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# Millenarianism/Millennialism, Eschatology, Apocalypticism, Utopianism

## A Definitions

The complex of beliefs that historians variously refer to as millenarianism, millennialism, chiliasm, hold that this broken, fallen, imperfect, even evil-ridden, world will be transformed into a perfect world of justice, peace, abundance, and mutual love. The name comes from the most popular Christian form of this belief: at a future time (initially at the end of six thousand years of earthly history), there would be a thousand-year (millennial) “reign of the saints” (*tausendjähriges Reich*), when the “good” would enjoy this messianic era *on earth*, and the evil (along with Satan) would be bound in the pit. In the Christian scenario, at the end of that thousand years, Satan and his minions would be unleashed, leading to a final conflict that would culminate in the *eschatological* Last Judgment, in which *the earth would be no more*, and the saved would go to heaven and the evil to hell. It helps to distinguish between these two cosmic transformations at each end of this thousand-year period. Hence, *millennialism* remains *within the time-space continuum of history* (the *saeculum*) and is therefore necessarily political; *eschatology*, on the other hand marks the *end of the physical universe*, with the entirely spiritual rewards of redemption, and has many a-political forms.

Among the answers to *theodicy* (why does a good God allow evil to flourish?), millennialism and eschatology are one of the most compelling and popular. They explain God’s tolerance for evil in this current world as a test, and anticipate an apocalyptic resolution that will publicly reward those who do good and suffer now, and punish those who do evil and prosper now. For religious authorities, this complex of end time events provides an endless font of motivation for “being good” in this world, even if doing so makes you a “loser.” For the losers, it’s an endless font of fantasy about a spectacular moment of retribution.

The only problem with this elegant solution to theodicy is that, at least until now, God and his agents have failed to deliver on the promises of a final reckoning. In this lies the great strength and weakness of end-time speculation: the less urgent the sense of judgment, the less intense the commitment, and, vice-versa. Moments of urgency, when critical numbers believe that the Judgment is imminent, can become immensely powerful public moments where whole populations behave in highly unusual ways.

Millennial and eschatological beliefs alternate between quiescent and volatile depending on contemporaries' convictions about the proximity of this future dramatic transformation. *Apocalyptic* believers hold that the Day is coming very soon, if not now. They tend toward dramatic, even extreme actions that fluctuate wildly between self-abnegation and megalomania, abstinence and indulgence, pacifism and violence. Norman Cohn (1970 [1959]), defined millennialism as including this apocalyptic sense of imminence, in part because such beliefs only become visible historically when activated by apocalyptic expectation, but as the sabbatical millennium (below) shows, there can be non-apocalyptic millennialism.

Convinced that the powers of evil rule the world—corruption, oppression, cruelty, dominion—and that this evil will be destroyed and replaced by a truly just world, often conceived in radically egalitarian terms (“world turned upside down,” Hill 1984), millennial movements have a long pedigree as violently subversive, or, as Norman Cohn called them, “revolutionaries” and “mystical anarchists” (Cohn 1970; Mendel 2000 [1987]).

When believers accept that the Day is far off, on the other hand, they tend to passively accept current conditions of suffering on the understanding that, that Day come, they will be justified and rewarded while the evil who now dominate this world will get their just punishment—pie in the sky by and by. (When Marx [1818–1883] referred to religion as the “opiate of the masses,” he referred to this passive belief, while he espoused a “scientific” apocalypticism that promised an egalitarian millennium.) Emphasis on *eschatological scenarios*, a post-millennial final and non-earthly resolution to the problem of injustice, tends to reinforce the passivity of believers, since such scenarios demand major divine intervention, thus ruling out active participation in the transformation/perfection of *this world* (Landes 2011, chpt.1).

All apocalyptic beliefs (until today) have proven wrong, and thus, exceptionally, the study of millennialism or eschatology in action (i.e., apocalyptic movements) is the study of mistaken beliefs and how believers deal with disappointment (O’Leary 1994). This unusual element (most religious beliefs cannot be empirically proven wrong) has made apocalypticism one of the more problematic subjects of historical research. Not only are apocalyptic movements brief (the briefer, the more intense), but, in order to deal with the inevitable disconfirming evidence (cognitive dissonance), they go through rapid changes (Festinger 1956; Carroll 1979; O’Leary 2000). In most cases the dissonance of apocalyptic believers, faced with clear disproof of their outrageous expectations to which they have dedicated every fiber of their being and their community, generates extensive improvisation, a kind of apocalyptic “jazz.” Movements, trying to maintain (even increase) the dynamics of the apocalyptic

time that is rapidly fading, adapt and adopt beliefs often diametrically opposed to the original ones: from pacifist-egalitarian to violent-totalitarian (Münster Anabaptists, Taiping), from violence to pacifism (Quakers, Bahai), from egalitarianism to hierarchy (Maccabees-Hasmoneans, Marxism-Communism), etc. (Landes 2011).

Moreover, religious movements set in motion by apocalyptic time tend to mutate upon re-entry into normal time, from new religious movement/sect to church (Swatos 1981; Lewis 2008. Since almost all of the documentation is written from this post-apocalyptic period (*ex post defectu*, from after the disappointment/failure), the later faithful often eliminate from the record the (mistaken) beliefs of the founders, replacing them with less disprovable (but also less gratifying) claims (“the kingdom of heaven is within”). Similarly, hostile outsiders tend to depict apocalyptic preachers as either knaves or fools, with little appreciation of either their passion or their appeal. As a result, one of the most fertile and influential complexes of belief in human history gets overlooked by historians, both the positivists “trying to get the story straight,” and the post-modernists “trying to get the story crooked.” To understand apocalyptic millennialism, one has to get the crooked story straight (Landes 2011, chpt. 3).

All monotheistic religions have major components of millennial-eschatological thought, as well as a linear concept of time to match those expectations. As a result all monotheistic religions have elaborate chronologies, and repeated instances of apocalyptic outbreaks when a critical mass believed they were witnessing and participating in final Days. Indeed, many “new religious movements” that arise from monotheistic beliefs (including Christianity and Islam) first “take off” in apocalyptic time.

The more common notions of time tend to be cyclical, and where it measures large segments of linear time, it subordinates that to larger cycles, a belief in some form or other that appears the world over. These “great cycles” or “great years” variously defined generally take (some combination of) two forms—the circular and the linear. In circular cosmogonies, the most widespread variant, creation goes through cycles from origins to annihilation (a non-redemptive eschaton), and then to a new beginning and repeating indefinitely. These cycles tend to be extremely long, measured in chronological units ranging from the Roman and Greek “great year” (365 years) to the Babylonian *sar* (3600 years each) to Hindu kalpas (8.64 billion years each). From such mega-cycles, people looked upon the yearly cycle as a microcosm, and celebrated the completion and new beginning of a cycle as a “myth of eternal return” (Eliade 1965). Greek philosophical thought leaned heavily toward cyclical cosmologies in which everything repeated, or even replicated exactly, the details of the previous cycle ad infinitum as in Stoic *ekpyrosis* (Campion 1994; Kragh 2010).

In both linear and cyclical cases, the future “end of the world” had more than conceptual significance depending on where they placed the *present* in the larger process. The most prominent approach viewed the cycle as one of monotonic declension from a golden age to the current (worst) age. Often these schemes placed the present time toward the middle of the final age. Hindu scriptures (e.g., *Surya Siddhanta*) start the last and most debased cycle, the *kaliyuga* in 3102 B.C.E., placing the present the early millennia of that *yuga*, and the cataclysmic “end” some 420 *millennia* away. Greek and Roman ideas of these cycles appear in most philosophical schools (Pythagorean, Platonic, Stoic), although the associated cycles are measured in chronological units taken from Babylonian astronomical calculations, but significantly reduced. Drawn from the second century B.C.E. Babylonian astronomer Berossos’s 12,960,000 year cycle, Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), dated the *magnus et verus annus* to 12,954 years. The final conflagration in these scenarios often appears as both a destructive and a purging flame that wipes out impurities and reunites creation with eternity.

A sufficiently long period between cycles, such as the Vedic, may discourage any kind of apocalyptic thinking, *a fortiori*, millennial. But within a seemingly cyclical vision of time, chronology can emerge, and both apocalyptic and even millennial themes can result, such as in Egyptian, Zoroastrian, Taoist and Buddhist prophetic texts that have strong millennial traditions (Gnuse 2011; Naquin 1976; Ownby 1999). In other cases, as with many tribal cultures, millennial beliefs can develop in response to events, rather than chronological calculations, e.g., conquest by imperial conquerors (first example of this may be Judaism; Hanson 1979).

Whatever its presence in other cultures, there is no doubt that eschatological and millennial beliefs are fundamental to monotheism and millennialism a common feature. Most significantly, while secular thought in the West prides itself on shedding the superstitions of religion, secular forms of millennialism (often called “utopianism”) have developed, some with even greater vigor and impact on society and polity than their predecessors (Manuel and Manuel 1979). After all, if there is no God to bring it about, the creation of the millennium falls entirely on the shoulders of the “faithful”: Communism (Riegel 2005), Nazism (Redles 2006), even democratic revolutions (Landes 2011, chpts. 9–12). More broadly speaking, however, both millennialism and redemptive eschatology (in which believers are rewarded and unbelievers punished) tend to flourish in cultures with a linear sense of time.

## B Terminology

The following vocabulary facilitates discussion and analysis of millennialism and its cognate beliefs.

*Millennialism*: (*mille anni* = a thousand years) belief that at some point in the future this material world will be transformed into a just and peaceful one, heaven on earth, the *perfection* of the world.

- *Demotic millennialism*: egalitarian, without hierarchy, “no king but God,” bottom-up, holy anarchy (Jewish Zealots/Essenes, Anabaptists, anarchist communism); apocalyptic enemy: evil empire.
- *Imperial millennialism*: hierarchical, peace and order imposed from above through conquest, “one God, one ruler”: Constantinian Christianity (see below), Jihad and Muslim imperial dynasties (Yücesoy 2009); apocalyptic enemy: chaos and anarchy.
- *Restorative*: model taken from a past “Golden Age,” Eden restored: Xhosa Cattle-Slaying (Landes 2011, chpt. 4), Ghost Dance, Salafism.
- *Progressive*: perfect world to come new, based on the cumulative development of mankind, never before seen: communism, democracies, technology-based utopias (Noble 1999), Woodstock Nation (Mendel 2000; P. Berman 1996).
- *Messianic*: led by a dynamic, charismatic (often mystical) figure who has salvific powers and attains a near- or deified status in the minds of his or her followers (Idel 2000). Messianic movements tend toward hierarchical structures no matter how egalitarian the ethos: e.g., Jonestown (Chidester 2004), and in the cognitive dissonance of failure can develop strong anti-nomian dimensions: Shabbatianism (Scholem 1976); Ranters (Hill 1984).
- *Pre- and Post-Millennialism*: variants of modern Christian millennialism. In the pre-millennial scenarios, Jesus comes *before* establishing the millennium, which tends to encourage passivity. In post-millennial scenarios, Jesus comes *after* believers establish the millennium, therefore encouraging a more activist approach (Searle and Newport 2012).

No matter how diametrically opposed, these variants often mix, either at the same time (egalitarianism for the in-group, subjection for the out-group), or in often rapid sequence (from radical egalitarianism to theocracy/totalitarianism, from acephalous to messianic leadership, from asceticism to libidinal excess).

*Eschatology*: (*eschaton* = the end), belief in a final cosmic resolution to human history, the *end* of the world. Religious forms tend to emphasize God’s justice

(Last Judgment), while more secular forms anticipate the annihilation of all life (including spiritual).

- *Moral eschatology*: one is saved by one's behavior, especially toward one's fellow humans. Natural affinity with demotic millennialism.
- *Creedal eschatology*: one is saved by one's denominational beliefs that claim to have a monopoly on salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Elective affinity for imperial millennialism and coercive conversion.
- *Annihilationist eschatology*: all life is extinguished, no distinction between good and bad, nothing to be done (ELE—extinction level event, comet, nuclear war).
- *Avertive eschatology*: Warnings of impending disaster meant to spur efforts to avert the catastrophe (global warming, see Wojcik 2011).

Because eschatological beliefs demand the most fantastic events for fulfillment, they tend not to survive in apocalyptic mode very long (days to months), whereas millennial beliefs that inaugurate reformist/perfectionists projects can last longer (months to decades).

*Apocalypticism*: (*apocalypsis* = revelation [about end time events]), a belief that the great revelation/resolution of theodicy is about to happen, now or imminently, and apocalyptic belief varies both according to the intensity of the imminence, and the various scenarios on how this cosmic transition will occur. Apocalyptic transitions can either lead to the *millennium* or the *eschaton*.

- *Passive*: God or the forces of the cosmos (e.g., comets) accomplish most if not all the necessary actions, humans should repent in hopes of being saved. Only religious forms of millennialism can be passive: “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven/Last Judgment is at hand.”
- *Active*: Humans act (in conjunction with God) to bring about the needed transformations. All secular forms of millennialism are active. Some secular active cataclysmic movements are “avertive,” mobilizing believers to avoid a catastrophe (Y2K, Anthropogenic Global Warming).
- *Cataclysmic*: in order to pass into the “new world” vast destruction must occur to pave the way, in millennial variants only a small remnant survives to enjoy the new era. Active: Destroying the world to save it—Aum Shin Rikyo (Lifton 2000); Passive: Tribulation. Most eschatologies are cosmically cataclysmic: *end* of the world. Cataclysmic apocalyptic has an elective affinity for paranoid, Manichean, genocidal thinking: forces of evil (Antichrist, *Dajjal*)

are ubiquitous and nearly omnipotent; they must be utterly exterminated in order for good to prevail (Landes and Katz, ed., 2011).

- *Transformative*: the transition occurs through a voluntary transformation of people's hearts in which they renounce evil ways. Most millennialism begins with important transformative currents: *perfection of the world*. Natural affinity for positive-sum interactions, embrace of "Other" (Isaiah 2, Micah 4).

Modern versions involve technology as a redemptive force (Noble 1999).

All apocalyptic thought contends with the paradox that the more imminent (and hence rapidly disprovable) the promises, the more intense both the movement and its disappointment. Thus apocalyptic time varies from intense (imminent) to more drawn out expectations (decades away, but within the lifetime of the believer). Any belief in a coming apocalyptic transformation after the death of the believers is not "apocalyptic" by this definition. Thus, the death of the final disciples of a messianic pretender produces a crisis among the now orphaned next generation (e.g., *John*, 21:23–24).

*Apocalyptic Moments* occur when a public sphere—of a city, a region, even a country—is taken over by people who act out their belief that the final moment is at hand. Such moments can have powerful effects on monotheistic faithful who believe that God is about to judge the quick and the dead, as in this example from sixth century Constantinople, described by the Byzantine historian Agathias (530–582/94):

At the time, however, there was no one who was not greatly shocked and afraid. Litanies and hymns of supplication were everywhere to be heard, with everyone joining in. And things that are always promised in words, but never carried out in deeds, were at that time readily performed. *Suddenly all were honest in their business dealings, so that even public officials, putting aside their greed, dealt with law-suits according to the law, and other powerful men contented themselves with doing good and abstaining from shameful acts.*

Some, changing their life-style completely, espoused a monastic and mountain way of life, *renouncing money and honors and all the other things most pleasing to men*. Many gifts were brought to the churches, and *by night the most powerful citizens frequented the streets and cared for those wretched and pitiful people who lay crippled on the ground, providing all that they needed in food and clothing*. But all this was limited to *that fixed space of time in which the terror was endemic* [i.e., the apocalyptic moment]. As soon as there was some respite and relief from danger, most people reverted to their normal ways (Magdalino 1993, 6).

Apocalyptic time has its own peculiar dynamics. Among them, one finds regular if not unbreakable patterns:

- *One person's messiah is another's Antichrist*, making the apocalyptic "other" the "enemy to be exterminated."

- *All apocalyptic movements are wrong*, no prophet predicting either the millennium or the Eschaton has been right (till now).
- *Wrong does not mean inconsequential*, millennial movements, no matter how “wrong” about what they anticipate, can nonetheless have enormous consequences.
- *Wrong does mean all consequences are unintended*: The actual results of apocalyptic movements, some of them powerful and enduring, are all unintentional. However great its achievements, no millennial movement ever accomplishes what it intended: a perfect world.

Apocalyptic millennialism, that is millennial hopes activated by a sense of their imminent fulfillment, constitutes one of the most powerful belief sets in human history. The two most influential forms of these multiple variants are *active cataclysmic apocalyptic aiming at a hierarchical millennium*, on the one hand, and *active transformational aiming at a demotic one*. In the former, true believers consider themselves the (divinely) appointed agents of cosmic destruction intended to clear the way for an imposed perfection—Jihad, Abbasids, Crusades, Thomas Müntzer, Taiping, Communism, Nazism. In the latter case, true believers attempt to transform the world peacefully into an egalitarian society—*Isaiah* 2:1–4; Sermon on the Mount, Montanism; Peace of God; Joachim of Fiore, Anabaptists, Quakers, Hippies (Mendel 2000).

Ultimately the historical course and significance of a millennial movement rides on how much it uses violence to respond to the cognitive dissonance of prophecy failed in order to sustain its momentum and achieve its goals. In other words, the key issue is not so much the beliefs, but the character of the believers. In many cases at least for a moment, violence is necessary, and a peaceful outcome depends on whether, once the sword raised, believers can set violence aside and accept imperfection (e.g., contrast between French Revolution to Terror to Napoleon, on the one hand, vs. American Revolution, via the Federalist Papers to constitutional democracy on the other).

## C Case Studies

All the varieties of this complex of beliefs have multiple variants and take widely different social forms, even though they share a number of key elements including the intensity of the conviction and of the disappointment. To familiarize researchers with the range of these variants, I list below various relatively well-known movements (whether or not they are currently viewed as millennial) and



characterize them according to their dynamic types, with particular focus on the Christian Middle Ages. NB: in any specific apocalyptic movement, the nature of the endgame is secondary to the sense of urgent imminence that brings the believers together. Thus, while the believers may all share the sense of imminence, they may have different expectations about the apocalyptic scenario, and may differ even more widely on the meta-apocalyptic goal: what kind of *millennium*, what kind of *eschaton*?

## I Moses Movement-Israelite Nation

From the standpoint of the above terminology, the biblical story of the Exodus and entrance into the Promised Land narrates a divinely appointed millennial experiment: God tries, through his agent Moses, to create a nation of free peasants following an egalitarian (*isonomic*) law code. The Mosaic legislation, and especially Deuteronomy, in this sense, constitutes the earliest recorded egalitarian constitution (J. Berman 2008). The “apocalyptic” (transitional) scenario that leads to this utopia involved the freeing of slaves from the yoke of the most advanced “civilization” of the time (Egypt), and bringing them to a “Promised Land” (Canaan).

Initially, the transitional scenario had passive humans acted upon by a strong-handed God who would take them straight to the promised land. But, so the *ex post defectu* biblical narrative tells us, the people proved a weak vessel for God’s expectations, and after two major disappointments—the worship of the Molten Calf (*Exodus* 32) and the report of the Spies (*Numbers* 13)—God readjusted his plans and created a more active apocalyptic community through forty years of “training” in the desert. The passage chronicling God’s cognitive dissonance and His recalculation of the redemptive process (*Numbers*, 14:21–25) is exceptional in world literature, especially in monotheistic traditions where God is assumed omniscient.

The forty years of preparation lead to an active cataclysmic transition via the genocidal wars of conquest (*Joshua*). The result, however, unlike most cases of ruthless wars of conquest, was the establishment of a demotic polity in which charismatic Judges, acting as courts of appeal, led a federation of self-regulating tribes. The tribes are literate, aniconic, have an egalitarian law code in civil and criminal matters, are led by charismatic judges (including a woman), and consider the worker of the land as paradigmatic free citizen. An anti-monarchical ideology prevails: *No king but God* (*Judges*, 8: 23; I *Samuel* 8: 11).

Later, under the blows of empire, Judaism developed many of the most popular demotic millennial scenarios, most prominently, the transformational world peace of Isaiah and Micah: “they [the warriors] will beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.” Constant frustration with the non-

arrival of the messianic era in which “all sit under their fig and vine with none to harass them,” and continued external imperial rule, produced increasingly cataclysmic scenarios on the one hand, and elaborate Davidic messianism of the other (Russell 1964; Hanson 1979; Collins 1999; VanderKam 1999).

Most Jewish apocalyptic thought is this-worldly (Scholem 1971): millennial, not eschatological, and that millennialism, despite its Davidic royal tropes, is much more demotic (“No King but God”) than imperial (no example of Jewish sources for “one God, one Ruler”). This demotic Jewish millennialism has inspired a wide range of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic behavior:

- active cataclysmic episodes, guerilla insurgencies among both Jews (Maccabees, Zealots, Bar Kohba), Christians (Dolcinites, Hussites, Müntzerites), and Jihadis (Cook, 2005).
- passive cataclysmic: Essenes, Qumran, retreat to monastic (strictly egalitarian) life awaiting the Endtimes (Baumgarten 1997);
- active transformational: early Christian missionary (Gager 1975);
- passive (slow) transformational: (*Avot* 2:21); mysticism (Mach 1999).

## II Christianity: From the Early Jesus Movement to Imperial Millennialism

The early Jesus movement starts in apocalyptic time. Both John the Baptist and Jesus call out: “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Mt 3:2; 4:17). It combined a divinely carried out catastrophe (“Little Apocalypse,” Mk 13; Mt 24; Lk 21) and transformative moral eschatology (Sermon on the Mount), with strong demotic millennial elements (Gager 1975). Papias’s (ca. 100) attribution to Jesus of the passage from Jewish Pseudepigrapha (2 *Baruch* 29:5) about the supernatural, carnal millennium of the messianic feast suggests that Jesus’ preaching, like all other Jewish teaching before him, involved both revolt against empire and the delights of the millennium (Ehrman 1999; Horsley 1999). Those, like Eusebius (260–340), who wanted to exclude the *Book of Revelation*, with its carnal millennialism, from the canon, preferred a Jesus of pure spirituality. That theological move has had a continuing impact of subsequent historians who share the apologetic program of both clearing Jesus of millennial carnality (Hill 2001), and apocalyptic error—“the seemingly humiliating discovery that Jesus was, in effect, a false prophet” (Allison 1999, 269).

The first inescapable disappointment for the followers of Jesus (Crucifixion), with its failure to end Roman rule (a millennial *sine qua non*; Luke 24:21), led to a two-stage salvific plan in which an active transformational stage (Christians bring

Gospel to the nations) would end in a divinely-wrought cataclysmic messianic scenario in which Jesus would return (*Parousia*) and destroy the forces of evil (*Revelation* 19) and inaugurate the millennium (*Revelation* 20–22) for the saved (saints, martyrs and company).

Within the framework of this persistent and punctuated disappointment, Christians developed a “normal time”/between-times institution, the Church, to which the agonizingly delayed hopes of the faithful shifted. The Church, the community of true believers became a salvific vehicle carrying the faithful toward the *Parousia*. Over the centuries, this salvific institution became increasingly hierarchical (clergy-laity split, monarchical episcopacy), and claimed a creedal monopoly on salvation: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.

The Church’s theologians grew correspondingly hostile to any demotic millennial teachings in Christianity (a “Judaizing heresy”), and insisted on an increasingly other-worldly (i.e., passive cataclysmic) eschatology in which the Final Events occurred in a purely spiritual, i.e., non-material, setting (Mendel 2000, Tabor 2011). This shift was reflected in the deep hostility, already visible in the second century in response to the Montanists, to a main source of inspiration for these apocalyptic beliefs in the New Testament, the book of *Revelation* (Tabbernee 2007). In the East, where imperial millennialism dominated (Alexander 1985), *Revelation* disappeared from most Greek NTs and from the official lectionaries of the Greek Church (Metzger 1997). By the third century, these anti-millennial, hierarchizing trends gave birth to the “monarchical episcopacy” which formalized hierarchical organization (and corresponding belief) within the Church. Ironically, the most voluble opponent of demotic millennialism, Eusebius, coined the imperial millennial formula to describe Constantine (272–337): “One God, one Emperor” (Peterson 1935 Drake 1976). For more than one contemporary (including probably the emperor himself), the messianic emperor Constantine, ruled over the salvific Christian Roman Empire (Bardill 2012).

With the failure of the imperial millennial project, especially visible in the Western empire in the early fifth century (Sack of Rome, 410), Augustine (354–430) developed with a systematic rejection of every kind of millennialism (including Roman imperial). In the West where *Revelation* was firmly ensconced in the Latin canon, Augustine attempted to ban any effort to interpret the text as a symbolic description of current events: e.g., Gog and Magog were *not* the Goths and the Visigoths (*De civitate dei*, 20.11; Fredriksen 1982, 68). At the same time, he accomplished an exegetical pirouette in which, rather than looking forward to an earthly millennium of peace and justice, believers should understand that the millennium, invisible to the eyes of fallen man, had already begun with the Resurrection and the formation of the Church (Markus 1989). The opacity of both the human soul and human society, *corpora permixta*, meant that no carnal

millennium could ever occur, that the actual millennium was only visible to the spiritual eye, and that the *Parousia* would only come at the end of the *saeculum*. Hence the faithful should be looking forward not to a perfect world, but the End of the world and the Last Judgment. Augustine's domination of subsequent theology, especially in these matters, meant that for more than six centuries until the eleventh century, "a profound millennialist silence" fell upon our surviving texts (Lerner 1999, 329).

### III Islam, From Last Judgment to Millennial Imperialism

Muhammad began his prophetic career announcing the imminent Judgment Day (*apocalyptic eschatological*). His initial preaching (Suras 90–114) formulates a *passive cataclysmic* scenario in which God would resurrect the Dead, *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, and judge all mankind, *Yawm ad-Din* (Arjomand 2002; Waldman 2005). With the (inevitable but unimaginable) delay of that judgment and the shift to Medina, Muhammad and his followers became increasingly active, replacing Allah's delay in punishing with their own infliction of punishment on unbelievers (Landes 2011, chpt. 14).

The shift to creedal eschatology occurs simultaneously: from believers (*maamunim*) who await and believe in God's coming punishments, to submitters [to Allah] (*muslimim*) who fight a Jihad to punish those who do not submit, the mockers and unbelievers (Donner 2010). The astonishing success of Jihad, both during the prophet's later career (return to Mecca) and among his successors (west to Spain and east to India in a century) gave birth to a global millennial dream in which those lands submitted to Muslim Sharia (*Dar al Islam*/land of submission, or peace) would continue to expand, while those still resisting (*Dar al Harb*/land of the sword, or war) would eventually disappear (Karsh 2006).

No matter how wildly successful early Muslim warriors might have been, however, they could not meet these global millennial ambitions. Inevitably, hierarchy and abuse of power stepped in, and over the centuries, a secondary imperial millennialism set in with messianic claims underlining the takeover of various imperial dynasties, Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Savafid, Mughal (Cook 2002; Yücesoy 2009; Moin 2012). These empires, then, constitute the unanticipated consequences of failed millennial ambitions, and their dissolution/defeat, even long after the initial millennial period has faded (e.g., Ottoman Caliphate) inevitably had apocalyptic implications.

## IV Christian Sabbatical Millennialism and Apocalyptic Chronologies

The scenario of the *Parousia* (Appearance/Return of Christ *in power and glory*) has guaranteed a permanent condition of cognitive dissonance to Christians who inhabit this “middle age” between the first and second (still unaccomplished), a period whose (continuously expanding) length was well beyond the apocalyptic horizon of all the early generations and even well beyond those of the early centuries (Landes 1988, 45–46). A reasonable working hypothesis considers the possibility that *every* generation of Christians experienced collective waves of apocalyptic hope and despair, that every generation knew communities that “jumped the apocalyptic gun” as it were, as described in Paul’s earliest letters (*Thessalonians* I and II) or in Hippolytus’s *Commentary on Daniel* (IV, 18–19). In response to this repeated hope and despair, Christian exegetes and chronographers elaborated an *anti-apocalyptic* millennial scenario. In this teaching, the millennium would not come until the year 6000, since a thousand years are a day in the sight of the Lord (Ps. 90, II Peter 3:8), and God toiled to make the world for six days, then mankind will suffer for six millennia, at which point, Christ will return in power and glory, and bring on the *sabbatical millennium*.

Putting eschatological expectations in the framework of millennia, created a large buffer between the present and the End, a teaching that responsible clerics, concerned about the excesses of the faithful in apocalyptic time could use to counter apocalyptic prophets like the Montanists (Tabbernee 2007). Thus, around 200 C.E., with even bishops jumping the apocalyptic gun, Hippolytus of Rome (170–235) dated his present to 5700 AM (*Annus Mundi*), and urged his readers to wait 300 years till the millennium.

The formula was well suited to transfer from generation to generation, gaining credibility every time premature apocalyptic enthusiasm failed. The problem came at the approach of the year 6000 (500 C.E.). Not only did sabbatical millennialism have the stamp of approval of church traditions but the very teaching that had served prudent ecclesiastics, became a powerful weapon in the apocalyptic prophet’s rhetorical armory (Landes 1988; O’Leary 1994). Some long-range thinkers, anticipating the problem, tried to “correct” the calculations of AM I. The most important chronographical suggestion, first proposed by Eusebius in 300 C.E./5800 A.M. I), rejuvenated the world by three more centuries, postponing the millennium to 801 CE. While Eastern chronographers ignored it, Latin ecclesiastical historians and chronographers adopted the new system in the early 60th century A.M. I (fifth century C.E.), with strong urging from Jerome (347–420) and Augustine. Thus, when the year 6000 A.M. I came (500 C.E.), a contemporary like

Cassiodorus (484–585) dated it 5699 A.M. II, without a mention of the apocalyptic beliefs the date may (or may not) have inspired in contemporaries.

A similar phenomenon occurred at the approach of the year 6000 A.M. II (801 C.E.). In the early 60th century (eighth C.E.), Bede dismissed A.M. II, and proposed dating either A.D., or A.M. III (Incarnation in 3952). Both English and Carolingian authorities, lay and clerical, picked up A.D., which rapidly became the major chronology for historians, annalists, computists, and even chancelleries. Thus, when 6000 came again, and Charlemagne (769–814) was crowned on the first day of that millennial year, none of the chroniclers who recounted this momentous event, even mentioned the coincidence.

## V Apocalyptic Expectations and Millennial Movements at the Millennium

The preference for A.D. as an alternative system over A.M. III may have come from the need to have the apocalyptic date in the not too distant future: thus, in the eighth and ninth centuries, A.D. 1000 for the *Parousia* seemed more realistic than A.D. 2048. A.D. 1000 constitutes the first openly preached apocalyptic date that was not “disappeared” before its advent, and as one might expect from the earlier efforts to suppress such an advent, a wide range of apocalyptic manifestations marked its advent and passage (Frassetto, ed., 2002; Landes et al., ed., 2003). Indeed, according to Rodulfus Glaber (985–1047), with its passage, many contemporaries re-dated the hopes and fears (*tam spem quam formidolositatem*) to 1033—the millennium of the Passion (*Quinque libri historiarum*, IV.1).

At the approach of 1000, another calculation for the apocalyptic moment rose to prominence: the coincidence of the calendric date of the (original) Passion (a movable feast) and the Annunciation (Friday March 25), also the day humankind was created. This coincidence occurs generally around three times a century, but only took on apocalyptic significance in the latter centuries of the first Christian millennium (Van Meter 1996). At the approach of the year 1000 it occurred in 970, 981, and 992 (Landes 2000b). After the millennium, it occurred in 1065 (also the end of the Easter Annus Magnus of 532 years, hence the exact replica of the first Annunciation) and 1076. In 1065 it provoked a massive apocalyptic pilgrimage to Jerusalem led by the Gunther, Bishop of Bamberg (Joranson 1924). And 1076 was the year in which the papal-imperial rivalry first heard accusations of anti-Christ. In 1155, Louis VII, King of France (1120–1180) attempted to institute a “pax” for his entire kingdom. Along with others, these calculations seem to have taken up the apocalyptic cause in the absence of the now-defunct sabbatical millennium.

The Peace of God (990s–1030s) consisted of a wave of extremely popular ecclesiastical assemblies that summoned the whole people—including the aristocracy and commoners. Assembled through the unprecedentedly liberal use of relics brought from different places, these assemblies gathered large “civilian” crowds—men, women, children, commoners, powerful, lay, monks, clergy. There the organizers extracted oaths from the assembled warriors that protected the unarmed religious and commoners (*inermes*) from the arbitrary violence of the weapons bearers (Head and Landes, ed., 1992).

In the terminology laid out here, this movement arises at a time when a wide range of apocalyptic expectations (eschatological and millennial) grew more intense at the approach of the millennium of the Incarnation and the Passion (1000, 1033). Signs and catastrophes (Halley’s comet, earthquakes, episodes of ergot poisoning) brought on apocalyptic moments in which large collective penitential assemblies gathered to beg God’s mercy. These large gatherings in response to imminent *eschatological* expectations—Final Judgment now!—swelled in size, generating even vaster, regional assemblies where all the most important personalities of the region and their *milites* gathered together with commoners. Drawing large crowds with relics, the miracles showed God’s approval of the proceedings of the assemblies. Accordingly, its two “peak” periods clustered in the decade approaching the two millennial dates of 1000 and 1033 (Duby 1968). At its second peak (in 1033), these assemblies attempted to inaugurate an “absolute peace” including the end of feuds (Van Meter 1996, Landes 2013). In the minds of at least some of the participants in this quixotic two score-long movement, these assemblies marked a covenant with God and inaugurated an era of messianic peace (Landes 1994; Landes 2013).

The “Truce” of God, first detectable in the late 1020s and becoming more prominent after 1033, shifted the focus from space to time, sacralizing the last days of the week (Thursday evening to Monday morning), Lent and Easter, as days where no warfare should take place, and protecting certain populations (the unarmed, pilgrims, peasants *at their plow*). The Truce became increasingly popular with those calling peace assemblies in the aftermath of 1033, including a major initiative under the aegis of Odilo of Cluny (962–1049) in 1041–1042 (Cowdrey, 1970). In addition, in the aftermath of 1033, we find more practical formulations, including the formation of “peace leagues” in which even commoners joined to punish oath breakers, most notably in Bourges under the initiative of the Archbishop Aimon in 1038. In this case the Eudo, Count of Déols smashed the Peace League. The idea did not, however, fade. In 1056 in Narbonne, a peace assembly declared that no Christian should shed the blood of a fellow Christian, a radical formulation with little chance of succeeding.

The subsequent history of the *Pax Dei* can best be understood in terms of a cognitive dissonance that sought in some way to at once cope with the disappointment and find alternative (and often more practical) ways to implement the messianic program. The combination of drives toward purity and the enthusiastic crowds of layfolk who supported such developments, dates back to the Peace movement earlier in the century (Moore 1980; Remensnyder 1992; Van Meter, 2003). More recently, some historians have linked the reform, which some, both back then and now, consider more a revolution or heresy than a reform (Moore 1977; H. Berman 1985) to apocalyptic theology (McGinn 1999 Whalen 2009). Retrospectively, the great church historians of the twelfth century repeatedly interpret the Church and its reform in an eschatological framework in which the purified Church plays a central role (Morrison 1992). Subsequent clashes, especially during the reign of Frederick II (1194–1250) took on particularly sharp apocalyptic turns, both millennial and eschatological (Whalen 2009).

The holy war of the end of the eleventh century (known *ex post defectu* as the “First” “Crusade”), has long been linked to the Peace, but only recently to apocalyptic expectations. The violence that had (only partially) been repressed by the “Peace” (e.g., the impossible restraints on killing Christians at Narbonne) and the open hostility it had mobilized against aristocratic violence (e.g., the Bourges Peace League of 1038 viewed peace-breakers as Canaanites and themselves as the Children of Israel), now directed legitimate aristocratic violence outside the society and sacralized as “God’s will.” This remarkable and radical move unleashed waves of enthusiastic violence that not only swept Europe (the slaughter of Jewish communities) but engulfed the Holy Land (Erdmann 1977; Rubenstein 2011). Moreover, and unexpectedly, the Pope’s call to take the Holy Land, directed at the *milites*, also aroused a widespread enthusiasm among commoners (People’s Crusade), in which one can detect, some two generations later, the same sense of standing at the center of God’s covenant with his people first described by Glaber for 1033: *gesta Dei per populum Dei*. Subsequent crusades consistently had apocalyptic dimensions.

## VI Philo-Judaic/Anti-Semitic Apocalyptic Cycle

Apocalyptic expectations had a paradoxical impact on relations between Christians and Jews. By the end of the tenth century, the apocalyptic scenario was fairly well set on this score: some of the Jews would convert and the rest would join the Antichrist, himself a Jewish messianic pretender who would fight the returning Christ at Armageddon (Libellus de Antichristi; Gow 1995). This, of



course, made the elimination of the Jews, either through conversion or extermination, an urgent agendum of apocalyptic time.

Historically speaking, Christian-Jewish relations in apocalyptic time have followed a two-stroke pattern. In the early stages of enthusiasm, when Christians believe that Christ is about to return, filled with confidence and excitement, they try and convert the Jews by embracing them, by reaching out in the most generous and affectionate ways. But with the rebuff of the Jews (almost as predictable as the failure of the Messiah to appear), the feelings turned bitter. In the painful cognitive dissonance of apocalyptic disappointment, at least some of the Christians, once so generous, turn on the Jews and blame the failure of Christ to return on their refusal to convert.

This apocalyptic scapegoating, especially if it occurred while still in apocalyptic time, could lead to the most ferocious, even genocidal assaults of the Jews. Any Jew who did not convert became, for the apocalyptic Christian, one of Antichrist's minions and had to be destroyed. As with the apocalyptic "First" (really Last) Crusade, Jews are given the choice between conversion (saved Christians) or death (the forces of the Antichrist destroyed). Most of the worst anti-Semitic episodes in Christian history arise in the later stages of an apocalyptic movement, preceded by both a generous offer and bitter disappointment. Martin Luther's (1483–1546) career illustrates the pattern well: having discovered "true" Christianity at the end of time, he (thought he) understood why the Jews had rejected the Church, and reached out to them with the true message. When rejected, he became one of the most ferocious purveyors of hatred toward the Jews in Christian history (Oberman 1984).

There is, however, an upside to this apocalyptic process as well. When Christians and Jews draw together in religiosity, when Christians grow *Philo-Judaic*, they find demotic values most congenial—equality, dignity of everyone, empathy for the "other," kingship of heaven, positive-sum relations. In these (even temporary) periods of *convivencia* (living well together; see the contribution on this topic to the present *Handbook* by Mark Abate), the mutual respect and cooperation that results do much to change the larger society. In the eleventh century, in the period before the Crusade (1096), both Jews and Christian commoners lived in cities where both populations acquired the freedom of self-rule, a symbiosis which may have contributed to the communes (Grabois 1983). In the ultimate positive-sum/negative-sum dilemma, those who bless the Jews (i.e., enter into positive-sum relations with them), are blessed (Western democracies, especially USA). Those who chase the Jews away (and thereby cement authoritarian and theocratic regimes), suffer, no matter how much wealth they have at their disposal (Spain in the 16th century, Arabs in the second half of the 20th century). The philo-Judaic strain of Western Christian millennialism (Lerner 2000), may

have contributed significantly to the rise of the democratic West (Landes 2011, chpts. 8–9).

## VII Millennial Movements after the Millennium

Most of the explicitly recorded medieval millennial movements occurred after the passage of the year 1000. Western theologians began to break the “millennial silence” in the latter half of the twelfth century, when a new round of imperial millennialism inspired by the Tiburtine Sybil gained widespread currency in political circles, and the popularity of the prophetic writings of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202; Lerner 1999). The formal appearance of millennialism in these (and other) theological writings, inspired a wider range of popular apocalyptic millennial movements (Cohn 1970; Reeves 1969; Whalen 2009).

The role of written millennialism in encouraging popular millennialism, already negatively visible in the silences surrounding the advent of the two years 6000, is particularly notable in the impact of Joachite writings on the thirteenth century. In the final decades of the twelfth century, the Calabrian abbot, Joachim of Fiore developed an elaborate historical scheme based not on the sevens of the sabbatical millennium, but the threes of the trinity. He placed himself (as do most “salvific historians”) at the turning point between the age (status) of the Son/flesh (the current Church), and the new age, about to dawn, of the Holy Spirit/fire. In this last age, which would dawn *after* the defeat of Antichrist, spiritual men would live in complete freedom and mutual love, and of messianic peace. This age of earthly perfection, in which the differences between Jews and Christians would disappear, represented the first formal depiction of an optimistic earthly expectation of redemption since the fifth century.

The early interpretations of the advent of this new age were purely transformative (the Holy Spirit descending upon chosen people and infusing them with spirit), almost imperceptibly apocalyptic, but distinctly demotic (freedom, end of hierarchy, holy anarchy). Thus despite the controversy that Joachim elicited with his embrace of the book of *Revelation* as a guide to history and the future, his millennialism made it past the censors, even finding papal support. Had Augustine been present at these papal discussions, he would have been distressed at the inability of ecclesiastics to “stop up the mouths” of the millennialists and warned that the coming century would pay the price of their folly. And indeed it did; one might even call the thirteenth century, the “Joachite century.”

The first major movements to draw inspiration from Joachite salvation history were the two mutations in monastic history, the preaching orders of Dominicans

and Franciscans. They were widely seen both within the orders and without as the new “spiritual men” whose advent Joachim had predicted. Over time, the radical millennial movement split off from the institutional one (Spiritual vs. Conventual Franciscans), and both popular movements and sophisticated exegetical treatises came to identify the Church (including the Conventual Franciscans) as agents of Antichrist (Burr 2001). The thorough mixing of millennial prophecy and contemporary historical interpretation led to opposing strains that saw either a coming “angelic” pope or a coming messianic emperor as the millennial savior. At the same time, at the turn of the fourteenth century, a violent demotic millennial movement under the leadership of Fra Dolcino (ca. 1250–1307) broke out (in part in response to the burning of their previous leader, Gerardo Segarelli in 1300). Based in the Alps, his disciples waged war on the clergy and the rich. In the same way the peace of God had become a holy war in the course of a century, so the transformative millennialism of Joachim had become active cataclysmic within a hundred years of his death.

Subsequent Christian “medieval” history is so thick with millennial themes and movements that it is hard to enumerate them all. Exegetes and theologians like Peter Olivi (1248–1298), Ubertino da Casale (1259–1329) and John of Rupescissa (d. 1366) elaborated millennial themes, while radical groups like the Beguins and the Beguines incorporated them into their spirituality. Prophecies related to events in the East (Prester John, Mongols, Cedars of Lebanon) repeatedly inspired both individuals and groups to believe they had entered apocalyptic time and in some cases to launch millennial movements. Apocalyptic millennial themes appear repeatedly in the “reforming” literature including the Lollards, the Hussites, and the early Protestant sects like the Anabaptists and the followers of Thomas Müntzer (Potestà 1999), as well as many if not most “peasant” revolts like the Jacquerie and English Peasant Revolt (Mollat and Wolff 1973). Even the Western scientific tradition has a millennial genealogy that dates back to the Middle Ages (Noble 1999), with particular significance to the work of Roger Bacon (1214–1294; Abate 2000; Matus 2012) and Arnold of Villanova (1235–1313; Backman 1995).

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