



David S. Katz, Richard H. Popkin. *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1999. xxv + 303 pp. \$26.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8090-6885-2.

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Published on H-AmRel (August, 1999)



Radical Messiahs

Amid an increasingly interesting stream of millennial texts, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* strives hard to strike a distinctive note. Katz, a Tel Aviv University historian, and Richard Popkin, professor emeritus of the history of philosophy and religion at UCLA, draw upon the intersection of their respective fields to tackle one of the more intriguing aspects of the millennial phenomenon: the persistent recurrence of messianic motifs in disparate historical epochs. In the introduction, the authors declare their intent to provide a history of the beliefs that motivate messianic revolutionary groups, concentrated on those that have manifested in Protestant Christianity and especially those now evident in the USA. In the eight chapters that follow, Katz and Popkin undertake to follow through on that claim by covering approximately five hundred years of messianic thought beginning with renaissance messianism at the end of the fifteenth century and concluding with messianism at the close of the twentieth century.

The book has many strengths, including clear and lively prose and chapters that consistently present the big ideas of the millennial tradition—so much so that the book could easily have been sub-titled “the greatest hits of the millennium.” Of the book’s eight chapters, the one that most fully delivers what the introduction promises (i.e., provides the historiography of a millennial idea through the presentation of convincing evidence regarding how a millennial idea initially develops and subsequently gets adopted and adapted by others) is Chapter

Seven on British Israelism. While the chapter presents no data with which dedicated millennial scholars will not already be familiar, Katz and Popkin do a laudable job telling the complex story of how an obscure idea that arose in seventeenth century England—that the English were actually the lost tribes of Israel—came to be a motivational belief of the late twentieth century American racist right.

From this historical highpoint, the book plunges into a troubling denouement in its final chapter. The authors trot out examples not clearly related to its central Protestant messianic revolutionary theme (from Swedenborgianism to Rev. Sun Myung Moon). They also pose the unwarranted and rather dubious conclusion that the postmillennialism of Christian Reconstructionism is an irenic development in American millennial thought. Yet overall, this is a very readable text. Although it is not organized well enough to be of much use to newcomers and provides no discernibly novel information for experts, *Messianic Revolution* is a quite good mid-range book. It probably will be most appreciated by those who have already done some preliminary reading in millennialism, but wish to gain a better grasp of the historical linkages among the varieties of human millennial experience in the western Christian tradition.

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Citation: Brenda E. Brasher. Review of Katz, David S.; Popkin, Richard H., *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium*. H-AmRel, H-Net Reviews. August, 1999.

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