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specific signs of the End set forth for imminent fulfillment (2 Peter 3:8).

Earliest Christianity can be described as a Jewish apocalyptic sect, or millenarian movement, that, drawing upon Daniel and the Hebrew Prophets, pinned its hopes and dreams on the catastrophic events before, during, and after the first Jewish Revolt. What they most expected to happen never came—the return of Jesus on the clouds of heaven to usher in the Kingdom of God. What they least expected to happen was what in fact *did* happen: the utter demise of the Jewish state and the increasing power and stability of Rome over the next several centuries. The fact that Christianity survived these disappointments suggests that its center was not solely apocalyptic expectation, but there is no denying that such expectation was central to the earliest movement. At various points in history, whenever the “signs of the times” are such that one can posit a fit between text and event, we find that apocalypticism experiences a revival. Indeed, it is driven by the very notion of Signs of the End, especially the highly specific ones found in the Books of Daniel and Revelation.

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See also 666, Apocalypse, Chernobyl, Holocaust, Plague and Pestilence

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## Environmentalism

Environmentalism is a diverse social movement that seeks to protect and restore the earth's living systems. It provides a *worldview* (a way of understanding the world and the human place in it) and an *ideology* (assertions and goals that constitute a political program). Environmentalism is critical of modern lifeways, either wholly or in part. It advocates fundamental changes in the ways humans relate to nonhuman nature.

## Development of Modern Environmental Consciousness

Contemporary environmentalism is increasingly shaped by scientific claims that human activities are causing ecosystems to collapse and populations of plants and animals to decline, even to extinction. As environmental scientists issue ever more catastrophic predictions, the worldviews and ideologies of environmentalists are assuming an increasingly apocalyptic character. Thus is environmental science helping apocalyptic thinking to escape its typically religious milieu. At the same time, however, religious groups that do not endorse an environmental worldview, nevertheless increasingly draw on expectations of environmental catastrophe for their own expectations of doom.

Modern environmentalism is often traced to Rachael Carson's frightening warnings, in her famous 1962 book *Silent Spring*, about the threats posed by pesticides to ecosystems and human health. Earlier environment-related concern is sometimes labeled the conservation movement, to distinguish it from contemporary environmentalism. The distinction between an earlier “conservation” and later “environmental” approaches is problematic, however.

Writers before Carson recognized the complexity and interrelationships among living and nonliving things within ecosystems expressing concern about pollution and biodepletion (species decline and extinction). Moreover, from the late 1940s and throughout the cold war, fears of genocide from nuclear or biological weapons spread, fanned by popular literature and motion pictures. The idea that humans might—through hubris, folly, and warlike disposition—destroy their own habitat and unleash an environmental apocalypse was not invented by Rachael Carson. Beginning in the late 1940s, for example, the Union of Concerned Scientists periodically adjusted their figurative doomsday clock to reflect current international tensions and the danger of a nuclear conflagration.

The publication of *Silent Spring* was, nevertheless, a watershed in the emergence of science-based, apocalyptic environmentalism. Its vision of an impending anthropogenic (human-caused) environmental disaster provided fertile ground for the apocalyptic imagination. Since its publication many scientific studies, popular nonfiction books drawing on them, and a growing body of literature and art, intensified apocalyptic expectations among environmentalists and the wider public.

## Environmental Apocalypticism

The ecologists Paul Ehrlich and Garrett Hardin were the most influential proponents of environmental apocalypticism. They wrote of the inevitability of ecosystem collapse resulting from human population growth. Ehrlich published

## A NEW MILLENNIUM'S RESOLUTION

**New beginnings present opportunities to renew and improve ourselves. And if the tick of a new year can motivate us individually, the thunderous clap of a new millennium can arouse us collectively.**

**Certainly some pervasive change is in order. Our relationships with each other and with the environment are so troubled that there might not be much left to celebrate come the dawn of the next millennium.**

**Coupled with this unique numerological opportunity for reflection is a unique tool for group reflection: the Internet, the most egalitarian means of mass communication yet to evolve on this planet. It enables one individual to propose to the entire group a resolution for the year 2000 (or 2001, if we also want to resolve to be accurate).**

**The best resolutions recognize simple truths and commit to adhering to them, sometimes using affirmations as an aide.**

**A resolution for a millennium looks to the big picture and the long term. That means all of us, the whole earth, and for generations, starting with our children.**

**Indeed, attitudes towards other peoples and other species are molded during childhood and difficult to change population-wide thereafter. A successful model for inculcating values, via a daily recitation in schools, is America's Pledge of Allegiance.**

**The unifying effect of such a pledge is easily appreciated. However, the flip side of a strong sense of national (or religious) cohesiveness is often the conviction that other peoples are less important or worthy. To say nothing of other species.**

**A more inclusive sense of belonging needs to be fostered. By widening the group to which we feel connected, we narrow the group we feel justified in exploiting. Eventually the extent of the former eliminates the latter.**

**In addition to patriotism, we can expand the loyalty we aspire to instill. It is time to adopt a more visionary and all encompassing "world pledge" as a New Millennium's Resolution:**

### **A Recognition of Unity**

**"I recognize a vital unity linking me with all humanity and humanity with all life, acknowledging that where none prevails over another, each may prosper and all may continue."**

Source: <http://http://www.redshift.com/~wsandtt/>.

*The Population Bomb* (1968); and Hardin, in "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968), advanced his influential parable of human-caused environmental decline. Both predicted in subsequent works the devolution of civilization as we know it (e.g., Ehrlich 1974; Hardin 1972, 1993). In such works they updated the Malthusian argument that increasing consumption and population growth by humans were precipitating widespread ecosystem degradation and fostering starvation and social decline. Most controversially, Hardin articulated a "Lifeboat Ethics," arguing that nations should refuse to provide aid to countries that fail to reduce human numbers.

Meanwhile, a new field called environmental economics proclaimed that disaster might only be averted if humans recognize the constraints that ecosystems place on economic growth. This effort to integrate ecology into economics was led by Herman Daly. His *Toward a Steady-State Economy*

(1973) and *Economics, Ecology, Ethics* (1980) pioneered this approach. Along with the globally influential study led by Donella H. Meadows entitled *Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (1972), and specific events like the 1973 energy crisis, environmental economics fueled an apocalyptic vision of the collapse of fossil-fuel dependent industrial society.

Atmospheric scientist James Lovelock's "Gaia Hypothesis" also contributed to environmental apocalypticism. First advanced in the early 1970s and later articulated in *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979), Lovelock took the name for his theory from the ancient Greek goddess of the earth. He asserted that the biosphere behaves like a living, self-regulating organism modifying its own living systems to ensure that its own internal conditions remain hospitable for life. Lovelock's subsequent works suggested that human-caused



Borrowing ecologist Paul Ehrlich's slogan, "Nature Bats Last", to underscore the apocalyptic view that if we continue to degrade the earth it will come back and harm us, the graphic anticipates the destruction of modern society. Left ambiguous is whether this destruction will result from an unsustainable modern society breaking nature's laws, or from aspects of nature (human or nonhuman) purposefully engaging in a rebellion. *EARTH FIRST!* 11, 5: 41 (1 MAY 1991).

insults to the atmosphere could threaten the sustainability of the earth's living systems.

Less cautious books followed, drawing on Lovelock's work and the growing scientific evidence regarding the warming of earth's atmosphere. Bill McKibben in *The End of Nature* (1989), for example, implied that it was already too late to prevent catastrophe; nature is no longer autonomous from humankind, and modern society is destroying the very ability of the earth to sustain life. Meanwhile in *Algeny* (1983) and other works Jeremy Rifkin led a growing chorus of critics asserting that biotechnology promised to fundamentally disrupt ecosystems in unforeseen and catastrophic ways. Other books and movies, such as Richard Preston's *The Hot Zone* (1994) and the film *Outbreak* (1995) painted ominous pictures of epidemics triggered by deforestation that exposed humans to new and ever more virulent diseases.

These environment-focused terrors have often been combined with the profound fears of totalitarianism expressed by many twentieth-century writers, including George Orwell in his classics, *Animal Farm* (1946) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Numerous social critics, activists, and artists claimed that democracy had been destroyed or rendered impotent by corporate power or totalitarian technology. Such views have played a significant role in the increasingly apocalyptic character of contemporary environmentalism; sometimes contributing to a fatalistic expectation that the destructive trends documented by environmental scientists is irreversible. Many works promoted a terrifying vision where the human technological manipulation of nature had escaped human political and scientific control, for example Louis Mumford in *The Myth of the Machine* (1966), Langdon Winner in *Autonomous Technology* (1977), and book-films from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1831, film 1931) to Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* (1990, film 1993). In this genre, the future truly looks monstrous.

These themes of ecological and political breakdown were explored in numerous novels and motion pictures. Edward Abbey's novel *Good News* (1980), for example, is set after a cataclysmic biological and social meltdown and portrays a heroic green remnant fighting totalitarian forces hostile to nature and human freedom. More optimistic novels grounded in environmental apocalyptic are Earnest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) and James Redfield's New Age best-seller *The Celestine Prophecy* (1993). Both writers suggest that humans will eventually and through great trials grow spiritually and learn to live appropriately on earth.

Apocalypticism demands an explanation of what went wrong. Many root causes have been offered to explain the unfolding ecological disaster. Some blame Western religion, philosophy, and science for overturning earlier nature-venerating spiritualities and lifeways. Such cultural critique

is sometimes based on scholarly work, such as Lynn White's famous essay, "The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (1967), Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1973), and Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (1980). Such analyses suggested that the West's desecralization of nature led to technology-obsessed, manipulative, and destructive attitudes toward nature.

"Deep ecologists" accept this explanation of the roots of the current crisis while emphasizing that desecralization yields anthropocentric (human-centered) attitudes that disregard nature. "Ecofeminists" trace the original environmental sin to patriarchy, while "social ecologists" blame social hierarchy itself. Meanwhile, the historian Paul Shephard developed a comprehensive theory of the origins of environmental decline, contributing significantly to the evolving, green-apocalyptic myth. Shephard viewed small-scale foraging societies as paradise: ecologically sustainable and spiritually fulfilling. The "fall" came with the advent of agriculture. Agricultural peoples overran and exterminated nature-beneficent foraging peoples, replacing them nearly everywhere with nature-destroying cultures. Shephard's 1998 book, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, well summarizes this theory. It also suggests, however, that humans may eventually reestablish appropriate lifeways on earth. Such analysis and apocalyptic hope is common within environmental subcultures. Daniel Quinn's novels *Ishmael* and *The Story of B* (1992 and 1996) popularize such perceptions. Through the teachings of a gorilla named Ishmael, readers are urged to return to an animistic perception and a sense of the sacredness of the earth as a prerequisite to rediscovering ecologically sustainable and religiously meaningful lives.

In conclusion, intensifying alarm about environmental decline has fostered two trends in contemporary apocalypticism. First, environmental science has freed apocalypticism from its religious underpinnings and contributed dramatically to the secularization of apocalypticism. Apocalypticism is no longer dependent on religious faith. Second, for the first time in the history of religion, religious apocalypticism was fueled by environmental science. Now, secular environmental science will increasingly strengthen and shape religious apocalypticism. Apocalypticism is no longer independent from science. Given these ironic, new dynamics, in the foreseeable future, apocalypticism promises to be an increasingly influential aspect of human worldviews and cultures.

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See also Earth First!, Literature, Secular Millennialism

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## False Prophet

The expression "false prophet" is an oxymoron. A prophet is normally understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition as one who brings a word from God that is directly given to him by the spirit of God. If the prophet is "false," then he or she is not, strictly speaking, a prophet. Yet the phrase, in singular and plural, appears often in both the Old and New Testaments. Some of these references are in apocalyptic passages, and so the phrase has entered the vocabulary and schemes of endtime movements.

## The Hebrew Scriptures

A recurring structural element in the accounts of prophetic proclamation is that the prophet of Yahweh, sent with a warning of destruction, is contradicted by an opposing prophet. An example is that of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 28–29). Commissioned to warn the nation of Judah of their captivity and defeat at the hands of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century BCE, he was contradicted by Hananiah, whose message from the Lord was that Judah would survive the siege of Jerusalem. Apparently there was no way of determining, at the time of utterance, which prophet had brought the genuine message, since Jeremiah must rely on the unfolding of events to justify him. He adds, though, an additional prophecy: that his opponent would die within the next year.

A similar confrontation is reported from the time of King Jehoshaphat of Israel. Again, one prophet, Micaiah, foresaw destruction while another, Zedekiah, predicted victory (1 Kings 22). Again, the outcome of events would identify the true prophet and the false. For similar narrative structures, compare the Egyptian sorcerers who oppose Moses (Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18–19) and, in the New Testament, the confrontation between Paul and "a certain sorcerer, a false prophet," Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas (Acts 13:4–12).

Prophets who are viewed as genuine in the Bible tradition did not always prophesy destruction. If that were so, one would not need divine inspiration to be a prophet, just a reflexive pessimism. A prophet also knew when to speak a word of comfort or hope, as the opening words of the second major section of Isaiah (40:1–2) show.

On the other hand, the fulfillment of a prediction was not enough to guarantee the genuineness of a prophet. The Book of Deuteronomy, a lengthy recapitulation of the law of Israel, gives as the test of a prophet the exclusive devotion to Yahweh, Israel's god (Deuteronomy 13:1–5). This reflects the conflict concerning other indigenous deities in the land. To be "true," a prophet had to speak in the name of the "true" god.