Introduction: how the world ends

In 557 the great imperial city of Constantinople was devastated by an earthquake. Here was a city founded two hundred years earlier to be a truly Christian place, at the time under the dominance of the powerful and long-lived emperor Justinian I (r. 527–65). But, as the monumental Hagia Sophia built by the emperor partially collapsed, people panicked. Rumours circulated that the world was nearly at its end and self-proclaimed prophets caused terror by preaching about worse things to come. Had Christ himself not foretold of earthquakes in the Last Days (Matt. 24.7; Mark 13.8; Luke, 21.11)? Agathias, a lawyer in the city, despaired at how easily people had been wound up by such nonsense, which he found often accompanied these kinds of disasters. He also noted that the people of the city reformed their lives: 'suddenly all were honest in their business dealings, so that even public officials, putting aside their greed, dealt with lawsuits according to the law.'[1] Hymns were sung, gifts were given to the Church, people lived better lives. The fear of imminent judgement had reformed society – or at least would have done, had people not reverted to their old ways as soon as things had calmed down (Proverbs 26.11).

Agathias's story treats us to a drama which is resoundingly human and modern despite its distance to us in time. In many crises, big or small, people are unsettled and seek to change their lives, as they hope to understand the higher reasons for what is going on. Apocalypticism has repeated, if not enduring, resonance for human societies. It reveals much about how people understand the world and their place in it. As Frank Kermode observed, it is almost natural for human beings to anticipate endings when they tell stories about the world.[2] The way a narrative resolves can legitimise or subvert the route there, so a life of

[1] Agathias, *Historiae*, V. 5, ed. R. Keydell (Berlin, 1967), pp. 169–70, quoted in P. Magdalino, 'The History of the Future and Its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda', in R. Beaton and C. Roueché (eds.), *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol on His Seventieth Birthday* (Aldershot, 1993), pp. 3–34 at p. 6.
[2] F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London, 1967).

suffering can be made good by a finale of peace and joy but it can be made more tragic if the ending resounds with hopelessness, fear and torment. And since everyone has an ending, even if the end of time or the world is too abstract to conceptualise fully, then it really is a universal in human experience. Johannes Fried expressed this in no uncertain terms for the Middle Ages: 'the end of time was *the* fundamental interpretative category for all humanity, belief, knowledge and action, even if it was not always and by everyone and in every deed made explicit.'[3] Agathias may have shaken his head at the popular response to the earthquake, but he understood all too well that he was observing a common human dynamic, framed in this case by (mis)understandings of scripture.

Not everyone was as dismissive as our Constantinopolitan lawyer. All Christians knew that the End was promised – it is just that no one knew *when* it would come, not least because scripture stated that only God could know that (Matt. 24.36; Mark, 17.32; Acts 1.7). There would be signs including wars, tribulations and earthquakes, adding up to 'perilous times' (2 Tim. 3.1). There would be many 'antichrists' (1 John 2.18) and, once there had been a 'falling away' of political power, the Son of Perdition himself – Antichrist – would come (2 Thess. 2.3). But whether people lived to witness the End Times themselves, or died beforehand, everyone was going to have to face the Last Judgement. Such inevitability meant that many people channelled fear rather than dismissing it, because there was a pastoral imperative to get people to prepare themselves and for society to be judged. Apocalypse and Judgement were reasons to act and, consequently, things which could be employed to persuade people into action.[4] Neither denial nor fatalism is an appropriate response. This is why Apocalypse remains such a central theme in analyses of environmental change, global economic crises or terrorism – the penalties for inaction are doom.[5]

[3] J. Fried, *Aufstieg aus dem Untergang. Apokalyptisches Denken und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaft im Mittelalter* (Munich, 2001), p. 37: 'Endzeit war die fundamentale Deutungskatagorie alles Menschen, des Glaubens, der Wissenschaften, des Handelns, auch wenn es nicht immer und von jedermann bei jedem Tun expliziert wurde.' Possibly the best introductory survey of apocalyptic thought in the early Middle Ages is J. Flori, *L'Islam et la fin des temps. L'interprétation prophétique des invasions musulmanes dans la chrétienté médiévale* (Paris, 2007). See also the essays in R. Emmerson and B. McGinn (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), J. A. Aertsen and M. Pickavé (eds.), *Ende und Vollendung. Eschatologische Perspektiven im Mittelalter* (Berlin and New York, 2002), A. Gow, R. Landes and D. C. van Meter (eds.), *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Changes 950–1050* (Oxford, 2003), and R. E. Guglielmetti (ed.), *L'apocalisse nel medioevo* (Florence, 2011).

[4] F. Borschardt, *Doomsday Speculation as a Strategy of Persuasion* (Lewiston, NY, 1990).

[5] V. Wieser, C. Zolles, C. Feik, M. Zolles and L. Schlöndorff (eds.), *Abendländische Apokalyptik. Kompendium zur Genealogie der Endzeit* (Berlin, 2013)

The thesis of the present book then is this: apocalyptic thought in the early Middle Ages was commonplace and mainstream, and an important factor in the way that people conceptualised, stimulated and directed change. It was not solely the marginal and extremist way of thinking nearly all modern scholars imagine. Apocalyptic thought, understood properly, essentially becomes a powerful part of reform discourse about how best to direct people – individually and collectively – towards a better life on Earth. Even when people saw divine punishment, maybe in attacks by Huns or raids by Vikings, they felt compelled to change behaviour, rather than to wallow in fatalistic self-pity.[6] The apocalyptic, then, is a heightened engagement with the problem of the limited chances one has to 'get it right' before one is judged. It is, as Stephen O'Leary recognised, a mode of argument, and one which makes sense of key problems in human experience (the existence of evil, the mystery of time, the problem of authority).[7] But, by that very definition, it is also a living body of ideas which changes in response to how the general theory meets the historically specific, such as in the way the scripture resonates differently with each social and political upheaval. I shall refrain from making any regrettable claims that this was a 'definitive period' in European/world history because the devil is in the detail: this is a case study of the interplay between big ideas and action, not an exercise in teleological thinking.

Why might the End have come? In the history of Christianity and Christendom, the simple answer is that it was promised – first by Christ himself, then in the revelation of John of Patmos, and in apocrypha such as the Revelation of Thomas.[8] But the End did not come soon enough, which led to repeated crises of interpretation. What did the eschatological and apocalyptic promises in the Bible really mean? At the same time as they dealt with this issue, early Christians experienced other crises and challenges: persecution, institutionalisation, codification, schism. Christianity only even became dominant in Roman society long after emperors were Christians from the early fourth century, with plenty of 'Roman' pagans still active in the public life of the empire a century later. And then new challenges appeared: the Western Empire grew weak and gave way to new 'barbarian' kingdoms; plague more than decimated the population of Europe throughout the sixth century; the rise of Islam and the Arab caliphates redrew the political and religious map in the seventh;

[6] J. T. Palmer, 'Apocalyptic Outsiders and Their Uses in the Early Medieval West' (forthcoming).
[7] S. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1994).
[8] M. Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (Chichester, 2010); E. Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York, 2012).

and then in the eighth century, Charlemagne reinvented empire in the West through conquest and propaganda, but ended his days anxious and introspective. Apocalyptic thought shaped and fed off all of these things.

If Charlemagne's empire represented any kind of 'high point' in Europe's early medieval history, it was one with little comfort. People worried about whether it was possible to calculate the proximity of the End. People certainly worried about Vikings and heretics and other outsiders who might have been challenges foretold. As the unity of empire fell away again once more, there were concerns about signs, strange natural occurrences, dreams, and the fate of the soul in the afterlife. By the tenth century, political continuity seemed to be a good barrier to the coming of Antichrist, but such continuity was in short supply. The 'transformation of the Year 1000' was also the 'crisis of the Year 1000', with violence, invasion, succession disputes and new mobilisations of popular piety. The world changed, and changed often; and as it did so people drew on apocalyptic hopes and fears, from emperors and kings down to peasant farmers. The history of early medieval apocalyptic thought is also the history of the early Middle Ages.

Debating the apocalyptic

Few historians have ever succeeded in discussing the apocalyptic dynamics of the early Middle Ages without controversy. The historiography on the 'Terrors of the Year 1000', following Edward Peters's classification, can be divided into three broad schools, two of which place apocalypticism centrally in medieval history, and one which denies its importance.[9] The first of the apocalyptic schools propounds the 'strong thesis', in which 1000 marked a clear dividing line in history, with widespread apocalyptic anxiety beforehand giving way to relief afterwards. According to Daniel Milo, the seminal formulation of this idea was largely due to Jules Michelet in the 1830s, in particular as he responded to the revolution of 1830.[10] In no small part Michelet, like many after him, was led to his interpretation of the period by Ralph Glaber's complex *Five Books of History*, although it represents only one extreme take on the early eleventh century. Significant refinement was provided by the 'weak thesis', so-called because it concerns a wider date range – 979 to 1042

[9] E. Peters, 'Mutations, Adjustments, Terrors, Historians, and the Year 1000', in M. Frassetto, *The Year 1000: Religious and Social Response to the Turning of the First Millennium* (New York, 2002), pp. 9–28.

[10] D. Milo, 'L'an mil: un problème d'historiographie moderne', *History and Theory*, 27.3 (1988), 261–81 at p. 278. See J. Michelet, *History of France*, trans. W. K. Kelly (London, 1844), pp. 336–40.

in Fried's version – in which heightened interest in apocalyptic thought fed into a panorama of political, social and religious change.[11] It was first developed by Henri Focillon in 1952 in a study of early medieval art and its contexts, but the thesis found its most profound and wide-ranging exposition in Johannes Fried's 1989 article 'Endzeiterwartung um die Jahrtausendwende' ('Awaiting the End of Time around the Turn of the Year 1000').[12] Many more have followed Fried's lead, most prominently Richard Landes in his studies of millenarian movements and apocalyptic chronography.[13] Variations of the 'weak thesis' have also been important in studies of Byzantine apocalypticism.

There is a long history of challenging the work of scholars who have studied the apocalyptic. From 1873, and the publication of François Plaine's 'Les prétendues terreurs de l'an mille', we can see what Peters labelled the 'strong counter-thesis'. Plaine opened the issue by subjecting a wider selection of sources than earlier historians to critical analysis – although fewer than Fried and others a century later – and he concluded that there was little evidence of widespread interest in the Year 1000. 'In a word, the terrors of the Year 1000 are nothing more or less than a myth.'[14] This theme was taken up by Pietro Orsi in Italy, Heinrich von Eicken in Germany, and George Lincoln Burr in the United States, the latter summarising the terrors as 'only a nightmare of modern scholars'.[15] The mood

[11] The reason for this extended range for the millennium of the Incarnation and of the Passion is that 979 represents the earliest contemporaries might have dated the Incarnation, while 1042 represented the latest that they might have placed the Passion. For a good study of the relevant chronological inquiries – but passing over issues of apocalypse – see P. Verbist, *Duelling with the Past: Medieval Authors and the Problem of the Christian Era, c. 990–1135* (Turnhout, 2010).

[12] H. Focillon, *L'an mil* (Paris, 1952) [*The Year 1000*, trans. F. Wieck (New York, 1969), pp. 39–72]; J. Fried, 'Endzeiterwartung um die Jahrtausendwende', *DA*, 45.2 (1989), 385–473. Professor Fried's important article is translated into English as 'Awaiting the End of Time around the Year 1000', in Gow, Landes and van Meter, *The Apocalyptic Year 1000*, pp. 16–63, but I will refer to the original German version throughout this book because only there do you get the full references.

[13] R. Landes, 'Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography, 100–800 CE', in W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), pp. 137–211; '*Millenarismus absconditus*: L'historiographie augustinienne et l'An Mil', *Le Moyen Âge*, 98 (1992), 355–77; 'Sur les traces du Millennium: La via negativa', *Le Moyen Âge*, 99 (1993), 5–26; *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes (989–1034)* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford, 2011).

[14] F. Plaine, 'Les prétendues terreurs de l'an mille', *Revue des questions historiques*, 13 (1873), 145–64 at p. 164: 'En un mot, les terreurs de l'an 1000 ne sont ni plus ni moins qu'un mythe.'

[15] G. L. Burr, 'The Year 1000 and the Antecedents of the Crusades', *American Historical Review*, 6.3 (1901), 429–39 (quotation at p. 438). H. von Eicken, 'Die Legende von der Erwartung des Weltunterganges und der Wiederkehr Christi im Jahre 1000', *Forschungen*

of the 'strong counter-thesis' has been no less pronounced in the writings of critics of the 'weak thesis'. Most notably, Sylvain Gouguenheim's *Les fausses terreurs de l'an mil* (1999) offered point-by-point challenges to Fried's and Landes's 'over-interpretation' of the sources, and the tendency of both to join up isolated references into a coherent whole and to read between the lines.[16] The warning to be careful is of course essential but, as Fried argued at length, Gouguenheim's strictures remain intellectually problematic, and his non-apocalyptic readings of sources are not always more convincing.[17]

These theses, although principally concerned with France and Germany in the Year 1000, are indicative of the ways in which apocalyptic tradition is approached by early medieval historians more generally. The clearest, and in some ways quietest, divide is between scholars who believe apocalyptic tradition was widely influential and those who pass over it altogether for whatever reason. A good example in scholarship on the Carolingian world concerns the imperial coronation of Charlemagne on Christmas Day, 800. In 1978 Juan Gil, combining the prevailing chronological tradition that 800 was the 6,000th year of the world with the logic of literalist readings of scripture which claimed the world would last only 6,000 years, argued that there was clearly an eschatological setting for Charlemagne's actions.[18] But while prominent 'weak thesis' historians – Fried, Landes, Brandes – have supported and developed this idea, there has been little engagement from historians specialising in other aspects of Carolingian history, with silence on the matter, for example, in the cultural and political biographies of the emperor by Rosamond McKitterick (2008) and Matthias Becher (1999; second edition 2007).[19] Such absences are not the products of ignorance or neglect, but rather of the wealth of source material which has led some historians to prioritise other factors (ambition, conquest, economic change). For Peter Brown's

zur Deutschen Geschichte, 23 (1883), 303–18; P. Orsi, *L'anno mille: Saggio di critica storica* (Turin, 1887).

[16] S. Gouguenheim, *Les fausses terreurs de l'an mil: Attente de la fin des temps ou approfondissement de la foi* (Paris, 1999), pp. 52–63.

[17] J. Fried, 'Die Endzeit fest im Griff des Positivismus? Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Sylvain Gouguenheim', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 275 (2002), 281–322. See also R. Landes, 'The *Terribles espoirs* of 1000 and the Tacit Fears of 2000', in Gow, Landes and van Meter, *The Apocalyptic Year 1000*, pp. 3–16 at p. 4 and dismissive footnotes throughout his 'The Fear'.

[18] J. Gil, 'Los terrores del ano 6000', in *Actas del simposio para el estudio de los codices del 'Comentario al apocalypsis' de Beato de Liebana* (Madrid, 1978), pp. 217–47.

[19] M. Becher, *Karl der Große* (2nd edn, Munich, 2007); R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, 2008). Note even the silence of Henry Mayr-Harting in his 'Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation of 800', *EHR*, 111.444 (1996), 1113–33, despite his interest in later (Ottonian) eschatology and apocalypticism.

study of the formation of Christendom, apocalyptic tradition was but one voice of many; but with a more institutional perspective, such as Chris Wickham's, these voices naturally seem barely audible at all.[20] Buried within Gouguenheim's position is the weaker truism that the apocalyptic was not always important in every way – but Fried allowed for that, as we have seen, and it does not mean that it was unimportant.

As characterised so far, the 'counter-thesis' position sounds largely negative, when in practice many of its implications can be pursued productively. Simon MacLean, for example, has argued persuasively that modern scholars on both sides focus on debating whether or not the sources contain literal interpretations of apocalyptic tradition; often, he suggested instead, the ideologies and rhetoric employed could be more revealing of the strategies of authors, expectations of audiences and the nature of various discourses in general.[21] References to antichrists in Adso's *Letter on the Origins of Antichrist* (*c.* 950) and Wulfstan of York's *Sermon of the Wolf* (1009, revised in 1014), for MacLean, reveal much about how calls to action against opponents were framed by scripture.[22] A variation of the theme is provided by Dominique Barthélemy, who interpreted Bernard of Angers' reference to 'antichrists' in the early eleventh century as a mere dramatisation of claims against St Foy of Conques and the eventual come-uppance of the claimants.[23] Pursued carefully, as in these cases, attention to rhetorical strategy illuminates the ways in which apocalyptic thought was adopted in situations which do not seem to be apocalyptic, millenarian or eschatological beyond a superficial level. The danger is to expect that apocalyptic in extant sources works only at a rhetorical level, and indeed MacLean warns that 'the rhetorical baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater'.[24] Sometimes the sources will work like Barthélemy's example; sometimes they will seem in context to reflect something that fits Fried's model.

There is a fourth position which requires outlining, not least because it is the one I find resonates best with the source material. In 1995, Bernard McGinn argued that the defining characteristic of early medieval apocalyptic was a persistent sense of 'psychological imminence' rather than

[20] P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity AD 200–1000* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2003); C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005).

[21] S. MacLean, 'Apocalypse and Revolution: Europe around the Year 1000', *EME*, 15.1 (2007), 86–106 at pp. 100–5.

[22] Ibid., p. 102; S. MacLean, 'Reform, Queenship and the End of the World in Tenth-Century France: Adso's "Letter on the Origin and Time of the Antichrist"', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 86 (2008), 645–75, esp. pp. 653–8.

[23] D. Barthélemy, 'Antichrist et blasphémateur', *Médiévales*, 37 (1999), 57–70 at pp. 68–9.

[24] MacLean, 'Apocalypse and Revolution', p. 105.

'chronological imminence'.[25] By this, he meant that the Augustinian warnings against prediction meant not a de-eschatologising of ways of thinking, but rather a more radical mode of thought in which Judgement might come at any moment, with action (Church reform, invasion, etc.) pursued accordingly. A particular attraction of this point of view is that it explains the consistency of apocalyptic tradition across *and between* key dates (500, 800, 1000) and it begins to make sense of personal eschatologies and responses to specific events or processes which lie significantly outwith the obvious markers of 'chronological imminence'. Dates can be meaningful within this framework, as Paul Magdalino has argued occurs in Byzantine apocalyptic tradition; their significance, however, is defined by the nature of psychological imminence not the date alone.[26] A similar way of understanding late antique tradition was sketched by R. A. Markus, who illustrated his point with reference to Gregory the Great, who neither observed calendrical calculations nor combated vulgar beliefs about the End, but who rather expressed a 'sense of urgency and the conviction that his world could not be taken for granted. Its very instability and the fragility of civilized order demand constant effort of imagination, of understanding and enterprise.'[27]

Resources for exploring the devotional and intellectual parameters of apocalyptic tradition in the early Middle Ages are well served by attention to the theology and philosophy of the early Church. The thought of the North African bishop Augustine of Hippo is the most thoroughly explored in this context, including important analysis from Markus and Paula Fredriksen.[28] Other individuals to receive sustained treatment

[25] B. McGinn, 'The End of the World and the Beginning of Christendom', in M. Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the End of the World* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 58–89.

[26] Magdalino, 'The History of the Future'; idem, 'The Year 1000 in Byzantium', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *Byzantium in the Year 1000* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 233–70; idem, 'The End of Time in Byzantium', in W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (eds.), *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 119–34. See also W. Brandes, 'Anastasios ó Δίκορος. Endzeiterwartung und Kaiserkritik in Byzanz um 500 n.Chr.', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 90 (1997), 24–63 and 'Liudprand von Cremona (*Legatio* Cap. 39–40) und eine bisher unbeachtete West-Östliche Korrespondenz über die Bedeutung des Jahres 1000 A.D.', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 93 (2000), 435–63.

[27] R. A. Markus, 'Living within Sight of the End', in C. Humphrey and M. Ormrod (eds.), *Time in the Medieval World* (York, 2001), pp. 23–34 at p. 34. In many respects this principle can be seen at work in other recent studies of medieval apocalyptic including: B. Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); M. Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory: The Legend of Charlemagne, the Franks and Jerusalem before the First Crusade* (Oxford, 2011); J. Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, PA, 2011).

[28] R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970); P. Fredriksen, 'Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity: From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 45.2 (1991), 151–83, reworked in

include Gregory the Great, Bede and John Scottus Eriugena.[29] Far more attention has been devoted to later figures beyond the scope of the present study, such as Hildegard of Bingen, Rupert of Deutz and Joachim of Fiore.[30] Certain themes in theology have been charted through the period in question, most notably with Brian Daley's study of hope,[31] and numerous examinations of interpretations of the figure of Antichrist.[32] Trends in biblical exegesis have also been analysed in general in ways which affect our subject.[33] The challenge posed by Fried's 'Endzeiterwartung' in particular is to take the currents in the writings which have formed the basis of these kinds of studies and to trace the ways in which they intersect with political, social and, in both cases, devotional activity. In many ways the interesting question is not whether there was evidence of apocalypticism in the early Middle Ages – there is – but why people invoked apocalyptic thought when they did in the context of a range of political and cultural processes.

A question of methodology

A survey of historiographical moods will only take us so far because we need to begin to outline the kinds of interpretative tools available and appropriate to the task. Sociology, anthropology and religious studies

'Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse', in Emmerson and McGinn, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, pp. 20–37.

[29] On Gregory see R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, 1997), ch. 4. On Bede, P. Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham, 2012) and the introduction to F. Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation* (Liverpool, 2013). On Eriugena, J. McEvoy and M. Dunne (eds.), *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time* (Leuven, 2002), pp. 3–29.

[30] M. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford, 1969); A. Williams (ed.), *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves* (London, 1980); S. Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098–1179: A Visionary Life* (2nd edn, London 1998); B. Newman (ed.), *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley, CA, 1998); J. van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley, CA, 1983).

[31] B. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1991).

[32] H. D. Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist im Mittelalter: Von Tyconius zum deutschen Symbolismus* (Münster, 1973); D. Verhelst, 'La préhistoire des conceptions d'Adson concernant l'Antichrist', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 40 (1973), 52–103; R. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Manchester, 1981); B. McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco, CA, 1994); K. Hughes, *Constructing Antichrist: Paul, Biblical Commentaries, and the Development of Doctrine in the Middle Ages* (Washington, DC, 2005).

[33] Fredriksen, 'Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse'; E. A. Matter, 'The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis', in Emmerson and McGinn, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, pp. 38–50; Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 5–22.

can provide a rich world of case studies and models which might help to shed light on the ways in which apocalyptic movements work. It has been a notable feature of Richard Landes's work, most overwhelmingly in his 2011 book *Heaven on Earth*, that many of his lines of argument stem from understandings about how 'millennial movements' work in general, and how cults deal with both prophecy and prophecy failure. Such trails can be productive as long as we avoid the Landesian temptation to engage in 'Jurassic Park' anthropology and to start filling in missing dinosaur DNA (e.g., silences in eighth-century chronicles) with frog DNA (e.g., appeals to what would happen in 1950s' UFO cults). Any study which concerns itself with cross-cultural comparisons does need to make allowance for difference as well as similarity, because the logic of ideas and actions cannot always be constant when their context is invariably different from one instance to the next.[34] But far from comparative history being an empty pursuit, it can lead us towards two useful things: first, it allows us to begin to identify distinctiveness and similitude in the societies we are going to study, and second, it can help us to draw up the *questions* we might ask of our material, even if it cannot tell us the answers in advance.

Before we can even begin that task, we need to be careful about our terminology. Time and time again, it transpires that words like 'millennialism' do not quite mean what people take them to mean at first sight; some words take on new meanings, and some words are just uncommon. The word 'eschatology' can be taken as being the study of Last Things, pursued on the assumption that all people are mortal, all earthly things will wither, and that there will be a Day of Judgement.[35] 'Apocalypticism' stands as a subsection of eschatology – so much so that it is not always possible to distinguish the two – because it is the belief that that End is imminent. This is the meaning of 'apocalyptic' which resonates best with popular usage, where it often means something catastrophically bad, either en route to a very final ending or else preceding a post-apocalyptic dystopia. One might talk of *the* Apocalypse. We must bear in mind, however, that in eschatology and apocalypse a believer can be *hopeful* that the End is to hand, because it will bring resolution and an end to suffering, and might even usher in some kind of paradise. Moreover, the word 'apocalypse' itself actually means 'revelation'. In the last book of the New Testament, John of Patmos did not 'see the Apocalypse', but rather had various truths about future things

[34] C. Wickham, 'Problems in Doing Comparative History', in P. Skinner (ed.), *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History* (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 5–28.
[35] J. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford, 2008).