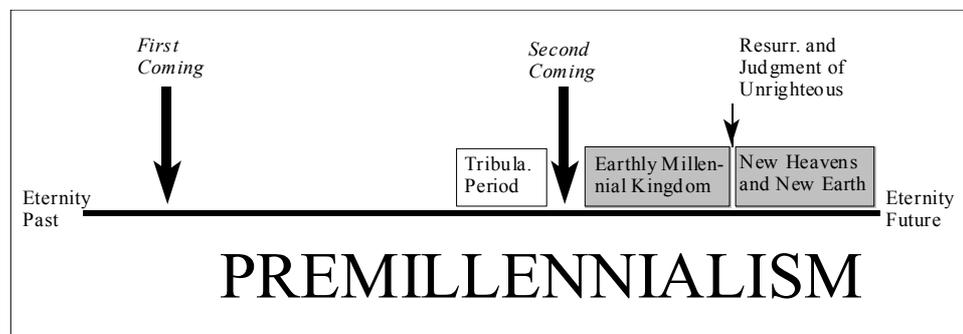


## APPENDIX B

## ESCHATOLOGICAL SYSTEMS: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND HERMENEUTICS

**OBJECTIVES:**

- 1) To be able to identify and describe the three primary eschatological systems that have been embraced throughout Church history (not including liberal views).
- 2) To be able to explain the historical rise and influence that these systems have had, and the factors that led to major shifts of thought.

**I. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR ESCHATOLOGICAL SYSTEMS<sup>1</sup>****A. PREMILLENNIALISM**

## 1. General Description

Premillennialism is the view that there will be a literal reign of Christ *on earth* following the Second Coming. On the basis of Rev 20:1-6, this is normally considered to last for 1000 years. According to this view, the kingdom promises to Israel in the O.T. and most of the *kingdom verses* in the N.T. refer to this time after the Second Coming. Furthermore, the world condition will generally get worse before the return of Christ.

## 2. Variations

## a. Dispensational Premillennialism

## (1) Proponents

John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Paul Tan, Earl Radmacher, Charles Feinberg, Stanley D. Toussaint, and Elliott E. Johnson

<sup>1</sup> For a general orientation to the various eschatological systems, see Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995); Darrell L. Bock, *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999); Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992); and Robert P. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook : A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding the Different Views of Prophecy, Who Believes What About Prophecy and Why*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998).

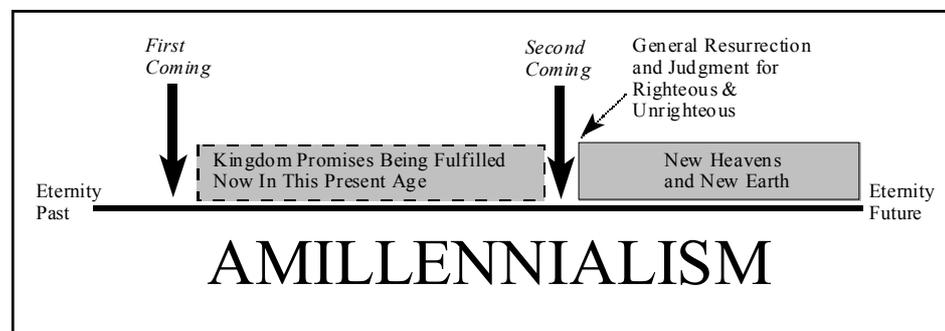
- (2) Teachings
    - (a) There is a clear distinction in the Bible between God's program with the nation of Israel and His program with the Church (the Church  $\neq$  Israel). The Church began at Pentecost as a distinct entity from Israel. Hence, many dispensationalists will see the present church age as a "parenthesis" in God's program. Because Israel rejected God's offer of the kingdom at Christ's 1st advent, the kingdom is (supposedly) postponed and Israel has been set aside.
    - (b) Christ is not now ruling on the promised throne of David, and will not begin to do so until after the Second Coming.
    - (c) God is dispensing or administering the affairs of the world in various stages as time progresses (hence, dispensations). Currently, we are in the "Church age," and believers today are not under the Mosaic Law.
    - (d) The *rapture* of the Church will occur before the Tribulation.
  - (3) Implications
    - (a) The promises to O.T. Israel will be fulfilled with Israel as a nation (not the present-day Israel in unbelief but an *eschatological Israel* that has turned to faith in Christ). Hence, the nation of Israel still has a future in God's plan.
    - (b) Israel, as a nation, will eventually turn to faith in Christ, and have a prominent role in the future Millennial Kingdom.
    - (c) The Church today is partaking of some of Israel's promises and responsibilities (promise: partaking of some of the benefits of the New Covenant; responsibility: being a light to the nations).
- b. Historic Premillennialism
- (1) Proponents: George Ladd
  - (2) Teachings:
    - (a) There is a present and future aspect to the "Kingdom." Christ's reign is a "spiritual reign" now, although there will be a literal aspect later after the Second Coming.
    - (b) Less distinction between Israel and the Church (Church = spiritual Israel). While allowing that there will be some future role for Israel, this view sees most of the O.T. promises to Israel fulfilled in the Church.
    - (c) The *rapture* of the Church will take place at the Second Coming, not before the Tribulation (post-tribulational view).
  - (3) Implications:
 

Historic Premillennialism has a mixed hermeneutic: some passages are interpreted literally, e.g., Rev 20:1-6 (there will be an earthly kingdom rule of Christ); but other passages are spiritualized (especially in regard to Israel).
- c. Progressive Dispensationalism
- (1) Proponents:
 

Craig Blaising, Darrell Bock, Robert Saucy, and J. Lanier Burns

- (2) Teachings:
- (a) Distinction is still made between Israel and the Church (the Church  $\neq$  Israel). However, there is much more *continuity* between God's program with Israel and that of the Church than traditional dispensationalists have admitted.
  - (b) God is fulfilling many of the promises originally given to Israel with the Church, especially the New Covenant. Oftentimes, this means a partial fulfillment now, with a complete fulfillment still to come in the future. Thus, an "already-not yet" hermeneutic.
  - (c) Christ is now ruling on the promised throne of David, and hence the Kingdom is both present and future (a millennial form of the kingdom is still expected after the 2nd Coming).
  - (d) The *rapture* of the Church will occur before the Tribulation.

B. AMILLENNIALISM (some would prefer the label "Realized Millennialism")



1. General Description

Amillennialism is the view that there will be no literal reign of Christ *on earth* following the Second Coming. According to this view, the kingdom promises are somehow fulfilled in the period between the 1st and 2nd Comings of Christ. Following the Second Coming, there will be a general resurrection and judgment of both the righteous and the unrighteous, and subsequently the creation of the new order.

Note: Many amillennialists object to the label "Amillennialism" (which actually means *no millennium*). They would argue that they have a valid reason for believing that the kingdom passages (depicting the reign of Christ) are being fulfilled in this present age. Hence, they do believe in the kingdom reign of Christ; they see these as being fulfilled *spiritually*, not literally.

2. Variations

a. View of Augustine (AD 354–430)

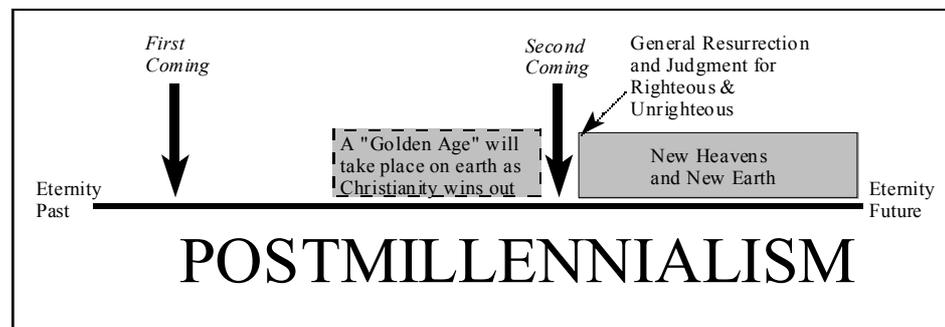
Augustine took the position that the Church was the kingdom. Hence, the kingdom promises are being fulfilled now *on earth* through the Church. His view had a strong influence on the eschatology of the Roman Catholic church as well as the Reformers.

b. Contribution of B. B. Warfield (1851–1921)

Warfield was a distinguished professor during the more evangelical days of Princeton Seminary. According to him, the kingdom promises are being fulfilled now *in Heaven* where Christ is reigning at the right hand of the Father (and dead saints with Him). Although Warfield himself was a *postmillennialist*, his view was quickly embraced by *amillennialists*.

3. Proponents  
Seminaries like Covenant, Westminster and Reformed. Individuals such as Louis Berkhof, Anthony A. Hoekema and R. C. Sproul.
4. Teachings:
  - a. Rev 20:1-6 is not interpreted literally, and does not refer to the time after the 2nd Coming but to the present age.
  - b. Rejection of the dispensational distinction of Israel and the Church. Instead, the Church is considered to be the *spiritual Israel*, and the promises to O.T. Israel are either forfeited or fulfilled with the Church.
  - c. Stress is placed on the "theological covenants" (so Covenant Theology), and these are used as the primary basis of understanding the Bible rather than the biblical covenants.<sup>2</sup>
5. Implications
  - a. Normally, Amillennialists do not see a future for Israel as a nation.
  - b. Amillennialists differ on the *nature* and *time* of the kingdom.
  - c. In some sense, Satan is "bound" during the present age (since Rev 20:1-6 is taken in regard to the intervening period between the two Comings of Christ).
  - d. The "1000 year reign" in Rev 20:1-6 is spiritualized to mean a *long time*, rather than a literal 1000 years.

### C. POSTMILLENNIALISM



#### 1. General Description

Postmillennialism is the view that the kingdom passages will be fulfilled before the 2nd Coming of Christ at a time when the world is eventually *Christianized*. That is, there will be a "Golden Age" in which righteousness, peace and prosperity flourish on earth, when the world is "won over" by the gospel. Like Amillennialism, there will be *no* literal reign of Christ on the earth following the 2nd Coming. Following the

<sup>2</sup>In the "Covenant of works" between God and Adam, God promised life for obedience or death for disobedience. Adam's failure led to the "Covenant of grace," an agreement between God and the sinner in which God promises salvation through Christ.

Second Coming, there will be a general resurrection and judgment of both the righteous and the unrighteous, and subsequently the creation of the new order.

## 2. Teachings

- a. Ethnic Israel has no future, being judged for its apostasy in AD 70. The Church has taken the place of Israel as the people of God.
- b. The Millennium is not a literal 1000 year reign after the 2nd Coming, but a long period of a "Golden Age" before Christ returns.

Note: The implications recorded earlier for Amillennialism would apply to Postmillennialism as well.

## 3. Variations

### a. Classical Postmillennialism

#### (1) Description

Postmillennialism is essentially a Post-Reformation view. The kingdom and kingdom blessings were believed to depict a future utopian age that would be brought about by the universal spread and acceptance of the gospel. After the world had experienced this "Golden Age," Christ would return to usher in the New Order for eternity.

#### (2) Proponents

##### (a) Daniel Whitby (1638–1726)

Postmillennialism received influential formulation in the writings of Daniel Whitby, which in turn influenced Jonathan Edwards and others of early colonial America.<sup>3</sup>

##### (b) Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921)

Strong published his *Systematic Theology* (3 vols) in 1886, which gave strong impetus to Postmillennialism.

##### (c) Loraine Boettner (represents Postmillennialism in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*).<sup>4</sup>

### b. Contemporary Postmillennialism (Theonomy / Christian Reconstructionism)

#### (1) Description

A more recent "flavor" of Postmillennialism has emerged in the past 20 years which acknowledges a present existence of the kingdom. This is also known as "Dominion Theology." According to this view, the kingdom is operative now, and does not need to wait for the close of the present age. However, it has not yet reached its full development.

The stress of this form of Postmillennialism is to impose O.T. law on society. Hence, they would regard the Mosaic Law as basically still in force (not the ceremonial law, but the moral law and all or most of case law).

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<sup>3</sup>Daniel Whitby's publication in 1703 of his two volume *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* is the primary foundation of Postmillennialism.

<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Clouse and George E. Ladd (edd.), *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977).

- (2) Proponents  
Rousas J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, Gary DeMar, and David Chilton.

## II. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (ELABORATION)

### A. The Early Church

During the first two hundred years of Church history, the early Church fathers were clearly **premillennial** in their eschatological expectations. Although they did not have a very developed eschatology, they did expect a literal reign of Christ *on earth* following the Second Coming.

Premillennialism can be witnessed in such figures as Papias (c. 60–c. 130), Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), Irenaeus (fl. c. 175–c. 195), Tertullian (c. 160/70 – c. 215/20), and Hippolytus (d. c. 236).<sup>5</sup> The expectation of a future kingdom was still affirmed as late as the Council of Nicea in AD 325.

### B. The Shift to Allegorization

#### 1. Philo (c. 20 BC – c. AD 40)

Philo was not a Christian but rather a Jewish philosopher (and a contemporary of Christ). He is mentioned here because of the fact that he lived in Alexandria of Egypt, and had a significant impact upon Christians of that region in the way that he interpreted the Scriptures.

Philo sought to reconcile Mosaic law and Greek philosophy so that the Mosaic law might become acceptable to the Greek mind. To do so, however, it was necessary for him to adopt an allegorizing method of interpreting the Scriptures.

#### 2. The Rise of the Catechetical School at Alexandria

##### a. Pantaeus (d. c. 190)

Over a hundred years after Philo, a Christian by the name of Pantaeus is known to have started the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Though a Christian, he was influenced by Philo's method of handling Scripture (he had been a converted Stoic).

##### b. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215)

Though born in Athens, Clement moved to Alexandria and was educated under Pantaeus at the Catechetical School of Alexandria. In 190, he became head of the school. He believed in the divine origin of Greek philosophy, and openly taught that all Scripture must be allegorically understood. One of Clement's students was Origen.

##### c. Origen (c. 185 – c. 254)

Origen was born in Alexandria and studied under Clement. Though influenced by Clement, it was Origen who would develop and popularize the allegorical method as it applied to Scripture. Philip Schaff, the famous church historian,

<sup>5</sup>Other chiliasts in the early church included Julius "Africanus," Victorinus of Petlau, Cyprian, and Lactantius.

writes of Origen:

Origen was the first to lay down, in connection with the allegorical method of the Jewish Platonist, Philo, a formal theory of interpretation, which he carried out in a long series of exegetical works . . . In the application of this theory he shows the same tendency as Philo, to spiritualize away the letter of scripture . . . and instead of simply bringing out the sense of the Bible, he puts into it all sorts of foreign ideas and irrelevant fancies.<sup>6</sup>

Keep in mind that the allegorical method was not born out of a study of the Scriptures, but rather arose out of a desire to unite Greek philosophy with the Scriptures.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the rise of the allegorizing approach to Scripture, there were other factors that led to a rejection of chiliasm. This would include the disappointment of early attempts at date-setting as well as "guilt-by-association" with such groups as the Montanists who became known for their excesses and prophetic extremes. Also exerting an influence on the early church away from premillennialism was the noted Eusebius (c. 265 – c. 339), commonly known as "The Father of Church History." Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, is famous for his lengthy church history, *Ecclesiastical History*, which was written about AD 325. In this work, he falsely attributed the origins of Chiliasm to a heretic by the name of Cerinthus.<sup>8</sup> Hence, Eusebius rejected the premillennial expectation of a literal kingdom on earth following the Lord's return.

#### C. The Influence of Augustine (354–430)

Augustine was the most influential of the Latin Church fathers. He became the bishop of Hippo in Roman North Africa, and was influenced by the allegorical system of Origen.

Through one of his books, the *City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*, c. 413–27), Augustine came to have a major impact upon eschatology. The book was actually written in response to the sack of Rome in 410 as an apologia against allegations that Christianity was ultimately responsible for the sack of Rome. In the book, Augustine depicted two cities in an attempt to explain the dealings of God in history. Cairns explains:

The first city, the City of God, consisted of all human and celestial beings united in love to God and seeking His glory alone. The City of Earth is composed of those beings who, loving only self, seek their own glory and good. The supreme dividing principle is that of love. Augustine never had the Roman Empire or the Church of Rome in mind when he spoke of these two cities. . . . In Books XV to XVIII he traces the growth and progress of the two cities through Biblical and secular history. The remaining books give an account of the destiny of the two cities. After judgment the members of the City of God share in eternal happiness and those of the City of Earth in eternal punishment. Augustine does not take into account the place of the Jew in the future and believes that **the present age of the Church is the millennium.**<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1884), II:521.

<sup>7</sup>Origen was apparently influenced by secular philosophies in other ways. His idealistic depreciation of matter furthered his rejection of a literal kingdom as being too *earthly*.

<sup>8</sup>*Ecccl. Hist.*, Book III, ch. 28. Cerinthus (c. AD 100) was a gnostic.

<sup>9</sup>Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1967), 159-60.

Although Augustine did not intend that one of the cities would represent the church at Rome, in the course of time others applied it this way. Cairns writes,

His interpretation of the millennium as the era between the Incarnation and Second Advent of Christ in which the Church would conquer the world led to the Roman emphasis upon the Church of Rome as the universal Church destined to bring all within its fold.<sup>10</sup>

The important contribution of Augustine is that he established the interpretation that the millennium represented the period between the two Comings of Christ, not the period after the Second Coming (as had the early Church).<sup>11</sup>

The timing of Augustine's *City of God* is also of significance. Although the papacy would not become formally established until the time of Gregory I, the Great (c. 540 – 604), by the time of Augustine there was a growing movement of ecclesiasticism. When Augustine wrote *City of God* (c. 413–27), the authority of the Church was being asserted in all doctrinal matters. In other words, there was a tendency for the church to dictate orthodoxy, especially through special church councils. In many cases, this served to protect the Church from heresy, but this also carried the potentiality of abuse. Because Augustine was the most influential theologian to arise since the Apostle Paul, his system of allegorization easily became the accepted standard for the rest of the Church. Farrar explains,

The exegesis of St. Augustine is marked by the most glaring defects. . . . He laid down the rule that the Bible must be interpreted with reference to Church Orthodoxy, and that no Scriptural expression can be out of accordance with any other.<sup>12</sup>

As a warning about the subjectivity of allegorization, Farrar goes on to say,

. . . When once the principle of allegory is admitted, when once we start with the rule that whole passages and books of Scripture say one thing when they mean another, the reader is delivered bound hand and foot to the caprice of the interpreter. He can be sure of absolutely nothing except what is dictated to him by the Church, and in all ages the authority of "the Church" has been falsely claimed for the presumptuous tyranny of false prevalent opinions."<sup>13</sup>

Within a year of Augustine's death, the Council of Ephesus was held in 431 to deal with the Nestorian controversy. As a byproduct, however, the Council condemned the belief in the millennium as superstitious.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>11</sup>In regard to his view on Rev 20:1-6, Augustine may have been influenced by the 4th century donatist Tyconius. Oswald T. Allis elaborates the view of Augustine:

"He taught that the millennium is to be interpreted spiritually as fulfilled in the Christian Church. He held that the binding of Satan took place during the earthly ministry of our Lord (Lk. x.18), that the first resurrection is the new birth of the believer (Jn. v.25), and that the millennium must correspond, therefore, to the inter-adventual period or Church age. This involved the interpreting of Rev. xx.1-6 as a 'recapitulation' of the preceding chapter instead of as describing a new age following chronologically on the events set forth in chap. xix" (*Prophecy and the Church* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1945], 3; quoted in John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1959], 20).

<sup>12</sup>F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1886), 236, quoted in J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1958), 23.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. (Farrar, 238; quoted in Pentecost, 23).

With the formal emergence of the Roman Catholic church, as the papacy became officially established with Gregory I the Great, Augustine's view of the millennium served as a perfect vehicle through which to promote the *catholic church* as the kingdom on earth. This eschatological view served Catholicism well. Sadly, for the next 1200 years Christianity would be dominated by **amillennialism** as a result of the hermeneutical shift to allegorization at Alexandria. There would be no significant developments in eschatology until the Reformation, although speculations began to arise after the year AD 1000.<sup>14</sup>

#### D. The Reformation – A Turn Around of Hermeneutics

The Reformation was a reaction against the abuses of Roman Catholicism, and the invention of the printing press enabled an uprising against Rome to succeed. Hand in hand with this was a return to the Scriptures, and particularly the literal method of interpreting the Scriptures. William Tyndale expressed this sentiment when he wrote,

Thou shalt understand, therefore, that the Scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way. And if thou leave the literal sense, thou canst not but go out of the way. Nevertheless, the Scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories, as all other speeches do; but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifieth, is over the literal sense, which thou must seek out diligently.<sup>15</sup>

To this the great theologian John Calvin added, "Let us know then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning, and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely."<sup>16</sup>

To the Reformers, the Church today is deeply indebted for a return of the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Despite this emphasis upon the literal interpretation of the Bible, however, the Reformers did not consistently apply this hermeneutic. When it came to the area of eschatology, Luther, Calvin and others continued to embrace the amillennial view.

One needs to understand the historical context to appreciate this. The Reformers were primarily focused on soteriology, not eschatology. They relished in the recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith. In seeking to establish this point, they found a friend in Augustine. In his writings, Augustine had stressed the matter of grace in salvation. Hence, the Reformers pointed to his writings as a way of saying to the church at Rome: "You cherish Augustine; listen to what he says about salvation!"

But in their esteem of Augustine, the Reformers were not so discerning of Augustine's eschatology. Hence, the view persisted that the "millennium" represented the period between the two Comings of Christ. Their main contribution to eschatology was a widespread belief

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<sup>14</sup>Despite his spiritualizing of the *kingdom* itself, Augustine had actually interpreted the 1000 years literally (i.e., the interim period would be 1000 years). Hence, as the Church approached the year AD 1000, many had expectations of the Lord's return. When this date came and went, some turned to considering aberrational forms of the kingdom (cf. N. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium ... in Europe from the 11th to the 16th Century* [1961]).

<sup>15</sup>Quoted by Charles Augustus Briggs, *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 456-57; cited in Pentecost, 27.

<sup>16</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians*, 136; quoted in Gerrit H. Hospers, *The Principle of Spiritualization in Hermeneutics* (East Williamson, New York, 1935), 11.

that the Roman Catholic pope was the Antichrist.<sup>17</sup>

#### E. Post-Reformation Confusion

The influence of the Reformation would be felt in the area of eschatology, not so much by the Reformers themselves, but certainly by those who followed in their footsteps. The commitment to the literal-grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture would sooner or later affect views of eschatology. Farrar writes,

Among all of these there was a general agreement in principles, a rejection of scholastic methods, a refusal to acknowledge the exclusive dominance of patristic authority and church tradition; a repudiation of the hitherto dominant fourfold meaning; an avoidance of allegory; a study of the original languages; a close attention to the literal sense; a belief in the perspicuity and sufficiency of Scripture; the study of Scripture as a whole and the reference of its total contents to Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Although amillennialism continues to have a strong following today, the Post-Reformation period has also seen the reemergence of premillennialism as well as the introduction of postmillennialism.

##### 1. Amillennialism

Although amillennialism ceased being the exclusive view of Christianity as a result of the Reformation, it continues to have a strong following even until today. For one thing, the Roman Catholic church still propagates amillennialism in its view of representing the kingdom on earth. But even in Protestant circles, amillennialism still has a following. More liberal Protestants (who do not have a high view of Scripture) do not teach a literal millennial reign of Christ. Furthermore, Protestant denominations (and various individuals) who are strongly connected with the Reformation have not only adopted the soteriological views of the Reformers, but often their eschatological views as well. Hence, many of the Bible colleges and seminaries that espouse Reformed Theology also hold to an amillennial eschatology.

Although many of the earlier theologians at Princeton were postmillennial (see below under "Postmillennialism"), eventually there was a shift to amillennialism. According to Kik, it was with Geerhardus Vos that the amillennial position was introduced at Princeton.<sup>19</sup> As Princeton Seminary became more liberal, the conservative faction of the faculty resigned to found Westminster Seminary in 1929. Conservative amillennialism was championed at Westminster through men such as G. Gresham Machen, Oswald T. Allis, Cornelius Van Til and Robert Dick Wilson. Other significant amillennialists of the 20th century include Louis Berkhof and Anthony A. Hoekema. Amillennialism is still propagated in conservative circles through such schools as Westminster, Covenant Seminary, and Reformed Seminary.

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<sup>17</sup>The chiliastic belief was advocated by an extremist group responsible for the uprising at Münster (1534). The radical actions taken by this group were denounced by other Reformers, and this may have tended to make others hesitant to seriously consider premillennialism.

<sup>18</sup>Farrar, 342; quoted in Pentecost, 31.

<sup>19</sup>J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Philiipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1971). For Vos, see *The Kingdom of God and the Church* (NY: American Tract Society, 1903); *Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1948); and *The Pauline Eschatology* (Eerdmans, 1952).

2. Postmillennialism
  - a. Classical Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism is essentially a Post-Reformation view, connected with the Puritan movement and its quest to create a model of the kingdom of God on earth. Early postmillennialists did not like the allegorizing extreme of amillennialism and felt that premillennialism led to a pessimistic view of human history. Hence, the kingdom and kingdom blessings were believed to depict a future utopian age that would be brought about by the universal spread and acceptance of the gospel. After the world had experienced this "golden age," Christ would return to usher in the New Order for eternity. There was variation of belief as to how this "golden age" would come about, as Shepherd has noted:

Some postmillennialists provide for a gradual establishment of the millennium; others for a more abrupt beginning. Most, but not all, allow for a brief apostasy or resurgence of evil just prior to the advent and in preparation for the judgment.<sup>20</sup>

Though not the first to espouse it, postmillennialism received influential formulation in the writings of Daniel Whitby (1638–1726).<sup>21</sup> Whereas Augustine had viewed Rev 20:1-6 as a recapitulation of the previous chapters of Revelation, Whitby advanced the idea that Rev 20:1-6 followed chronologically the events of Rev 19, and hence the millennium (though still in the interadvent period) was still future. Whitby is also significant in that he influenced the great Jonathan Edwards to adopt postmillennialism. Clouse remarks, "Edwardsean postmillennialism also emphasized the place of America in the establishment of millennial conditions upon the earth."<sup>22</sup>

During the 19th century and early part of the 20th century, postmillennialism gathered more adherents and became the dominant view of this period. With the increasing scientific advancements and popularity of Christianity in western civilization, the expectation arose that man was on the verge of bringing in the "golden age." Not all postmillennialists saw this as being so immediate, but they were quite confident of its arrival, sooner or later.

Especially influential during the 19th century were the postmillennial theologians at Princeton Seminary. During the 1800's, Princeton Seminary became a bastion of theological orthodoxy. The faculty included such stalwarts of the faith as Archibald Alexander, J. A. Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield. Charles Hodge, for instance, rejected any literal millennium with earthly bodies on the basis of 1 Cor 15:50 ("flesh and blood

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<sup>20</sup>Merrill Tenney, gen. ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), s.v. "Postmillennialism" by N. Shepherd, 4:822.

<sup>21</sup>Daniel Whitby's publication in 1703 of his two volume *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* is the primary foundation of Postmillennialism. Some have claimed that the earliest expression of postmillennialism can be found in Joachim of Floris (a Roman Catholic of the 12th century). Postmillennial thought was also expressed in the works of some Puritan scholars.

<sup>22</sup>R. G. Clouse, "Millennium, Views of the," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 717; quoted in H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), 209.

cannot inherit the kingdom of God"). Yet he saw the kingdom as having more than one sense in Scripture. Like amillennialists, he advocated that the kingdom was in existence *now* during the entire interadvent period in the form of the Church: "Those who profess allegiance to Christ as king constitute his visible kingdom upon earth."<sup>23</sup> Hodge argued that Christ's kingdom was not of this world, but on the basis of Lk 17:21 was "within you."<sup>24</sup> Yet Hodge also advocated a postmillennial form of the kingdom (a "golden age") when Christianity would prevail before the return of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

B. B. Warfield, who succeeded Dr. A. A. Hodge as professor of Systematic Theology, was a committed Calvinist with high regard for the Westminster Confession of Faith, and taught at Princeton from 1886 until his death in 1921. Warfield, who would become the most prominent of Princeton's theologians, made a further contribution in eschatological thought, one which would influence both amillennialism and postmillennialism. In contrast to Augustine, Warfield popularized the view that the millennial promises were being fulfilled now (between the two Comings), but in heaven rather than on earth (i.e., they were being fulfilled by Christ ruling in heaven at the right hand of the Father where the "dead saints" were in a state of blessedness with Him).<sup>26</sup> This new interpretation solved the problem of correlating the identification of the millennium as the Church age with the hard facts of a world of unbelief, sin and warfare. This idea would become the prevalent view of both amillennialism and postmillennialism. But Warfield was not an amillennialist, for (like C. Hodge before him) he also anticipated a "golden age" of triumph for Christianity before the return of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Also influential during this period was the noted theologian, Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921), whose *Systematic Theology* (3 vols) in 1886 gave further

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<sup>23</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:857.

<sup>24</sup>The translation "within you" is doubtful, however, on lexical grounds. Furthermore, this interpretation cannot be sustained contextually, since Christ was speaking to the Pharisees.

<sup>25</sup>Hodge states,

". . . before the second coming of Christ there is to be a time of great and long continued prosperity, to be followed by a season of decay and of suffering, so that when the Son of Man comes he shall hardly find faith on the earth. It appears from passages already quoted that all nations are to be converted; that the Jews are to be brought in and reingrafted into their own olive-tree; and that their restoration is to be the occasion and the cause of a change from death unto life; that is, analogous to the change of a body mouldering in the grave to one instinct with joyous activity and power. Of this period the ancient prophets speak in terms adapted to raise the hopes of the Church to the highest pitch. . . . there is to be a period of millennial glory on earth, and a still more glorious consummation of the Church in heaven. This period is called a millennium because in Revelation it is said to last a thousand years, . . . During this period, be it longer or shorter, the Church is to enjoy a season of peace, purity, and blessedness such as it has never yet experienced.

The principal reason for assuming that the prophets predict a glorious state of the Church prior to the second advent, is, that they represent the Church as being thus prosperous and glorious on earth" (C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:858-59).

<sup>26</sup>This interpretation may not have originated with Warfield himself, as he seems to have acknowledged the help of Kliefoth (1874).

<sup>27</sup>See B. B. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," in *Biblical Doctrines* (1929); also see *The Savior of the World*, 129.

impetus to postmillennialism. Other postmillennialists included Patrick Fairbairn (*Interpretation of Prophecy*, 1865), W. G. T. Shedd (*Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols.), Robert Dabney and Stephen Charnock.

World Wars I and II brought a crushing blow to postmillennial expectations. Civilization was not becoming more Christian after all, but rather man was manifesting more evil than ever. Consequently, postmillennialism lost nearly all its adherents. Modern day representatives of classical postmillennialism are Loraine Boettner, J. Marcellus Kik, and John Jefferson Davis.<sup>28</sup>

b. Contemporary Postmillennialism (Theonomy / Christian Reconstructionism)

A more recent "flavor" of postmillennialism has emerged in the past 20 years which acknowledges a present existence of the kingdom. This brand of postmillennialism stems from the movement known as "Christian Reconstructionism" (also known as "Dominion Theology").<sup>29</sup> According to this view, the kingdom is operative now, and does not need to wait for the close of the present age. However, it has not yet reached its full development.

The stress of this form of postmillennialism is to impose O.T. law on society. Hence, they would regard the Mosaic Law as basically still in force (not the ceremonial law, but the moral law and all or most of case law). This is represented in the writings of Rousas J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, Gary DeMar, and David Chilton.

3. Premillennialism

Although the Reformers themselves did not return to premillennialism, the fact that they stressed a literal interpretation would be very influential in the reemergence of premillennial belief. Hence, in the Post-Reformation period, others eventually carried forward with the principle of the literal interpretation of Scripture and applied the same method to eschatology as the Reformers had with soteriology.

Although premillennialism would not make strong headway until the 19th century, there would be representation and some revival as early as the 17th century. One of these who helped revive the premillennial view was Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638), whose book *The Beloved City* in 1627 helped influence the famous Joseph Mede (1586–1638) to become a premillennialist.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, several of the 17th century divines of the Westminster Assembly (e.g., Thomas Goodwin) were decidedly premillennial in their theology, and the "Cambridge Platonist" Henry More believed in a chiliastic future.<sup>31</sup> According to Montgomery, a number of early Christian leaders of

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<sup>28</sup>Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*; John Jefferson Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom: Postmillennialism Reconsidered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986).

<sup>29</sup>For a helpful introduction and evaluation of Christian Reconstructionism by an advocate of dispensationalism, see H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988).

<sup>30</sup>Joseph Mede, professor of Greek at Cambridge, was one of the greatest biblical scholars of the English Church. His *Apocalypica (Key of the Revelation, 1627, 1643)* advocated premillennialism in such a scholarly way as to have an influence on eschatological interpretation for centuries.

<sup>31</sup>G. W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI:

colonial America maintained premillennialism, including John Davenport, Samuel Mather, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Samuel Sewall and Timothy Dwight.<sup>32</sup> However, the millenarian excesses among the Puritans (e.g., the "Fifth Monarchy Men" led by Thomas Venner) tended to bring millennialism into disfavor in the 18th century. But even then, there was some representation in such men as J. H. Bengel, Isaac Newton, and Joseph Priestly.

In the 19th century, however, premillennialism made strong headway, the postmillennialism of many of the theologians notwithstanding. This happened in Britain and even more so in America. In Europe, interest in biblical prophecy had been building since the late 1700s and especially in relation to the French Revolution. Many Christians had adopted the "year-day" theory by which a biblical day was equivalent (prophetically) to a year. Hence, the 1260 days mentioned in Revelation took on new significance. Adding 1260 years to the year 538 (which was regarded by some as the beginning of the papacy), this added up to 1798. Expectations were running high.

In Scotland, a minister by the name of Edward Irving (1792–1834) helped stir up prophetic interests. Though Irving was regarded by many with suspicion (especially for trying to revive the apostolic gifts, including tongues) and was later tried for heresy, he was instrumental in helping set up the Albury Park prophetic conferences of 1826–28 which brought together most every millenarian scholar of England. Not only did the Albury Park conferences lead to a revival of millennial interest in Britain, but it also resulted in the expectancy of Christ's return within a few years (some even set dates).

Of more lasting influence was the ministry and teachings of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), the leading teacher of the Plymouth Brethren movement.<sup>33</sup> By avoiding the extremism of Irving and by eventual ministry trips to both the Continent and the United States, Darby was able to spread his prophetic teachings. In contrast to Irving, Darby did not try to promote the revival of apostolic gifts (which some considered to be marks of the "last days"), did not tie prophetic events to contemporary European politics, and did not set dates.

Building on the precedent set by the Albury Park conferences, Darby and the Plymouth Brethren dominated the Powerscourt conferences beginning in 1831. This gave Darby a platform to espouse his views, which included:

- 1) A rejection of the "year-day" theory (which had been crucial to dating the 1260 years to 1798),
- 2) a stress on a spiritually pure church and rebuke of worldliness that was characteristic of so many churches,
- 3) a futuristic interpretation of the book of Revelation (i.e., that the events of the bulk of Revelation were still future),
- 4) a belief that the Church was a parenthesis in God's program, and that the Church was distinct from Israel (hence, one needed to distinguish

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Eerdmans, 1979–88), s.v. "The Millennium," by J. W. Montgomery, 3:359.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>For a helpful historical sketch of both Irving and Darby, see Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism; British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978).

- Scripture for Israel from that of the Church)
- 5) a belief that the return of Christ actually consisted of two comings, one secretly for His Church (the rapture) and the other publicly at the end of the Tribulation.

In the 1833 Powerscourt conference, Darby introduced into the discussion his idea of a secret rapture and his belief of a parenthesis in fulfillment between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's Seventy Weeks prophecy (see Dan 9:24-27).

During the years 1862–1877, Darby visited the United States and Canada seven times. This, together with the fact that many of his converts had emigrated to America, enabled the Plymouth Brethren to spread his teachings and thus foster premillennialism .

During the early 1800s, Darby was not the sole voice of premillennialism in America by any means. Many others had been expecting Christ's return and had even attempted to set dates. At one point, this even worked to the detriment of premillennialism. William Miller and his followers known as the Millerites (the Seventh Day Adventists) attempted to calculate the return of Christ as 1843 and again in 1844. The failure of these to materialize nearly sank the millenarian movement in America, but by the latter part of the century it began to rapidly gain strength and influence.

The strong emergence of premillennialism in the late 19th century can be attributed to at least two factors. One of these would be the preaching of Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899), the most influential evangelist of his times. Moody believed and taught premillennialism, and in 1880 helped initiate the Northfield conferences.

A second factor, and perhaps even more significant, was the rise of the Niagara Bible conferences held during the years 1883–1897.<sup>34</sup> These conferences attracted many serious Bible students, as well as some of the most noted pastors and teachers of the day (these included Nathaniel West, James H. Brookes, A. T. Pierson, W. J. Eerdman and A. J. Gordon). During the 1890 conference, a doctrinal statement was drawn up that included an affirmation of the premillennial return of the Lord. Although the conference movement drew representatives from several denominations, "Presbyterianism unquestionably provided more leadership and converts to the millenarian movement than any other denomination."<sup>35</sup>

Other Bible conferences sprang up on the heels of the Niagara conferences. These included the Sea Cliff conference initiated by A. C. Gaebelein, and the American Keswick movement which met for the first time in 1913, combining holiness teachings with premillennialism.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>According to Sandeen, "The founding father and controlling spirit of the conference was the Reverend James Hall Brookes (1830–97), a Presbyterian minister from Saint Louis, Missouri" (134). He had earlier advocated premillennialism through the periodical, *Waymarks in the Wilderness*, and beginning in 1875 through his own periodical, the *Truth*. The later served as the unofficial organ of the millenarian movement during the last years of the 19th century.

<sup>35</sup>Sandeen, 167.

<sup>36</sup>It was at the Sea Cliff conference of 1901 that C. I. Scofield first discussed with Gaebelein his plan to write an annotated version of the Bible.

Arising out of this Bible conference movement was the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909. C. I. Scofield (1843–1921), with seven consulting editors, produced a study Bible with notes that not only advocated premillennialism but was uncompromisingly Darbyite dispensationalism in theology.<sup>37</sup> Of great significance is the fact that this study Bible would become one of the primary means by which premillennialism would be spread during the 20th century, as thousands of laymen bought and studied the *Scofield Reference Bible*.

In addition to the *Scofield Reference Bible*, one other very significant development in the 20th century has enabled premillennialism to rise to great popularity. This would be the establishment of Bible colleges and seminaries that have advocated premillennialism. Among the more important of these would be the Moody Bible Institute, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA), Talbot Seminary, Trinity Seminary (Deerfield, IL), and Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. Perhaps the most influential school of all for the advance of premillennialism (and dispensationalism) has been Dallas Theological Seminary, established in 1924 with Lewis Sperry Chafer as the first president. The literature that has come from the faculty and graduates of this school has had an inestimable impact upon premillennialism throughout the world. This would include noted faculty such as Charles Ryrie and H. A. Ironside, radio Bible teachers such as J. Vernon McGee and Chuck Swindoll, prolific authors of prophetic materials such as John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost and Charles L. Feinberg, popular authors such as Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*), not to mention scores of graduates who have gone on to lead and staff numerous other Bible colleges and seminaries.

Since the 1980's, a modification of dispensational premillennialism has arisen called "progressive dispensationalism."<sup>38</sup> This recent development retains the expectation in the premillennial return of the Lord, but advocates that Christ's Davidic rule is going on now in the interadvent age *at least in some way* (an already/not yet view of the kingdom). There is also a tendency to not treat the Church as a parenthesis in God's program (i.e., there is some continuity between God's promises to Israel and the Church).

This modified form of dispensationalism is a welcome alternative, providing some important correctives to the weaknesses of traditional dispensationalism. For a more developed presentation of this approach, see my notes "A Progressive Dispensational Look At the Fulfilment of Israel's Old Testament Covenants and Promises" in volume two of *A Guide to Understanding the Old Testament*.

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<sup>37</sup>The consulting editors of this first edition were Henry G. Weston, James M. Gray, W. J. Eerdman, A. T. Pierson, W. G. Moorehead, Elmore Harris, and A. C. Gaebelein.

<sup>38</sup>See for example, Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1993); and Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-to-date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993). Cf. Herbert W. Bateman IV, ed., *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism; A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999).