



DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE,  
HISTORY OF IDEAS, AND RELIGION

# “Whaddaya Mean Biblical?”

Apocalypticism and Apocalypse in *Ghostbusters* (1984)

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the sci-fi horror comedy film *Ghostbusters* (1984) from an exegetical perspective of reception history with a focus on questions of apocalypticism and apocalypse. This splits the study in two, with the first question being what the four ghostbusters of the movie mean when they talk about the end of the world in a biblical context: their *apocalyptic hermeneutic*. To find this the intertextual theory of Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg is applied to categorize the different uses of Bible pericopes by the ghostbusters, by which transplantations of NT verses are most common, followed by transgressions of OT motifs, an individual transumption of the Book of Revelation and a transplantation and transgression of the idea of universal resurrection at the end of time stemming from the reception history of the Bible. Most found pericopes allude to an eschatological milieu of God's wrath, and the NT texts also link this to the Parousia. What can be said about how the ghostbusters use these texts is however in a secularized and dechristologized understanding, where natural and supernatural disasters are mentioned with the Day of the Lord playing a not more than allegorical role. The second part of the work answers the question what the *apocalypse* per se of the film is instead, and not what any character means by this. With the help of John J. Collins' apocalyptic definition derived from his master-paradigm, a proto-apocalypse can at least be seen in *Ghostbusters* (1984). This is primarily made possible by the film's inclusion of revelatory content exposed to the character Dana Barret (Sigourney Weaver) by an otherworldly mediator but limited by the lack of an explicit transcendent reality with temporal and spatial aspects within this.

**Keywords:** *Ghostbusters*, apocalyptic hermeneutic, apocalypticism, reception history, exegesis, intertextuality

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The size of the apocalyptic film genre has exploded in later years, moving from a marginal occurrence being mainly occupied by low budget evangelical rapture horror movies, to the pinnacles of Hollywood's production, with such secular multimillion-dollar franchises as *Planet of the Apes* and *Mad Max*.<sup>1</sup> With the increased popularity of the post-apocalyptic variant in these film series, the genre's historic and literary foundation in the Bible sheds light on its more prophetic and pre-apocalyptic dimensions. This is where *Ghostbusters* (1984) comes in, serving as a pre-apocalyptic story through most of its runtime, with much of its narrative build-up consisting of biblical allusions. The latter has up until now been ignored in exegetical studies, and will in this thesis, coinciding with the film's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, finally be examined.

## 1.2 Purpose

This thesis will analyze *Ghostbusters* (1984) from two perspectives: the first being what the four main characters mean when they talk about the Bible and "biblical" in the context of the end of the world in two different scenes, and the second being how the actual apocalyptic scenario of the film really manifests itself. Thus, a distinction is made between the *apocalyptic hermeneutic* of the ghostbusters, i.e., what they mean by apocalypse, and the *apocalypse* per se of *Ghostbusters* (1984). The latter point of view will be seen with the help of John J. Collins' master-paradigm (Appendix 1), to further categorize the apocalyptic expressions and put them in a wider biblical comparison, while the former will take help of Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg's intertextual terminology to determine how biblical intertexts are used by the ghostbusters and how it can bring an understanding of their hermeneutic.

## 1.3 Questions

- What is the apocalyptic hermeneutic of the ghostbusters in *Ghostbusters* (1984)?
- What is the actual apocalyptic course of events in *Ghostbusters* (1984) and how can it be understood?

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, "List of apocalyptic films," last modified August 14, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_apocalyptic\\_films](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_apocalyptic_films).

## **1.4 Demarcations**

Apart from the demarcations made to the questions in the form of limiting the apocalyptic hermeneutic to pieces of dialogue uttered by the four ghostbusters in the bridge and city hall scenes (see 1.7.1 for details), the limits set for the project are described in the theoretical framework (1.5) and material below (1.7). This means not asking for the expression of this from the entire plot and/or director for example, as well as using Collins' master-paradigm in order to rule out and understand the apocalyptic course of events instead of searching for this in various definitions.

Another demarcation is made for the first question above, where the final line up for examination in *Ghostbusters* (1984), "human sacrifice, cats and dogs living together, mass hysteria", is ignored in this study due to its overexaggerated and ironic tone, which compared to the other eschatological tropes featured serves more of a comedic purpose than to show any apocalyptic worldview that should be taken seriously.

When it comes to the literary approaches taken from Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg (see chapter 1.5.3), three terms are implemented in this work, and not all fifteen of her presented terminology. These three expressions are found the most fitting for the use of biblical pericopes in the film, further argued for in chapter 2.3.

Also, *Ghostbusters* (1984) is filled with more religious imagery than just the biblical references and apocalyptic framing that this work is about, but it is only this that will be up for study and analysis here. Examples of other religious features of the movie that will be ignored in this thesis except for some short discussion and suggestion for future research in the fourth chapter includes the ancient Sumerian mythology of Gozer, the different religious figures seen in the city hall and *Savin' the Day* scenes, and the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man stepping on the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan with Peter Venkman reacting protective and enraged to it.

## **1.5 Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

### **1.5.1 Reception History**

This work is first and foremost an exegetical study belonging to the tradition of reception theory and history. The millennia long scope that the history of how the Bible has been read, interpreted and received is here limited to one reception historical product in the shape of *Ghostbusters* (1984). Hermeneutics are central to the methodology of reception history and often a key question that scholars ask for when studying works that use biblical texts and

themes.<sup>2</sup> This thesis is no exception, and to find the biblical literature that the study object actually is a piece of reception history to, the theory of intertextuality is applied, as well as John J. Collins' master-paradigm, to see the film from a point of view regarding the biblical apocalyptic genre, both of which are presented below.

### 1.5.2 Intertextuality

To be able to reach a more precise result when looking at the biblically relevant apocalyptic-hermeneutical parts of the movie French literary critic Gérard Genette's definition of *intertextuality* is applied, in the sake of not getting lost in the umbrella term "reception history", which due to its diachronic character can tend to stimulate more perspectives than wanted and answer more questions than asked. Therefore, this thesis will explore the relationship between *Ghostbusters* (1984) and biblical texts according to the following description: "...as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another."<sup>3</sup> In that way, intertextuality ranges from quotations to allusions and the explicit use of one text in another to the more implicit yet necessary connection to another text which otherwise would make the application of it seem impossible to understand, in Genette's recognition.<sup>4</sup> Here, *Ghostbusters* (1984) will serve as a literary text to fit into this definition, and the intertexts looked for in the film will primarily be contained in the biblical canon.

Because of Genette's rather broad definition of intertextuality and what it can apply to Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg's vocabulary of literary approaches is included here, making an even more clear statement on how the biblical texts are used in *Ghostbusters* (1984) possible. Of Cushing Stahlberg's terms, which are presented in relation to Genette's intertextual foundation, the following three are used in this essay because of their relevance in the context of the film (this is further argued for in chapter 2.3):

- *Transgression*-using the original as a springboard for another work, taking some dimension of the original and using it as a departure point.
- *Transplantation*-the extraction of a particular element of the original story.
- *Transumption*-a quoting of the original.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Knight, "Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (2010): 137–46, 137.

<sup>3</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Stages 8 (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Genette, *Palimpsests*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Cushing Stahlberg's complete vocabulary and its explanations concerning approaches:

*Transfocalization*—shifting the point of view of the story... Also useful here is the idea of defocalization, which removes the point of view of the original.

### 1.5.3 Apocalypticism, Apocalypse and the Master-Paradigm

As mentioned above the core purpose and questions of this paper differs between apocalypse as a narrative event at one hand, and apocalypticism as a genre and hermeneutical definition on the other. The latter definition is not set at the beginning of the work though, and will instead be explored from the movie, pericopes and master-paradigm brought up below. The only real demarcation made in the terms of what can be considered apocalyptic is the biblical perspective, leading to the preliminary meaning to start from is biblical eschatology as it is presented in the film, even if this can be challenged from the sources chosen.

Since biblical apocalypticism lacks a definitive genre description, especially considering the variation of literary forms of expression different biblical texts defined as apocalyptic can take, this work will use biblical scholar John J. Collins' suggestion at a paradigm for placing literature in an apocalyptic frame mainly based on narrative elements (Appendix 1).<sup>67</sup> See 1.5.4 for how this will be implemented.

### 1.5.4 Implementation

To clarify, even if the thesis starts from the exegetical tradition of reception history, the distinct theories used to apply the broad biblical reception perspective to *Ghostbusters* (1984) are Genette's intertextuality and Collins' master-paradigm. These theories are also part of the work's methodology, where the terms of Cushing Stahlberg based on Genette's theory help find and categorize the use of the biblical intertexts and the model of Collins help structuralize the

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*Transfusion*—importing the lifeblood of the original.

*Transgression*—using the original as a springboard for another work, taking some dimension of the original and using it as a departure point.

*Transiency*—the brief introduction of an element from the original; an unsustained allusion.

*Transition*—the setting of a story in a new era or period.

*Translation*—the carrying across of the original to a new cultural setting. This may involve transition and translocation as well.

*Translocation*—the setting of a story in a new place.

*Translucency*—a significant transposition of the original, which nonetheless maintains the shape or form of the original: one can see the telling through the retelling.

*Transmodalization*—the changing of the form of the original... The retelling still operates within the literary mode, but alters the literary form.

*Transmutation*—the alteration of the medium of the retelling.

*Transplantation*—the extraction of a particular element of the original story.

*Transposition*—following Genette, a serious transformation of the original.

*Transumption*—a quoting of the original.

*Transvaluation*—a reframing that shifts the evaluative connotation from negative to positive or from positive to negative.

*Transvocalization*—the telling of the story in another voice, Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, *Sustaining Fictions: Intertextuality, Midrash, Translation, and the Literary Afterlife of the Bible*, (New York: T&T International, 2008), 211–12.

<sup>6</sup> John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–20, 5–8.

<sup>7</sup> John J. Collins, "The Jewish Apocalypses" *Semeia* 14 (1979): 21–59, 28.

plot of the movie, thus additionally working as methodological tools in the execution of the analysis.

The six intertexts of *Ghostbusters* (1984) from the Bible, brought up in chapter 2, will first be seen through a broader apocalyptic lens, in order to find similarities and differences between their apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic dimensions and from there conclude on the apocalyptic hermeneutic of the ghostbusters, who are the intertextual carriers of the picture through their dialogue in the bridge and city hall scenes respectively (see further details in 1.7 Material). After that the film's narrative in itself will be up for apocalyptic scrutiny in chapter 3 where it will be put into the master-paradigm, to see how its apocalypse can be understood.

### 1.6 Previous Research

When it comes to the study of the Bible on and in film in general it is by no means an unexplored area by scholars of religion, theology and film.<sup>8</sup> Even if the phenomenon of Bible and cinema in itself misses any comprehensive attention, Bible movies have been given credit and academic relevance for their ability to reverse the hermeneutical flow of the biblical texts, as well as to shed light on the reception history of the Bible with their use of not only verses or themes from biblical books, but of literature, music, art, drama, exegesis, liturgy and theology descended from the Bible's reception history.<sup>9</sup>

*Ghostbusters* (1984) have on the other hand received little attention by scholars reigning in the fields of religious studies and theology, which is a subject that instead has been mainly explored by fandom and writers on popular culture.<sup>10</sup> Rather politics has been the main academic focus in studies of *Ghostbusters* (1984), mostly set in the social and economic situation of the Reagan era. Topics discussed has therefore often referred to political regulations by the Reagan-Bush administration during the 1980's and the ideological shift it led to in the USA. Examples are the representation of libertarian and capitalist ideals in the small company of the ghostbusters and their value for New York,<sup>11</sup> and also how their business of ghost hunting reflects the contemporary views on immigration<sup>12</sup> and pollution.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Adele Reinhartz, *Bible and Cinema: An introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 2–3.

<sup>9</sup> Reinhartz, *Bible and Cinema*, 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew N. Anderson & Collin L. Brown, ““We’re ready to believe you!” Spiritualism and the interpretation of paranormal experience in *Ghostbusters* (1984),” in *The Paranormal and Popular Culture: A Postmodern Religious Landscape*, edited by Darryl Catherine and John W. Morehead (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 133–46, 133–34.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Clare, *Fictions Inc. The Corporation in Postmodern Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 76.

<sup>12</sup> Zoila Clark, “Immigrants as aliens in the *Ghostbusters* films,” *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 4: 1 (2015), 29–42.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Alice Corcos, ““WHO YA GONNA C(S)ITE?” *GHOSTBUSTERS* AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION DEBATE,” *Journal of Land Use & Environmental Law* 13: 1 (1997): 231–72.



Matthew N. Anderson and Collin L. Brown's article on the Spiritualist influences on the film is an exception from the trend of political analyses.<sup>14</sup> In the article Anderson and Brown argue for an expression of a perspective on the paranormal retrieved from 19th century Spiritualism in *Ghostbusters* (1984), partially based on the movement's role in the family background of one of the movie's writers, Dan Aykroyd.<sup>15</sup> Though some kind of religious implications are up for study here, the work is still taking part of the more extensive ignorance of the film's exegetical potential, despite its both explicit and implicit use of Bible verses, as well as the genre of apocalypticism in this context.

This thesis will contribute to the relatively unexplored religious study area of *Ghostbusters* (1984) and will be the first academic paper of knowledge to draw attention to its relevance for exegesis and biblical studies, together with the apocalyptic genre and reception perspective.

## 1.7 Material

The primary material for this study is the movie *Ghostbusters* (1984) in itself, which all pericope findings, model applications and theoretical analyses will be derived from. Below follows an introduction to the film, its cast and plot, including what will be the focus of the runtime in this paper.

### 1.7.1 *Ghostbusters* (1984)

Released in 1984, summer blockbuster *Ghostbusters* (1984) broke new ground in American cinema by combining comedy, horror and science fiction.<sup>16</sup> Directed and produced by Jewish filmmaker Ivan Reitman and co-written by Jewish filmmaker Harold Ramis,<sup>17</sup> together with Dan Aykroyd, the film stars Bill Murray, Aykroyd and Ramis as three paranormal investigators turned ghostbusters. Later joined by a fourth member played by Ernie Hudson the company gains success and fame in New York City as the paranormal activity surges.

The group's newest recruit Winston Zeddemore (Ernie Hudson) soon realizes that the increased demand for ghostbusting is a sign for the world coming to an end, which after the scientific research of Egon Spengler (Harold Ramis) and Ray Stantz (Dan Aykroyd) on their client Dana Barret (Sigourney Weaver), turns out to be true. The eschatological prophecies are

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<sup>14</sup> Anderson & Brown, "We're ready to believe you!", 133–46.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson & Brown, "We're ready to believe you!", 133–34.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Bramesco, "How 'Ghostbusters' Gave Birth to the Modern Blockbuster", *Rolling Stone*, June 8, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/tv-movies/tv-movie-news/how-ghostbusters-gave-birth-to-the-modern-blockbuster-121570/>.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Kohn, "Director Shows His 'Stripes'", *Forward*, November 14, 2007, <https://forward.com/culture/12012/director-shows-his-stripes-00780/>.

made out of Dana's signs of a demon dog known as Zuul, who acts as a gatekeeper to the parallel dimension of the Sumerian god Gozer. When Zuul finally shows up it possesses Dana, along with its keymaster twin Vinz Clortho which takes over her neighbor Louis Tully (Rick Moranis). The two then have intercourse, which summons Gozer, enabling the apocalyptic climax of the film.

After being confronted by the environmental inspector Walter Peck and arrested by the police this leads the ghostbusters to a meeting with the mayor, in the cause of convincing the city of its need for help, effectively expressed not the least by the wit and irony of Peter Venkman (Bill Murray). The ghostbusters are then escorted to the apartment building of Dana and Louis where Gozer appears at the top during great dramatical circumstances, after an archbishop, nuns, orthodox Jews and street protesters calling for repentance are seen in the previous scenes. Gozer lets the gentlemen choose the form of their destroyer, which becomes a giant marshmallow man, a commercial mascot who is accidentally chosen by Ray's thinking. The film concludes with the team destroying the marshmallow mascot by crossing the streams of their proton packs and Dana and Louis returning to their ordinary selves.

The two scenes where the Bible is explicitly referred to in the one hour and forty-five minute runtime is one where Winston theorizes about biblical eschatology when driving over a bridge (time slot 01:00:41–01:02:10),<sup>18</sup> and another where the ghostbusters use biblical imagery to describe what is going on for the mayor, in the city hall (time slot 01:11:41–01:14:49).<sup>19</sup> Because these two parts are the only ones relevant to reveal the apocalyptic hermeneutic of Winston, Egon, Ray and Peter, they make out the starting point for the discourse in chapter 2, where they are continually addressed as the bridge and city hall scenes, named after their location in the story. The rest of the plot is not overlooked however, instead analyzed in chapter 3 to pinpoint the apocalyptic sequence throughout its runtime and put it into the master-paradigm as well. One scene is of particular interest when looking at the apocalyptic premises of and their eventual fulfilment in the movie, though, which follows directly after the city hall scene (time slot 01:14:49–01:19:96).<sup>20</sup> Because it lacks a spatial connection to a given location, instead following the ghostbusters' escort through the city, it is presented as the *Savin' the Day* scene here, named after the song which plays through most of the scene. It is given a further description in 3.1.

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<sup>18</sup> Time slot 01:00:41–01:02:10 in the DVD release *Ghostbusters*, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment LC-10488CE-ST, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Time slot 01:11:41–01:14:49 in the DVD release *Ghostbusters*, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment LC-10488CE-ST, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Time slot 01:14:49–01:19:96 in the DVD release *Ghostbusters*, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment LC-10488CE-ST, 2014.

## 2. The Apocalyptic Hermeneutic of the Ghostbusters

In this chapter the biblically relevant dialogue of the bridge scene and city hall scene will be presented, and then the canonical texts that the lines are colored by will be found. These pericopes and the thematical significances of their usage in the film will after that be discussed in relation to their similarities, to declare a more precise meaning of what the ghostbusters are talking about when throwing around biblical quotes and characteristics to describe the end of the world; their definition and hermeneutic of apocalypticism.

### 2.1 The Bridge Scene

While driving the Ectomobile over the Manhattan Bridge, Winston starts a theological discussion with Ray over a cigarette when the latter is inspecting the blueprints of Dana Barret's apartment building.<sup>21</sup> After starting by asking if he believes in God and declaring his own Christian faith and love of Jesus's style, he asks him about a biblical topic he will shortly refer back to in the city hall scene, about the dead rising from the grave, in the context of it happening "in the last days" i.e., at the end of the world i.e., Judgement Day:

Winston - "Hey, Ray. Do you believe in God?"

Ray - "Never met him."

Winston - "I do, and I love Jesus's style."

Ray - "This roof cap is made out of a magnesium-tungsten alloy."

Winston - "What are you so involved in?"

Ray - "These are the blueprints for the structural iron work in Dana Barret's apartment building, and they're very, very strange."

Winston - "Hey, Ray. Do you remember something in the Bible about the last days when the dead rise from the grave?"

Ray - "I remember Revelation 7:12: And I looked as he opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became as black as sackcloth, and the moon became as blood."

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<sup>21</sup> Time slot 01:00:41–01:02:10 in the DVD release *Ghostbusters*, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment LC-10488CE-ST, 2014.

Winston - “And the seas boiled, and the skies fell.”

Ray - “Judgement Day.”

Winston - “Judgement Day.”

Ray - “Every ancient religion has its own myth about the end of the world.”

Winston - “Myth? Ray, has it ever occurred to you, that maybe the reason we’ve been so busy lately is because the dead have been rising from the grave?”

Ray - “How about a little music?”

Winston - “Yeah.”

The two look at each other uneasily before Ray asks about putting on the radio and they drive off into the night. The scene is put between the introducing search by the gatekeeper and keymaster after each other, in the shape of Dana and Louis, and the first persecution of the ghostbusters.<sup>22</sup>

Ray not only answers Winston’s question by quoting an unrelated verse from the Book of Revelation, but also refers to it incorrectly as Revelation 7:12 when he is actually talking about Revelation 6:12. Despite this he quotes the text somewhat close to the New Revised Standard Version: “When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood” (Rev 6:12). After that Winston adds his own information about boiling seas and falling skies.

In short, the bridge scene gives the viewer not more than six apocalyptic motifs with an mostly natural disastrous aura, by three of which stem from Rev 6:12. Winston mentions resurrection of the dead, boiling seas and falling skies, and Ray quotes Rev 6:12 as mentioned, which includes a great earthquake, the sun becoming black and the moon becoming as blood.

## **2.2 The City Hall Scene**

Meeting the mayor in the New York City Hall, the ghostbusters initiate a collective bombardment of apocalyptic motifs to make him understand the “biblical” proportion of the doomsday scenario approaching, with Ray starting by describing it with “Old Testament” and

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<sup>22</sup> See point 7.2 in the master-paradigm in chapter 3.3.

“wrath of God”.<sup>23</sup> Directly after, he and Winston mentions phenomena they were talking about in the car earlier, rivers and seas boiling and dead rising from the grave, together with “fire and brimstone coming down from the skies”. Egon brings up earthquakes, again alluding to disasters discussed in the bridge scene, but also “forty years of darkness”:

Peter - “Or you can accept the fact that this city is headed for a disaster of biblical proportion.”

The mayor - “Whaddaya mean biblical?”

Ray - “What he means is Old Testament, Mr. mayor. Real wrath of God type stuff. Fire and brimstone coming down from the skies. Rivers and seas boiling.”

Egon - “Forty years of darkness, earthquakes, volcanoes.”

Winston - “The dead rising from the grave.”

The mayor acts convinced to this, and ask the team what they need, which cuts directly to the *Savin’ the Day* scene.<sup>24</sup> The more or less conflicting standpoints of Walter Peck and the archbishop in the same scene are therefore overlooked.

The city hall scene offers both broader theological terms to describe the apocalyptic event of the film and more specific examples of apocalyptic elements. The wider themes consist of “biblical”, “Old Testament” and “real wrath of God type stuff” while the illustrating examples are once again dominated by natural disasters, with fire and brimstone showers, boiling rivers and seas, forty years of darkness, earthquakes, volcanoes and resurrection of the dead. Noticeable is that the tropes of boiling seas, earthquakes and dead rising from the grave is repeated from the bridge scene.

### **2.3 Intertextual Pericopes**

The apocalyptic hermeneutic that comes through listening to the combined sayings in the matter by Winston, Ray, Peter and Egon in the two chosen scenes, consists of key components from both the New Testament and the Old Testament. Therefore, the biblical-eschatological tropes found above are here traced back to their potential biblical origin and studied for their meaning and use in the film, partly with the help of Cushing Stahlberg's intertextual terminology.

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<sup>23</sup> Time slot 01:11:41–01:14:49 in the DVD release *Ghostbusters*, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment LC-10488CE-ST, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 3.1 for this.

Beginning with Winston's obsession with the dead rising from the grave, which in the film arguably takes the price of the most important apocalyptic theme, since it sets off the whole realization of what the increased paranormal activity implies for the protagonists, its wording presents at least two major inherent premises which are crucial to find its most precise theological meaning, and from there biblical origin. The exact saying, "Do you remember something in the Bible about the last days when the dead rise from the grave?", first is set in an eschatological context and not just about dead rising in general with *the last days*. Second, it seems to be about a universal resurrection of the dead of the entire world, since Winston terms it as *the* dead in a fixed form without further distinction. This means that the trope that should be looked for in the Bible is a general resurrection at the end of time, something that Winston also repeats when mentioning the consequences of the coming disaster for the mayor in the city hall scene. Resurrection motifs occurs in different texts of the Old and New Testament, but not in a clear universal and eschatological sense as expressed by the mentioned ghostbuster.<sup>25</sup> This idea is being implied in several pericopes from the time of Second Temple Judaism, amongst them belonging to Paul.<sup>26</sup> 1 Thess 4:13–18 could serve as an example here, where the dead are said to rise while the Day of the Lord is mentioned in parallel, which is a synonym for Judgement Day in New Testament tradition.<sup>27</sup> There, the dead rising are referred to as the dead "in Christ" (1 Thess 4:16), which is a symptomatic way of putting the final resurrection for Paul, and to some degree biblical texts over-all, as an apparent relation between every dead person being resurrected and the end of the world always is missing.<sup>28</sup> Instead, Winston's understanding of this is easier to attribute to a developed idea in the reception history of the Bible, rather than the Bible itself, at least in explicit terms. Justin Martyr is for example one of the earliest authors to express this idea of universal resurrection at Judgement Day.<sup>29</sup> Despite the lack of a specific Bible verse to apply here, though, the character still uses this later tradition in an intertextual way. The way that it is used makes it both transgressing and transplanting, in how it takes the particular eschatological resurrection motif from the developed religious thought, transplantation, while also applying this dimension to the movie plot as a departure point to the climax, transgression.

Revelation 6:12 is perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly added to this list because it is nearly literally quoted by Ray in the bridge scene, making it a transumption of the same verse,

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<sup>25</sup> L. J. Kreitzer, "Resurrection," *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*: 805–12.

<sup>26</sup> Kreitzer, "Resurrection," 806–7, 811–12.

<sup>27</sup> G. E. Ladd, "Eschatology," *The New Bible Dictionary*: 386–91.

<sup>28</sup> S. H. Travis, "Resurrection," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*: 1015–20.

<sup>29</sup> Travis, "Resurrection," 1018–19.

and the only one in the entire film intentionally quoted in this way. Composed by John of Patmos in the year 96 CE,<sup>30</sup> the verse also serves as the most distinguishable collection of apocalyptic tropes represented in *Ghostbusters* (1984), both in theory and practice (see chapter 3.2 for this).

Moving on to the motif of boiling seas and rivers which Winston plants in Ray's quote from Revelation and which the latter later shares with the mayor, the closest image found in the Bible is from the the Book of Job: "It makes the deep boil like a pot; it makes the sea like a pot of ointment." (Job 41:31). The verse applies to the Old Testament sea monster Leviathan (Job 41:1) and stimulates Winston's line since it is the only place in the Old or New Testament where a natural watercourse is said to be boiling. Even if a subtle intertextual and transplanting bond can be found here, it is the least obvious that the several pericopes of this essay make out between film and book, as an effect of Winston's lack of information about it in comparison to his hypothesis about the dead rising from the grave.

"Fire and brimstone coming down from the skies" could be the broadest and most biblically rich quote said in the city hall scene, in its amount of possible specific Bible references. Fire and brimstone is an expression that can be found from Genesis to Revelation but narrowing it down to records about it specifically coming down from the skies leaves a manageable number of Bible passages to explore. At Genesis 19:24 God lets fire and brimstone rain on Sodom and Gomorrah to destroy them, which is shortly retold at Luke 17:29, and the same god says he will let the same thing happen to Gog from Magog when he enters Israel at Ezekiel 38:22, and on the wicked at Psalm 11:6. The reason why these are bundled together under one paragraph here, is that they all work as biblical inspiration and potential transplantation material to Ray's mentioned line. The other used pericopes allude to parts of the movie script in the bridge and city hall scenes exclusively without other possible sources, which is why they are placed separately in this chapter.

Egon's contribution to the vivid picture the ghostbusters paint for the mayor is "forty years of darkness, earthquakes, volcanoes". Apart from the related geological occurrences already stimulated by Ray's remembered Revelation verse, forty years of darkness is not an exact saying that can be found in either the Old or New Testament. What the expression probably takes inspiration from must nonetheless be the biblically significant number of forty, appearing throughout mainly the Old Testament,<sup>31</sup> perhaps in combination with the darkened sun from Rev 6:12, which gives it an apocalyptic connection to the New Testament. This creates

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<sup>30</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Apocalypse (Revelation)," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 996–1016, 998.

<sup>31</sup> Michael D. Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in Its Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 116.

a broader biblical transplantation without an obvious particular textual source. It could be mentioned that an earthquake is not only present in Rev 6:12 quoted by Ray, but also in various OT and NT texts where apocalyptic allusions are often featured in relation to them, making it a classic biblical cliché for the apocalyptic genre.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the introducing sayings by Ray in the city hall scene about the Old Testament and God's wrath, it does not have clear origins to specific Bible places either but can despite this be categorized with Cushing Stahlberg's terms. Because of this, it takes a similar transplanting role as to Egon's line about forty years of darkness, drawing parallels to a broader biblical tradition without an exact text source. Nevertheless, his expressions also stimulate an intertextual transgression by using the Bible and its reception history as a springboard to what is about to happen in the story of the film. The same thing can be said about Peter's line about a disaster of "biblical" proportion.

Finally, a large number of Bible passages of an apocalyptic character can be found when researching the ghostbusters' dialogue in the two chosen scenes, who partake in their apocalyptic hermeneutic described later. From a narrative point of view, Winston's resurrection idea linked to reception history is most important for the plot of the movie, as it transgresses its traditional intertext, using it as a departure point for the coming apocalyptic scenario and the first foreshadowing of this in the story. It also transplants a theme, which also applies to Job 41:31; Gen 19:24; Luk 17:29; Ezek 38:22 and Ps 11:6. Rev 6:12 is the only text which is directly quoted/transumpted. Broader transgressions and transplantations are executed of the sayings "biblical," "Old Testament," "wrath of God" and "Forty years of darkness, earthquakes." There are beyond these connections to God's wrath in most of the biblical intertexts, and these and their apocalyptic relevance of this topic is brought up next.

## **2.4 Divine Retribution and Apocalypticism**

Before fully describing and defining the apocalyptic hermeneutic of the ghostbusters expressed in the bridge and city hall scenes and with the help of the pericope findings and intertextual analyses in 2.3 the relation between the wrath of God, a theme that is central in the ghostbusters' meaning of apocalypse, and apocalypticism as a genre, will be examined. The importance of this comes through via Ray's initiate response to the mayor asking about the coming disasters being of biblical proportion in the city hall scene, which is referring to the Old Testament and

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Bauckham, "The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 19: 3 (1977): 224–33, 224, 232.



the wrath of God. This sets the Old Testament and God's wrath as the preliminary definition in theme and basis officially of what is perceived of as the ghostbusters' apocalyptic hermeneutic. Obviously, all the biblical disasters mentioned does not originate from Old Testament texts, as a matter of fact only Winston's vague part about seas boiling, which is here tracked to Job, does. However, the theme of God's wrath needs to be explored in the context of the other verses in question, to reach a fuller understanding of the biblical and apocalyptic hermeneutics of the film. That is why a passage about divine retribution in each biblical intertext of the two scenes is also included below. After that the link between biblical apocalypticism and divine retribution will be handled. This task is brought upon the assignment by first briefly looking at Old Testament theology and then by searching for potential parallels in New Testament thought, mainly Pauline, in order to find what could be apocalyptic about the mentioned pericopes more than just natural disasters and other temporal elements, thus adding a fatal dimension to the apocalyptic hermeneutic and genre description of apocalypticism belonging to the ghostbusters.

Revelation 6 offers a close bond between the apocalypse and God's wrath, where at the end of the seal opening procedure and its effects, including what Ray and Winston talk about, the wrath of the Lamb and "the great day of their wrath" (Rev 6:16-17) is ruled out as the direct cause of it all.

More than in the Book of Revelation, earthquakes are featured in apocalyptic settings of other biblical books, which followed by not only the mentioned earthquake in Ray's transumption of Rev 6:12 is relevant to examine with regards to the wrath of God thematic because Egon also brings it up in the city hall scene. This seismic activity contains great theological and apocalyptic connotations already developed in Old Testament thought as a prelude to a theophany of God at the Day of the Lord, and sometimes before his coming to judge the wicked.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, an apocalyptic dimension is distinctly related to biblical earthquakes. See below how this tie in with divine retribution.

Even if the wrath of God is featured throughout the Book of Job, aimed at the titular character in the first hand, there is not a clear connection to it in the verse in question, which instead describes Leviathan.

God's wrath bears an important weight in explaining the theological meaning behind the four different pericopes about fire and brimstone showers. In the first, Genesis 19:24, the wrath of God can be seen through the Old Testament lens as an expression for his judgement of sinners via the fire and brimstone rain on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20–33), more

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<sup>33</sup> Bauckham, "The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John," 224–25.

specified in the paragraph below, even if not literally outspoken in the book of the verse. Luke 17:29 is solely a recaption of the event in Genesis, though using it as an illustration of what will happen at the Day of the Son of Man in the next sentence (Luke 17:30) after also using the tale of the Ark and the Flood (Luke 17:27) to make the same point about God's destruction of sinners at the Second Coming of Christ. With that said, Luke offers the same understanding of the wrath of God as in Genesis 19:24 in the pericope in question, meaning a manifestation of the Lord's judgement and destruction of sinners, while also adding an apocalyptic touch with the Day of the Lord. The terms "the Day of the Son of Man", "the Second Coming of Christ" and "the Day of the Lord" are here used as different expressions for the same theological idea of the return of Christ in the final days, accordingly to New Testament eschatology.<sup>34</sup> Going back to the Old Testament and Ezekiel 38:22, God's wrath is here openly declared against Gog from Magog in a future tense (Ezek 38:18) resulting in fire and brimstone being let down on him, and the text is too a case of early biblical apocalypticism, or rather proto-apocalypticism.<sup>35</sup> Lastly, at Psalm 11:6 God is once again told to be letting down fire and brimstone on the wicked, something the text says proofs his righteousness (Ps 11:5–7).

The examples of the wrath of God in apocalyptic and proto-apocalyptic settings of the pericopes in 2.3 are no mere coincidences seen through either Old Testament or New Testament tradition. Paul takes the idea from the Old Testament, where it should be understood as a metaphor for God's unwavering judgement of covenant criminals and anti-Israelite oppressors, and not an emotion of anger in the human sense.<sup>36</sup> Paul also joins the tradition of relating God's wrath to the Day of the Lord<sup>37</sup> where it becomes eschatological retribution.<sup>38</sup> With this said, there is a clear link between divine retribution and apocalypticism in parts of both Old Testament and New Testament thought. That would make the element of God's wrath fruitful to apply to a genre definition of biblical apocalypses to a certain degree, and a at least similar theme can be found in Collins' master-paradigm at parameter number eight: "Eschatological judgement and/or destruction". This is not to say that this is an exact translation from retribution and/or wrath, but in the Old Testament context of divine wrath simultaneously being expressed primarily through judgement and often being conceived of as eschatological retribution in the apocalyptic perspective, it results in a concept of God's wrath not far from the one of Pauline theology. Collins also explains that the eight stage in his model is "brought about

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<sup>34</sup> Collins, "The First Letter to the Thessalonians," 773.

<sup>35</sup> Lawrence Boadt, "Ezekiel" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 305–28, 325.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 1382–1416, 1390.

<sup>37</sup> or the Day of YAWEH.

<sup>38</sup> Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology," 1390.

by supernatural intervention”<sup>39</sup> and comes upon ”sinners, usually oppressors”<sup>40</sup> among others, furthermore, fitting into the frame of Paul’s Old Testament inspired idea of divine wrath. Since the ghostbusters directly or indirectly transgresses, transplants and/or transumpt ”wrath of God”, or texts or thoughts that link the concept to an apocalyptic event when they themselves define apocalypse, they also prove to make bonds with this biblical tradition.

## **2.5 Universal Resurrection and Apocalypticism**

Another crucial idea for the ghostbusters’ understanding of apocalypticism is eschatological universal resurrection. This is presented by Winston in the bridge scene, where it both enables the second act of the film and goes hand in hand with its general plot about ghosts, something that Winston sees as dead rising from the grave, and from that “apocalyptifies” the worldview of the movie. It is however not present in the intertextual pericopes above in the same way as with the wrath of God, since it is as mentioned actually not explicitly present in the Bible at all. But because it still plays this significant role for the apocalyptic hermeneutic of the protagonists and is brought up by Winston in both selected scenes, it is briefly discussed here in relation to the apocalyptic genre.

Where divine retribution holds a natural theological bond with apocalypse and eschatology in both OT and NT tradition and text, making it a part of apocalyptic definitions of Collins and other relevant, universal resurrection with its more unclear status regarding the end of time and world, instead applying to this in reception history rather than in or behind original scripture, makes a less distinct case for being a criteria for a biblical apocalyptic work. Collins does for example not feature a universal or general resurrection of the dead, as Winston puts it, in his master-paradigm. This differentiates this from the different apocalyptic motifs of the ghostbusters that has been presented up until now, as an effect of the others’ biblical origins and this theme’s basis in reception history. It should be said that this does not mean that it is given any minor importance by the main characters, as it opposite to this plays a key role for them to create an apocalyptic hermeneutic to begin with, even if it actually is the only exception from their use of the Bible when it comes to describing the end of the world.

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<sup>39</sup> Collins, ”Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 7.

<sup>40</sup> Collins, ”Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 7.

## 2.6 The Apocalypse of the Four Horsemen

The apocalyptic hermeneutic of the four horsemen of the film, meaning the ghostbusters, is generally colored by an understanding of eschatology in relation to the wrath of God found in the Old Testament and the dead rising from the grave developed in the Bible's reception history, while also using apocalyptic imagery from specific OT verses as well as reoccurring terms and tropes from the Hebrew Bible. Examples of the latter are "fire and brimstone", "forty years" and "wrath of God", who all share a distinct place in the Old Testament and Judeo-Christian tradition, thus serving as broader intertextual transgressions and transplantations. Despite the apocalyptic value the ghostbusters give the Old Testament when asked to explain the "biblical" proportion of the coming eschatological phenomena with all these allusions, the disasters mentioned with biblical sources all originate from the New Testament, with seas boiling from Job and fire and brimstone from Genesis among others serving as the one exception. The only verse that is directly quoted and transumpted in *Ghostbusters* (1984), Rev 6:12, is also a NT text. This being said there are signs of the same apocalyptic Old Testament tradition and theology in most of the pericopes found in the film (see chapter 2.4 for this) where the wrath of God is told to come upon sinners/oppressors at the Day of the Lord. There is also added weight to the idea of universal resurrection which misses an obvious historical link to any biblical text. What is worth considering here is how many of the pericopes found use the developed New Testament thought of the Parousia<sup>41</sup> together with the Old Testament idea of divine wrath at the Day of the Lord, which Paul and his successors dates coincidentally with the Second Coming, namely all the NT texts used. Even if God is only mentioned once in the city hall scene, within Ray's "Real wrath of God type stuff." Jesus Christ is not, though. The God quote also does not explicitly say that the wrath of God actually will be fulfilled, such as the temporal processes of earthquakes and others seem to be, judging by their lack of further comments by the ghostbusters. Instead, Ray just says that things will happen in that Old Testament manner; "*type stuff.*" Peter expresses the same secular tendency when starting by saying that the city is headed for a disaster of biblical *proportion*, i.e., not an actual biblical disaster by itself. In that way, the apocalypticism of *Ghostbusters* (1984) is dechristologized.

Something else to take into consideration is the intertextual roles of the biblical disaster tropes in the movie. As mentioned earlier the most common way that the movie uses biblical texts is via transplantations, extracting particular elements from the original story, here in the shape of apocalyptic tropes. Only one transumption, quoting, occurs, of Rev 6:12, and a few transgressions, where some part of the original text is used as a springboard for the story.

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<sup>41</sup> the return of Christ.

The transgressions are executed upon the idea of universal resurrection primarily, and also the general phrases “biblical”, “Old Testament”, “wrath of God” and “forty.” What can be said after looking at which texts and themes are used in what ways is that the majority of pericopes that are transplanted and/or transumpted stem from the New Testament while transgressions occur more commonly linked to wider concepts from the OT or later developments without referred exact text places. This is partly due to the fact that most biblical intertexts of the film are NT texts. At the same time, the general difference in its use of OT and NT texts adds to the picture of the apocalyptic hermeneutic of *Ghostbusters* (1984) as “Old Testament” in preliminary definition, and “New Testament” in its application of disaster motifs but taken out of its Christological context.

In summary, apocalypticism according to the ghostbusters is primarily seen as something secular, but with Old Testament eschatology of divine retribution at the Day of the Lord as a thankful thematical source for finding different apocalyptic tropes to describe what is “biblical” about the end approaching, with transgressions, transplantations and transumptions of the Bible and its reception. The fact that most of their disaster motifs also rely on the New Testament and its core Christian eschatological teachings about Jesus is ignored however, creating an apocalyptic hermeneutic that initially defies both God and Jesus, but still uses the wrath of the previous as a reoccurring apocalyptic image from the Old Testament, and the New Testament for specific examples of this.

### **3. The Apocalypse of *Ghostbusters* (1984)**

After spending time on the script of the protagonists in two short scenes the full runtime and plot of *Ghostbusters* (1984) is scrutinized in this chapter. First, the apocalypticisms presented in chapter 2.3 are shortly compared to what actually happens in the film, and how many of these eventually take place in the movie for real. This is first implemented on the *Savin' the Day* scene, mirroring the structure of chapter 2. Then, the master-paradigm is applied fully to the plot. To find an understanding of the actual apocalyptic course of events of *Ghostbusters* (1984) the master-paradigm is thereafter discussed in relation to its story. This differentiates this chapter from the last, where the apocalypticism and apocalyptic hermeneutic of the movie was found, and not the actual apocalypse.

#### **3.1 The *Savin' the Day* Scene**

After successfully convincing the mayor of the biblical proportion of the disaster ahead and how the ghostbusters are needed to stop it, consequently saving the lives of millions of registered voters, parts of what they have been talking about actually starts taking place downtown.<sup>42</sup> First, the sky darkens midday followed by lightning and strong winds, after which a local earthquake disturbs the peace. Before this, the ghostbusters are escorted to Dana Barret's apartment by police and military, and outside the building there are nuns, priests, repentance callers and rabbis seen praying. The scene is followed by the heroes climbing the stairs of the apartment to confront Gozer.

#### **3.2 Fulfilled Prophecies: The Keymaster-Paradigm**

For a brief comparison between the events of the intertextual pericopes of *Ghostbusters* (1984) found in chapter 2, and what actually happens at the time slot 01:14:49-01:19:96 in the film, described at 3.1, it is at first hand Rev 6:12 that turns out to have prophetic value. Two out of three happenings from the verse can be seen in the movie: an earthquake and the sun becoming black. The rest of the apocalypticisms from the bridge and city hall scenes are not shown on screen: the moon is not up to be becoming as blood, the Hudson River does not boil, no volcanoes can be found and not counting the ghosts already featured, dead are not seen rising. More indirectly, the thunderstorm might be included in the list of biblical disasters represented

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<sup>42</sup> Time slot 01:14:49–01:19:96 in the DVD release *Ghostbusters*, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment LC-10488CE-ST, 2014.

in dialogue and special effects, stimulating the saying about “fire and brimstone coming down from the skies” by referring to a natural cause of both fires and sulfur dioxide, in the shape of lightning strikes. A schematical comparison of the movie with the ghostbusters’ different apocalyptic parameters in the same style as the master-paradigm below can be seen at Appendix 2, called the keymaster-paradigm to paraphrase Collins’ model with a term from the film lore. The two paradigms and their varying apocalyptic elements are also discussed and compared in 4.2.

### **3.3 *Ghostbusters* (1984) in the Master-Paradigm**

Here, the full narrative story of *Ghostbusters* (1984) is put into Collins’ master-paradigm in order to see how well it lives up to his apocalyptic definition. When an element in the paradigm is not present in the film the text “Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).” is applied to that category. The implementation of the plot to the paradigm can also be seen in tabular form in Appendix 1 at the end of the essay.

#### **Manner of Revelation**

1. *Medium* by which the revelation is communicated.

1.1 *Visual* revelation may be either in the form of:

1.1.1 *Visions*, where the content of the revelation is seen, or

Dana Barret, and the viewer, sees Zuul uttering its name in the front of a temple-like portal surrounded by dark clouds, when opening her fridge.

1.1.2 *Epiphanies*, where the apparition of the mediator is described.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

1.2 *Auditory* revelation usually clarifies the visual.

Epiphanies are always followed by auditory revelation.

They may either be in the form of

1.2.1 *Discourse*, uninterrupted speech by mediator, or

As mentioned, Zuul says its name in the refrigerator revelation.

1.2.2 *Dialogue*, where there is conversation between mediator and recipient, often in the form of question and answer.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

1.3 *Otherworldly Journey*, when the visionary travels through heaven, hell or remote regions beyond the normally accessible world. Revelation in the course of a journey is usually predominantly visual.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

1.4 *Writing*, when the revelation is contained in a written document, usually a heavenly book.

Putting the role of the Book of Revelation here could seem farfetched. Though looking at its importance for the dramaturgical foreshadowing as well as the main characters' insight about the climax, it is given a certain purpose for the over-all revelation of Gozer.

2. An *Otherworldly Mediator* communicates the revelation.

Often the mediation consists of interpreting a vision but it can also take the form of a direct speech or simply of guiding the recipient and directing his attention to the revelation. The mediator is most often an angel, or in some Christian texts, Christ.

See point 1 above.

3. The *Human Recipient*.

3.1 *Pseudonymity*: The recipient is usually identified as a venerable figure from the past. A few Christian apocalypses are not pseudonymous.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

3.2 The *Disposition of Recipient* notes the circumstances and emotional state in which the revelation is received.

The fridge vision is built up by the viewer following Dana coming home after work and grocery shopping, where her varying emotional expressions of tiredness, irritation, relief and surprise are seen.

3.3 The *Reaction of the Recipient* usually describes the awe and/or perplexity of the recipient confronted with the revelation.



After the initial reaction of fear, Dana visits the ghostbusters to describe her perplexity with such lines as “Well, if I knew what it was, I wouldn’t be here.”

### **Content: Temporal Axis**

4. *Protology*: Matters which deal with the beginning of history or pre-history.

4.1 *Theogony* (in Gnostic texts, describing the origin of the Pleroma) and/or *Cosmogony* (the origin of the world).

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

4.2 *Primordial events*, which have paradigmatic significance for the remainder of history (e.g. the sin of Adam).

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

5. *History*, may be reviewed either as:

5.1 *Explicit recollection* of the past, or

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

5.2 *Ex eventu prophecy* where past history is disguised as future and so associated with the eschatological prophecies.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

6. *Present salvation through knowledge* is a major way of salvation in Gnostic texts and distinguishes them significantly from other apocalypses.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

7. *Eschatological crisis*. This may take the form of

7.1 *Persecution*, and/or

One could argue that Walter Peck and the city authorities persecute the ghostbusters when they both take control of their business against their will and put them in jail.

7.2 *Other eschatological upheavals* which disturb the order of nature or history.

Perhaps the ghost invasion to begin with could be included here, and at least the opening of the ghostbusters’ spirit container by the Environmental Protection Agency.

8. *Eschatological judgment and/or destruction*. This is brought about by supernatural intervention. It comes upon

8.1 *Sinners*, usually oppressors, but in Gnostic texts, the *ignorant*.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

8.2 *The world*, i.e. the natural elements.

One example of this is the earthquake described at 3.2 in this chapter, by which the street in question is destroyed.

8.3 *Otherworldly beings*, e.g. the forces of Satan or Belial, or other evil powers.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

9. *Eschatological salvation* is the positive counterpart of eschatological judgement. Like the judgment, it is always brought about by supernatural means. It may involve:

9.1 *Cosmic transformation*, where the whole world is renewed.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

9.2 *Personal salvation*, which may be part of the cosmic transformation or may be independent of it. This in turn may take the form of

9.2.1 *Resurrection*, in bodily form or

Dana is actually resurrected from her monster form after waking up dressed in stone. The same goes for Louis.

9.2.2 *Other forms of afterlife*, e.g. exaltation to heaven with the angels

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

### **Content: Spatial Axis**

10. *Otherworldly elements* may be either personal or impersonal and either good or bad.

10.1 *Otherworldly regions* are described especially in the otherworldly journeys but also in lists of revealed things in other contexts. Again they may be evaluated in either a positive or a negative way. The Gnostic texts evaluate the lower heavens negatively.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

10.2 *Otherworldly beings*, angelic or demonic.

Zuul, Vinz Clortho and Gozer marks this box.

### **Paraenesis**

11. *Paraenesis* by the mediator to the recipient in the course of the revelation is relatively rare and is prominent only in a few Christian apocalypses.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

### **Concluding Elements**

12. *Instructions to the recipient*. These are distinct from Paraenesis (11) and come after the revelation as part of the concluding framework: e.g. the tell the recipient to conceal or publish the revelation.

Does not occur in *Ghostbusters* (1984).

13. *Narrative conclusion*. This may describe the awakening or return to earth of the recipient, the departure of the revealer or the consequent actions of the recipients. In some Gnostic texts we find reference to the persecution of the recipients because of the revelation.

In the end of the story, Dana the recipient awakes and Zuul the revealer is defeated, while the ghostbusters are celebrated by the people of New York.

What elements of the paradigm that does and does not take place in *Ghostbusters* (1984) are hereafter discussed below with the intention to define the motion picture accordingly from an apocalyptic genre perspective. Collins' model is problematized as well, seen through the questions popping up when studying the film with it.

### **3.4 Whaddaya Mean Apocalyptic?**

Looking at how *Ghostbusters* (1984) checks a total of thirteen out of Collins' twenty-eight possible criteria for an apocalyptic work, the category by which the largest part of its parameters is stimulated by the motion picture is called "Manner of Revelation".<sup>43</sup> Dana Barret is set as the most important player of this sub paradigm, since she is given the role of the recipient of the Gozerian revelation, with her disposition, reaction and receipted vision and discourse filling some of Collins' definitional requirements in the category. The only aspect under the revelatory

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<sup>43</sup> *Ghostbusters* (1984) checks six out of ten boxes in this category. See Appendix 1.

heading that does not relate to Dana's character is 1.4 Writing, which is here linked to Winston and Ray's conversation about Revelation in the bridge scene instead, brought up in chapter 2.1 of this essay. A question about the master-paradigm's room for varying characters playing parts of the same recipient role arises with this categorization, which is made relevant further when examining which characters are present in the different apocalyptic criteria about the story's content. Especially noticeable regarding the film's application to the two content axis of the model, temporal and spatial, is that the temporal axis is more well represented in the events of the movie, but also that different characters and groups of characters check these boxes with their acts and experiences. All of the ghostbusters are for example persecuted, marking box 7.1, but Dana and Louis are resurrected, marking box 9.2.1. Collins does not clearly state that the character going through the revelation, temporal elements and cosmic transformation has to be the same person or people, that is not the case in *Ghostbusters* (1984). He does present a few examples of apocalyptic literature that fulfill his criteria according to him though, which all has the one and same character experiencing these elements.<sup>44</sup> If a solo character definition applies to the master-paradigm therefore remains unclear, but if the genre of *Ghostbusters* (1984) should be able to categorize itself as apocalyptic according to Collins a broader group perspective is needed, where one character, Dana, takes care of the revelation, reception of it and cosmic transformation, while others, the ghostbusters, jump in to be persecuted as well as to add a scripture to the revelation.

Another key question to ask when analyzing *Ghostbusters* (1984) with the help of Collins' master-paradigm is what is really needed to define a work as belonging to the apocalyptic genre with it. No piece of literature that are put in the paradigm, either Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Greco-Roman or Persian,<sup>45</sup> fills all his criteria, making an absolute fulfillment of the model both unnecessary to define a work as apocalyptic, and nearly impossible, at least judging from his biblical perspective together with application of a wide range of biblical texts. Collins also presents the following definition of apocalypse when introducing his model after precisising it with his different parameters:

Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages

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<sup>44</sup> Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," 14–15.

<sup>45</sup> Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," 8, 12.

eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.<sup>46</sup>

This definition expresses much of what the master-paradigm brings up in a more concise manner, thus making potential apocalyptic genre determinations easier to comprehend than when solely using the master-paradigm without knowing which boxes actually counts checking or not. Regarding this genre definition and *Ghostbusters* (1984), the picture has a narrative framework and even if “revelatory literature” would require a definition of its own by Collins to really clarify what he means by this, some aspects of the film could be included here, such as that it contains both a revelation, Dana’s refrigerator experience, and on the meta-level revelatory literature, namely Revelation. The revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being, Zuul, to a human recipient, Dana. This far *Ghostbusters* (1984) seem to fulfill Collins’ demands for an apocalyptic story. What complicates the question somewhat are the following temporal and spatial factors in the revelation’s disclosing transcendent reality. Starting with this reality by itself, Dana’s vision in her fridge could be interpreted as an otherworldly region, but the temporal salvation aspect of it is not clear, even if the spatial one might be, also considering the otherworldly origin of both Zuul and Gozer. Though looking at what the master-paradigm says about these parameters, point 9, “Eschatological salvation”, includes 9.2.1 Resurrection which is a personal salvation (9.2) committed by Dana. But even though eschatological salvation and in any case a note of another, supernatural world are featured in the film, these things do not take part of Dana’s revelation to an obvious degree.

What oddly enough is missing from Collins’ short summary of “apocalypse” quoted above in comparison to the master-paradigm is everything that happens after the revelation, for example the practical fulfillment of the revelation and eventual prophecies, and content on the spatial and temporal axis. This begs the question what differentiates a literary apocalypse from a literary revelation, or in some cases prophetic literature of an apocalyptic nature, according to Collins’ introducing definition. Going back to *Ghostbusters* (1984), the film could perhaps at least be defined as proto-apocalyptic from Collins’ shorter definition as well as the master-paradigm, where Dana contributes most to the apocalyptic dimensions of the film, with her revelation and salvation.

To summarize, seen through Collins’ master-paradigm the actual apocalyptic course of events in *Ghostbusters* (1984) consists of Dana Barret’s revelatory experience through visions and discourse by an otherworldly mediator in the first hand, since this also is a

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<sup>46</sup> Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 9.

part of Collins' concise definition of "apocalypse" presented together with his paradigm. More than that, Dana's disposition and reaction as recipient is present in the film and related to the temporal content axis of the paradigm, she goes through a cosmic transformation in the shape of a resurrection. The ghostbusters add a scriptural dimension to the revelation with the Book of Revelation from the Bible, and also fills a criterion by being persecuted at one point. Several questions arise about Collins' model when putting *Ghostbusters* (1984) into it, mainly regarding the room for more than one character, and if an ensemble cast is possible to still contribute to the apocalypticism of a given work. Because of this, there is not a clear way to determine the genre of *Ghostbusters* (1984) as apocalyptic or not but taking into consideration especially the first part of Collins' concluding definition with the revelation content playing a key role, the movie should at least be able to be called proto-apocalyptic. The rest of the characteristics referring to a transcendent temporal and spatial reality are not as prominent in the movie, not without saying that more subtle signals of these things are present in short terms of dialogue.

## 4. Discussion

Below a few short introducing topics are discussed in relation to what has been found in chapters 2 and 3, starting with a brief pondering of the divine and theistic questions related to *Ghostbusters* (1984) as well as the master-paradigm and the apocalyptic genre as a whole in 4.1, then moving over to a comparison between what Collins and the ghostbusters mean by “apocalypse” in 4.2, and finishing off with a number of suggestions for future research on *Ghostbusters* (1984) from a religious, theological and exegetical point of view in 4.3.

### 4.1 Godbusters

Initially, the existence and expression of God is a fundamental question to any study in theology, exegesis or religion, either if it can or will be answered or not. Watching *Ghostbusters* (1984) from these perspectives makes no exception.

First, the concrete feature of this in the film is not of the Abrahamic god, Jesus Christ or any other biblical figure, but of the fictional Sumerian god Gozer, with the demi-gods Zuul the gatekeeper and Vinz Clortho the keymaster. As brought up in chapter 2.5 the apocalyptic hermeneutic of the ghostbusters is expressed through biblical eschatological imagery with an emphasis on the wrath of God but secularized and more specifically dechristologized to rather use the pictures of natural disasters, who later occur in real life, but not to relate them to explicit divine interaction. As God or Jesus are not openly taking part in the apocalyptic scenario of the movie, instead leaving room for the only divine intervention to be taken up by Sumerian gods, an interesting theological dilemma occurs from a monotheistic point of view. Perhaps one could not go as far to declare a precise theological statement of the ghostbusters or *Ghostbusters* (1984) from this, but it at least raises questions about what religious ideas could be taken out from the motion picture.

Relating back to Anderson and Brown’s work on the Spiritualist influences and ideas of the film and co-writer Dan Aykroyd from the previous research, the potential importance of the Jewish background of both director Ivan Reitman and second co-writer Harold Ramis should not be overlooked here. This mainly has two theoretical bearing points for the theistic implications of the film. The first one is the dechristologized use of the NT texts, where primarily the OT, or more correctly in this context, the Hebrew Bible theme of God’s wrath takes center stage. That is, even if the characters seem to start from a Christian standpoint, which is also the religion most featured in other parts of the movie, such as dialogue, for example Winston’s declared Christian belief and appreciation of Jesus in the bridge scene, and action, for example when the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man steps on a church, mentioned in chapter 1.4, the actual use and rendering of the biblical texts take primarily Jewish forms, or at

least is fully applicable to Jewish theology, maybe apart from the use of NT texts, even if they are more or less understood Jewishly. The other meaning that could be relevant from a Jewish perspective is the role of Gozer, Zuul and Vinz Clortho. That Sumerian gods and demigods actually exist in the universe of *Ghostbusters* (1984) reminds one of several texts and contexts of the Hebrew Bible, and ancient Judaism in general. This includes the idea that ancient Israelites practiced monolatry rather than monotheism, together with the mentioning of different deities from surrounding cultures to Israel in the Hebrew Bible. Sumer was one of these, which despite collapsing before the writing of and not having gods named in the Hebrew Bible, contributed heavily to the Mesopotamian mythology that some parts of Scripture are written in different terms of dialogue to. If Reitman or Ramis were aware of these Jewish connotations when directing and writing *Ghostbusters* (1984) remains unsaid but is it at least a significant religious dimension to take into consideration when studying the film, especially in relation to Anderson and Brown's emphasis on Aykroyd and Spiritualism.

Second, the secular understanding of apocalypticism in *Ghostbusters* (1984) is surprisingly easy to apply to Collins' biblical master-paradigm. This being even though God and/or Jesus are central to the Bible pericopes used to describe the end of the world, but by whom the latter is ignored and former is related to divine retribution rhetorically but not further featured or motivated to be behind any real-life occurrences. A key factor in explaining why the secular and divinely unrelated apocalypse of *Ghostbusters* (1984) can still be called a proto-apocalypse according to Collins' criteria based on biblical literature is the lack of directly divine elements and the presence of otherworldly and supernatural elements in the master-paradigm. Cases of this are among others point 2 of the paradigm, where the refrigerator revelation of Zuul becomes apocalyptic due to its otherworldly origin, as well as point 8.2 which gives the movie an eschatological judgement/destruction solely thanks to Collins' definition of this as coming about by supernatural intervention. If God would have to intervene in these parts, the scenes of the film would not be possible to put in Collins' boxes in the same sense as they are now. This raises to question God's importance or unimportance in intervention and feature of apocalyptic works over-all.

Today, the apocalyptic film genre has in its mainstream appearance as good as fully cut the cord to God or Jesus Christ as a narrative explanation or occurring character. The Judeo-Christian heritage of the genre has thus been left behind, which makes it all the more questionable to why Collins would exclude any explicitly theistic elements in his biblically founded genre definition. On the other hand, apocalypticism should perchance not be received of as religiously rooted art in the primary sense, meaning that it necessarily builds from theological concepts from the start in an obvious way. Rather, it could work in the area, context



and to some extent canon of Judaism and Christianity, and what makes apocalyptic literature related to God is its inherent theistic premises, and not how noticeable God is as an actor in the story. With this being said, the absence of direct divine attributes in Collins' master-paradigm is up for debate.

Finally, the ghostbusters having to bust a non-Christian god rather than ghosts in the end opens up for a range of questions related to the movie's religious worldview as well as creates possible parallels to the Jewish background of director Reitman and writer Ramis, and what God means or does not mean for apocalypticism as a genre.

#### **4.2 The Master-Paradigm vs. the Keymaster-Paradigm**

As coming through when comparing the two schematic tables in the appendix of this paper, what mainly differentiates the master-paradigm, the apocalyptic hermeneutic of John J. Collins, and the keymaster-paradigm, the apocalyptic hermeneutic of the ghostbusters found in chapter 2, is the extent of the former. Also, the added subheadings of revelatory manner, spatial content, paraenesis by revealer and concluding elements, whereas the keymaster-paradigm only offers a temporal axis, tell them apart. The only element of the keymaster-paradigm that can be compared to any of the master-paradigm's is point 1.5 *Earthquakes* which fits point 8.2 *Judgement/destruction of world* of the latter, and since it occurs in *Ghostbusters* (1984) also makes out the most clear similarity between the apocalypse of the film and the definition of apocalypticism according to the ghostbusters and Collins. The over-all lack of common denominators between the two paradigms could depend on Collins' more theoretical approach which uses broader thematical elements in comparison to the specific natural and supernatural disasters mentioned by the ghostbusters in the bridge and city hall scenes. That a combination of lines from a comedy film would not present an as fully theoretical model as Collins' might not be surprising, but looking at the expression of the apocalyptic disasters said by the ghostbusting quartet can still add to the discussion of what the apocalyptic genre is and presupposes, in both biblical and pop cultural means. What the ghostbusters take for examples of apocalypticisms are all temporal phenomena and not spatial, while any revelation is never mentioned either, despite the revelation of Dana Barret that they have just been informed about, and their knowledge of the spatial coming of the otherworldly being Gozer. Related to the secularization Hollywood has committed upon the apocalyptic genre brought up in chapter 4.1 above, it would be interesting to ask if a similar tendency of temporalization of the same art tradition can be found. This could in some cases go hand in hand with excluding divine intervention and religious implications of apocalyptic scenarios, as the doomsday is limited to this world and without visions, epiphanies and other revelatory content that Collins applies to

the biblical apocalypse. Somewhat ironically though, this temporal and secular apocalyptic hermeneutic of the ghostbusters that is prevailing in today's disaster cinema is not represented in the actual apocalypse of the film, which instead has gods, revelations and spatial elements.

### 4.3 Further Research

Apart from the topics briefly discussed in this chapter there is a wide range of possible questions to ask and answer concerning *Ghostbusters* (1984) in the contextually relatively unexplored field of religious studies, theology and biblical exegesis. This applies to the spiritual understanding of the film's universe and its inhabitation of ancient mythological creatures and deities, as well as ghosts and paranormal activity, together with the roles and representations of religious authorities and figures. Speaking of which, the more explicit and specific study of small pieces of dialogue in the first part of this thesis leaves room for a more extensive narrative film study from the perspectives of religion and apocalypticism. One example relevant to the conclusions of this study includes the feature of repentance callers in the *Savin' the Day* scene, which could be related to the thematic of God's wrath and fire and brimstone in the ghostbusters' apocalyptic hermeneutic.

Other scenes to analyze and draw symbolic parallels to would be the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man's destruction of a church and Peter's disapproving reaction to it, possibly alluding to the church founder and apostle Peter, or in relation to the Jewish standpoint mentioned in chapter 4.1, creates an allegory for the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, something that contributes to the Jewish apocalypticism the movie in some ways indicates. The earthquake in the *Savin' the Day* scene also has much potential for further analysis, as it seem to accompany the theophany of Gozer in a similar manner to how earthquakes accompany theophanies in the Old Testament, brought up in chapter 2.3. Put differently, a more analogical approach to the study of the film could help further find not only direct Bible quotes and references in the script but also pericopes in the shapes of allusions, allegories and accreditments in scenes and scenery.

This does not mean that the historical-critical legacy of biblical studies is irrelevant in film studies like these ones, though. The mentioned church destruction scene could for example be used for a fruitful application of historical research of the temple's meaning both *in* ancient apocalyptic literature and the historical correlation between production of this and the temple's then often uncertain contemporary status. In that way, historical and narrative, analogical perspectives can work together to find relevant themes and symbolisms.

Thus, the post secular masterpiece that is *Ghostbusters* (1984) still has great academic potential as a study object, and with the presence of everything from archbishops and

hellfire preachers to spiritual entities and mythological demon dogs presents many more religious connections to be made than just to Spiritualism or apocalypticism, justifying a shift in intellectual focus from politics to religion, theology and Bible.

## 5. Conclusion

The first question of this work is about the apocalyptic hermeneutic of the four ghostbusters, meaning what Winston, Ray, Peter and Egon mean when talking about a biblical doomsday scenario, which is the preliminary definition of apocalypticism set up in this essay. Judging from their use of Bible texts in the bridge and city hall scenes examined earlier, they generally transumpt, quote, and transplant, extract particular elements from, New Testament pericopes to describe the end of the world. The Old Testament and biblical reception are rather used for intertextual transgressions, where some dimensions are taken from it and used as narrative departure points. One apocalyptic trope is also derived from biblical reception, and transplanted and transgressed from there. The head similarity between all biblical transumptions, transplantations and transgressions are their apocalyptic-thematical link to the wrath of God and the Day of the Lord, originating in Old Testament tradition and also being prominent in several New Testament texts, for example them of Paul. The NT texts offer a theological difference in their Christian understanding with Jesus Christ and his second coming as a fundamental part of all this, something that is ignored by the ghostbusters as no explicit Christological content is intertextually treated by them. This, together with how Peter and Ray express the apocalypse in the city hall scene with biblical allegories and comparisons, with sayings such as “Real wrath of God *type stuff*” and “disaster of biblical *proportion*”, instead of actually declaring that biblical prophecies will come true and not just in a manner like them, in combination with the dechristologized NT verses, creates a secularized apocalyptic hermeneutic where OT themes are at the core of expression and NT texts are applied to illustrate them.

The second question asks how the apocalypse per se of the movie *Ghostbusters* (1984) is manifested and can be understood. A few of the natural disaster tropes the ghostbusters mention as part of their apocalyptic definition are actually featured in the *Savin' the Day* scene, more fully revealed in Appendix 2. Appendix 1 offers the full plot of the film put into John J. Collins' master-paradigm. What especially stands out from the film as belonging to an apocalyptic work according to Collins' criteria is the revelatory content in the first hand related to Dana Barret and her stalking by Zuul. What misses from Collins' shorter concluding definition of apocalypticism in the film is mainly the temporal and spatial aspects of the revelation consisting of a transcendent reality and another, supernatural world, at least in an explicit manner. Thus, the movie should at least be able to be called a protoapocalypse, as it contains the otherworldly mediator, Zuul, and human recipient, Dana. A question that arises when studying the picture with the help of the master-paradigm is the latter's eventual room for

different characters to check different boxes and partake in the same apocalyptic narrative, here highlighted by the ghostbusters and not Dana being persecuted and using Scripture.

Also discussed in this paper, in dialogue with the main previous research of Anderson and Brown on Spiritualism in *Ghostbusters* (1984) and co-writer Dan Aykroyd's Spiritualist background, the film could, partially based on director Ivan Reitman and co-writer Harold Ramis' Jewish upbringings, make expression of a sort of Jewish worldview. This would be made out by the already mentioned dechristologized apocalypticism with theological fundamentals from the Hebrew Bible, and the role of Sumerian deities drawing parallels to beliefs and practices of ancient Israel.

Another thing discussed is the differences and similarities between the master-paradigm and the keymaster-paradigm; John J. Collins' apocalyptic hermeneutic and the ghostbusters' equivalent of this. The primary differentiating factor lies in the spatial and temporal realms, by which the latter is only represented in the keymaster-paradigm, adding further to the secular and this-worldly character of the ghostbusters' apocalyptic interpretation, also popular in the apocalypse genre of modern cinema. This should not be confused with the actual apocalypse of the film, though, which fills some of Collins' revelatory and spatial criteria, and also feature clear religious elements such as ghosts and gods.

Further research suggested related to the questions and conclusions of this thesis includes a more extensive analogical and narrative film analysis of *Ghostbusters* (1984) that takes into consideration the varying religious symbols of the film more than just dialogue. Historical perspectives are not irrelevant either, which in the apocalyptic context for example could contribute to an understanding of the church destruction of the final destroyer, with possible Jewish temple allusions, as well as the meaning behind the different religious figures seen in the movie. The new exegetical approach to the film with this study nonetheless paves the way for future academic works on *Ghostbusters* (1984) from the perspectives of religious studies, theology and exegesis, rather than just political and social issues, which has been the main focus up until now. A biblical point of view has been proven to be fully relevant when examining the movie, in other words.

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## Appendix

### 1. The Master-Paradigm

	<i>Ghostbusters</i> (1984)
<b>Manner of Revelation</b>	
1.1.1 Visions	X
1.1.2 Epiphanies	
1.2.1 Discourse	X
1.2.2 Dialogue	
1.3 Otherworldly journey	
1.4 Writing	X
2. Otherworldly mediator	X
3.1 Pseudonymity	
3.2 Disposition of recipient	X
3.3 Reaction of recipient	X
<b>Temporal Axis</b>	
4.1 Cosmogony	
4.2 Primordial events	
5.1 Recollection of past	
5.2 Ex eventu prophecy	
6. Present salvation	
7.1 Persecution	X
7.2 Other eschat. upheavals	X
8.1 Judgement/destruction of wicked	
8.2 of World	X
8.3 of Otherworldly Beings	
9.1 Cosmic Transformation	
9.2.1 Resurrection	X
9.2.2 Other forms of afterlife	
<b>Spatial Axis</b>	
10.1 Otherworldly regions	
10.2 Otherworldly beings	X
<b>Paraenesis by Revealer</b>	
11.	



<b>Concluding Elements</b>	
12. Instructions to the recipients	
13. Narrative Conclusion	X

## 2. The Keymaster-Paradigm

	<i>Ghostbusters</i> (1984)
<b>Temporal Axis</b>	
1.1 The moon becoming as blood	
1.2 Fire and brimstone coming down from the skies	X*
1.3 Rivers and seas boiling	
1.4 Darkness	X
1.5 Earthquakes	X
1.6 Volcanoes	
1.7 The dead rising from the grave	

\*Asterisks indicate either (1) that an element is possibly, but not certainly, present, or (2) is implicit, or (3) is present in a very minor way.