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# The Apocalyptic Complex

*Perspectives, Histories, Persistence*

*Edited by*

Nadia Al-Bagdadi, David Marno, and Matthias Riedl

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## Introduction

# The Resilience of the Apocalyptic

*Matthias Riedl and David Marno*

Those who were following the United States Presidential elections in 2008 may still remember a widely discussed campaign spot called “The One.” Funded by the campaign of Barack Obama’s Republican opponent, John McCain, the brief video clip was a montage of sound bites from Obama’s speeches, accompanied by a sarcastic commentary that was both spelled out in white capitals on the screen and spoken by a deep, masculine voice. As a bonus, the clip ended with a scene from the 1956 blockbuster, in which Charlton Heston as Moses divides the Red Sea with a wave of his staff, allowing Obama’s campaign seal to appear from beyond the waters. The spot was an attempt to poke fun at what it suggested was Obama’s self-congratulatory, bombastic rhetoric, with a not-so-subtle hint that Obama may be deceiving his followers like a false Messiah would. In response, Democrats accused the McCain campaign of using apocalyptic imagery and rhetoric to arouse the opposition of Christian fundamentalist voters.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the debate that ensued might appear as a proof that Richard Hofstadter’s classical essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” was as good a description of political discourse in 2008 as in 1964, when the essay was first published.<sup>2</sup> The spot itself was perhaps the McCain campaign’s single most successful attempt to undermine not only Obama’s by then generally acknowledged rhetorical prowess, but also his perception as a potentially redemptive leader. “Redemptive” may from one side be seen as a purely secular qualification: after the George W. Bush administration’s second term, many Americans were at the very least intrigued by Obama’s promises to lead the nation in a radically different direction. At the same time, the religious sense of redemption was not entirely foreign to the Obama campaign. From choosing “Hope” as their campaign slogan—a seemingly innocuous term that becomes laden with eschatological significance when seen



from a Christian perspective—to countless other gestures made to Christian voters, Obama's campaign consistently walked the thin line between secularism and religion, between a rejection of the former Republican administration's cooperation with the Christian right, and an attempt to court Christian constituencies. By pulling together sound bites that depicted Obama as a narcissistic candidate with bombastic claims and promises, "The One" suggested that Obama's charisma masked a false rhetoric laden with deceptive religious symbolism. It did so, according to those who produced the ad, by poking fun of Obama's remarks.

Democrats, however, did not take the ad quite so lightly and argued that it sent a hidden message to Christian voters. They pointed out that the clip's sarcastic references to "The One" who brings blessing to the world, to Obama's remarks that "we are the ones we have been waiting for," and to his claim that the "world [will be] repaired, and a light will shine down from somewhere . . . and you will experience an epiphany" added up to more than mere parody. When these remarks are taken out of their original contexts and put together in one brief video, and when this video reaches Christians who may earnestly believe in the coming end of the world, it effectively associates Obama with false prophecy and accuses him of having a Messiah complex. According to some Democrats, within the symbolic language of fundamentalist Christianity, the ad drew a comparison between Obama and the Antichrist.<sup>3</sup> When McCain's campaign ridiculed these charges, accusing the Democrats in turn with paranoia and deliberate misinterpretation, some Democrats endeavored to substantiate their position by pointing to alleged similarities between the ad and the widely popular *Left Behind* novels, which depict the events of the apocalypse in contemporary American settings.<sup>4</sup>

While the *Left Behind* series has never really caught on in European markets, in the US it has sold in over 65 million copies, a figure augmented by substantial revenue coming from additional products in the franchise, such as spin-off novels, movies, and videogames. The work of the Christian evangelical minister Tim LaHaye and author Jerry B. Jenkins, the *Left Behind* novels built their success by combining a radically literal, premillennial dispensationalist interpretation of



the Book of Revelation with a Hollywood-style, action-packed plot.<sup>5</sup> The series begins, for instance, with a scene on a flight from New York to London, where all of a sudden half of the passengers disappear into the thin air, leaving behind both their relatives and their clothes (which remain on their seats as though the body itself had simply evaporated). This science-fiction premise soon turns out to be an event of apocalyptic significance: we learn that the passengers, as well as millions of others around the world, have been “raptured” into heaven as the first act of the eschatological struggle between good and evil. Indeed, much of the *Left Behind* plots unfold along the lines of an increasing articulation of the good and the evil of the millennium. The main antagonist facing the Christians is a Romanian politician by the name of Nicolae Carpathia. Charismatic and multi-talented, Carpathia rises from the position of a simple representative to the Romanian parliament, eventually becoming Secretary General of the United Nations. Although Carpathia first appears to be benevolent, promising peace and prosperity to the world, he soon shows his real colors: he converts the U.N. into the so-called Global Community, a worldwide totalitarian regime, and meanwhile founds his own religion, “Carpathianism.” The increasingly persecuted Christians come to understand that Carpathia is the Antichrist.

Those asserting that the McCain spot associated Obama with the Antichrist argued that it used the *Left Behind* series—and particularly the character of Nicolae Carpathia, a sleek, young, charming political leader with diabolic intentions—to help fundamentalist Christians connect the ad’s vague symbolism to their own apocalyptic beliefs. Eventually the creators of the *Left Behind* series themselves weighed in; Tim LaHaye reportedly commented, “I can see by the language [Obama] uses why people think he could be the antichrist, but from my reading of scripture, he doesn’t meet the criteria. There is no indication in the Bible that the Antichrist will be an American.”<sup>6</sup> The ambivalence in Tim LaHaye’s comment is characteristic of a certain strain of politicized fundamentalism. Hal Lindsey, author of the 1970 *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the most popular non-fictional treatment of the premillennial dispensationalist view of the apocalypse, wrote in an article:



Obama is correct in saying that the world is ready for someone like him—a messiah-like figure, charismatic and glib and seemingly holding all the answers to all the world’s questions. And the Bible says that such a leader will soon make his appearance on the scene. It won’t be Barack Obama, but Obama’s world tour provided a foretaste of the reception he can expect to receive. He will probably also stand in some European capital, addressing the people of the world and telling them that he is the one that they have been waiting for. And he can expect as wildly enthusiastic a greeting as Obama got in Berlin. The Bible calls that leader the Antichrist. And it seems apparent that the world is now ready to make his acquaintance.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

The last three decades have been particularly rich in literature reflecting on the apocalyptic. The turn of the millennium, the attack against the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, and the ensuing cultural and military clash between East and West were all perceived as potentially apocalyptic events. Accordingly, they evoked a massive outpouring of both popular and scholarly publications. In the United States, paperback books with cheap, colorful covers spread the view that the US war against Iraq was a war on Babylon, marking the beginning of the end—to the careful observer, these publications resembled the apocalyptic pamphlets that flooded London in the decades before the Civil War in the seventeenth century. Meanwhile, journalists and scholars noted the apocalyptic mood, and even more so, the apocalyptic rhetoric of the administration. Popular books like the *Left Behind* series, all but neglected in the 1990s, now drew considerable attention both from scholars and from such mainstream publications as the *New York Review of Books*, where the celebrated writer John Didion wrote in the same breath about George W. Bush’s rhetoric and the *Left Behind* books.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, many tried to brush aside the anxiety (which typically came from the liberal side of the political spectrum) by suggesting that apocalypticism was either still a marginal phenomenon, or that even though it might have entered mainstream culture, it



was merely an opportunistically used rhetorical discourse. Still, apocalyptic talk was in vogue, and it remains so today.

Almost two decades into the twenty-first century, we are living, as we have many times before in history, in post-apocalyptic times. The Armageddon, it is now safe to say, did not arrive with the turn of the millennium, and while the tragic events of September 11 in 2001 or the similarly dreadful war in Iraq could be called “apocalyptic” in a loose, metaphorical sense, neither has brought about the end of the world as some had predicted. Yet as the above case of McCain’s campaign advertisement shows, the apocalyptic survives into our own times, and it deserves our continued attention. Indeed, it is perhaps in times such as these that the resilience of the apocalyptic may most easily be observed and analyzed. The essays in this book put the resilience of the apocalyptic in historical perspective. They suggest that the particular ways in which apocalyptic structures are inflected in actual historical phenomena of apocalypticism is key to understanding this resilience. For the purposes of this suggestion, the “apocalyptic” is a general structure that may take different forms (as a literary genre, a psychological disposition, a rhetorical discourse, or a religious tradition) but remains mostly implicit and imperceptible. “Apocalypticism,” on the other hand, refers to those religious, cultural, or political movements and groups that actualize otherwise implicit apocalyptic forms, bringing them to public consciousness. For instance, one might argue that while the apocalyptic has always been present in Christian culture, it only occasionally became actualized in apocalypticism. Still more rarely did it give shape to movements whose apocalypticism acquired a more than local significance. Seventeenth-century English apocalypticism, which arguably played a significant role in both the English revolution in 1640 and the Puritan settlements of America, is an obvious counterexample. The point here is to recognize that the latitude of moving from latency to manifestation and back ensures the resilience of the apocalyptic.

“The One” shows how the apocalyptic continues to be present and significant even at times when apocalypticism is less apparent. When we look at it along with Hal Lindsey’s or Tim LaHaye’s flirtation with the notion that the current president of the United States may be, if not



the Antichrist himself, at least a false prophet and a herald of the Antichrist, “The One” gives us some clue as to why the apocalyptic is as resilient as it appears to be. The success of an ad like “The One” depends precisely on the deeply ambiguous way in which apocalyptic symbolism is harnessed. For someone who is not particularly invested in the ideology of premillennial dispensationalism, the ad appears to be a mockery of Barack Obama’s somewhat bombastic, and at times religious, rhetoric. Yet within the religious vocabulary of premillennial dispensationalism, the spot is perfectly clear in suggesting that Obama is at the very least a false prophet, and potentially something quite a bit more. Interestingly, the fact that the creators of the ad explicitly disassociate themselves from the apocalyptic implications of their work does nothing to temper its effect. In fact, this denial creates a climate of apparent rationalism, which, in turn, leaves even more room for the apocalyptic to linger as innuendo and subtext. To make an explicit claim about the end of the world is to risk an obvious error that can be disproved unequivocally only with the passage of time. The resilience of the apocalyptic, in sum, is to a large degree due to the fact that the apocalyptic is a form that thrives in a climate of ambiguity of subtext, innuendo, and insinuation. It is perhaps related to this capacity to flourish in contexts of implicit, subthematic attention that we also find the apocalyptic demonstrating a remarkable adaptability to new cultural contexts. Hal Lindsey’s bestselling *The Late, Great Planet Earth* shared its 1970s bookshelves with books on pop psychology, transcendental meditation, and translations of the I Ching.<sup>9</sup> In our own decades, the *Left Behind* series has been sold everywhere in the United States from Walgreens to gas stations, from airport bookstores to Amazon (where the electronic edition is also available for Kindle).<sup>10</sup> The apocalyptic has become fully compatible with late capitalism.

\* \* \*

The original versions of the papers included in this volume were given at the conference “The Apocalyptic Complex—Origins, Histories, Permanence” at Central European University, Budapest, on December 7th and 8th, 2007. The conference took the risk of bringing together a



great variety of perspectives on the apocalyptic complex: sociology, history, theology, psychology, literary studies, religious studies, Islamic Studies and more. Because of this variety, the conference, on the one hand, had to avoid general discussions aimed at an authoritative definition of terms like “apocalypse,” “apocalyptic,” and “apocalypticism.” On the other hand, the presenters proved that a conversation across disciplines and disciplinary jargons does not have to result in continuous mutual misunderstanding. Beyond the specific context-bound applications of the adjective “apocalyptic,” there seems to exist a shared aggregate of associations connected with the symbol of “the apocalypse,” to which the participants of the conference could refer. However, the aggregate of associations, addressed in the title of this volume as “the apocalyptic complex,” defies any attempt of comprehensive conceptualization or definition.

This finding may also be illustrated by developments in the scholarship of apocalypticism, which began in the 1970s and could be subsumed under the title “the quest for a definition.” Undoubtedly, the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, which took place in the Swedish city of Uppsala in 1979, was a landmark in research history which has remained unparalleled. The colloquium was explicitly modeled on the great Gnosticism congress in Messina (1966) and hoped to be equally successful in producing a commonly accepted definition of apocalypticism that all further scholarship could refer to. However, the conference was largely restricted to ancient apocalypticism. Moreover, the choice of the location as well as the structure of the conference reflected the conceptual authority of Protestant bible scholarship, which mostly dominated the event. Despite the multidisciplinary approach of the colloquium, the subsections were organized according to the methodological principles of the German Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel. The section on “The Phenomenon of Apocalypticism” was meant to explore common thoughts and moods. The section on “The Literary Genre of Apocalypses” was supposed to find common forms of expression. Finally, in the third section “Sociology of Apocalypticism” or “Function of Apocalypticism,” sociological and historical methods were applied to identify the *Sitz im Leben* of Apocalypticism.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the volume of the proceedings includes numerous



attempts to define apocalypticism according to ideational and formal criteria or to its socio-historical conditionality. Yet, ultimately the colloquium failed in uniting all elements in one overarching definition.

Another project, the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project, was seemingly successful despite being even more restricted. A “task force” under the supervision of the Hebrew Bible scholar John J. Collins produced the following definition:

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.<sup>12</sup>

This definition has raised some inescapable questions. Collins was convinced that not only Biblical Studies but all further historical and sociological research would have to refer to his definition. At the same time, the definition itself is restricted to the apocalypse as a literary genre. The combination of this focus on genre with the broad ambition of the project meant that even within the limits of the Genres Project, a certain arbitrariness could not be avoided. The “task force” established two major types of apocalypses fulfilling the criteria of the above definition: apocalypses that involve an otherworldly journey, and apocalypses that don’t. These major types were again subdivided into subordinate types: a) “‘historical’ apocalypses which include a review of history, eschatological crises and cosmic and/or political eschatology”; b) “apocalypses which have no historical review but envisage cosmic and/or political eschatology”; c) “apocalypses which have neither historical review nor cosmic transformation but only personal eschatology.” According to these formal criteria, the researchers identified Plato, Cicero, Plutarch, and Virgil among others as authors producing apocalypses according to the latter type. It seems obvious that hardly anyone who is not familiar with the classificatory method of the Genres Project would identify these writers as apocalyptic thinkers. The problem is the same as with the Uppsala conference: formal criteria and ideational criteria simply cannot be brought into accord.



The quest for a definition has not been pursued with the same zeal since the Uppsala colloquium, even though scholars have by no means given up on it.<sup>13</sup> However, the problem remains: in what cases can we meaningfully apply terms like “apocalyptic” or “apocalypticism?” A more promising approach is to reconsider the origins of apocalypticism as a generic term during the nineteenth century. In 1832, the Lutheran theologian Friedrich Lücke published a book with the rather cumbersome title *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung des Johannes oder Allgemeine Untersuchungen über die apokalyptische Litteratur überhaupt und die Apokalypse des Johannes insbesondere*. At least in the West, until Lücke’s work, the word “Apocalypse” had mainly been used to refer to the Revelation of John, which in its first verse is described as the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ (*apocalypsis Iesou Christou*). Lücke discovered that the Revelation of John shows numerous similarities with certain other ancient Jewish and Christian texts. Following the practice of the Greek Church, he called these texts apocalypses or apocalyptic literature.<sup>14</sup> Lücke also established the generic term “apocalypticism” (German: *Apokalyptik*); but he was always aware that the Revelation of John remains paradigmatic for the identification of texts belonging to that genre. Thus, to answer the question raised above, while a definition of the “apocalyptic” or “apocalypticism” is not necessary for a meaningful limitation of the empirical field, scholarship on apocalypticism that does not accept the Revelation of John as a paradigmatic text risks terminological arbitrariness.

Moreover, a brief look at recent apocalyptic literature such as the Left Behind series or even modern Muslim apocalypses reveals that the Revelation of John has indeed remained the matrix for the narrative structure of apocalypses.<sup>15</sup> In this structure, there is always a series of disasters, which become gradually disclosed as the pattern of eschatological events. These events always lead toward the great final clash between the forces of good and evil, evoking superhuman leader personalities on both sides. Finally, there is always a concluding divine act of judgment and of political transformation, which ends the humiliation of the believers, puts the faithful in power, and brings about the destruction of the wicked. The symbolic imagery of the Revelation



of John has also, up to this day, remained extraordinarily influential: the Riders of the Apocalypse, the Seven Seals, Armageddon, the Millennium, the Whore Babylon and the Beast, the Antichrist as false prophet, God and Magog, Judgment Day, the victorious Lamb, the New World, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and finally the *apocalypsis* itself, denoting the revelatory insight into a predetermined linear structure of history. Many of these symbols may occur in other ancient apocalyptic texts as well; but the cultural paradigm has always been the Revelation of John, as the only apocalypse commonly accepted as part of the New Testament canon.<sup>16</sup> It is the continuous presence of this symbolic imagery in the art, literature, and rhetoric of our time that provides for at least a minimal consistency in the application of the term “apocalypse,” inside and outside academia.

Friedrich Lücke’s groundbreaking study is interesting for another reason as well. The preface to the 1852 second edition, in particular, shows that the author’s interests went far beyond establishing a new literary genre.<sup>17</sup> Lücke begins his study with a general observation about the political atmosphere in Germany after the failed revolution of 1848. He writes:

Even in the most recent times and even in our Evangelical Church many follow old interpretations and look at the Apocalypse as a heavenly clockwork for politics. Moreover, they regard it as an everlasting political calendar, displaying definitely and securely what time and hour it is, not only in the church. Especially since the evil year of 1848 it is supposed to show what is at stake in the future of this German Empire or Non-Empire (*Unreich*).<sup>18</sup>

Not much has changed since then, it seems. Today, just as much as in Lücke’s times, it is primarily the political revitalizations of apocalypticism that have created, ever since the Hellenist period, the need for a thorough scholarly analysis of apocalyptic phenomena, their origins, their features, their socio-political function, and their persistence. This, however, is hardly surprising considering that even the earliest apocalypses were meant to convey a political message. They had been written under the immediate impression of unwilling subjugation and



imperial dominance. The author of the ancient apocryphal apocalypse Fourth Ezra describes his situation after the destruction of the Second Temple by the troops of Rome (alias Babylon):

In the thirtieth year after the destruction of our city, I, Salathiel, who am also called Esra, was in Babylon. I was troubled as I lay on my bed, and my thoughts welled up in my heart, because I saw the desolation of Zion and the wealth of those who lived in Babylon.<sup>19</sup>

In a series of visions Ezra then learns that things will become even worse in the future; but ultimately God will transform the world, the faithful will be reestablished on Mount Zion, while the ungodly nations will be tortured and tormented.<sup>20</sup> Fourth Ezra illustrates that apocalypses always were primarily a means to understand the predominance of God's enemies and the humiliation of the true believers. Precisely in a situation where the power of the enemies is so overwhelming that active resistance appears as hopeless, apocalyptic literature and its anticipation of a future Divine transformation of reality gives consolation to the believers.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, apocalypses have also contained a strong element of resentment. In fact, there is virtually no apocalypse without an open display of hateful fantasies about the destruction of the enemy.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the Middle Ages, the modern times, and up to this day, apocalypticism has provided an interpretive narrative which, on the one hand, allows for the meaningful integration of present's disturbing events, the defeats, the disasters, and the triumph of the enemy, but, on the other hand, has also served to legitimize the politics of the self-proclaimed anti-Satanic forces, be they the Medieval Catholic Church, the Protestant reformers in Germany, the revolutionaries in the English Civil War, or, in our present, Muslim and Christian fundamentalists.<sup>23</sup>

\* \* \*

Accordingly, this volume begins with three essays that demonstrate how even a general discussion of the apocalyptic needs to simultaneously pay attention to the concrete, ideological and political contexts



in which apocalyptic phenomena actually appear. Indeed, the apocalyptic is a living subject with continuing relevance in our own time; it evokes passionate personal and political responses, and during the conference where these papers were first delivered we sometimes ended up with spirited disagreements. In the first essay of the book, Richard Landes's typology of millennial experiences and movements takes its examples from contemporary Islamic millennialism to suggest that a comprehensive understanding of apocalypticism cannot rely on a stable typology but must take into account the dynamic nature of apocalyptic phenomena. Klaus Vondung's essay raises the vexed question of whether or not apocalyptic motivations necessarily lead to apocalyptic violence. Using the example of the Nazi regime, which he situates in the broader context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history, Vondung suggests that the apocalyptic is a useful analytical category to describe a type of political violence. Finally, this first section of general inquiries is concluded by Charles Strozier and Katharine Boyd's discussion of how psychology is able to provide insights into the motivations, experiences, and actions behind apocalyptic movements.

The rest of the volume is divided into three parts according to roughly periodical considerations, focusing on medieval, early modern and modern, and contemporary apocalyptic phenomena. The medieval period is formative for apocalyptic movements in all three monotheistic traditions. Moshe Idel's contribution follows the rise and gradual taming of eschatological expectations within Judaism. Aziz Al-Azmeh's essay examines "isomorphous" time, the disjunction between dissipative time and the teleological time of the apocalyptic, within various Muslim traditions. Brett Whalen focuses on the apocalyptic motivations and goals of the crusades in the context of Western Christianity. In the final essay of the section, Petre Guran traces the myth of the last emperor in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

After the enlightenment, the relationship between religion and the increasingly secular realms of philosophy and politics becomes enormously complicated. Michael Gillespie's essay shows how the great century of German philosophy between Kant and Nietzsche might be seen as a continuous grappling with the apocalyptic heritage of Chris-



tianity. Marina Cattaruzza, in turn, focuses on the relationship between politics and apocalypticism, and particularly the notion of “political religions” in the context of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In the last essay of this section, David Marno looks at how Milton fashions Eve’s character in *Paradise Lost* as a response to frustrated apocalyptic expectations.

The volume concludes with three essays that demonstrate the continuing relevance of the apocalyptic into our own times. In focusing on recent Ukrainian history, Lilya Berezhnaya shows how in a post-communist context traditional ideologies of nationalism and apocalypticism can return with a vengeance. György Szönyi’s essay turns from politics to popular culture by showing how the apocalypse of Enoch has influenced not only traditionalist philosophers such as the Hungarian Béla Hamvas, but literature such as Philip Pullman’s immensely successful novel, *His Dark Materials*. In the last essay the book, David Cook accounts for the apocalyptic sources and motivations behind contemporary Jihadist movements. The volume concludes with László Hubbes’s summary of the scholarship and with a select bibliography of the apocalyptic.

In preparing this volume, the editors have incurred numerous debts of gratitude. Katalin Straner was of essential assistance at the very beginning of this project. The comments and suggestions of anonymous readers from CEU Press proved to be immensely helpful in the final revision of the manuscript. Finally, for their invaluable work on preparing the manuscript for publication, we would like to express our thanks to Irina Denischenko, Rachel Renz, Alexandra Medzibrodzky, Martin Pjecha, and Nikola Pantić, as well as to Esther Holbrook at CEU, and to Nóra Vörös at CEU Press.



## Notes

- 1 For an account of the debate, see Amy Sullivan, "An Antichrist Obama in McCain Ad?," *Time.com*, August 08, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1830590,00.html>
- 2 Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, November, 1964, 77–86.
- 3 Robert Fuller's study gives perspective on these claims. Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 4 The Left Behind series has attracted commendable scholarship in the past decade. The most extensive study is Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde ed., *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For a remarkable account of the readership of the series, see Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: "Left Behind" in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 5 On the role of premillennial dispensationalism in American culture, see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); and Charles B. Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).
- 6 Foon Rheen, "Some Say Ad Casts Obama as the Antichrist," *boston.com*, August 9, 2008, [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/08/09/some\\_say\\_ad\\_casts\\_obama\\_as\\_the\\_antichrist/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/08/09/some_say_ad_casts_obama_as_the_antichrist/).
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- 12 John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.
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- 15 David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 37ff.
- 16 Compare to Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Book of Revelation," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1 *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Bloomsbury, 1998), 384.



- 17 The preface addresses Lücke's friend Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, Royal Prussian Envoy in London, to whom the volume is dedicated. Von Bunsen was just as much a scholar as a diplomat. He played a highly important role in establishing an international network of Egyptologists. Yet, Lücke fashions his preface as the words of a recluse theologian spoken to a politician who, despite acting on the stage of an international public, has not given up his membership in the heavenly *politeuma*. Lücke, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung*, ix–xii.
- 18 Ibid., xv.
- 19 4 Ezra 3:1–2, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 528.
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**P a r t**

**I**

# **Perspectives**







# The Varieties of Millennial Experience<sup>1</sup>

*Richard Landes*

In order to understand millennial beliefs and their apocalyptic movements, we must become familiar with their fundamental tensions. What I offer below is a typology of millennial and apocalyptic experiences and movements. This typology, however, represents only a static view of the phenomenon. Nothing takes shape and mutates faster over (apocalyptic) time than a millennial movement which can go from waxing enthusiasm to devastating disappointment in a matter of days, months, at most years. In order, then, to illustrate how these varieties can appear and mutate within a single movement, I will use the example of one of the religious movements whose apocalyptic and millennial dimensions are relatively unknown.

## Eschatology

This notion holds that at the end (*eschaton*) of “time,” the Lord will judge the quick and the dead, all, together, publicly. This apocalyptic theodicy can give birth to two possible aftermaths:

1. An eschatological (final) one in which the earthly world is consumed in purifying fires and rewards in heaven and punishments in hell are final.
2. A millennial one in which the new world of justice appears on earth and marks a messianic age of abundance and the joy of fellowship.

There are, of course, both religious and secular variants of eschatology. If God does not bring his creation to an end, the universe may, in the form of, for example, comets colliding with earth.<sup>2</sup> Even more attractive are the profoundly moralistic warnings against self-destruction by nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, or by irrevers-



ible human-induced ecological destruction that threatens the very existence of the human race—or certainly “the world as we know it.”

From the point of view of millennial analysis, the Qur’ān is an apocalyptic document, and the origins of the movement lie in an apocalyptic prophecy by Muhammad. Both traditional Muslims and modern scholars agree that the earliest Suras recording Muhammad’s initial teachings appear at the end of the Qur’ān.<sup>3</sup> This evidence of these early Suras makes it clear that, like Jesus’ opening message, Muhammad’s was apocalyptic. But whereas Jesus started out millennial—“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven [on earth] is at hand”—Muhammad started out eschatological—“Repent, for the Resurrection of the Dead (*al-Qiyāma*) and the Day of Judgment (*Yawm al-Hisāb*) are at hand.”

Eschatological thought tends towards totalism: the conclusion is final and decisive, a closed solution. The messiness of earthly existence must itself burn up in the process. This vision of a final and ultimate solution encourages a zero-sum or dualistic way of thinking that imagines a closed form of redemption: the good in heaven, the evil in hell; the body and all its disorderly delights are gone, permanently. Tertullian’s vision of a heaven where the saved got to watch the torments of the damned in all their locations in Hell (which later inspired Dante to visionary poetry) may well represent a high-water mark in millennial resentment,<sup>4</sup> but it also illustrates the workings of closed images of redemption, in which the saved delight in the punishments of the damned. When the body and soul are separated, the very drama of moral existence has been resolved. This is the real final solution. There is no future, no more tests, no more hopes. Future generations and the open-ended directions in which they might move no longer have a say in the redemptive process. For the apocalyptic eschatological thinker, this is the End.

## Millennialism

The millennial option moves in the opposite direction in its quest for theodicy; it looks for justice in this world. This option is an open challenge to the narrative that says everybody is morally corrupt, no real



change is possible, and this is how things have to be. Here saints will transform this world by transforming society, and this will bring about a time of justice here on earth. Millennialism is a form of social mysticism that is deeply subversive in the political sense.

Accordingly, in this essay I use the term millennial to designate the belief that at some point in the future the world that we live in will be radically transformed into one of perfection—of peace, justice, fellowship and plenty. This can, but need not, entail a belief in God. The earliest recorded millennial movements have all invoked God; but, possibly as early as ancient Greece, and with increasing frequency in the course of the last half millennium (1500–2000 CE), the West has produced and exported a number of secular, indeed atheistic forms of millennialism. Marx's vision of the future, for example, fits all the criteria for demotic millennialism—from the vision of a non-coercive society (withering away of the state), to the dignity of manual labor (workers of the world), to the radical egalitarianism (renunciation of private property), to the fascination with the historical signs indicating the imminent apocalypse (historical dialectic).<sup>5</sup>

Some historians object to maintaining so capacious a definition for millennialism, and suspect that it is merely a ploy for staking a claim on a whole range of subjects which include virtually every radical movement in history within the purview of millennial studies.<sup>6</sup> My suggestion is that it is far too early in our research to decide what relevance millennial studies have for these topics. Given that most people have never thought about Nazism as a millennial movement (and this includes scholars who know that the Nazis claimed to inaugurate the *tausendjähriges Reich*), it seems a bit early to decide how useful or bloated the term might be.<sup>7</sup>

My contention is that by understanding movements that share the simple combination of a millennial vision of the world transformed, and an apocalyptic belief in that transformation's imminence, one can make sense of these movements in significant ways. They participate in an unusual and characteristic dynamic that is well worth understanding. These movements form a natural grouping of socio-cultural phenomena that cut across all cultures and regions and periods of history. They are still with us. We navigate in their currents.



Millennialism takes on more active forms than other endtime beliefs, since, in these scenarios, the dramatic changes happen in this world and within our time. Thus, we find especially strong tendencies towards social perfectionism and an emphasis on human agency. More cosmic scenarios, on the other hand, those in which only God or the astronomical forces can effect any significant change, discourage precisely these activist tendencies.

Although not all millennial movements are active, all secular millennial movements are. There is no one but “us” (however defined) to bring about this transformation. The secular dimension of millennialism—its insistence that redemption occurs in the world of time and history, in the saeculum—makes it possible for non-theistic versions to emerge, like utopianism and communism.<sup>8</sup> Until the advent of nuclear weapons, on the other hand, cosmic apocalyptic scenarios—eschatological destruction of the world—necessitated a deity.

Thus, although millennialism by this definition can cover a very wide range of beliefs and behavior patterns from active to passive, violent to pacifist, all of these patterns relate closely to one another. When we work with these definitions, we keep company with both the Church Fathers, who objected to precisely this “earthly” element of millennialism, and modern anthropologists who want to study it in all its forms, from the tribal cargo cults of Melanesia to the post-modern cargo cults of UFOs.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of Islam, the millennial tradition emerges later, as a result of the combination of heavenly “failure”—the Last Judgment never materializes—and earthly success—Muhammad’s followers conquer half the known world within a few generations after his death.<sup>10</sup> Islam presents us with a particularly strong case of a religion that begins in apocalyptic time with a passive cataclysmic eschatological scenario, responds to the delay of the end (the failure of the Last Judgment to occur) by shifting from waiting for Allah to punish the sinners and scoffers to having Allah’s faithful execute judgment.

This shift, which includes both a military and political program and can be dated to year 1 of the Hejira, eventually leads—due largely to its astounding success—to the inauguration of a millennial war (Jihad) that conquered much of the world in only a few generations.<sup>11</sup>



And finally, when the anticipated transformations do not occur despite these stunning “earthly” successes, Islam normalized the millennial vision in a permanent program of struggle for world conquest and imperial rule.<sup>12</sup>

Those who want to limit millennialism to seeking radical social change primarily through violence,<sup>13</sup> miss a key dynamic. Individual millennial believers or groups can change from one extreme to the other of their various options of dealing with others in apocalyptic time—peace, violence, reconciliation, extermination—and however radically different they may seem to us, as reported in the documents, they do share significant traits. The wave of new religious movements we call the “Protestant Reformation” produced the exceptionally egalitarian and pacifist Anabaptist communities which gave women a prominent role and renounced all forms of coercion. But under the pressures of a public breach of apocalyptic time in 1533 in the town of Munster, they turned to violent, patriarchal, and hierarchical behavior.<sup>14</sup> To understand the phenomenon, we need to focus on its key components—a belief in the possibility of radical social change, perfection in this world (millennialism), and an expectation that this revolution is now occurring (apocalypticism). Within each of these dimensions, we find a significant variety of types.

## **Hierarchical, Imperial, Iconic Millennialism**

This form of millennial thinking works from a top-down model of the “perfect” society. Its cosmic battle for the world pits chaos (evil) against order (good), and calls for the establishment of justice and peace from a hierarchy on earth that mirrors the hierarchy in heaven.<sup>15</sup> Monotheistic variants favor the formula: One God, one emperor, where an emperor-messiah represents God on earth and constitutes the image or icon of God on earth.<sup>16</sup> In Christianity this tradition dates back to the time of Constantine, and produces in its failure to actualize the imperial millennium, the notion of a coming “Last Emperor” who will conquer the world and bring all within the just confines of true Christianity.<sup>17</sup> The image of a final “world conqueror” who in-



augurates the Golden Age appears in many world historical traditions, including both Matreya Buddhism and Hinduism.<sup>18</sup>

Elites prefer hierarchical millennialism. It offers a vision of the perfect society where “the people” prosper under the beneficent and omnipotent power of the ruler and his servants, a beneficent, demotic monarchy. Such an idea has particular attraction for clerical elites who believe that the particular liturgies they conduct assure the harmonious alignment between celestial and terrestrial forces.<sup>19</sup> Thus temple-based cities whose very architecture replicates heavenly symmetries often stand at the center of a great imperial tradition, many of which tend towards sun imagery for the ruler.<sup>20</sup>

Although often based on past “creation myths” about the origin of, or order within, the universe, and serving as a “charter” for the current monarchy, such myths also have future-oriented, millennial variants, which view the present as one of increasing chaos against which their forces must struggle. The forward-looking myths structured on the order/chaos duality have a tendency to be cataclysmic: the world has succumbed to evil, and the (vast) majority of mankind is irredeemably corrupted. In order for the world to be as it should be—as God, the dialectic, the race, or Allah wills it—then the forces of order must annihilate those of evil. The hierarchical millennial “world to come” will be one in which the messianic conqueror has destroyed forever the mad passions that drive men to civil war and violence.<sup>21</sup>

The images of the evil forces that hierarchical millennialists emphasize target disorder from “below” as much as threat from “without.” Among the apocalyptic signs of oncoming chaos—the world turned upside down<sup>22</sup>—they identify: commoners who do not know their place, women who talk back, aristocrats who are treated as slaves, and rulers who are thrown out of their cities.<sup>23</sup> Alone a strong king can keep chaos at bay, and in relegating this immense task to his officers, he serves both his subjects and his aristocracy.<sup>24</sup> Here we encounter again the firm belief of most “political” thinkers throughout history that democracy was a recipe for anarchy and social disaster.<sup>25</sup> The overlap between this hierarchical vision and the stratified structures of pre-modern societies, something that made the idea acceptable to elites, also finds a special predilection among “reformers.”<sup>26</sup>



Not surprisingly, this is perhaps the best-attested form of millennialism we have.<sup>27</sup>

In its monotheistic form, be that the monotheism of revelation or philosophy, this hierarchical formula reads: "One God, one king." Here, heaven's order becomes a model for that of earth, and just as God rules in heaven, so on earth, the one king rules over a numerous, obedient, and grateful population of people saved by the beneficent conqueror's pax. In the millennial variants of such hierarchy, we find a world conqueror who brings all peoples under his messianic wing, who, with a new "law," inaugurates the new world, the new dispensation. In Islam, for example, all of the great empires used millennial rhetoric extensively in the early stages of their development, although Islamic beliefs tended to stop short of deifying the emperor as Eusebius attempted to do with Constantine.<sup>28</sup>

These millennial ideologies had a great deal to recommend them. In apocalyptic time, they permitted one to rally support for a conqueror among the populace, to present the conqueror as their true friend, as the anointed messenger of God sent to free commoners from the tyranny of their aristocracies.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the Islamic warriors who conquered the Sassanid empire probably thought they were destroying a corrupt aristocracy and freeing an oppressed people to receive the word of Allah before the last judgment.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, they gave a free hand to the forces of their own warrior aristocracies, men who put their lives on the line because they expected to benefit from their victories.

Monotheistic or not, polities in which temples and icons play a major role in state-sponsored religiosity tend to accompany hierarchical political millennialism.<sup>31</sup> The rituals of the central temple create the capital of the empire, the massive city where court and cult become monumental. Such projects often involve large amounts of forced, slave labor, and therefore the radical subjection of large numbers of people to such projects.<sup>32</sup> They also create a strong market for the arts and trades, channeling talented cultural energy and resources into these publicly funded projects dedicated to the glory of the elites and the gods they serve. Such millennial notions offer an almost irresistible ideology to people with visionary ambitions, to those intent on



bringing about great changes, to conquering generals and social architects, to those who would carve out the millennial kingdom from the body social. In Islam, for example, despite the strict ban on images, the allure of empire rapidly exercised its gravitational pull.<sup>33</sup>

Among the many characteristic products of imperial millennialism, we find a wide range of monumental sculptural programs, including the iconic depiction of the emperor and the empress.<sup>34</sup> The advent of the imperial Roman style in rule immediately generated a massive iconic program featuring the messianic ruler and his relationship to the forces of the universe.<sup>35</sup> This kind of thinking also has an affinity with bee imagery, and sun-king imagery, the divinization, as it were, of Hobbes's Leviathan, as the all-nurturing center. Almost all great empires with a demotic program "for all"—Hellenistic, Roman, Christian, Buddhist—bring with them massive public campaigns of visual art aimed at establishing the icon of the ruler in the social imagination. Alone, Islam has succeeded in breaking this matrix between empire and icon, between on the one hand, a world salvific conquest and empire (which it undoubtedly pursued), and, on the other, a fairly strict adherence to the prohibition on images imbedded in Muslim scriptures.<sup>36</sup>

## Demotic, Egalitarian, Iconoclastic Millennialism

This variety of millennialism embraces the opposite conception of the universe: it sees salvation as a "bottom-up" phenomenon, involving voluntarism and egalitarian ideals. Here the inhabitants of the messianic world act justly by choice, and thus there will be no need for government. "No king but God!" was the political formula of monotheism according the Zealots of Jesus' time.<sup>37</sup> The "withering away of the state" was Marx's. Demotic millennialists view empire and hierarchy as the incarnation of evil.<sup>38</sup> For them, freedom and justice in the messianic age will abolish all dominion of people over each other, a kind of holy anarchy in which the "saved" behave justly not from fear but from love.

It is difficult to communicate the radical difference between hierarchical and demotic millennialism, especially in their view of human



nature. Both are ardent views, one infinitely optimistic about humanity's capacity to handle freedom, to flourish in a voluntary and self-disciplined universe; the other deeply pessimistic about humanity's addiction to selfish and destructive behavior, desperately in need of "correction."<sup>39</sup>

Demotic millennialism can take a variety of actual forms, from particularistic to universalistic. Some forms "unify" a given population of believers—nation, race, denomination. Others imagine a multicultural world, where "nation does not lift up sword against nation," and honest hardworking people enjoy the fruits of their labor regardless of their form of worship. Still others imagine a universalist melting pot into which all substantive differences vanish. Islamic apocalyptic had an original and enduring (if often eclipsed) commitment to radical egalitarianism and ecumenism, in which all kinds of distinctions—clan, class, even ethnicity—dissolved in the common submission to Allah. Indeed, in the earliest stages of the tradition, Christians and Jews could be considered true believers without formally becoming "Muslims."<sup>40</sup> From there to the same kind of denominational "monopoly on salvation" expressed in the Christian formula, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus est* (no salvation outside the Church), constitutes one of the first major steps towards imperial monotheism.<sup>41</sup>

Demotic millennialism, at least in its earliest stages, views the stratification of societies as the enemy. Rather than seeing hierarchy as the way to impose the millennial peace, something to be repaired or restructured, it sees it as something that should and will vanish. Thus, the pacifist demotic tradition foresees an apocalyptic transition that dismantles the prime divider between elites and commoners. Here the enemy is not chaos and disorder, but rather order in inequality, evil empire. Here collective salvation comes in a celebration of equality and freedom, of conscious moral beings allowing each other, in fellowship, to enjoy freedom, to rejoice in "holy anarchy." Here the sword and spear, weapons of predatory aristocratic dominion become plow and pruning hook, tools of honest labor (Isaiah 2:1–4). Here commoners who live by the sweat of their own brows, sit under their own fig and vine, with no one to make them afraid (Micah 4:4). Here all men are free, equal, and brothers—*liberté, égalité, fraternité*.<sup>42</sup>



In his poem on the American revolution, Blake gave voice to the demotic dream with the characteristic exuberance of those who rejoice in hope:

The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;  
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up'  
The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'ed.  
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!  
Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are bust;  
Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the field:  
Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;  
Let the chained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing  
Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years;  
Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open.  
And let his wife and children return from the oppressors scourge;  
They look behind at every step & believe it is a dream.  
Smiling, The Sun has left his blackness, & found a fresher morning  
And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear and cloudless night;  
For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease.<sup>43</sup>

Committed to egalitarian ideals, demotic millennialists are especially imaginative in the field of social relations—generating and embracing new social paradigms that, in some cases, go mainstream (the opposition to slavery in America at the time of the Revolution was from millennialists).<sup>44</sup> This social creativity often places a high value on manual labor (as any egalitarian ethic must) and demotic millennialists, the Shakers for example, often become early adapters of new technology, especially communications technology.<sup>45</sup>

In the language of social science, the goal of demotic millennialism is to dismantle traditional authoritarian and socially stratified societies, to launch a large (universal?) network of hard-working and productive civil societies, living in mutual peace and exchange, regulated by a discourse of judicial fairness.<sup>46</sup> It is at once a modern ideal and an ancient prophetic dream. It seems, especially today, that the modern version is no less outrageously hopeful than the prophetic one some 2700 years ago.



But when the grip of Leviathan is at last broken, then the earth bursts forth in magical abundance. Here we find demotic millennial dreams of a land of Cockayne, of great feasts where all eat and drink and love without cease:

The earth also shall yield its fruit ten thousandfold and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster produce a thousand grapes, and each grape produce a cor of wine. And those who have hungered shall rejoice: moreover, also, they shall behold marvels every day. For winds shall go forth from before Me to bring every morning the fragrance of aromatic fruits, and at the close of the day clouds distilling the dew of health. And it shall come to pass at that self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time.<sup>47</sup>

This demotic millennialism constitutes precisely what the church fathers rejected as they formulated a salvific ideology (Christology) that found favor above the prime divider and permitted the Christianization of the Roman empire. The imperial Fathers of the Catholic "Golden Age" denounced this kind of millennialism as carnal, as Judaizing.<sup>48</sup> It takes the textual promises of a millennium of peace and abundance literally. It expects the millennium to transform the saeculum.

Where do we find such demotic millennialism? Virtually everywhere. Almost all nativist movements involve a sense of return to a time when people were far fairer with each other, and the soon-to-be restored golden age was a return to that original fairness.<sup>49</sup> The most egalitarian millennial distribution of agrarian holdings on record occurred in Nanquin under the *Taiping* (Great Peace) in the 1840s: all got exactly equal shares, and adult women got the same as adult men.<sup>50</sup> A number of apocalyptic Islamic movements—Baha'i, Ahmadiyya—have distinctively demotic dimensions.<sup>51</sup>



## From Demotic to Hierarchical Millennialism: The Wages of Success

Of course the greatest danger that all these egalitarians run is success. While they are weak and powerless, their complaints and goals sound noble. But Nietzsche identified the inherent hypocrisy of such demotic ideals in the “ressentiment” of “slave morality.”<sup>52</sup> Like the Athenians chiding the Melians, he identified arguments for fairness not as an expression of a desire to put an end to domination, but to substitute one’s own right to domination for that of those currently in positions of power. In such cases, the results of “attaining power” can veer rapidly from demotic to hierarchical. The large numbers of demotic millennial movements that turn into totalitarian adventures reflect precisely the kind of reversal that so many cynics express about the proponents of equality.<sup>53</sup> They only speak of fairness when they are weak. Upon achieving power—in millennial cases, absolute power—such discourses rapidly turn to coercive purity.<sup>54</sup>

As one analyst has noted, in the Protestant Reformation, tolerance—a key demotic ideal—is a loser’s creed; once in the majority, every denomination that had begun insisting on freedom of conscience became theocratic.<sup>55</sup> In Islam, the rise to power, which had initially meant liberation from the defeated ruling classes, rapidly turned to subjection and the development of *Dhimmi* laws that formalized the inferior status of those people sufficiently wrongheaded to reject Allah’s dominion.<sup>56</sup>

What happens to movements that succeed in launching an egalitarian experiment? Is the reversal from demotic to hierarchical a necessary occurrence? Are the leaders of these movements—Robespierre, Lenin, Mao—hypocrites from the start, or do they undergo a transformation once they gain power? Millennial studies suggest that, although in some cases the bad faith may have been present from the beginning,<sup>57</sup> in most cases the movement begins with ardent and sincere motives but fails to meet the challenge of disappointment. For in every case of these movements, the millennial presuppositions upon which the movement predicated its apocalyptic strategy—take power and get rid of the forces of evil (money, property, privilege, selfishness, Jews)



and the “new human” (fellow, citizen, comrade, redeemed Aryan) will spontaneously emerge—are always disappointed. In fact, taking power almost guarantees that the movement faces disappointments, including the reappearance of all those corrupt and selfish attitudes that Augustine had insisted would exist until the very end of the saeculum within the ranks of the new order. The new millennial body rapidly becomes a *corpus permixtum*, in which good and evil continue to struggle for control of the human soul.

Once engaged in apocalyptic time however, adherents resist losing its promises by following ever more radical paths. Like the Xhosa, they greet every disappointment by raising the stakes. When demotic millennial movements face failure in a position of power (e.g., revolutionary groups), they are faced with a particularly acute choice: Either they maintain their ethical ideology even if this necessitates an initial shift to education, or they abandon it for an increasingly cataclysmic, apocalyptic scenario in which they take an increasingly coercive role. Here one might argue that resentment, often undetected or unacknowledged, begins to play a role. Communism, for example, not only appeals to generous egalitarians, it also appeals to the envy of the have-nots—what Marx called *der rohe Kommunismus*, raw or crude communism.<sup>58</sup> When such envy plays a major role in the mobilization of an egalitarian movement, it will most likely fail the test of disappointment.

The shift in Islam from the non-coercive early stage in Mecca to the jihadi activities of the Medina period, from the brotherhood of believers in the one true God to members of the Muslim faith, closely follows this pattern of response to disappointment. When Allah does not bring on the Day of Judgment and punish all those arrogant sinners who mocked His prophet, then the Prophet and his followers will punish them.<sup>59</sup> This shift from voluntary to coercive purity in response to failure offers a particularly important insight into the etiology for totalitarianism in both communist and fascist regimes: when the “perfect society” fails to emerge spontaneously, the millennialists who hold power carve that perfection out of the body social.<sup>60</sup>

The key to the demotic millennial reentry into normal time revolves around the way in which the leaders and power holders handle



the imperfections which confront all social experiments. Those who view even internal opposition as betrayal, who seize upon demonizing narratives about the sins of "others" (as was the case in the French revolution and later with the Xhosa), are capable of killing vast numbers of people. The Chinese Great Peace ceased only after some 20–35 million Chinese had lost their lives; the successors of the Great Peace under Mao may have killed as many as 70 million of their own people, most of them in peacetime!<sup>61</sup> The ideologies of revolutionary terror, *shahid*, and apocalyptic devastation come out of frustrated totalitarians, who, unable to coerce reality to fit their desires, come to believe that only by destroying the world can one save it.<sup>62</sup>

The question that faces millennial historians at this point is not whether Nietzsche was right about Tertullian and the Athenians about the Melians.<sup>63</sup> Undoubtedly there are people who only complain about unfairness while they are weak, but as soon as they are strong, they will turn on others. There are unquestionably many *hommes de ressentiment* in the annals of millennial behavior. Indeed one important branch of millennial rhetoric appeals to precisely such desires, among other things, for retribution.<sup>64</sup> Whole movements can be the product of ressentiment and their impact can be devastating.

But do all who speak prophetically speak in bad faith? And do all who listen and become aroused at this discourse listen in bad faith? The fate of millennial movements turns not on whether their presuppositions and predictions are wrong—they will always prove to be so—but on how believers handle the disappointment, what changes do they go through when re-entering normal time. The most self-destructive tend to be those that readily abandon earlier, irenic positions and turn violently towards a demonizing narrative. The most constructive tend to cleave to the values of justice on whose wings they first rose from popularity to power—what Mendel calls "tautological millennialism."<sup>65</sup>

Whatever the outcome, however, the early passions of apocalyptic movements make little sense without understanding the widespread appeal of demotic millennialism and its vision of a world at once free and just. In a sense, what prevents people from pursuing such visions is their Augustinian conviction that the world is a cruel place and that



such dreams mark one as a victim not a victor. When, if the meme spreads fast enough in apocalyptic time, it looks like the new world has become an irresistible force, many will gladly join.

## Apocalypticism

The millennial vision of a transformable man and society becomes a discourse of beliefs about time. It interprets the present in terms of the future, and therefore places timing at the center of its rhetoric.<sup>66</sup> If one believes that the great transformation is far off in the future, millennialism tends to have a pacifying effect—it gives meaning to one's sufferings in the long run, but discourages any action in the present since the time is not ripe. If, on the other hand, one believes the transformation is imminent—that is, apocalyptic—then one becomes far more active, joining with others to start revivalist movements, rich in emotion and tears of joy.<sup>67</sup>

The obviously important role of apocalypticism in bringing millennialism to light has tended, however, to blind many to this distinction. Indeed most definitions of millennialism, including Norman Cohn's, include the apocalyptic component without mentioning the long term alternative.<sup>68</sup> However, the fact that millennialism is most visible when its followers believe the end is imminent, does not mean the phenomenon is absent when we cannot see it in our documents. On the contrary, not only can we detect its presence by looking at non-apocalyptic millennial discourse like the Christian and Jewish "Sabbatical Millennium"—wait for the year 6000 *Annus Mundi*<sup>69</sup>—but when we attend to apocalyptic beliefs and their inevitable disappointment, we find a richly textured narrative about how once eager public advocates of eschatological beliefs do their best to disappear after their failure.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, despite key common traits, especially in comparison with those approaches that accept the world as is, millennial beliefs take a wide variety of forms. We can profitably divide them into several polar attitudes towards key issues: 1) the apocalyptic question: when and how would the millennial transformation come about? 2) the question of agency: who does what to bring about this transformation? 3) the



millennial question: what would the millennial kingdom look like after the transformation? In answer to the first question we have cataclysmic vs. transformational apocalypticism; in answer to the second, we have a continuum from divine to human agency and human to divine passivity; and in answer to the third, we have authoritarian or hierarchical vs. anarchic or demotic millennialism.

*Cataclysmic apocalyptic scenarios* foresee enormous destruction preceding the advent of the God's kingdom. They tend to emphasize the depravity of man—most people are damned and must perish before any truly just society can come about. This apocalyptic scenario thus involves staggering levels of violence and destruction—rivers of blood, plague, earthquakes, floods, famines, the devastation of war and natural calamity. Religious forms of cataclysmic apocalyptic belief, like modern “pre-millennial dispensationalism” among American Protestants, tend to emphasize the central role of God and divine agents in bringing about the millennium. In these scenarios evil forces control the world either openly or, in many Christian and anti-modern versions, secretly in the form of a worldwide conspiracy that will soon—at the apocalyptic moment—spring their trap and enslave the whole world.

The most widespread and familiar form of this belief is the coming of a world in the grip of a totalitarian cabal and fears of the emergence of a New World Order.<sup>71</sup> Modern Protestant “pre-millennialism” expects Jesus to return before the millennium to destroy Antichrist and his agents in the battle of Armageddon, and then to found the kingdom of the saints (millennium). Here humanity has a passive role, largely limited to penitence and preaching: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Heaven's Gate, and many other Gnostic and UFO apocalyptic approaches, view this physical world as a prison from which we all need to be released, as something that will be “plowed under” at the great transformation. When we imagine the apocalyptic as disastrous and speak of Doomsday as a day of terror, we are referring primarily to various manifestations of the cataclysmic millennial scenario.

*Transformational apocalyptic scenarios* emphasize the voluntary and peaceful change of humanity. A massive collective change of heart, per-



haps divinely inspired, brings on the messianic age. Transformational scenarios assume that large numbers of people can transcend their current social paradigms and move into a messianic mode voluntarily—the lion lies down with the lamb, aristocrats beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Transformational millennialism tends to foster programs of radical—often unrealistic—social change (peace movements, temperance, emancipation, utopian communities) while placing great emphasis on educational reforms that create “new” people (citizens, comrades, believers).

Currently, the most prominent form of transformational millennialism comes from the “new age” movements set in motion by the millennial wave of the 60s—environmentally harmonized communes.<sup>72</sup> In Protestant circles, transformational millennialism is known as “post-millennialism.” This refers to the idea that Jesus comes back after his faithful create the millennium on earth, although there are also cataclysmic variants of post-millennialism.<sup>73</sup> Historically, transformational (post-) millennialism has contributed to a number of typically American “reformist” developments—the Great Awakenings, the Civil War, utopian farming and industrial communities (from the Shakers and Amish to the Oneida and Fourier communities), the Temperance movement, the profession of social work, the civil rights movement, etc.

*Active and Passive Apocalyptic Scenarios* vary internally according to the various roles they assign to God and humans in bringing about the transformation. The most passive eschatological scenarios are non-millennial (nothing to change on earth) and cataclysmic (only super-human forces can affect the necessary destruction). Such scenarios relegate a passive role to humans: they must await God’s appointed time, and their task calls for repentance, not for social transformation.

Paul apparently embraced such a notion when he called on Christian slaves to accept their status and Christian subjects to accept the rule of the existing powers. Paul doesn’t approve of slavery or the rule of unjust pagans (especially those of the Roman Empire) as a feature of the coming kingdom, but he doesn’t think that one should expend one’s final efforts, just before the return of Christ in power and glory, in resisting a doomed system: “For you know what hour it is, how it is



full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand.”<sup>74</sup> Passive non-millennial scenarios are largely apolitical, and tend, therefore, to be more “respectable” to the opponents of apocalyptic enthusiasm in “normal time.” Hence they are one of the favorite forms of eschatological thinking in institutionalized religions like Christianity and Islam which originated in apocalyptic expectation. But one can certainly find cases of passive transformational and millennial scenarios. Movements that stress individual transformation, meditation, and limited participation in the larger culture discourage any visible millennial activity while ardently using apocalyptic rhetoric and holding out millennial goals (e.g., the intellectual vanguard of the revolution).

Active scenarios, on the other hand, place agency in human hands: mankind, perhaps inspired by God, brings about the dramatic events. Most active apocalyptic scenarios at least start out as transformative—human beings, transfigured by God’s grace (or that of the historical dialectic), inaugurate the millennial world. All secular scenarios are activist, as there is no God to await, but so are many religious ones. The messianic vision of Isaiah and Micah places the key in the actions of the nations, but that action is to accept the yoke of God’s justice, to voluntarily submit to God’s kingship. Nations turn to His path and in doing so they convert the weapons of aristocratic violence (swords and spears) into tools of honest manual labor (plowshares and pruning hooks).<sup>75</sup>

In their early stages, active cataclysmic apocalyptic scenarios most often appear linked to a radical demotic millennium. In the face of the hierarchies dominating normal time, the call of an egalitarian millennium has a powerful appeal, especially when apocalyptic time makes that dream seem realizable. This switch is so common that the forgers of the Protocols made it a conscious strategy—sell people on democracy in order to enslave them—and given the behavior of the Russians in the decades after the text’s publication, that aspect was the most believable part of the story. In some cases, as with fascism and especially with Nazism, one finds a double message that bodes ill for the future: their millennialism is demotic within (the nation, the



race, the religion), but hierarchical without (outsiders must be subordinated).

Active cataclysmic millennialism is a peculiarly modern, technologically empowered phenomenon. From the revolutions of France, Russia, Germany, and China, to the feverish apocalyptic visions induced by nuclear weapons, we have a growing array of cataclysmic apocalyptic thinking that is vigorously activist.<sup>76</sup> Such groups, starting out small, tend to view the social world as if it were a set of high-pressured tectonic plates where a small but well-aimed explosion can trigger a massive quake (Aum Shin Rikyo and the Tokyo subway system). What they lack in strength, they make up for in enhanced technology and the true (Gnostic) understanding of who is good and who evil.<sup>77</sup> Active cataclysmic apocalypticism driving towards a hierarchical millennium represents the single most destructive force in human society—religious or secular.

All known cases of movements that have resulted in the death of millions if not tens of millions of people, from the Taiping in nineteenth century China to the various incarnations of twentieth century fascism (Nazism, Nichiren Emperor Worship) and communism (Russia, China, Cambodia) either began as, or mutated into active cataclysmic mode. As the above list indicates, the most egregious cases are secular, but that may only result from the fact that the twentieth century, with its technologies of mass destruction and its plethora of secular millennial movements, has created circumstances most favorable to secular mass murder. On the other hand, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed a most ominous religious development: the rise of global Jihad. Like the fascist millennialism of the early twentieth century (during which time the Muslim Brotherhood, much influenced by these “anti-modern” reactions, first developed), Islamism contains a powerful in-group demotic appeal linked to a powerful hierarchical relationship to outsiders: the faithful are, in principle, equal; the *dhimmi* are, by definition and law, subjected and inferior. Conquest alone can assure this process; and such millennial movements are accordingly notably belligerent.



## **The Dynamics of Apocalyptic Time**

While all these apocalyptic and millennial variants appear to have mutually exclusive traits, this is only the deception of a categorical approach that tries to define a movement by a single set of beliefs. To the contrary, millennialism is a dynamic phenomenon, and in the course of an apocalyptic episode, a movement can easily flip from one extreme to the other. The Anabaptists present a classic example when, in the course of their failed millennium at Munster which took place from 1533 to 1535, they went from the most radically pacifist and egalitarian of the new “Protestant” groups, to a violent and authoritarian group, or from transformational demotic to cataclysmic hierarchical.<sup>78</sup> In an example of the phenomenon operating in the opposite direction, a violently revolutionary group like the Baha’i transformed into a radically demotic, transformative millennial religion. Indeed, one might suspect that the inevitable disappointment and failure of any apocalyptic group tends to swing its practitioners from active to passive, or, vice-versa, demotic to hierarchic, cataclysmic to transformational. In this paradoxical volatility we may find some of the keys to the strange relationship between millennial vision and violence.<sup>79</sup> Thus the apocalyptic and millennial variants presented above should be taken not as categories, but as a map of a terrain over which millennial groups, in the course of an apocalyptic episode, may travel extensively.

## **The First Apocalyptic Movement of the Twenty-first Century: Global Jihad**

Millennial historians looking back at the early twenty-first century will invariably note that the year 2000 marked a new and more vigorous stage in the apocalyptic wave of global Jihad. The earliest phases of this current wave began when Khomeini took over Iran in a revolution that used the rhetoric and imagery of Shī’ite millennialism linked to the advent of the year 1400 AH (1979/80 CE). Over the course of the following decade, Shī’ite millennialism inspired Sunni millennialism, especially in Afghanistan (Osama bin Laden) and Palestine (Hamas,



Islamic Jihad).<sup>80</sup> The successful expulsion of the Russians from Afghanistan in 1989, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, had for modern Jihadis the same meaning as the destruction of the Sassanid (Persian) Empire for the first generation of Jihadis: one of the two evil empires had been toppled by zealots of the faith.<sup>81</sup> At the same time that such geopolitical events were occurring, new forms of apocalyptic thinking emerged at the popular level. This was a literature that drew heavily on the Protestant apocalyptic traditions in both style (glossy pamphlets, tapes, and websites) and content (UFOs, biblical prophecy, dating the end of the world).<sup>82</sup>

Although the role of these Muslims who invoked apocalyptic language may not have registered much on the awareness of Westerners before the turn of the millennium, their spectacular successes in Central Asia had won the attention of Muslims the world over. But even then, the pride such accomplishments may have inspired could not overcome the dominant anti-apocalyptic tradition within Islam. As a result, the radical agenda—conquer the world—and the strange apocalyptic language remained largely at the margins of the Muslim public sphere. For example, most prominent Muslim theologians condemned suicide terrorism, which originated in the most apocalyptic circles of Hamas in the mid-1990s, both its murder of civilians and the suicide of the believer.<sup>83</sup>

After 2000, the most troubling forms of cataclysmic apocalyptic rhetoric and action made major strides from the margins towards the center of Muslim public discourse, especially via television, with consequences of major significance for huge numbers of people the world over. These included:

**Anti-Semitism** which, in the twentieth-century Muslim world still seemed like a European import of limited significance,<sup>84</sup> in the twenty-first gained an intensity and originality that both revived indigenous strains and fused European strains with anti-Zionism.<sup>85</sup> These, in turn, exploited European sensibilities, rendering the continent particularly vulnerable to global Jihad and terror.<sup>86</sup>

**Conspiracy theories**, especially the Protocols of the Elders of Zion which, along with blood libels, were turned into immensely popular se-



rialized television shows in both Egypt and Syria. Whereas observers in the 1990s viewed conspiracy theories in the Arab world as contributing to passivity,<sup>87</sup> after 2000, they more often inspired violent actions.<sup>88</sup>

**Genocidal hatreds**, particularly in the form of the apocalyptic hadith about an endtime battle between the Muslims and the Jews in which the Muslims slaughter the Jews, who flee and hide and the very rocks and trees call out, "Oh Muslim, oh servant of Allah, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come slay him."<sup>89</sup>

**Suicide terrorism**, which before 2000 was largely condemned by Muslim theologians and even among Palestinians had limited approval, became the weapon of choice for global Jihad, praised by theologians and achieving over 80% approval rates among Palestinians. Osama bin Laden's attack on the USA on 9-11 inspired copycat actions some of which, in Madrid and London, succeeded. The major form of "resistance" in Iraq has been suicide bombings against other Muslims.<sup>90</sup>

**Global Jihad**, which before 2000, operated not only at the margins of Muslim discourse, but also well below the radar of the Western cultures that were the target of these millennial ambitions. The demonstration outside the Danish Embassy in London in 2004, for example, featured signs and speeches revealing these active cataclysmic ambitions to the Western public in quite startling terms.<sup>91</sup>

**Internet Jihad**, which exploits the new technological revolution in pervasive and often highly innovative fashion much as apocalyptic Christian movements used printing in the early sixteenth century.<sup>92</sup> This has created a worldwide presence for Salafi Islam, a neo-Islamic, reactionary modern identity that at once separates youth from a more traditional and less apocalyptic Islam (especially in Western countries) and unites zealous new Muslim identities across a wide range of cultures, ethnicities, languages, and customs.<sup>93</sup>

If the year 2000 inaugurated the century—or millennium—of global society, then it also inaugurated the first truly global, active cataclysmic millennial movement in the history of the phenomenon.

From the perspective of millennial studies, this situation, this shift from the margins towards the center of a religious and public discourse



that involves a religion with over a billion faithful the world over is most disturbing. As Henri Desroches noted, apocalyptic movements are like forest fires: they do not start easily, but once they “take” they are extremely difficult to put out.<sup>94</sup> And when that forest fire is the most dangerous and destructive form of religious belief on record, the ominous beginnings of a global movement that can draw on countless faithful and potential converts constitutes a matter of great concern.

There are several matters that historians of millennial movements can safely predict in this situation. First, that even if the Islamists succeed, even partially, in achieving their dream of a global Caliphate, it will not be the millennium, but a nightmare—not utopia, but dystopia. The Taliban’s experiment shows what kind of coercive purity one can expect from triumphant Islamists. Second, even if that dream is impossible, the amount of damage it can do, especially in this age of portable weapons of mass destruction, is close to limitless. One of the laws of millennial dynamics is that wrong does not imply inconsequential. Although all millennial movements have proved wrong, many have also shown themselves to be mightily consequential, both for good and ill. Third, as long as the targets of this apocalyptic fervor do not recognize what they confront, as long as they fear to utter the very language that Islamists use among themselves for fear of being accused of “Islamophobia,” as long as they believe that the passage of time and the acquisition of power will moderate these forces, they end up encouraging the very aggression they hope to placate.<sup>95</sup> Sometimes appeasement works as a political strategy for moderating foes, but most definitely not in the case of active cataclysmic apocalyptic movements.

In resisting this apocalyptic death cult, the modern West must find a non-cataclysmic apocalyptic response. Another law of millennial dynamics holds that one person’s messiah is another’s Antichrist. In order not to develop counter-fascism, the West needs to resist now, firmly, and in the realm where it has the greatest strength and the Jihadis have the greatest weakness: in the world of free speech and the right to rebuke others.<sup>96</sup> When the Pope quotes a fourteenth century emperor saying Islam is inherently violent, and Muslims riot in response, the onus should be on Muslims for their response, not on the pope for provoking them.



This battle need not be bloody; and it could be a tremendous victory for the forces of freedom and tolerance, including that large but immeasurable population of “moderate Muslims” who are the earliest and easiest target of Jihadi violence. On the one hand, if the West makes all the concessions and the Islamic millennialists make all the demands, that encourages the worst and discourages the best. If an apocalyptic movement appears to be ascending, and the cost of joining are minimal, it is capable of gaining followers who might otherwise be reluctant to join.<sup>97</sup> If this is not effectively combated, we, the beneficiaries of the most tolerant and capacious civilization the world has ever witnessed, may look back with immense regret on the early twenty-first century in the way Yeats did on the early twentieth and conclude: “The best lack conviction; while the worst are filled with passionate intensity.”



# Notes

- 1 The following is a substantially rewritten chapter from my book, Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of Millennial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). I refer to a number of chapters in the book in the course of the notes.
- 2 The role of "apocalyptic time" in activating eschatological concerns comes out in the famous anecdote of the astronomer who, after lecturing on how the sun will eventually go *nova*, burning the earth up, was asked how long until that will happen. "Five billion years," he replied. "Oh," said the questioner, "thank goodness. I thought you said five million."
- 3 The traditional explanation for this is that the Qur'ān is compiled by the length of the Sura, and that these early ones are almost all very short.
- 4 And the opposite of Origen's heretical notion that even Satan himself, *a fortiori* all people, will eventually be saved.
- 5 On Marx, see Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 11.
- 6 Often historians, especially historians of theology, use a more restrictive term for millennialism, for a recent example see Charles Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 1–8. Hill rejects the broader term as I use it here in favor of a more restrictive one. "Full blown *chiliasm*" [the Greek term for millennialism] he insists, includes all three elements of 1) a temporary period (not necessarily 1000 years), 2) earthly, and 3) messianic [individual deliverers play a key role], *ibid.*, 5ff. If one does not adhere to this specific scenario, he argues, if one denies the interim, temporary millennial period, one "remove[s] oneself from the millennialist camp." *Ibid.*, 111. Aside from the fact that he is tracing this particular configuration in early Christianity, Hill gives no reason to so restrict the definition. It does, certainly, permit him to argue that not only is millennialism not the dominant ideology of the early Church (contra many, primarily Protestant German, historians, pp. 2–4), but that not even the book of *Revelation* (!) is millennial (163–77). Both puzzling and crippling conclusions for understanding the larger phenomenon that is the subject of this chapter. His analysis would be far more useful if he had a term for the larger phenomenon, as well as for this subset. Hereafter, I refer to the larger phenomenon of expectation of the kingdom of God *on earth* (Hill's points 2 and 3) as *millennial*.
- 7 See Landes *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 13.
- 8 Here I use the term in Augustine's sense of the time-space continuum, the embodied, the historical. For Augustine, the *saeculum* could *not* be redeemed. There was no earthly millennium of peace and never would be. Compare to Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
- 9 For a sense of the full range of millennial beliefs and the various disciplines that contribute to this field of study, see Ted Daniels, *Millennialism: An International Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1992); for a recent discussion of the anthropological dimensions, see Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern, eds., "Millennial Countdown in New Guinea," special issue *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 1 (2000). One of the most astute students of both anthropological and theological dimensions of millennialism is Gary Trompf, see his books *Payback: the Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retributive Justice* (London: Continuum, 2000).
- 10 David Cook, "The beginnings of Islam as an apocalyptic movement," in *War in Heaven, Heaven on Earth: Theories of the Apocalyptic*, ed. Glen McGhee and Stephen O'Leary (Sheffield: Equinox, 2005) 79–93. Fred M. Donner, "The Islamic Conquests," in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 28–51. See also Donner's recent book Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- 11 Cook addresses the nature of this astounding success and attributes it, neither to Allah (as the Muslims do), nor to various socio-economic-military conjunctures (as do the Western historians), but to



- an apocalyptic *belief* in being the destined warriors of the End Time whose task was to liberate mankind. Cook, "Beginnings of Islam."
- 12 Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Donner, "Islamic Conquest."
- 13 For Hill, the socially disruptive dimension is key, Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 111. This seems to be a widespread tendency among historians, drawn largely from a (possibly superficial reading) of Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.
- 14 Erik Middlefort, "Madness and the Millennium at Münster, 1534–35," in *Fearful Hope: Approaching the New Millennium*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz and Fannie J. LeMoine (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 115–34.
- 15 Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). For a fuller discussion of these varieties of millennialism and their importance in understanding the political dimension of millennialism, see Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 4.
- 16 Eric Peterson argues that monotheism's central political corollary is "one God, one king," an argument that has found considerable echo in recent arguments that monotheism is "inherently" violent. Peterson, *Monotheismus als politisches Problem. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1934). For further examples, see Barrington Moore Jr., *Moral Purity and Persecution in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Rodney Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Garth Fowden also assumes that this is the central political meaning of monotheism, Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 17 Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- 18 For Buddhism, see Takashi James Kodera, "Nichiren and His Nationalistic Eschatology," *Religious Studies* 15 (1979): 41–53; and Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). On Hinduism see Robert F. Maher Tommy Kabu Movement of the Purari Delta," *Oceania* 29 (1958): 75–90.
- 19 For Egyptian examples, see Cohn, *Cosmos*, 14–18.
- 20 On Amenhotep III and Akhenaten of Egypt, see Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 7. Early Islamic imperialism marks the shift from temporary prayer structures to stone mosques in major capitals (Baghdad, Damascus). Note that the earliest stone structure in Islam, the Dome of the Rock (not a mosque), may well have been the Muslim attempt to build the "third" (messianic) Temple; see Cook, "Beginnings of Islam," 90.
- 21 Many imperial ideologies insist on the role of the emperor in putting an end to civil war and the unconquerable passions of men, e.g., Rome, China.
- 22 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside-Down* (London: Penguin, 1991).
- 23 On the *Prophecies of Neferti* and the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, see Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 134–61; on these images of a social order inverted as a reflection of "the anxieties of the privileged, their sense of living on a tiny island of order and civilization amidst a sea of disorder and barbarism," see Cohn, *Cosmos*, 20.
- 24 Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 118–28.
- 25 "Monarchy far transcends every other constitution and form of government: for that democratic equality of power, which is its opposite, may rather be described as anarchy and disorder." Eusebius Pamphilus, *Oration in Praise of Constantine*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2 (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1890), chap. 3.6, 584, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iv.viii.iv.html>.
- 26 On the link between millennialism and reform in the early Church, see Gerhard Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 27–32. For an astute analysis of the working of a "reforming elite" in eleventh-century Western Europe (without reference to millennial currents), see R. I. Moore, *For-*



- 27 *mation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1987).
- 28 Indeed, Norman Cohn, despite having done a great deal of work on demotic millennialism in *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957), found this ur-millennial myth of a battle between good/order and evil/chaos as the primary form of millennialism in his later *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (1993). Most of Greek Orthodox millennial thought is of this variety, compare to Alexander *Apocalyptic Tradition*; and Fransiš Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1966).
- 29 Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*.
- 30 See Maccabees' vision of themselves in Maccabees 1 and 2. For Napoleon, see Christopher T. George, "The Eroica Riddle: Did Napoleon Remain Beethoven's "Hero"?", *Napoleonic Scholarship* 1, no. 2 (1998), accessed July 6, 2008, [http://www.napoleon-series.org/ins/scholarship98/c\\_eroica.html](http://www.napoleon-series.org/ins/scholarship98/c_eroica.html).
- 31 Cook, "Beginnings of Islam"; Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003): 9–53.
- 32 This is not to say that these forms of government may arise without any identifiable millennialism as their ideological basis, but hierarchical millennialism produces this kind of configuration quite consistently.
- 33 In the Babylonian myth, *Enuma elish*, the defeated Gods created mankind so that someone else would build the temples of their divine conqueror Marduk. Cohn, *Cosmos*, 45–49. Obviously the pyramids and other great temple complexes illustrate the dynamic (in particular the reigns of Amenhotep III, the "Sun King" and Akhenaten, the "monotheist Pharaoh" in 14th century BCE Egypt. See Arielle Kozloff, Betsy M. Bryan, and Lawrence M. Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and His World* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992); Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 7. Similar tendencies were evident in the early developments towards hierarchical centralization in the Davidic monarchy, especially under Solomon. See Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: the Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Augsburg: Fortress Publications, 1994).
- 34 Cook, "Beginnings of Islam," Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*, chaps. 1 and 2.
- 35 Fowden, *From Empire*, chap. 6. See also Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*, 37–38, and 50–52.
- 36 Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).
- 37 Fowden, *From Empire*, chap. 6; see also Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*.
- 38 "These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an invisible attachment to liberty; and they say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord." Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews in Josephus: The Complete Works*, trans. William Whitson (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1978), 377.
- 39 See Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971). Islam, whose key tenet—"No God but God"—plays off of this formula and has a powerful iconoclastic tradition that regularly disrupts the tendency towards imperial hierarchy that tends to emerge in the wake of their military victories. Fowden, *From Empire*, chap. 6. For some excellent explanations of the paradoxes involved, see Patricia Crone, *God's Rule—Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- 40 For a choice example of the shift from demotic to hierarchical millennialism in the Peace of God movement of early eleventh-century Europe, see Radulfus Glaber's description of the massive and pivotal peace wave in 1033, the millennium of the Passion. Richard Landes, "Rodulfus Glaber and the Dawn of the New Millennium: Eschatology, Historiography and the Year 1000," *Revue Mabillon* 68, no. 7 (1996): 1–21.
- 41 Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 8 (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997); Donner "From Believers."
- 42 Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing The History Of Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).
- 43 On the origins of the slogan in early modern France, see George Huppert, *The Style of Paris: Renaissance Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), chap. 4; on the French Revolution as a secular millennial movement, see Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 10.



- 43 William Blake, *America: The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 52.
- 44 Richard H. Brodhead, "Millennium Prophecy and the Energies of Social Transformation: The Case of Nat Turner," in *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypses from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002); Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also the giant painting by Francis Danby, *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* (1828) with its central focus as the abasement of kings and priests and the exultation of freed slaves, with the combination of enthusiasm and hostility it provoked over the years, discussed at length in Francis Greenacre, *Francis Danby, 1793–1861* (London, Tate Gallery, 1988).
- 45 Ernst Benz, *Evolution and Christian Hope: Man's Concept of the Future from the Early Fathers to Teilhard de Chardin* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).
- 46 For a more detailed analysis, see Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 8.
- 47 2 Baruch: 29: 5–8, in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 630–31.
- 48 One might almost define the period as one in which millennialism became an increasingly and finally, with Augustine, overwhelmingly shunted belief.
- 49 Kenelm Burridge is particularly attentive to the discourse of justice imbedded in millennial discourse. See Burridge, *New Heaven New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).
- 50 See Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 8. It is possible that medieval Christian movements like the Husesites and offshoots may have followed the same principles (inherent in the demotic logic) without producing as clear a paper trail as the Taiping; see Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Fairlawn, NJ: Essential Books, 1957), chap. 11.
- 51 Yohana Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); on Bahai, see Juan Cole, "Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought in the Nineteenth Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, (1992): 1–26.
- 52 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). The Nazi use of Nietzsche represents one of the great ironies of history since, in their earliest stages, they represented precisely the kind of self-pitying *ressentiment* at loss of power that Nietzsche denounced, and once they took power, they illustrated precisely the "[scarcely] hidden agenda" of such haters. See Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 13.
- 53 See Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chaps. 8 and 12.
- 54 On coercive purity, see Lee Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). On the prediction of reversal with power, see the Athenians to the Melians in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1954) bk. 5, 400–408; or, more acidly, Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 1:10–15; 2:11.
- 55 Ole Peter Grell and Robert Scribner, eds., *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 236ff.
- 56 On Dhimmi, see Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).
- 57 For this argument, see Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Knopf, 2005).
- 58 "Universal *envy* establishing itself as a power is only the disguised form in which *greed* re-establishes and satisfies itself in another way. The thought of every piece of private property as such is *at the very least* turned against *richer* private property as *envy*, and the desire to level, so that *envy* and the desire to level in fact constitute the essence [of the hatred of the results] of competition. Crude communism is only the fulfillment of this *envy* and leveling on the basis of a *preconceived* minimum. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddar (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 302 (italics and brackets mine).



- 59 Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, 428–30.
- 60 Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, chap. 14.
- 61 Chang and Halliday, *Mao*.
- 62 Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999).
- 63 The “Melian Dialogue,” in Thucydides, *Peloponnesian Wars*, 5:89.
- 64 Stephen O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 63–73, 83–84; Trompf, *Payback*.
- 65 Arthur Mendel, *Vision and Violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 83–84.
- 66 O’Leary, *Arguing*, 195–206.
- 67 Compare with the discussion in Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), 15–22.
- 68 Cohn, *Pursuit*; Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Brian Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
- 69 Richard 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: Katholieke U, 1988), 137–211.
- 70 Josephus describes how the followers of a failed messiah—an Egyptian false prophet—dispersed after his defeat, “every one to his own home and there concealed themselves.” *Jewish Wars* 2.13.5, in Josephus, *Complete Works*, 482.
- 71 The locus classicus of this is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, but it has many more recent avatars such as UFOs, New World Order conspiracies, and Christian fundamentalism. See respectively: Keith Thompson, *Angels and Aliens: UFO’s and the Mythic Imagination* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley Longman, 1991); Pat Robertson, *The New World Order* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991); Franklin Allen Leib, *Behold a Pale Horse* (New York: Forge, 2000).
- 72 John Hall, *The Ways Out: Utopian Communal Groups in an Age of Babylon* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
- 73 E.g., the postmillennial Reconstructionists, whose cataclysmic scenario made Y2K so attractive to some (Gary North). Chip Berlet has described these groups as “Calvinism on crack,” “Millennialist and Apocalyptic Influences on Dominionism,” *Lapis Magazine*, <http://www.lapismagazine.org/millennialist-and-apocalyptic-influences-on-dominionism-by-chip-berlet/>.
- 74 *Romans* 13: 11–12; note the apocalyptic timeframe. Paul on slaves, *Corinthians* 7:17–24; on obeying the powers that be followed by the passage cited above: *Romans*, 13.
- 75 *Isaiah*, 2:2–4; *Micah* 4:1–4.
- 76 See Christopher Hill, “John Mason and the End of the World,” in *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958); Lifton, *Destroying the World*.
- 77 Hence Eric Voegelin identified what we are here calling the millennial, as Gnostic, because of the power of the knowledge in defining the course of action. Of course all of Voegelin’s examples represent an aggressive, activist form of gnosticism that is only a minor dimension of Gnosticism, as discussed by ancient historians. In the language of this essay, they are millennial projects (based on esoteric knowledge), triggered by apocalyptic time (we have “finally understood”). See Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Laurent Murawiec makes the same lexical move in his study of apocalyptic and millennial dimensions of current Islam, see “Manichean Tribalism,” in *The Mind of Jihad* (Cicero, IN: Hudson Institute, 2005), 169–208.
- 78 Compare with Midelfort, *Madness and the Millennium*.
- 79 Arthur Mendel, *Vision and Violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).
- 80 Ladan and Roya Boroumand, “Terror, Islam, and Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 5–20.
- 81 For example see Hassan Hanfi, “The Origins of Modern Conservatism and Islamic Fundamentalism,”



- in *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists, and Industrialization*, ed. Ernst Gellner (Berlin: Mouton, 1985), 103.
- 82 On this apocalyptic literature, see David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005); and Timothy Furnish, *Holiest Wars: Islamic Mahdis, Their Jihads, and Osama bin Laden* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005).
- 83 For a representative example, see the remarks of Sheikh Muḥammad Tantawi of al Azhar University (Cairo) in Yotam Feldner, "Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombings Part 1: The Debate over Religious Legitimacy," *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series* 53, May 3, 2001, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA5301>. On the context of the development of suicide terrorism (suicide attacks on civilians rather than on military or political targets) in the apocalyptic circles of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, see Anne Marie Oliver and Paul Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 84 Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York: Norton, 1999).
- 85 Cook, *Contemporary Muslim*; Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9-11* (New York: Telos Press, 2007); Andrew Bostom, ed., *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism: From Sacred Texts to Solemn History* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2008).
- 86 Fiamma Nierentstein and Anne Appel, *Terror: The New Anti-Semitism and the War against the West* (New York: Smith and Kraus, 2005).
- 87 Daniel Pipes, *The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Timothy Furnish notes a similar impact of waiting for the Mahdī in *Holiest Wars*, 80–129.
- 88 Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: An Authentic Document in Palestinian Authority Ideology," in *The Paranoid Apocalypse: A Hundred Year Retrospective on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, ed. Richard Lander and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2012).
- 89 The ḥadīth has multiple variants reported in the Sahih Muslim, Book 41, *The Book Pertaining to the Turmoil and Portents of the Last Hour* (*Kitab Al-Fitan wa Ashrat As-Sa'ah*), numbers 6978–85, <http://archive.today/e5SOW>. On its current popularity in Palestinian circles, see Article 7 of "The Hamas Covenant, 1988," [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp); and numerous subsequent quotations cited in Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook, "Kill a Jew—Go to Heaven," *Palestinian Media Watch*, 2005, [http://www.palwatch.org/STORAGE/special%20reports/Kill\\_A\\_Jew.pdf](http://www.palwatch.org/STORAGE/special%20reports/Kill_A_Jew.pdf). Osama bin Laden refers to this in a 1998 interview, see "Greetings America. My Name is Osama bin Laden," *Esquire*, February 1, 1999, [http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0299-FEB\\_LADEN](http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0299-FEB_LADEN); and in 2003 in his essay "Band of Knights." See Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), 191. The text of the ḥadīth also appears in school textbooks in Saudi Arabia. See "Religious textbooks: Two excerpts from ministry of education textbooks . . .," *PBS Frontline*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saudi/etc/textbooks.html>. In 2008 a controversy erupted at University of Southern California, where the Muslim Students Association had posted this ḥadīth on their website. Asked to repudiate the ḥadīth and remove it from their website, they refused to do the former and did the latter under protest. See Reut Cohen, "Muslim Student Union Fights for the Right to Incite Murder," *Pajamas Media*, September 12, 2008, <http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/muslim-student-union-fights-for-the-right-to-incite-murder/?singlepage=true>.
- 90 There is an extensive literature on suicide bombing, much of it badly compromised by functionalist thinking that itself reflects the success of post-2000 suicide terror (before 2000 one couldn't argue that it "makes sense" because it works). See, for example, Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); better analysis by Mia Bloom, *Dying To Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On the striking shift in public opinion after 2000, Nichole Argo notes: "The rise in public support for istash' had operations (suicide bomb operations) is shocking, having at times tripled as compared to pre-Intifada polls." Nichole Argo, "Understanding and Defusing Human Bombs: The Palestinian Case and the Pursuit of



- a Martyrdom Complex" (Working Paper), 4. (Argo notes in an email that this rise is arguably in response to the Israeli killing of Palestinian non-combatants.)
- 91 See the signs held by protestors at the demonstration outside the Danish Embassy in London on February 3, 2006 in response to a Danish paper publishing an image of Mohammed the previous September. For images of the protestors, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "2006 Islamist demonstration outside the Embassy of Denmark in London," last modified 13 December 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamist\\_demonstration\\_outside\\_Danish\\_Embassy\\_in\\_London\\_in\\_2006](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamist_demonstration_outside_Danish_Embassy_in_London_in_2006). More broadly, on the startling progress of various forms of non-violent and violent Jihadi initiatives, see Bruce Bawer, *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007). Most recently Bruce Bawer has condemned the "progressive" Western intelligentsia for its cowardice in dealing with the problem. See Bawer, *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, 2009). The pre-emptive decision (there were no threats) of Yale University Press not to publish the Muhammad cartoons in Jytte Klausen's book on the controversy, illustrates Bawer's argument quite pointedly. *Ibid.*, 279.
- 92 On the apocalyptic, millennial dimension of early Protestantism, see Richard Landes, "Millennialism," in *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Routledge, 2004), vol. 3, 1236–41.
- 93 On the uses of the internet see Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006); on new identities Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting it Right* (New York: Times Books, 2005).
- 94 Henri Desroches, *The Sociology of Hope* (New York: Routledge Keegan Paul, 1979).
- 95 For a comparison of how an early millennial terrorism—the Bolsheviks—behaved once they took power, and the current situation in Islam, see Anna Geifmann, *La Mort sera votre Dieu: Du nihilisme russe au terrorisme islamiste* (Paris: Éditions de la Table Ronde, 2005).
- 96 See the extensive analysis of this problem by David Barnhizer, "Reverse Colonization: Islam, Honor Cultures and the Confrontation between Divine and Quasi-Secular Natural Law," Cleveland-Marshall Legal Studies Paper No. 07-142, April 2007, [http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=david\\_barnhizer](http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=david_barnhizer).
- 97 See Lee Smith, *The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).







# Apocalyptic Violence

Klaus Vondung

The practice of distinguishing between different types of violence is not only sensible, but in some cases necessary, as, for example, in the field of criminal law. To this end, violence can be classified as follows: violence as physical force against human beings, e.g., murder, manslaughter, rape, and battery; violence as damage to property and habitation; and violence as disturbance of peace and order. How does *apocalyptic violence* fit into this scheme? Or does it merit a separate category? Could one single out this particular type of violence with respect to motivation, legitimization, and character? Finally, would such a category be of analytical value in political science or sociology?

My attempt to differentiate and describe apocalyptic violence as a distinct category is grounded, first, in the observation that apocalyptic texts are charged with violence. Second, apocalyptic violence can be used as a category to describe extreme physical violence exercised by some modern political movements and regimes. In this article, National Socialism will serve as my primary example. Before I proceed to explaining how National Socialism can be characterized as apocalyptic, I will examine the classical sources that have coined the notion of apocalyptic.<sup>1</sup>

The principal source of the Western apocalyptic tradition, the Book of Revelation, is a representative example of verbal apocalyptic violence, as it is filled with destructive images. The disproportionate attention given to monstrous and fearful scenes overpowers the final vision of salvation in the heavenly New Jerusalem: the three great visions, the vision of the seven seals, the vision of the seven trumpets, and the vision of the seven bowls describe in great detail the plagues that will befall humanity and the world. Earthquakes shake the very foundations of the world, hail and fire mixed with blood fall from heaven, the sun darkens, stars fall to the earth, the sea turns to blood, heaven flees; the "fiery red dragon" and other horrible beasts rise up out of the sea, murderous insects swarm up from the abyss; these crea-



tures torment and kill people until they themselves are finally destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of violent imagery in the Revelation and many other apocalyptic texts, which depict salvation as attainable only when the old, corrupt world is destroyed, suggests that apocalyptic visions necessarily entail violence. The motivation behind the violent apocalyptic narratives can be understood if one looks at the historical situations in which these texts originated. The apocalyptic speculations in Judaism and Christianity emerged primarily in times of crisis, produced by men who felt threatened and humiliated, oppressed and persecuted in all spheres of existence: spiritually, politically, and socially. Convinced of their claim to truth, they perceived their oppression as undeserved and interpreted their suffering as resulting from life in a world devoid of meaning, utterly corrupt and evil. Such an interpretation fueled their longing for salvation and motivated the prediction that the old world and their oppressors would be destroyed and a new world, in which they would find their rightful place, would be established. Eric Voegelin notes this motivation in connection with the Book of Daniel, the first fully formed apocalyptic text which originated in Israel after a long period of political oppression when orthodox Jews were severely persecuted by the Seleucid Empire: "There is no hope of pragmatic victory over the imperial enemy or of a spiritual transformation of mankind. Since the present structure of reality is without meaning, divine intervention has to change the structure itself if the divine order is to be reintroduced."<sup>3</sup> The same motivation can also be found in the Revelation of John. The tension between the overpowering but spiritually empty ecumenic empire of the Romans and the universal but powerless claim of the Christians to represent spiritual truth is resolved in a vision of the imminent ending of this meaningless order of reality.

Apocalyptic visionaries presented their experiences of suffering in such a way that the world in which they lived appeared utterly corrupt and evil, down to its very core. They yearned for salvation, but they did not believe that anything could be achieved through moderate changes, improvements, or reforms, either in the political or social sphere. Salvation, they believed, could only be achieved through the fall of the old, corrupt world and the destruction of the *evil enemy* who was guilty



of this corruption. They experienced the crisis as universal and acute, and saw the final judgment as inescapable and within sight. Thus, the apocalypse is characterized, first, by a strict dualism, that is, by a radical division between the corrupt old world and the perfect future one, between the evil enemy and the chosen ones, who suffer now, but soon will triumph. Second, it is characterized by the conviction that salvation is preceded by the devastation of the old world and the destruction of the evil enemy.

The specifics of the apocalypse are verbally expressed in dramatic visions of the imminent decision as a final, terrible battle. The destruction of the old world is depicted most often in images of nature's devastating powers—flood, storm, fire, and earthquakes. The strict dualism of the apocalypse, the division between the deficient old world and the expected new condition, which is also a moral separation, expresses itself in images of the enemy and the chosen, filth and purity, illness and sanity, darkness and light. The evil enemy is depicted as a cruel, malicious, repulsive, and loathsome beast. The expected change of reality and of the entirety of existence is expressed in terms of "transformation," "regeneration," "renovation," "salvation," "redemption," and "resurrection."

The expected transformation necessarily entails violent destruction, and since the transformation is universal, the envisioned destruction has a universal, cosmic scope. The violence against the evil enemy and its followers is no less radical. Again and again the Revelation of John describes the destruction of evil men through terrible plagues. Many suffer particularly cruel torments: "And in those days men will seek death and not find it, will long to die, and death will flee from them." Others will be humiliated even in death: "And their corpses will lie about on the street of the great city . . . And many will see their corpses for three and a half days and refuse them burial. And those who live on the earth will gloat over them, make merry, and exchange presents."<sup>4</sup> Psychologically, these images of violence can be explained as fantasies of revenge, and, as long as they remain in the realm of imagination, they do not seem to do any harm. The violent imagery, apocalyptic impatience, and apocalyptic reaction in general may seem understandable with regard to the situation of oppression and perse-



cution. Nonetheless, such an interpretation is problematic and may become dangerous; it confuses the spiritual and pragmatic order of reality. The spiritual order of reality is built upon the categories of Good and Evil, Truth and Untruth, whereas the political and social reality is dependent on pragmatism and compromise—or so it should be. In the course of interpreting their motivating experiences, the authors of apocalyptic speculations tend to overestimate the meaning of their particular historical situation and to exaggerate the attributes of their enemy. Hyperboles are a typical facet of apocalyptic rhetoric.

While imagined violence does not translate directly into real violence, imagination always plays a certain role in instigating violent action. Therefore, imagined violence can become dangerous if an apocalyptic interpretation of the world turns active, especially if the threat that the enemy seems to pose is exaggerated up to the point where it amounts to a delusion. The religious and social groups from which the oldest Jewish and Christian apocalyptic visions emerged were more passive than active, since in these visions it is God who intervenes in world history and uses violence to destroy the old world, the evil enemy and its followers. Later on, there were also interpretations in which the pious and chosen people should assist God and fulfill his intentions by taking up the sword.

The apocalyptic tradition, following the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John as well as Jewish and Christian apocryphal texts, is rich and varied. There is a Jewish apocalyptic tradition of its own that is generally referred to as messianism.<sup>5</sup> In Christianity, the Revelation's prophesy of a Millennium, a paradise on earth under the rule of Christ and the Saints, played an important role from the eleventh to the sixteenth century in numerous religious as well as social movements.<sup>6</sup> Millenarianism was brought to North America by Puritans, Anabaptists, and other religious sects. There, it has mingled with politics into the present day.<sup>7</sup> These various apocalyptic traditions, however, are beyond the scope of this article.

In the following, I will concentrate on modern apocalyptic worldviews that have separated entirely from their original religious roots. These apocalyptic worldviews are descendants of the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, although some decisive differences have to be



noted. First, in the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John as well as in the apocryphal texts of that time, the destruction of the old world and the transformation of reality are brought about by God himself, whereas in the modern apocalypse this task is ascribed to men. Now the agent of salvation is a nation, a social class or a race, and the evil enemy is redefined in accordance with each. Second, in modern apocalyptic worldviews the state of salvation is envisioned not as a "heavenly Jerusalem," but as a "paradise on earth." This earthly paradise will not be ruled by Christ and his faithful followers, but by a nation, a social class (with a party as the class's avant-garde), or a race (with a party leader as the race's representative). This apocalyptic scenario is completely worldly. It suggests that the new apocalyptic vision can be transformed into reality and that violence must be used to achieve the envisioned goal. However, with respect to structure, motivation, images, and symbols, modern apocalyptic worldviews are so closely related to the Judeo-Christian models that it seems justified to designate them with the term apocalypse. Of these modern apocalyptic worldviews I will examine nineteenth-century German nationalism, National Socialism, and the twentieth-century Marxist terrorist gang, the Red Army Faction.<sup>8</sup> At first, I will examine the transition from verbal apocalyptic rhetoric to real physical violence. In order to understand how such a transition takes place and identify the motivations behind it, I will compare German apocalyptic nationalism with National Socialism.

German nationalism as a political doctrine originated when Germany was conquered and occupied by Napoleon. German Nationalism was apocalyptic from the outset, i.e., it showed all characteristics of the apocalyptic vision as described above transformed into a worldly, political rendition. The political situation between 1806 and 1813, Napoleon's extreme expansion of power and Germany's deep weakness was certainly devastating for German patriots. But some of them, like the writer and journalist Ernst Moritz Arndt and the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, interpreted the oppression which accompanied the conquest as an apocalyptic scenario. They viewed the political and military events of those years not as a mere struggle for power, but as a battle between Good and Evil, as a decisive battle, a "final holy



war" that would decide not only Germany's fate but the fate of the whole world.<sup>9</sup> Arndt viewed Napoleon not as a political enemy, but as the "prince of darkness," as "devil on the hellish throne." He considered him to be "utterly evil."<sup>10</sup> In 1807, Arndt interpreted Napoleon's wars of conquest not only as a political threat, but also as a spiritual one: "Its entire meaning is spiritual, and only in the third place political." He supposed that Napoleon wanted to establish a "universal monarchy" as well as a "universal religion."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Arndt argued, Napoleon and "everything Old" must be destroyed so that "the New can come into being." In Arndt's view, the New did not only refer to the new organization of political and social life, but a "new birth of times," nothing less than "salvation."<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that Arndt's interpretations of his experiences of suffering were separated from the political and historical reality. The same disconnect with reality is present in Fichte, who similarly believed that: "In Napoleon everything evil, everything that is inimical to God and freedom, that has been fought since the beginning of time by all virtuous men, now has come forward at once, equipped with all power that evil can have."<sup>13</sup> In his *Speeches to the German Nation* (*Reden an die deutsche Nation*) of 1808, Fichte inflamed his listeners to prepare for a final apocalyptic battle with the following words: "If you perish, all mankind perishes with you, without the hope of a subsequent restoration."<sup>14</sup>

Before proceeding to discuss the National Socialist apocalypse, let us consider how violence is legitimized within the framework of such an apocalyptic interpretation. Practical action, political and even military resistance can be justified if one's own land is oppressed by an apparently conquest-hungry enemy, as in the Napoleonic period. But the call for the use of violence becomes problematic if the pragmatic facts of reality have veered out of view, i.e., if the struggle for political independence of a nation is presented as a universal and final struggle against the powers of evil, as in the admonitions of Arndt and Fichte. A justification of every conceivable means of violence is developed on the basis of denouncing the enemy not only as dangerous, but also disgusting, wicked, and evil. In his poem "Germania Addressing Her Children" (*Germania an ihre Kinder*), written in 1809, the writer



Heinrich von Kleist reveals the functional connection between the apocalyptic worldview, the demand for action, and the legitimization of the use of extreme violence against the demonized opponent:

A pleasure hunt, as when marksmen  
Pursue the track of the wolf!  
Beat him to death! The last judgment  
Won't ask you for reasons!<sup>15</sup>

However provocative, Kleist's, Arndt's and Fichte's calls for violence, legitimized by an apocalyptic worldview, did not lead to extreme acts of violence in the Wars of Liberation—nothing out of the ordinary character of war. And although the apocalyptic interpretation of Napoleon was certainly exaggerated, he did not have to face the threat of this interpretation defenselessly; he had an army and could strike back. Above all, during Arndt's and Fichte's time, certain codes of behavior that hindered the literal translation of apocalyptic imagination into reality were still observed.

The situation is entirely different if the apocalyptic worldview not only exaggerates a given political or even spiritual oppression, but creates a fictitious one. In the National Socialist apocalypse, the evil enemy was in fact defenseless. Apart from that, traditional moral standards were broken down and exchanged for a different set of morals that was in accordance with the prescribed apocalyptic worldview. Finally, the National Socialist regime implemented this worldview. Before explaining how the murderous acts against the Jews fit into the category of apocalyptic violence, I will give some reasons for interpreting the ideology of Hitler and other Nazis as an apocalyptic worldview.

In *Mein Kampf* and in many of his speeches, Hitler developed an apocalyptic image of the world in which he himself undoubtedly believed. He viewed world history as being determined by the struggle between two universal forces, whose irreconcilability he chiefly expressed in the dualistic symbolism of light versus darkness. He believed the decisive battle which would bring victory over the "deadly enemy of all light" to be close at hand.<sup>16</sup> For him, the "power of evil" manifested itself in the Jews, the "evil enemy of mankind."<sup>17</sup> He be-



lied Jews to be responsible for all material deficits of the world, as well as other imaginary dangers and threats. Hitler viewed the well-being of the entire world as dependent on Germany's victory in the final apocalyptic struggle. Other leading Nazis presented the same apocalyptic worldview. Alfred Rosenberg, for instance, the Nazi party's chief-ideologist, assumed there was a worldwide conspiracy between Jewish capitalism and Jewish bolshevism against the "Nordic race of light." He fomented a fear of destruction by producing a terrifying vision of "Jewish world revolution," which was a "gigantically conceived, messianic attempt" to exact "revenge on the eternally alien character of the Europeans, and not only the Europeans." He also prophesied an apocalyptic struggle, a "decisive world war."<sup>18</sup>

In the context of Hitler's worldview, violence against Jews is justified with the same reasoning that Fichte used against Napoleon: extreme violence is necessary when the fate of mankind depends on the destruction of the evil enemy. In Hitler's words: "If our people and our country become the victims of these bloodthirsty and greedy Jewish tyrants, the entire world will fall into the clutches of this octopus; but if Germany can free itself from its grasp, then we may regard this greatest of all dangers as eliminated from the whole world."<sup>19</sup> In contrast, however, to Fichte and Arndt's view of Napoleon, who had indeed conquered the German states, the Jewish threat to Germany was an imagined one. Moreover, after 1933, Hitler's apocalyptic worldview was no longer an idiosyncrasy, as it received the executive power and the administrative means to be enacted.

Further justification for using merciless violence against the Jews, the "evil enemy of mankind," was derived from an appeal to images of beastliness and filth, identifying Jews with the apocalyptic beast. Goebbels, for instance, noted in his diary: "The Jew is, I believe, the Antichrist of world history. We hardly find our way in all this filth of lies, dirt, blood, and bestial savagery."<sup>20</sup> Rosenberg described the approaching "final struggle" as a struggle against filth: "Either we ascend to a cleansing effort, or the last Germanic-Western values of civilization and culture are lost in the filthy human tides of the metropolises."<sup>21</sup> In order to cast Jews as the "evil enemy" in a particularly dangerous and sinister light and at the same time justify their extermination



as disinfection, they were deliberately associated with vermin. The 1940 propaganda film *The Eternal Jew* presented the wanderings of Jews on the map of Europe and commented on this presentation with dissolves into scenes of rats streaming along.

Still, the transition from imagined to practical violence and from explicit proclamations of violence to real massacres and mass-murder requires an explanation. In a state of rage, it may be conceivable to call out: "Beat him to death!" But to do it with one's own hands is different, and it is different to kill dozens or hundreds of human beings. Recently, two excellent studies have traced and analyzed the processes that led to large-scale massacres and mass-murders in the twentieth century. The German historians Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel have compared the measures of destruction and annihilation in Nazi Germany with those in the Soviet Union under Stalin,<sup>22</sup> while the French political scientist Jacques Sémelin has compared the politics of massacres and genocides in Nazi Germany, Bosnia, and Rwanda.<sup>23</sup> Both studies stress that several preconditions are necessary for the transition from imagination or ideological proclamation to real violence. In Germany, for instance, such preconditions were, among others, the mass destruction in World War I that had a brutalizing effect and, at the same time, made former soldiers indifferent to suffering of other human beings; the defeat and the humiliating Treaty of Versailles; and, after the war, ideological indoctrination. Second, they stress that there is always a process of radicalization. In the Soviet Union, for instance, there was a development from "class-struggle" to "cultural racism" and "cleansing in permanence."<sup>24</sup> In Nazi Germany, the rule of law was gradually abolished. During the war "areas free of law" were created in Eastern Europe.<sup>25</sup> Finally, both studies agree that the most important precondition is the presence of something like a spiritual concept which instigates the imagination, interprets the historical and political situation in accordance with this concept, links imagination with reality, and defines the political goal.

Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel call this concept the "Manichaeic ideology of salvation."<sup>26</sup> Although the characterization of Hitler's and Stalin's ideologies as "Manichaeic" may be appropriate as a typological notion for their dualistic worldviews, there is no genealog-



ical connection with the Manichaean religion that died out in the fourteenth century. By contrast, there has been a continuous tradition of apocalyptic interpretations of the world, history, and its particular events. Only a few years before Hitler and Stalin became political leaders, there was an abundance of nationalistic as well as left-wing apocalyptic interpretations of the First World War and its aftermath. In this sense, Hitler's and Stalin's worldviews have more in common with the apocalyptic tradition than with Manichaeism.

Sémelin uses the term "apocalypse" once or twice, but only as a catchword for destruction.<sup>27</sup> The spiritual precondition for mass-murder, which he calls the preceding "coherence of meaning" or just an "ideology," is precisely an apocalyptic worldview. The character of this precondition is revealed in the title of his book, *Cleansing and Destroying*—two major characteristics of apocalyptic visions. Moreover, in the course of his analysis he exposes many of the typical features of an apocalyptic worldview: the dualistic division between Good and Evil and "us" and "them," the striving for unity and purity, the bestializing of the enemy, and its identification with filth and vermin.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel disclose characteristics of the Nazi and Bolshevik ideologies that are pertinent for apocalyptic worldviews: both ideologies identify the enemy with "chaos," Nazis also connect them with "filth." In order to legitimize the annihilation of the enemy, both systems refer to a "superior law" that allows, even demands, killing. In order to create a "new future" and a "new man," both insist on abolishing the despised past. Finally, both plan to create a homogeneous order without ambivalences—a "paradisiacal order."<sup>29</sup>

Thus, one could argue that these two books deal with the political apocalypse in the twentieth century without calling it by its proper name: both describe apocalyptic worldviews in their different ideological appearances, as well as trace and explain the transitions from apocalyptic imagination to apocalyptic violence. These works even help to define the particular character of apocalyptic violence. Its main feature is not outrageous cruelty, as one might assume at first, though apocalyptic violence may be extremely cruel. As the German sociologist, Wolfgang Sofsky, points out, even sadistic violence does not require any particular motivation or justification.<sup>30</sup> The main



characteristic of apocalyptic violence is the preceding and underlying apocalyptic interpretation of the world that has particular consequences. This interpretation includes the incontrovertible division between the representatives of the new society and the enemy, as well as the conviction that the enemy must be destroyed in a final battle that is close at hand. The apocalyptic interpretation of the world turns the enemy—the “power of evil”—into something of an abstract category; the enemy has no individual human face. Additionally, the portrayal of the enemies as beasts and vermin deprives them of their human status. The combination of these interpretations allows the violence against this kind of enemy to assume a categorical, abstract, bureaucratic quality, as exemplified by the factory-like mass-murder of Jews in the extermination camps.

There is no necessary connection between motive and action, and apocalyptic visions do not necessarily lead to violence. Between imagination and real action there is a sphere of existential freedom to use violence or not. Above all, apocalyptic violence imagined by individuals without political power differs from the apocalyptic violence that can be enacted with the political and material means of a regime, as in the National Socialist and Stalinist cases. However, when apocalyptic violence occurs, it always stems from the motivation described above, regardless of whether this motivation is the product of a misinterpretation of experiences or of the condition of the world in general. This misinterpretation serves as justification for the use of violence, and, again, there is a typical strategy for justifying apocalyptic violence. The justification constitutes a new value system that is even able to legitimize massacres and genocide. The persecution of Jews after 1933 reveals that a process of acclimation to the new value system may be necessary. It began with the legal discrimination and segregation of the persons identified as the evil enemy, and then led to bullying, violence against their property, and the first acts of physical violence. As people became habituated to this violence, it became institutionalized and permanent. For those who exercised violence, it became routine, until it finally ended in genocide.<sup>31</sup>

Studies on violence and on the Holocaust have stressed that the genocide of the Jews must be understood as a project that would not



have happened without the political decision of the Nazi regime and its administrative possibilities. Despite the individual guilt of many, especially the perpetrators in the concentration camps, these people did not act on their own initiative.<sup>32</sup> Baberowski and Doering-Man-teuffel, as well as Sémelin, have shown how important it is for the perpetrators to be able to refer to a “superior law.” They have also pointed out that when mass murder is based in a moral code, it is particularly effective in destroying the enemy.<sup>33</sup> The set of values and morals that was internalized by the Nazi believers belonged to an apocalyptic worldview. Its standards and rules constituted the articles of faith of the National Socialist political religion.<sup>34</sup> These articles of faith were repeatedly articulated by Hitler himself and other leading Nazis, visualized and enacted in numerous celebrations, and promulgated by believing intellectuals of all sorts, from university professors to journalists and schoolteachers. Even if the believing intellectuals were not always identical with the perpetrators, and the perpetrators were not themselves confident believers, the Nazi view of the world permeated the whole society, created a climate of opinion, and provided moral standards and guidelines for behavior and action. Consequently, if one of the articles of faith stated that the Jews were the “evil enemy of mankind” and that survival and well-being of all good people depended on the destruction of that “power of evil,” the implementation of destruction would be logical. Even for those who were not confident believers and lacked other moral standards, this article provided at least a formal rationalization for their behavior.

There is one additional characteristic of apocalyptic violence that remains to be identified. The process of violence may encroach upon the very persons who, as a result of their apocalyptic worldview, inflict violence on others. Especially in the modern, political apocalypse, the intention to use violence against the evil enemy is often accompanied by the willingness to sacrifice oneself. The synthesis of the apocalyptic activist and the martyr has been characteristic of the apocalypse in Germany for two hundred years. During the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon, blood lust and the spirit of sacrifice were often made indistinguishable and expressed in a single breath, as, for example, in Theodor Körners well-known poem “Call” (*Anruf*):



Grant no mercy! If you cannot lift the sword,  
Strangle them without hesitation;  
And sell the final drop of your life dearly!  
Death makes everyone free.

Freshen up, my people! — The signs of flames are smoking,  
The crops are ripe; reapers, do not tremble!  
Ultimate redemption lies in the sword!  
Press the spear into your loyal heart;  
A lane for freedom! — Wash the earth,  
Your German country, clean with your own blood!<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, during World War I countless poems that interpreted the war as an apocalyptic event suggested that self-sacrifice was necessary in order to achieve redemption. During the Third Reich, the interrelation of action and sacrifice was promoted not only through verbal sanctification, but also through ritual celebration of the numerous cultic ceremonies inaugurated by Nazism. In particular, the so-called “day of remembrance for those who died in the movement”—the ninth of November, which commemorated Hitler’s failed Putsch of 1923—celebrated the unity of action and sacrifice in front of the Feldherrnhalle and on the Königsplatz in Munich as a prerequisite for the final “redemption” of all “Aryans” in the Third Reich. Every year, in an evening ceremony, the names of the sixteen “martyrs” (*Blutzeugen*) shot in 1923 were called out one by one, and the Hitler Youth responded in unison, “Here!” This ritual act rendered those who had sacrificed themselves immortal and also obliged the survivors, who conveyed this immortality with their cry of “Here!” to take upon themselves self-sacrifice for the sake of redemption.<sup>36</sup> The young Nazi writer Gerhard Schumann, who wrote liturgical texts for ceremonies of this kind, especially those involving the Hitler Youth, states:

Life lives because one throws himself away,  
Who loves the fluttering flag more than himself.  
The stormy life that never ends,  
As long as one will offer himself up for sacrifice.<sup>37</sup>



The last apocalyptic movement in Germany that had political significance and demonstrated the synthesis of violent action against others and the willingness to sacrifice oneself was the left-wing terrorist gang the Red Army Faction (RAF) of the 1970s and 80s. Sharing common features with other apocalyptic worldviews, the RAF believed in the division of the world into good and evil, expressed in the typical, simplifying, and denunciatory bestialization of the enemy,<sup>38</sup> and was convinced that the world of evil must be destroyed so that a new, truly free and humane world could arise. This apocalyptic worldview had a much stronger impact than its Marxist accoutrements and justifications. Corresponding to the apocalyptic logic, the act of violence was meant to have the function of redemption. According to the terrorist Jan-Carl Raspe: "Certainly, the heart, the core, which must be split, the Midas's knot, which when unraveled, promised the beginning of the Golden Age, was not unraveled, but split . . . everything revolves around the question of violence."<sup>39</sup> Following this kind of reasoning, the RAF was ready to kill not only prominent enemies like Hanns Martin Schleyer, president of the German Employer's Association, but also, as the terrorist Klaus Jünschke put it, "people chosen almost arbitrarily, chosen by the time of detonation of the explosive devices. Whoever was nearby got it."<sup>40</sup> The final consequence of such extreme indifference to suffering and death was the willingness to commit violence against oneself, that is, to commit suicide. Following the suicides of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe at the Stammheim Prison, a volume containing Bertolt Brecht's play, *The Decision* (*Die Maßnahme*), which the prisoners had frequently quoted, was found in Gudrun Ensslin's cell. This volume contains the following text:

It is terrible to kill.

But not just others, we also kill ourselves, when it is necessary,

Because only with violence is this killing

World to be changed, as

Every living person knows.<sup>41</sup>

In our days, these lines remind us of other terrorists who kill and commit suicide at the same time, both the terrorists of 9/11, as well as the



less well-known suicide bombers who carry explosives on their bodies and blow themselves up together with those they consider enemies. Unscrupulously, they take the risk that innocent bystanders, women, and children get killed, as the German terrorist Jünschke already put it: "Whoever was nearby got it." Again, this type of violence discloses the rigid and dogmatic attitude of people who believe in the apocalyptic interpretation of the world. It discloses an attitude that views the enemy not as an individual human being but as an abstract category, The Evil that has to be wiped out.

Apocalyptic worldviews may have different religious and cultural roots, connect with different ideologies and political movements, and change in content, but all apocalyptic worldviews envision a perfect new society, a paradisiacal order, and an existence in purity and homogeneity, following the destruction of the old, corrupt world and the annihilation of the evil enemy who is guilty of the deficient state of existence. If, however, violence is used in order to achieve the envisioned goal, which requires cleansing and destroying, the only "winner" in such an apocalypse is death, as is made evident by the murderous self-sacrifice of apocalyptic terrorists.



## Notes

- 1 For a detailed account of the apocalyptic tradition, from the classical Jewish and Christian sources via the Middle Ages up to modern apocalyptic ideologies and political movements, especially in Germany, see my book Klaus Vondung, *The Apocalypse in Germany* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).
- 2 Rev. 6:12; 8:6; 9; 11:13, 19; 13; 16; 17.
- 3 Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4, *The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 26.
- 4 Rev. 9:6; 11:8–10.
- 5 See Gerschom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971).
- 6 See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- 7 See Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
- 8 The modern political apocalypse is neither “left” nor “right.” The apocalyptic model can be filled with different ideological content.
- 9 Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Geist der Zeit*, vol. 2, *Ernst Moritz Arndt's Sämtliche Werke*, ed. E. Schirmer (Magdeburg: Magdeburger Verlags-Anstalt, n.d.), 128 (my translation).
- 10 Ibid., 2:96, 220; 3:110 (my translation).
- 11 Ibid., 2:135–37, 195, 252–55; compare to 3:105, 127.
- 12 Ibid., 2:207; 3:299, 292.
- 13 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Über den Begriff des wahrhaften Krieges in Bezug auf den Krieg im Jahre 1813 etc.* (Tübingen, 1813), 39 (my translation).
- 14 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Fritz Medicus (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), 5:610 (my translation).
- 15 Eine Lustjagd, wie wenn Schützen  
Auf der Spur dem Wolfe sitzen!  
Schlagt ihn tot! Das Weltgericht  
Fragt euch nach dem Gründen nicht!  
Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner (Munich: Hanser, 1977), 1:27 (my translation).
- 16 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Eher, 1933), 2:123, 216, 320, 421, 432, 782, esp. 346, 752.
- 17 Ibid., 2:724.
- 18 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der entscheidende Weltkampf* (Munich, n.d.), 2–4, 12–13 (my translation).
- 19 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 2:703; translation in Vondung, *The Apocalypse*, 169.
- 20 Helmut Heiber, ed., *Das Tagebuch von Joseph Goebbels 1925–26* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1960), 85; translation in Vondung, *The Apocalypse*, 227.
- 21 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelischgeistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (Munich: Hoheneichen Verlag, 1935), 82; translation in Vondung, *The Apocalypse*, 227–28.
- 22 Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Ordnung durch Terror: Gewaltexzesse und Vernichtung im nationalsozialistischen und im stalinistischen Imperium* (Bonn: Dietz, 2006).
- 23 Jaques Sémelin, *Säubern und Vernichten. Die Politik der Massaker und Völkermorde* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2007).
- 24 Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, *Ordnung durch Terror*, 68, 88–89.
- 25 Ibid., 48.
- 26 Ibid., 16.
- 27 Sémelin, *Säubern und Vernichten*, 87, 320.
- 28 Ibid., 33, 45, 51–52, 92.
- 29 Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, *Ordnung durch Terror*, 16, 37–38, 47–48, 89.



- 30 Wolfgang Sofsky, *Traktat über die Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996); Sofsky, "Paradies der Grausamkeit," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 2, 1999, 51.
- 31 There has been a longstanding debate around the question of whether the genocidal extermination of Jews was the result of Hitler's *intention* (Saul Friedländer and others) or the final step in a process of "cumulative radicalization" (Hans Mommsen) that must be explained with respect to external factors and *structural* aspects of the Nazi regime. More recently, a view reconciling these two interpretations has become available. There is no doubt that from the first measures of discrimination against and persecution of Jews in 1933 up to the *Endlösung* there was a process of radicalization, and that internal as well as external factors—especially the war against the Soviet Union—played a role in its course. On the other hand, this process cannot explain the result or the decisive step from general anti-Semitism, even persecution, to organized mass-murder. Without Hitler's anti-Semitism and his determination "to solve the Jewish question" (Christopher Browning) the dynamics of radicalization cannot be explained. See Saul Friedländer, *Die Jahre der Vernichtung. Das Dritte Reich und die Juden 1939–1945* (Munich: Beck, 2006); Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Hans Mommsen, "Forschungskontroversen zum Nationalsozialismus," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 57, No. 14–15 (2007): 14–21.
- 32 I am referring here to the penetrating observations of Manfred Henningsen in a different context: Manfred Henningsen, *Der Mythos Amerika* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2009), 242–44; compare to Jan Philipp Reemtsma, *Vertrauen und Gewalt: Versuch über eine besondere Konstellation der Moderne* (Hamburg: Pantheon, 2009), 310, 317, 320, 344; and for general information see Trotha (1997), Sofsky (1996); Browning (2004).
- 33 Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, *Ordnung durch Terror*, 48, 66; Sémelin, *Säubern und Vernichten*, 280, 313.
- 34 See my essay Klaus Vondung, "National Socialism as a Political Religion: Potentials and Limits of an Analytical Concept," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 1 (2005): 87–95, and the seminal study Voegelin, "The Political Religions," in *Modernity without Restraint: The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Manfred Henningsen, vol. 5 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).
- 35 Gebt kein Pardon! Könnt ihr das Schwert nicht heben,  
So würgt sie ohne Scheu;  
Und hoch verkauft den letzten Tropfen Leben!  
Der Tod macht alle frei.  
Frisch auf, mein Volk! – Die Flammenzeichen rauchen,  
Die Saat ist reif; ihr Schnitter, zaudert nicht!  
Das höchste Heil, das letzte, liegt im Schwerte!  
Drück dir den Speer ins treue Herz hinein:  
Der Freiheit eine Gasse! – Wasch die Erde,  
Dein deutsches Land, mit deinem Blute rein!  
Theodor Körner, *Sämtliche Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe in zwei Bänden*, ed. Eugen Wildenow (Leipzig: M. Hesse, n.d.), 1:25, 21; translation in Vondung, *The Apocalypse*, 383.
- 36 See Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation: Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1971), 83–85.
- 37 Das Leben lebt, weil einer sich verschwendet,  
Der mehr als sich die wehende Fahne liebt.  
Das stürmische Leben, welches niemals endet,  
Solange einer sich zum Opfer gibt.  
Gerhard Schumann, *Siegendes Leben. Dichtungen für eine Gemeinschaft* (Oldenburg and Berlin: Stall-ing, 1935), 27; translation in Vondung, *The Apocalypse*, 187.
- 38 The leading terrorist Ulrike Meinhof said in an interview with the journalist Ray in 1970: "Of course we say that the cops are pigs, we say that the person in uniform is a pig, not a human being, and so we have to deal with him." *Ibid.*, 392.



39 Ibid., 394.

40 Ibid., 393.

41 Furchtbar ist es, zu töten.

Aber nicht andere nur, auch uns töten wir, wenn es nottut,

Da doch nur mit Gewalt diese tötende

Welt zu ändern ist, wie

Jeder Lebende weiß.

Bertolt Brecht, *Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 344; trans-

lation in Vondung, *The Apocalypse*, 395–96.



# The Psychology of Apocalypticism<sup>1</sup>

*Charles B. Strozier and Katharine Boyd*

There are many approaches to the concept of apocalypticism in the scholarly literature. Robert Jay Lifton uses the term synonymously with the “end times,” or the end of the world brought about by undefined means, though he is mostly concerned with nuclear annihilation.<sup>2</sup> Norman Cohn prefers to talk about “millenarianism” in his description of cultic groups in the Middle Ages that are caught up in end-time concerns.<sup>3</sup> Richard Landes, editor of *The Encyclopedia of Millennialism*, notes that “chiliasm” emphasizes the thousand-year cycles so often characteristic of apocalyptic groups.<sup>4</sup> Bernard McGinn distinguishes apocalypticism as a more radical form of eschatology, or the theology of last things.<sup>5</sup> “Utopianism” describes an ideal community and is often associated with “millennialism,” as well as with political ideologies.<sup>6</sup> The typological divisions and subdivisions continue to accumulate.

There is no question that the apocalyptic is grounded in culture, religion, and history. But there is also a psychology of apocalypticism. Because humans know of death, ultimate endings are an essential dimension of individual and collective consciousness. Endism is the location of the self in some future, ultimate narrative. That ultimate discourse can be highly distorted, however, because the anticipation of involvement in the end draws on projections that inhibit a personal, human connection between past and future.<sup>7</sup> Such a disjunction is inherently violent.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, *apokalypsis* has always meant the specific ways in which God is revealed to humans. Such a revelation of God and of a new beginning requires the end of the human experiment, or the death of everyone.<sup>8</sup> Collective endings in this narrative are the precondition for heavenly new beginnings. Violence is always redemptive. An ethical and spiritual ambiguity lies at the heart of any apocalyptic drama. The strictly religious (and mostly Western) context in which most apocalyptic stories are told, however, should not



obscure the more psychological ways in which thinking about collective endings and radical new beginnings has inspired political and social movements for millennia and become woven into the fabric of the psychology of apocalypticism.

The theology or ideology that constitutes the apocalyptic ultimately depends on its underlying psychology. Certain key themes universally define this psychology. What follows makes no attempt at typological completeness but instead seeks to suggest a few concepts which begin to describe the contours of the psychology of apocalypticism.

## **Time**

The experience of time is a fundamental factor in apocalyptic thinking. Bernard McGinn emphasizes that the appeal of the apocalyptic lies in its ability to offer an explanation for one's personal history, as well as provide the larger context of world history.<sup>9</sup> In the theory of premillennial dispensationalism, which is the ideological basis of Christian fundamentalism, present time constitutes the last dispensation before the end of the world.<sup>10</sup> The apocalyptic provides an understanding of history "its unity, its structure, its goal, the future hope which it promises."<sup>11</sup> McGinn says that such Christian groups believe "they have been given control over history, even a blueprint allowing them certainty regarding the signs of the times and the approach of the End."<sup>12</sup> David Mann adds that in comparison to other cultures that perceive time as a cycle of birth, destruction, and rebirth, the Judeo-Christian tradition experiences time as linear and teleological.<sup>13</sup> The Christian apocalyptic radicalizes teleology. Christians believe in a single creation, which necessarily encompasses the end of the world and concludes with the rebirth of the righteous few.

Stephen O'Leary argues for the need to distinguish apocalyptic ideology from conspiracy. Although both utilize dualistic thinking, the apocalyptic "locates the problem of evil in time and looks forward to its imminent resolution."<sup>14</sup> The apocalyptic is psychologically grounded in kairotic time, since the only meaningful future event is the transformative end of the world followed by salvation. Such time is



not linear or homogenous but is weighted by value and experienced in an uneven, discordant fashion. As in individual trauma, such experience of time is psychologically and spiritually different from history as we know it. Apocalyptic believers are not living within time but rather “escape history by destroying time,” thereby freeing themselves of responsibility for the world. Kairotic time is always running out. Such an urgent expectation of the end frames one’s logical, spiritual, and ethical deliberation.<sup>15</sup>

Richard Landes argues that millennialists experience “apocalyptic time” when they expect the end to occur, but he believes they are able to reenter “normal” time following disappointment. Landes says millennialists see signs of the end everywhere and “such arousal, precisely because it believes that the future will be radically discontinuous with the present, liberates believers from any earthly inhibitions . . . no fear of future consequences (except from a judging deity) restrains the conscience of apocalyptic actors.”<sup>16</sup> Jean Baudrillard describes how this perception of time relates to violence. He argues that apocalyptic groups feel that salvation has not yet occurred within history, and this feeling creates extreme tension.<sup>17</sup> Apocalyptic groups sometimes experience a great deal of stress and anxiety, which are often expressed in acts of violence or mass suicide in the hope of precipitating the End. Salvation was prophesized to occur at the end of time, and these individuals wish to end time themselves.<sup>18</sup>

## Death & Violence

The embrace of an apocalyptic order compels an individual to re-conceptualize the death of both the individual and the collective.<sup>19</sup> It is human for one to imagine one’s own death. The apocalyptic, however, demands that one extend that image to include the death of all human beings.<sup>20</sup> Such imagining is highly motivated by the apocalyptic narrative, which provides purpose, direction, and imagery for one’s conceptualization of death, and ultimately stresses the transcendence of death.<sup>21</sup> Many authors emphasize that the perception of death and violence is drastically reoriented in the fundamentalist mindset where



the day of destruction is “not one of terror but one of vindication.”<sup>22</sup> Hoffer argues that a mass movement can transform death and violence from a frightful or unjust event into “an act of make-believe and a theatrical gesture” such that participation “seem[s] easy when [such events] are part of a ritual, ceremonial, dramatic performance.”<sup>23</sup> The Books of Daniel and Revelation embrace end-of-the-world imagery in ways that require violence, blood, fire, and total destruction. The imagery provides a plot for collective death, though the narrative requires that a righteous few survive. One can say in general that apocalyptic myths are survivor stories.

Although most authors agree that the apocalyptic narrative has been associated with violence, Mortimer Ostow, among others, argues that it can be expressed in either a passive or a militant way.<sup>24</sup> Those who embrace a passive or, more aptly, “quiescent” apocalyptic are much less inclined to inflict violence on those outside of their group.<sup>25</sup> According to Ostow, although a quiescent apocalyptic group may not participate in violence, it is not passive in its ideology because salvation is ultimately dependent on violent destruction. In fact, the imagery of destruction in an apocalyptic narrative is depicted as a form of punishment and a method of cleansing, which add a moral credence to violence and ultimately world annihilation.<sup>26</sup> Some suggestion of this active relationship to violence even among those ostensibly quiescent populations lies in the politics of apocalyptic groups, which, for example, look more favorably on corporal punishment and a “willingness to inflict pain on children in the name of discipline and see punishment as a proper means of upholding order and obedience.”<sup>27</sup>

The violence can also be enthusiastically embraced. A group’s commitment to the apocalyptic emboldens personal conviction in the group’s righteousness, which in turn encourages the group to partake in violence. Militant apocalyptic groups rationalize their activism by reframing the concept of renewal so that “rebirth, just as literal birth, can be induced rather than awaited passively.”<sup>28</sup> At the same time, most fundamentalists do not believe human beings can forcefully bring about the End with their actions.<sup>29</sup> This shift in agency from the individual to God characterizes apocalyptic thinking in general. The



resulting lack of personal agency is a powerful tool for repressing desires or urges to act violently. However, strong commitment to a religious cause, in addition to the relinquishment of personal agency, is often associated with the feeling of liberation from guilt and responsibility for one's own actions. This combination may enable a true believer to rationalize the enactment of his or her violent urges. Dualistic thinking, an inherent part of apocalyptic thinking, makes one view "the rest of the world's religions as satanic strongholds—not as the cultures of people with the right to live and worship as they please."<sup>30</sup> Consequently, an otherwise passive community may justify pre-emptive violence against the other if it feels threatened.<sup>31</sup> Lifton suggests that religiously motivated violence requires the group to experience an aggressive numbing that results from total ideological commitment to a dualistic doctrine.<sup>32</sup> Aggressive numbing, in the context of the apocalyptic transvaluation of time, undervalues the present and yet is potentially able to mobilize violence to inaugurate an apocalyptic future.

Nuclear weapons have fundamentally altered images of death and violence for all human beings in the sense that humans now have the capacity to execute total destruction in a form previously held only by God. The existence of nuclear and other ultimate weapons, especially biological ones, makes all people imagine collective death. In fact, it takes an act of imagination, or a numbing, not to think about it.<sup>33</sup> Few scholars discuss the effect of nuclear weapons on the apocalyptic beyond mentioning how nuclear weapons have been included into the end-times scenario.<sup>34</sup> Stephen O'Leary argues that these weapons legitimize the apocalyptic for more people. He also notes how Hal Lindsey and others have incorporated the development of ultimate weapons as one of the signs of the imminent End.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Richard Landes says that the "cloud of nuclear destruction. . . has proved a breeding ground for apocalyptic and millennial themes."<sup>36</sup> The far more important point, however, is that the mere existence of ultimate weapons in the world evokes apocalyptic energies and has dramatically altered the psychohistorical context of the modern apocalyptic.<sup>37</sup>



## Psychohistorical Disclosure

The psychology of apocalypticism is influenced by psychohistorical factors. Although similar in the forms of their underlying psychology, apocalyptic groups are differentiated by the historical context in which they emerge.<sup>38</sup> Frank Kermode, for example, argues that apocalyptic narratives in history are distinguished by an “apocalyptic ‘set’” which is the “state of affairs in which one can discern some sociological predisposition to the acceptance of apocalyptic structures” such as one finds in contemporary environmental concerns. This collective predisposition affects the degree to which apocalyptic ideation will be accepted. In addition, Kermode says that a “canonical apocalypse,” or an apocalyptic religious doctrine, and the “interpretative apocalypse,” meaning the materials and writing that have become associated with the movement but are not canonical, are important characteristics of the historical context that contribute to the differences between apocalyptic groups.<sup>39</sup>

Kermode’s “apocalyptic set” stresses the role of historical context in determining the relation between ideology and a mass movement. Bryan Wilson emphasizes how a movement is “strongly characterized by the prevailing cultural tradition of the society in which it occurs,” and that “cultural responses, [such as] mythical themes [and] patterns of action . . . are often re-structured in the context of millennialism.” Wilson stresses the importance of studying such movements within an appropriate cultural context.<sup>40</sup> In a similar vein, O’Leary argues that apocalyptic narratives contribute and react to their historical context. His study analyzes “how the form and symbolism of apocalyptic discourse are shaped by and in turn help to shape the collective behavior of its historical audiences.” By focusing on the rhetoric of the Millerite movement and of Hal Lindsey, for example, O’Leary shows how both of these narratives utilize the “social knowledge base that enables apocalyptic movements to appeal occasionally to a wider audience.” For example, the Millerite movement that drew thousands of members in the 1830s and 1840s utilized the socially accepted premise that the Bible is divine authority; it needed no additional argument. O’Leary shows how the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, that occurred when William Miller’s prediction of the end did not take place contributed to gen-



eral social knowledge. Following this event groups that predict dates for the apocalypse generally do not appeal to the mainstream public. As a result, the evangelical apocalyptic espoused by Hal Lindsey never actually specified a date for the end. Lindsey only suggested the imminence of the end by means of "signs" that cause public discomfort.<sup>41</sup>

Speaking in general terms, Mortimer Ostow describes three types of apocalyptic discourses created to address specific social group formations: those created to provide hope for the oppressed, those created by authority figures to maintain proper order by threatening the populace with ideas of destruction, and those created to encourage people to take up arms against an enemy.<sup>42</sup> Norman Cohn, who describes the millennial movements in medieval Europe from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, suggests that certain sociological preconditions must be present before apocalyptic movements can flourish.<sup>43</sup> There must be a large group of impoverished people who are unorganized and poorly integrated into society. Such groups are more likely to form if the individuals in them are not able to further their interests through secular means. In addition, there must be a significant event that changes the state of societal life, such as population displacement, the growth and expansion of the economy, new forms of trade, and other such social factors. Apocalyptic groups, for example, often flourish after a major disaster or among people who fear catastrophe such as famines and plagues.<sup>44</sup> Often such traumatic events are interpreted as signs of the End. Cohn suggests that many, if not all, human beings desire deliverance from suffering, which is amplified in times of crisis.<sup>45</sup> He stresses how apocalyptic movements require the population to feel a pervasive anxiety and uncertainty. Ultimately, apocalyptic group movements are potentially dangerous and difficult to control because of the multiple avenues by means of which people arrive at such thinking.

## Psychological Context

To address the general psychological aspects of these issues, Ostow emphasizes mood as the determining factor for how one perceives and rationalizes people, things, and events.<sup>46</sup> He suggests that the apoca-



lyptic is the projection of an internal mood onto the societal landscape. Ostow evaluates mood in relation to the apocalyptic on two levels: the individual and the society. He describes some individuals' predisposition towards end-of-the-world thinking as a "personal apocalyptic complex." Ostow proposes that this complex has the potential to become an illness, an "apocalyptic syndrome."<sup>47</sup> One's inability to control rage, particularly if it is amplified by feelings of humiliation, can combine with a predisposed apocalyptic complex to generate the syndrome. With regards to the psychology of society, Ostow claims that the "apocalyptic mood" can become prevalent in a society by attracting individuals who experience the apocalyptic complex.<sup>48</sup> The predisposed individuals, bonded by the apocalyptic, form a cohesive collective that reaffirms the population's visions. Stress can also give rise to the apocalyptic paradigm in those who are otherwise not prone to such thinking.

Anxiety, insecurity and uneasiness are common sentiments among the dispossessed. It follows that the apocalyptic narrative is often associated with poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised populations that are in need, not only of hope for salvation and an idealized future, but also of some satisfaction of their desires for vengeance.<sup>49</sup> Hope, however, is a universal human yearning that cuts across class lines.<sup>50</sup> One finds apocalyptic ideology in times of crisis as well as prosperity, which generates "excessive narcissism and a concurrent loss of the sense of communal obligation."<sup>51</sup> Apocalyptic thinking, however, is not limited to the poor and needy.<sup>52</sup> Cohn discusses the Free Spirit heresy that did not come from the poor segments of society but rather sprang up among mystics from the upper class who believed in removing social distinctions and living in communal settings.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Lois Ann Lorentzen describes the members of the apocalyptic group, Earth First!, as being members of a rather privileged class.<sup>54</sup> In his fieldwork carried out in New York City, Charles Strozier reports on how fundamentalism was moving up the social scale in the early 1990s.<sup>55</sup> It is also important to note that people from vastly different educational levels can be found among fundamentalist group members.<sup>56</sup>

Philip Charles Lucas emphasizes the psychological attraction to the "sense of security and consolation in their assumption that the



millennial scenario they embrace transcends the venality and uncertainty of secular history.”<sup>57</sup> O’Leary suggests that the apocalyptic is created to help “explain and justify the phenomenal realities of evil, to locate humanity within a cycle or progression of cosmic time, and to legitimate or subvert the structures of existing power through the resources of sacred myth.”<sup>58</sup> When discussing fundamentalism, many writers note that human beings have a general, universal need to be connected to some cause that endures beyond their lifetime and offers a semblance of immortality.<sup>59</sup> Other authors cite social aspects of group membership, which involve friends and kin, or the heroism perceived among group members as primary motivating factors for joining a movement with a cause.<sup>60</sup> A mass movement, including a fundamentalist one, can satisfy both of these needs. Additionally, the nature of the fundamentalist mindset stimulates similar behavior among individuals who join such groups for other reasons.

Beit-Hallahmi argues that the production of violent imagery in apocalyptic narratives can help achieve or maintain psychic balance and prevent one from carrying out such actions. Images of destruction and violence may offer an outlet for aggression and frustration.<sup>61</sup> Future salvation frees the self from desire and the urges of the body.<sup>62</sup> He suggests that a militant apocalyptic group that acts on violent or aggressive urges is struggling outwardly against a perceived enemy while also struggling within itself “against a powerful tendency toward self-destruction,” often finding that its pursuits result in its own destruction.<sup>63</sup> This struggle is accompanied by an attempt to deny all reality external to the group’s pursuits. Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter have alluded to this denial as a reaction to cognitive dissonance—one way of reconciling contradicting beliefs.<sup>64</sup> This skewed perception of reality among the collective grounds the comparison of such groups with those suffering from schizophrenia and other forms of mental illness.<sup>65</sup> Ultimately, the apocalyptic narrative has an appeal beyond satisfying the plight of socio-economic distress.<sup>66</sup> Incorrectly assuming that such factors fully explain the appeal of the apocalyptic furthermore limits our capacity for responding to and preventing totalistic violence.

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The apocalyptic is an inherent part of a larger psychological construct, the fundamentalist mindset. In addition to an apocalyptic orientation, this mindset, wherever it occurs, includes dualistic thinking, paranoia and rage in a group context, an orientation towards charismatic leadership, and a totalized conversion experience. To consider the apocalyptic outside of this larger context is to maintain a conceptual fiction.

Dualistic thinking, especially its more radical forms, for example, is inherently apocalyptic. Binary oppositions grow in the soil of absolutist ideology. Michael Barkun argues that such thinking is characterized by the “tendency to view the world as a battleground between pure good and pure evil.”<sup>67</sup> Dualistic thinking is grounded in a rigid psychology that denies the possibility of error. Robert M. Young, for example, argues that psychological anxiety due to perceived threat or uncertainty results in a tendency to simplify. He argues that “to simplify in psychoanalytic terms is to regress, to eliminate the middle ground, to split, dividing the world into safe and threat, good and evil, life and death.”<sup>68</sup> Dualistic thinking causes one to “see others in very partial terms—as part-objects,” such that fundamentalists “lose the ability to imagine the inner world and humanity of others.”<sup>69</sup> These dualistic categories force the experience of others into group structures. Such thinking provides a moral framework that differentiates good from evil—and then totalizes the difference. The “totalistic moral thinking” associated with these groups appeals to some people, particularly among young individuals who display weak identity formation.<sup>70</sup> Such strong conviction is generated more easily when the promoted message resonates with pre-existing beliefs and prejudices regarding the other. For a doctrine to be effective in generating and maintaining a mass movement, the belief in the certainty and truth of a doctrine is more important than its actual meaning. A true believer is not baffled, frightened, or discouraged by obstacles. His fundamentalist faith makes him secure. In fact, the greater the obstacles, the more secure such spiritual and ideological commitments become.<sup>71</sup>

Dualistic thinking becomes apocalyptic because “locating evil also presumes the possibility of salvation, or an escape from evil.”<sup>72</sup> The struggle between the forces of good and evil requires destruction and



eventually the end of the world. People who perceive themselves as opposing the evil other by joining what they believe to be a righteous cause can form a fundamentalist group. "Apocalyptic logic" organizes dualistic thinking by establishing an ideology of "redemption and demonization" which ultimately "polarizes camps between a victimized elect and an odious enemy."<sup>73</sup> Chip Berlet stresses that dualistic thinking is not forced upon people but is upheld willingly by those who believe their apocalyptic ideology is the absolute truth.<sup>74</sup> Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins argue that "the millennial destiny of humankind" hinges on the psychological context created by "moral, eschatological, and cosmic polarities."<sup>75</sup>

Such belief systems limit personal judgment and variation of opinion within groups. By defining those who are not in the group as evil, the fundamentalist mindset reduces and sometimes even eliminates empathy for the other, ultimately dehumanizing the out-group. The oppositional nature of dualistic thinking provides a foundation for rationalizing the use of violence toward the other.<sup>76</sup> It is this potential for violence in fundamentalist thinking, which at times is actualized, that is so often overlooked or minimized.<sup>77</sup>

The fundamentalist mindset also incorporates paranoia, which is inherently related to apocalypticism. The paranoid lives in a world of heated exaggerations, one in which empathy has been leached away, and which lacks humor, creativity, and wisdom.<sup>78</sup> The paranoid lives in a world of shame and humiliation, of suspiciousness, aggressiveness, and dualisms that separate out all good from pure evil. The paranoid is grandiose and megalomaniacal, and always has an apocalyptic view of history that contains within it a mythical sense of time.

Apocalypticism also plays a role in the dynamic between the charismatic leader and the followers in fundamentalist groups. O'Leary indicates that "charisma is best conceived as a property attributed by the audience."<sup>79</sup> This quality signifies the synergistic nature of the leader-follower relationship. Expressing ideas with assured, intense conviction, the leaders gain a powerful influence.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, most charismatic leaders suffer from paranoia, which is the source of the certainty with which they speak.<sup>81</sup> Such leaders attract and captivate disciples, not friends. Followers are attracted to strong personality and



conviction. A leader is better able to assert his claims as legitimate if he adopts "culturally established styles of leadership."<sup>82</sup> Cohn stresses that a charismatic leader is most successful when he adopts traditional beliefs and cultural mores. He emphasizes that this process of creating an ideology has the potential to become a movement if the leader "possesses a suitable personality and is able to convey an impression of absolute conviction."<sup>83</sup> Lifton adds that charisma includes the "ability to instill and sustain feelings of vitality and immortality, feelings that reach into the core of each disciple's often wounded, always questing self." He warns that such emotions "can be as fragile as they are psychologically explosive."<sup>84</sup> Hoffer argues that "one of the main tasks of a real leader [is] to mask the grim reality of dying and killing by evoking in his followers the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle."<sup>85</sup> Paranoid groups often use the apocalyptic to mobilize people.<sup>86</sup> Margaret Thaler Singer suggests that leaders use the threat of the End to generate anxiety among followers wishing to leave the group.<sup>87</sup> Cohn asserts that apocalyptic groups in the Middle Ages arose out of the revolutionary sentiments among the oppressed whose leaders would embark on a social movement utilizing the apocalyptic as an ideological structure. Often, the leaders were intellectuals, and most commonly, former priests interested in mysticism. Such charismatic leaders (called "prophetae" by Cohn) adopted apocalyptic visions from different sources including the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation, as well as from Sibylline Oracles, Joachim of Fiore, and the Doctrine of the Egalitarian State of Nature to suit their own interests. By emphasizing the distressed state of society, the leader was able to impress upon his followers their role as the righteous, while demonizing the enemy.

The apocalyptic provides a narrative framework for leaders to exploit. Some leaders are taken in by the grandiose illusions they create. For example, Lifton, describing the psychological makeup of Shoko Asahara, the leader of Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, says that "the guru and the world become combined. But instead of the self becoming . . . a part of the world, the world becomes an aspect of the self." He says that the visions of the End are "a projection of the self and an assertion of the self."<sup>88</sup>



In terms of conversion, Erik Erikson distinguishes totalism from wholeness. He states that wholeness is "an assembly of parts . . . that enter into fruitful association and organization" such that "as a Gestalt . . . wholeness emphasizes a sound, organic, progressive mutuality between diversified functions and parts within an entirety, the boundaries of which are open and fluid." In contrast, totalism "evokes a Gestalt in which an absolute boundary is emphasized. . . . nothing that belongs inside must be left outside, nothing that must be outside can be tolerated inside. A totality is as absolutely inclusive as it is utterly exclusive." Erikson emphasizes that the psychological need for totality is due to the loss of wholeness and "accidental or developmental shifts" causing one to "restructure himself and the world by taking recourse to what we may call totalism."<sup>89</sup> The fundamentalist mindset is grounded in the psychology of totalism.

Other observers have noted the close relationship of trauma and personal crisis with the conversion process. Prior to conversion, there is almost always some antecedent or precipitating stress, crisis, social influence, personal struggle or trauma.<sup>90</sup> Conversion as a response to trauma or depression may lead the vulnerable to adopt an apocalyptic ideology. Beit-Hallahmi argues there is a sequence in which first, one experiences an event or trauma that causes a person to reassess priorities; second, one adopts a variation or substitute identity; and third, one establishes a break or disconnect from the past.<sup>91</sup> This process fosters higher self-esteem and the formation of a new identity. Likewise, the new identity generated with the conversion raises self-esteem. The certainty of conviction empowers the new self and provides hope despite the perceived corruption and chaos of the surrounding world.

Similarly, Carol Mason writes about the conversion experience of the apocalyptic believer.<sup>92</sup> The conversion process, she says, is initiated by reading the apocalyptic narrative in a sympathetic fashion. A reader's sympathetic approach to the doctrine suggests the reader is predisposed to apocalyptic ideation and/or has held a similar attitude against the group identified as the other. This attitude enables one to identify with the message and affects how one interprets the prophecy and reacts to the narrative. This process of involvement with the narrative is the evolution of the self, a transformation of one's identity. The narra-



tive also designates identities for those regarded as the opposition. Such identification restricts a believer's ability to perceive the opposition outside of the confines of the narrative. Ultimately, in this sense, conversion is an apocalyptic event in which the old self is destroyed and the righteous self is reborn.

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In this chapter, we have stressed the overlapping and related psychological dimensions of death, violence, and the apocalyptic. There are other aspects of the apocalyptic. Countless millions of oppressed people have found hope in their dreams of the ultimate transformation of the world. Many important social movements, from Marxist-socialists in Europe to the Abolitionists in nineteenth-century America, have drawn creative energy from the apocalyptic. Conservative evangelicals, awash in the "blood of the lamb" (a Revelation image), find meaning in such a discourse to heal personal miseries. But we are more affected by the malevolent power of the apocalyptic, as evident in social movements like Nazism, in leaders like Mao Tse-Tsung or Joseph Stalin, and in the fearsome aspirations of Osama bin Laden and al-Qā'ida.



# Notes

- 1 Some of the material in this chapter is based on our work in Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, and James W. Jones, eds., *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Reflections on Religion, Violence, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 2 Robert Jay Lifton and Meric Markusen, eds., *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 84–85.
- 3 Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).
- 4 Richard Landes, *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- 5 Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 4. McGinn argues that the belief in the present as the last age is characteristic of both apocalypticism and eschatology; however, apocalypticism anticipates the imminent end of the last age. Similarly, a belief in evil is common to both; however, apocalypticists believe it can be identified. Lastly, eschatology holds that one's life is occurring in the end of times as opposed apocalypticists who believe one's life events are the end of times, thereby believing they hold an active role in the end. Although McGinn warns that there is no single unifying apocalyptic belief, he argues that apocalyptic groups from different times, places, and of different faiths "display family resemblances." Ibid., 10. These include a "structure of history conceived as a divinely predetermined totality," belief in the imminent end, and "belief in the proximate judgment of evil and triumph of the good." Ibid.
- 6 Thomas L. Long, "Utopia," in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, ed. Richard Landes (New York: Routledge, 2000), 420–24.
- 7 Charles B. Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon 1994), 1.
- 8 An interesting variation on this theme is the "green apocalypse" of the Hopi Indians, in which most (but not all) humans die and the earth is preserved. See *ibid.*, chap. 8, 209–22.
- 9 Bernard McGinn, "Apocalyptic Spirituality: Approaching the 3rd Millennium," in *The Year 2000: Essays on the End*, ed. Charles B. Strozier and Michael Flynn (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 76.
- 10 Strozier, *Apocalypse*.
- 11 McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 30.
- 12 McGinn, "Apocalyptic Spirituality," 76.
- 13 David Mann, "The Infantile Origins of the Creation and Apocalyptic Myths," *The International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 19 (1992): 471–82. Compare to Catherine Keller, "The Breast, the Apocalypse, and the Colonial Journey," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn. Keller describes Colon's (Christopher Columbus) apocalyptic narrative and how he saw himself as "the indispensable agent" or spreading Christianity. Ibid., 52. She describes how Colon sought to acquire and conquer paradise in his exploration such that "he must find himself at the center of biblical prophecy about time . . . [and] he will bend time backward, making of it a commodifiable place." Ibid., 52.
- 14 Stephen O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.
- 15 Charles B. Strozier, "The Global War on Terror, Sliced Four Ways," *World Policy Journal* 24, no. 4 (2008): 90–98. Compare to Carol Mason, *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). Philip Rieff used the two words in Greek to distinguish time, *chronos* and *kaïros*. He argued that in trauma the individual experiences time in a *kaïrotic* fashion, Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). See also Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) and Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: On the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Mariner Books, 1955).



- 16 Richard Landes, "Millennialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. James R. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 17 Jean Baudrillard, "Hysteresis of the Millennium," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 250–62. Landes describes how millennialists are "driven by a sense of imminence" such that "believers can become disruptive, even engaging in revolutionary efforts to overthrow sociopolitical order in an attempt to bring about the kingdom of 'peace.'" Landes, "Millennialism," 334.
- 18 There is a distinction, reflected in most religious traditions, between millennialists who want to force the end and those who are content with waiting more patiently for the end. Among many discussions of the issue, see Nancy Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1–65.
- 19 Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "Death, Fantasy, and Religious Transformations," in *The Psychology of Death in Fantasy and History*, ed. Jerry S. Piven (London: Greenwood Publishing, 2004), 87–114.
- 20 Strozier and Flynn, *The Year 2000*. The thinker who first clarified this relation between the psychology of individual death and the group is Robert Jay Lifton. See Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).
- 21 McGinn says that "promised in apocalyptic texts was more than just the immortality of the soul that pagan philosophers had taught; it centered on the resurrection of the body – a belief difficult, even absurd, to human reason." McGinn, "Apocalyptic Spirituality," 78. See also McGinn, *Visions of the End*.
- 22 Richard Landes, "The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Millennial Fever and the Origins of the Modern West," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 17.
- 23 Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1951), 66.
- 24 Mortimer Ostow, "The Psychodynamics of Apocalyptic: Discussion of Papers on Identification and the Nazi Phenomenon," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 67 (1988): 285–97, 290. See also Keller, "The Breast," 53, who describes the patriarchal militancy of apocalyptic tradition; Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, 1991. "Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Wilson, "Millennialism," 97–98. Wilson distinguishes between different types of actions millennial groups partake in. There are those who only warn others about the end and conduct individual or symbolic collective activities to ensure one is prepared for the end. Other groups partake in activities that "imitate rational steps toward the establishment of a new dispensation, and which bring the movement into conflict with authorities." Ibid., 97–98.
- 25 Strozier, *Apocalypse*; Mason, *Killing for Life*.
- 26 Mortimer Ostow, "Mood Regulation: Spontaneous and Pharmacologically Assisted," *Neuro-Psychanalysis* 6 (2004): 77–86. See also Strozier and Flynn, *The Year 2000*, 2; and Jerry Piven, "The Psychosis (Religion) of Terrorists and the Ecstasy of Violence," in *Terrorism, Jihad, and Sacred Vengeance*, ed. Jerry Piven, Chris Boyd, and Henry Lawton (Haland: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2004). Piven addresses how a holy war needs an established evil enemy.
- 27 Lee Quinby, "Coercive Purity: The Dangerous Promise of Apocalyptic Masculinity" in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn, 156.
- 28 Mortimer Ostow, "Apocalyptic Thinking in Mental Illness and Social Disorder," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 11 (1988): 278. See also Sara Diamond, "Political Millennialism within the Evangelical Subculture," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn, 207–209. Diamond claims that "hard millennialism, linking a timetable for Christ's return to current events in world politics... [in history have] tended to promote a sort of siege mentality."
- 29 Strozier, *Apocalypse*. Also, Jesus says in Matthew 25:13 (King James Version), "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." Also see where McGinn describes Augustine and Thomas Aquinas as opposing Christian apocalyptic groups that are inclined to setting the date for Jesus' return. McGinn, "Apocalyptic Spirituality," 73



- 30 Diamond, "Political Millennialism," 214.
- 31 Beit-Hallahmi, "Death." Beit-Hallahmi warns that an apocalyptic group that perceives itself to be on the defense against outside forces may become violent, particularly if it is a relatively small group with an authoritarian leader in the possession of weapons.
- 32 Robert Jay Lifton, "Reflections on Aum Shinkrikyo," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn. Lifton acknowledges the feelings of guilt, responsibility, and self-blame that a human being associates with the imagery of killing another person, thereby making such action a difficult undertaking. He suggests "the anger-rage-violence constellation provides a means of assigning responsibility and blaming others for that same death imagery." Lifton, "Anger, Rage, and Violence," in *Terror and Apocalypse: Psychological Undercurrents of History*, ed. Jerry S. Piven, Paul Ziolo, and Henry W. Lawton (San Jose: Writer's Showcase, 2002), vol. 2, 87. This process of cognitive reorientation contributes to aggressive numbing.
- 33 Lifton says that "the nuclear culture in which we all grow up creates an Armageddon-like expectation or set of images in all of us that can be seized upon by a person with the right 'words.'" Lifton, "Reflections," 116. See also Lifton, *The Broken Connection*; Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism* (United States: Basic Books, 1982); Margaret Thaler Singer, "On the Image of 2000 in Contemporary Cults," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn, 142. Singer says that "nuclear threat has made us all 'end times,' as the means of destruction are now scientific and real." *Ibid.*, 142.
- 34 Catherine Keller talks about how premillennialists anticipate the apocalypse "probably in nuclear exchange with 'the evil empire.'" Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 5. See also Michael Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse: Millennialism on the Far Right," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn. Barkun explains how the nuclear threat and environmental concerns have generated secular apocalyptic scenarios.
- 35 O'Leary, *Arguing*, 7, 209.
- 36 Landes, "Millennialism," 338.
- 37 See Strozier, *Apocalypse*, 2; Strozier, "The Apocalyptic Guru," in *Psychological Undercurrents of History*, vol. 1, ed. Piven and Lawton (San Jose: Authors Choice Press, 2001); Strozier, "Global War," 94–95; Strozier, "The World Trade Center Disaster and the Apocalyptic," in *Psychological Undercurrents of History*, ed. Piven, Ziolo, and Lawton, 2:20; Strozier and Flynn, *The Year 2000*, 5. The apocalyptic fervor in the world is heightened by the existence of nuclear weapons. Osama Bin Laden attempted to acquire weapons of mass destruction and had a fatwa made that would allow him to use such weapons against the United States. Aum Shinrikyo also sought such weapons and was able to acquire and use sarin gas in the Tokyo subways, killing 11 and injuring up to 5,000 people.
- 38 Amos Funkenstein, "A Schedule for the End of the World: The Origins and Persistence of the Apocalyptic Mentality," in *Visions of Apocalypse: End or Rebirth?*, ed. Saul Friedlander, Gerald Holton, Leo Marx, and Eugene Skolnikoff (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 44–60. Only Funkenstein articulates his belief that apocalyptic groups defined by the unique "balance of myth, method and way of life existed only for 200 years" among the Jewish and early Christian populations. *Ibid.*, 57. Funkenstein proceeds to explain that he believes history has witnessed the continuous decline in apocalypticism since that time period.
- 39 Frank Kermode, "Apocalypse and the Modern," in *Visions of Apocalypse*, ed. Friedlander et al., 84–106, 86. See also David Miller, "Chiliasm: Apocalyptic with a Thousand Faces," in *Psychological Undercurrents of History*, vol. 1, ed. Piven and Lawton. Miller thinks Kermode's type of description is too narrow. He views the "apocalypse not as vision and scripture, not as myth and dream, but as acting-out, literally lived, imminent 'sense of an ending'; . . . not merely literary trope, explained by Frank Kermode." *Ibid.*, 30.
- 40 Bryan Wilson, "Millennialism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6, no. 1 (1963): 93–114. Wilson's recommendation is important to dissuade people from focusing on what they consider 'abnormal' psychological behavior in groups that may not be considered as such in the cultural context.



- 41 O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 6, 197, 93. O'Leary suggests two types of rhetoric, the tragic and the comic. He argues that due to the inability to end slavery and institute temperance, the "internal tensions in the discourse and external social pressures combined to make the comic optimism of post-millennialism unsustainable. With the collapse of the comic frame of acceptance, Millerism offered a tragic interpretation of history as predestined and moving toward its catastrophic close, an interpretation that was distinctly pessimistic about the utility of political and social reform." Ibid., 93.
- 42 Mortimer Ostow, "Myth and Madness: A Report of a Psychoanalytic Study of Antisemitism," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 77 (1996): 15–31.
- 43 Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 37. Cohn states "the tradition of apocalyptic prophecy was only one of several preconditions of the movements of which this book is concerned." Cohn acknowledges the "sociological import" of the information he provides in the Foreword of the latest version of the book in 1970. Ibid., 12.
- 44 Dan Liechty explains how social transitions in a culture, such as the contemporary changes from "manufacturing-based economy to information-based economy. . . results in deep-seated fears." Liechty, "Hasten the Apocalypse! Historical and Psychological Perspectives on the American Militia Movement," in *Psychological Undercurrents of History*, ed. Piven and Lawton, vol. 1, 75. The "conquering evil" ideology can have a pertinent appeal, particularly to youth and those experiencing a midlife crisis suffering through the turmoil of socializing in times of change.
- 45 Norman Cohn, "Medieval Millenarianism: Its Bearing on the Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn, 40.
- 46 Ostow, "Mood Regulation." Others have called this process a form of projection, see Strozier, *Apocalypse*. McGinn points out that "apocalyptic spirituality often appears as a projection of the least noble aspects of human hopes and fears onto history." McGinn, "Apocalyptic Spirituality," 75–76.
- 47 Ostow, "Psychodynamics," 277–85, 283.
- 48 Ostow, "Myth and Madness."
- 49 Martin Buber, "Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour," in *Pointing the Way*, ed. Maurice Friedman (New York: Books for Libraries, 1957), 192–207. See also Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of the Apocalypse: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); and Harvey Cox, "Christianity and the Apocalypse," presentation at the second conference on the Apocalypse in Providence, Rhode Island, organized by Robbie Bosnak, June 14–17, 1990, comments summarized by Michael Perlman.
- 50 Strozier, *Apocalypse*. The Grady House fundamentalists seen in Strozier are examples of upper-class individuals who are attracted to the appeal of hope offered in the apocalyptic narrative. In this book Strozier also studied a multicultural congregation of fundamentalists at Abiding Light, and a predominantly black congregation at Calvary in Harlem. O'Leary also states that the "apocalyptic discourse shows that its appeal has historically cut across class lines." O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 9.
- 51 Ostow, "Apocalyptic Thinking," 294. See also Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).
- 52 Strozier, *Apocalypse*. This book discusses the upper-class fundamentalists at Grady House, as well as lower-class fundamentalist groups at other churches in New York City in the early 1990s.
- 53 Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*.
- 54 Lois Ann Lorentzen (1997), "Phallic Millennialism and Radical Environmentalism: The Apocalyptic Vision of Earth First!," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn, 149 O'Leary critiques theories that claim the apocalyptic appeal is based on economic distress because these theories "fail to account for [the] wide variety of class and education in apocalyptic audiences." O'Leary *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 9.
- 55 Strozier, *Apocalypse*.
- 56 Speaking specifically of cults, Singer says that "education is no vaccine against being led to join a cult." Singer, "Image of 2000," 137. Similarly, O'Leary warns that "it is unfair and dangerous to dismiss these arguments as irrational and the audiences persuaded by them as ignorant fools." O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 4.



- 57 Philip Charles Lucas, "Shifting Millennial Visions in New Religious Movements: The Case of the Holy Order of MANS," in *The Year 2000*, ed. Strozier and Flynn, 121.
- 58 O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 61. Note also Mann, "Infantile Origins." Mann uses the psychodynamic paradigm to suggest that apocalyptic myth derives from traumatic birth experience. Mann suggests the 'hope' of rebirth is similar to the longing for a return to the womb where all needs were satisfied.
- 59 Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999). Lifton notes "an ultimate level of universal need for human connectedness, for a sense of being part of a great chain of being that long preceded, and will continue endlessly after, one's own life span." *Ibid.*, 13. Wilson cites that both Cohn and Muhlmann suggest that all mankind is generally receptive to salvation, "but it is an idea always subject to re-interpretation, to new associations with other cultural elements and aspirations." See also Wilson, "Millennialism," 97.
- 60 Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Christopher Dickey, "'Jihadi Cool': Comic book action heroes may be better weapons against terror than bullets or bombs," *Newsweek*, April 15, 2008. This article refers to Scott Atran's work where he has found that people who join the jihad often have family members, friends, or teammates also involved in the movement. This finding suggests that ideological causes may not play as large of a role as personal ties in individuals' participation in such a group.
- 61 Beit-Hallahmi, "Death, Fantasy."
- 62 Mann, "Infantile Origins." This sentence is related to Mann, who suggests that the desire for the future period of salvation represents the desire to return to the womb where all physical needs were met. See also Strozier, *Apocalypse*.
- 63 Ostow, "Apocalyptic Thinking," 291.
- 64 Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956).
- 65 Wilson describes how one cannot assume that millennial movements are "moving towards a genuinely realistic appraisal of social circumstances." Though they may desire change or adjustment, it may be "in a way analogous to a neurosis in the individual, the adjustment is at a false level—and it is difficult to see how it can be otherwise." Wilson, "Millennialism," 106.
- 66 Chip Berlet, "When Alienation Turns Right: Populist Conspiracy, the Apocalyptic Style, and Neo-fascist Movements," in *Evolution of Alienation: Trauma, Promise, and the Millennium*, ed. Lauren Langman and Deborah Kalekin-Fishman (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 115–44. Berlet discusses how the dualistic apocalyptic narrative is found in right-wing populism, which appeals to people of different socioeconomic classes. Successful middle- and upper-middle class Americans join the Christian Right, and the gun-wielding militia men often feel that they have or will soon suffer economic hardship.
- 67 Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse," 201. Manichaeism was a Gnostic religion that flourished between the third and seventh centuries. It is characterized by dualistic theology positioning good and evil as two equal yet opposing powers.
- 68 Robert M. Young, "Fundamentalism and Terrorism." In *Psychological Undercurrents of History*, ed. Piven, Ziolo, and Lawton, vol. 2, 210. Young suggests that fundamentalists are often the poor, disenfranchised and displaced people; however, he clearly indicates that fundamentalists do not have to come from an economically poor background.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 211.
- 70 Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).
- 71 Compare to Hoffer, *True Believer*, 80, 156. When discussing the fanatic, Hoffer states that "the blindness [of absolute conviction]... is a source of strength (he sees no obstacles), but it is the cause of intellectual sterility and emotional monotony." *Ibid.*, 156.
- 72 Lorentzen, "Phallic Millennialism," 146.



- 73 Quinby, "Coercive Purity," 155.
- 74 Chip Berlet, "Protocols to the Left, Protocols to the Right: Conspiracism in American Political Discourse at the Turn of the Second Millennium." Paper presented at the conference: Reconsidering "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion": 100 Years after the Forgery, The Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies, Boston University, October 30–31, 2005.
- 75 Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Exemplary Dualism, and the Waco Tragedy," in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York: Routledge, 1997), 261–84, 267.
- 76 Barkun discusses the concept of *appropriative millennialism*, which he defines as "claiming as one's own the special status claimed by another group." He suggests that this type of thinking, which incorporates paranoid tendencies, "exaggerates the Manichaeism present in all apocalyptic groups" such that they "view the world as a battleground between pure good and pure evil." Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse," 201. Berlet acknowledges the paranoid nature of the apocalyptic, which he believes underlies many conspiracy theories. He suggests that the paranoid style that describes conspiracism, which distinctly identifies a scapegoat, is related to the dualistic thinking promoted in the apocalyptic narrative. Dualistic thinking that is associated with an apocalyptic narrative "creates a dynamic that encourages the construction of conspiracy theories that blame a demonized and scapegoated 'other.'" Berlet, "When Alienation turns Right," 121.
- 77 Note in this regard the extensive literature review in Strozier, Terman, and James, *Fundamentalist Mindset*.
- 78 Heinz Kohut, "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut, 1950–1978*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), vol. 1, 427–60. Note also my biography of Kohut, Charles B. Strozier, *Heinz Kohut: The Making of a Psychoanalyst* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001).
- 79 O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 53.
- 80 Strozier, "Apocalyptic Guru," 4. Lifton argues that "intense personal conviction is essential to the guru's success. But that conviction can be helped considerably by grandiose ambitions and manipulative inclinations." Lifton, *Destroying the World*, 19.
- 81 Heinz Kohut, "Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 27 (1972): 360–400. See also Kohut, "On Leadership," in *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach*, ed. Charles B. Strozier (New York: Norton, 1985), 51–72.
- 82 Wilson, "Millennialism," 102.
- 83 Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 40.
- 84 Lifton, *Destroying the World*, 14.
- 85 Hoffer, *True Believer*, 66–67.
- 86 Berlet, "Protocols to the Left, Protocols to the Right." See also Strozier, *Apocalypse*; and Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*.
- 87 Singer, "Image of 2000," 137.
- 88 Lifton, "Reflections," 116–17.
- 89 Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 80–81. Lifton also uses the term "totalism." See Lifton, *Destroying the World*; and Lifton, *Thought Reform*.
- 90 Willem Kox, Wim Meeus, and Harm't Hart, "Religious Conversion of Adolescents," *Sociological Analysis* 52, no. 3 (1999): 227–40. A study comparing adolescent converts to a Pentecostal group with matched controls found that 67% of converts reported having problems within 3 to 5 years before converting as compared to 20% of the non-converts. More converts also mentioned a major life stress before their conversion. One might recall Fritz's parent's separation in this context. Marc Galanter, *Cults: Faith, Healing and Coercion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) found significantly higher levels of emotional distress just prior to conversion in those joining the Unification Church.
- 91 Beit-Hallahmi, "Death, Fantasy," 87–114.
- 92 Mason, *Killing for Life*.



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# The Chained Messiah: The Taming of the Apocalyptic Complex in Jewish Mystical Eschatology

*Moshe Idel*

This study addresses the treatment of apocalypticism in a series of medieval writings known as Kabbalah and in eighteenth-century Hasidism. I argue that the dramatic processes associated with early Jewish forms of apocalypticism, understood as cataclysmic, catastrophic, or entailing a radical rupture in history or in nature,<sup>1</sup> were gradually domesticated, as they were adopted into, and interpreted by the more comprehensive speculative systems informing Kabbalistic and Hasidic literature.<sup>2</sup> The premise of my argument is that the biblical and post-biblical depictions of the End, which involve the abrupt intervention of a divine power (sometimes described as the warrior Messiah) in the regular course of history, functioned in a theological framework that presumed no strong laws of nature able to counteract such interventions.

In the Middle Ages, some elite figures of Rabbinic Judaism encountered, adopted and adapted different worldviews stemming basically from Greek and Hellenistic sources commonly mediated by Muslim channels and previously neglected in Judaism.<sup>3</sup> Sa'adya Gaon, Salomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Maimonides are some of the first examples for this new elite. These different worldviews were adopted into Jewish literature and the philosophy known as Kabbalah, as well as into a series of scientific writings in Hebrew. Such worldviews surmise much more ordered universes, or different forms of cosmos, in which divine intervention becomes more and more problematic from an intellectual point of view. In the confrontation between the Greek philosophically organized cosmoses and the Jewish understanding of the divine will and power as quintessential to the governing of the world, the Greek views prevailed to a great extent. These newly adopted worldviews reinterpreted the drama of the apocalypse



already present in the canonical writings in Judaism, obliterating the dramatic aspect of changes in nature.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, although individual apocalyptic motifs appear in many Kabbalistic texts and to a lesser extent in Hasidic ones, the main feature of apocalypticism—the dramatic rupture in nature and history—is for the most part absent. The heroes of the apocalyptic scenario become less important, and their power-based personalities are substantially less present in the main eschatological events.<sup>5</sup> We may discern three major forms of order in which the messianic and apocalyptic elements were adopted and dramatically adapted: the cosmic-astrological, related to periods of time that go from several thousands to tens of thousands of years, what I refer to as macro-chronos; the inner-psychological, operating with micro-chronos; and the theosophical-divine system, less concerned with normal forms of time. Each of them operates with concepts of time that transcend the ordinary history, or what I call meso-chronos, namely an approach to events related to units of time that consist in hundreds or few thousands of years. Within this last form of time alone apocalyptic events receive the significance they have in the Judaeo-Christian culture.<sup>6</sup> To understand the prevailing conceptions of the Messiah and apocalypticism in a certain literary corpus, it is important to be aware both of their sources and of the specific structure of the system within which they appear. The logic of these different structures enchains these concepts, as part of what Aron Gurwitsch called Gestalt-coherence.<sup>7</sup>

For the sake of accuracy, I shall distinguish between the complex phenomenon of apocalypticism in Jewish<sup>8</sup> and Christian<sup>9</sup> imagery, which point to two scenarios: external catastrophic redemption, and Messianism, to be understood as a more comprehensive eschatological category.<sup>10</sup> My assumption is that the conception of the former describes processes that may take place without a Messiah, while the latter may be, at least in principle, but also de facto, non-apocalyptic. Therefore, though there may be a significant overlap in the use of the two concepts, they certainly do not fully coincide semantically. Interestingly enough, there is no technical term for apocalypse and apocalypticism in Hebrew. Though expressions like the biblical *Yom ha-Shem*, the day of the Lord, or the Talmudic *Hevlei Mashiyah*, the vicissitudes related to the coming



of the Messiah, suggest the occurrence of apocalyptic events, they do not represent a cohesive eschatological scenario. Below, I shall show how the apocalyptic sting was mitigated and sometimes even removed in the writings of certain Jewish elites during and after the Middle Ages, even when they had to address issues related to apocalypticism and the Messiah.<sup>11</sup> In the process, I will make clear that the role of apocalypticism in elite literatures is less significant than has previously been envisioned in Jewish mysticism scholarship, thus departing from the thesis of Gershom Scholem. As Vladimir Jankélévitch audaciously and inspiringly formulated, “*La dépersonnalisation du Messie, qui n’est resté personnel que dans les croyances populaires, est une phénomène essentiel à l’histoire philosophique du judaïsme.*”<sup>12</sup> Though I am not concerned here with a philosophical history of Judaism, there is a common denominator between the view of Jankélévitch and the literatures to be addressed below: both focus on the elite, rather than popular and better known apocalyptic, vision of Messianism.

## Gershom Scholem on Messianism as Apocalypse

There is no doubt that the modern study of Messianism is heavily indebted to the oeuvre of Gershom Scholem.<sup>13</sup> As Scholem pointed out, nineteenth-century scholarship marginalized the apocalyptic elements in Judaism. In response, he sought to restore the role of apocalypticism in the economy of Messianism.<sup>14</sup> Yet Scholem’s argument fails to consider the significance of the work of the seminal nineteenth-century Jewish studies scholar, Adolf Jellinek. Jellinek published a six-volume series of apocalyptic treatises entitled *Bet ha-Midrash* and was the first to publish Abraham Abulafia’s *Sefer ha-’Ot*, a text I am going to discuss below and which Jellinek explicitly characterized as apocalyptic. By the end of the nineteenth century, little of the Jewish apocalyptic material remained unpublished due to Jellinek’s efforts, whose attitude towards Kabbalah and Messianism was much more positive than that of his contemporaries.<sup>15</sup>

On Scholem’s view, apocalypse and Messianism are intimately related. He writes:



Jewish Messianism in its origins and by its nature—this cannot be sufficiently emphasized—is a theory of catastrophe. This theory stresses the revolutionary, cataclysmic element in the transition from every historical present to the Messianic future. . . . The elements of the catastrophic and the vision of the doom are present in peculiar fashion in the Messianic vision.<sup>16</sup>

Scholem's emphasis on terms like "catastrophe," "revolution," "cataclysm" and "doom" make his insistence on the dramatic aspects of Messianism obvious. A description of only four and a half lines aspires to depict "Jewish Messianism" as if it had been a completely homogeneous movement. Indeed, Scholem affirmed that this emphasis on homogeneity was essential to his entire scholarly project:

If I have demonstrated something [at all] in my writings I have shown that ancient apocalypse has accepted some forms and replaced them, but it is one under its metamorphoses after the destruction of the second temple, and one is it in its first metamorphoses beforehand.<sup>17</sup>

Harold Bloom and Baruch Kurzweil have appropriately ascribed to Scholem "an obsession with the imagery of catastrophe."<sup>18</sup> In addition, as R. J. Zwi Werblowsky has aptly noted, an intensive search for the antinomian and the catastrophic permeates important segments of the Scholemian school as well, explaining the relation between Messianism and apocalypticism in his phenomenology.<sup>19</sup> The primacy of the rupture for the accomplishment of the redemption is evident in this taxonomy. The question is: What are the phenomenological connections between the apocalypse, Messianism, and the history of Jewish mysticism?

Surprisingly, in his treatment of the various stages of the history of Kabbalah, Scholem categorically denies any meaningful connection between Messianism and the first phase of the history of this lore. On his view, Kabbalah was indifferent towards Messianism between 1180 and 1492. If Messianism means speculations concerning the eschaton, that is, strong apocalyptic aspirations and beliefs that the end is near,



then the Kabbalists rejected such a preoccupation in the first three hundred years of its development. Instead, they focused on the emanational type of creation or the nature of the theosophical processes, according to Scholem. Salvation was sought in the contemplative return of the individual to the beginning rather than in attempts to hasten the end.<sup>20</sup>

After the Jewish expulsion from Spain, however, Messianism gradually became part of the core of Kabbalistic thought. Scholem sees this change as a result of the trauma caused by the brutal expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>21</sup> There are three major stages of mystical Messianism in this second phase. The first is between the time of the expulsion and the emergence of the Lurianic Kabbalah, namely between 1492 and 1570. During this phase, there are two major relationships between Messianism and Kabbalah: the Kabbalah as a distinct type of lore was still divorced from messianic thought, though some Kabbalists were deeply involved in messianic propaganda.<sup>22</sup> Yet in Scholem's other discussions, these two distinct types of thought were combined though nothing original emerged from such a combination.<sup>23</sup> It is not so simple to decide which of these two is the more representative view of Scholem's thought. The second stage is between 1570 and the emergence of Sabbateanism circa 1660. In this period, Kabbalah, in its Lurianic version, absorbed messianic concerns,<sup>24</sup> and became imbued with eschatological issues, though the advent of the Messianic figure himself is marginal for the Lurianic corpus. It is rather an implicit Messianism, embodied in the Kabbalistic concept of *tiqqun*,<sup>25</sup> with no precedent in the previous versions of Kabbalah. By and large, Kabbalistic Messianism is based on the assumption that the cumulative efforts of the whole Jewish nation to mend or repair the primordial metaphysical catastrophe within the divine realm through adherence to the Kabbalistic commandments are paramount for the advent of the redemption.

My basic understanding of these statements is that Scholem envisioned external events, that is, the collapse of the natural, political and social order as quintessential ingredients of Jewish Messianism. Messianism, according to Scholem, is a "subversive catalyst."<sup>26</sup> In this school, the mystics' "life in deferment"<sup>27</sup> is based on messianistic be-



liefs, and the paramount importance of the axis “exile-redemption” in Kabbalistic thought, which according to Scholem emerged strongly in the sixteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

Scholem oftentimes equates the term with apocalypticism, presumably to restore the role of the apocalyptic elements that had been marginalized by the more rationalistic approach of the scholars who belonged to the school of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.<sup>29</sup> Yet this cannot be a consistent vision of Messianism even according to Scholem, as he recognizes the more anti-apocalyptic vision of Maimonides’s Messianism.<sup>30</sup> Scholem’s constructive effort to correct his academic predecessors’ antagonism, or at least reticence toward apocalypticism tilted the pendulum in the other direction, suggesting a strong, though not always explicit affinity between apocalypticism and Messianism.<sup>31</sup> Scholem judged a phenomenon as messianic not by the criterion of the occurrence of the term Messiah and its importance to a certain text or author, but rather by the apocalyptic valences he could detect in it. The centrality of the apocalypse in this vision of Messianism renders Scholem’s emphasis on the crisis of tradition a necessary correlative.<sup>32</sup> Whether this radical reading of Messianism is just a philological-historical enterprise based on text analyses, or it reflects more basic concerns among early-twentieth-century Jewish–German intellectuals, the anarchists, is a matter that is interesting but nevertheless transcends our concerns here. Fascinated by the antinomian potentialities inherent in this extreme form of mysticism, Scholem regarded the more mystical, less radical interpretations of Messianism as forms of “neutralizations” of this phenomenon, in some cases even as its “liquidation.”<sup>33</sup> Though he would never expressly deny the messianic beliefs of any of the Jewish philosophers or mystics, Scholem would nevertheless consider the more individualistic forms of Jewish eschatology as significantly deviant from the vital version of apocalyptic Messianism. Phenomenologically speaking, Scholem defined the subject matter of Messianism in a way that excluded the more private and mystical “interpretations” or “neutralizations” of the popular apocalyptic understanding of Messianism from the focus of his studies. According to him, Jewish Messianism is drastically different from the Christian emphasis on the redemption of the soul, the latter being “not considered



by either Rabbinism or Kabbalism as having anything to do with Messianism.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, by reintegrating apocalyptic components neglected by earlier scholars into an entire range of messianic phenomena, Scholem identified and fused these two concepts to a great extent. Below I shall try to qualify Scholem’s vision.<sup>35</sup>

## The Invasions of the Mongols and Apocalyptic Elements in Kabbalah

Early Kabbalah, and many forms of early medieval Jewish philosophies, only marginally engaged messianic apocalypticism. The rare occurrences of the terms “Messiah” and “redemption” in the first decades of the history of Kabbalah do not touch the core of the first Provençal and Catalan Kabbalistic writings. Scholem’s diagnosis of the indifference of early Kabbalists to apocalypticism and Messianism is therefore correct, but applies only to the decades before 1260.

The situation changes after this date, however, as a number of Kabbalistic apocalypses written by authors of Spanish origin emerged before the turn of the thirteenth century. The first is the discussions of the Kabbalist R. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Soria from the beginning of the second half of the thirteenth century, which introduced a demonological understanding of the apocalyptic battles.<sup>36</sup> As we shall see below, two other Kabbalists in the following generation also addressed apocalyptic issues. What may be the background of this emergence of apocalypticism?

The Catalan poet R. Meshullam ben Shlomo of Dapiera, an older contemporary of R. Isaac closely acquainted with the Kabbalists active in his city of Gerona, knew that “at the limit of Ashkenaz, cities are terrified, some of them being afraid of the sword.”<sup>37</sup> Writing in 1260, this author is well-aware of the panic that prevailed among Christians in Germany because of the invasion of the Mongols in Eastern Europe and their victories in the Middle East.

It is unlikely that R. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Cohen, writing at roughly the same time, would have been ignorant of the terror that seized Christian Europe and the hopes that these rumors evoked among the



Jews. It seems that in Catalonia and Castile rumors concerning the Mongols also reached the Kabbalists. R. Meshullam da Pierra's poem below shows the nexus between these rumors regarding the Mongols and the heightening of eschatological expectations:

There is a witness to Redemption  
and visions and legends widespread,<sup>38</sup>  
and the kingdom will be renewed in our days  
for the lost nation and the dispersed communities,  
and an offering will be brought to the son of David and Ishai  
and to My secretaries and My officers, donations,  
and My Temple will be built up and consolidated. . . .  
The tribes that were dispersed in the ancient days  
now they have left the country of their sojourn,<sup>39</sup>  
and the sign that they were sent by God is  
that plenty of princes are afraid.  
And their [the tribe's] time has come,  
to [perform] an act of great redemption and they have [already]  
passed the passages.  
..... See how  
Babylonia<sup>40</sup> was sized, and Aleppo  
and Damascus, and the towns were devastated.<sup>41</sup>

By mentioning the seizure of Babylonia and Syria and the devastation of their cities, Baghdad and Aleppo, the poet is referring to the invasion of the Mongols in March 1260. Moreover, this event is explicitly envisioned as part of an eschatological scheme, mentioning both the coming of the Messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in the imminent future. The Mongols are conceived of as the ten lost tribes and designated as the "hidden ones," *ba-Genuzim*.<sup>42</sup> From the second cited verse, one learns that the rumors concerning the tribes were "widespread." As I have shown elsewhere, R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka, the somewhat younger contemporary of da Pierra and a Kabbalist with a strong penchant for astrology, was also aware of these invasions. He too considered them part of an eschatological scenario to be actualized already in his lifetime.<sup>43</sup>



The texts and events referred to above date back to the early 1260s. They serve as a background for certain later discussions found in the Kabbalistic literature following the 1260s. The most important body of Kabbalistic literature in the thirteenth century is the Zohar, composed in Castile during the late 1280s. Following some early medieval Jewish treatises concerned with eschatological events, the Zohar includes a certain apocalypse. It also adds an important dimension to the existing eschatological discussions by emphasizing the importance of the theurgical activity, which the Kabbalist is requested to fulfill through intentional, mystical performance of the commandments. This common background of the messianic expectations, connected to the imminent arrival of the lost tribes, seems to be a major reason for the renewed concern in Messianism among Kabbalists. In one of the passages we read:

The sons of Ishmael will cause fierce wars in the world and the sons of Edom will gather and wage battles against them, one on the dry earth, another on the sea, and near Jerusalem. And each of them will rule over the other. And the land of Israel will not be given to the sons of Edom. At that time, a nation [coming] from the end of the world will awake against the wicked Rome, and will fight there for three months. And [other] nations will gather there and fall in its hands, until all the sons of Rome will gather together from all the corners of the world . . . and it will expulse the sons of Ishmael from there.<sup>44</sup>

While the names “Ishma’el” and “Edom” obviously refer to Muslims and Christians, the description of the third, victorious nation arriving from the corner of the world to fight both Christianity and Islam seems to allude to the Mongols. Here Rome can be understood not only as referring to the city itself, but also metonymically, to Christianity. From the context of the above quotation, it is obvious that the author (or the editor) of the Zohar believed the wars of that nation to be part of the eschatological processes. Similarly, in the second half of the thirteenth century, some European Jews viewed the emergence of an unexpected superpower of obscure origin, the Mongols, and the change of the military status of the Christians in the Holy Land as



portents with messianic overtones. It seems, then, that the defeat of the Christians contributed more to messianic expectations among some Jews than the suffering of their own people.

The belief that international conflagrations are signs of the Gog and Magog apocalyptic battles can be traced to the reading of the traditional apocalyptic literature produced in the period between the sixth and the tenth century. The arrival of the hordes of Mongols that terrified Christian Europe surely renewed interest in a more active attitude toward apocalyptic Messianism among the Jews, especially among some of the Kabbalists in the second part of the thirteenth century.

Let us turn to a Kabbalist who claimed to be both a prophet and a Messiah, and who composed one of the few and most important Jewish apocalypses in the Middle Ages: R. Abraham Abulafia's [1240–c.1291] *Sefer ha-'Ot*, the Book of the Sign.<sup>45</sup> Unlike other Kabbalists who were active in Spain and were acquainted with the Mongols only through hearsay and vague rumors, Abulafia was incited by these same rumors to search for the Mongolian hordes, which invaded the Middle East and conquered Jerusalem. At the age of twenty he was inspired by a divine revelation to seek the legendary Sambatyon River and in 1260 traveled to the land of Israel, already partly occupied by the Mongols.<sup>46</sup> He believed that these newly-arrived armies were no other than the ten lost tribes. Abulafia attempted to establish some contact, even learning some words, which he later referenced in his numerical calculations, of what he calls Tatar language.<sup>47</sup> His mention of the decisive war between the Mongols and the Mameluks in 'Ein Jhalut—today the Kibbutz 'Ein Harod—in September of 1260, which terminated the Mongols' presence in the land of Israel following their defeat, reveals his apocalyptic interest.<sup>48</sup>

The apocalyptic tone of Abulafia's *Sefer ha-'Ot* is best understood against this background, replete with rumors, misunderstandings and aspirations.<sup>49</sup> The book contains a description of Abulafia's vision of apocalyptic wars. The most prominent of these are the wars between three kings or warriors, possessing theophoric names. The first is the Southern king, designated by the name of his angelic power, Qedari'el.<sup>50</sup> This is a reference to the Arab Mameluks, who were ruling over Egypt and, thus, the South. In general, the term Qeidar refers, in many medi-



eval Jewish sources, to Islam.<sup>51</sup> The Northern king is known as Magdi'el, a biblical name, which originates in the Middle Ages and refers to Christianity.<sup>52</sup> The third is the king of the East, 'Alfi'el. There appears to be no reference to such an angel or religion in the Middle Ages. After describing the wars between the three kings, he introduces a fourth king, described as Tori'el, which is quite plausibly identified with Judaism, as the name of this king may be related to the term Torah. It is probably also connected to Abulafia himself, as some form of human Messiah. The fifth angelic name, Yaho'el, is portrayed as revealing itself to Abulafia, paralleling a spiritual Messiah.<sup>53</sup> In this allegory of imaginary wars, the first king kills the second, meaning that Islam will terminate Christianity, while the third kills the first, implying that a third nation will eliminate Islam. Indeed in this book, the fall of Christianity is imminent:

The end of abomination has arrived  
And behold, the destruction of the worshippers of the Cross has  
come<sup>54</sup>  
Because God has examined and tested by means of His name  
The heart of His servants.<sup>55</sup>

In my opinion, this third figure, a king coming from the East designated by the name or perhaps governed by the angel 'Alfi'el, refers to the Mongols. The presumed representative of the Mongols is described as being non-Jewish though sent by God to fight for the Jews.<sup>56</sup>

It seems that the wars between the three superpowers took place in the land of Israel during the thirteenth century, when Crusaders, Mameluks, and Mongols confronted each other. Unlike in the allegory of *Sefer ha-'Ot*, in historical reality, the Mameluks defeated the Mongols. Though Abulafia was in the immediate vicinity of the war, he seems to describe an eschatological war—that is, not an historical one, but one envisioned as taking place in the future. This battle will end differently: the Mongols will prevail. It is probable that Abulafia resorted to his historical experience in 1260, when the Crusaders had been defeated by the Mameluks, and the latter defeated the Mongols. He tries to correct the course of history in his vision, which, following



the Book of Daniel, will culminate with the fourth kingdom and the coming of the fifth figure, the Messiah. His vision represents a form of apocalyptic counter-history, that is, the use of historical material in a manner that subverts or reinterprets it.

In Abulafia, like in the passage of the Zohar cited above, it is the third nation that prevails before the redemption of the Jews takes place. If it is correct to assume that the three main Kabbalists: R. Isaac ha-Kohen, the Zohar and Abraham Abulafia, as well as some other minor figures such as Meshullam da Piera and R. Yehudah ibn Malka were acquainted with the rumors and facts related to the Mongols and integrated them in their eschatology, then the apocalyptic attitude towards these tribes invading Eastern Europe and Middle East can be seen as a major precursor of the flowering of Kabbalistic literature in the second part of the thirteenth century.

However, in Abulafia's apocalypse, the war described above was not a matter of a remote eschatological future. As mentioned before, a figure participating in the apocalyptic drama represents Abulafia himself. The warrior that appeared to him in a vision before the three others, identified as *Tori'el*, is described as having at his disposal twenty-two thousand letters, which most likely refer to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>57</sup> Abulafia's own involvement with letters is quintessential for his specific version of Kabbalah. In fact, the names *'Alfi'el* and *Tori'el* seem to point to the letters *'Aleph* and *Tav*, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a version of Alpha and Omega.

Completed in 1288, Abulafia's apocalypse claims in quite explicit terms that a stark upheaval is going to take place in the near future:

The coming day is the day of Judgment  
And it is called the day of remembrance  
And the time of the trial has arrived  
And the time of the end has been accomplished.  
The heaven will become earth  
And earth will become celestial  
Because the Lord of the trial is called by the name YHWH  
And His judgment is one of truth,  
And his trial is upright.<sup>58</sup>



Though using widespread images from the stock of Jewish apocalypticism dealing with corporeal resurrection, Abulafia's statements point to spiritual awakening as the real form of resurrection rather than the resurrection of the body.<sup>59</sup> The manipulation of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and especially of the letters of the divine names is considered the main tool of awakening in an either oral or written manner:

He did not do this to every people and nation  
 As He did to Israel His servant and His nation  
 For the sake of His Name  
 And the end of delivery and the day of redemption has arrived  
 But no one is paying attention to this issue to-day to know it  
 There is no redemption but by means of the name of YHWH  
 And His redemption is not for those who do not request it  
 In accordance to His Name.  
 This is why I, Zekharyahu<sup>60</sup>  
 The destroyer of the building  
 And the builder of the destruction  
 Has written this small book,  
 By [means of] the name of 'ADONAY the small  
 In order to disclose in it the secret of YHWH the great.<sup>61</sup>

Divine names are, according to Abulafia, instrumental for reaching an experience of the divine and for producing miracles. The centrality of the divine name in the Kabbalah of Abulafia is evident in the manner in which he depicts the process of redemption:

When I arrived at [the knowledge of] the Names, by my loosening of the bonds of the seals<sup>62</sup> 'the Lord of All'<sup>63</sup> appeared to me and revealed to me his secret and informed me of the end of the exile<sup>64</sup> and of the time of the beginning of redemption. He compelled me to prophesy.<sup>65</sup>

It seems Abulafia employed apocalyptic language in order to transmit a spiritual message. This message involved a concept of spiritual re-



demption based on a resort to the salvific role of language. It is difficult to imagine that an external catastrophe—unlike the call for an internal, spiritual metanoia—is what he intended to communicate even in the most apocalyptic of his writings. Apocalyptic imagery, whether or not it has been interpreted metaphorically, served as an important form of mediation between messianic elites and popular circles.

It is relevant here to recall Scholem's claim about the persistence of the apocalyptic or "messianic idea" over the centuries. I have pointed out that the specifics of the Mongolian rumors and even some historical facts about them indeed resuscitated some earlier apocalyptic traditions. At the same time, much was also added to these traditions. New elements were grafted onto earlier traditions, in order to adapt the more authoritative traditions as some form of apocalyptic prophecy.

The common denominator of the Zoharic passage and Abulafia's attributing a decisive role to the third nation in the apocalyptic scenario seems to constitute a new dimension in the constellation of messianic ideas, rotating in Jewish circles around Christianity and Islam and based on historical events and imagination. Another novel approach becomes evident in Abulafia's emphasis on the revelation of the divine name.

Finally, it is worth noting that the above material is reminiscent of a much earlier Christian apocalypse, known as the Tripoli Prophecy, which also includes references to the salvation of the Jews and to apocalyptic battles. Composed around 1240, this apocalypse may have had an impact on the Jewish texts discussed above. Indeed a Hebrew translation of it, the period of which cannot be established, is found in manuscripts.<sup>66</sup>

## On Astrology and Apocalypticism in Kabbalah

Astrology was one of the most widespread types of cosmic order accepted among intellectual elites of the Middle Ages. The celestial movement of astral bodies was considered influential in sublunar events, including the time of the End and redemption. According to a well-known astrological theory, religions have their beginning and



end depending on the conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter. According to another astrological theory, what I called above macrochronos, the world follows a form of cyclical processes, related to the rhythm of seven thousand years of forty-nine thousand years; these years culminate with the destruction of the cosmos, followed by its renewal. This macrochronic theory had a strong impact on Kabbalistic literature, which attributed the specific nature of each of these cycles not to an astral body, but to a divine power named *sefirah*. The cycle of seven thousand years was identified with the biblical concept of *Shemittah*,<sup>67</sup> while the cycle of forty-nine was identified with the biblical *Yovel*, or Jubilee, and the sefirah of Binah.<sup>68</sup> This cosmic reading of the biblical material involves something that has no precedent in the Bible: the total obliteration of the world by some form of Stoic ekpyrosis.<sup>69</sup> This new cyclical order is quite deterministic and has very little to do with the much more unilinear Messianic vision. In lieu of, and sometimes in addition to, the national redemption based upon a certain sacred geography, return to the land, and the establishment of a new temple and state after fierce apocalyptic wars, a new series of eschatological questions arose with the adoption of the astral order. Although in this type of cosmic order the arrival of the Messiah is not essential, the figure of the Messiah was canonical enough not to be renounced. Thus we find combinations of the cosmic cycles with some mild forms of messianic eschatology. An interesting passage illustrating the view of recurrent eschaton appears in *Sefer Midrash Hokhmah*, a vast encyclopedia authored by the thirteenth-century Toledan thinker Rabbi Yehudah ben Salomon ha-Kohen. He asserts, "if things revolve in a cyclical manner<sup>70</sup> then [also] our kingdom [*malkhutenu*] will return. May this be the will [of God] soon in our days."<sup>71</sup>

R. Yehudah envisioned the return of the Jewish kingdom neither as the result of a divine plan nor of a special intervention of God's will, but as part of the way of the world. In principle, the cyclical return mitigates the role of divine will and thus the concept of divine intervention is almost obliterated. This passage combines two different, even opposing views: that of the return, presumably stemming from Greek astrological sources, and that of the intervention, which stems from Jewish sources. A contemporary of R. Yehudah, a certain R.



Moshe ben Yehudah, writes in his *Commentary on the Alphabet*, that the *conjunctio maior* between Saturn and Jupiter will start in 1260, and redemption will take place.<sup>72</sup> Another contemporary, R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka, also refers to this topos.<sup>73</sup> As part of the astral model we should mention the Kabbalistic identification of the Messiah with the planet of Saturn, and sometimes also with the sefirah of Binah, an identification that had a deep impact on Sabbateanism. Thus, features characteristic of this planet—such as melancholy—, were transferred to the personality of the Messiah.<sup>74</sup>

Though most of the early theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists did not accept the astrological understanding of Kabbalah, the impact of astrology may be discerned in Abraham Abulafia's eschatology:

The end of the change of the times has arrived, and so is the end of the order of the stars, in accordance with the [divine] attributes. And the attributes and names will change, and the languages will be mixed, and the nations and the beliefs will be distorted, and the diadem of the Israelite [nation] will return to its former state, and the rank of Jews will be related to the name of the essence [of God] not to the name of [His] attribute. [Then] the revealed will become concealed, and the concealed will become revealed, and the rank of the gentiles—men and women—will be lowered and they will be vanquished, and the rank of the Jews—men and women—will ascend and rise.<sup>75</sup>

Though a faithful follower of Maimonides, the starkest critic of astrology in medieval Judaism, Abulafia adopts the widespread type of astrological order and refers to it in order to explain the eschatological event.

Much more deterministic, however, is the passage found in an anonymous Kabbalistic treatise *Ginnat Beitán*, written in the sixteenth century, where it is said:

The great purpose of the advent of the king Messiah and of the World to Come, [was not disclosed as it is said].<sup>76</sup> "The heart did not disclose to the mouth," neither to the vulgar or to all of the elite but



to the few ones who merit this [i.e., the knowledge of the secret]. It is forbidden to the recipient of this secret to disclose it even to the elite, except to a friend exceptionally close to him. And in the year of Messiah, namely in the year whose secret is 358 of the sixth millennium, which is the year [Shannah]<sup>77</sup> then the Messiah will arrive. [However] In an occult manner he has already arrived during the several cycles of the worlds which have already passed before the present one, in which we are, since at the time when he has already arrived, then he will come again also in this time. And when it was said “and then he will come” it means that the Messiah will come in the future at the time he comes in our time, namely in our world.<sup>78</sup>

The Kabbalist combines the linear vision of ancient Jewish eschatology, which assumes the arrival of the Messiah at a precise date, with the theory of the cosmic cycles, or *Shemittot*, which assumes concepts of time dealing with thousands of years as the basic unit. In each of these cosmic cycles of seven thousand years, the Messiah will arrive in exactly the same year, which is the numerical value of the consonant of the Hebrew word *ha-MaShiYaH*, namely 1595, corresponding to the Jewish year five thousand three hundred ninety-five. Here again, the logic of this broader framework dramatically changed the meaning of the specifically Jewish topic of the arrival of the Messiah. No less dramatic, is the fact that no special eschatological task can be attributed to human actions. Neither God nor the Messiah has the will or capacity to change this date. This deterministic stand is hardly consonant with any of the biblical or Rabbinic forms of order, or with any of the Kabbalists.’

The arrival of the Messiah takes place much less than a thousand years before the end of the cosmic cycle, which means that he will rule for five hundred years, not a millennium, before the termination of the world. Though R. Isaac reveals the secret of the time of the Messiah in his lifetime, he is hardly apocalyptic. Here Messianism is grafted on a cyclical order, without mentioning apocalypse. In the cosmic dissipation of reality, or its ascent into the divine worlds, the apocalyptic wars become irrelevant. Apocalypse as a process in history, or meso-chronos, was transcended by forms of ekpyrosis, which takes place in the



macro-chronos. When two different forms of order are brought together, one of them loses its centrality, in this case the meso-chronic. In a way, the Messiah and the apocalyptic process that was commonly part of the historical process now became part of the natural one.

## Messiah and the Process of Intellection

Another major type of order that dominated the thought of some of the Jewish elite in the Middle Ages is the Neoaristotelian one, especially as it was described by Maimonides. In this system, the most significant factors influencing the sublunar world are not astrological—Maimonides was one of the most ardent critics of astrology in the Middle Ages—but the cosmic intellects, especially the last one, known in Arabic as *al-'Aql 'al-Fa'al*, in Latin as *Intellectus Agens* or in Hebrew as *Sekhel ha-Po'el*. Some Kabbalists identified this concept with the Messiah, as becomes evident from a discussion about the variety of meanings of the term “Messiah,” found in one of the “prophetic” writings of Abraham Abulafia:

The term Mashiyah is equivocal, [designating] three [different] matters; [a] first and foremost the true Agent Intellect is called the Messiah. . . [b] and the man who will forcibly bring us out of the exile from under the rule of the nations due to his contact with the Agent Intellect—he will [also] be called Messiah. [c] And the material human Intellect is called Messiah. This is the hylic<sup>79</sup> intellect that is the redeemer and has influence over the soul and all elevated spiritual powers. It can save the soul from the rule of the material kings and their people and their powers, the lowly bodily desires. It is a commandment and an obligation to reveal this matter to every wise man of the wise ones of Israel in order that he may be saved because there are many things that oppose the opinions of the multitude of the Rabbis, even more so differ from the views of the vulgus.<sup>80</sup>

For the ecstatic Kabbalist, the term “Messiah” stands for three different types of redeemers: the cosmic, namely the Agent Intellect in the



way it has been defined by the Arabic and Jewish philosophy, which rules over the sublunar world, the intellectual cosmokrator; the national, or the human redeemer in history; and the personal, the individual intellect that redeems the lower psychic powers in man. All three are explicitly connected to the concept of intellection, while the latter two depend upon the contact with the Agent Intellect, the entity described in the first category.

In this passage, the external and more common concept of salvation found in the form of an individual Messiah of the Jewish nation is not mutually exclusive from the spiritual concept of a Messiah in human spiritual faculties and cosmic intellectual entities. They may co-exist, as in the above passage of the ecstatic Kabbalist, who believed that he was a Messiah himself. In fact, the more the apocalyptic is present, the more there seems to be a need to reinterpret it allegorically. Thus in Abulafia we have both an extreme apocalyptic scenario presented as a revelation in a vision, and an extreme allegoresis, intertwined in the same text.

It is essential to note that the first of these three meanings of the Messiah is introduced by the word *true*, implying that the meaning of Agent Intellect, from which the other two, also related to acts of intellection, are derived, is of the outmost importance. This understanding ties the scope of meanings related to the concept of Messiah to the Neoaristotelian chain of ten separate cosmic intellects. As a redemptive act, the disclosure of this intellectual dimension of the Messiah implies that it saves the believers from another erroneous type of belief in the nature of the Messiah. Indeed, the end of the quotation presents the existence of other views among Jews, Rabbis or vulgus, as inferior. It can be assumed here that Abulafia has in mind more apocalyptic and less intellectual understandings of the task of the Messiah.

There is a hierarchy here: category [c] is the lowest, consisting in a human being whose intellect should be connected to the Agent Intellect in order to become the Messiah as defined in category [b], and in turn, as the result of a unitive noetic experience,<sup>81</sup> become a still higher one. Thus [c] stands for the person acting in history as a national Messiah, [b] stands for the human actualized intellect, the inner Messiah which saves the human lower capacities while [a] stands for the



pure intellectual entity, the atemporal spiritual Messiah, which is the ultimate source of the two lower Messiahs.

In a way similar to the intellectual understanding of the human savior [b], we read in another passage of the ecstatic Kabbalah:

The prophet is necessarily called Mashiyah because he is anointed with the supernal oil that is called “the oil of anointing”<sup>82</sup>... with which he utilizes the Names. Actually the Mashiyah must possess two qualities: One he must first be anointed by God with wondrous prophecy and, secondly, he must continue to be consecrated by God and people, who will hail him as their great king of all times. And he will rule from sea to sea,<sup>83</sup> and this is all due to the great intensity of his clinging<sup>84</sup> to the divine intellect and his reception of the power, in a strong manner like the matter of Moses, Joshu’a, David and Solomon. And the issue of Messiah will be known by everyone, and this is the reason why there is no need to announce here its issue more, because he is destined to reveal himself shortly in our days.<sup>85</sup>

Two attributes of the Messiah are mentioned here: prophecy and power. The power depends not on brutal force, but on some form of intellectual experience. This adherence to the supernal intellect allows the prophet, and implicitly also the Messiah, to perform miracles, which are understood as part of the laws of nature, following views found in Avicenna’s thought.<sup>86</sup> However, what is more characteristic of Abulafia’s thought is the assumption that the power of the Messiah is related to his knowledge of the divine names:

The powers<sup>87</sup> of the Special Name<sup>88</sup> are the tools of Messiah<sup>89</sup> in order to change the natures by their means, because its<sup>90</sup> powers are above Man, Lion, Ox, and Eagle. And know that eHeYeH is the Special Name and this is why it comprises all the living beasts just as the vowels of the name are tantamount to Ratzo va-Shov,<sup>91</sup> and I shall give you a sign that all the Chariot is beneath the hands of Man.<sup>92</sup>

The passage quoted from *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot* was written in 1289, one year before Abulafia’s predicted date for the advent of the Messiah



in 1290.<sup>93</sup> In describing the Messiah who will reveal himself imminently in one way or another, this Kabbalist describes himself. This is the essential meaning of the following passage, written a decade earlier:

These secrets will be revealed during the advent of the Messianic era, by the prophets who will arise, and by the Messiah Himself, because through them<sup>94</sup> all of Israel and those who are drawn to them, will be strengthened.<sup>95</sup>

Prophecy in Abulafia involves not just telling the future or admonishing the Jews: the Messiah as a prophet possesses an intellectual attribute as the supreme form of intellectual achievement, understood in terms similar to those used by Maimonides.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, while the first three kings described above are indeed warriors, the Messiah is depicted as related to the letters of the Torah, thus diminishing the apocalyptic dimension. His activity does not differ dramatically from that of an ecstatic Kabbalist though it may be more intensified just as in the case of the union of the mystic with the Agent Intellect, as we shall see below.

This intellectual nature of the Messiah is connected to the “secret interpretation”—*ha-pitaron ha-ne’elam*—of the wars described in *Seder ha-Ot*.<sup>97</sup> For Abulafia, the inner, spiritual war constitutes an important axis in his spiritual worldview.<sup>98</sup> This is part of an agonistic spirituality, for which the external wars are understood as allegories, when they are not just eschatological visions revealed to him. In other words, the eschatological events, just as the Messiah, were integrated into the new dominant system, the Neoaristotelian noetics, and redemption itself was conceived in noetic terms.

## Messianism and Theosophical Orders

The most influential type of order that permeates many Kabbalistic writings is the theosophical one, namely the assumption that the divine realm is constituted by a plurality of powers, attributes, or hypostases, known as *sefirot*. Each of these powers possesses its own name,



and many qualities that differ from one Kabbalist to another. These powers constellate the entire realm of sub-divine worlds and the events that take place there. Thus, all the realms emanating from this sefirotic world are connected and governed by these divine powers, though they are also affected by the human performance of the rituals or by sins.<sup>99</sup> In a sense, this explanation amounts to a super-astral vision of reality, and in several cases, the astral world has been subordinated to the sefirotic one. The theosophical systems are indeed systems, dynamic as they may be.<sup>100</sup> Messianism and apocalypticism, like many other values in Judaism, therefore reflect the dynamics of the theosophical structure, thus imposing an order originally alien to these eschatological concepts. This is just one more case of these concepts being qualified by the logic of systems new to Judaism.

In this specific case, different Kabbalists identify the Messiah with various divine powers. The most widespread identification seems to be with the last of these, the sefirah of Malkhut, called also Shekhinah, or 'Atarah or 'Ateret [diadem], which is a paramount feminine potency.<sup>101</sup> This identification appears in the work of late-thirteenth-century R. Moshe ben Shem Tov de Leon, or in the eighteenth-century R. Elijah of Vilnius.<sup>102</sup> In many other cases, the Messiah is identified with the ninth sefirah of Yesod, the divine phallus, which was described also as a cosmic righteous.<sup>103</sup> In some instances, it is the feminine aspect of this male sefirah, designated 'Ateret Yesod, that is, identified with the Messiah and is therefore dimorphic.<sup>104</sup> In a series of other Kabbalistic writings, the Messiah is connected to the third sefirah, that of Binah, as part of the quasi-astral vision of this divine power related to the Jubilee.<sup>105</sup> According to R. Moses of Burgos, a Castilian Kabbalist active during the 1270s, the Messiah stems from the sefirah of Hokhmah.<sup>106</sup> In other cases the Messiah was identified with the sefirah of Keter.<sup>107</sup> According to early fourteenth century kabbalist R. Joseph Angelet, the Messiah or more precisely his soul, stems from the supreme power found within the divine world according to the theosophy of the Zohar, designated by the term *'Attiq Yomin*—which means the Primordial divine power—a phrase stemming from another apocalypse, the Book of Daniel.<sup>108</sup> In Sabbateanism the most important Kabbalistic-messianic movement which flowered in the second part of the seventeenth century, there is



more than one messianic figure identical with divine powers.<sup>109</sup> In one case, Nathan of Gaza, the main ideologue of Sabbateanism, described Sabbatai Tzevi as the Messiah and as the manifestation of the divine configuration *Ze'vir Anppin*.<sup>110</sup> Thus, the fluidity of the significance of the term Messiah demonstrates that it assumes the emphases found in the specific theosophical structure within which it appears.<sup>111</sup>

Some Kabbalists, however, regarded the Messiah to be related to non-sefirotic worlds. Abraham Abulafia and R. Isaac ben Shmuel of Acre identified the Messiah with Metatron.<sup>112</sup> For example, Abulafia writes that:

[I]t will appear to him as if his entire body, from head to foot, has been anointed with the oil of anointing, and he was "the anointed of the Lord" [*Mashiyaḥ YHWH*] and is an emissary, and he will be called "the angel of the Lord"; his name will be similar to that of his Master, which is Shadday, who is called Metatron, the prince [namely the angel] of the divine Face.<sup>113</sup>

The metanoia involved in the mystical experience amounts to a sense of a messianic mission and of being angelified. According to a passage of R. Isaac of Acre's *Sefer 'Otzar Hayyim*, the redeemer is an emanation descending onto the souls of the Jews.<sup>114</sup> R. Moshe Alsheikh identifies the Messiah with the world of the souls, symbolizing the cosmic world between the angelic and the divine one. He operates within the Kabbalistic theory of four worlds, and describes the Messiah transmitting what happens in the lower worlds to God, who represents the fourth and highest world.<sup>115</sup>

As theories of evil and transmigration became more important in the general economy of theosophical Kabbalah, particularly after the sixteenth century, the Messiah was conceptualized generation after generation as engaged in a struggle with the demonic powers. These battles were not necessarily apocalyptic. In the mid thirteenth century, a vision of the present as a mixture of good and evil to be separated in a utopian future entered Kabbalah, presumably from Manichaean sources.<sup>116</sup> A passage authored by R. Shlomo Molkho, himself a messianic figure, serves as an example of this development:



Abel is Moses, who is Abel, because all the deliverances are done by him, because his soul will transmigrate into the Messiah, and this is why he [Moses] has been buried abroad. "What is the gain of man from all his labors under the sun,"<sup>117</sup> if the redemption does not come? And he [Solomon] answered:<sup>118</sup> "One generation goeth, another generation cometh," namely it is a necessity that the Messiah will come, because he is the power of Satan [and] Serpent,<sup>119</sup> and he removed the impurity of the Serpent from the world, and this is the reason that he goes, because in the very moment and time that Israel will repent, they will immediately be redeemed . . . this is why in each and every generation there was a person [stemming] from [the children of] Israel, worthwhile and prepared to become the Messiah, and fulfill what has been written . . . "because a generation goeth and another generation cometh, and earth abideth forever" because it cannot subsist without the Messiah, because of the impurity of the Serpent . . . because the impurity of the Serpent spills over all the spheres and comes from the power of the seventh, lower sphere, which is that of the Moon.<sup>120</sup>

Generation after generation, the Messiah returns in order to sustain the world and safeguard it from the attack of the demonic powers. The two powers confront each other all the time. In fact, in the generation after Molkho, redemption was associated with demonic or impure powers and much less with the historical and national dimensions also seen in Lurianic Kabbalah.<sup>121</sup> Again, the nature of the system dictates the nature of the messianic event. Thus each theosophical system imbued the concept of the Messiah with its specific conceptual valences.

As Yehuda Liebes's brilliant analysis has shown, the mid seventeenth-century Sabbatai Tzevi adopted a more personal type of religion, based on his devoted submission to the divine will. In Tzevi's thought, a coherent Kabbalistic theosophical system was less evident and there was space for more apocalyptic approaches than in other forms of Kabbalah.<sup>122</sup> In the return of the centrality of the divine will in the religious approach of Tzevi, who openly rejected Lurianic Kabbalah,<sup>123</sup> is a precondition to embrace the possibility of dramatic and



immediate changes. Though Tzevi himself was acquainted with an astral vision of Messianism and was likely influenced by the messianic implications of the Saturn/Sabbatai planet, he himself did not adopt the entire astrological order, which was nevertheless known to some of his followers and appeared in the way they perceived him.<sup>124</sup>

## Messianism and Coordinated Communal Unity in the Besht

In the revivalist mystical movement known as eighteenth-century Hasidism, the forms of order that were adopted in the different Kabbalistic literatures mentioned above lost much of their influence. Unlike most of the Kabbalists, who wrote their books for an audience they rarely saw and lived their lives without a meaningful direct encounter with larger masses of Jews, many of the masters of eighteenth-century Hasidism were in constant contact with Jews and sought to create forms of Hasidic communities. The righteous person, or the *Tzaddiq*, became not only the spiritual leader of the community, but in some cases also considered himself its savior in a spiritual redemption which consisted of the elevation of divine sparks stemming from his soul that are found in his vicinity.<sup>125</sup> Less enchained by metaphysical or cosmic orders, now the activity of the Messiah/Tzaddiq depends on the order of the society in which he is supposed to operate. The founder of Hasidism, R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, known as the Besht (1698–1760), reportedly concluded that the Messiah relates to the social body the way the soul is related to the physical body:

Just as in the individual man the soul dwells on his da'at, vivifying all the limbs as long as they are connected together [to each other] so that the deeds of all his limbs are done in accordance to his da'at, as I heard from my teacher,<sup>126</sup> may his memory be blessed, the interpretation of the verse<sup>127</sup> “Whatever thy hand finds to do, do it with thy strength,” so that the deed will be done with all your limbs in accordance to the da'at. And in such a manner there is the expansion of the da'at within all his limbs. So also in the macrocosm there is a righteous one like Moses that is the secret of da'at,



and all the other people in his generation.<sup>128</sup> When they are in a linkage with him,<sup>129</sup> all are called “the generation of knowledge”<sup>130</sup> and this is the secret of the resurrection and of the Messiah, unlike the inverse [situation], when there is a separation between them and they are [then] separated from the [supernal] vitality and from the da‘at, and then this is the reason for the exile of Egypt and Pharaoh, [which is tantamount to] the secret of the neck, the back part of the da‘at.<sup>131</sup> And by this [principle] the [Talmudic] saying<sup>132</sup> “whoever derides a scholar etc.” [should be understood]. And indeed it is known that they slandered Moses and separated themselves from the da‘at, and this is the reason for the exile . . . and the words of the wise are gracious.<sup>133</sup>

The two major traditional concepts in the apocalyptic scenario in Judaism, Messiah and resurrection, are reinterpreted here allegorically, as in the case of Abulafia. The assumption is that just as the connection of the limbs is necessary for the presence of the soul in the body, so the connection between the members of the community is a precondition for the presence of the Messiah within it—he may enter the social body only when it functions in a unified manner. Indeed, human cooperation is quintessential for the Messiah to manifest himself in the community. The Messiah is described with the term *Da‘at*, knowledge, no doubt a depersonalized vision of the redemptive figure. Hence the reverence toward scholars mentioned in the above passage: the Messiah has been transformed into both a righteous man and a scholar, just as the Rabbis Rabinized and the Kabbalists Kabbalized the Messiah. Redemption is not described here as the result of the study of the members of the society, but rather of their cooperation, which prepares for the dwelling of the da‘at within the societal body. This will fill the group and presumably the entire world with knowledge, an ideal that reflects the Maimonidean axiology.

A more explicit nexus between study and Messiah is found in an early Hasidic discussion. According to R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, a Hasidic master who was also for a while R. Israel Ba‘al Shem Tov’s student:



Whoever accepts the yoke of the Torah, the Torah will remove the impurity of the serpent by means of his preoccupation with the Torah of the Lord, and with the holy letters, which are the palace of the Lord.<sup>134</sup> And so he will be able to be united with Him, Blessed be He, and all the wrongdoers will be removed [from him]<sup>135</sup> and no impurity and dirt will cling to him. This is why he is dispensed of the yokes of the [secular] dominion and of politeness, and from the subjugation to the [vicissitudes of] exile. . . and he will remove the serpent from himself and by them [namely by Torah and its letter] he merits [to witness] the advent of our Mashiyah.<sup>136</sup>

Thus redemption, which is described here as a spiritual event, will dispense the redeemed master from the vicissitudes of the inner exile, symbolizing here passion or corporeality. The Torah or the letters that are fraught with divine luminosity can undo the darkness of the impure condition of external exile and liberate the mystic from the servitude of this world, thus bringing him into a direct contact with the divine essence found in the vocables of the texts he studies. Those letters, considered the palace of the divine spirituality, constitute the locus of the encounter between the human and the divine. It is therefore in the quotidian ritual, in the everyday religious activities, that the devotion of the mystic can break the yoke of exile or impurity and bring about redemption. When the Jewish ritual is performed with a spiritual intention, the anticipation of the Messianic time becomes possible. The serpent's impurity is transcended by the purification of dirt by means of study, which will project him back to the Paradisiacal moments.<sup>137</sup>

The interpretation of the concepts Messiah, exile, and redemption in spiritual terms, as seen above in the discussions concerning Abraham Abulafia, existed prior to eighteenth-century Hasidism. Indeed, a vision of the Bible dealing with issues of spiritual exile and redemption even in situations in which they do not occur is representative of Hasidism. R. Jacob Joseph quotes the Besht:

I heard from my teacher that the matter of resurrection and Messiah is the secret of da'at,<sup>138</sup> etc., and the words of the wise are gracious. And when we shall know the secret of the exile in Egypt and



of the redemption from Egypt, which are found in every man in all times, in the past, future and present, what happened is what will happen, [and] this will elucidate the quandary related to the erasure of the name of Amalek immediately, and this war should recur generation after generation.<sup>139</sup>

The recurrence of exile and redemption in one's personal experience reduces dramatically the importance of apocalypticism. What was once a unique external event now turns out to be a recurring psychological process. The Messiah is again conceptualized in noetic terms, recurring in the inner experience. Indeed in a discussion of R. Moshe Hayyim Efrayyim of Sudylkov, the Besht's grandson, exile is referred to as a "sleep," while:

[r]edemption means that He enlightens their eyes, so that everyone will see the absolute truth, and they leave Exile, which is falsehood. And thus it is with the individual in each person, in the secret of [the verse] "Draw near to my soul, redeem it."<sup>140</sup> As in the image of a dream, when he, God forbid, sinks down into falseness, he is in exile, which is compared to sleep and to a dream.<sup>141</sup>

This extreme allegorization, identifying what used to be considered the historical realities of exile and redemption with states of the mind, is reminiscent of the allegories of Abraham Abulafia. In a similar manner, the ecstatic Kabbalist wrote in *Commentary on Genesis*:

God, blessed be He, said to Jacob in this dream, "Behold, I am with you and I shall protect you in whatever way you shall go,"<sup>142</sup> and then it is immediately written: "And Jacob has awakened from his sleep"<sup>143</sup> and it is said, "he was afraid, and he said: How dreadful,"<sup>144</sup> All this is a hint at the exile of Israel and at the redemption at the end.<sup>145</sup>

From the meso-chronic framework of the national events, both the ecstatic Kabbalah and Hasidic masters shifted the status of these events to that of inner experiences that recur in the micro-chronos. Whether the eighteenth-century Hasidic masters were acquainted with the



thirteenth-century ecstatic Kabbalah or not is a question that should not preoccupy us here.<sup>146</sup> More significant is the phenomenological affinity that consists in the common transfer of the external national events to the inner arena, where the developments may be more evolutionary, thus mitigating the catastrophic understandings of the eschaton in the meso-chronos. This does not mean that a Hasidic master would ever deny his confidence in national redemption or even its apocalyptic valences, but they are no longer the center of the messianic processes as they understood them.

### Some Concluding Remarks

The medieval encounters between the Greek and Hellenistic kinds of cosmos and consequently also between the two kinds of time on the one side, with the earlier Jewish loose theology based on the divine will and power as expressed—inter alia—in the apocalyptic approach on the other side, generated some evolutionary forms of redemption. The Greek and Hellenistic forms of worldviews are, to a great extent, independent of the interventionist approach of the divine providence in history and nature. This shift from a heterogeneous explanation of historical developments found in early Judaism, to more autonomous processes dependent on Greek forms of thought prepared the integration of the traditional messianic constellation of ideas into more secular forms of thought, especially in the modern form of philosophy.<sup>147</sup> In a way we may speak about a process of naturalization—and implicitly secularization—of apocalypticism by the strong systematical approaches adopted in the Middle Ages, and this process continued in modern forms of Judaism as well. It should be pointed out that naturalization and secularization are also conducive to a universalistic vision of Messianism, which indeed prevailed in modern Jewish thinkers.

From this point of view there is certain continuity between, on the one hand, the medieval philosophers and some Kabbalists, and on the other hand, the modern Jewish thinkers, both active on the European continent. In both cases a particularistic eschatology based on the irresistible will of God was domesticated and could be presented in more



universalistic terms through the use of terms and systems whose ultimate sources were Greek and Hellenistic. The manner in which the scholars of Judaism in the nineteenth century portrayed Messianism, sometimes by minimizing the role of apocalypticism, reflects this secularizing approach that they shared with their contemporaries. Similar tendencies appear in the work of twentieth-century thinkers such as Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Ernst Bloch, and Emmanuel Levinas—active for most of their lives in Europe—though with other types of intellectual apparatuses.<sup>148</sup> In their cases, the impact of Greek forms of thought is evident as well. Thus, in order to understand the uniqueness of Gershom Scholem's proclivity for apocalyptic aspects of Messianism in modern times, it should be viewed as a response to both the medieval developments of taming apocalypticism and the similar tendencies of his contemporaries.

Some forms of Greek thought helped tame the apocalyptic complex as evident from the writings of elite Jewish figures, belonging to the secondary elite. Nevertheless, the Jewish apocalyptic complex contributed to the dimension of hope and progress among those elites, particularly to the emergence of forms of *historiosophies* with a propensity to more optimistic prospects. In any case, the systemic developments related to the spiritual interpretation of apocalypticism are not a result of a crisis,<sup>149</sup> but rather a change generated by the enrichment of modes of religious thought existing in medieval Judaism. This does not mean that among the Jews apocalypticism was obliterated in the Middle Ages or later.<sup>150</sup> Rather, in some cases it changed in the general worldview of Kabbalists as a result of its encounter with the Kabbalistic systems, just as in the writings of Jewish astrologers and philosophers.<sup>151</sup> Different as their interpretations were from the apocalyptic forms that preceded them, they constituted forms of Jewish Messianism, which are not just neutralizations,<sup>152</sup> but part of the ongoing process of enrichment generated by the intellectual encounters of Judaism with other cultures. From this point of view, eighteenth-century Hasidism and the later Central European Jewish thinkers moved in a similar direction, insofar as apocalypticism was concerned. Each of these forms of thought granted the highest value to the utopia understood as Messianism.



## Notes

- 1 See the comprehensive collection of Jewish apocalyptic texts compiled by Yehudah Even Shemuel, ed., *Midreshei Ge'ullah: Pirqei ha-'Apocalypsah ha-Yehudit* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1954); the analyses of some of those treatises by Avraham Grossman, "Jerusalem in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," in *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period, 638–1099*, ed. Joshua Prawer and Haggai Ben-Shammai (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 295–310; and Robert Bonfil, "The Vision of Daniel as a Historical and Literary Document," in *Yitzhak F. Baer Memorial Volume 1888–1980*, ed. H. Beinart, M. Stern, and Sh. Ettinger (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel, 1980), 111–47. For English translations of some of the apocalyptic treatises, see Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979). Regarding treatises printed in the above collection, see the studies mentioned below in notes 8 and 108.
- 2 For a preliminary formulation of this thesis see Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 9–11.
- 3 Philo of Alexandria is a major exception.
- 4 See Moshe Idel, "'Deferred Lives' – Something about the Configuration of the Scholemian Kabbalah Research," *Daat* 50–52 (2003): xxxi–lviii; or Yehuda Liebes, "New Directions in the Study of Kabbalah," *Pe'amim* 50 (1992): 150–170. For Maimonides' type of order, see Aviezer Ravitzky, "To the Utmost of Human Capacity: Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. Joel Kramer (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991), 221–56.
- 5 It should be pointed out that already in Rabbinic literature of the last centuries of the first millennium of the Common Era there is a phenomenon of Rabbinization of the Messiah, described as a scholar in the celestial Yeshivah. On this phenomenon, see Adiel Qadari, "Talmud Torah, Mysticism and Apocalypticism: On God's Beit ha-Midrash in Late Midrash," *Tarbiz* 73 (2004): 181–95.
- 6 For more on these three concepts of time see Moshe Idel, "Some Concepts of Time and History in Kabbalah," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, ed. E. Carlebach, J. M. Efron, and D. N. Myers (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 153–88; Moshe Idel, "Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism," in *Sabbath, Idea, History, Reality*, ed. G. Blidstein (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2004), 57–93; and "Higher than Time: Observations on Some Concepts of Time in Kabbalah and Hasidism," in *Time and Eternity in Jewish Mysticism: That Which is Before and That Which is After*, ed. B. Ogren (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 179–210.
- 7 Aron Gurwitsch, "Phenomenology of Perception: Perceptual Implications," in *An Invitation to Phenomenology*, ed. James M. Edie (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 21.
- 8 John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 1–17; Anthony Saldarini, "Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975): 348–58.; Saldarini, "The Use of Apocalyptic in the Mishnah and Tosefta," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 396–409.; Peter Schaefer, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des Rabbinischen Judentums* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 37–43; Stephen Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 9–26, 45–60; Joshua Bloch, *On the Apocalyptic in Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College, 1952); M. Goldish and R. H. Popkin, eds., *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 1, *Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001); Joseph Dan, *Apocalypse Then and Now* (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot, 2000), 253–263; Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12–13, 79–80; and Jacob B. Agus, "The Messianic Ideal and the Apocalyptic Vision," *Judaism* 32 (1983): 205–14. See also the bibliography in Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 328n3, 328n10; Idel, "Jewish Apocalypticism: 670–1670," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. John J. Collins, Bernard McGinn, and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 1998), vol. 2, 204–37; and Peter Koslowski, ed., *Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History and Life After Death of the Human Person in the World Religions* (Boston: Kluwer, 2002), 40–74.



- 9 Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 4–6; John Collins, “Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 21–43.; For the Middle Ages, see: Bernard McGinn, “Apocalyptic Traditions and Spiritual Identity in the Thirteenth-Century Religious Life,” in *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press 1979), 10, 13; idem, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994) essays I and II; the introduction of the editors in J. Collins, B. McGinn, S. Stein, vol. 1–3 of the *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum, 1998), ix–xiii; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Paladin, 1972); Cohn, “Medieval Millenarism: Its Bearing on the Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements,” in *Millennial Dreams in Action, Essays in Comparative Study*, ed. Sylvia Thrupp (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 31–43; Also see McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 1–36. On later Christian forms of apocalypticism, which do not differ substantially from the Jewish ones, see Paul J. Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” *The American Historical Review* 73 (1968): 997–1018; Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Richard K. Emmerson and Ronald B. Hertzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 22; and Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
- 10 There is extensive secondary literature on these terms in Judaism and Christianity. For example see Klaus Koch and Johann M. Schmidt, trans., *Apokaliptik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982); Claude Kappeler, *Apocalypses et voyages dans l'au-delà* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1987), especially his introduction; and more recently Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhandsson, eds., *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (London: Tauris, 2002).
- 11 This remark should be seen as part of recommendation for a more sociologically oriented approach to Kabbalah that differentiates between primary or first elites and secondary elites on the one hand and more exoteric popular beliefs on the other.
- 12 Vladimir Jankelevitch, “L’esperance et la fin des temps,” in *La conscience juive, Face à l’histoire: Le Pardon*, ed. Eliane Amado Levy-Valensi et Jean Halperin (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 7–21.
- 13 For a survey of Scholem’s views on messianism, see Joseph Dan, “Gershom Scholem and Jewish Messianism,” in *Gershom Scholem, The Man and the Work*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 73–85; and David Biale and Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 71–93. I undertake below a survey that highlights the affinity between his view of messianism and apocalypticism, an emphasis that has escaped some of the surveyors of his views. See also below, note 157.
- 14 Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 8–9.
- 15 See also Moritz Steinschneider, “Apocalypsen mit polemischer Tendenz,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 28 (1876): 360.
- 16 Meier, *Messianic Idea*, 7–8.
- 17 Gershom Scholem, *‘Od Davar: Explications and Implications* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989). See also Scholem’s concluding remarks in Meier, *Messianic Idea*. On the continuity of Jewish apocalypticism, see Schloem, *Sabbatai Sevi, The Mystical Messiah*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 9.
- 18 Compare respectively, Harold Bloom, “Unhistorical or Jewish Gnosticism,” in *Gershom Scholem*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publisher, 1987), 217 and Brauch Kurzweil, *Struggling for the Values of Judaism* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1969), 213–40. See also Michael Lowy, *Redemption et utopie: Le judaïsme libertaire en Europe centrale* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1988), 82. The first decades of Scholem’s research represent a profound concern with messianism, as well as Biale and Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 154, 174. Scholem was fond of the apocalyptic vision of history, which was shared also by his friend Walter Benjamin, as we learn from his depiction of the Angel of history. For more on this issue, see Moshe Idel, “Zur Funktion von Symbolen bei G.G. Scholem,” in *Gershom Scholem - Literatur und Rhetorik*, ed. S. Moses and S. Wiegell (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2000), 51–92.



- 19 R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Reflections on Gershom Scholem's Sabbatai Sevi," *Molad* 15 (1957): 539–47; and Scholem's response (without identifying the name of the addressee, that has been printed) in a shorter version in Scholem, *Od Davar*, 98–104. For the different views on Scholem's messianism and apocalypticism see Shira Wolosky, "Gershom Scholem's Linguistic Theory," in *Gershom Scholem, 1897–1982: In Memoriam*, ed. Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: Department of Jewish Thought, 2007), vol. 2, 193–194n44; and Pierre Bouretz, *Témoins du Futur, Philosophie et Messianisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003). Compare below with note 157.
- 20 R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Mysticism and messianism, the case of Hasidism," in *Man and His Salvation: Essays in Memory of the Late Professor S.G.F. Brandon*, ed. Eric J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 15–16.
- 21 Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 41–43.
- 22 Ibid., 41.
- 23 *Devarim be-Go*, 205; Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 18–20.
- 24 Scholem wrote about Lurianism, for example, that "This latter Kabbalah, as it developed in classical forms in Safed in Palestine in the sixteenth century, was in its whole design electric with Messianism and pressing for its release; it was impelling a Messianic outburst." See Meier (1972), 59. The deterministic vision of the history of Kabbalah, within which Messianism played such an important role, is evident also in some other discussions of this scholar. See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 284, 287.
- 25 Tiqqun: the act of repairing. See Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 13; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 246. To be sure, the concept of *tiqqun* precedes Lurianic Kabbalah, as we may easily see in R. Meir ibn Gabbai's classic *Avodat ha-Qodesh*.
- 26 See Moshe Idel, "Subversive Catalysts: Gnosticism and Messianism in Gershom Scholem's View of Jewish Mysticism," in *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*, ed. David N. Myers and David B. Ruderman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 56–60.
- 27 See Idel, "Deferred Lives," 483–98.
- 28 See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 245–51.
- 29 See *ibid.*, 8–9.
- 30 Ibid., 31–32.
- 31 See also *ibid.*, 265.
- 32 Scholem, *The Messianic Idea*, 9.
- 33 Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 202, 217.
- 34 For a critique of this stark distinction see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 29–35. See also my forthcoming study "Mystical Redemption and Messianism in R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov."
- 35 See for example Idel, *Messianic Mystics*; and Idel, "Subversive Catalysts."
- 36 The theory advanced by Joseph Dan, who regards the messianic discussions of R. Isaac ha-Cohen as emerging solely from the figments of this Kabbalist's imagination without any historical background, fails to mention the repercussions of the Mongolian invasion on the Jews who were, at the time of R. Isaac ha-Cohen, well-acquainted with the impact the advent of the Mongols has on their Christian neighbors. Joseph Dan, "The Emergence of Messianic Mythology in 13th Century Kabbalah in Spain," in *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of A. Schreiber*, ed. R. Dán (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 57–68.
- 37 See the text in Aharon Z. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1987), 214. On this poet and his other poems see H. Brody, "Poems of R. Meshullam ben Shlomo da Piera," *Studies of the Research Institute for Jewish Poetry in Jerusalem* 4 (1938): 1–118.
- 38 The Hebrew phrase *Be-fi rabbim shegurot* may be translated literally as "found commonly in the mouth of many people."
- 39 This is a hint at the misunderstanding of the Mongols as the ten lost Jewish tribes, who allegedly left the region beyond the mythical river of Sambatyon, as part of the messianic redemption.
- 40 I assume that the reference here is to the fall of Baghdad.
- 41 Aescoly, *Messianic Movements*, 214.



- 42 Ibid., 215. See also Lerner, *Powers of Prophecy*, 21–23.
- 43 See the manuscript document printed and analyzed in Moshe Idel, “The Beginnings of the Kabbalah in North Africa? The Forgotten Document of R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka,” *Pe’amim* 43 (1990), 8–12.
- 44 *Zohar*, vol. 2, fol. 32a. For the explanation of another apocalyptic passage in the *Zohar* as a reverberation of a recent historical event, Abraham Abulafia’s attempt to meet the Pope and the latter’s sudden death, see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 121–24; and Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 46.
- 45 A. Jellinek, ed., “‘Sefer Ha-Ot’: Apokalypse des Pseudo-Propheten und Pseudo-Messias Abraham Abulafia,” in *Jubelschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstage des Prof. Dr. H. Graetz* (Breslau: S. Schottlaender, 1887), 65–85. On this book, see also Harvey Hames, “Three in One or One That is Three: On the Dating of Abraham Abulafia’s *Sefer ha-’Ot*,” *Revue des études juives* 165 (2006): 179–89. On Abulafia’s messianism, see Abraham Berger, “The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia—A Tentative Evaluation,” in *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought Presented in Honor of Salo Wittmayer Baron*, ed. J. Blau (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 55–61; and Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 58–100. For an English translation of part of the passages under scrutiny below see Patai, *Messiah Text*, 178–80.
- 46 Amnon Gross, ed., *Otzar’ Eden Ganuz* (Jerusalem, 2000), 368.
- 47 See for example *ibid.*, 182. There, he refers also to the language of Togarma, presumably Turkish, as a distinct language.
- 48 On this war, see Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- 49 See Harvey J. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans, and Joachimism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008). Hames proposes that Abulafia was influenced by the Christian spiritualists.
- 50 This part of the apocalypse is not vocalized. Patai, *Messiah Texts*, 180, reads here Qadriel, without explaining what was Abulafia’s intention. Also his vocalization of what I decode as Tori’el as Turiel, is left without any explanation.
- 51 For example see R. David Qimhi’s commentary on Jeremy 49:28.
- 52 For example see the commentary of Rashi and Nahmanides on Genesis 36:43 or R. Bahya ben Asher on Genesis 36:39.
- 53 See Moshe Idel, *Ben, Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London: Continuum, 2007), 276–94, esp. 290; and Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 90–91.
- 54 *’Ovedei sheti va-’erev*. For *sheti va-’erev* as a sign of Christianity, see Gross, *Otzar’ Eden Ganuz* i, 1580, fols. 4b–5a, 51a, 65a, and 169b–70a.
- 55 Jellinek, “*Sefer Ha-Ot*,” 68.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 84. See also the above poem by R. Meshullam da Piera. On the Mongols as sent by God, see Lerner, *Powers of Prophecy*, 24.
- 57 See Abraham of Cologne, “*Keter Shem Tov*,” in *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, ed. Adolph Jellinek and Erstes Helf (Leipzig: A.M. Coldits, 1853). This is a short Kabbalistic treatise written in the sixties of the thirteenth century, which has some affinities to ecstatic Kabbalah: “The Messiah will reveal the rationales of the Torah and the secret of 22 letters, which are the ground for all speech and all creatures and this is the reason why also these three sefirot are like a *segulah*, and then the kingdom of Israel will return and the kingdom of God, blessed be He, to its place, and the *’Atarab* will return to its primal place, as it has been said: “And God will be the King over the entire earth, and that day, He will be one, and His name will be one.”
- 58 Jellinek, “*Sefer Ha-Ot*,” 69.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 68, 79.
- 60 On Abulafia and theophoric names see Idel, *Ben*, 306–307.
- 61 Jellinek, “*Sefer Ha-Ot*,” 76. See also Idel, *Ben*, 312.
- 62 On this issue see Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), 134–37, 141–43.



- 63 The original expression is *'Adon ha-Kol*, which stems from *Sefer Yetzirah*, a book that strongly influenced Abulafia's thought. On 'All' in Jewish thought see Elliot R. Wolfson, "God, the Demiurge and the Intellect: On the Usage of the Word Kol in Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Revue des études juives* 149, no. 1-2 (1990): 77-111; and Howard Kreisel, "On the Term 'Kol' in Abraham Ibn Ezra: A Reappraisal," *Revue des études juives* 153, no. 1-2 (1994): 29-66 as well as bibliography adduced by these two scholars.
- 64 *'et qetz ha-galut*. This is a phrase found in chapter 12 of Daniel. The printed phrase *'ad qetz ha-galut* contains a printing error.
- 65 See Abulafia's epistle to Jellinek, "Sefer Ha-Ot," 18-19. On the messianic awareness of Abulafia in general, see also the useful study of Berger, "Messianic Self-Consciousness," 55-61. For more on the issues dealt with in this passage, see Idel, "'The Time of the End': Apocalypticism and Its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia's Eschatology," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 155-86.
- 66 See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 377n46. For the Tripoli prophecy see Lerner, *Powers of Prophecy*.
- 67 Shemittah: according to the Kabbalists, the cosmic cycle of six thousand years; sefirah: the term for each of the ten divine manifestations.
- 68 Binah: understanding, the third sefirah. See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 187-97.
- 69 See Samuel Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 106-107, 143.
- 70 *Hozerim Halilah*. It seems that this is the influence of a passage in *Sefer Yetzirah*, chapter 2, where it is said that the sphere, or circle, *hozer halilah*, namely *recurs*. See also Abulafia's phrase in his *Sitrei Torah*, a commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 148a, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. Here the movement of the sphere is described as *hazarat hillelat [!] ha-galgal*. Similar phrases occur in Gross, *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*; *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1580, fol. 106a, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- 71 Printed by Colette Sirat, "Juda b. Salomon Ha-Kohen - philosophe, astronome et peut-être Kabbaliste de la première moitié du 13<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Italia* 2 (1979): 48n21.
- 72 See Moshe Idel, "Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schafer and M. R. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 180.
- 73 Ibid., 181.
- 74 Ibid., 173-202.
- 75 *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1580, fol. 41a, Bodleian Library, Oxford; Gross, *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, 83. See also Idel, "Saturn," 179-80.
- 76 *BT*, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 99a.
- 77 This word is translated as the "Hebrew Year", but the numerical value of its consonants amounts to five thousand three hundred ninety-five, like *ha-Mashiyah*.
- 78 *Sefer Ginnat Beitan*, chap. 52; Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1578, fol. 63b, Bodleian Library, Oxford. On this book see Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbalah Literature*, ed. J. Hacker (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1976), 477-507, esp. 506. Part of the original Hebrew passage translated here has already been printed. For some further discussions see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 159-60.
- 79 Namely, the material or potential intellect.
- 80 *Commentary on Sefer ha-Melitz*, ms. Rome-Angelica 38, fol. 9a, Angelica Library, Rome; and Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 127 and 140; Idel, *Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 66; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 65-66; and Idel, *Ben*, 308.
- 81 See Idel, *Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 1-32.
- 82 Presumably the supernal intellectual influx that descends upon the prophet and the Messiah.
- 83 See Zacharia 9:10.
- 84 Compare this conspicuously messianic view of *devequt* to the recurrent claim of Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 51, 185, 194, 204, that negated an eschatological significance of this act in pre-Hasidic Jewish mysticism.
- 85 See the commentary on Deuteronomy in Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Maṭṭe'ah ha-Tokhehot*, ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1605, fol. 46b, Bodleian Library, Oxford.



- 86 See Idel, *Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 63–71. See also Menachem Kellner, “Gersonides on Miracles, the Messiah and Resurrection,” *Da’at* 4 (1980): 5–34.
- 87 The single manuscript of this untitled treatise is not so clear here
- 88 *ba-Shem ha-Meyuhad*, in gematria 418.
- 89 *Kelei Mashiyah* 418. On the divine names as the weapons of the Messiah see Idel, *Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 47. For the uses of divine names by Jesus, see *Toledot Jesus*. There can be no doubt that an earlier tradition about the revelation and use of the divine names by the Messiah has been elaborated by Abulafia, and this issue requires a special study.
- 90 The name’s powers. The divine name is higher than the four beasts of Ezekiel’s chariot.
- 91 The vowels of the four letters are those found under the consonants of the words *Ratzo va-Shov*, the phrase that describes the dynamic of the four beasts, namely *aoao*.
- 92 Manuscript, Firenze-Laurentina 2, 48, fol. 90a, Laurentian Library, Florence. On Abulafia’s authorship on this untitled treatise see Moshe Idel, “A Unique Manuscript of an Untitled Treatise of Abraham Abulafia in Biblioteca Laurentiana Medicea,” *Kabbalah* 17 (2007): 7–28.
- 93 See Idel, “Time of the End,” 160–63.
- 94 Through the secrets of the Torah.
- 95 *Sitrei Torah*, ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 119a, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. See also the assumption committed to writing around 1280, discussed in Idel, *Messianic Mythics*, 73.
- 96 For Abulafia’s various definitions of prophecy formulated in explicitly Maimonidean terms, see Moshe Idel, “Definitions of Prophecy – Maimonides and Abulafia,” *Maimonides and Mysticism, Presented to Moshe Hallamish on the Occasion of his Retirement*, eds. A. Elqayam and D. Schwartz (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan U.P., 2009), 1–36 (Hebrew).
- 97 See Jellinek, “Sefer Ha-Ot,” 85. See also *ibid.*, 84.
- 98 See Moshe Idel, “The Battle of the Urges: Psychomachia in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia,” in *Peace and War in Jewish Culture*, ed. Avriel Bar-Levav (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2006), 99–143.
- 99 On Kabbalistic theurgy, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 173–99.
- 100 For the constraining nature of the theosophical system, see Yehuda Liebes, “Myth vs. Symbol in the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah,” in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, ed. Lawrence Fine (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 212–42.
- 101 See *idem*, Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 111–14.
- 102 *Perush Sifra’ de-Tzeniuta’*, chap. 1.
- 103 Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 17–19.
- 104 See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef Mem, Tau, Kabbalistic Musing on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 145–46.
- 105 See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 187–97.
- 106 See the passage printed by Gershom Scholem, “R. Moses of Burgos,” *Tarbiz* 4 (1933): 55.
- 107 Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 115–118. See also Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Engenderment of Messianic Politics: Symbolic Significance of Sabbatai Sevi’s Coronation,” in *Toward the Millennium*, ed. Schafer and Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 243–44n135.
- 108 R. Joseph Angelet, *Livnat ha-Sappir*, ed. Shlomo Mussaioff (Jerusalem, 1981), fol. 16a. In print the book is attributed to R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid. See also the view of Tzevi in a text of Nathan of Gaza, translated and discussed in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 275.
- 109 Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 103.
- 110 See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 275–76.
- 111 For an identification of the Messiah to the Lurianic hypostasis of *da’at*, see below in the next section.
- 112 Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 299–300, 303–306.
- 113 *Sefer Hayyei ha-Olam ha-Ba’*, ms. Paris BN 777, fol. 109, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.
- 114 Reprinted and discussed in Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbalah Literature*, 241.



- 115 *Sefer Torat Moshe* on Genesis 37:25–30.
- 116 See Moshe Idel, “The Interpretations on the Incest Interdictions in Early Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 12 (2004): 149–53. See also Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2005) 123–27.
- 117 Ecclesiastes 1:3.
- 118 *Ibid.*, 1:4.
- 119 Here the gematria of *Mashiyah*, numerically identical to *Nahash* [serpent], is found. On this identification, see Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 17; Wolfson, “Messianic Politics,” 221–22n458; and the bibliography cited there.
- 120 Manuscript, *Moscow-Gunzburg*, 302, Russian State Library, Moscow. See also Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 150–51.
- 121 See Wolfson, “Messianic Politics,” 209–11 and the secondary literature cited there.
- 122 Liebes, *Jewish Myth*, 107–13. On apocalypticism and Sabbateanism, see Scholem’s analysis of the so-called Yemenite apocalypse *Gei Hizzayon* in Schloem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 653–57. This approach differs from that of Nathan of Gaza, who embraced Lurianic Kabbalah at some point in his career as the overall framework for the interpretation of Sabbateanism. In the Yemenite apocalypse, there are no traces of Lurianic Kabbalah, but it is informed by a loose combination of theosophical and ecstatic Kabbalah.
- 123 See Schloem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 118; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 292; and Liebes, *Jewish Myth*, 109–10. For the irrelevance of Lurianic Kabbalah for the first stage of Nathan of Gaza’s studies up to 1665, see Idel, “Prophecy and Magic,” 13–15. Implicitly, and in my opinion correctly, Scholem assumes that the apocalyptic elements in Nathan’s views are related to popular traditions to be distinguished from his Lurianic thought. See Scholem, *Mystical Messiah*, 465.
- 124 See Idel, “Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi,” 191–202, and idem, *Saturn’s Jews: On the Witches’ Sabbat and Sabbateanism* (London, New York, Continuum, 2011), 46–83.
- 125 See the scholarly bibliography I collected in Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 206, 375n130. See also now Moshe Idel, “Jewish Mysticism among the Jews of Arab/Moslem Lands,” *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry* 1 (2007): 35–39, and idem, “The Tsaddiq and His Soul’s Sparks: From Kabbalah to Hasidism,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 103/2 (Spring 2013), 196–240.
- 126 The Besht.
- 127 Ecclesiastes 9:10. This is one of the most quoted verses in the Beshtian traditions. The second part of the verse, rarely quoted by the Besht, but which he assumed was known by the listeners or readers, is “since there is no *da’at* in the She’ol.” I assume that the Besht understood the absence of the *da’at* in the lower world, referring to its existence in the higher one.
- 128 This view should be compared to the manner in which the Besht is describing the loss of the Jews who left Judaism as part of the conversion of the Sabbateans and the Frankists. “As long as the member is connected, there is some hope that it will recover, but when the member is cut off there is no repair possible.” Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, trans. and eds., *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov [Shivhei ha-Besht]* (New York: Schocken, 1984), 59.
- 129 The topic of the linkage is quite an important issue in the Besht and cannot be dealt with in this context. For a parallel discussion in the name of the Besht, where the limbs are linked to the intellect of man and thus they become spiritualized, see Moshe Hayyim Efrayyim, *Degel Mahaneh Efrayyim* (Jerusalem, 1995), 3–4.
- 130 *Dor de’ah*. This expression, found earlier in *Midrash Tanhuma* and then in the *Zohar*, II, fol. 62b, describes Moses’s generation in the wilderness. Especially relevant for the context of the Besht’s discussions are the Lurianic connection between *dor de’ah* and the *Ze’ir Anpin*, which is lower than the *da’at*. Compare with Hayyim Vital, *Sha’ar ha-Pesugim* (Tel Aviv: Eshel, 1966), 104–106. Also see Abraham Azulai, *Hesed le-Avraham* (Lemberg, 1863), fols. 29d–30a. It became a widespread phrase in Hasidism and it is used in the context of both *da’at* and redemption. See Jacob Joseph, *Tzafnat Paaneah*, ed. G. Nigal (Jerusalem, 1989), 320, 405; and Manahem Nahum, *Me’or Einayim* (Jerusalem: 1975), 195–96. I should emphasize that affinities between the portrayals of Moses and that of the



- Messiah were well-known in Lurianic Kabbalah. See Scholem, *Mystical Messiah*, 53, 59, 584–86, and Idel (2005/a), 136 note 50.
- 131 Face and Neck are the two aspects of the *da'at*, and they represent redemption and exile, respectively. On the states of *Gadelut*—Grandeur—and *Qatenut*—Smallness—of the divine hypostatis *da'at*, see Joseph, *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*, 17–18; and Nahum, *Me'or 'Einayyim*, 116–17.
- 132 For example, see *Yalqut Shimeoni*, on II Chronicles, chap. 36, paragraph 1085.
- 133 Joseph, *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*, 214; and Keter R. Aharon, *Shem Tov* (Brooklyn, 1987), fols. 54d–55a. On this passage, see Ron Margolin, *The Human Temple* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005), 407. The two topics found together in this passage, namely the interpretation of the verse from Ecclesiastes and the secret of Messiah as *da'at*, are two different traditions, quoted one after the other in *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef* (Koretz, 1780), fol. 29b. For the Parallel discussion in the name of Besht, see *ibid.*, fol. 129a. See also the passage of the Besht quoted in Efrayyim, *Degel Mahaneh 'Efrayyim*, 208. On some of the passages from R. Jacob Joseph's books that deal with the relationship between *da'at* and redemption, see the discussion in Netanel Lederberg, *Sod ha-Da'at, Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov: His Spiritual Character and Social Leadership* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 2007), 134–39; and the discussion in Mendel Piekartz, *Between Ideology and Reality, Humility, Ayin, Self-Negation and Devekut in the Hasidic Thought* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1994), 79.
- 134 For the concept of the letters as palaces for the divine powers and the instruction to cleave to them, see: Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 158–64, and *idem*, “Modes of Cleaveing to the Letters in the Teachings of Israel Baal Shem Tov: A Sample Analysis,” *Jewish History*, 27 (2013), 299–317.
- 135 Compare to Psalm 92:10, a verse which frequently appears in traditions reported in the name of the Besht.
- 136 Nahum, *Me'or 'Einayyim*, 113.
- 137 *Ibid.*
- 138 See also above in the passage from Jacob, *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*, fol. 96cd. It should be mentioned that the remembrance is also linked to the *sefirah* of *Da'at*, in several discussions in the writings of this Hasidic master. For example see the important discussion found in *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef*, fol. 70ab.
- 139 Jacob, *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*, fol. 62ab. Also see the view of Phinehas, which emphasizes the recurrence of redemption, in Phinehas ben Abraham, *Midrash Pinhas* (Ashdod: Hotsa'at Yashlim, 2001), 96.
- 140 Psalms 92:10.
- 141 Efrayyim, *Degel Mahaneh 'Efrayyim*, 38. For a markedly different analysis of this passage, see Werblowsky, “Mysticism and Messianism,” 305–14.
- 142 Genesis 28:15.
- 143 *Ibid.*, 28:16.
- 144 *Ibid.*, 28:17.
- 145 Parma De Rossi, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot* [ed. Amnon Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 2003), 93, 141, fol. 30a.
- 146 See, for the time being, Moshe Idel, “On Prophecy and Early Hasidism,” in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Babi-Baha'i Faiths*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 41–75.
- 147 On messianism in modern Jewish philosophy, see Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Pierre Bouretz, “Messianism and Modern Jewish Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, ed., Michael Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 170–91. For a comprehensive account, see Bouretz, *Temoins du Futur*; and Robert Gibbs, “Lines, Circles, Points: Messianic Epistemology in Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Benjamin,” in *Toward the Millennium*, ed. Schafer and Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 363–81; Georges Bensoussan, *Le temps messianique. Temps historique et temps vécu* (Paris: Vrin, 2001); Martin Kavka, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 321–26.
- 148 For more on those views, see Bouretz, *Temoins du Futur*.
- 149 See Jacob Taubes, “The Prince of Messianism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 496. Taubes conceives of interiorization as the result of a “crisis within Jewish eschatology itself.”



- 150 See Isaiah Tishby, *Messianism in the Time of the Expulsion from Spain and Portugal* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1985)
- 151 See Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1997); Arthur Hyman, *Eschatological Themes in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002); S. M. Stern, *Aristotle on the World State* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968); Sara O. Heller-Willensky, "Messianism, Eschatology and Utopia in the Philosophical-Mystical Trend of Kabbalah of the 13th Century," in *Messianism and Eschatology*, ed. Z. Baras (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1984), 221–38.
- 152 Scholem's assumption is that Hasidism "neutralized" the Sabbatean acute messianism. See Scholem, *Messianic Idea*; and Scholem, *Major Trends*, 329, 330, 335. For the view that in Sabbateanism there are strong non-political trends, which emphasized the religious reform, see Liebes, *Jewish Myth*, 106. Also, the manner in which Scholem portrays Lurianic messianism does not include apocalyptic moments. Thus, the issue of neutralization of messianism in Hasidism is predicated upon a certain reading of earlier forms of Kabbalistic thought as acutely apocalyptic. For more on messianism in early Hasidism, see Moshe Idel, "Mystical Redemption and Messianism in R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov's Teachings," *Kabbalah*, 24 (2011), 7–121.







# God's Chronography and Dissipative Time<sup>1</sup>

*Aziz Al-Azmeh*

Apocalypses are of interest not only to antiquarians or religious ideologues. They subtend and rest upon a rich and ubiquitous conception of time which is, as we shall see, of salience to fields far broader than eschatology or of salvation history, and this judgment I believe applies to all apocalypses, including those of Islam, all of which treat temporality in a manner that is conceptually isomorphous. This is a conception of time that brings out with particular sharpness of relief and definition, almost as an ideal-type, notions of history that are of an ubiquity far greater than is generally perceived: conceptions of history upon which rest revivalisms of all descriptions, religious (as Reform) and secular (nationalist and romantic-conservative), and conceptions of history implicit in the historiography of large-scale historical masses such as civilizations, nations, geographical blocks (such as the West) that are in evidence in textbooks, magazine articles, bar-room musings on roots and identities, and erudite manuals. These all construe histories of their favored units, civilizations, or nations, in terms of rise and of decline, of persistence, adulteration, and senescence, telescoping times and events by means of typology as well as of tropes of repetition, degeneration, and regeneration.

Of these historiographic notions, there are specifically two concepts of time that are of salience and which bear illustration and sharp definition from the apocalyptic ideal-type. One of them is recursive histories which construe the labor of time in terms of repetition, of the re-enactment of beginnings, such as we see in Herder, Toynbee, Huntington, and others, in what amounts to a natural history of human society or of "culture areas" or civilizations.<sup>2</sup> The other is the confusion of typology and causality in histories such as these, where continuity is taken for a figure of "origin." This is where Noah's Ark is taken to prefigure the Church, Muhammad to repeat earlier prophets, the medieval Norman wars in north Africa (as with Ranke and Hegel) repeating Rome's Punic wars, and medieval kingship regarded to be the



imitation of Christ, and in which Islamophobia is taken for a repetition of the Crusades, in such a way that typology, figured by causality, is an allegory in the medium of time.<sup>3</sup>

Both of these notions are best seen through the mind of God, and there is no better guide to the workings of the mind of God than St. Augustine. Commenting on the Gospel of James (1:17), "for with him [God], there is no variation or shadow of any moment," Augustine offered the following description of God's perception of time:

It is not that there is any difference in God's knowledge according as it is produced by things not yet in existence, by things now or by things that are no more. Unlike us, He does not look ahead to the future, see the present before him, and look back to the past. Rather he sees events in another way, far and profoundly different from any experience that is familiar to our minds. For he does not variably turn his attention from one thing to another. . . . Hence all events in time, events that will be and are not yet and those that are now, being present, and those that have passed and are no more, all of them are apprehended by him in a motionless and everlasting present moment. . . . Nor does it make any difference whether he looks at them from present, past or future, since his knowledge, unlike ours, of the three kinds of time, present, past and future, does not change as time changes. . . . Neither does [God's] attention stray from one subject to another. . . for he knows events in time without any temporal acts of knowing of his own.<sup>4</sup>

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As a scheme for conceiving past, present, and future, eschatology and the apocalyptic constitute a sub-species of salvation history whose differentia is the construal of selected events as mystical signs presaging an eschatological time that terminates human history. Broadly speaking, eschatology can in terms of its socio-political moorings be differentiated between the apocalyptic and the conventional. By eschatological convention I understand a schema of salvation history in which the history of the past and the history of the future are conjoined in



the perspective of a quietist determinism without reference to the imminence of the End. Therefore, unlike chiliasm and various forms of messianism in the activist mode, it is a mythological repertoire which excludes social forms of mythopraxis, the attempts to realize finalist prophecies. In this sense, apocalyptic convention is distinguishable from the activist messianism that characterized many movements of revolt and of state formation in the histories of Muslim peoples. I take it here to refer to the elaboration by the Sunnī clerical classes of conservative textual traditions of messianic prophecy (I am excluding here consideration of Shī'ites traditions, which are in many ways comparable, but crucially distinctive in other ways). This particular Sunnī apocalyptic tradition disengages Signs of the End, signs of the accomplishment and termination of human history, from political action and from the chronometric time of human history, and lodges them in a cumulative repertoire of past accomplishments and of accomplishments to come, which is altogether contemplative and devoid of practical implications for historical actors. In the register of the text, these prophecies complete and reconfirm the overall veracity of Muhammadan Tradition (*hadith*) by confirming its messianic prophecies. This prophetic textualism thus comes to constitute a logolatric form of devotion to the Prophet by the constant reconfirmation of the miracle of prophecy that Muhammad performed.

This impeccable prophetic veracity is doubly reconfirmed by the seamless and smooth transition between Signs past, present, and future, inscribed in eschatological Traditions attributed to Muhammad. This seamless transition takes place in a temporal medium which organizes the succession of apocalyptic Signs in a perspective of eternity, the eternity of Augustine's "motionless moment." This perspective of the divine mind, translated to inspired prophecy, is only very contingently related to the chronometer in which eschatological time, as will be presently shown, is taken for the medium of succession which extrudes particular events considered as Signs from the ordinary parameters that connect events to their mundane historical circumstances and transposes them to a register of succession adjacent but ontologically unrelated to the ordinary time of the chronometer. Such events as are considered Signs are endowed with a



qualitative accent whose connection to the chronometer is arhythmic in such a way that their being in time is discernible only by their succession. As we shall see, the ritual reconfirmation of Muhammadan veracity takes the form of pairing what Tradition designated as his apocalyptic statements, gnomic as well as explicit, with specific events that followed his life and that will come in the future, such that Muhammadan apocalyptic traditions act as *ex eventu* prophecies and realized eschatology, as well as eschatologically-weighted events to come. The rest of Muslim history, that which is excluded from this apocalyptic register, becomes the domain of a temporality whose main characteristic is that it is dissipative, inherently monotonous, a story of unending banality, carnage and greed, and captive to redundancy and inconsequence. This stands in contrast to the aggregatively qualitative structure of eschatological time which, while the succession of its Signs cannot be said to be processual, can still be said to be a register of progressive accomplishment and serial completion which acquires a coherence outside chronometric time.

These Signs therefore constitute a chronographic model in the process of completion by an agency external to their unfolding. In this chronography, time is by nature simultaneous, organized spatially rather than serially. Its moments do not imply a teleology, for history has in it what in human terms might be regarded simply as a terminus of completion, and does not have a goal. These moments in succession have no internal dynamic as might be expressed in the Aristotelian terms of an *entelecheia*, which might impel an immanent process that connects its successive moments. Their ultimate configuration is rather more akin to the completion of a mosaic than the termination of a series. The structure in question is geometrical rather than arithmetical.

I do not propose to take up here the analysis of salvation-historical temporality, which I have done elsewhere in the broader context of traditionalist discourse,<sup>5</sup> and which I have termed "chronophagous." Nor will I approach the matter of the overall typological history of prophecy from Adam to the Messiah (*al-Mahdī* or *al-Qā'im* to the Shi'a in their various denominations) of which the eschatological history of Islam is the final moment.<sup>6</sup> It is rather the conjunction in continuity of the history of the future with the history of Signs from the



Muslim past, as canonized in *ḥadīth*—the repertoire of Traditions, enunciative as well as active, actions as well as pronouncements, attributed to Muhammad—and elaborated within this body of Traditions, that will be the central concern of the following paragraphs. What I propose in the following paragraphs is a marginal gloss on the passage from Augustine quoted at the outset. I propose to do this by setting out some salient elements of the history of the future in a central Muslim tradition. But before I do so, a number of prefatory observations will be in order, observations concerning the temporal parameters of the traditional material in question, and concerning the genre-specific character of this material.

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With regard to chronological termini, and without wishing to enter into an elaborate discussion of periodization, I shall start with the first definitive repertoire of canonical eschatological *ḥadīth*, written by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād,<sup>7</sup> a Traditionalist and pietist who died in prison in ca. 843 during the persecution of the Caliph al-Muʿtasim, and whose collection of 1,056 narratives under scrutiny here, composed during the period AD 833–838,<sup>8</sup> was the first collection of *ḥadīth* in the mode of *musnad* (slightly predating the *musnad* of his younger contemporary Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal,<sup>9</sup> and the later, canonical and comprehensive *ḥadīth* collections of Muslim, Bukhārī, Ibn Māja, Abū Dāwūd, and Tirmidhī).<sup>10</sup> I do so despite the controversial standing and skeptical assessment of this collection and of its author, which did not prevent it from being most extensively and consistently used. I will end with the work of al-Barzanjī, whose work was completed in 1665.<sup>11</sup> A sectoral continuity may be ascribed to this stretch of some eight centuries, that is to say, a continuity of Tradition, that of a finite textual repertoire which underwent a process of restatement, elaboration, expurgation, criticism, commentary, and systematization. All of these operations upon this body of eschatological *ḥadīth* are explicit in the work of al-Barzanjī who, like scholars of *ḥadīth* in the intervening period to whom occasional reference will be made, used the collection of Nuʿaym as a base, as for instance the Andalusian Traditionalist, jurist, and Ko-



ranic exegete ‘Abd Allah b. Muḥammad al-Qurtubī (d. 1272), author of an important intermediate treatise on eschatology.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the edition of Nu‘aym at hand is based on a manuscript copy held in London and completed in Damascus in 1306-1307, during a period which witnessed a heightened interest in ḥadīth under the Ayyubids and the Mamluks between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, first in Damascus (exemplified by Ibn Kathīr—d. 1373) and later in Cairo (exemplified by Ibn Ḥajar—d. 1449), and which witnessed among other things the operation of a theologically and pietistically led historical criticism of certain sections of ḥadīth, designed to remove from it matters thought to be morally unacceptable and in consequence, according to Traditionist thinking, improbable, as well as the unacceptably marvelous and miraculous, and designed to confine miraculous powers exclusively to the Prophet, to some selected historical and prophetic personalities, and of course to the Divinity.

In other words, we have here the continuity of a repertoire of Tradition which traverses other orders of historical reality, cutting across the classical and medieval periods of Muslim history, with their distinctive and internally diverse modes of political organization, social formations, sociologies of knowledge sacred and profane, and mentalities, a sectoral textual continuity that belongs rather to the time of the canon, the time of textual and referential authority within the bodies of Muslim religious discourse. This is a continuity in many ways comparable to certain sectoral continuities identified by Jacques Le Goff in his “long moyen âge.”<sup>13</sup>

Nu‘aym was active at the crucial time during which a strong sense existed among certain circles that foundations were being definitively laid, and during which in consequence the strong sense was conveyed that this classical repertoire of religious texts was being completed in detail now that its foundations had been incontrovertibly established and were being inventoried: these comprised of the definitive canonical collections of ḥadīth in the second half of the ninth century and, somewhat later, by the setting of the canonical readings of the Qur’ān into its henceforth seven admissible phonetic redactions, by the use of textual techniques applied to the assimilation and organization of materials truly or putatively emanating from the proto- and palaeo-Is-



lamic period, the period which comprised of roughly the first century and a half of Muslim history.

For his part, al-Barzanjī thrived in the relative timelessness and sense of closure of what we might designate as the late medieval period of this sector of religious tradition, a sense of closure which also discerned, over the smooth face of certainty and confidence, a series of past and present disturbances of an antinomian nature that expressed themselves eschatologically, and which therefore needed to be accounted for in a register of anti-history—true and consequential history being constituted of those events qualified as eschatological Signs. This anti-history has a sense contrary to the history of salvation, one which is paradoxical and unexplained as to its sheer existence, and which finds none but an implicit explanation: that mundane history is inevitably one of decline, and that prophecy and its repetition across human history is a history of elevating re-enactment, protological reassertion, and the return of things to their original order, with the debris of this process being eventually relegated to hell.<sup>14</sup> To my knowledge, there is no comprehensive and systematic apocalyptic treatise in the central lands of Islam posterior to that of al-Barzanjī, although eschatological moods, movements, and writings of a more restricted scope do come into evidence, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and at the close of the twentieth, in addition to a certain number of apologetic writings imbued with a decided sense of fatigue, and, perhaps, irrelevance.

Moreover, both authors led itinerant lives, Nu'aym having been born in Marw (in today's Afghanistan), studied ḥadīth and worked in the juridical systems of Iraq, Arabia, and Egypt, and died in Baghdad during the persecution that pitted caliphal practice and dogma against the then emerging universalist sunna of the Prophet in which we find the glimmerings of what was later to crystallize as Sunnism. As for al-Barzanjī, he was born in a small village in northern Mesopotamia, and studied in Baghdad, Hamadhān, Damascus, Constantinople, and Cairo, and died in Medina, where he composed his eschatological treatise, ending his days in the proximity of the Prophet's tomb, as befitted his pietistic temper and traditionalist's vocation. Both had a Muslim ecumenical vocation conceived beyond space and beyond time, a vocation to which both space and time were subordinate to the space of



canon and its atopian timelessness. The specific structures of society, polity, mentality, production of knowledge, and historical circumstance that made for the adoption of this attitude by the authors to which it applies are beyond the scope of this study.

As for genre-specific matters, we must distinguish the writings in question from the *Malāʿim*, prophecies of an historical and political character concerning the fate of specific reigns and of dynasties. These tend to be oracular in their enunciative mode and, with time, increasingly esoteric and onomantic, given to the deployment of gematric and astrological techniques, and often enmeshed with Sufi movements and Sufi-inspired revolts<sup>15</sup> but not confined to these, as there are similar texts authored by or attributed to, among others, the philosophers al-Kindī and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna).<sup>16</sup> This genre was often implicitly associated with imminent apocalyptic expectations, including works written and movements witnessed in the Ottoman Empire, such as the Jewish messianism of Sabbatai Sevi, al-Barzanjī's contemporary,<sup>17</sup> a movement which inspired alarm among some Muslim circles, and interpreted by Muslim authorities as one involving the illusion that the Dajjāl, the Antichrist, had appeared. For Sabbataians, the appearance of Sabbatai and his announcement of his messianic character betokened the reversion of universal kingship to the Israelites, and resulted in an energetic response by Ottoman authorities.<sup>18</sup> This took place at a time, of course, when Protestant Europe itself was awash with eschatological imaginings (the connection between the two is a matter of perpetual controversy), not to speak of the eschatological mobilization that accompanied the genesis, consolidation, and institution of the Safavids of Iran, neighbors and enemies of the Ottomans.<sup>19</sup>

Be that as it may, the literary genre under discussion contains a wide variety of narrative modes and thematic components, and cannot admit a restrictive definition or of a "master paradigm."<sup>20</sup> The genre—here defined thematically as apocalyptic and eschatology—does take ḥadīth narratives as its primary materials, but these themselves are of various natures with regard to content and to narrative mode, and range in their method of presentation from the sheer tabulation of discrete and sometimes inconsistent narrative elements with few composite accounts, as generally but not exclusively in Nuʿaym, to



more elaborate commentary, topical classification, and finally, with al-Barzanjī, to systematic and sequential arrangement along the axis of time, in such a way that this sequence parallels that of the unfolding of past and future history. In this sense, the history of the future and the history of realized, proleptic eschatology in the past operates according to the conventions of historical writing based on the techniques of ḥadīth criticism, with the difference that, instead of using a strict and punctilious chronometric arrangement of events, as in the great analistic history of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), the arrangement of events takes the form of a seriality and relative chronology to which the precise measures of the chronometer is incidental.

Thus we see in the trajectory of Muslim apocalyptic literature from Nu'aym to al-Barzanjī a movement towards greater systematization, towards the imposition of increasingly greater degrees of consistency and sequentiality, by the management of inconsistency and internal incongruity, towards the eventual production of all-encompassing narratives, first at the hand of Ibn Kathīr as a supplement to his universal history entitled *The Beginning and the End*, whose supplement is entitled *The End of the Beginning and the End* (comprising apocalypticism and eschatology),<sup>21</sup> and later at the hand of Barzanjī. All in all, and as indicated above, the purpose of the genre was the performance of a pietist and quietist logolatric ritual of veneration for the Prophet. Ibn Kathīr quite plainly stated that his history of the future was designed to supplement, with the continuous reconfirmation of prophecy, his earlier consideration, in the section of his universal history where the Muhammadan biography is treated, of the Prophet's miracles,<sup>22</sup>—including foretelling the future—which, in the Muslim conception, act as the tokens, proofs, and divine confirmations of his prophetic status. Nu'aym opened his work with a ḥadīth concerning Muhammad's afternoon speech in which he detailed all that was to come<sup>23</sup> and, in a different register, al-Ṭabarī reaffirmed the historically omniscient capacities of Muhammad.<sup>24</sup> This is one sense in which this genre may be regarded as a scholarly and pietist convention rather than as a mode of activist mobilization.

Yet the thematic elements that came to compose this genre from its very inception were not all born of the imagination, but integrated



into the register of proleptic eschatology factual and other elements that had once pertained to apocalyptic movements, most particularly but not exclusively elements from the palaeo-Islamic and early Islamic periods, that is, from the first century-and-a-half of Muslim history, which witnessed civil wars often fought under the signature of messianic restorations of the Muhammadan order (later transmuted into the register of the future, as eschatological expectations<sup>25</sup>), and messianic revolts, no less than the messianic impulses often seen to have been associated with Muhammad himself and with the coming of the 'Abbasids and the complex reign of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn.<sup>26</sup> These ran parallel to the steady contemporary production of Christian and Manichaean apocalypses, and were clearly related to the eventual reassertion of Zoroastrian eschatological lore that took final shape in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>27</sup>

This material would include above all—here as in apocalyptic convention—divinely-inspired pronouncements, in addition to sibylline statements, oracular visions, stenographic allusions, the use of symbols and allegories, heavily symbolized and dilated indications of time-scales, allusive and symbolic keys to the geographic locations of events to come, motifemic, legendary, and mythological elements, mirabilia, protological statements detailing elements from the typological history of prophecy and eschatology from Adam to the Mahdī, and references to layers of belief, including apocalyptic lore, that were later to be discarded with the crystallization of classical Muslim traditions—and indeed other features of early narratives which help in their dating. Examples of the last mentioned element that might be cited are the reference to Jerusalem as 'Īliyā—Aelea—in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus during the forthcoming time of the Mahdī,<sup>28</sup> and the reference to a fifth Heraclid during whose reign in Constantinople eschatological battles signaling the end of the world will take place.<sup>29</sup> All these elements were, in the context of the genre under consideration, domesticated and contained for the purposes of the genre as discussed above.<sup>30</sup>

Some of these elements were combined in the works under consideration in the reproduction of integral texts of particular apocalypses, as they are properly called,<sup>31</sup> which are thematically and mythologically



congruent with Late Antique apocalyptic texts Pagan and Christian, most notably the crucially important Apocalypse of the Pseudo-Methodius,<sup>32</sup> despite the extreme rarity of references to Biblical apocalyptic personalities in the Qur'ān.<sup>33</sup> This is a comparison which cannot, unfortunately, be undertaken in the present compass, although specific and more general points of comparability will be evident in what follows. It is perhaps noteworthy that the scheme of four world-empires which was an important element within these antecedent traditions is not evident in Muslim apocalyptic writing, though it does appear in secular Muslim historical writing. Thus profound mythological and motifemic continuities between Muslim apocalyptic ḥadīth and the Late Antique heritage can be signaled, and their domestication can also help us in determining the point at which, in this particular sector, the history of Islam became disengaged from that of late Antiquity and instituted a register of continuity all of its own, despite references in classical and medieval Muslim material to a variety of pseudepigraphic pre-Islamic material under the generic name of *The Book of Daniel*.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, I should like to stress that, in speaking of domestication by means of ejecting any notion of imminence to the apocalypse, thereby transforming its activist elements into a textualist pietism for the Muslim priestly elite in societies severely albeit not rigidly stratified, I do not wish to imply in any definitive way that such exclusion of imminence is somehow necessarily allied to defensive postures in times of crisis, however a crisis may be defined. Neither do I imply correlatively that imminence is asserted by the disenfranchised, although this was indeed sometimes the case. I should rather like to affirm that not all the purposes of the apocalyptic genre are apocalyptic. As some recent detailed historical research on apocalypticism has shown, and contrary to certain pietistic, sentimentalist, or impressionistic assertions to the contrary,<sup>35</sup> there is no necessary correlation between misery, crisis, and apocalypse, and no specific social or historical setting for the emergence of the genre, not least for the point being made *a contrario*, that seemingly minor dislocations have sometimes provoked disproportionate responses, and that major conflagrations did not provoke apocalyptic responses when such were available.<sup>36</sup> Nu'aym, for one, was a quietist who stressed pious caution



during calamitous times, in keeping with his milieu, very much unlike the eschatological milieus and sentiments that animated certain peasant revolts of his time.<sup>37</sup>

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It is now time to take a closer look at the systematization of Muslim apocalypticism: the process that witnessed the construction of a sequential and connected narrative of the history of past and present, in such a way that the former is inscribed in the register of the latter, bereft of its specific historicity, of its *Vergangenheit*, and relegated to the status of prophecy already accomplished, of *vaticinium ex eventu*. This accounts for the past as past in the future anterior only, being a future prophetically foretold at the time of the inception of prophecy, a future following its pronouncement or its writing, by Muhammad, by Nu'aym or by al-Barzanjī, and indeed already inscribed by the first demiurgical act of God Himself, when He commanded the Pen to inscribe the course of His creation onto the Tablet which stands eternally at the foot of His Throne.<sup>38</sup> The Tablet, the register of the divine command, is the timeless locus of the achronic continuum which combines together the projection and retrojection of times past and future, which are so separated into past and future and made chronometric only to mundane human experience, but not to the perspective of eternity—for as al-Barzanjī tells us, the world was not created for perpetuity, but is merely a moment or a station (*manzil min manāzil*) of the End.<sup>39</sup> Both past and future therefore exist together in the medium of a duration indeterminate as to its chronological measure and as to the rhythms and divisions of historical becoming, forming together part of what the Arabic lexicon knows and accounts for as *al-dahr*, *sheer duration*<sup>40</sup>—a conception reminiscent of many other places and times, and characteristic of monotheism, most eloquently and limpidly expressed by St. Augustine, who proposed that the unchangeable mind of God embraced the innumerable possibilities of history without needing to pass them in sequence before His mind.<sup>41</sup>

The past in the mode of *vaticinium ex eventu* is a past-future, in that its sense is a sense to come expressed in the future tense, and a fu-



ture already realized; together past and future constitute the predetermined past of the End and the predetermined future of the Beginning. What remained at the time of writing—by Nu'aym or al-Barzanjī—is the rest of a future whose sum-total, whose entire sequence, belongs to a past of the End which is past only virtually, merely in terms of the human experience of time, an experience which is entirely distinct from the time of divinity pronounced by the Prophet as a before and as an after: the history of prophecy preceding him, and the long eschatological period intervening between him and the End.

Al-Barzanjī continues the two registers of prophesied past accomplished and prophesied future to be accomplished, in a form rendered all the more systematic by the passage of ten centuries replete with Signs of the End. The chronometric measure of this period was irrelevant. Nu'aym at the beginning of our story had assembled assorted Traditions ascribed to the Prophet concerning the timing of the End without much consequence, most of these timings having lapsed by his own lifetime, and arising out of a variety of apocalypses and eschatological expectations: 100 years, 167 years and 31 days, 125 years, the typological figure of 300 years congruent with the time-span of the Israelites, and others.<sup>42</sup> The mainstream of Sunnism was particularly resistant to this kind of specification, and indeed the specification of the overall duration of the world, which had over many centuries been associated with astrological and numerological apocalypses characteristic of certain insurrectionary movements and Sufi mystagogues. Sunnism—for all its internal variety—generally resorted to ascribing such specifications to People of the Book,<sup>43</sup> and to a variety of interpretive procedures made all the more available by other Traditions in which time appears distorted as to its measure by dilation and contraction. The days of the Dajjāl for instance, are said to be forty: a day measuring a year, a day measuring less, yet another measuring a month and yet another measuring less, and so on until there come days that “pass as does fire in a stack of hay,” with a man entering the gate of the city at sunrise and exiting another gate at sunset,<sup>44</sup> or indeed a day as a year, another as a month, yet another as a week, and the rest passing as ordinary days, otherwise forty days or forty months or forty years.<sup>45</sup>



In all, the end is determined not so much by a chronometric measure, but by the passing of Signs that are prophesied to occur in proper sequence. This sense of abidance and of expectation dominated the genre all the way until the time of al-Barzanjī, who chose the figure of two centuries which, among others, had been pronounced by the Prophet as the life-span of his (Muslim) people, and speculated that this admits interpretation as 200 years after the passing of the first Muslim millennium. He consequently made the practically irrelevant prediction that the terminus would not exceed the AH 1200, corresponding to AD 1785,<sup>46</sup> at a respectable and speculative remove from his own time, a period which was to include the passing of the political, natural, and cosmic conflagrations and subversions of order that were merely to complete eschatological Signs already accomplished.

The Signs to come occasionally needed to be made to conform with each other chronologically in order to produce a consistent narrative. Thus of the forty or twenty-four or nineteen or seven years allocated for the reign of the Mahdī, these might be considered from different beginnings pertaining to this eschatological figure: seven years from the beginning of his universal world dominion, nineteen years from the time he kills al-Sufyānī (a figure akin in some respects to the Dajjāl, but of only local and no universal significance), twenty-four years following his exit from Syria, and forty years from the start of his dominion overall.<sup>47</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that this and similar procedures, as are to be found in al-Barzanjī and elsewhere, are applied as part of a protocol of trimming, a hypertrophy of officious application to material indubitably established, rather than with a mind to any form of innovation or the development of the material at hand. For, crucially, what was to be established, even though this establishment was never to be impeccable due to the variegated nature of the material at hand, was not a chronology, as we have seen, but rather a chronography, a certain order of succession in which Signs past and future are not in essence to be distinguished, their distinction being purely phenomenological, and it is to these that I will now turn.

It transpires from what has been said that history, as the succession of events experienced by mankind, is complete *ab initio*, and that its closure is expressed in the continuum between eschatological prophe-



cy already realized and the remains of this realization, bidding their human time and expectation, in such a way that the past is subsumable in the apocalyptic future and forms part of its register. Al-Barzanjī was well-aware of this, and expressed it in the manner in which he organized his treatise into three sections corresponding to the chronographic status of apocalyptic Signs in them: Signs past, Signs intermediate and continuing, and Signs to come.

It is a tribute to al-Barzanjī's complete disassociation from any notion of historicity that virtually the entire history of Islam up to his own time is comprehended in the Signs of the first moment indicated, that of time already run its predetermined course. Seemingly mundane events—and a volume of post-classical events unusual for the genre—are accentuated beyond the requirements of events in mundane time, and apprehended as wonders read as Signs and frequently, albeit not always, attached to interpretations of prophetic pronouncements. The whole of Muslim history is a process of winding down towards the End, and is in the salvation historical and pietistic modes regarded as the action of the essentially degenerative and regressive nature of all time following prophecy. In this process, al-Barzanjī, like other authors, incorporated into the *ex eventu* register materials posterior to those present in the canonical texts, just as the canonical authors had incorporated materials as yet un-canonized and canonized in the process.

Thus the sequential register of these signs commences with the death of the Prophet, followed by the significant events of palaeo-islamic and early Muslim history: the murder of 'Umar and 'Uthmān, the Battles of the Camel and of Siffīn, the reign of Yazīd and the death of al-Ḥusayn, the Second Civil War, and various misdeeds of the Umayyads who, it must be said, and in keeping with Sunni judgments upon history, are not condemned wholesale, but are regarded to have been errant.<sup>48</sup> Not distinguishing between long and short events, al-Barzanjī then pronounces the mundane course of history as a bundle of Signs: the coming of the 'Abbaud dynasty, the death of Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and of Mūsā al-Kāzim, the imprisonment of Ja'far al-Sādiq, the temporary triumph of Mu'tazilist theology under al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'tasim, the coming of the Fāṭimid state, the Qarmatī movement, and the Mongols<sup>49</sup>—the last being, in appear-



ance, corresponding to the way in which the Prophet, in a famous ḥadīth, described the Turks, as having faces “akin to moulded shields (*ka’l mijān al-muṭarraqa*).”<sup>50</sup> The author’s reference to unspecified evil in Shiraz may well be intended as a reference to the contemporary Safavids, and appears to be the only contemporary reference he made.<sup>51</sup>

In a parallel register, a number of sundry Signs are cited, most importantly the appearance of prototypes of the Dajjāl: Muhammad’s erstwhile Arabian competitors in prophecy, Masaylima b. Ḥabīb and al-Aswad al-‘Ansī, in addition to insurrectionary apocalyptic figures such as Yaḥyā b. Zikrawayh, as well as others in Iraq, Persia, and the Maghreb.<sup>52</sup> His register also includes the waning of Arab dominion with the decline and eventual disappearance of the ‘Abbasids,<sup>53</sup> the interruptions of pilgrimage routes to Mecca at several points in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Hijra,<sup>54</sup> as well as Signs of positive value, most notably the three-fold conquest of Jerusalem under ‘Umar, Saladin, and Saladin’s grandson.<sup>55</sup>

Al-Barzanjī does not omit cosmic, marvelous, and meteorological Signs, all part of the gnomic and visionary eschatological lore attributed to the Prophet. He therefore offers his reader what may be regarded as a geological history of Muslim lands, detailing earthquakes, a history of extraordinary climatic phenomena like storms, hail storms, and sand storms, followed by a history of droughts, heat waves, and the consequent famine and inflationary phenomena,<sup>56</sup> as well as the appearance of comets and pestilence.<sup>57</sup> He also mentions extraordinary meteorological phenomena and miraculous phenomena that reinforced the resonant moment and the eschatological significance of certain Signs he cited, such as eclipses, floods, and transmogrifications.<sup>58</sup>

It might safely be assumed that the rest of past history was relegated by al-Barzanjī to the register of dissipative time, an absurd time without consequence for the chronography of eschatology already sketched. Yet this same dissipative time, which crosses over into the moment of intermediate Signs that was still to be beheld during the author’s time, is laden with manifestations of evil that underline the degenerative effect of time altogether and which lead, in an inexorable fashion, to the End. Thus these Signs of the intermediate moment are said to be in a process of accentuation until they reach consummation



with the End<sup>59</sup>: the exercise of public authority by the foolish and the base, the marginalization of the honest, hypocritical piety, the spread of the habit of drinking alcoholic beverages, the increasing incidence of homosexuality, disobedience of parents, rule of husbands by wives, disrespect for learning, anisogamous marriages, belief in astrology, sodomisation of women, denial of predestination, ornamenting mosques as if they were churches, return to royalist habits and institutes and the wearing of crowns, the illumination of Qur'ānic manuscripts,<sup>60</sup> the spectacle of women on horseback, rhymed with dubious wit as "*rukūb dhawāt al-furūj al-surūj*"<sup>61</sup>—antinomian women were ever present as signs of the End.<sup>62</sup> In all, we have here the common pietistic discourse on *fasād al-zamān*,<sup>63</sup> corruption of the present time. It contains the familiar polemic against the inversion of order and the restatement of aversion to social life as actually experienced in the fullness of its transformations.

The elements of this polemic are here fully recuperated into the apocalyptic register,<sup>64</sup> where they are regarded as a progressively aggravating condition, congenital to time as a degenerative and dissipative medium. This gradual but manifest degeneration is expected to be consummated with the trials, tribulations, and calamities that will follow and that will presage the End, for this degenerative passage to the End is a steady state, albeit one weighted and inflected towards a self-evident End, with no major Signs expected except for those which are associated with the coming of the Mahdī. His appearance will be followed by a number of battles against sundry figures, culminating in their prototype, al-Dajjāl, who will be fought in alliance with Jesus.<sup>65</sup> The latter's *parousia* will be a descent upon the white eastern minaret of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, when he appears as a decidedly martial figure.<sup>66</sup> Then follow the world-historical battles which will lead to the conquests of Constantinople and of Rome, the cleansing of the world and the restoration of the Adamic order, the depredations of Gog and Magog and their eventual destruction, calamitous earth-falls, the Fire of Aden to be seen from all corners of the earth, the rise of the sun from the west, the appearance of the Beast (*al-dābba*), the blowing of the Trumpet, the death of the rest of humanity as of all the angels by command of God, followed by the Resurrection (*al-qiyāma*,



*al-ba'th wa'l-nushūr*), the apportioning of salvation and damnation, and finally the habitation forever of paradise (*al-janna*) and of hell (*al-jahīm*, or simply: Fire, *al-nār*).<sup>67</sup>

The account by al-Barzanjī of the Mahdī<sup>68</sup> follows earlier accounts,<sup>69</sup> but lends them a greater degree of cogency, and resolves the prior uncertainty over the chronographic relationship between the Mahdī and Jesus, and indeed the question of their possible identity, by asserting that the former appears first.<sup>70</sup> The mahdist appearance itself is presaged by preparatory signs: the almost simultaneous and repeated eclipses of the sun and the moon, the frequent appearance of comets, the splitting of the Euphrates and the emergence from it of a mountain of gold.

The Mahdī is a typological figure for prophecy and with accounts of him (as of his main foe, the Dajjāl) we move from sparse accounts of folktales to detailed description of myth. The Mahdī will have a straight nose and black eyes, with a luminous spot on his right cheek; he will be thickly bearded, distinguished by the heaviness of his tongue, and will be aged forty, like a mature Israelite. He will be the Prophet's namesake, named Muhammad b. 'Abd Allāh, born of the line of Fāṭima,<sup>71</sup> with the somatic sign of prophecy between his shoulders, wearing the Prophet's mantle and carrying his sword and his standard. He will be given an acclamation of allegiance (*bay'a*), attended by 315 Syrians (the number of men commanded by Muhammad at the battle of Badr) like the Prophet and Caliphs after him, in Mecca between al-Rukn and al-Maqām on the hallowed night of al-qadr. He will make Jerusalem his seat of government, will rule the whole world according to the world-historical and model of universal royalty—an important apocalyptic motif overall<sup>72</sup>—as had Alexander and Solomon before him, returning life to its original and pristine state of normalcy, removing adultery, pestilence, drinking, and usury, providing for conditions that would allow a sheep safely to keep the company of a wolf, and such as children may safely play with serpents and scorpions.

Yet this Cogcaienesque idyll will be disturbed. The Sufyānī will appear and enter Damascus with 360 horsemen, and will be aided by 30,000 Kalbites, as will other adversaries in Egypt and the Mesopotamia and the Maghreb, all of whom are finally defeated in wars that in-



volve the Romans (the Byzantines), and end with the slaying of the Sufyānī in Jerusalem after a period of injustice and iniquity, during which adultery will be committed even on the minbars of mosques. The Mahdī's triumph will be followed by wars with the Romans, in which the archangels Gabriel and Michael come to his aid, each of them commanding 200,000 angels, as they had previously aided Muhammad at the battle of Badr. With the defeat of the Romans after a spectacular betrayal, Constantinople will be taken by the Mahdī's armies, followed by the conquest of Rome, and the retrieval of ur-prophetic emblems: the Ark of the Covenant (in one version, this is extracted from Antioch), the cloak of Adam, the minbar of Solomon, and the remnants of the Manna sent the Israelites by God near Mount Sinai, the original Torah revealed to Moses, and the original Gospel revealed to Jesus<sup>73</sup>—both since their revelation subjected to *tahrīf*, adulteration, according to the standard Muslim view of the history of religions.

Next emerges al-Dajjāl,<sup>74</sup> the Antichrist per se. Noah and all other prophets before and after him had adverted their people of his coming,<sup>75</sup> and he had been sighted, according to sailors in the Indian Ocean, chained to a rock,<sup>76</sup> like Prometheus, awaiting his appointed time. He is one-eyed, and his legs are arched. He starts his career of forty years (with different computations of the figure “forty”) three years after the fall of Constantinople, with a dissimulating reign of equity and religious rectitude, performing all manner of miracles to mystify and seduce his followers, such as causing the sun to stop in its path, causing the sky to rain and the earth to bloom, showing images of heaven and hell, and bringing the dead back to life. He then ravages the earth—except for the two holiest cities of Mecca, to which Muslims everywhere direct their prayer prostrations, and Medina, where the Prophet Muhammad is buried—aided and abetted with complement of 70,000 Jews from Isfahan, women, and assorted evil-doers, miscreants, and malcontents, while Jesus descends onto the white minaret at the Great Mosque in Damascus<sup>77</sup>, breaks the cross, kills all pigs, marries, leads the faithful in prayer, and commands them to engage and destroy the al-Dajjāl and his hordes at Lydda in battles in which he appears endowed with the power to cause his adversaries' swords to melt, as salt does in water or metal in a forge, by the sheer



projection of his gaze.<sup>78</sup> He abolished *dhimma*, converts the world to the true religion of Islam, which, after all, is in the register of typology, his true religion, being the primeval religion of all prophets, one which therefore consummates and truly fulfils his prophet-hood—the history of prophecy in Muslim salvation history (and I speak here of *risāla*, apostolic prophecy, confined to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, as distinct from *nubuwwa*, merely visionary prophecy, which the four prophets mentioned share with many others) is a movement of *Aufhebung*, in which later prophecies, and last of all the prophecy of Muhammad, confirms, fulfils, augments, consummates, and transcends earlier ones, but does not ordinarily deny them in their graduated and cumulative succession, except when the glimmerings of the End betoken the last transcendence of all things past.

Be that as it may, the time of Jesus is described in terms similar to those used for describing the mahdist idyll, with the earth reverting to the way it was “at the beginning”<sup>79</sup> or at the time of Adam,<sup>80</sup> though his personal appearance is different to that of the Mahdī, being red-haired and broad-chested, and the relationship between the two appears uncertain and very confused in its details. They are assumed to work in concert, although some Traditions report that the Mahdī will already be dead by the time al-Dajjāl appears. He will remain for seven or nineteen or forty years of uncertain chronometric value after the defeat of the al-Dajjāl, and upon his death will be interred in the Prophet’s burial chamber.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, the Mahdī is assumed to have died, and the earth seems to be no longer in need of Kingship,<sup>82</sup> just as Kingship appears to Byzantine apocalypses to be no longer necessary once the Last Emperor turns over his crown to Jesus at Golgotha.

For the rest of what remains of the world, a succession of chaotic Signs will still be in waiting.<sup>83</sup> The gate of Alexander breaks and the Gog and Magog are unleashed upon the world. A marginal and grotesque form of humanity approaching monstrosity, these people, of Turkic stock, are described according to the conventional mirabilia in a manner very much akin to the Blemmiae, and were the subject of much ethnological attention.<sup>84</sup> They will destroy all before them, and drink the river Euphrates dry, before they are destroyed by a foul wind sent by God. Their destruction is followed by geological upheavals and



by the appearance of the fearsome preternatural Beast of the Apocalypse, *al-dābba*,<sup>85</sup> a hybrid of many animal forms which pursues what remains of humanity and, reading their hearts, piercingly pronounces them believers or unbelievers. This will be the last terrestrial Sign of the End,<sup>86</sup> for what follows are all extra-terrestrial occurrences, most notably the rise of the sun from the west, after which occurrence no repentance will any longer be accepted by God.<sup>87</sup> All that then remains is for God to cause the death of all remaining humanity after the call of the Archangel Israfil's trumpet,<sup>88</sup> followed by that of the angels and by the Resurrection and the final reckoning.<sup>89</sup>

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Al-Barzanjī speaks of the fall of Constantinople as an event still to come, describing it in the terms familiar to medieval Arab geography as a city called Būzantiya in "Romish" (Greek: *al-Rumiyya*), with a long rectangular cathedral, city walls twenty-one yards high, and a statue of Constantine with a golden orb in his hand.<sup>90</sup> Yet what had been Constantinople is the city in which he had spent time. Still, its fall as he knew of it had not followed the appearance of the Mahdī, for Mehmet the Conqueror was clearly no Mahdī to him. The fall of Constantinople to a Muslim power had not occurred according to the manner prophesied, and it was no longer, in his time, ruled by the Romans, although the Ottoman Sultans had *kaiser-i Rum* (Caesar of the Romans) to a regnal title. Its fall therefore, in the register of sacred chronography, could not be presumed to have taken place except to the virtual and mundane perception of humans, just like the messianic character of Barzanjī's contemporary Ottoman "compatriot" Sabbatai Zvi who had, by his eventual conversion in Istanbul to Islam, proven himself to be a false Messiah.

It would not be just to say that there had been a tension between visionary and temporal realities, a tension which would have prompted our author to attempt yet another apologetic strategy to close the gap between predictions and happenings, between events foretold and events past and present. While the event may require interpretation in order to fit in the chronography of prediction, it cannot contradict



prophecy, most particularly in an order which is not equivalent to that of mundane events, despite the incorporation of the sequence of these events within it. In such incorporation, the event loses its mundane quality and is incorporated into an order of events which is wholly distinctive, belonging to a distinctive—but chronometrically parallel—order of sequence whose constituent elements (the events) are made to belong by being transposed from time dissipative to time aggregative and salvational, inscribed in a different order, that of *al-dahr*.

To the pietistic imagination, the degenerative, eggressive distance between the order of perfection—the perfection of radically imperfect reality as highlighted by prophecy and authenticated by correspondence between reality and prophecy—and the imperfect order of dissipative time, amounts quite simply to an ontological distinction, indeed disjunction, between truth and falsity, reality and appearance, two orders between which correspondence is impossible. Istanbul belongs to dissipative time, Constantinople-Büzantia to an atypical and atemporal salvational time, and the former cannot be seen to belie the latter, for temporal and mundane relations cannot be seen to fetter or disturb the order of Signs. The ontological load of the event is conferred by the *vaticinium*, which confers upon it the status of Sign, in a disjunctive relation to the mundane order of events in the medium of which it arose.

The seamlessness of the transition between past and future Signs arises precisely out of this disjunctive detachment of mundanity, from this radical transposition to the register of *al-dahr*. Whereas historical past and historical future are connected by a movement from the one to the other, the perspective of quietist eschatology rests on the elision of movement and posits instead a translation bereft of a medium in which such a movement might take place. Events past and future are here components in a topological arrangement of elements that is still to find completion, and the future is to the present as it is to the past, figuring as the completion of requisite parts whose connection is one of mapping, not of kinesis.

It is perhaps unsurprising in this perspective that the absence of a socially relevant notion of imminence to the Signs of the future yields, by the same token, to the absence of socially relevant perceptions of events past that might not be regarded as Signs. Fatalist eschatology and escha-



tology as conventional are inseparable: both devolve the sense and purpose of eschatology from the world-historical scheme of beginning, decline, and re-enactment and reversion to origins to the piety of the individual, ponderously awaiting the advent of an uncertain moment, and subsuming apocalypse within the bounds of traditionalist convention. Both arise from the corporatist convention of a sodality (the *'ulamā*) that from around the thirteenth century, in the central lands of Islam, crystallized institutionally and declared its moral and monocratic guardianship of the laity in alliance with and as functionaries of a sultanate across many centuries of a long medieval Muslim period.<sup>91</sup>

Both lodge themselves within the atemporal time of the canon which, in this particular Sunni sultanate inflection, detaches itself deliberately from more richly textured and more finely articulated conceptions of history available:<sup>92</sup> a time whose movement is anticipated and assimilated by the immeasurability *al-dahr*, by the simultaneity of divine purposes and of the divine perception of history. There is indeed no better guide to this divine ratio than St. Augustine:

It is not that there is any difference in God's knowledge according as it is produced by things not yet in existence, by things now or by things that are no more. Unlike us, He does not look ahead to the future, see the present before him, and look back to the past. Rather he sees events in another way, far and profoundly different from any experience that is familiar to our minds. For he does not variably turn his attention from one thing to another. . . . Hence all events in time, events that will be and are not yet and those that are now, being present, and those that have passed and are no more, all of them are apprehended by him in a motionless and everlasting present moment. . . . Nor does it make any difference whether he looks at them from present, past or future, since his knowledge, unlike ours, of the three kinds of time, present, past and future, does not change as time changes.

He continues, speaking for the apocalyptic perspective in general, including that of al-Barzanjī: "Neither does [God's] attention stray from one subject to another . . . for he knows events in time without any temporal acts of knowing of his own."<sup>93</sup>



## Notes

- 1 I am grateful for comments from the participants at the workshop on "History's Visions of the Future," held at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, June 8–9, 2001, and another, on "Temporalities in Context," held at the Central European University, Budapest, November 28–29, 2003. Earlier versions of this chapter were published as Aziz Al-Azmeh, "God's Chronography and Dissipative Time: Vaticanum ex Eventu in Classical and Medieval Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition," *The Medieval History Journal* 7, no. 2 (2004): 199–225; and Al-Azmeh, *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007).
- 2 For further treatments, see Al-Azmeh, "Civilization, Concept of," in *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001); and Al-Azmeh, "Genealogie, Typologie und Organismus," in *Kontinuität und Wandel. Geschichtsbilder in verschiedenen Fächern und Kulturen*, ed. E. Schulz and W. Sonne (Zurich: Hochschulverlag AG, 1999), 453–87.
- 3 For example, see Al-Azmeh, "Geschichte, Kultur und die Suche nach dem Organischen." In J. Rüsen, M. Gottlob, and A. Mittag, eds., *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen: Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), vol. 4, 74–114; and the Michel Foucault, introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).
- 4 Augustine, *De civitate dei*, trans. D. S. Wiesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 11:21, 413.
- 5 Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse," in *Religion and Practical Reason*, ed. F. E. Reynolds and D. Tracy (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 163–211, reprinted in *The Times of History*, ch. 5.
- 6 Al-Azmeh, *al-Kitāba al-tārikhiyya wa'l-ma'rifa al-tārikhiyya* [Historical writing and historical knowledge] (Beirut, 1995), chap. 3; and Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship* (London: Tauris, 1997), 41 ff., 190 ff. Additionally, see Al-Azmeh, "Geschichte, Kultur," 74–114; and G. Fowden, "Eusebius and Ibn Ishaq" (unpublished mimeograph, n.d.); S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- 7 See J. Aguadé, *Messianismus zur Zeit der frühen Abbasiden: Das Kitāb al-fitan des Nu'aim Ibn Hammād* (Doctoral dissertation, Eberhard-Karls University of Tübingen, 1979), 8 ff.
- 8 Ibid., 43–44.
- 9 On the distinctive positions of Nu'aim and of Ibn Hanbal during this persecution, see *ibid.*, 35 ff.
- 10 Nu'aim b. Hammād, *al-Fitan* [The book of calamities], ed. M. al-Shūrā (Beirut, 1997).
- 11 Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Rasūl al-Barzanji, *ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Barzanji, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, [Book rendering the signs of the hour], ed. M. B. Na'sānī (Cairo, 1907), 287.
- 12 Still in manuscript at the British Library. See the conspectus presented in al-Sha'rānī, *Mukhtaṣar al-tadhkira al-Qurtubīya* [Conspectus of al-Qurṭubi's Tadhkira] (Cairo, AH 1302 [1884]).
- 13 J. Le Goff, *Un autre moyen âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 447 ff.
- 14 The literature is vast and very uneven in quality. It is sufficient mention the following: W. A. Graham, *Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977); A. Neuwirth, "Vom Rezitationstext über Liturgie zum Kanon," in *The Qur'ān as Text* ed. S. Wild (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 69–105; B. M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996); Aziz Al-Azmeh, "The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism," in *Canonization and Decanonization*, ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van den Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 193–213; H. Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000). See also P. Legendre, *L'amour du censeur* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1974); and Legendre, "Tradition," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck, vol. 6 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004).
- 15 In general, see T. Fahd, *La divination arabe* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 224 ff.; Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 190 ff.; Ibn Khaldun, *Les prolegomènes d'Ibn Khaldoun*, ed. E. Quatremère, 2 vols. (Paris, 1858), 1:192 ff., 2:168 ff.; Hajji Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn 'an asāmi al-kutub wa'l-funūn* [The exposure of doubts], ed. Yaltakaya and R. Bilge (Istanbul, 1942), vol. 2, 1812–13.



- 16 Ibn Khaldun, *Les prolégomènes*, vol. 2, 168, 170, 196; Otto Loth, "Al-Kindi als Astrolog," in *Morgenländische Forschungen. Festschrift Heinrich L. Fleischer* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1875), 263–309. For the Arabic text, see *ibid.*, 273–79.
- 17 See G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi, the Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
- 18 For instance, see the Arabic text in P. van Koningsveld, J. Sadan Sj, and Q. Al-Samarrai, *Yemenite Authorities and Jewish Messianism* (Leiden: University of Leiden, Faculty of Theology, 1990), 162, 163, 167, as well as chaps. 1–2, *passim*. Compare with Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, 397, 426–30.
- 19 Arjomand, *Shadow of God*.
- 20 As for example in J. J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," in "Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre," special issue, *Semeia* 14 (1980): 4 ff.
- 21 Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim* [The end of the beginning and the end], ed. M. 'Ubayya, F. Abū. Riyadh, 2 vols. (1968).
- 22 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 7.
- 23 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, section 1 and *passim*.
- 24 Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusūl wa'l-mulūk* [History of apostles and kings], ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1879), vol. 1, 416–17.
- 25 W. Madelung, "al-Mahdī," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), col. 1234.
- 26 See in general, S. A. Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. B. McGinn and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 2000), vol. 2, 248ff.; P. Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1911); Casanova, "La malhamat dans l'Islam primitive," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 61 (1910): 151–61. For the emergence of some important traditions out of particular historical experiences, see W. Madelung, "Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 30 (1981): 291–305; Madelung, "The Sufyāni between Tradition and History," *Studia Islamica* 63 (1984): 5–48; S. Bashear, "Apocalyptic and other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1991): 173–207; W. F. Tucker, "Revolutionary Chiliaism in Umayyad Iraq" (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1971).
- 27 A. Abel, "Changements politiques et littérature eschatologique dans le monde musulman," *Studia Islamica* 2 (1954): 23–43; M. Moazami, "Millennianism, Eschatology, and Messianic Figures in Iranian Tradition," *Journal for Millennial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2000): 1.
- 28 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1333 and *passim*.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 1223. See M. Cook, "The Heraclian Dynasty in Muslim Eschatology," *Al-Qantara* 13 (1992): 3–23.
- 30 For details of references in Nu'aym, see Aguadé, *Messianismus zur Zeit*, 82ff.
- 31 See for instance Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1482, 1496, and *passim*.
- 32 See in general, Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1975); Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbeck: The Triburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967); W. Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895); E. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen* (1898; rpt., Turin: Bortega d'Erasmus, 1963); R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997) chap. 8; Michael Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudo-Methodius," *Byzantion* 6 (1931): 273–96; H. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessischen Apokalypik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985); G. J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 149–88; B. McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), chap. 1; Anders Hultgård, "Persian Apocalypticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 2000), vol. 1, 39–83; W. Bousset, "Antichrist," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1908); J. W. Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monar-



chies," *Classical Philology* 35 (1940): 1–21; A. Vasiliev, "Medieval Ideas of the End of the World: West and East," *Byzantion* 15, no. 2 (1942–43): 462–502 (to the best of my knowledge, this is only text to attempt a comparison with Islamic concepts); Podskalsky, *Die Byzantinische Reichsideologie*. It must be stressed, overall, that the extravagant claims made for the salience of Jewish apocalypticism are at best unnecessary assumptions and must be amended by the consideration that Jewish apocalypticism itself makes little sense without the Near Eastern environment from which it emerged and of which it formed a slight component quite apart from the textual as opposed to the real influence it came to have later, amidst myths and restorative apocalyptic expectations, particularly in Persian Babylonia under Macedonian rule—see the cautionary remarks in J. J. Collins, "From Prophecy to Apocalypticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. Collins (New York: Continuum, 2000), vol. 1, 133ff.; Hultgård, "Persian Apocalypticism," 63ff.; and Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 175–76n116; for early apocalyptic notions, see Norman Cohn, part 1 of *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

33 Cf. Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 241.

34 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1338.

35 For instance, E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 3:1126, 1132, and passim.

36 McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition*, chap. 1, 15–16; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), chaps. 1 and 2.

37 Aguadé, *Messianismus zur Zeit*, 72ff., 89ff., 209ff.

38 See, for instance, al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusūl wa'l-mulūk*, vol. 1, 29–30; cf. Youakim Moubarac, *Abraham dans le Coran* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958), 130–32.

39 Muḥammad, *ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 3.

40 For more on this, see Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf istilāhāt al-funūn. al-Badī'*, ed. L. 'Abd (Cairo, 1977).

41 Augustine, *De civitate dei*, xii:18.

42 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1445ff., 1480.

43 Ibn Kathīr, *Kitāb al-fitan wa-l-malāhim* [The beginning and the end], ed. I. al-Ansārī (Riyadh, 1983), 20–21.

44 Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *al-Fitan*, 1327.

45 Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, 105, 107, 114, 167. These distensions and compressions of time take on a far more elaborate complexion, "almost calculated to defeat any controllable sense of time," in the Great Time of Sanskrit writings on the *yugas* and *kalpas*: Romila Thapar, "Time as a Metaphor of History," in *History and Beyond* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13ff. In all, there are parallelisms between monotheistic conceptions of antinomianism and inversions preceding the end of time, and Brahminical construals of the fourth, terminal stage (*kaliyuga*) of each temporal cycle. See *ibid.*, 21ff.

46 Muḥammad, *ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 105–106.

47 *Ibid.*, 159–61.

48 *Ibid.*, 5–50; and Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 71–104, 572ff.

49 Muḥammad, *ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 51–60.

50 *Ibid.*, 55.

51 *Ibid.*, 61–63.

52 *Ibid.*, 67–73.

53 *Ibid.*, 74.

54 *Ibid.*, 85–86.

55 *Ibid.*, 73.

56 *Ibid.*, 75–85.

57 *Ibid.*, 87–99.

58 *Ibid.*, 58–60, 78–79. Compare with Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 221ff., 467ff., 487ff., 510ff., 532ff.

59 Muḥammad, *ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 106.

60 *Ibid.*, 106–27.

61 *Ibid.*, 122.



- 62 See W. Saleh, "The Female as a Locus of Apocalyptic Anxiety in Medieval Sunni Islam," in *Myth, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature*, Beirut Texts and Studies 64, ed. A. Neuwirth and M. Jarrar (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999), 121–42.
- 63 For a representative statement, see the fourteenth century text Ibn Rajab, *Kashf al-kurba bi-waṣf hal al-ghurba* [The easing of despondence], ed. J. Mādi (Alexandria, 1983). In an eschatological register, see al-Sha'rānī, *Mukhtaṣar al-tadhkira al-Qurtubīya*.
- 64 Compare to the sparser detail in Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1363 and passim; Ibn Kathīr, Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, 206 ff.
- 65 For Jesus in Muslim eschatology, see P. Mclean, "Jesus in the Qur'an and Hadith Literature" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1970).
- 66 This is of course familiar from the Christian apocalypse. It renders the figure of Christ in an interesting complexity, which is very much at variance with the dewy sentimentalism of the image projected in modern Muslim apologetics such as, Tarif Khalidī, trans. and ed., *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
- 67 See the relevant articles and terms in the new edition of *The Encyclopedia of Islam* and relevant items in J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1960).
- 68 Muḥammad, *'Abd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 132–59.
- 69 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 620ff.
- 70 See Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, vol. 1, 37, 45; al-Sha'rānī, *Mukhtaṣar al-tadhkira al-Qurtubīya*, 144.
- 71 For other genealogies, from 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and from al-'Abbās, see Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1038, 1044.
- 72 See the convenient summary of J. Coppens' voluminous work on the Old and New Testaments in Coppens, *Le messianisme royal*, Coll. Lectio Divina 54 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968).
- 73 Compare with Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 969.
- 74 Muḥammad, *'Abd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 185–202.
- 75 Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, 1:110; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* [The Musnad], ed. A. M. Shākir, 13 vols. (Cairo, 1949), ff. § 1526.
- 76 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-dhahab* [Les prairies d'or], ed. Barbier de Meynard and P. de Courteille (Paris, 1861), 4:29. Compare to Muḥammad, *'Abd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī*, 185ff.
- 77 Muḥammad, *'Abd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 216ff. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, vol. 1, 171–72; Ibn Batuta, *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, ed. C. Deffrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti (Paris, 1893), vol. 1, 229.
- 78 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1333.
- 79 Ibid., 1334.
- 80 Al-Mutahhār b. Tāhīr al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa'l-Tārik* [Book of the beginning and of history], ed. C. Huart and attributed to al-Balkhī (Paris, 1899) vol. 2, 190. A most useful and cogent account of the entire history of the future is sketched in ibid, vol. 2, 158–92.
- 81 Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, vol. 1, 80, vol. 2, 99.
- 82 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 234, 1334.
- 83 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1071; Muḥammad, *'Abd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Ashrāt al-Sā'a*, 231 ff.
- 84 André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1973), 2:497ff.; Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past and Present* 134, (1992): 15ff.
- 85 Curiously, al-Burāq, the beast mounted by the Prophet on his nocturnal journey to heaven is also called *al-dābba*. See the relevant article in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed. According to an opinion attributed to an early exegetical authority, Ibn 'Abbās, this Beast of the Apocalypse is none other than the serpent that had previously guarded the idols of the Ka'ba until, at an unspecified date, God sent an eagle that carried it off, see al-Azraqī, *Akbbār Makka* [History of Mecca], ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1859), 386–87. This mythological lore requires detailed study.



- 86 Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, vol. 1, 194–95.
- 87 For an anthropomorphic account of God's procedure in causing the sun to rise from the west, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hay'a al-saniyya fi'l-hay'a al-sunniyya* [The splendid structure], § 4:21, in *Islamic Cosmology*, ed. A.M. Heinen (Beirut and Wiesbaden: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1982), 148. Al-Barzanjī considered himself as filling a particular lacuna in this polymath's work.
- 88 This is described with fearsome detail in Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 149–50. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyat al-bidāya wa'n-nihāya fi'l-fitan wa'l-malāhim*, vol. 1, 247.
- 89 Hammād, *al-Fitan*, 1345, 1367. Quite unusually, this source describes the resurrection of the dead as resulting from semen akin to human semen, which showered down by the command of God.
- 90 Muḥammad, *ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Barzanjī, Kitāb al-Ishā'a li-Asbrāt al-Sā'a*, 150–55.
- 91 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 102ff., 181ff.
- 92 The literature on this constellation of topics, of uneven quality, is growing. See L. Ammann, "Kommentiertes Literaturverzeichnis zu Zeitvorstellungen und geschichtlichem Denken in der islamischen Welt" *Die Welt des Islams* 37 (1997): 29–34, 38ff., 43ff.
- 93 Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 11:21.



# Christendom, Crusade, and the End of Days: The Dream of World Conversion (1099–1274)

*Brett Edward Whalen*

Before and after the capture of Damietta in 1219, crusader James of Vitry believed that he was witnessing the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. Writing to Pope Honorius III (r. 1216–27), James described a number of marvelous texts that he had seen during the course of what we now call the Fifth Crusade. These works included a letter that described the recent conquests in the East made by “David, king of the Indians, who is commonly called Prester John.”<sup>1</sup> Rumors of King David’s victories against infidel peoples impressed James, who called that Christian ruler “the hammer of pagans” and “the destroyer of perfidious Muhammad’s vile tradition and execrable law.” James also described a prophecy attributed to a Muslim seer, who had predicted the crusader conquest of Damietta along with other events that “we saw before our very eyes.” Finally, James described an apocalypse, the Revelations of Saint Peter the Apostle. This work predicted that two Christian kings would come to aid the crusaders in Egypt, one from the West (the German emperor, Frederick II), and one from the East (the aforementioned Prester John). Together, these rulers would smash the power of the infidels, killing some and converting others, signaling the beginning of the end. The “fullness of the Gentiles” would enter into the faith and “all Israel would be saved,” that is, pagan peoples and then the Jews would convert to Christianity, followed by the rise of Antichrist, the Second Coming of Christ, and Final Judgment.<sup>2</sup>

James of Vitry was not a wild-eyed figure on the margins. In short, he was not a character taken straight from the pages of Norman Cohn’s classic *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, a work which highlighted the importance of apocalyptic thinking among the rootless poor of later medieval and early modern European society.<sup>3</sup> Although he traveled a great deal, James was neither rootless nor poor. Rather, he was the newly elected bishop of Acre, a Paris-educated theologian, a prolific



historian, and a church-sanctioned crusade-preacher, on familiar terms with the Roman pope. His fascination with prophecies, tales of distant Christian conquerors, and apocalyptic scenarios that foretold the triumph of the Christian faith over the infidels was far from a casual aside. They cut to the heart of how James and many of his contemporaries viewed the meaning of current events as part of a divine plan leading toward the eschatological realization of Christendom, the community of right-practicing, right-believing Christians assembled under the authority of Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Modern scholars have shown a considerable interest in the connections between apocalyptic eschatology and war, in particular crusading, a form of sanctified Christian violence directed against the Islamic world along with other targets.<sup>5</sup> During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, from the First Crusade until the Second Council of Lyon in 1274, crusading came to occupy a prominent place in Western Christian theology of history and apocalyptic speculation. Holy War, however, was just one part of God's plan for history that would transform the Christian world order—in fact, as we will see, there was a great deal of ambivalence among Christian thinkers toward crusading and its historical role in salvation. In addition to crusading, apocalyptic notions of mission formed another vehicle to achieve the global realization of Christendom, a process that would include the spread of the Roman Catholic faith, union between Eastern and Western Christians, the subduing and conversion of pagans and infidels, the conversion of the Jews, and last but not least, the recovery of Jerusalem for Christianity. In fulfillment of Christ's promises (made, among other places in Matthew 24:14 and John 10:16), the Gospel would reach the entire world before the end of time, creating a "single flock" under "one shepherd." This meant more than the spread of Christianity, but rather the fruition of a certain kind of Christian faith and discipline that originated within the Latin Church of Rome. Christendom offered a compelling vision of world order, anticipated as the realization of the divine plan for history. Indeed, long after the crusading mentality slipped from prominence and respectability among European intellectuals and political actors, the view that historical events were leading toward the "conversion" of the world under "Western" auspice-



es has remained an important element in the framing of history, both in secular and persistently religious terms.<sup>6</sup>

Before proceeding, two things should be noted upfront. First of all, there is a great deal of debate among scholars about the precise role that apocalyptic thought played in the origins of the First Crusade. According to some, it was hardly a factor; according to others, it was a critical element in fueling popular support for the expedition to Jerusalem, which would usher in the Kingdom of God here on earth.<sup>7</sup> Second, the First Crusade was not a “missionary” enterprise in its ideology or practice. The sources for the crusade showed little interest in the mass conversion of infidels; rather, the non-believers were something to be wiped out or at least pushed out from the sacred ground of the Christian holy places.<sup>8</sup> There was one important exception in this regard, the attempt by some crusaders to convert or slaughter the Jewish communities of the Rhineland in 1096, a fascinating topic that lies beyond the scope of this present essay.<sup>9</sup> In short, during the formation and progress of the First Crusade, linkages between crusade, mission, and apocalypticism were absent or not entirely clear.

In the aftermath of the First Crusade, however, over the course of the twelfth century, crusading became firmly linked to the apocalyptic imagination of medieval Europeans. Consider one notable example: the place of crusading in the works of the well-known apocalyptic commentator, Joachim of Fiore, who lived in southern Italy from around 1140 to 1202.<sup>10</sup> Scattered throughout his influential and notoriously complex works, one finds a number of observations about the First Crusade along with subsequent armed clashes between Christendom and the infidels. For example, in his commentary *On the Life and Rule of Saint Benedict*, Joachim explored crusading through his exegesis of the seven-headed dragon from the Book of Revelation.<sup>11</sup> He was particularly interested in John’s statement that one of the heads looked “as if it were dead,” which the abbot associated with the temporary lapse of infidel power during the First Crusade: “For so it was in the days of Pope Urban that there was a great movement of Christians from every part of the Western church heading across the sea to liberate holy Jerusalem.”<sup>12</sup> The head, however, was not truly dead and revived, that is to say, on account of Christian sins the Saracens arose



again against the faithful under Saladin, recapturing Jerusalem and the holy places in 1187.

The abbot showed considerable ambivalence when crusaders came knocking on his door, so to speak, during his meeting with King Richard I as the English monarch was en route to the Holy Land during the Third Crusade (1189–92).<sup>13</sup> In the most detailed account of this encounter, provided by Roger of Hoveden, the abbot explained his interpretation of the seven-headed dragon from the Book of Revelation: five heads were past and Saladin, the sixth head, currently raged against Christians. After the demise of Saladin, the seventh head, Antichrist, would arise and usher in a final persecution against the Church.<sup>14</sup> There was apparently some uncertainty about Joachim's forecast for the success of Richard's expedition: according to various redactions of the report, Joachim seems to have hedged his bet, predicting that Richard would accomplish great things, or at least something, but that the time was not really at hand for the liberation of Jerusalem. According to chronicler Robert of Auxerre, Joachim simply asserted that Richard (and the French ruler, Philip) "would accomplish nothing or very little."<sup>15</sup> This hesitancy might also have reflected the fact that later chroniclers, writing after the fact, were well aware of Richard's limited successes against Saladin and the failure of his crusade to recapture the holy places. Given this outcome, some "prophetic revisionism" might have been in order.

Joachim could not ignore the crusades, but he could make it clear that they were an abortive attempt to accomplish things contrary to the will of God. It was through humility and not the sword that the true "liberty" of the Church would be achieved in a future Sabbath age before the end of time.<sup>16</sup> This perspective on the crusades fit well with Joachim's general view of the present-day Roman Church, mired in corruption but perched on the edge of a spiritual transformation. Joachim believed that the future would indeed bring about the triumph of Christendom during an age of the Holy Spirit after the persecutions of Antichrist, when the wayward Christians of the East would be "converted" to the true faith of the Roman Church, followed by the conversion of the Jews to Christianity, along with the conversion of infidel peoples, transformed together into "one flock" under "one shep-



herd.” This purification, spiritualization, and dilatation of the faith would happen, however, through the preaching of certain “spiritual men” that would emerge from within the Western church, rather than by the swords of crusaders.<sup>17</sup>

Joachim died in 1202. Two years later, the army of the Fourth Crusade captured the Christian city of Constantinople. In the aftermath of the crusade, Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) borrowed passages from Joachim to interpret the capture of the city by the crusaders as one step toward the apocalyptic union of the Greek Church with Rome, setting the stage for the conversion of the Jews, the recovery of the places and the end of time. This eschatological interpretation of the Fourth Crusade forms a fascinating subject in and of itself.<sup>18</sup> However, in order to stay focused on the question of Western attitudes toward Islam within the framework of crusading and apocalyptic thought, I will press onward to the Fifth Crusade, which was in the planning stages when Innocent III died in 1216.

This brings us back to James of Vitry and his enthusiasm for legends and prophecies about the preordained victory of Christendom over the infidels. James was not unique in this regard. His fellow crusader and crusade-historian Oliver of Paderborn presents us with some similar hopes and expectations, declaring that he himself had read a collection of pagan prophecies that circulated in the crusader camp shortly before the capture of Damietta in 1219.<sup>19</sup> One of these texts promised that a Christian king from Nubia would capture the city of Mecca and scatter the bones of the “pseudo-prophet” Muhammad. This dramatic occurrence would start a chain of events that would bring about the “exaltation of Christendom and the shame of the Agarenes” (i.e., Muslims).<sup>20</sup> Oliver also mentioned the elusive figure of Prester John as a potential savior for Western Christians fighting against Islam. From what both James and Oliver tell us, the rumors that “King David” or “Prester John” was on his way to assist the crusaders in Egypt circulated around the crusader camp and were greeted with considerable enthusiasm.<sup>21</sup>

Armed Christian victory, however, did not occupy the historical imagination of men like James of Vitry and Oliver of Paderborn to the exclusion of all else. In the course of the Fifth Crusade, we find an in-



novative sense of missionary aspiration, directed largely at “heretical” Eastern Christians, but also at the infidels. James, for example, had been particularly shocked by the diversity of Christian religious traditions that he encountered at Acre when he arrived there as the city’s new bishop in 1216. Soon after, he began to preach through interpreters to the local Christians, encouraging them to abandon their own deviant religious practices and to adopt those of the Roman Church. On another occasion, James left Acre by night to preach to indigenous Christians living under Islamic authority. In his letters, he specifically connected the liberation of the Holy Land to the potential for converts among Eastern Christians and Saracens, both of whom, he believed, would be more willing to embrace proper Christianity if they were brought under the power of Western princes. As James put it, “There are many heretics dwelling in the Eastern regions, as well as Saracens, who, so I believe, would easily convert to the Lord if they hear proper doctrine.”<sup>22</sup> From this perspective, crusading and mission were complementary, not antithetical: conquests would open up missionary territory. As James put it on another occasion while on crusade in Egypt: “Further beyond toward the East all the way until the end of the earth, there are Christians everywhere. Whereupon, if we are able by the mercy of God to seize this land, we might join together the Christian religion in a continuous succession from the West to the East.”<sup>23</sup>

In the short term, James, Oliver, and their contemporaries must have been extremely disappointed with the outcome of their efforts. As a military venture, the Fifth Crusade notoriously collapsed in the summer of 1221. Among other problems, Frederick II never showed up to help the crusaders, nor did Prester John. Despite this disaster (or perhaps because of it), crusade, mission, and apocalyptic speculation would be bundled together with increasing frequency in the Christian European historical imagination over the following decades. In particular, members of the Franciscan order tapped into these currents of eschatological speculation about the conversion of the world. During the course of the Fifth Crusade, in fact, James of Vitry described one of the most famous missionary encounters of the Middle Ages, when Saint Francis had “crossed enemy lines” to preach the Christian faith openly at the court of the Ayyubid sultan, al-Kāmil.<sup>24</sup> Building upon



the missionary spirit of their founder, the Franciscan order quickly committed itself to proselytizing among both non-believers and non-Western Christians. Not unrelated to this development, certain Franciscan circles showed an equal fascination with apocalyptic schemes of history, above all, those relating to the works of Joachim of Fiore.<sup>25</sup>

In the mid-1230s, roughly a decade after the failure of the Fifth Crusade, Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227–41) issued the remarkable bull *Cum hora undecima*.<sup>26</sup> This papal pronouncement confirmed special privileges—such as the right to hear confessions or absolve excommunicates—for Franciscan friars who were active as missionaries in the “lands of the pagans and infidels.” Later on, various “heretical” Eastern Christian communities were added to this mandate. The apocalyptic framing for this bull was explicit in its opening lines, which declared that the “eleventh hour” was at hand when “men with the purity of the spiritual life and the gift of intelligence” should go forth to “prophesy among all men and all peoples, speaking every tongue and in every kingdom” (notice the echoes of Joachim “spiritual men” in this language). It was only after this “fullness of the Gentiles” had entered into the Church that the remnant of Israel would be saved before the final days. *Cum hora undecima* was a landmark in the development of what E. Randolph Daniel has called an “apocalyptic” approach to mission based on the premise that history was leading toward the mass-conversion of non-Christian peoples before the end of time.<sup>27</sup> From this point forward, among the Franciscans and to a lesser extent the Dominicans, apocalyptic eschatology began to play a critical role in shaping how some mendicants viewed the future of Christendom, as well as the historical destiny of their own orders.

Toward the closing years of Gregory’s papacy, the playing field for both the theory and practice of a worldwide mission was radically transformed by the advent of the Mongols.<sup>28</sup> In 1238, the English chronicler Matthew Paris reported that Muslim emissaries had come to the French king and informed him that a “monstrous and inhuman race of men” had burst forth from the lands to the north. The Saracens, who sought aid against the furor of the “Tartars,” also dispatched an envoy to the English court seeking aid. According to Matthew, when he heard the report of the devastation caused by the Tartars, Bishop



Peter of Winchester darkly declared that “we should permit these dogs to devour each other, and thus consumed, they shall perish. At that point, we will descend upon those enemies of Christ who remain left over, slaughtering them and wiping them off the face of the earth. As a result, the entire world will be brought under the one Catholic Church, and there shall be one shepherd and one flock.”<sup>29</sup> More bloody minded than most, the bishop of Winchester was far from being the only Christian in the Roman Church who hoped that the arrival of the Mongols would somehow transform the status of Christendom in the world, leading to a universal Christian order that would precede the end of time.<sup>30</sup>

At first, war was the answer to the Mongols. Gregory IX and his successor Innocent IV (r. 1243–54) tried with little success to raise a crusading army against the invaders.<sup>31</sup> Before too long had passed, however, Innocent IV began to contemplate an alternative approach to the “Mongol problem,” sending envoys to meet with them, perhaps in the hope of their eventual conversion to the Christian faith. To start, Innocent turned to the friars, dispatching the famous embassy to the Mongols under Franciscan John of Plano Carpini in 1245. John’s fascinating expedition to the Mongols forms a topic for discussion in its own right.<sup>32</sup> Based on his account, there is no sign that he saw his activities as part of any historical or apocalyptic scheme. Some of his contemporaries, however, did draw such connections. When John of Plano Carpini returned to Lyons from Central Asia in 1248, he was greeted with great fanfare. The Franciscan friar and chronicler Salimbene of Adam was among those who avidly listened to the tales of his travels. Decades later, he described the excitement that surrounded John’s news of the menace posed by the Tartars. According to Salimbene, the threat that the Tartars posed to Italy was not random, but rather the conclusion to a series of preordained invasions. First, the Vandals had invaded Italy; second, the Huns during the time of Pope Leo I; third, the Goths under their Arian ruler Theodoric; and fourth, the Lombards in the time of Pope Gregory I. The Tartars represented the fifth and final invader that was poised to occupy the peninsula.<sup>33</sup>

Part of Salimbene’s inspiration for this scheme, he informs his readers, derived from Joachim of Fiore’s *Book of Figures* and his *Con-*



cordance of the Old and New Testament. Like many of his Franciscan peers, Salimbene was highly interested in Joachim of Fiore's interpretation of history, above all where it seemed to touch upon the role of the Franciscan order in the future realization of God's plan for salvation. The middle decades of the thirteenth century witnessed a flourishing of "Joachite" literature, prophecies, works of exegesis, and apocalyptic commentaries that were attributed to the abbot, but mostly produced by Franciscan circles.<sup>34</sup> Woven throughout these works, one finds the persistent theme of a future transformation of the world into "one flock" under "one shepherd," meaning the unity of all peoples under a purified, spiritualized Roman papacy. The reunion of the Latins and Greeks, the conversion of the Jews, and the spread of the faith among infidel peoples were all included in such visions of the end. To be clear: this Joachite tradition was highly critical of internal failings within Christendom, excoriating the German empire, the corrupt papacy of the day, and lax Christians within the ranks of the Roman Church. Devastating apocalyptic trials awaited the faithful before the future conversion of the world.<sup>35</sup> In some prophecies, Islam occupied a familiar role as a divine scourge sent by God against his Chosen People—the Muslims would ravage the Western church before their final defeat or conversion. Joachite views certainly did not constitute some sort of "apocalyptic multiculturalism," one world united in tolerance, love, and understanding. Rather, there would be an apocalyptic purging of the "bad elements" both inside and outside of Christendom, followed by unity among those who finally recognized Christ and joined with the spiritualized Roman Church.

This wave of eschatological anticipation crested around the time of the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. Pope Gregory X (r. 1271–76) summoned this council for three main purposes: to reform the Western church; to form a new crusade to the Holy Land; and to unite the Western and Eastern churches.<sup>36</sup> Prophecy was in the air. According to one prediction, supposedly delivered at the council, the stage was being set for the end of the Saracens' power in the Holy Land "by divine, not human operation."<sup>37</sup> The Mongols, whose envoys were present at the council, would recapture Jerusalem before their power finally began to wane. Alexandria would be restored to the Christians and the



land of Armenia would be subjected to Western Christian power, while the Greeks would again lose Constantinople. Immediately after the council, chroniclers of universal histories shared the impression that Pope Gregory had truly succeeded in restoring the Greeks to the catholic fold and in securing an alliance with the Tartars—during the council, Greek legates did in fact recognize Roman primacy and several of the Mongol envoys were publicly baptized.<sup>38</sup> Even though such chronicles did not make explicitly apocalyptic claims, a dramatic sense of optimism and manifest destiny hovered over such reports of the council and its outcome. Salimbene of Adam, for his part, implied that Pope Gregory's successful negotiations with the Greeks were a sign that the time of their "conversion" was at hand, to be followed by the conversion of the Jews and pagan peoples everywhere, events predicted by none other than Joachim of Fiore.<sup>39</sup>

As time passed, Western Christians were forced to confront the fact that Gregory's crusade never got off the ground; the Mongols did not convert to Christianity (in fact, many converted to Islam); and the union with the Greek Church was illusory and short-lived. Writing in Cologne around 1288, Alexander of Roes looked back at Lyons as a remarkable moment when "not only the Christian people and ecclesiastical prelates, but also the kings of the world, the Jews, the Greeks, and the Tartars coming together recognized the Roman bishop as the monarch of the world."<sup>40</sup> This historical high-point in the fortunes of priestly authority, however, had been followed by disaster. Alexander particularly excoriated Pope Martin IV (r. 1281–85), on whose watch the Greeks had again withdrawn from unity with Rome; the Mongols had renewed their attacks in Eastern Europe; the Saracens had grown restless in Africa; and internal wars had erupted among Christians. Although he was cautious about claiming any special knowledge of future events, Alexander saw signs of apocalyptic gloom on the near horizon, perhaps within a few decades. He continued to foresee hopeful developments after the tribulations under the Antichrist, including the recovery of the Holy Land, the conversion of the world's peoples, and an age of peace for the universal Church. Over the following decades, however, a growing pessimism and radicalism came to characterize the Western apocalyptic imagination. Increasingly, apocalyptic



thinkers (particularly among the Franciscans) would turn their gaze inward to criticize what they saw the evident failings of the Roman papacy. In the fourteenth century, for some, engaging in apocalyptic speculation would mean a life spent in prison or even execution.

From this perspective, the High Middle Ages formed a distinct epoch in European apocalyptic thinking, first and foremost, via the concept of Christendom as an imagined world order under the auspices of the papal monarchy. Western speculation about the eschatological transformation of the world, however, did not disappear in the later Middle Ages or even in the early modern period. It has been suggested that “apocalyptic perception of both Islam and other supposed enemies of Christianity might still be relevant in the present.”<sup>41</sup> The reverse also holds true. Research into the Latin apocalyptic mentality of the Middle Ages suggests that the “apocalyptic perception” tells us something equally important about Western self-identity, set within the frame of history’s progression toward a divinely ordained realization. Indeed, one needs only to look at Christopher Columbus’s declarations that his voyages of discovery were part of the biblically promised spread of Christianity to find potential connections between the traditionally ascribed “medieval” and “modern” world views.<sup>42</sup> A thorough investigation of such linkages would form a study in its own right. For now, it suffices to say, that although the eschatological dream of Christendom has effectively vanished, the idea of Western “manifest destiny” seems alive and well, in American political discourse and beyond.



## Notes

- 1 James de Vitry to Pope Honorius III, April 18, 1221, in *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 134–53. On the Fifth Crusade in general, see James Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade 1213–1221* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
- 2 De Vitry, 150–53. For variant versions of these prophecies in Latin and French, see Reinhold Rörich, ed., “Prophetiae cuiusdam Arabicae in Latinorum castris ante Damiatam vulgatae versio quadruplex,” in *Quinti belli sacri scriptores minores*, Société de l’Orient Latin: série historique 2 (Geneva: Fick, 1879), 204–28.
- 3 Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Cohn’s ground-breaking work has been criticized for its tendency to over-estimate the violent implications of apocalypticism and to under-estimate its conservative potential to reinforce institutions and sources of authority. See Robert Lerner, “Medieval Millenarianism and Violence,” in *Pace e Guerra nel basso medioevo: atti del 40 convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 12–14 Ottobre 2003* (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2004), 37–52 and Bernard McGinn, “Apocalypticism and Church Reform: 1100–1500,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 74–109.
- 4 On the notion of Christendom in the medieval Latin tradition, see Jean Rupp, *L’idée de chrétienté dans la pensée pontificale des origines à Innocent III* (Paris: Les Presses modernes, 1939) and John Van Engen, “Faith as a Concept of Order,” in *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, ed. Thomas Kselman (London: Notre Dame Press, 1991), 19–67.
- 5 For a recent description, see Jean Flori, *L’islam et la fin des temps: l’interprétation prophétique des invasions musulmanes dans la chrétienté médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 2007). See also Norman Housley, “The Eschatological Imperative: Messianism and Holy War in Europe, 1260–1556,” in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Mark Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 123–50.
- 6 Brett Whalen explores the importance of apocalyptic thinking and other historical theorizing for the idea of Christendom and its world-wide realization before the end of time. Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- 7 For affirmations of the crusade’s apocalyptic inspirations, see André Vauchez, “Les composantes eschatologique de l’idée de croisade,” in *Le Concile de Clermont de 1095 et l’appel à la croisade* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1997), 233–43. Jay Rubenstein, “How, or How Much, to Reevaluate Peter the Hermit,” in *The Medieval Crusade*, ed. Susan Ridyard (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), 53–69; Flori, *L’islam et la fin des temps*, 250–81. For a contrasting opinion, see Bernard McGinn, “*Iter sancti Sepulchri*: The Piety of the First Crusaders,” in *The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures: Essays on Medieval Civilization*, ed. Bede Lackner and Kenneth Philip (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 33–71.
- 8 See Penny Cole, “The Theme of Religious Pollution in Crusade Documents, 1095–1188,” in *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 84–111; and Benjamin Kedar, *Crusade and Mission* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 9 Among numerous works on this subject, see Jonathan Riley-Smith, “The First Crusade and the Persecution of the Jews,” *Studies in Church History* 21 (1984): 51–52; Benjamin Kedar, “Crusade Historians and the Massacres of 1096,” *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 11–31, Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and David Malkiel, “Jewish-Christian Relations in Europe, 840–1096,” *Journal of Medieval History* 29 (2003): 5583.
- 10 On the life, career, and apocalyptic thought of the famous abbot, see Majorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (1976; rpt., Stroud: Sutton, 1999); Majorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (1969; rpt., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Ber-



- nard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1985); and Gian Luca Potestà, *Il tempo dell'apocalisse: vita di Gioacchino da Fiore* (Bari: Laterza, 2004).
- 11 See Cipriano Baraut, "Un tratado inédito de Joaquín de Fiore: 'De vita sancti Benedicti et de officio divino secundum eius doctrinam,'" *Analecta sacra Tarraconensia* 24 (1951): 33–122.
- 12 Baraut, Cipriano. "Un Tratado Inédito De Joaquín De Fiore: *De Vita Sancti Benedicti Et De Officio Divino Secundum Eius Doctrinam*." *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 24 (1951): 53.
- 13 The two primary accounts of this meeting are found in contemporary English chronicles. The earliest version comes from an anonymous work, sometimes associated with William Stubbs, ed. "Benedict of Petersborough," in *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis*, Rolls series 49 (London, 1867), vol. 2, 151–55; and a later edition of that chronicle by Roger of Hoveden, *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, Rolls series 51, vol. 3 (London, 1867). Some scholars have argued that Roger composed both the earlier and later versions, although there is no convincing evidence that this was the case. See Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to 1307* (Ithaca, NY: Routledge, 1974), 222–30.
- 14 For a representation of the seven-headed dragon in Joachim's famous collection of pictorial representations, see Leone Tondelli, *Gioacchino da Fiore: Il libro delle figure* (Turin, 1953), table 14. See also Randolph E. Daniel, "Apocalyptic Conversion: The Joachimite Alternative to Crusade," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 127–54.
- 15 Robert of Auxerre, *Chronicon cum continuationibus*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH, SS 26 (Hanover. 1882), 255.
- 16 On the "liberty" of the church, see Joachim von Fiore, "Intelligentia super calathi," in *Gioacchino da Fiore: aspetti inediti della vita e delle opere*, ed. Pietro de Leo (Soveria Manelli: Rubbettino, 1988), 135–48. For analysis of this text, see Herbert Grundmann, "Kirchenfreiheit und Kaisermacht um 1190 in der Sicht Joachims von Fiore," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 19 (1963): 353–96.
- 17 As far as I have determined, Joachim's earliest reference to the future conversion of Greek Christians and Jews is found in E. Randolph Daniel, "Liber de concordia novi et veteris testament," *American Philosophy Society* 73 (1983): 137. See also Joachim's final work, his commentary on the Gospels, Francesco Santi, ed., *Tractatus super quatuor evangelia* (Rome, 2002), 109, 150, 288–89, 308. See also my previous observations on this theme in Whalen, "Joachim of Fiore and the Division of Christendom," *Viator* 98 (2003): 89–108.
- 18 See *ibid.*, as well as Alfred J. Andrea, "Innocent III, the Fourth Crusade, and the Coming Apocalypse," in *The Medieval Crusade*, ed. Susan Ridyard (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 97–106; Flori, *L'islam et la fin des temps*, 326–31.
- 19 See Oliver Scholasticus, *Die Schriften des kölnen Domscholasters, späteren Bischofs von Paderborn und Kardinalbischofs von S. Sabina*, ed. Hermann Hoogeweg (Tubingen: Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 1894), 232–33.
- 20 See "Historia damiatina" in *ibid.*, 232.
- 21 Important articles and key primary sources for the legend of Prester John have been assembled and reprinted in Charles Beckingham, Bernard Hamilton, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996).
- 22 De Vitry, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, 96–97.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 102–103.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 132–33. See also Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 116–135, and Flori, *L'islam et la fin des temps*, 347–51.
- 25 On the development of Joachimite thought among the Franciscans, see Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 175–90, and E. Randolph Daniel, "A Re-Examination of the Origins of Franciscan Joachimism," *Speculum* 43 (1968): 671–76.
- 26 *Cum hora undecima* was first issued by Gregory IX in 1233 and reissued in 1234 and 1235. See Lucien Auvray, *Les registres de Grégoire IX* (Paris: Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1896–1955), cols. 1267–1268. See Felicitas Schmieder, "Cum hora undecima: The Incorporation of Asia into the Orbis Christianus," in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. Guyda Armstrong and Ian Wood (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 259–65.



- 27 E. Randolph Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 6–22, 76–100.
- 28 See Felicitas Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden: die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis das 15. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994).
- 29 “Sinamus canes hos illos devorare ad invicem, ut consumpti pereant. Nos cum ad Christi inimicos, qui residui remanebunt, venerimus, trucidabimus, et mundabimus terrae superficiem; ut universus mundus uni catholicae ecclesiae subdatur, et fiat unus pastor et unum ovile.” Mathew Paris, *Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani. Chronica majora*, Rolls series 57 (London, 1890), vol. 3, 489.
- 30 See Felicitas Schmieder, “Nota sectam maometicam atterendam a tartaris et christianis: The Mongols as Non-Believing Apocalyptic Friends around the Year 1260,” *Journal of Millennial Studies* 1 (1998): 1–11.
- 31 See Peter Jackson, “The Crusade against the Mongols (1241),” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991): 1–18.
- 32 See John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, in *Sinica Franciscana: Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi 12 et 14*, ed. Anastasius Van den Wyngaert (Quaracchi, 1929), 3–130.
- 33 Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, *Corpus christianorum continuatio mediaevalis* 125, ed. Guiseppe Scalia (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), vol. 1, 311–21.
- 34 On the development of Joachite thought in the thirteenth century, see Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 45–58, 145–60; Morton Bloomfield and Marjorie Reeves, “The Penetration of Joachimism into Northern Europe,” *Speculum* 29 (1954): 772–93; and Bernard McGinn, “The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic to the Radical Eschatology of Jochim of Fiore,” *Church History* 40 (1971): 30–47.
- 35 These themes are particularly pronounced in the pseudo-Joachim commentary on Jeremiah, Joachim de Flore, *Abbatis Joachim divina prorsus in Jeremiam prophetam interpretatio* (Cologne, 1577). See also Bernard McGinn, “Apocalyptic Traditions and Spiritual Identity in Thirteenth-Century Religious Life,” in *The Roots of the Modern Christian Tradition*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo: Continuum, 1984), 1–26.
- 36 See the acts of the council in Joseph Alberigo, ed., *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta* (Bologna: Eglise Catholic Romaine Concile, 1973), 303–31. Also see the contemporary report of the council’s proceedings in Antonio Franchi, “Ordinatio concilii generalis Lugdunensis,” in *Il concilio II di Lione (1274)* (Rome: Edizioni Francescane, 1965), 67–100, especially 72–73. See also, Flori, *L’islam et la fin des temps*, 383–86.
- 37 For a near contemporary manuscript which includes a number of such prophecies and Joachite tracts, see the anthology in the Vatican Library, ms. Lat. 3822. See Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 536, and the discussion of this manuscript by Jeanne Bignami-Odier, “Notes sur deux manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Vatican,” *Mélanges d’archéologie et de la histoire* 54 (1937): 211–41.
- 38 Franchi, “Ordinatio concilii generalis Lugdunensis,” 79–84.
- 39 Salimbene of Adam, *Cronica*, vol. 2, 750–51.
- 40 Alexander von Roes, *Notitia saeculi*, in *Alexander von Roes Schriften*, ed. Grundmann and Hermann Heimpel (Stuttgart: MGH Staatsschriften, 1958), 149–71.
- 41 The following quotation is from the *Apocalyptic Complex* conference program (Central European University, Budapest, 2005).
- 42 See Robert Rusconi, ed., “The Book of Prophecies Edited by Christopher Columbus.” Translated by Blair Sullivan, *Repertorium Columbianum* 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 59; and Pauline Moffit Watts, “Prophecy and Discovery: On the Spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus’s ‘Enterprise of the Indies,’” *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 73–102.



# From the Last Emperor to the Sleeping Emperor: The Evolution of a Myth<sup>1</sup>

Petre Guran

In the nineteenth century, a Greek inhabitant of Constantinople leading a European traveler either to the Golden Gate or to the Romanos Gate would have pointed out a place where it was believed the emperor Constantine XI Paleologos was lying asleep until the day of restoration of Christian rule in Constantinople.<sup>2</sup> This legend circulated under the name of the “marmoreal emperor,” *ho marmaromenos vasilias*, and related that an angel of the Lord rescued Constantine XI when he was about to be killed by the Turks. The angel swept him up, turned him into marble, and concealed him in a subterranean cave near the Golden Gate of the city. There the marble emperor still sleeps, awaiting for the angel’s call to wake up. Legends about the tomb of the last Constantine are multifarious and intermingled with legends concerning the manner and place of his death on the morning of May 29, 1453. Even truthful historical sources about his last hours are utterly contradictory.<sup>3</sup>

The ideological structure of such a popular belief, which can be found even in the New Year’s Eve greeting *tou chronou stin poli*—“next year in Constantinople”—reaches far back to the eschatological production of the seventh century. In this paper I trace the evolution of the myth of the “returning emperor” and establish the place of such Byzantine legends within the eschatological debate of monotheistic religions explaining political domination over the Eastern Mediterranean and its sacred cities (Jerusalem and Constantinople).

A legend from the immediate aftermath of the fall of Constantinople combines several century-long issues in the Byzantine apocalyptic narrative to offer a coherent answer to the questions about the final destiny of Constantinople and consequently of Christian rule. The night before the final attack, Emperor Constantine XI saw the following vision as he was resting on the ramparts next to the Romanos Gate:



On his right was a church of the Virgin. He saw someone like a Queen coming towards it with a number of eunuchs. They went in and the Emperor and his nobles hurried to see who this Queen might be and went into the church. [They saw her] opening the sanctuary gate and going inside. She sat on the bishop's throne and looked very mournful. Then she opened her holy mouth and addressed the Emperor: This unhappy city was dedicated to me and many a time have I saved it from divine wrath. Now too I have entreated my Son and my God. But, alas, He has decreed that this time you should be consigned to the hands of your enemies because the sins of your people have inflamed the anger of God. So leave your imperial crown here for me to look after until such time as God will permit another to come and take it. When the emperor heard this he became very sad. He took his crown and the scepter which was in his hand and laid them on the altar; and he stood in tears and said: My Lady, since for my sins I have been bereft of my imperial majesty, I resign also my soul into your hands along with my crown. The Lady of the Angels replied: May the Lord God rest your soul in peace in the company of His Saints. The emperor made obeisance and went to kiss her knee; and she vanished and her eunuchs, who were her angels, vanished with her. But neither the crown nor the scepter were found where they had been left; for the Lady, the Mother of God, took them with her to keep until such time as there would be mercy for the wretched race of Christians. This was reported later by some who had been there and witnessed the miracle. The emperor with his nobles then went forth stripped of his majesty to look on the enemy from the walls. They joined forces and gave battle to some Turks whom they encountered and were defeated. The Turks cut them down; and they took the head of the pitiful emperor to the sultan who had great joy of it.<sup>4</sup>

This fragment belongs to the literary genre of songs and lamentations (*Monodiai kai threnoi*) about the fall of Constantinople. It conveys the idea that the conquest of Constantinople might be only a temporary punishment and that the purveyance of God might ensure the return of Christian monarchy in Constantinople. In the meantime,



the regalia must be safeguarded in the heavens until this future reestablishment.

The vision of the Virgin described in this anonymous lament echoes another well-known appearance of the Virgin in Constantinople: the one witnessed by Andreas Salos (Saint Andrew the Fool) and narrated by his hagiographer Nicephorus. In Andreas Salos' vision, the Virgin spreads her veil over the praying community as a sign of protection bestowed on the population of Constantinople.<sup>5</sup> The meaning of the Virgin's gesture during this special epiphany, that of protection, was later extended to embrace the whole Christian community and popularized through numerous copies and translations of the Life of Saint Andrew the Fool. An icon depicting this event, best known as Pokrov in the Russian branch of iconographic tradition, transformed the legend into a forceful image of divine protection.

To portray Constantine the Great as the dedicator of the city to the Theotokos was a political claim in the ninth century, as we can surmise from the mosaic over the south entrance gate to the narthex of the Hagia Sophia. Here Constantine is depicted presenting the city of Constantinople to the Virgin, while Justinian the Great offers her his Church. The tenth-century anonymous hagiographic work *The Life of Constantine* attests that the claim gained credence and popularity.<sup>6</sup> An eleventh-century Constantinopolitan Synaxarium takes over this belief and recounts that from the very beginning, the city was dedicated by its founder Constantine to the Mother of God.<sup>7</sup> In *The Life of Basil the Younger* (tenth–eleventh century), the belief in Constantine's dedication of the city to the Virgin is modified into a mystical and heavenly variant, where Christ himself bestows the city upon his mother as her inheritance (*eis klèron dedotai*).<sup>8</sup> In *The Life of Andreas Salos*, this mystical aspect is never explicitly stated, but rather implied in the idea that the city “has been given as a gift” (*keharistai*) to the Virgin.<sup>9</sup>

The second important aspect of the fragment is the mention of the remittance of the regalia to the Virgin in the sacred context of a church. We may presume that here “church” designates the Church of Blachernae, the same place where Andreas Salos had his vision of the Virgin. This remittance of the regalia refers to a seventh-century eschatological legend, first formulated in *Pseudo-Methodius' Vision of the End*,



where the “last emperor” appears as an imperial figure who closes the line of legitimate Christian kingship and thus world history.<sup>10</sup> The main role of the last emperor is purely religious and consists in returning the regalia to Christ, thus completing the cycle of legitimate kingship on earth.

The quoted fragment combines the remittance of the regalia in *Pseudo-Methodius* with yet another belief with political weight quoted in Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *De Administrando Imperio*, according to which the regalia of the Byzantine emperors were of heavenly origin, brought by an angel to the founder of the city, Constantine.<sup>11</sup> Thus for the fifteenth-century author it was only natural to return the regalia to where they came from.

After having been configured in the seventh century, the “last emperor” figure was lent to various other later eschatological texts. The evolution of this figure in Byzantine literature in the following centuries discloses the attitude of the eschatological author towards the anticipated end of history, which meant towards his contemporary society and the empire as a religious factor. My aim here is to describe three categories of transformations within this literature, which characterize the evolution of the Byzantine religious Weltanschauung from the seventh century to the conquest of Constantinople. First, I emphasize a shift in eschatological thought from the genuine religious interest in the Parousia (the best example would be the Latin Pseudo Ephrem/Pseudo Isidore) to the historical interval between the time of the author or supposed author and the time of the material destruction of the world. Second, I discuss the dissociation of historical prophecy from its eschatological background. Finally, I consider the geographic shift from Jerusalem to Constantinople, and from the complex space of a world empire to a space confined between Western Anatolia and the Southern Balkans, with Constantinople as a center. All these changes amount to a shift from sacred history to secular eschatology, or, in other words, to the fall into history.

The first formulations of the “last emperor” theme are to be found in two seventh-century apocalyptic texts: *Pseudo-Methodius’s Vision of History and Its End* and *The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl*. Pseudo-Methodius’s text can be dated from the 670s to the 690s with relative certainty, as



the textual evidence shows that the two Latin manuscripts produced in the early eighth century are translations of the Greek text, which in turn is a translation from Syriac.<sup>12</sup> Establishing a similar date for *The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl* presents some difficulties and a variety of hypotheses have been proposed ranging from the fourth to the eleventh century. Nevertheless, there are three elements which support the dating of the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl to the mid-seventh century. First, the enemies of the empire are identified as pagans. Second, the name given to the last emperor is Constans, a possible reference to Constans II (born 630, reigned 641–68), the Byzantine emperor who traveled to Rome and tried to establish his capital in Syracuse. Both of these facts, the name of the final enemy and of the last emperor, suggest that the text must date prior to the Christians' awareness of the real threat of Islam and of its monotheistic Judeo-Christian background. As *terminus post quem* we have the reference to the final conflict described as a battle between a king of the Romans and the unclean nations of Gog and Magog. This last element appears for the first time in the Byzantine *Legend Alexander the Great* of the 630s.<sup>13</sup> Thus 630–670 is the most probable span of time for an apocalypse written in Latin and ascribing to the last emperor the name of a real emperor of the seventh century. A third apocalyptic text, which contains a key phrase of the last emperor theme and likewise presents some dating difficulties, is *The Latin Pseudo-Ephrem Sermon on the End of the World*.<sup>14</sup> For all these reasons, the “last emperor” is most likely a seventh-century theme.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the relation between *Pseudo-Methodius's Vision* and *The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl*, in the latter text, the “last emperor” theme runs as follows:

But when the king of the Romans will hear [about the attack of Gog and Magog], he will summon his army, destroy the enemy to the point of death, then go to Jerusalem, there lay down the diadem from his head and all his royal attire, and relinquish the kingdom of the Christians to God the Father and to Jesus Christ his Son.<sup>16</sup>

There is no reason to believe that this simple narrative of the last emperor is derived from *The Vision of Pseudo-Methodius*, where the em-



phasis falls on the fact that the last emperor fights the Ishmaelites. Unlike the text of *Pseudo-Methodius*, *The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl* also fails to emphasize the role of the cross, which gained particular importance during the Byzantine-Persian War and was more strongly perceived by Christians in the eastern territories of the empire than in the west. Captured by the Persians and restored to Jerusalem by Heraclius in 631, the cross was finally transferred from Jerusalem to Constantinople shortly before the conquest of the city by the Arabs in 638. Although initially kept and displayed at the Hagia Sophia, where the pilgrim Arculf witnessed its veneration in 680,<sup>17</sup> in the ninth century the cross became the most important element of the imperial collection of relics related to the life of Christ, according to tenth-century sources.<sup>18</sup> It is in this context that we should understand the identification of the labarum with the cross and the particular connection of the cross to the regalia. In *Pseudo-Methodius's Legend of the Last Emperor*, the cross is the receptor of the regalia. In the fifteenth-century lament cited above, the Virgin takes the place of the cross as receptor of the regalia. This variation echoes the realities after 1204, when the largest piece of the cross in the imperial collection of relics was sold by the Latin emperors of Constantinople to the French king, Saint Louis, and consequently the more modest role of these relics of the Passion in the imperial ideology of the Paleologan period.<sup>19</sup>

Despite some differences, there is nevertheless a certain coherence in both forms of the seventh-century last emperor myth and its connection to imperial ideology.<sup>20</sup> Perfectly corresponding to the views expressed in the fourth-century works of Eusebius of Caesarea, *Laus Constantini* and *Vita Constantini*,<sup>21</sup> or in Cosmas Indicopleustes's sixth-century *Cosmography*,<sup>22</sup> the central idea of this ideology presents the Roman Empire as the best possible political framework for Christianity, foreshadowing the Celestial Kingdom, and background of the Parousia. But military disasters of the seventh century challenged such confident views on both the eastern and western fronts of the empire. In the west, not only did the Justinianic conquest fail to restore the empire to its previous dimensions, but its territory actually shrunk to a few endangered possessions in Italy. At the same time, the Balkan region was lost to the Slavs and the Avars, which were pagan populations. In



the east, the Persian War opened the way to the Arab conquest that striped the empire of half of its provinces. The "last emperor" myth thus provides an answer cogent with imperial ideology to this challenge by saying that the empire would be restored and Jerusalem reintegrated into it in the final act of history. If one wonders why the earlier sixth-century layer of eschatological production did not contain the last emperor figure, as attested by *The Oracle of Baalbek*,<sup>23</sup> we have simply to observe that it made no sense to speculate about an eschatological restoration of the empire in Justinian's time. Although we see the weakness and precariousness of Justinian's conquests from our vantage point as historians, the contemporaries must have felt much more confident in the perpetuity of the empire. The spiritual danger came from within the empire and from the empire's leadership if we are to believe Procopius of Caesarea's criticism of Justinian in *The Secret History*.

The easily identifiable transition from the *vaticinia post eventum* to the part of real prophecy characterizes these sixth- and seventh-century texts: *The Oracle of Baalbek*, *Latin Tiburtine Sibyl*, and *Pseudo-Methodius's Vision*. Even more importantly, the eschatological future is presented in a rather simple and schematic way. *Pseudo-Methodius'* eschatological chronology runs as follows: 1) the Arab/Muslim conquest (called according to the prophecy in the Genesis the "Wild Ass") and the tribulations of the Christians; 2) the last emperor's restoration of the empire, his beneficent reign, and his journey to Jerusalem; 3) the invasion of Gog and Magog; 4) the revelation of Antichrist; 5) the Parousia. The importance of this simple scheme resides in perpetuating the belief in the trans-historical role of the Roman Empire.

In a later phase of the conflict between Byzantium and the Caliphate, when the likelihood of tremendous threats such as sieges of the capital from 674 to 678 and 716 abated and the war became an endemic conflict on the frontiers, the imminent end of history was postponed and opening the scene to history from the point of view of a person living and writing in Constantinople. Without distinguishing between iconoclast and iconophile eschatology, the end of time seemed less imminent. Instead, religious unrest and internal controversies about the orthodoxy of Byzantine power decreased its religious relevance. In this stage, the eschatological authors develop a long and blurred future.



*The Daniel-Diegesis*, edited by K. Berger, initiates the last emperor myth's fall into history.<sup>24</sup> Set shortly after the extremely dangerous 716–717 Arab campaigns against Byzantium, the text portrays the last emperor as a savior-emperor and destroyer of the Arabs. The prophecy does not, however, end here. Historical development continues for several generations with two successive wicked rulers and a “foul alien woman” until the cataclysmic destruction of Constantinople through submersion under the waters of the sea.<sup>25</sup> Historical developments continue in Rome and Jerusalem. This part of the text, an anti-Jewish polemic, states that the Antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan. In *The Daniel-Diegesis*, there is no last emperor in the restricted sense of *Pseudo-Methodius* and *The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl*.

Similarly, *The Apocalypse of Patriarch Leo of Constantinople*, dated to the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century, presents a historical scenario where the last emperor is completely absent. None of the seventh-century features of the last emperor are ascribed to any of the emperors of the series prophesied by the eschatological author. There is only a hazy figure of a good emperor, followed by a wicked woman called Irene, and a man named Constantine, who will for the last time restore true faith and piety.<sup>26</sup> Another peculiarity of this apocalypse is its equal emphasis on the historical phase of the prophecy and the strictly eschatological scene of the Last Judgment, which takes up one third of the text (chapters 21 to 29).

*The Andreas Salos Apocalypse* adopts this perspective and further blurs the simple scheme of *Pseudo-Methodius*. His series of future rulers introduces a disjunction between the different aspects of the last emperor. Chronologically there is no last emperor, but the functions assumed by the last emperor are divided among several future emperors.

*Andreas Salos's* sequence starts with a good emperor, called “from poverty,” who will humble the sons of Hagar, establish peace, and create abundance. After him comes a bad emperor, called the “son of lawlessness” (like the Antichrist in II Thess. 2:3), who will reign three and a half years (Daniel 7:25; 12:7) and will be followed by another bad emperor called the “apostate and persecutor.” In the fourth place arrives a good emperor from Ethiopia, who will restore churches and spread the love of Christ, followed immediately by an emperor from



Arabia who will go to Jerusalem and depose his regalia (the “last emperor” in the restricted sense). After the death of the Arabian emperor, three brothers will arise and wage wars between them (inspired by the Diadochi, according to Rydén). They will be supplanted by the filthy woman, after whose reign Jewish power will be restored in Jerusalem. In the ninth range comes the disintegration of the empire, the transfer of power to Rome, Thessalonica, and Sylaiion, and the release of Gog and Magog. At this moment, the Antichrist is revealed and begins the final clash between himself and the three witnesses, Elijah, Enoch, and the Son of Thunder (John the Evangelist). The prophecy ends with Christ’s second coming.

Thus for Andreas Salos, four emperors precede the imperial figure that accomplishes the most important function of the last emperor—the deposing of the regalia in Jerusalem—but other “last emperor” functions are assumed by the emperor who comes first—the military restoration of the empire—and by the emperor who comes in the fourth place—the restoration of Christianity. After the death of the fifth emperor political power continues with a series of disastrous reigns and conflicting powers, which means that the end of legitimate Roman power is distanced from the ultimate acts of the end of history.

According to *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse*, the True Cross is not one object, but is composed of several pieces, kept in different places as relics, which put together form the Cross. Once the dispersed pieces are reunited in a mysterious way, they will reconstitute the Cross on Golgotha in Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> In this way, *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse* can be viewed as an attempt to reconcile divergent opinions about the destiny of the True Cross: on the one hand, the belief that the Cross cannot be found on earth and will appear only at the end of time as a heavenly sign of the Parousia (a belief defended by Saint John Chrysostom); and, on the other hand, the belief in the authenticity of the relics of the Cross, stored first in the Hagia Sophia and then in the palatine chapels of Constantinople, as numerous literary sources inform us starting from the ninth century.<sup>28</sup> *The Apocalypse of Patriarch Leo of Constantinople* shares the same difficulty regarding the Cross, as it states that the Cross is in Heaven, ready to descend for the Parousia. Thus the scene of the last emperor deposing his crown on the Cross became



senseless; the last emperor has lost the most important of his functions and disappeared altogether.<sup>29</sup> It seems to be a peculiarity of the Apocalypses of the iconoclastic era (Daniel Diegesis, Patriarch Leo) to deny the eschatological relevance of the collection of relics related to the Passion of Christ. In this respect *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse* joins this group.

*The Andreas Salos Apocalypse* has also in common with *The Daniel-Diegesis* and *The Apocalypse of Patriarch Leo of Constantinople* a strong anti-Jewish polemical content. It is worth noting that *The Daniel-Diegesis* and *The Apocalypse of Patriarch Leo* can be dated to the eighth century with some certainty. The former goes back to the accession of Leo III, while the latter dates to the decline of his dynasty. Although Rydén dates *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse*, together with the whole text of *The Life*, to the mid-tenth century, C. Mango believes that *The Life of Andreas Salos* was produced sometime between the end of the seventh and the middle of the eighth century.<sup>30</sup> At least in the case of the Apocalypse in *The Life of Andreas Salos*, an earlier dating than the one proposed by Rydén (mid-tenth century) is possible. The significance would be that the three texts belong either to a period when ideological interest in the Cross was not yet developed, or to a background of religious opposition to imperial government, in this context and that period, to the iconophiles.

Another series of Byzantine eschatological texts appears in the manuscripts with the title *The Vision of Daniel*. Afanasii Vasiliev (1893) edited three such texts: the second text bears the complete title *Horasis tou Daniel peri tou eschatou kairou kai peri tes synteleyias tou aiōnos*;<sup>31</sup> the third text is called *The Last Vision of Daniel* (*He eschate horasis tou Daniel*);<sup>32</sup> while the first text is a homily falsely ascribed to St. John Chrysostom based on fragments of *The Vision of Daniel* (*Tou en hagiois patros hemon Ioannou tou Hrisostomou logos ek ten horasin tou Daniel*).<sup>33</sup> However, the longest, most detailed, and oldest Byzantine *Vision of Daniel* was transmitted to us only in its Slavonic translation contained in the famous codex *Zbornik Popa Dragolja*.<sup>34</sup> Based on the *vaticinia ex eventu*, all these texts were created in the ninth century.

The Slavonic text gives the following sequence of future reigns and events after the last recognizable historical context linked to a rebel-



lion and the consequent Arab invasion in Sicily: 1) An emperor of humble or unknown origin will be discovered by divine revelation and anointed at Akrodounion. His mission is to fight back the Ishmaelites, he will afterwards turn to the west, subdue the fair-haired nations, sojourn in Rome for a while, and finally come with many nations to Constantinople, from where he will scare off an emperor whose name starts with the letter sigma. 2) Then a ruler called "the tenth horn" (vocabulary borrowed from the Old Testament Book of Daniel) will rise to power and reign for one year. 3) The Ethiopian emperor will kill the tenth horn and reign in peace and prosperity for thirty-two years, restoring churches and holy images. 4) After his reign the unclean people of Gog and Magog will be unleashed, but finally destroyed by an archangel. 5) Eventually an emperor of the Romans will go to Jerusalem and sojourn there for twelve years, and, as the son of perdition is revealed, this last emperor will depose the regalia on the cross and hand over the empire to God. 6) The son of perdition will fight the witnesses of God and kill them.

The text stops abruptly here. The structure preserves some of the simplicity of seventh-century apocalypses (*Pseudo-Methodius* and *The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl*), but splits the pseudo-methodian figure of the last emperor into three figures: the anointed emperor who fights the Arabs, the Ethiopian Emperor who brings abundance, and the emperor residing in Jerusalem who hands over the empire to God. The second text in Vassiliev's edition (*Orasis tou Daniel*) keeps close to this sequence, only it splits the tenth horn into a succession of three emperors, the third of which pronounces the prophecy of Constantinople drowned in the waters. The rest of the structure is identical. A new feature in these ninth-century visions of Daniel is the relation of the first or second eschatological emperor to Rome or more generally to Western Mediterranean geo-political notions and his trajectory from the west to Constantinople. This feature might be explained by the fact that all these texts are derived from an eschatological production in Sicily or interested in the development of Sicilian history. Among them the pseudo-chrysostomian homily stands out because of its very short future. In it, like in *Pseudo-Methodius*, the Antichrist comes after the emperor who defeats the Arabs. Nevertheless the text seems to



be only a conglomerate of excerpts from different other texts combining exegetic and narrative styles, particularly *Pseudo-Methodius* and the Slavonic Daniel.

Compared to eighth-century eschatology (*Daniel-Diegesis* and *Apocalypse of Patriarch Leo*), where the figure of the last emperor is very weak or altogether absent, the visions of Daniel share with *Pseudo-Methodius* the assertion that Christian imperial history will last until the coming of the Antichrist, which means that it is a necessary framework for the historical condition and it is only the ceremonial restitution of the regalia in Jerusalem which allows for the Antichrist to come. This is a faithful rendering of patristic interpretation of II Thessalonians 2:6-7, expressly mentioned in the Pseudo-Chrysostom homily on the biblical Vision of Daniel.<sup>35</sup>

Liutprand of Cremona, visiting Constantinople in the mid-tenth century, testifies to an apocalyptic tradition ascribed to a Hippolytus bishop in Sicily, whose prophecy indicates that an emperor of the west would defeat the Ishmaelites, causing Liutprand to think of the Ottonian emperors.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to earlier apocalypses linked to the tradition of *Pseudo-Methodius*, the visions of Daniel produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries<sup>37</sup> describe the appearance of an aged king—eventually named John—in the “right hand part of Constantinople” escorted by four angels to Hagia Sophia and crowned there.<sup>38</sup> After the crowning of this king the apocalyptic author describes a victorious campaign against the Ishmaelites.<sup>39</sup> These texts already concentrate only on a fragment of future history: the victorious campaign of a Christian emperor against Muslim forces.

A completely new type of apocalyptic interests appears in *The Oracles of Leo the Wise*.<sup>40</sup> The first characteristic of this text consists in the lack of any indication that the future events of the narrative may be linked to the major eschata preceding the Parousia. They are a fragment of history written in future tense. The text describes simply a succession of emperors, reigning in Constantinople until the eventual fall of the city. A second characteristic is the geographic and geopolitical simplification. The geography of the eighth and ninth-century apocalypses, in which the authors still knew that the emperors’



action concerned a large world reaching from Spain, Italy, and Sicily to Palestine and Mesopotamia, is replaced by the concentration on Constantinople alone. History, more precisely Constantinopolitan history, replaces eschatology. The emperors are generally presented in grim colors, the essence of the prophecy being their identification by different symbols: the first emperor is associated with a canine aspect; the second is symbolized by a serpent devoured by crows; the third is depicted as an eagle bearing a cross and a unicorn; and the fourth image presents an old emperor, symbolized by a scythe and a rose, who is pagan and rebuilds the temples; the fifth emperor is a beneficent one, after whose death follows the division of the empire, bloodshed in Constantinople, and a fox cunningly seizing power. The series of future emperors is closed by an anointed liberator-king, whose name is Menahem.<sup>41</sup> Thus in *The Oracles of Leo* the last emperor is given a name, which is quite unique. Only in late visions of Daniel (of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) did the liberator king bear a name, Ioannes,<sup>42</sup> who echoes the priestly king of an unknown country looked after by western mendicant brothers. Yet, the name Menahem of *The Oracles of Leo*<sup>43</sup> links this tradition to another source of eschatological beliefs. The same name, Menahem, appears in The Apocalypse of Zerubabel (a Jewish eschatological text produced at the beginning of the seventh century in Palestine during the Persian invasion), where the character who bears it is a Messiah dedicated to waging war whose mission is to restore the Jewish kingdom in Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup> The connection between the Jewish apocalypticism of the seventh century and the thirteenth century's *Oracles of Leo* seems hardly possible, but as Paul Alexander rightly affirmed, the figure of the last emperor is a mirror image of the Jewish warrior Messiah.<sup>45</sup> The increasingly secularized historical prophecies in Byzantium thus run closer to what was also merely a historical eschatology, the Jewish Messianism. The structural resemblance of the two genres thus justifies an exchange of information between the two cultural spheres. Byzantine historical prophecies, as ongoing pseudo-scriptural or pseudo-patristic literature developing outside the canonical control of the Scriptures, was naturally open to exchange with a wide range of cultural spheres in the Mediterranean.



The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries supplement this tradition with another text, which is primarily concerned with the fate of the Byzantine capital. *The Centon of the Poor Emperor*<sup>46</sup> assumes Constantinople has already been conquered and expresses the dream of Christian restoration. Although there are several hypotheses regarding the date, ranging from the early thirteenth to the fifteenth century, the text was probably composed during the siege of the capital by Bayazid Ildirim (1394–1401) or, more precisely, during the absence of Manuel II, who went by sea to seek help from the western kingdoms. The invasion of Anatolia by Tamerlane, the battle of Ankara and the defeat of Bayazid provide a suitable context for imagining the end of the Ishmaelites/Turks. The text paints a detailed portrait of the savior emperor, who combines noble and ridiculous traits. Moreover, he wears chains on his neck, breast, and members—an ascetic feature characteristic of holy fools.<sup>47</sup>

After the fall of Constantinople, the Oracles of Leo were reinterpreted by their Greek readers as referring to a series of sultans, signifying the countdown to the hoped end of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>48</sup>

Starting with *Pseudo-Methodius*, eschatology is irreversibly split into two literary genres: unhistorical visions of the Last Judgment with a strong moralizing intention<sup>49</sup> (starting with an important Jewish and early Christian tradition<sup>50</sup> and continuing in both western<sup>51</sup> and eastern Christianity until the tenth century with *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger* and *The Life of Saint Niphon of Constantiana*<sup>52</sup>), and prophecies about an earthly future, such as those described above. This earthly future sometimes includes a long description of the terrible deeds of the Antichrist, the glorious second coming of Christ, the killing of the Antichrist, and the beginning of the Judgment (*Pseudo-Ephrem* and *The Apocalypse of Patriarch Leo*). Other texts only briefly mention the Antichrist (*Pseudo-Methodius* and the visions of Daniel). Growing out of this second vein of apocalyptic thought, historical prophecies acquired an autonomous status which eventually evolved into late Byzantine and post-Byzantine legends of a sleeping emperor.

But what is the role of this new pseudo-prophetic literature? In contrast to the pseudo-methodian structure of the last emperor myth, the series of emperors which appear in *The Vision of Daniel*, *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse* or in *The Oracles of Leo* can hardly be read as imperial



ideology or propaganda.<sup>53</sup> The overall picture is frightening, and although good emperors show up from time to time, the tone is one of pessimism. Perhaps the most important message of this literature is the lack of spiritual relevance of Christian imperial power. This interpretation becomes obvious if we take into consideration the whole text of *The Life of Andreas Salos*. First, he clearly states that Constantinople does not enjoy a particularly happy destiny, and, after several wicked rulers, deserves to be drowned in the sea. In regard to Epiphanius' concern about the holy relics, Andreas answers that God will lift the relics of his saints up to heaven.<sup>54</sup> The holy man believes that there is no reason to be concerned about the Hagia Sophia; it is only a stone building and God needs no particular dwelling place on earth, as he inhabits the whole of creation.<sup>55</sup> Constantinople—with its corrupt and violent officials, whores, hypocritical clergyman, and individuals driven by lust whom Andreas Salos meets on the streets of the city—is by no means on the verge of becoming a heavenly Jerusalem. Adding up the number of years of the rule of different emperors mentioned in the text, we arrive at fifty-two, which is a short future. But then the saint announces that the power of the assembled Jews in Jerusalem will last until the fulfillment of the seventh millennium. Even if the text were written at the end of the tenth century, there would still be some five hundred years left until the end of the seventh millennium, which allows for a long historical time without Christian rule. Andreas offers no eschatological consolation. In this sense, it is noteworthy that this text constantly alludes to and quotes *The Revelation of Saint John*, a text which did not yet enjoy canonical status in Byzantium. Moreover, *Andreas Salos* shares the same pessimistic perspective of history as *The Revelation*. By contrast, Andreas's disciple Epiphanius, as a good Byzantine official, believes and hopes that Constantinople enjoys a special status. He calls the city a "New Jerusalem" and worries about its relics and churches. As a saintly patriarch, he also assumes the direction of the Constantinopolitan church after the death of his teacher. Through the two characters, the text offers two opposing stances on the spiritual relevance of organized society, and particularly of Christian society. Andreas, on the other hand, suggests a mystical solution. He believes that there is no hope for perfect society on earth, and consequently



that one must seek the Kingdom of Heaven with the unique means through which it can be achieved: ascetic strife. The reward for such an attempt is a vision of the future or otherworldly reality, like a quick glimpse into that private felicity one would enjoy after physical death.

Although the visions of Daniel discussed above do not benefit from a coherent literary background like the one we read in *The Life of Andreas Salos* as theological support for the saint's apocalyptic, this entire group of eighth- to tenth-century apocalypses convey a similar frame of mind. It seems, then, more logical to see this middle and late Byzantine political eschatology as a gradual separation from the political theology based on the katechon-theory<sup>56</sup> developed in *Pseudo-Methodius*, or, more precisely, as a rejection of the identification of the empire with an instrument of salvation, and of an ideal Christian society foreshadowing the Heavenly Kingdom. We may also ask how central this literature was to Byzantine religiosity. Obviously it is hard to judge the dissemination of a text based on the number of preserved manuscripts. Yet, compared to other popular religious literature, the poor quality of the textual transmission of several of these texts is astonishing. Was it because of inattentive or unspecialized copyists that the number of variations from one manuscript to the other, of textual corruptions and misreading, amount to unreliable textual transmission? Contrasted with the fine rhetoric production of court circles, one could hardly call this literature imperial. Nevertheless, these prophecies were widely read and cited: emperors sometimes consulted them superstitiously, while historians mocked such attitudes, and clergymen fervently opposed the practice.<sup>57</sup> Historical prophecies belonged to the same area of interest as astrology.

If already in *The Life of Andreas Salos* Constantinople is hardly a New Jerusalem, by the twelfth century the distrust in the eternal destiny of the New Rome finds its way into historiography. Michael Attaleiates sternly criticizes Byzantine warfare and its political action and expresses distrust in its eternal destiny after the battle of Mantzikert. He reproaches the Byzantines for having abandoned Justice, their ancestral customs, and the praise of their creator,<sup>58</sup> for which sins they were also abandoned by God on the battlefield. Starting with the Second Crusade, as western armies closed in on Constantinople, the city



was in unrest. The inhabitants of the capital no longer felt that the city was impenetrable, as was the case when Frederic Barbarossa and the Third Crusade approached the city.<sup>59</sup> The year of 1204 only confirmed these fears.

As shown by the Hesychast controversy, by the fourteenth century, Constantinople no longer represented the standard of orthodoxy and Christian practice. Philotheos Kokkinos in his *Encomium on Gregory Palamas* expresses a surprisingly stern criticism of Constantinople:

Meanwhile as I said, their enemy Barlaam arrived in Constantinople, a city which I, at least, do not praise for its beauty and wealth and wisdom, as someone else might, since I am not able to praise even one of these things. For there they sport with the divine as if with draughts and dice, or, to quote the wise theologian, "as if these things were horse races and theaters"; and they treat what is seen (in the liturgy, or the uncreated light) contemptuously and betray the divine and evilly perform what is mystical as in theatre or drama.<sup>60</sup>

Confronted with the decline of their empire in the fourteenth century, some Byzantines found consolation in the mystical and liturgical eschatology of the Hesychasts, in their exaltation of a Church capable of surviving without an empire.<sup>61</sup> By the time the capital succumbed to the Turkish assaults, all of Anatolia and most of the Balkans had already been under Ottoman rule for more than a century. But this mystical eschatology has another story.

Our analysis allows us to identify four stages in the evolution of historical prophecy. The first stage emphasizes the centrality of the empire in the *Weltanschauung* of the Byzantines. It groups several texts produced in the seventh century, an echo of either what seemed to be the restoration through Heraclius or of the Muslim invasion: *The Legend of Alexander the Great* in the 630s; *Pseudo-Ephrem's Sermon on the End of the World*; *The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl*; and *Pseudo-Methodius's Vision of History and Its End*.

In the second stage, eschatology with historical content may express a subversive stance towards political power. The universal empire of the Romans is not necessarily a stronghold of Christianity; pagan or



anti-Christian rulers could also govern this empire: such is the stance in *The Daniel-Diegesis* and *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse*. Christianity and empire might even occasionally part ways, as in *The Apocalypse of Leo, Patriarch of Constantinople*.

In the third stage, the concern with the role of the empire at the end of time is substituted by an interest in the final fate of Constantinople. The belief in a natural cataclysm destroying Constantinople prior to the end of the world is expressed in many early medieval apocalypses, most notably in *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse* and in *The Vision of Daniel*. Later medieval apocalypses (*The Late Daniel Visions*, *The Oracles of Leo the Wise*, and *The Centon of the True Emperor*) reveal a firm awareness that a military conquest of Constantinople is also possible and would mean merely the end of Christian rule in that city, and not the end of the world.

The fourth stage, which appears in the same late medieval and the early modern (post-Byzantine) historical apocalypses, marks the transformation of the political content of apocalyptic literature into a truly “secular eschatology.” Hoping for the deliverance of Constantinople, these pseudonymous authors are interested only in the historical fate of the city. The last universal savior emperor merely turns into a liberator of the Greek nation.

The already growing national consciousness of the Greek-speaking population of Byzantium borrows the language of eschatology only to express a political expectation. In the post-Byzantine *Oracles of Leo* and in *The Songs and Laments over the Fall of Constantinople*, eschatology reverts to a definitive fall into history. Occasionally the eighteenth century revisits *Pseudo-Methodius* to find a meaning for the growing Russian Empire. Byzantine eschatology—ranging from the core of the Christian religious system (the belief in the second coming of Christ) to diverse forms of historical prophecies favoring ethno-cultural identifications—produced material for almost every type of attitude towards political power, from sacred awe of God-given imperial order to total distrust and rejection of social order. There is nevertheless a chronology to this religious and political thought which highlights an evolution and gives meaning to history. Religious thought pours out of man’s dynamic relation to past and future, the only possible frames for an evanescent present.



## Notes

- 1 A version of this essay has been published in the *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*.
- 2 N. Politès, Παράδοσεις [Traditions], (Athens, 1904), 1:22; Ibid., vol. 2, 658–74.
- 3 Donald Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor. The Life and Legend of Constantine Palaiologos, Last Emperor of the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 4 Anonymi Monodia in Spyridon Lambros, “Μονωδίαι καὶ Θρήνοι ἐπὶ τῇ αλώσει τῆς 392 Κωνσταντινουπόλεως,” *Νέος Ἐλληνομήμων* 5 (1908): 248–50; A. Pertusi and A. Carile, *Testi inediti e poco noti sulla caduta di Costantinopoli* (Bologna: Pàtron Editore, 1983), 326–31. The same tale is told in a short chronicle found in a manuscript in the monastery of St. John on Patmos, Tomadakis (1955), 28–37. For the translation given here, see Nicol, *Immortal Emperor*, 89–90.
- 5 Lennart Rydén, *The Life and Conduct of Our Holy Father Andrew the Fool for the Sake of Christ* (Uppsala: 1995), 254–56; J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 111 (Athens: Kentron Paterikōn Ekdoseōn, 1987), 848C.
- 6 François Halkin, “Une Nouvelle Vie de Constantin dans un légendier de Patmos,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 77 (1959): 79.
- 7 A. Frolov, “La dedicace de Constantinople dans la tradition byzantine,” *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 127 (1944): 61–127.
- 8 A.N. Veselovskij, ed., *Vita Basilii iunioris* (Moscow, 1889), 65.
- 9 Lennart Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse. Greek Text, Translation, and Commentary,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 201, 215; [Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 11, 853B]; Commentary, 228–29.
- 10 Paul J. Alexander, “The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and its Messianic Origin,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institute* 41 (1978): 1–15.
- 11 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik and trans. R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967), 66–67.
- 12 Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. Dorothy de F. Abrahamse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- 13 Gerrit J. Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies during the Reign of Heraclius,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit te Groningen, 2002), 81–94.
- 14 Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 136–141.
- 15 See Michael Kmosko “Das Rätsel des Pseudo-Methodius,” *Byzantion* 6 (1931): 273–296; Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*; Paul J. Alexander, *Religious and Political History and Thought in the Byzantine Empire* (London: Variorum, 1978); Sebastian Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam” *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 9–21; Brock, “Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1976): 17–36; Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book 15 of John Bar Penkāyē’s Riš Mellē,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1989): 51–75; Gerrit Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser,” in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniël Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 82–111; Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Sources*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 149–87; Reinink, *Syriac Christianity under Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Rule* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005).
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- 17 Thomas Wright, ed., *Early Travels in Palestine, Comprising the Narratives of Arculf* (London: Bohn, 1848), 12.



- 18 P. Magdalino, "L'église du Phare et les reliques de la Passion à Constantinople (7/8–13e siècle)," in *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. J. Durand and B. Flusin (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2004), 15–30.
- 19 G. P. Majeska, "The Relics of Constantinople after 1204," in *Byzance et les reliques*, ed. Durand and Flusin, 183–90.
- 20 P. Guran, "Genesis and Function of the Last Emperor-Myth in Byzantium," *Bizantinistica. Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi*, 2nd ser., 8 (2006): 273–303.
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- 23 Paul J. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967).
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- 26 Maisano, *L'apocalisse apocrifa di Leone di Costantinopoli* (Naples: Morano Editore, 1975).
- 27 Rydén, *Andrew the Fool*, 268.
- 28 B. Flusin, "Construire une nouvelle Jérusalem: Constantinople et les reliques," in *L'Orient dans l'histoire religieuse de l'Europe. L'invention des origines*, ed. M.A. Amir-Moezzi and J. Scheid (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 51–70; Magdalino, *Relics of Constantinople*, 15–30.
- 29 Maisano, *L'apocalisse apocrifa*, 103. The Cross is displayed only after the general resurrection of the dead, together with the other signs of his passion.
- 30 Compare C. Mango, "The Life of St. Andrew the Fool Reconsidered," *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi* 2 (1982): 297–313; and Lennart Rydén, "The Date of the Life of Andreas Salo," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32 (1978): 129–55.
- 31 A. Vassiliev, ed. *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina* (Moscow, 1893), 38–43; Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 77–95. This piece is discussed as "Daniel Ka' aestai" referring to the first words of the text.
- 32 Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, 43–47; Alexander calls it "Last Daniel."
- 33 Ibid., 33–38; Alexander calls it "Pseudo-Chrysostom."
- 34 P. S. Srechkovich, "Zbornik Popa Dragolia," *Spomenik* 5 (1890); V. Istrin, *Otkrovenie Mefodia Patarskago i apokrificheskie videniia Daniila*, vol. 1, *Teksty* [Texts] (Moscow, 1897), 156–58; P. A. Lavrov, "Apokrificheskie Teksty" [Apocryphal texts], *Sbornik Otdelenia Russkago Jazyka i Slovesnosti Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk* 67, no. 13 (1899): 1–5.
- 35 Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, 35. For discussions of the eschatological content of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, see Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist. Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 33–57; Cristian Badilita, *Métamorphoses de l'Antichrist chez les Pères de l'Église* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2005), 51–60; Théodore Paléologue, *Sous l'oeil du grand Inquisiteur. Carl Schmitt et l'héritage de la théologie politique* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 111–29.
- 36 Ernest F. Henderson, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1910), 460–64.
- 37 Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, 43–47.
- 38 Istrin, *Otkrovenie Mefodia Patarskago*, vol. 1, 137.
- 39 C. Mango, "The Legend of Leo the Wise," *Zbornik Radova Vizantolškog Instituta* 6 (1960): 59–93.
- 40 See the reprint of the 1650 Petrus Lambecius' Paris edition in *Tou sophotatou basileos Leontos chresmoi* in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, 107:1122–1158; E. Legrand, *Les oracles de Léon le Sage* (Paris, 1875).
- 41 Mango, "Leo the Wise," 60.
- 42 Istrin, *Otkrovenie Mefodia Patarskago*, vol. 1, 137.
- 43 *Tou sophotatou basileos Leontos chresmoi*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, 107:1137A.



- 44 Israel Lévi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès," *Revue des études juives* 68 (1914): 131–44.
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- 47 *Anonymou paraphrasis ton tou basileos Leontos chresmon*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, 107:1144AB.
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- 53 Gerhard Podskalsky, "Représentation du temps dans l'eschatologie imperial byzantine," in *Le Temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge, 3–13 siècles* (Paris: CNRS, 1984), 439–50.
- 54 Rydén (1974), 208–209 and 220–21 [Migne (1987), 111:864C].
- 55 Rydén, "Andreas Salos Apocalypse," 211, 222; [Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 111:868B].
- 56 See footnote 34.
- 57 A late Byzantine example of this attitude is the rejection by Saint Maxim Kavsocalivitis of Emperor John V Paleologos and Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos' interests in political predictions. See François Halkin, "Deux Vies de saint Maxime le Kausokalybe," *Analecta Bollandiana* 54 (1936): 93.
- 58 Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. E. Bekker (Bonn: CSHB, 1864), 193–97.
- 59 An echo of this fear can be found in the second series of *Oracles of Leo*, Mango, "Leo the Wise," 67.
- 60 Philotheos Kokkinos, *Encomium of Gregory Palamas* in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, 151:594D–595B.
- 61 P. Guran, "L'eschatologie de Palamas entre théologie et politique," *Études byzantines et post-byzantines* 5 (2006): 291–320; Guran, "Les implications théologico-politiques de l'image de la deësis à Voronež," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 44 (2005): 39–67.







Part

III

# Transformations







## Radical Hopes: Apocalyptic Longing in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy

*Michael Allen Gillespie*

In his *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, the Greek poet Hesiod recounts the story of Pandora, who let loose from her famous jar all of the evils in the world, all that is except for hope, which by the command of Zeus was not released. Modern readers of Hesiod have found it difficult to make sense of these passages, in large part because they cannot bring themselves to believe that hope is an evil.<sup>1</sup> Their perplexity is understandable. Hope may not be the greatest good we have, but most modern human beings certainly consider it a good, and an important one at that. We live in the reasonable hope or expectation of a better future, and believe that a hopeless life would not be worth living. What then could Hesiod possibly have meant? How could hope be an evil?

This question highlights the gulf that separates us from the Greeks, a gulf rooted in fundamental differences that distinguish their experience of the world from our own. Among these is the way that they and we conceptualize time. For Hesiod and his contemporaries, time was a cycle of birth and death, governed by an unknowable but also unbreakable fatality.<sup>2</sup> Hope for them was an evil because it led humans to believe they could overcome the cycles of nature, that they could escape their fates, and elude mortality. From Hesiod's point of view, such a delusive dream leads to hubris or foolishness, rendering men fit objects for either tragedy or comedy.

The transformation of hope into something more positive began with Christianity, which characterized hope as one of the three cardinal virtues along with faith and charity. For Christians hope had a more positive valence because they understood it within a different conception of time. Christianity imagined time not as an eternally repeating natural cycle but as a unique unfolding of events according to a divine will, a story beginning with creation, a middle in which fallen man was redeemed by God's self-sacrifice, and an end in which all humans will be judged and some few granted eternal life in a radically



transformed reality under the rule of Christ. To hope in this context is not to be filled with an over-weening pride that glories in its own deeds and creations, but to live in expectation of the divinely ordained end, in the faith that one will be among the elect who are granted eternal life at the final reckoning.

This Christian vision of the end of time is a vision of the apocalyptic moment, the moment in which the veil is cast aside and those who saw once through a glass darkly finally see face to face. The end within Christian thought is conceived as a transition to a higher plane of existence, and therefore also as a radical rupture with everything that has occurred before. This transition is characterized by a ferocious battle of good and evil, a battle between the forces of light under the leadership of Christ and the forces of darkness led by a raging Satan. This Manichean notion of a final conflict is derived from earlier Zoroastrian sources and is part of the underlying Gnostic moment in Christian thought. What distinguishes the Christian reading of this conflict is that there is finally no doubt about the outcome, which is decided in advance by God's omnipotent power. This victory and the transfiguration of the elect thus are not the result of human effort but the consequence of divine action. Thus, while humans may be able to make themselves worthy of salvation, there is nothing they can do to bring about their transfiguration. They thus can only live in the expectation or hope of this coming end. Such hope is an integral part of the faith that helps the Christian endure the suffering of life in this world. In contrast to the Greeks, hope is consequently not a danger to Christians but a source of comfort during their passage through this vale of tears.

Hope for early modernity has a much different valence, for it is understood within a radically different conception of time—time conceived not as a cyclical process or as a finite stretch of time that will give way to eternity but as a vast and perhaps infinite temporal dimension within which the world unfolds. This view of time was part of the early modern transformation of the closed world of antiquity and the Middle Ages into an infinite universe.<sup>3</sup> Hope in this context is the expectation of continual improvement in the human condition as a result of the application of modern science and technology to master the natural world. It is, in short, the idea of progress with which we are so



familiar. Modernity does not imagine humans to be subject to cycles of rise and decline that they must accept, nor to be pilgrims in an alien world patiently waiting for a divine transfiguration of reality. Modern human beings imagine that they can make themselves powerful, as powerful perhaps as God, and thus control their own destinies. They are thus drawn not to the past and a golden age or to the beatific vision of a coming end but to an engagement with the present in an effort to promote human flourishing. Modernity thus does not see hope as an evil but as a realistic possibility rooted in rational expectations. Hope, however, is not always rational. Indeed, the capacity of modern humans to do things that previous ages would have found astounding, has led to the widespread belief that there are few if any limits to human striving. It is this factor that gives rise to a new and more dangerous version of apocalyptic longing.

This linear notion of time that is essential to modernity leaves no room for the notion of cycles of rise and decline in human life, and the concomitant fatalism embodied in the image of a wheel of fortune. As a result, the ancient prohibition against hubris becomes increasingly incomprehensible in modern times. Moreover, the Christian notion that only God can transfigure the world gives way to the notion that miracles have come to an end and that humans can and must act on their own behalf. In this way the modern notion of time warrants and encourages humans in their efforts to master and transform the world. The impact upon apocalyptic thinking of this changed notion of time is already apparent in the humanist view of man as a quasi-divine being with a will akin to that of God (e.g., Pico della Mirandola); the Reformation idea of man as an agent of divine will; and the Hermetic notion of a magical key or method that will unlock the secrets of nature and give humans godlike power. These factors produced apocalyptic movements of their own, especially during the Wars of Religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but they still fell within a generally Christian horizon and were ultimately dependent on divine rather than human action.

Two other factors were decisive for the rebirth of apocalyptic thought in the nineteenth century. The first was the recognition that the science that enabled humanity to master and transform nature



also gave humanity the power to master and transform itself. Early modern thinkers had some inkling of this fact. Hobbes in fact imagined restructuring human political life on the model of a clock to control the natural struggle for power that led to the war of all against all.<sup>4</sup> Hobbes and his contemporaries, however, generally thought of technology in the service of human beings. Later moderns, by contrast, came to recognize that the very use of technology inevitably brought about a transformation of humanity. Humans adopted different practices, habits, ways of life, and forms of organization. With their tools they improved the strength and health of the human body, and augmented human abilities in hitherto undreamed of ways, but at the same time this scientific investigation and technical mastery of the natural world reconceived the relationship of God and his creation, leaving the world and man himself disenchanted. Humans who had imagined themselves to be the *imago dei* came to see themselves as more akin to the ape or the worm. Not only was the divinity of man called into question, his very naturalness underwent a radical change. The taming of the wilderness required and produced a similar taming of the wild in human beings themselves. As a result, the worker, the manager, and the bureaucrat replaced the peasant, the warrior, and the priest as the exemplary forms of human life.

While this transformation was important in its own right it is not sufficient to explain the turn to apocalyptic thinking. Here another, less obvious factor was more important. The modern project rested on the idea that knowledge could be obtained by many people working together, publishing their results, and accumulating a vast store of information. The culmination of this view was the Encyclopedia that was the pinnacle of the Enlightenment. Diderot and his contemporaries assumed that the gradual accumulation of knowledge would produce a continual progress in human happiness and morality. This notion seemed to be borne out by the success of the American colonies in establishing a republican government and by the early French Revolution that seemed to be a realization of the dreams of the Enlightenment. However, the advent of the Terror called all of this into question, and the rise of Napoleon seemed to many to indicate that the Enlightenment had come to a catastrophic end.



While the failure of the Revolution called the idea of cumulative progress into question, it was Kantian philosophy that demonstrated that such progress could never produce human happiness. Progress is conceived as motion toward a specific end, and in general an end that is good. We thus can only know that we are progressing (or regressing) rather than merely wandering aimlessly if we know where we are going. But it was precisely this fact that was impossible to discern. While thinkers such as Hobbes recognized that there was no idea of the highest good, they believed that progress might consist in motion away from what is a manifest evil, that is, away from violent death. But this move cannot be wholly satisfying, since it ultimately depends upon knowing not merely that death is evil but also that life is good. Others have asserted that either wealth or power is the goal, since both improve an individual's chances of obtaining whatever he or she desires. Wealth and power, however, are merely means, not ends, and thus cannot give meaning to motion. More power might be conducive to progress if used properly but would be conducive to regress if wrongly employed.

If science allows us to transform both physical and human nature, then there either is no ultimate end to human action and therefore no progress, or the end of human action transcends nature. Both of these possibilities are plausible but have radically different consequences. The first leads to the abandonment of any overarching meaning to human life. In some cases this produces pessimism and despair, in others a pragmatic engagement with a continually changing actuality. The second, leads to an effort not merely to transform the world but to transform it in a profound and final way. It is this possibility in combination with the others discussed above that empowers and authorizes nineteenth-century apocalyptic aspirations.

Rousseau already had some insight into the inability of the Enlightenment project to provide a meaningful ground for human existence. In his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, Rousseau argued that the supposed progress of modernity was in fact a source of decline since it was not guided by a notion of moral purpose or human excellence. His conclusions were widely echoed in late eighteenth-century Europe. The result of this growing skepticism about the moral project



of modernity gave rise to a sense of aimlessness and despair, and led to a variety of attempts to find a ground for moral judgment that was compatible with modern science. For some this meant an investigation of history, understood as the unfolding of human being in time. In this way one might be able to discern where humanity went astray, as Rousseau imagined in *The Discourse on Inequality*; or how a people developed its specific national character (e.g., Burke), or even where humanity was headed (e.g., Turgot or Condorcet). On the basis of such a historical investigation, it might be possible to determine what should be done. Of course, this assumes that there is some hidden purpose or direction in the unfolding of history. However, such an end or purpose cannot itself be something historical. This goal for the most part was identified with the moral law or kingdom of ends that transcended everyday experience.

The thinker who most clearly defended such a notion was Immanuel Kant. He argued in his critical philosophy that there was a realm that transcended our everyday experience and understanding, a kingdom of unreachable moral ends that must always be our guiding star. Indeed, he was convinced that only action guided by such ends could be autonomous and moral, and that all action motivated by natural desires was heteronymous and merely self-interested. Kant came to this conclusion as the result of his critique of Enlightenment reason. He recognized that the Enlightenment project rested on two assumptions: first, that humans could develop a science that explicated the necessary causes of all things, and second, that they could be held accountable for their actions because their actions were freely chosen. He not only recognized both but also demonstrated that each was necessarily to the other and also contradictory to the other. They were in short antinomious. A causal series could only make sense, he argued, if it terminated in a first, free or uncaused cause. Such freedom, however, undermined the notion of causality itself. The world as the Enlightenment understood it was thus necessarily contradictory.<sup>5</sup>

Kant's solution to this problem was transcendental idealism. It was an attempt to save science, while preserving a space for freedom and morality. He believed that he could achieve this task if he could show that we experience reality only in and through consciousness. Being



(*Sein*) in Kant's view always appears as consciousness (*Bewusstsein*). There is no awareness that is not an awareness of things and things are only as they are perceived. This is not to say that there is no reality behind the appearances of things but only that our access to this reality is always mediated by our sensory and mental apparatus. Our understanding, and therefore science, does not reach to the-things-in-themselves but only to appearances, that is, to the phenomenal world. As powerful as the understanding may be, if it were the sole faculty we had to guide us through life, we would not know how to live, what to choose, or even who we were. Fortunately, in Kant's view we have another entrance to the reality that lies behind appearances. This is our capacity to perceive the moral law, which tells us not what is but what ought to be, thus giving us access to what Kant calls the kingdom of ends, and thereby establishing a direction for human striving. It is a power not of pure reason but of practical reason, and to be rational for Kant is thus to be guided by this moral law.

The danger that grows out of the Enlightenment notion of reason is the tendency of pure reason to overstep its bounds and seek to grasp the thing-in-itself. Pure reason in Kant's view must be content to confine itself to what he calls "the island of truth," the finite realm available to us through perception. The understanding must not venture out onto the foggy, iceberg-infested seas in the hopeless search for a truth about the infinite absolute. On this unbounded sea the understanding constantly goes astray, led hither, thither, and yon by the arbitrary images cast up by the imagination, as it hopelessly seeks to make sense of that which it cannot grasp. Humans for Kant can thus only live a good life if they are guided by the moral law and abandon all hopes of peering behind the veil of perception and understanding the things-in-themselves. The attempt to do so, in Kant's view, is equivalent to the attempt to make ourselves gods, and leads to disaster. In establishing this limitation Kant hoped to restrain the Enlightenment's impossible hopes and consequent longing for the infinite, for a godlike knowledge and perfection. It was precisely his efforts to delineate the forms and limits of consciousness and reason, however, that provided the philosophical mariners of the nineteenth-century with the means for an escape from the island on which Kant had



sought to confine them, and it was his clues about the existence of a reality hidden beyond experience that tempted them to set sail for the infinite. It was on this voyage that they became entangled in apocalyptic speculation.<sup>6</sup>

Kant himself seemed to give them warrant for such an investigation. In his *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, he argued that while humans could not intentionally establish the kingdom of ends, the course of history was moving toward the realization of such a goal. What distinguishes this idea from those of later nineteenth-century thinkers is, of course, Kant's belief that this goal would be attained not because of human planning but due to the teleological structure of the world itself (presumably established by God). Still, the idea that such a regime could be brought into existence opened up the possibility of combining transcendent moral goals with historical action, the potent combination that was to give rise to the apocalyptic radicalism of the nineteenth century.

Kant's immediate successors were dissatisfied with transcendental idealism because it seemed to save the consistency of things only by showing that consciousness, the highest thing, was contradictory.<sup>7</sup> They believed that the key to resolving the contradictions that Kant had revealed and to coming to terms with the sources of the moral law and the meaning of human life, could only be obtained by an investigation of consciousness itself, an investigation not of the structures of consciousness as it exists everywhere and always, but as they unfold historically—an investigation of what Hegel called first “the experience of consciousness,” and later “the phenomenology of spirit.” To understand how we ought to live, we need to investigate the historical origin and development of consciousness.

In its most primitive state, consciousness in Hegel's view is awareness that is lost or submerged in its object. The moment it becomes self-consciousness is a moment of great loss, in which awareness is separated or alienated from its object. It comes to perceive itself not as intrinsically bound up with the object but as something apart from and opposed to it. This alienation in Hegel's view establishes the historical task for all consciousness as the reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) of the subject and the object, of self and other.<sup>8</sup> Self-consciousness perceives it-



self as merely the subject and does not recognize that its true being encompasses the subject and the object as well as the relationship between them. Self-consciousness consequently does not and cannot understand itself until it has grasped the fact that it is this duality. The “experience of consciousness” or the “phenomenology of spirit” is the historical process in and through which consciousness comes to grasp this fact, that is, the dialectical process of its development through all of its possible forms to the recognition that it is all reality. This recognition is what Hegel calls absolute knowledge or science. In this moment not only does consciousness come to understand the absolute truth, it becomes that absolute and recognizes itself as this absolute. Consciousness thereby sees that it is the union of subject and object, of individual and the community, of human and divine.<sup>9</sup>

At the core of Hegel’s thought is thus a remarkable apocalyptic event in which the veil is lifted and finite human beings come to the recognition that they are a moment of the absolute. Like the apocalyptic moment described in Revelations, it too is preceded by a great war. Hegel completed the *Phenomenology*, which he presents as the realization of absolute knowledge and thus as the culmination and perfection of all previous forms of consciousness, on the evening of the Battle of Jena and reports that he could hear the canon firing in the distance as he sent it off to his publisher.<sup>10</sup> However, in contrast to the battle predicted in Revelations, the wars of Napoleon are not a great struggle of good and evil. Such a struggle is impossible in Hegel’s view because there is no absolute good and evil. They are no longer intelligible within the modern conception of time that understands the good as what is new, progressive, or avant-garde, and the bad not as evil but as what is old, stale, or reactionary. What is new is thus relatively better than what came before but it is not diametrically opposed to it. Indeed, the new for Hegel always embodies the previous forms of consciousness.

What distinguishes Hegel’s thought from earlier notions of progress is the claim that the transformation wrought with the advent of absolute knowledge is not merely an incremental improvement but the final stage in a process that ends with a transfiguration of the whole, an end to alienation, and the complete reconciliation of consciousness



with itself. It is, in other words, the end of the experience of consciousness, and thus, nothing new or better is possible. This is the basis for Hegel's famous claim that history has come to an end. "What is rational," he proclaims, "is now actual and what is actual is rational."<sup>11</sup> At the end of history we no longer have anything to love and pursue because we have the truth and the good in its utmost possible perfection. Thus, as in the biblical prophecy, we no longer see through a glass darkly but face to face. In contrast to the biblical account, however, in Hegel's apocalyptic moment the face we see is not God's but our own.

While this moment heralds the advent of a new world, it cannot provide us with the satisfaction that the Christian beatific vision promised or that utopian thinkers longed for. Indeed, while the advent of absolute knowledge ushers in a new age, this age, as Hegel knew, will be something of a disappointment to those hoping for perfection. First, the absolute synthesis at the heart of this perfected reality is completed only within consciousness or spirit, only as an intellectual event or philosophic insight, and not in actuality. A number of other disheartening factors also remain—class difference, poverty, hereditary authority, narrow self-interest, warfare, the need to produce one's own subsistence, etc. Indeed, to those expecting the apocalypse to produce a new paradise, Hegel's thought was a bitter pill, and a great deal of his rhetorical effort is aimed at reconciling those disheartened idealists to the final reality he reveals. His apocalyptic message is nominally idealist, but also in important respects realistic and quietistic.

Moreover, at times Hegel even seems to imply that the end of history might not be the end per se. He argues at the end of the *Phenomenology* that at the end of its development, spirit is engulfed in the "night of self-consciousness," in which consciousness lifts itself above its attained unity and thereby alienates itself utterly from its attained perfection, and returns to its primitive beginning in immediacy.<sup>12</sup> In his lectures on the *Philosophy of History*, he suggests that the new world may unfold according to a plan quite different from that of the old world.<sup>13</sup> In the end, Hegel thus seems to imperfectly combine three notions of time: the notion that time is a linear progressive development that characterized modernity; the notion that time is a circular process that characterized antiquity; and the notion of a final end or apoc-



alyptic revelation that characterized Christianity. This is only possible, however, because he imagined time itself to be not something independent of human being but the unfolding and development of consciousness. Consciousness does not unfold in time, time is the shape of consciousness's unfolding. For Hegel, as for Kant, there is thus no meaningful world outside consciousness, and the final apocalyptic event, the moment of reconciliation is only possible within thinking and not in actuality.

Hegel sought to show that humanity had attained its highest possible perfection. In possession of absolute truth, all that remained was to incorporate it in social and political institutions. This Hegelian vision of the imminence of this transformation was regnant in Germany and much of the rest of Europe until 1838, when Hegelianism began to decline, and was almost universally abandoned after the failure of the revolutions of 1848, when the state apparatus that Hegel saw as the agent of liberal change suppressed the liberal revolutionaries. Those who had been influenced by Hegel, especially on the left, became convinced that while his reasoning was basically correct, his innate conservatism had blinded him to the crucial need for an actual versus a merely intellectual reconciliation. Or, as Marx famously asserted in the eleventh of his *Theses on Feuerbach*, "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

Hegel's leftwing successors hoped that a radicalized Hegelianism could bring about a more profound revolutionary transformation of Europe than they had envisioned in 1848. Marx is a good example. Dissatisfied with what he saw as a merely ideal synthesis at the pinnacle of Hegel's thought, he abandoned the Hegelian philosophy of consciousness in favor of historical materialism that saw humanity struggling not to find its lost self but to survive in an alien and inhospitable world. Humanity's weapon in this struggle is technology, which Marx believes will ultimately allow humans to liberate themselves from the limits imposed by the natural world. The effectiveness of this technology, however, is considerably hampered by the private ownership of the means of production. The result is a vicious cycle of over- and under-production that radically diminishes the productive capacity of labor. To conquer nature, in Marx's view, it is thus not sufficient merely



gitimate ends of human life, and a common vision of the general nature of a post-apocalyptic world. This realm in their view would be a renewed Eden in which there would be no more human want and thus no need for work, competition, or war.<sup>17</sup> In this realm men could hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and be critical critics in the evening, just as they pleased, as Marx so famously put it in the *German Ideology*.<sup>18</sup> This life is strangely reminiscent of the aristocratic life that capitalism had left behind, a life that itself had become ever more meaningless, although apparently not for that reason any less attractive.

The new, post-apocalyptic world that left-wing revolutionaries sought to establish was in essence then only the universalization of the life of ruling class in the previous world that they had already rejected. The efforts to produce such a world in the nineteenth-century were a dismal failure and in the twentieth-century a horrifying disaster. Their rightwing contemporaries shared their longing for an apocalyptic transformation but had a radically different view of the post-apocalyptic world. Indeed, what they most feared was the world that thinkers on the left hoped to realize. This is apparent in the thought of Schopenhauer but it becomes much clearer in the work of Nietzsche.

As Nietzsche saw it, the modern world opened up the possibility of immense human power that would enable humans to attain all of the ends they had hitherto desired, but also undermined and devalued these very ends. Modernity thus necessarily ended in the collapse of European morality and the advent of what he called "a monstrous logic of terror."<sup>19</sup> These ends, which Hegel, Marx, and the Russian nihilists had pursued, were in his view nothing other than a secular version of Christian morality and thus rested on the belief in a transcendent God and absolute standards of good and evil. Beginning with Copernicus, however, modern science called this God and all the moral structures that depended upon him into question. The modern project as Nietzsche understands it grows out of the Christian demand for truth above all else. This relentless pursuit of the truth, however, reveals that God is unbelievable, that he thus cannot ground our moral life, and consequently that all values based on this God are consequently moribund.<sup>20</sup> The death of God in his view thus will inevitably lead to the collapse of "our whole European morality."<sup>21</sup> Modernity in Nietzsche's



view thus ends in nihilism. Kantian, Hegelian, Left-Hegelian and Anarchist/Nihilist efforts are thus equally unable to provide or imagine a meaningful end for the titanic human power modernity unleashes.

In surprising fashion, however, it is the death of God for Nietzsche that opens up the possibility of an apocalyptic moment. The commandments of the Christian God in Nietzsche's view served as the basis for a psychic rank ordering of desires and thus for the hierarchy and discipline that are essential to the self and social life. This God, in Nietzsche's view, had always been merely a projection of human will, an image written on the heavens by some humans to rule over others, who then forgot it was a human creation. This projection provided a moral compass for European humanity that lasted fifteen hundred years. The death of God and the advent of explicit nihilism presented humanity with a choice, either to follow the path already implicit in liberalism and socialism toward the last man, that is, toward a hedonism devoid of all order and discipline, or to follow a much more difficult but also much more noble path toward the superman.<sup>22</sup> To follow this latter path one must learn a new discipline and a new ordering of the self and society.

Nietzsche employs his considerable rhetorical gifts in advocating this latter path. It is a path to the apocalypse. This path follows clear steps laid out in the philosophical anthropology at the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>23</sup> Those who were previously pious, whom Zarathustra calls camel-spirits, must first be transformed into lion-spirited destroyers who will obliterate all the remaining vestiges of the dominant Christian/liberal world. This effort will not be merely spiritual but will lead to wars "the like of which the world has never seen" over the next two hundred years.<sup>24</sup> From his notes we know that Nietzsche believed these lion-spirits would be like the Russian nihilists.<sup>25</sup> The apocalyptic conflict they will engender is essential in his view to the production of the superman, who must first attain a childlike innocence and then a tragic seriousness. The innocence is necessary so that he can be active rather than merely reactive. To achieve this he must overcome what Zarathustra calls the spirit of revenge, the desire to revenge oneself against the "it was," the seemingly inescapable dead hand of the past.<sup>26</sup> Forgetfulness in this sense is a positive power. This child-spirit represents a new beginning, the first turning of a wheel,



but he is not yet the superman, and cannot be until he becomes mature, accepts responsibility, and attains the tragic seriousness necessary for his great task. In order to reach this great height the superman in Nietzsche's view must affirm the fundamental truth that the will of the individual is only a moment of the cosmological will to power that is all things, that this will itself follows a necessary and inalterable path in eternal repetition, that everything we do is therefore already willed as part of this great circle of becoming, and finally that we ourselves as willing beings already have and must ever again will this circular whole with all of its pain and suffering to escape from the spirit of revenge and become superhuman. To become superhuman it is thus necessary to accept the doctrine of *amor fati*, "love of fate."<sup>27</sup>

It is this insight and act of will that in Nietzsche's view is the apocalyptic moment in which man becomes god. To will everything thus effectively makes the superman not merely one with all things, but the source of all things. While Nietzsche's idea of apocalypse has much in common with earlier thought, it differs in crucial respects: the god that the superman becomes one with is not the Christian God but Dionysus. The choice that humanity faces at the end of modernity is thus encapsulated in the famous phrase with which Nietzsche ends *The Antichrist*, "Dionysus versus the Crucified."<sup>28</sup> Dionysus represents a different value system than Christ. Indeed, Nietzsche characterizes it as a rebirth of master morality combined with some features of the slave morality that is at the core of the Christian/liberal tradition. Nietzsche's superman is the supreme form of this moral system. He does not hate his neighbor but he also does not love him or serve him. He is not concerned with the well-being of others but with his work. He has eliminated all pity for himself and for others and has in Nietzsche's language "become hard."<sup>29</sup> He is a monstrous version of the self-made and self-making man. He is immensely powerful and yet strangely innocent. Nietzsche characterized him in one of his notes as "Caesar with the soul of Christ."<sup>30</sup>

For Nietzsche the apocalyptic moment is what he calls the Great Noon in which the decision is made to proceed toward the superman rather than toward the last man.<sup>31</sup> What is decisive about this moment is that it must be willed, and that to will it, one must will everything



that ever was or ever will be, that is, affirm and do everything that has and that will be done from the best to the worst, from the lowest to the highest. This, in Nietzsche's view, is the step one must take in order to become divine—one must take responsibility for all that is. At the heart of Nietzsche's anti-Christian thought we thus see the surprising rebirth of a figure that resembles the Christian God, not as he appears in Paul, wearing a mask of pity, or in Aquinas, wearing the mask of rationality, but as the radically omnipotent God of nominalists such as William of Ockham or Thomas Bradwardine whose will alone determines his actions, and who does not act according to standards of good and evil because his actions establish the standards of good and evil.<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche does not, and indeed cannot, complete this transformation. It is rather his highest hope, and his goal is to induce a longing for this superman. Perhaps the clearest expression of these apocalyptic hopes occurs in "On the Great Longing" in Zarathustra:

O my soul, will you smile rather than pour forth your grief then in gushing tears, pour forth all your grief concerning your fullness, the craving of the vine for the vintager and vintage-knife! Will you not weep, will you not weep forth your purple melancholy, then will you have to sing, O my soul! Behold, I smile myself, who foretell this to you: you will have to sing with passionate song, until all the seas turn calm to hearken to your longing, until over calm longing seas the bark glides, the golden marvel, around the gold of which all good, bad, and marvelous things play, also many large and small animals, and everything that has light marvelous feet, so that it can run on violet-blue paths towards the golden marvel, the spontaneous bark, and its master: he, however, is the vintager who waits with the diamond vintage-knife, your great deliverer, O my soul, the nameless one for whom future songs only will find names! And truly, already your breath has the fragrance of future songs; already you glow and dream; already you drink thirstily at all deep echoing wells of consolation; already your melancholy rests in the bliss of future songs!<sup>33</sup>

The individual soul is portrayed as a ripe grape, longing for the harvest, for the vintager with his diamond knife to cut it from the vine



and crush it into wine. The vintager is the god of wine, Dionysus, and the passage is a vision of a reunion with this god, a vision by which the individual becomes one with the world-song that characterizes existence. It is this god who is on his way, who is near, whose approaching epiphany can already be discerned. The longing that possesses Nietzsche and that is portrayed in "On the Great Longing" is thus a longing for the advent of this god and all he entails, a longing for apocalypse, for destruction and transfiguration.

But for transfiguration into what? This is a question that is only indirectly answered by Nietzsche and the other "prophets of extremity" of the later nineteenth century, as Allan Megill called them.<sup>34</sup> Marx, for example, says very little about the character of the beings he imagines will populate his post-revolutionary world. Chernyshevsky describes them only as a moment of a dream.<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche approaches this question only allusively. His Zarathustra perceives this superman only in a vision as a shepherd who has recovered from the harrowing experience of biting off and spitting out the head of a great black snake that had crawled down his throat. Through this act of will he becomes:

a transfigured being, a light-surrounded being, that laughed! Never on earth has a man laughed as he laughed! O my brothers, I heard a laughter which was no human laughter, and now a thirst gnaws at me, a longing that can never be stilled. My longing for that laughter gnaws at me: oh, how can I still stand to be alive! And how could I stand to die now!<sup>36</sup>

For all of his longing, Nietzsche like his predecessors continues to see only through a glass darkly. This is hardly surprising given the radical discontinuity that these thinkers imagine between this coming age and their own. As Nietzsche says, "Man is to the ape as the superman will be to man."<sup>37</sup> The ape could not imagine man and man cannot imagine the superman.

What is surprising is the powerful effect that such vague images have had on humanity. In part this can be explained by the deep dissatisfaction that human beings have experienced with the triumph of modernity, the rise of industrial society, the dominance of self-inter-



ested behavior, and the concomitant decline of the noble, the beautiful, and the sacred in human life, but all of these merely point us away from the world in which we live and not toward another possibility. In this respect, we should not underestimate the power that hope has exercised on humanity in this context. We do not imagine that the wheel of fortune determines our destinies or that in a brief space of time God will reorder the world choosing whom he will for eternal life. Rather we believe that we can make our own future, and that we can attain the power to do what we will, to make ourselves something much greater than we are.

The apocalyptic aspirations of much of nineteenth-century philosophy found their horrible (and largely unintended) realization in twentieth-century politics. These hopes are echoed in Trotsky's claim that through permanent revolution man would be able to "raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social, biological type, or, if you please, a superman. . . . Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser, subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movement more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise."<sup>8</sup> Such apocalyptic aspirations were not realized. It was not the supermen these thinkers believed to be just over the horizon that dominated the coming decades but torturers in black leather, secret police who carried the innocent away in the middle of the night, gas chambers, firing squads, slave labor camps, black Marias, and the apotheosis of death.

Perhaps from this perspective we can better understand the story of Pandora. Prometheus, whose name in Greek means forethought, urged his brother Epimetheus, or Afterthought, not to marry Pandora. He and his creator Hesiod understood all too well what the future held in store, understood the way in which inordinate hopes can and do often lead humanity to catastrophe. The longing for apocalyptic change is such a hope and has been a curse that nineteenth-century theory bequeathed to twentieth-century practice. As we rush into the twenty-first century, we would do well to regard the future with more skepticism, rein in our longing for transfiguration, and hope above all things that we can rediscover the lost virtue of moderation.



## Notes

- 1 See, for example, M. L. West, *Hesiod, Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 96; and Apostoles Athanassakis, *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Shield* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
- 2 On this point see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- 3 For the seminal discussion of this transformation see Alexandre Koyré, *From Closed World to Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957). For a further discussion of this point and particularly the continuities and discontinuities between the modern world and what preceded it, see Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). This is a topic that has been broadly discussed by many different thinkers including Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg, Amos Funkenstein, and Alasdair MacIntyre to name only the best known.
- 4 Thomas Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. William Molesworth (London: Bohn, 1839), vol. 3, 81.
- 5 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Raymund Schmidt (Leipzig: Meiner, 1944), 472–79, 490–518.
- 6 On this point see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
- 7 G. F. W. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), vol. 20, 359.
- 8 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 21.
- 9 Hegel here imagines that through the development of consciousness through all its possible forms the (neo-Platonic) One will be reunified with itself. This moment of reunification from a Christian perspective is the recognition of the parousia in which God comes to be “by us.”
- 10 Henry Siltou Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 9.
- 11 Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 7, 24.
- 12 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 590–91.
- 13 *Ibid.*, vol. 12, 114.
- 14 Nikolai Valentinov [N. K. Volski], *The Early Years of Lenin*, trans. Rolf Theen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 209–10.
- 15 Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. N. Dole and S.S. Skidelsky (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 381–87.
- 16 For a thorough discussion of this movement see Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. Frances Haskell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
- 17 This will be a world with “an everlasting spring and summer, an everlasting joy.” Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, 387. Even more revealing are the comments of the Cosmist and Blacksmith groups who proclaimed that, “We shall arrange the stars in rows and put reins on the moon. We shall erect upon the canals of mars the palace of World Freedom.” James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 488.
- 18 Karl Marx, *German Ideology*, in *Werke*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Berlin: Dietz, 1969), vol. 3, 33.
- 19 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Massimo Montinari, vol. 5, bk. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967), 253.
- 20 “Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in the same way Christianity as morality must now perish, too,” through Christian truthfulness. Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 6, bk. 2, 428.
- 21 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, bk. 2, 253.
- 22 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, bk. 1, 8–15.



- 23 Ibid., vol. 6, bk. 1, 23–28.
- 24 Ibid., vol. 6, bk. 2, 84, 261; vol. 6, bk. 3, 364.
- 25 Ibid., vol. 3, bk. 4, 182; vol. 5, bk. 2, 264; vol. 6, bk. 2, 424; vol. 8, bk. 1, 125.
- 26 Ibid., vol. 6, bk. 1, 173–79.
- 27 Ibid., vol. 5, bk. 2 199; vol. 6, bk. 3, 293, 360, 434.
- 28 Ibid., vol. 6, bk. 3, 372.
- 29 Ibid., vol. 6, bk. 1, 264.
- 30 Ibid., vol. 7, bk. 2, 289.
- 31 Ibid., vol. 6, bk. 1, 93, 207; vol. 7, bk. 2, 296; vol. 8, bk. 1, 249; vol. 8, bk. 3, 261, 336, 337.
- 32 For a more extensive discussion of this argument see Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), especially 253–57.
- 33 Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 6, bk. 1, 276.
- 34 Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- 35 Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, 375–77. In the novel Chernyshevsky develops a number of characters who in his story are (and will be) instrumental in bringing about revolutionary change but the depiction of the future human beings on the other side of the revolutionary divide is presented only in a dream in the novel.
- 36 Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 6, bk. 1, 198.
- 37 Ibid., vol. 7, bk. 1, 166.
- 38 Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1957), 256.







# Political Religions, Apocalypticism, and the End of History: Some Considerations

*Marina Cattaruzza*

In an article written over three decades ago, the Catholic Italian philosopher Augusto Del Noce defined the years between 1917 (the beginning of the Bolshevik revolution) and 1953 (the death of Stalin) as the sacred period of secularization.<sup>1</sup> Although the traditionalist philosopher failed to provide a taxonomic definition of “political religion,” the concept was implied in his discussion of Communism, Nazism, and Fascism as secular religions. Further evidence of Del Noce’s interest in the issue of political religions can be found in his introduction to the (incomplete) Italian edition of *The New Science of Politics* by Eric Voegelin, who first made the idea popular in a small book that appeared in 1938.<sup>2</sup> In this introduction, Del Noce went back to Benedetto Croce’s reading of the Second World War as a religious war between Christianity and neo-paganism.<sup>3</sup>

Despite some differences in emphasis, numerous historians consider the years from 1917 (or 1914)<sup>4</sup> to 1945 (or in Del Noce’s case, to 1953) as a single unit. The expression “Thirty Years’ War” already utilized by Charles de Gaulle in a broadcast program in 1941<sup>5</sup> to describe this period was subsequently used by Arno Mayer and Ernst Nolte, by the English First World War historian Michael Howard, and more recently, by Ian Kershaw.<sup>6</sup> The obvious reference is to the wars of religion, which dragged on between 1618 and 1648, devastating and depopulating wide areas of central Europe. Critical to this comparison is the character of religious war for the true faith waged, in the earlier case, between different Christian factions, and in the later case, between opposing ideologies and totalitarian regimes. With the present article I intend to deliver a contribution on the characteristics of this epoch, focusing on the elements of innerworldly religiosity which pervaded politics and culture in Germany and Italy from the *fin de siècle* until the end of the Second World War. In this frame, particular attention will be paid to the attempts of totalitarian regimes to tran-



scend time and to usher into a non-historical condition, that is to say, into innerworldly eternity.

## The Manifestations of the European Crisis in Germany and Italy

Historical research into National Socialism and Fascism rarely employs a comparative approach with respect to the two regimes. Similarly, it hardly ever touches on the question of how totalitarian movements<sup>7</sup> rose to power in Germany and Italy by their own strength and with a considerable amount of popular support.<sup>8</sup> This support remained constant in the case of both regimes over a relatively long period of time and dried up only when their military defeat was either imminent or had already taken place.<sup>9</sup>

In part, Germany and Italy achieved their contemporaneous unification into nation-states by joining forces: by fighting alongside Prussia in the war of 1866, Italy obtained Venetia from Austria. Moreover, the defeat of France at the hands of the Prussian army led, on the one hand, to the proclamation of the Second German Empire and on the other, to the “liberation” of Rome and its transformation into the capital of the new Kingdom of Italy.

In both countries, the euphoria over the newly achieved national unity soon gave way to a widespread sense of disappointment, boredom, and disgust among those middle class intellectuals who had been the principal advocates of the movement. In the case of Germany, George Mosse analyzed this state of mind forty years ago in his pioneering work, *The Crisis of German Ideology*.<sup>10</sup> There he described the disillusionment felt by university students, schoolteachers, and nationalist publishers alike towards a unification that was “only skin-deep” and failed to bring about a higher sense of belonging. Such reactions, in which anti-Semitism was an important bonding factor in a confused panorama of outlandish beliefs and hazardous countercultural practices, were common in the pre-war period among petty bourgeois fringes.<sup>11</sup> This cultural breeding ground was to become the foundation of what Mosse called “new politics.” New politics questioned



traditional concepts of politics and the separation between politics and life, turning them into an antipolitics where a place was found for such countercultural manifestations as naturalistic mysticism, sun worship, and theosophy.<sup>12</sup>

A similar attitude of dissatisfaction with regard to the hopes of the Risorgimento can be found in various intellectual movements in post-unification Italy. Here too, disenchantment resulted in a critique of liberal institutions, the reformism of the workers' movement, positivist culture, and so on. It is by no means a coincidence that George Sorel's mythical thought was received with such enthusiasm in Italy,<sup>13</sup> just as the French aristocrat Arthur de Gobineau and the Englishman, Huston Stuart Chamberlain were well received in Germany.<sup>14</sup> Stanley Payne rightly pointed out that in no other country, in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War, did anti-democratic, authoritarian and elitist thinking flourish as it did in Italy:

The cultural crisis of the *fin de siècle* had greater impact in Italy than in most other lands. Italian philosophers vied with those of Germany in leading the antipositivist revolt on behalf of neoidealism, while Italian social scientists and theorists such as Mosca, Pareto and Scipio Sighele were international leaders of the new elitist and antiparliamentary doctrines. Nowhere in the world were there more vehement opponents of bourgeois culture, liberalism, humanitarianism, and pacifism. The corollary of aggressive nationalism was held to be strong elite leadership and imperialism.<sup>15</sup>

My intention behind making these observations is not to argue in favor of a similarity between National Socialism and Fascism. Rather, I would like to draw attention to the fact that both Germany and Italy were undergoing a similar crisis of questioning the unified, constitutional, liberal State and searching for radical methods to overcome it. In both countries, the problem of how to give "shape" or "order" to the mass society which had come into being was already being formulated in radical terms before the outbreak of war.<sup>16</sup>



## The Expected Apocalypse and its Occurring in the First World War

The spiritual climate in the pre-war years was characterized by widespread expectations of a palingenetic renewal that would usher in a new age, where the separation between life, culture, and politics would be overcome in a higher synthesis.<sup>17</sup> Already in 1882, Friedrich Nietzsche, anticipating the founder of Futurism Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, wrote: "We Europeans confront a world of tremendous ruins. A few things are still towering, much looks decayed and uncanny, while most things already lie on the ground. It is all very picturesque—where has one ever seen more beautiful ruins?—and overgrown by large and small weeds."<sup>18</sup> In aphorisms that follow, Nietzsche prophesied the coming of "a few warlike centuries," which "all coming centuries will look back on with envy and awe for its perfection" (*ein Stück Vollkommenheit*).<sup>19</sup>

The apocalypse of the First World War seemed to confirm the expectations expressed in the spiritual climate of the *fin de siècle*. In his work *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, written in 1917 when the reality of the terrible slaughter was already apparent to everyone, Thomas Mann observed that the world had never been more beautiful, or more humane, or gentler, than during the conflict. It was when war broke out, when "peace" was swept away, that Germany became "beautiful"<sup>20</sup> for one moment. In his famous essay, "The Origins and Doctrines of Fascism," written after the war, (later to become the entry for the Italian Encyclopedia on the definition of Fascism supposedly written by Benito Mussolini), the idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile claimed that Italy had not fought the First World War for Trent, Trieste, or Dalmatia, and certainly not for any political, military or economic advantages, but to cement the nation through the shedding of blood, by creating a single thought for all citizens, a single feeling, a single passion, and a common hope, an anxiety lived by all, with the life that is common to all, but which transcends the particular interests of any. Through war, then, stated the Italian philosopher, the nation could be created as every spiritual reality is created, with effort and sacrifice.<sup>21</sup>



According to Klaus Vondung, the author of pioneering studies on apocalyptic interpretations of the First World War, the images of “universal judgment” were omnipresent in the German Reich to such an extent that the outbreak of war in 1914 was interpreted apocalyptically almost automatically, so as to give it meaning (*Sinndeutung*). Salvation was to occur on earth and lead to the fusion of the state into a mystical unit, to the extension of the Reich’s sovereignty and to universal redemption by means of German culture.<sup>22</sup>

The war, with its unprecedented loss of life and the liminal experience of the trenches<sup>23</sup> seemed to signify a realization of a divine judgment, which would augur in a new dawn. The men of the trench generation presented themselves as the new elite, entitled to enter the leadership of the nation and to give or confer onto her a new shape.<sup>24</sup> In 1917, the Italian poet Gabriele D’Annunzio evoked the Eucharistic ritual of the sacrifice of blood by the community of the trenches, united by initiatic bonds. In “Trenchocracy,” a December 15, 1917 article in *Il Popolo d’Italia*, Mussolini called for a new political order, which would be led by the new aristocracy of the trenches, the true collective embodiment of the idea of the Nation.<sup>25</sup> Approximately two years later, the port city of Fiume would become a fantastic laboratory for the application of the “new politics” after it was occupied by Gabriele D’Annunzio and his legionnaires. These were based on mass rituals, neopagan bacchanalia, and charismatic power. At Fiume, D’Annunzio would put into practice the pre-war utopia of a new unity between art, life, and politics.<sup>26</sup>

## Modernity and the Erratic Nature of the “Sacred”

In order to transform these new ferments into a political religion, it was necessary to question the role traditionally played by religion: giving meaning to finite human existence and projecting it onto a transcendental dimension. In fact, only when organized religion was no longer the sole institution able to endow human life with meaning<sup>27</sup> could the quest for the sacred, having become “erratic,” manifest itself as a political religion.<sup>28</sup> In his introduction to the collection of



essays on the "Expectation of Salvation and Terror," Hermann Lübbe listed the following religious features of totalitarian regimes: the redeemer role of the totalitarian Führer, or leader; the assignment of the role of prophet and apostle to precursors and propagandists of the political "Gospel"; the interpretation of revolutions according to an eschatological meaning; the sentencing of heretics; the cult of martyrs and relics; the ritual repetition of redemptive facts in a totalitarian calendar (*Festkalender*); the increasing ability to endure suffering given the immediate expectation of God's realm and the techniques of intellectually and emotionally coping with its failure to appear.<sup>29</sup> Referring to Fascism as the prototype of totalitarian religions, Emilio Gentile develops a functionalist model, characterized by the coexistence of the following constituencies: the primacy of faith and myth as mobilizing forces; the hypostatization of myth as the only form of collective political conscience; the necessity of a charismatic leader as pivot of the totalitarian state and interpreter of national consciousness; the imposition of ethical commandments and the development of a political liturgy.<sup>30</sup>

According to Mathias Behrens, political religion is characterized by the identity of politics and religion: political religion intends to be at the same time a universal interpretation of the world and a universal state. Political religions may be universal religions, like Marxism, as well as *Volksreligionen*, like National Socialism. Contrary to Christianity, in political religions, the Führer, the party, the law of history, etc., do not take the place of the church, but of God himself. This fact proves the inner-worldly character of political religions.<sup>31</sup>

Following his announcement that "God is dead," Friedrich Nietzsche alluded to an age that was to have nothing in common with the preceding ones: "What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."<sup>32</sup> Max Weber too, strongly influenced by *The Gay Science*, held that his age was characterized by the schism between knowledge of reality and attribution of meaning to life in human society, so that



the task of scientific investigation was simply to subtract a finite portion of this infinite reality from that "meaningless infinity."<sup>33</sup> The German sociologist declared:

The absolute infinitude of this multiplicity is seen to remain undiminished even when our attention is focused on a single 'object'—for instance a concrete act of exchange, and this already happens as soon as we make a serious attempt to describe all the individual components of this individual phenomena, let alone when we try to explain it causally. All the analysis of infinite reality which the finite human mind can conduct rests on the tacit assumption that only a finite portion of this reality constitutes the object of scientific investigation, and that only it is "important" in the sense of being 'worthy of being known.'<sup>34</sup>

This was his way of expressing the tragic schism characteristic of modern existence, once "disenchantment" with the world had been accomplished.<sup>35</sup>

In the Weimar Republic there were sects of "Germanic" inspiration as well as openly neopagan movements. In 1924, the Franciscan monk Erhard Schlund wrote,

The war of Christianity against Teutonic paganism did not end when Saint Boniface felled the holy oak. Even after the general victory of Christendom and the conversion of the Germanic tribes, the battle continued in the form of guerrilla warfare, in the souls, in the beliefs, in the religious customs and even within the individual himself, and there were still men who preferred Wotan to Christ. Today it would seem that after centuries of skirmishes, we find ourselves once again with an open battle."<sup>36</sup>

The Italian state had placed itself "against" the temporal power of the Church and its political elites were secular if not actually anti-clerical. Freemasonry itself, which had such an important role to play in the *Risorgimento*, is interpreted by some scholars as one of the earliest manifestations of the quest for salvation outside the confines of tradition-



al religion.<sup>37</sup> I do not mean to imply that there is a direct and necessary connection between these movements and the political religions of totalitarianism, but that in both countries the traditional faith had been sufficiently shaken to allow the emergence of forms of religion or para-religion that lay outside the realm of traditional beliefs. Additionally, in order to gain power, political religions needed some fatal weakening in the structures and institutions of the State, which occurred in Italy in 1922, with the not particularly edifying display of the Italian government's toleration of the mutiny of the Fiume legionnaires, and in Germany between 1932 and 1933, after the world economic crisis. In Tsarist Russia too, there was a great cultural ferment, accompanied by a radical questioning of the Orthodox faith and experimentation with new beliefs, which sometimes found expression in the deification of the individual. Such movements then came together in the faith in the "new Soviet man," professed by Trotsky, Lunacharsky, and Gorky, among others.<sup>38</sup>

Some important additions to the challenging historical problem of the rise of totalitarianisms in countries such as Russia, Italy, and Germany can be found in the final pages of Eric Voegelin's *New Science of Politics*, where, beginning with his key concept of contemporary Gnosticism,<sup>39</sup> the German-American political scientist explains how this post-Christian Gnosticism—understood as a radical, salvific immanentism—was gradually radicalized over a millennium. Thus, in Voegelin's view, a more radical form of Gnosticism set apart later revolutions from the earlier ones, like the English and American. Further, Voegelin suggests that the coming of National Socialism to power is the epitome of radical Gnosticism: "... in an environment without strong institutional traditions, [the German Revolution] brought for the first time into full play economic materialism, racist biology, corrupt psychology, scientism and technological ruthlessness—in brief, modernity without restraint."<sup>40</sup> Although Voegelin was later to distance himself from the concept of "political religion" due to its ambiguity,<sup>41</sup> he must be credited for his insight into radical immanentism which resisted characterizing of the core of political religions as the simplistic borrowing of the elements of traditional religions by politics.<sup>42</sup>



In a recent article, Emilio Gentile explained how political messianism and millenarianism, based on revolutionary faith and the myth of regeneration, are the primary sources tapped by political religions. The main cultural trends of the nineteenth century, which include the idea of progress, historicism (universal history as universal judgment for Hegel), positivism and Marxism, were political eschatologies designed to sacralize history and humanity. The First World War—for many, a personal experience of a religious nature—created a space for new manifestations of “collective effervescence” among the masses.<sup>43</sup> Oszkár Jászi, the Hungarian minister for minorities in Count Károlyi’s liberal government, noted the atmosphere of excitement, fraught with millenarian expectations, on the eve of Béla Kun’s Hungarian Soviet Republic:

It was not the first time that the devilish spark flickering within Marxism had caught fire. Like every true mass movement, to begin with, it spread with powers similar to that of a religion. We were constantly witness to animated discussions in the streets, in cafés, in theatres and at public lectures, where men with a feverish look in their eyes and dramatic gestures prophesied and discussed the coming of a new world order. The days of capitalism are numbered, world revolution is advancing apace, and Lenin will soon unite all the workers of Europe into a single revolutionary union. In the minds of these people the new divinity was alive: the faith in the inevitable dialectic of economic development, which would bring about the fall of evil capitalism, and with the irresistible force of the laws of nature—divine laws!—bring about that new society dreamt of by all the prophets, that country of peace, equality, and brotherhood—communist society.<sup>44</sup>

This vivid description efficaciously reproduces the apocalyptic expectation that spread in Hungary at the moment of revolution, the sense that the day of universal judgment and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth were imminent.

In 1920, having experienced the Bavarian Soviet Republic, the liberal journalist Fritz Gerlich,<sup>45</sup> who later converted to Catholicism in



1931, wrote *Communism as the Doctrine of the Thousand-Year Reich* (*Der Kommunismus als Lehre vom Tausendjährigen Reich*), which included the following chapters: "Orthodox Marxism as Chiliasm," "Marxism and the Doctrine of the New Pentecostal Miracle," and "Chiliastic Marxism in Practice."<sup>46</sup> Here, Marxism is repeatedly described as a religion of salvation for this world (*eine auf das Diesseits gerichtete Erlösungsreligion*). From this perspective, political religions may be seen as a manifestation (and perhaps the most radical and complete) of the erratic form assumed by the "sacred" in the age of secularization.<sup>47</sup> Gerlich was eventually imprisoned after Hitler's rise to power and was ultimately killed at Dachau, at the same time when an attack was launched on the SA (the so-called "Night of the Long Knives") between June 30, and July 1, 1934.<sup>48</sup>

## Totalitarianism, Apocalypticism, and the End of History

All forms of totalitarianism which appeared after the First World War reconceptualized time. Reconnecting with those paligenetic expectations which had pervaded the experience of the trenches, the totalitarian movements advocated a sort of "end of history" by means of its coming to pass (*eschaton*). As Eric Voegelin pointed out, an eschatological interpretation of history destroys "the oldest wisdom of mankind concerning the rhythm of growth and decay that is the fate of all things under the sun."<sup>49</sup> The similarity with the Christian apocalyptic vision is striking here: the arrival of God in the world sets in motion the transition to the "final things" and thus to the end of time.

In Fascism, this state of coming to pass is represented by the re-proposition of the Roman Empire into a super-temporal, and at the same time, dynamic dimension which connects the past with the future.<sup>50</sup> In the already quoted article on fascism in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, the duo Giovanni Gentile-Benito Mussolini defines the fascist man as:

an individual who is both nation and homeland, and moral law, who binds together individuals and generations into a tradition



and into a mission, who suppresses the instinct of life being limited to short-lived pleasure in exchange for making of duty a higher life, free of the limits of time and space: a life in which, by sacrificing himself, by sacrificing his own particular interests, by his own death, the individual can realize that purely spiritual existence in which his value as a man lies.<sup>51</sup>

In Soviet Communism, the victory of the proletariat was seen as having brought about the end of the class struggle and thereby the end of history (since history was understood as nothing else but the class struggle). According to an insightful remark by Klaus Vondung, the time of Communism should not be considered any longer “historical time,” since the stage of perfection reached would make any further change impossible.<sup>52</sup> We should also bear in mind the apocalyptic nature attributed first by Lenin and then by Stalin to the two World Wars, which were viewed as signs of the imminent, worldwide victory of Communism. In 1920, in his introduction to the new edition of *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin wrote: “The period of Imperialism is the eve of the socialist revolution. This statement has proved true on an international scale since 1917.”<sup>53</sup> In effect, the establishment of the Bolshevik government in many of the territories of ex-Tsarist Russia and the setting-up of the socialist bloc at the end of the Second World War seemed to validate such expectations. The fact that the prophecy of Lenin on the “imperialistic war” being the eve of the socialist revolution came true played a formidable role in legitimizing the Soviet regime’s salvific projection on a worldwide scale.

Finally, in the case of National Socialism, the new age was characterized by the rediscovery of the laws of nature (social Darwinism) and of blood (racial politics). The creation of the “millenarian Reich” would bring about the end of history as an open-ended process. Time would be marked out by the procession of generations of “good blood” in a chain opening out towards infinity. Michael Burleigh found in this generational chain the principle of eternity peculiar to the natural religion of National Socialism.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, who wrote an in-depth study of the political religion of National Socialism,<sup>55</sup> holds that “the national socialist religion contains



fragments of a new theology, inasmuch as it creates a new connection between religion and politics. This connection is not based on the traditional distinction between man and God, or between cosmos and society on earth, but rather on the symbiosis between “Arian humanity” and God, or on the sacralization of the Volk.” Although Bärtsch regards the immanentization of the National Socialist religion as partial, he too comes to the conclusion that “the Arian believer” attains immortality by being part of the racial nucleus of his own people.<sup>56</sup> In Bärtsch’s view, in National Socialism the immortality of the race is linked to the belief in the immortality of the soul, “In this way, death as eternal non-being is deprived of its thorns.”<sup>57</sup>

Heinrich Himmler himself said in a 1942 speech that it was by means of the chain of ancestors and descendants that the people were “destined to have eternal life through blood” (*blutlich das ewige Leben haben*).<sup>58</sup> Of some significance here is Heinrich Himmler’s visionary passage, which, written in 1944, discusses the form of the future advancement of the ethnic-racial borders in the German Reich: “We and our children will succeed, year by year, from generation to generation, in readying our peasant convoys and setting off from the territories in our possession behind the military lines, in order first to build bridge-heads a few hundred kilometers away and then to settle in that territory, driving away the previous inhabitants. This is our task.”<sup>59</sup> This quotation seems to allude too to an understanding of history as a monotonous repeating of the same handling, where there was no place for new and not yet experienced occurrences.

In the case of Fascism, the reference at the base of the new vision of time is a phenomenon that actually existed in the past (George Mosse observed that, as far as Fascism was concerned, history was the only reality).<sup>60</sup> In the case of Soviet Communism, this reference is given by a supposed “law of history,” and in National Socialism, by “the eternal laws of nature.” It might therefore be argued that in the latter two cases, the break with the historical time belonging to the past is more radical, and that the “unveiling” character assumed respectively by the apocalypse of revolution and by the monstrous racial massacres perpetrated by the Nazis in the course of the Second World War is more evident.



Almost half a century ago, Mircea Eliade stressed the anxiety of modern man thrown into history and expelled from the cyclical time of the archaic age, which allowed him to recommence his existence periodically, by means of cyclically abolishing time and celebrating rites of collective regeneration. In his view, only the Christian faith, open to "salvation," can save modern man from the terror of history, attributing to mankind a freedom based on the existence of God.<sup>61</sup> Only Christianity would allow men to find some kind of transhistoric meaning in the tragedies of history, even though this meaning is not always apparent to mankind given its contingent state. According to Eliade, it is no mere coincidence that the myth of the "eternal return" was proposed by Nietzsche almost at the same time as he announced the "death of God" and was taken up again by the supporters of the "conservative revolution" during the restless years of the Weimar Republic.<sup>62</sup>

Focusing on the incompleteness of revelation, Eric Voegelin argued in a similar vein in the short essay "The Gnostic Mass Movements in Our Time." Referring to Hegel's vision of history, Voegelin noted that in the Hegelian philosophy of history the revelation of God in history is made fully comprehensible: "[t]he validity of the construct depends on the assumption that the mystery of revelation and of the course of history can be solved and made fully transparent through the dialectical unfolding of the Logos."<sup>63</sup> He then came to the conclusion that "The factor Hegel excludes is the mystery of a history that wends its way into the future without our knowing its end."<sup>64</sup> It is not by chance that Voegelin named Hegel the "greatest of speculative Gnostics."<sup>65</sup> The aspiration to transcend linear time and to reach a condition beyond history, which we have seen in the cases of totalitarian regimes, implies a radical immanentism similar to Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence of the same" or Hegel's unfolding of the Logos. This aspiration and the immanentism it implies are crucial elements of political religions, and they deserve more attention than they have so far received.



## Notes

- 1 Augusto Del Noce, "Appunti per una definizione storica del fascismo," in *L'epoca della secolarizzazione* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1970), 116–17.
- 2 Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1939).
- 3 Augusto Del Noce, "Eric Voegelin e la critica dell'idea di modernità," in *La nuova scienza politica*, Eric Voegelin (Turin: Borla, 1968), 21.
- 4 At the center of the analysis of Andreas Hillgruber lies the end of the European powers system with its influence over the rest of the world. Hence 1914 is the starting point for the period. See especially Andreas Hillgruber, "Der historische Ort des Ersten Weltkrieges," in *Die Zerstörung Europas. Beiträge zur Weltkriegsepoch 1914 bis 1945* (Munich: Propyläen, 1988), 103–18.
- 5 A. Prost and Jay Winter, eds., *Penser la Grande Guerre. Un essai d'historiographie* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 33.
- 6 Ian Kershaw, "Europe's Second Thirty Years War," *History Today*, September 2005, 10–17.
- 7 The debate about totalitarianism is still going on. In this article, I adopt the term "totalitarianism" from Hans Maier's definition: "totalitarianism is applicable to all regimes, which overcome the limits of authoritarian rule (or of a temporary limited emergency dictatorship) and establish a lasting, irrevocable reign of violence." Hans Maier, "Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs: 'Totalitarismus' und 'politische Religionen,'" in *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen*, vol. 1, *Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs*, ed. Hans Maier (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996), 250.
- 8 Wolfgang Schieder represents a rare exception. See Wolfgang Schieder, *Die Geburt des Faschismus aus der Krise der Moderne, in Deutschland und Italien 1860–1960*, ed. Christof Dipper (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), 159–79. This essay is an attempt to revive the *Sonderweg* theory and extend it to Italy. On the influence of Italian fascism in Germany in the final throes of the Weimar Republic, see Schieder, "Das italienische Experiment. Der Faschismus als Vorbild in der Krise der Weimarer Republik," *Historische Zeitschrift* 262 (1986): 73–125. For comparative perspectives, see: Christof Dipper, Rainer Hudemann, and Jens Petersen, eds., *Faschismus und Faschismen im Vergleich. Wolfgang Schieder zum 60. Geburtstag* (Vierow bei Greifswald, 1998).
- 9 See for example Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 132–52. For National Socialism, see Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- 10 George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).
- 11 With regard to the rich collection of sources on the agricultural communes in Germany from 1890 to 1933, see the pioneering work Ulrich Linse, ed., *Zurück o Mensch zur Mutter Erde. Landkommunen in Deutschland 1890–1933* (Munich: DTV, 1983). These communes ranged over a wide spectrum, from anarchism to the Germanic (*völkisch*) movement. Heinrich Himmler and the camp commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, had been members of a *völkisch* rural settlement, the purpose of which was an ethnic defense of the "German East." Referring to utopian agricultural communities in the USA in the nineteenth century, the sociologist Yonina Talmon stressed their translated apocalyptic character, as they substituted "perfect time" with "perfect space." See Michael Barkun, "Politics and Apocalypticism," in *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 3, *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins, Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 1999), 444.
- 12 Mosse, *German Ideology*, 1–10. In his important study of 1975, *Die Nationalisierung der Massen*, Mosse identified "new politics" with the liturgical manifestations of the *völkisch* counterculture in the German national and national socialist movements. See Mosse, *Die Nationalisierung der Massen. Politische Symbolik und Massenbewegungen in Deutschland von den Napoleonischen Kriegen bis zum Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1976).
- 13 Cf. Zeev Sternhell, *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 181–219.
- 14 For a summary, see Emilio Gentile, "Un'apocalisse della modernità. La Grande Guerra e il Mito della Rigenerazione della politica," *Storia contemporanea* 26, no. 5 (1995): 733–87.



- 15 Stanelly G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 62.
- 16 In the thinking of Alfredo Rocco, the main architect of the Fascist State, the principle of organization seems pre-eminent with respect to the principle of nationhood. See Emilio Gentile, *Il mito dello Stato nuovo. Dal radicalismo nazionale al fascismo* (1982; repr. Roma–Bari: GLF, 1999), in particular 180–84. The various theories about the “government of producers” too, like the reappearance of the corporative idea, seem to meet the need to reinstate a lost order and to adapt it to industrial society.
- 17 Emilio Gentile, “Dall’apocalisse della modernità alla modernità totalitaria,” in *Storia della Shoah*, vol. 1, *La crisi dell’Europa: le origini e il contesto*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza, Marcello Flores, Simon Levi Sullam, and Enzo Traverso (Turin: Utet, 2005), 229–45.
- 18 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 310.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 320.
- 20 Thomas Mann, “Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen,” in *Politische Schriften und Reden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1968), vol. 1, 350.
- 21 Giovanni Gentile, *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism*, ed. A. James Gregor (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 2.
- 22 Klaus Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland* (Munich: DTV, 1988), 132–35, 198–99.
- 23 See Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- 24 Gentile, “Dall’apocalisse,” 291–96.
- 25 Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell’ideologia fascista, 1918–1925* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), 99–100, 109.
- 26 See M. A. Ledeen, *The First Duce: D’Annunzio at Fiume* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Claudia Salaris, *Alla festa della rivoluzione. Artisti e libertari con D’Annunzio a Fiume* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002).
- 27 See Marina Cattaruzza, “Introduction to the Special Issue of Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions: Political Religions as a Characteristic of the 20th Century,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 1 (2005): 1–18, esp. 2–4.
- 28 Emilio Gentile, “Political Religions in the 20th Century,” in *Die Säkularisation im Prozess der Säkularisierung Europas*, ed. Peter Blickle, Rudolf Schloegl (Ependorf: Bibliotheca academica, 2005), 551–62. “Politics became one of the main areas in which the sacred has been transfused into modern societies. In fact, in the realm of modern mass politics, political movements presenting religious characteristics became more and more frequent.” *Ibid.*, 555.
- 29 Cf. Herman Lübbe, ed., *Heilserwartung und Terror: politische Religionen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Duesseldorf: Patmos, 1995), 10. Despite such impressive analytical achievement on “political religions,” Lübbe refuses the use of the concept, proposing instead the concept of “anti-religions.”
- 30 Cf. Emilio Gentile, “The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 1 (2000): 40.
- 31 See Matthias Behrens, “‘Politische Religion’ – eine Religion? Bemerkungen zum Religionsbegriff,” in *“Totalitarismus” und “Politische Religionen,” Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs*, ed. Hans Maier and Michael Schäfer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997), 249–69, esp. 259. Behrens also rejects the use of the term for non-transcendent religious phenomena.
- 32 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 181. See also Eric Voegelin, “The Murder of God,” in *Modernity without Restraint: The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 5278–89.
- 33 See Stuart H. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890–1930* (1958; repr., Brighton, 1979), 308–309.
- 34 See Max Weber, “Die ‘Objektivität’ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1951), 171. The principal part of this famous essay deals with the problem of separating and distinguishing knowledge of social phenomena from value judgments.



- 35 On this topic, see Luciano Pellicani's pertinent remarks in Luciano Pellicani, *Modernizzazione e Secolarizzazione* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1997), 100–101.
- 36 Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932. Ein Handbuch*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (1949; repr., Darmstadt, 1994), 138.
- 37 For further bibliography, see Antonio Panaino, "Rito e ritualità nella tradizione massonica tra storia e Antropologia," in *La Massoneria*, Storia d'Italia – Annali 21 (Turin, 2006), 753–70. According to Panaino, however, Freemasonry does not possess certain elements essential to revealed faiths, such as its own theology, a specific plan for individual and collective salvation, and a rite which might be called sacramental, soteriological and antagonistic to those put forward by the single religious confessions. It does, however, possess elements proper to a spiritual and transcendent reality (initiation rites). *Ibid.*, 756.
- 38 See Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). On the antecedents of this faith present in Russian terrorism and populism during the second half of the nineteenth century, with cogent and illuminating references to how the phenomenon is represented in the works of Dostoevsky, see Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (London: Harper, 2005), 276–310.
- 39 On the concept of the gnostic attitude in Voegelin, as the founding principle of modernity, see Hans Otto Seitschek, "Exkurs: Eric Voegelin's Konzept der 'Gnosis,'" in *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen*, vol. 3, *Deutungsgeschichte und Theorie*, ed. Hans Maier (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 237–45. Regarding the redemption of man through his own efforts and the divinization of society as cornerstones of modern gnosis, see *ibid.*, 243.
- 40 Eric Voegelin, "The New Science of Politics: An Introduction," in *Modernity Without Restraint*, 241.
- 41 See Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 51.
- 42 Such a connotation of radical immanentism has gone unnoticed by many critics of the concept, who deny the existence of the phenomenon on the basis of the fact that in political religion, there is no imaginary participation of "gods or other normally non-observable beings." Stanley Stowers, "The Concepts of 'Religion,' 'Political Religion' and the Study of Nazism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 15. See also the comments of Ernst Piper: "Did the State, the ethnically purified People's community, thus become 'a new Realissimum' as postulated by Eric Voegelin's successor Klaus Vondung, or National Socialism an 'internalized religion'? The hypostatization of the state is not in doubt. But what is questionable is whether this leads to something which can be sensibly described as religion. It seems to me that the National Socialists rejected religion altogether. They were not prepared to tolerate loyalty to a higher being outside the State they controlled, however private those loyalties. They felt uncomfortable with anything based on aura, luminosity and the transcendental. Adolf Hitler wanted nothing which transcended the Third Reich." Ernst Piper, "Steigmann-Gall: The Holy Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 56. Besides the bizarre claim that the National Socialists had deified the State (while there are countless statements by Hitler and other Nazi leaders postulating the Volk's superiority over the State), it is debatable whether Hitler's immanentism is in itself in contradiction with an interpretation of National Socialism as political religion.
- 43 Gentile, "Un'apocalisse della modernità," 768–87.
- 44 Oskar Jászi, *Magyariens Schuld, Ungarns Sühne. Revolution und Gegenrevolution in Ungarn* (Munich: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1923), 69–70.
- 45 See Michael Schäfer, Fritz Gerlich 1883–1934. *Publizistik als Auseinandersetzung mit den "politischen Religionen" des 20. Jahrhunderts* (PhD dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians University, 1998).
- 46 Fritz Gerlich, *Der Kommunismus als Lehre vom Tausendjährigen Reich* (Munich: Hugo Bruckmann, 1920).
- 47 See for example Hans Maier's remark: "This (the concept of 'political religion') reminds us that religion cannot easily be eradicated from society, and that where this attempt is made, religion reappears in unexpected and unforeseen forms." Hans Maier, "Political Religion: A Concept and its Lim-



- itations," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 1 (2007): 15. In particular, see Emilio Gentile, *Le religioni della politica. Fra democrazie e totalitarismi* (Rome: Laterza, 2001), 22–23.
- 48 See Johannes Steiner, ed., *Propbetien wider das Dritte Reich. Aus den Schriften des Dr. Fritz Gerlich und des Paters Ingbert Naab O.F.M. Cap* (Munich: Dr. Schnell, 1946), 10.
- 49 Voegelin, "New Science of Politics," 223.
- 50 Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, 121–31; Gentile, *Fascismo di pietra* (Rome: Laterza, 2007).
- 51 Benito Mussolini, *La dottrina del fascismo. Con una storia del movimento fascista di Gioacchino Volpe* (Rome, 1937), 2 (my italics).
- 52 Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland*, 101–102.
- 53 Vladimir Ilich Lenin, "Der Imperialismus als höchstes Stadium des Kapitalismus," in *Werke* (Berlin, 1960), 22:198.
- 54 Michael Burleigh, *Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Eine Gesamtdarstellung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2000), 299–300.
- 55 See Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus. Die religiöse Dimension der NS-Ideologie in den Schriften von Dietrich Eckart, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg und Adolf Hitler* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1998).
- 56 Ibid., 367, 370, 378.
- 57 Ibid., 378.
- 58 Bradley F. Smith and Agnes F. Peterson, eds., *Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Propylän, 1974), 160. This is quoted from a speech delivered to SS officers in Berlin on June 9, 1942.
- 59 Ibid., 246.
- 60 George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 352.
- 61 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Eric Voegelin, "Ersatz Religion—The Gnostic Mass Movements of Our Time," in *Modernity without Restraint*, 308.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Eric Voegelin, "Science, Politics, and Gnosticism," in *Modernity without Restraint*, 272. On the apocalyptic character Hegel's *Phenomenology* see Thomas J. J. Altizer, "Modern Thought and Apocalypticism," in *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 3, *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins, Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 1999), 325–59, esp. 329–39.







## Eve's Last Dream

*David Marno*

The spirit of Walter Raleigh haunts at least two passages in *Paradise Lost*. Immediately after the Fall, Adam, facing "this new commer, Shame" (11.1097),<sup>1</sup> suggests that they cover themselves with "smooth Leaves together sowd" (9.1095). As usual, Milton clarifies the technical details:

...they chose  
The Figtree, not that kind for fruit renown'd.  
But such as at this day to *Indians* known  
In *Malabar* or *Decan* spreads her Armes  
Braunching so broad and long, that in the ground  
The bended Twigs take root, and Daughters grow  
About the Mother Tree, a Pillard shade  
High overarch't, and echoing Walks between. . . .  
(9.1100–1107.)

Adding to the hermeneutic problems posed by the trees of life and knowledge, the fig tree is a much discussed riddle of Genesis. Traditionally, questions about these trees have been raised against the background of larger etiological and theodicean issues, so that the particular and the general can mingle into a theory of the Fall. By joining this debate with his *History of the World*, Raleigh brought into the discussion something that exegetes had relied on before only very rarely: first-hand experience. He condemns the "coniectures" of Becanus and Moses Bar-Cephas, according to which the fig tree "spreadeth it selfe so farre abroad, as that a troupe of horsemen may hide themselves under it," because they "all speake by an ill-understood report." Not without some pride, Raleigh tells of his own experience:

For this Indian Fig-tree is not so rare a Plant, as Becanus conceiveth, who because he found it no where else, would needes draw the Para-



dise to the Tree. . . . But many parts of the world have them, and I my selfe have seene twentie thousand of them in one Valley, not farre from Paria in America. They grow in moist grounds, and in this manner. After they are first shot up some twentie or thirtie foote in length . . . they spread a very large toppe, having no bough nor twigge in the truncke or stemme: for from the utmost end of the head branches there issueth out a gummie iuyce, which hangeth downward like a cord or sinnew, and within a few Moneths reacheth the ground; which it no sooner toucheth but it taketh roote, and then being filled both from toppe boughes, and from his owne peoper roote, this corde maketh it selfe a Tree exceeding hastily.<sup>2</sup>

Surprisingly, Raleigh then goes on to confirm the testimonies of previous exegetes about the size of the tree and its leaves, pointing to one difference: it is not one tree but the incestuous union of tree-mother and her children that gave Adam shelter. Moreover, Raleigh is inclined to accept the theory that if Adam and Eve “made them breeches of Fig-leaves,” then “either the tree [of knowledge] it selfe was a Fig-tree, or that a Fig-tree grew neare it: because Adam being possesst with shame did not runne up and downe the garden to seeke out leaves to cover him.” Religion within the limits of reason, one might say, but then quite abruptly Raleigh claims that “the matter is of no great weight,” because the tree of knowledge was possibly a phenomenon of Eden only, now extinct. There was nothing immanently special about it anyway: it was “*forbidden, not for any other respect, then thereby to commend the goodnesse of pure and simple Obedience.*” Thus the reader is left wondering why Raleigh devotes an entire chapter to a question that “is of no great weight.”<sup>3</sup>

One can only speculate as to how Milton, who read Raleigh’s *History of the World*, recalled Raleigh’s account of this singular tree while working on the “great argument,” and consequently, as to how we should read the vision of Adam and Eve covered by these shield-like leaves of a self-perpetuating plant.<sup>4</sup> Milton would not have agreed with the identification of the fig tree and the tree of knowledge—a hypothesis that Raleigh ultimately rejected as well. Nevertheless the fig tree is important: it stands for the couple’s desire to return to a uterine,



prelapsarian state, as if they tried to re-cover themselves with Nature herself. Adam's desperate thoughts about death betray this desire: "how glad would lay me down / As in my Mother's lap?" (10.777-78). But such regressive thoughts, together with "mutual accusation" seem "fruitless," to use Milton's own pun. The escape route from the fallen state is to be found elsewhere.

The second passage that reveals the influence of Raleigh comes in Book XI. Prefiguring the temptation of Christ by Satan in the wilderness, Michael presents to Adam his earthly kingdom from the top of the highest hill in Eden. The long list of kingdoms ends with a few more that Adam and Michael can see only in spirit, since they are located in the other hemisphere. Among these kingdoms is the "yet unspoil'd / *Guiana*, whose great citie *Geryons* sons / Call *El Dorado*. . . . (11.409-11) The word "unspoil'd" makes it clear that Milton is referring to a passage in Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana*: "Guiana is a Countrey that hath yet her Maydenhead, never sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not beene torne, nor the vertue and salt of the soyle spent by manurance."<sup>5</sup> The unspoiled Guiana in *Paradise Lost* might suggest a comparison in terms of colonialism, and indeed a colonialism that re-conquers Nature lost to Adam after the Fall. The allusion just before Adam's grand historical revelation also suggests that the real route back to Eden is through history, by conquering foreign countries, and converting native peoples.

In this essay, I propose yet another direction for finding the way back to Eden. *Paradise Lost* is a retelling of the Biblical story, focusing on the beginning and foreshadowing the end. Such a retelling is far from being "unattempted." In fact, the Bible itself offers the earliest recapitulations of the story in its entirety. One such example is the second book of Ezra, a Jewish apocalypse that begins with summing up Israel's history since the Fall. But one reason allowing Milton to insist on his version being "unattempted" is his interest in the particularities of the grand narrative. Like Raleigh, Milton always seeks to shed light on the narrative's minute details, to explain the most obscure connections, thus turning the historical perspectivism of the Bible into epic transparency. Raleigh's popularity among Puritans in the 17th century may be explained by reference to his personal martyrdom and to the



providential history of the *History of the World*. But Raleigh's Puritan reception may have also been helped by the ways in which Raleigh mingled traditional theological arguments with the empiricist episteme of the discoveries, thus offering a matrix to the self-identification of the English with the new "chosen seed."

Following up on this matrix, the question I ask in this essay concerns the relevance and character of the apocalyptic in *Paradise Lost*. With the term "relevance", I want to indicate that it is not my goal to sort out all the possible references to the apocalypse in Milton's work. Nor do I want to speculate about whether or not Milton was a millenarian on the basis of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's interest in the end of history seems beyond question; his views on history and theodicy consistently show him deeply invested in questions of the apocalypse. My focus in this essay is how Milton's theological and political interest in the apocalypse transforms into an apocalyptic aesthetic in *Paradise Lost*.

Before turning to these issues, I offer an overview of some of the technical aspects of Milton's millenarianism or the lack thereof. In the second part of the paper I show how apocalyptic figurations related to Adam infuse certain parts of *Paradise Lost* that are not usually connected with the apocalypse in the literature. In the third part, I turn to the character of Eve in order to think about the ways in which her special gift of revelation allows Milton to bring together in her character the appearances of apocalyptic figures scattered throughout *Paradise Lost* and to convert their figural structure into a temporal one. Shifting the focus of the paper to Eve, I suggest that Milton's giving the last word to Eve has much to do with the eschatology of the poem: as a particularly Protestant *figura* of the Virgin Mary, Eve represents the apocalyptic principle of *Paradise Lost* precisely by virtue of her transgressive but in the end justified aesthetic disposition.

## Apocalyptic Relevance

Rather than focusing on the apocalyptic, scholarly literature tends to debate the presence or absence of millenarianism in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>6</sup> While the "apocalyptic" is a broad term and, as such, difficult to de-



fine, millenarianism is presumed to be a relatively narrow concept. It is commonly identified with the belief that the Last Judgment is preceded by a thousand year (or indefinite) period of Christ's earthly kingdom, during which Satan is bound and the Messiah reigns with his saints, that is, with those who have died as martyrs of their faith, following Christ's example. This view stems from Chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation; one reason for the multiple confusions surrounding the millennium is the fact that the Bible gives no other mention of it.

The literature on millenarianism in *Paradise Lost* is motivated not so much by the poem itself but by Milton's other writings, in which he sometimes seems to hold millenarian views; accordingly, the focus of scholarly attention is often Milton the author, rather than the poem. Generally, however, it is difficult to assess the role of millenarianism in the pre-Restoration era of the seventeenth century. While it is tempting to argue that millenarian beliefs played a major role in paving the way to the revolution and in shaping the events during and even after the Civil Wars, millenarianism always remained an ambivalent view; as soon as a certain political or religious group achieved any politically powerful position, they began rhetorically and politically to marginalize Chiliastic beliefs. This ambivalence poses a methodological problem that becomes particularly acute when focusing on those who, like Milton, seem to have held millenarian views before the Restoration, but apparently did not do so in the post-Restoration era.

And yet *Paradise Lost* is in a sense evidently *not* millenarian; in fact, it approaches the opposite of millenarianism, a spiritual and Augustinian interpretation of the millennial prophecy. In Book XII, Adam, facing the history of mankind, raises the question that Protestants who were interested in the apocalypse, from Luther<sup>7</sup> to the Fifth Monarchists, struggled with: "say where and when / Thir fight, what stroke shall bruise the Victors heel" (12.384–85), referring to the ultimate battle between Satan and Christ.

From a millenarian point of view, Michael's answer is disappointing. The final battle is a spiritual rather than a physical one; moreover, invoking the core of the Augustinian solution to the problem of the millennium, Michael suggests that, following the resurrection, Christ ascends to heaven, defeats and binds Satan, and comes back only when



“this worlds dissolution shall be ripe, / With glory and power to judge both quick and dead; / To judge th’ unfaithful dead, but to reward / His faithful.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, although for Adam the battle is still in the future, for us it is history: the battle took place right after Christ’s resurrection, and since then mankind has been living in a world without Satan who is waiting in chains for the final battle preceding the Last Judgment. Such an answer does not leave room for millenarian expectations; rather, it follows Augustine in identifying the thousand-year reign of Christ with secular history, that is, with the intermediary time between Christ’s resurrection and the Last Judgment. From this point of view, it is hard to object to those critics who reflect on the absence of millenarianism in *Paradise Lost*, or who suggest, as Malabika Sarkar in “Astronomical signs in *Paradise Lost*,”<sup>9</sup> that the scant references to the millennium are mostly ironical.

While this abstract, conceptual approach may enlighten the reading of particular passages, it ultimately obscures the question of millenarianism in *Paradise Lost* even further. From the viewpoint of intellectual history, it can be argued that even references that might allude to more than one place in the Bible could have been taken by Milton’s contemporaries to refer to the millennium for reasons outside of his poetry.<sup>10</sup> Problematic as such speculations are, it is hard to completely dismiss them.

My suggestion is to reverse the question in order to avoid the hermeneutical problem. Instead of asking whether Milton was a millenarian at any given point in his life, which we could prove or refute by pointing out certain words or sentences in his texts, I will begin with the possible *relevance* of the millennium for Milton and for the seventeenth-century reader. This approach may supply us with a point of view from which it becomes unnecessary to sort out hints and allusions, and struggle with minute theological or conceptual definitions that may not have been clear even for the contemporary reader. Instead, one could approach *Paradise Lost* as a whole, and ask questions—about the millennium or the apocalyptic—with regard to the entire work.

The Book of Revelation reflects both the eschatological consciousness of the early Christian community and disappointment resulting from unfulfilled expectations of an immanent end. Eschatological



consciousness, or the expectation that the community would *live* the Second Coming is radically ahistorical: the past and the present lack meaning; the expected end is not a historical event but rather an outside interruption of the historical process. In the Book of Revelation this eschatological consciousness is mediated by certain *topoi*, such as the Son of Man tradition, mostly taken from Jewish apocalypses. Through these elements, the end is connected with the beginning, and just as in the probably cotemporaneous apocalypse of Ezra, the Serpent of Armageddon is identified with the Serpent of Genesis. Yet in its general outlook the Book of Revelation differs greatly from Ezra: while in Ezra the apocalypse is represented as the outcome of the world-historical process whose protagonist is Israel, in the Book of Revelation a highly allegorical language completes the mediation between the atemporality of eschatology and the temporality of myth and history. Instead of a nation, the protagonist is a vaguely defined community, and instead of a proper historical process the end takes place in a symbolic space that has only hermetic references to history.

While in general the Book of Revelation occupies the space between Jewish apocalypticism and early Christian eschatology, and mediates between them with its allegorical-hermetic imagery, Revelation 20 stands out of the allegorical text with its Chiliastic prophecy. It is important to note that the Book of Revelation would make perfect sense without Revelation 20. The prophecy about Christ's thousand-year-long reign, the judgment that precedes it and differs from the Last Judgment, the resurrection of the saints—all these elements seem to duplicate the structure of the apocalypse without apparent reason. Whatever may have been the original reason for including this chapter in the Book of Revelation, the two millennia of Christianity have proven the crucial significance of Revelation 20. For if the rest of the Book of Revelation remains unclear about the connection between history and apocalypse, and thus about the meaning of history, Revelation 20 offers the possibility of reconnecting prophecy with history. The vision of Christ's reign on earth suggests that those who sacrifice their life for their faith would resurrect and live in their physical body. More importantly, this passage allows the possibility for human action to propel the historical process and hasten the apocalyptic end;



from John Foxe to the Fifth Monarchists, British readers of the Book of Revelation were concerned with this possibility.

The tension between the Book of Revelation in general and Revelation 20 allows two radically different kinds of interpretations. In keeping with the general structure and imagery of the Book of Revelation, one may interpret the entire book in the allegorical mode. In this case, the millennium is also interpreted allegorically: as in Augustine, the millennium is *always in history* by being *eternally parallel* with it. The distance that separates history and those who live in history from the transcendent is not temporal but *metaphysical* and only allegory can transcend it. In contrast, the Book of Revelation can also be interpreted in the light of Revelation 20; this reading goes against the allegorical mode by affirming the literality and temporality of the end. In this second case, the distance that separates the historical viewer from the ontological locus is a matter of *time*; redemption itself is a matter of time. The millennium is at the end of history and makes history meaningful only *as* a process which tends toward the end, *insofar* as it approaches this end. But the linear historical process does not in itself guarantee that the process is also progress; for this to be true, one of the following two conditions has to be met: either the date of the millennium has to be revealed, or people have to be able to propel the process that leads to the millennium. These are precisely the two conditions that have always separated radical millenarians from mainstream eschatology; they are the conditions that made the Book of Revelation a source of revolutionary imagination throughout Christian history.

According to the testimony of *Paradise Lost*, Milton gave up the belief, if he ever held it, that the millennium as described in the Book of Revelation was yet to occur.<sup>11</sup> After the Restoration, he had to face the reality that the liberty of his people, that is, the religious, domestic, and civil liberty he spent his life promoting, was approaching the end of its illusionary reign. What was probably especially difficult for him to bear was the fact that liberty was not repressed by outside forces, such as the royalists, Catholics, or some other such enemy that could have been identified as the Antichrist or some other variant of Satan. Rather, it was the English people themselves who, in Milton's eyes, vol-



untarily gave up their freedom. He voices this conclusion in the *Ready and Easy Way*:

What I have spoken, is the language of the good old cause: if it seem strange to any, it will not seem more strange, I hope, than convincing to backsliders. Thus much I should perhaps have said, though I were sure I should have spoken only to trees and stones, and had none to cry to, but with the Prophet, *O earth, earth, earth* to tell the verie soil it self *what her perverse inhabitants are deaf to. Nay, though what I spoke should happen (which thou suffer not, who didst create mankind free; nor thou next, who didst redeem us from being servants of men!) to the last word of our expiring liberty.* But I trust I shall have spoken persuasion to abundance of sensible and ingenuous men; to some, perhaps, whom God may raise of these stones to become children of *reviving liberty*; and may *reclaim, though they seem now choosing them a captain back for Egypt, to bethink themselves a little, and consider whither they are rushing; to exhort this torrent also of people not to be so impetuous, but to keep their due channel, and at length recovering and uniting their better resolutions, now that they see already how open and unbounded the insolence and rage is of our common enemies, to stay these ruinous proceedings, justly and timely fearing to what a precipice of destruction the deluge of this epidemic madness would hurry us, through the general defection of the misguided and abus'd multitude.*<sup>12</sup> (My emphases.)

Note that this is the second edition of the text from 1660, probably published in April, and thus written on the eve of the Restoration. The italicized parts that were changed or added to the first edition point to Milton's growing disappointment not with providence or enemies, but with his own people. This experience also leaves its mark on *Paradise Lost*:

... sometimes Nations will decline so low  
 From vertue, which is reason, that no wrong,  
 But Justice, and some fatal curse annex  
 Deprives them of thir outward libertie . . .  
 (12.97–100.)



Here the Fall accounts for the voluntary slavery of the English people. The poem's most explicit eschatological passage echoes the same view:

... Truth shall retire  
Bestuck with slanderous darts, and works of Faith  
Rarely be found: So shall the World goe on,  
To good malignant, to bad men benigne;  
*Under her own waight groaning till the day*  
Appeer of respiration to the just,  
And vengeance to the wicked, at return  
Of him so lately promiss'd to thy aid.  
(12.531–542; my emphasis.)

The italicized line captures the passage's message from a millenarian point of view: while Christ is in Heaven with the Father, the emphasis is not so much on Satan's unbound rage but rather on the people's inherent corruption.

Milton's disappointment is entirely in accord with a millenarian position. By pointing out the mistakes of the English people, *Paradise Lost* justifies God's ways and explains the apparent failure of the millennium.<sup>13</sup> The eschatological passages in *Paradise Lost* do not call into question the millenarian belief that the end is in a temporal distance, which was opened up by human action and may be transcended by human action, too.

And yet, hints about the millennium in *Paradise Lost* usually remain ambiguous. Perhaps the least ambivalent of these is Milton's reference to the heroic virtues that, being hitherto unsung, call for his poetic commemoration: when he changes his "Notes to Tragic," one "better fortitude" that he claims to write about is heroic martyrdom, the millenarian virtue par excellence. As far back as John Bale, but especially since Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, Englishmen with millenarian inclinations had been eager to sacrifice themselves for their faith, thus following Christ's example<sup>14</sup> and gaining the right to participate in his millennial kingdom, while "the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:5).<sup>15</sup> In its totality, *Paradise Lost* tends toward post-millenarianism, while deliberately



maintaining a certain suspension of the question. But in terms of relevance, the millenarian perspective remains operative throughout the poem; paradoxically, even while refuting millennial expectations, Milton remains on millenarian grounds.

In order to understand how this apparent paradox works, I turn away from the question of millenarianism to the issue of the apocalyptic. It is generally accepted that while in literary terms *Paradise Lost* is (or begins as) an epic, in doctrinal terms it is theodicy. Milton gives grounds for such a view: his aim is to “justifie the wayes of God to men.” A theodicy that is based on the Fall can, however, assume rather divergent interpretations and thus divergent consequences. After all, to use the Fall for justifying the “wayes of God” implies the difficult task of justifying the Fall itself. In Christian theodicy, the Fall is more than just an etiological myth, and the difference is indeed expressed by the word “justification.” Etiology is merely a story of origins—it uses a causal structure. Why serpents don’t have legs, why there are seasons rather than eternal spring, or even grand questions like why do we suffer, and why do we feel guilty without any apparent reason: no matter how minute or large the question, the explanation remains etiological if it answers the question by referring to a beginning.<sup>16</sup>

The Christian story is different from etiological myths in that it justifies the ways of God not simply by pointing out their origins, but rather by pointing out their origins *and*, immanent in their origins, also their *telos*. The Fall can fulfill its crucial role in the great argument only if it refers forward to redemption. It is the beginning of a story that has to come to an end: in theodicy, causality merges with teleology.

But the very point that establishes this merging of causality and teleology also complicates theodicy: the fact that it is apocalyptic theodicy. Based on a grand narrative that puts an end to the story by envisioning the absolute opposite of the interior of the story, apocalypse is supposed to reveal infinity, the divine that remains hidden throughout the finite and secular history. The Christian metanarrative creates a round, finite narrative by putting this story in contrast with the Other of the story, the absolute end that implies infinity and openness: the new Jerusalem of the apocalypse has no story, it is an image of eternal bliss.



This double-sidedness of the apocalyptic narrative creates a far-reaching ambivalence to theodicy. In keeping with the structure of the grand narrative, it is possible to focus on the inside of the story, its rounded, finite character. This focus allows the story to function as justification of the present: everything that is inside the story is to be accepted *because* it is in its proper place. This is the feat of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*: he manages to give an interpretation to the end, to the Book of Revelation, that focuses on how this end creates a narrative out of the preceding events, and thus how the end, together with the Fall, justifies that story.

On the other hand, one can concentrate on the end itself. Such a shift of focus has several implications: the structure will still serve to justify the whole, but not to affirm the present. By emphasizing the end, the in-between time may become the object of total negation: it is justified inasmuch as it will come to an end, but this does not mean that historical time has immanent value. What is affirmed is not the present but the *not* immanent but transcendent future, the absolute difference.

This is how I propose to define the two paradigmatically different views on the relevance of the *apocalyptic*, the immanent and the transcendent, or, politically speaking, the conservative and the radical interpretation. The radical negation of the present may assume a form of pietism, and the major virtue will be patience; in this case, though there is an ontologically radical interpretation of the end, the ontological radicalism doesn't necessarily imply a corresponding existential radicalism. However, radical apocalypticism could assume a form of existential and eventually political radicalism, a belief that the coming of the end can be hastened by human, and sometimes militant, action: "heroic martyrdom." Efforts to convert Jewish people or the natives of newly discovered countries, attempts to morally purge urban communities in the West have all been partly motivated by this radical attitude towards the end. In Milton's time, Fifth Monarchists believed that their time was the time of the Sword, and that they could prepare the ground for the *parousia* by fighting the enemy and sacrificing their lives.

These two paradigms of apocalypticism, the immanent and the transcendent, do not always overlap with the more theoretical difference between post-millenarian and pre-millenarian views, but they approximate



the two basic, allegorical and millenarian interpretations of Revelation 20. The focus on the story as such is in accord with an allegorical interpretation of the Book of Revelation, while a millenarian reading is closer to the radical interpretation which focuses exclusively on the end. While Milton does not seem to hold pre-millenarian views in *Paradise Lost*, he never abandons the radical interpretation of the apocalypse: for him secular history would never be more than just a regrettable prelude to the absolute other of New Jerusalem. Consequently, the Fall is, in his account, significant only as a sign of a future redemption, the Second Coming that will restore Eden on a higher level. *Paradise Lost*, if theodicy at all, is an *apocalyptic theodicy* in which conservative allegorism is replaced by a radical and temporal understanding of the end. This does not mean that Milton relies on any fixed interpretation of the apocalypse; indeed, as I argue in the following, the apocalypse is present on the level of aesthetics rather than dogmatics in *Paradise Lost*.

### Adam, *apocalypsis*<sup>17</sup>

In the introduction I suggested that the two passages that reveal Raleigh's influence on Milton are of crucial importance in the unfolding of the drama of *Paradise Lost*. Raleigh's incestuous fig tree appears right after the Fall, his "unspoil'd" Guiana just before the grand historical prophecy that Michael offers to Adam. The passages are also connected by the motif of opening eyes. The leaves of Raleigh's fig tree offer an illusory solution to the problem brought about by the Fall:

As from unrest, and each the other viewing,  
 Soon found thir how *Eyes op'nd*, and thir minds  
 How dark'nd; innocence, *that as a veile*  
*Had shadow'd them* from knowing ill, was gon,  
 Just confidence, and native righteousness  
 And honour from about them, naked left  
 To guiltie shame hee covered, but his Robe  
 Uncover'd more . . .  
 (9.1052–59. My emphases.)



This is *the* moment of the Fall as an event of consciousness that occurs right after their sexual intercourse, following the transgression. The fig tree would cure the shame resulting from the opening of the eyes, the brand new experience of nakedness. The image of the "Eyes op'nd" comes from Genesis, which, as usual, is laconic on the issue. But why does Milton compare the opening of the eyes to the loss of innocence as a *veil*? Is this invocation of the notion of unveiling, *apocalypsis*, a coincidence?

It will take a Kant to argue that the first act of Adam and Eve, the making of aprons out of the fig leaves, demonstrated their aesthetic *raffinement*:

Man soon found that sexual attraction—which in animals rests on a passing, largely periodic impulse—is capable of being prolonged and even increased by imagination, which pursues its affairs the more temperately, but at the same time with more obduracy and constancy, the more removed the object of the senses, and he hereby discovered the weariness that accompanies the appeasement of mere animal desire. The fig leaf (Gen 3:7) was thus a product of a far greater expression of reason than the one displayed in the first stage of its development.<sup>18</sup>

It is instructive to see how Kant interprets the fig leaf as a teaser by presuming an evolution in the human faculty of aesthetics. Aesthetic pleasure is to compensate for the loss of Eden. This pleasure, Kant suggests, exploits the ambivalence inherent in the figure of veiling and unveiling. Veils simultaneously imply and postpone unveiling. They work like a sign that covers the signified inasmuch as it stands in for its reference, but, at the same time, it also points toward the signified. Veiling implies epiphany, and veils establish narratives; they are laden with what might happen -- that is, laden with Aristotle's probable and necessary.

In Milton's description, prelapsarian innocence covers not the other, but the self. Like blindness, the cataract of innocence is "cured" by the fruit of the tree of knowledge. In contrast, when Adam and Eve wake up from their transgressive dream, they do so "each the other viewing." What they see, after the Fall, is not so much their own na-



kedness; but rather one another's eyes: the terror that seizes them comes from what they see there.

But why would Milton evoke unveiling at the precise antipode of the apocalypse? Keeping in mind the structure of apocalyptic theodicy, Milton may have thought it important to indicate that the Fall is just the beginning of a story in which another event will complete what is just a fragment at this point. Another possible explanation points in the opposite direction: one might conclude that Milton is actually mocking revelation by referring to unveiling at a point that in fact implies veiling, "minds dark'nd."

Let me postpone this dilemma for a while, and trace the motive of opening eyes and falling veils in a few other passages. Adam and Eve, most commentators on Genesis suggest, were also naked before the Fall, but they were unaware of their nakedness. Milton's opinion is slightly different: in *Paradise Lost*, in their prelapsarian state Adam and Eve wear Nature on their naked bodies. The wilderness of the garden that embraces them is so rampant that the first couple's work consists only of maintenance: "our joynt hands / Will keep from Wilderness with ease, as wide / As we need walk" (9.244-46). This is not yet real work in the sense of "spoiling" the soil; rather, every day they cut themselves into this organic wilderness, slipping into it as if into a robe. Nature is their second skin, covering and protecting their naked bodies. If the vapor of the "fallacious Fruit" made them fall into a drunken sleep, Eve's innocent grace included her fragrance-robe. Satan spies her, "Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood, / Half spi'd, so thick the Roses bushing round / About her glowd. . . ." (9.425-27). Nature as an overwhelming attack on sense, perception, smell, vision, touch, creates at least the illusion of safety. The Fall therefore is also the fall of nature's veil, the curtain behind which history awaits for the couple to enter secularity.

Consider, on the other hand, the lines that follow the mention of Raleigh's Guiana:

. . . but to nobler sights  
*Michael* from *Adams* eyes the *Filme* remov'd  
 Which that False fruit that promis'd clearer sight  
 Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue



The visual Nerve, for he had much to see;  
And from the Well of Life three drops instill'd.  
So deep the power of these Ingredients pierc'd,  
Even to the inmost seat of mental sight,  
That *Adam* now enforc't to close his eyes,  
Sunk down and all his Spirits became intranst.  
(11.411–20.)

This singular method of curing Adam's fallen eyes is presumably a combination of Milton's personal encounter with contemporary medicine and his ambition to make use, if only by way of analogy, of the tree of life, so mysteriously present in the Genesis story. Of course, the tree of life and the well of life are two different issues. But both possess healing power, and, as in *The Faerie Queene*, they may symbolize the two major Christian rituals, Baptism and the Eucharist. Michael, anticipating John the Baptist, makes an exception with Adam, redeeming his eyes so that he can at least see the future of his successors. In contrast with the dense sensuality of the garden, associated with Eve, Adam's gift is pure vision, abstract, emphatically spiritual. Accordingly, it is his eyes that react to what he sees: "thee another Floud, / Of tears and sorrow a Floud thee also drown'd / And sunk thee as thy Sons"—as described by the jocular Michael to Adam when the latter bursts into tears upon envisioning the Flood (11.756–57).

For Adam, then, the opening of the eyes means the prophetic revelation of his spoiling of future soils. "Unspoil'd" works like "veil" in its relationship to "unveiling," "uncovering." In Adam's case, "uncovering" becomes "discovering"—as a royalist historian noted about Raleigh:

Sir *Walter Raleigh* was kept in the *Tower*, where to his great honour he spent his time in writing, and had bin a happy man if he had never beene released. But such is our state, that no mans fortune is understood, whether it be good or bad, untill it be discovered by the Event.<sup>19</sup>

Adam has the special honor to have his fortune uncovered in advance, with the help of Michael. Leaving Eden, he enters a world in which



one's future is always already there, and it is just the understanding of this future that requires the "Event." Men and Events work together in this project of discoveries: time is like a planet, with large *terra incognita* in the eyes of men waiting to be revealed.

While Adam's future is unfolding, Eve is asleep. It seems that once again she has been denied the gift of revelation. As Michael invites Adam to "Ascend / this Hill," Eve's eyes are "drencht." Michael adds: . . . let *Eve*. . . / Here sleep below while thou to foresight wak'st, / As once thou slepst, while Shee to life was formed (11.367–369).

Michael then advises Adam to "go, waken *Eve*. . . / Let her with thee partake what thou hast heard." But when Adam returns to her, presumably meditating on the historical "happie end," he finds her already awake and with no need of further enlightenment as to their destiny: "Whence thou returnst, and whither wentst, I know. . . ." (12.610). This last opening of eyes, Eve's eyes, involves her seemingly happiest moment since their Fall, or since their last intimate moments before the Fall. She is overwhelmed with joy; while some sense of anxiety lingers in Adam's abstract "happie end," Eve seems to be free of all her former doubts and more satisfied and confident than even before the Fall.

In a sense, the Fall is her story rather than Adam's. It is Eve who is first tempted by Satan and who first envisions the hidden modalities of Eden, which Adam could not even dream about. *Her* dream at the end of Book XII puts an end to her long story of doubt, desire, and deceit—all of which center around dreams, wakings, open eyes, and revelations. Let me recapitulate this story in order to show how, while Adam's mainstream movement from Eden proceeds in its own way, in Eve's story the figure of unfolding is converted into a temporal structure—how it is Eve, rather than Adam, whose character figures the apocalyptic dimension of *Paradise Lost*.

### *Eve, apocalypseos*

Eve's temptation by Satan may be read in terms of courtly wooing. Milton resented the rhetorical *raffinement* of such late-Petrarchist discourses; he must have been disappointed when facing the proliferating



literature in the genre of his very own nephew Edward Phillips' *The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence or, The Arts of Wooing and Complimenting*. Rhetoric as well as resistance to it are major themes throughout *Paradise Lost*; the frequent mention of words like wonder and miracle in the temptation scene is again a travesty, Milton's way of condemning courtly niceties by exposing their abuse.

Then again, behind the wonder and miracle there is more than mere eloquence. According to Satan, the major miracle is the tree of knowledge, and on this point Eve agrees without hesitation: "Wondrous indeed. . . ." (9.650) Satan's first, easy victory is carefully prepared. When he first calls Eve out of her "Cloud of Fragrance," he begins the temptation with "Wonder not, sovran Mistress. . . ." (9.532) The strategy is doubly inverted: first, Eve should not wonder *at him* because *she* is the "sole Wonder" (9.533). Second, it *is* certainly a way of calling Eve's attention to the most wondrous fact about the serpent: his ability to praise Eve is based on his not less wondrous ability to speak. Eve has no way to avoid the trap; she stands "much marveling," and cannot but express her wonder: "What may this mean? Language of Man pronounced / By Tongue of Brute?" (9:553–54). Later she adds: "Such wonder claims attention due" (9.566). Why is Eve so easy to entrap? Why does Satan's blatant adulation of her and the tree of knowledge find her so defenseless? It seems that Satan's *ability* to adulate, rather than the adulation itself, is what convinces Eve that her attention is rightfully claimed. Satan speaks, *ergo* he convinces.

Eve's wondering over Satan's linguistic skills is foreshadowed in Book VIII, in Adam's story of his coming to consciousness. Adam's encounter with the world around him and himself in it proceeds in an interplay of dream and awakening. Their dialectic introduces order into the chaotic sense data of his first impressions; or rather, it cuts off bits and pieces from this chaos and creates identities for them. "As new wak't from soundest sleep" (8.253), Adam perceives nature around him: the "Balmie Sweat" in which he finds himself invokes birth,<sup>20</sup> and Adam's "wondring Eye" scans the sky, landscape, plants and animals. For a moment, he simply enjoys this abundance of experience; but his inclination to philosophize soon surfaces when the question "who I was, or where, or from what cause" occurs to him. And as soon as he



thinks the question, he is able to speak it. With his first question about the "great Maker," he addresses his environment: there is no answer. Instead, he falls asleep again, or rather for the first time in his life, and thinks "I then was passing to my former state / Insensible." (8.290-91) But the beginning of a dream convinces him that what he experiences is not death, nor some other way of returning to the state of non-being.

The appearance in his dream leads him to the garden. This is still part of the dream, yet "whereat I wak't, and found / before mine Eyes all real, as the dream / Had lively shadowd" (8.309-11). The first scene of Adam's coming to awareness consists of his first awakening, the first encounter with reality. Then, the first falling asleep prefigures the possibility of death, but his dreaming clarifies that something else is happening. God's appearance in the dream serves two purposes: he leads Adam through these first moments of learning to differentiate, and by being present both in Adam's dream and in the reality that the awakening Adam faces, he demonstrates his omnipresence and thus his omnipotence.

The dialogue that follows reveals why the serpent's language is a miracle. God advises Adam to name the subjects of his new kingdom, and Adam meets this challenge. But the process of naming animals makes him wonder about his own solitude, and he daringly asks God about his further intentions. God's answer, that he should consider the fact that even God is alone, meets an unequivocal refusal by Adam: "in thee / Is no deficiencie found; not so is Man." (8.415-16) God is delighted by this answer: "Thus farr to try thee, *Adam*, I was pleas'd, / And finde thee knowing not of Beasts alone / Which thou hast rightly nam'd, but of thy self" (8.437-39).

Adam is praised for his rapid learning: hardly an hour old, he already knows his self, that is, his place in the great chain of beings. This place is defined, primarily, by language. Animals cannot answer to Adam's questions because they have no language. Therefore, Adam has the right to name them. But facing his God, Adam is as speechless as his animals: "O by what Name . . . / Adore thee, Author of this Universe?" If dream and awakening are the regulative principles along which the world unfolds in front of Adam's eyes, it is language that classifies this unfolding world, as well as Adam within it. Life, death,



sleep, and dream; animals, Me, You, and God: these are the two major orders of things that Adam has to learn in his new life in order to confirm his place in the great chain of being.

This ontological and epistemic hierarchy is the order of the world in Eden. As soon as the serpent addresses Eve in human language, therefore, Eve has to admit that she is facing a miracle: a phenomenon that transgresses the order of reality, God's epistemological and ontological world order. If there is a miracle in Eden, then God is either not omnipotent, or not benevolent: either his world order allows exceptions, or it is a trick. In either case, eating from the tree can only help her find out the answer.

This strict logical argument, which is also a rehearsal of major heretical positions on the issue of the Fall, relies not on Eve's but Adam's knowledge and experience. If Eve is privy to the argument, it is only because Adam has taught it to her. But she has her own story, one that is quite separate from Adam's, and that prefigures her Fall in a completely different way.

Eve, relating the story of *her* creation, begins with blatant flattery: "I chiefly, who enjoy / So farr the happier Lot, / enjoying thee / Præeminent by so much odds, while thou / Like consort to thy self canst nowhere find" (4.445–48). The reader, and possibly even Adam, remains unconvinced, especially since Eve is considerably less admiring when it comes to Adam's looks: "I espi'd thee, fair indeed and tall, / Under a Platan, yet methought less faire, / Less winning soft, less amiable milde, / Than that smooth watry image" (4.477–80), that is, the mirror-image of herself. Eve makes up for this by praising the superiority of "manly grace / And wisdom" over mere beauty. Like Adam before, she also has to come to terms with the order of the world.

That Eve has not completely internalized the lesson becomes obvious when, for the first time, she raises a question that will in a way become her obsession. The way she verbalizes her thoughts reiterates the structure of her speech about wisdom and beauty. Once again, she begins by affirming the world's order: "God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more / Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise" (4.637–38). But when she comes to the end of her monologue, enumerating the



beauties of nature in Eden, Eve asks a question concerning the stars that goes well beyond Adam's usual inquiries: "wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" (4.657–58).

Paradoxically, it is Eve rather than Adam who raises the question at the core of *Paradise Lost*, a question concerning the telos of beauty and sleep. Is not it the case that sleep "comes as a thief," and robs of us something—the beauty of the world? Beyond the general question, as Satan will quickly understand it, Eve's inquiry concerns her own beauty and its goal in the world. What is the goal of *her* beauty if the only person who could enjoy and admire it, recurrently and inevitably falls asleep? Eve's questions prefigure death—another proof of the finality and vanity of beauty—as well as her desire to become divine and have divine admirers. Becoming mortals, or becoming gods: these are the two modalities of Edenic ontology, which Eve comes to understand well before Adam is informed of them by Raphael.

Eve's concern originates partly in her nature—in her native narcissism and aesthetic sense, which have been signaled from the beginning—and partly in the difference between her and Adam's primordial training. If she cannot appreciate dreams, it is because she does not have the kind of divine experience with dreams that Adam does. She has never been visited by God, never praised by him. Her admirer and teacher is Adam, but he is not omnipresent, cannot appear in her dreams as God appears in his.

To be sure, the text does not necessarily convey these doubts and concerns. Their dialogue proceeds evenly, her question receives a detailed answer from Adam, and the operatic character of the scene is intensified by a hymn, a unison praise of God's creation and "the gift of sleep" that ends the duet of fragile, soprano questions and confident, if somewhat dull, tenor answers.<sup>21</sup> Yet even after Adam's answer, there remains a vague sense that Eve's question is not really answered. In fact, Milton offers another clue indicating that there may be a problem here, which Adam and Eve try to repress but which is too virulent to simply eliminate. In Book VIII, as Raphael's account of the creation comes to an end, Adam addresses the "Divine Hystorian" with one more question. "[S]omething yet of doubt remaines," he notes:



. . . this Earth a spot, a graine,  
An Atom, with the Firmament compar'd  
And all her numberd Starrs, that seem to rowle  
Spaces incomprehensible, (for such  
Thir distance argues, and thir swift return  
Diurnal) merely to officiate light  
Round this opacous Earth, this punctual spot,  
One day and night; in all thir vast survey  
*Useless* besides; reasoning I oft admire,  
How Nature wise and frugal could commit  
Such disproportions, . . .  
(8.17–27, my emphasis)

Adam's question is not only a parallel of Eve's concerning the beauty of the stars, but it is also motivated by Eve's. Unsatisfied by his own functionalist explanation, now Adam asks: What could possibly explain excess?

And yet, as if not noting that Adam is asking *her* question, Eve shows no interest in Adam's inquiry, nor in Raphael's answer; she leaves for "her Fruits and Flours, / To visit how they prosper'd" (8.44–45).<sup>22</sup> The reason may be that Eve's questions cannot be answered solely by "Words"—they demand a response that would "intermix" explanation with aesthetic excess, the latter being the parallel of the very question itself. But there is another difference. What for Adam is a question about the universe, for Eve is a question of the universe and of herself: the apparent contradiction between *logos* or *telos* on the one hand, and excess and exception on the other becomes her own private contradiction.

Meanwhile, dramaturgically speaking, Milton draws our attention to a considerable disagreement between Adam and Eve, present prior to the Fall. Both Adam and Eve are inclined to transgress the border of human knowledge, Adam by intellectual curiosity, Eve by her existential-aesthetic doubts: rational uselessness, the waste of reason on the one hand, and aesthetic uselessness, the waste of beauty on the other. The problem is that they don't seem to understand each other's questions and doubts.



The man who truly listens to Eve is Satan, himself a great admirer of aesthetic qualities. Just as God prepares Adam for real experience with a dream, Satan prefigures the temptation scene in Eve's earlier dream. Eve's account is structured in the same way as all of her speeches before the Fall. She begins by praising Adam, only to turn to her dream, in which she becomes "horror chil'd" when the now angelic Satan tastes the fruit. Apart from this passing moment, the dream is mostly a pleasant one, at least in a sensual sense, sweetened by Satan's "gentle voice" and the "savourie smell" of the forbidden fruit. And yet she ends her relation by assuring Adam, "O how glad I waked / To find this but a dream!" (5.92-93).

Adam again proves to be more pedantic than sensitive in his answer, giving a philosophical lecture about the faculties of human soul. For a moment, a grain of suspicion that this explanation may not be timely occurs to him: "Som such resemblances methinks I find / Of our last Evenings talk, in this thy dream, / But with addition strange." But he expels the disturbing thought from his mind, and together with Eve, sings a hymn in praise of God's glory—an action which has become a habitual response to unsettling doubts.

Had Adam paid more attention to Eve's dream, he would have been able to make stronger arguments to protect her from Satan's temptation. In the dream, Satan indeed evokes Eve's previous talk, but "with addition strange":

... now reignes

Full Orb'd the Moon, and with more pleasing light  
Shadowie sets off the face of things; in vain,  
If none regard; Heav'n wakes with all his eyes,  
Whom to behold but thee, Natures desire,  
In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment  
Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze. . . .

(9.41-47)

And he explains further in the real temptation of Eve: "Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen / A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd / By Angels numberless, thy daily Train" (9.546-48).



Beauty, so goes the argument, is both excess and exception: it transgresses order, whether in Eve's "celestial beauty" or the stars' anthropomorphic gaze: they are created for one another, for mutual wonder. Supernatural beauty requires supernatural admirers; the tree of the knowledge is the next logical step as the ultimate miracle that assures the perpetual transgression of Edenic order. In this sense, Satan is a liberator of a special kind: he fights against a world order in which beauty and its proper wonder are repressed. It is only he who recognizes that Eve's question about the uselessness of celestial ornaments is also an ultimate (existential and metaphysical) question about the purpose of her beauty.

Theodicy as a philosophico-historical vision, one that includes the "discovering" of space, time, and destiny, is Adam's gift and burden. When, happy with his gift and yet anxious under the burden, he returns to Eve, she welcomes her husband with unclouded joy:

Whence thou returnst, and whither wentst, I know;  
For God is also in sleep; and Dreams advise,  
Which he hath sent propitious, some great good  
Presaging, since with sorrow and hearts distress  
Wearied I fell asleep: but now lead on;  
In mee is no delay; with thee to goe,  
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,  
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to mee  
Art all things under Heav'n, all places thou,  
Who for my wilful crime art banisht hence.  
This further consolation yet secure  
I carry hence; though all by mee is lost,  
Such favour I unworthie am voutsaft,  
By me the Promis'd Seed shall all restore.  
(12.610-23)

Eve begins her last sonnet by reversing chronological time, taking pride in and displaying her new gift, which enables her to "know" or to see beyond time because "God is also in sleep." In all her former dreams, Satan has been her only visitor. Hitherto, all truly divine rev-



elations, in contrast, have favored Adam. But now God, for the first time in *Paradise Lost*, chooses her over her husband. In the lines afterwards, she hurries to assure her husband of her devotion, but the way she concludes makes it clear that she is able to love her husband precisely because she now knows *his* place in the chain of beings: "thou to me Art all things under Heav'n." And who is in Heaven?

Eve is now the subject of personal revelation, without the usual mediation of Adam. "God in sleep" prefigures the annunciation. But it is more than prefiguration. For the Eve of *Paradise Lost*, it is also satisfaction. It is an immediate fulfillment of her desire to be admired by appropriate eyes, eyes that are *never* closed. This immediate fulfillment is what really persuades her of the ultimate purposefulness of her beauty: unlike in the Biblical story, in *Paradise Lost* it is God himself who announces both the conception and that Eve/Mary will give birth to the Son who will take revenge on the seducer of his Mother. Distracted by Michael, Adam receives a speculative synopsis of secular history, in accord with his inclination to ask speculative questions. Eve, by contrast, partakes in divine revelation that justifies her desire and promises its fulfillment in the course of history's grand unfolding.

## Conclusion

So why is Eve the subject of God's last, special attention in *Paradise Lost*? Is it a compensation for her being neglected earlier? Does Milton, after all his doubts and concerns, return here to the image of Mary's celestial beauty, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev 12:1-2)? Such a recourse to the Book of Revelation would not be unprecedented; medieval and Renaissance love poetry is scattered with apocalyptic allusions, perhaps the most famous being Petrarch's concluding poem in the *Canzoniere* where Laura is contrasted with "Vergin bella, che di sol vestita." That the image of Mary in the Book of Revelation may be the antitype of Eve is also suggested by Mary's epithet "Second Eve," a perplexing emphasis on Mary coming from the obstinately an-



ti-Catholic Milton, which becomes less perplexing if the Mary to whom it refers is the Mary of the Book of Revelation.<sup>23</sup>

But whereas late medieval and Renaissance female figures are mostly conceived in allegorical modes, the way Eve prefigures Mary is anything but allegorical. In *Paradise Lost*, allegory is transgression. In terms of theories and speculations, references to the apocalypse remain ambivalent throughout *Paradise Lost*. They all seek to do the impossible (or, for that matter, the forbidden): to repeat the ill-conceived attempt of Eve, to stretch out to the transcendent beyond the limits of time. As figures, they reflect the apocalypse as an atemporal structure. As allegories, they reiterate the relationship between the immanent and the transcendent but do not determine the direction of this relationship. Allegory typically establishes a reciprocal relationship in which the two ontological poles can be mediated with each other; it thus paves the way towards an immanent apocalypse.

Most of the allegorical references to a potentially immanent apocalypse occur, however, within the context of Adam's story; indeed, on an explicit level, apocalypse is present in *Paradise Lost* mainly as a series of revelations belonging to Adam. My argument in this paper is that apocalypse as Adam's revelation is ambivalent, not because it is revelation, but because it is Adam's. In contrast to the inherent ambivalence of the apocalyptic figures that infuse Adam's story, Eve's last dream reaffirms the apocalyptic in the transcendent mode. It is only Eve's character in which the allegorical structure is deconstructed and the a-temporal structure is stretched out again on a horizontal surface, the surface of apocalyptic history. Her desire for aesthetic transparency, her caring about fruits and flowers, and most importantly her narcissistic curiosity establish a typological temporality in which her sensual desire and curiosity are not negated (as they would be in allegory) but instead they are partly fulfilled, and (thereby) partly promised fulfillment. Of all the characters in *Paradise Lost*, Eve emerges as a figure in whom the breathtaking general questions about the transcendent mingle with the most particular interest in the world around her, and together they merge into a temporal horizon with fulfillment in the end. She is the first to understand the modalities of Eden, the first to understand that the question concerning excess and exception is si-



multaneously the most general and the most particular question of Eden. Like the self-proliferating fig tree with "pillared shade" and the "echoing walks between," in *Paradise Lost* it is Eve who gives birth to the organic, self-emanating history that awaits the fallen couple outside the gate of Eden.



## Notes

- 1 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Roy Flannagan (New York: Macmillan, 1993). All references to *Paradise Lost* are to this edition.
- 2 Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London, 1614), 58.
- 3 Ibid. 59.
- 4 Milton's inclusion of the fig tree may have other sources: besides Pliny's *Natural History* and John Gerard's *Herball*, a further source could be the Jesuit traveler John Huighen van Linchoten's *Voyage to Goa, and Observations of East India*, incorporated in *Purchas His Pilgrimes*. What makes Raleigh's a more interesting text to compare with Milton's fig tree is Raleigh's obvious interest in the exegetical problems of the fig tree in the context of the debate about the geographical location of Eden.
- 5 Raleigh, *History*, 196.
- 6 A recent collection of essays is Juliet Cummins (ed.), *Milton and the Ends of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Earlier important studies include Arthur Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, 1641–1660*, 1942; Austin C. Dobbins, *Milton and the Book of Revelation: The Heavenly Cycle*, 1975; and Leland Ryken, *The Apocalyptic Vision in Paradise Lost*, 1970.
- 7 In 1535, Luther wrote: "Though I was not at first historically well informed, I attacked the papacy on the basis of Holy Scripture. Now I rejoice heartily to see that others have attacked it from another source, that is, from history. . . . What I have learned and taught from Paul and Daniel, namely, that the Pope is Antichrist, that history proclaims, pointing to and indicating the very man himself." Quoted in Katharine Firth Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 13.
- 8 Scholarly literature does not always treat 12.451–65 as a problem for a millennial interpretation of *Paradise Lost*. In "Milton and the Millennium," Barbara Lewalski suggests that "[m]illennial expectation is offered to encourage Adam's progeny to continue their resistance to these wicked oppressors, and also to console them for the loss of Eden by describing the blighted earth at last transformed all to paradise" (Cummins, *Milton and the Ends of Time*, 22). Lewalski's argument is that Milton's references to the millennium always serve the goal of creating citizens willing to resist oppression. She is certainly right in pointing this out, but the fact remains that this particular passage does not refer to the millennium. In "The Millennial Moment: Milton vs. 'Milton,'" William B. Hunter offers an accurate reading of the passage, but does not seem to draw the right conclusion: "[The passage] describes the events succeeding the Last Judgment; for, to repeat, at the Judgment that begins the millennium only the martyrs are restored to rule with the Son (20:4). Everyone else must wait (20:5). Since the unfaithful and the faithful are judged together in this passage of the poem, it must refer to the final judging of everyone as recounted in Revelation 20:12–13" (Cummins, *Milton and the Ends of Time*, 100–101). The analysis is correct, but this is precisely the reason why the passage seems to doubt the millennium: it describes Christ's *first* resurrection and the Last Judgment, and it seems to identify the millennium with the time span between these two events, that is, with history itself.
- 9 Cummins, *Milton and the Ends of Time*, 82–96.
- 10 Stella P. Revard holds this position in "Milton and Millenarianism: From the Nativity Ode to *Paradise Regained*," in Cummins, *Milton and the Ends of Time*.
- 11 In this paper, I do not discuss the further possibility that the millennium is cotemporaneous with the judgment that in the Book of Revelation is described as preceding the millennium. This is the position that Mede held and Milton may have taken from him; a rather complicated view in the sense that it merges the Augustinian allegorical interpretation with a more literal millenarian reading. Technically speaking, it does not mean the abandonment of pre-millenarianism, but it relies on Augustine in that it introduces judgment into history. This seems to be the view of the author of *De Doctrina Christiana*; but in the above quoted eschatological passage in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's position is not this: there he clearly abandons every form of pre-millenarianism. On Mede and Milton, see Sarah Hutton, "Mede, Milton, and More: Christ's College Millenarians," in Cummins, *Milton and the Ends of Time*, esp. 36–37.



- 12 "The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth," in John Milton, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 353.
- 13 Arthur Baker is particularly clear on this point: "As the revolution progressed, Milton's confidence diminished; but if he lost his faith in the English people and his sense of the imminence of Christ's coming, the idea of the Kingdom remained fixed in his mind." Baker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942), 195–96.
- 14 The comparison between epic warriors and the "better fortitude" of heroes of patience and martyrdom goes back to the topos of English saints: "if men commonly delight so much in other chronicles which entreat only upon matters of policy, and rejoice to behold therein the variable events of worldly affairs, the stratagems of valiant captains, the roar of foughthen fields, the sacking of cities, the hurlyburlies of realms and people. . . how much more then it is meet for Christians to conserve in remembrance the lives, acts, and doings, not of bloody warriors, but of mild and constant martyrs of Christ." In Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), xxv.
- 15 This and the following references to the Bible are to the KJV version printed in *The Oxford Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- 16 On etiology, see Martin Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).
- 17 Cf. Henry Moore's *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (London, 1680).
- 18 Immanuel Kant, "Speculative Beginning of Human History," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 51–52.
- 19 Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London, 1643), 123.
- 20 Milton makes this clear by explaining that the balmy sweat is not caused by sun, on the contrary, the sun dries it up.
- 21 The major dialogues between Adam and Eve are staged very much in the way baroque operas work; their mutual praise of one another at the beginning, a problem appearing on the horizon that makes their duet dissonant, then reconciliation and an apparently unison hymn to praise the Creator. If it is really the case that Milton saw Monteverdi operas in Italy, one may ask what influence this experience might have had on *Paradise Lost*. Such an influence could also explain why Milton did not completely refuse Dryden's attempt to write a libretto of *Paradise Lost*, despite all his repugnance against the now royalist poet.
- 22 Behind the scene, there are also the early Christian, allegorical interpretations of the Fall. In Philo's view, for instance, Eden is an allegory of the soul, the woman being a symbol of *aisthesis*, and man a symbol of *nous*. On Philo, see Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, 70–72.
- 23 For the sources and significance of Mary as Second Eve in *Paradise Lost*, see Mary Christopher Pecheux, "The Concept of the Second Eve in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* (1960) Vol. 75, No. 4; Sep, 359–66.







## Part

## IV

# Persistence







# Ukrainian Millennialism: A Historical Overview

*Lilya Berezhnaya*

In November of 2007, Russian and international media reported on the shocking events that took place in the region of Penza, some 400 miles (640 km) from Moscow. Members of a doomsday religious group had barricaded themselves inside of a cave and threatened to blow themselves up. The authorities were pressured to act quickly due to the presence of four children—one as young as seventeen months—among the twenty-nine members of the splinter group of the Russian Orthodox Church. Their intention was to remain in the cave until the end of the world, which they expected to take place in May of 2008. They claimed that they would kill themselves if any moves were made to force them from their hideout. Reportedly, none of the cave's residents were employed, and their children were not allowed to go to school. Besides some local parishioners, the group included several Belorussian and Ukrainian citizens.

According to the media reports, the group believed that “everything in the world is evil. Globalization is evil.” They resisted the introduction of a new Russian tax, individual identification numbers, and new passports, seeing these as signs of “satanic globalization” and tribulations leading to the End of the World. The group's leader, Pyotr Kuznetsov, who did not go into hiding with his followers, was charged with setting up a religious organization associated with violence.

When spring floodwaters covered the floor of the cave and it collapsed in three places, seven females in the group saw it as a bad omen and left. Not long after that, in April of 2008, there was another collapse and the other members emerged together with their new leader Vitalii Nedogon. The hermits then continued their seclusion by moving into the houses of the leaders. When Kuznetsov's doomsday prophecy failed to come true, he attempted to commit suicide by hitting himself on the head with a log several times. Reportedly, one of the hermit women died from voluntary starvation and another from cancer. Several weeks later, the cave was blown up at the orders of the Pen-



za region police. Eventually the local court signed an order for the forced psychiatric treatment of Pyotr Kuznetsov.<sup>1</sup>

Many Russian Orthodox Church officials, along with some international Orthodox leaders, condemned the action of the so-called Penza's hermits as sectarian and "anti-human." Yet the condemnation was not unanimous. The Archbishop Filaret of Penza and Kuznetsk did not consider the Penza Doomsday group to be a sect, accusing "foreign organizations" of standing behind the Penza action.<sup>2</sup> Russia's western neighbors also voiced their disagreement. Several priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan patriarchate objected to the conclusions of the Moscow St. Tykhon Theological Academy's professor, deacon Andrei Kuraev. They protested against the parallel drawn by the Moscow theologian between the Orange Revolution and contemporary apocalyptic expectations among Russian Orthodox believers.<sup>3</sup> Kuraev argued that the 2004 protests in the Ukrainian capital and the present millennial fever were both masterfully organized from above. He failed, however, to specify who stood behind both mass movements.<sup>4</sup> Like Kuraev, none of his Ukrainian critics endeavored to analyze the situation from a historical perspective. For them, the Penza case was the result of religious exaltation within a small group, and it did not reflect developments within the Russian Orthodox Church. Similar cases, however, also appeared within the parishes and monasteries of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, e.g., the Kharkiv Intercession Monastery, whose monks decided to move to a remote area in 2003. Unfortunately, such "Orthodox doomsday groups" receive little attention in the Ukrainian mass media.

In this essay, I follow the fluctuations of eschatological expectations in Ukrainian history. I raise the question of whether or not it is possible to trace fluctuations and dependencies in the development of apocalyptic fears among the Eastern Christian believers without just repeating Nikolai Berdiaev's famous equation between "Moscow—the Third Rome" and the Third International.<sup>5</sup> Research into Ukrainian history in this respect is more than a local case study; it is a part of a broader investigation of the relationships between political and religious loyalties in one of the borderlands of Europe. I examine the distinctiveness of the eschatological expectations found in the history of



the territories which form modern-day Ukraine in order to determine what distinguished them from the expectations among the Muscovite (or later Russian) believers.

The problem of a specifically "Ukrainian apocalypse" is bound up with the formation of national consciousness from the nineteenth century onward. After Ukraine gained independence in the 1990s, it became popular among some local intellectuals to define a certain "Ukrainian eschatological myth," as a part of the hazily sketched "national character." Thus this paper also analyzes the ways in which apocalyptic fears have been politically manipulated throughout Ukrainian history.

Several periods in Ukrainian history are marked by an interest in millennialist themes. In some cases, apocalyptic theory helped legitimize the status quo of the church; in other cases it justified social revolt. The most acute apocalyptic phases were characterized by the presence of both. The first of these periods can be seen as stretching from the late sixteenth century, starting with the Union of Brest, to the final outbreak of apocalyptic dread in mid-eighteenth-century bloodbath of Koliivshchyna in Right-bank Ukraine, with the Cossack revolts of the seventeenth century making up the interim. This was followed by a phase consisting of the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century when popular expectations of the End of the World were reflected in the popularization of the so-called Letters from Heaven in Western Ukraine, and the rapid spread of radical Protestant sects in the southern regions. This was followed by another phase connected with the general political and social turmoil in Eastern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century when the Ukrainian lands witnessed the calamities of the revolution, Civil War, collectivization and the famine (popularly known as *Holodomor*). Finally, the end of the twentieth century has been characterized by new forms of apocalyptic fears, namely ecological, caused by the Chernobyl catastrophe, and religious, the result of the revival and further fragmentation of the Ukrainian churches.

One of the major problems confronting Ukrainian millennialism studies is the subjectivity of historical interpretation. Ukrainian independence is a recent event, unprecedented in its history apart from a



few temporary exceptions. Indeed, the difficulties in answering the provocative question, “Does Ukraine have a history?” can lead to a methodological split.<sup>6</sup> General questions of the legibility of Ukrainian history as such also apply to the studies of apocalyptic expectations. As a result, most historians regard the history of apocalyptic fears in the Ukrainian lands as a part of the Russian<sup>7</sup> or Polish apocalyptic movements.<sup>8</sup>

### **Kyivan Rus’ “eschatological optimism”**

The case of Kyivan Rus’ between the ninth and thirteenth centuries is rather exceptional within the mainstream of historiography. The differences between interpretations of Russian and Ukrainian history lie merely in different emphases. Historians of Russia usually consider original and translated apocalyptic literature of that time to be a stage in the process which finally resulted in the outbreak of eschatological expectations in Muscovy around the year 1492.<sup>9</sup> Their Ukrainian colleagues, on the other hand, accentuate the Kyivan Rus’ legacy in the eschatological writings coming from the Galych-Volynian principality in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup>

It is, however, commonly accepted that after the official tenth-century baptism of Rus’, expressions of eschatological content were apparent in texts coming from the elite theological culture. Kyivan Rus’, as a newly baptized land was often depicted in local chronicles as “the eleventh hour workers” (Matthew, 20:6),<sup>11</sup> people who came into the Church on the eve of the Second Coming.<sup>12</sup> The state legitimized its power by drawing from Byzantine realized eschatology.<sup>13</sup> Its major components—preoccupation with imperial succession and concern with the fate of the capital city—were successfully transmitted to the Kyivan hills. When the nomadic Cumans sacked Kyiv in 1096, a chronicler identified them as one of the races that had to issue forth before the end of the world,<sup>14</sup> according to the Pseudo-Methodius of Patara Apocalypse.<sup>15</sup>

Here, as in the Byzantine literature, the horrors of apocalyptic preaching were combined with hopes for a fortunate End.<sup>16</sup> A revealing



example is the “Sermon on Law and Grace,” traditionally ascribed to Metropolitan Ilarion (eleventh century), where numerous references to the End of Time are combined with statements about a hopeful future without any sense of an impending drama. Addressing the soul of the deceased Prince Volodimer, the baptizer of Rus’, Ilarion exclaimed:

Your devotion is well witnessed . . . by the holy Church of Holy Mary Mother of God, founded by you on foundations of faith and now the abode of your earthly remains which await the archangels’ last trumpet. . . . Arise, or venerable head. . . . Shake off your sleep, lift up your eyes to behold what honor the Lord has vouchsafed you in heaven. . . . Behold your offspring . . . and so rejoice and be exceedingly glad.<sup>17</sup>

This combination of eschatological admonitions and confidence in the afterlife’s rewarding future supports the idea of “religious optimism” in Kyivan Rus’. In connection with this optimism, Michael Flier draws attention to the distinction between the terms “eschatology” and “apocalypse.” The first refers generally to the End of Time, and as such to the End of History, described in Chapters 20, 21 of the book of Revelation, with the eternal death of sinners and the New Jerusalem as the final abode for the righteous. The second term applies to an End that is imminent, typically preceded by prophecies and signs of a cataclysmic and violent confrontation.<sup>18</sup> This latter tradition is transmitted through prophetic literature with its rich variety of signs and symbols to set the scene for the inevitable End. For Kyivan Rus’, the translated apocalyptic literature of the Byzantines—namely, the works of Hippolytus, Kiprianus, Pseudo-Methodius of Patara, and Ephraem the Syrian—pointed to a way of understanding the End of Times through a depiction of the forthcoming reign of the Antichrist. Kyivan Rus’ clerics interpreted the raids of nomads according to the biblical toponymy as “Ismaelites” or northern tribes of Gog and Magog. Flier argues that although the literature of Kyivan Rus’ was full of eschatological references, for the most part, it lacked apocalyptic statements.<sup>19</sup>

This idea is shared by the Russian historian Alexei Alexeev, who affirms that the complex of the translated eschatological literature of the



Byzantines was mostly interpreted as historical, rather than apocalyptic. "Eschatology was eventually withdrawn from eschatological writings" (V.Mil'kov).<sup>20</sup> Alexeev explains this phenomenon by the late Christianization of Kyivan Rus' and by the general optimistic mode of the Byzantine eschatological tradition, which, in contrast to Western Europe, did not witness the outbreak of chiliastic movements around the year 1000.<sup>21</sup>

This "optimism of salvation" found its reflection not only in the numerous translated, juridical and panegyric texts, but also in the formation of the new doctrine of "Kyiv—the New Jerusalem." In the list of the medieval "God-blessed cities," Kyiv was perceived as a direct heir of Constantinople. According to the tradition that appeared around the seventh century, when Arabs conquered the eastern parts of the Roman Empire Constantinople acquired the name of the New Jerusalem. Constantinople as a substitute for Jerusalem was interpreted in Byzantine theology through the formula of the "God-saved city." It was perceived as a place created by the Lord himself, establishing a limit to chaos and ruin. This concept was implemented in city planning and topography.<sup>22</sup> Robert Ousterhout has recently objected to the direct application of this metaphor to the history of Constantinople, arguing that "as a sacred city [Constantinople] could be likened to Jerusalem, in its heavenly and earthly aspects, but it neither replicated nor replaced the prototype."<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Ousterhout admits that, "in Constantinople . . . sanctity was introduced and perpetuated within a complex system . . . it was carefully imported, invented, constructed, and celebrated."<sup>24</sup> In the scope of the present study, it is irrelevant whether or not the Byzantine capital was really built as a local "souvenir" version of the Heavenly City, as was the case in many places throughout Western Europe at that time.<sup>25</sup> What is of importance is that the city was perceived as a sacral place and a capital of the Orthodox world, the true bearer of the Christian faith.

Already in the early eleventh century, the idea that Constantinople had lost its position as the center of salvation due to the sins of its citizens had penetrated the literary circles of Rus'. It was now Kyiv that had pretences towards the glorious title of the New Jerusalem of the Chosen Lands.<sup>26</sup> This theory was articulated for the first time in the above-mentioned "Sermon on Law and Grace."<sup>27</sup>



Several recent publications by historians, art historians, and literary critics have traced the notion of “Kyiv—the New Jerusalem” to the old princely tradition. The architecture of eleventh- and twelfth-century Kyiv reflects the topography of Constantinople, not only in the names of churches and fortifications, but also in the sacral meaning of its artistic implementations. This applies, for instance, to the Golden Gates, which were treated as the entry to Heavenly Jerusalem in a similar manner as the main gates of Constantinople and Jerusalem. The same correspondence marked the St. Sophia Cathedral and Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, the cave monastery below it. Kyivan historian Nadiia Nikitenko has discovered the measurement system used during the construction of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv. The proportions of the twelve basic portals all correspond with the sacred number twelve, the symbol of Heavenly Jerusalem. All the major architectonical components find their parallel in the sanctuaries of the Holy City. This applies to the five-nave core of the Cathedral and to two marble columns at the entrance. In addition, the number twelve conjures up the name of the St. Volodymyr. For instance, in the literature of Kyivan Rus’ this number is associated with Volodymyr’s twelve sons, as well as with the number of cupolas of the Novgorod St. Sophia Cathedral built by the Kyivan ruler.<sup>28</sup> Significantly, on the walls of the Kyivan St. Sophia Cathedral, Volodymyr is depicted with a reliquary called Zion in his hands. Later, this association was reinforced through other symbolic means. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, jasper stone, the biblical symbol of Heavenly Jerusalem, was embedded into St. Sophia’s floor near the main altar.<sup>29</sup>

The Kyiv Pechersk Lavra also bears signs of the Heavenly City. Its sacred topography has clear parallels with both, the city plan of Constantinople and with the Holy Land itself. This applies in particular to the Dormition Cathedral, which was considered a guardian of the city of Kyiv, its inviolable Zion. According to a widely spread belief, a pilgrim to the Lavra became an active participant in the Passion of Christ. Since the territory of the Lavra represented the Holy Land itself, entering its gates meant embarking upon the path of salvation.<sup>30</sup>



## The year 7000: Muscovy versus Ruthenia

The idea of “Kyiv—the New Jerusalem,” born in old princely times, remained in popular use for centuries. Folk materials collected at the end of the nineteenth century serve as evidence for the notion that Kyiv was considered to be a City of God, and its monasteries and churches—holy places. It was often perceived as a gateway to Heaven.<sup>31</sup> Soteriological and eschatological parallels between Kyiv as a capital of the Ruthenian lands, and Jerusalem as an apocalyptic City of God, were clearly drawn in these folk tales. The dual Kyiv—Jerusalem was a locus that occupied the highest position on the sacral scale.<sup>32</sup>

This symbolic connotation was recovered during periods of cultural revival in Ukrainian history. This was the case in Peter Mohyla’s time at the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the hetmanacy of Ivan Mazepa at the turn of the eighteenth century, and in the mid-nineteenth century, during the period of nation building.<sup>33</sup>

Some form of “eschatological and soteriological optimism” from the times of Kyivan Rus’ survived both in the elite circles and in the popular milieu until the social turmoil of the seventeenth century. However, it seems that not every social crisis precipitated an apocalyptic response; the Mongol invasion, for instance, although described by chroniclers as a sign of the immanent End, did not spark apocalyptic expectations among the Eastern Slavs. Oftentimes the cause of the transformation of the “eschatological” expectations, which circulated in the theological milieu, into a mass “apocalyptic” outbreak was some sort of preexisting social movement. A particularly important case was that of the apocalyptic expectations that preceded the year 1492. This year corresponded in the Orthodox calendar with the year 7000, which was often seen as the year in which the world would come to an end.<sup>34</sup> That said, Ukrainian (or, according to the historical terminology, Ruthenian) experience of the fifteenth century differs in this respect from the Muscovite one, since traces of chiliastic movements outbreaks of heresies are hard to find in the former.

In what follows, I will focus on two pieces of evidence in support of this statement. When one compares fifteenth-century Muscovite and Ruthenian iconographies that interpret the issues of “large eschatology,”



one finds major differences. Ruthenian iconography does not have special depictions of the Apocalypse. Illustrations based on the book of Revelation formed the structure of several Last Judgment icons, but the book of Revelation itself never became the material for a separate iconographic program.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, fifteenth-century Muscovite iconography testifies to an extraordinary interest in the Apocalypse as a dreadful end of human history. An indicative example is the commission during the period of a large icon of the Apocalypse for Moscow's Dormition Cathedral in the Kremlin. This icon is the earliest known panel painting with this theme in the Byzantine world. The inclusion of the elements described in the Revelation—the seven seals, the whore of Babylon, the seven-headed beast with ten horns, the pale rider, the king of kings leading his army against the forces of the Antichrist, and many more—provides tangible proof that in the elite circles of Orthodox Moscow, eschatological certainty had “begun to yield to apocalyptic imminence.”<sup>36</sup>

Texts, icons, and frescoes, as well as Muscovite Easter tables, which were planned only until 1492, were products of a privileged context. This apocalyptic trend among the elites invites the question: did the dread of the imminent apocalypse also penetrate the everyday life of the people? Indeed, the everyday context appears to reveal similar trends. If one considers testaments as documents of popular religious devotion, it is possible to trace the difference between the fifteenth-century eschatological expectations on the territories of modern-day Ukraine and those of modern-day Russia. A revealing example comes from the 1477 testament of the Great Princess Maria Iaroslavna, who donated a sum of 500 rubles to the Kirillo-Belozersk monastery intended for almsgiving and monastery needs for the next fifteen years, that is, until 1492. This contradicts both earlier and later traditions, when the donation implied “eternal commemoration.”<sup>37</sup>

The cultural phenomenon of awaiting the apocalypse in Muscovite Rus' was not a widespread panic that would manifest itself in popular millennialist movements. Rather, the “apocalypse stimulated concern” spread among the elite circles.<sup>38</sup> Still, there is overt evidence for the emergence of a certain apocalyptic mode, which remained valid until the seventeenth century, when popular voices came to challenge the state and church.<sup>39</sup>



Significantly, in Ruthenian materials from the fifteenth century, it is difficult to find expressions of personal fear and uncertainty, typical of the Muscovite testaments of that time.<sup>40</sup> A century later, the constant reference to God's endless compassion, grace, and benevolence remained the most characteristic feature of the Ruthenian Orthodox testaments. The testament of the Prince Gregory Sangushkovych-Koshyrsky (1601) is a particularly clear example of this phenomenon. While reflecting on the Last Judgment, he affirmed: "I shall behold My Lord the Savior and I shall hear His joyful voice. He will point at me with His finger to sit at His right hand among the saved."<sup>41</sup>

The question of why the Ruthenian tradition remained relatively immune to the apocalyptic fever of the year 7000 does not have a single answer. We know that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the so-called crisis of Western European consciousness, caused by endless epidemics, wars, famines, and followed by a demographic decline, did not affect the late medieval Polish Catholic culture, in which "macabre" frightening motifs were quite rare. Late Christianization and nomadic invasions, which destroyed monastic life, are plausible explanations for this relative immunity.<sup>42</sup> The borderland position of the Ruthenian and Polish lands, which were situated on a crosscurrent of cultural and social influences, offers another explanation.

### **The First Wave of Apocalyptic Fears: The End of the Sixteenth to the Mid-Seventeenth Century**

In relation to medieval and early modern realities, the social factor is crucial for understanding the origins of the East European apocalyptic movement. It is relevant for the Muscovite, Polish, as well as Ukrainian situations. In particular, it is the calamities of the Cossack wars and the following ruin in the second half of the seventeenth century that caused the outbreak of apocalyptic fears. No less important in this context, however, was the rise of eschatological sentiments among the Kyivan literary clerics a half-century earlier. This rise paved the way for the outbreak of millennialism. The renaissance of the idea of "Kyiv—the New Jerusalem" among these circles provided a basis for the rise of the



concept of a “chosen people” and the notion that Kyiv was a “mother of all Ruthenian cities.” The polemics surrounding the 1596 Union of Brest gave the old concept a new apocalyptic flavor. For instance, this idea appeared in Zaxarija Kopystens’kyi’s *Book of Defense* (Palinodiia, 1621) and *A Book of Faith* (*Kniga o Vere*), which elaborated the concept of the Orthodox Church as the only canonical church in the Ruthenian lands. Kopystens’kyi asserted that Ruthenia aspired to the heavenly kingdom. He was sure that the Union of Brest was caused by the machinations of the Pope, whom he considered to be the Antichrist. Thus he situated recent events in the long history of the holy Christian fight with the “enemy.” For Kopystens’kyi, the apocalyptic meaning of the figures 1600-1660-1666 rested on the realities of the new Church schism and clearly signified the Second Coming:

this enemy deceived and is deceiving many; he caused a pernicious schism and ceases not even today to divert people from the true Orthodox faith. But the longer the time, the more he does so. And when, after the thousandth year, six hundred years were coming to a close and as sixty-six are nearing fulfillment, apostasy and deception have become manifest and have been increasing... Likewise some worse evil will surely appear when 1660 and 6 will be written; for such is the “number of the man,” Antichrist.<sup>43</sup>

It is noteworthy that this concept, based on the “chronological” approach, which connected the apocalyptic thousand years with the eleventh-century Church schism, is atypical for the Byzantine and Muscovite traditions. Still, Kopys’tenskyi’s supposition became popular not only in the Kyivan church circles, but also among Muscovite clerics as well as the Old Believers.

Another example testifying to the spread of apocalyptic connotations among the Kyivan Orthodox hierarchs is Borets’kyi’s 1621 memorial to the tsar, which referred to “the most holy throne of the Kyivan metropolitanate of Jerusalem.”<sup>44</sup> Borets’kyi declared:

The goal and the end is the Heavenly Kingdom and life with God Almighty. And the profit, trophy and regard are the crowns of



heaven. Others have our fatherland, while we have the mountainous places [a biblical reference to Jerusalem]; others have our bishoprics, while we have Christ. The years and days return to us that lasted from apostolic times to Constantine the Great. . . . The Day of Judgment approaches.<sup>45</sup>

For many this Judgment Day did in fact arrive with the war. A recent study by the Ukrainian historian Natalia Iakovenko revealed the symbolic eschatological meaning of group behavior during Khmelnitskyi's wars in the mid-seventeenth century. The semiotics of a world turned upside down with clear biblical connotations is traceable in major sources coming from all the camps: Cossacks, peasants, Poles, Jews, Catholics, Orthodox, and Uniates.<sup>46</sup> It is not at all strange that at that time, the massacres of Jews by the Cossacks gave rise to the Jewish millennial movement Sabbatianism.<sup>47</sup> The irrational logic of the "total annihilation" of the conquered land dictated the destruction of all the plundered goods, ruled the soldiers' behavior and painted the depiction of events in apocalyptic colors. There is, of course, nothing new in such associations. Across the whole the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and neighboring Muscovy, the first half of the seventeenth century coincided with the peak of apocalyptic expectations.<sup>48</sup>

This mode of behavior was still present several decades after the war subsided. The outbreak of the Koliivshchyna uprising in the mid-eighteenth century was determined by religious and social clashes.<sup>49</sup> These events, particularly the massacre of Uman' in 1768, were perceived by the major actors and their contemporaries as signs of the approaching End.

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ukrainian apocalyptic expectations are unique and valuable not due to their specific forms of expression, but rather to the central role they played in the formation of a national mythology. These expectations provided a basis for the development of the Cossacks' popular image as guards of the Orthodox *antemurale christianitatis*, social liberators, and at the same time as sacral victims of the enemy. This enemy received easily recognizable features, usually associated with either Poles or Russians.<sup>50</sup>



## Ukrainian Romanticism and “Nationalized Eschatology”

In this form the Cossacks myth was popularized in folk legends and as such was elaborated on by the Ukrainian romantics. The leaders of the nineteenth-century national revival not only used the Cossack’ myth, but also politicized its eschatological content. Mykola Kostomarov, who in the 1840s wrote “The Book of the Genesis of the Ukrainian People” (originally called *God’s Law*), the political manifesto of the Kyivan Sts. Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood, depicted the history of Ukraine beginning with biblical times.<sup>51</sup> According to his interpretation, “human history is perceived in terms of man sinning against the true God, being punished for it, and finally being promised redemption, in the Slavic world, by Ukraine’s resurrection.”<sup>52</sup> Displacing the Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans from their position as the chosen people, the Ukrainians will become the leading voice in the concert of the all-Slavic Kingdom (which was perceived as the Heavenly Kingdom):

Ukraine will rise from her grave and again will call to her brother Slavs, and they will hear her call; and the Slavic peoples will rise, and there will remain neither tsar nor tsarevich, nor prince, nor count, nor duke, nor Excellency, nor Highness, nor lord, nor boyar, nor peasant, nor serf, neither in Great Russia, nor in Poland, nor in Ukraine, nor in the Czech lands, nor among the Croats, nor among the Serbs, nor among the Bulgars. And Ukraine will be independent republic in the Slavic union. Then all the peoples, pointing to the place on the map where Ukraine will be delineated, will say: “Behold, the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”<sup>53</sup>

Kostomarov interpreted the Cossacks’ past as part of the divine plan for Ukraine. The image of the Cossacks was in his interpretation inseparably connected with the old idea of “Kyiv—the New Jerusalem,” which now meant the glorification of the city as the future capital of “the Slavic race.” Kostomarov’s literary work “Mister Natalich” is a hymn of praise of all the Slavic languages that would rise to the Lord while the ancient bells of Kyivan Saint Sophia sounded out. “Believe me, it will come to be, to be, to be!” he exclaimed.<sup>54</sup>



Millenarian overtones are also present in Taras Shevchenko's work that depicts the Cossack uprisings. This nineteenth-century Ukrainian poet was a member of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood. Similarly to Kostomarov, Shevchenko glorifies the common Slavic past in its edenic quality as a golden age and a paradise lost:

When we were still Cossacks  
And there was not sight or sound of the Union [of Brest],  
Then life was gay!  
We lived as brothers with the free Poles,  
We reveled in our free steppes,  
Our daughters, like lilies, loved and bloomed in the orchards.  
The mother took pride in her sons, free sons. . . .<sup>55</sup>

Give the hand to a Cossack,  
And give him a pure heart!  
And once again with the name of Christ,  
We shall renew our quiet Paradise. (To the Poles, 1847)<sup>56</sup>

George Grabowicz, who has studied Shevchenko's millennial views in detail, notes its peculiarities. Shevchenko, particularly in his last years, was a proponent of the "collective, the elect" sense of the millennium, expressed in the "total opposition to society structure, to authority, to the powerful of this world."<sup>57</sup> A quintessential implementation of this idea is the statement:

The grain sowed by the tsars  
Will be threshed!  
But the people will grow.  
The tsars yet unborn will die. . .  
And on the renewed earth  
There will be no enemy, no temper,  
But there will be a son, and a mother,  
And there will be people on this earth.  
(Both Archimedes and Galileo, 1860)<sup>58</sup>



Oksana Zabuzhko calls Shevchenko's poetry an implementation of the "national version" of Christian eschatology. In the setting of the "hellish" image of St. Petersburg as a "sin-city" and the "sanctity of the Kyivan hills," she traces an apologia of the eminent national revival. The future purification from the "national sin should transform the historical being of the guilty [Ukrainian] people to the sort of the earthly penitence." In fact, Shevchenko reconstructed the image of Ukraine as a victim and a sacral lamb of the Slavic peoples.<sup>59</sup>

The way Shevchenko constructed this image was not uniquely Ukrainian. The main idea lay in the electedness and the messianic role of Ukrainians in the world history of salvation. It was a ubiquitous topos in the ideologies of national liberation of that time.<sup>60</sup> Taras Shevchenko and other Kirillo-Methodians did not invent something new when they proposed a teleological version of Ukrainian history and depicted Ukraine as a sacrificed lamb victimized by Petersburg. Their historiosophy was much indebted to Mickiewicz's vision of Poland as Christ of peoples.<sup>61</sup> In this sense, there is no "Ukrainian eschatological myth" as such. Ukrainian Romanticism presented the national Cossack myth in the universal form of God's fight against the Enemy. Cossacks and Ukraine in general became symbols of freedom and part of the apocalyptic plan.

In the later stages of nation building, the Cossack myth lost its eschatological component. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the leaders of Ukrainian nationalism reduced it to one of the arguments in the fight against the Russian Empire, accentuating the freedom-loving nature of the Cossack character and the sovereignty of the Cossack state.

## Popular Millennialism in Western and Southern Ukraine

Ukrainian millennialism in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century left the circles of intellectuals and moved to the popular milieu. On both sides of the border, Habsburg Galicia and Russian Slobozhanshchyna were domains of various apocalyptic movements. The popularization of the so-called "Letters from



Heaven" in Western Ukraine and the spread of numerous millennial sects in Southern Ukraine are the most notable examples in this respect. Recent studies have attempted to explain these phenomena either as movements for church reform or as forms of social protest.

The "Letters from Heaven" (*Lysty z Neba*) first came to Ukraine from the Western flagellants in the fourteenth century and gave eschatological warnings to those who did not follow God's commandments.<sup>62</sup> Usually, the "Letters" contained an account of their origin, a description of their power, and the statement: "I, Jesus Christ, have written this letter in my own hand." Further on came the warning itself:

And I will draw out my sword and there will be a disturbance and spilling of blood among you. . . . You will run from each other, you work and your estate will turn to nothing, your cattle will be eaten by wild beasts, you will die for nothing, and not a trace will be left of you.<sup>63</sup>

The popularity of these texts among the peasants can be explained by their structure. The narrative of the "Letters" is based on a group of oppositions, which meant not only the declaration of the world's sinfulness, but also an appeal for a spiritual revival. Moreover, the "Letters" embodied a direct channel of communication between the peasants and sacrum, a written text which was not controlled by church or state.<sup>64</sup>

Protestant sects in Southern Ukraine appeared as a result of intensive colonization of the region by various religious and ethnic groups. A combination of these patterns and the transformation of Russian society in the aftermath of the abolition of serfdom created conditions for the spread of radical evangelical religion among the rural population. A new phenomenon in the Evangelical movement—Ukrainian Stundism—resulted from an appropriation of various Russian and Western European traditions of religious dissent. Radical Stundists and another sect called Maliovantsi rejected human authorities and church rituals. The most important element of this movement was its "spiritualist" trend which included practices of spirit possession and the sacred theater of the Millennium. Since the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian and Russian dissenters came from the oppressed and uneducated part



of the population, the pursuit for social justice and revenge expressed in a form of millennialism is rather understandable.<sup>65</sup>

Later, the Bolshevik state attempted to use the radical evangelical sects to promote communist ideas among the rural population. This method lasted until the mid-1920s, when antireligious politics reached their peak, all sects were prohibited, and their leaders were persecuted.<sup>66</sup>

### Apocalyptic Expectations in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine

The Bolshevik state failed to liquidate the peasant vision of the Apocalypse with the dissolution of millennialist Protestant sects. This vision continued to exist among Russian and Ukrainian peasants at the time of the revolution and civil war, and throughout the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP). This tradition may have been an undercurrent in the peasant culture of popular protest for a long time, but it was quite pronounced in the 1920s—a time of transition and uncertainty—and perhaps became even more dominant during the peasant protests against collectivization during Stalin's five-year plan (1928–1932). It manifested itself in various prophecies, omens, and other expressions of apocalyptic forecasts. Eschatological expectations in the Ukrainian lands did not differ significantly in this respect from the Soviet situation in general. The most common types of apocalyptic fears concerned three basic themes: the reign of the Antichrist, impending war and invasion, and the destruction of traditional ways of peasant life.<sup>67</sup>

Collectivization and Holodomor (famine) at the beginning of the 1930s contributed to the dissolution of the apocalyptic fears. Both of these events were regarded by the peasants as signs of the approaching apocalypse, but as Collectivization and Holodomor proceeded, the social basis for apocalyptic movement was undermined.<sup>68</sup> The folklore tradition of that time generally lacks eschatological texts depicting Stalinist repressions.<sup>69</sup> These were revived during World War II as foreign invasion became a popular trope and eschatological motifs dominated stories about Nazi occupation, captivity, and guerilla brigades.<sup>70</sup>



The postwar period, however, was characterized by apocalyptic skepticism with the 1960s marking its peak. This period coincided with a lack of debate on eschatological issues within the Orthodox Church of the Soviet Union in general. Nikolai Mitrokhin characterizes the years between 1972 and the 1990s as a “silent period” in the eschatological history of contemporary Russian Orthodox Church. He notes that neither the radical transformations of Gorbachev’s times, nor the shortages of food supply during Yeltsin’s reign, nor real or potential military conflicts could provoke a rise in eschatological expectations. Mitrokhin explains the lack of apocalyptic fears by the religious revival at that time, which was seen in a predominantly optimistic light by Church members.<sup>71</sup>

The situation changed once again towards the end of the century. The figure 2000 spurred a new wave of interest in mystical numerology. The traditional fear of round numbers was exacerbated by attempts to introduce Tax Identification Numbers for each Russian and Ukrainian citizen. For many believers, this meant that the time had come when “no one can buy or sell unless he has a mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of his name” (Rev 13:17). Public demonstrations of Orthodox Christians against the imposition of tax IDs were staged in Russia, Ukraine, and Greece. These protests reflected both apocalyptic fears and an insistence on maintaining religious identity.<sup>72</sup> As a result, new Ukrainian and Russian legislations allowed believers to refuse to accept tax numbers under special conditions.<sup>73</sup>

For the specifically Ukrainian form of modern apocalypticism the main impetus came much earlier, with the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear plant in 1986. Ecological apocalypticism, characteristic of modern society in general, received particular religious overtones within the post-Soviet context. For many people, the name of Chernobyl became a sign of the forthcoming end of time. The biblical star Wormwood, a symbol of the bitterness and forgetfulness of sin resulting in divine judgment, was often translated as “Chornobyl” in Ukrainian (“Polyn” in Russian). The nuclear explosion was therefore seen as a prophecy fulfilled<sup>74</sup>:

Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the



springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter (Rev 8:10–11).

The media as well as modern Ukrainian writers often put an emphasis on the religious dimension of the Chernobyl catastrophe, but politicians also did their best to turn the memory of Chernobyl into a valuable argument in their debates about Ukrainian future.<sup>75</sup> This disaster, as well as Holodomor, were used by nationally oriented intellectuals and the environmentalists to explore the theme of “national apocalypticism” and to accelerate the process of gaining independence.<sup>76</sup>

Generally speaking, this tendency is also characteristic of the religious situation in independent Ukraine. Its high politicization contributed to a gradual absorption of religious apocalyptic terminology by the public sphere and secular media discourses.<sup>77</sup> Gradual “confessionalizing” of intellectual discourse contributed to the spread of apocalyptic terminology in media reflections on Ukrainian independence and civil society.<sup>78</sup>

The split within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the 1990s contributed to this situation.<sup>79</sup> Recent attempts by the Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko to coordinate the founding of the local united Ukrainian Orthodox Church are often interpreted in millennial terms. In particular, many statements originating from the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC-MP) can be characterized as the political use of apocalyptic terminology. In one example, one of its bishops recently declared that “if the Russian Orthodox Church falls apart, Satan will conquer all of us.”<sup>80</sup> Quite often the prophecies of “the church elders” (*startsy*) are used to challenge religious opponents and to gain the confidence of believers.<sup>81</sup>

The use of apocalyptic terminology in today’s Ukrainian church and intellectual discourses has much to do with unsolved conflicts of historical memory as well as churches’ claims to legitimacy. The title of the “Kyivan Church,” often employed by each of the conflicting sides to describe themselves, in practice means not only the possession of the Kyivan sanctuaries and cathedrals, but also state-guaranteed privileges.<sup>82</sup> Thus, in the Ukrainian case, apocalyptic fears common to



transition periods coincide with artificially nourished millennial expectations, which often serve an instrument for some Church authorities in their fight for legitimacy.

## Conclusions

By way of conclusion, let me return to the questions posed at the beginning of the article. Do we see any repeating patterns in the development of East European millennialism? Can one define a uniquely "Ukrainian version" of apocalyptic movements, or at least a certain intellectually constructed "Ukrainian eschatological myth"? Most probably, both of these questions deserve negative answers. An eschatological frame of mind is by no means a national attribute. Apocalyptic thinking is mostly fueled by uncertainty, despair, disorder, and the breakdown of the traditional social order. This statement could be applied to Ukrainian history, among many others. Its geographical position as a borderland rendered Ukraine susceptible to different apocalyptic movements coming from both the West and the East. However, the most "acute attacks" of apocalyptic fears coincided with the radical transformations within Ukrainian society. This was the case in the seventeenth century, as well as at the beginning of the twentieth. To a large degree, today's interest in apocalyptic prophecies in Ukraine has to do with the same phenomenon. Contemporary ecological and technological apocalyptic fears are enriched by fears of conflicting Church authorities. Therefore, in comparison with Russia, the Ukrainian situation seems to be more complicated.

Still the situation in the Penza region had little to do with the peculiarities of Orthodox theology or specific traits of the Russian/Ukrainian religious mind. Rather, this incident reflects a certain crisis within the Russian Orthodox Church precipitated by its attempts to come to terms with the challenges of the contemporary world.



## Notes

- 1 "Russian doomsday cult siege ends," *BBC*, May 16, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7404318.stm>; "Za tri nedeli do kontsa sveta" [Three weeks before Doomsday], *Lenta.ru*, April 11, 2008, <http://lenta.ru/articles/2008/04/11/apocalypse/>.
- 2 Archbishop Filaret of Penza and Kuznetsk, interview, *Interfax-Religion*, April 15, 2008, <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=interview&div=64>.
- 3 Viktor Ielens'kyi, "'Penzens'ki vidludnyky': do zhyttia vichnoho cherez samopidryv," [Penza hermits: To eternal life through self-explosion] *Radio Svoboda* [Radio Free Europe], November 20, 2007, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/972918.html>.
- 4 "Penzenskiie 'sektanty'—sledstviie sistemnogo nevnimania tserkovnonachaliiia k 'oranzhevoi revoliutsii' sredi mirian, schitaiet diakon Kuraev" [Penza sektarians—result of the Church authorities' systematic neglect of the "Orange revolution" among laymen, according to deacon Andrei Kuraev], *Interfax-Religion*, November 16, 2007, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=21461>.
- 5 Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, trans. R. M. French (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960).
- 6 Mark von Hagen, "Does Ukraine Have a History?" *Slavic Review* 54, no. 3 (1995): 658–73.
- 7 Gabriele Scheidegger, *Endzeit. Russland am Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts*, *Slavica Helvetica*, 63 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999); J. E. Clay, "Apocalypticism in Eastern Europe," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 3, *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, ed. S. J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 1998), 293–321.
- 8 Andrzej Karpiński, *W walce z niewidzialnym wrogiem. Epidemie chorób zakaźnych w Rzeczypospolitej w 16–18 w. i ich następstwa demograficzne, społecznoekonomiczne i polityczne* [In fight with invisible enemy. Epidemics of infectious illnesses in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its demographic, socio-economic, and political consequences] (Warsaw: Neriton, 2000); Stanisław Bylina, *Człowiek i zaświaty: wizje kar pośmiertnych w Polsce średniowiecznej* [Man and the afterlife: Visions of the afterlife punishments in medieval Poland] (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 1992); Jacek Sokolski, *Staropolskie zaświaty: obraz piekła, czyszcza i nieba w renesansowej i barokowej literaturze polskiej wobec tradycji średniowiecznej* [Old-Polish afterlife: the images of the purgatory and paradise in the Polish Renaissance and Baroque literature in relation to the medieval tradition] (Wrocław: Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994); Jacek Kowzan, *Quattuor hominum novissima: dzieje serii tematycznej czterech rzeczy ostatecznych w literaturze staropolskiej* [Quattuor hominum novissima: history of the thematic series of the "Four Last Things" in old-Polish literature] (Siedlce: Wydaw. AP, 2003); Bogdan Rok, *Człowiek wobec śmierci w kulturze staropolskiej* [Man in relation to death in old-Polish culture], *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, no. 1673, *Historia* 119 (Wrocław: Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1995); and Rok, *Zagadnienie śmierci w kulturze Rzeczypospolitej czasów Saskich* [Notion of death in the Polish-Lithuanian culture from the Saxonian period] (Wrocław: Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1991).
- 9 Cesare G. de Michelis, "L'Antéchrist dans la culture russe, et l'idée protestante du 'pape-antéchrist,'" *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 29, no. 3–4 (1988): 303–16; Alexei I. Alexeev, *Pod znakom kontsa vremen. Oчерki russkoi religioznosti kontsa 14–nachala 16 vv* [Under the sign of the end of times. Essays on the Russian religiosity from the end of the 14th–beginning of the 16th centuries] (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2002).
- 10 A classical reference is Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Istoriia ukrains'koi literatury* [History of Ukrainian literature], vol. 3 (Kyiv, 1993).
- 11 "About the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle. He said to them, 'Why do you stand here all day idle?'" Matthew 20:6.
- 12 Aleksei Karpov, "Ob eschatologicheskikh ozhidaniakh v Kievskoi Rusi v kontse 11 – nachale 12 veka" [On the eschatological expectations in Kyivan Rus' at the end of the 11th–beginning of the 12th centuries], *Otechestvennyie zapiski* 2 (2002): 3–15.



- 13 The term "realized eschatology" was suggested by John Meyendorff. In his account, Byzantine theological thought often depicted the church as heaven on earth and assumed the possibility of human transfiguration and deification already now, in earthly life, not just in the future. See John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), esp. 124–25. On the Byzantine eschatological imagination, see S. J. Gerhard Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichsideologie. Die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Großreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20). Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Münchener Universitätschriften, Reihe der Philosophischen Fakultät 9 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972); Paul Magdalino, "The End of Time in Byzantium," in *Endzeiten. Eschatologie in Den Monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. W. Brandes, F. Schmieder (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 119–34, and esp. 123–26; Hans Georg Beck, *Die Byzantiner und ihr Jenseits: zur Entstehungsgeschichte einer Mentalität* (Munich: Beck, 1979).
- 14 Vasilii M. Istrin, *Otkrovenie Mefodii Patarskogo* i apokrificheskie videnia Daniila v vizantiiskoi i slaviano-russkoi literaturakh. *Issledovaniia i teksty* ["The Revelation of Methodius of Patara" and the apocryphal visions of Daniel in the Byzantine and Russian–Slavic literatures. Studies and texts] (Moscow: Universitetskaia Tipografiia, 1897); Istrin, "Otkrovenie Mefodii Patarskogo i Letopis'" ["The Revelation of Methodius of Patara" and the Chronicle], *Izvestiia Otdeleniia Russkogo Iazyka i slovesnosti Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk 1924 g* [Proceedings of the Department of the Russian Language and Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences from the year 1924] (Leningrad, 1925), 380–82; Igor Danilevskii, "Eskhatologicheskie motivy v Povesti vremennykh let" [Eschatological motifs in the "Tale of Bygone Years"], in *Ustochnika. Sbornik v chest S. M. Kashtanova* [By the spring. A collection of articles in honor of S. M. Kashtanov] (Moscow: MPU "Signal," 1997), vol. 1, 192–93; Karpov, "Ob eskhatologicheskikh ozhidaniakh"; Gerhard Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur in der Kiever Rus' (988–1237)* (Munich: Beck, 1982).
- 15 The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius is a seventeenth-century text that shaped the eschatological imagination of Christendom throughout the Middle Ages. Its introduction of the so-called Legend of the Last Emperor into the Christian apocalyptic imagination makes it particularly interesting. Cf. Paul J. Alexander, "The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origin," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978): 1–15; Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 70–76.
- 16 Beck, *Die Byzantiner und ihr Jenseits*, 68–70. Compare with millenary expectations in medieval Western Europe, Richard Landes, "Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography, 100–800 C.E.," in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welckenhuysen (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1988), 137–211; Alexander Vasiliev, "Medieval Ideas of the End of the World. West and East," *Byzantion* 16 (1943).
- 17 Ilarion, "Sermon on Law and Grace," in *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus'*, trans. Simon Franklin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 23–24.
- 18 Michael Flier, "Till the End of Time: The Apocalypse in Russian Historical Experience before 1500," in *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, ed. Valerie Kivelson and Robert H. Green (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003), 129. See my review, Lilya Berezhnaya, review of *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, ed. Valerie Kivelson and Robert H. Green, *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 874–78.
- 19 Flier also argues that until the end of the fifteenth century, these apocalyptic statements were to be found exclusively in the texts coming from the elite theological circles. It is hard to trace similar admissions in the sources belonging to the lower levels of society. Flier, "Till the End of Time," 131ff.
- 20 Vladimir Mil'kov, *Apokryfy Drevnei Rusi. Teksty i issledovaniia* [Apocrypha of Old Rus'. Texts and studies] (Moscow: RCHGI, 1997).
- 21 Alexeev, *Pod znakom kontsa vremen*, 56–58.
- 22 Bernard Flusin, "Construire une Nouvelle Jérusalem: Constantinople et les reliques," in *L'Orient dans l'histoire religieuse de l'Europe. L'invention des origines*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and John



- Scheid (Brepolis: Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes et sciences religieuses, 2000), 51–70; Daniel Poirion, ed., *Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople. L'image et le mythe de la ville au Moyen Age. Colloque du Département d'Etudes Médiévales de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne* (Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1986).
- 23 Robert Ousterhout, "Sacred Geographies and Holy Cities: Constantinople as Jerusalem," in *Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Space in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. Alexei Lidov (Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2006), 106.
  - 24 *Ibid.*, 109.
  - 25 For a history of other European cities which claimed the title of the "God's City," see Martin Hengel, Siegfried Mittmann, and Anna Maria Schwemer, eds., *La Cité de Dieu / Die Stadt Gottes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000); Aliza Cohen-Mushlin and Bianca Kühnel, eds., *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art*. Special issue of *Jewish Art* 23/24 (1998); Bianca Kühnel, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem: Representations of the Holy City in Christian Art of the First Millennium*, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte*, Supplementheft 42 (Freiburg: Herder, 1987).
  - 26 Robert Stupperich, "Kiev – das zweite Jerusalem. Ein Beitrag zum Geschichte des ukrainisch-russischen Nationalbewußtseins," *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie* (1935): 332–54; Igor Danilevskii, "Mog li Kyiv byt Novym Ierusalimom?" [Could Kiev have been the New Jerusalem?], in *Odisei. Chelovek v istorii* [Odysseus. Man in History], (Moscow: Nauka, 1999), 135–50; Omeljan Pritsak, "Kiev and all of Rus: The Fate of a Sacral Idea" *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10 (1986): 279–300; Volodymyr Rychka, "Idea Kyiva – drugoho Ierusalima v polityko-ideolohichnykh kontsepsiakh seredniovichnoi Rusi" [The Idea of Kyiv as Second Jerusalem in medieval political-ideological concepts] *Archeologia* 2 (1998): 72–81; *idem* (2002): 51–55; Rychka, "*Kyiv – drugyi Ierusalym*" [z istorii politychoi dumky ta idelogii seredniovichnoi Rusi] [Kyiv – the Second Jerusalem: to the history of political thinking and ideology in medieval Rus'] (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy NAN Ukrainy, 2005); Lev Lebedev, "Bogoslovie Russkoi zemli kak obraza Obetovannoi zemli Tsarstva Nebesnogo" [Theology of the Russian lands as image of the promised land of Heavenly Kingdom], in *Tysiacheletie krescheniia Rusi: Mezhdunarodnaia tserkovno-nauchnaia konferentsiia "Bogoslovie i dukhovnost," Moskva, 11–18 maia 1987* [A thousand years of the baptism of Rus': International conference of church history "Theology and Spirituality," Moscow, May 11–18, 1987] (Moscow, 1989), 150–75; Liliya Berezhanaya, "Kiew—das 'Neue Jerusalem,' in *Religiöse Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa. Konstitution und Konkurrenz im nationen- und epochenübergreifenden Zugriff*, edited by Bahlecke Joachim, Rohdewald Stefan, Wunsch Thomas (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 37–51.
  - 27 Danilevskii, "Eskhatologicheskie motivy," 150.
  - 28 Nadezhda Nikitenko, *Rus' i Vizantiia v monumentalnom komplekse Sofii Kievskoi. Istoricheskaia problematika* [Rus' and Byzantium in the monuments complex of St. Sophia in Kiev. The historical context] (Kyiv: Kievskii gosudarstvennyi universitet literatury i iskusstv NAN Ukrainy, 1999), 195.
  - 29 *Ibid.*, 180 (fig. 2), and 185–98; Rychka, "Idea Kyiva," 72–81.
  - 30 Mariia Nikitenko, "Obraz sviatoi zemli u sakralnii topografi Kyivo-Pechers'koi Lavry" [The image of the Holy Land in the sacral topography of the Kyivan Caves Monastery], *Proseminarii. Medievistyka, Istoriiia tserkvy, nauky ta kultury* 5 (2005): 64–78.
  - 31 In some texts the Lavra was directly associated with the New Jerusalem. For instance, a story was recorded about a woman, who, while on a pilgrimage to the Kyivan cave monastery of Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, got lost underground. After seven years of wandering, she met a monk who explained that she was in Jerusalem, in a foreign land. Soon this woman returned to Kyiv. See Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Istoriiia ukrains'koi literatury* (Kyiv: Lybid, 1993), vol. 4, 218.
  - 32 See S. Tolstaia, "Ierusalim v slavianskoi folklornoi traditsii" [Jerusalem in the Slavic folklore tradition], *Jerusalem in Slavic Cultures. Jews and Slavs* 6 (1999): 51–68, esp. 53.
  - 33 Liliya Berezhanaya, "Topography of Salvation: 'Kyiv-the New Jerusalem' in the Ruthenian Literary Polemics, end of the sixteenth- beginning of the seventeenth century," in *Litauen und Ruthenien. Studien zu einer transkulturellen Kommunikations-region, 15.–18. Jahrhundert*, *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 71 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 253–78.



- 34 Flier, "Till the End of Time," 134.
- 35 Lilya Berezhnaya, "Sub Specie Mortis: Ruthenian and Russian Last Judgment Icons Compared," *European Review of History* 11, no. 1 (2004): 5–32; Lilya Berezhnaya, John-Paul Himka, *The World to Come. Ukrainian Images of the Last Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015).
- 36 Flier, "Till the End of Time," 140–44; Mikhail Alpatov, *Pamiatnik drevnerusskoi zhivopisi kontsa 15 veka. Ikona "Apokalipsis" Uspenskogo sobora Moskovskogo kremla* [A monument of old Russian painting from the end of the 15th century. The "Apocalypse" icon of Moscow Kremlin Assumption Cathedral] (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1964).
- 37 Alexeev, *Pod znakom kontsa vremen*, 72. Analogous examples are analyzed in detail in, *ibid.*, 62–72. See also Nikolai Borisov, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' srednievkovoi Rusi nakanunie "kontsa sveta."* *Rossia v 1492 godu ot Rozhdestva Khristova, ili v 7000 godu ot Stvoreniia mira* [Everyday life of medieval Rus' on the eve of "the end of the world." Russia in the year 1492 AD, or 7000 of the world's creation] (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2004).
- 38 Flier, "Till the End of Time," 158.
- 39 On apocalyptic expectations among Russian Old Believers at the time see Robert O. Crummey, *The Old Believers and the World of Antichrist: The Vyg Community and the Russian State, 1694–1855* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Scheidegger, *Endzeit*.
- 40 See Vitalii Rusaniv's'ky, *Ukrains'ki bramoty 15st* [Ukrainian documents from the 15th century] (Kyiv, 1965); Lilya Berezhnaya, "Preparatio mortis: Death, Devotion, and Funeral Practices in Catholic, Orthodox, and Uniate Testaments from the Eastern Lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth," in *Death and the Afterlife in Early Modern Ukrainian Culture* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, forthcoming), chap. 3; Wioletta Zielecka-Mikołajczyk, *Prawosławni i unicy w Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVIII wieku wobec życia i śmierci w świetle testamentów* [Orthodox and Uniate believers' attitude towards life and death in the light of their testaments in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th–17th centuries] (Warsaw: Neriton, 2012).
- 41 *Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie. Zbiór Sanguszków*. [State Archive in Cracow. Sanguszko Collection], Teka 1. Plik 6. I am grateful to Natalia Starchenko for graciously providing me with a copy of this unpublished document.
- 42 Bylina, *Człowiek i zaśluby*, 167; Karol Górski, "Prądy religijne 15 wieku a sztuka" [Religious trends in 15th century and art] in *Sztuka i ideologia 15 wieku* [Art and ideology of the 15th century], ed. Piotr Skubiszewski (Warsaw: PWN, 1978), 131.
- 43 Bohdan Struminsky, trans., *Lev Krevza's Obrona iednosti cerkiewney and Zaxarija Kopystens'kyj's Palinodija*, Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature, English translations, 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 80 and in English, 176. See also Tatiana Oparina, "Chislo 1666 v russkoi knizhnosti serediny-tretiei chetverti 17 Vieka" [The number 1666 in Russian literary culture of the mid to third quarter of the 17th century] in *Chelovek mezhdru tsarstvom i imperiei. Sbornik materialov mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii* [Man between tsardom and empire. Proceedings of an international conference] (Moscow: Institut Cheloveka RAN, 2003), 287–317; Iurii Peleshenko, "'Pokhvala Ierusalymu' Zakharii Kopystens'koho v konteksti tserkovno-politychnoi situatsii v Ukraini 20–30-kh rokakh 17 st." ["The Praise of Jerusalem" of Zakharii Kopystens'kyi in the context of the ecclesiastical and political situation in Ukraine in the 1620–30s], in *Jews and Eastern Slavs: Essays on Intercultural Relations. Jews and Slavs 7*, ed. Wolf Moskovich, Leonid Finberg, and Marten Feller (Jerusalem, 2000), 48–54.
- 44 Serhii Plokhyy, *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 263.
- 45 Piotr Zhukovich, "'Protestatsiia' Iova Boretskogo," *Star'i po slavianovedeniiu* 3 (1910): 153. For an English translation, see Plokhyy, *Cossacks and Religion*, 178n9. Apocalyptic reflections of this kind did not, however, provoke mass chiliastic movements on the Ruthenian lands comparable to that of Muscovy in the second half of the seventeenth century. See Scheidegger, *Endzeit*; Oparina, "Chislo 1666."
- 46 Natalia Iakovenko, *Parallelny svit. Doslidzhennia z istorii uiaвлення ta idei v Ukraini 16–17 st.* [Parallel world. Studies to the history of notions and ideas in 16th and 17th century Ukraine] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2002), 213–17.



- 47 Sabbatarism was a seventeenth-century Jewish messianic movement formed around the figure of Sabbatai Zvi/Zebi (1626–1676). See David Halperin, ed., *Sabbatai Zvi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah* (Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007); Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, trans. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
- 48 On the role of Ruthenian apocalyptic preaching in the development of Muscovite eschatological expectations in the mid seventeenth century, see Grigorii Lur'ie, "Tri eschatologii" [Three eschatologies], in *Mir Pravslaviiia. Sbornik nauchnykh statei* [The world of Orthodoxy. Collection of articles], ed. Metropolitan German (Volgograd: Izdatel'stvo VolGU, 2000), vol. 3, 150–78; Oparina, "Chislo 1666," 290–92. On sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries eschatological themes in Polish Catholic and Protestant literature, see Alicja Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Pieśni czasu śmierci: Studium z historii duchowości 16–18 wieku* [Songs of the times of death: Studies in the history of 16th–18th century spirituality] (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1992), 190; Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Homo viator-mundus-mors: Studia z dziejów eschatologii w literaturze staropolskiej* [Homo viator-mundus-mors: Studies in the history of eschatology in Old Polish literature], vols. 1–3 (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Polonistyki, 1988); Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Sarmaci i Śmierć: O staropolskiej poezji żałobnej* [Sarmatians and death: On Old Polish funeral poetry] (Warsaw: PWN 1992); Jan Chrościcki, *Pompa Funebris. Z dziejów kultury staropolskiej* [Pompa funebris: To the history of Old Polish culture] (Warsaw: PWN, 1974); Stanisław Grzybowski, "Strach w 17 wieku: nowe wzorce osobowe" [Fear in the 17th century: New personal examples], *Spoleczeństwo staropolskie. Studia i szkice*, vol. 1 (1976): 121–47. On seventeenth-century Muscovite apocalyptic fears, see Scheidegger, *Endzeit*; Andrei L. Iurganov, *Kategorii russkoj srednievekovoj kultury* [Categories of Russian medieval culture] (Moscow: MIROS, 1998).
- 49 Among the recent notable studies of this uprising is the work of Barbara Skinner, "Borderlands of Faith: Reconsidering the Origins of a Ukrainian Tragedy," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (2005): 88–116.
- 50 On the formation of the Cossack myth in Ukrainian history, see Serhii Plokhyy, "Historical Debates and Territorial Claims: Cossack Mythology in the Russian–Ukrainian Border Dispute," in *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. S. Frederick Star (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 147–70; Andreas Kappeler, "Die Kosaken-Aera als zentraler Baustein der Konstruktion einer national-ukrainischen Geschichte: Das Beispiel der Zeitschrift *Kievskaja Starina* 1882–1891," in *Russische und Ukrainische Geschichte vom 16.–18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Robert O. Crummey, Holm Sundhaussen, and Ricarda Vulpius (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002); Kappeler, *Der Schwierige Weg zur Nation: Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte der Ukraine* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2003), 123–35; Frank Sysyn, "The Reemergence of the Ukrainian Nation and Cossack Mythology," *Social Research* 58, no. 1 (1991): 845–64; Lilya Berezhnaya, "'Kazacki bastion' 17 veka—vzgliad snaruzhi i iznutri," ["The Cossack Bastion" of the 17th century—a view from the outside and the inside] in *Religion und Integration im Moskauer Russland. Konzepte und Praktiken, Potentiale und Grenzen. 14.–17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ludwig Steindorff, *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 76 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 269–97; Jana Bürgers, *Kosakenmythos und Nationsbildung in der postsowjetischen Ukraine* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 2006).
- 51 The Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius was a secret society established in December 1845–January 1846 in Kyiv. The aim of the society was to transform the social order according to the Christian principles of justice, freedom, equality, and brotherhood. Before the society could become fully active, its members were arrested in March 1847. After a police investigation held in Saint Petersburg, the arrested members were punished without trial by exile or imprisonment. The documents of the St. Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood were published in *Kyrylo-Mefodiivske tovarystvo* [Saint Cyril and Methodius Society] 3 vols. (Kyiv, 1990). On the Brotherhood's literary activity see, Mikhaïlo Vozniak, *Kyrylo-Metodiiv'ske bratstvo* [Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius], (Lviv: Stavropihiinoho Instytutu, 1921); Dmytro Bahalii, *T.H. Shevchenko i kyrylo-metodiivtsi* [T.H. Shevchenko and the Cyril and Methodius brothers] (Kharkiv: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1925); Józef Gołąbek, *Bractwo św. Cyryla i Metodego w Kijowie* [The Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood in Kyiv] (Warsaw, 1935); Georges Luciani, *Le Livre de la Genèse du peuple ukrainien* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1956);



- Piotr Zaionchkovskii, *Kirillo-Mefodievskoe obshchestvo, 1846–1847* [The Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood, 1846–1847] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1959); Hryhorii Ia. Serhiienko, *Iaskrava storinka vyzvol'noho rukhu: Do 125-richchia Kyrylo-Metodiiv's'koho tovarystva* [A light page of the liberation movement: To the 125th anniversary of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood] (Kyiv: Tovarystvo "Znannia," 1971); Horst Glassl, "Die Kyrylo-Methodianische Bruderschaft als Erscheinung der ukrainischen Romantik," in *Ukrainische Romantik und Neurromantik vor dem Hintergrund der europäischen Literatur. Symposium der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München und der Weltvereinigung der ukrainischen Exilschriftsteller, Literaturwissenschaftler und Kritiker "Slovo" am 11. und 12. Januar 1983*, ed. Jurij Bojko-Blochyn (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1985), 97–104.
- 52 George Luckyj, *Young Ukraine: the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Kiev, 1845–1847* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1991), 49.
- 53 Mykola Kostomarov, *Knyhy buttia ukrains'koho narodu* [The book of Genesis of the Ukrainian people] (Augsburg, 1947), 24; For an English translation, see Thomas M. Prymak, *Mykola Kostomarov: A Biography* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1996), 47.
- 54 Ibid., 44.
- 55 Taras H. Shevchenko, *Povne zibrannia tvoriv u shesty tomakh* [Complete collected works in six volumes] (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1963), 2:51. For an English translation, see George Grabowicz, *The Poet as Mythmaker: A Study of Symbolic Meaning in Taras Ševchenko* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 122.
- 56 Shevchenko, *Povne zibrannia tvoriv*, 52.
- 57 Grabowicz, *Poet as Mythmaker*, 144.
- 58 Shevchenko, *Povne zibrannia tvoriv*, 400. For the English translation, see Grabowicz, *Poet as Mythmaker*, 144.
- 59 Oksana Zabuzhko, *Shevchenkiv mif Ukrainy. Sproba filosof's'koho analizu* [Shevchenko's myth of Ukraine. An attempt at a philosophical analysis] (Kyiv: Fakt, 1997), 66, 120–21. Zabuzhko notes the peculiarity of Shevchenko's interpretation of the "Slavic victim" topos. Shevchenko emphasized the sinfulness of Ukrainians as grounds for their persecution by the Russian regime. Ibid., 118–41.
- 60 Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Alois Mosser, "Gottes auserwählte Völker." *Erwählungsvorstellungen und kollektive Selbstfindung in der Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001).
- 61 On the relationship of Kostomarov's *Books of the Genesis of the Ukrainian People* to Adam Mickiewicz's *Books of the Polish People and of the Polish Pilgrimage* and to other works of Romantic literature, see Vozniak, *Kyrylo-Metodiiv's'ke bratstvo*; Prymak, *Mykola Kostomarov*, 48–50; Stefan Kozak, *Polacy i Ukraincy. W kręgu myśli i kultury pogranicza. Epoka romantyzmu* [Poles and Ukrainians. In the sphere of borderland thoughts and culture. Romantic period] (Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2005), 157–84; Andrzej Walicki, "Koncepcja narodu i terytorium narodowego w misjonistycznych ideologiach polskiego romantyzmu" [The concept of the people and its territory in missionary ideologies of Polish Romanticism], in *Mesjanizm Adama Mickiewicza w perspektywie porównawczej* [Messianism of Adam Mickiewicz in comparative perspective] (Warsaw: IfiS, 2006), 125–78. On Shevchenko's poetry in relation to the Romantic tradition, see Iurii Boiko, "Taras Shevchenko and West European Literature," *Slavic and East-European Review* 34 (1956): 77–98. Ievgen Nakhlik, *Dola-los-sud'ba. Shevchenko i pol's'ki ta rosii's'ki romantyky* ["Dola-los-sud'ba." Shevchenko and Polish and Russian Romanticism] (Lviv: NAN Ukrainy, Lviv's'ke viddilennia Instytutu literatury im. T.H. Shevchenka, 2003); Edward Kasperski, *Dyskursy romantyków: Norwid i inni* [Discourses of romantics: Norwid and others] (Warsaw: ASPRA-JR, 2003).
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- 63 Ibid., 174–75.



- 64 Ibid., 165–200. For more on popular religiosity in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ukraine and Russia, see Mark D. Steinberg and Heather H. Coleman, eds., *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Green, eds., *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003). See my review in *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 874–78.
- 65 Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830–1917* (Washington, DC: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 246–51.
- 66 Ibid., 402; Alexandr Etkind, “Russkii sekty i sovetskii kommunizm: proekt Valdimira Bonch-Bruievicha” [Russian sects and Soviet Communism: The project of Vladimir Bonch-Bruievich], *Minushee* 19 (1996): 257–319.
- 67 Lynne Viola, “The Mark of Antichrist: Rumors and the Ideology of Peasant Resistance,” in *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); idem, “The Peasant Nightmare: Visions of the Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside,” *Journal of Modern History* 62, no. 4 (1990): 747–70; Nicolas Werth, “Rumeurs défaitistes et apocalyptiques dans l’URSS des années 1920 et 1930,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 71 (2001): 25–35. For an examination of the way rumors can take on apocalyptic undertones, see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 21–22, 41–42, 82–83.
- 68 On Holodomor in Ukrainian history and contemporary Ukrainian memory culture, see Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Manfred Sapper, Volker Weichsel, and Agathe Gebert, eds., *Vernichtung durch Hunger. Der Holodomor in der Ukraine und der UdSSR* (Berlin: BWV, 2004).
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- 70 A. V. Goncharova, *Usnyie rasskazy Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* [Oral tales from the Great Patriotic War] (Kalinin, 1974); V. A. Tonkov, ed., *Narodnoie tvorchestvo v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* [Popular art in the period of the Great Patriotic War] (Voronezh: Voronezhskoe oblastnoie knigoizdatel’stvo, 1951).
- 71 Nikolai Mitrokhin, “Infrastruktura podderzhki pravoslavnoi eskhatalogii v sovremennoi RPTs. Istoriia u sovremennost’” [Infrastructure of maintaining of an Orthodox eschatology in contemporary ROC. History and contemporality], in *Russkii natsionalizm v politicheskoi prostranstve. Issledovaniia po natsionalizmu v Rossii* [Russian nationalism in the political sphere. Studies in Russian nationalism], ed. Marlène Laruelle (Moscow: Franko-rossiiskii tsentr gumanitarnykh i obshchestvennykh nauk, 2007), 229–31.
- 72 Frank Brown, “Russian believers see Antichrist in tax number,” *The Christian Century*, April, 4, 2001.
- 73 “Sud obiazal nalogovuiu likvidirovat’ INN,” June 30, 2006, <http://www.zaistinu.ru/articles/?aid=1236>.
- 74 Michael J. Christensen, “Chernobyl,” in *The Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, ed. Richard Landes (New York: Routledge, 2003), 71.
- 75 Larissa M. L. Zaleska-Onyshkevych, “Echoes of Glasnost: Chernobyl in Soviet Ukrainian Literature,” in *Echoes of Glasnost in Soviet Ukraine*, ed. Romana M. Bahry (New York: Captus University Publications, 1989), 151–70; Jennifer Tishler, “Identity and Meaning: Chernobyl and Literature,” in *Chernobyl: The Event and Its Aftermath*, ed. Leonard Berkowitz, Norma Berkowitz, and Michael Patrick (Milwaukee: Goblin Fern Press, 2006), 88–113.
- 76 David Marples, “The Economic and Political Repercussions,” in *The Social Impact of the Chernobyl Disaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 89–124; Marples, “The Political Consequences of the Chernobyl Disaster in Belarus and Ukraine,” in Berkowitz, et al, *Chernobyl*, 53–67.
- 77 The usage of media, websites as well as documentary and feature films, in this confrontation is significant. Each religious denomination in contemporary Ukraine attempts to retell the story of the Ukrai-



- nian Church Schisms in artistic forms. Documentary films like series *Anatomy of Schism* (2002), made on the order of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), *On the Road to the Local Church* (2005), on the order of the UAOC together with the UOC (Kyiv Patriarchate), as well as Oles' Ianchuk's recent feature film *Metropolitan Andrey* (2008) about the life of the Greek-Catholic metropolitan, are aimed at constructing a new historical narrative in which apocalyptic terminology occupies a considerable place.
- 78 For instance, Myroslav Marynovych, *Ukrains'ka ideia i khrystyianstvo, abo koly hartsiuiut' kolorovi koni Apokalipsisu* [The Ukrainian idea and Christianity or when the colored horses of Apocalypse prance] (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2003); Marynovych, "Unykannia apokalipsisu: shansy ta iluzii." [Escape from Apocalypsis: Chances and illusions] *Ji* 26 (2002): <http://www.ji.lviv.ua/n26texts/marynovych.htm>. On Ukrainian intellectual identity discourses, see Olia Hnatiuk, *Proshannia z imperiieiu. Ukrains'ki dyskursy pro identychnist'* [Farewell to the Empire. Ukrainian discourses on identity] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2006).
- 79 On the Church Schism in Ukraine in the 1990s and the complexities of church-state relations, see Serhii Plokhly and Frank Sysyn, *Religion and Nation in Modern Ukraine* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2003); Kathrin Boeckh, Aleksandr Ivanov, and Christian Seidl, *Die Ukraine im Aufbruch: Historiographische und kirchenpolitische Aspekte der postsozialistischen Transformation* (Munich : Forschungsverbund Ost- und Südosteuropa, 2002); Thomas Bremer, ed., *Religion und Nation: die Situation der Kirchen in der Ukraine*, Schriften zur Geistesgeschichte des östlichen Europa 27 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003).
- 80 This statement belongs to the Secretary of the Odessa and Ismail Diocese Andrii (Novykov). It was presented during the Congress of Orthodox Communities of the Odessa Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) on 3 February 2007. The Congress was held with the blessing of the local Bishop, Agaphangel (Savvin). "Odes'ka ieparkhiia UPTs (MP) proty avtokefalii, bo 'u vypadku rozpadu Rosiis'koi Tserkvy satana peremozhe vsikh'" (The Odessa eparchy of UOC [MP] is against autocephaly, because "in the case of a dissolution of the Russian Church the devil will win over them all"), *RISU.org*, February 6, 2007, [http://www.risu.org.ua/ukr/religion.and.society/other\\_art/article;14106](http://www.risu.org.ua/ukr/religion.and.society/other_art/article;14106).
- 81 The prophecies of St. Lavrentii Chernigovskii (1868–1950) who predicted the split of Ukrainian Orthodoxy as a sign of the imminent End of Times are particularly popular. His texts are often quoted in the newsletter of the Pochaiv Lavra (UOC-MP) *Pochaivs'kyi Lystok*. See <http://www.pochaev.org.ua/?p=listok/listok32>.
- 82 Lil'ja Berezhnaja, "Kiewer Kirchenstreit. Nationale ,Erinnerungsorte' im Fokus der Konfessionen," *Ost-europa* 59, no. 6 (2009): 171–88.



# Abu Muṣ‘ab al-Sūrī and Abu Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqawī: The Apocalyptic Theorist and the Apocalyptic Practitioner

*David Cook*

Abu Muṣ‘ab al-Sūrī, probably the most comprehensive strategist that Salafi-jihadism has ever produced, in his monumental *Da‘wat al-muqāwama al-islāmiyya al-‘ālamīyya* (2004) included almost 250 pages of apocalyptic predictions as the conclusion to his 1650 page work. These predictions give us a sense of where al-Sūrī and his readership see the movement going in the close and distant future. At almost the same time as al-Sūrī was publishing his work, Abu Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqawī, the well-known Jordanian radical who headed al-Qā‘ida in the Land of the Two Rivers (2003–2006), later to become the Islamic State, was publishing communiqués detailing the apocalyptic fulfillment of al-Sūrī’s prophecies. Zarqawī’s works (published on the internet) have yet to be analyzed for their apocalyptic content. In this paper, I survey his ideas and look at how they claim to fulfill al-Sūrī’s prophecies.

## Apocalyptic Predictions and Salafi-jihadism

Globalist Salafi-jihadi Islam (comprised of al-Qā‘ida, the Islamic State, and their ideological affiliates) has certain apocalyptic aspects that are revealed both through the statements of its leaders and ideologues as well as through the actions of the various groups that comprise the movement. In general, it is easy to see the reasons why Salafi-jihadism might be drawn to apocalyptic prophecies. This is a movement that is bound together by a number of shared characteristics, among them a strong pan-Islamic identity, a feeling that the Muslim world has undergone and is undergoing a concerted attack by the non-Muslim world, and the idea that the use of violent jihad is the only method to counteract this assault. Doctrinal issues are fundamental for Salafi-



jihādism, and it is set off from the rest of Sunnism by its willingness to declare apparent Muslims unbelievers (*takfīr*).<sup>1</sup> Further goals are more messianic, involving the establishment of a united, pan-Islamic state under the rule of a caliph, a radical transformation of Islam away from a purely conservative interpretation of the *sharīʿa* to a more revolutionary and malleable type of law-system, and the modernization of Muslims societies to the point where ultimately they will come to dominate the entire world, attracting converts that today are more attracted by Christianity or other faiths.

Like all other Sunni Muslims, globalist radical Muslims are heir to a vast sum of apocalyptic prophecies that are mostly, but not always, to be found within the hadith (or tradition) literature. These traditions, for the most part ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad, speak of a number of events that are due to happen prior to the end of the world. Although these events or portents are not arranged in a coherent form (such as the Jewish or Christian literary apocalypse) they serve as a roadmap of the future, and have been organized by contemporary Muslim apocalyptic writers. Many of these portents are useful to contemporary radical Muslims, because the initial Sunni apocalyptic framework was largely established during the period of the Muslim wars with the Christian Byzantine Empire during the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries. Traditions taken from this heritage describe wars taking place mainly in Syria-Palestine, but usually involve the ultimate conquest of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, and sometimes of Rome. Some of those traditions also detail Byzantine invasions and conquests of Muslim lands, either in Syria or in Iraq.<sup>2</sup>

Other scenarios that are developed in the classical framework involve inter-Muslim warfare. These focus around the figure of the Sufyānī, who from classical times was the messianic candidate of the Umayyad dynasty (ruling in Syria 661–747), and who serves as the figure that the Shīʿites most hate as the apocalyptic opponent of the Twelfth Imam. The Sufyānī is said to come from what is today northern Jordan, and to bring armies from Syria to attack and kill Shīʿites in Iraq, which he does in large numbers. His cruelty is appalling, even though he is specifically said to be a Muslim. In the end, a hero from the family of the Prophet Muhammad will appear and fight him. This



figure in Shī'ism is interpreted as the Twelfth Imam, while in Sunni traditions he is the Mahdī, the messianic figure (who is mostly said to be a descendent of the Prophet, but can also be unconnected with his line). The Mahdī will either arise in the region of Khurasan (today eastern Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan) or either of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina.<sup>3</sup>

After his appearance, the Mahdī will gather supporters and either come through Iran towards Iraq where he will confront the Sufyānī and defeat him (but not kill him), or come up from western Saudi Arabia towards the region of Syria where he will defeat the Sufyānī and establish a messianic capital in Jerusalem. After this point, the Mahdī will continue with the conquest of the entire world, specifically Europe, India, and Central Asia (left unconquered in the first wave of Muslim conquests), and rule a state based upon righteousness and justice. It is unclear whether he will convert all non-Muslims to Islam, but at the very least his state will be very decidedly Islamic in character.<sup>4</sup>

It is easy to see why radical Muslims could be attracted to these prophecies. Since radical Muslims constitute a fairly small minority within the overall Muslim community—but define themselves as a fighting vanguard—their fixation upon the future is necessary. From a geographical point of view, the apocalyptic framework accords quite nicely with their placement. Nationalistic radical Muslim groups such as Hamas are able to portray themselves as fulfilling the prophecies through their combat against Israel. Globalist radical Muslims through the 1990s were able to portray Afghanistan as being critical to the establishment of the caliphal or messianic state because of its description as the place from which the Mahdī will arise, and indeed the leader of the Taliban, Mullah 'Umar Muḥajhid, took the caliphal title of *amīr al-mu'uminīn* (commander of the believers) in 1996. Other radical Muslim claimants, such as those associated with the movement of Juhayman al-'Utaybi in 1979 sought specifically to proclaim themselves at the Holy Mosque in Mecca in order to fulfill these prophecies.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is also important to point out the difficulties that Salafi-jihadis might have with apocalyptic prophecies. Although many dynasties and rulers in Islam have come to power through the use of



messianic imagery, a much larger number of Mahdī claimants have failed and are only a footnote in Islamic history. Claims to be a Mahdī are inherently divisive, and even Mullah ‘Umar’s comparative tame proclamation to be *amīr al-mu’uminīn* was greeted as a joke by virtually every one outside of Afghanistan. Other questions concerning the apocalyptic materials center upon the marginality of this genre within the *ḥadīth* literature where most of the traditions that would be the most helpful for globalist radical Muslims are not cited by the major collections and can only be found in rather dubious literature. And the sense of permanent warfare that is described inside the apocalyptic literature, while appealing to those who fight in Afghanistan or Iraq, is off-putting to most Muslims who live a sedentary lifestyle. Globalist radical Muslims, moreover, tend to judge all other Muslims according to the criterion of whether they are willing to fight in a jihad, and call into question the Islam of those who are not.<sup>6</sup> Citation of the apocalyptic material only widens that divide.

Because of this divisive potential, leaders of Salafi-jihadism, including Osama bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawāhiri, have been reluctant to cite overtly apocalyptic traditions.<sup>7</sup> Usually their discourse will center around a strong critique of the corrupt Muslim rulers, who they say are subservient to the infidel West, attacks upon the religious leadership (the *‘ulama*) who are subservient to the rulers, and the presentation of a messianic future through eternal jihad without closely stating who their messianic candidate is or how specifically such a candidate will bring this transformation about. Globalist radical Muslims also usually avoid the trap of closely dating the end of the world, although surely they are familiar with calculations about this subject from classical times. All of these characteristics are common to a fairly weak group that seeks to unite Muslims against an outside foe rather than to further divide them, and realizes that close delineation of its own platform will only cause division.

In the recent past, however, there have been several globalist radical Muslim thinkers and activists who have broken these paradigms, the most important of whom are Abu Muṣ‘ab al-Sūrī and Abu Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqawī. Both of these figures are central to the continuing development of radical Sunni Muslim apocalyptic thought.



## Abu Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī and the *Da'wat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'alamiyya*

Abu Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī, born Muṣṭafa Setmaryam Naṣṣār, was, as his name suggests, from Syria, and originally had close connections with the Muslim Brotherhood. Like so many of his generation, he moved on beyond the Brotherhood and joined the al-Ṭalī'a al-Muqātila of Marwān al-Ḥadīd in Syria.<sup>8</sup> After fleeing Syria in 1982 he went and joined 'Abdallah 'Azzām in Peshawar, and then moved on to Spain (where he acquired citizenship). He then lived in London from approximately 1992 to 1997, when he moved back to Afghanistan. Although al-Sūrī was connected with al-Qā'ida, because of his arrogant and irascible personality he clashed repeatedly with Osama bin Laden and eventually founded his own small organization, the Ghurabā', which had a base to the north of Kabul. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001 al-Sūrī disappeared, and apparently used this time to formulate his great work, *Da'wat al-muqāwama al-Islāmiyya al-'ālamīyya* (*A Call to World-wide Islamic Revolution*), which was released in December 2004.<sup>9</sup> Eleven months later, in November 2005, al-Sūrī was arrested in Quetta, Pakistan, and has been in detention ever since.<sup>10</sup>

There is no work quite like the *Da'wa* among globalist radical Muslims. Both in terms of length (1254 pages) and comprehensiveness, al-Sūrī stands head and shoulders above all other theorists. While one can argue about the originality of his ideas, the fact is that because of his connections to just about every Arabic-speaking radical Muslim jihadist group of the two decades prior to 2004 and to a number of those in the broader Muslim community as well, al-Sūrī is well-placed to assess their progress in achieving their goals. His arrogance and inability to work with others means that he, unlike most radical Islamic theorists, is not hesitant to critique not only individual operations and personalities, but also the foundational premises upon which these organizations were established.

But the *Da'wa* is most unique for its comprehensiveness and teleological view of Muslim history. Unlike most radical Muslims, who concentrate on the formative years of the Prophet Muhammad's life or the early Muslim conquests (seventh and eighth centuries) or on the



Crusader-Mongol interlude (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), al-Sūrī details the entirety of Muslim history (from 622-2004), focusing upon the imperatives of jihad in each time-period.<sup>11</sup> In essence this presentation is designed to give the reader a sense of present-day jihad as the logical outcome of Muslim history, and constitutes something of a *heilsgeschichtliche* reading of the past. In this, however, not once does he cite the original Muslim Arabic sources—all of his sources are translations of Western readings of Arab and Muslim history.

While the middle part of al-Sūrī's tome details the goals, the methodology and the ethics of jihad, he then examines what he considers to be the paradigmatic jihadi experiences of the forty 40 years. These are divided into two groups: the first is a list of nineteen that are of a globalist radical Muslim bent, while the second list of fourteen are all of a nationalistic jihadi bent (Palestinians—Israel, Chechnya, Bosnia—Herzegovina and others). All experiences that belong to the second group are attempts by various Salafi-jihadi groups to establish Muslim states in specific local contexts. These latter experiences receive very detailed treatment and analysis as to the reasons for failure (in which al-Sūrī draws extensively upon his personal knowledge and experience).<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that al-Sūrī sees this detailed historical presentation as the evidence of God's working in history on behalf of the Muslim community, and that the future will be one of victory for Islam. For this reason al-Sūrī completes his work with a detailed list of apocalyptic prophecies.<sup>13</sup> He states:

We will complete this book, attempting to touch on the circumstances of victory. What we prophesy will be followed by inevitable victory over our enemies, just as the prophecies in the Book of Allah were followed [by victory].<sup>14</sup>

Al-Sūrī, despite his impressive experience, is not much of a religious scholar. This fact is demonstrated abundantly throughout the *Da'wa* where he does not utilize the careful discrimination between *hadiths* that Salafis usually do. In dealing with the end of the world, he demonstrates a certain timidity by starting off the seventy-five pages on apocalyptic predictions with a discussion penned by 'Abdallah 'Azzām



on the imminent collapse of western civilization. After this initial statement, al-Sūrī himself explains his methodology in which he says that most of the apocalyptic traditions are not considered to be strong, and yet the believers deserve some hope, especially since the majority of his work is quite negative and critical.<sup>15</sup>

But then he groups the traditions into eight categories according to their subject matter: the corrupt circumstances at the end of time, the corruption of most of the *'ulama*, the loneliness (*ghurbā*) of the righteous at the end of time, the signs of the Hour, the appearance of the Mahdī, his signs, the black banners and the reign of the Qahtani (a minor messianic figure), the apocalyptic wars with the Byzantines, the appearance of the Antichrist (*al-Dajjāl*) and the return of Jesus to fight him, and the appearance of Gog and Magog. In accordance with his stated methodology, al-Sūrī first lists whatever sound traditions he can find, and then branches into the traditions that are deemed to be weaker.

While the first category of corruption at the end of time is well-documented, the second two categories are more interesting. Both of them are comparatively minor (the corruption of the *'ulama* receives only two pages, while the loneliness of the righteous only one, compared to the fifteen pages of traditions on corruption prior to them). However, it is easy to see from al-Sūrī's thought that they are far more important to him. The corruption of the *'ulama* is a major issue for radical Muslims in general, and globalist radical Muslims in particular, who see the *'ulama* as subservient to the corrupt rulers. Salafi-jihadism can be seen as an attempt to wrest authority away from those knowledge-based *'ulama* and accord it to those whose spiritual authority is based upon their jihad.

This idea goes hand-in-hand with the category of loneliness of the believer at the end of time. Most commonly the tradition supporting this idea is cited as "Islam began as a stranger and will return to being a stranger, so blessings (*tuba*) to the strangers."<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, in spite of the fact that al-Sūrī devoted an entire section of his treatise to discussion of this idea (at the beginning of the book), he does not cite this tradition here. The importance of this tradition was already recognized in classical times<sup>17</sup> and consistently during the last ten years it



has supplied Salafi-jihadi Muslims with names for their various groups, including al-Sūrī's own.<sup>18</sup>

Messianic traditions are also crucial to al-Sūrī, and his fixation with Afghanistan, especially the tradition of the "black banners coming from Khurasan" and their association with the Mahdī's followers. Although al-Sūrī does not comment on any of these traditions, he underlines the ones mentioning Khurasan and the black banners indicating that he believed the jihadist state in Afghanistan was a fulfillment of those traditions.<sup>19</sup> In the section on the wars with the Byzantines, he highlights a number of traditions that speak of the Byzantines invading Muslim lands, and the Muslims destroying them or obtaining victory over them through the power of God. These citations include the now famous passage mentioning Dabiq, which has been utilized to such effect by the Islamic State since 2015.<sup>20</sup> However, the last two sections are of little interest to al-Sūrī, and he does not cite very many traditions or highlight any of them.

Throughout his career, Al-Sūrī has gone through several different changes of attitude towards apocalyptic traditions. In tracts published while he was in Afghanistan he emphasized the apocalyptic importance of Central Asia as the place of the Mahdī's appearance.<sup>21</sup> Apparently, this idea was closely connected to his training of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (headquartered near his home in Mazar) and Chinese radical Muslims, who receive very high marks inside the *Da'wa* for their piety and professionalism.<sup>22</sup> Al-Sūrī states:

And from the region of northern Afghanistan to the river and beyond the black banners will emerge, among its [sic!] ranks will be al-Mahdī who will fill the world with justice and will carry the banners of the people of Islam to victory and to the slaughters of the end of time against the Jews and Christians in Syria.<sup>23</sup>

As can be seen from his later works, it was for this reason that al-Sūrī believed the radical Muslim movements in Central Asia were so important.

However, at the time of the fall of the Taliban al-Sūrī had clearly lost patience with apocalyptic prophecies and dreams, and published a



screed decrying globalist radical Muslims' reliance upon these types of crutches.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to see how by the time he writes the *Da'wa* four years later, al-Sūrī has come back to the middle ground. He neither de-emphasizes nor over-emphasizes the role of apocalyptic. It is clear from the placement of the apocalyptic prophecies at the end of the *Da'wa* that he actually believes them, and that more than most Salafis he is willing to accord importance even to the comparatively weak traditions with the argument that they give hope to the Muslims. In the end, al-Sūrī, with the exception of his attempts to train the Ghurabā' in Afghanistan, was never a field operator, but a good synthesizer and popularizer. To see how his ideas are taken on the field, we must go to Iraq.

### Abu Muṣ'ab al-Zarqawī and His Statements

During the period 2004-6, Abu Muṣ'ab al-Zarqawī became the most famous and visible face of radical Islam in Iraq. Ironically, al-Zarqawī, born Ahmad al-Khalaylah in the northwestern Jordanian city of al-Zarqa', was not an Iraqi, but a sometime petty criminal who in prison had fallen under the influence of the radical Muslim preacher Abu Muhammad al-Maḥdī. After al-Zarqawī's release from prison he traveled to Afghanistan, but never formally joined al-Qā'ida. After the fall of the Taliban, he made his way to northern Iraq by early 2003.<sup>25</sup> Thus, he was in Iraq when the U.S. forces toppled the Ba'thist regime, and it was then that he founded his al-Ṭawḥīd wa-l-Jihād organization (again closely linked to al-Maḥdī).

Zarqawī remained little known until the fall of 2003 when he began to attract attention because of his organization's extensive use of suicide attacks. In the spring of 2004, while the organization was headquartered in Falluja, Zarqawī began high profile kidnappings of foreigners (Nick Berg and Kenneth Bigley, for example) and beheading them, earning him the title of *shaykh al-dhābiḥīn*.<sup>26</sup> Through skillful use of the internet Zarqawī publicized the struggle of radical Muslims in Iraq, and, while his group was comparatively small, he attracted large numbers of foreign volunteers and money with which he was able



to carry out more operations than other much larger but more nationalistic Iraqi groups. On Oct. 17, 2004 al-Zarqawī proclaimed his allegiance to Osama bin Laden, and renamed his organization al-Qā'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers, later in the summer of 2005 becoming the Mujahidin Shura Council, and then finally in 2006 the Islamic State of Iraq. Zarqawī participated in both of the sieges of Falluja (April and November 2004), and carried out a number of high-profile attacks prior to being killed by a U.S. airstrike on June 7, 2006.<sup>27</sup>

More than any other contemporary radical Muslim jihadist, al-Zarqawī made use of apocalyptic imagery, and in essence tried to create an apocalyptic scenario in Iraq during the three years of his activities there. This attempt is articulated in the collection of his writings and speeches.<sup>28</sup> In Zarqawī's earliest writings, he does not mention specific apocalyptic prophecies at all, but frequently alludes to the Day of Judgment or the Day of Resurrection when confronting Muslim individuals or institutions he considers to be infidel.<sup>29</sup> These ideas date from the first proclamations made after the fall of Ṣaddām Ḥusayn in May 2003, but were directed against the real object of Zarqawī's hate: the Jordanian government. All the way through his writings and speeches, he never forgets to see the Jordanians as his opponents, frequently refers to them as "slaves of the Zionists," etc, and uses apocalyptic prophecies that speak of "the corrupt ruler" in order to describe them.<sup>30</sup>

Zarqawī, like Sūrī, has a good grasp of history, and he wields that grasp in order to position himself as the apocalyptic champion. For the most part, he uses three paradigms in order to communicate his struggle:

1. He positions himself in an apocalyptic struggle against the Persians or Shī'ites. The tropes of this paradigm can be taken from the initial conflict between the Arab Muslims and the Zoroastrian Persians at the Battle of Qadisiyya (in 637), after which control of Iraq and eventually Iran passed into Muslim hands.<sup>31</sup> Or, more commonly, Zarqawī uses the Mongol invasions, and the betrayal of Baghdad by the Shī'ite vizier Ibn al-'Alqami (in 1258).<sup>32</sup> This characterization is particularly damning for an Arab audience, which would have often heard about



the Mongols. Associating the Shī'ites with their barbarism is a powerful propaganda tool. Occasionally Zarqawī also uses the collaboration between Safavid Persia and Christian Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to try and prove that there is some type of innate connection between Shī'ism and Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

2. Zarqawī also uses the historical situation of the conflict between the Byzantine Christians and the Muslims (either Arabs or Turks). Apocalyptic jihad prophecies are cited here, taken from the numerous battles between the early Muslim Arabs and the Byzantines, who are then identified with the United States. All the way through his writings, Zarqawī uses the term *rum* (Byzantines) to refer to the U.S., with one exception where it refers to the French president Jacques Chirac.<sup>34</sup> (This is in contradistinction to the general tendency of al-Qā'ida writings to refer to the United States or Americans as *ṣālibīyyīn* or Crusaders.) Alternatively, later he uses the term *Bānū al-Aṣfar* (the yellow-haired people), a term also taken from anti-Byzantine apocalyptic literature, for the U.S.<sup>35</sup> He also alludes to the historical situation of the conflict between the Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes and the Turk Alp Arslan at Manzikert in 1071, a conflict in which the Byzantines were decisively defeated and the control of Anatolia passed to the Turks. Zarqawī identifies Diogenes with George Bush, as will be noted.<sup>36</sup>
3. Like all radical Muslim jihadists he also positions himself as a type of the Prophet Muhammad by citing all of the major battles as exemplars of what he is accomplishing in Iraq.

Zarqawī is quite adept at weaving his historical narrative, and at least in the first and most important of his historical examples—of Arabs versus Persians—he can benefit from the large amount of anti-Iranian propaganda developed under the Ṣaddām Ḥusayn regime especially in the period of the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88). However, Husayn never developed the line that Iraqi Shī'ites were the equivalent of Iranian Shī'ites; indeed he put a maximum amount of pressure on Iraqi Shī'ites to support the war effort and to demonize their co-religionists.



In general Zarqawī's view of history is cyclical; as he states on July 6, 2004, "history is repeating itself" in Iraq.<sup>37</sup> This interpretation of history is bolstered by Zarqawī's repeated citation of the hadith of Thawban (one of the most common in radical Muslim proclamations) that the nations are about to fall upon the Muslim community and divide it up like starving people a bowl of food.<sup>38</sup> The reason why this will happen is because the Muslims have become weak—indeed the tradition describes them as "scum"—and have abandoned jihad.<sup>39</sup> Zarqawī overwhelmingly focuses upon the salvational side of jihad, the idea, first developed by 'Azzam, that only one who is fighting can be certain of their salvation as a Muslim. He presents the entirety of history as something dominated by that imperative, tying this to numerous apocalyptic-jihad traditions.<sup>40</sup>

From a careful reading of Zarqawī's materials, it is clear that while his initial statements are focused merely upon jihad, as events in Iraq became more dire, especially with the double siege of Falluja in the spring and fall of 2004, he began to rely more and more upon apocalyptic scenarios. During this period he repeatedly describes the battles as *malāhim* (or apocalyptic wars)<sup>41</sup> starting with his "Message to the Community" (April 5, 2004), and referring to the biblical prophecies that inspire both Israel and the United States. These need to be countered, he says, by the true Islamic prophecies, which he enumerates and identifies with. This happened just as the U.S. forces were taking Falluja, and he returned with a series of apocalyptic epistles in the fall of 2004.

Facing failure after the Iraqi adoption of its constitution and the January 2005 elections, he issued again an apocalyptic warning, citing the tradition from al-Bukhārī answering the question of what happens when the prophets lose their battles: "in this way the messengers are tested then they win in the end."<sup>42</sup> There is no doubt that this proclamation is his most apocalyptically detailed formulation. It starts out with the citation of the *ḥadith* of Thawban, and then details the coming Day of Judgment. Just as before, the salvational qualities of jihad are listed off, and then al-Zarqawī details what these apocalyptic battles will look like.<sup>43</sup> For the first time, he cites traditions that speak specifically of Iraq rather than of generalities. One apocalyptic tradi-



tion speaks of a mountain of treasure that will be uncovered in Iraq at the end of time. Zarqawī uses that tradition to explain the reasons why the U.S. forces are in Iraq—namely to steal the treasure.<sup>44</sup> Zarqawī's citation of this tradition is a mark of his desperation, arguably the low point of the conflict for radical Muslims, when they had been decisively rejected at the ballot box twice. Until this point, he had been very careful to describe the struggle as one between good and evil, between *sharī'a* and democracy, between the Sunnis and the Shi'a rather than descend into such polemics.

Unfortunately, the material collected is rather thin from the middle of 2005 onwards, and it ends with a statement from January 2006, a full six months before he was killed. During these months Zarqawī managed to re-energize the radical Muslims, and embarked upon a suicide attack campaign, which by the middle of 2005 had dragged the country to its knees, culminating in the February 22, 2006 bombing of the Hasan al-Askari Mosque in Samarra. Although Zarqawī was reprimanded by both his mentor Abu Muḥammad al-Maḥdī<sup>45</sup> and al-Qā'ida's leader al-Zawāhiri for his massive killings of Shi'ites,<sup>46</sup> it was his attempt to actually establish an al-Qā'ida state in Iraq that eventually turned Sunni leaders against him and led to his betrayal and death.

In these collected works Zarqawī presents himself as a monumental champion of Islam. He places himself in the position of previous heroes of Islam, like Alp Arslan at Manzikert, or Saladin at the Horns of Hittin, against his personal opponent President George Bush or the Shi'ites he loathed so much. Zarqawī wanted to present Iraq as an example, and for this reason he continually emphasizes the importance of martyrdom operations (of which there have been hundreds since 2003). He states in one of his final exhortations:

The [Muslim] community does not need more compositions and compilations; its libraries are bursting with tens of thousands of volumes. It is only in need of lights that will light up the way for it, illuminating the path. It needs examples who will wet the earth of its country by their blood, and to renew vitality among the ranks of its sons.<sup>47</sup>



Abu Muṣ'ab al-Zarqawī was an apocalyptic fighter who sought to take the most violent apocalyptic-jihad traditions and turn them into reality in Iraq. His language is suffused with both Qur'ānic and hadith citations that are apocalyptic in tone and content. Unlike al-Sūrī, however, he did not cite any of the Maḥdī traditions (with one exception),<sup>48</sup> most probably because they are divisive, and also because they might have been too closely associated with his Shī'ite opponents for his tastes. Zarqawī was truly a man of action, rather than words as his final statement above indicates.

There are many apocalyptic possibilities with regard to Iraq that he did not develop. For Shī'ites, Zarqawī was actually a type of the Sufyānī, the figure they loathe the most, and many of his tactics do bear a marked similarity to those of the Sufyānī (who is said to have killed indiscriminately, both women and children, and who remarkably comes from exactly the same area as did Zarqawī). But now that he is dead, this identification is probably still-born.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusions: Directions for Salafi-jihadism and Apocalyptic

It would be incorrect to see apocalyptic aspects in every single word or action ascribed to Salafi-jihadis. However, as a movement that is comparatively weak and needs to highlight its own importance, the apocalyptic manifestations of contemporary Sunni radicalism cannot be ignored. These serve as a powerful recruiting tool, and, if wielded properly, they can accord the movement with a certain sense of inevitable triumph (especially when they are closely associated with the terms *al-Tā'ifa al-Manṣūra* or *al-firqa al-najīya* as they oftentimes are).

Fighting and apocalyptic traditions in Islam have been intermingled since the first century of Muslim conquest, and can tend to either propel fighters forward, energizing them to greater feats, or to console them in low moments. In the works of both Abu Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī and Abu Muṣ'ab al-Zarqawī it is possible to see both trends. Both of these figures—the contemplative man, and the man of action—place themselves very carefully within the flow of Muslim history, and see apocalyptic predictions as the logical outcome of that history, and further-



more one that mandates victory. Both of these figures avoid or play down the issue of the Maḥdī, and neither of them involves themselves with any dating of the end of the world or even calculations of the fall of key opponents such as Israel or the United States. Both concentrate upon the close connections between apocalyptic predictions and jihad and benefit from the additional authority those traditions grant them; for without that connection, in the end, both al-Sūrī and al-Zarqawī would not be very significant.

Although al-Sūrī tries to play with the apocalyptic significance of Khurasan in developing Central Asian jihadists, it is surprising how little al-Zarqawī uses the apocalyptic geography of Iraq to his benefit. Perhaps he felt that this would hamper his movements or make him too predictable. Or perhaps he noticed, like his Shī'ite opponents did, that most of those traditions are associated with the Sufyānī, with whom al-Zarqawī probably did not want to be associated. For Iraq, then, the apocalyptic geography needs to be imposed from an outside source, as indeed a number of Egyptian and Lebanese apocalyptic writers have done. These writers have examined the actions and movements of Zarqawī closely in comparison to the apocalyptic traditions in order to give him a place in the interpretations.

One interesting continuity of Zarqawī's apocalyptic heritage has been the focus upon the location of Dabiq, mentioned inside the ḥadith literature just one time as the location where the Byzantines and the Muslims would fight the endtimes battle. From a historical point of view, these battles are the ones that are attested for the eighth and ninth centuries, but because of the mention of Dabiq, their significance has made them eternal:

"The Hour will not arise until the Byzantines descend upon the valleys [of northern Syria] or upon Dabiq . . ."<sup>50</sup> Zarqawī was said to have revived the importance of this tradition and is cited to have said in 2004 "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify . . . until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq."<sup>51</sup> An exhaustive search of Zarqawī's published writings and videos from before the rise of the Islamic State in 2012 does not reveal any such statement. Thus, it is not possible to know whether it is genuine and undocumented, or whether it is a convenient historical retrojection.



However one sees the apocalyptic legacy of Zarqawī, and independent of whether he really was the first in the contemporary Salafi-jihadi community to notice the importance of Dabiq, one cannot deny him the primacy in the use of apocalyptic geography overall. Thus, even if one denies Zarqawī sufficient foresight to see the future conquest of Dabiq preparatory to the Armageddon-style final battle that the Islamic State has prepared for the site, the idea of connecting apocalyptic prophecies to present-day geography belongs to him.



## Notes

- 1 Fundamental texts for the study of *takfir* include Abu Basir al-Tartusi (ironically declared himself to be a *kafir* in *Dabiq* no. 14), *Qawa'id fi al-takfir* (available at [http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS\\_1172.html](http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_1172.html); also, Nasir b. 'Abd al-Karim al-'Aql, *Minhaj al-Imam Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab fi masa'lat al-takfir* (Riyad: Dar al-Fadila, 2005); Khalid b. Muḥammad al-Anbari, *Ruling by Other than what Allah has revealed: The Fundamentals of Takfir* (Detroit: al-Qur'an wa-l-Sunnah Society of North America, 1999); Isma'il b. Ghassab b. Sulayman al-'Adawi, *al-Takfir al-mutlag wa-l-mu'ayyin wa-ahkamuha* (Riyad: Dar al-Tawhid li-l-nashr, 2013); in opposition to the Salafi position: Najih Ibrahim 'Abdallah, and 'Ali Muḥammad 'Ali Sharif, *Hurmat al-ghulu fi al-din wa-takfir al-Muslimin*. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2002); Ibrahim b. Salih al-'Ayid, *al-Takfir 'inda jama'at al-'unf al-mu'asira* (Beirut: Nima Center, 2014).
- 2 Such as the famous tradition about Dabiq, in northern Syria, where the Byzantine armies will assemble.
- 3 For a full summary, see my *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002).
- 4 See my *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005).
- 5 See Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 24f.
- 6 Based upon Qur'an 9:20.
- 7 I am relying upon the collections of Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, trans. James Howarth (London: Verso, 2005); and Laura Mansfield, trans., *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri* (TLG Publishers, 2006). The collection of Osama bin Laden's speeches in Arabic can be found at [http://www.e-prism.org/images/Osama\\_speeches\\_-\\_Ver2\\_-\\_3-7-06.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/Osama_speeches_-_Ver2_-_3-7-06.pdf).
- 8 Biographical details in Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), especially chapters 2–4, 6, 8; see also the tawhed.ws biography at <http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://tawhed.ws/a?PHPSESSID=5174f526a6412baef30944432542c03&ci=78>.
- 9 Available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/am-suri.doc>.
- 10 In early 2012 there was a notice that he had been released from Syrian prison, see [http://www.long-warjournal.org/archives/2012/02/abu\\_musab\\_al\\_suri\\_re.php](http://www.long-warjournal.org/archives/2012/02/abu_musab_al_suri_re.php) (accessed June 1, 2016). However, if this was true, it is curious that no one has heard very much of him since.
- 11 Mustafa Setmariam al-Sūrī (Abu Muṣ'ab al-Sūrī), *Da'wat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'alamiyya*, 175–356, with a further detailed analysis of the status of Muslim countries, pp. 357–401, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/am-suri.doc>. Al-Sūrī, *Da'wat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya al-'alamiyya*,
- 12 *Ibid.*, 551–641.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 1175–1249.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 1175.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 1188.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 66–72, at 66.
- 17 For example, see Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ajurri, *al-Kitab al-ghurabā' min al-mu'minin* (Damascus: Dar al-Basha'ir, 1992).
- 18 The nucleus of the Southeast Asian Jama'a Islamiyya located in Karachi also went by this name. See a number of examples of similar organizations cited in Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, 250–51n65.
- 19 Al-Sūrī, *Da'wa*, 1222.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 1233 (no. 2897), first under heading 6.
- 21 See Mustafa Setmariam al-Sūrī, *al-Muslimun fi wasat Asiya wa-ma'rakat al-Islam al-muqabila* [The Muslims in Central Asia and the upcoming battle of Islam], dated November, 1999, at anonymouse.org (1641). Thanks to Elena Pavlova for supplying me with this source.
- 22 Al-Sūrī, *Da'wa*, 617–18.



- 23 Al-Sūrī, *al-Muslimun*, 6; For a translation, see *ibid.*, 9.
- 24 Mustafa Setmariam al-Sūrī, *Ru'y wa-ablam am tamanniyyat wa-takhayyulat wa-awham* (dated 2001), <http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http://tawhed.ws/?i=3908&a=p&PHPSESSID=5174f526a6412bacaf30944432542c03>.
- 25 Biographical details in Fu'ad Husayn, *al-Zarqawī: al-jayl al-thani li-l-Qa'ida* (Beirut: Dar al-Khayyal, 2005), 7–45.
- 26 Videos can still be seen: <http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=2f30af0d52> (Berg), <https://goregrish.com/video/204/the-execution-of-ken-bigley-7th-october-2004-iraq> (Bigley) (accessed June 1, 2016).
- 27 See Will McCants, *ISIS: The Apocalypse. The History, Strategy and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).
- 28 See al-Zarqawī, *Kalimat mudi'a: al-Kitab al-jami' li-khubat wa-kalimat al-shaykh al-mu'tazz bi-dini-hi Abi Musa' b al-Zarqawī* (dated 2006) at <http://www.e-prism.org/images/AMZ-Ver1.doc>.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 19, 21 (dating from May 1, 2003), 34 (Jan. 4, 2004).
- 30 E.g., 24.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 270.
- 32 For example in his speech of May 18, 2005 '*Ada ahfad Ibn al-'Alqami* (see also 67–68, 74, 104–105).
- 33 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 81, 145, 203, 220 (*baghaya al-rum*), 227 (Chirac).
- 35 *Ibid.*, 233, 251, 257.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 261–62.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 38 For a full discussion of this important hadith, see Sulaym b. 'Id al-Hilali al-Silafi, *Al-Fawa'id al-bis-an-min hadith Thawban (tada'i al-umam)* [The exquisite benefits of the hadith of Thawban (The nations will come together)]. (Casablanca: Dar Ibn 'Affan, 2001).
- 39 al-Zarqawī, 127, 157.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 166 (*la tazala*), 251 (*la tazala*), 300 (*bu'ithtu bayna yaday al-sa'a*).
- 41 *Ibid.*, 65–66.
- 42 Al-Bukhārī, *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), iii, 270, no. 2804. The quote is ascribed to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius in his pseudo-conversation with Abu Sufyan.
- 43 Al-Zarqawī, 171, 176.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 152.
- 45 See "Dispute in Islamist Circles over the Legitimacy of Attacking Muslims, Shi'ites, and Non-combatant Non-Muslims in Jihad Operations in Iraq: Al-Maqdisi vs. His Disciple Al-Zarqawī," MEMRI *Inquiry and Analysis Series Report* 239, Sept. 11, 2005, <http://www.memritv.org/report/en/1473.htm>; answered Bayan wa-tawdih li-ma atharahu al-Shaykh al-Maqdisi fi liqa'ih ma' qanat al-Jazira (July 12, 2005).
- 46 Dated October 11, 2005. See Laura Mansfield, trans., *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawabiri* (TLG Publications, 2006), 250–79.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 312.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 218 (where he cites the tradition about the army of the Sufyānī being swallowed in the Bayda' and the appearance of the Mahdī).
- 49 See the forums "al-Sufyānī (I.A)," Shia Chat, <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/lofiversion/index.php/t64593.html>; "Signs of the Reappearance of Imam Sahib il Asr wa Zaman," Aliraqi, <http://www.aliraqi.org/forums/archive/index.php/t-56507.html>; and <http://www.lfpm.org/forum/showthread.php?t=10108>. It is also hinted at in 'Abd Muḥammad Hasan, *Iqtaraba al-zuhur: dirasa tatanawala ahadith abl al-bayt wa-ahdath al-alam wa-tastadill 'ala qurb zuhur al-Imam al-Mahdī watuwaqq-it lahu* (Beirut: Dar al-Mahajja al-Bayda', 2006), 133. Hasan sees al-Zarqawī as merely a type of the Sufyānī.
- 50 Muslim, *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar Jil, n.d.), viii, 175–76.
- 51 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30083303> (accessed June 1, 2016).



## **“His Dark Materials.” The Early Apocalypticism of Enoch Recycled in Modern and Postmodern Times**

*György E. Szönyi*

Next to the book of Revelations, perhaps the second most important and influential apocalyptic text—at least within the Judeo-Christian tradition—is Enoch’s Apocalypse, commonly known as the book of Enoch. Among other powerful visions, both the Revelations and Enoch have crucial things to say about the forces of the rebel angels and the fight between God’s angelic armies and the regiments of the dark side. As these struggles conclude in world-shattering cataclysms, they always leave behind one overwhelming question: Why has all this happened if the creator is all good and omnipotent? Where has creation gone wrong?

For centuries humankind has given various answers to this ultimate question; from theology through heretical esoterism to science and literature. One footnote among the many answers and explanations is made up of a few enigmatic lines in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Towards the end of Book II, Satan sets out on a great journey to take revenge upon the Creator and on his way he crosses the space filled with unformed particles, kept together by Chaos and governed by Chance. The description of this ur-material runs as follows:

Into this wilde Abyss,  
The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,  
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,  
But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt  
Confus’dly, and which thus must ever fight,  
Unless th’ Almighty Maker them ordain  
His dark materials to create more Worlds,  
Into this wilde Abyss the warie fiend  
Stood on the brink of Hell and look’d a while,  
Pondering his Voyage. . . .<sup>1</sup>



Why does the Almighty Maker have “dark materials”? What is their origin? Was Satan also made of these “dark materials”? Some may develop ontological investigations deriving from the problem and speculate on the origins of evil in the world; others might choose an epistemological-phenomenological direction while trying to describe and explain evil in the world; yet others might want to look into the future and figure out the consequences of evil in an eschatological perspective. Apocalyptic literature combines all three aspects that are connected by the vexing problem of the “dark materials.” This is one reason I have chosen Milton’s phrase as the title of my paper.

The other reason is that a particularly powerful and shocking apocalyptic vision of the late twentieth century, which interestingly took the disguise of “fantasy literature for young adults,” has also chosen this text: the general title of Philip Pullman’s fascinating trilogy is *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000). In the first part of my paper I shall pinpoint some crucial apocalyptic features of the book of Enoch in its various versions, relating to Biblical times, early Judaic as well as Christian concerns. In the second part, I am going to introduce the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century revival of Enochian apocalypticism, with a special attention to Béla Hamvas, the Hungarian traditionalist thinker who, during Communism, became a cultic role model for a lot of young Hungarians. In the final part of the survey I will focus on the New Age career of Enoch in Western culture. This revival has resulted in a great number of cultural representations in a variety of media: fiction, film, internet, digital pop culture. Philip Pullman’s trilogy will serve as an example of criticism against this Enochian apocalypticism while Kevin Smith’s film, *Dogma* can exemplify the contemporary symbolic potential of this ancient patriarch.

## Enoch’s Apocalypse

Although there is scattered information about Enoch in the Bible, the canonical text is not too informative about this prophet or patriarch. What we learn is that Enoch was the descendant of Adam’s son, Seth, and was begotten by Jared in the year 622 (Gen. 5:18–9). He lived 365



years; he begot Methuselah in his sixty-fifth year, then he "walked with God: and he was not; for God took him": (Gen. 5:24). St. Paul in his "Letter to the Hebrews" remembers Enoch as somebody who "by faith was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). Finally, he is also mentioned in the epistle of Jude: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all. . .'" (Jude 14-15).

The scarcity of remarks in the Old and New Testaments is compensated for by an abundance of references to Enoch in apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, surviving from both the Jewish and the Christian traditions.<sup>2</sup> This textual lore is intriguing and complex. Interestingly, although the core text, the so-called Apocalypse of Enoch was not known to Europeans until the eighteenth century, rumors about this material fascinated European humanists since the time of the Renaissance.

At present three major texts are known that relate to Enoch in one way or another. The first is the aforementioned *Apocalypse of Enoch* (abbreviated 1 Enoch), the full version of which has survived only in the Ethiopian language, Ge'ez. It was brought to Europe by the Scottish Africa-traveler, James Bruce, in 1773. The original must have been written in Aramaic or in Hebrew as is testified by the surviving fragments among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Further fragments survived in Greek and Latin.<sup>3</sup>

1 Enoch consists of the following structural sections: after the introduction, chapters 6-36 relate the story of the fallen angels who had intercourse with the daughters of men and thus corrupted humankind. When punishment was approaching the sinful angels begged Enoch, as the most righteous man, to intervene on their behalf before the Lord. These angels are also called the Watchers and this section—the "book of the Watchers"—describes a complex system of angelology.

The second part, the book of Parables, chapters 37-71, presents apocalyptic visions about the Last Judgment, including the following images:



Wisdom went forth to dwell among the sons of men,  
but she did not find a dwelling.  
Wisdom returned to her place,  
and sat down among the angels.  
Iniquity went forth from her chambers,  
those whom she did not seek she found,  
and she dwelt among them  
like rain in a desert  
and dew in a thirsty land.<sup>4</sup>

The third part, the book of the Luminaries, chapters 72–82, is an astrological treatise, which, according to some scholars, influenced the development of medieval astrology. The fourth part consists of Enoch's dream visions of the Flood and about the history of humanity (chapters 83–90). This part is followed by the Epistle of Enoch (chapters 92–105), an account about the birth of Noah (chapters 106–107), and a final book (chapter 108), restating the apocalyptic messages:

You who have observed are waiting in these days  
until the evildoers are brought to an end  
and the power of the sinners is brought to an end—  
you wait until sin passes away.  
For their names will be erased from the book of life and  
from the books of the holy ones  
and their descendants will perish forever.<sup>5</sup>

2 Enoch is the so called Slavonic Enoch, which survived in an Orthodox manuscript and was discovered in the nineteenth century. Its dating and genealogy are uncertain but it seems that its original was a Greek version.<sup>6</sup>

3 Enoch is a Hebrew text, a product of Merkabah mysticism having flourished between the fifth and tenth centuries AD. The text has survived in several medieval manuscripts but was discovered by Western scholarship only in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> 3 Enoch relates the *Himmelfahrt* of Rabbi Ishmael during which he saw God's Throne and Chariot and received revelations from the archangel Metatron. Chap-



ters 3–16 relate the exaltation of Enoch. Metatron reveals his origin as Enoch who had been translated and became the angels' vice-regent.

Rabbi Ishmael said: The angel Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, said to me: "When the Holy One, blessed be he, removed me from the generation of the Flood, he bore me up on the stormy winds of the Shekinah to the highest heaven and brought me into the great palaces in the height of the heaven. . . . He stationed me there to serve the throne of glory day by day. . . . Then the Holy One, blessed be he, bestowed upon me wisdom heaped upon wisdom, understanding upon understanding, prudence upon prudence, knowledge upon knowledge, mercy upon mercy. . . . In addition to all these qualities, the Holy One, blessed be he, laid his hand on me and blessed me with 1,365,000 blessings. I was enlarged and increased in size till I matched the world in length and breadth. He made to grow on me 72 wings, 36 on one side and 36 on the other and each single wing covered the entire world. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

Metatron's narrative about his translation is followed by an elaborate description of the angelic hierarchies and the names of God.

None of the texts described above were known in the Middle Ages, at least not known to the theologians of Western Christianity. Enoch was nevertheless often remembered by the Church Fathers as well as later divines. Enoch also exercised a strong influence on medieval Christian iconography. Numerous medieval representations picture the event when Enoch disappears because he is elevated to God by angles. With contemporary terminology it was called the *translatio* of Enoch.

Another aspect of the medieval career of Enoch is in connection with a body of strange, magical texts that proliferated from the thirteenth century under his supposed authorship. The Patriarch also appeared in many works on astrology and alchemy and this led to his identification with Hermes Trismegistus, the mythical sage of hermeticism.<sup>9</sup> Enoch's lore on angels was also echoed in the spurious medieval manuscript literature of ceremonial magic, including the "book of Venus," the *Liber Juratus*, the *Liber lunae* and the various versions of the "book of Toz."<sup>10</sup>



The medieval reception of Enoch sometimes bordered on heresy. Upon the emergence of neoplatonic hermeticism in the fifteenth century, the heterodox treatment of the Patriarch gained completely new and enlarged dimensions. Next to Hermes Trismegistus it was Enoch who provided the magically minded humanists with examples of deification, or *exaltatio*, a much-desired technique of “ascension on high.”<sup>11</sup> The Renaissance humanists were also excited by Enoch’s presumed ability to talk to God face-to-face, meaning that he still knew the *lingua adamica*, believed to have been lost after the Fall. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a great number of serious scholars were seeking the book of Enoch with the hope that from it Adam’s language could be recovered. This eccentric search contributed to the early modern theories of a universal language.<sup>12</sup>

## The Modern Enochian Revival

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholarship on the book(s) of Enoch was dominated by a search for textual sources. The texts were (re)discovered for Western scholarship, and the first critical editions as well as translations and a great number of philological studies were also published.<sup>13</sup> These undoubtedly provided an inspiration for twentieth-century neo-occultists to turn again toward Enoch. The Patriarch and his primordial *exaltatio* features prominently in the thought of every major modern occultist-mystic: Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–91), Annie Besant (1847–1933), William Westcott (1848–1925), MacGregor-Mothers (1854–1918), Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), and others.<sup>14</sup>

It was Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), however, who brought Enoch into the spotlight of modern esoteric speculations. While creating a very complex and syncretic system, Crowley did not restrict himself to theorizing. He also practiced magic and actively contributed to the development of twentieth-century occult movements.<sup>15</sup> Crowley also wanted to offer accessible methods of magic to realize his radical moral program. He condensed his world view in the following, much debated formula: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.” He



found the proper method of ceremonial magic in John Dee's sixteenth-century esoteric system and renamed it "Enochian Magick."

An infamous Russian writer and mystic, Dmitri Merezhkovsky (1865–1941) associated Enoch's teachings with the mythology of the lost continent Atlantis (1929) and used this train of thought to his prophesy about an upcoming great destructive war.

After the late war and, perhaps, on the eve of a new war, to speak of war in Europe today is the same as speak of the rope in the house of the suicide. . . . The kingdom of Atlantes and the kingdom of the Nephelim—the whole of first humanity—perished and it is possible that the second will also perish—in its war madness. Obscurely, Plato speaks of this, while Enoch so clearly that one must needs be deaf not to hear: and God commanded that all the living on earth shall be wiped out, for having learned the secrets of the angels and the power of the demons, and all their witcheries and casting of metals. The angel Azazel taught men the mortal scourges of war. They came out of his hands against all the living on earth, from that day and to this.<sup>16</sup>

His loud apocalypticism was echoed by a new generation of "traditionalist" thinkers in the years before WWII: Leopold Ziegler (1881–1958), René Guénon (1886–1951), Julius Évola (1898–1974), Fritjof Schuon (1907–98), Titus Burckhardt (1908–84), and others.<sup>17</sup>

These "traditionalists" had their counterpart in Hungary, whose heritage became subject to a cult during the years of communism: Béla Hamvas (1897–1968). Three of his works should be mentioned here: his magnum opus, *Scientia sacra: The Spiritual Tradition of the Ancients* (1943–44, published in 1988) is a compelling account of human wisdom in the midst of the madness of war. This "mature traditionalism" was preceded by an agitated work of apocalypticism, entitled *The World Crisis* (1937) which was obviously written under the influence of Merezhkovsky, Guénon's *La crise du monde moderne* (1927), and Évola's *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (1934). Last, but not least, as a by-product of *Scientia sacra*, Hamvas translated *The Apocalypse of Enoch* that was published just at the end of the war in 1945.



Hamvas's philosophy may be termed "sacral metaphysics," and his main concern was the most ancient past, as remote as the lost Golden Age. Unlike Rudolf Steiner, he never thought of mixing the spheres of analytical, scientific discourse with that of hermeticism, and claimed that the investigation of nature was confined to the surface of the material world only. For this kind of philosopher, the occult relations of the universe are effective in the transcendental spheres, so the development of science remains irrelevant in this respect. This metaphysical traditionalism explains why highly qualified philosophers like him wanted to devote their life and intellectual activity to the recovery and preservation of the lost, ancient wisdom, the *prisca theologia*.

For him, the heritage of Enoch represented something crucially important which he explained in the preface attached to his translation. Hamvas—in a somewhat easygoing way—disregarded the question of exact dating. While he admitted that, according to philologists, the book of Enoch probably dated from between 500 BC and 300 AD (which more or less corresponds with today's scholarly evaluations), at the same time he emphasized that Enoch, if he existed as a historical personality, must have lived eight to twelve thousand years ago, so his teachings must belong to the most ancient layers of human wisdom.

Hamvas attributed great importance to the fact that Enoch descended from the line of Seth who was destined to set right the time which had become "out of joint" with the murder of Abel by Cain. Seth was a diligent and humble Human (emphasis by Hamvas!), struggling with his fate, devoid of wild passions, who, while he busied himself toiling on the surface of the earth, always looked upward. All the great prophets of ancient times descended from Seth: Lao-Tse as well as Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus as well as Zarathustra. Unfortunately, the living tradition of Seth came to an end at the beginning of human history and was only periodically rediscovered by "true men," such as Enoch. He was the only pure and honest man in his generation, this is why he was brave enough to represent the case of the sinful Watchers before God, and this is why it was he who became translated by God's grace. The Watchers taught humankind to use instruments and develop crafts, such as the female use of cosmetics and coqueting,



but Hamvas sees in them no relatives of Prometheus, rather he condemns science and technology as agents destroying the original peace and harmony of humankind.

No doubt, the world wars greatly contributed to the strengthening of the moral stature of conservative esoterism. Hamvas, from a traditionalist-humanist standpoint asserted together with Merezhkovsky: *The Apocalypse of Enoch* told about the destruction of the first humankind, but it was addressed to the second humankind, that is the people of modernity. As he put it, in the Deluge, the first humankind had been destroyed by water (*hydratosis*) while this second humankind would die because of fire (*ekpyrosis*)—obviously referring to the world wars. Enoch's voice can hardly be heard in the cacophony of modernity, but weak as it may be, it reminds us that the apocalypse is the final judgment of the human existence, which has been corrupted by Cain and the Watchers. This existence has to be placed under the law again and the righteous people will be spared while the false will be annihilated.<sup>18</sup>

## New Age Enoch and His Discontents

One of the curious phenomena of our contemporary culture is the prevailing lure of the occult. From the popular register to certain trends in high-brow philosophy, esoterism is still a valid and respected outlook. This cries for a scholarly explanation that can only be achieved by interdisciplinary research, coordinating cultural theory and history, art and literary history, sociology, and social psychology—not to mention religious studies. In my opinion, one of the catalysts of the lure of the occult is a strong feeling (and experience) of apocalypticism in our modern times, both from religious and secular points of view.

One of the primary sources of apocalyptic experience is war, which has often included genocide. The twentieth century has produced more than imaginable in this respect, climaxing with WWII, yet rehashing with the Vietnam War, the recent Gulf Wars, and the civil wars in Cambodia and in Yugoslavia. Modern cultural representations of war have produced symbolic apocalyptic scenarios of Stalingrad, Auschwitz, Sarajevo, Abu Ghraib. As Marina Warner remarks,



The present strands of the Book of Revelation in the contemporary imaginary are bound with memories of both World Wars, but the lessons of Nazi applications of its vision have not been absorbed. Rather, the contrary. The plot, the images, the language of the Bible's closing vision permeate the speeches of Bush and Blair, and structure the very premise of "the war on terror" that the destruction of the World Trade Center inaugurated a new time, a cataclysmic break with the past.<sup>19</sup>

Film, a truly emblematic medium of cultural representations of this century, has capitalized on this experience extensively. It would be too easy to enumerate famous pictures with the word "Apocalypse" in their title, such as the ones by Francis Ford Coppola or Peter Gerretsen.<sup>20</sup> Instead, I would like to call to mind Andrzej Żuławski's shocking, 1971 film, *The Third Part of the Night*.<sup>21</sup> This complex and surreal work about Poland in WWII does not feature Enoch, but is more than suitable to demonstrate the presence of the apocalyptic in postwar culture. Aptly, the film begins and ends with quotations from the Revelations and the prophecies of Jeremiah; in the meantime it gives an account about innumerable loss of lives, disruption of families, and a horroristic atmosphere of a German-run hospital, where Polish people try to survive by "feeding lice," that is providing blood for these parasites that are then turned into typhoid vaccine to save the lives of Wehrmacht fighters on the front.

The main character of the film is Michal, whose wife, small son, and mother are murdered before his eyes by German soldiers. Later he witnesses the brutal killing of several friends, clandestine freedom-fighting comrades, amicable and innocent Jewish neighbors, and a great many unknown fellow sufferers. Finally, he himself is shot in a schizophrenically shattering scene. While he witnesses supernatural apparitions throughout his ordeal, he does not have answers, he only asks: "Does what has happened to me make any sense? Does it have some meaning which I am unable to grasp?" (0:43). There are two answers in the film, both disconcerting.

After he and his father discover the execution of their family, the old man exclaims: "God, who allows cruelty to be propagated and peo-



ple to torment each other, Oh God, who elevates the most evil ones and puts the whip into their hands, O, merciless God have no mercy upon us" (0:07). Later he adds, as if he tried to make sense of this new reality: "The world has crumbled, has gotten smashed, has vanished. You must fathom the new laws, that governs this decay and adjust yourself to them" (0:54). Nevertheless, even later, after his daughter, a nun, is also taken, he recites the *dies irae* and sets fire to himself.

Michal's friend, Marian also tries to understand the world turned cruelly upside down. When they witness a senseless murder on the street, he passionately protests, "There must be some law. It's time we talked with God. A cry must burst out from this country's soul" (0:39). At a later stage he seems to give up, as if understanding the apocalyptic message: "Perhaps this extermination is like a plague sent to people that they make out the meaning of their own lives" (1:12). The film is framed by shattering prophecies recited from St. John, but passages from the Book of Enoch would serve just as well:

There my eyes saw a deep valley, and its mouth was open,  
and all who dwell on the land and the sea and the islands  
will bring it gifts and presents and tribute,  
but the valley will not become full.  
And their hands commit lawless deeds,  
and everything that the righteous labor over, the sinners law-  
lessly devour.<sup>22</sup>

Today, when the Great War seems to be left behind, often New Age esotericism inspires apocalyptic themes that are combined with fantasy and heterodox religious speculations. In these Enoch also features strongly. One should not be surprised to find the title page of a book by Indus Khamit Kush on an American hip-hop site, announcing: *Enoch the Ethiopian. The Lost Prophet of the Bible: Greater Than Abraham, Holier Than Moses*,<sup>23</sup> while a Hungarian site, under the heading "esoteric services" summarizes the apocalyptic aspect of "Enochian magic" as follows:

[In the Book of Enoch it is said] that humans abused the knowledge which had been taught to them by the angels of God, so the Lord, by



way of punishment, sent to the Earth his wicked angels, who had false speech and were craving for the women of humans; they taught black magic and thus humankind inflicted retribution upon itself.<sup>24</sup>

One of the strangest films among the esoterically oriented movies of recent years is Kevin Smith's *Dogma* (1999) also capitalizes on the Enoch-myth. The film quite ingeniously strikes a balance between Hollywood glamour (Ben Affleck, Salma Hayek) and independent cinema, dark comedy and apocalyptic prophecy, a serious appeal for true religiousness and outrageous heterodoxy. In the film, two fallen angels—Bartleby, one of the Watchers, and Loki, formerly the Angel of Death—are banished from Heaven by God after Bartleby had cajoled Loki to stop killing humans. Forced to live out their lives in a place worse than Hell (Wisconsin), the two figure out that by a loophole in Christian dogma (utilizing plenary indulgence) they could go back to Heaven. However, by achieving this, Bartleby and Loki would overrule the word of God. Since the fundamental basis of existence is that God cannot be wrong, to do so would destroy existence itself. To prevent this would-be catastrophe from happening, the angel Metatron (alias Enoch transfigured), who here acts as the Voice of God, appears to abortion clinic worker Bethany and gives her the task of forestalling the return of the two degenerate angels. In the penultimate scene of the film, Azrael, the satanic mastermind who is behind this plot, incites a terrifying mass murder, executed by Bartleby in front of the Cathedral of New Jersey. The ending is happy, however, since God manifests in the form of a stunning beautiful woman (after all, why do you always have to picture the Lord as a grandpa) and sets things right, what is more s/he conceives an heir inside Bethany, to carry on Scion's line.<sup>25</sup>

As one critic remarked, "*Dogma* is one of the most entertaining films ever made about religion. Keep in mind that it's a comedy, indeed a satire which aims directly at the flaws and pretensions of organized religion."<sup>26</sup> No wonder that scandals, protest, and hate-letters preceded and followed its release, which, because of the anticipated public rage, had to be postponed by a year. Nevertheless, Kevin Smith, in many of his interviews, refused to be a profane blasphemer. Instead, as he claimed, he tried to give a personal statement of faith in his own



way, using hip dialogue and sharp observations on pop culture, religion, and bodily functions. In any case, it is a thought provoking example which reveals connections between Enoch's New Age survival and today's apocalypticism.

Even Christian fundamentalism uses Enoch as a moral emblem, and even eventually a plot element. The Baptist minister and bestselling writer of "Christian thrillers," Alton Gansky has chosen Enoch as the main character of his latest book, *Enoch*.<sup>27</sup> As the cover of the novel summarizes: "He lived long ago. He never died, now the most powerful woman in the world is trying to own him. . . ." With a traditionalist message, the book indeed is thrilling and, like *Dogma*, its setting is absolutely up to date. In the book, an unusual message begins popping up around the world: "TIME GOES SHORT. LOOK FOR THE ONE I SEND YOU. HE WALKS AMONG YOU." This can be heard in radio commercials, seen flashing in movies and TV shows, and even as a huge advertisement in the New York Times. While believing that it is somebody's elaborate prank, FCC agent Gene Manford and FBI agent Katherine Rooney launch an investigation into a strange fellow wandering around the small towns of Texas and performing miracles—he saves people in a mass accident, heals the sick, etc. He introduces himself as Henick, but later it turns out that people misheard it, his name is really Enoch. The action perks up when a powerful and ultimately evil televangelist woman learns about this miracle-working prophet and decides to kidnap and use him for her own selfish purposes. The outcome is really breathtaking: things escalate not simply into a psychomachia, but a real fight between good and evil on a cosmic scale. Gansky's *Enoch* is just one of numerous postmodern cultural representations which prove that the borders between rational and irrational, natural and supernatural, factual and fictional are no less blurred today than they were before the "Age of Reason." As ever, the apocalyptic is one of the themes that can easily bridge these contrary realms.

I would like to use the remaining part of my essay to look at Philip Pullman's celebrated trilogy which approaches the Enoch-phenomenon from a radically different viewpoint. Here, Enoch—in his translated identity as the angel Metatron—appears to be the usurper of the power of the Authority, that is, God, who himself had established his



rule by usurpation. Metatron is a true manipulator who has fully assimilated among the angelic orders and pushed himself into a leading position. What is more, Pullman's supernatural narrative is told from the mouth of a professed atheist.

It is impossible to outline the very complex design of the trilogy of novels. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* is not only a masterly plotted narrative with unforgettable characters, it is also an intriguing philosophical system discernible in a possible world of multiple utopias and dystopias. Pullman's vision is provocative, harshly anticlerical, and boldly heretical, if this word still means anything today. According to a Hungarian critic, Pullman set out in this trilogy to rewrite Milton's epic in the framework of fantasy-fiction, or, at least, revisits Milton's fundamental inquiries about the sense of life, the existence of supernatural power(s), the characteristics of human nature, and the like.<sup>28</sup> Or, as interviewer Robert Butler introduced Pullman in the December 2007 issue of the magazine *Intelligent Life*, "Pullman has written an epic with the entertainment value to capture a mass audience, which simultaneously taps into the same profound themes as Homer and the Bible. It's a story with a dark and powerful undertow: a creation myth for the twenty-first century."<sup>29</sup>

Since his novels are well-known, there is no need for a plot summary. It should be enough to reiterate that Pullman's fictional Oxford is not the famous university town, although it bears resemblance to it. In Pullman's fictional world, every aspect of private and social existence is thoroughly regulated by the Church, established by Jean Calvin in the sixteenth century, who became pope and moved the holy seat to Geneva. In this respect, Pullman's epic has curious reminiscences of the now-so-fashionable counterfactual history writing. One of the famous colleges of the "alternative Oxford" is Jordan, where twelve-year-old Lyra Belacqua is brought up. She is the offspring of a strange union. Her mother is Mrs. Coulter, who cheated on her husband when she fell in love with the most powerful and ingenious man in England, Lord Asriel. When Mr. Coulter found out about the relationship—what is more, about the illegitimate child—he tried to kill Lord Asriel. However the outcome was the opposite: Lyra's father shot his jealous attacker. All this leads to the break-up of the adulterous couple, the ex-



ile of Asriel to the North, and placement of Lyra in the custody of Jordan College.

While in exile, Lord Asriel discovers a strange phenomenon in the North—Dust. It consists of elementary particles which fall from space and stick to grown-ups but not to children. This is related to one of the most curious of Pullman's literary conceits: in his world people have daemons in the form of animals from which they cannot be separated until they die. A daemon is like a soul which lives outside the body but in perfect harmony and cooperation with it. Children's daemons can change their shape, while a sure sign of growing up is that the daemon becomes fixed in form. The effects of Dust deeply worry the Church, because the theologians think that Dust is the punishment of God which will destroy humankind, still burdened by original sin. This seems obvious, since only children are exempt until they reach puberty and their daemons get fixed.

The concept of Dust is closely connected with Pullman's mythic etiology of intelligence in the cosmos, the birth of religion, as well as of tyranny. Volume one introduces an intriguing apocryphal myth, according to which the Serpent tempts Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge as follows:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and your daemons shall assume their true forms, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.<sup>30</sup>

And after having eaten from the forbidden fruit:

The eyes of them were opened, and they saw the true form of their daemons, and spoke with them. But when the man and woman knew their own daemons, they knew that a great change had come upon them . . . , and they saw the difference, and they knew good and evil; and they were ashamed, and they sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness. . . .<sup>31</sup>

So this is how evil, shame, and death came into the world and now Dust seems to be the physical proof that grown-ups with fixed dae-



mons are subjected to the fate of original sin. From every angle, Dust appears to be harmful. Asriel, as a scientist, wants to destroy it because he thinks it poses a danger to people's health; the Magisterium also wants to eliminate Dust, because of its theological implications. But Lyra is struck by a radical intuition: what if all grown-ups are mistaken and Dust is really good, and it should be cherished?

By the second volume (*The Subtle Knife*), Lord Asriel figures out the origin of Dust and by volume three (*The Amber Spyglass*) another extraordinary apocryphal myth unfolds. These elementary particles are nothing else but the material essence of consciousness and they stick to developed human subjects and all other forms of intelligence. These particles had existed since the beginning of time and out of their density the first intelligent beings, the angels, came to life. The first angel assumed power and called himself Authority. As an angel later explains to Lyra and his friend:

The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty—those were all names he gave himself. He was never the creator. He was an angel like ourselves—the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are, and Dust is only the name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself. Matter loves matter. It seeks more and more to know about itself, and Dust is formed. The first angels condensed out of Dust, and the Authority was the first of all. He told those who came after him that he had created them, but it was a lie. . . .<sup>32</sup>

Soon an unsuccessful rebellion broke out against him but the outcome of this rebellion was most surprising.<sup>33</sup> Not long after the Authority had won, his appointed deputy, Metatron (alias Enoch) took over power step by step, gradually reducing the Authority into a weak figurehead, or even less. At the time the narrative takes place, the Authority is travelling in a Clouded Mountain, also known as “the Chariot”:

With the Regent at the reins. He's concealed himself well, this Metatron. They speak of him in the apocryphal scriptures: he was a man once, a man called Enoch, the son of Jared—six generations



away from Adam. And now he rules the Kingdom. And he is intending to do more than that. If he wins this battle, he intends to intervene directly in human life. . . . Metatron is proud and his ambition is limitless. The Authority chose him four thousand years ago to be his Regent, and they laid their plans together. The Authority considers that conscious beings of every kind have become dangerously independent, so Metatron is going to intervene much more actively in human affairs. . . . Imagine that, a permanent Inquisition, worse than anything the Consistorial Court of Discipline could dream up. . . . The old Authority at least had the grace to withdraw; the dirty work of burning heretics and hanging witches was left to his priests. This new one will be far, far worse.<sup>34</sup>

This is how Metatron in Pullman's novels becomes the arch enemy and tyrant who manipulates humans through his evil device, the organized church(es). In the third volume (*The Amber Spyglass*) we see the Authority dragged on by the troops of Metatron, totally helpless and senile, until finally he melts into thin air.

Lord Asriel, learning about the state of affairs in Heaven, forges a cosmic alliance between humans, fallen angels (who are also called the Watchers as in the Book of Enoch. Here, however, they are not wicked but simply those who revolted against the tyranny of the Authority at the beginnings of time), and various syncretic beings from various worlds (such as Lapland witches, armored bears from Svalbard, even the dead from the underworld) in order to wage war against the usurper Metatron. His aim is to bring about total freedom to all creatures of all worlds. He does not know, however, about the ancient prophecy of the witches according to which a child

is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing, as if it were her nature and not destiny to do it. If she's told what she must do, it will fail; death will sweep through all the worlds; it will be the triumph of despair, for ever. [It is also said that this child's destiny] can only be fulfilled elsewhere, not in this world, but far beyond. Without this child we shall all die.<sup>35</sup>



This child is his own daughter, Lyra. From volume two on, the reader witnesses a lot of coming and going among various worlds (including our own) while Lyra is working for noble, but smaller goals, not realizing that she is destined to be the new Eve, the new mother and savior of humankind. Her mission even involves a journey to the world of the dead—a must in any archetypal epic story of universal significance—which gives Pullman a chance to integrate his very deep philosophical thoughts about life and death into the texture of the narrative.

Ultimately, Pullman suggests that the Fall, that is the appearance of consciousness and independence in the world, was the best thing that could happen to humanity.<sup>36</sup> However, in order to wisely utilize those two assets in the long run, it is necessary to go through apocalyptic experiences, facing sin, evil, destruction, and death.

Recently Marina Warner has written about human phantasmagorias, as being determined by ideological constructs, the changing rules of cultural representation, as well as technical development. She discusses *St. John's Apocalypse* as one of the great, archetypal phantasmas of the Western world. In her review of the impact of the Revelations in cultural history, she also mentions Pullman's trilogy. Warner sets up a paradigm, ranging from Dante and Joachim of Fiore, through Dürer, Milton, and Blake, up to contemporary creators of apocalyptic, supernatural imagery, such as Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling. She locates Pullman within this company as follows:

Some other filaments of past and present apocalypticism are worth teasing out, in order to grasp why its myth has regained moral force and reinvigorated the Counter-Enlightenment reign of spirit forces in our time. . . . Pullman read English—unhappily—and then started out as a schoolteacher in Oxford during the first peak phase of the Tolkien cult and, as he often recalls with some asperity, the popular ascendancy of another Oxford children's visionary, C. S. Lewis and the Narnia cycle. Pullman's highly ambitious trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, consciously defies both those precursors: he challenges the archaic savagery and the apocalyptic vision of Tolkien's invented Englishness and Lewis's Anglican piety. He draws on a parallel, dialectical literary tradition, taking on Milton, speaking with Blake, shadowing Bunyan,



and surpassing certainly Milton and even Blake in his defiance of Christian dualism, his rejection of the doctrine of original sin, and his championing of women, children, and their energies of curiosity, sex, and love. He stages several topoi of apocalyptic struggle, but in each case, makes a knight's move in another direction.<sup>37</sup>

Marina Warner's observations draw attention to the cultural phenomenon according to which postmodern apocalypticism tends to return to narrative fiction. Here, we witness large-scale novels and complicated movies presenting multiple epic structures with overwhelming apocalyptic imagery. This tendency of fictionalization seems to be contrary to the previous generation of visionaries from Blavatsky and Steiner through Guénon and Hamvas, who, while often referring to myths, remained within the confines of philosophical discourse.

Journalists and critics, among them Alona Wartofsky and Bernard Schweizer, have found it noteworthy that, in spite of Pullman's radical theological subversion, resistance and hostility against him from the side of fundamentalism has been significantly less aggressive than against the relatively harmless Harry Potter series.<sup>38</sup> Schweizer seems to be right when he suggests by way of explanation that the author "tapped into a stream of antitheistic rebellion (with roots in Thomas Paine, Nietzsche, Swinburne, and anarchists like Bakunin) that has simply not been promoted to the status of a major intellectual tradition to date."<sup>39</sup> The Western esoteric traditions seem to be in a similar situation nowadays. Since the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution the organic and occult world picture has been reduced to the status of a counter culture. This reduced form is nevertheless a persistent one, carrying on as a testament to the age-old dissatisfaction with bare rationalism and the optimistic belief in progress. Pullman's work develops a paradoxical relationship with this tradition. While subverting institutionalized doctrines and attacking organized churches from the stance of an atheist, in many respects he sides with hermeticism and gnosticism.<sup>40</sup>

Why has someone like Pullman chosen the form of narrative fiction, instead of polemical or argumentative genres? The answer is rather simple: because he believes in narratives which, according to Clifford Geertz, constitute the net of correspondences making up human



culture.<sup>41</sup> Pullman has realized that in the postmodern age, an authentic speaker of the apocalypse has to be a storyteller, just like in prehistoric times, like the speaking voice in the book of Enoch. Beyond this recognition, I hope, my essay has also succeeded in demonstrating that the study of modern apocalypticism is incomplete without the examination of the Enochic-traditions.



## Notes

- 1 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1957), 253, bk. 2, lines 910–18.
- 2 Biblical scholarship calls those books apocryphal, which have uncertain provenance or authorship. The church authorities have excluded them from the canonized collection of sacred books. As opposed to this, the term pseudepigrapha (etymologically meaning "with false superscription") embraces those texts that were in early Christian times "attributed to ideal figures in Israel's past; that customarily claim to contain God's word or message, that frequently build upon ideas and narratives present in the Old testament, and that preserve, albeit in an edited form, Jewish traditions that date from the period between 200 BC and AD 200" James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), xxiv–vi. All in all, there is no great difference between the two terms, except that the word apocrypha carries a touch of value judgment, while pseudepigrapha is a neutral term of Bible-scholarship.
- 3 Chapters 6–16 (The Book of the Watchers) have been preserved in the work of Georgius Syncellus, the early ninth-century Byzantine chronographer. See Georgius Syncellus, *The Chronography of George Synkellos: a Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation*, ed. and trans. William Adler and Paul Tuffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Another Greek fragment dates from the eighth century and was found in a Christian tomb. There also exists a Latin fragment from the same period. The English critical edition of 1 Enoch was prepared by E. Isaac, see Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:5–89; another important edition contains an appendix on the "Astronomical" Chapters, see Otto Neugebauer and Matthew Black, eds., *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1985). For the original Ge'ez text, see <http://earth-history.com/pseudepigrapha/book-the-book-of-enoch>. Among the Qumran scrolls one finds some fragments of the Aramaic version of 1 Enoch, see Géza Vermes, ed., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 545–59. For a new, authoritative, annotated edition and translation of 1 Enoch, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, and Klaus Baltzer, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). For a full text new translation without annotations that is based on this commentary, see Nickelsburg and James C. Vander Kam, trans. and eds., *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). For a detailed review of Nickelsburg's *Commentary*, see Michael A. Knibb, "Interpreting the Book of Enoch: Reflections on a Recently Published Commentary," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 33, no. 4 (2002): 437–50.
- 4 Nickelsburg, et al, *New Translation*, 56. 1 Enoch 42:2–3,
- 5 *Ibid.*, 168. 1 Enoch 108:2–3
- 6 See the introduction of F. I. Andersen in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 91–100. For further recent studies, see Christfried Böttrich, *Weltweisheit, Menschheitsethik, Urkult: Studien zum slavischen Henochbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992); and Andrei A. Orlov, "Celestial Choirmaster: The Liturgical Role of Enoch-Metatron in 2 Enoch and the Merkaba Tradition," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14, no. 1 (2004): 3–29.
- 7 See the introduction of P. Alexander in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 223–53. For further studies, see Gerschom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1946; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1961); John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984); and Moshe Idel, *Ascension on High in Jewish Mysticism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005).
- 8 Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 264–65; 3. Enoch 7:1, 8:2, 9:1–2
- 9 For some basic works on hermeticism, see Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); D. Nock and A. J. Festugière, eds., *Corpus hermeticum*, vols., 1–4 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945–54); Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus, eds., *Hermeticism and the Renaissance* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988); Lynn White, ed., *Hermeticism and the Scientific*



- Revolution: Papers Read at the Clark Library Seminar, March, 1974* (Los Angeles: UCLA, W. A. Clark Memorial Library, 1977); Paolo Rossi, "Hermeticism, Rationality, and the Scientific Revolution," in *Reason, Experiment, and Mysticism in the Scientific Revolution*, ed. M. L. Righini-Bonelli and William R Shea (New York: Science History Publications, 1975); Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1964); Luisa Rotondi Secchi Tarugi, *L'ermetismo nell'Antichità e nel Rinascimento* (Milan: Nuovi Orizzonti, 1998); György E. Szönyi, *John Dee's Occultism: Magical Exaltation Through Powerful Signs* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004). For references to Enoch's presence in hermetic tracts, Lynn Thorndike, *The History of Magic and Experimental Sciences*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923–58), vol. 1, 340. For one of the first scholarly works to note the correlation between Hellenistic hermeticism and the Book of Enoch, see Edward Murray, *Enoch Res-titutus; or, An Attempt to Separate from the Books of Enoch the Book Quoted by St. Jude; also A Comparison of the Chronology of Enoch with the Hebrew Computation, and with the Periods Mentioned in the Book of Daniel and in the Apocalypse* (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1836).
- 10 Thorndike, *History of Magic*, vol. 2, 220–27. On ceremonial magic, see Richard Kieckheffer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Claire Fanger, ed. *Conjuring Spirits: Texts Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1998). For a useful edition of late seventeenth-century angelological manuscripts including ceremonial rituals, see Adam McLean, ed., *A Treatise on Angel Magic* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2006).
  - 11 On the doctrine of *exaltatio* see Szönyi, introduction to *John Dee's Occultism* (2004). On the phenomenon of "ascension on high," see Idel, *Ascension on High*. On the medieval and Renaissance reception of Enoch see György E. Szönyi, "The Reincarnations of Enoch from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance," in Gerhard Jaritz ed. *Angels, Devils. The Supernatural and Its Visual Representation* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2011, *Medievalia* 15, 162–78).
  - 12 Among those who were most ardently seeking Enoch's (or Adam's) lost language was the French philologist, Guillaume Postel (1510–81), the English hermetic magi, John Dee (1527–1609) and Robert Fludd (1574–1637), the "last polymath," Athanasius Kircher SJ (1601–80), and many other early modern humanists, theologians, even scientists, such as Isaac Newton. Among other pertinent scholarly works, see Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Marina Yaguello, *Les Fous du langage: Des langues imaginaires et de leurs inventeurs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984).
  - 13 For the first scholarly edition, see Richard Laurence, ed., *The Book of Enoch, the Prophet: An Apocryphal Production, supposed for ages lost; but discovered at the close of the last century in Abyssinia; now first translated from an Ethiopic MS of the Bodleian Library*. Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1833 (1821).
  - 14 For example, see H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Technology, 1877* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1998), vol. 1, 149–50; vol. 2, 452–69; Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy, 1888* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1999), vol. 1, 207; vol. 2, 229, 366, 533.
  - 15 He was a member of the famous Golden Dawn, and when he broke with them he founded the Ordo Templi Orientis society, the Collegium ad Spiritum Sanctum magical school, and the Abbey of Thelema occult commune in Sicily. On Crowley, see Charles Richard Cammell, *Aleister Crowley* (London: New English Library, 1969); Roger Hutchinson, *Aleister Crowley: The Beast Demystified* (London: Mainstream, 1998); Serge Hutin, *Aleister Crowley: le plus grand des mages modernes* (Verviers: Gérard, 1973); Francis King, *Magic: The Western Tradition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 29–31; Colin Wilson, *Aleister Crowley: The Nature of the Beast* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1987). For the best and newest interpretation of Crowley's "Enochian magick," see Lon Milo DuQuette, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley: A Handbook of Rituals of Thelema* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2003).
  - 16 Tanja Zapada, *Atlantida-Europa* [Atlantis/Europe] (Belgrade, 1929). Quotes from the English edition, Zapada, *The Secret of the West*, trans. John Cournos (New York: Brewer, Warren, and Putnam, 1933), 11, 94–5. Here Merezhkovsky cites 1 Enoch, 65:6.
  - 17 Among them, René Guénon summarized views about Enoch-Metatron in Guénon, *Le roi du monde* (Paris, 1927), chap. 3. For an English translation and biographical note, see Guénon, *The Lord of the World*, trans. Pietro Nutrizio (Ellingsring: Coombe Springs Press, 1983).



- 18 Béla Hamvas, trans. and ed., introduction to *Henoch apokalypsisé* [*The Apocalypse of Enoch*] (1945; repr., Budapest: Vízöntő, 1945), 7–29. On Hamvas, see György E. Szönyi, "Hamvas, Béla," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. W. J. Hanegraaff (Lieden: Brill, 2006); and Szönyi, "Occult Ascension in Troubled Times: The Ideals of Mankind in Rudolf Steiner and Béla Hamvas," in *Life the Human Quest for an Ideal*, ed. M. Kronegger and Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996), 29–43.
- 19 Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 345.
- 20 Peter Gerretsen, *Apocalypse: Caught in the Eye of the Storm* (1998; Cloud Ten Pictures, 2008), DVD. Here is Cindy Holden's the plot summary of *Apocalypse* "Bronson Pearl and Helen Hannah are two news broadcasters who are covering the impending war in Israel. Yet, suddenly millions of people disappear, then a new leader performs an incredible miracle. These are astounding media events. Helen soon comes to the realization that these times are fulfilling biblical prophesy..." <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0149695/>
- 21 Andrzej Żuławski, *Trzecia część nocy* [The third part of the night] (1971; Second Run DVD, 2007). I thank Rowland Wymer for bringing this film to my attention.
- 22 Nickelsburg, et al, *Enoch: A New Translation*, 67. 1 Enoch 53:1.
- 23 Indus Khamit Kush, *Enoch the Ethiopian The Lost Prophet of the Bible: Greater Than Abraham, Holier Than Moses* (New York: A and B Publishing Group, 2000).
- 24 See *Magia Magia*, <http://magia.magia.hu/keret.cgi?enochmagia.html>, accessed April 4, 2009.
- 25 Kevin Smith, *Dogma* (1999; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD.
- 26 Charles Henderson, "Dogma: Kevin Smith's Sacred Satire," *God Web*, <http://www.godweb.org/dogma.htm>, accessed April 5, 2009.
- 27 Linda Rios Brook, *Lucifer's Flood* (Lake Mary, FL: Realms, 2008).
- 28 Tamás Bényei, "Boldog bünbeesés" [Happy fall], *Élet és Irodalom* 48, no. 39 (2004): [http://www.es.hu/benyei\\_tamas:boldog\\_bunbeeses;2004-09-27.html](http://www.es.hu/benyei_tamas:boldog_bunbeeses;2004-09-27.html).
- 29 Robert Butler, "Philip Pullman's Dark Arts," *Intelligent Life*, December 2007, <http://www.moreintelligentlife.com/node/697>.
- 30 Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass* (New York: Random House, 2001), 372.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (New York: Random House, 2001), 32.
- 33 Here Pullman agrees with William Blake, who, with other readers of the Romantic period, asserted that Milton—at least unconsciously—sided with Satan by making him the real hero of *Paradise Lost*. On "Satanists" and "anti-Satanists," see John Carey, "Milton's Satan," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 160–75.
- 34 Pullman, *Golden Compass*, 373, 61, 374.
- 35 Pullman, *Amber Spyglass*, 310, 176.
- 36 I am adopting here Tamás Bényei's observation in Bényei, "Boldog bünbeesés."
- 37 Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 347. On Pullman's theology and esotericism see Joscelyn Godwin, "Esotericism without Religion: Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials," in *Esotericism, Art, and Imagination*, ed. Arthur Versluis (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008). See also from the recent mushrooming literature on Pullman: Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott, eds., "*His Dark Materials*" *Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Donna Freitas and Jason King, *Killing the Imposter God: Philip Pullman's Spiritual Imagination in "His Dark Materials"* (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2007); Leonard F. Wheat, *Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials"—A Multiple Allegory* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008).
- 38 See Alona Wartofsky's review of *The Amber Spyglass* in the *Washington Post* (February, 2001), cited in Bernard Schweizer, "'And He's A-Going to Destroy Him': Religious Subversion in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*," in "*His Dark Materials*," ed. Lenz, et al, 160–73.
- 39 Ibid., 161.
- 40 See Godwin, "Esotericism without Religion."
- 41 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: University Books, 1973), 49.







# Appendices







## Appendix I

# Elements of Online Apocalypticism

*László Attila Hubbes*

*—In memory of my older little brother*

In our everyday life we tend to think that apocalypticism is a long-extinct, extremist religious mentality centered on some catastrophic end-of-the-world scenario. We usually suppose that people must have thought this way only very long ago, and if some still think so today, they are only a small minority somewhere in America or in underdeveloped Muslim fundamentalist communities even farther away. In any case, the prevailing sentiment is that this phenomenon is not happening now, not here among us. Not in an age of such technological advancement and scientific enlightenment like our era of the Internet. Through my investigations, however, I would like to show that there is no need to think of apocalyptic and apocalypticists in such extreme terms or with such derision, nor should one place such phenomena in the distant past or some faraway land. The core narrative of apocalyptic discourse survives in many variations and so too does its symbolism, with its visual and textual elements adapting to newer contexts and to its users' needs.

As a lecturer in communication studies with an interest in apocalypticism, I examine visual and textual elements and the apocalyptic rhetoric of online religious (and also non-religious) websites, social networks, and forums, conducting semiotic content-interpretations, analyzing the uses and misuses of new means of interpersonal argumentation and social interaction as part of my preparatory investigations for further research on ideological web-semiotics and rhetoric. The idea was born out of a fortunate coincidence in which my main scholarly interest in the field of apocalyptic studies overlapped with my current work in the domain of contemporary communication studies. Within this research program, I have investigated how (ex-



tremist) religiosity has infiltrated channels of hypermedia, how such stories and argumentations of apocalyptic origin were imported and converted for contemporary messages in some fundamentalist or conspiracist online communities, and also how these groups have propagated their apocalyptic visions by using ancient bestiaries or incorporating and inventing newer iconographic elements.

In this short essay, I will offer a brief overview of my recent studies on the inter-disciplinary cross-sections of what one might call “online apocalypticism.” Though I will not provide an explicit and concise definition of the proposed term “online apocalypticism,” all four works discussed below focus on this same syndrome, each providing insights into different aspects and thus contributing to the exploration of this new and vast range of social media. The first study, “Signs of Times,” offers a semiotic content analysis of the visual rhetoric on Hungarian conspiracist websites.<sup>1</sup> The second, “Debating Contemporary Internet-Based Apocalyptic Discourse in Class,” presents some remarks regarding my personal experience in teaching and discussing applied rhetoric and communication with students.<sup>2</sup> The third study, entitled “Apocalyptic Demonizing: Dehumanizing Images of the ‘Other’ on the Web,” is dedicated to the semiotic analysis of the pictorial heritage of various ancient apocalyptic traditions that appear in new digital iconography.<sup>3</sup> The fourth and final study, “Spectacular Apocalypse: Visual Rhetoric of Cyberspace Apocalypticism,” is an iconographic–rhetorical analysis examining New Age and Millenarian websites in regard to their doomsday-discourses surrounding 2012.<sup>4</sup> These four studies form part of a larger research project devoted to ideological web-semiotics and rhetoric. For these investigations, I have chosen certain Hungarian, US-based, or international websites and online communities formed around them<sup>5</sup> through which I present the apocalyptic narratives and iconography at work. In the following pages, I will briefly describe the aforementioned studies.

“Signs of Times” addresses the phenomena of conspiracy theories, radical nationalism, alternative historicism, xenophobia, topical Internet communities, and introduces the experimental notion of “apocalypticizing rhetoric.” After discussing key terms and theoretical issues



such as social anxieties, mythical narratives, apocalyptic and “apocalypticizing” rhetoric, ethnic eschatology, conspiracy beliefs, and cultural mistrust, the study turns to the presentation and analysis of the narratives and images of specific virtual sites. It also draws attention to the visual transfer of ancient emblems through electronic media, as well as to the formation of topical online communities and the ritual deliberation of net-communities. The study builds on the premise that there have been increasingly strong interconnections between various forms of social anxieties that manifest themselves in a multitude of religious, political, national, or even environmental movements—all of them now present in the virtual geography of cyberspace. One of the most prominent categories of these anxiety-driven movements is conspiracism, which—buttressed by radical nationalism—displays a curious resemblance to various forms of apocalypticism. In both cases, people’s fears and resentment (along with hope) find expression in mythical narratives structured on the ancient opposition of good versus evil. Apocalyptic rhetoric represents the most crystallized form of verbal warfare against evil forces (mundane or supernatural). These narratives have lost some of their religious character through the processes of secularization and globalization, but at the same time, they have penetrated new realms in the irrational imaginary and have impregnated many beliefs and ideologies, from academic and philosophical theories to popular mythology and urban legends.

In studying the relationship between apocalypticism and conspiracism, several authors<sup>6</sup> have highlighted the underlying paranoid nature of apocalypticism, which characterizes many conspiracy theories as well. The paranoid aspect of conspiracism, which identifies a distinct scapegoat, is related to the dualistic thinking inherent in apocalyptic narratives. Still, conspiracist discourse is not tantamount to apocalyptic rhetoric (although they may overlap). This is not only because the former lacks a transcendent dimension, but also because it has no *dénouement*—it contains no consolatory message promising an end to present hardships. There is, however, an important similarity between the two modes: their revelatory nature. Both aim to unveil reality by claiming to possess the ultimate truth. Yet, while the latter offers a godly perspective, conspiracy theory only “unmasks” the occult



(usually worldly) machinations that secretly govern our life. Taking into account the basic differences and similarities, I propose “apocalypticizing rhetoric”<sup>7</sup> as a distinguishing term for the language of conspiracism. This apocalypticizing style may be characteristic for conspiracism and also for various radical nationalistic, political, or ideological discourses related to it. Fundamentalist religious conservatives, radical right-wing (or left-wing) ideologists, or ultraliberal activists may utilize and adapt the style to suit their own purposes.<sup>8</sup>

As in the case of ancient thought, anxieties also find their way into contemporary ideas spreading on the World Wide Web, where—along with a sense of helplessness—they project the solution of perceived crises into the spiritual realm. Here myths of some idealized place or time (whether in the past or future) offer a virtual salvation accompanied by the satisfaction of vengeful fantasies targeting the enemy, but without physical outbursts of aggression.<sup>9</sup> Though far from being their only cultural function, such mythical narratives may provide paradigms for social action, but more often they serve to channel uncontrollable emotions by solving immanent human problems in the transcendence or the virtuality of the imaginary. The easiest way to transform ancient sacral stories of antagonisms into modern narratives was through symbols and visual signs. Although anxieties have always been present showing certain patterns of rise and decline—the electronic media of the past century have definitely contributed both to the perpetuation of higher tension and to the proliferation of such story-bearing visual symbols. Today, the Internet serves as an ideal incubator for the processes mentioned above—not only through unidirectional web pages, but also, or even more importantly, through self-organizing, virtual net-communities. There are countless religious or ethno-political groups with their own symbolic iconography, but most of these signs are quasi-universal and are the same as the stories they bear.

The second study, “Debating Contemporary Internet-Based Religious Discourse in Class,” addresses themes such as apocalypticism, web rhetoric, participatory media, virtual groups, and ritual deliberation. In this paper, I present similar issues of online apocalypticism through my own personal experience teaching and discussing topics of applied



rhetoric with students. As a lecturer in rhetoric and communication studies, I am curious as to how radical religious groups and online forums utilize social media, and so I engaged my students in debates regarding the uses and misuses of new means of interpersonal argumentation and participatory media.

With the emergence of the Internet, new forms of communication and social interaction have appeared in the realm of electronic media. Furthermore, anonymity, along with opportunities offered by new participatory media—as opposed to unidirectional media—have brought about substantial changes in the ways that people communicate with each other. Online group formation induced new modes of exchanging messages. Web-rhetoric and narratives are characterized by peculiar features of “secondary literacy”<sup>10</sup> both as part of computer literacy and as written, on-screen “orality.” Within this global village of hyperspace socializing, the phenomenon of online topical community formation,<sup>11</sup> and especially some examples of “virtual ekklesia,”<sup>12</sup> are primary subjects of the study. Online groups formed around the topic of apocalyptic issues often exploit the subversive nature of both the Internet (due to the lack of a “gatekeeping” function) and apocalyptic discourse.<sup>13</sup> Fundamentalism and fundamentalist discourses suffer no significant changes due to their high adaptability to shifting circumstances, and media “*apocalyptic rhetoric*”<sup>14</sup> contributes to the perpetuation of “*sustainable apocalypticism*.”<sup>15</sup>

Religious fundamentalism is just one movement or field that readily took advantage of new means of communication, while various extremist, apocalypticist, and conspiracist groups formed, in turn, their own dramaturgy of “*ritual deliberation*.”<sup>16</sup> Ritual deliberation is a specific case of web-based religious communication that forms around a given topic—in our case, the apocalypse—and generates an exchange of mutually reinforcing ideas without resolving any problems. In addition to accompanying certain social-psychological phenomena such as conspiracy theories and cultural mistrust, these ritual deliberations characteristic of online apocalyptic groups are very exclusivist (just like religious or ideological fundamentalism) and discourage public deliberation through insulating argumentation.<sup>17</sup> In the article, I also interpret other issues through the presentation of argumentative prob-



lems characteristic of these formations: membership categorization,<sup>18</sup> self-victimization and demonization,<sup>19</sup> spiritual warfare,<sup>20</sup> virtual drama-performance, and “armchair fundamentalism” in online apocalyptic communities.

Finally, in the second main part I briefly outline the results of seminar discussions with students. In general, I observed a sceptical attitude toward religious issues and suspicion about the seriousness or even the existence of such apocalyptic discourse(s). Also, students raised several objections about whether religion could be experienced in virtual space. After some uneasy debating, my presentations of concrete cases have silenced class arguments. In conclusion, I have the impression that the issue is too unfamiliar to spark the interest of my students. The answer as to why this is so will require further investigation and debate.<sup>21</sup>

The third work, “Apocalyptic Demonizing: Dehumanizing Images of the ‘Other’ on the Web”—a presentation I gave at the 2010 annual meeting of the European Association of Biblical Studies—examines issues such as apocalyptic iconography and bestiary, religious studies, social psychology, symbolic anthropology, communication, mass media, and the Internet. The central argument revolves around the pictorial heritage of various ancient apocalyptic traditions and how it survived and adapted to the new iconography of the “sustainable apocalyptic discourse” unfolding on the World Wide Web. The study proceeds from the premise that religious and/or ethnic communities have always perceived otherness as not only “differing from *us*” but also as threatening, especially in times of crisis. Benevolent or malevolent spirits as well as any human worldly forces, such as certain individuals or external hostile groups (whether oppressors or foreign authorities), were often represented symbolically as animals, demons, and monsters. Apocalypses—whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or otherwise—were products of crisis-communities and used monster iconography for encrypted representations of foes: fearful and powerful entities (perceived as agents of the utmost evil) often appeared as terrible monsters, while surrounding infidel communities were depicted using inferior, unclean, repulsive animal imagery. Scorpions, drag-



ons, fish, snakes, birds of prey, swine, canines, lions, or even horses—just like chimerical beasts of the sea, land, and underworld—are only some of the most well-known elements of this apocalyptic bestiary. Otherness, both the unknown and well-known “other,” has been a constant source of anxiety since time immemorial.<sup>22</sup> Stressed, desperate, and frightened religious eschatological communities have always reproduced this imagery with every new medium—the printing press, photography, film, radio, and television offered innumerable technical possibilities for apocalyptic propaganda. Most recently, computer-based media, including PC games, the Internet, and Web 2.0 applications, have provided fertile ground for countless fundamentalist and extremist religious (or secular) groups, enabling them to propagate their apocalyptic visions, deploy the notorious ancient bestiary, or invent newer iconographic elements. My presentation includes a short inventory of the apocalyptic creatures appearing on the Internet and draws comparisons between this modern bestiary and biblical apocalypticism, offering some contrasting semiotic exegesis of this iconography, both diachronically and synchronically.

The fourth and final work in this overview, entitled “Spectacular Apocalypse: Visual Rhetoric of Cyberspace Apocalypticism,” focuses on the iconographic–rhetorical analysis of New Age and Millenarian websites in regard to their doomsday-discourses surrounding the “apocalyptic year” of 2012. In this study, I argue that apocalypticism itself represents an ancient pictorial turn, a “revolution of the eye” already in its archaic Near Eastern, anti-iconic context, and this “visual revolution” has returned once again in the form of recombinant apocalyptic imagery along with the modern pictorial turn<sup>23</sup> of contemporary media. At the same time, while electronic media provided the ultimate technical support for recombinant apocalyptic discourses, the turn of the millennium—and especially the year 2012—provided the temporal-cultural setting for millenarian upheavals. The projected end of the ancient Mayan calendar on December 21, 2012 produced a most interesting phenomenon: it was arguably the first global New Age apocalyptic movement. New Age and Christian, religious and secular, dispensationalist and ecological groups competed with each oth-



er in producing apocalyptic images on their websites, community portals, and in digital documentary films centered on end-of-the-world spirituality. The central question guiding my research revolves around how contemporary digital apocalypticists use the pictorial heritage of various apocalyptic or esoteric traditions and fantastic imagery, while reconfiguring them using state-of-the-art scientific visual devices.

The study investigates apocalyptic imagery in its contemporary, globalized context of re-emerging religiosity, fundamentalism and New Age spirituality, millennial–calendrical anxieties, conspiracy culture and crisis neurosis, boosted by the visual flood of old and new electronic media. In this regard, it examines two types of religious or spiritual environments in virtual space: the more traditional spaces of Christian millennialism and the hyper-eclectic atmosphere of New Age networks, as well as a third, more “neutral” environment of online “civil public discourse” infiltrated by images from the aforementioned domains and from entertainment and reality media. I focus on the common images circulating in these spaces that are sometimes shared and transferred from one environment to the other. To account for the great diversity of fantastic apocalyptic imagery, I propose a typological approach and a comparative iconographic analysis using the following theories and methods: an iconographic description based on Panofsky’s model;<sup>24</sup> an archetypal criticism combining methodologies elaborated by Northrop Frye<sup>25</sup> and Gilbert Durand,<sup>26</sup> and complemented by the mythic-analytic semiotic model elaborated by Kapitány and Kapitány;<sup>27</sup> and finally, Lucian Boia’s patterns of the imaginary.<sup>28</sup> The continuously mutating, recombinant elements<sup>29</sup> found in the targeted virtual spaces form and support sustainable ritual narratives<sup>30</sup> of various apocalyptic myths, affording one the opportunity to interpret them from the perspective of visual rhetoric.

Beyond visual and mythic-analytical investigations of the contemporary online imaginary, the study “Spectacular Apocalypse” makes two more important theoretical contributions: namely, it reveals the paradigmatic nature of the apocalyptic, and the recent, multiple connections between apocalypticism and New Age spirituality. On the one hand, based on parallel studies,<sup>31</sup> I argue in favor of the paradigmatic nature of the apocalyptic—as a distinct kind of mentality or



structure of the imaginary, despite its different manifestations or its labeling by various authors—that may be discovered outside religion even in scientific, materialistic, and/or atheistic worldviews. On the other hand, I stress that apocalypticism can be observed in several new pseudo-religious patterns like urban legends, conspiracy theories, occult racism, science fiction utopianism, UFO-mythologies, parapsychology, and alternative medicine—coalescing into a colorful popular culture sometimes labeled as “New Age Spirituality” that permeates elite, middle, and marginal societies alike.<sup>32</sup> The idea of New Age apocalypticism may appear contradictory at first glance. Not only is New Age generally regarded as a spiritual movement rather than as a distinct religion, but its syncretic construction synthesizes various eastern esoteric traditions, modern western spiritualism, counter-cultural ideologies, as well as contemporary fringe sciences—none of which excels in apocalyptic thinking. Still, as Barkun<sup>33</sup> and Hane-graaff<sup>34</sup> point out, there are multiple connections between apocalypticism and New Age, especially in regard to the coming astrological Age of Aquarius. I hypothesize that we have witnessed a genuine, purely apocalyptic thread produced by New Age spirituality and disseminated—thanks to the Internet and popular culture—across the globe: the so-called Mayan Apocalypse or the 2012 Phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> This phenomenon built on and united mythopoeic elements such as the ending of the thirteenth *b’ak’tun* of the Pre-Columbian Mayan astronomical Long Count Calendar on December 21, 2012,<sup>36</sup> ancient calculations of the Chinese I-Ching, Native American prophecies, calculations of a returning mysterious Planet X or Nibiru of the Sumerian pantheon, a new, higher stage of human cosmic consciousness, as well as visions generated by psychedelic hallucinations.<sup>37</sup> New Age apocalypticism uses both rhetoric and iconography that recall the beliefs of classic Christian millennialists, prophesizing a new era of peace, harmony, and prosperity for humankind—just like the biblical promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth.

As a real, “sustainable discourse,” apocalyptic—with its occasionally extreme forms—presents multiple challenges to mainstream religiosity, secular states, and scholars alike. The four studies surveyed here offer the possibility to gain greater insight into the most recent



developments related to apocalypticism; namely, its adaptation to the exigencies of the digital world and to contemporary spiritualities. The final aim of the research project, of which these investigations are an integral part, is to provide a helpful description and analysis of the pictorial and textual language, structures, and impulses of apocalypticism in virtual realms.

## Selected web-sources

[http://allthingsbeautiful.com/all\\_things\\_beautiful/2006/07/index.html](http://allthingsbeautiful.com/all_things_beautiful/2006/07/index.html)  
<http://elragadtatas.hu/>  
<http://faithandsurvival.com/?p=3257>  
<http://forums.armageddononline.org/religion-f22.html>  
<http://fossilizedcustoms.com/beast.html>  
<http://heavenawaits.wordpress.com/is-the-beast-rome/>  
<http://jewsribsinbearjaw.wordpress.com/>  
<http://lawoftime.org/timeshipearth/articlesbyvv/revelation-prophecies.html>  
<http://lendvaykati.gportal.hu>  
<http://maghar.gportal.hu>  
[http://members.tripod.com/border\\_of\\_mystic/medieval\\_dragons\\_magic/id7.html](http://members.tripod.com/border_of_mystic/medieval_dragons_magic/id7.html)  
<http://mt.net/~watcher/>  
<http://nemzszoc.esmartdesign.com>  
<http://raptureready.com/>  
[http://realitysandwich.com/our\\_forgotten\\_future](http://realitysandwich.com/our_forgotten_future)  
<http://returnofthenephilim.com/ProphecyInTheNews.html>  
<http://thirtysix.org/>  
<http://vsetkyvidea.sk/dajjal/>  
<http://yearsofawe.blogspot.com/2007/10/peres-second-face-of-armilus.html>



## Notes

- 1 Paper presented at the Literary Studies and Social Sciences Section of the First International Conference on Discourse, Culture, and Representation organized at the Department of Humanities, Sapientia University, Miercurea-Ciuc (Csíkszereda), Romania, April 23–24, 2010; then, in a modified version proposed for debate during the workshop of the Summer University (SUN) course on Mesianism—Jewish and Christian Perspectives, organized at Central European University (CEU) Budapest, Hungary, July 5–16, 2010. Published: László Hubbes, “Signs of Times’ – A Semiotic Content Analysis of Visual Apocalyptic Rhetoric on Hungarian Conspiracist Websites,” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae. Philologica* 2, no. 2 (2010): 176–92.
- 2 Paper presented at “Argumentor,” the First Conference on Teaching Argumentation and Rhetoric organized by the Philosophy Institute of the Partium Christian University in Oradea (Nagyvárad), Romania, May 20–22, 2010. Published: László Hubbes, “Debating Contemporary Internet-Based Apocalyptic Discourse in Class,” in *Argumentor: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Teaching Argumentation and Rhetoric*, eds. R. Bakó and G. Horváth (Cluj-Napoca: Transylvanian Museum Society, 2010), 46–59.
- 3 Paper presented at the Bible and the Visual Arts (EABS) Section of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL)—European Association for Biblical Studies (EABS) Joint Meeting in Tartu, Estonia, July 25–29, 2010 (unpublished).
- 4 Paper presented at the Second Global Conference of Inter-Disciplinary.Net: Apocalypse: Imagining the End. Mansfield College, Oxford, July 10–12, 2013 (unpublished).
- 5 See the list of websites at the end of this essay.
- 6 See Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997); Chip Berlet, “Dances with Devils: How Apocalyptic and Millennialist Themes Influence Right Wing Scapegoating and Conspiracism,” *The Public Eye*, Fall 1998, revised April 15, 1999, online, n.p., last accessed February 9, 2016, [http://www.politicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02-/Dances\\_with\\_Devils.pdf](http://www.politicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02-/Dances_with_Devils.pdf); Barry Brummett, *Contemporary Apocalyptic Rhetoric* (New York, Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger Series in Political Communication, 1991); Dino Enrico Cardone, “Programming the Apocalypse: Recombinant Narrative in Cyberspace” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2007), online, n.p., last accessed February 9, 2016, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll127/id/589514>; Stephen D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 7 Similar to Michael Barkun’s concept of “improvisational millennialism” (*A Culture of Conspiracy*, ix) or Enrico Cardone’s “recombinant apocalyptic (narrative)” (in “Programming the Apocalypse”).
- 8 Barkun raises similar arguments for identifying the narratives of his proposed new type of improvisational millennialism (see Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, 11–38).
- 9 Charles B. Strozier and Katharine Boyd, “The Psychology of Apocalypticism,” *The Journal of Psychohistory* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 5.
- 10 Géza Balázs, “Az írásbeliség változásai: A nyelv egyetlen létforma – de több technológia,” [Changes of literacy: Language is one single entity—but several technologies] *Napút* 3 (2007): 101–106.
- 11 Robert Glenn Howard, “Sustainability and Narrative Plasticity in Online Apocalyptic Discourse after September 11, 2001,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 5, no. 1 (March 2006): 25–47.
- 12 Robert Glenn Howard, “An End Times Virtual ‘Ekklesia’: Ritual Deliberation in Participatory Media,” in *The End All Around Us: Apocalyptic Texts and Popular Culture*, eds. John Walliss and Kenneth G.C. Newport (London: Equinox Publishing, 2009), 198–218.
- 13 Cardone, “Programming the Apocalypse,” chaps. 2 and 3.
- 14 O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 7–10.
- 15 Howard, “Sustainability and Narrative Plasticity,” 26.
- 16 Howard, “An End Times,” 200–206.



- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Jonathan Clifton, "A Membership Categorization Analysis of the Waco Siege: Perpetrator-Victim Identity as a Moral Discrepancy Device for 'Doing' Subversion," *Sociological Research Online* 14(5)8 (2009), online, n.p., last accessed: February 9, 2016, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/14/5/8.html>.
- 19 Berlet, *Dances with Devils*, n.p.
- 20 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: Utah State University Press, 2009), 159–74.
- 21 One hypothetical explanation may be proposed in advance: unlike in contemporary public discourse trends abroad, in classical terms, neither religious nor popular millennial-apocalyptic narratives are prevalent in Central-Eastern European—and consequently, in Transylvanian—contemporary culture.
- 22 Cf. Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, 3.
- 23 In this regard, see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Cf. also Gottfried Boehm's related concept of the "iconic turn" in *Was ist ein Bild?*, eds. Gottfried Boehm and Karlheinz Stierle (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1994).
- 24 Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
- 25 Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- 26 Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (Mount Nebo: Boombana Publications, 1999). Original: Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire: introduction à l'archétypologie générale* (Paris: PUF, 1963).
- 27 Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány, eds., "Jelbeszéd az életünk." *A szimbolizáció története és kutatásának módszerei* [Living by symbols—The history of symbolization and research methodologies] (Budapest: Osiris, 1995); Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány, eds., "Rejtjelek 2." *Modern Mitológiák*, ["Cyphers 2." *Modern mythologies*] (Budapest: Osiris, 2002). Available in German: "Wie wir moderne Mythen am Institut für Kulturanthropologie der ELTE Budapest analysieren," in *Myths, Rites, Simulacra, Semiotic Viewpoints I–II*, eds. J. Bernard and G. Withalm, *Angewandte Semiotik*, 18/19 (Wien: Österreichische Gesellschaft für Semiotik, 2001).
- 28 Lucian Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000). Original: Lucian Boia, *Pour une histoire de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Société d'édition les Belles Lettres, 1998).
- 29 Cardone, "Programming the Apocalypse," 230.
- 30 Howard, "An End Times," 200–205.
- 31 László Hubbes, "Apocalyptic as a New Mental Paradigm of the Middle Ages," in *A Companion to the Premodern Apocalypse*, ed. Michael A. Ryan (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 143–75.
- 32 For a detailed vision of the re-emergent religiosity manifested in the entangled connections between apocalypticism, conspiracy theories, UFO fantasies, and New Age Spirituality, see Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, especially chapters 5, 6, and 8.
- 33 Ibid., chapter 1 (pp. 2–13) and passim.
- 34 Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1996), chapter 5.
- 35 For a description of the 2012 Phenomenon, see Robert K. Sittler, "The 2012 Phenomenon: New Age Appropriation of an Ancient Mayan Calendar," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 9, no. 3 (2006): 24–38; further discussion can be found in Sacha Defesche, "The 2012 Phenomenon: An historical and typological approach to a modern apocalyptic mythology" (MA thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2007), online, last accessed: February 15, 2016, [https://www.academia.edu/2307032/The\\_2012\\_Phenomenon\\_a\\_historical\\_and\\_typological\\_approach\\_to\\_a\\_modern\\_apocalyptic\\_mythology](https://www.academia.edu/2307032/The_2012_Phenomenon_a_historical_and_typological_approach_to_a_modern_apocalyptic_mythology).
- 36 This largely popular belief is theorized by authors like José Argüelles in Argüelles, *The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology* (Rochester: Bear & Company, 1984); Terence and Dennis McKenna in McKenna and McKenna, *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching* (New York:



HarperCollins, 1975); Daniel Pinchbeck in Pinchbeck, *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002); also Pinchbeck, 2012: *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* (London: Tarcher/Penguin, 2006); and John Major Jenkins in Jenkins, *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012: The True Meaning of the Maya Calendar End-Date* (Rochester: Bear & Co., 1998).

37 See Sitler, *The 2012 Phenomenon*, passim; and Defesche, "The 2012 Phenomenon," passim.







## Appendix II

# Select Bibliography for the Study of Apocalypticism

### Apocalyptic Texts and their Interpretations: Primary Sources, Translations, Commentaries, Exegesis

*This bibliography, beyond being a comprehensive list of the reference sources for the chapters in this volume aims to offer an up to date selection of essential literature for the study of historical and contemporary apocalypticism, eschatology, messianism, millennialism and related phenomena; arranged in thematic sections.*

1. Adso of Montier-en-Der. "Letter on the Origin and Time of the Antichrist." In *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-En-Der, Joachim of Fiore, The Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*. Translated by Bernard McGinn, 89–96. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1979.
2. Alexander, Paul J. *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress*. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967.
3. Andrew of Caesarea. "On the Apocalypse." In *Andrew of Caesarea and the Apocalypse in the Ancient Church of the East: Studies and Translation* by Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou. Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Laval University, Quebec, 2008. [www.theses.ulaval.ca/2008/25095/25095.pdf](http://www.theses.ulaval.ca/2008/25095/25095.pdf)
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The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country. It is found that the population is increasing rapidly, and that the land is being cultivated more extensively than in former years. The climate is also becoming more settled, and the crops are more abundant. The people are more civilized, and the government is more efficient. The country is becoming more united, and the people are more loyal to the government. The report also mentions the progress of the various branches of industry, and the state of the finances. It is found that the country is making great progress in all respects, and that the future is bright.



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