

PROGRAMME and ABSTRACTS

The Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements Critical and Interdisciplinary Approaches

The CenSAMM Annual Conference 2021
Online: 29 June to 1 July 2021

The annual conference of the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM) will take place online on 29 June to 1 July 2021 with the theme “The Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements: Critical and Interdisciplinary Approaches”.

Day 1

Tuesday 29 June 2021

17.00-17.30	1. Welcome: CenSAMM and CDAMM	James Crossley, Alastair Lockhart
17.30-18.30	2. Plenary discussion A	Kelly Baker, Ipsita Chatterjea

Day 2

Wednesday 30 June 2021

10.00-11.30	3. Meanings and Mediations	Deane Galbraith, Emily Pothast, Peter Webster
11.30-12.30	4. Plenary paper	Paul Middleton
12.30-13.30	BREAK	
13.30-15.30	5. Jehovah's Witnesses panel A	Edward Graham-Hyde, Sarah Harvey, Zoe Knox, Gary Perkins
15.30-16.00	BREAK	
16.00-17.30	6. Politics and Identity	James Crossley, Margaret Cullen, Tommy Lynch

Day 3

Thursday 1 July 2021

13.30-15.00	7. Jehovah's Witnesses panel B	George Chryssides, Donald Jacobs, Hege Kristin Ringnes and Sarah Demmrich
15.00-15.30	BREAK	
15.30-17.00	8. Southcott and Panacea	Matthew Fisher, Alastair Lockhart, Victoria Ward
17.00-17.30	BREAK	
17.30-18.30	9. Plenary discussion B	Lorenzo DiTommaso, Rachel Wagner
18.30-18.45	10. Close	James Crossley, Alastair Lockhart

All times are UK/BST

Registration and Participation

There is no charge for attendance or participation. Attendance is by registration only; see the conference website for information:

<https://censamm.org/conferences/samm-2021>

Joining instructions will be provided to participants shortly before the conference open.

Speakers and Abstracts

Baker, Kelly (Independent scholar): Plenary discussion with Ipsita Chatterjea: 'America, race and culture'. (Session 2: Plenary discussion A.)

Chatterjea, Ipsita (SORAAAD): Plenary discussion with Kelly Baker: 'America, race and culture'. (Session 2: Plenary discussion A.)

Chryssides, George (York St John University): 'Beyond Armageddon: Jehovah's Witnesses' concept of Paradise Earth'. (Session 7: Jehovah's Witnesses panel B.)

To what extent can an earthly paradise be envisaged? Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) offer the prospect of a paradise on earth after Armageddon, in which there will be everlasting life, with ample food and shelter, and without pain, sickness, sorrow, disability or death. However, to what extent is such a situation conceivable, and what are the practical implications of such a prospect? The presentation explores the speculative fiction of E. K. Jonathan, who is a practising Jehovah's Witnesses who has written a series of end-time novels (somewhat akin to those of LaHaye and Jenkins). Jonathan's fiction helps to explain puzzling points of detail, such as how those who are resurrected might find each other amidst a "great crowd" of survivors, how family relationships can extend through centuries of survival, what levels of technology might be expected and be compatible with an ecologically sustainable planet.

The presentation considers the compatibility of Jonathan's speculations with Watch Tower literature and its interpretation of the Bible. Ultimately Jehovah God is believed to determine the nature of the coming earthly paradise, but JWs hold that the Bible – which is their ultimate source of authority – offers a number of clues. It is contended that Jonathan succeeds in resolving some conundrums about life in the "new world". Other aspects of his writing, however, involve extra-biblical speculation, leave important issues unexplained, or even to some degree contradict aspects of Watch Tower literature.

Crossley, James (CenSAMM/St Mary's University Twickenham): 'Antislavery, ethnicity, and apocalypticism in the reception of John Ball'. (Session 6: Politics and Identity.)

This paper will look at how the leading priest of the 1381 English uprising (John Ball), and his idea about an imminent transformation grounded in a mythic past, were taken up as part of challenging dominant claims about racial or ethnic Englishness in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This will also involve looking at how such ideas were used in England but also with reference to how Ball was seen as an especially useful figure for discussion among or with slaves in the American south and to challenge the very concept of slavery in America.

Cullen, Margaret (Ohio Northern University): 'The fire we need: Frederick Douglass' postmillennial spiritual commitments'. (Session 6: Politics and Identity.)

The widely esteemed historical reputation of Frederick Douglass rests largely on his abolitionist achievements that grew by necessity to post-Civil War struggles on behalf of African Americans. Historian William Andrews says that Douglass "rose through the ranks of the antislavery movement in the 1840s and 1850s to become the most electrifying speaker and commanding writer produced by black Americans in the nineteenth century." In this well-accepted context, Douglass' rousing challenges

such as “[i]t is not light that we need, but fire . . .” are often interpreted as expressions of his liberationist political passions.

What is frequently overlooked is that Douglass’ postmillennial spiritual commitments fueled his incandescent and charismatic leadership. As a licensed lay preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal church, Douglass assimilated the postmillennial visions the era, such of those of the famous evangelist Lyman Beecher who claimed that “the way of the Lord” was being prepared by “the march of revolution and civil liberty.” Douglass echoed those types of aspirations often. In a letter to a friend, for example, he asserted that a “settled assurance of faith in God—and the ultimate triumph of Righteousness in the World” motivated him, not sheer human hopes for solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

The fire Douglass invoked is the energy he derived from the postmillennial belief that humanity can, and must, move their own history ever closer to the transcending will of God. This conviction, as historian David Blight points out, formed in Douglass “a set of root values layered throughout his oratory and his writing,” guided by his “spiritual understanding of history.”

Demmrich, Sarah (University of Münster) with Hege Kristin Ringnes (Oslo Metropolitan University): ‘Emotional Forecasting: Emotional Implications of Eschatological Expectations among Jehovah’s Witnesses’. (Session 7: Jehovah’s Witnesses panel B.)

Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs) is a worldwide end-time oriented religious community characterized by a unitary doctrinal context. Our studies applied an *emotion regulation perspective* to outline the most significant emotional implications of eschatological expectations and active membership in this group. An implication is that individual JWs have emotion goals, tied to the religious goal of surviving death and living forever in a paradise on earth where the emotion of *happiness* will predominate. However, within this unitary doctrinal religious group individual members can have personal as well as culturally flavoured emotional goals. We describe examples of individual emotional goals among JWs and explore the group-based emotion regulation strategy of *emotional forecasting* - predicting which emotions would arise in the future to regulate present-day emotions and manage current lives. The prospection of the future is a strong regulator of emotions of the *here and now* and increases positive emotions among JWs. But then JWs do not expect to obtain full happiness in current time. Life challenges, together with struggles connected to the requirements of being an active JW, lead to some negative emotions nowadays.

The presentation outlines how JWs end-time expectations can be termed a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there is often a mismatch between JWs and their social environment, the strong focus on eschatological expectations implies to be out of line with their surroundings and the high focus on the next world can be understood as a religious avoidance strategy. On the other hand, the pre-feeling of paradise is positive for the individual Witness, the strong religious in-group exclusivity can down-regulate negative emotions and belief in eternal life can be a significant part of a positive meaning-making system.

DiTommaso, Lorenzo (Concordia University): Plenary discussion with Rachel Wagner (Ithaca College): ‘Apocalypticism today’. (Session 9: Plenary discussion B.)

Fisher, Matthew (University of Portsmouth): ‘Reverend Robert Hoadley Ashe versus Samuel Lane (separated by eight miles and theological chasm): A search for nuance amongst the theological divide of early nineteenth century Millenarianism and Calvinism’. (Session 8: Southcott and Panacea.)

This presentation will examine Yeovil Calvinistic preacher Samuel Lane’s 1811 pamphlet against Reverend Robert Hoadley Ashe and Joanna Southcott. The primary focus will be to use Lane’s pamphlet to highlight some of the perceived reluctance of, and issues facing historians when evaluating texts of a primarily theological nature. The temptation of historians to elevate the plot of such writings can cause the Biblical and religious aspects to become secondary issues, rather than be evaluated as the author’s primary motivation. As a result, religious arguments dissipate, and theological divisions deemed to have eternal consequences by their writers are reduced to fanciful quirks of times long forgotten. For example, Bevir, (2011) repeatedly oversimplifies and diminishes religious influence in *The Making of British Socialism*.

Crewkerne Curate Ashe’s devotion to Joanna Southcott plays a brief supporting role in works on Millenarianism. This is usually limited to the drama of a burning effigy in Crewkerne, or a lengthy letter written by Ashe after a visit to Southcott (for example Harrison, 1979; Hopkins, 1982; Shaw &

Lockley, 2017). However, Lane's (over one-hundred page) pamphlet enlightens Southcott's popularity and the part played by Ashe in an area of the country littered with "cottages of worship" (Lockley, 2013). Like Southcott, Lane utilises extensive Biblical references and aims to chop down Ashe (Lane, 1811) with Ashe's own church's doctrinal statement found in the *39 Articles*. This pamphlet attacking Ashe and Southcott illustrates the importance of opposing arguments to sharpen and enrich the study of theology and history (as illustrated by Southcott's response to Lane in *An Answer to Thomas Paine's Third Part of the Age of Reason*). Examined as a religious tract with relevance to Biblical, Theological, Cultural and Historical studies this presentation concludes that the study of these texts would benefit from a greater understanding of the contemporary theological landscape of their subject rather than assuming twenty-first century ecumenism.

Galbraith, Deane (University of Otago/Te Whare Wānanga o Ōtākou): 'Christianizing the conspiritual apocalypse, or, how evil atheist scientists in these end times are recreating giants with recovered Nephilim DNA'. (Session 3: Meanings and Mediations.)

In the conspiracist mindset, where everything is connected, it can appear fitting to construct ever more intricate conspiracy theories based on earlier, already complex combinations of conspiracy theory and other forms of stigmatized knowledge. Michael Barkun (2003) has coined the term "improvisational millennialism" for the combination of seemingly incompatible religious, conspiratorial and stigmatized knowledge that is "characterized by relentless and seemingly indiscriminate borrowing". Charlotte Ward and David Voas (2013) term the recent improvisational combinations of 'liberal' New Age spirituality with 'rightist' conspiracy theories as "conspiritual", which as Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal (2015) contend is a combination with far deeper roots in western esotericism. Over the last two decades or so, Nephilim conspiracy theorists might seem to follow this logic in developing their heavily conspiracist apocalyptic schemas. The Nephilim conspiracy theory typically involves atheistic scientists, under the control of the puppet-masters of the ruling cabal, seeking to recover Nephilim DNA in order to bring about key events leading up to the apocalypse. The apocalypse here is imagined broadly within the dispensationalist framework, with the addition of some distinctive features, such as the undermining of human salvation by genetic manipulation from Fallen Angels, creation of the Antichrist from Nephilim DNA, and the raising an army of transhumanist giants to police the coming New World Order. The theory has been popularized by such writers as Steve Quayle, Tom Horn, and L.A. Marzulli, among others. The conviction of the Nephilim conspirators is that, in this process, they are simply rediscovering the deeper meaning from their study of the Bible. The resulting superconspiracy, I argue, absorbs the conspiritualized view of the Apocalypse back into an Evangelical Christian framework, but not without influence from New Age conspiracism.

Graham-Hyde, Edward (University of Central Lancashire): "'Empower me, and I'll follow" – Why adherents join Jehovah's Witnesses and other millenarian religious minorities'. (Session 5: Jehovah's Witnesses panel A.)

The aim of this study is to understand the motivations behind participants initial recruitment and continued involvement with their local Jehovah's Witness church despite the sometimes-vitriolic attention garnered in media and societal imagination. This paper outlines the findings from a small-scale study, in North West England, which employed the use of semi-structured interviews; a methodology that was chosen as it empowers the individual and can often gather a wider depth of information. Four participants took part in the detailed semi-structured interviews. Two of the participants are strongly committed to their local congregation whilst the other two identify as "faded Witnesses". Several themes emerged out of the interviews that shed light on motivations behind initial conversion and continued involvement within their congregations. For the purposes of this paper, these motivations are: empowerment through making sense of the world; duty bound responsibility; a sense of belonging; and persecution and solidifying of faith. The conclusions drawn from these main themes identify that the adherents' journey experienced empowers them to understand the complexities of life through a new lens; providing an answer. Equally, continued persecution not only provides further vehemence in belief but also socially binds the adherent more intimately with the rest of the congregation; the loss of which can be hurtful, destructive and disempowering. Finally, this paper will link to further research being done with other groups and provide a comparison of the adherents' journey of a Jehovah's Witness with a Baha'i and a Modern Pagan; further helping to identify the intricacies of the Jehovah's Witness journey.

Harvey, Sarah (Inform/King's College London): 'Jehovah's Witnesses – enquiries and concerns: An Inform perspective'. (Session 5: Jehovah's Witnesses panel A.)

Inform is an educational charity founded by Professor Eileen Barker in order to reduce misinformation about minority religious groups and to bring academic knowledge into dialogue with policy makers, police and those affected by a variety of minority ideologies and belief systems. Since our founding in 1988, we have built up a unique archive of materials on over 5000 minority religious movements. This includes a wide range of materials: the movements' own literature; newspaper articles; academic books and articles; and information received from enquiries through our telephone line or email service. On our database of movements, 103 have been tagged with the keywords Apocalyptic/Millenarian. Jehovah's Witnesses are one such movement about which we receive a relatively high number of enquiries (211 since 1996).

In this presentation, I will give an overview of the enquiries we have received about JWs, providing some data about the categorisation of enquirer (relative, former member, government body, etc.) and their broad question or concern. I will discuss how themes of apocalypticism/ millennialism have presented in these enquiries, noting in particular how it arises in former member narratives as an enduring concern, something that impacts lives even whilst the belief itself is relinquished. I will make comparisons with former member narratives of other Christian millennial movements, including The Family International, the Twelve Tribes and the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church.

I will also discuss other key themes arising from JW enquiries, most notably the issue of disfellowshipping and child sexual abuse. I will discuss some of the ways in which Inform has engaged with both JWs themselves and former members and other critics, always seeking to collect information from as many sides as possible and speaking to all sides in the debate.

Jacobs, Donald (Independent scholar): "'A long stretch to serve the Lord undivided": 1975 and prophetic speculation as a catalyst for organisational transformation among Jehovah's Witnesses'. (Session 7: Jehovah's Witnesses panel B.)

Jehovah's Witnesses were cautious in their publications about 1975: they never stated that Armageddon would arrive that year. Nevertheless, raised expectations had an enduring impact on the Watchtower organisation. While popular commentary on the disappointment has focussed on whether it constituted false prophecy, scholars have utilised it as a case study to assess Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. The applicability of this model is doubtful because dogmatic certainty was absent, and the disappointment resulted in loss of membership and reduced activity. Focus on 1975 through the lens of sociological models and false prophecy has obscured its significance in reshaping the organisation. The pivotal year in this regard was 1942. Upon the death of Watchtower president Joseph Rutherford, dynamic and effective new leadership emerged in the partnership of Frederick Franz and Nathan Knorr. Watchtower literature now pointed to the 1970s as scripturally signposted. Knorr announced at the 1942 summer convention that World War Two would not culminate in Armageddon, as Rutherford had supposed. Instead the new president declared that a period of peace would ensue, and JWs must prepare for a great preaching campaign. In 1944 The Watchtower exhorted JWs not to be discouraged that, "it is a long stretch to serve the Lord continuous and undivided" until the 1970s. Knorr and Franz grasped this opportunity with enthusiasm. With the prospect of three decades to prepare the "New World Society" of believers for Armageddon, they initiated wide-ranging changes. They set up Watchtower's missionary school, congregational training, new branches worldwide, a vast publishing infrastructure, and translated their own Bible. These innovations aided global expansion up to 1975 and promoted relative stability through the disconfirmation. Expectation surrounding 1975 fostered a transformation of JWs during the 1940s, which left a deeper and more enduring mark than short term enthusiasm surrounding the actual date itself.

Knox, Zoe (University of Leicester): "'Pastor" Charles Taze Russell: Publisher, preacher, prophet'. (Session 5: Jehovah's Witnesses panel A.)

Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) was the founder-leader of the International Bible Student Association (IBSA), known today as Jehovah's Witnesses. Russell's Bible-based prophecies reached millions of Americans, facilitated by the publication of sermons in thousands of newspapers, widespread dissemination of his books and tracts, extensive preaching tours, and high profile debates with leading Protestant clergy. Russell achieved acclaim but also censure in his lifetime. He was involved in a number of high-profile legal disputes, including a libel case brought against the *Brooklyn Eagle*, a conviction for

selling so-called miracle wheat, and a trial centred on his acrimonious divorce. Russell's reach extended worldwide; there were Bible Student branches in numerous countries by the time of his death.

Russell was a household name in his day and yet there has been no serious academic study of this influential religious thinker. This paper will examine what has been written about him and by whom, and consider why his legacy has been overlooked. It will also discuss one of his initiatives, *The Photo-Drama of Creation*, released in 1914. It was a first in motion picture history and brought his unique millenarian theology to an audience of millions worldwide. The paper will argue that we need to write Russell into religious history not only because of his contemporary renown and enduring legacy but also because of his innovative and influential approach to spreading the Christian message.

Lockhart, Alastair (CenSAMM/University of Cambridge): 'Transcendence and place: Psychology and the Panacea Society's garden'. (Session 8: Southcott and Panacea.)

The Panacea Society was established after World War One in Bedford, England. The group followed the teachings of the early-19th century prophet Joanna Southcott, and made a number of spiritual and theological innovations of their own based on inspired theological insight and the mystical experiences of its members. Over time, the Society assembled a large garden in the middle of Bedford by knocking down the walls of the smaller gardens of various houses they owned; this was centred on the home of their leader, Mabel Barltrop (known as Octavia). During the group's heyday in the 1920s and 1930s, the Panacea Society's garden took on a special role in the social and theological life of the community; it started as a pleasant space for social gathering and was eventually understood in terms parallel to an eschatological Garden of Eden. This paper examines the formation of a theology of the garden within the Panacea Society. Referring to research in the psychology of religion and mental health and the social function of gardens, the discussion examines the registers of analogy and literalism in the group's communal experience of the garden, the particular significance of the garden for Octavia, and considers the particular ways in which the garden functioned as a complex social and theological interactive point for the Panacea Society.

Lynch, Tommy (University of Chichester): 'Race, the world and Its end'. (Session 6: Politics and Identity.)

Aimé Césaire once declared that the end of the world was the only thing worth beginning. Later paraphrased by Fanon, this opposition to a racially defined world has been central to a body of literature which elaborates the dimensions of this world and its potential end. In particular Sylvia Wynter and Denise Ferreira da Silva have provided genealogies of 'the world' and 'the global', respectively. These genealogies contain their own apocalypses and apocalypticisms, charting the role of millenarianism in European expansion as well as the destruction of the 'new worlds' Europeans encountered. The implications of these genealogies have been taken up in more recent work by Frank B. Wilderson III and David Marriot. The result is an assemblage of theoretical interventions that confound disciplinary boundaries. History, theology, anthropology, evolutionary science, literature and geography are all brought to bear in explorations of the world and its end.

This paper asks to what extent this literature can be considered apocalyptic. On the one hand, there is a political theological lexicon at play, including notions of world, endings and Manichean antagonism. There is a historical schema at work which, at least at first glance, 'feels' apocalyptic. On the other hand, this is apocalypticism shorn of redemption. While there are resonances of Jewish and Christian forms of apocalypticism, Césaire's and Fanon's legacy cannot be reduced to these or any other theological tropes. I ask whether it is possible to take Césaire's end of the world as an apocalyptic provocation and, if it is, how this might impact conceptions of apocalypticism as a political theological genre.

Middleton, Paul (University of Chester): Plenary paper: 'Empire of the Son: Divine imperialism in the Book of Revelation'. (Session 4: Plenary paper.)

Perkins, Gary (Independent scholar): 'A millenarian, apocalyptic, "pacifist" and sectarian religion and the retelling of American and world history relating to religion and war'. (Session 5: Jehovah's Witnesses panel A.)

Professor Richard H. Gamble suggested that if historians of the Great War search carefully they might find something of considerable value among the religions that opposed the conflict. Indeed, he set up nine criteria by which to measure such, concluding that if a group could be found that matched these criteria "the entire narrative of American religious history, especially of religion and war, would have to be retold."

There are good reasons why historians should look toward the millenarian, apocalyptic, pacifist and consequently sectarian religious groups of the time. Further, Zoe Knox has argued that the stand of one such group, the International Bible Students Association (IBSA), has become obscured because “the Bible Students apocalyptic vision countered the claims of the wartime state to be fighting the good fight to protect the ordinary Americans” and, consequently, the IBSA discourse seemed to align them “with organizations already identified as hostile to America”. Indeed, the IBSA’s apocalyptic premillennialism seems to have been the decisive factor behind their comparative neglect amongst religious historians which seems all the more puzzling since, as Phillip Jenkins has commented, at the time this group was “by far the most visible and nationally active group” among the religious opponents of the Great War.

So what are Gamble’s nine criteria and to what extent did the IBSA, later known as Jehovah’s Witnesses, satisfy them? Is this the time to retell not just “the entire narrative of American religious history”, but also world history relating to religion and war?

Pothast, Emily (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley): ‘Toward a theory of the apocalyptic apparatus’. (Session 3: Meanings and Mediations.)

Apocalyptic literature has been defined as a narrative framework in which an eschatological and otherworldly vision is revealed to a human seer through a mediating figure. (John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 5.) The role of the divine mediator—often an angel in apocalyptic texts—is generally one of revelation and interpretation. (*Angelus* literally means ‘messenger.’) This genre convention gives rise to a tripartite semiotic model in which something is seen by a seer, and that something is inherently mediated. When we encounter apocalyptic texts as readers, we enter into a recursive engagement with this structure—we assume the role of the seer, and the text becomes our mediator.

Drawing on textual examples from Revelation, Daniel, and 1 Enoch, Jean Baudry’s theory of the cinematographic apparatus, and contemporary trauma-informed approaches to media studies, this paper and visual presentation seek to articulate the structure of an *apocalyptic apparatus*: the framework inscribed by the tripartite model of seer, mediator, and that which is seen. The recurring theme of inscription within apocalyptic narratives—for example, the voice’s instruction to John to “write in a book what you see” (Rev. 1:11) —suggests an active, lucid seer, productively engaged with the vision, as opposed to a passive absorber of content. The apocalyptic apparatus therefore posits a constructive, collaborative relationship between seer and revelation. This relationship is crucial to its utility as a form of resistance literature, constituting an alternative to the hegemonic “mainstream media” of empire. By establishing a creative, dynamic relationship with a revelatory authority higher than the prevailing authority of a given era, the apocalyptic apparatus presents its scribe/seer with an opportunity to reframe reality, and even write visionary new realities into existence.

Ringnes, Hege Kristin (Oslo Metropolitan University) with Sarah Demmrich (University of Münster): ‘Emotional forecasting: Emotional implications of eschatological expectations among Jehovah’s Witnesses’. (Session 7: Jehovah’s Witnesses panel B.)

Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs) is a worldwide end-time oriented religious community characterized by a unitary doctrinal context. Our studies applied an *emotion regulation perspective* to outline the most significant emotional implications of eschatological expectations and active membership in this group. An implication is that individual JWs have emotion goals, tied to the religious goal of surviving death and living forever in a paradise on earth where the emotion of *happiness* will predominate. However, within this unitary doctrinal religious group individual members can have personal as well as culturally flavoured emotional goals. We describe examples of individual emotional goals among JWs and explore the group-based emotion regulation strategy of *emotional forecasting* - predicting which emotions would arise in the future to regulate present-day emotions and manage current lives. The prospection of the future is a strong regulator of emotions of the *here and now* and increases positive emotions among JWs. But then JWs do not expect to obtain full happiness in current time. Life challenges, together with struggles connected to the requirements of being an active JW, lead to some negative emotions nowadays.

The presentation outlines how JWs end-time expectations can be termed a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there is often a mismatch between JWs and their social environment, the strong focus on eschatological expectations implies to be out of line with their surroundings and the high focus on the next world can be understood as a religious avoidance strategy. On the other hand, the pre-feeling of paradise is positive for the individual Witness, the strong religious in-group exclusivity

can down-regulate negative emotions and belief in eternal life can be a significant part of a positive meaning-making system.

Wagner, Rachel (Ithaca College): Plenary discussion with Lorenzo DiTommaso (Concordia University): 'Apocalypticism today'. (Session 9: Plenary discussion B.)

Ward, Victoria (University of Glasgow): 'The spiritualizing of the material and the materializing of the spiritual: The textile history of the Panacea Society'. (Session 8: Southcott and Panacea.)

Between 1919 and 2012, the small English town of Bedford was home to a secretive religious group called the Panacea Society. What began as a network of correspondence between adherents of the Devonshire prophetess Joanna Southcott (1750-1814), swiftly evolved into a hermetic community with its own heterodox doctrine. Their theology built upon Southcott's millenarian prophecies, which claimed a central role for women in the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. Furthermore, the Panaceans also believed that their founder, Mabel Barltrop (1866-1934), was the daughter of God, able to receive divine communications and heal people. The society's largely female, middle-class, middle-aged Anglican members were, in many ways, thoroughly conservative. Yet, they built a community upon a distinctly unconventional interpretation of the scriptures, which subverted woman's traditional role both within the Church of England and the home. The Panacea Society has been subject to academic study by theologians who have referred primarily to their archive of letters, manuscripts and publications. This paper seeks to demonstrate that broadening the study to include key textile items from the Panacea Museum's archive and applying a material culture methodology such as object analysis to these artefacts offers additional, meaningful insight into the Society's doctrine. Historically, textiles have formed an integral part of the feminine domestic sphere. Consequently, much feminist scholarship has chosen to focus on needlework because of its potential to uncover previously undocumented areas of women's history. In this respect, both domestic, everyday textiles and the act of needlework will be shown to be of particular relevance to the Society's practice and their 'domestic' theology. This paper will examine how the aesthetic, practical and sacred characteristics of textiles lent themselves to the Panaceans' doctrine and thereby enabled the Society to use a traditionally female medium such as needlework to convey its unorthodox message.

Webster, Peter (Independent scholar): 'A new method of studying British prophetic movements online: Patterns in the archived Web, 1996-2008'. (Session 3: Meanings and Mediations.)

Historians of mainstream evangelicalism have a hard time with prophecy. Whilst the interpretation by lay Christians of 'the signs of the times' is (to one way of thinking) nothing less than a gospel imperative, few have been the mainstream evangelical leaders and organisations who have embraced the practice with much enthusiasm. As such, until the advent of the Web in the 1990s, historians intent on tracking the patterns of such handling of current politics were limited by the patchy survival of documentary sources, and the dependence of British enthusiasts on materials from the United States. One of the founding myths of the Web, however, was its ability to bring to the fore voices that had been excluded from the mainstream media, and to enable the instantaneous communication between individuals and groups who hitherto had searched the Scriptures in isolation.

The last decade, however, has seen the emergence of archives of the early Web, and with them a worldwide methodological community in which the implications of this new historical source are being worked out. This paper brings this methodological development into dialogue with the history of contemporary evangelicalism. It examines in particular the network of links between sites in the British web, employing a combination of close reading of individual sites and 'distant reading' of the network as a whole. It asks: to what extent were sites devoted to the interpretation of prophecy integrated with the wider evangelical web sphere? Which were the churches, parachurch organisations and individuals which provided their users with links to prophecy sites? It also investigates the extent to which British prophetic enthusiasts bypassed sites provided by others in the UK, and continued to draw their resources directly from the USA.