

## **SOME KEY ISSUES IN THE HISTORY OF PREMILLENNIALISM**

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The focus in this study is very narrow - some key issues in the history of premillennialism. Of course the decisive considerations are Biblical and theological, but we cannot be oblivious to the historical data - what has the church believed across the centuries?

In her masterful new biography of A.T. Pierson entitled: *Occupy Until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World*, Professor Dana Roberts shows how Pierson became a strong Biblical preacher and one of the truly great Bible teachers of the nineteenth century. His sermons were widely read in this country and abroad. He was a favorite preacher at Keswick. He debated Robert Ingersoll and wrote an influential book on apologetics entitled *Many Infallible Proofs*. He pastored the great Fort Street Presbyterian Church of Detroit and often preached for Spurgeon in London. But like so many at this time, he was a post-millennialist.

Then in 1879 under the tutelage of George Muller of Bristol, he became an ardent premillennialist.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to the popular caricature, he was not a pessimist nor a fatalist. Rather imbued with millennial urgency, he became the father of "faith missions." He became pastor of the Bethany Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, the "Wanamaker Church," and was seen as one of the founders of the modern missionary movement. He traveled widely as an evangelist at home and abroad. He was active in the Niagara Conferences and delivered a brilliant and scholarly lecture

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in the great Chicago Prophetic Conference of 1886 on "The Lord's Second Coming - A Motive for World-wide Evangelization." Professor Roberts shows how the leading evangelicals of the age were premillennial.

I want to briefly trace some of the continuities and vitalities of premillennialism, some of the hills and the valleys of the movement. The fact is that millennial expectation at certain times in history has exerted what Leonard Sweet has called "a formative sway over diverse social movements and over broad sections of society."<sup>2</sup> Premillennialism has been a powerful and positive influence in human history and in the life of the Church.

### **MOUNTAIN PEAKS OF MILLENNIAL EXPECTANCY IN THE EARLY CENTURIES**

Beyond any question, premillennialism is apostolic. The early church was a radical eschatological community. Someone has defined the early Christian churches as revivalistic fellowships, seeking to win their world for Christ and eagerly waiting for His return from heaven. Theirs was an eschatological urgency and their expectation was the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. The "theme of imminence plays like a broken record"

is the way one scholar describes the early emphasis.<sup>3</sup>

Some held to a 6000 year theory and there were other differences, but the overwhelmingly dominant conviction was that Christ in returning in power and glory would set up His Kingdom and rule for 1000 years. Papias (70-155 A.D.) is typical: “There will be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth.”<sup>4</sup>

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Slightly later, Justin Martyr (110-165 A.D.) wrote in his dialogue with Trypho:

“But I and others who are right minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, (as) the prophets Ezeiel and Isaiah and others declare.”<sup>5</sup>

It has long been established by students and scholars of all eschatological persuasion that the orthodox position in the early church was premillennial. Even Edward Gibbon renown author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* says: “The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus--who conversed with the immediate disciples of the apostles--down to Lactantius, who was the preceptor of the son of Constantine. It appears to have been the reigning sentiment of all orthodox believers. It was productive of the most salutary effect upon the faith and practice of Christians.”<sup>6</sup>

The late Professor Ned Stonehouse of Westminster, devout adherent of amillennialism in his doctoral dissertation recognizes that chiliasm was once the orthodox doctrine.<sup>7</sup> J.N.D. Kelly the most astute of contemporary students of the history of dogma (and who has no axe whatever to grind) makes it plain that premillennialism reigned in the first three hundred years of church history.<sup>8</sup> For the first two centuries no one fought it. Premillennialism was pervasive. There is no evidence whatever of any amillennial challenge in the first three centuries. This awaits Augustine.

L. Berkhof argues that amillennialism “had at least as many advocates as Chiliasm in the second and third centuries supposed to have been the heyday of chiliasm,” but he does not cite a single one.<sup>9</sup> Loraine Boettner calls premillennialism “one of the principle errors in the early church” (along with gnosticism and Arianism).<sup>10</sup> The early dominance of premillennialism is obviously disconcerting to its opponents.

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More recent assaults on the received doctrine of the millennium

Although no critique of millennial thought had ever argued that “in 431 the Council of Ephesus condemned belief in the millennium as a superstitious aberration,” Norman Cohn did just that in his widely-read study, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.<sup>11</sup> Many have followed Cohn in this allegation including Robert Clouse, Peter Toon, Stanley Grenz, Richard Kyle and a host of others. Premillennialism was early seen as heretical, it is urged. A Dallas Seminary PhD student, Michael J. Svingel, has done us a service as has

our Trinity Journal in publishing his work. The fact is Cohn misconstrued a French footnote with regard to the Oriental bishops' opposition to chiliasm as conciliar condemnation and he dropped the allegation in the 1970 edition of his work. Sadly, his original error has had a life of its own but in fact we are dealing with what Svigel calls "a phantom error."<sup>12</sup> Whatever may or may not be said of the Council of Ephesus in 431, it did not condemn premillennialism as a heresy.

More substantive has been the Herculean effort mounted by Professor Charles Hill, church historian at Reformed Seminary, Orlando. Professor Hill admits that the majority in the early centuries were premillennial but he seeks to knock some key figures from their premillennial perch like Hippolytus (d. 235) who in his great commentary on Daniel argues for a detached 70th week in Daniel 9. But Hippolytus held to a 6000 year theory after which would come the Sabbath (which clearly is the kingdom on earth).<sup>13</sup> Hill disdains Jewish apocalyptic which in itself raises questions about chiliasm from his standpoint because Rabbi Eliezer spoke of the

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days of the Messiah as being 1000 years and echoes of this are found in the Sybilline Oracles (Book 2) and also The Twelve Patriarchs. The fact that the heavenly Son of Man is set forth in The First Book of Enoch as well as in Daniel 7:13 does not disincite our interest or our confidence in the Biblical representation. Of passing interest is the fact that Professor Hill acknowledges great debt to his mentor at Oxford, Rowan Williams, the very liberal new Archbishop of Canterbury who danced with the druids at his recent installation.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, as all concede, Professor Hill is right that not all were chiliastic. Indeed Clement of Alexandria and Origen strongly influenced by Greek philosophy and put off by the tendency of some chiliasts to grossly exaggerate how many vines there would be to the acre in the millennium, drastically allegorized the Biblical text and in this radical spiritualizing went so far as to deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. Origen argued that the millennium of the Book of Revelation is in fact the intermediate state. His proof text was the statement of Jesus to the dying thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise." But this is hardly the platform text which gives us the meaning of the "kingdom." The first resurrection is seen as Christian baptism.

Despite Origen, "the millennial hope remained strong."<sup>15</sup> Hill seeks to gravely weaken the premillennial case by compromising Irenaeus (130-200) of Gaul and Tertullian the Montanist (155-222) of North Africa both of whom mounted a strong pro-materialist thrust against gnosticism and its denial of the bodily resurrection and the earthly millennium. Not all saw the change of venue for the

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believing dead after the resurrection of Christ. Hill seeks to congenitally join the Subterraneanists who held that believers in the intermediate state now wait their entrance into heaven at the parousia with the premillennialists. Some taught that only martyrs bypass the earthly waiting period. The amillennial argument is that if the saints are in heaven now, there is no need for the millennium. But this is a logical non sequitur. The

glory and power of God will be manifest in the time-space order during the 1000 year reign of Christ, irregardless of the location of the intermediate state. We believe the intermediate state is in the Lord's heavenly presence but this does not touch the millennial issue.

In point of fact Irenaeus believed vigorously in the 1000 year reign and sets forth in his *Adversus Haereses* his "defense of the millenarian hope represented by Papias and the 'elders' of earlier Asiatic Christianity (5.33.3-4)."16 He refuses to allegorize away the "many Biblical passages that promise salvation to Israel in typical terms of peace, prosperity and material restoration (35.1-2)."16 Interestingly, Professor Daley, one of our leading experts in early eschatology even in his 2003 updating of his work makes no reference to Professor Hill's argument. Hill's premise is of course that there is nothing chiliastic in Revelation 20.18 Not so. Sadly, Hill is right on one thing: premillennialism is in for a seismic shock.

#### THE DISASTER OF THE AUGUSTINIAN DOMESTICATION OF THE KINGDOM

While the decline of the Roman Empire and the prospect of barbarian invasions cast

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"a pall of anxiety" over many, a new burst of millennial hope sought to counter the prevailing pessimism. Such teachers as Gaudentius of Brescia, Maximus of Turin, Sulpicious Severus and Hilarius in North Africa were vigorous premillennarians. Augustine himself was originally a premillennialist and held to the 6000 year theory (Sermon 259). "We ourselves were formerly of this opinion," he admits. It does seem quite clear that "the doctrine of the personal reign of Christ in the new earth is of the Bible."18 The church was never referred to as the kingdom by anyone before Augustine.19

The constant chipping away of the allegorizers and the impending collapse of the Roman Empire had an apocalyptic effect on Jerome but he was anti-millennial. Under the unfluence of the Donatist teacher, Tyconius, Augustine reconfigured the eschatological landscape bringing a virtual end to millennial urgency and opening the door to a realized eschatology in which the church is the Kingdom of God.

This institutionalization of the Kingdom meant no millennium and no imminence.

"Therefore the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven. Even now His saints reign with Him. The devil is bound and loosed for a little while at the end of the thousand years."20

Augustine effectively de-eschatologizes the Christian faith and domesticates the kingdom. Professor Sickenburger is right that Augustine has done violence to the text of Revelation 20 and this why he asserts that

"The amillennial approach has lost nearly all support of Revelation specialists in this century on the valid grounds that it fails to do justice to the unique eschatological perspectives of Revelation itself. If Rev. 20:7-10 is related to 20:4-6 then the saints martyred by the Beast are raised to rule with Christ."21

The reign following the martyrdom is the decisive problem of the Augustinian  
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model. The ecclesiological interpretation of Revelation poses many problems. Augustine's domestication of the kingdom led to the triumphant medieval theocracy which lasted 1000 years. The hierarchical church featured "the reign of the pope" and government people as "rulers in Christ's kingdom."<sup>22</sup> An immediate casualty was an expectation of the imminent return. With the virtual allegorization of the entire OT the OT ban on icons was ignored and the Jews were harshly treated.

Professor Peter Beyerhaus of Tübingen looking from a modern perspective does not speak too boldly when he says:

"The Kingdom became a blurred concept under the influence of theological liberalism and the social gospel as well as human ideologies, but partly also due to different millennial theories."<sup>23</sup>

The loss of the eschatological kingdom in favor of its evolutionary development in history has always cut off missions and evangelism at the knees.

#### THE COMEBACK AND QUICKENING OF THE PREMILLENNIAL PULSE

Of course there were those stalwart champions who would not have yielded, to the Augustinian juggernaut. Such worthies as Evodius of North Africa, Methodius the critic of Origen, Lactantius, Commodian the Syrian (who spoke of the procreation of children during the millennium as did Irenaeus), Victorinus, Pseudo-Efrem, but they were few. Futurism is for all practical purposes dead.

In the desperately dark days in which he lived, Pope Gregory I although generally following Augustine saw apocalyptic aspects in history and asserted the end was  
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near. The year 1000 stirred up some fear and foreboding. In such as Richard of St. Victor we see some deviation from the Augustinian line and in Bruno of Segni (1049-1123) we hear some "back to the Bible notes." Anselm of Havelberg (d. 1158) in making the seven seals historical began to prepare the ground for Joachim.

In Joachim of Fiore (1130-1202) of Calabria in Italy we see the rebirth of futurism. He and his peers considered themselves as "the laborers of the eleventh hour."<sup>24</sup> Out of his study in connection with writing a commentary on the much-neglected Book of Revelation came his insistence that contrary to Augustine and Aquinas God would redeem the time-space order and that the end was at hand. He projects a Sabbath age or millennium and the conversion of the Jews. Fascinatingly, Jürgen Moltmann of the theology of hope in our time says that "Joachim is more alive today than Augustine because all of the promises of both Testaments will be fulfilled."<sup>25</sup> Many of the Franciscan "spirituals" were chiliastic and doubtless Joachim influenced St. Bonaventura and St. Francis. His influence swept across Europe and Savonarola the powerful preacher of Florence was called "the prophet of the millennium." The latter's thunderous sermons included series of messages preached from Daniel and Revelation.

This impact extended to Thomas Muntzer and the anabaptist extremists who gave millennialism a bad name. The Reformers had no interest in things eschatological with the exception of the later Luther who became truly apocalyptic in his conflicts with the papacy. Karlstedt, an early

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follower of Luther, was a premillennialist. Marjorie Reeves, the foremost Joachimite scholar makes what to her is an astounding statement:

“At the end of the seventeenth century serious thinkers and sober men still believed in prophecy.”<sup>26</sup>

Spinning off from the Hussite revolt in Czechoslovakia in the fifteenth century were millennialist movements like the Taborites and Adamites. These radical Hussites insisted on communion in both kinds. They took the Bible literally and believed an imminent day of wrath was at hand and the establishment of the millennial reign of Christ.<sup>27</sup> Peasants in South Bohemia thought they were in the anticipated period of tribulation. Some millennial strains can be heard among the Waldensians in the valleys of northern Italy. An early key figure in Germany is the German Calvinistic theologian, Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638). His classic *The Beloved City* (1627) influenced both Pietistic and Puritan thinking.<sup>28</sup> What Broadbent calls “the pilgrim church” thrives.

The tie between the Moravians, Pietism and Count Zinzendorf produced Johann Albrecht Bengel of Germany (1687-1751) who according to Robert Culver, “gave Premillennialism respectability in scholarly and ecclesiastical circles in the modern era by adopting an energetic Premillennialism himself and advocating it in his writings.”<sup>29</sup> We see also at this time a strong move to premillennialism in the French Huguenots. Bengel steadied the somewhat erratic Zinzendorf and stood with Vitringa, Cocceius, Alsted and Philip Spener in affirming that “Jerusalem would be the center of the millennial kingdom and that Israel will again rise to the summit of

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mankind.”<sup>30</sup> Bengel’s follower, C.A. Auberlen epitomizes the revival of chiliasm when he says that “Jesus, the prophets and the apostles were express chiliasts.”<sup>31</sup>

These centuries were much awash with interest in Biblical prophecy and the millennium. John Amos Comenius the great Moravian educator and ardent pre-millenarian had a very good friend at Cambridge University, Joseph Mede (1586-1638) whom many call the father of modern premillennialism because he so clearly placed the entire 1000 years in the future. In the eschatological frenzy of this period, many of the Fifth Monarchy Men (the period when the great stone of Daniel 2 fills the whole earth) identified Oliver Cromwell as the little horn of Daniel 7. Learned and erudite, Mede mastered Greek and Hebrew and wrote an epochal commentary on Revelation, *Clavis Apocalypticae* in Latin (1627). His views on the millennium and the conversion of the Jews were endorsed by John Robinson (of the Pilgrim Fathers), Archbishop Ussher, Isaac Newton who was a dedicated student of Daniel and Revelation and John Milton “the mighty organ-voice of England. Mede saw the development of a massive apostasy embracing 1) Roman Catholicism; 2) Islam; and 3) Protestantism’s

capitulation to rationalistic unbelief and infidelity.<sup>32</sup>

Mede noted early the writings of Johann Heinrich Alsted (d.1638) who was a Rhineland Calvinist. He taught philosophy at Herborn but in the ravages of the Thirty Years War, the school was closed and he moved to Transylvania to teach in 1629. He sets forth his millennialism in his book *Beloved City*, which was translated into English by William Burton in 1634. He bases his argument for a literal 1000 year reign on the literal fulfillment of OT passages like Isaiah 2:1-4, Isaiah 34, Joel

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3:1-2, 9-13, Psalm 22, 86:9, 117:1, Daniel 12:11-12, etc. He claimed that Osiander, Conradus and Piscator followed him in his views. Even before the translation of this book, Joseph Mede had noted it in the original German. Alsted's other followers included Isaac Newton, Henry More and Nathaniel Homes.<sup>33</sup>

Augustinian "realized eschatology" was still represented in Puritanism but was giving way dramatically to postmillennialism which posited the victory of the church and the conversion of the world before Christ's return, a rather peculiar Enlightenment type optimism. But some Puritans like Thomas Shepard (1604-1649), noted pastor of Cambridge in the new world and first president of Harvard believed that the return of the Lord would be required to establish the millennial rule of the Savior. He seems to speak of two future comings of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> The redoubtable Increase Mather (1639-1723) was an articulate premillennialist after 1660 and viewed the stirrings of a false Messiah among the Jews in the Middle East as a possible sign of the Lord's soon return. His noted son, Cotton Mather (1663-1728) followed in his father's thinking and he was successful in winning two Massachusetts governors to premillennial views.<sup>35</sup> Roger Williams the separatist who founded Rhode Island (1604-1683) trumpeted the message that "only the millennial advent of Christ would change or significantly alter the situation (the apostasy all around him).<sup>36</sup>

## THE STARTLING REBOUND OF PREMILLENNIAL CONFIDENCE

Whoever would have imagined that the premillennialism which simmered in the

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eschatological broth after the Reformation and the Puritan and Pietistic revivals would burst into such brilliant flame as indeed it did even in the face of the Enlightenment's vicious despoliation of supernatural prophecy. A marked upsurge of premillennial fervor is in evidence in the 1820s. In the forefront of this mighty move was the young Irish Anglican, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). The Albury Conferences which began in England in 1826 and the Powerscourt Conferences in Ireland in the 1830s stimulated interest in Biblical prophecy especially in a resurgence of confidence in the imminent return of our Lord. But Darby et al heralded a return to the ante-Nicene premillennial position as well. He stood with Augustus Toplady (who wrote "Rock of Ages") on the millennium: "I am one of the old-fashioned people who believe the doctrine of the Millennium and that there will be two distinct resurrections of the dead--first, of the just; second, of the unjust; which last resurrection will not commence till one thousand years after the

resurrection

of the elect. In this glorious interval of one thousand years Christ will reign in person over the kingdom of the just.”<sup>37</sup>

Darby and the Brethren spearheaded an impact which reached evangelicalism around the world, especially upon the Congregationalist C.I. Scofield and the Presbyterian James H. Brookes. Even those in the movement who did not go along with the pretribulational emphasis on the rapture such as George Muller, S.P.Tregelles, B.N. Newton and others such as Edward Irving and the Bonar brothers of Scotland stood squarely and firmly for the premillennial return of Christ to set up the kingdom. What Sibley called the “ineluctable call of apocalyptic” had deeply gripped and moved these people.<sup>38</sup> Though not of this stream of thought, Gerald Thomas Noll, a close friend of William Wilberforce, in his *Brief Inquiry into the Prospects of the Church* (1828) depicts the restoration of the Jews and the millennium as the actual monarchy of Christ, believers “living among their mortal

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kindred as benefactors, princes and kings” (77). W.H. Oliver does not overstate the matter when he concludes that “prophecy was a normal intellectual activity in early 19th century England.”<sup>39</sup>

Even in the face of the devilish attack of Darwinian evolution on every aspect of Biblical supernaturalism and despite the debacle of date-setting by William Miller and his followers in the 1840s, premillennialism flourished in the most unexpected places. Beginning in 1863, the *Prophetic Times* edited by the Lutheran Joseph Seiss beat on the premillennial drum with vigor. Nathaniel West (1826-1906), an energetic scholar and Presbyterian pastor, wrote his magisterial exposition *The Thousand Years in Both Testaments* which was published in 1880. He argues that the millennium is the first stage of the everlasting Kingdom. He stands with the European scholars Godet, Delitzsch and Van Osterzee and with Dornier who insisted “A point undoubtedly common to both Jewish and Christian apocalypticists, is the period of blessedness on earth, called the 1000 years.”<sup>40</sup> Americans who followed were Robert Speer, S.H. Kellogg the Presbyterian missionary and theologian and Charles Blanchard the first president of Wheaton College.

No less impressive is the monumental 2100 page *The Theocratic Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament*, written by the prominent and able Lutheran pastor, George N.H. Peters.

He grapples with the meaning of the kingdom of God and comes down hard in favor of the theocratic kingdom of our Lord, “an earnest, introductory or initiatory

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form of the kingdom.”<sup>41</sup> Peters’ case is for “the literal restoration and conversion of the Jewish people” in the wrap-up of space-time history. Peters suffered much ecclesiastically for his stand but exerted a broad and effective witness for truth. While dispensational premillennialism was really the main engine force that estab-

lished a maturing premillennial conviction through the churches and institutions of America, it should not be forgotten that many Britons held tenaciously to the essential premillennial persuasion such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Bishops J.C. Ryle, Edward Bickersteth and H.C.G. Moule. The Advent Preparation Movement stood right here and featured such leaders as J. Stuart Holden, F.B. Meyer, Dinsdale Young, G. Campbell Morgan, E.L. Langston and A.C. Dixon. The transatlantic ministries of American evangelists like D.L. Moody, R.A. Torrey, J. Wilbur Chapman, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham were much used of God and all of these were zealous premillennarians and indeed pretribulationists also.

The wearisome refrain of the critics is that premillennialism is unduly pessimistic and that it encourages disengagement from the problems of time/space history. None less than the guru of Protestant mainliners, Martin E. Marty, uses William E. Blackstone as an example of how early fundamentalism fused premillennialism and Princeton-style inerrancy and assumed even a political posture. Quite a different line is taken by Barnard College Randall Balmer (ostensibly one of evangelicalism's own) who blasts premillennialism as "a theology of despair" and curiously argues that it "breeds a grim indifference both to individual non-believers and to the American project as a whole."<sup>42</sup>

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Marty, on the other hand, sees Protestant fundamentalists as Zionists "before Jewish Zionism took hold." He attributes this societal activism to the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible, The Bible Conferences such as the Niagara Conferences, and the virtual takeover of proto-fundamentalism by dispensational premillennialists." As the cause celebre he cites "the tireless agitator, William E. Blackstone, who as early as 1891 gathered the names of over 400 prominent Americans and presented to President Harrison a petition asserting the political right of the Jews to rebuild the nation of Israel."<sup>43</sup> Further evidence to Marty is fundamentalist participation in the Scopes' Trial, their dedication to rebuilding after their denominational defeats and institutional losses in the twenties. He further cites the anti-communist posture of evangelicals/fundamentalists in the Cold War. "Even if the Second Coming is imminent, Christians are to 'occupy until Christ comes.'" Indeed, trumpeting the stance of the so-called "religious right" in America down to the present moment, he shows (contrary to Balmer) fundamentalism's efforts to "rescue individuals before the rapture."

The final issue raised by this history is this: even with amillennialism losing some of its steam in our time and the new postmillennialism and preterism seeking to stand on yet very unsteady feet, can classical premillennialism shorn of dispensationalism's hermeneutic, its attention to the periodization of redemptive history and its dogged insistence on the difference between Israel and the Church, can it really withstand the onslaughts of a diluting covenant theology which is really not all that interested in eschatology anyway? Dispensational premillennialism with the Left Behind series, the prophecy conferences, fidelity to God's covenant promises to Israel without com

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promise is the greatest bulwark to the continuing erosion of evangelical conviction on

this critical and crucial aspect of Biblical truth. Premillennialism and imminence have stood together from the earliest ages of church history. ALWAYS EXPECT THE ADVENT has been the recurring clarion call from the beginning. As Archbishop Trench put it: the Lord's return is "possible any day; impossible no day." John Nelson Darby preached "It is no mistake to be always expecting the Lord to return" and he was right.<sup>44</sup> In his classic study on The Parousia in the New Testament, A.L. Moore leaves no doubt that the hope of the imminent return belongs to "the very fabric and substance of the New Testament."<sup>45</sup> The Apostles are of one mind - Christ is at the door. Believers are to watch.

Not all who held to premillennialism and imminence saw the Scriptural and logical necessity of a two-stage coming, but more and more followed out the difference between the signless rapture in coming for the Church and the many-signed return in glory with the Church. The erosion of this urgent looking and waiting has always been disastrous for the Church. Failure to affirm imminence along with the difference between Israel and the Church have often led to the weakening and the wasting of premillennialism (as in the case of George Ladd). Abandonment of either of these twin pillars of New Testament eschatology opens the slippery slope.

Further evidence of this peril can be seen in two magisterial commentaries on Revelation of recent date. Coming out of Wheaton which sometime ago abandoned its premillennial stand, is Greg Beale's massive The Book of Revelation in Eerdman's New International Greek Commentary Series (1999). This book is

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amillennial to the core. How long can you maintain premillennialism without the dispensational pre-tribulational framework?

Another notable work follows in the Ladd-Mounce tradition and that is by my colleague at Trinity, Grant R. Osborne's nearly 900 page Revelation in the Baker Exegetical Commentary Series. This study pulsates with a warm devotional tone and is avowedly premillennial in its commitment. Osborne makes no effort at correlating Daniel, Zechariah, the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. A helpful commentary must, it seems to me, deal with a text and then do some work on the analogia scripturae, how this fits into what Scripture as a whole says about this. For instance, Osborne depicts the Lord Jesus coming in power and glory in Revelation 19 with "the armies of heaven following." He asks: might this imply that the saints would have to have been caught up if they were to accompany the Lord in His triumphant descent.<sup>46</sup> But he says that the answer to this question must be sought in "the rest of the New Testament," although he has obviously opted for the post-tribulational position.

So Osborne sees Revelation 3:10 as promising protection in rather than exemption from; the 24 elders are heavenly beings; the 144,000 and the great unnumbered multitude are the church; the saints in Revelation are the Church; Israel does not even have mention in the subject index. He does hold to a 1000 reign of Christ because that position does "more justice to the literary flow" and to 20:3 and 20:4-5.<sup>47</sup> But I think he is hanging on by the skin of his teeth. The covenantal, classical premillenarian is very close to giving

away the store. With the surrender of  
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imminence in any significant sense and with the abolition of any significant  
difference between Israel and the Church, these folk are hanging by a thread.

Dispensationalism with its embrace of an unequivocally clear “imminent return” and its striking continuity with historic and orthodox premillennialism with its strong insistence on the distinction between Israel and the Church would seem to be in the strongest and most defensible position. Thus it would seem to me that this is not the hour in which to weaken our resolve but indeed to raise up the flag - JESUS IS COMING! HE COULD COME TODAY!

1. Dana L. Robert, *Occupy Until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 10
2. Leonard I. Sweet, “The Revelation of St. John and History,” *Christianity Today*, May 11, 1973, 9
3. John T. Carroll, *The Return of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000) 111
4. Ante-Nicene Fathers, “Fragments of Papias,” VI, from Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* III, 39, Vol. 1, 154. For further study, Edward H. Hall, *Papias and His Contemporaries: A Study of Religious Thought in the Second Century* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899) 131ff. “Millennialism was the prevailing belief...”
5. Ante-Nicene Fathers, Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho,” ixxx, Volume 1, 239
6. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, I, 15, II
7. Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Apocalypse in the Ancient Church* (Goes, Holland: Oosterbaan and LaCointre, 3ff) John Calvin called chiliasm “a puerile fiction.”
8. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1960) 465ff  
Professor Jaroslav Pelikan admits that “Every tenet of primitive Christian belief must be understood in this apocalyptic context” in *The Christian Tradition*, I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) 123.
9. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 708. Heinrich Schmid in his scholastic *Lutheran Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1875), dismisses chiliasm as held only by “The Jews, Cerinthus, Papias, Joachim, the Fanatics and Anabaptists, Schwenkfeld and others,” 650. Obviously a totally inadequate statement of the history of chiliasm.
10. Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957) 365. Boettner himself was postmillennial.
11. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Harper, 1957) 14  
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12. Michael J. Szigel, “The Phantom Heresy: Did the Council of Ephesus (431) Condemn Chiliasm?” in *The Trinity Journal*, 24NS (2003) 105-112
13. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, 4.23. David Dunbar of Biblical Seminary wrote his doctoral dissertation on “The Eschatology of Hippolytus of Rome” at Drew University, 1979. He makes the case for the millenarianism of Hippolytus.
14. Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early*

Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). He pits John vs “Jewish chiliasts.” George Ladd well argues that “the occurrence of a doctrine of a temporal kingdom in Jewish eschatology does not invalidate a similar doctrine in Christian theology,” cf Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 165. The NT doctrine of the two ages is also found in Jewish apocalyptic.

15. Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003) 60-61. Augustine’s exegesis sees the garment which Shem and Japheth put over Noah’s nakedness as “the sacrament that backs the memories of things past and that celebrates the passion of Christ as already accomplished,” *City of God*, 16.2

16. *ibid.* 15

17. *ibid.* 15. Even Geerhardus Vos in *Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) concedes that “there is an interval between the return of Christ (the parousia) and the end” from his exegesis of I Corinthians 15, 237

18. Daniel T. Taylor, *The Voice of the Church and the Coming Kingdom* (New York: H.L. Hastings, 1855) 10

19. Archibald Robertson, *Regnum Dei* (New York: Macmillan, 1901) 176

20. Augustine, *The City of God*, XX, 6-13. Dr. Walvoord points out that so imbued with the 6000 year theory and the necessity of taking the six uses of 1000 in Revelation 20 literally, that he posited the beginning of the 1000 as occurring before the time of Christ and the Second Advent taking place in 650, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959, 1971) 55f.

21. J. Webb Measley, *After the 1000 Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 19

22. Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 1998) 170

23. Peter P. J. Beyerhaus, *God’s Kingdom and the Utopian Error* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992) ix

24. M.-D Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) 244f

25. Jurgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 92

26. Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (New York: Harper, 1976) 166

27. Michael J. St. Clair, *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992) 130

28. Robert G. Clouse, “Johann Heinrich Alsted and English Millennialism” in *Harvard Theological Review*, LXII (1969), 189-207.

29. Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days: A Study in Millennialism* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1954) 23. Franz Delitzsch, the great Leipzig OT commen-

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tator has observed: “To whom do we owe it that the Evangelical Church of today no longer after the fashion of the old Dogmatics, brands as a heterodoxy, the Chiliastic view of the end-time, but has taken it up into her deepest and innermost life, so that today, a believing Christian can scarcely be found who does not enjoy it?”

We owe it to none other than Bengel...he vindicated the mother-right of exegesis to control Dogmatixcs..” from *Frontespiece*, Nathaniel West, *The Thousand Years in Both*

Testaments (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1880).

30. Quoted in Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper, 1977) 379. A delightful essay on "A Premillennial Philosophy of History" is found in Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959) 527-531. An incredibly rich study of premillennialism.

31. C.A. Auberlen as quoted in George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, I* (rep. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952) 267

32. Joseph Mede, *Apostasy in the Latter Times* (London: R. Groombridge, 1836) xxvii

33. Robert G. Clouse, "Johann Heinrich Alsted," in *Harvard Theological Review*, LXII, 1969, 189-201. Also by Clouse, "The Apocalyptic Interpretation of Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XI, 1968, 181-193

34. David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 299

35. John S. Erwin, *The Millennialism of Cotton Mather: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990) 2. Mather published 454 books. Among the 15 unpublished works is his *Triparadisus* which runs to 390 pages (found at the American Antiquarian Society). Here especially we see his millennial obsession. He wrote more of the millennium than any other colonial. He expected the immediate return of Christ after which would be the promised millennium. Erwin traces his reliance on Mede, William Whiston, Pierre Jurieu and Isaac Newton. Christ's coming would be "like a thief."

36. W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 57

37. Augustus Toplady in R.J. Reid, *Remarks on the Millennium and Kindred Teaching of Philip Mauro* (New York: Loizeaux, 1943) 5

38. W. Sibley Towner in eds. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995) 15

39. W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Bible Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978) 11

40. Nathaniel West, *The Thousand Years in Both Testaments* (New York: F.H. Revell, 1880). An exceedingly rich and suggestive study. Two other very influential premillennialists of this time were E.R. Craven the Presbyterian (1824-1908) who argued effectively for the ultimate futurity of the Kingdom and James R. Graves, the Southern Baptist (1820-1893) whose ministry counteracted postmillennial trends in the SBC and lent a strong dispensational premillennial flavor to Baptist thinking. For informative biographical data, cf articles by Thomas Ice and Mal Couch in ed. Mal

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Couch, *Dictionary of Premillennial Thought* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996) 74, 128

41. George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament* (rep. Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1952). Of this massive work in three volumes Wilbur M. Smith well said: "The most important single work on Biblical predictive prophecy to appear in this country at any time during the nineteenth century." Worth digging through.

He demonstrates so clearly that the Theocratic Kingdom was not established while

Christ was on earth (Mark 15:43, Acts 1:6). The Kingdom was held in abeyance because of the foreseen rebellion, cf I, 367. He shows that the Apostles preached “a near and expectant Advent” II, 17. David’s Throne is not the Father’s Throne.  
42. In “The Bible and the Apocalypse--Why more Americans are reading and talking about the end of the world,” cover-story in Time Magazine, July 1, 2001, 47  
43. Martin E. Marty, Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987) 298  
44. Max S. Waremchuk, John Nelson Darby (Neptune: Loizeaux, 1992) 129  
45. A.L. Moore, The Parousia in the New Testament (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966) 4  
46. Grant R. Osborne, Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 669  
47. *ibid.* 716

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