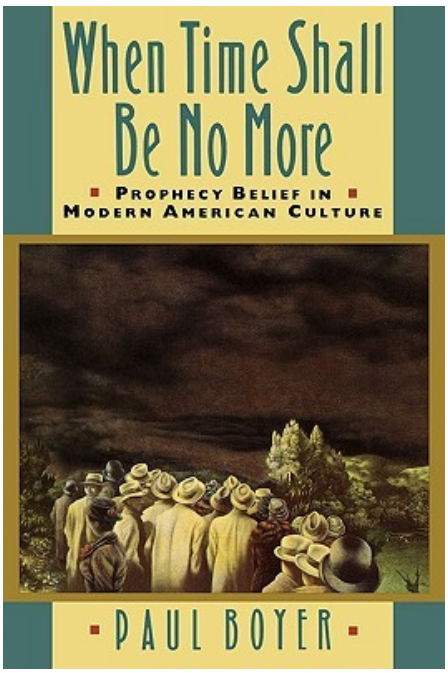

When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture

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Millions of Americans take the Bible at its word and turn to like-minded local ministers and TV preachers, periodicals and paperbacks for help in finding their place in God's prophetic plan for mankind. And yet, influential as this phenomenon is in the worldview of so many, the belief in biblical prophecy remains a popular mystery, largely unstudied and little understood. *When Time Shall Be No More* offers for the first time an in-depth look at the subtle, pervasive ways in which prophecy belief shapes contemporary American thought and culture.

Belief in prophecy dates back to antiquity, and there Paul Boyer begins, seeking out the origins of this particular brand of faith in early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings, then tracing its development over time. Against this broad historical overview, the effect of prophecy belief on the events and themes of recent decades emerges in clear and striking detail. Nuclear war, the Soviet Union, Israel and the Middle East, the destiny of the United States, the rise of a computerized global economic order--Boyer shows how impressive feats of exegesis have incorporated all of these in the popular imagination in terms of the Bible's apocalyptic works. Reflecting finally on the tenacity of prophecy belief in our supposedly secular age, Boyer considers the direction such popular conviction might take--and the forms it might assume--in the post-Cold War era.

The product of a four-year immersion in the literature and culture of prophecy belief, *When Time Shall Be No More* serves as a pathbreaking guide to this vast *terra incognita* of contemporary American popular thought--a thorough and thoroughly fascinating index to its sources, its implications, and its enduring appeal.

When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture Details

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From Reader Review When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture for online ebook

Katherine says

"One easily forgets, amid the forecasts of doom, that premillenialism is, at heart, a Utopian belief system..."

The overview of the history of Christian prophecy belief is instructive enough on its own, but the analysis laid out in the book's final chapters is profoundly insightful, illuminating many aspects of a world on whose periphery I've spent some time. Prophecy belief as expressive of first the hopes and then the anxieties of the age, the cottage industry of expounding prophetic interpretations, with its conscious anti-establishment bias, the curious intellectual connections between premillennial dispensationalism and other radical movements, its striving for scientific legitimacy even as it eschews science itself - In short, premillennial dispensationalism in US culture represents (among other things) a wholesale attempt to reconcile a deep unease with and mistrust of power with an equally profound longing for authority and certainty.

John says

Paul Boyer's point in this book is that historians should take millennial believers (Christian end-time enthusiasts) more seriously. While we seem to have little trouble with the idea that millennialism in olden days may have affected American history, today’s apocalyptic believers tend to be dismissed as marginal crackpots. Boyer says we need to stop dismissing these people. He estimates that while the core, Bible quoting, conference attending believers may number perhaps 8 million, there is another, much larger group that firmly believes in a Bible-predicted apocalypse, and another, even larger group that is “evangelically inclined” and receptive to the idea. Most millennarians today subscribe to dispensational premillennialism – the idea that the apocalypse will take place and Jesus will return before a 1000-year golden age on Earth, and that we are currently living in the era immediately prior to these events. Millions of Americans consume literature on the subject: Boyer managed to find and read over 300 individual biblical apocalypse-themed books, most from the Cold War era, in addition to dozens of newspapers and periodicals (and this book was published before the Left Behind series arrived, with its 16 volumes and 65 million copies sold).
Boyer argues that millennialism has “shaped public attitudes,” and this has had a cumulative effect on society. Since the turn of the 20th century, American premillenialist discourse has provided a grassroots counter-narrative to American progressive/optimistic discourse. Though apocalyptic believers have been eager to condemn materialism and identify American society as corrupt, they have also been quick to condemn as futile all efforts to improve society. Human governments, they argue, cannot hope to create perfect (or even really good) societies, and any hopes to do so are at best naïve, and at worst heretical. Social reform is akin to “polishing the brass fixtures on a sinking ocean liner.” (299) Only God is capable of fixing human society, which He will do after Christ’s return. This mindset has led to a certain fatalism, or “passive acquiescence,” during the nuclear age. (146) Many evangelicals during the Cold War came to see nuclear conflict as preordained. The Soviet Union was widely interpreted to be “Gog,” the nation that would ally with Satan and invade Israel during the end times. Nuclear arms control agreements were therefore pacts with the devil, and contrary to God’s will. This passive mindset has led to a similar complacency about peace in the Middle East and reflexive support for Israel – premillennialists believe that Jews were destined to regain control of Israel and eventually rebuild the temple, so Jewish nationalism is seen as divinely sanctioned, while Arab nationalists are seen as allies of the Devil.
Boyer does an excellent job illustrating the endless adaptability of apocalyptic belief – nearly any leader can

be (and has been) “proven” to align somehow with the number 666 and thus be a potential antichrist. One thing he does not do, however, is provide a decent argument for why this passive fatalism has taken hold among so many Americans. Boyer does note all the terrible things that have happened during the 20th century, but even those events fail to explain why so many people – whose ancestors likely believed that America was God’s chosen nation and the hope of the world – now believe that it is useless to work toward a better society. Why has this pessimistic and bloody vision of the end times become so appealing? How has a “God will fix everything” philosophy become so pervasive?

Matt Blanzy says

Thorough, scholarly work.

Andrea says

This is a methodical overview of the history of prophecy belief in America which focuses very strongly on its reaction to social changes during the 20th century. The timeline for the edition I read ended in the late 1980s, which is a pity as the 1990s brought more significant changes to the field, however the time period it covers is covered well. This would be of particular interest to anyone who wants to see how WWI, WWII, and the Cold War shaped prophecy interpretations in America. My only substantial qualm with this book is its strong focus on white Protestant prophecy beliefs, ignoring, for example, how apocalyptic prophetic beliefs shaped the African American and Native American experience in the 1800s (ex. Ghost Dance and Nat Turner's slave revolt).

Seth Pierce says

This book is a great resource into the thinking and movements of American belief in Bible prophecy. A wide range of interpretations are covered and the footnotes are invaluable.

The book primarily focuses on dispensationalism--to a degree that other schools of thought are left out. Naturally the beliefs of John Darby and Cyrus Scofield dominate the American prophetic landscape but it would have been nice to see more int he way of Adventist, Catholic, and even Mormon beliefs structures among others.

While the detail is great for research at times, especially towards the end it felt a bit verbose and like it was repeating itself. This is to be expected because prophetic themes rise and fall but it would have been nice if an editor was a little more exacting and cut out about 30 pages.

A great book to have in your library!

Tim says

An excellent overview of American prophecy belief, providing substantial background but focused on the time after WWII and the interactions of premillenial dispensationalist interpretations of prophecy with Israel, the Cold War, and American identity. It was written in the early 90s, so it came before the Left Behind books, but provides a good summary (some charts would have made it better) and the last chapter on the why of prophecy in America is excellent. Evangelicals sure do like being experts.

Alan Dikkers says

If you think about prophecy beliefs or know others who have strong beliefs, Paul presents a wide view, views in plural. As someone with exposure to prophecy driven people and ideologies, I grew as a person reading this book.

Violet says

Read it for a Religious Studies class. I laughed at some of the assumptions through the years, but over all found it to be very academic. If that is what you're looking for then this will not fail to satisfy.

Michael Samerdyke says

On the one hand, I wish I had read this book when it was first published. On the other hand, reading it now has been very thought-provoking.

Boyer gives a thorough look at "apocalypticism" in American thought, focusing mostly on the post-1945 era, but giving a good look at its origins.

I wish I had read this earlier. It would have given me the background to understand why some people think about Russia and the Middle East the way they do.

On the other hand, reading this book about 25 years after it was published shows how sound Boyer's research and conclusions were. This book was published before the "Left Behind" phenomenon, (and Boyer identified La Haye as a key thinker/popularist of apocalypticism). Also the attitudes Boyer discusses, namely the distrust of internationalism, globalization, and elites, one sees forces that have had a political impact in recent years.

This is old, but it is well worth a read.

Stephanie McGarrah says

Paul Boyer's well researched When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture,

traces the eschatological underpinnings of America from early Jewish apocalyptic thought, to the modern Christian fundamentalism that has pervaded American politics and culture since the first invaders set foot on the land. Since its beginnings, the U.S. has seen itself as being marked for God's grand plan, its "Manifest Destiny." Of course there are differing opinions on what that looks like, but nonetheless America is exceptional. Despite their political power, it's still easy to write off fundamentalists as an ignorant fringe of a secular nation, but that would be a mistake. As Boyer makes clear, prophetic thought is central to the creation of the U.S., and its continued power and influence in the world. Beliefs that are held by everyone from the poor and marginalized to the rich and powerful.

When one views prophecy as a way of ordering a chaotic, violent and unpredictable existence, it is easy to see why these are such tenacious beliefs. What seems arbitrary, meaningless, or beyond one's control, is imbued with meaning, and there will never be a shortage of catastrophic events, wars and disasters that people will read as signs. Indeed, once you get sucked into prophetic thought suddenly everything, no matter how mundane, gains a cosmic significance (apparently a rise in overdue library books was enough to signal the end times to one man, presumably trying to shame people into getting theirs in on time!).

Prophetic signs may be found in seemingly insignificant events, but it is the events that cause a sudden and profound impact that cause sharp increases in the acceptance of apocalyptic belief. In the U.S. examples of these have included both world wars, the holocaust, the dropping of atomic bombs and the fear of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War. More recently 9/11, continued turmoil in the Middle East, and Obama as the Antichrist (according to one website, he will reveal his true identity June 6, 2016) have provided plenty of fuel for apocalyptic theorists. The caliphate ISIS has even embraced their identification with the Antichrist, using flashing images of Baphomet and 666 in between Hollywood quality video of horrific executions.

What I liked most about Boyer's approach, is that he doesn't ridicule, judge or insert his personal beliefs into the writing. He is able to avoid putting a single face on American fundamentalism, reminding readers many times to avoid pigeonholing these beliefs. Surprisingly, I found myself enjoying many of the quotes and thought if you were to take away any religious context, the themes of capitalism, environmental destruction, technological advances and social disintegration would fit right into many a anarchist text.

> "Civilization is on a collision course with destiny, and the pace is increasing at a frightening rate of speed...It is only a matter of time before our accepted form of civilization is derailed completely."

The parallels between what would seem to be radically different world-views (that of the anarchist and the christian fundamentalist) are surprising, one example being the debate between those who are positive and active (missionaries saving souls/anarchists and social justice), and those who are fatalistic. Whether one is an activist or a pessimist, the coming of the Lord/the coming of Revolution will signal the end of this rotten world and the beginning of the utopia.

One thing I found hilarious was that even though there will be no pain or suffering in this new world, some idiots think there will still be employment. Having to work even after the end of the world and the final judgement? No thank you.

David Boone says

Read parts of this for an undergrad elective course on apocalyptic religious movements. It was pretty good, but I didn't have enough time to delve more deeply into it as I would've liked. Would definitely recommend for anyone who has an interest in modern prophecy cults and specifically Judeo-Christian eschatology.