



# Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church

*Damian Thompson*

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How can people believe that the supernatural end of the world lies just around the corner when, so far, every such prediction has been proved wrong? Some scholars argue that millenarians are psychologically disturbed; others maintain that their dreams of paradise on earth reflect a nascent political awareness. In this book Damian Thompson looks at the members of one religious group with a strong apocalyptic tradition--Kensington Temple, a large Pentecostal church in London--and attempts to understand how they reconcile doctrines of the end of the world with the demands of their everyday lives. He asks such questions as: Who is making the argument that the world is about to end, and on whose authority? How is it communicated? Which members are persuaded by it? What are the practical consequences for them? How do they rationalize their position? Based on extensive interviews as well as a survey of almost 3000 members, Thompson finds existing explanations of apocalyptic belief inadequate. Although they profess allegiance to millennial doctrine, he discovers, members actually assign a low priority to the End Times. The history of millenarianism is littered with disappointment, Thompson notes, and the lesson has largely been learned: predictive millenarianism--with its risky time-specific predictions of the end--has been substantially supplanted by explanatory millenarianism, which uses apocalyptic narratives to explain features of the contemporary world. Most apocalyptic believers, he finds, are comfortable with these lower-cost explanatory narratives that do not require them to sell their houses and head for the hills. He does uncover a handful of textbook millenarians in the congregation--people who are confident that Jesus will return in their lifetimes. He concludes that their atypical beliefs were influenced by their conversion experiences, individual psychology, and degree of subcultural immersion. Although much has been written about apocalyptic belief, Thompsons empirically-based study is unprecedented. It constitutes an important step forward in our understanding of this puzzling feature of contemporary religious life.

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