

# Introduction

## Nature, Scope, and Structure of the Book

This book examines how evangelicals in Northern Ireland read the Troubles (1966–2007) in the light of how they read the Bible. Notwithstanding its rootedness in the Northern Ireland context, this work is more than yet another addition to the existing articles and monographs that constitute the historiography of the Troubles. By considering the ways in which evangelical readings of the Bible inform their interpretations of society, this work supervenes on issues that reach out beyond this specific field of scholarly debate and makes sustained critical incursions into the much larger academic provinces of critical theory, hermeneutics and biblical studies. This study will demonstrate that biblical apocalyptic-eschatological language was a decisive presence (albeit often an inconspicuous and subtle presence)<sup>1</sup> in evangelical discourses concerning the turbulent events that characterized this dark yet fascinating period in the history of Northern Ireland. The very fact that the Northern Ireland conflict has become known in the popular mind as the “Troubles” could be seen as an implicit acknowledgement of the decisive role of apocalyptic eschatology in the crisis associated with the violent events of 1967–2007. The word, “Troubles”, possesses connotations that resonate with the biblical notion of “tribulation,” particularly the apocalyptic conception of the “great tribulation” (θλίψιν μεγάλην—Matt 24:21; Rev 2:22; 7:14).<sup>2</sup> This work aims to shed important new

1. Landes, a leading figure in contemporary millennial studies, notes that “most of the time . . . apocalyptic beliefs remain dormant or concealed.” See Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, 41.

2. In what has become known as his “Olivet Discourse,” Christ spoke of a time of

light on the issue of how the interpretation of certain texts can affect the hermeneutical horizon of evangelical experience in a context of crisis and conflict. The analysis will be directed throughout towards providing innovative ways of conceptualizing the relation between texts and social events and processes.

Despite the vast range of primary and secondary materials and the eclectic diversity of disciplinary approaches employed in this study, the unity of this work is established by the central notion of the text as an active agent rather than a passive object in the hermeneutical process. Much of the scholarship in the field of millennial studies has underlined the great extent to which apocalyptic-eschatological texts can be adapted to suit the changing contexts of differing ages according to the convictions and aspirations of a particular people for whom apocalyptic categories become formative of their identity.<sup>3</sup> My aim is to overturn this understanding by positing the notion of the text as an active hermeneutical agent in the interpretive process in relation to Northern Ireland evangelical interpretations of biblical apocalyptic-eschatological texts.

Although millennial studies has undergone a decisive break with the so-called “deprivation thesis,”<sup>4</sup> even the most recent scholarship continues to take for granted the notion that apocalyptic discourse<sup>5</sup>

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tribulation, “such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be,” which would accompany the end times. This period would be marked by natural disasters such as “famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places” and disruptions in the firmament, as well as man-made calamity such as war, and a profusion of false prophets who will deceive many people into their ruin (Matt 24).

3. Weber, *Apocalypses*, 32; Farmer, *Beyond the Impasse*, 145; Schüssler-Fiorenza, “The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic,” 313–14.

4. This notion, which dominated early millennial scholarship in the wake of Norman Cohn’s *Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957), asserted in its crudest form that millennial ideas were little more than ideological by-products of the social context that produced them. See chapter 1 for a more detailed summary of this notion in the history of millennial studies and a sustained refutation of its central assumptions.

5. In using this word, I should note that this study introduces a subtle distinction between the terms “text” and “discourse.” My use of these terms in this study corresponds to the notion that biblical texts generate discourses, which includes the interpretation of the reading community. “Text” thus refers to language that pre-exists a particular interpretive community, whereas “discourse” refers to the use of such language in context by communities which interpret these texts. However, this distinction is not clear-cut and there is considerable overlap in the use of these terms. For instance, as Ricoeur argues, texts can be understood as extending to phenomena “not specifically limited to writing, nor even to discourse.” See Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 37. For a useful discussion of the formal distinctions between the two terms and an account

emerges out of social contexts. Seeking to critically interrogate this assumption, this book aims to identify ways in which millennial writing itself can become constitutive of the contexts against which it is read. This study will demonstrate that far from responding to prevalent social conditions, apocalyptic language became formative of evangelical perceptions of their context. But the relationship between text and context is not a simple “either/or” issue. Context was important in determining how apocalyptic-eschatological language was used for particular purposes and why it acquired a particular influence at certain points in the history of the Troubles. Although there is no evidence to support the notion of a direct correlation between political contexts of crisis and the emergence of apocalyptic thought, it is nevertheless the case that, in some instances, the sense of crisis contributed to an increase in the use of apocalyptic language. In other words, it will be shown that although a context of crisis does not create apocalyptic thought, it can amplify its influence. Rather than positing either/or arguments for text and context, I will argue that the theory that language shapes social reality supports the notion of a dialectical relationship between text and context, since context is itself a confluence of texts.

Therefore, in acknowledging the importance of context in this respect, it is equally important not to overlook the ways in which apocalyptic-eschatological language of the biblical texts actively shaped evangelical perceptions of their historical context. In other words, apocalyptic language was more than simply a response to a historical crisis or a feeling of deprivation or persecution among evangelical interpreters. This point underlines the complexity and polyvalence of the relation between text and context which lies at the heart of this book. Pursuing the implications of these claims I will argue that the analysis of apocalyptic-eschatological language during the Troubles can be used to illuminate some of the theoretical arguments which have occupied philosophers of language concerning the relationship between texts and contexts in interpretive processes.<sup>6</sup>

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of how theorists have used the terms, see Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, *Discourse Analysis*, 1–8.

6. Jacques Derrida has argued that the “text” overruns contextual limits. A text is best understood as “a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces”; Derrida, “Living on,” 84–85. See also Derrida, *Spurs*, 123–43.

This study is thus a discursive analysis of evangelical uses of apocalyptic-eschatological language in relation to the conflict and crisis of the Northern Ireland Troubles between 1966 and 2007. The aim is to outline an original approach to the relationship between the interpretation of apocalyptic-eschatological texts and contextual crises. By setting out this relationship this study brings a new perspective to millennial studies that has the potential to open new paths towards a proper conceptualization of the interaction between apocalyptic-eschatological texts and social crisis. Part of the aim will be to illustrate and account for the different interpretative responses of evangelicals to apocalyptic-eschatological texts through an innovative analysis of the relations among the texts, contexts and cultures of evangelicalism in Northern Ireland during this period.

This book is written with two distinct reading audiences in mind. Firstly, I hope to reach those with an interest in the Troubles. Many of the arguments in this book are original and offer new and creative perspectives from which to comprehend the dynamics of the conflict, particularly with regard to the supposed biblical warrants for ideologically-inspired sectarian violence. The second audience is much broader and includes all those in search of fresh and imaginative ways of understanding how people interpret formative texts (such as the Bible) determines how they form and interpret culture. This work thus aspires to develop creative ways of conceiving the relationship between hermeneutics (in particular biblical hermeneutics) and the interpretation of culture. Although this present work is a study of a particular phenomenon in a specific setting, it aims to provide a constructive way of understanding the engagement between biblical texts and their effect on readers. As such I hope that despite its contextual rootedness, this work will make a genuinely original contribution to the broader ongoing debates concerning the cultural expressions of biblical interpretations.

## Guiding Presuppositions

Undergirding this book is a core conviction that human existence, as an emerging reality rather than something fixed or static, is inherently orientated towards eschatology.<sup>7</sup> Human life, remarks John Macquarrie

7. In the words of one German theologian, Claus Schwambach, commenting on Leonard Boff's theology, "Human existence is from the beginning nothing other than eschatological existence." See Schwambach, *Rechtfertigungsgeschehen und Befreiungsprozess*, 224 (my translation).

commenting on Heidegger, is necessarily eschatological in so far as it can be considered as “Being-toward-death” and aware of “the urgency and responsibility of living before the imminent end.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, if we share with Karl Rahner the conviction that eschatological assertions are invariably assertions concerned with human existence,<sup>9</sup> it follows that the study of how eschatological language is negotiated by human interpreters has the potential to shed new light on the most difficult yet most important question of what it means to be human. Since it is concerned with potentiality just as much as with actuality, apocalyptic eschatology issues a salutary reminder that the study of human nature must go beyond existing empirical “facts” and take seriously the role of dreams, visions and the imagination as basic realities governing human volition.<sup>10</sup> Ernst Bloch claimed that to be human is to hope and that volition is determined primarily not (*pace* positivism) by empirical calculations based on an inherent inclination to make the most material gain out of present circumstances.<sup>11</sup> Human beings are governed above all not by calculation but by vision, by an underlying will to hope, *eine Leidenschaft für das Mögliche* (“a passion for the possible”).<sup>12</sup> This “will to hope” manifests itself in a desire to work creatively towards the realization of deeply-held, almost inarticulable aspirations for the future.<sup>13</sup> In the Christian tradition, it is in apocalyptic-eschatological texts that such hopes find their ultimate collective manifestation and definitive culmination. The vision of hope applies to every aspect of human life, both individually and corporately; it is a vision in which “the usurped creation will be restored; the corrupted universe will be cleansed [and] the created world will be recreated.”<sup>14</sup>

This study also proceeds from another core conviction: namely, that interpretation matters. The central place of interpretation in every aspect of human life has been acknowledged and pursued by some of the greatest philosophical minds down through the centuries. “Our ex-

8. Macquarrie, *Martin Heidegger*, 31.

9. Rahner, “Hermeneutics of Eschatological Associations,” 337.

10. Macquarrie, *Humanity*, 3–4.

11. Bloch, “Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins,” 41.

12. Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 15. This phrase is attributed originally to Søren Kierkegaard. See Ricoeur, “Freiheit im Licht der Hoffnung,” 205.

13. Parushev, “Walking in the Dawn of the Light,” 60–120.

14. Russell, *Method & Message*, 280.

perience of things, indeed even of everyday life . . . also of the sphere of our vital concerns,” insists Hans Georg Gadamer, “are one and all hermeneutic.”<sup>15</sup> Gadamer recognized that every attempt we make to understand something will invariably involve us in an act of interpretation.<sup>16</sup> Interpretation is not merely an academic matter of exegetical method nor an issue to do with “mere ideas” but a matter that lies at the heart of what it means to be human. It thus follows that any sustained philosophical analysis of hermeneutical phenomena is at the same time an anthropological reflection on the basic issues pertaining to human life in general. Interpretation matters.

This maxim applies with particular truth and contemporary relevance to the subject of this book—the controversial issue of biblical interpretation. Of all the textual battlegrounds on which the hermeneutical conflicts of modernity have taken place, there has been none more bitterly fought over than the Bible.<sup>17</sup> Despite the secularization of culture, which sociologists allege has been one of the salient trends of Western society since the Reformation, the Bible remains in the front line of the hermeneutical wars that rage in our culture today. “Debates about postmodernity,” observes Garrett Green, “have focused, for good reason, on the interpretation of texts—especially culturally authoritative texts, among which the Scriptures represent the most authoritative of all.”<sup>18</sup> The way the Bible is interpreted by particular communities or individuals can determine how one relates to every issue of ethical concern. In the sphere of social ethics, when the issues concern vital questions of war, peace, violence, sectarianism, racism, euthanasia, or other decisive matters of contemporary controversy, interpretation becomes literally a matter of life and death. Many of the contemporary conflicts over which today’s churches and Christian cultures contend most bitterly can be shown to be to some extent attributable to issues of biblical hermeneutics; that is, they are conflicts generated in large part by disagreements concerning how biblical texts ought to be read.

15. Gadamer, quoted in Ward, *Cultural Transformation*, 65.

16. “*Alles Verstehen ist Auslegung*” (all understanding is interpretation), as Gadamer put it in his greatest work, *Wahrheit und Methode*. See Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, I:392.

17. Sawyer, ed., *Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*.

18. Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination*, 18.

A notable example of such a conflict was the Northern Ireland Troubles. Although this assertion does not amount to the claim that the complex dynamics of the Troubles can be reduced to hermeneutics (still less biblical hermeneutics), it does give due precedence to the decisive influence of interpretive issues in evangelical perceptions of the conflict. In an article written in response to the unrest and division generated by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, David Porter, Director of the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI), made the following succinct and telling observation: “The current problems with the peace process in Northern Ireland are, at one level, a problem of hermeneutics.”<sup>19</sup> This was a remarkable insight, which attests to the acute attentiveness of certain evangelicals in Northern Ireland during the Troubles to the issues underlying the conflict. The following study will seek to develop the implications of this insight by considering the evangelical interpretations of biblical apocalyptic-eschatological texts during the Northern Ireland Troubles, all the time keeping in view the larger issue of how evangelicals interpret the Bible.

### Outline Structure of the Argument

On the way to the conclusion concerning the notion of an active text in the hermeneutical process, it will be demonstrated that Northern Ireland expressions of apocalyptic eschatology were characterized by a juxtaposition of contradictions, an apparently chaotic mingling of hope and fear, pessimism and optimism, activism and quietism, assurance and uncertainty. Although the variety of expressions of Northern Ireland apocalyptic-eschatological convictions necessitates a wide-ranging discussion, the key stages in the development of the argument can be clearly delineated. Chapter 1 situates the main arguments and approaches of this study within the context of other scholarly attempts to understand religion and apocalyptic in the Troubles. The second chapter will set out with an account of the methodological premises together with a definition of the key strands of the argument—the texts, cultures, and contexts of Northern Ireland apocalyptic eschatology. Northern Ireland evangelical apocalyptic eschatology may be said to follow a threefold pattern, each strand corresponding to the notions of hope, fear, and uncompromising rhetoric, which manifested dualistic

19. *lion & lamb* (Winter, 1998), 3.

tendencies by postulating rigid distinctions between heaven and hell, the present age and the age to come, the elect and the reprobate, good and evil, light and darkness, and victory and defeat. The issue of how these themes—hope, fear and apocalyptic dualism—found expression in the apocalyptic-eschatological discourses of Northern Ireland evangelicalism, will be taken up in chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

## Defining the Key Terms

The initial difficulty encountered by anyone wishing to understand the diverse discourses of Northern Ireland evangelicalism is the wide variety of semantic associations to which its dominant characteristics have been affixed. The existing scholarship reflects both the semantic heterogeneity and the multiplicity of applications of such terms as “evangelicalism,” “fundamentalism,” “apocalyptic eschatology” and “Protestantism.” Thus it is necessary to introduce certain general considerations of the key terms before entering upon a closer examination of their meaning in the Northern Ireland Troubles.

### *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism*

This book focuses specifically on evangelical uses of apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>20</sup> The term “evangelicalism” has been used in numerous contexts with varying degrees of accuracy to denote a primary theological conviction that “truth is constituted by what God has done for his world and for humankind in Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup> Evangelicalism goes beyond this basic Christian conviction by manifesting a range of further characteristic ethical, religious, and political beliefs. Recent historians of the Northern Ireland Troubles have generally followed the British historian David Bebbington who identifies the four convictions of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and social activism as the salient manifestations common to British evangelical worldviews.<sup>22</sup> This classification

20. This is not to suggest that there were not other expressions of apocalyptic eschatology in Northern Ireland during the Troubles apart from evangelical ones. These included beliefs of other groups such as Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims, all of which would make for an interesting study. Nevertheless, in the interests of specificity and the constraints of time and space, this study shall focus on evangelical expressions of apocalyptic eschatology in Northern Ireland.

21. O’Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order*, ix.

22. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 1–19. For examples of histori-



is to be found not merely in the scholarly contributions to Northern Ireland evangelicalism but also in Northern Ireland evangelical primary texts themselves.<sup>23</sup> George Marsden, who has focused more upon the American context, has identified five marks of evangelicalism, which he enumerates as the Reformation emphasis on the Bible as the ultimate authority in matters of faith; the historical reality of God's salvation plan; eternal life made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ; mission and evangelism; and an emphasis on holiness and spiritual growth.<sup>24</sup> Given its significance as a place in which evangelicals constitute such a high proportion of the general population (relative to other parts of the UK), it is noteworthy that neither Marsden nor Bebbington has written a sustained analysis of evangelicalism in Northern Ireland.<sup>25</sup> Both Bebbington and Marsden have highlighted important aspects of evangelicalism, all of which could be applied to the context of this inquiry into Northern Ireland evangelicalism. Nevertheless, since historians are now coming to recognize that evangelicals in Ireland "have frequently understood their world in millennial and apocalyptic terms,"<sup>26</sup> it may be necessary to include an emphasis on apocalyptic eschatology as a central aspect of evangelicalism in the Northern Ireland context.<sup>27</sup> A typical expression of this attitude is found in an article in a 1966 edition of the Northern Ireland fundamentalist evangelical publication, the *Protestant Telegraph*, in which the writer remarked, "I cannot classify Christians who reject prophecy . . . as Evangelicals."<sup>28</sup> This is an illuminating example of an apocalyptic-eschatological category being used by a particular evangelical to determine the semantic parameters of what

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ans of Northern Ireland evangelicalism who have used Bebbington's classification, see Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, 14; Gribben, "Antichrist in Ireland," 2.

23. Examples include the following ECONI publications: Thompson, *The Fractured Family*, 17–18; ECONI, *A Future with Hope*, 9–10.

24. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 4–5.

25. In a 1977 essay, Marsden does make passing reference to Northern Ireland. See Marsden, "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon," 215–32.

26. Gribben, "Antichrist in Ireland," 2.

27. In his survey of evangelical belief in Northern Ireland, Patrick Mitchel claims that Bebbington overlooks the significance of personal piety in evangelicalism; Mitchel, *Evangelicalism*, 106.

28. *Protestant Telegraph*, 17 December, 1966, 4. Readers may be interested to learn that in 1967 the *Protestant Telegraph* claimed to circulate 100,000 copies to subscribers and newsagents each week; *Protestant Telegraph* (18 March 1967), 4.

constitutes an “evangelical.” By making the acceptance of “prophecy” a precondition of evangelical identity, this evangelical author was able to restrict the definition of “evangelical” to those who were interested in or at least accepting of prophecy.

This example highlights the point that the term “evangelical” in Northern Ireland was a hotly contested concept. Thus, when a group emerged in Northern Ireland in the 1970s calling themselves “evangelical Catholics,” many fundamentalist evangelicals responded with criticism and derision at what they saw as a meaningless contradiction in terms. According to one of the early leaders of the evangelical Catholic movement, the term referred to those Catholics who “came into a deeper, or first-time, personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Saviour and were baptised in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> Given that there is no evidence of this group stating its eschatological position or even commenting on apocalyptic-eschatological material, this study will focus exclusively on evangelicals who would self-identify as Protestants, from Paisleyite fundamentalism to the more moderate evangelicalism of ECONI.

The strong criticism of the “evangelical Catholic” movement and the insistence upon an acceptance of “prophecy” as a necessary corollary of evangelical identity highlight the important distinction between “evangelicals” and “fundamentalists” in Northern Ireland. The distinctive emphasis upon prophetic speculations of an apocalyptic-eschatological nature has been identified by historians as one of the major points of divergence between British evangelicals and their more fundamentalist counterparts in Northern Ireland. Gribben explains that in the late twentieth century,

British evangelicals grew increasingly suspicious of apocalyptic rhetoric, which was increasingly identified with the horrors of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland and the perceived anti-intellectualism of American Fundamentalists. It was a sign that

29. Monaghan, “What Is an Evangelical Catholic?” This essay was originally published on the (now extinct) website of the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI). A version of the essay remains online on the website of an Irish Free Presbyterian, complete with a scathingly critical commentary. The critic writes, “Evangelical Catholics endorse the concept of the Pope being another Christ on earth. They endorse the Calvary denying error of the mass. They endorse salvation by a sacrament and not by grace alone. Sorry, but we can’t run with this and be faithful to the word of God.” Online: <http://www.corkfpc.com/evangelicalcatholics.html>.

the British evangelical mainstream was beginning to position itself at a critical distance from that of the United States.<sup>30</sup>

This remark highlights the apparent gap between “evangelicals” and “fundamentalists.” The term “fundamentalism” is derived from a set of twelve books published by a group of American Protestants which were collectively entitled, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth* (1910–15).<sup>31</sup> Although many theologians and social scientists conflate Christian, Jewish, and Islamic fundamentalism into a single “mass movement,”<sup>32</sup> Christian fundamentalists have distinguished themselves historically both from other faiths as well as their liberal Christian counterparts in their affirmation of the indispensability of five doctrines: Biblical Inerrancy, the Deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, Penal-Substitutionary Atonement, and the Physical Resurrection and Bodily Return of Christ to Earth.<sup>33</sup> Historians have uncovered the extent to which these theological principles of the early fundamentalists were birthed in millennial thinking and how they provided a focal point of unity upon which radical millenarians and traditional conservatives could converge.<sup>34</sup>

What can be said, therefore, of the main points of divergence between evangelicalism and fundamentalism in relation to the present inquiry? Such has been the depth of evangelical convictions in Northern Ireland that it is often difficult to maintain a clear distinction between these two terms. Historians and theologians have come to different conclusions as to whether the difference between the two is one of essence<sup>35</sup>

30. Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism*, 120.

31. *The Fundamentals*.

32. Odermatt, *Der Fundamentalismus*, 8–9. Odermatt, writing from the perspective of psychology, contends that fundamentalism across these three religions constitutes a mass movement (*Massenbewegung*) and claims that fundamentalism thrives only in cultures in which monotheistic religion is prevalent. Fundamentalism, however, is by no means confined to monotheistic religions, as demonstrated by the phenomenon of Hindu fundamentalism. See Teltumbde, “Hindu Fundamentalist Politics,” 247–61.

33. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism*, 34. Although these five fundamental beliefs were amplified in the series of pamphlets called *The Fundamentals*, which appeared between 1910 and 1915, they were first defined at the Bible Conference of Conservative Christians at Niagara in 1895.

34. Sandeen notes that *The Fundamentals* arose out of an “alliance between millenarians and conservatives.” See Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 189.

35. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 112–13; Ward, *What the Bible Really Teaches*, 2–3 and *passim*.

or degree.<sup>36</sup> Others have commented on the widespread perception of fundamentalism as “anti-intellectual, reactionary, and authoritarian,”<sup>37</sup> which purportedly distinguishes this phenomenon from evangelicalism, which in turn, it is claimed, offers a more hospitable environment for intellectual engagement.<sup>38</sup> In relation to the Troubles, Gladys Ganiel highlights the extent of the overlap between evangelical and fundamentalist positions in Northern Ireland and argues that “evangelicals in Northern Ireland who could be classified as fundamentalists often call themselves evangelicals” and thus concludes, that the distinction between “evangelicalism” and “fundamentalism” is less significant than the differences that exist within evangelicalism.<sup>39</sup>

In light of such diverse views among scholars concerning the nature and historical significance of evangelicalism, it is important to remain focused on the issue of how the differences are manifested on the point of apocalyptic eschatology. The key point is that fundamentalism in Northern Ireland has usually been associated with premillennial world-views. This notion corresponds to Harriet Harris’ remark that one of the key differences in outlook is the “siege mentality and a narrow commitment to premillennial dispensationalism” which often distinguishes fundamentalism from evangelicalism.<sup>40</sup> Although fundamentalists in the Troubles tended to be premillennialists, not all were committed to dispensational premillennialism. Others, most notably, Ian Paisley, were historic premillennialists.<sup>41</sup>

36. Thus he proffers the rather tongue-in-cheek, sound-bite definition of a fundamentalist as “an evangelical who is angry about something”; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 1.

37. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 6.

38. Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 329. Thatcher makes a similar point in his *Savage Text*, 169.

39. Ganiel, *Evangelicalism and Conflict*, 4. This argument is supported by the findings of attitude surveys of Northern Ireland evangelicals in which respondents argued that the two terms are practically synonymous. For example, see MacIver, “A Clash of Symbols in Northern Ireland,” 364.

40. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 7.

41. Premillennialists hold that the second coming of Christ will occur *before* the millennium rule of the saints, as prophesied in Revelation 20. Premillennialists can be divided into those who believe that the second coming will take place after the great tribulation (historic premillennialism) and those who maintain that the return of Christ will precede the great tribulation (dispensational premillennialism). These perspectives have thus been known as “post-tribulational” and “pre-tribulational” respectively.

Despite the different opinions among scholars of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, the primary texts of Northern Ireland evangelicals appear to substantiate Ganiel's notion of the essential similarity between the two positions.<sup>42</sup> Consider, for instance, a definition of evangelicalism offered by the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI):

Evangelicalism, like all movements, is diverse in its expression and embraces a wide spectrum of Christians, *including those who are commonly referred to as fundamentalists*. It is characterised by four central tenets [biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism].<sup>43</sup>

As well as the explicit and acknowledged use of Bebbington's model, this definition seems to imply that the difference between evangelicals and fundamentalists in Northern Ireland consisted not in the essence of theological convictions but rather in the militancy with which such convictions were held. In the context of the crisis of Northern Ireland evangelicalism during the Troubles, the distinction between "evangelicals" and "fundamentalists" can be seen in the rhetoric employed by exponents of each position, particularly in regard to apocalyptic-eschatological beliefs. This notion is also to be found in Northern Ireland fundamentalist publications, such as Ian Paisley's magazine, *Battle Standard*, launched in October 1997, whose editors maintained unashamedly that they were "dedicated to Bible fundamentalism."<sup>44</sup> In a passage from the debut publication of this magazine the editors reassured their readers that,

Wherever sin's taint or Satan's trail is to be found the *Battle Standard* will be found busily engaged for God in Holy Warfare. The difference between us and other evangelical periodicals will be that they most often use a tin-tack mallet while we will employ the sledge hammer.<sup>45</sup>

42. Alywn Thompson, writing for ECONI, maintained that evangelicalism and fundamentalism exist on the same spectrum; see Thompson, *The Fractured Family*, 16. Thompson draws on both Bebbington and Marsden in his definition of evangelicalism.

43. ECONI, *A Future With Hope*, 9 [emphasis added].

44. *Battle Standard* 1/1 (October, 1997), 7.

45. *Ibid.*, 1.

The “warfare” metaphor and the militant “sledge-hammer” approach distinguish the rhetoric of fundamentalism from the more moderate critical sentiments of evangelicalism.<sup>46</sup>

Despite being situated within the broader worldwide emergence of fundamentalism in the twentieth century, Northern Ireland fundamentalism has a number of notable distinctive qualities. Northern Ireland fundamentalism was distinguished not by its antipathy towards the traditional challenges of modern liberal theology and “Higher Criticism”—such aversion was a common feature of fundamentalism worldwide.<sup>47</sup> The distinctiveness of the fundamentalism of Northern Ireland evangelicals consisted in its inveterate antagonism towards Roman Catholicism.<sup>48</sup> Although anti-Catholic tropes are to be found in other contexts in which fundamentalism has been prevalent, such antipathy was not nearly as preponderant or decisive as in the case of Northern Ireland. Another crucial difference, which is not sufficiently emphasized in the secondary literature, consists in the different approaches to apocalyptic-eschatology exhibited by evangelicals and fundamentalists. In Northern Ireland it is perhaps at the level of apocalyptic-eschatological convictions that the distinction is most conspicuous.<sup>49</sup> Whereas evangelicalism can accommodate a broad spectrum of eschatological thinking<sup>50</sup>—including pre-,<sup>51</sup>

46. Harris, in her comparative study of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, argues that militancy is one of the characteristic manifestations of a fundamentalist mentality; Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 7.

47. Anderson, “Fundamentalism,” 229–33.

48. Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 329.

49. Writing about the eschatological convictions of Northern Ireland evangelicals, Crawford Gribben notes that, “Differences between evangelicals and fundamentalists were most obvious in their eschatological preferences.” See Gribben, “Protestant Millennialism,” 52.

50. As Harriet Harris notes in *Fundamentalism*, 6.

51. For a definition of premillennialism and its historical and dispensational varieties, see footnote 41 above.

post-<sup>52</sup> and a-millennial<sup>53</sup> perspectives<sup>54</sup>—fundamentalism in Northern Ireland has been associated with premillennial interpretations of biblical prophecy.

### *Apocalyptic Eschatology*

The confusion of the “evangelical” and “fundamentalist” categories has raised considerable doubts among scholars concerning the applicability of the term “evangelical” to the Northern Ireland context. One means towards the further elucidation of the term, “evangelicalism” in relation to this inquiry is to consider the salient characteristics of evangelical “apocalyptic eschatology” and the application of the term to the Northern Ireland context. The adjectives “apocalyptic” and “eschatological” have been used to describe a wide variety of texts, cultures, individuals and worldviews. The word “apocalypse,” derived from the Greek word *ἀποκάλυψις*, signifies “unveiling” or “disclosure.” Eschatology, derived from the Greek word *εσχάτος*, means “end,” “last,” “edge,” and can also mean “uttermost.” The concern of the following study is not to uncover the etymological origins of these words and the seemingly arbitrary meanings which theologians have chosen to confer upon these concepts; rather, our task is to examine the ways in which Northern Ireland evangelicals understood apocalyptic eschatology during the Troubles.

The idea that certain biblical texts could be isolated and classified according to a particular literary genre known as “apocalyptic” first emerged from nineteenth-century biblical criticism.<sup>55</sup> Under the influ-

52. Postmillennialism is the belief that the second coming of Christ will occur only *after* the era of the millennium has substantially transformed life on the earth. Among adherents of postmillennialism there is some variety of opinion on the point of whether the millennium signifies a gradual process of transformation or a decisive apocalyptic event. Postmillennialists also exhibit a variety of views regarding the extent to which the coming of the millennium can be advanced through their own efforts.

53. Amillennialism posits the notion that the period of one thousand years in Revelation 20 refers not to a specific event in the end times but constitutes a metaphorical description of the whole period between Christ’s incarnation and the second coming.

54. For a useful summary of the leading tenets of each position, see Clouse, ed., *Meaning of the Millennium*.

55. One of the pioneering works in this regard was Friedrich Lücke, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung* cf. Koch, “The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic,” 18–35.

ence of theologians such as Johannes Weiss<sup>56</sup> and Albert Schweitzer<sup>57</sup> eschatology ceased to be, as Karl Barth remarked in ironical jest, “a harmless little chapter at the conclusion of Christian Dogmatics,”<sup>58</sup> and became instead a central theme at the heart of theological studies in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup> According to Rudolf Bultmann, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was becoming “more and more clear that the eschatological expectation and hope are the core of the New Testament preaching throughout.”<sup>60</sup> Eschatology became regarded not so much as a branch of theology as an all-pervasive perspective which should undergird all theological discussion.<sup>61</sup> After the devastation and carnage of the First and Second World Wars, eschatological themes began to emerge in the works of leading thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre,<sup>62</sup> Karl Jaspers,<sup>63</sup> Theodore Adorno,<sup>64</sup> and Martin Heidegger.<sup>65</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century apocalyptic eschatology was subjected to sustained and detailed analysis of sociologists and historians as well as biblical scholars.<sup>66</sup> In the early 1980s,

56. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu*.

57. Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*.

58. Barth, *Romans*, 500.

59. The origins and development of this trend are discussed in Fastenrath, “*In Vitam Aeternam*.” Hans Schwarz also helpfully elucidates the decisive influence of Weiss and Schweitzer in particular as figures central to the reconfiguration of theology towards eschatology in his *Eschatology*, 107–15.

60. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 13.

61. This notion was taken up and vastly elaborated upon by Moltmann in *Theologie der Hoffnung*, first published in 1964.

62. See in particular Sartre’s discussion of the apocalyptic aspects of his dialectical materialism in his *Notebooks for an Ethics*, 414, in which Sartre calls for a “return to the Apocalypse” as a means towards “the liberation of oneself and of others in reciprocal recognition.”

63. Jaspers, *Die Atombombe*.

64. For an account of the apocalyptic-eschatological undertones of Adorno’s negative dialectics, see Theunissen, “Negativität bei Adorno,” 53–55.

65. For instance Heidegger’s 1951–52 essay, “Was heißt Denken?,” is pervaded by apocalyptic motifs pertaining to the “manifestation of Being” (die Offenbarung des Seins). Apocalypse was a key theme of post-war existentialist philosophy and literature as McElroy points out in, *Existentialism and Modern Literature*, 35.

66. There are many theories that purport to explain the resurgence of interest in apocalypticism in terms of social or cultural transitions. For example, in 1979 the Harvard scholar, Paul Hanson commenced and concluded his study of Jewish apocalypticism with references to the disrepute into which the modernist vision of scientific



Paul Hanson described the “new impetus in apocalyptic research”<sup>67</sup> and maintained that “concrete textual studies and more hypothetical efforts at definition and reconstruction must go hand in hand if further insight were to be gained into the mysteries of apocalypticism.”<sup>68</sup>

Hanson’s call has since been answered by a recent “explosion of scholarly writing on apocalyptic themes.”<sup>69</sup> Since then apocalyptic concepts such as the millennium have “come to be seen as a major category of social analysis.”<sup>70</sup> Thus there is now a broad consensus across a range of disciplines that, for better or worse, apocalyptic eschatology is an important force in the shaping of cultures.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, it could be argued that the application of scholarly methods to the interpretation of apocalyptic-eschatological biblical material has in fact contributed to the diversification of hermeneutical appropriation by opening up these texts to multiple meanings.<sup>72</sup> The issue is particularly complex in relation to the disputed concepts of “apocalypticism” and “eschatology.” Many of the scholarly disagreements surrounding these terms have focused on the tension between immanence and transcendence.<sup>73</sup> In an effort to formulate a conception of apocalyptic that would facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue, John J. Collins defined “apocalyptic” as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, in that it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, in that it involves another, supernatural world.”<sup>74</sup> “Apocalypse,” according to Collins, is a particular expression

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progress has allegedly fallen. See Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*.

67. Hanson, *Visionaries and their Apocalypses*, 6.

68. *Ibid.*, 11.

69. Shantz, “Millennialism and Apocalypticism,” 20.

70. Barkun, ed., *Millennialism and Violence*, 1.

71. Shantz, “Millennialism and Apocalypticism,” 43.

72. Mühling, *Grundinformation Eschatologie*, 32.

73. This tension is apparent in even the most recent works in millennial studies, most notably in Catherine Wessinger, *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, 5.

74. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 9. This statement was adopted by the *Society of Biblical Literature* as their official definition of “apocalyptic.” Recent revisions criticize Collins’ definition on account of its broadness and lack of reference to the means of revelation. For a recent alternative definition based on Collins’ formulation but integrating these critical comments, see Reynolds, *The Apocalyptic Son of Man*, 16.

of a more general eschatological mindset, which is orientated towards transcendence. Thus Collins maintains that salvation, from an apocalyptic perspective, involves “a radically different type of human existence in which all the constraints of the human condition, including death, are transcended.”<sup>75</sup> In contrast to Collins’ emphasis on transcendence, others have insisted that the apparent apocalyptic other-worldliness of biblical prophecy must be understood in terms of its impact on the “temporal” world. On this issue, Liberation Theologians challenged the allegedly detached transcendence of Jewish apocalyptic literature, which, it is claimed, “often got lost in otherworldly and cosmic speculations, drawing it away from the historical responsibility of the believer within the world.”<sup>76</sup> Making a similar point, but arguing from a different theological perspective, John Howard Yoder reminds us that apocalypse “is a way of thinking critically about *this* world.”<sup>77</sup> L. L. Thompson aptly observes that the purpose of apocalyptic writing is “not to reveal another world,” but to uncover “dimensions of the world in which humans live and die . . . an apocalypse is not world-negating but, rather, world-expanding: it extends or expands the universe to include transcendent realities, and it does this both spatially and temporally.”<sup>78</sup> Stanley Hauerwas captures the tension between the immanent temporality and transcendent otherness of apocalyptic eschatology with an adroit paradox: “Apocalyptic means that there is another world, another time, than the one in which we live; but it turns out to be the same world in which we live.”<sup>79</sup> The impor-

75. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 10.

76. Richard, *Apocalypse*, 15. Marxist historians have likewise tended to emphasize the temporal aspects of millennial belief. According to Eric Hobsbawm the basic essence of millennial thinking consists in “the hope of a complete and radical change in the world.” See Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 57.

77. Yoder, *For the Nations*, 137. Fiorenza likewise argues that far from despairing from history, Christian apocalyptic eschatology seeks to redeem history by identifying salvation as something which occurs within its course. See Fiorenza, “The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic,” 303.

78. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 31.

79. Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 24. Interestingly, the archival records of the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) shows that Hauerwas had some involvement in the Northern Ireland peace process in the lead up to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. His influence came not only indirectly through his writings (which seem to have been influential among the ECONI leadership) but also through personal participation in ECONI’s peace and reconciliation initiatives. In 1998 Hauerwas spoke at a major ECONI conference. See ECONI’s publication, *lion & lamb* (Autumn, 1998), 16.

tant point to draw from all these various scholarly perspectives for the present study is that, notwithstanding its emphasis on transcendence, apocalyptic eschatology posits a world that is at once beyond human comprehension and yet an integral part of our humanity. By insisting that “God is both radically other and yet present to us,”<sup>80</sup> apocalyptic eschatology offers a potential point of creative conceptual convergence between the ostensibly irreconcilable notions of the alterity of divine being and the immanence of divine presence.

In addition to the tension between immanence and transcendence in millennial discourses, a further ambiguity is the differing conceptions of when the apocalypse can be expected. A notable recent reaffirmation of the importance of imminence in millennial thinking is the *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (2011), edited by Catherine Wessinger. In her introductory chapter, Wessinger offers the following definition of millennialism as

belief in an imminent transition to a collective salvation, in which the faithful will experience well-being, and the unpleasant limitations of the human condition will be eliminated. The collective salvation is often considered to be earthly, but it can also be heavenly. The collective salvation will be accomplished either by a divine or superhuman agent alone, or with the assistance of humans working according to the divine or superhuman will and plan.<sup>81</sup>

This formulation is not without its difficulties, for, as Crawford Gribben notes, this insistence on immanence as an integral aspect of all millennial belief does not correspond to Wessinger’s equation of premillennialism and postmillennialism with what she calls “catastrophic millennialism” and “progressive millennialism” respectively.<sup>82</sup> The latter perspective, as noted even by some of the contributors to the *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*,<sup>83</sup> does not anticipate an imminent millennium.<sup>84</sup>

80. Dolejšová, *Accounts of Hope*, 284.

81. Wessinger, “Millennialism in Cross-cultural Perspective,” 5.

82. Gribben, “The Future of Millennial Studies.”

83. See, for instance, Ashcraft’s discussion of the millennial beliefs of the New England puritans in his chapter, “Progressive millennialism,” in Wessinger, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, 44–65.

84. In his important new work in millennial studies, Richard Landes likewise focuses on imminence as a major constitutive element of apocalyptic belief, but unlike Wessinger, offers a more nuanced and qualified definition of what the term “immi-

Millennial scholarship has also emphasized different aspects of apocalyptic eschatology, such as the centrality of the disclosure of divine mysteries<sup>85</sup> or the notion of reversal and restoration.<sup>86</sup> The Italian scholar Paolo Sacchi has sought to explain apocalypticism as an attempt to come to terms with the question of theodicy and the origins and nature of evil by appealing to its supernatural agency.<sup>87</sup> Still others have denied the existence of a single common characteristic of apocalyptic texts.<sup>88</sup> Recent historians have used conceptual models which treat “apocalypse” as an aspect of eschatology, alongside other “eschatologies” such as “immortality” and “resurrection.”<sup>89</sup> Bernard McGinn, by contrast, contends that apocalypticism is best understood as a branch of eschatology which “covers any type of belief that looks forward to the end of history as that which gives structure and meaning to the whole.”<sup>90</sup> History is thus perceived to progress according to an overarching messianic design until the historical process reaches its Omega point of eschatological consummation. The apocalyptic schema posits a worldview in which individual events are thus bound together to give the impression of “an inevitable progression towards a predetermined end.”<sup>91</sup>

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nence” means in an apocalyptic context, noting that “there are all kinds of intensities to that feeling [of imminence], from immediate to “within my lifetime” and along that spectrum a large gamut of emotions, from quiet determination to delirium, exalted or panicked.” See Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, 29.

85. Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 49–61.

86. Sanders, “Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses,” 447–59.

87. Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic*.

88. This view is especially prevalent among continental scholars. See Jean Carmignac, “Qu’est-ce que l’Apocalyptique?” 3–33; H. Stegemann, “Die Bedeutung der Qumranfunde,” 495–530.

89. This conceptual framework is used in Bynum and Freedman, *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*.

90. McGinn, ed., *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 5. Hanson departs from McGinn in this respect by positing an alternative distinction between what he terms “Prophetic Eschatology” and “Apocalyptic Eschatology.” See, Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 10–12. Although the notion of a trans-historical process underlying the apparent contingency of events is at the heart of apocalyptic eschatology, this idea on its own is insufficient to speak of the worldview as “apocalyptic” or “eschatological.” The Hegelian vision of the “End of History,” although maintaining a comprehensive conception of history as infused with meaning and purpose, is devoid of the notion of human actions and natural processes being subjected to the intervention and judgment of powers or beings outside of the historical realm.

91. Hanson, “Old Testament Apocalyptic Reexamined,” 57.

In the context of Northern Ireland, this conviction has often given rise to the notion that the prophetic oracles of the Scriptures were foreshadowed in significant social or political events, which were sometimes supposed to prognosticate end time events such as the tribulation and the rise and defeat of the Antichrist and the False Prophet.<sup>92</sup> Thus, as Patrick Mitchel observes, Ian Paisley's interpretation of prophetic Scripture presupposed "the ability to discern exact prophetic fulfilment in contemporary political events."<sup>93</sup> Biblical passages were perceived to have a present-day relevance and application to the extent that many were read as symbolic descriptions of the situation faced by contemporary evangelicals. Such passages were read as ominous warnings of an indeterminate yet ineluctable eschatological future which threatened "at any time to break into the present, and therefore call for an urgent response on the part of its readers."<sup>94</sup> This notion was often rooted in the conviction held by a significant minority of Northern Ireland evangelicals that the book of Revelation ought to be interpreted as "a record of historical events following in logical, chronological sequence from John's day in 96 AD until the present time."<sup>95</sup>

In a pioneering work on the social origins of the early Jewish apocalyptic writings, the scholar of the Hebrew Bible, Paul Hanson, maintained a distinction between "eschatology" and "apocalyptic eschatology" in terms of history (which pertains to the former) and myth (which relates to the latter).<sup>96</sup> This distinction has been challenged by others' scholarly probing into the nature and origins of apocalyptic eschatology and its relation to apocalypticism and eschatology.<sup>97</sup> J. J. Collins has maintained that the distinction consists in the generality (apocalyptic eschatology) and specificity (eschatology) of divine judgment.<sup>98</sup> David C. Sim helpfully distinguishes between the socio-religious phenomenon of "apocalypticism" and the religious conviction of "apocalyptic eschatology."<sup>99</sup>

92. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, argues that the basic tenet of the apocalyptic worldview is the awareness that "eschatological events are foreshadowed in historical events" (156).

93. Mitchel, "Unionism and the Eschatological fate of Ulster," 208.

94. Boxall, *Revelation*, 106.

95. Campbell, *Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse*, 4.

96. Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 11.

97. Roberts, "Myth versus History," 1–13; Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology," 43–44.

98. Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death," 61–86.

99. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 12.

Although such distinctions have clarified the scholarly applications of these contested terms, it seems that one of the main differences has been relatively neglected, namely that eschatology, unlike apocalypse, is indubitably a theological concept. Apocalypticism can be a matter of irredeemable disaster and has associations in the popular mind with violent endings either in the form of a suicide cult or a peril of otherworldly origins, such as that posed by an interstellar asteroid collision with the earth or even invasion by malevolent extra-terrestrial beings. Apocalyptic scenarios likewise do not entail a concomitant belief in divine or supernatural agency in causing a catastrophic end to human existence.<sup>100</sup> In an age of global warming, a diminishing ozone layer, and chemical, biological, and most of all nuclear weapons, the prospect of an entirely secular apocalyptic meltdown can be just as pertinent and menacing as the fear of being annihilated by the fire and brimstone of an irascible Deity consumed with fulminating wrath.<sup>101</sup> The only difference is that whereas theistic apocalypses usually entail some kind of ultimate consolation (albeit sometimes for only a very small remnant who profess the doctrines belonging to the cult), the secular apocalypse jettisons any hope in such deliverance and in the face of cosmic catastrophe succumbs with despairing resignation to an inevitable fate, which is invariably shrouded in doom.<sup>102</sup>

For the Northern Ireland Baptist pastor, L. E. Deens, eschatology was “the doctrine of the last things. Eschatology has to do with human destiny. It is a subject of tremendous fascination, shrouded in mystery, about which all covet light.”<sup>103</sup> This study builds on this conception, adding that the eschatological component of apocalyptic eschatology introduces the notion of human destiny and its sub-themes of justice, judgment, divine condemnation, salvation and reward to apocalypticism. Whereas apocalypticism says, “the end of all things is at hand”

100. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 183.

101. Thompson, *The End of Time*, 133–34. Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, 19–21.

102. Travis, *Christian Hope*, 25. Despite the prevailing sense of foreboding invariably associated with apocalyptic scenarios, some have maintained that the notion of apocalypse does not rule out the possibility of hope entirely. Frank Kermode for instance distinguishes apocalypse and tragedy, the difference being that while “tragedy assumes the figurations of apocalypse, of death and judgement, heaven and hell,” apocalypse leaves open the possibility that “the world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors.” See Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 82.

103. *Irish Baptist* 98 (December, 1975), 3.

(1 Pet 4:7), eschatology adds to this by saying either, “come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34) or, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). Apocalyptic eschatology combines these two ideas of catastrophic ending and divine judgment by saying, for instance, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet 3:10). In its most hopeful and exuberant expression, apocalyptic eschatology declares that, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15). By stressing divine agency in the inauguration of the end times, eschatology (unlike apocalypticism) is an exclusively theological concept<sup>104</sup> and can be conceived only within a theistic worldview. Eschatological doctrines can be professed only by those with faith convictions, such as evangelicals.

Since Northern Ireland evangelicals from across the denominational spectrum have retained a firm conviction in the ultimate triumph of good over evil and a hope in the final vindication and salvation of God’s people, the concept of apocalypticism on its own would not be adequate to our investigation. In order to encompass the diversity of opinion regarding the end times that exist within the various cultures of Northern Ireland evangelicalism, it is necessary to retain both the apocalyptic and eschatological aspects. The apocalyptic apprehension of evangelicals regarding the rise of “the beast” and the coming tribulation was counterbalanced by an equally ardent belief in his inevitable downfall and the hope that God would vindicate and reward the faithfulness of his people in the midst of great adversity—as well as punish their enemies in a sulphurous lake of unquenchable fire. Since this book considers the end-times thinking of Northern Ireland evangelicals under both apocalyptic and eschatological aspects, the concept of apocalyptic eschatology is better suited to the present study than either “apocalypticism” or “eschatology” as isolated categories.

104. Despite the ubiquitous use of the terms “apocalypticism” and “millennialism” in the writings of many social scientists, the related word, “eschatology” is conspicuously absent from contemporary sociological analysis. In contrast, theologians continue to make widespread use of the term “eschatology.”

Despite the considerable scholarly efforts to understand both the meaning of apocalyptic eschatology and the social contexts out of which it supposedly arose, it has been said as recently as 2002 that “the study of biblical apocalypticism remains in its infancy.”<sup>105</sup> Despite the flurry of monographs and articles since then, there remains an evident need for a study which, although focused on a particular context, aims to juxtapose disciplines in the examination of apocalyptic-eschatological language in such a way as to open up new lines of inquiry which will contribute to the broader field of millennial studies.

### *Protestantism*

As well as “evangelicalism” and “apocalyptic eschatology” another equally contested term in relation to the Northern Ireland Troubles has been that of “Protestantism.” Some historians and social scientists have argued that “Protestantism” in Northern Ireland during the Troubles was a relatively homogenous phenomenon in so far as it referred to a belief system that was shaped by two dominant traditions identified as Calvinism and evangelicalism.<sup>106</sup> By maintaining that individual citizens had the right to disobey the government in matters of Christian conscience, Calvinistic conceptions of the relationship between church and state provided the basis for the radical political philosophy of Northern Ireland evangelicalism.<sup>107</sup> It has thus been argued that the Calvinist radical political tradition, on which Northern Ireland Protestantism draws, inclines towards activism rather than quietism.<sup>108</sup>

For many Northern Ireland evangelicals Protestantism denoted a certain theological conviction which distinguished “biblical Christianity” from the perceived departures from biblical doctrines, manifested primarily—it was claimed—in the Catholic Church. “True Protestantism,” declared Ian Paisley,

is Bible Christianity, the Christianity of the Bible. Protestantism is Christianity, the Christianity of Christ. Protestantism is

105. Wilson, “Biblical Roots of Apocalyptic,” 57.

106. Ganiel, “Religious Dissent and Reconciliation,” 379–86; Alwyn Thompson, *Fields of Vision*; Bruce, *God Save Ulster!*

107. The historical origins of these developments are traced in detail in volume 2 of Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.

108. Ganiel, “Religious Dissent,” 381.



Christianity, the Christianity of the Apostles. Protestantism is Christianity, the Christianity of the Early Church. Protestantism is nothing less and nothing more than that Holy Religion revealed supernaturally to mankind in the pages of the Inspired Word and centered and circumscribed in the glorious adorable Person of the Incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>109</sup>

For some Northern Ireland evangelicals Protestantism was synonymous with “Biblical faith,” as evinced rhetorically by Paisley’s frequent use of the term, “Bible Protestantism” to identify his professed faith convictions. One Northern Ireland evangelical writing to the *Larne Guardian* expressed this notion of an inherent link between Protestantism and biblical truth with the unequivocal statement that, “The Protestant God is the God of the Bible.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, notwithstanding the focus on the political dimensions of Protestantism, which characterizes many of the scholarly accounts of the Troubles, it is important to understand that Northern Ireland Protestantism was not merely a radical political ideology but also a basic theological conviction, the essence of which was constituted by the classic doctrines of Reformed theology such as *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*. The first question for the Northern Ireland evangelical was not “how can I preserve my national identity?” Rather the central question resembled more the anguished cry of the Philippian jailer in the book of Acts: “what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). In regard to controversial moral and spiritual issues the basic question, which evangelicals purported to ask themselves, was, “what saith the Scripture?” (Rom 4:3).

Another major influence on the historical development of Northern Ireland evangelicalism was the theology of John Calvin, or more accurately, the version of his thought elaborated by his more radical followers, most notably John Knox and Christopher Goodman.<sup>111</sup> Calvin is perhaps best known for his vigorous exposition and defence of predestination and providence<sup>112</sup> and the distinction between the “elect” and the “reprobate.”<sup>113</sup> Despite the acknowledgement of the influence

109. Paisley, “Are We to Lose Our Protestant Heritage Forever?”

110. Letter published in *The Larne Guardian* (6 October, 1988), 10 (signed by “True Christian”).

111. Skinner, *Foundations*, 225f. and *passim*.

112. Helm, “Calvin,” 341–48.

113. The twenty-first chapter of Book Three of the definitive 1559 edition of Calvin’s *Institutes* has the title, “Of the Eternal Election, by which God has Predestinated Some to Salvation, and Others to Destruction.”

of what one scholar called “rigid Calvinism”<sup>114</sup> on some expressions of Northern Ireland evangelicalism,<sup>115</sup> scholarly neglect of the vital transformative impact of religious convictions has led to a distorted account of the role of religion in the conflict which must first be illustrated and then redressed.

### Limitations

Before engaging in a full critique of the existing scholarly approaches to religion and apocalyptic in Northern Ireland, it is necessary to be clear about the potential limits of this study. Despite its ambitious scope, this book jettisons the notion that any investigation concerning the interpretation and reception of texts into host cultures and the complex relationships between texts and contexts can aspire to the methodological precision of an exact science. Thus in order to dispel false expectations, it must be understood that this book is neither a sociological account of how ideas affect general social behavior nor a quantitative survey of the “influence” of apocalyptic eschatological ideas in Northern Ireland society during the Troubles. Neither shall this study be drawn into facile speculation about the alleged affinity of cataclysmic apocalyptic prophecies to certain types of psychological disposition. The focus of this study is more manageable, more edifying and in the end, I hope, more interesting. The paramount preoccupation of this study is with ideas and how these ideas were expressed in texts and in turn how these texts were interpreted by evangelicals. By focusing on use of apocalyptic-eschatological language within particular cultures of Northern Ireland evangelicalism this book identifies a particular intellectual milieu which stretches across denominations.

Notwithstanding its specific focus, this study draws on a wide array of primary material which emerged from evangelical communities in Northern Ireland. This diversity is reflected in the substantial number of evangelicals, some better known than others, whose texts are cited in what follows. Such are the numbers of evangelicals mentioned that it seemed tedious and potentially distracting to include detailed biograph-

114. Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland*, II:7.

115. See Wright, “Protestant Ideology and Politics,” 213–80; MacIver, “Militant Protestant Political Ideology”; Southern, “The Democratic Unionist Party,” 125–49; and Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, 14–15.

ical information for each individual cited. Brief biographical sketches have nevertheless been given in the case of certain lesser-known evangelicals whose texts are cited at regular points throughout the study. The omission of extensive biographical details is also consistent with the general theoretical approach of the whole project which is less focused on individual authors and is instead much more concerned with locating texts within semantic fields of particular discourses.

Another point that must be made in connection with the potential limitations of this work is the fact that male voices predominate throughout this examination of apocalyptic-eschatological language. Within Northern Ireland evangelicalism during the Troubles there appears to have been very few published female evangelical statements of an apocalyptic-eschatological nature.<sup>116</sup> Without wishing to speculate at length as to why this should have been the case, it seems plausible to suppose that the apparent silence of the female voice could indicate that female interpreters might have been uncomfortable with the biblical texts of apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>117</sup> Such reticence might in turn be attributable to the alleged misogynistic overtones of the classic biblical apocalyptic texts, in particular the book of Revelation. Tina Pippin denounces this text as “misogynist male fantasy of the end of time” and condemns the “sexual murder” of the Babylonian Whore in Revelation 18. After drawing attention to the alleged homoerotic undertones of the 144,000 chaste male figures of Revelation 7 and the purported degrading portrayal of women throughout the book, she concludes that the vision of Revelation is one of “misogyny and exclusion by a powerful, wrathful deity. In the Apocalypse, the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of perversity.”<sup>118</sup> Whatever the justification of these claims or the broader explanation for the absence of a distinctive female discourse of apocalyptic eschatology within Northern Ireland evangelicalism, it is evident that the issue of gender in apocalyptic-eschatological texts is a highly complex and controversial problem of end-times hermeneutics. Whilst it is not necessary to attempt to account for these difficulties, it is nev-

116. This is not to say that women played a merely passive role in the Troubles. Fran Porter has conclusively demonstrated important ways in which women contributed to the faith and politics of Northern Ireland during the Troubles. See Porter, *Changing Women, Changing Worlds*.

117. Some reasons for this unease are given in Carpenter, *Imperial Bibles Domestic Bodies*, 127–48.

118. Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 121–25.

ertheless important to be aware of the gender dichotomy that pervaded the apocalyptic-eschatological discourses of evangelical communities in Northern Ireland.

Although this book shall not pretend to have pronounced the final word on any of these issues, it is hoped that the findings uncovered in the following pages will succeed in bringing the scholarly contributions to the understanding of the Troubles into a mutually-enriching conversation with some of the leading ideas in contemporary millennial studies. Many of the conclusions arising from this research are original and could be of great potential interest to academics and non-specialists alike whose interests relate to other contexts and cultures which today find themselves confronting the same kinds of questions as those addressed in the present study.

SAMPLE