
RELS 370: MILLENNIALISM, APOCALYPTICISM, AND CONSPIRACY IN AMERICAN RELIGION



SPRING 2023 | M/F 2:00-3:15PM | ECTR 219

INSTRUCTOR

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OFFICE LOCATION

4 Glebe St. Rm 102

OFFICE HOURS

Tuesdays 11am-2pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From as early as the letters of the Apostle Paul, the Christians have looked forward to the return of Christ, sometimes with fear and sometimes with excitement. This course will explore the history of millennialism in American religion. From the Great Awakenings to Waco, TX to QAnon, this touchstone of Christian eschatology has produced utopian movements, death cults, and insurrections. Reading from both histories and ethnographies, this course will examine the external forces -- the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts -- that have spurred millennialist movements. Along the way, we will also reflect upon the broader patterns of thought and behavior -- anxieties, hopes, and fears -- that continue to inspire new riffs on an old theme. The course is, therefore, a study of the history of an idea and an impulse that operates quietly in the ambient background of American culture but at different times comes roaring to the foreground of American domestic, foreign, and cultural politics.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Daniel Wojcik, *End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs)

GenEd SLO: Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture. (Evaluated through "Millennialism in the US" Research Project)

RELS SLO: Students will demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft a persuasive argument in defense of a coherent thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary and secondary sources. (Evaluated through "Millennialism in the US" Research Project)

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, you will gain the following knowledge and skills:

Understanding the history of important terms in Christianity and American religion like **millennialism** and **apocalypticism**

Understanding the deep integration of **religious perspectives in political and social life**

Learning to approach religion with a **historical-critical** perspective that avoids assigning **value** and can distinguish between the **normative claims that come from religious people** and the **analytical claims of religious studies scholars**

Learning to **develop a research question** and conduct **independent research** on a topic determined by your professor.

This Course within RELS Curriculum

100-Level Courses: Introduce students to religion; teach content *about* religions; introduce students to directed writing about religion, religious phenomena, or religious cultures.

200-Level Courses: Expose students to a specific set of Religious Studies sources, methods, and/or theories; expect students to conduct narrowly defined research-style writing (close reading of sources, annotated bibliographies, short essays, etc.)

300-Level Courses: *Deep engagement with Religious Studies sources, methods, and theories; students conduct independent research within the topical limits of the course; students orally present course material or research to class*

450 Senior Seminar: Production and Presentation of independent research of student's own design; deep and prolonged engagement with religious studies sources, methods and theories.

Course Assignments

Reading Questions: Due each class period (on OAKS); write two questions related to or inspired by the reading for the day; constitutes 10% of final grade

Weekly Discussion Forums: Due Sunday Nights ten times during semester; 300 Word responses to critical-analytical questions from the week's material; constitutes 20% of final grade

Annotated Bibliography : Due after mid-terms, annotated bibliography will provide starting point for final research project; constitutes 20% of final grade

Millennialism in America Research Essay : Due Before final week of class, will be the result of independent research on a topic provided; constitutes 40% of final grade

In-Class Presentation: Presented semi-formally in front of class; constitutes 10% of final grade

GRADING SCALE:

100-94% = A
93-90% = A-
89-87% = B+
86-83% = B
82-80% = B-
79-77% = C+
76-73% = C
72-70% = C-
69% and Below D/F

TOTAL PTS: 666

GRADING POLICY

- Assignments should be turned in ON TIME. Late assignments receive a score of 0 (but, see coins below)
- Any writing assignment may be significantly revised and resubmitted for an increase of NO MORE THAN half letter grade increase (ex: B+ → A-). This excludes discussion posts and presentation.
- You begin the course with 3 (Virtual) “Fokòp” Coins. One coin is required for either 1) a late submission of any assignment or 2) a “revise and resubmit” of any writing assignment

COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>UNIT 1</u>	<u>LOCATING & DEFINING MILLENNIALISM</u>
WEEK 1	<i>INTRODUCTIONS</i>
JAN. 11 TH	→READING: SYLLABUS, REVELATION CH. 19 vs. 11 THROUGH CH. 20; WESSINGER, “MILLENNIALISM” (OAKS) →ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION THREAD #1
WEEK 2	<i>BEGINNINGS</i>
JAN. 18	→READING: BOYER, “PROLOGUE” & CH. 1 “ORIGINS OF THE APOCALYPTIC”; WOJCIK, CH. 1 “APPROACHING DOOMSDAY” →ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION THREAD #2
WEEK 3	<i>EARLY CHRISTIANITY TO EARLY AMERICA</i>
JAN. 23	→READING: BOYER, CH. 2 “RHYTHMS OF PROPHECY BELIEF”
JAN. 25	→ WOJCIK, CH. 2 “THE AMERICAN APOCALYPTIC LEGACY” →ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION THREAD #3

WEEK 4

***FROM POST- TO PRE-: PROGRESS AND DECLINE IN
AMERICAN MILLENNIALISM***

JAN. 30

→ READING: MOORHEAD, “BETWEEN PROGRESS AND APOCALYPSE” (OAKS)

FEB. 1

→ READING: MATTHEW AVERY SUTTON, “JESUS IS COMING” (OAKS); SUPPLEMENT: ESCOBEDO, “THE MILLENNIAL BORDER...” (OAKS)

→ ASSIGNMENT: **DISCUSSION #4**

UNIT 2

THE BURNED-OVER DISTRICT

WEEK 5

SETTING THE STAGE

FEB. 6

→ READING: BOYER, CH. 3

FEB. 8

→ READING: SCHMIDT, “REGARDING SIGNS OF THE TIMES” (OAKS) –OR-- KRUCZEK-AARON “SECOND GREAT AWAKENING...” (OAKS)

→ ASSIGNMENT: RESEARCH TOPIC (PRELIMINARY)

WEEK 6

BECOMING PERFECT: SHAKERS & ONEIDA

FEB. 13

→ READING: WONDERLY, “INTRO” (OAKS); IN CLASS FILM: “SHAKERS” (OAKS)

FEB. 15	→ READING: WONDERLY, “CH. 1” & “CONCLUSION” (OAKS)
	→ ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION #5
WEEK 7	<i>PREDICTING THE END: MILLERISM AND WITNESSES</i>
FEB. 20	→ READING: O’LEARY “MILLERISM AS A RHETORICAL MOVEMENT” (OAKS)
FEB. 22	→ READING: ZYGMUNT, “PROPHETIC FAILURE AND CHILIASTIC IDENTITY” (OAKS); SCHMALZ, “WHEN FESTINGER FAILS” (OAKS)
	→ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION #6
WEEK 8	<i>ENGENDERING VIOLENCE: GHOST DANCE & JONESTOWN</i>
FEB. 27	→ READING: MOONEY, “THE GHOST DANCE” (OAKS)
MAR. 1	→ READING: HALL, “APOCALYPSE AT JONESTOWN” (OAKS)
	→ ASSIGNMENT: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE MARCH 5TH, 11:59PM (ASSIGNMENTS FOLDER)
NO CLASS	<i>SPRING BREAK MARCH 5 – MARCH 11</i>
<u>UNIT 3</u>	<u>THE MIND OF THE MILLENNIALIST</u>
WEEK 9	<i>IMAGINING APOCALYPTIC SPACE AND TIME</i>
MAR. 13	→ READING: BAUMGARTEN, “INTRODUCTION” (OAKS); MOTZKIN, “ABNORMAL AND NORMAL TIME” (OAKS)

MAR. 15	→ READING: HAZANI, “APOCALYPTICISM, SYMBOLIC BREAKDOWN, AND PARANOIA” (OAKS)
	→ ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION #7
WEEK 10	COGNITIVE DISSONANCE?
MAR. 20	→ READING: O’LEARY, “WHEN PROPHECY FAILS AND WHEN IT SUCCEEDS” (OAKS)
MAR. 22	→ READING: MELTON, “SPIRITUALIZATION AND REAFFIRMATION” (OAKS); ZYGMUNT, “WHEN PROPHECIES FAIL” (OAKS)
	→ ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION #8
WEEK 11	OPTIMISM & FATALISM
MAR. 27	→ READING: WOJCIK, CH. 6 “FATALISM AND APOCALYPTIC BELIEFS”
MAR. 29	→ READING: BOYER, CH. 9 “THE CONTINUING APPEAL OF PROPHECY BELIEF”
	→ ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION #9
WEEK 12	CONSPIRACY THINKING
APRIL 3	→ READING: BARKUN, “THE NATURE OF CONSPIRACY BELIEF” (OAKS)

APRIL 5	→ READING: WOJCIK, CH. 8 “EMERGENT APOCALYPTIC BELIEFS ABOUT UFOs AND EXTRATERRESTRIAL BEINGS”
	→ ASSIGNMENT: DISCUSSION #10
<u>UNIT 4</u>	<u>POLITICS OF APOCALYPSE</u>
WEEK 13	<i>VISIONS FROM THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT</i>
APRIL 10	→ READING: MATTHEW AVERY SUTTON, “APOCALYPSE Now” (OAKS); IN CLASS: “WAITING FOR APOCALYPSE” (FILM: HTTPS://WWW.KANOPY.COM/EN/COC/VIDEO/375020)
APRIL 12	→ READING: BARKUN, “RACIST APOCALYPSE” (OAKS); O’LEARY, “APOCALYPTIC POLITICS IN THE NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT” (OAKS)
	→ ASSIGNMENT: NONE
WEEK 14	<i>SEX TRAFFICKING, BABY EATING, AND CONSPIRACY</i>
APRIL 17	→ READING: EXLINE, ET.AL. “DEMONIC AND DIVINE...” (OAKS)
APRIL 19	→ READING: HUGHES, “THE EVERYTHING CULT” (OAKS) → ASSIGNMENT: RESEARCH PAPER DUE, APRIL 23RD @ 11:59PM (ASSIGNMENTS FOLDER)
WEEK 15	<i>CONCLUSIONS & PRESENTATIONS</i>
APRIL 24, 26	READING: NONE ASSIGNMENT: IN-CLASS RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Discussion Posts: Semi-Formal, 300-word minimum. Write in full sentences with correct grammar, but feel free to write in the first person if applicable. You need NOT respond to a fellow classmate, but please do read other posts. Citation can be minimal [parenthetical citation only is fine, ex: ... (Wessinger, 17).] Posts are graded on a basic 10 pt. scale as follows:

10 pts. → An exemplary post that demonstrates **clear engagement** with the readings and course material, demonstrates a **critical-analytical** approach to the material, is completely devoid of **typographical errors**, and offers a **complete** and **original** response to the question.

9 pts. → A great post that demonstrates all the above EXCEPT demonstrates less engagement with readings or contains typos.

8 → A good post that completely answers the question, BUT contains typos or fails to add anything new to the discussion

7 → An adequate post that meets word count but shows shallow engagement with materials, doesn't directly answer the question, or contains a distracting number of typos.

6 or Below → Does not satisfy requirements including minimum word count. No submission = 0 pts.

Annotated Bibliography

This assignment is designed to provide the preliminary research necessary to produce your final essay. See specifications below:

BASIC (79%-70) C+/C/C-

- Formatted appropriately as an annotated bibliography
- Contains at least a total of 10 sources (academic articles, book chapters) with no more than 4 being course resources
- Each annotation is at least 150 words and accurately summarizes relevant content
- Each full bibliographic entry is correctly formatted

GOOD (86%-80%) B/B-

- All the above
- Annotations show the ability to reflect critically on the relative quality of sources
- Annotations are all *relevant* to the student's planned research
- Fewer than 10 formatting or grammatical errors

GREAT (93%-87%) A-/B+

- All of the above
- Annotations show ability to offer critique of sources
- Annotations demonstrate a developing argument
- Only a few formatting or grammar errors

EXEMPLARY (100%-94%) A

- All of the above
- Flawless formatting and grammar
- Sources are of very high quality and demonstrate time and attention in choosing
- Annotations demonstrate a clear vision for research

DUE SUNDAY MARCH 12th (or earlier) as Word Document (.docx) in Assignments folder in OAKS

Millennialism in the US Research Essay

This assignment requires you to conduct independent research on a chosen topic within the confines of course content. Possible choices:

- Research on a lesser-known Millennialist movement in US history that we did not directly study
- Research on Millennialism in popular culture (not explicitly or overtly “religion)
- Research on Millennialism and conspiracy in politics
- Research on Millennialism, apocalypticism and conspiracy as mode of thinking, as discourse and rhetoric, or as ontology in US popular culture, politics, social structure, etc.

BASIC (79%-70) C+/C/C-

- Formatted appropriately as a research paper.
- Name, Course, Essay Title, Page numbers, Double Spaced, Times12pt. Font, 1 inch margins
- Between 2200 and 2800 words
- Contains at least a total of 10 sources (presumably drawn from annotated bib)
- Organized into paragraphs
 - Introduction paragraph that contains a clear thesis
 - Body paragraphs that supply evidence for the thesis
 - Conclusion paragraph that revisits the thesis and emphasizes broader conclusions from the research

GOOD (86%-80%) B/B-

- All of the above
- Thesis demonstrates careful reflection on previous reading and research
- Outside sources all provide relevant evidence of primary thesis
- Essay is focused, clear, and devoid of excessive grammar or spelling errors
- Shows awareness of the limitations and biases of sources

GREAT (93%-87%) A-/B+

- All of the above
- Sources are well integrated into the writing and appropriately cited throughout with consistency
- Essay shows awareness of historical-critical perspective and a theoretical understanding of religion as a constructed category
- Only a few formatting or grammar errors

EXEMPLARY (100%-94%) A

- All of the above
- Flawless formatting and grammar
- Conclusion is original, compelling
- Essay is worthy of submission to AARSE 2024 Regional Conference

DUE SUNDAY APRIL 16th as Word Document (.docx) in Assignments folder in OAKS

IN CLASS PRESENTATION

An opportunity to present your research findings to an audience of peers

BASIC (79%-70) C+/C/C-

- Student provides some form of presentation material for audience (e.g. handout, slides)
- Clearly states the main argument of the research

GOOD (86%-80%) B/B-

- All of the above
- Presentation materials show time and attention
- Presentation presents clear evidence that supports the research findings

GREAT (93%-87%) A-/B+

- All of the above
- Presentation materials are polished and engaging
- Presentation style is formal and professional
- Presentation reveals possible new questions raised by research and embraces ambivalence and uncertainty where necessary

EXEMPLARY (100%-94%) A

- All of the above
- Presentation is engaging, informative, and professional
- Demonstrates high level critical thinking and invites audience to interact with the research material

GENERAL POLICIES

Honor Code and Academic Integrity

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student's actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at: <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>.

Disability/Access Statements:

Any student eligible for and needing accommodations because of a disability is requested to speak with the professor during the first two weeks of class or as soon as the student has been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be arranged.

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed.

This College abides by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see an administrator at the Center of Disability Services/SNAP, 843.953.1431 or me so that such accommodation may be arranged.

OAKS

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

Recording of Classes (via ZOOM)

Class sessions may be recorded via both voice and video recording. By attending and remaining in this class, the student consents to being recorded. Recorded class sessions are for instructional use only and may not be shared with anyone who is not enrolled in the class.

Inclement Weather, Pandemic or Substantial Interruption of Instruction

If in-person classes are suspended, faculty will announce to their students a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

Center for Student Learning

The Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services provide assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. Services include tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843) 953-5635.

Mental & Physical Wellbeing

At the college, we take every students' mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3rd Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>,

or meet with them in person 3rd Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.

Food & Housing Resources

Many CofC students report experiencing food and housing insecurity. If you are facing challenges in securing food (such as not being able to afford groceries or get sufficient food to eat every day) and housing (such as lacking a safe and stable place to live), please contact the Dean of Students for support (<http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/about/salt.php>). Also, you can go to <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/student-food-housing-insecurity/index.php> to learn about food and housing assistance that is available to you. In addition, there are several resources on and off campus to help. You can visit the Cougar Pantry in the Stern Center (2nd floor), a student-run food pantry that provides dry-goods and hygiene products at no charge to any student in need. Please also consider reaching out to Professor ABC if you are comfortable in doing so.

Inclusion

It is my aim, as part of our class commitments and my personal commitments as a member of society, to cultivate an inclusion classroom space, especially as regards an individual's identity. The College of Charleston offers many resources for LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff along with their allies:

[Preferred Name and Pronoun Information](#)

[On Campus Gender Inclusive facilities](#)

[Campus Resources](#)

[College of Charleston Reporting Portals](#)

[National Resources for Faculty & Staff](#)

[GSEC Reports](#)

[Documenting LGBTQ Life in the Lowcountry](#) (CofC Addlestone Library Special Collections Project)

[College of Charleston Quality Enhancement Plan \(QEP\)](#)

[Articles about CofC and LGBTQ+ Issues](#)

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS

The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. We value student rights and freedoms, including the right of each student to adhere to individual systems of religion. The College prohibits discrimination against any student because of such student's religious belief or any absence thereof.

The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observances in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, like many other colleges and universities, the College supports the concept of "reasonable accommodation for religious observance" in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College.

The accommodation request imposes responsibilities and obligations on both the individual requesting the accommodation and the College. Examples of reasonable accommodations for student absences might include: rescheduling of an exam or giving a make-up exam for the student in question; altering the time of a student's presentation; allowing extra-credit assignments to substitute for missed class work or arranging for an increased flexibility in assignment dates. Regardless of any accommodation that may be granted, students are responsible for satisfying all academic objectives, requirements and prerequisites as defined by the instructor and by the Colleg

