Terminal Visions: Apocalyptic Thought of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Stelle Group

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Turning and turning in the wide round Ceil —
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed.
The ceremony of innocence is desecrated.
The best lack conviction, whilst the worst are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand.
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out.
When a vast image out of Spirit
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sea
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the缀
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant
The darkness drops again; but now
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a dream
And what rough beast, its hours in dark
Slouches towards Bethlehem town?

Please don't dominate the wra.
If you got nothing new to say.
If you please, go back up the train.
This train's got to run today.

Apocalyptic thought, belief, and practice are a part of the American experience from its very inception. Apocalyptic is infused with the culture. In differing degrees it has permeated the creeds of almost every church, faith, and sect, whether labeled as “mainline” churches (Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Protestant, Catholic, Methodist, etc.) apocalyptic thought is a part of the creeds of almost every church, faith, and sect, whether labeled as "mainline" churches (Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Protestant, Catholic, Methodist, etc.)
Turning and turing in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shawdows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethleham to be born?

W.B. Yeats

Please don't dominate the wrath Jack
If you got nothing new to say.
If you please, go back up the track
This train's got to run today.

"New Speedway Boogie"
The Grateful Dead

Apocalyptic thought, belief and action have been an integral part of
the American experience from Columbus' landing right up to this very
moment. Apocalyptic is infused into many facets of American life and
culture. In differing degrees it plays some part in the teachings and
creeds of almost every church, domination and sect. In many of the
"mainline" churches (Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United
Methodist, etc.) apocalyptic tends to receive little attention. More
fundamentalist organizations (Assemblies of God, Latter Day Saints,
Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) often focus and dwell upon apocalyptic concerns including Armageddon, Doom's Day and the Millenium. Not to be dominated by religious groups, apocalyptic has played huge roles in American literature, film, television and politics. A two and a half page article in the Fall 1985 issue of Convergance, entitled "The Politics of Armageddon," describes statements, public and private, of President Ronald Reagan that "mirror the Armageddon theology of Jerry Falwell and his allies in the New Christian Right." The author of this article stresses that Reagan was saying similar things during his first term as Governor of California, indicating that Reagan is not making comments of this nature for use as a political tool but that he is "one of millions of Americans who read the Bible as a sourcebook for predictions of global conflict."

Upon reaching the coast of South America, Columbus quoted passages from Revelation and Isaiah which speak of "a new heaven and a new earth," and wrote to the sponsors of his voyage, "I deeply feel within me that there, where I have said, lies the Terrestrial Paradise." Millenialism, belief in the second coming and thousand year reign of Christ, was very strong among the Puritans who viewed their Massachusetts settlement as a "city on a hill." Inherent in American culture from the start, apocalyptic has found expression in popular religious treatments like Hal Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth, but also has received a great deal of secular attention in popular entertainment. John Wiley Nelson, author and minister, describes the prominence of apocalyptic and prophetic themes in recent American films and television shows. Analyses of Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica, the Western in general, On the Beach, and Dr. Strangelove (to name only a few) leads him to the belief that entertainment of this type is merely an expression of an "onslaught of fear, anxiety, paranoia and technological guilt." Nelson then identifies three reasons for this "onslaught." 1) Apocalyptic is as American as the hotdog. 2) After the civil rights movement, the burning of the cities, the assassinations, the birth of the drug culture, the Vietnam War and Watergate, who wouldn't feel anxious, paranoid and guilty? 3) A growing sense that only radical, in-breaking action can successfully resolve problems today.

The End of the World is a compilation of essays which treat the use of apocalyptic themes in science fiction. A major characteristic of science fiction apocalyptic is that "the end of the world is seldom the end. The cataclysm is always followed by a new creation." And in the eyes of science fiction there will always be a cataclysm. "The twentieth century has trained us to expect catastrophes." The general form of apocalyptic during the one human prophetic ideals of the Hebrew dominating empires of Persia. The establishment of a common Yahweh seemed less and less supplant the prophets, insisting on earthly destinies of people. The prophet perceives. Apocalyptic emphasizes future their current suffering with.
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Undergraduate Review, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 [1986], Art. 6
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apocalypticist sees the future breaking into the present, not being constructed out of it.\textsuperscript{11}

According to G. E. Ladd, apocalyptic literature is the product of three main factors. 1) The emergence of the “Righteous Remnant.” Whenever people found themselves in a minority group, faithfully serving God but with little prospect of the whole nation adopting their perspective, there was a tendency to hold that the Righteous Remnant prophecies were fulfilled in them. 2) The problem of evil. 3) The ending of prophecy. Apocalyptic was never prevalent when life was easy and straightforward, it was called forth by the circumstances of the day. With its emphasis on God’s final and perfect solution it made life livable under intolerable conditions.\textsuperscript{12} “Apocalyptic was a Judeo-Christian world-view which located the believer in a minority community and gave his life meaning by relating it to the end, soon to come, which would reverse his present status. The key to the interpretation of apocalyptic has usually been seen in the restlessness with the imperfection of the present and its quest for a new and total solution to the human problem.”\textsuperscript{13}

A feature of much apocalyptic is the use of a cryptic language and strange symbolism, which makes the message unintelligible to the modern reader, or anyone outside the group for whom the writing was intended.\textsuperscript{14} It is very difficult to interpret in detail because it belongs within a sect or party. It is esoteric, its meaning to be kept secret until the last days, which always turn out to be in the apocalypticist’s own time.\textsuperscript{15} The question to be asked of apocalyptic is not, “What the hell was the writer really trying to say behind and amid all that imagery and symbolism?" It is rather, “What did the readers (the people) hope for that could only be expressed in such outlandish use of images and symbols?"\textsuperscript{16}

The apocalypticists were concerned by the problem of why the righteous should be called upon to endure very harsh suffering and persecution.\textsuperscript{17} They concluded that the goodness of God lies in his bringing a speedy end to the evils of history and the imminent beginning of the Messianic Age. Characteristics of apocalyptic thinking include that:

1) history is teleological (exhibiting or relating to design or purpose),
2) the teleology of history is moral,
3) the evils of history are necessary preludes to the realization of the moral end of history,
4) this world will be cataclysmically destroyed before the new world begins,
5) we are living at the critical period of historical transformation,
6) only the moral person lives,
7) human choices have no meaning but they do effect the immediate outcome.\textsuperscript{18}

A glaring theme is apocalyptic vs. future salvation, evil vs. god, etc.\textsuperscript{19} Human history is not deterministic, it needs humans, whose choices which allow the time to reward moral behavior by people must choose whether about when the End would be (in their own perspective) and how apocalypticists put their emphasis that God would prevail.\textsuperscript{20} Historical apocalyptic is not immediate politics.” Apocalyptic is a retreat back from immediate involvement about story.” Apocalyptic is the meaning of current political way through the present suffering that will “devolve from the adventure.”

What types of people, or kinds of literary expectations: movements almost always: \cite{Gray '86: Terminal Visions: Apocalyptic Thought of Jehovah’s Witnesses and}

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of the "Righteous Remnant." As a minority group, faithfully the whole nation adopting their problem of evil. 3) The never prevalent when life was forth by the circumstances of the prevalent when life was perfect solution it made life time. "Apocalyptic was a Judea-believer in a minority by relating it to the end, soon to its quest for a new and total use of a cryptic language and message unintelligible to the group for whom the writing was secret in detail because it belongs meaning to be kept secret until be in the apocalypticist's own apocalyptic is not, "What the hell and amid all that imagery and the readers (the people) hope for outlandish use of images and by the problem of why the future very harsh suffering and goodness of God lies in his history and the imminent characteristics of apocalyptic thinking preludes to the realization of the destroyed before the new world and of historical transformation, 6) only the moral person has a place in the new world, 7) human choices have no effect on the processes of history per se, but they do effect the individual's own situation in the world to come. A glaring theme is apocalyptic is dualistic thinking—present suffering vs. future salvation, evil vs. good, evil spirits vs. good spirits, Satan vs. God, etc. Human history is seen as a dialectic between two opposing forces, both personal and cosmic in character, which vie for control of the world; the evil powers which are currently in dominance will soon be overcome by the direct intervention of God. This dualism of ethical forces implies that history is "radically discontinuous." After the final cosmic struggle time will cease, "heaven and earth will become one for eternity and the faithful will enter the holy city." Apocalyptic tradition recognizes the existence of history, but only as a limited time in which human change is possible. But God's control of history is not deterministic. "He sets the teleological course of history but needs humans, whose choices he doesn't control, to create the conditions which allow the teleological processes to occur. He promises to reward moral behavior by implementing the Messianic Age, but people must choose whether or not to be moral." Though details about when the End would be (though never too far in the future from their own perspective) and how it would come about differ, all the apocalypticists put their emphasis on the next world and on their faith that God would prevail. History does not interpret itself. Therefore, apocalyptic is not immediately concerned with "plain history and real politics." Apocalyptic is a re-telling of events. It takes another step back from immediate involvement and response and becomes "story about story." Apocalyptic is the cosmic, universal interpretation of the meaning of current political and historical happenings. It points the way through the present suffering and total chaos toward those things that will "devolve from the mighty works of God." What types of people, or groups, have tended to array behind these kinds of literary expectations of time, history and God? Apocalyptic movements almost always: 1) Have had a charismatic leader (s), 2) Have established clear boundaries between truth and falsehood and see the world as essentially evil territory to be avoided at all costs, 3) Have members which hail from among the sociologically and psychologically unsettled masses. In times of unusual social stress apocalyptic movements create a "lively sense of group identity. "Urbanization and industrialization furnished a social context for the emergence of such groups as the Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. The same milieu also set the stage for refining other variants of the apocalyptic vision which helped to assure the place of hope for a 'new
heaven and a new earth' within mainstream protestantism.24 Converts to the new religions are concerned about their personal, physical and moral survival and because of this are very negatively oriented toward the established society which is "sunk in materialism and headed for disaster."25

This brief summary of the tradition of apocalyptic is drawn from and is descriptive of very old religious traditions, which began to develop during the first century B.C. Two thousand years later the conditions which made this type of movement possible still exist and still find receptive personalities and mindsets willing to embrace and perpetuate even the extremes of the apocalyptic lifestyle. The organization known as the Jehovah's Witnesses provides an excellent contemporary example of the degree to which apocalyptic can thrive in American culture.

In 1869, at the age of seventeen, Charles Taze Russell, heard a sermon by an Advent Christian preacher that restored his faith in the Bible. He did not become a Second Adventist, but gathered a few friends to meet weekly for systematic Bible study. "We came to recognize," wrote Russell, "the difference between our Lord as 'the man who gave himself,' and as the Lord who would come again, a spirit being. We saw that spirit-beings can be present, and yet invisible to men...we felt greatly grieved at the error of the Second Adventists, who were expecting Christ in the flesh..."26 To counteract these erroneous teachings Russell wrote and published at his own expense, in 1873, 50,000 copies of "The Object and Manner of the Lord's Return," the first publication of what would later be known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Throughout the history of the Witnesses there has been a very confusing number of leadership associations made and dissolved, due usually to disagreements in theology, prophecy and prediction. My discussion of the history and organization of Jehovah's Witnesses will therefore be very simple and existent only to the extent necessary to understand some of their teachings.

The motivating factor behind the Jehovah's Witnesses development as a sect (a religious movement alienated from the world, which stresses that it alone possesses the truth) and their insistence on remaining one has been their millenarian eschatology. No major Christian movement has been so insistent on prophesying the end of the world in such definite ways or such specific dates. They have consistently looked to specific dates—1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1920, 1925, 1975 and others-as having specific eschatological significance.27 Russell originally believed that 1874 would mark the beginning of Christ's "invisible presence," that 1878 and then 1881 would see the "change" of members of the church from fleshly bodies to spiritual bodies, and that 1910 would be the beginning of global troubles leading to the end of the world. When prophesied dates were not "spiritualized," or abandoned.

All of this prediction and speculation, based upon examples from the Bible, are assigned significant dates (month and day) are assigned beginning of the existence of the world, the beginning of the end times; the birth of the New Nation 6,000 years of human existence on earth will be completed; 29 it will be restored to mankind. Jehovah's Witnesses hold that only one that is completely true; the Bible was conducted by a committee of Bible "scholars."28 Throughout the plethora of Bible study aids, they explain the Bible to its members; these Watchtower printings to explain the Bible and its importance to the Bible and its Witnesses were expected to read the Bible and its Witnesses were expected to read but only 197 pages of the Bible were to be understood.30

"The Watchtower Society it has held to a particular interpretation of the Bible, as one that Watchtower leaders are light."31 For years "God's people" were the end of the Gentile Times when the faithful would be identified, that date as "the birth of the New Nation." In 1975 an attempt was made to identify that date as "the birth of the New Nation."
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Charles Taze Russell, heard a sermon that restored his faith in the Adventist, but gathered a few followers. "We came to believe in the nearness of our Lord as 'the man of the man,' and that the Second Adventists, those who believe in and practice the Second Adventist faith, have a responsibility to the extent necessary to explain the Bible to its members. Due to the emphasis placed upon these Watchtower printings there has occurred an inversion of importance of the Bible and the "supplementary teachings." Jehovah's Witnesses hold that "all scripture is of God." They accept the sixty six books of the standard Protestant Old and New Testaments as the only scripture, but maintain that some translations are more truthful than others. They hold that the New World Translation is the only one that is completely error-free. Translation of the New World Bible was conducted by a committee composed of Watchtower Society Bible "scholars." Throughout its history the Society has published a plethora of Bible study aids, commentaries and other materials to explain the Bible to its members. Due to the emphasis placed upon these Watchtower printings there has occurred an inversion of importance of the Bible and the "supplementary teachings." In 1981 Witnesses were expected to read 3,178 pages of Watchtower literature, but only 197 pages of the Bible. Russell's teachings quickly attained the status of tradition and became the only medium by which the scriptures were to be understood.

The Watchtower Society had been extremely doctrinaire whenever it has held to a particular position, whether relating to prophetic speculation or otherwise. Then, later, when it became obvious that the doctrine in question was untenable, it would retreat to the assertion that Watchtower leaders are not infallible and must progress with the light."31 For years "God's people" had anticipated October 1, 1914, as the end of the Gentile Times, the end of all things and the moment when the faithful would be lifted off the earth heavenward. As October 1914 receded further into the past, members of the society began to identify that date as "the beginning of the end."32

In 1975 an attempt was made to get the governing body to set the Witness community on a more open, less dogmatic course. There was hope that the Society's Gentile Times chronology and the teaching surrounding 1914 would be ditched, or at least re-examined. The
closest they came to abandoning that teaching was a proposal to shift
the date from 1914 to 1957; from the generation that saw World War I
to the generation that witnessed Sputnik and the beginning of the
Space Age. The latest spectacular date that has come and gone
without fireworks is 1975, the end of 6,000 years of human history and
the probable beginning of the millennium. The “Stay alive till ’75”
campaign proved to be a lot of hype, and caused serious chaos within
the power structure of the society and the falling away of many who
were weak in the faith. The preceding examples are enough to give us
a taste of the doctrinal integrity that has been practiced throughout the
entire history of the Watchtower Society. It would be unfair to assert
that leadership conciously engages in deceptions. The type of
person that reaches the upper tiers of leadership in the society is
thoroughly steeped in millenial thinking and really believes that God
will work in the ways they have distilled from the scriptures—the inspired
word of God.

Jehovah’s Witnesses have always accepted and believed the
traditional Christian concept of the linear progression of history.
History began with the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden. Jehovah
destroyed the first world of man and wicked angels by flooding them
out. He smiled upon Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and gave their
descendants a divine law to live by. However, the law only made Israel’s
innate sinfulness more apparent. Jesus Christ was sent to die in order to
ransom Israel and humankind in general from sin and death. At that
point God revealed his will for men and the way in which they could be
saved. At the same time Christ began to choose a “church class of
144,000 spiritual Israelites from among all sorts of men and women.”
This “little flock”, “bride of Christ,” etc. eventually will receive a
heavenly resurrection to reign and rule with Jesus as king-priests for
1000 years. Except for the people who have been “wilfully wicked” the
dead will be resurrected during the 1000-year reign of Christ and given
the opportunity to learn God’s will and then accept or reject it. Those
living during the end times will either pass through Armageddon, into a
new earth which will eventually become an Eden-like paradise, or will
be completely destroyed by God’s wrath. The dead who are resurrected
will be raised to that paradise. At the end of the 1000 years Satan and
his demon hordes will be released to deceive the nations. Then Satan,
his spirit comrades and those men and women that joined him in
rebellion will be destroyed by the fire of God’s wrath. Those left
alive will be declared justified and granted the loving reward of
everlasting life.

This brief outline of the entire history of the world has appeared in
Watchtower publications since 1884. We’ll now take a glimpse at some
of the details of the end time and thejsx

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eaching was a proposal to shift generation that saw World War I and the beginning of the 20th century, which has come and gone, 100 years of human history and more. The “Stay alive till ‘75” and caused serious chaos within the falling away of many who g examples are enough to give us an idea of how ancient and how long people have practiced throughout the world untruths. It would be unfair to assert that leadership in the society is wrong and really believes that God from the scriptures—the inspired Word—has been resurrected and believed the progression of history. And Eve in Eden. Jehovah and Jacob and gave their price, the law only made Israel’s Christ was sent to die in order to atone for sin and death. At that time the way in which they could be to choose a “church class of all sorts of men and women.” c. eventually will receive a with Jesus as king-priests for all the dead who are resurrected end of the 1000 years Satan and receive the nations. Then Satan, women who joined him in God’s wrath. Those left received the loving reward of paradise earth during his 1000-year reign.36

The human soul is the person him/her self. When the person dies it is the human soul that dies. The soul is not eternal. The spirit is the "life force" present in both men and animals, so when people die their spirits are in no sense conscious. Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe in hellfire or purgatory. Hell is simply man’s common grave from which individuals can be resurrected to either a heavenly or an earthly life. Gehenna and the lake of fire referred to by Jesus in Revelation do not indicate eternal torment, but the second death—eternal. Humans die because Adam and Eve’s willful sinning caused them to lose perfection, and imperfect beings die.37 Jehovah’s Witnesses have been raised up to make God’s will known before Armageddon—to give people of the last days another opportunity to know God’s will and accept it.38

In its formative years the Witness movement was fairly ‘liberal’ in the sense that it believed that other Christians, particularly some of the Protestants, were part of the church of Christ and could gain salvation. But as time passed Russell and his followers became convinced that he had a special role. He was the special servant referred to in Matthew 24:45-47 who was to provide “meat in due season” for the household of faith. Though he originally associated with, and borrowed from the teachings of, clergymen of various denominations, Russell gradually grew more negative towards, and critical of, other churches, their pastors and priests. In 1919 Judge Rutherford, Russell’s successor as president of the Society, began a campaign of condemnation of the world in which business, government and religion “were labelled as the Devil’s chief instruments.” He claimed that the clergy of all religions had sided with Satan in opposition to the Lord, his Christ and his Christian Witnesses. The Catholic church was seen with the greatest disfavor, with Protestant and Jewish clergy faring little better. They were all depicted as deliberately misleading the children of God. “Religion is a Snares and a Racket.”40

The formal organizational structure, the theocracy, by which Jehovah’s Witnesses are governed is very important. To them it is the government of God on earth. In this case theocratic can be defined as hierarchical. The structure of the Witness government almost exactly mirrors the organization of the Roman Catholic Church (see charts).
Organizational Structure

The Organizational Structure of Jehovah's Witnesses

Solid lines indicate the ordinary lines of communication within the organizational structure of Jehovah's Witnesses; broken lines indicate more uncommon, but sanctioned, means of communication.

The Catholic Church

The Pope of Rome
The College of Cardinals
The Papal Curia
The Vatican
Archbishops
Bishops
Priests
Deacons
Regular Orders
The Catholic laity
Solid lines indicate the ordinary lines of communication within the organizational structure of Jehovah's Witnesses; broken lines indicate more uncommon, but sanctioned, means of communication.
The theocracy is a bureaucracy of which the president, until 1971, was a complete spiritual autocrat. After 1971, what is known as the governing body came into existence reducing the role of the president to that of "first among equals."¹⁴¹ The society exercises great control over the Witness community through 1) the preaching work, and 2) the system of judicial committees. It is difficult for an ordinary Witness to challenge the authority of an elder in his congregation, a circuit overseer or especially any aspect of the national leadership.⁴² "Jehovah’s Witnesses are, if anything, twentieth century sectarian Puritans with many of the same taboos and social attitudes as seventeenth century English and New England forbears, along with more than a touch of Victorian pietism."⁴³ For years the society has had a very negative attitude toward anyone who has wanted to study the Jehovah’s Witnesses in depth. The society has a policy of discouraging individual Witnesses from publishing anything relating to their faith. If something needs to be published, the society will do it. Watchtower officials have an idealized history of the movement, created by suppressing or distorting unflattering historical facts, to which they are dedicated to preserving.⁴⁴ The society has been anti-intellectual since the early days. Russell instructed members not to send children to universities, college or high school. Though Knorr, the third president, raised the educational levels up to the point of stressing the importance of basic education, it has never been believed that higher education was necessary for the training of preachers and evangelists. Circuit overseers and elders have often preached against higher education and made life unpleasant for any Witness students who insisted on attending a university.⁴⁵

There are no prohibitions against any foods (except those containing blood) or any beverages, no peculiar dress styles and no absolute prohibitions against most forms of entertainment for members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet every Witness feels constantly alienated from the world by the many things he must not do and the many others that he should not do. A Witness may not serve in the military, work for another religious organization, hold an elected public office, produce, sell or consume tobacco, stand for the national anthem, salute the flag, use hallucinogens, celebrate holidays, engage in improper sexual relations, etc.⁴⁶ So why does anyone become a Witness? Some reasons given include:

1) Disillusionment with chaotic political, social and economic conditions throughout much of the world.
2) Strong feelings of disillusionment with the religious groups with which they were formerly associated in both the Christian and non-Christian worlds.
3) Admiration for both Witness moral values and behavior.

Since almost the very beginning, use of the printed word has been major. Over 53,500,000 Bibles, books and 460,072,000 copies of Awake! and much evidence to the contrary, Witnesses believe that it is an effective means, rate, the literature is a major source considered a most important factor and is the basic means of inculcating ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses. The view of James Penton, the Watchtower's written articles, especially when done. But it often repeats in tiresome fashion, have been printed again and again, a rather low grade version of Reader's Digest hammers on the themes of social and Kingdom Ministry is a dull monthly congregational service meetings are techniques.⁵⁰

There are currently about 2,700,000 congregations around the world with adherents. There has continued to
4) Appreciation for a religion which claims ultimate answers for mankind's ultimate questions.
5) An equal appreciation for a social and organizational structure in which the life of the individual can become eternally meaningful. Consequently most Witnesses tend to think of society outside their own community as decadent and corrupt. Every political, economic and military crisis is seen as another sign that the world is fast coming to its end and is beyond repair. This means that they must keep to themselves (except for preaching work); apart from Satan's "doomed system of things." 47

Since the present evil world is passing away there is little time for any thing except the preaching work. It makes no sense to them to exert time and energy on building schools, hospitals, or any other charitable institutions. "The preaching work of the Jehovah's Witnesses is seen as the 'touchstone' of their lives, central to their very raison d'etre." 48 The governing body has placed a great deal of stress on salvation through a work, through preaching. The Watchtower society still teaches that both the apocalypse and the dawning of a new age are at hand, therefore to Witnesses in general "life is real; life is earnest; and its goal is not the grave"—it is rather to praise Jehovah and vindicate his name by reading Watchtower literature and placing it at doors. 49

Since almost the very beginning of the Witness movement, extensive use of the printed word has been made. In 1983 alone they distributed over 53,500,000 Bibles, books and booklets around the world plus over 460,072,000 copies of Awake! and Watchtower magazines. In spite of much evidence to the contrary, Watch Tower leaders continue to believe that it is an effective means of spreading their message. At any rate, the literature is a major source of income for the society, is considered a most important factor in door-to-door preaching work, and is the basic means of inculcating ideas into the heads and hearts of ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses. The quality of the literature varies. In the view of James Penton, the Watchtower has some reasonably well-written articles, especially when dealing with moral or social issues. But it often repeats in tiresome fashion old doctrines or themes which have been printed again and again since World War I. Awake! is "a rather low grade version of Reader's Digest, is dated, pedestrian and hammers on the themes of social breakdown and moral decay." Our Kingdom Ministry is a dull monthly bulletin outlining weekly congregational service meetings and repetitively discusses proselytizing techniques. 50

There are currently about 2,700,000 Jehovah's Witnesses comprising 34,500 congregations around the world, plus several million more adherents. There has continued to be a growth in numbers, but the
Turnover rate has been very high. Policies of headquarters and the governing body have led to the loss of many intellectuals and the defection of many of the movements formerly most loyal and able members. In effect, then, while it is always dangerous to predict the future, it is reasonable to believe that while in the short term Jehovah's Witnesses will maintain their 'unworldly' sectarian style, eventually they will be forced to come to terms with the world which today they would like so much to see destroyed. That is, unless mankind as a whole is overtaken by that great apocalypse or battle of Armageddon which not only Jehovah's Witnesses but many others as well see as a real possibility during the last years of the twentieth century.

For the sake of recognizing the diversity of the American apocalyptic experience, we will also take a brief glance at the Stelle Group whose approach to apocalypse contrasts sharply with the Jehovah's Witnesses, but also parallels some of the basic underlying themes. The purpose of life is "Ultimate advancement to the pinnacle of existence—to be one with God! You cannot become one with God until you are His equal in knowledge of everything. God has provided the means and intermediate steps to do so. It is the very meaning of our presence here. God created us in order to glorify Him in the greatest way imaginable, which is to elevate ourselves to his very level." The Stelle Group was founded March 5, 1963, as not-for-profit religious/educational corporation to provide a way for people to consciously work toward the goal mentioned above. In January of 1970 the Stelle Group bought 240 acres of land about 60 miles south of Chicago and began construction of a community, Stelle, Illinois, which it is hoped will eventually mushroom in growth. Stelle is different from other intentional communities in that it pursues a balanced, holistic upgrading of all aspects of living, which includes the conscious evolution of economics, politics, social structure, art, aesthetics, education, health, technology, spiritual and psychological growth, commerce, construction, agriculture and futuristic undertakings. Its people are practical enough to use anything that has proven workable in improving their lives and the environment of their community. It is an ongoing community of people working to establish a culture that transcends the mediocrity of mass-man. The Stelle Group provides an organization for persons to achieve the greatness intended of human beings. But there are no recruiting drives or evangelism efforts, it is seen as far more appropriate that the people who are naturally ready for the great work should actively seek a place there by their own volition. The formation of the Stelle Group and the building and continued existence of the Stelle community were inspired and guided by the ideals and philosophy expounded by Eklal Kueshana, pen name of the founder of the Stelle Group. Eklal Kueshana, pen name explanation of the organization's founder, is the telling of Richard's continuous attempts to describe the Brotherhoods. Through the instruction nature of man and what is means to advancement, assuring society as it currently exists some of the main points of Stelle are:

Over a million years ago individually each human through the course of their life of existence, to gain complete existence—the physical, mental, spiritual. In this way the Ego is known to helping other Egos attain Mastership, the whole life was existence. Those beings on that level those on that level progressed to where they become one with the whole community.

It should only take one to attain Mastership, but due to the Egos on Earth have taken only a very small percentage of Egos are supposed to be Masters. The members of one plane other Egos on other plane Egos that have become Masters 7,000 years ago to destroy the society that develops will advancements. In this way goal of perfection will happen and thus advance with 15,000 years before the pr gets on the right track to just a few lifetimes; but the path. There are twelve degree first degree requires spirit body, controlled clairvoyant a long record of good work profession and a burning
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Undergraduate Review, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 [1986], Art. 6
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/rev/vol1/iss1/6
the advancement of mankind. Degrees one through seven indicate the degree of control over oneself and one's environment. Attainment of the seventh degree means that the Ego no longer must function on the physical plane, and is known as an Adept. The twelfth degree is Master and indicates a complete understanding of everything possible on the first four planes of existence; a high proficiency in at least 144 trades, arts, and professions; and that one is perfectly free from hate, fear, envy, lust, and pride.

Those Egos who have already attained Adeptship or Mastership have organized into twelve Brotherhoods dedicated to aiding the rest of mankind in their advancement. Five of the Brotherhoods are composed only of Masters who function strictly on the mental plane. The other seven are composed of Masters, Adepts and other advanced human Egos who have been carefully selected for special attention and instruction so that they may also be elevated to Adeptship. A Brotherhood will never interfere in the affairs of a nation and will not operate in the environment of any individual without expressed invitation to do so, and then only if the person has done his very best to help himself and can no further without aid. Students of the Brotherhoods have included Moses, Socrates, Jesus, John the Baptist, Buddha, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin.

The Great Pyramid of Giza was built under the supervision of the Brotherhoods in order to record in stone the plan for the evolution of a superior society. The dates and events foretold in the pyramid were accurately predicted, usually to the minute, and the Brotherhoods have adhered to this established timetable. However, with the advent of the Aquarian Age in August of 1953, the period of the pyramid's prophecies came to a close. However, Chapter 16 of Revelation foretells the nature of the final years of the twentieth century. In The Ultimate Frontier Armageddon and Doom's Day are two distinct occurrences. Armageddon "is a series of wars, or more exactly one war with pauses, which began in 1914 and will grow more destructive and vicious as this century draws to its close. Armageddon's violent culmination will take place about a year before the turn of the century. It is a major instrument of the Judgment." Armageddon and Doom's Day will be the result of natural geological transformation. The Earth's crust is continually in the process of rising and falling, becoming alternately ocean and continent producing the stratified layers of rock that are easily observed in mountainous areas. The crust is currently out of equilibrium; the continental arches are ripe for buckling, and the ice caps are unbalanced. The trigger for the great seismic re-shifting of the Earth's surface will come from an outside source. On May 5, 2000 A.D., the planets of the solar system will be arrayed in practically a straight line in space, putting enough gravitational distortions on the Earth to set the crust in motion. Armageddon and Doom's Day will then occur.

Less than one tenth of the world's population will survive. Those who survive will have their convications and civilizations transformed by the Kingdom of God. After October 1969, the Brothership will form upon “The Great Isle of Power” in the Pacific Ocean. The Brotherhood's mission is to aid in the transformation of the earth's civilization by providing leadership for the new age. Kieninger was given the task of choosing a major preliminary step for this mission. He directed this step to the Chicago area for the training of the leadership for the Kingdom of God. This community is called Stelle.

Though given the guidance to be leaders together by the highest ideals have been faced with the same difficulties and challenges as any small group. The group gathered in Chicago; directed by Kieninger's wife; established a base; constructed a woodwork building in Stelle. There were a number of different leadership styles, whether or not the task was being completed. The wife gained a large amount of control and was eventually exiled from the community. The husband and she voluntarily quit the group and moved to another location. The leadership at Stelle was vested in the membership, which is necessary for a person to be a member of the Kingdom of God. This community is called Stelle. Now anyone who wishes can join.

It is a group of people who take responsibility for their own lives and what they think and talk among themselves. It is concerned with daily living by doing their best and thinking of others. If someone has a complaint, they would have them do unto you. They are working to correct the situation. They are looking for improvement and personal resources.

There are about 100 people who reside in surrounding towns, and another couple of hundred people...
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Though given the guidance of the great Brotherhoods and brought together by the highest ideals known to mankind, the Stelle Group has been faced with the same difficulties as any other group—power struggles, schisms, economic uncertainty, and a rockier and much slower growth than expected. Under the direction of Kieninger, the group gathered in Chicago; developed a school for the children; directed by Kieninger's wife; started Stelle Woodworking; bought farm land; constructed a woodworking factory and houses on the site of Stelle. There were a number of schisms over democratic and oligarchic leadership styles, whether or not to permit drug use, etc. Kieninger's wife gained a large amount of power and succeeded in getting her husband exiled from the community. In 1975 he was allowed to return and she voluntarily quit the group. Kieninger then began to concentrate on establishing another community in Texas. The leadership at Stelle was vested in a chairman. Until 1981 it was necessary for a person to be a member of the Stelle Group to reside in Stelle. Now anyone who wishes to may live there.

It is a group of people who have come together to recognize responsibility for their own lives. There is a degree of apocalyptic thought and talk among the members, but the majority are mostly concerned with daily living by the rules of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" and "what you sow, so shall you reap." If someone has a complaint, they realize that they are responsible for working to correct the situation. Great emphasis is placed on personal improvement and personal responsibility.

There are about 100 people who live in Stelle, another 30 or 40 who reside in surrounding towns, 40 or 50 in the Dallas, Texas, area, and another couple of hundred people across the country who support the
group. Though minuscule compared to the size of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Stelle provides a good comparison to them in regard to the forms that American apocalyptic expression is currently taking. Though they both fulfill all seven characteristics of apocalyptic thinking noted early in this paper, the differences are quite striking. The Witnesses are a more widespread organization with congregations in many locations. Stelle is a residential community mostly withdrawn from the predominant culture and society, but they tend to be more open-minded and accepting of other people and do not insist on a conformity of thought to be a resident of their project. Jehovah's Witnesses eschatology is more strictly Judeo-Christian in background, contains lots of questionable applications of scripture and numerous unfulfilled prophecies. Stelle's philosophy draws from many traditions but seems to make a great deal more sense than the Jehovah's Witnesses. The dates that have been predicted are yet to come, but preparation for the end requires a refining of one's whole life, but *The Ultimate Frontier* allows for more incarnations in the future to perfect oneself—compared to the Witnesses' one life in which to find the truth.

This paper does not claim to reach any conclusions regarding the validity of apocalyptic, but merely to identify some of its characteristics and current manifestations. Its persuasiveness and influence is quite widespread, and in this day and age of earthquakes, terrorism, and reprisal, and the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, its influence and message need to be taken into consideration.


Notes

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24 Lippy, pp. 48, 50, 52
25 Bergoffen, p. 33.
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