depicting images of lions lying down in peace with lambs and spears being crushed and recast into pruning hooks, the biblical texts also set out an unequivocal vision of restored creation. The end of eschatology is the 'restitution of all things' (Acts 3.21). Eschatology presents a vision of cosmic consummation in which humankind overcomes its alienation from God and creation; a vision in which 'the usurped creation will be restored; the corrupted universe will be cleansed [and] the created world will be recreated'.[39] In this new era of flourishing, every trace of existential alienation and what Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor called the 'unresolved historical contradictions of human nature'[40] will have been overcome and superseded by a new order of harmony and reconciliation in the natural and human world. This vision acts as a lens that unifies the diverse strands of human experience, refracting even tragedy and setbacks into a single beam of hope, so that everything is seen in the new light of an in-breaking eschatological dawn. In

37.   Catherine Wessinger argues that millennial thinking does not necessarily presuppose a linear view of history, noting that forms of apocalypticism have prevailed in Asian contexts in which history was understood in terms of cyclical patterns. See Wessinger, 'Millennialism with and without the Mayhem', in Robbins and Palmer (eds.), *Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, pp. 47-59 (51).

38.   Paul Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology and Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 18.

39.   D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 280.

40.   Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (trans. C. Garnett; New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), p. 234.

the language of theology, the vision of apocalyptic-eschatological hope creates the conditions which can recognize that, 'There is room…for tragedy as well as triumph in God's victory over suffering'.[41]

This vision is irreducibly teleological in so far as it is constituted in the narrative texture of the human experience of temporality which, following Ricoeur, we affirm is orientated towards hope.[42] The meaning of the eschatological vision arises through the imaginative engagement with the world of the text on the part of the reader who works creatively towards the realization of its *telos*. This hermeneutical method corresponds to the ontological condition of human nature, which, as Ricoeur following Heidegger maintains, is constantly projecting itself 'ahead of itself'[43] into the *terra incognita* of new ways of being human. Underpinning this process is a creative drive propelled by an underlying existential impulse, which Heidegger, following Kierkegaard, called '*die Leidenschaft für das Mögliche*' (the passion for the possible).[44]

As already noted, the biblical texts of apocalyptic eschatology depict the culmination of the narrative with the aid of the metaphor of a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. In its capacity as 'the Christian's ultimate hope',[45] the symbol of the heavenly city is the 'end' of the apocalypse, in the sense in which the word 'end' signifies both 'destination' in the spatial sense and 'conclusion' or 'culmination' in the temporal sense. Since the vision is orientated towards the end (in both the temporal and spatial sense), it follows that any valid interpretation of apocalyptic-eschatological texts must be governed by the text's *terminus ad quem*; that is, the ultimate meaning of apocalyptic-eschatological texts is revealed only by the end, the point at which the narrative culminates in hope. Millennial texts from this perspective can be said to present a conception of history as 'a totality presented from the perspective of an end'.[46] Furthermore, if we follow Ricoeur, Heidegger and others and affirm that human existence is 'irreducibly narrative in texture', it

41.   Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 105.

42.   Paul Ricoeur, 'Freiheit im Licht der Hoffnung', in *Hermeneutik und Strukturalismus: Der Konflikt der Interpretationen I* (trans. Johannes Rütsch; Munich: Kösel, 1973), pp. 199-226 (205).

43.   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 322. As John Macquarrie put it, 'Man is possibility. He is always more than he is; his being is never complete at any given moment'; Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 32.

44.   Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1964), p. 15.

45.   Fiddes, *Promised End*, p. 282.

46.   Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Hermeneutics and Universal History', in *History and Hermeneutic* (ed. Robert W. Funk; Journal for Theology and the Church, 4: New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 122-53 (151).

is possible to assert that the ontological contours of human life in their quantitative element is constituted by temporality and in their qualitative aspect by teleology.[47]

If Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur are correct in the assumption that the best hermeneutic is that which corresponds most closely to the narrative-temporal character of human existence,[48] it further follows that apocalyptic-eschatological texts should be interpreted through a teleologically orientated hermeneutic which sees the meaning of the text as radiating out from its hopeful conclusion. The ultimate meaning that is invested in a text or even a single constitutive word within the text is thus a function of the culmination towards which it points. The hermeneutics of hope thus recognizes the truth of Gerhard Ebeling's pertinent comment that 'we do not get at the nature of words by asking what they contain, but by asking what they effect, what they set going, what future they disclose'.[49] In the case of apocalyptic-eschatological texts, this means that the meaning of a text emanates from the end and can thus be perceived correctly only in the light of the eschatological consummation, the hopeful outcome towards which it is directed. As Pannenberg expressed it:

> The text can only be understood in connection with the totality of history which links the past to the present, and indeed not only to what currently exists today, but also the horizon of the future based on what is presently possible, because the meaning of the present becomes clear only in the light of the future.[50]

Moreover, this hopeful conclusion, although contained in the narrative of the text, requires the active participation of the reader to achieve its fruition.

The idea that endings are determinative of the meaning of texts is well established in theology and literary theory.[51] By means of its orientation towards a hopeful culmination of a narrative, the text becomes a discursive function of an ontological principle which Heidegger calls 'the monumental possibilities of human existence'.[52] Furthermore, staying with Heidegger,

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47. Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), p. 207.

48. Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 64.

49. Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith* (trans. R.G. Smith; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 187.

50. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Basic Questions in Theology* (3 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1970), I, p. 129.

51. Notable works in which this thesis is represented include Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1982); Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, and Fiddes, *Promised End*.

52. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 448.

through its future orientation towards an ultimate aspiration, symbolized in the Christian scriptures by the eschatological city, the text gives material expression to '*die stille Kraft des Möglichen*' (the quiet force of the possible).[53] Seen in this light, the hermeneutic of hope interprets apocalyptic-eschatological texts neither as blueprints of a sequence of events that are to take place in the 'end times',[54] nor as devices for the uncovering of the supposed 'true' identity of particular contemporary individuals, movements or organizations. By avoiding unfortunate identifications of Antichrist with the pope, Barack Obama or the Spice Girls, or whoever else might have fallen foul of prevailing evangelical opinion, the hermeneutic of hope refuses to surrender the theological content of the text to transient cultural trends. The hermeneutic advocated here is one which preserves the integrity of millennial texts by reading them as presenting a universal vision of salvation which enjoins their readers to work creatively towards its realization.

It may be objected that this teleological hermeneutic falls into the kind of logocentric reductionism repudiated by poststructuralism on the grounds that such approaches play inexorably into the hands of the human will to dominate, to exert power over others through the pretence that one has unmediated access to a particular presence invoked by a text. It may further be charged that this hermeneutics of hope, which interprets everything from the perspective of the end and which elevates one particular text relating to the New Jerusalem, is merely a return to a supposed omnipotent, authoritative text, a 'meta-text' through which all other texts are to be interpreted. The criticism in this instance would, however, be misaimed, for the vision of the culmination of the eschatological *telos* is utterly divested of power; it has no power because it is not the exclusive possession of one interpretive community to use as a weapon in a power game *vis-à-vis* another interpretive community. This is absolutely crucial to the hermeneutics of hope. In apocalyptic-eschatological texts, the promised presence is not the oppressive imposition of ideologically contrived systems of domination but the powerless presence of divine compassion in which the apparent power narratives of warring beasts and dragons collapse into a peaceable vision of eschatological culmination in the vision of the New Jerusalem. The 'power' of the promised presence

53. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 446. Richard Kearney helpfully points out that, 'much of [Heidegger's] language is deeply resonant with the religious language of Christian eschatology'; Kearney, 'Eschatology of the Possible God', in *The Religious* (ed. John Caputo; Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 175-96 (183).

54. Contemporary biblical studies scholars evince a profound scepticism towards fundamentalist reductions of apocalyptic-eschatological texts into chronological frameworks. See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 138; M.E. Boring, 'Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992), pp. 702-23.

consists only in its irresistible powerlessness,[55] symbolized by the evocative image of the messianic lamb of the book of Revelation. Indeed, the absolute powerlessness of the presence in the apocalyptic-eschatological narratives has never been more strikingly asserted than in this plain statement that 'the definitive manifestation of God's character in history'[56] is a slain lamb.

Moreover, the hermeneutics of hope is undergirded by a healthy humility. The efficacy of the hermeneutic of hope rests on the acceptance of the element of humility born of the conviction that the 'truth' is always something that will evade our best efforts to possess or dominate it. History has produced countless examples of adherents to a particular utopian ideal who began to think that they had finally fathomed the 'true meaning of the millennial vision'. This conviction gave rise to the assumption that this privileged status conferred upon them the right to impose their 'truth' on others. They thereby set out on the same ideological journey taken by many of the most malevolent and even murderous ideologies to have emerged in recent as well as ancient times. The most cursory survey of the history of ideologies will suffice to testify to the truth of James Allison's remark that 'being greatly mistaken in our whole perception of this world, including the things of God, is part of the human condition'.[57]

Such criticisms of the hermeneutics of hope that I have set out in this chapter also miss the point that the *telos* of apocalyptic eschatology is not a static conceptual category but a dynamic and incomplete principle of hope expressed in a metaphor which always resists any attempts to crystallize it into any particular ideology. As Räpple put it, 'The scene [of eschatological consummation] is not an arrival but a horizon of possibility, a non-completed visionary work that cries out for completion'.[58] The hermeneutics of hope is inherently dialectical; even when the dialectic seems to collapse in the metaphor of the heavenly city there remains an unmistakable quality of incompleteness about the resulting synthesis.[59] The kind of resolution envisaged by millennial texts is thus not the culmination leading to a fixed

55.   John Caputo alludes to the notion of 'the power of powerlessness' in the formulation of his 'Theology of the Event', noting that, 'The kingdom of God is a domain in which weakness *reigns*'; Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 12-17.

56.   Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), p. 3.

57.   James Alison, *Living in the End Times: The Last Things Re-imagined* (London: SPCK, 1997), p. 39.

58.   E.M. Räpple, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 211.

59.   William A. Beardslee, 'Hope in Biblical Eschatology and in Process Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 38 (1970), pp. 227-39 (236).

synthesis of static perfection but 'a paralogical journey towards the horizon of an eschatological dawn'.[60]

In order to prevent such visions from degenerating into the perverted ideologies which brought us Auschwitz, Jonestown, Waco and the killing fields of Rwanda and Cambodia, the means employed towards this fulfilment must be consistent with the peaceable character of the inclusive vision of fulfilment and flourishing expressed in the metaphor of the eschatological city of Revelation 21 and 22. In other words the hermeneutics of hope inter- prets the millennial texts of apocalyptic eschatology in light of the end of the narrative. In the Christian vision of hope this refers to none other than the effulgent, incandescent light radiating out from the New Jerusalem. This is the city, we recall, which has no need of the light of the sun or moon for the glory of the light of God is radiant in the midst of his people. Only in this light can the biblical texts of apocalyptic-eschatology be read at all. To read without this light is to engage in the futile practice of reading in the dark, unable even to see the text for what it is.

Notwithstanding its emphasis on the eschatological vision of the biblical text, the hermeneutic of hope is not confined to theology and does not pre- suppose agreement with Christian visions of the end times. The hermeneutics of hope is primarily a means with which to humanize eschatology by applying the millennial discourses to human interests without falling prey to 'the idolatry of conceptual schemes'.[61] Indeed if the emerging academic field of millennial studies is to possess credibility and relevance outside of Christian theology, it must address not merely those who profess adherence to a particular faith tradition but must speak into the human condition as such. Drawing on apocalyptic-eschatological discourses, millennial studies makes a unique contribution toward the elucidation of the vital questions of human existence by considering human life not in its perfective aspect as something static or empirically given but as a dynamic unfolding reality which is constituted as much by process and becoming as it is by essence and being.

The notion of human existence not as something fixed or static but entwined in dynamic processes of becoming corresponds with the idea that life is inherently eschatological.[62] Human life, remarks John Macquarrie, is necessarily eschatological in so far as it can be considered (in Heideggarian

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60. Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 16.

61. Ivana Dolejšová, *Accounts of Hope: A Problem of Method in Postmodern Apologia* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 284.

62. In the words of one German theologian, Claus Schwambach, commenting on Leonard Boff's theology, 'Human existence is from the beginning nothing other than eschatological existence'. See Schwambach, *Rechtfertigungsgeschehen und Befreiungs- prozess: Die Eschatologien von Martin Luther und Leonardo Boff im kritischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), p. 224 (my translation).

terms) as 'Being-toward-death' and aware of 'the urgency and responsibility of living before the imminent end'.[63] Moreover, if we share with Karl Rahner the conviction that eschatological assertions are invariably assertions concerned with human existence,[64] it follows that the study of how eschatological language is negotiated by human interpreters (i.e. the primary task of millennial studies) has the potential to shed new light on the most difficult yet most important questions of what it means to be human.

Since it is concerned with potentiality just as much as with actuality, millennial studies can be a voice which issues a salutary reminder to the wider scholarly community that the study of human nature must go beyond existing empirical 'facts' and take seriously the role of dreams, visions and the imagination as basic realities governing human volition.[65] As John Macquarrie aptly expresses it, 'the study of human nature is a study of possibility as much as of actuality'.[66] To say, with Ernst Bloch, that it belongs to the human condition to hope means to assert that human volition is determined primarily not (*pace* positivism) by empirical calculations based on an inherent inclination to make the most material gain out of present circumstances.[67] Human volition is governed above all not by calculation but by vision, by an underlying will to hope, '*eine Leidenschaft für das Mögliche*' (a passion for the possible).[68]

Such hope, in its capacity as 'an inclusive concept, denoting a mood or attitude in which beliefs, emotions, imagination and purpose are all combined',[69] converges with the eschatological nature of texts, as defined by Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur conceives of texts not as empirical descriptions of the world as it is but as imaginative explorations of the world as it could be.[70] Ricoeur's notion can be applied with particular truth to millennial texts which are explicitly concerned with such imaginative explorations. Drawing on Ricoeur's notion of the 'surplus of meaning', Paul Fiddes remarks that 'human existence is orientated forwards in a passion to be, and this is the true

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63.   John Macquarrie, *Martin Heidegger* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 31.

64.   Karl Rahner, 'The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Associations', in *Theological Investigations*, IV (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 337.

65.   Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, pp. 3-4.

66.   Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, p. 3.

67.   Ernst Bloch, 'Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins', in *Auswahl aus seinem Schriften* (Hamburg: Fischer, 1967), p. 41.

68.   Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, p. 15. This phrase is attributed originally to Søren Kierkegaard. See Ricoeur, 'Freiheit im Licht der Hoffnung', p. 205.

69.   Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, p. 243.

70.   Ricoeur himself acknowledges his debt to Jürgen Moltmann when he remarks that 'I have been very much taken with—I should say, won over by—the eschatological interpretation that Jürgen Moltmann gives to the Christian kerygma in his work *The Theology of Hope*'; Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', p. 404.

basis of hope'.[71] This orientation of human existence which 'projects itself' into an open future consisting of boundless possibilities[72] finds its definitive expression in apocalyptic-eschatological texts, which present a vision of the future as the sphere—to use the phraseology of Ernst Bloch's dialectical utopianism—of 'not-yet realised possibilities' (*noch nicht verwirklichte Möglichkeiten*).[73]

The hermeneutic of hope also enables millennial studies' scholars to read apocalyptic-eschatological texts as the domain not of empirical actuality but of imaginative potentiality. Texts do correspond to the world, Ricoeur concedes, but the relationship is not one of empirical, subject–object referentiality but of an eschatological awareness on the part of the reader in whom the text awakens what Ricoeur, drawing on Kierkegaard, calls a 'passion for the possible'.[74] Although texts cannot be said to represent in any sense of fixed totality a notion of the empirical reality of the world, they do nevertheless refer to the real world of the possible, which, for Ricoeur, following Aristotle, is just as real as the world of present actuality.[75] According to the hermeneutic of hope, texts are not merely conduits for the human mind's apprehension of given empirical reality but function also as harbingers of the future which 'through imagination and symbolism' open up 'new levels of awareness'[76] in the creative interpretive faculties of the reader. By 'outlining a new way of being in the world', texts contribute to the 'enlarging of our horizon of existence'.[77]

Predicated on Kierkegaard's 'passion for the possible' and Ricoeur's notion of the 'surplus of meaning', the hermeneutic of hope draws on the semantic exuberance of language and transforms this surplus into a theology

71.   Fiddes, *Promised End*, p. 40.

72.   This conception of human existence owes much to Martin Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* as being irreducibly constituted by temporality and thus embracing possibility just as much as actuality; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 183-90. Ricoeur himself acknowledges his debt to Heidegger in this respect in volume three of his *Time and Narrative* (trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer; 3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), III, pp. 253-58.

73.   Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (5 vols.; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), V, p. 727.

74.   Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', pp. 407, 411; Fiddes, *Promised End*, pp. 45-47. According to Kevin Vanhoozer, this 'passion for the possible' constitutes the 'driving force behind Ricoeur's whole philosophical enterprise'; Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 6.

75.   Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 92. Ricoeur writes of 'the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things, which is the genuine referential power of the text'.

76.   Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, p. 105.

77.   Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 37, 88.

of human hope. The hermeneutic of hope does not regard language merely as a system of reference which follows a stable correspondence between words and things. It is precisely because words 'cannot express exhaustively or precisely that which they seek to convey'[78] that makes it possible for language to become a site of hope. The fact that words are not bound to things is precisely what gives language the power to create meaning and hope.

The hermeneutics of hope thus denotes a reading strategy which begins with an awareness of millennial language not just as a system of signs corresponding to a static or empirically given world of objects; rather, it regards such language as a manifestation of human hope expressing a 'passion for the possible' which calls for a creative response on the part of the reader. As such, millennial language can be viewed as providing a stimulus to the exploration of what one theologian calls the 'still unrealised possibilities of humanity'.[79] This approach therefore also comprehends such texts as discursive units containing within their own fabric a radical provocation to the reader to work towards its actualization. The 'passion for the possible' is thus transformed into the 'realization of the possible' through the activity of responsible hermeneutical appropriation. This transition is characterized by Ricoeur's conception of the movement from the 'world of the text' to the 'world of action'.[80]

The kind of reading endorsed by the hermeneutics of hope is predicated on these theoretical insights concerning the nature of language and interpretation. It might reasonably be asked how this reading strategy can be applied to specific instances of millennial discourse. However, while this task undoubtedly requires attention, it falls outside of the scope of this chapter, which has sought not to provide a full critical engagement but a provocation to further reflection on the constructive transformative potential of millennial belief.

To sum up: the hermeneutics of hope is rich, vivid and imaginative; it is also complex, problematic, potentially contentious and necessarily incomplete. Yet therein lies its greatest strength, for it thereby reflects the complex, problematic, controversial and incomplete nature of millennial discourse. It stands to reason that a monologic hermeneutic cannot be employed towards the elucidation of a polyphonic phenomenon such as millennial discourse. Future researchers in millennial studies must take seriously the notion that millennialism 'operates much more at an emotional than a cerebral level'.[81]

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78. Ronald L. Farmer, *Beyond the Impasse: The Promise of a Process Hermeneutic* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), p. 104.

79. I have borrowed this phrase from Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, p. 93.

80. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, I, p. 81, 180.

81. Kenneth G.C. Newport, in Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben (eds.), *Expecting the End: Contemporary Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Baylor, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), p. viii.

This does not mean that either the millennial discourse or the hermeneutic of hope through which it is interpreted is illogical or irrational, but it does entail a proper acknowledgment of the complexity of millennial discourses, which often surpass logical thought and which will always resist any attempt to reduce them to sociological ideal types or strict linguistic categories. It is precisely on account of its complexity that the hermeneutics of hope has the potential to open up new avenues of research in millennial studies.

If the emerging field of millennial studies is to find its distinctive voice in contemporary cultural studies, it must first take millennial discourse seriously as determinative of human volition. The primary descriptive task of millennial studies is to understand how these discourses have manifested themselves in culture through their interpretation and appropriation by diverse reading communities. The main critical task of millennial studies is to interpret millennial discourses in socially responsible ways in order to deploy the rich insights of millennial beliefs towards the renewal of culture and the elevation of human life. The theoretical insights gathered together in this chapter under the heading of 'a hermeneutic of hope' offer a conceptual vocabulary for the further exploration of the constructive, socially transformative applications of millennial belief. The hermeneutic of hope thus has potentially important implications for the future of millennial studies.

Millennial studies must begin to redress the paramount preoccupation with the uncovering of the eccentric or idiosyncratic beliefs of the latest fundamentalist cult or suicide sect. Instead, millennial studies can offer the conceptual rudiments of a phenomenology of human hope through which to explore the ways in which millennial discourses can be employed towards the renewal of culture in our age through a hermeneutic of responsible hope. The pressing need in millennial studies scholarship today is thus for scholars who will redeem millennial hope from the grip of cultic obscurantism as well as from the irresponsible sensationalism of rapture fiction and its associated subcultures and deploy millennial hope in transformative and imaginative ways in the service of cultural and spiritual renewal. Eschatological hope constitutes a universal affirmation of the inherent dignity and meaning of human life and as such should be brought down from library shelves and transferred to homes, streets, communities, churches, university lecture theatres and academic debating chambers and expressed responsibly in radical, practical, life-enhancing and transformative ways.

The future of millennial studies belongs to those who are willing to engage in creative explorations of the transformative and responsible application of this hope as an imaginative possibility in our world today. It is my sincere hope that this initial contribution has at least set down some important markers to an ongoing conversation and has within it plenty of fresh insights which can guide such further explorations of the vital issues raised by millennial belief.

READING PROPHETICALLY:
MILLENNIALISM, PROPHECY AND TRADITION

Eugene V. Gallagher

Even as they cast a baleful eye on their contemporary circumstances, millennialists also profess a passionate hope for an imminent transformation of the world that they know. Maintaining such a double vision requires a distinctive approach to understanding the past, present and near future. Millennialists frequently assert that ancient, authoritative texts actually refer to the world in which they are living and the new world that will soon be ushered in. They read those authoritative texts and their contemporary situation in terms of each other, with each adding layers of significance to the other. The texts' authority is reinforced and enhanced to the extent that they can be understood as making sense of the present, and the present situation yields its full meaning in the clarifying light of the authoritative traditions. In his classic study of millennialism, *New Heaven, New Earth*, Kenelm Burridge describes that process as 'quarrying into tradition'. Burridge argues that the purpose of such selective retrieval of hallowed wisdom is 'to find those authentic principles which can be channeled anew'.[1]

As Burridge's statement suggests, millennialists intentionally use tradition in innovative ways. They make choices both about what to retrieve from their own, and sometimes other, cultural wisdom traditions and how to apply it to their current situations. Similarly, they make choices about which aspects of their current situations are worthy of sustained attention and how they might be understood as in some way revelatory of meaning far beyond the quotidian. Millennialists are therefore involved in complex interpretive processes which are decisively shaped by the choices they make to read certain texts or events in specific ways. Reading 'prophetically', that is, choosing to understand selected aspects of traditional wisdom as having a significant meaning for the present and near future, is in fact a core process of millennialist thinking. Close attention to the strategies by which millennialists select and interpret elements of authoritative tradition as being directly relevant to their

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1.   Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 163.

own situations promises to reveal much about the dynamics by which millennial messages are formed, promulgated, adjusted and re-formed in specific social and historical circumstances. The prominence of prophetic reading in millennialist thinking should drive students of millennialism to ask what Jacques Berlinerblau asserts is the fundamental question to be asked about biblical interpretation and, I argue by extension, of the interpretation of any form of traditional wisdom: 'Why did this particular interpreter or community of readers conclude that the Bible said this (but not that)?'.[2] Prophetic readings of authoritative cultural traditions are acts of creative meaning-making, choices believed by their makers to be fraught with significance.

For such choices to have social impact, they must be presented as being authoritative in some way. Whether they are portrayed as coming from a mere openness to the plain meaning of traditional texts or contemporary events, privileged insight or inspiration from an extra-human source, millennialists' readings of both tradition and their own situations must be grounded on some sort of claim to authority. In many instances, and particularly within the broad biblical tradition of millennialism, individual millennialists who proclaim a new message must situate their own interpretive positions among many competing ones. The texts on which they base their anticipations of the coming millennium have often been carefully combed over by many of their predecessors, yet they need to establish simultaneously that those previous readings of the authoritative texts are either slightly or wholly off the mark and that their own, new interpretations unlock the full meaning of those familiar texts. This time, they confidently assert, someone has finally gotten it right. Even millennialists outside of the biblical tradition rarely base their messages on novel and previously un-interpreted texts, and they therefore face a similar challenge. In fact, much of the dynamism of millennialism as a persistent feature of human religious life stems from its apparently inexhaustible ability to produce new readings of familiar texts and make urgent demands on whoever encounters them. The stones yielded by quarrying into tradition are continually used to construct new millennial edifices that put familiar building materials to innovative uses.

Millennialists, then, are conscious architects of new religious messages. Working both with traditional materials and whatever else is ready to hand that they find potentially useful, they strive to articulate innovative meanings that will capture the attention and allegiance of the audiences that they address. They aim to spur action by clarifying the way the world is, presenting an image of the way the world can be and devising a program of action that will enable the attentive and faithful to move from one world into the other. Those who construct millennialist systems of thought are thus involved

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2. Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 113.

in creative intellectual work, even when they operate outside the confines of socially sanctioned structures of knowledge.[3] That work involves making a number of very consequential choices, of which I will focus on two in particular: the decision to read both traditional sources of wisdom and the signs of the times prophetically, and the readjustments that frequently occur when prophecies about the imminent dawn of the millennium inevitably fail.

Reading Prophetically:
John Major Jenkins and Mayan Prophecy

In one of the first scholarly treatments of the growing popular attention to the ancient Mayan calendar and its purported prophecy of the ending of a world age on 21 December 2012, Robert Sitler observed that 'There is intense and growing speculation concerning the significance of this date among many New Age aficionados and others interested in Mayan culture' and that 'many suggest it will bring about a catastrophic destruction of the world and/or a radical renovation of human consciousness'.[4] One person who has played a central role in speculation about the contemporary meaning of ancient Mayan artifacts is the independent researcher John Major Jenkins. Canvassing both physical evidence from multiple sites and texts committed to writing during the colonial period, Jenkins develops a complex prophetic reading of the Mayan evidence that argues that 2012 'basically represents the shift from one World Age to the next World Age'.[5] The ways in which Jenkins constructs his understanding of the historical sources as being general prophecies about the present and near future demonstrate both the processes by which millennialists can quarry into tradition to produce vivid contemporary innovations and some of the hazards they face in so doing.

Jenkins is acutely aware of the need to justify his own authority—all the more so since he has no affiliation with any of the institutions, such as universities, museums and research centers that are broadly accepted as producing socially legitimated knowledge. He informs his readers that he has 'been investigating Maya culture since 1985' and has written many books and

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3. On the uses of 'stigmatized knowledge' in contemporary forms of 'improvisational millennialism', see Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 2-4, 23-28.

4. Robert K. Sitler, 'The 2012 Phenomenon: New Age Appropriation of an Ancient Mayan Calendar', *Nova Religio* 9.3 (2006), pp. 24-38 (24). See also Sitler, 'The 2012 Phenomenon Comes of Age', *Nova Religio* 16.1 (2012), pp. 61-87.

5. John Major Jenkins, *The 2012 Story: The Myths, Fallacies, and Truth Behind the Most Intriguing Date in History* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin Books, 2009), p. 125. Jenkins maintains a web presence at <http://alignment2012.com/> and <http://johnmajorjenkins.com/>.

articles.[6] In fact, he embraces his status as an outsider, proudly declaring 'I count myself among the autodidacts, the self-taught perpetual students fueled by passion and a sense of mission'.[7] In addition, he presents his very independence as something that supports the authority of his interpretations. He criticizes scholars for simply replicating established models of understanding ancient cultures, arguing that they 'do not try to shift their consciousness in order to perceive the unique traits of an ancient culture and are instead content to interpret it through the unmoving filters of their own paradigm's values and assumptions'.[8] With that, Jenkins positions himself as someone whose apprehension of the past is not occluded by pre-established expectations; he is able to see the Maya for who they really are. Jenkins thus claims both an unfettered openness to the plain meaning of the texts and artifacts he considers and a privileged outsider's insight into their meaning.

Not content with those attempts to shore up his authority, however, Jenkins makes a different sort of appeal towards the end of his book. After arguing that 'the visions induced by sacred plants must have informed the profound cosmology pioneered at Izapa' (a pre-Columbian archeological site in the contemporary Mexican state of Chiapas that figures prominently in Jenkins's argument),[9] Jenkins embarks on an account of an experience that he, too, had had under the influence of a mind-altering substance. Jenkins recalls that in that experience 'I would be combining my ability to go into a meditative state, which I had developed as a result of daily meditation practice, with the isolation tank and a good dose of quality LSD'.[10] As might be expected from the place he gives it in his narrative, Jenkins's experiment yielded what he took to be a profound insight into nothing less than the 'ultimate vision of reality; …the process of history and time; …the creation of the manifest cosmos and created beings, and…the purpose and destiny of humanity'.[11] Although he reserves it for the next to last chapter of his book, Jenkins's authority as an interpreter of Mayan culture is ultimately founded on his claim to have had a particular kind of revelatory experience—one that he also attributes to the ancient Maya themselves. As Jenkins presents it, he is just like the people about whom he is writing. Introspection thus becomes an important avenue to understanding. It is thus with substantial justification that archaeo-astronomer and Mayan scholar Anthony Aveni identifies Jenkins as a contemporary 'Gnostic' whose claims to have distinctive knowledge are validated not by the widely accepted canons of scholarship but by an appeal

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6. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 2.
7. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 5.
8. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 51.
9. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 391.
10. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 396.
11. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 398.

to personal experience.[12] Jenkins's millennialist message is founded on experiences that he presumes he shares with the ancient Maya, among others.

Throughout his book, Jenkins also emphasizes that he is an exponent of the Perennial Philosophy. He argues, for example, that 'Maya teachings, including those pertaining to cycle endings, belong to a Perennial Philosophy, or Primordial Tradition, a reservoir of knowledge and spiritual wisdom common in its essential form to all great religious traditions'.[13] Jenkins's commitment to the Perennial Philosophy provides the framework for his interpretation of all of the ancient evidence, particularly his decision to read certain texts as prophecies. As he puts it, 'it helps us understand so much of what 2012 means in the larger sense'.[14] Jenkins's appeal to the Perennial Philosophy enables him indirectly to construct an answer to the pointed question posed by Aveni: 'What compels contemporary Anglo-American societies to think that the message of the ancient Maya is intended for us?'.[15] Jenkins's answer is that when they are properly construed, the world's religious traditions, including that of the ancient Maya, must be seen as communicating a religious message that is fundamentally the same. As Jenkins evocatively describes it, 'The vein of pure gnosis is there, right before our eyes, in the Maya Creation Mythology; we just need to read it with eyes attuned to the symbolic, archetypal, universal content'.[16] That statement is founded on a set of assumptions and decisions that shape Jenkins's interpretive approach. He releases the Mayan mythology from any historical constraints of time and place by stressing its universal meaning, while at the same times he embeds it in what he sees as a continuing harmonious tradition of esoteric wisdom that is actually at the core of all of the world's religious traditions. Moreover, he asserts that 'pure gnosis' expresses a significant message in the present world for anyone who cares to look deeply enough into it.

That Jenkins's claims represent a choice of interpretive perspective rather than a simple statement of fact is clarified by the reactions of many academics to his work. Anthony Aveni, for example, rejects the contention that the ancient Maya were writing prophecy that would be relevant to our own times. In contrast to Jenkins, he asserts that 'the long period cycles carved in stone served the purpose of demonstrating that the rulers were the very embodiments of their ancestors who lived in previous eras and now reside in the afterworld of the sky'. Consequently, 'Carved Mayan stelae were a form of

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12.   See Anthony Aveni, *The End of Time: The Maya Mystery of 2012* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2009), pp. 15, 124-26.

13.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 8; see p. 292 for his summary of the Perennial Philosophy.

14.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 285.

15.   Aveni, *The End of Time*, p. xvii.

16.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 9.

political and religious esoteric propaganda'.[17] Similarly, concerning a monument and inscription which play a central in Jenkins's argument, Matthew Restall and Amara Solari insist that its purpose was 'dedicatory, not prophetic'.[18] In those academic readings, the Mayan mythology looks backwards not forwards; it seeks to root the legitimacy of specific rulers in the past. The purpose of devices like the long count calendar is to lend political rule a sense of solidity and even inevitability, not to offer predictions or prophecies about the future. Restall and Solari argue further that whatever millennialism might be found in Mayan sources that date to the period after contact with the Spanish needs to be traced to the influence of the millennial worldview of the European Franciscan missionaries, not to the Mayans themselves.[19] Rather than focusing on who is correct about the often ambiguous Mayan evidence in the skirmishes between Jenkins and his academic critics, the academics' dramatically different readings of the evidence can be used to underline the contention that Jenkins's own interpretations are just that, readings of the evidence that are based on certain interests and presuppositions and therefore choices about how to make meaning.

Much of Jenkins's work is given over to an interpretation of examples of the so-called Mayan 'long-count' calendar. While Jenkins affirms that existing examples of the calendar do point to 21 December 2012 as a momentous date, he is ultimately fairly cagey about precisely what that date might signify. Avoiding the inherent problem of courting evident and decisive disconfirmation by focusing on a specific date, Jenkins proposes instead that '2012 is definitely not just about one day in 2012; it is about a sea change that probably won't bear fruit for many decades'.[20] Jenkins thus eludes the possibility of unequivocal disconfirmation on a date that looms ever closer. Instead, he identifies a millennial 'zone' of time, in which the outlines of the new world will become progressively more apparent. Just what those outlines will look like becomes clearer when Jenkins turns his attention to reading texts, rather than engraved monuments, prophetically.

The central text in Jenkins's *The 2012 Story* is the *Popol Vuh*, a collection of traditional Mayan stories transcribed by an unidentified Guatemalan in the 1550s and later translated into Spanish by a priest, Francisco Ximenez, in 1700.[21] Jenkins believes that the narrative of the *Popol Vuh* expresses the

17. Aveni, *The End of Time*, p. 63.

18. Matthew Restall and Amara Solari, *2012 and the End of the World: The Western Roots of the Maya Apocalypse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), p. 28.

19. See Restall and Solari, *2012 and the End of the World*, p. 101.

20. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 282; see also pp. 168-69.

21. For background on the *Popol Vuh* and a contemporary English translation, see Dennis Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of The Mayan Book of The Dawn of Life and The Glories of Gods and Kings* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

same mythology as the long count calendar.[22] In Jenkins's reading, the *Popol Vuh* also provides precious wisdom about the crisis of the contemporary world, which is 'caused by a limited ego consciousness running the show, [and] prevents the transformational breakthrough of awakening to the larger, trans-ego perspective'.[23] Jenkins reads the text prophetically, as an example of ancient wisdom that speaks directly to the present and near future, with a universal, archetypal message. He suggests that it should become 'our play-book' as we confront the myriad challenges of the contemporary world.[24] As Jenkins's previous comments suggest, he reads the characters in the text as archetypes rather than as historically conditioned expressions of a particular culture. Jenkins focuses on what he calls the Hero Twin narrative in the text, and particularly on two characters, whom he identifies as One Hunahpu, a solar deity, and Seven Macaw, a bird deity who claims that he is the real lord of the world.

   Throughout his interpretation Jenkins emphasizes that the various characters and their interactions have distinct 'archetypal purposes', 'illustrate' fundamental processes of the human psyche, 'represent' either basic problems or their solutions and teach important 'lessons'.[25] The following interpretation of Seven Macaw aptly expresses Jenkins's interpretive perspective:

> Seven Macaw is a bird deity, a false sun, who proclaims his divine nature but is in fact something else. He is the ego. The ego identity centered in ego consciousness serves a purpose in the life of humanity, but should be held in right relationship to the eternal soul. The ego complex belongs to the individual self, the mortal and ultimately passing identity of this life. Many problems arise in the world when ego assumes the mantle of the eternal soul and projects itself as an invincible figure, all-knowing and indestructible. Ego is a mask, and the modern world confuses the mask with the real person. Seven Macaw squawks and deceives humanity, magnifies himself as the true sun, and tries to take the place of One Hunahpu (the eternal soul).[26]

For Jenkins, then, the characters in the *Popol Vuh* represent nothing that is particular to Mayan culture at any specific place and time; instead they present 'a perennially recurring mythic drama' that takes place at the end of each cycle of time.[27] Their relevance to the particular world crisis that Jenkins believes we are facing as we near 21 December 2012 stems directly from their general characteristics, not from anything that would identify them as

   22.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 315.
   23.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 380.
   24.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 383.
   25.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, pp. 313-20. Most paragraphs of the interpretation include at least one of those phrases.
   26.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 317.
   27.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 315.

distinctively Mayan. In Jenkins's reading, their archetypal meaning effaces their historical particularity and ensures their contemporary relevance or, for that matter, their relevance to any period that might be identified as the ending of a cycle of time.

Jenkins's prophetic reading of the *Popol Vuh* effectively complements his wariness about emphasizing the precise date of 21 December 2012 as marking the transformation of the world as we know it. Just as his reading of the calendar opens up a temporal millennial zone that can stretch, in his estimation, for decades, so does his emphasis on only the most general archetypal characteristics of the characters of the *Popol Vuh* increase his opportunities for applying their 'lessons' to multiple contemporary situations. The effect of Jenkins's generalizing reading of the ancient evidence is to create a diffuse set of expectations for some sort of loosely defined transformation whose beginnings may or may not be clearly evident on the day that appears to end a massive cycle in the Mayan long count calendar. What Jenkins loses in specificity and urgency, he gains in broad applicability.

It is surprising, then, to see Jenkins abandon that strategy of reading when he comes to the end of his interpretation of the *Popol Vuh*. In a striking reversal of his previous predilection for vague archetypal readings, Jenkins offers this pointed commentary:

> The Maya prophecy for 2012 is literally verified in a person who appeared, ruled, and ruined so much while seeking to exercise great control over humanity, all in service to his own selfish purposes. The prophesied appearance of Seven Macaw came to pass, and his name was George W. Bush.[28]

Although Jenkins then quickly attempts to back away from that level of specificity in his interpretation, acknowledging that it was 'a bit hyperbolic', he appears to be unable to avoid identifying discrete individuals as conforming to the Seven Macaw archetype, among them Bush's Vice-President, Dick Cheney, and political advisor, Karl Rove. After all, Jenkins argues as if the identifications were indisputable, 'Seven Macaw is a code name for self-serving megalomania'.[29] Jenkins's venture into political allegory does not ignore the other figures in the story, either. He asserts that 'it is hard not to see Obama as the fulfillment of the second part of the Maya prophecy—namely, the restoration of the true ruler and the emergence of a unity consciousness represented by One Hunahpu'.[30] Jenkins's attempt to portray the Hero Twins story from the *Popol Vuh* as a prophecy about the 2008 election of President Obama runs counter to both his careful hedging about the significance of the 21 December 2012 date and his broad archetypal

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28. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 320.
29. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 326.
30. Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, p. 327.

reading of the story in the rest of his commentary. It reveals a thirst for contemporary relevance that is often expressed by millennialists. Not content with identifying a millennial zone that stretches at least for decades into an indefinite future, Jenkins succumbs to the desire to show that the Mayan evidence that he reads as prophecy has an up-to-the-minute relevance, including even the presidential election that took place in the November before the 2009 publication of his book.

   Jenkins's vacillation between treating the ancient sources as prophecies with definite contemporary references and treating them as more general indicators of a more gradual, but still significant, transformation of the world as we know it expresses neatly one of the dilemmas commonly faced by millennialists. The more specific they get in the application of prophecy to their current situations, the more likely they are to experience the dejection that comes with inevitable disconfirmation. The experience of a 'Great Disappointment' was not limited to the Millerites who looked forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ first sometime between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844, and then again on 22 October 1844; throughout history and across cultures it has been the common fate of millennial prophecies. By identifying George W. Bush as Seven Macaw and Barack Obama as One Hunahpu, Jenkins opens himself up, and any readers that he may have persuaded, to similar disappointment, especially if it becomes difficult to view Obama's presidency as successfully ushering in 'the emergence of a unity of consciousness'. For a certain audience (one more sympathetic to Obama's political orientation than to Bush's) Jenkins's identification of the two American presidents with figures from the *Popol Vuh* might add both specificity and urgency to his general millennial scenario, but his interpretive choice both limited his potential audience (partisans of former President Bush are not likely to see him as Seven Macaw) and exposed Jenkins prophetic reading of *Popol Vuh* to disconfirmation. In reading prophetically, as in many other endeavors, choices have consequences.

Re-Reading Prophetically:
The 'Chosen Vessel' in the Adventist Tradition

Disconfirmation, in fact, has always been the fate of millennial prophecies. Richard Landes, for example, notes that 'Rarely can any respectable historian say so categorically about any phenomenon, much more about a religious one, "In every case, this belief has been wrong"'.[31] But scholars of millennialism have long noted that initial disconfirmation does not seem to deter the

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31. Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 56.

proponents of a millennial message.[32] In his inventory of responses to failed prophecy, Landes lists the following: recalculating the date, predictions of a second coming, proselytizing, withdrawal from the hostility of the world, imposition of coercive purity and spiritualization of the notion of the coming kingdom.[33] Lorne Dawson offers a more economical list of strategies for dealing with the failure of prophecy: rationalization, reaffirmation and proselytization.[34] However they are identified and categorized, all of those responses to disconfirmation of prophecy involve a return to the sources out of which an original millennial prophecy had been constructed. Like clever carpenters who can harvest the boards from an old barn and turn them into cabinets and other items of furniture, disappointed millennialists return to the sources they used originally in order to make something new of them, again. They look there for both new resources that they may have initially over-looked and for familiar resources that can be put to new purposes. They pick and choose among the available materials in order to reinforce their shaken sense of the future, reassure themselves and others that all is not lost and chart again the path into the elusive new world.

The voluminous writings of a relatively obscure millennialist prophet, who styles himself the 'Chosen Vessel', provide a particularly clear and detailed account of a reaction, or actually successive reactions, to prophetic disconfir-mation. The person who has adopted that pen name was originally one of the Bible students who gathered around David Koresh in the 1980s and early 1990s at the Mount Carmel Center outside of Waco, Texas. Koresh had come to understand himself as the Lamb of God mentioned in Revelation 5, the only one who could open the scroll sealed with seven seals. Moreover, he preached that as the sealed scroll was being opened the events described in it would simultaneously unfold. Consequently, Koresh preached, and his audience appears to have accepted, that the events of the end were taking place in their own time. He asserted, for example, around 1991, that the events of the fifth seal were taking place.[35] The 28 February 1993 raid on the Mount Carmel Center by the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) upset Koresh's expectation that the events of the end times would

32. Jon R. Stone collects a variety of essays that respond to and critique the seminal contribution to the understanding of failed prophecy by Leon Festinger and his colleagues in *When Prophecy Fails* in Jon R. Stone (ed.), *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

33. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 57.

34. See Lorne L. Dawson, 'Prophetic Failure in Millennial Movements', in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (ed. Catherine Wessinger; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 150-70.

35. See James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 77, 53-58.

take place during his lifetime but in Israel.[36] Koresh's death in the 19 April 1993 fire further scrambled the expectations of his few remaining followers. In the days after the fire some of the remaining faithful revisited Koresh's pronouncements and found in them predictions that he would be resurrected from the dead, with a date around 13 December 1996 originally being the focus. When that date passed, the time of Koresh's return was pushed back to late August 1999.[37] The writings of the Chosen Vessel constitute a much more sustained and detailed attempt to come to terms with the apparent disconfirmation of the passionately held expectations of Koresh and his band of Bible students.

The Chosen Vessel was one of the nine survivors of the 19 April 1993 fire that destroyed the Mount Carmel Center and nearly everyone in it. He now explicitly identifies himself as the prophetic successor of David Koresh, who was himself the heir to a tradition of dissenting Seventh-day Adventists that goes back to the 1920s. In a series of documents posted on the websites www.sevenseals.com and <http://new-light-publications.com>, the Chosen Vessel strives to keep the Branch Davidians' millennial hopes alive by charting a distinctive response to the death of David Koresh, the near total demise of the community of his students and the apparent frustration of their millennial hopes. He repeatedly asserts that new prophetic revelations are continually being made available to the faithful, a legitimating strategy that resonates with one of the core tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist tradition since its origins. The Chosen Vessel claims to deliver a 'present truth' that surpasses even what Koresh or any of the Adventist prophets before him revealed.[38] That new truth centrally concerns the manner and timing of the imminent transformation of the world as we know it.

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36. See Tabor and Gallagher, *Why Waco?*, pp. 76-77. See also Kenneth G.C. Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The History and Beliefs of an Apocalyptic Sect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 327.

37. See Tabor and Gallagher, *Why Waco?*, p. 79; Newport, *The Branch Davidians*, p. 329.

38. On the Adventist notion of 'present truth', see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (1911), p. vii <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/books/gc/gcintroduction.html> (accessed 7 February 2012). White writes: 'yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of His Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings.' On David Koresh's particular 'new light' revelation about his sexual monopoly over all female Branch Davidians, see Newport, *The Branch Davidians*, pp. 199-201. Both Avraam's and Koresh's predecessors in the general Davidian lineage of Adventists appealed to the need for present truth. In the mid-1950s, for example, Ben Roden asserted that 'without the "living testimony" or the human instrumentality through whom God works to send the church fresh rays of light, she is dead and her connection with Heaven is

The author's initial efforts to preserve anonymity and to be known only by his preferred title have been progressively undermined both by the efforts of others to uncover his identity and by the autobiographical details included in some of his own texts. It is now completely clear that Renos Avraam is writing as the Chosen Vessel.[39] Avraam is a British national who was deported from the US to London on 31 May 2006, after he was released from jail, having served part of a 15-year sentence for his conviction on charges stemming from the 28 February 1993 shootout between agents of the BATF and residents of the Mount Carmel Center. His literary output began during his prison term and continues during his repatriation. Unfortunately, a complete collection of the Chosen Vessel's writings does not appear to have a permanent repository on the web; documents are put up and taken down primarily, it seems, in response to the Chosen Vessel's unfolding understanding of his own prophetic message.

Although he makes sweeping claims about the importance of his interpretation of the Bible, the Chosen Vessel is reticent about precisely what establishes its legitimacy. In his first book, a two-volume interpretation of the seven seals of Revelation begun around 1995, the first sentence asserts that 'it is a great privilege to be a part of the forwarding of the Revelations that are found within this inspired book'.[40] The capitalization of 'Revelations' appears to be a play on words. The Chosen Vessel had received revelations, and they most importantly concern the biblical book of Revelation. The author intimates that his inspiration is divine when he argues that 'to reject the explanation of prophecies contained in the Seven Seals, which are found in this book, is to reject the Holy Spirit'.[41] He makes the divine impetus for his teaching mission even clearer in his later screenplay, *A Star Falls from*

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cut off' ('The Branch' [Ben Roden], *Seven Letters to Florence Houteff and the Executive Council of the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association* [1978], letter 5, p. 11 <http://www.the-branch.org/Jesus'_New_Name_The_Branch_Day_Of_Atonement_Ben_Roden> [accessed 7 February 2012]).

39. On Avraam see Newport, *The Branch Davidians*, pp. 335-36. Newport's identification of the 'Chosen Vessel' is necessarily more tentative, given the time when he was writing. The Chosen Vessel includes biographical details in a screenplay formerly available on the <http://www.sevenseals.com> website entitled *A Star Falls from Heaven* (accessed 20 August 2010; copy in my possession). More recently, in a set of Frequently Asked Questions on <http://www.sevenseals.com>, Avraam unequivocally identifies himself as the Chosen Vessel: 'I [Renos Avraam] was a follower and with David Koresh until the last day of his death' (accessed 2 February 2012; copy in my possession).

40. The Chosen Vessel, *Seven Seals*, I.i; originally posted at <http://www.sevenseals.com> (no longer available; copy in my possession). The two volumes of more than 600 pages are not paginated consecutively; references will therefore be made to the volume and page.

41. The Chosen Vessel, *Seven Seals*, I.i.

Heaven, when he cites Hab. 2.2, 'and the Lord answered me, and said, "Write the vision and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it"', as referring to his prison experience in 1995.[42] The ambiguity of the word 'vision' again makes the Chosen Vessel's claim to extraordinary experience difficult to pin down. It could refer to a specific visionary experience, or, more broadly, to the Chosen Vessel's claim to have a complete, synoptic understanding of biblical prophecy. It appears that the Chosen Vessel's lack of specificity is as much as anything a calculated rhetorical ploy to assert his authority without courting any potential doubts about his actual experience.

From his first written work onward, the Chosen Vessel has left no doubt about precisely what his present truth reveals. In that initial extensive interpretation of the seven seals of the book of Revelation, he insists that 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord is at the door'.[43] The only question that remains is when the events of the end will actually transpire. For a time, at least, the Chosen Vessel seems to have latched on to the building expectations that 2012 would mark a turning point in human history. In 2007, he produced a book with the ominous title, *August 2012: It All Begins as Foretold*.[44] That text betrays absolutely no interest in supposed Mayan prophecies, as its focus on August rather than December indicates, but appears to have used 2012 as a convenient indicator for the prophetic declaration that major changes can be expected in a few short years. Some traces of a popular notion that 2012 will usher in catastrophic events may nonetheless be detected in the Chosen Vessel's proclamation that 'We are living in the last generation that will be hit by a huge comet'.[45] Virtually all of the exposition that follows that initial pronouncement is devoted to painstaking biblical exegesis designed to establish the comet scenario. Since the 2007 prophecy that the destruction of the earth would come from collision with a comet, the Chosen Vessel has held fast to that image of the earth's demise, even as he gently nudged the date a bit farther into the future. At the beginning of 2012 the <www.sevenseals.com> website bore the headline, with reference to Rev. 9.11, 'Comet 2014: And His Name is Destroyer'.[46] At that time the website offered book-length interpretations of two millennialist biblical books, Daniel and Revelation, another treatise entitled *Just the Truth* and a set of Frequently Asked Questions.

42.   The Chosen Vessel, *A Star Falls From Heaven*, p. 14.
43.   The Chosen Vessel, *Seven Seals*, II.224.
44.   The Chosen Vessel, *August 2012: It All Begins as Foretold*; originally available at <http://www.sevenseals.com>; the book is now archived at <http://http://new-light-publications.com/august-2012.php> (accessed 2 February 2012).
45.   The Chosen Vessel, *August 2012*, p. 7.
46.   See <http://www.sevenseals.com> (accessed 7 February 2012).

The centrality of the comet scenario comes through in the interpretations of both biblical books. Early in his exegesis of Daniel, the Chosen Vessel focuses on the image that appeared to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar of a statue with a golden head, silver chest and arms, bronze midsection, legs of iron and feet of mixed iron and clay (see Dan. 2.31-35). Like the figure Daniel in the biblical book, the Chosen Vessel offers an interpretation, but his new reading makes the text refer to the Chosen Vessel's own present and near future. He writes concerning the stone that shatters the figure's feet (Dan. 2.35) that 'The stone that smites the statue refers to a large fragment of a comet. In our day, the statue represents the U.S.A.'s capital and her nation.'[47] The destruction will be catastrophic and total: 'This means the comet's final effect of erupting lava will dissolve all things on the Earth's face (see Isa. 28:22)'.[48] The Chosen Vessel also finds confirmation of his apocalyptic message in the book of Revelation. He asserts:

> From Revelation Chapter 6, the scroll of life is revealing its record pertaining to events that it will have witnessed taking place in this last generation (hence, the record pertaining to the comet's impact and its effects in *Revelation 6:12-17*; *8:10*; *9:1-4*; *18:1-4*) and what takes place during the initial 1,000 years, and a new Earth (according to the written record concerning a new Earth in *Revelation 21:1-7*).[49]

Without specifying a particular day on which those events will commence, the Chosen Vessel leaves no doubt that they will be happening very soon. He writes in *Just the Truth* that

> it will take place in 2014 when a comet impact's [*sic*] the USA causing a massive earthquake. This great earthquake triggers a super volcano in Yellowstone National Park to erupt, as well as many other volcanoes. For five months, ash, smoke, and debris will be continually ejected into the atmosphere. This will plunge the USA into darkness; hence, the light of the sun by day and moon and stars by night will have been, as it were, blotted out. With no sunlight, vegetation will perish. Famine and anarchy will then prevail in the USA and surrounding nations.[50]

In the Chosen Vessel's complex and evolving millennialist scenario, the period between August 2012 and sometime in 2014 will witness the events that usher in the complete destruction of the current world. Although he spends quite a lot of time trying to align various temporal references from the

47. The Chosen Vessel, *Book of Daniel Revealed*, Chapter 1 <http://www.sevenseals.com> (accessed 9 February 2012).

48. The Chosen Vessel, *Book of Daniel Revealed*, Chapter 1.

49. The Chosen Vessel, *Book of Revelation Revealed*, Introduction <http://www.sevenseals.com> (accessed 9 February 2012).

50. The Chosen Vessel, *Just the Truth*, <http://www.sevenseals.com> (accessed 9 February 2012).

Bible with the sequence of the end, the Chosen Vessel appears to use his references to 2012 and 2014 mostly as ciphers for the notion that the end will be occurring 'soon'. The direct mention of '2012' in the title of his 2007 book and the prominent display of '2014' on the <www.sevenseals. com> website are both designed to keep his audience in a state of what Landes calls 'semiotic arousal', a hyper-awareness of the potential for anything to be a sign of the impending transformation of the world.[51] The Chosen Vessel's general response to failure of the anticipated end to materialize during the lifetime of David Koresh was insistently to reassure his audience that it would indeed happen 'soon'.

Three specific strategies undergird the Chosen Vessel's effort to maintain heightened expectation of the catastrophic destruction of this world and the dawning of a new one. The first involves an elaborate justification of his claim to present a new and improved version of David Koresh's message. The second provides a biblically based rationale for his constantly evolving message. The third directly addresses the apparent disconfirmation of his own prophecies.

From the start of his prophetic career, the Chosen Vessel devoted considerable attention to describing his relationship to David Koresh. In an ingenious image, he takes advantage of the physical properties of a scroll and the mention in Rev. 5.1 that the heavenly scroll had writing on both sides. The Chosen Vessel offers the striking notion that 'the Lamb [Koresh] revealed the mysteries written on one side of the scroll unto his Bride [the community]. The Chosen Vessel who reveals the other side of the scroll was made equal to the Lamb after receiving the Lamb's Reward (*scroll, book of Seven Seals; see Rev. 10:8-10*).'[52] While the Chosen Vessel positions his own prophetic mission as being in continuity with that of Koresh, he also clearly asserts that he is revealing a present truth that goes well beyond what his predecessor could offer. The Chosen Vessel reinforces that depiction of his connection to Koresh by appealing to a series of biblical 'types' that illuminate their relationship. He argues concerning Koresh that,

> since he claimed to be the Elijah messenger and a David [like old king David], there is always a messenger that comes after Elijah. In the past Elisha came after Elijah. Yashua/Jesus came after John the Baptist, and King Solomon came after old King David. Old King David, Elijah, and John the Baptist all knew their successor, being King Solomon, Elisha, and Yashua/ Jesus, just as I [Renos Avraam] was a follower and with David Koresh until the last day of his death.[53]

51. See Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 98-99.
52. The Chosen Vessel, *Seven Seals*, I.14; see I.172, 253. My explanatory additions are in square brackets.
53. The Chosen Vessel, 'FAQ' <http://www.sevenseals.com> (accessed 9 February 2012).

Koresh's teachings are thus portrayed as both valuable and incomplete. Anyone who accepted Koresh as a millennialist prophet must now recognize that his particular message is being supplemented by new revelations.[54]

The Chosen Vessel also explicitly claims that his insight into the divine plan is continually deepening. In *August 2012: It All Begins as Foretold*, he declares that he 'progressively receives the understanding of all written prophecies in the word of God'.[55] In the set of FAQs on the <www.sevenseals.com> website at the beginning of 2012, he expands that conception of continuing revelations and links it to a biblical warrant. He asserts that 'From the beginning of when I started to reveal my message from the Bible it was as a light/truth that gets clearer/brighter and brighter until the perfect day when the predictions are fulfilled. This is why it says in Prov. 4.18 "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day".'[56] The Chosen Vessel also returns to the touchstone image of the scroll sealed with seven seals to reinforce his argument and underscore the imminence of the coming end. In his clearest justification for his changing perspectives on the time of the end, he asserts:

> I can only reveal the message as I figuratively removed each of the seven seals/bands and then unrolled the scroll to expose more words (that were previously hidden while the scroll was rolled up). Now the scroll is unrolled I can read the whole scroll, which evidently takes three periods of 2300 days to unseal its seven seals and read and finish reading the unrolled scroll. Therefore as the prefect [*sic*] day, concerning the fulfillment of the two witnesses written biblical predictions gets nearer and nearer and nearer, the light from the unrolled scroll is getting clearer/brighter and brighter and brighter.[57]

In that passage, the Chosen Vessel's own realization of his deepening understanding of the events attending the end is most clearly signaled by his use of 'evidently'. His use of the term implies that he is still learning about his own prophetic mission, not least about how long it will take him to comprehend the full message of the scroll. His statement also echoes Koresh's notion that the unsealing of each of the seals will also cause the events associated with them to take place. If that is the case, the Chosen Vessel's reckoning of a total of 6900 days would again put the time of the end sometime between 2012 (some 6900 days after the destruction of Mount Carmel and the death of David Koresh) and 2014 (some 6900 days after the beginning of the Chosen Vessel's prophetic career in 1995).

54. See The Chosen Vessel, *Seven Seals*, I.303.
55. The Chosen Vessel, *August 2012: It All Begins as Foretold* (accessed 2 February 2012).
56. The Chosen Vessel, 'FAQ' (accessed 9 February 2012).
57. The Chosen Vessel, 'FAQ'.

The Chosen Vessel's insistence that his own prophetic understanding of the scriptures is constantly evolving enables him to maintain the fervent expectation that the end is indeed near despite apparently disconfirming events in 1993 (the destruction of Mount Carmel and the death of David Koresh), 1996 and 1999 (the failures of the resurrected David Koresh to return) and potentially even August 2012 (when the unfolding of the end will only begin, not culminate). It opens up a temporal window for the fulfillment of millennialist prophecy between 2012 and 2014, a window that is substantially smaller and more clearly defined than Jenkins's much vaguer reference to 21 December 2012 marking the beginning of a temporal millennial zone that might stretch for 'many decades'. The greater specificity enables the Chosen Vessel to emphasize the urgency of his message, as his triple repetition of 'nearer' and 'brighter' in the passage above attests. It also makes the Chosen Vessel's message more open to potential disconfirmation, but he also anticipates that possibility in his self-justification.

In his FAQs the Chosen Vessel addresses the issue of disconfirmation of prophecy forthrightly. In response to a question that anticipates the failure of a comet to arrive in 2012, he replies that it has always been part of the mission given to him by God to 'update my message since my understanding/ knowledge continually increased'.[58] Beyond that forthright admission of fallibility, however, the Chosen Vessel turns the tables to suggest that apparent disconfirmation can have a salutary effect on his followers. He argues that 'by Elohiym employing this method [as frustrating and tiring it is to myself and the people who believe my message], it tests the spirit/mind of people who claim to believe by seeing if they have what it takes to soldier on after being continually disappointed'.[59] Further, those who criticize the Chosen Vessel for having to revise his message are, according to him, simply clarifying in time for the coming judgment who is really on the side of God and who is against him and thus worthy of condemnation. In addition to those responses to apparent disconfirmation, the Chosen Vessel also makes the argument that disconfirmation itself has been predicted by the Bible and consequently does not diminish his status as a prophet. He writes that 'if the prophet/messenger can show from the Book of Revelation and other Old Testament writings that it was biblically written that he would make predictions that would fail, then he is not a false prophet'.[60] Failed prophecies are actually part of his divinely approved mission. In a move designed to insulate him from the negative impact of failed prophecy on his credibility, the

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58. The Chosen Vessel, 'FAQ'. It should be noted that the Chosen Vessel has apparently written both the questions and answers in the FAQs.
59. The Chosen Vessel, 'FAQ'.
60. The Chosen Vessel, 'FAQ'.

Chosen Vessel asserts directly that he 'was able to reveal that the failure was a part of the fulfillment of prophecy'.[61]

In his efforts to cope, both retrospectively and prospectively, with the kind of disconfirmation that has so far always awaited millennialist prophets, the Chosen Vessel calls on a full array of strategies. He deals with the past frustration of his fellow students of David Koresh by qualifying the significance of their prophet and re-directing the attention of the surviving few to a new message that both continues and supersedes Koresh's. The Chosen Vessel also forthrightly acknowledges that his own prophetic insight into the meaning of the scriptures and particularly the seven seals of the book of Revelation is a work in progress. As his understanding deepens, his message changes. Most strikingly, the Chosen Vessel directly tackles the deeply threatening issue of the disconfirmation of prophecy. In a fascinating twist of argument, he posits that if the scriptures are understood correctly, they can be read as actually prophesying the disconfirmation of prophecy. Disconfirmation thus actually reinforces the Chosen Vessel's status as a prophet because scripture itself predicts that a prophet's predictions will be disconfirmed. The Chosen Vessel's creative prophetic re-reading of scripture constitutes an inventive attempt to insulate his confident prediction of the earth's imminent collision with a comet and the ensuing destruction of the world as we know it from the corrosive effects of disconfirmation.

Conclusions

The study of millennialism has a future simply because millennialism itself has one. Despite the truly abysmal track record of predictions that 'this generation' would see the earnestly hoped for transformation of the world as we know it, the root issues that millennialism in its various forms addresses—what Catherine Wessinger calls 'the unpleasant limitations of the human condition'[62]—remain intractably present. The persistence of the problems that millennialism addresses, however they are framed, is at least matched by the creativity with which individual millennialists strive to solve them. For example, by reading his ancient evidence prophetically, John Major Jenkins is able to make texts like Monument 6 from Tortuguero and the *Popol Vuh* provide a hopeful perspective on what he sees as a 'contemporary global crisis' brought on by rampant 'self-serving megalomania' and embodied in a 'many-headed monster—the corporation…'[63] Similarly, by reading and re-reading his ancient sources prophetically, the Chosen Vessel is able to

61.   The Chosen Vessel, 'FAQ'.

62.   Catherine Wessinger, 'Millennialism in Cross Cultural Perspective', in Wessinger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, pp. 3-24 (5).

63.   Jenkins, *The 2012 Story*, pp. 340, 326, 330, respectively.

counteract the potentially damaging effects of the death of David Koresh and his failure to return in resurrected form and to keep alive the sparkling promise from Revelation 21 of 'a new heaven and a new earth'.

The double focus that millennialism typically adopts is key to understanding its apparently limitless capacity to wrest hope from the universally encountered despair of disconfirmation, to overcome 'Great Disappointment' and renew even greater hope. By reading various cultural wisdom traditions prophetically, millennialism exploits their inherent ambiguities and emphasizes their fundamental malleability. Since millennialists make conscious decisions to interpret both the past and the present in ways that support a hopeful vision of the future, the study of millennialism needs to pay careful attention to the ways in which they 'quarry into tradition' to identify the building blocks from which they construct their millennial visions. Jonathan Z. Smith's description of 'apocalyptic' in the ancient Mediterranean world as a 'learned phenomenon' needs to be taken seriously not only as a description of developments in the particular religious traditions of Late Antiquity with which he was directly concerned but as a broadly applicable characterization of millennialism.[64] Smith's observation that 'the paradigmatic concerns of the scribe…led to the development of complex exegetical techniques devoted to the task of discovering the everchanging relevance of ancient precedents and archetypes'[65] holds true, I argue, for millennialism in general. Millennialist messages are everywhere generated in a process in which 'texts are used and reused, glossed, interpreted and reinterpreted in a continual process of "updating" the materials'.[66]

Certainly to millennialists themselves, it simply does not matter whether their interpretations of traditional wisdom receive the imprimatur of those social institutions that claim the power to differentiate between truth and error. Although millennialists like Jenkins have come in for at least their fair share of criticism from academic specialists on the Mayan world, they nonetheless conceive of their interpretive efforts as serious intellectual pursuits. Indeed, many millennialists who prize what Michael Barkun has called 'stigmatized knowledge' approach their interpretive tasks with a remarkable singleness of purpose, attention to detail and synthesizing reach. As Barkun notes 'the literature of stigmatized knowledge enthusiastically mimics mainstream scholarship'.[67] What is important for the study of millennialism is not, for example, whether the Chosen Vessel's ongoing efforts to establish the correct interpretation of the book of Revelation can persuade

64. See Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Wisdom and Apocalyptic', in *Map Is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1978]), pp. 67-87.

65. Smith, 'Wisdom and Apocalyptic', p. 77.

66. Smith, 'Wisdom and Apocalyptic', p. 77.

67. Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, p. 28.

scholars, but rather that his exegetical enterprise be recognized as the fundamental mechanism that drives the formation and promulgation of his millennialist message.

Millennial messages are formed and re-formed in the fluid and reciprocal interactions among interpreters, texts or traditions of cultural wisdom and contexts. Interpreters strive to furnish their credentials as trustworthy readers of both their traditions and contemporary contexts by a variety of strategies, ranging from ingenuous claims that they are simply reproducing the message of authoritative texts to direct or indirect claims to divine inspiration. Having established their credibility, they strive to align traditional sources of wisdom with current events in order to wring fresh meaning from both of them, as Jenkins does with the *Popol Vuh* and the Chosen Vessel does with the book of Revelation, among other biblical texts. Millennialism is avid for meaning; it feeds on what Landes calls 'semiotic arousal'. Both the initial construction of a millennial message and the subsequent adjustments that it will necessarily have to undergo are driven by decisions to read both tradition and the millennialist's contemporary situation prophetically. Understanding the ways in which prophetic readings are generated, sustained, extended, defended and adjusted reveals some of the crucial mechanisms by which inchoate yearnings for a transformed world make the transition into passionate proclamations and programs for action.

THE IMAGINATION OF THE MILLENNIAL MIND

Kenneth G.C. Newport

Contrary to 1 Cor. 13.8 prophecies almost never fail.[1] This is not to say, of course, that expected events that have confidently been predicted on the basis of biblical texts sometimes appear, at least to the outsider, not to occur, for such is a common occurrence: dead Messiahs never come back it seems, and even Jesus himself, at best, does not come back on time; the world never ends to order and the Antichrist is not the best time-keeper. But for those who have invested much in such predictions (and they are numerous) an apparent non-event will almost always turn out to be an actual fulfilment of the prophecy—just not in the way expected.

The phenomenon of apparently 'failed' prophecies turning out actually to be fulfilled has, of course, been addressed at length before. However, almost all the work that has been done in this area has been from the perspective of social-science and/or cognitive dissonance theory.[2] Those studies are important and we can learn much from them. Here, however, I want to come at this question from a different perspective and to look at one very precise ingredient in the overall mix of post-failure survival strategies. It is the biblical text that will be central to the discussion as it is this text that so often forms the basis of the initial belief in prophetic fulfilment, at least among the groups that are in focus here. As we shall see, the ways in which the text is interpreted and re-interpreted can be instructive, as the highly imaginative schemes often give some insight into the lengths to which a group may go in an effort (usually successful) to lessen the strain that cognitive dissonance brings once a 'failed' prophecy has occurred. This is an informative area for

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1. 'Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away'; unless otherwise indicated, the KJV is used here since it is the version that is principally used by those under discussion.

2. The classic study is Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken and Stanley Schacter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956); see also Jon R. Stone (ed.), *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy* (London: Routledge, 2000).

study in itself; in the context of this volume, however, it is one that relates directly to the future of millennial studies. This is so since, if the past is a guide to the future, then the past history of prophetic eisegesis[3] may give some fairly significant clue to the ways in which those who are millennially disappointed in the future may seek to recover. The survival instinct is strong and, as we shall see, it is not only the beast of Rev. 13.3 who can recover from an apparently deadly wound. Prophetic groups too can often survive what to a non-believer may appear to be a pretty obviously fatal blow, namely the non-fulfilment of a clearly predicted event. It is not so much the fact of their survival, however, nor yet the social or psychological reasons for it that we have in view in this chapter; it is rather the at times extremely complex thought processes, not to mention impressive imaginative spirit, that enable the disappointed millennialist to continue to look to the future with confidence and hope. If such processes and the true extent of the capacity for rethinking are understood, cause for confidence that millennial studies as a discipline will itself continue is established. Indeed, only those of little faith could doubt this; faith, that is, in the way in which sheer ingenuity and, at times, monumental imaginative leaps and truly impressive eisegetical contortions can and will be able to transform potentially crushing disappointment into actual renewed expectation.

In the latter part of the chapter I turn attention to some other highly imaginative readings of scripture that have not as yet passed their prophetic 'fulfil by date'. Again, what is noted here is the almost infinite malleability of the text as it comes under the scrutiny of the determined millennially inclined reader. Of interpretations, it seems, there will be no end, for, as Jesus says, 'every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old' (Mt. 13.52). The rich seams of meaning that are understood to lie in the text are there to be explored and into that treasure trove ventures the intrepid disappointed prophetic believer. Soon he or she will emerge with a new reading which gives new meaning and hence a lifeline to an apparently shipwrecked millennial community is thrown. In time that too may turn out to be in need of adjustment. But the mine is never shut, the uncut stones it contains never exhausted; the timetable of the End is never without the possibility of just one more final revision.

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3. I use the word 'eisegesis' here in the way in which I have argued for it in Kenneth G.C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), namely the art of reading into a text pretty much whatever the reader wants, or needs, to find there.

The Millerite-Adventist-Davidian-Branch Davidian Tradition

I have examined in detail elsewhere the history and beliefs of one particular apocalyptic community, namely the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas.[4] This group shot to fame in 1993 when it became the focal point of a wide debate in America regarding the government's understanding of and response to fringe religious belief. The media pictures of a burning 'Mt Carmel', the home of the Branch Davidians, became one of the lasting images of the late twentieth century, and the debate it sparked has been as long-running as it has intense. More than eighty deaths resulted from the confrontation, including those of some twenty children and four ATF agents. What was perhaps not as appreciated in 1993 as it is now, however, is that the Branch Davidians were themselves heirs of a prophetic tradition stretching back to the 1830s: that is, to the early preaching of William Miller and the rise of the Millerites. It is a history punctuated by prophetic disappointment followed by imaginative eisegesis, and an understanding of it flushes out some of the strategies that the disappointed have to hand as they continue to wait for the End.

The Millerites were followers of William Miller, a New England farmer turned prophetic exegete who came to the conclusion that Jesus would return to earth sometime in 1843. This was based upon a reading of Dan. 8.14 and the '2300' day prophecy there given: 'unto 2,300 days then shall the sanctuary be cleansed'. Using the standard Protestant historicist exegetical methodology of his day, Miller took these 2300 'days' to be so many years and added them to the date 457 BCE (a date worked out from Dan. 9.25). This gave Miller the date of 1843 for the return of Jesus, and he set about preaching this news with understandable urgency and energy. The date of 1843 was a mistake, however, for it did not allow for the fact that there is no year '0': 1 BCE is followed by 1 CE. As a consequence the date was adjusted to 1844. As things got closer a more specific date in March was set and then, when that failed to come about, a final date of 22 October 1844 was given. There was huge excitement as the day drew closer with tales of Millerites behaving in quite extraordinary ways (although quite rational ones in the context of the precisely focused belief in the return of Jesus). Some gave away money and possessions, others did not see the need to plant crops, while others, it is alleged, assembled on hill-tops on the day of the Lord's predicted return (possibly in specially crafted 'ascension robes') so that they would be just that little bit closer to their redemption when the heavens parted and Jesus reappeared.[5]

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4.   Kenneth G.C. Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The History and Beliefs of an Apocalyptic Sect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

5.   See in particular Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry: A Defense of William Miller and the Millerites* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1944); David L. Rowe,

The day came. Nothing happened. As one disappointed Millerite, Hiram Edson, was later to comment:

> Our expectations were raised high, and thus we looked for our coming Lord until the clock tolled 12 at midnight. The day had then passed and our disappointment became a certainty. Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.[6]

The number of 'disappointed' Millerites has been estimated at some 50,000 and from the wreck of Millerism there arose perhaps as many as thirty-three different groups. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, can be traced back to these events, although the line of descent is not unbroken.[7] Another group that is even more obviously a direct descendant of the Millerite movement are the Seventh-day Adventists.

The transition from disappointed Millerite to Seventh-day Adventist is not particularly complicated, but it did require some determined efforts on the part of some in the movement to stabilize the now dangerously listing ship. After all, this was a community that put great store by the Bible and hence some explanation of what had gone wrong had to be given, and it had to given on the basis of the biblical text itself.

The first major step was taken the very next day after the 'great disappointment', that is, 23 October 1844, when one of the Millerites, Hiram Edson, who is quoted above, had something divinely revealed to him (quite how that revelation came is not important for present purposes). As we have seen, Miller expected that at the end of the 2300 days of Dan. 8.14 Jesus would 'cleanse the sanctuary': that is, so Miller argued, come to earth to cleanse it of sin. On the morning of 23 October, however, Edson came to a different conclusion. The 'cleansing of the sanctuary' mentioned in Dan. 8.14 was not, he now understood, the return of Christ to earth, but rather Christ's

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'Millerites: A Shadow Portrait', in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 1-16.

6.   Appendix 1, in Numbers and Butler (eds.), *The Disappointed*, p. 215.

7.   Were there time it would be useful to outline here the imaginative eisegetical tradition of this group, among which the year 1914 came to be the focus of attention. When that date came and went, the scriptures were searched, and it was discovered that actually 1914 had seen the fulfilment of prophecy, just not in the way predicted. Rather, the outbreak of the First World War in that year fulfilled Mt. 24.7, 'nation shall rise against nation', and the starting point of the prophecies that follow in the next verses culminate in the promise that 'this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled'. There have been other dates set by the community, the most widely accepted of which was 1975. See further Joseph F. Zygmunt, 'Prophetic Failure and Chiliastic Identity', in Stone (ed.), *Expecting Armageddon*, pp. 65-85.

entry into the heavenly 'holy of holies' in the sanctuary, there to begin the final phase of his heavenly ministry *prior* to coming to earth. Drawing on Hebrews, Edson argued that just as the priests in the earthly sanctuary ministered the 'daily' but, once a year, the High Priest went into the holy of holies to complete the mediatorial work, so Christ, the true high priest in the true (heavenly) sanctuary must, prior to coming to earth, go into the heavenly Holy of Holies to complete the work of salvation. It was this, he said, that had happened on 22 October 1844.

This exegetical adjustment was a masterstroke on Edson's part and effectively threw a theological lifeline to those who now found themselves floundering in some very uncertain waters. Perhaps the date had been right after all; maybe it was the event that had been misunderstood. What is more, unlike the uncompromising claim 'Jesus will return visibly to this earth on 22 October 1844', this new one 'yesterday Jesus moved from the heavenly Holy Place into the heavenly Holy of Holies' could in no way be proved wrong, since there is no conceivable way in which it could be tested. The potential long term viability of the movement was hence assured.

Further study revealed that not only had the prophecy of the 2300 days in fact been fulfilled exactly, if on a plane not open to the human eye, but that even the 'bitter' experience through which the Millerites had come had itself clearly been predicted in scripture, specifically in Revelation 10 in the image of the eating of the 'little book'. The Millerites had expected the end, but the end had not come. Like the experience of eating that 'little book' described in Revelation 10 ('And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter'), the experience of the Millerites had been first sweet (as they preached Christ's return), then bitter (as they experienced disappointment). But they read on further in that chapter and discovered that they now had a task to do: to prophesy again, for what does the last verse of Revelation 10 say? 'And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings'. Hence the transition was complete, and this small group, whose fondest hopes had been dashed with the striking of midnight on 22 October, were now renewed in evangelistic energy and sense of divine purpose. Not only did they now understand their past, but knew their task for the future and had confidence for the present. Along with this came the reassurance that while understandings of scripture may be wrong, the scriptures themselves are absolutely trustworthy.

What we see with the emergence of the Adventists from the Millerites is common enough in the reading strategies adopted by those who have come through prophetic disappointment; it is a strategy which can, as in this case, work well. We may refer to it as the 'right date, wrong event' approach. Miller was right: 22 October 1844 was a momentous date in the history of

salvation. His mistake was to think that it was the date of Christ's return to this earth, when in fact it was the date upon which Jesus had left the heavenly 'holy place' and entered into the heavenly 'most holy place'; the book of Hebrews is central to all this, of course. It may be difficult for an outsider to accept the validity of the early Adventist argument but—and this is the heart of the matter—how, exactly, would one disprove it? Or, to give just one other example of a 'right date wrong event' tactic, how would one go about demonstrating to a convinced Jehovah's Witness that Jesus did not come back to this earth 'spiritually' in 1914?[8] The past and present of millennial studies is littered with examples of this sort of eisegetical manoeuvring as potentially disappointed groups come to terms with the fact that things have not worked out as confidently predicted but have nevertheless proved them right. What is important as one contemplates the future of millennial studies, it seems, is not to underestimate the extent to which the millennial mind is able to find hitherto unearthed treasures and perform the impressive mental turns to enable such discoveries to take place. To write all this off as the work of those whose intellect, or sanity, may be questioned is to fail to appreciate the at times exceptionally complex schemes that arise from the ashes of apparent failure. One may think that the failure of the clear-cut prediction 'Jesus will return to this earth visibly on 22 October, 1844' could not but result in the collapse of the movement that proclaimed it, and the stopping in its tracks of the trajectory it represented. If so, the exceptionally self-confident Seventh-day Adventist Church, which now boasts some seventeen million members, acts as a reminder that things do not always work out as one might predict.

The Davidian Seventh-day Adventists

It was from the Seventh-day Adventists that another group was later to come: the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. The key figure here is Victor Houteff, a Bulgarian immigrant to the USA. In 1929, Houteff began to challenge the Adventist Church leaders on a number of doctrinal points, most specifically those related to end-time events. His reinterpretation of the scriptures was far-reaching. Perhaps the most central issue related to Houteff's confident prediction that before the end came, indeed as a necessary precursor to it, God would fulfil his promise to restore the Kingdom of David; this promise is found extensively in the Hebrew Scriptures, and hence the inclusion of the word 'Davidian' in the title of this group. To cut a very long story very short, we note only that in 1935 Houteff moved his followers from California to Waco in Texas. The plan was to work from that location (Houteff had figured out that Waco is more or less at the geographical centre of the world) to call

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8.   See n. 7, above.

and gather Revelation's 144,000: a literal number whom Houteff, as the man with the inkhorn in Ezekiel 9, would mark out for salvation. All 144,000, said Houteff, were already in the Seventh-day Adventist community, but that community was the one depicted in Revelation 17 and 18 as the Whore of Babylon that had now become the habit of everything unclean. His job, he said, was to call faithful Adventists to repentance. Drawing on Mic. 6.9, he referred to his message as that of the 'Shepherd's Rod'. Eventually Houteff's followers came to believe that Houteff himself was the anti-typical, end-time King David and that it was he who would lead the people of God, the literal 144,000, into a literal end-time kingdom in the Holy Land. But on 5 February 1955, Houteff died. Again the question arose: Had prophecy failed?

The death of Houteff was a serious blow to the community he had founded, and there ensued a period of crisis that almost saw the movement's total collapse. Problems came on several fronts. Not the least was the thorny question of why Victor had died, or, more precisely, how a dead person would be able to rule over a literal kingdom in Israel upon its expected rapidly approaching establishment. The issue was very real, for it is evident that even before Houteff's death there were many in the community who believed that he was the end-time King. Some rapid rethinking was hence necessary.

The most interesting response came from Victor's own wife, who within a relatively short period of time had discovered an exegetical escape route. The key was the book of Revelation chaps. 11 and 12 and, in particular, the period of 1260 days that is mentioned there. Houteff's wife argued that this was a literal 1260-day period, during which the church of God (understood to be symbolized by the woman of Rev. 12) would undergo a period in the wilderness, that is, a period without the leadership of a prophet. However, at the end of the 1260 days, the work would be finished; Houteff would be resurrected and the marking of those destined for salvation, the work of the man with the inkhorn in Ezekiel 9, would be completed. Florence Houteff then played the trump card and indicated the very day that these events would unfold: 22 April 1959. Interestingly, this was not quite 1260 days after Houteff's death but rather 1260 days from the date when the date itself was announced. The reason for this slight adjustment is pretty obvious: given the centrality of the Passover symbolism in Davidian theology, Florence Houteff was keen to have her husband's resurrection occur during the Passover season. In fact, even though it can be shown that Florence had come to the views she had on the 1260 day period well before the date upon which she communicated them to the community, it is evident that she purposely delayed the announcement so that the anticipated resurrection would take place at Passover 1959. The community hence had a new focus and a new date that was loaded with Davidian symbolism, coming as it did at Passover. Excitement grew. As the expected date drew near, about one thousand

Davidian Seventh-day Adventists arrived at the Mt Carmel Centre in Waco. But again nothing happened.[9]

Florence Houteff's reworking of the group's understanding of Revelation 11 and 12 prediction of the end had, however, at least postponed things and given the community time to recover from the blow of Victor's death. It may have been a rash move on Florence's part, since in effect she sacrificed potential long-term viability for a short-term quick fix and like Miller, but unlike Edson, had set up a hypothesis that could be tested (not a wise move in this context). However, while many of the Davidians were preparing for the expected end of the 1260 days in 1959, there were some who took the opportunity provided by this breathing space to rethink things on an even more radical level. One of those persons (and he was not the only one) was Ben Roden—founder of the Branch Davidians.

The Branch Davidians

For the next thirty years or so (i.e. from 1962 to 1993), the Branch Davidians remained in relative obscurity. Within the community, however, there was intense biblical-interpretative work going on, as first Ben Roden himself and then his wife Lois continued to work out a complex biblical-interpretative scheme leading up to the end of the world. Finally, one Vernon Howell, otherwise known as David Koresh, took over. He too sought to sustain the movement and to explain why things had not happened in the way that previous leaders of the movement had predicted; he also laid out his own biblically saturated scheme.

Central to Koresh's understanding of things was his view that Revelation predicts the coming of a sequence of seven angels—or messengers of God. These seven angels, and Koresh had their names listed, gradually reveal God's truth. This was a good move on Koresh's part, for it enabled him both to affirm the importance of others in the tradition that some held in high regard while at the same time giving an explanation of how not all of what they had said had come to pass. Figures like Ellen White (the Seventh-day Adventist prophetess), the Houteffs and the Rodens did not understand fully, though they understood in part (cf. 1 Cor. 13.12). Koresh himself, however, as the seventh and final messenger, had a full understanding of things and was hence to be listened to with particular attentiveness. Revelation 10.7 was central. 'But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets'. This is again an impressive bit of eisegesis. It is effective too, for it has the advantage of not devaluing the status of those to whom the millennial group have heretofore looked for guidance on their way

9.   On this see further Newport, *The Branch Davidians*, pp. 95-114.

to the Kingdom. Although Koresh was to take the group in some radically new directions, there was in theory no break with the past. Koresh could claim Miller, Houteff and both Rodens as his precursors, despite the fact that each had made prophetic predictions that had apparently failed.

Key points of Koresh's predictive timetable for the end of the age were in fact fulfilled, probably because he engineered it that way, though that is another story. He, like Jesus, did die at the age of 33 and his death, again like that of Jesus, did take place around Passover time. His expectation that his own death would immediately be followed by the end of the Age does not, however, appear to have worked out—at least that is the view to which an unbeliever might come. Those inside the movement are, on the other hand, rather more resilient in their expectations and in the wake of the catastrophic fire that took place on 19 April 1993 have been able to show how the Bible itself both predicted the events of Waco and also gives an account of what is to happen from that point on. What we see again is some considerable exercising of the imagination, but it is a process that cannot be cut free from the text itself. The Branch Davidian remnant community is microscopic, and it is this rather than running out of eisegetical space that may yet prove its demise. But still, even in this tiny religious group, there is a determination to find the answer to apparent failure and to do so by agreeing on the (new) interpretation of the Bible, the authority of which is not in any question whatsoever among the believers. The instinct for survival is great. Even the death of the vast majority of the members does not dissuade those that remain from seeking to remain faithful. And what is true of this group is true of many others: with the passing of any one community, there comes another that is equally determined. Chronological landmarks, such as the year 2000, may come and go. Predictions are confidently made and, to the unbelieving eye at least, equally conclusively disproven. But the quest goes on.

The Branch Davidians: Post-1993

An event such as the destruction of Mt Carmel and near obliteration of a community that considered itself to be God's faithful remnant needed explanation. On the surface the situation looked hopeless, at least to the non-believer. It was perhaps fortunate, however, that Koresh had left some room for prophetic manoeuvre, with the result that the surviving Branch Davidians found that the corner into which they had become painted was not at all difficult to escape. After all, some of what Koresh had said *had* come to pass. The *second* striking of the rock had taken place (cf. Num. 20.11; 1 Cor. 10.4); that is, the Messiah in both his 'sinless' and 'sinful' incarnations had been slain.[10]

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10.   See further Newport, *The Branch Davidians*, p. 226.

And the fire itself was not an event that had been unexpected. Even Houteff had spoken of a 'baptism by fire' that was to precede the end, and Florence Houteff had similarly confirmed that the figure who was to 'baptize with the holy ghost and with fire' (cf. Mt. 3.11-12) was, from her time perspective, yet to come.[11] There was no precise date set for the end and no clearly disprovable hypothesis that needed to be adjusted. Some determined reading of the Bible took place and, unsurprisingly, answers were found.[12]

Of particular interest to some were the last verses of the book of Daniel and in particular the reference to a period of 1335 days (Dan. 12.12). Some took the view that these 1335 days were the period between the death of Koresh and his return as 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (cf. Rev. 19.16). This would have set the date at 13 December 1996. There was no discernible flurry of activity following the non-events of that date; it simply came and went. There is rather more information available, however, regarding the setting of another date for Koresh's return: August 1999.[13] This was arrived on the basis of a text that had been central to the trajectory since the time of Miller himself, namely Dan. 8.14 and the 2300 days there spoken of. In the event, however, August 1999, like December 1996, passed without event. For several years, the only discernible response from those who had focused attention on the date was silence. That silence was broken, however, by one of the surviving Branch Davidians, Livingstone Fagan. According to him, the non-appearance of David Koresh in both 1996 and 1999 can easily be explained. The answer lies in 1 Cor. 13.8: 'Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away'. The explanation is hence simple. The 'failure' of the 1335 day and 2300 day prophecies fulfils the prediction in 1 Cor. 13.8 that 'prophecies shall fail'. Fagan then continued by arguing that the situation the Branch Davidians now face is like that faced by Noah when he got

11.   See further Newport, *The Branch Davidians*, pp. 155-70.

12.   On this see generally Eugene Gallagher, 'The Persistence of the Millennium: Branch Davidian Expectations of the End after Waco', *Nova Religio* 3 (2000), pp. 303-19; and Marc Breault, 'The Return of David Koresh' (unpublished paper, n.d.; a copy is in my possession). Marc Breault was a follower of David Koresh and spent some considerable time at Mt Carmel before defecting and becoming a harsh critic.

13.   The precise date is not given in any of the literature I have been able to access. The expectation that Koresh would return at the end of the period was, however, very clear on materials that were on the website <www.branchdavidian.com> and its sister website <www.sevenseals.com>. These websites reflected the views of Waco fire survivor Renos Avraam and his small group of followers; both sites became defunct sometime after August 1999 but are now back up with a very different message again. (This chapter was completed prior to my reading of Eugene Gallagher's contribution to this volume which now gives a much more detailed account of Avraam, or 'the Chosen Vessel', and the way in which the tradition has been further developed at his hands.)

into the Ark. (And, does it not say in Mt. 24.37: 'but as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be'?) There was nothing to sustain Noah other than his faith that God would do what God said he would do. Noah had to wait seven days before it began to rain.[14] Similarly the Branch Davidians, according to Fagan, have no prophecies, no dates and no outward signs upon which to depend. The task now is simply to believe, this despite being proved wrong, and even despite the fact that (as 1 Cor. 13.8 had, in retrospect, warned) prophecies had failed.

To the outsider the ability of the early Adventists, Victor and Florence Houteff, David Koresh, Livingstone Fagan and others constantly to reinterpret scripture to explain apparent prophetic failure may appear at best an act of self-deluded desperation or at worst a symptom of underlying psychological ill-health. Such uncharitable judgments, however, could be said to fail to understand the context out of which such readings arise. There may be many reasons to expect the dawn of the millennial kingdom before one's own death. The uncompromising logic of scripture may be one of them. But if so, it will almost certainly be a logic reflective of an identified internal coherence within a social-constructed paradigm based upon unquestioned first principles. What those future socially constructed paradigms will look like is yet to be seen, but whatever appearance they take on, they will doubtless give rise to equally imaginative readings as those that have been evident in the past.

Barack Hussein Obama

So far in this chapter attention has been given almost exclusively to one particular apocalyptic trajectory. One does not need to look very far, however, to find evidence that imaginative interpretations and prophetic (re-)readings can be supportive of much wider millennial musings. Indeed, reflection on almost any event seems capable of opening the flood gates to release torrential eisegetical flow as those who are looking for the end seek to integrate world events into the millennial scheme. Again, from a scholarly perspective, there is no sense of anything ever being final about such musings. Any particular event may be hailed as a clear sign that the first rays of the millennial dawn have broken; any other, an unmistakable portent of the coming apocalyptic chaos. Both may actually turn out to have no obvious coordinates on the map of the End Times. But there will always be other signs of the End, and to them attention will then be turned by those on the constant lookout for such. And once spotted, no intellectual effort will be spared in seeking to demonstrate just how clear the Bible is in identifying this new

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14.   Fagan evidently understands Gen. 7.1-10 to indicate that there was a period of seven days after Noah's getting into the Ark before the rains began to fall.

candidate for a predicted role. One can see this clearly enough, for example, in the case of the initial election to the US presidency of Mr Barack Obama.

Barack Hussein Obama (all three names are important here) was elected president of the USA in November 2008. For many the ascendency to the White House of the first black president was a cause for celebration. For others, however, it was a sign of the end of the world.

It is not the intention here to seek an explanation for why it was that Obama came to be seen in a particular light by any given section of the US electorate. Such an explanation lies outside the interests of this chapter. What is sought, however, is evidence that despite the fact that Obama has not as yet called down the armies of Satan to drive righteousness from the earth, this will not necessarily mean that future speculation to this effect will cease, be that relative to Obama or any other present or future presidential candidate. Indeed, early speculation on the place of Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum is already rife as a Google search using the obvious words will quickly show.[15] As we have seen, the millennially inclined mind is imaginative indeed when it comes to interpretations and re-interpretations, and in this context the apparent absence of any non-biblical evidence is not of substantial significance. The one determined to find a proof text to demonstrate that Obama is Beelzebub will be able to do it. Of this there is no doubt. The logic at work will be strange, the context of the debate unfamiliar to the outsider, the conclusions as startling as the rabbit that appears from the magician's hat, but it will be done. And with this process at work, the future of millennial expectation, and therefore of millennial studies, is equally sure.

So how, precisely, has the Bible been used by those who wished to portray Obama as Antichrist? What particular images and symbols have been picked up and in what wider biblical-interpretative paradigm have they been set? As we shall see, the answers to these questions are forthcoming and, I would argue, by studying them carefully we are able better to understand some of the tensions, fears and expectations current within a particular vein of American religious popular apocalypticism.

It is clear that 'out there' there has been nothing short of an eruption of apocalyptic expectation in relation to President Obama. Religious language abounds, and overtly religious terminology has been used excessively to talk about Obama and what his election meant. One would, of course, expect that an event as momentous as the election of any US president might excite the minds of those who look to the Bible for guidance not just in the present but for the future. But it is perhaps the fact that Obama is relatively young, of mixed race and has 'Hussein' as a middle name that has proven nothing short

15. Note that this chapter was completed in April 2012.

of irresistible to some of the more apocalyptically minded.[16] The particular focus of this paper is on the negative portrayal of President Obama as an Antichrist figure who, so some believe, is a sign of the end and indeed is himself a key player as the world draws closer to its apocalyptic climax.

The figure of the Antichrist is, of course, a popular one, whose history goes back a very long way. Indeed, the word is used in the New Testament itself (although actually not in the kind of way that one would expect it to be and only in the letters of St John). Other biblical images include the 'Man of Sin' from 1 and 2 Thessalonians and the figures described in the book of Daniel, especially chaps. 7 and 8, and, most particularly, Revelation 13. Down through the centuries the apocalyptically minded have looked for the coming of this figure who would herald a time of chaos, destruction, war, moral bankruptcy and, eventually, the end of the world. Up until the middle of the nineteenth century, the Pope and/or the Catholic Church in general was often seen by Protestants as the fulfilment of such passages, and one should not underestimate just how widespread was such a view; defining oneself by vilifying the other is, alas, a part of Christian history and for sure it shows up here. Other candidates have ranged from Martin Luther, John and Charles Wesley, the Internet, the AIDS pandemic and a panoply of other figures and events. In seeking to identify the Antichrist, one particular passage, Rev. 13.18, was often seen as the key to the mystery. The number of this beast, the text says, is the number of a man: and it is 666.

When Mr Obama burst onto the political stage, the apocalyptic mind quickly began to race. Even the shallowest of trawls of the Internet—which, if it is not already, is rapidly becoming *the* principal stage upon which expectations of the apocalyptic drama are rehearsed—will reveal just how strong the undercurrent of popular belief is that in the election of Obama we see the rise of Antichrist.

Let us take one very forthright website as an example (and indeed there are many). This is the aptly named <http://www.beastobama.com/>. The site is evidently run by the Westboro Baptist Church, the same group that runs the rather better known <www.godhatesfags.com> and a number of other similarly odious sites. It is, of course, difficult to know the extent to which this site is influential. However, its simple existence is itself not to be overlooked and it is, as has been noted, simply an example of a much more widely spread phenomenon that could easily be documented here much more copiously.

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16.   See further Amarnath Amarasingam, 'Baracknophobia and the Paranoid Style: Visions of Obama as the Antichrist on the World Wide Web', in *Network Apocalypse: Visions of the End in an Age of Internet Media* (ed. Robert Glenn Howard; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), pp. 96-123.

Rather predictably, the level of biblical interpretation in evidence on this site is extremely limited, and even for a group that is as far to the right as this one, the use of the Bible is particularly extreme and selective. Here one can find the usual kind of speculation that surrounds predictions of the rise of Antichrist. Indeed, the same was in evidence when Ratzinger was elected pope, and in fact this group have imported quite a lot of end-time speculation from their similarly minded interpretations of that event.

The use made of the Bible in spreading the message that Obama is the Antichrist (based largely, it seems, upon his alleged support for homosexuality and abortion) is predictable, and we are soon into the usual passages from Daniel, 2 Thessalonians and Revelation. For example, according to this website, the beast of Revelation 13 is identified as Obama, who arises out of the 'worldwide sea of humanity'. Obama's oratorical skills have been given to him so that he might deceive the world while at the same time speaking blasphemy, which is the name written on his forehead (the use of Rev. 13.1 and 13.6 are plain in this detail). Obama will seek to change the time and laws (a reference to Dan. 7.25) and to raise an army to fight against Christ. Here Rev. 16.13-14 and the build up to the battle of Armageddon are in view. His father is Satan, and it is Obama, Satan and the Pope that form the latter-day 'unholy Trinity' that will conspire to deceive the world.

As has been noted, this website is the not-very-impressive tip of a very substantial iceberg. Indeed, when making a search of the Internet one is struck by the sheer volume of sometimes very extensive sites and blog spots similarly devoted to developing this same theme. Even YouTube is populated with such material. Typing 'Obama antichrist' into its search engine returns over 20,000 hits. A sample quickly reveals that some are spoof; a significant percentage, however, are deadly serious. Just a couple of examples from among the very many will give a sense of what is going on here. (Readers are reminded that the Internet is by nature notoriously unstable and the examples given here will doubtless be taken down at some point. But as some go out of existence, new ones arise, which in itself supports the contention of this chapter that the imaginative millennial mind will always find a way to adapt and change to suit a changing political, historical and social landscape.)

Luke 10.18

One particular YouTube video puts this into near comic perspective (though to succumb to laughter is perhaps a narrow and unprofessional response to a very serious indication of the level of anxiety-driven popular biblical eisegesis and its wider cultural and psychological origins). In Lk. 10.18 Jesus says that he saw Satan falling as 'lightning' from the heavens. This passage is picked up on a number of Internet sites, including this YouTube video, to make the argument, or at least 'report the fact', that a careful word study of

the passage reveals that what Jesus actually said was that he saw 'Satan as Barack Obama'.[17]

There is a fascinating example of imaginative eisegesis here, which is made all the more impressive by the fact that the one who engages in it clearly knows neither of the relevant languages that are central to what is being said. On the video, the speaker refers to the fact that Jesus would have spoken these words in Aramaic, which would sound very much like Hebrew. (There are in fact several leaps being made here but we can leave them aside for present purposes.) In a study of the words of Lk. 10.18 that is clearly independent of any knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic (or indeed Greek or post-King James biblical English), it is then noted that the Hebrew word for 'lightning' is nothing other than *baraq*. Actually this is correct: the root is ברק. So, the speaker points out, we now have Jesus saying in Lk. 10.18 'I saw Satan fall as *baraq* from heaven'. The video then goes on to put in place the word 'Obama' from a study of Isaiah 14. The extremely unstable linguistic skills come close to total collapse at this stage, but that is not the point; one can see easily enough where the speaker is going, and it is the imaginative leap and not any presumed insights into biblical Hebrew that is so impressive: 'heavens' or 'heights', says the speaker, in Isa. 14.14 is '*bam-mah*'. Again this is not without foundation. The speaker is dependent upon Strong's *Concordance* for his information, and in particular word 1116 in that source. Strong's does indeed give '*bam-mah*' or '*bam-maw*' for 'height' or 'high place' for the word found in Isa. 14.14 and translated 'heights', at least in its plural construct form of במתי (*bamatey*). Earlier in the video the speaker has made a presumed link (which is again questionable) between 'heights' in Lk. 10.18 and 'heavens', with the result that he can then fairly confidently state that Jesus would have said '*baraq bam-mah*' (or '*baraq bam-maw*') for 'lightning…heaven' in the text. But even this does not dry up the eisegetical juices, which at this point are flowing as liberally as the wine at Cana. Rather, the speaker goes on to explain that to join '*baraq*' and '*bam-mah*' together to make 'lightning and heaven' or 'lightning from heaven' in Hebrew, a *waw* (ו) may be used. He is, of course, right about *waw* being used for 'and'; he is also right that *waw* can be transcribed as 'o' or 'u'.[18] How the leap from 'and' to 'from' is made is unclear; nevertheless, this very last point aside, what the speaker has now done is arrive at a position where he can

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17. The video was originally at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mK_zh-X21f0> and was highly professional looking. It has, however, been taken down by YouTube for 'copyright infringement', but the same content can at present (April 2012) be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xhTw_aJuYA>.

18. Actually what the speaker is getting at here, though he does not understand the point himself, is that the Hebrew letter *waw* (ו) can also be used as a vowel letter to represent either a long 'o' or a long 'u'.

'report the fact' that if we could have heard Jesus say in Aramaic what is recorded in Greek and translated into English in Lk. 10.18 as 'I beheld Satan as lightning falling from the heavens', what we would actually have heard him say is 'and I saw Satan as *baraq o bam-mah*'.[19]

As noted above, the fact that the speaker on the video clearly knows no Aramaic or Hebrew makes this particular example of eisegesis even more impressive. A traditional biblical scholar may have a plethora of objections to this reconstruction of the presumed words of Jesus in Lk. 10.10 and may indeed argue that what the speaker on the video says is simply unsustainable. But if the reconstruction is wrong, it is impressively so, and the speaker has somehow at least got into the right linguistic ball park. But that raises the really important question here. What is really driving this bit of eisegesis? And, more particularly, how did anyone without a knowledge of the biblical languages land on the English of Lk. 10.16 and somehow get at least a vaguely plausible, if imaginative, argument together that what Jesus would have said in Lk. 10.18 would have sounded something like 'I saw Satan as Barack Obama'?

666

Seeking to get Obama's name to add up to 666 has not been easy. However, for the determined eisegete it is a challenge to be embraced, and he or she may do so with great enthusiasm. Unlike the letters of the name 'Ronald Wilson Reagan', those of 'Barack Hussein Obama' do not come in a simple '6-6-6' formation (though actually there are a total of 18 letters, which for some solves the problem).[20] Other attempts to get the numbers to fall out correctly include transliterating (not translating) 'King Barack Hussein Obama' into Hebrew script. If this is done, then the total numerical value of the letters can be made to yield the 666 number.[21]

But there are, of course, much more ingenious suggestions. For some it is significant that $6 \times 6 \times 6 = 216$, and that this latter number is linked to Obama in several ways. His birthday of 4 August, for example, was the 216th day of the year in which he was born (1961 not being a leap year); he was born in Honolulu, the latitude of which is 21.6;[22] he submitted a budget that

19. An actual cross-check with one version of the New Testament in Hebrew yields the anticipated result: '[as] lightning' is there as 'כברק' ('[*kay*]-*baraq*'), but 'from heaven' is (as one would expect) 'מן־השמים' ('*min-hasamayim*').

20. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDHUwlcPOOg&feature=player_embedded> (accessed 27 September 2012).

21. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNARJqoT8co> (accessed 27 September 2012).

22. It is perhaps significant that currently (April 2012) if you type 'latitude 21.6' into Google, the first hit you get is a site with the headline 'number 216 exposes Barack Obama as Antichrist candidate'.

was 216 pages long; he cancelled 216 scholarships in Washington, DC, and Obamacare was passed with 216 votes.[23] What is more, if we assume that Obama wins the 2012 election and hence serves eight years as president from 20 January 2009 to 20 January 2017, he will be 666 months old at the time of his retirement.[24]

Well: there is a lot more of this that we could report. The Internet is awash with ingenious ways to relate the number 666 to President Obama. The number of the beast given in Rev. 13.18 can hence be attached to Obama if not with ease then with conviction. (And does not the text itself say that to understand it one will need wisdom and understanding—no-one said it would be obvious.) However, why bother with any of this when the Illinois State Lottery delivered the number right into the hands of the Antichrist spotter the very day after the election? On 5 November 2008, the 'pick three' numbers of that lottery were '666',[25] which provided a real boost to those determined to link the number of the beast in Rev. 13.8 to Obama. And on it goes. It is the subject of huge discussion. Not all of it is serious, but some of it is deadly so.

What we see here, of course, is a process by which there comes together a particular mind-set that is predisposed to looking constantly for the end, and one of the places it looks is in the malleable biblical text. Even without detailed discussion of reading theories, such as the authorial intent fallacy or reader-response criticism as applied to biblical studies, one can perhaps see pretty clearly that here is a text that has yielded to the interests of its reader. Why the interests should be as they are is an interesting question but not one that can be taken up here in any detail. What we note here is simply that the fact that the Bible appears not to support a particular view is of no conse-quence to the determined millennial reader of it. Neither will it matter if one reading of the text proves to be 'wrong'. If Obama comes and goes with no evidence that he was actually Antichrist, then the reading of Lk. 10.18 explored above will simply slip into the past to be replaced by another. The mind that is at work is set within the context of a particular social-historical setting and must be able fully to interact with it. The same will be true of those that follow it. However, for one particular group of people, biblical fundamentalists, there is no freedom simply to state one's views without reference to the biblical text. So that text is explored. Every nook and cranny is opened up to detailed inspection in order to find that all-important evidence to support views that have been already settled upon for reasons quite other

23. <http://www.fivedoves.com/letters/jan2012/chelseab114.htm> (accessed 27 September 2012).

24. <http://www.fivedoves.com/rapture/2008/obama_666.htm> (accessed 27 September 2012).

25. <http://www.illinoislottery.com/subsections/History/Win2008.htm> (accessed 27 September 2012).

than any extent to which they may be biblically based. The text acts as a mirror, reflecting back the image of the one who looks into it as creative reading strategies are employed to ensure that the interests of the individual, and more importantly the community, are served. It is far from random. Highly complex systems can often be employed (much more complex and ingenious than the one we have noted here), and one should not underestimate the imaginative energy that is put into it. Neither should one underestimate the way in which such readings enable disappointed communities and millennially frustrated individuals to deal with cognitive dissonance and to survive.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how the biblical text can provide significant room for exegetical manoeuvre on the part of those who have suffered significant prophetic disappointment and at the same time give scope for seemingly endless speculation regarding how the end-times will be played out in the (usually not too distant) future. We have seen how a number of different reading strategies have been employed by those in such situations to provide the biblical explanation of what the community has gone through. Sometimes the reason discovered will be related to the nature of the event predicted (the 'right date, wrong event' approach); other times it will relate to the date itself (the 'right event, wrong date' approach). But even more ingenious solutions are possible, such as the one proposed by Fagan to explain Koresh's non-appearance in 1996 and 1999. For such communities and individuals, the Bible cannot be wrong; it is an inspired text. There is hence a constant round of reading and re-reading to uncover new truths and gain greater clarification of things not fully understood. The outsider may marvel at the ingenuity and spiritual energy that is in evidence. But for the believers themselves it is all far from an intellectual game.

So where, to return to the central concern of this book, does that leave the future of millennial studies? There are at least two points to be made here. First, that belief in the coming of the End is unlikely to wane. Even among those groups who have confidently predicted its occurrence in the past and have been proved wrong, there is always the possibility of new understandings and new interpretations of old texts. God is not slack in keeping his promises; it may rather simply be that he is giving a little more time for repentance, not wishing any to perish (cf. 2 Pet. 3.9). Alternatively, as the experience of Jonah shows, the preaching of the prophet of doom might itself result in repentance such that God himself 'repents and turns away from his fierce anger and we perish not' (Jon. 3.9). The date may itself have been understood correctly, but for the event to occur on that date misunderstood: Jesus may have moved from the Holy to the Most Holy place in the heavenly

sanctuary rather than come visibly to the earth as thought. Or perhaps the event had been understood correctly, but a miscalculation made so that a new date may be set correcting the previous mistake. Perhaps, even, prophecy must fail so that the prophecy that it would fail can be fulfilled (cf. 1 Cor. 13.8). There are always explanations possible. The end of the road is never reached, at least not for the lack of eisegetical options.

Second, as has been demonstrated here, when it comes to spotting signs of the end or readjusting predictions of what is to come, there is no lack of imagination at work and no shortage of energy either. An unsatisfactory but understandable response to the kind of intellectual gymnastics showcased above might be mirth, amusement, ridicule or outright dismissal as worthy of any serious enquiry. The scholar of millennialism will, however, need to tread more professionally. It is absolutely plain to many that the kinds of interpretations outlined above simply cannot be sustained. The sound of barrels being scraped is at times deafening. But this only begs the question: Why is it that huge numbers of persons, and we are talking millions, accept such propositions and, apparently, can discern internal logic and order where the outsider sees only chaos? Perhaps these millions are all irrational, gullible, of questionable intellectual ability or just plain stupid. But the arrogance of such a position is itself almost breathtaking, and leaving it aside, the question then becomes: How is it that millions of basically sane and rational individuals can enthusiastically subscribe to beliefs that others struggle even to understand?. Of course, a non-Christian could ask the same of the doctrine of the Trinity as could a non-Catholic of the doctrine of transubstantiation; but are we then to question the intellectual ability of St Augustine or the mental prowess of St Thomas Aquinas?

The task, of course, is to understand. What we see on the surface of millennialist thinking are the outer workings of much more complex social, psychological and historical forces. Some of these can rightly be described as odious, a word that has been applied above to the views of the Westboro Baptist Church, I think with complete justification. But even these are better described as odious and repugnant rather than simply irrational. When Fagan states that when Koresh did not come back as predicted this fulfilled 1 Cor. 13.8, he does so having been sentenced to 40 years imprisonment and after having lost his wife and mother in the Waco fire. One can understand how, under those circumstances, 1 Cor. 13.8 was more of a psychological lifeline than a springboard into prophetic fantasy. Similarly the argument that in Lk. 10.18 Jesus says (in Aramaic) that he saw Satan as Barack Obama is not so much insane as ill-informed. These, and countless millions like them, are not weak minds at work but rather ones that operate within a particular paradigm and with certain psychological and social needs (not to mention historical conditioning) that others find difficult to comprehend. Some resulting

interpretations, it is true, are hateful. Others are benign, while still others are a positive force for good.[26] The task of the millennial scholar of the future will be to try to keep up with an ever-changing landscape as the context and content of end-time expectation give rise to new forms of belief and new expressions of hope. Sometimes, albeit rarely, things go bad; and at the very least, we should seek to guard against that.

26.   One could argue this, for example, in the case of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whose desire to prepare physically, spiritually and mentally for life in the new kingdom has led to the creation of a vast world-wide health and education infrastructure that serves not just the Adventist community but also wider society, and is to its great benefit.

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