

# **The Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements: Critical and Interdisciplinary Approaches**

**7-8 July 2022**

The Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements

ONLINE

## **CONFERENCE PROGRAMME**

All times are UK local time (presently British Summer Time, GMT+1)

### **Thursday 7 July**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>11.45-12.00</b> | <b>Conference Open</b>   |
| <b>12.00-13.00</b> | <b>Technology and Techne - 1</b>   |
| Emily Pothast      | Apocalypse and Early Print Capitalism in Germany   |
| Michelle Bentley   | “When we are as strong as men”: Literature and the Apocalyptic Threat of Chemical Warfare                          |
| <b>14.00-15.30</b> | <b>Jehovah’s Witnesses - 1</b>   |
| Jolene Chu         | The Role of Millennial Thought in Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Nonviolent Resistance to Nazism                             |
| Gary Perkins       | “A greater danger than a division of the German Army”: Bible Students and Opposition to war in World War I America |
| George Chryssides  | Successful prophecy? Jehovah’s Witnesses and the War in Ukraine  |
| <b>16.00-17.00</b> | <b>Modern Biblical Visions - 1</b>   |
| Margaret Cullen    | A Bold Prophet: Zilpha Elaw’s American Christian Millennialism in Britain  |
| Alastair Lockhart  | A Millenarian Theology of Englishness in Interwar Britain  |

### **Friday 8 July**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>10.00-11.30</b> | <b>Jehovah’s Witnesses - 2</b>   |
| Joseph Webster     | Imagining Paradise Ahead: Scriptural Reasoning and Circumspect Speculation among Jehovah’s Witnesses |

Justin Lee Haruyama History Written in Advance: Christian Prophecy, Chinese-Zambian Relations, and Diffracted Modernity

Donald Jacobs An Uncanny Encounter: Comparing Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians

**12.00-13.00**

**Technology and Techne - 2**

Robert Drury King Surveilling The Apocalypse: The Entropy of Human Behavioral Prediction Products and The Systemic Costs of Their Capture

Inna Sukhenko Hope Narrative in Communicating a Nuclear Disaster: from Survival towards Energy Literacy

**14.00-15.00**

**Modern Biblical Visions - 2**

Jesper Høgenhaven A Post-Apocalyptic Landscape in the Copper Scroll from the Dead Sea

James Crossley The English Historical Jesus from Below after the French Revolution

**15.00-15.15**

**Conference Close**

## **SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS**

**Bentley, Michelle: Royal Holloway, University of London**

### **“When we are as strong as men”: Literature and the Apocalyptic Threat of Chemical Warfare**

This paper re-analyses gendered International Relations (IR) perspectives on the apocalyptic threat of chemical warfare through the interdisciplinary lens of Greek myth. Within IR, apocalyptic and millenarian movements are considered to be attracted to chemical warfare – for example, the Tokyo sarin attack by Aum Shinrikyo – as a means of deliberately creating mass destruction. In deconstructing this chemical threat, analysis frequently associates the issue with a wider connection between women and poison. Women have been seen to use poison as a power equalizer and as an expression of disproportionate harm, where this view then underpins arguments as to why certain movements wish to cause apocalyptic effect and will employ chemical aggression to do so. Yet the connection between women and poison, and subsequently apocalyptic chemical warfare, has not been fully explored. This paper seeks to extend that exploration, specifically by adopting an interdisciplinary approach combining political analysis with literary studies; in particular, the tale of Medea. While Medea is best known for killing her sons in revenge for her husband’s marital betrayal, she is also an expert poisoner and witch. As such, Medea provides an ideal example for identifying the gendered ideas/tropes that have developed around chemical warfare and what these tell us about unconventional movements that wish to employ chemical arms on a mass scale. The paper examines the reasons why females are associated with poison and the associated power relationships/assumptions (e.g. that women occupy a position of low/no power and so resort to such unconventional means as a consequence) – an analysis which is then applied to unconventional actors linked to apocalyptic violence. The paper will also consider the implications of adopting an interdisciplinary approach and what it means to bring together such different approaches in respect of apocalyptic ideology and behaviour.

**Chryssides, George: York St John University**

### **Successful prophecy? Jehovah’s Witnesses and the War in Ukraine**

Jehovah’s Witnesses have acquired a reputation for making prophecies that have failed. In this presentation, it is argued that such accusations are unfair: on the contrary, they have foregone plausible opportunities to claim success. The prophet Daniel mentions two conflicting kings – the King of the North and the King of the South (Daniel 11: 5-13). Even before the Russian attack on Ukraine, the Watch Tower Society identified the King of the North with Russia, who is predicted to wage a large-scale war. Although such a prediction could be used as examples of successful predictive prophecy, Jehovah’s Witnesses continue to regard such events as signs that we are living

in the earth's last days, rather than as predictions of specific world events. The presentation explores the reasons for identifying Russia as the King of the North, and the Anglo-American Alliance as the King of the South. The conflict cannot be equated with Armageddon, since there are reasons for perceiving Armageddon as a spiritual rather than a physical conflict. Because of their anti-war stance, Jehovah's Witnesses support neither Ukraine nor Russia, but deplore the way in which both national churches have taken sides. The Ukraine-Russia conflict is not one between good and evil, but is evidence of a world that is ruled by Satan, who will finally be defeated by Christ and angels in the coming supernatural battle of Armageddon, which they believe to be imminent.

### **Chu, Jolene: Jehovah's Witnesses World Headquarters**

#### **The Role of Millennial Thought in Jehovah's Witnesses' Nonviolent Resistance to Nazism**

Before and during World War I in the US, progressive Christian leaders heavily criticized premillennialism, not only as theological heresy, but also as inimical to the war effort. The "premillennial menace," as Shirley Jackson Case framed it, induced passivity through its pessimism in human efforts to improve the world, playing straight into the hands of the Teutonic enemy. Among the offending groups, he singled out the International Bible Students, later called Jehovah's Witnesses. Some 25 years later, the Nazi State banned the apolitical but far from passive Witnesses, who went on to earn the distinction as being the foremost religious resisters to Nazism. This presentation will consider how the distinctive millennialist beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses informed their response to the totalitarian demands of the Nazi regime. For instance: (1) They viewed God's Kingdom as a literal government to which Christians owe allegiance; hence, they maintained political neutrality and refused to swear loyalty to or fight for human governments. (2) They viewed all peoples, regardless of origin, as eligible for life under Kingdom rule; hence, they rejected the Nazi racial ideologies of *Übermenschen* and *Untermenschen*. (3) They held that the present period of the "last days" would soon give way to the perfect governance of God's Kingdom over the earth; hence, they waited on God to end injustice. (4) They hoped for a literal resurrection during Kingdom rule, which prospect mitigated the cost of martyrdom. Based on a review of first-person sources, such as correspondence, court testimony, government documents, eyewitness testimony, and autobiographical accounts, I will argue that Witnesses consciously oriented their response to Nazi coercion around these millennialist beliefs.

### **Crossley, James: Censamm and MF Oslo**

#### **The English Historical Jesus from Below after the French Revolution**

This paper will look at the overlooked quest for the historical Jesus taking place in English radical circles after the French Revolution and until the mid-nineteenth century. It will look not only at the influential Thomas Paine but a range of material from figures in the emerging working-class

movement (alongside or in tension with middle-class radicalism), rarely (if ever) acknowledged in the scholarly histories of the quest for the historical Jesus. It will be shown that, while there was an overarching concern for the “human Jesus” as a challenge the dominant Jesus(es) of the religious and political establishments, this was also a quest that looked at ideas of historical reconstruction of Jesus behind the sources, in a analogous way to what was being discussed in Germanic contexts. It will further be shown that this quest was also about an “apocalyptic” Jesus—if by that label we include ideas about radical transformation of the social, political, and religious order—whose ideas were paralleled with other world-transforming figures, such as Moses to Alfred the Great.

**Cullen, Margaret: Ohio Northern University**

#### **A Bold Prophet: Zilpha Elaw’s American Christian Millennialism in Britain**

One of the most bold prophets of American Christian Millennialism was Zilpha Elaw (1790 to 1873), an African American free woman preacher who absorbed the millennial ethos of the nineteenth-century revivals and attempted to export them to Britain in 1840. As historian Nathan O. Hatch has documented, “those without formal education or high social status,” such as Elaw, embraced “liberty and equality” as part of radical social vision during the early phases of the Second Great Awakening. Christian populist leaders such as Elias Smith anticipated a millennial transformation that would end all hierarchal established power. His fellow revivalist, Thomas Campbell, exalted in “convulsions and revolutions . . . that are dashing the nations like a potter’s vessel.” All three, along with many others, believed that the American experiments in freedom after the revolution was a manifestation of God’s kingdom on earth. Historian David Hempton points out that the foundation of spiritual formation in this era occurred in a “a radically egalitarian republican context.” Along the same lines, scholar Catherine Brekus notes that women preachers such as Elaw were steeped in a “democratization of American Christianity” and often felt “intoxicated with the . . . [accompanying] rhetoric.” Buoyed by millennial fervor, and summoned by divine command to reform Britain, Elaw challenged British authorities, including prominent abolitionists, in public and private meetings. She castigated them for their “whited exterior, the artificial surface.” She categorized the nation’s church culture as morally compromised with the prophetic zeal she had cultivated in America. She insisted that British Christians “too often flow in a deep and mighty undercurrent; no principles are more vicious, no practices more immoral and debasing than covetousness and worldly pride.” Secure in American millennial fervor, Elaw boldly embraced her prophetic role.

**Haruyama, Justin Lee: University of California, Davis**

#### **History Written in Advance: Christian Prophecy, Chinese-Zambian Relations, and Diffracted Modernity**

Over the last decade, Mandarin-language Jehovah's Witness congregations have proliferated across Zambia. These congregations are almost exclusively composed of local Zambians who have learned Mandarin as a second language, but count few to no ethnic Chinese congregants. Though they find little success in converting Chinese migrants, these Witnesses transgress common Zambian social norms by befriending Chinese migrants, eating Chinese food, and expressing appreciation for Chinese culture. Explaining their actions, Witnesses invoke and elide history in ways that erase national and racialized differences between themselves and Chinese migrants. They instead act upon a temporal horizon in which Biblical truths must be quickly spread before the rapidly approaching dissolution of the current system of things. In doing so, they enact a diffracted modernity that appropriates modernity's totalizing tropes while challenging the secular liberalism of the nation-state, as they anticipate the world entering its final years before Jehovah God vanquishes all human-governed polities.

**Høgenhaven, Jesper: University of Copenhagen**

### **A Post-Apocalyptic Landscape in the Copper Scroll from the Dead Sea**

The Copper Scroll found in 1952 at Qumran is one of the most "mysterious" scrolls from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The mysterious features of the manuscript are due to its materiality (copper rather than parchment or papyrus) and its contents (a journey of hidden treasures). The scroll (dated to the 1st century CE) presents its readers with several enigmatic challenges and still unanswered questions. Scholarly debates on the scroll have been dominated by the question of fact or fiction regarding the treasures. The text registers locations of hidden valuables, providing instructions to retrieve the treasure from their hiding-places. There is no narrative framework or introduction. The Copper Scroll, however, is more than a catalogue. The anonymous instructing "voice" directs the addressee to undertake a journey from place to place, and there seems to be a symbolic significance associated with the sequence of place-names, many of which resonate with biblical traditions. Remarkably, the world of the Copper Scroll is devoid of humans. Apart from the instructing voice and the implicit addressee, there is no contemporary human presence in the text. The landscape is one of ruins and mounds, abandoned buildings, aqueducts fallen out of use, tombs, and subterranean caves and structures. These monuments and landmarks and all the treasures hidden in or beneath them are remnants of earlier eras' glory and achievements. In the present they situate the reader within a deserted and troubled land. Previous research has sometimes connected the Copper Scroll to apocalyptic writings. In this paper, I shall attempt to read the landscape of the scroll in the light of "post-apocalyptic" images and sceneries, drawing on recent studies in post-apocalyptic fiction (literature, films, TV series). Such an interdisciplinary perspective will shed new light on the literary character and meaning of this ancient text.

**Jacobs, Donald: Independent scholar**

**An Uncanny Encounter: Comparing Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians**

The religious communities of Christadelphians and Jehovah's Witnesses are sufficiently alike that an exploration of their differences can offer fruitful analyses of the historical, organisational and theological characteristics of the respective groups. Both originate in nineteenth-century North America and claim to restore the belief and practice of the early Christians. They are politically neutral, being conscientious objectors during wartime; are non-Trinitarian; reject the immortality of the soul doctrine; actively preach the hope of a restored earth under God's Kingdom; disfellowship members for breaking biblical commandments; and live in close-knit communities that value their global brotherhood. The ambience and resemblance of the two groups can induce a sensation of the uncanny, when encountering one group from the perspective of familiarity with the other. A key theological difference that distinguishes Christadelphians is their denial of the existence of a personal devil or other fallen angels. However, on closer inspection, even some of the striking similarities between the two groups break down. Both groups are non-Trinitarian, but have very different Christologies. Both groups abstain from voting, but give different reasons for their stance; and whereas Christadelphians are Zionist supporters of Israel, Jehovah's Witnesses abandoned application of Bible prophecy to modern-day Israel in the 1930s. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that 144,000 believers will be resurrected to life in heaven, whereas Christadelphians teach that all believers will live on a restored earth with Jesus in the Kingdom. During the twentieth century, Jehovah's Witnesses moved away from independent and autonomous congregations to a highly centralised organisational structure, while ecclesial independence remains a defining characteristic of Christadelphian life. Watchtower restructuring coincided with worldwide expansion in the post-war era, compared with stagnant growth, and decline among Christadelphians, in Britain in particular. Varied end-time expectations among Christadelphians arise from private study and the publications of individual members, whereas interpretations of end-time prophecies among Jehovah's Witnesses are formulated and promulgated through official channels.

**King, Robert Drury: Saint Leo University USA and Free University Brussels**

**Surveilling The Apocalypse: The Entropy of Human Behavioral Prediction Products and The Systemic Costs of Their Capture**

Capital contains mechanisms that cause it to 'overdevelop' and which require it to produce and dump immense, high-input quantities of disorder into its environments: high-input quantities (hydrocarbons, e-waste) that increase the entropy in the system. In the systems-theoretic analysis I use, the viability of any political movement can be gauged according to the ways in which precise forms of entropic "capture and dumping" are conducted, governed, and reproduced. In the contemporary apocalyptic phase of capitalism, capital itself pursues the cheapest possible "natures"

it can, effectively searching out the future trajectories of its behavior. The point is to capture flows of matter, energy, and information to be converted into surpluses of capital, some of which are taken up by anti-systemic political movements, and indeed the great variety of our current millenarian movements. The apocalypse asks, what is to come? Glimpse the nefarious object of a children's play doll—"Cayla." Outfitted with a blue tooth app, a microphone, and voice recognition technology, Cayla already signals the capture of a nature even cheaper than the biomasses that might replace hydrocarbons: our behavior itself. And this nature, termed our "human nature," is the new cheap nature sought by the accumulation regime of surveillance capitalism. In the contemporary apocalypse, our behavior seems to come from somewhere internal, a cognitive source providing spontaneous surpluses of data, free for the mining. We offer surplus behavior in our most passive, generous states of labor (from infancy to adult—analysis of a quantity of labor is here useless). There is no greater current threat to democratic political movements than that presented by surveillance capitalists like Google and Facebook as they defy any notion of democratic standard by practices of "surveilling, extracting and selling off to the highest bidder," using algorithms that generate "prediction products." The long-trend goal is to predict and modify our future behaviors, creating continual streams of capital for advertisers and players on "behavioral futures" markets. Of course, contemporary political movements are also taken up in these dynamics of social reproduction. The goal under the regime of surveillance capitalism is to capture such flows of future behavior, code this data as surpluses to be bought and sold, and to harvest this future behavior into "cost-free" feedback for the accumulation regime. Recently scholars have analyzed this emerging history and the logic of these new capital dynamics, but as yet little has been said about the thermo-entropic costs of this new mode of capital accumulation. We seem to give our behavior away, freely, up for surveillance capitalists, but the actual matter, energy, and information involved in the exchange has patent costs. My paper asks, what material supports must regardless be deployed for the capture of our behavior? What are the costs? How much matter, energy, and information (thermo-entropically) actually go into mining our behavior in a world defined by the apocalyptic encroachment of the periphery upon the core, of the environment upon the system?

**Lockhart, Alastair: Censamm and University of Cambridge**

**A Millenarian Theology of Englishness in Interwar Britain**

The Panacea Society was a small religious group with a millenarian vision inspired by the idea of a female divine. The group was established in England in the aftermath of the First World War. Over time, they developed a complex theology building on the ideas of Joanna Southcott and a number of Southcottian successor prophets – although their principal reference points were divine communications received by the group's leaders, Mabel Barltrop (known as "Octavia") who was understood to receive direct communications from God, and Emily Goodwin who was recognized by



the membership as channelling the voice of the female divinity. The group was connected to the breadth of religious and spiritual innovation occurring in the interwar period in Britain, and members were aware of or had been actively involved in Christian Science, Theosophy, Spiritualism and a host of other movements – including British Israelism. Developing previous work on the Panacea Society's connection to wider movements, this paper explores the group's theology of Englishness which can be understood as a variant of British Israelism inflected by their understanding of the divine as female as well as male, their mistrust of the Church of England, and their distinctive form of mixed philosemitism.

**Perkins, Gary: Independent scholar**

**“A greater danger than a division of the German Army”: Bible Students and Opposition to war in World War I America**

In 2019 historian Zoe Knox wrote a superb article for Peace and Change magazine with the above title and commented that “The voices of ordinary Bible Students who suffered as a consequence of their antiwar convictions ... need to be uncovered.” For the last five years researcher Gary Perkins has been uncovering these voices and now discusses the questions: (1) How are their voices becoming un-muted and what did these millennialists say? (2) What positions did ordinary Bible Students face after America joined the war? (3) Why were the Bible Students considered “A greater danger than a division of the German Army' in World War I America?” (4) How are these voices related to important civil rights cases in the United States involving children in the late 1930s and early 1940s? (5) Who cares? Why should it matter to ordinary people living in the Western World over 100 years later?

**Pothast, Emily: Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley**

**Apocalypse and Early Print Capitalism in Germany**

Beginning in the mid 15th century, the introduction of the printing press in Germany transformed the way information was codified, stored, and transmitted. Many popular narratives surrounding this innovation herald the early printing press as a democratizer of information with the power to destabilize powerful institutions. However early print shops were thoroughly profit-driven enterprises, creating output aimed at cultivating new markets for printed books—a fact which is crucial for understanding the specific ways in which this technological transformation played out in the years prior to and during the Reformation. This richly illustrated slide presentation examines the key role that printed illustrations of the Book of Revelation played in the early decades of what Benedict Anderson has termed “print capitalism.” It argues that such images, printed both alongside and independent of texts, were instrumental in the establishment of a German Christian “imagined community” which would ultimately serve the needs of an increasingly powerful and wealthy

merchant class. Expanding on the medieval tradition of illustrating Revelation as a series of sequentially unfolding images, Apocalypse blockbooks made such images widely accessible to vernacular audiences, while publishers devoted extra pages to Revelation's visionary violence in order to make their illustrated Bibles more enticing. The popularity of these image cycles made it possible for artists to insert details that would create a visual association between the evils described in the text and contemporary groups believed to be their political, economic, and religious rivals. This practice helped encourage the rise of adjacent phenomena such as the Antichrist legend, blood libels, the deeply felt fear of Ottoman invasion, and the witch-hunting trend, before finally being instrumentalised by propagandists on both sides of the Reformation.

**Sukhenko, Inna: University of Helsinki**

### **Hope Narrative in Communicating a Nuclear Disaster: from Survival towards Energy Literacy**

The literary and cultural parameters of profiling 'hope narrative' in reconsidering (post-)apocalyptic energetic scenarios in nuclear energy storytelling, regarded as a component of 'world energy literature' (Szeman, 2018), are under study in the aspect of researching the narrative tools of communicating a nuclear disaster from the perspective of 'slow hope' narrative (Mauch, 2018), emphasizing a trauma as a starting point for hope and energy awareness, within 'literary energy narrative' frames (Goodbody, 2018). Such perspective allows distinguishing socio-cultural dimensions of 'hope narrative' in the context of intermedial ecocritical perspective (Bruhn, 2020) with its emphasis on transforming scientific knowledge in 'energy storytelling' in U.S. and Eastern European fictional writing practices, regarded within narrating (post-)apocalyptic energetic scenarios under the contemporary energy humanities' agenda as a response of the society to the current debates on energetic crisis' challenges in the perspective of critical thinking of energetic history and future energetic scenarios. The focus is made on studying the literary dimensions of 'hope narrative' in fictionalizing a nuclear disaster in nuclear fictional writings on the Chernobyl disaster, such as Frederik Pohl's Chernobyl (1987), Andrea White's Radiant Girl and James Reich's Bombshell (2013), which allows revealing the transformations of narrating a nuclear disaster with a reference to 'slow hope' and 'survival' within profiling 'nuke' experienced communities. My presentation highlights these aspects: 1) the 'hope narrative' frames of communicating a nuclear disaster within the (post)apocalyptic imaginary paradigm can not only reveal new ideas, images, concept, related to energy production technology and infrastructure, energy policy and energy transitions towards the energetic future, but also develop the narrative toolkit of framing 'change narrative' with the focus on energy literacy; 2) the emphasis on literary dimensions of 'hope narrative' as a tool of reconsidering historical nuclear events helps to investigate the critical thinking components of (post-)apocalyptic experiences in the aspect of researching the distinguished features of (nuclear) energy storytelling, stemmed from the narrativization of '(post)apocalyptic experiences'. Such perspective

of fictionalizing a nuclear disaster (the Chernobyl nuclear disaster – in our case) from the perspective of situating ‘hope narrative’ helps to frame the critical perception of nuclear energy related issues in the aspect of transmitting scientific (nuclear) energy knowledge through fictional writings to the public.

**Webster, Joseph: University of Cambridge**

**Imagining Paradise Ahead: Scriptural Reasoning and Circumspect Speculation among Jehovah’s Witnesses**

Based on new ethnographic fieldwork among Jehovah’s Witnesses in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, this paper examines how Witnesses imagine the soon arrival of the eschaton. As Witnesses live and preach during the present ‘last days of this wicked system of things’, the nearness of Armageddon inspires hopeful acts of ‘imagining a paradise home ahead’. In this future, the millennium is a busy period of mass bodily resurrection, deep spiritual reeducation, and total environmental renewal, culminating in the final destruction of Satan and the establishment of a New World. But what will life in the millennium and into Paradise be like? Who will receive resurrection? Will everyone be youthful? Will children be born in the New World? How will the planet heal following the environmental horrors of Armageddon? Because no death exists in the New World, will everyone be vegetarian? By considering how such questions are pondered by Witnesses, this paper aims to show what happens when ultra-rational scriptural reasoning reaches its limit, and then pivots to allow continued pondering via what I term ‘circumspect speculation’. Far from being what Witnesses would call ‘foolish and ignorant debates’, circumspect speculation can instead be understood as a careful extension of ‘reasoning from the scriptures’ via tentative Biblical inference. Always offered with the warning that ‘we can’t know for sure’, circumspect speculation allows Witnesses a hermeneutically guarded way to extend hopeful imaginings of life in the future about which neither the Bible nor Watchtower literature offers definitive statements, while still remaining tethered to both.