

Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World,
1500–2000

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RAPTURE FICTION AND THE EVANGELICAL CRISIS

WRITING THE RAPTURE: PROPHECY FICTION IN EVANGELICAL AMERICA

Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000

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For Martin Grubb

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Revelation 20:1–10

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Preface

I have accumulated many debts in the years in which I have been researching and writing this book. Like its companion volume, *Writing the rapture: Prophecy fiction in evangelical America* (2009), and an earlier project, *God's Irishmen: Theological debates in Cromwellian Ireland* (2007), this book had its genesis during my postdoctoral fellowship in the Centre for Irish–Scottish Studies, Trinity College Dublin; it developed during my period of employment in English and American Studies at the University of Manchester; and it was completed after my return to Trinity and my subsequent and concurrent appointment as adjunct professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary. Throughout these years, my colleagues in each of these institutions have been a constant support and resource. In particular, I would like to thank Robert Armstrong, Terence Brown, Jeremy Gregory, Darryl Jones, Jeff Jue, Peter Knight, Graeme Murdock, Andrew Pierce, Amanda Piesse, Murray Pittock, Alan Rawes, Scott Spurlock, Mark Sweetnam, Carl Trueman and Brian Ward for many stimulating conversations on eschatological and related themes; Murray Pittock, David Alderson, Jane Ohlmeyer, Roger Stalley, Stephen Matterson and Darryl Jones for being ever supportive heads of school; Ian Campbell Ross and David Dickson, past and present directors of the Centre for Irish–Scottish Studies, for permitting and facilitating the development of the Trinity Millennialism Project; and the many colleagues and friends who have attended and participated in the Project's conferences. Among the latter, I have found the conversation of a series of graduate students of particular help: Jennie Chapman, Joe Purcell, Josh Searle, Katie Sturm, Jennifer Trieu and Sarah Wareham deserve special appreciation. My research has also been assisted by a wider circle of colleagues whose discussions have stimulated new ideas and new ways of approaching old ideas: their number includes Kenneth Newport and John Wallis of the Centre for Millennialism Studies at Liverpool Hope University, as well as Nigel Agnew, Michael Bath, David Bebbington, Ian Hugh Clary, John Coffey, James Davison, Amy Frykholm, Kenneth Gentry, Jerome de Groot, John Grier, Gary Harrison, Michael Haykin, Andrew Holmes, Barry Horner, Thomas Ice, Mark Jones, Richard Landes, David McKay, Patrick Mitchel, James Renihan, Mike Renihan, David Shedden, Nigel Smith, Kenneth Stewart and Arthur Williamson. I would also like to thank

John Gillespie, Doug Shantz, Michael Haykin, Nicholas Allen, Murray Pittock, Anthony Cross, John Briggs, Paul Muldoon and Nigel Smith for invitations to explore some of the themes of this book in lectures at the University of Ulster (2005), the University of Calgary (2006), Toronto Baptist Seminary (2006), NUI Galway (2008), the University of Glasgow (2009), Regent's Park College, Oxford (2009), and Princeton University (2010), and to thank Sheridan Gilley for the invitation to address the conference of the Ecclesiastical History Society (2010). My colleagues and friends in the Brethren Archivists and Historians Network, especially Neil Dickson, Timothy C.F. Stunt and Paul Wilkinson, have been of greater influence than they might realize. So too have the churches of which I have been a member during the writing of this project. The ministers and members of these and related congregations, particularly Matthew Brennan, Martin Grubb, Jason Isherwood, Shaun McFall, Stephen Rees, Stephen Roger and Mike Tardive, deserve special thanks.

This research has been made possible by the assistance provided by librarians at many North American institutions, including the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School; the James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama; the Mugar Library, Boston University; the Pre-Trib Research Center, Liberty University; the Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary; Toronto Baptist Seminary; and Westminster Theological Seminary. Enormous help has also been provided by librarians in many European institutions, including the Andersonian Library, University of Strathclyde; Bonn University Library; the British Library; Edinburgh University Library; the Gamble Library, Union Theological College, Belfast, especially Stephen Gregory; Glasgow University Library; Irish Baptist College; the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, especially Graham Johnson, archivist of the Christian Brethren Archive; Queen's University Belfast; the National Library of Ireland; New College, Edinburgh; Marsh's Library, Dublin; Reformed Theological College, Belfast; Trinity College Library, Dublin; the University Library, Cambridge; and Westminster College, Cambridge.

Some parts of this book have been developed from earlier publications, particularly the discussion of the Geneva Bible and James Ussher in *The Puritan millennium: Literature and theology, 1550–1682* (2000); my essay on 'John Gill and puritan eschatology', published in *Evangelical Quarterly* (2001); my chapter in *Prisoners of hope? Aspects of evangelical millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880*, a collection of essays edited by Timothy C.F. Stunt and myself (2004); my chapter in *The*

emergence of evangelicalism: Exploring historical continuities (2008), a collection of essays edited by Michael A.G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart; my chapter in *Exploring Baptist origins* (2010), edited by Anthony R. Cross and Nicholas J. Wood; and my chapter in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, edited by Murray G.H. Pittock. I am grateful to colleagues for their permission to return to these themes here.

Others of my debts are financial. The provision of a British Academy Small Grant facilitated Ian Hugh Clary's research in the libraries of a number of North American institutions in the summer of 2007, and I am hugely grateful for this vital assistance. I had hoped that the timely completion of this book would be made possible by a research sabbatical which was awarded by the University of Manchester and by further funding for an additional research sabbatical which was awarded by the Leverhulme Trust for the academic year of 2007–8, but this was made impossible by my departure from the United Kingdom. Further research assistance was, however, provided by Trinity's Start-Up Fund (2008) and by its Arts and Social Sciences Benefactions Fund (2008 and 2009), which supported the short-term research assistance of graduate students Mark Sweetnam and Kelly Pederson. Finally, I wish to thank Michael Strang and Ruth Ireland, my editors at Palgrave Macmillan, who have shown enthusiasm for the project since its inception – and enormous patience as 'the end' continually failed to materialize. And, of course, it should go without saying that I alone should be held responsible for the errors of fact or interpretation that remain within this book.

Reflecting on the 15 years I have spent investigating this tradition, it is tempting to remember the widely attributed maxim that the study of eschatology 'either finds a man mad or leaves him so'. There may be examples of both trends in the writing described in this book; but this book is written in the conviction that eschatological hope has been and should continue to be central to the common faith of Christians. It is in that context that the dedication records a formative debt. Greatest thanks, as always, are due to my family, especially mum and dad, Pauline, Daniel, Honor and Finn. *Tar chugainn, a Thiarna Íosa.*

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Glossary¹

Amillennialism

The belief that the period of one thousand years described in Revelation 20:1–10 does not refer to an end-time period and is instead a metaphor for all or a substantial part of the period between Christ's incarnation and second coming. This appears to be the reading of Revelation 20:1–10 assumed in the major reformation confessions of faith.

Antichrist

The church's theological enemies are described as 'antichrist' in several New Testament passages (1 John 2:18, 22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 7). In popular discourse, however, 'the Antichrist' is a single figure who tends to combine elements of the various eschatological enemies described in Daniel and Revelation. The older protestant identification of the Antichrist as the Pope has given way to a range of other opinions under the influence of *futurist premillennialism* and *preterism*.

Apocalyptic

A Biblical genre, with disputed characteristics, that has given its name to a wider approach to the understanding of world affairs. Apocalyptic literature emphasizes the sudden (and often imminent) end of all things. In contrast to the *millennium*, the apocalyptic mode can seem dualistic (evil is in constant struggle with goodness), pessimistic (world conditions are not likely to improve), deterministic (the future has been planned by God), ethically passive (if conditions are not likely to improve, there is little that can be done to make the world a better place), and final.

Christian Reconstruction

The belief, developed in the later twentieth century, that the *postmillennial* coming of Christ will be preceded by the establishment of 'godly rule' on earth. This 'godly rule' will be marked by an unprecedented revival of Christianity and the international adoption of the Mosaic judicial and penal codes.

Dispensationalism

A variety of *premillennialism* which emerged in the 1830s to argue for a radical disjunction between Israel and the church and which teaches that the 'secret rapture' will precede the *tribulation*. Dispensationalists commonly mark seven distinct stages in the development of the history of redemption, which may or may not have different conditions of salvation. Dispensationalism has developed through three major stages: classical dispensationalism, which is best represented by the *Scofield reference Bible* (1909; second edition 1917) and the writings of L.S. Chafer and J. Dwight Pentecost; revised dispensationalism, which is best represented by the *New Scofield Bible* (1967); and progressive dispensationalism, which is best represented by the writings of Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock.

Eschatology

Classically, the study of the 'four last things' – death, judgement, heaven and hell – but the term has been expanded in use to refer to other aspects of end of the world belief. Evangelical eschatology can be either pessimistic, in its expectation of *apocalyptic* events, or optimistic, in its expectation of the *millennium*.

Futurism

A system of hermeneutics that understands New Testament prophecies to be chiefly concerned with the last few years before the second coming of Christ. Futurists tend to argue that the *Antichrist* will not be a pope. Futurism is common among *amillennialists* and *premillennialists*, and is a basic feature of *dispensationalism*.

Historicism

A system of hermeneutics that understands New Testament prophecies to detail all or part of the course of history in the period before the second coming. The identification of the Pope as the Antichrist is common in protestant historicist interpretation; but the identification of the establishment of Israel in 1948 as a fulfilment of prophecy also represents an historicist interpretive approach. 'Historicist' *premillennialism*, one variant of which is represented in the writings of Hal Lindsey, should be distinguished from 'historic' (i.e., non-dispensational) *premillennialism*,

as advanced by G.E. Ladd, which may or may not be historicist, and which Lindsey would certainly oppose.

Millenarian / Millennialist

Conventionally, scholars working in millennial studies have followed Ernest L. Tuveson in distinguishing 'millennialists' (believers who adopt *postmillennial*, optimistic and gradualist theologies) from 'millenarians' (believers who adopt *premillennial*, pessimistic and radical theologies). Ernest R. Sandeen has noted, however, that the terms are interchangeable in the literature of the emerging fundamentalist movement and a strict distinction should probably not therefore be imposed.²

Millennium

A utopian period whose general characteristics are based on the description of the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1–10 and the prophecies of the renewal of the natural world in the Hebrew prophets. Its specific characteristics vary according to the interpreter, and the millennium can be used as a trope for a wide and sometimes contradictory range of political, cultural and religious presuppositions. The three most common of evangelical millennial schemes, *amillennialism*, *premillennialism* and *postmillennialism*, should not be anachronistically read into older material. Not every exegete would share the basic assumption of these schemes, the idea that Revelation 20:1–10 refers to only one thousand-year period. The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the development of the *premillennial* and *postmillennial* terms to the mid-nineteenth century, though the interpretive paradigms they represent can be traced to the reformation; it does not provide any information on the development of 'amillennial,' though it approximates to the eschatological position of the reformation creeds.

National election

The idea, popular in ancient Israel, reformation Britain and modern America, that God has chosen a nation, invested its progress with the earthly display of his glory, and will therefore make certain its dominance. This is not necessarily an uncritical nationalism, however; national election points to the responsibilities as much as the privileges of being God's chosen people, and can often lead to a jeremiad on the decay of truth among the chosen. It is based on a providential worldview

that recognizes the hand of God in the drama of human history, and lies behind some forms of the American 'redeemer nation' myth.

Postmillennialism

The belief that Christ will return after the *millennium* has substantially reformed life on earth. Postmillennialists can be either *apocalyptic* or *gradualist*, and vary in the extent to which they believe the *millennium* can be expedited by their own effort. Postmillennialism has been revived among some conservative Presbyterians, particularly those with interests in *Christian Reconstruction*, but, among evangelicals more generally, remains much less popular than *premillennialism*.

Premillennialism

The belief that the second coming of Christ will take place before the *millennium*. Historic premillennialism teaches that Christ will return after the *tribulation* (and is consequently designated 'post-tribulation'); this was the view of, for example, C.H. Spurgeon and G.E. Ladd. *Dispensational* premillennialism, developed from the works of J.N. Darby, argues that Christ will return for the 'secret rapture' before the *tribulation* (and is consequently designated 'pre-tribulation'). This rapture will 'catch up' believers in order to take them into heaven while the *Antichrist* rages on earth. The second coming proper will take place at the end of the tribulation, and Christ will then usher in the *millennium* and reign over the world for one thousand years. Premillennialists debate whether believers will live on earth during the *millennium* and debate the specific roles of Israel and a range of other powers in this end-times scenario.

Preterism

A system of hermeneutics that understands New Testament prophecies to be chiefly concerned with the Roman assault on Jerusalem and the end of Temple worship in AD 70. Preterism has influenced a number of recent evangelical *premillennial* and *postmillennial* Bible commentaries.

Tribulation

The belief (shared by many *premillennialists*) that the Bible predicts a final seven-year period of terrible suffering during which the *Antichrist* persecutes believers and God pours judgement on the world.

Note on the text

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are taken from the King James (Authorized) Version.

Notes

1. This glossary is revised and expanded from earlier versions which I first published in Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes (eds), *Protestant millennialism, evangelicalism and Irish society, 1790–2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), x–xii, and Crawford Gribben, *Writing the rapture: Prophecy fiction in evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171–4.
2. Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer nation: The idea of America's millennial role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 33–4; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism: British and American millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 5 n. 3.