Introduction

Nazism, Myth, and Meaning

This is a book about myth. To be precise, it is a book about the myth of the millennium and the correlated myths of apocalypse and the anticipated coming of a world-saving messiah. While these terms originated in a specific Judeo-Christian tradition, it would be wrong to restrict them to that context, for variations have appeared throughout the world and throughout history. As they are narrowly defined, the millennium (from the Latin *mille*, meaning “thousand,” and *annus*, meaning “year”) is the thousand-year period after the Second Coming of the Christian messiah-figure Jesus, as prophesied by John of Patmos in the book of Revelation. In this version of the millennium myth, Satan (the epitome of what I term the Evil Other) is locked in chains for 1,000 years, only to break free for one final, eschatological battle. The Christian messiah, taken over from the Jewish apocalyptic Son of Man, finally and definitively defeats Satan, the ultimate force of evil and chaos.

The word “messiah” comes from the Hebrew word for “anointed,” with Christ the Greek for “messiah.” Being anointed signifies that an individual has been chosen, usually by supernatural forces, to bring order to a world fallen into chaos. This is typically done by defeating the forces of the Evil Other. The word “apocalypse” derives from the Greek for “unveiling,” which reflects the idea that the prophecy of John of Patmos revealed the “gnosis,” the secret knowledge of the world’s end—thus the term “revelation.” In more common parlance, “apocalypse” refers to the end of the world, the end of history, and the end of time as we know it. The apocalypse often entails visions of a final battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil (order and chaos, respectively), comprising upheavals of all kinds, from fiery conflagrations to great floods, earthquakes to pestilence and plague, all marked by signs that the world is unbalanced.
and coming to an end. For this reason we also use the term “eschatology,” meaning “thoughts on the end of things.”

Scholars from a variety of fields have noted a number of different catalysts that often generate millenarian movements. That such different events, from natural disaster, war, and colonization to the process of rapid modernization, all elicit such strikingly similar millenial symbolic formations and behavioral responses, despite wide variations in time and place, culture and context, points to the existence of some underlying causal factor that these apocalyptic catalysts share. It is rarely solely natural disaster, war, colonialism, or rapid modernization that acts as the primary catalyst for millennial reactions, but rather that each generates a series of interconnected events that in their cumulative effect destroy the traditional order, in all its political, economic, social, and religious manifestations.1

The multiplicity of causality, the convergence of cataclysmic events, creates rapid, sudden, and irrevocable change in society and change within the psyches of those who experience it. Therefore, it is not the specific causal agent of change that is key but the degree and rapidity of the change itself—change so sudden and so severe that basic structural systems break down. While it can be argued that all people experience rapid and radical change at some time in their lives, they do not necessarily turn to apocalyptic beliefs for support. Yet for the millenarian, the perceived harmony or balance of the world, including such things as normal patterns of birth and death, of marriage, faith, leadership, and economic well-being, are severely skewed. The perception of a peaceful harmony degenerating into a chaos of apocalyptic proportions results, in part, from the breakdown of heretofore stable social-ordering factors, such as family bonds, faith, and governmental and economic stability. These social-ordering factors not only are essential for creating order (structure) in society but also are important for the psychic stability of individuals within that society. In times of personal trauma or chaos, such as the convergence of a loss of a job and a subsequent breakup of a marriage, an individual can fall back on family and faith to regain a sense of order and stability. However, if these social-ordering factors cannot provide the needed stability, that individual might seek out a millennial sect or messiah-figure to provide it. For small millennial groups, then, rapid social change is not needed, simply rapid change in the lives of enough individuals that they join together around a prophet, messiah, or guru.
During times of rapid social change, however, these societal-ordering factors are often weakened considerably. This increases the possibility that a mass millenarian movement will arise, rather than the smaller sects or cults that can arise during relatively stable periods. This can be seen in the case of colonized peoples in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries whose religion, customs, leaders, and economies were suddenly rendered ineffectual or obsolete. In some cases, apocalyptic movements arise in precisely those areas where the ordering factors are already weak. Many individuals in such circumstances are left with a profound sense of being lost, of being cut off from others, of having no sense of direction or meaning in life. They experience an inner or psychic chaos that is then projected back on the society, which in turn is viewed as being in a state of utter chaos, approaching apocalypse. The idea that Weimar Germany exhibited the converging catalysts that led to an experience of rapid and radical change that was subsequently interpreted by many Germans who became Nazis as a time of apocalypse is the focus of chapter 1.

Interpreting the chaos of rapid and radical change as a sign of imminent apocalypse, millenarians believe that the world has reached a historic turning point and that it is at a time that will witness either the end of the world or the birth of a New Order—a New Age of millennial perfection. This New Age is usually described as a period of perfect order, a changeless and, for the most part, eternal world. It is typically portrayed as a time without hunger and crime, without want or need, without disease, and, often, without death. It is this sense of perfection, of timelessness and changelessness, that links millennial notions all around the world. From a comparative perspective, then, we should not fixate on the specific number 1,000 but should focus on the idea of a perfect order to come. As I discuss in chapter 2, the Nazi conception of the *tausendjährige Reich*, literally millennial kingdom, was taken to be just such a perfect world, one cleansed of racial degeneracy, among other things.

The followers of apocalyptic movements usually believe that they are an integral part of this historic turning point. Millenarians believe that they are not only witnessing the birth of the New Age but actively taking part in its fruition. For example, the Chinese Buddhist White Lotus millennial sect believed, as most millenarians do, that their historic mission would result in a profound universal transformation of the nature of society and humankind itself. This transformation means, in part, that society will be governed by a new system of values and human relation-
ships. In other words, a new myth or world view will replace that of the
dying contemporary society.

George Shepperson has pointed out that the use of the Judeo-Christian
term “millennium,” signifying a finality, the end of the world, is some-
what misleading, for it really describes a transitional period. The millen-
nium marks a time of transformation to something new and better, a per-
fect order that is timeless and changeless. Time and change, therefore,
come to an end, but existence, for the chosen in the coming New Age,
goes on.6 The apocalypse, therefore, means destruction and end for some
but transformation and redemption for the chosen.

Millenarians usually believe that they have been divinely chosen not
only to survive the apocalypse but also to witness and perhaps help cre-
ate the millennial New Age, thereby living eternally in the transformed
new order.7 The psychologist George Atwood found that patients who
felt themselves called by higher spiritual powers for sacred missions used
imagery that bore a “striking parallelism” to “all those saviors and re-
curring heroes” in “fairy tales, myths, and the literature of religions.”8
This clearly reflects the archetypal nature of the apocalypse complex, a
collection of symbols that generates a sense of order to replace the per-
ception of chaos.

With the perception of a total collapse of order comes a deep insecu-
rrity brought on by fears that eternal instability will replace the sense of
eternal order. The apocalypse complex, with its symbols of eternity and
harmony, is an initially unconscious psychic response that alleviates this
fear. The correlated myths of eternal paradise, the past Golden Age and
the future New Age, are illusions. They never existed in the past and will
never exist in the future. But, as a symbol, the New Age of millennial per-
fection restores a sense of order to a perception of chaos and gives the be-
lievers a heightened sense of self-worth as one of the chosen, imbued with
a sense of meaning and purpose, rather than a sense of hopelessness, as
they help bring the New Order to fruition through their faith and/or di-
rect action. But who first envisions the coming New Age and leads the
faithful to its realization? Prophets and messiahs are essential for the
emergence and development of most millennial movements. The conver-
sion experiences of the Nazi Old Guard, detailed in chapter 3, clearly be-
tray this pattern.

The coming messiah-figure may first appear in the visions of prophets,
individuals with a facility for nondirected thinking, a mode of compre-
hension that is highly symbolic and often experienced as coming not from
within the thinker but from some external or supernatural force. This type of thinking is contrasted with directed thinking, a mode of comprehension that involves a conscious focusing of one’s thoughts on the external world. Directed thinking is used primarily in our conscious or waking lives. A proclivity for nondirected thinking can be rooted in the particular nature of the prophet’s psyche or result from training in altering consciousness, whether from meditation, induced trance states, the use of mind-altering substances, or a period of profound physical or mental illness. The prophet, whether it is his personal life or that of his society that is in a state of chaos, elicits the apocalypse complex and the symbolic forms of messiah, savior, redeemer, returning king, or some other culture-hero. In whatever guise, the messiah-figure is seen as an ordering principle without parallel, bringing order (salvation, redemption, deliverance) to chaos, salvation from apocalypse. If the prophet’s vision of the coming savior is prompted more by personal trauma (rapid and radical change in his life alone) than by social chaos (rapid and radical change in society at large), his voice may go unheeded.

If, however, those prophecies are passed down orally or in written form, as with the prophets of ancient Israel or the poet-prophets of the White Lotus sect in east Asia, then the visions and their symbolic power can reverberate even centuries later. Contemporary millennial visions, prompted by specific personal and occasionally collective experiences, are therefore associated with pre-existing millennial traditions, lending authority and adding depth to the new vision, often updated and tailored to reflect contemporary times. It is not that the specific cultural millennial tradition prompts all later expressions but rather that new visions brought on by the apocalypse complex, usually highly symbolic and dreamlike in form, are subsequently explained and elaborated by pre-existing millennial traditions. Contemporary apocalyptic visions gain legitimacy through association with traditional correlates.

In many traditions, the messiah/prophet (the roles often merge at some point) is viewed as having been sent from God or ancestral spirits to show the path to the new world that is emerging. The messiah/prophet knows all truth, knows exactly what must be done to achieve salvation. He often is a warrior figure who will lead the righteous into battle against the minions of evil and immorality. It is the messiah-figure, along with prophets, who has the vision of the “new way,” or “new path,” the new view of reality necessary to re-order society from chaos. The “new way” propagated by an apocalyptic movement therefore often is first perceived by a
single individual, the messiah/prophet. The new way is usually made known by some means of divine intervention, such as revelation, ecstatic experience, dream, or vision. The suggestion that Hitler viewed himself as both prophet and messiah is the focus of chapter 4. How many Germans who became Nazis, and many others, came to accept Hitler in both roles is the subject of chapter 5.

For some millenarians, the signs of imminent apocalypse, and the promise of a coming, transformed, better world, is their signal to induce that apocalypse. Believing themselves chosen not only to witness the End-time but also to help bring it to fruition, some true believers consciously or unconsciously induce the apocalypse, “forcing the end,” as the ancient Hebrews termed the actions of impatient messianic movements. These millenarians assume that, since the signs of the time tell them that now is the time and since they have been chosen for a special mission, then the apocalyptic event must occur in their lifetimes. The apocalyptic event is induced because the possibility that the prophesied apocalyptic event will fail to occur means that the believer’s sense of being chosen, of having a special mission, of being immortal, indeed the entire new postconversion identity, is illusory. This cannot be tolerated. The idea that World War II and the Holocaust should be seen as examples of an induced apocalypse is the focus of the final chapter.

The apocalypse complex, therefore, is a set of interrelated myths. By approaching our subject from the perspective of myth, of the symbolic formations constructed by the human mind to give meaning to the meaningless, to reconstruct a sense of order from a world perceived to have descended into chaos, we can come closer to understanding the millenialism, messianism, and apocalypticism that are at the heart of Nazism. But how best to understand such a myth?

Myth can be understood in two fundamental ways, seemingly contradictory, but ultimately complementary. One perspective defines myth by its unreality or falseness. A myth is something that, while generally accepted, is in fact untrue. The interrelated myths that encompass millenialism, apocalypticism, and messianism can in part be understood in this way. To give but one example, the idea of an imminent millennium, a dawning New Age of peace and harmony, is an archetypal image of perfection that can never and will never become real. Yet the very unreality of myth may be its most powerful attraction, surrounding the imagery that supports the myth with an aura of mystery and supernatural power. Moreover, in the attempt to realize the unrealizable, millenarians for
thousands of years have in fact achieved wondrous personal and social transformations. Individuals lost in psychic darkness, adrift in meaningless and empty lives, have found themselves “reborn” into the “light,” their weakened identities suddenly transformed with a much stronger sense of personal meaning and purpose. This conversion is often at the heart of the individual experience of the millennial myth, and so it is with the Nazi Old Guard. Societies also have been transformed by the myth of the millennium, from the transformations wrought by Christian apocalyptic belief in Roman times and again during the Renaissance (a collective rebirth of society through the myth of the perfecting of society) to the millennial impulse that helped shape the settling of the New World, giving deep symbolic meaning to the American Revolution and Civil War, as well as to the modern Fundamentalist awakening.

However, attempts to realize the unrealizable, fraught as they are with ultimate frustration, have led some millenarians to commit horrific examples of inhumanity on a grand scale. For, when the millennial New Age is not achieved (and as a state of perfection it cannot be), millenarians often resort to coercion in an effort to quickly and irrevocably bring it about. In other words, convinced that the New Age of millennial perfection is destined to be realized in their lifetimes, some true believers attempt to induce the apocalypse themselves, through mass suicide or mass murder or by consciously or unconsciously involving themselves in a scenario that brings about mass death, theirs or others’. The mass suicides by the cultists of Heaven’s Gate, the Solar Temple, and Jonestown, the mass murders committed by the followers of Charles Manson and the Aum Shinrikyo cult, the mass deaths of the Branch Davidians and those of the Brazilian Canudos followers, and, finally, the mass killings of the Nazi Final Solution all must be seen in this light. The road to millennial perfection is filled with possibilities, transformative and catastrophic.

Myth therefore has another meaning, and another more powerful relevance than simply being something that is not true. Myth can be a potent reality-shaping force. The myths of a coming millennium, apocalypse, and messiah, while unreal in the sense that they have never occurred and will never occur, have real power to shape reality, to transform human modes of conceptualizing reality, enabling us to literally change reality itself. Specifically, the millennial myth attempts to reconstruct a sense of order from a perception of chaos. The degree of chaos in a given society can determine how real the apocalypse is perceived and how large the millennial movement may become.
Both Hitlerism, which I consider the messianic aspect of the National Socialist movement, and Nazism, its millennial and apocalyptic aspect, can be understood in both the real and the unreal senses of myth. For the history of the rise of Hitler and National Socialism is full of myths that I explore in subsequent chapters, such as Hitler’s role as savior of Germany, as its redeemer from economic depression and the alleged machinations of evil Jewish Bolsheviks. Interestingly, this version of the Hitler myth still resonates not only with contemporary neo-Nazis but also with many uncritical observers who still credit Hitler with saving Germany economically and with rescuing the West from Bolshevism, neither of which is true. Myths, real or not, never really die.

Not surprisingly, the magnitude of the horror that was National Socialist Germany has generated as much literature as any event in modern history. This too is a testament to the human construction of myth. Historians themselves, in attempting to understand this darkest period of human history, have encountered myth, in the archives, in memoirs, in Nazi propaganda, in the speeches and writings of Nazi elites and the confessional writings of the Old Guard, and, finally, in the construction of their own historical narrative. This historiography of what the novelist Don DeLillo sarcastically, but not inaccurately, terms “Hitler Studies,” is as much about myth as it is about history. Therefore, it is essential to understand something of the mythography of Hitler Studies.

Nazi Religiosity and the Millennial Third Reich

For many years, the literature on National Socialism stressed the relative lack of ideological commitment on the part of the Nazis. One of the first detailed examinations of Nazi ideology was undertaken by Hermann Rauschning, a one-time Nazi supporter turned vocal opponent. In a series of works, Rauschning emphasized what he termed Nazism’s underlying nihilistic character. However, while Rauschning hoped to warn the world of the nihilistic and thus destructive nature of Nazism, his own writings, especially his controversial *The Voice of Destruction*, point in an entirely different direction. From his view, the horrors of Nazi Germany resulted primarily from the monomaniacal power goals of a shallow Machiavellian figure. However, if Nazism, in its apocalypticism, and Hitler, in his role as prophet and messiah, are not unique in history but simply another variation of the apocalypse complex, then this perspective
will not do. If ideology was of little importance in the formation and spread of the movement and, consequently, of little relevance for understanding it, what is left for the historian to grasp? Was it all a shell game? Did 60 million people die simply to gratify the aggrandizing appetites of a few historical anomalies? This oft-mentioned nihilism may reflect the existential cynicism of Nazi contemporaries and later historians more than the historical reality of the times.

The Nazi nihilist myth then, like most myths, never really died. Many leading historians, while they now accept that the Nazis expressed a more or less cogent world view, argue that this fact is largely irrelevant since the leaders, followers, and most Germans never really believed it. These historians are still operating under the spell of the nihilist myth, clinging to the notion that it was all, in the end, only propaganda, the great lie, well told. And, even if these historians agree that Hitler and his closest associates believed in Nazism as a coherent set of beliefs, they argue that, since most other Nazis and, more important, most Germans seemingly ignored it, it is therefore largely irrelevant. However, I demonstrate in the following chapters that many in the Nazi Old Guard, and significant numbers of other Germans (as the reports of contemporary journalists attest), were indeed attracted to the millennial and messianic beliefs of the Nazis.

A few early studies of the Nazi world view did take its ideas seriously. These writers noted its obvious debt to volkish thought, a German offshoot of Romantic nature mysticism. This approach is sometimes referred to as “irrationalist,” since it ultimately charges the Nazis with adopting irrationalism as an intellectual virtue. By extension, this “struggle for the irrational” is then used to explain the conspiratorial hatred of the Jews and Germany’s descent into barbarism. Implicit in this view is the belief that the triumph of the irrational helps explain the brutality and violence of Nazism, ignoring the brutally logical nature of Nazi racial hygiene measures and ultimately the Final Solution itself. As becomes clear in later chapters, within its own conception of the apocalyptic nature of the struggle between Aryans and Jews, the Nazis’ attempt to exterminate the Jews once and for all was highly logical. The means to achieve this goal were often rationalized to the extreme. This criticism aside, the irrationalist approach did acknowledge, if only indirectly, the centrality of millennial thinking, pointing out the imagery of rebirth and regeneration, the fears of a racial apocalypse, and the hope of a coming messianic Führer (leader). These works, however, rarely moved beyond implying an
influence of volkish thought on the Nazi inner circle and never fully acknowledged that the concepts they were discussing were in fact millennial.\(^{20}\)

Robert Pois, in keeping with the authors already mentioned, argued that National Socialism must be seen from the perspective of its religiosity.\(^{21}\) In this he follows a number of authors who have focused on religious aspects of Nazism, including Ackerman, Stern, Heer, Ach and Pentrop, Tal, and, most recently, Steigmann-Gall.\(^{22}\) Most of their works have noted the Christian or, conversely, anti-Christian nature of Nazi religiosity. While they are certainly correct in both regards, such approaches miss the archetypal nature of Nazi millennialism. Perhaps for this reason, each study finds in Nazi religiosity a different expression of the religious impulse. Pois, for instance, stresses the importance of nature worship in the Nazi world view, while Friedrich Heer profiles the Nazis’ use of Christian symbolism and rhetoric. Nazi ritual and pageant, and their obvious religious content, have also been a focus of study.\(^{23}\) More often than not, however, Nazi ritual has been interpreted as insincere in performance, a blatant attempt to manipulate mass psychology. Once again this makes the mistake of projecting the historian’s own cynicism onto the sincere, albeit horrid, aims and beliefs of the Nazis. In the same way, propaganda, one of the most successful Nazi tools for instilling (or, in their term, “awakening”) racial consciousness in the populace, is often wrongly interpreted as just another device for gaining and maintaining power. While political expediency was important, the message promoted was also widely held by its promoters and by many of its intended audience. Besides, the politically expedient and the fervently believed often are part of the same propaganda effort. Moreover, both efforts had the same ends in mind—the translation of a specific Weltanschauung (world view) into political and social reality. Therefore, while Joseph Goebbels could be the epitome of calculated cynicism, he was a true believer, as well. Propaganda, whether operating as the great lie or as a vehicle of sincere belief, had the same goal of awakening the racial soul and always was a means to an end—racial salvation.

A few contemporary observers, most importantly Peter Viereck and Eric Voegelin, likewise saw a neoreligious impulse in Nazism. Yet they, too, were strongly influenced by the nihilism myth, interpreting Nazism as a “political religion” centered around a total rejection of the world. According to this view, Nazism was ultimately a form of secular gnosticism.\(^{24}\) Therefore, while these scholars noted the relevance of Nazi reli-
gious beliefs, they still found the Nazi world view to be at heart nihilistic—the Nazis were simply modern-day gnostics who rejected the world and consequently attempted to destroy it. Such views at times betray a none too sophisticated knowledge of gnosticism, for the world-rejecting aspect of gnostic thought was not, and is not, universally held. However, this approach does underscore a valuable and little understood aspect of Nazi thought—the connection between gnosis and prophecy, the perceived ability to foretell the flow of history and, therefore, to choose the correct course. Traditionally, millennial beliefs originate in prophetic gnosis attained via some magical, occult, or visionary experience. According to a few authors, the esoteric world view of the Nazi inner circle was based, at least in part, on modern occult thought and visionary experience.

Most important for the topic under consideration here, a growing body of literature points to the importance of millennialism, messianism, and apocalypticism in the Nazi world view. Norman Cohn first noted the possible connection between millenarianism and Nazism in his classic study, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. Importantly, Cohn also argued that psychology may be an important means of understanding millennialism. In later editions, Cohn tended to de-emphasize both Nazi millenarianism and the psychological analysis, but time and subsequent research have proven Cohn right on both scores. It was not, however, until the 1980s that Cohn’s line of inquiry was developed to any great extent. James Rhodes, in his important and underutilized study, *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution*, analyzed both elite and minor Nazis and found a consistent millenarian tone in their writings and speeches. My research both confirms and extends this view. Robert Wistrich, in his equally significant but similarly ignored *Hitler’s Apocalypse*, likewise returned to original Nazi literature and speeches, especially as they related to the Nazi construction of the Jewish Other, and found them to be thoroughly apocalyptic.

A number of German scholars have recently returned to the original writings and speeches of the Nazi elite and, rather than interpret them solely as propaganda (in the sense of the great lie), have begun to take them seriously as accurate reflections of the Nazi world view. Michael Ley and Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch especially have stressed the apocalyptic, messianic, and millennial aspects of Nazism. Allowing the Nazis to speak for themselves, both Ley and Bärsch have concluded that Nazi messianism and apocalypticism were central to the Nazi construction of re-
ality. Their work, however, is heavily indebted to Eric Voegelin’s notion of political religion, with its secularizing of spiritual experience, and are too Judeo-Christian oriented to fully explain the archetypal aspects of millennialism. Ley and Ekkehard-Bärslch also focus solely on the Nazi elites and do not extend the implications of their work to the rank and file.

Finally, a common element of all of these works, from the 1930s to the most recent German works, is that they stress the “secular” nature of Nazi religiosity. There is a constant refrain that speaks of Nazism as a “secular,” “political,” “pseudo,” or “ersatz” religion, a “secular” or “political” faith, a “secular gnosticism,” or a “secular millenarianism.” Such an interpretation seems to take for granted that a modern political movement, almost by definition, must be secular. In fact, this need not be so. The all too easy comparison to millennial aspects of Russian Marxism has something to do with this as well. Most important, the contemporary literature and archival sources that make up the bulk of the documentation in this book all speak of National Socialism as a spiritual movement created to meet corresponding spiritual needs. It is for this reason that I have subtitled the present volume Salvation and the Spiritual Power of Nazism, for it was the profoundly held belief by many elite and minor Nazis that National Socialism, led by its messianic Führer, held the key to salvation, not simply an economic and social miracle but a genuine spiritual transformation of Germany and, eventually, the world. This is apparent in the conversion experiences of minor Nazis, discussed in chapter 3, which alone demonstrate that Nazism was perceived by its followers as a spiritual phenomenon. Again, the question of sincerity is important. It is abundantly clear from the original sources that Hitler, his inner circle, and many lesser party members were indeed sincere in their millenarian spiritual beliefs.

This book began with a number of specific goals. First, as was mentioned, I desired to verify that millennialism, messianism, and apocalypticism were indeed major aspects of the Nazi construction of reality. Second, if this was so, what if any influence did this millennial world view have on the creation of the movement, and, importantly, in its rise from obscurity to a mass movement? And, finally, what were the catalysts for the generation of Nazi millennialism? I have concluded that Nazi millennialism was a pervasive aspect of the movement and that it was rooted in the very real social changes that occurred in Weimar Germany, changes that affected not only the Nazi elite but also the populace at large. In
other words, I ground the intellectual beliefs of this elite in its social and cultural environment and unite its chiliastic dreams and aspirations with those of the masses that supported it.

But how best to understand this Nazi millennialism? If secularizing theories, irrationalist views, or views centered solely on Judeo-Christian apocalyptic traditions fail to encompass the complexity and ubiquity of millennialism, a broader multidisciplinary understanding of this subject is required. An approach is needed that encompasses the diversity of millennial movements that have occurred throughout the world throughout recorded history. This tack is in fact now being undertaken in the nascent field of millennial studies, and it’s hoped that the brave scholars associated with this somewhat renegade academic movement will help answer the ultimate question of the essential humanness of millennialism.34

To better understand the ubiquity of millennialism and associated phenomena, I turned to sociological and psychological insight. I have avoided the all too easy trap of resorting to psychopathological analysis, interpreting millennial movements as examples of mass psychosis, all constellated around messiahs who are no more than psychopaths. Rather, I have tried to focus on both the potentially positive and the negative outcomes of movements that I believe result from the same initially therapeutic attempt by the human psyche to reconstruct a sense of balance and order after an experience of rapid and radical change, whether in individual lives or collectively in society at large.

What follows, then, is a study of myth. In particular, it is a study of how the apocalypse complex helped shape Hitler’s messianic self-perception, propelled the formation, growth, and success of the Nazi movement, and ultimately gave impetus to what the Nazis termed the Final War and the Final Solution—World War II and the Holocaust. To best understand the Nazi version of the apocalypse complex, I have resorted to a number of sources that have been simultaneously misused and misunderstood. To grasp the richly symbolic world of the millennial myth, I have looked at not only the published speeches and writings of the Nazi elites but also the confessional writings of the Old Guard. I have also utilized a number of accounts of Hitler’s monologues, his prophecy sessions, written by men such as Eckart, Rauschning, and Wagener. Although controversial, they are essential for comprehending Nazi millennialism. Because of the controversy, I urge the specialist to read the appendix to better understand my use of these sources. For the general reader, we turn to the Weimar culture of apocalypse.