It has long been recognised by feminist scholars and others that religions of all types generally place women in subordinate roles in relation to men. Within Jewish, Christian and Islamic contexts, for example, elevated structural positions of power and religious leadership tend to be closed to women. Yet the picture remains complex, with many forms of religious life also acting to subvert these patriarchal norms. From spirit possession cults in Northern Sudan, to Hindu female ascetics in Sri Lanka, to the global evangelical televangelist empires of Tammy Faye, Joyce Meyer, and Wendy Alec, experiences of religiously inflected gender inequality are far from straightforward.

This symposium seeks to debate where apocalyptic and millenarian religion fits into this context. Is millenarianism a striking example of religion enacting gender equality, or on the contrary, does it reinforce existing inequalities? Why are so many apocalyptic religions founded by women? Why have the doomsday predictions of female prophets established successful global religions such as Seventh Day Adventism, while the more 'moderate' claims of women within 'mainstream' religions go unnoticed? How does religious patriarchy seek to reassert its structural advantage when challenged by the apocalyptic revelations of female visionaries? How can we better understand the gender of prophecy and religious charisma? Is eschatological thought patriarchal, matriarchal, both, or neither? How do millennial religions imagine the transformation of sex and gender at the establishment of the new heaven and new earth? What, in short, is the gender of apocalypse? This symposium seeks to investigate such questions as a way to better understand the role of women and men within apocalyptic movements, as well as the gendered nature of millenarian religion more generally.
Thursday 28th January

9.00-9.15  Registration and coffee


9.25-9.40  Opening presentation on Southcott and the Panacea Society: Gordon Allan

9.40-11.00  Session 1 (Paper 1, Paper 2, Paper 3, Discussion)

**Paper 1: Deborah Joy Allen, University of Aberdeen**

*Living the 'not yet' as 'now': Prophetic speech, over-realised eschatology, and the tricky presence of 'the other.'*

Within the vast milieu of views on the Eschaton held by modern Christendom, the 'over-realised Eschatology' to which many Pentecostal/Charismatic movements adhere is becoming most prevalent. As research has shown, there is within these movements a particular way of interacting with the world, the locus and telos of which is seen to be located within the 'Kingdom to come.' Believers are encouraged to 'usher in' that kingdom through 'prophetic speech.' With a heavy emphasis upon victorious living, glory, a prescribed notion of perfection and, 'calling into being that which is not yet,' this speech seeks to rescript the narratives and experiences of believers. Through a close look at the literature and my own fieldwork, this paper will consider what that means for those who may not fit these prescribed narratives, and how they find their place within these 'kingdoms.' As will be shown, this can be particularly tricky for women. A response to this issue will be offered through exploration of the way in which these women use these 'prophetic narratives' to rescript their own lives and creatively realise their own part within these spheres, and what that may mean for the societies in which they live and the lives they live within them.

**Paper 2: Tristan Sturm, Queen’s University Belfast**

*The "Nature" of the Prophet Woman*

Women since Descartes have been equated with nature: the irrational, the nurturer, the aggressor, the body. Well before Descartes, however, women have served as mystics, oracles, prophets of the future that are in no way endemic to Christianity. I propose that the predominance of women as soothsayers has a much longer history that is related to seeing them as an irrational and embodied part of nature. They are positioned between the world of a pure god and humans therefore better channelling the mystical forces of god(s).
Paper 3: Joseph Webster, Queen’s University Belfast

The Glory of Godly Women? Brethren bodies and apostate bodies at the end of the world

By reflecting upon long term ethnographic fieldwork among Brethren fisher families in Gamrie, Northeast Scotland, this paper seeks to examine how apocalyptic ‘signs’ are imagined to be inscribed differently upon the bodies of ‘saved’ and ‘unsaved’ persons. In the context of Brethren efforts to identify embodied ‘signs of the times’, why is it primarily the bodies of women – Brethren and non – which become key indexes of the soon to arrive eschaton? How, if at all, do the bodies of men become objects of millennial speculation, and what might this tell us about the gender of Brethren eschatology more generally?

11-11.10 Coffee

11.10-12.10 Session 2 (Paper 4, Paper 5, Discussion)

Paper 4: Elena Romashko, University of Göttingen (paper via skype)

The "Strahlenden Madonnen": Female Images in the Russian Orthodox Iconography of the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster.

After the Chernobyl nuclear reactor explosion in 1986 about 23.5% of the Belarusian territory became a radiation contaminated area. The immediate religious parallel to the Chernobyl explosion was drawn to the text from Revelation 8:10-11. The name of the fallen Star in this passage resembles the word Chernobyl (‘chernobil’), which can be translated from Ukrainian as absinth grass, wormwood or mugwort, which in the Bible has become an allegory for bitterness (Prov. 5: 4) and sorrow (Jer. 23: 15). The given paper analyses how these apocalyptic allusions influenced the depictions of female characters, especially, the image of Mary as The Woman of the Apocalypse, on the Russian Orthodox icons of Chernobyl and religious paintings. I suggest that the sensitivity to the infertility issues and the atrocious power of radiation to cause congenital and genetic diseases in children born after the disaster, became one of the key reasons of this mass appeal in secular and religious art to the image of Mary with a child to depict the Chernobyl disaster. Moreover, I attempt to analyse the changes in the depiction of the female characters on the icons of Chernobyl within the last 29 years.

Paper 5: Sarah Jane Harvey and Suzanne Newcombe, INFORM, London School of Economics

Apocalyptic, millenarian religions and gender – how far can we generalize? What lessons can be learned?

Inform was established in 1988 to provide information on new and minority religious groups. It has continually been building up a database of religious movements since this time, with a focus on new and minority religions active in Britain. Currently there are 4,869 groups or organizations on our database, 198 of which have millennialism as a significant feature of their beliefs. However, the nature of the field means that this database will always be incomplete and in constant need of updating. This presentation will consider what generalizations could be made from the 198 groups with millennial beliefs – how many do have female leaders? How many have a focus on gender dynamics as a feature of their teachings? Are
millennial movements any more prone to violence than other groups? We will make some guesses as to the answers to these questions on the basis of the Inform database and give an overview of some case studies of female-led millenarian new religious.

12.10-1.00  Panacea Museum tour part 1

1.00-1.45  Lunch

1.45-2.45  Session 3 (Paper 6, Paper 7, Discussion)

**Paper 6: Katelynn Carver, University of St Andrews**

*Apocalypse Unending: The Creative Nature of an Agendered Uncovering of Novel Knowing*

The idea of the apocalypse has been near-ubiquitously skewed into an incontrovertible synonym for an end, despite the literal translation of the word leaning closer toward an “uncovering” or a disclosure of knowing; a knowing that arises from the “hidden” or that emerges from beyond the “veil” that is largely usurped by the Book of Revelation-based conceptualizations of the end of the world. Leading theologians like Catherine Keller, however, have placed the gender of apocalypse in the spotlight, questioning the issue specifically in her books *Apocalypse Now and Then* (1996) and *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (2005); however, the reinterpretation of the dominance of patriarchal institutions and mores in terms of what apocalypse means tends to be colloquially attached to the idea of rejecting the masculine entirely when, instead, I believe it should be more concerned with a sense of balance—largely agendered (perhaps in itself the apocalyptic unveiling of new knowledge in our time) in being aimed toward the character of creative novelty rather than an obsessive preoccupation with the gender of what it means to know or unveil, to transform or reinvent. Traditionally, yes, these themes have been associated with the feminine, but I challenge this established norm as a distraction from the larger understanding of the eschaton as what Keller herself alternatively translate as not end, but instead, edge (Cloud of the Impossible, 2014)—a chaosmos where possibility reigns and novelty is unavoidable as new knowledge emerges ad infinitum. And if we are at the edge, rather than the end, it is our task to take the potential that awaits there and have the courage to make it known in a way that uncovers the novelty presented and applies it to transform the reality we know into a new Revelation: an apocalypse that sees beyond gender and other limiting binaries, and instead ushers us—academically and practically—toward a more inclusive and progressive means of understanding our world and our place within it, both now and in whatever future apocalypses await.

**Paper 7: Adeel Kahn, University of Cambridge and Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue**

*Apocalypse now: Sharing time before the end of given time*

Arbitrary, absolute and relative ideas of time had like a chimera dominated Islamic metaphysics until the clear articulation by Shah Waliullah of 17th century Mughal India of notions of ‘shared time’ in companionate relations. This was a few centuries before the both/and (both absolute and relative) logic of
Iqbalian ‘tragic time’ in the midst of the anti-colonial struggle of the early 20th century. The ‘time of
girls’ as we approach the ascent towards merciful apocalypse is the dominant theme in the
conceptualization of the relation between time and gender in more recent fin-de-siècle Azeemi writing. My
intervention will overview ideas of time and its quality in Islamic metaphysics and question why feminine
personification of time is foregrounded and how it relates to Islamic ecclesiology?

2.45-3.00 Coffee

3.00-4.00 Session 4 (Paper 8, Paper 9, Discussion)

Paper 8: Benjamin Huskinson, Queen’s University Belfast

Adam and (St)Eve: Sexuality in American Creationism

Most scholarly historical work on American creationism has focused on the intellectual, legal, and structural
history of the movement. While work like Simon Locke’s Constructing “The Beginning” has highlighted the
rhetoric and discourse of different creationists and the obvious parallels in Evangelical fundamentalism, very
little of these works have touched on the manner in which creationism ties sexual “deviancy” to evolutionary
theory. This paper examines how creationists have not only inferred a hetero-normative design in human
beings, but have also used platforms such as creationist literature and public debates to charge evolutionary
theory with the social acceptance of homosexuality, despite evolutionary biology’s struggles to posit a model
for the evolutionary advantage of homosexuality in sexually reproductive species. By examining how
creationists have incorporated hetero-normative views of sexuality into literature and debate presentations
mostly concerned with scientific discussions on the age of the earth, flood geology, and fossil analysis, this
paper will showcase a hitherto unexplored facet of creationism as its proponents have sought to be taken
seriously by both the public and the mainstream scientific community.

Paper 9: Steve Hickey, University of Aberdeen

Hits like a Girl: Genesis 3:15 and the Demise of the Evil One

This paper will examine strands of the more apocalyptic sectors of charismatic evangelical Protestantism
with the aim of illuminating why it has generated significant performative resistance to oppressive gender
structures. The paper will consider contemporary movements that draw upon texts like Psalm 68:11-12,
“The Lord gives the command; the women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host: “Kings of armies flee… and she who remains at home will divide the spoils!” This position has developed out of a reading of
scripture in which women are understood as being given a central role in the ultimate defeat and overthrow
of the Evil One. It thus represents a modern exposition and application of the ancient prophecy in Genesis
3:15—that the latter day woman is ultimately the one who rises up at the end of the age to finally crush the
serpents head—and which is used to draw out the prophetic unction and destiny that rested on various
women throughout salvation history, including and especially Mary, the mother of Christ.
Paper 10: Ariel Hessayon, Goldsmiths

Jane Lead and the Philadelphian Society, c.1697–1704

The Philadelphian Society first appeared openly at London in January 1697. Their name was taken from Philadelphia, meaning brotherly love in the original Greek, the sixth of the seven churches in Asia Minor to whom John sent a book containing his revelation. These seven historical churches were understood as types, with the Philadelphian church superseding the Church of England, Presbyterianism, Independency, Anabaptism, the Fifth Monarchists and Quakers. According to a retrospective self-serv ing history of this small religious movement they were not a ‘peculiar sect’ or party but a ‘spiritual people’ with strong millenarian beliefs. Philadelphian teaching, moreover, emphasised the fulfilment of prophecies and full completion of divine promises, including the conversion of the Jews; primitive Christianity as practised by the Apostles; peace, love and Protestant church unity; the Reformation of Manners; charity; the necessity of private and public revelation, which superseded insufficient human learning; and the ‘deeply Mystical Work of the Regeneration and Ascension of Souls’. Against the backdrop of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), the Glorious Revolution (1688–89), the Toleration Act (1689), and the lapse of the Licensing Act (1695), not to mention the belief that Christ’s second coming would occur on 23 August 1697, this paper explores the public emergence of the short-lived Philadelphian Society within the wider contexts of an emerging British Enlightenment, spiritual devotions, visionary experiences and apocalyptic expectation. Although it has been argued that the Philadelphians must be considered a ‘spectacular failure’, they are peculiar in that so many of their guiding spiritual lights, so many readers and indeed authors of their texts, had been women. Foremost was Jane Lead (1624–1704). Accordingly, the construction of Lead’s message and its dissemination together with her social network and the movement’s disintegration on her death will be the principal focus here.
Paper 11: Matthew Niblett, University of Oxford

The Woman and the Great Red Dragon: the gendered eschatology of Joanna Southcott

Visionary, mystic and prophetess of the millennium, Joanna Southcott (1750 – 1814) remains one of the most significant and extraordinary religious figures of her era. Southcott’s siren prophecies attracted tens of thousands of followers, capturing national attention with her promise to bear a divine child, and in her lifetime she published a corpus of more than sixty books and tracts. At the heart of Southcott’s theology was a gendered eschatology emphasising her role as a woman in the salvation of humanity. Drawing from a radical reading of the books of Genesis and Revelation, Southcott constructed a plan of salvation grounded upon her redeeming role as part of a cosmic battle against Satan. This paper will explore the development of these theological constructs in Southcott’s thought, as well as tracing the relation of these ideas to contemporary understandings of female agency in salvation history. By contextualising these issues it will be possible to understand more fully her unusual doctrines of woman and salvation, and some of the reasons why she was able to appeal widely to the popular imagination and members of the clerical establishment.

10.20-10.40 Coffee

10.40-12 Session 6 (Paper 12, Paper 13, Paper 14, Discussion)

Paper 12: Matthew Bingham, Queen’s University Belfast

Baptism, Scandal and the Kingdom of God: Baptists during the English Revolution

From their early seventeenth-century beginnings, English Baptists were regularly pilloried as seditious and scandalous, dangerous to both religious orthodoxy and civic peace. Often, this rhetoric took on an overtly sexualized dimension as English Baptists were connected with the polygamous Anabaptist uprising in sixteenth-century Munster. Because male Baptist ministers regularly baptised female converts by full immersion, the former were often portrayed as licentious seducers. This paper will explore such sexualized, gendered rhetoric and connect it with Baptists’ strong sense of Christ's return and his impending millennial reign, showing how these themes worked to reinforce each other for both Baptist separatists and their polemical opponents.

Paper 13: Imogen Woodberry, Royal College of Art

The role of women in the development of apocalyptic thought in occult religiosities within Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

This paper will set out to explore the role of women in the development of apocalyptic thought in occult religiosities within Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The examination of end times was particularly important within the occultic sphere where it was frequently depicted in apocalyptic terms as a climatic struggle between the forces good and evil. Within this discourse women played a particularly prominent role. Occult organisations were noted for their frequent commitment to gender equality and many of its most vocal practitioners were women. This paper will focus on the work of the artist Isabelle de Steiger whose writings
devote significant attention to the notion of a coming struggle, drawing mainly on the Book of Revelation. De Steiger is a figure of particular interest because of the range of her occult associations; after joining the British Theosophical Society in 1879 she entered the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1888, founded the Alchemical Society in 1912 before finally turning to Rudolf Steiner and his Anthroposophical Society. Three primary areas will be addressed: first the way in which she negotiated her theology with her own struggles against gender inequality (her attempts to be recognised by the art establishment on an equal level with men) secondly, the significance of her apocalyptic thinking within her broader theological outlook and, thirdly, the influence and dissemination of her work among the occultic networks in which she operated.

**Paper 14: Timothy Jenkins, University of Cambridge**

*The prophetic condition and questions of gender*

I offer a distinction between prophecy and prediction as an aid to thinking about apocalyptic movements, drawing on an analysis of Festinger’s *When Prophecy Fails* (1956) (see Jenkins 2013). In this analysis, gender distinctions play a significant role, notably in the leadership of the group by a series of women spirit mediums, and in the male-led negotiations of the group’s relations to a wider public through the press. The social scientific description of the group drew on the latter because it matched some of its own presuppositions, leading to the misrecognition of features of the female-led group. In a brief concluding discussion, I ask whether it is possible, following this line of argument, to offer a better description of comparable apocalyptic groups, and whether gender is a key to such a description or simply an indicator.

12-12.30 Lunch

12.30-1.30 Session 7 (Paper 15, Paper 16, Discussion)

**Paper 15: Crawford Gribben, Queen’s University Belfast**

*Men and guns at the end of the world: Survivalism in evangelical America*

This paper explores the rise of survivalist themes in the recent history of American evangelicalism. Drawing on popular culture, evangelical writers have begun to reject older assumptions about gaining political influence, and are adopting new modes of ecclesiastical, educational, familiar and geographical secession. In enclaves of traditional culture in the Pacific North-west, these believers are refashioning the American family, emphasising as 'masculine' the virtues of self-sufficiency, ruggedness, and gun ownership, in religious communities that seek to resist the 'feminisation' of modern men. This new focus on gender moves beyond the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s into active preparation for actual war - a second civil war - in which the renewal of American values will be made possible by apocalyptic confrontation with the liberal other.
Historically many American Evangelicals held to a pre-Tribulation expectation of rapture as exemplified by the Left Behind series. This expectation for deliverance before apocalypse resulted predominantly in support within Evangelical Christianity for a traditional domestic role for women. However, in recent decades a significant transition has occurred, even among post-millennialists, wherein social collapse is understood to be imminent and the prospect of a lived apocalypse is understood to be a real possibility. Moreover, this belief is becoming increasingly mainstream. This in turn has driven a growing concern for Christians to be prepared and equipped to survive the impending societal collapse. This paper addresses the impact this has had on conceptions of women among some Christian communities in America and explore some of the ways they are responding.”

1.30-2.20 Discussant comments (Andrew Holmes) and general discussion

2.20-3.00 Panacea Museum Tour for Friday arrivals

3.00 Finish