

# Visions of the End: From Paul to Apocalyptic Fiction

RELG 334 Christian Thought and Culture (CATH 370 crosslisted)

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F2020 TR 10:05-11:25

'From a certain point of view, the world's history is God's judgment of the world.' – *Solovyov*

## *Description & Goals*

That time is directional, that history is headed somewhere rather than nowhere, that it does not merely go round in circles like the stars in their courses, is a biblical idea. Messianism, millennialism, myths of progress, and utopianism are all indebted to this covenantal postulate. So are dystopian and apocalyptic visions, with their contests between good and evil, Christ and Antichrist. We will examine some of these visions, paying special attention to their roots in Paul's early correspondence, in search of a better understanding of Christian eschatology and of our own times.

## *Required Texts & Assigned Novels*

- Douglas Farrow, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (2020)
- Josef Pieper, *The End of Time* (1980; ET 1999)
- Vladimir Solovyov, *War, Progress, and the End of History* (1900; ET 1915)
- Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World* (1915)
- C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (1945)
- P. D. James, *Children of Men* (1992; set in 2021)

Consult Paragraph Books or your local bookstore, or order on-line. It is best to do this in advance of term. None of the books is long or expensive. Short biblical texts will also be assigned and supporting material posted.

Recommended summer reading: Michael O'Brien, *Father Elijah: An Apocalypse* (1996)

## *Assignments & Assessment*

### **Quiz** (10 marks)

- read Book 20 of Augustine's *The City of God*, on the main points of which there will be a short quiz when we come to Augustine (Session 14 on **20 October**)
- those who wish a fuller picture of the work in question and of Augustine's prototypical theology of history may consult William Babcock's introduction to his fresh translation of *The City of God* (New City Press 2018, Abridged Study Edition, xii–xlix)

### First Paper (20 marks)

- read Benson, Lewis, and James
- write a reflection paper of c. 1500 words on the moral and psychological features of their respective dystopias, on which you should keep notes as you read
- you may appeal to other literature, primary or secondary, in elucidation (that's a good thing) but you must show genuine familiarity with the novels in question
- the paper, which is due on **26 October**, must be properly referenced and edited; late papers will be penalized one mark per diem (early submissions are welcome)

### Second Paper (35 marks)

- introduce yourself to Solovyov and Pieper (employ good encyclopedias such as *Religion Past & Present* to help you with unfamiliar names or ideas) and then read them
- from the bibliography below, select either Niebuhr or Moltmann as a third voice; read the parts that appear germane
- write a paper of 2500–3000 words, summarizing what each tries to tell us about a properly Christian view of history; develop and articulate your own questions for each author
- the paper, which is due on **24 November**, must be properly referenced and edited; late papers will be penalized one mark per diem

### Take-home Exam (35 marks)

- essay questions, based on the lectures, the Thessalonians commentary (pp. 171–265), and posted materials; begin preparing by taking good notes in class
- 48 hours, date TBA

### *Provisional Lecture Outline*

1. Evil and the possibility of a philosophy of history
2. 'When the wood is green'
3. Jesus among the prophets
4. 'Men's hearts failing them for fear'
5. Paul and Jesus
6. 'The time that remains'
7. Paul's mission to Thessaloniki
8. 'We do not wish you ignorant'
9. A question of justice
10. Paul's reading of Daniel
11. The mystery of lawlessness
12. Paul, John, and the legend of antichrist
13. Irenaeus and Hippolytus
14. *In templo dei?* Tyconius and Augustinus [Quiz]
15. Augustine's view of time and history
16. Augustine's view of the end
17. That question of justice again

18. The later apocalyptic imagination
19. The pope as antichrist?
20. The myth of progress
21. Utopian and dystopian visions
22. Christian optimism: postmillennialism, universalism, *apokatastasis*
23. 'When the wood is dry': apocalyptic fiction in the twentieth century
24. Apocalyptic fiction and its theologies
25. Apocalyptic fiction and its politics
26. The end of time?

### ***More Books & Novels***

- Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains* (2000; ET 2005)  
*The Mystery of Evil: Benedict XVI and the End of Days* (2013; ET 2017)
- Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (1959; ET 1963)
- Nickolai Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (1923; ET 1936)  
*The Beginning and the End* (ET 1952)
- B. Blackwell et al. (eds), *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination* (2016)
- Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (1945; ET 2002)
- G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine* (1966)  
*The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (1980)
- G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*
- Christopher Dawson, *The Judgement of the Nations* (1943)
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880; ET 1970)
- Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* (1999)  
*Ascension Theology* (2011)
- Northrup Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982)
- Douglas Harink, ed., *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision* (2010)
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1840; ET 1857)
- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)
- Kevin Hughes, *Constructing Antichrist* (2005)
- Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1)
- G. E. Lessing, *The Education of the Human Race* (1780; ET 1881)
- C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra (Voyage to Venus)*, 1943)  
*The Abolition of Man* (1943)  
*The Great Divorce* (1946)
- Joseph Mangina, *Revelation* (2010)
- Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)
- Bernard McGinn, *AntiChrist* (2000)
- Walter Miller Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959)
- Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God* (1994; ET 1996)
- J. H. Newman, "Four Lectures on Antichrist" (1838; 1907, vol. 2)
- Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (1943)
- Michael O'Brien, *Elijah in Jerusalem* (2015)
- Paul O'Callaghan, *Christ our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology* (2011)
- Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (1993; ET 1998)

- John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (1970)  
 Jean Raspail, *The Camp of the Saints* (1973; ET 1975)  
 Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (2000)  
 Anthony Thiselton, *First and Second Thessalonians Through the Centuries* (2011)  
*The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (2015)  
 J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings* (1954–55)  
 Eric Voegelin, *Crisis and the Apocalypse of Man* (CW26, 1990)  
 Charles Williams, *All Hallows' Eve* (1945)  
 Jerry Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (2008)  
 N.T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (2005)  
*Christian Origins and the Question of God* (5 vol., 1992–)

### ***Additional Information***

- The instructor is available for consultation after class, circumstances permitting.
- Lecture notes should be taken by hand. No computers or electronic devices may be used in the classroom except in cases of disability. [suspended due to remote delivery]
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. English is preferred by the instructor, as are typed submissions.
- McGill University values academic integrity. *Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.* For more information, see 'Keeping it Honest': [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)
- This course may contain unsettling material. Beyond the demands of the syllabus itself, no one will be obliged to adopt language, categories, or views with which he or she does not agree.



Signorelli, Disputation of Antichrist