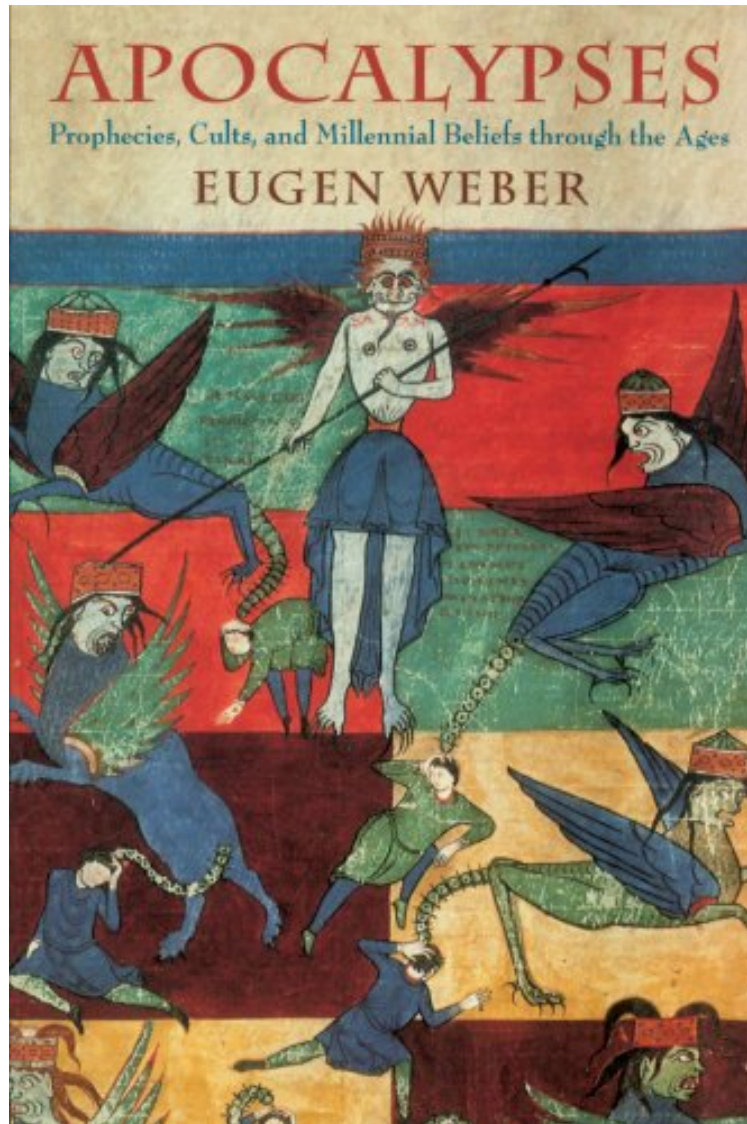


[Mobile book] Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages

# Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages

*Eugen Weber*

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**Eugen Weber : Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages:

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Are Revelations Man's Attempt To Control the Future?By A CustomerReview by Marianne Luban:When the Year 1000 was drawing near, people took it as an omen when Halley's

Comet streaked across the heavens. Did this portend Doomsday or the advent of the Messiah? Was Man marching inexorably into the dusk or the dawn? Another thousand years later, we still don't positively know the answer to that question. The eminent historian, Eugen Weber, delivers his latest work, "Apocalypses", just in time to ponder our status on the brink of the new millennium and to give us insight into the hopes and fears of previous generations who found themselves hesitating before the looming gateway of a new era, weighing prophecies or confronted with phenomena consisting of "lamps of fire, angels, plagues, lightnings, thunderings, earthquakes, falling stars, fire, blood, hail, black sun and bloody moon". Weber writes: "When the world ends, it could be argued that all that ends is the world we know. The end of the world was really only the end of one world, not the end of time but of our time, not the annihilation of mankind but the end of a way of life and its replacement by another." While some contemplated finales, optimists dreamed and wrote of their hopes for an enlightened, repentant world and the regeneration of the human race: "They speak, earth, ocean, air; I hear them say 'Awake, repent, 'ere we dissolve away!'" Yet others faced the unknown and dire forebodings armed with their wit. According to Weber, when Pope Benedict XIV was informed that the AntiChrist had come and was now three years old, the pontiff quipped, "Then I shall leave the problem to my successor." Eugen Weber must be the world's most fascinating conversationalist. One gets the impression, from reading "Apocalypses", that he has the entire saga of mankind stored in his marvel of a brain and can conjure up imagery, names, anecdotes and dates from it with the same fluency that some of us have when writing a chatty postcard home, describing an exciting day in a far-away locale. This is not to imply that, although Weber's style is urbane and witty, that "Apocalypses" is an easy read. It is not. Eugen Weber is never ponderous, but he makes it plain that he is first and foremost an historian and only secondarily a raconteur. Or perhaps thirdly, because Weber as philosopher is also very much a presence in the book. In fact, it is his own thoughts and comments that leave the most lingering impressions, reminding us that, while the deeds of Man are fleeting, it is his "death-defying thoughts", set down on paper, that are like the nacreous bits of shell that remain gleaming on the beach after the great tides of history have flooded and ebbed. For an academic, Eugen Weber is a very good writer, indeed. How different our "fin de siecle" seems from bygone chronological milestones. No longer moved by superstition and too jaded for optimism, we await the Millennium with a kind of dull signation. Our popular heroes are all dead or aging and nobody has emerged to replace them. The close of the century seems characterized by vapidty, greed and a lack of concern for the health of the planet we call home. Could there be a more fitting commentary on the status quo than that our direst prophecy for the Year 2000 concerns the imminent failure of the Machine, upon which we have formed such a frightening dependency? Eugen Weber doesn't have an email address. Perhaps he never will. Intellectually speaking, his address is the universe, his understanding cosmic. Doubtless he would like to offer greater comfort, but the honest scholar can only counsel, while commenting on the recent trend toward apocalyptic films and literature: "Adversity is good for faith, and adversity is ever present. Ages of decadence always suggest an end; few ages have not struck their contemporaries by their decadence" and "We suffer and suffering is catastrophic, sometimes unbearable, sometimes final.... We yearn for some explosive, extraordinary escape from the inescapable and, none forthcoming, we put our faith in an apocalyptic rupture whereby the inevitable is solved by the unbelievable...in the end, salvation from sin and evil--meaning anxiety, travail and pain." Marianne Luban is a freelance writer living in Minnesota. Her short fiction collection, "The Samaritan Treasure", is published by Coffee House Press. 12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. a fine introduction By Wyote This book is an introduction to Western European and American apocalypticism. It jumps around pretty freely, although it is roughly organized into time periods. What I'll say about this book is, if you've read a bit of history already, it will be enjoyable to you. But if you want a serious, careful and scholarly history of apocalypticism, this will disappoint you, as it did one reviewer. No phenomenon is explored in any depth, but the narrative moves quickly through a lot of fascinating history. I did appreciate the author's care with dates, since that made it easier to keep up with the narrative's jumping around. My field is religious studies, although not exactly what is covered here. Nevertheless, I learned enough from this book to begin doubting some "conventional wisdom" about apocalypticism: for instance, that around the year 1000 there was a wild outbreak of enthusiasm. On the contrary, most people didn't know what year it was. But I also learned that apocalypticism has gone on pretty much constantly in Western Christianity, often despite the official churches' attempts to control it. Depending on your situation, you of course will find something else in it. I also want to add that, as I read this book, I continually wondered why this fascinating material is rarely covered in more general histories of Western Christianity. Whatever the reason, I strongly recommend this book to students of Western Christian history. I don't think enough people are familiar with this part of Christian history. But let me recommend a couple other books for you to consider before you pick this up. One is Paul Boyer's "When Time Shall be no More," which looks at apocalypticism in America very closely; if you're more interested in this than in European history, that'll be a better book for you. This is a book that I very strongly recommend to anyone who wants to understand religion in America. Another is Norman Cohn's "Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come," which (also very briefly) covers the origins of apocalypticism in the ancient world. Very few people could read this book without learning something about Zoroastrianism, 2nd Temple Judaism, or early Christianity. 24 of 25 people found the following review helpful. hasty and superficial By Independent Scholar Weber acknowledges that he is no expert in the field, and offers APOCALYPSES as a subjective "travel guide" through the

subject, based on his reading of "hundreds of the thousands of books" on the subject. APOCALYPSES does show off the virtuosic breadth of Weber's reading, but unfortunately, like many travel guides written by mere passers-through, it betrays haste and superficiality. In fact, the book is almost unreadable, as you can divine from the reviews of even those who claim to like it. It reads like a catalogue of dates and names and quotations from the author's notecards, stitched together not by insight that would serve to order the phenomena in some kind of conceptual framework, but by "urbane and witty" (as reviewers say) commentary. Even the commentary itself sometimes sinks to banality. How many ways are there to say "Yet once again, the end did not come on time"? In his introduction, Weber promises "more narrative than interpretation." But for the most part we get neither narrative nor interpretation. For example, the transition of rural Christian America from a radical-left populist activism to radical-right reactionary fatalism over the course of a single generation early in the twentieth century is a fascinating phenomenon, one that cries out for some kind of explanation. Why did progressive political campaigners end up shunning politics and "declar[ing] the secular state demonic"? Weber lists his answers: the Scopes trial, Prohibition ("divided and criminalized the nation"), and the reform efforts of one Anthony Cornstock ("gave Christian altruism a bad name"). That's not an explanation, only a sketch of an outline of an explanation. It's about as informative and as entertaining as reading power-point slides. Passive voice abounds, covering up the gaps in the author's knowledge. In some places the gaps can't be hidden. The author stumbles over the word "beguin" in an eighteenth-century context, speculating some connection to the word "bigot." Although he refers several times to Norman Cohn's classic book THE PURSUIT OF THE MILLENIUM, if he had read Cohn carefully, he would know that "beguine" was the traditional name for pious females who lived in voluntary poverty in the Middle Ages, often in group homes and usually outside the supervision of the Church. Similarly, Weber speculates that the term "Caucasian" "probably originated with nineteenth-century British Israelism." No, in fact, the term was coined by the eighteenth-century German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. I'm no specialist, but I caught these errors. How many other errors does the book contain? The wittiness can get in the way of good scholarship. Weber adduces Dante's elliptical description of his birthday, "under the sign of Gemini" in "the year of the battle of Benvenuto," as evidence that pre-moderns were unaware of or indifferent to the numbering of years and days. But is it not possible that Dante chose those expressions due to considerations of rhyme, meter, and style? Similarly, the apocalyptic poem "Slouching Toward Bethlehem" includes the line "twenty centuries of stony sleep." From that, should we really conclude that Yeats literally believed the world will end exactly in the year 2000? Not only the research, but the writing seems hasty. The second chapter and the final chapter appear once to have been separate essays, for they rehash numerous witty details found elsewhere in the book. The final chapter, breathtakingly, starts right over again from ancient Israel and goes on through Paul and Augustine, and only six pages in do we finally get to some new thoughts. Weber quotes liberally from the dictionary. He does not define important terms until Chapter 7. He quotes primary and unnamed secondary sources together in the same sentence (p. 70, on Jean Bodin). Inexplicable brackets on page 235 suggest poor editing, and possibly worse: that in the shuffle of notecards, quotation marks went missing and a sentence or part of a sentence was unintentionally plagiarized. Weber observes that Cohn's "Pursuit of the Millenium" paints a picture of millenarism as a preoccupation of ignorant and desperate lower classes. In that Weber sees a risk of intellectual snobbery. Weber says: "Condescension is not the right approach." But he has trouble following his own precept. Of one chiliast's suicide note he says, "One hopes that the Belgian Messiah was a better master of the forceps than he was of the English language." And on the next page: "One may regret that less discreet and more destructive humans do not remove themselves from earth with as little fuss as the inhabitants of Heaven's Gate." Weber's book does have some value. While Cohn's book restricts itself to Northern Europe in the Middle Ages, Weber's succeeds in demonstrating (albeit in mind-numbing factoids) that end-time beliefs have been present in every generation since then, and indeed in all classes. The examples he gives show that the nineteenth century was something of an aberration--Christianity itself disavowed millenarism as less than respectable, while secular thinkers took it up (though oddly, Weber barely even mentions the most important secular millenarian of all, Karl Marx)--so today's eschatologically obsessed Christianity can be seen as just a return to the status quo. Weber does show that millenarism is not just for the poor and oppressed. (It is fascinating to learn, for example, that Christopher Columbus was not only a courageous explorer and rabid racist, he also believed that his life's work was bringing Armageddon a little closer.) But that does not negate Cohn's thesis. Cohn states quite clearly that susceptibility to "eschatological phantasies" is not simply a matter of poverty or oppression, it is a matter of insecurity and cultural dislocation. In the Middle Ages, the most culturally dislocated groups were peasants who had lost the security of the manorial system, and marginal artisans working outside the guild system. The fact that modern cults find recruits from all strata of society shows that in globalized post-industrial capitalism there is cultural dislocation and insecurity pushing people over the edge everywhere, from the slums of Afghanistan to the middle class suburbs of Colorado Springs to the mansions of Hollywood. Weber had an opportunity to synthesize the amazing amount of data he collected and use it to extend Cohn's thesis. Instead, he just gave readers the pile of data. The verdict is: If you are looking for a good grounding in the history of apocalyptic movements and thought, go for Norman Cohn's scholarly but accessible classic, THE PURSUIT OF THE MILLENNIUM. If you want fascinating storytelling about times when the end really did appear to be at hand, try Otto Friedrich's THE END OF THE WORLD: A HISTORY. If you want an

annotated bibliography for further research, go ahead and get Weber's APOCALYPSES--but check his facts before you use them.

Apocalyptic visions and prophecies from Zarathustra to yesterday form the luxuriant panorama in Eugen Weber's profound and elegant book. Beginning with the ancients of the West and the Orient and, especially, with those from whom we received our religions, the Jews and earliest Christians, Weber finds that an absolute belief in the end of time, when good would do final battle with evil, was omnipresent. Within centuries, apocalyptic beliefs inspired Crusades, scientific discoveries, works of art, voyages such as those of Columbus, rebellions and reforms. In the new world, American abolitionists, who were so critical to the movement to end slavery, believed in a final reckoning. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries' apocalyptic movements veered toward a lunatic fringe, and Weber rescues them from obloquy. From this more than two millennia history, he redresses the historical and religious amnesia that has consigned the study of apocalypses and millennial thought to the ash heap of thought and belief. Weber, a master storyteller, turns detective in this latest book as he finds these alternative rationalities in the West, Asia, Africa, and South America. He writes with profound respect for the millennial pulse in history while never losing his urbane and witty style of writing. As we approach our second millennium beset by a host of apocalyptic predictions and cults, this book offers a map of understanding of the creeds we ignore at our peril.

.com Plagues, fires from heaven, worldwide computer failure--apocalyptic visions are nothing new. Indeed, they may well be a necessary part of life. As historian Eugen Weber points out, "apocalyptic prophecies are attempts to interpret the times, console and guide, and suggest the future." In *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs Through the Ages*, Weber presents a history of end-of-the-worldisms, such as the panics during the sack of Rome in A.D. 410, multiple medieval Second Comings, Yeats's prediction of a "Celtic Armageddon" in 1899, and late-20th-century fears. This is no mere laundry list, however; Weber analyzes each of these beliefs and uses their historical contexts to make them more understandable. Weber's witty prose is tempered by an obvious respect for those with "alternative rationalities." Most readers, however, will enjoy watching these millennial beliefs recur throughout history--and perhaps breathe a sigh of relief. As Weber argues, St. Augustine's advice continues to ring true today: rather than trying to reckon the years before the end of the world, "relax your fingers and give them a little rest." From Publishers Weekly  
From the hellfire and brimstone prophecies of John of Patmos to Marilyn Manson's album *Antichrist Superstar*, apocalyptic currents have nourished the cultural imagination. Surveying the field of millenarian beliefs, Weber (France: *Fin de Si?cle*, etc.), professor of history at UCLA, contends that the apocalyptic "lunatic fringe" deserves more than the condescension typically doled out by scholars. Indeed, he explains, "endism" has often played an important historical role, motivating Columbus's voyage to the Americas, inflecting debates over anti-Semitism, even figuring in the 1870 birth of the Canadian province of Manitoba. Writing with curiosity and empathy about such varied topics as the eschatological fallout from Halley's comet and Y2K survivalism, Weber turns up a few intriguing facts. By 1992, for instance, more than half of adult Americans expected the imminent cataclysmic return of Jesus Christ. What accounts for the persistence of such beliefs? Sifting through the historical record, Weber examines the utopian intent of much millennial thought. The Second Coming, after all, promises heaven on earth; even Engels noted the revolutionary potential of revivalist Christianity. On the other hand, more combative strains of millennialism have led to the 1978 Jonestown mass suicide and the release of deadly nerve gas into the Tokyo subway system. Reluctant to interpret these acts in any depth, Weber fittingly describes his work as a travel book, recording a journey through the ages. Still, gifted is the writer who can nimbly span the distant cultural poles of Nostradamus and Bill Gates. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
From *Library Journal* As we approach the "fin de si?cle," Weber informs us that for Western man, "It is not the si?cle, but the fin that matters." Since Zoroaster and the Old and New Testaments, the end of history with its final battle between good and evil has been a common belief and not just among religious crazies. Weber argues that this belief stems from the hope that human suffering will ultimately be justified by a final "apocalyptic rupture." (LJ 4/1/99) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.