But—! The amazing Revolution, even that of a tremendous CONFLAGRATION, which this Wretched Earth must undergo, before it can have Restored and Augmented unto it, the Paradisian Circumstances intended for it! The astonishing Flames, that are to take Vengeance for the infinite Crimes, that have been perpetrated on it; and that are to Purify it, in order to bring its being made a Seat of these, Glorious Things which are spoken of thee, O Thou City of GOD!

Cotton Mather (1662-1727), Triparadisus

…the End is a fact of life and a fact of the imagination, working out from the middle, the human crisis. As the theologians say, we 'live from the End,' even if the world should be endless. We need ends and kairoi and the pleroma, even now when the history of the world has so terribly and so untidily expanded its endless successiveness… In the middest, we look for a fullness of time, for beginning, middle, and end in concord.

Frank Kermode (1919-2010), The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction

Alas! In the evil time/ Of the Dharma-Ending Age. Living beings’ blessings are slight, / It is difficult to train them. Far indeed from the sages of the past! / Their deviant views are deep. Demons are strong, the Dharma is weak, / Many are the wrongs and injuries…

Yòngjīā Xuānjué (665-713), Zhèngdào gē
Meeting Times: M.Tu.W.Th.F 12:00—3:00 pm  
Class Location: Francis Scott Key Hall 0116

Instructor: Jonathan P. Allen  
Instructor Email: jallen22@umd.edu  
Instructor Website: https://umcp.academia.edu/JonathanAllen

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3-4 pm  
Office Location: KEY 3119  
Mailbox Location: KEY 2114

Course Description: While beliefs and practices geared towards the end of biological life have been fixtures of human societies for much of our history, visions of the end of the world, of time, of human history as we know it have not always been universal. Beliefs, ideas, and practices that we can group under the headings of ‘apocalyptic,’ ‘millenial,’ ‘messianic,’ and ‘prophetic’ emerged at different points across ancient and late antique Eurasia, but did not remain confined to the ancient urban hearts of the continent. Rather, by the nineteenth century apocalyptic and millenarian concepts, language, movements, and beliefs had spread and transformed and taken root in diverse societies across the planet, from colonial New Zealand to the Sudan to the Great Lakes Region of North America, often but not always in conjunction with the so-called ‘Great Traditions’ of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism/Daoism. This course will explore this spectacular historical story, tracing the apocalypse—or rather, apocalypses—from late antique literature to anticolonial revolts to contemporary zombie films. We will try to understand why apocalypse and millennium have proved so powerful, and how and why humans have come to conceptualize not just apocalypse but the passage of time, the direction of the world, the role of God in history’s unfolding, and human ability—or lack thereof—to influence the outworking of history and the underlying nature of the cosmos.

The course will begin with an overview of the relevant terms and concepts, followed by a chronological movement through selected apocalyptic and millennial theologies, concepts, and movements from across the world. Class will consist of opening lectures by the instructor, interspersed with discussion, followed by alternating periods of readings and group discussion. Some class times will also incorporate multimedia material, while weeks two and three will include time for students to work on their final projects. Students are encouraged to ask questions and raise points and suggestions at all times.

Course Assigned Books and Readings: While students are not required to purchase any books for the course, and all required readings will be posted online, the following materials are helpful overview texts for our topic and will be placed on reserve in McKeldin for in-library reference:


**Grading:**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Class Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Written Assignments:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Review</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog Entry</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Final Project:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepatory Introduction and Bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-Class Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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**Class Participation:** Students are required to attend each class and to come class prepared. Because of the particular nature of this course, class attendance and active participation make up a primary grade component, and cannot be substituted. In case of emergencies or illness, students should contact the instructor immediately.

In order to prepare for class, students should complete all readings and assignments, and be prepared to discuss them in class. Students will be expected to discuss the progress of their projects each week and should feel free to use this opportunity to discuss any problems they may be having with their research or other components of the course.

**Final Assignment:** In lieu of a research paper or other written project, students will compose and present a final project whose parameters are subject to much individual variation in both composition and content. Your basic project will be to come up with a fictional apocalyptic/millennial ‘movement,’ drawing inspiration from any one of the number of historic examples we will cover or which you might discover in your own research. Using an existing ‘vocabulary’ of eschatology, prophetology, and apocalyptic theology or ideas, you will make your own permutation and depict it in a form of historical fiction. The final physical ‘object(s)’ which you will present to the class on the last day of the term, could be a collection of end-times pamphlets or tracts describing your ‘apocalyptic theology’ or predictions; it could be a graphic novel depicting an end-times scenario; it could involve film or music or visual media of other sorts. You will be evaluated based on your appropriation and understanding of existing apocalyptic discourses, and your drawing upon historical precedents and contexts in crafting your historical fiction. Use of additional primary and secondary literature as well as theoretical literature (anthropological, sociological, and so on) is encouraged. You will cite the material you draw upon in an annotated bibliography, a rough copy of which is due at the end of week two.

**Class Etiquette:** In addition to coming to class prepared, students are expected to contribute to
class discussion in a respectful manner. All students are encouraged to freely share their thoughts and opinions, in a manner respectful of others and of their ideas and thoughts, without monopolizing class discussion. Insulting and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.

Students should feel free to take notes on laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices with a word processor (preferably a laptop or a tablet equipped with a keyboard). Please do not surf the internet, check Facebook, or live-tweet class, as tempting as the latter option no doubt is. Repeated infractions of this rule will result in the suspension of the use of electronic devices in class, something I’d really like to avoid. Please turn off your cell phones before class. If you have an emergency that requires your phone to be on, please inform me before class and have the phone on vibrate.

**Academic Integrity and Honesty:** Honest and ethical research is the cornerstone of historical scholarship. Anything that may cause readers to question the methods, sources, or honesty of a historian taints not only the project itself but the reputation of the historian and their future work. Throughout the semester, we will learn how to conduct appropriate research and how to properly cite and credit your sources so as to avoid any inadvertent dishonesty or plagiarism.

Any form of academic dishonesty is taken very seriously and will not be tolerated. Students are expected to produce their own work individually and plagiarism will be dealt with swiftly. Academic dishonesty is defined by the University of Maryland as follows: *Any of the following acts, when committed by a student, shall constitute academic dishonesty:*

a. **Cheating:** Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise.
b. **Fabrication:** Intentional or unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
c. **Facilitating Academic Dishonesty:** Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to violate any provision of this Code.
d. **Plagiarism:** Intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise.

Please consult the University of Maryland’s Student Honor Council website for more information: http://shc.umd.edu. If you ever have any questions about how to cite or credit sources feel free to ask the instructor.

**Religious Observance:** University policy states that students “should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs: students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances.”

**Academic Support:** Please inform the instructor by the third day of class at the latest if you require any special accommodations due to disability. Please make sure that you contact Disability Support Services and complete all required documentation.

**Course Schedule**
Note: This schedule, like the class as a whole, is a work in progress, and is thus subject to change. Any changes to readings or assignments will be announced via e-mail and ELMS.

Week 1 (January 3-6): Basic Terms, Questions, and the Roots of Apocalyptic Thinking:
Apocalypticism in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages:


Readings: Selections from Old and New Testament apocalyptic books, selections from early Christian and Jewish apocrypha. To be distributed in class.

Wednesday: Apocalypticism in Christian and Jewish late antiquity: special knowledge, the possibility of prophecy, world emperors, and other exciting matters. Containing apocalyptic speculations and millennial dreams—St. Augustine’s perspective. Messiahs and milleniums in East Asian traditions. The reckoning of time and the apocalyptic sensibility.

St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XX.


Friday: Visual and material culture and the apocalypse. The role of apocalypse and millennium in literature, art, culture—‘the sense of an ending?’
Film: Alfonso Cuarón, Children of Men, 2006.

Week 2 (January 9-13): New Permutations of the End: Apocalypse, Millennuims, and Messiahs in Early Modernity:


Tuesday: The Reformation and the apocalypse: late medieval developments, Luther’s unleashing, the Peasant’s Rebellion, signs and wonders, and the Turks at the gate.


Thomas Münzer, Revelation and Revolution: Basic Writings of Thomas Müntzer (Bethlehem : Bethlehem :, 1993).

Wednesday: Messianic and millennial theologies and developments in the Ottoman Empire, and beyond: the incredible case of Sabbatai Sevi, or, the end of the world goes global. Millennial stirrings in late Ming and early Qing China.


Week 3 (January 16-20): The Golden Global Age of Apocalypticism: From 1800 to the Present:

Monday: (MLK Day, no class)

Tuesday: Revival, rapture, and new religious movements in the Anglophone world: Millerism and Mormonism as case studies. Qing millennial revolts. Early anti-colonial millennial uprisings. The true globalization of apocalypse—reasons and ways.


Readings: Richard Connors, Anglo-American Millennialism, from Milton to the Millerites (Leiden ; Leiden ;, 2004).


Book review due!


**Thursday:** The proliferation of the apocalyptic: radical political movements and the end of the world in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. New permutations of old traditions: millennial revolts in Burma and Brazil. Apocalypse and millennium in the collapse of the Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet Union. Fascism and communism as millennial ideologies?


**Blog post due!**

**Friday:** Contemporary developments: so many ends of the world, so little time! Why the obsession? Discerning ‘rhythms’ of the apocalyptic. ‘Religious’ and ‘secular’—what do the distinctions do? The role of apocalyptic/millennial movements in contemporary history. Case studies: China’s Eastern Lightning Movement. ISIS and apocalypse.


**Week 4 (January 23): The End is Nigh:**

**Monday:** Final project presentations, and wrapping up the course—last reflections, ideas for the future? Questioning our categories, revising our categories. The quest for unitive history—an apocalyptic idea?