

# Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations

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## I. A Brief History of Millennialism

Eschatology is that area of biblical doctrine that deals with the last things. The eschatological prophecies in the Bible tell us about the end of this world and the nature of the world to come.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain many such eschatological prophecies. They are God's own revelation to man of his gracious plans and eternal purposes. He would have us study them carefully, ponder them thoughtfully, believe them implicitly, and welcome their fulfillment joyfully.

The Old Testament prophets themselves set an example for us of such God-pleasing study of the Scriptures. Peter informs us that they diligently studied their own prophecies, "trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Pe 1:11).<sup>1</sup> "Even the angels," he adds, "long to look into these things" (v. 12).

Like all of God's revelation, the eschatological prophecies of the Bible have been written, "to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Ro 15:4). They are intended for our comfort and the strengthening of our faith. They provide us with an amazing wealth of information and with many truly precious promises concerning the future. These firm promises of our faithful God are the solid rock on which our hope of salvation and eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus is built.

The Bible also tells us, however, that God has reserved certain mysteries for himself. He has not revealed all of his plans to us. In his unsearchable wisdom he has set definite and distinct limits beyond which we can not and should not attempt to go in our study of eschatology. One of these mysteries is the date of Christ's second coming and the end of the world. In Matthew 24:36 Jesus says, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

According to these words even Jesus in his state of humiliation did not know when that day would come. As true God he was, of course, omniscient; but to carry out the work of our salvation he refrained from the continual exercise of his divine prerogatives, including also his omniscience. This simultaneous knowledge and non-knowledge on the part of Christ during his exinanition confronts us with a psychological mystery that is beyond our understanding. It rests in the mystery of his theanthropic person and the scriptural doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, a subject beyond the scope of our study at this time.

Again, just before his ascension into heaven Jesus sharply rebuked his disciples when they asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac 1:6). "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" was his reply (v. 7). We, too, need to be warned not to attempt to pry into the secret counsels of the hidden God, *Deus absconditus*. When questions arise that he has not answered in his Word, the only revelation that he has given us and in the area of eschatology such questions arise again and again—then we will take to heart Luther's remarks in his Genesis Commentary:

With regard to God, insofar as He has not been revealed, there is no faith, no knowledge, and no understanding. And here one must hold to the statement that what is above us is none of our concern. For thoughts of this kind, which investigate something more sublime above or outside the revelation of God are altogether devilish. With them nothing more is achieved than that we plunge ourselves into destruction; for they present an object that is inscrutable, namely, the unrevealed God. Why not rather let God keep his decisions and mysteries in secret?<sup>2</sup>

"It is our business;" Luther says elsewhere, "to pay attention to the word and leave that inscrutable will alone."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, New Testament passages are cited according to the New International Version old Testament passages according to the King James version.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther's Works* (hereafter *LW*), American Edition (St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1955-), 2:44.

<sup>3</sup> *LW* 33:140.

Despite our Lord's clear statements, a number of religious sects have been founded by people who have claimed to know what Jesus said no man knows—the date of his second coming. The Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses are but two modern examples.

Mrs. Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh Day Adventists, was an early follower of William Miller, a Baptist preacher who predicted that Christ would return in 1843. When this failed to materialize, he set the date as October 22, 1844.

Charles T. Russell, the father of the sect now known as Jehovah's Witnesses, claimed that Christ had returned to this world invisibly in 1874 and that a utopian new world would begin in 1914. That, as we know, was, however, the year in which World War I began, a war that brought untold suffering and death to millions.

Jean Dixon, a self-proclaimed prophetess and adviser to presidents, in her best seller *The Call to Glory*, predicts the return of Christ between 2020 and 2037.<sup>4</sup>

The Lutheran Church has also had its date-setters. A close friend of Luther's named Michael Stiefel fell victim to this temptation and calculated that Christ's return would take place on October 19, 1533. When his error became evident, he was dismissed from his pastorate and placed under house arrest in Wittenberg for four weeks. Luther, who strongly objected to Stiefel's prognostications, nevertheless provided for his support until he received another position as pastor in Holzendorf in 1535.<sup>5</sup>

The famed Lutheran theologian, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), author of the long popular *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, was another date-setter. He announced that the millennium referred to in Revelation 20 would begin in 1836.

Bengel's dream of a millennium, a golden age of universal peace and prosperity preceding the end of the world, is a prominent feature in the eschatology of a host of other errorists, both ancient and modern. Our subject, "Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations," will inevitably involve us in an investigation of various millennial theories. These are basically of two kinds, premillennialism and postmillennialism. Premillennialism is the view that Christ's return will precede and inaugurate the millennium. Postmillennialism is the belief that he will return at the end of the thousand years of Christian supremacy and peace.

Current misinterpretations of the Bible's eschatological prophecies are not really new. Ancient heresies are merely reappearing in modern dress. To place these errors into their proper historical perspective we shall begin our study with a brief sketch of the history of millennialism, or chiliasm, as it is also called.

The Augsburg Confession alludes to the origin of this error. In Article XVII it condemns those "who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed."<sup>6</sup>

Millennialism, as this statement suggests, has a long and hoary history. Its genesis is found in Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature that appeared in the centuries immediately preceding and following the birth of Christ.

We are all familiar with the carnal hopes that the Jews of Jesus' day attached to the advent of the Messiah. They looked for a political deliverer who would help them to throw off the hated Roman yoke and reestablish a powerful and independent Jewish state like the kingdom of David and Solomon.

We recall that after Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand, the people wanted to make him their King. But he avoided them because of their false conception of his Messianic kingship. Again and again Jesus tried to disabuse his disciples of the idea that he had come to establish an earthly kingdom. Even at the time of his ascension, however, they still entertained such thoughts. In his testimony before Pilate Jesus likewise emphasized the spiritual nature of his kingdom in the unambiguous words, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36).

<sup>4</sup> Jean Dixon, *The Call to Glory* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), p 181.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Meusel, *Kirchliches Handlexikon* (Leipzig: Justus Naumann, 1900), 6:425ff.

<sup>6</sup> The Augsburg Confession, Art. XVII, 5. *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p 51.

Chiliasm thought in Jewish apocalyptic writers is by no means uniform, but the following elements appear repeatedly:<sup>7</sup>

1. A final period of tribulation and confusion;
2. The appearance of Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah;
3. The appearance of the Messiah for the overthrow of his opponents;
4. A final attack on the Messiah and His follower by his enemies;
5. The destruction of the Messiah's adversaries through a divine intervention;
6. The restoration of Jerusalem;
7. The return of the dispersed Israelites;
8. A worldwide kingdom of glory with Jerusalem as its center;
9. The resurrection of former generations of Israelites to participate in this kingdom,
10. The renewal of the world;
11. The general resurrection;
12. The final judgment.

All of us will recognize at once, I am sure, that any of these ideas are part and parcel of Christian chiliasm.

It is often asserted that the Jews derived their millennialistic ideas from Persian Zoroastrianism. The teachings of Zoroaster, who was born about 660 B.C., spread rapidly through the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. His teachings included a belief in immortality for all good persons and the expectation of a final renovation, millenium, and resurrection. V. A. W. Mennicke states, "That the postexilic eschatological views of the Jews, where they departed from, and went beyond the Scriptures, were influenced by the prophet from the Land of the Lion and the Sun, is borne out by the extant correspondence carried on between the Jewish Rabbis and the Persian Magi during the closing centuries of the era before Christ."<sup>8</sup>

During the Babylonian Captivity the Jews were, naturally, exposed to this new pagan religion. Only a small remnant, numbering about 50,000 (Ezra 2:64,65), returned to Israel after Cyrus issued his decree in 538 B.C. permitting them to leave Babylonia. Those who chose to continue living in Mesopotamia were increasingly influenced by their pagan environment.

Whether this Zoroastrian influence was actually as strong as is supposed or not, it is a fact that chiliasm appeals to the natural heart of man. Ever since the Fall into sin, man has endeavored to create heaven for himself here on earth, has demanded honor for himself above others, and has attempted to persuade himself that the day of the Lord's wrath is far off. All these are basic elements in both Jewish and Christian millennialism.

The Jews who returned from the Babylonian Captivity had learned to avoid the Scylla of idolatry, but they were soon spiritually shipwrecked on the Charybdis of self-righteousness. This was the time when the sect of the Pharisees originated. Feeling no need for a Savior from sin, the Jews as a whole secularized the Messianic promises of the Old Testament. Prophecies which described the salvation, peace, and glory of the Messiah's spiritual kingdom in poetic imagery were misinterpreted to refer to a restoration of Israel's political power and the establishment of an ideal society. Carnal, material dreams filled the vacuum left when the nation as such renounced its spiritual heritage. By the time when Christ was born there was only a small remnant who, like aged Simeon and Anna, "were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38) in a spiritual sense.

R. H. Charles has collected and published the extant Jewish apocalypses in his definitive work, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*.<sup>9</sup> The apocalyptic writings in this collection

<sup>7</sup> Cf. D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), p 25.

<sup>8</sup> V. A. W. Mennicke, "Notes on the History of Chilism," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XIII, 3 (March, 1942), p 195. Cf. also Paul Althaus, *Die Letzten Dinge* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1964), p 297.

<sup>9</sup> R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2 Vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913).

include The Book of Jubilees, I and II Enoch, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Sibylline oracles, The Assumption of Moses, II and III Baruch, and IV Ezra (also known as II Esdras).

A few samples will serve to illustrate the expectations these writers associated with the Messianic kingdom. The following selection is from I Enoch:

Then shall the whole earth be tilled in righteousness and shall be planted with trees and be full of blessing. And all desirable trees shall be planted on it, and they shall plant vines on it: and the vine which they plant thereon shall yield wine in abundance, and as for all the seed which is sown thereon each measure (of it) shall bear a thousand, and each measure of olives shall yield ten presses of oil... And all the children of men shall become righteous, and all nations shall offer adoration and shall praise Me, and all shall worship Me. And the earth shall be cleansed from all defilement and from all sin, and from all punishment and from all torment.... And truth and peace shall be associated together throughout all the days of the world and throughout all generation of men.<sup>10</sup>

In those days also according to Enoch, the righteous “shall live till they beget thousands of children, and all the days of their youth and their old age shall they complete in peace” (10:17). He foretells a final but futile assault of the Gentiles on the Jews, the return of the dispersed Jews to the Promised Land, the establishment of the New Jerusalem on the site of the old city, the conversion the surviving Gentiles to the faith of Israel, and the resurrection of the righteous dead of Israel to take part in the Messianic kingdom (90:13-42).

The Sibylline oracles are a collection of prophecies by Jewish and Christian authors dating from about 160 B.C., to the fifth century A.D., or even later. The name of the ancient pagan oracles, the sibyls, was attached to them in order to give them greater credibility and authority.

The eschatology of the Sibylline oracles is similar to that of Enoch. The nations will assemble and attack Palestine, but God will miraculously protect Israel and destroy its enemies. The surviving Gentiles will be converted and unite with Israel in praising God. The Messianic age will bring universal peace and prosperity as God establishes his kingdom over all mankind with Jerusalem as its capital.

Like Enoch, Baruch pictures the earth’s productivity in the Messianic world in extravagant colors:

The earth shall yield its fruit ten thousandfold and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each ranch shall produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster produce a thousand grapes, and each grape produce a cor [about 120 gallons] of wine. And those who have hungered shall rejoice; moreover, they shall behold marvels every day.... And it shall come to pass at the self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they shall eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time. And it shall come to pass after these things, when the time of the advent of the Messiah is fulfilled, that he shall return in glory.<sup>11</sup>

It is not surprising that these “Jewish opinions,” as the Augsburg Confession called them, also took root here and there in the soil of the early Christian church. Millennialists often claim that from the time of the apostles to Augustine (354-430) the church was predominantly millennial. R. Ludwigson, for example, in his book *A Survey of Bible Prophecy* asserts, “Up to this point in history premillennialism was the prevailing opinion of the church.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I Enoch 10:18 - 11:2. Charles, Vol. II, p 195.

<sup>11</sup> II Baruch 29:5 -30:1. Charles, Vol. II, p 497f.

<sup>12</sup> R. Ludwigson, *A Survey of Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) p. 129.

There is no question that the error of millennialism was present in the post-apostolic church, but the claim that it was “the prevailing opinion of the church” is simply not in accord with the facts. The early church had in general a lively expectation that the Lord’s return was imminent. This expectation does not mean, however, that these early Christians were millennialists. George Murray in his *Millennial Studies* cites Neander, the church historian, who, while holding that premillennialism was quite prevalent in the post-apostolic period, adds that his remarks are “not to be understood as if chiliasm had ever formed a part of the general creed of the church.”<sup>13</sup> D. H. Kromminga of Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, a moderate premillennialist, also admits, “chiliasm never found creedal expression or approbation the ancient church.”<sup>14</sup>

A careful reading of the Apostolic Fathers—the writings of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Papias, Ignatius, Barnabas, and the anonymous Shepherd of Hermas and the Didache—reveals that the church of that period was not predominantly chiliastic. This is recognized also by such students of church history as Dr. Albertus Pieters of Western Seminary, Holland, Michigan, who studied these documents with the express purpose of determining whether the premillenarian claim that the early church was almost entirely premillennial was valid. He published the results of his studies in the August and September 1958, issues of the *Calvin Forum*. His conclusion is:

So far as the available evidence goes, there is no ground for the assertion that millennialism was prevalent in the church during the sub-apostolic period, ending with the year A.D. 150. Not only was there very little of it, so far as the literature indicates, but what little there was can be traced definitely to non-Christian Jewish apocalyptic sources.<sup>15</sup>

Kromminga, who also studied the writings of this period from this point of view, despite his own premillennialism finds even less evidence of chiliasm in them than does Dr. Pieters, an amillennialist.<sup>16</sup>

Examining the literature of this period, we find that Clement mentions the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, and the judgment, but says nothing about a restored Jewish kingdom with Christ as its King. The same is true of Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John. The Didache has much to say about the last days. It predicts the rise of a world deceiver who will claim to be the Son of God and will be guilty of unsurpassed wickedness. It has suggestions of two resurrections, but makes no mention of a thousand-year interval between them. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, who was martyred in 107, has no hint of chiliasm in any of his extant epistles.

The Epistle of Barnabas shows his acquaintance with premillennial beliefs, but not agreement with them. Barnabas pattern’s his eschatology on the creation week. Letting each day represent a thousand years, he expects the world to come to an end when it is 6000 years old. Then Christ will come again and usher in a new age, the new heaven and new earth of which the Bible speaks. Even Kromminga concedes that Barnabas was not a chiliast.

Crass chiliasm does appear, however, in the writings of Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia (70-155). Papias says that the elders who saw John remembered hearing from him that the Lord taught:

The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretes of wine.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> George Murray, *Millennial Studies* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1948), p 193, quoting Neander, Church History, Vol. 1, p 651.

<sup>14</sup> Kromminga, p 51.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Kromminga, p 41.

<sup>16</sup> Kromminga, p 41f.

<sup>17</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. [Reprint: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973], Vol. I, p 153.

This passage, it will be noted is strikingly similar to the selection quoted above from II Baruch, a pre-Christian, Jewish apocalypse. The only difference is that where Baruch says a thousand, Papias says ten thousand. As Murray states, “This is sufficient to prove to anyone who will accept proofs that the outstanding premillenarian of the early church actually borrowed his theories from Jewish fables.”<sup>18</sup>

Eusebius (280-339) describes Papias’ beliefs as “rather too fabulous,” including his teaching that “there would be a certain millennium after the resurrection, and that there would be a corporal reign of Christ on this very earth.” These things, Eusebius says, Papias “seems to have imagined, as if they were authorized by apostolic narrations.”<sup>19</sup>

Another exponent of millennialism in the early church was the Greek Apologist, Justin Martyr (100-165). In his *Dialogue with Trypho, A Jew* one finds this exchange: Trypho asks, “Do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes, who joined them before your Christ came?” Justin replies, “I and many others are of this opinion and believe that such will take place;...but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians think otherwise....But I and others, who are rightminded 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’ Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.”<sup>20</sup> It is to be noted that Justin admits that many Christians do not agree with his millennialism.

Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons (120-202), is yet another ante-Nicene father who was a millennialist. In his book *Against Heresies* he speaks of “The time of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food.”<sup>21</sup> He interprets Isaiah 11:6, which speaks of the wolf feeding with the lamb and the leopard lying down with the kid, literally, though he is aware that some interpret this of the fellowship of believers. But he insists that this and similar passages from Isaiah “were unquestionably spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule; in [the times of] which [resurrection] the righteous shall reign on earth.”<sup>22</sup> These prophecies, he says, can not refer to eternal life in heaven, but rather to the time when the earth has been restored and Jerusalem rebuilt.

Millennialism was the outstanding feature of the Montanist movement, which arose in the second century after Christ. A Phrygian enthusiast named Montanus and two prophetesses associated with him, Prisca and Maximilla, announced that the return of Christ was imminent. The New Jerusalem, they said, would soon descend on the Phrygian village of Pepuza and the golden age of Christ’s kingdom would then begin. The Montanist movement attracted thousands of adherents, including the famous lay theologian Tertullian.

Surprisingly enough, Origen (180-254), though he was the father of many a heresy, rejected chiliasm.<sup>23</sup> He is sharply criticized by chiliasts as being “perhaps the first to allegorize the passages on which the teaching of the millennium was based.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is alleged, the door was opened for a spiritual millennium and the school of amillennialism.

Lactantius (260-330) is the last great literary representative of ancient Christian chiliasm. He wrote his *Divine Institutes* for Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman emperor. His chiliasm is evident in the following quotation:

<sup>18</sup> Murray, p 197.

<sup>19</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, translated by Christian Frederick Cruse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955). III, 39: 11-14.

<sup>20</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p 153.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p 562.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p 565.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1909) IV, 283.

<sup>24</sup> Ludwigson, p 128.

Since all the works of God were completed in six days, the world must continue in its present state through six-ages, that is, six thousand years. For the great day of God is limited by a circle of a thousand years, as the prophet shows, who says: "In Thy sight, O Lord, a thousand years are as one day." And as God labored during those six days in creating such great works, so his religion and truth must labor during these six thousand years, while wickedness prevails and bears rule. And again, since God having finished his works, rested on the seventh day and blessed it, at the end of the six thousandth year all wickedness must be abolished from the earth and righteousness reign for a thousand years; and there must be tranquility and rest from the labors which the world now has long endured.<sup>25</sup>

Both Jerome (331-420) and Augustine (354-430) vigorously opposed chiliasm. Jerome says that if one takes the Revelation of St. John literally, one will inevitably fall into the error of judaizing. The text, he maintains, is symbolical and must be interpreted accordingly.<sup>26</sup>

Augustine originally held chiliastic views but later retracted them. In *The City of God* he mentions the chiliasts or millenarians by name<sup>27</sup> and refutes their opinions by making a detailed study of Revelation 20. He interprets the millennium symbolically and finds its fulfillment in the church. The millennial reign of the saints, he says, is spiritual and occupies the time between the first coming of Christ and the end of the world. This interval "goes by the name of a thousand years."<sup>28</sup>

Augustine's views dominated the Middle Ages, though chiliasm reared its head occasionally, as in the teachings of Joachim of Floris (died ca. 1202), Hildegard of St. Rupert's on the Rhine (1098-1178), Amalrich of Bena, who was a professor of philosophy at Paris (died 1204), and others.

Luther branded the doctrine of a millennium as heresy. "This false notion," he said in a sermon on Matthew 24 preached in 1539, "is lodged not only in the apostles (Ac 1:6), but also in the chiliasts, Valentinians, and Tertullians, who have played the fool with the idea that before Judgment Day the Christians alone will possess the earth and that there will be no ungodly."<sup>29</sup>

Calvin, too, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* writes that the doctrine of the millenarians is a "fiction too puerile to require or deserve refutation."<sup>30</sup>

But Carlstadt, Zwingli, and the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, including the Zwickau prophets, Thomas Muenzer, Nicholas Storch, and Marcus Stuebner, together with their adherents, Martin Cellarius and Thomas Marx, were thoroughgoing chiliasts.<sup>31</sup> In 1534 the Anabaptists seized control of Muenster in Westphalia, set up a so-called new kingdom of Zion, and advocated the sharing of property and women as a prelude to the millennium. Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession, as was mentioned earlier, expressly rejects chiliasm. It also condemns the related Anabaptist error "that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils."<sup>32</sup>

The Mennonites, who were Anabaptists, naturally espoused millennialism, as did the English Congregationalists.<sup>33</sup> Among later chiliastic Lutherans, the name of Philip Spener (1635-1705), the father of pietism, must be mentioned. Bengel was referred to previously.

<sup>25</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VII, p 211.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the quotation from Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah in *Lehre und Wehre* Vol. XVIII, 4 (April, 1872), p 107f.

<sup>27</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Reprint: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), Vol. II, p 426.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p 428.

<sup>29</sup> Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), Vol. I, p 284. Cf. *Dr. Martin Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften* (St. Louis; Concordia, 1891) 30 Vol. VII, 1289f.

<sup>30</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Allen, tr. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), Vol. II, 250f.

<sup>31</sup> Mennicke, op. cit., p 204.

<sup>32</sup> Augsburg Confession, Art. XVII, 4, *Trig.*, p 51.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. the Congregationalists' 1658 revision of the Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, 5 in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1896-1899), Vol. III, 723.



In the Reformed camp Cocceius (1604-1669), professor at Franeker and Leyden and author of the first tolerably complete Hebrew dictionary, embraced millennialism and was followed in this by his students Lampe and Vitringa, the latter being the author of a scholarly commentary on Isaiah.

The theology of the nineteenth century Lutherans Martensen, von Hofmann, Frank, Kliefoth, Rinck, Luthardt, Rothe, Auberlen, and Delitzsch was vitiated by chiliasm. The chiliasm of Delitzsch must be borne in mind by those who use his commentaries on the Old Testament.

Loeche of Neuendettelsau, who was instrumental in founding the Iowa Synod, was likewise a chiliast. Because the Iowa Synod was one of the bodies participating in the formation of the American Lutheran Church in 1930, chiliasm was always tolerated in the ALC. Its successor, TALC, has not given evidence of any change of position. These bodies have consistently maintained as Loeche did, that chiliasm is an open question and differing views on it are not divisive of church fellowship.

The chiliasm of Dr. Michael Reu, the foremost theologian of the former Iowa synod, is evident in the following statements taken from his *Lutheran Dogmatics*:

Antichrist will be vanquished by Christ who will also cause the first resurrection... This (first) resurrection will not be universal... The overthrow of Antichrist and the first resurrection are followed by the preliminary consummation of the kingdom of God, the millennial reign of the saints with Christ... It would appear that the state introduced by Christ's overthrow of Antichrist embraces two phases: one occurs in heaven, the other simultaneously on earth... The millennium is followed by the final crisis, through which the church passes to actual perfection.<sup>34</sup>

Reu also taught "that Israel as a nation—though not all Jews—would be restored to its place as the people of God."<sup>35</sup>

The Lutheran Church in America and its antecedents have throughout their history been a harbor for chiliasm, including the belief in two resurrections.

Chiliasm combined with dispensationalism has been popularized by the widely used *Scofield Reference Bible*. This Bible contains the King James Version together with a system of chain references and footnotes that set forth the doctrines of John Darby (1800-1882), an Englishman who was one of the early leaders of the Plymouth Brethren. Darby's eschatology was accepted by Charles Scofield. Scofield was an American lawyer who was born in 1843 and was converted to Christianity at the age of 36. Three years later, though he had no formal theological training, he was ordained by a Congregational Council. In 1909 with the assistance of an editorial board which included James M. Gray, president of the Moody Bible Institute, he published his *Scofield Reference Bible*. Since then more than three million copies have been distributed. A revised edition is now on the market.

Scofield finds seven dispensations in the Bible. He defines a dispensation as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God."<sup>36</sup> The seven dispensations are:

1. Innocency (Ge 1:28-2:13): the age that ended with Adam's Fall;
2. Conscience (Ge 3:23): the age during which God governed man solely by his conscience and the little revelation he had taken from Paradise, an age that ended with the Flood;
3. Human Government (Ge 8:20): the age in which government was established by the introduction of capital punishment, an age that ended with the destruction of Sodom;

<sup>34</sup> M. Reu, *Lutheran Dogmatics* (Dubuque: Wartburg Seminary, 1941-1942), Vol.II, p 240-245.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p 231.

<sup>36</sup> *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1917 edition), p 5.

4. Promise (Ge 12:1): the age in which God gave Abraham and his descendants the promise of every blessing, an age which ended when “Israel rashly accepted the law”;
5. Law (Ex 19:8): the age that extends from Sinai to Calvary, from the Exodus to the cross, when Israel was tested by the law;
6. Grace (Jn 1:17): the age that begins with the death and resurrection of Christ during which the acceptance or rejection of Christ is the point of testing, an age that ends in judgment on an unbelieving world and an apostate church;
7. Kingdom (Eph 1:10): the age which begins when Christ returns to restore the Davidic monarchy in his own person, regather dispersed Israel, establish his power over all the earth, and reign one thousand years, an age which ends with the beginning of the eternal “kingdom of God.”

In addition, Scofield lists eight covenants, namely:

1. The Edenic (Ge 1:28);
2. The Adamic (Ge 3:15);
3. The Noachic (Ge 9:1);
4. The Abrahamic (Ge 15:18);
5. The Mosaic (Ex 19:25);
6. The Palestinian (Dt 30:3);
7. The Davidic (2 Sa 7:16);
8. The New (Heb 8:8).

In discussing current misinterpretations of the Bible’s eschatological prophecies we are compelled to take note of Scofield’s eschatology because his edition of the Bible has been such an important factor in the widespread acceptance of chiliastic errors in modern times. His views on the return of Christ may be summarized as follows: After a great tribulation lasting three and a half years the day of the Lord will begin with Christ’s descent in glory. At that time the Gentile world powers will be besieging Jerusalem. Christ will deliver the Jewish remnant, and the Gentile armies will fall back to Armageddon (Megiddo), where they will be destroyed. The sleeping saints will then be raised and the living ones changed. They will share in Christ’s reign on earth for a thousand years. At Christ’s coming the prophecies concerning Israel’s regathering, conversion, and establishment under the Davidic covenant will also be fulfilled. For the Gentiles the return of Christ will mean the destruction of the present political system, the judgment of Matthew 25, followed by a world-wide Gentile conversion and participation in the blessings of the kingdom. The kingdom age constitutes the seventh dispensation. At the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed for a time, the second resurrection (that of the wicked) will take place, and the final judgment involving Satan, the fallen angels, and wicked men will be held. This is not the judgment of Matthew 25 but a second judgment supposedly referred to in Revelation 20: 11-15. This final judgment will be followed by a “day of God,” on which the earth will be purged by fire.<sup>37</sup>

Scofield’s eschatology obviously perpetuates the “Jewish opinions” previously traced back to the pre-Christian era. Scofield’s doctrines of redemption and of justification, which he defines as “the judicial act of God whereby he justly declares righteous one who believes in Jesus,”<sup>38</sup> are vitiated by the error of universalism. In addition, he fails to recognize the function of the Gospel in word and sacrament as a means of grace and is guilty of other errors too numerous to mention.

The clear presentation of the material in the notes and comments of the Scofield Bible has certainly contributed to its appeal. But it is just because its explanations sound so convincing and are presented in such an

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *The Scofield Reference Bible*, pp 1148, 1226f, 1250, 1337,1348f.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p 1195.

authoritative way that the Scofield Bible is so insidiously dangerous. Philip Mauro, a former disciple of Scofield's dispensationalism who later disavowed it, has correctly diagnosed it as "a humanly contrived system that has been *imposed upon* the Bible, and not a scheme of doctrine *derived from* it."<sup>39</sup>

We can not conclude this sketch of the history of millennialism without a brief reference to the chiliastic doctrine of Mormonism, a thoroughly heathen religion with a veneer of Christianity. The official name of this antichristian cult, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, has a strongly chiliastic connotation.

In the short outline of Mormon doctrine which Joseph Smith published in 1842, two years before his death, the gathering together of Israel and the restoration of the Ten Tribes, the building of Zion somewhere on the American continent, the personal rule of Christ on earth, and the renewal of the earth to the glory of paradise are taught. These doctrines are to be understood, of course, in the light of the specific Mormon belief in the physical nature of God and the future advance of the saints to the rank of gods. It is a sad fact that many, naive Christians have sampled the heady wine of error peddled by Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses until their spiritual senses were too numb to enable them to see that they were on the road to eternal destruction.

It is also a sad fact, and in itself one of the signs of the end, that the pernicious error of millennialism has made deep inroads into the visible Christian church, especially into the Fundamentalist groups, whether of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Pentecostal affiliation.

As we turn now in subsequent lectures to a study of the Bible's eschatological prophecies themselves, we shall "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 Jn 4:1). We shall focus the light of Holy Scripture on chiliasm and other eschatological errors. That these are in fact dangerous and devilish errors will, we believe, become abundantly clear as our study progresses. It will then also become still more evident that current misinterpretations merely revive errors that have repeatedly risen to trouble the church through the ages.

## II. A Brief Survey of the Bible's Eschatological Prophecies

Our purpose in this lecture is to present a brief sketch of the biblical doctrine of eschatology. If we are to judge chiliasm and other eschatological teachings in the light of God's holy Word, it is vital that we bear in mind some of the basic truths revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures concerning the last things. In the light of these truths we shall then in subsequent lectures study in more detail several frequently misinterpreted prophecies such as Revelation 20, II Thessalonians 2, Romans 11, and others on which millennialists and other false teachers claim their doctrines are based.

On the Tuesday before his death Jesus paid his last visit to the temple in Jerusalem. As he left the city and climbed the Mount of Olives overlooking it, his disciples called his attention to the beauty of the temple. Herod the Great had begun the work of restoring it more than 40 years earlier. Though not yet completed, it was an impressive sight.

His disciples' pride in this imposing edifice prompted Jesus to tell them about the awesome judgment of God which would shortly destroy this temple and the entire city. Not one stone would be left lying on another. The disciples then asked, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Mt 24:3). In reply, Jesus delivered his so-called Olivet discourse, in which he described the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and his return for the final judgment. In the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of the Gospel of St. Matthew, the thirteenth chapter of St. Mark, and the twenty-first chapter of St. Luke we have then the eschatological prophecies of our Lord Himself. These chapters constitute, therefore, some of the principal *sedes* for our doctrine of eschatology.

The question of the disciples, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" links the destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the world. In his reply Jesus also speaks of both of these events. In fact, these two catastrophes are so closely interwoven in Jesus' account that, like two strands that are spun together to form a single thread they can not always be clearly distinguished.

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<sup>39</sup> Philip Mauro, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Swengel, Pa.: Reiner, 1966), p 21.

There are two reasons for this. The one lies in a characteristic feature of biblical prophecy. Prophecies often speak of related events without putting them into the perspective of time. They do not indicate that the events that are foretold will be separated by hundreds or thousands of years. Reading them is therefore like looking from a distance at two mountain peaks without seeing the valley that lies between them.

For example, when the Psalmist calls on the heavens and the earth to rejoice before the Lord, “for he cometh to judge the earth” (Ps 96:13; 98:9), his words apply to both Christ’s first and second coming (in 12:31; 5: 27,30). Or again, when John the Baptist compares his work with the work of Christ, he tells the Jews, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Mt 3:11, 12). In one breath John refers to Jesus’ outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost and the culmination of his Messianic work in the final judgment.

The second reason for the problem we have in trying to determine whether some of Jesus’ statements refer only to the destruction of Jerusalem or only to the end of the world or to both of these events lies in the fact that what happened in the destruction of Jerusalem served not only as a prelude to the end of the world, but also as a type foreshadowing the events of the last days. So, for example, unparalleled calamities and indescribable suffering characterize the time of both of these occurrences.

That we have difficulty in fully understanding the prophecies in the Bible that have not yet been fulfilled does not mean, of course, that God’s Word is unclear. The problem lies not in God’s Word, but in us. It lies in our limited ability to comprehend these deep mysteries of God. We are like an old woman with cataracts on her eyes that can barely make out the form of her grandchildren, even though they are standing in the bright noonday sun. The Apostle Paul says we are like children. Our understanding is limited. Now we know only in part, but the time will come when we will know fully, even as we are fully known (1 Co 13:12).

The destruction of Jerusalem, as was mentioned, prefigured the end of the world and signaled the beginning of that end. When Jesus approached the city on Sunday of the Passion Week, he wept over it and said, “The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (Lk 19: 41-44). Two days later he again warned his disciples, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near” (Lk 21:20).

Josephus has detailed the horrors of this prophecy’s fulfillment. When the Jews rebelled against the tyranny of Rome, the Roman legions under Titus moved swiftly to crush the revolt. In the year 70 they laid siege to Jerusalem. The city’s population was swollen with refugees who poured in from the countryside. A plague broke out, and thousands died. Hundreds tried to escape, but the ever alert Roman legionaries caught and crucified as many as five hundred a day. Hunger stalked the streets of the doomed city, and mothers cannibalized their own children.

Finally, Titus captured the castle of Antonia. A torch was put to the temple, and the hill on which it stood was soon carpeted with corpses. A river of blood flowed down its slopes. Over a million Jews either died of starvation or disease or were killed. A hundred thousand were carried away as prisoners of war. The Roman soldiers planted their eagles on the smoldering ruins, offered sacrifices to their gods, and proclaimed Titus *Imperator*. Such was the horrible fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation in the holy place (Da 9:27; 12: 11) to which Jesus alluded in Matthew 24:15 (cf. Lk 21:20), and such was the appalling way in which Jesus’ words concerning the people were carried out, “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations” (Lk 21:24). To this day the Jews are scattered among all nations.

Throughout the New Testament period a variety of signs mentioned by Jesus will serve as warnings that the end of all things is imminent. These signs fall into three categories: signs in the realm of nature, in human society, and in the church.

In the realm of nature, according to Jesus, prophecy, “there will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven” (Lk 21:11; cf. Mt 24:7; Mk 13:8).

He also says, “There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (Lk 21:25-27; cf. also Mt. 24:29; Mk. 13:24).

Earthquakes, droughts, famines, epidemics of disease, eclipses of the sun and moon, meteor showers, comets, sunspots, northern and southern lights, hurricanes, monsoons, typhoons, tidal waves, tornadoes, and floods—all these signs are taking place all the time, and they have been taking place through the centuries. Each and every such event ought to remind us that this world rushing headlong toward its final hour.

In addition, Jesus mentions signs in human society that will point to the end. There will be wars and rumors of wars, revolutions, rebellions, and riots (Mt 24:6,7; Mk 13:7,8; Lk 21:9,10). The last days will be times of adversity, suffering, anxiety, and fear (Mt 24:21; Lk 21:26). Law and order will break down. The very foundations of the social order will collapse as men wantonly flout the moral law inscribed in their hearts. Unbridled selfishness will snuff out the natural love that binds families, relatives, and friends together.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul adds these details in second Letter to Timothy: “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Ti 3:1-4). Some will cloak their wickedness with a mask of piety, “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Ti 3:5).

The ante-diluvian patriarch Enoch, as Jude informs us, prophesied that rampant ungodliness would characterize the last days and warned, “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly acts they have done in their ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (vss 14, 15). Ungodliness—a form of the word is mentioned four times in this passage—is the distinctive mark of the last times.

According to Jesus’ prophecy, false Christs and false prophets will deceive many (Mt 24:4,5,11). Paul warns that “savage wolves” will come who “Will not spare the flock” (Ac 20:29). Some of these pseudo-prophets will perform astonishing signs and miracles so that even the elect will be in danger of being deceived. But God in his grace will preserve them from falling and for their sake will shorten those last evil days.

We are reminded of the millions who have been duped by such self appointed prophets as Mohammed, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, Mary Baker Eddy, Charles Russell and Joseph F. Rutherford, Baha’u’llah, and the popular gurus and swamis of today, like Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who promise peace of mind and union with God through transcendental meditation. Some of these charlatans capitalize on the name of Christ in order to gain a following. Think of the so-called Christian Scientists, who are neither Christians nor scientists, and the church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, which is neither Christ’s church nor are its members his saints. Many, like Jehovah’s Witnesses, claim to base their teachings on the Bible, though they are rank heathen.

Despite the clear warning of these many signs, the vast majority of people will close their eyes and stop their ears. As it was in the days of Noah and as it was in the days of Lot, so it will be when the world comes to an end. People will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building, buying and selling, until all these activities are brought to a crashing halt by the trumpet blast that signals the end.

It may strike us that all these activities are a normal part of life and not wrong in and of themselves. But the point Jesus is making is that these human affairs are people’s sole concern. They live for the here and now with no thought for the life to come. They heap ridicule on those who expect the world to come to an end. “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?” they scoff. “Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Pe 3:4; cf. Jude 18). What a shock it will be for them when the Son of Man unexpectedly appears in the clouds of heaven (Lk 17:26-30; Mt 24:37-39)!

To the warning signs in the realm of nature and in human society Jesus adds significant signs within the visible church itself. Within the church, too, false teachers will appear. “Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them,” Paul warned the elders of Ephesus (Ac 20:30). From Scripture we know that many such errorists appeared already in the days of the apostles. John

writes, “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour” (1 Jn 2:18).

John makes a distinction here between the many antichrists and one archantichrist. Back in the sixth century before Christ, Daniel had foretold the coming of this rival *sans pareil* of Christ (Da 9:26,27; 11:36,37). It is Paul, however, who gives us the most complete description of this man of sin, doomed to destruction, who sets himself up in God’s temple and proclaims himself to be God (2 Th 2:2-11). It is Paul also who warns Timothy that “in the latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” “Such teaching,” he says, “will come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods” (1 Ti 4:1-3).

Persecutions which will sweep over the church constitute yet another sign of the end. Jesus warns his disciples, “They will lay hands on you and persecute you.... You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me” (Lk 21:12,16,17).

The machinations of the Antichrist, the seductiveness of the world, and the fires of persecution will result in widespread apostasy. “Many,” Jesus prophesies, “will turn from the faith” (Mt 24:10). “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Mt 24:12). Sadly Jesus asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18:8).

From this description of the dreadful days preceding the end of the world it is clear that the millennialists’ notion that the church will experience unprecedented growth and power in a golden age before the end of the world is an empty dream. But Jesus does say, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14). This sign is often misunderstood. People think that the end is still a long way off because there are still many who have not heard the Gospel. They overlook the fact that, according to the Bible, the Gospel was carried to the ends of the earth already in the days of the apostles (Ro 10:18). Paul tells the Colossians that it “has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (Col 1:23).

“Keep watch! Be ready!” (2 Tim 4:15) This is the repeated admonition of Jesus (Mt 24:42,44; 25:13). “Be on your guard! Be alert!” is a continuing refrain in the New Testament (Ac 20:31; 1 Co 16:13; Col 4:2; 1 Th 5:6; 1 Pe 4:7; Rev 3:2). Paul and the other apostles speak of Christ’s return as a very real possibility within their own lifetime. Significantly, Paul uses the present tense when he tells the Thessalonians, “We who *are still alive* and *are left* will be caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Th 4:17). “The time is short,” he says to the Corinthians (1 Co 7:29). “The Lord’s coming is near,” James declares (Jas 5:8). “It is the last hour,” John warns (1 Jn 2:18) “The end of all things is near,” Peter writes (1 Pe 4:7). “In just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come,’” the writer to the Hebrews predicts (Heb 10:37). If this was true in the days of the apostles, how much more true is it not in our day (cf. Ro 13:11)!

Repeatedly Scripture warns that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (Mt 24:43,41f; Lk 12:39,40; 1 Th 5:2,4; 2 Pe 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15). The thought that this or that sign has not yet been fulfilled and that therefore that day is still some time off can lead only to a false security. It sets aside the Savior’s clear statement, “You do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Mt 24:42). If He were to come at the end of a thousand years of universal peace, as the postmillennialists claim, the date of his second coming could easily be calculated. Or if he were to return and establish his millennial kingdom here on earth, as the premillennialists believe, the end of the world could be expected a thousand years after the day on which the millennium began.

No, the Son of Man will come at an hour when he is not expected (Mt 24:44). He has not yet come because he is patient, “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pe 3:9). When, however, the last of his elect has heard the Gospel and has come to faith, “the sign of the Son of Man [the manifestation of his glory so that all will immediately recognize him] will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Mt 24:30). “Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him” (Rev 1:7).

He will not therefore come secretly, as William Miller asserted when Christ did not appear visibly on the day Miller had predicted. A secret return is taught also by premillennialists, who expect believers to disappear from the earth in a secret rapture to meet Christ in the upper atmosphere.

No, Scripture clearly teaches that his return will be visible to all. As the disciples watched him ascend into the clouds from the Mount of Olives, so all will see him as he returns (Ac 1:11). To Caiaphas and the Jewish Sanhedrin Jesus testified, “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty one and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64). The clouds, which are often mentioned in Scripture as a visible manifestation of God’s presence (Ex 13:21; 19:16, 34:5; 40:34; 1 Ki 8:10; Ps 97:2; Eze 1:4; Da 7:13 etc.) will constitute his majestic chariot (cf. Isa 19:1).

Christ’s appearance in his heavenly glory and majesty will strike terror into the hearts of all that did not believe in him. In panic the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man who rejected him as Savior and Lord will call to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev 6:17). God’s judgment hour will have struck. The day of grace will have passed.

Contrary to the expectation of some chiliasts, there will only be one return of Christ, not one to inaugurate the millennium and another to judge the world. Hebrews 9:28 knows of only two advents: “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a *second* time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

At his second advent, according to Paul, “He will come down from heaven with a loud command with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God” (1 Th 4:16). Jesus himself tells us that “all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out” (Jn 5:28,29). When the archangel sounds God’s final trumpet, all the billions upon billions of people who once lived and died will return to life. The futility of the efforts of those who hoped to prevent God from restoring them to life by having their bodies cremated and their ashes scattered by the winds or the waves will then be apparent. In terror they will come out of their graves to meet their Judge. The angels will gather Christ’s elect, however, “from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Mt 24:31).

When Paul writes to the Thessalonians that “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Th 4:16), he is not teaching a double resurrection, as chiliasts assume. The adverb “first” (πρῶτον) is to be connected closely with “then” (επειτα). First the believers who have died will rise; after that the believers who are living at Christ’s return will be caught up together with the saints who have risen from the dead to meet their returning Lord in the air.

That both, believers and unbelievers, will rise at the same time is unmistakably clear from the Lord’s own word that “all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (Jn 5:28,29). This clear statement leaves no room for the theory of a double resurrection with a millennium separating the first from the second. The same is true of Paul’s testimony before Felix, “There will be a resurrection [singular!] of both the righteous and the wicked” (Ac 24:15).

Daniel’s prophecy in the Old Testament similarly, speaks of but a single resurrection: “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Da 12:2). The expression “many” here, incidentally, does not deny the fact that all will rise. It emphasizes, rather, that those rising will be not a small but a vast number. The Hebrew *min* used here is not partitive, but explanatory. The proper translation is therefore, “Many, *namely*, those who sleep in the ground of the earth, shall awake.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> cf. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p 221f.

Ezekiel's vision of the dead bones (Eze 37:1-14) presents a vivid picture of how God will raise the dead on the last day and applies this to Israel. He who can perform the stupendous miracle of giving life to dry bones can also give new life to his dispersed people and restore them to their homeland.

God assures us in His Word that the body that will be raised from the grave will be the very same one we had in this life. In Job's glorious confession he gives the eloquent testimony, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me (Job 19:25-27). The critical phrase in this passage is "in my flesh" (yr #ḏḡ). This *min* is not privative but local. It does not mean "without my flesh" (NASB), but "from out of my flesh." This, as Alexander Heidel points out, "is supported by the emphatic expression of the pronoun 'I,' the phrase 'mine own eyes' and the addition 'and that not as another'" in verse 27.<sup>41</sup>

The identity of the resurrection body with the buried body is apparent also from the account of Jesus' appearance to his disciples after his resurrection from the grave. "Look at my hands and feet," He urged them. "It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Lk 24:39). His hands and feet still showed the print of the nails and his side the mark of the spear (Lk 24:40; in 20:20; 21:27). His risen body was the same one that had been laid into the grave, though it was glorified.

When our bodies come out of the graves on the last day, they will also be the same ones we have now, except that they will be glorified. Our mighty Savior "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Php 3:21). Those believers who are alive at Christ's coming will likewise be changed "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Co 15:52). These new "spiritual bodies," as Paul calls them (1 Co 15:44), will be adapted to the new manner of life in the new heaven and new earth which God will create (Isa 65:17). All the effects of sin will be erased. All weakness, imperfections and mortality will be laid aside. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat on them nor any scorching heat" (Rev 7:16). God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4).

The bodies of the damned, on the other hand, according to Isaiah, will be "an abhorring to all flesh" (Isa 66:24). Every form of suffering, pain, disease, and decay will afflict them. "Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched" (Isa 66:24). The worm of decay will perpetually gnaw at them. Never through all eternity will there be any relief from or any end to the suffering of those who have transgressed against God. Theirs will be only "shame and everlasting contempt" (Da 12:2).

At Christ's Parousia this present world will be destroyed. "Heaven and earth," Jesus says, "will pass away" (Mt 24:35). He quotes the Prophet Isaiah (Isa 13:10; 34:4), who declares, "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Mt 24:29). The forces of nature such as gravitation and inertia that keep the sun and moon, the planets and stars in their appointed places in the heavens will be suspended. As a result, the whole universe will collapse in a cosmic cataclysm that staggers the imagination.

In his Second Letter, Peter describes the awesome events of that last day in these words: "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat" (2 Pe 3:10,12). Our entire solar system, the huge galaxy of which it is a part, and the countless galaxies extending through the vast reaches of space with their billions upon billions of stars—all will be swept away with a thunderous roar. Space and time will be abolished (1 Co 15:44-50; Rev 10:6).

To take the place of the old world God will create "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Pe 2:13).

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p 216. Cf. also Rudolph Honsey, "Exegetical Paper on Job 19:23-27," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No.3 (July, 1970), p 184ff.



The question has been asked whether the substance itself of the present heaven and earth will be annihilated, or whether it will be transformed. Will matter revert to nothingness, the condition that existed prior to the beginning, or will it undergo a transformation? Our Lutheran forefathers have debated this question back and forth over the years.

Looking at the passages which speak of the destruction of the present world, we note that Jesus in Matthew 24:35 says it “will pass away” (parel qwsin). Peter uses this same verb (parel euhsontai) in 2 Peter 3:10, adding that “the elements will be destroyed by fire” (stouxeia dekausoumena l uqhsetai). The universe will be broken up into its component parts. It will come apart. Its basic elements will disintegrate. Textual problems are involved in the last clause of this verse. If euqhsetai, the reading in the Nestle and UBS text, is correct—and it is the most difficult reading—the sense must be something like the NIV translation, “The earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” In verse 12 Peter again states that the heavens “will be destroyed” (l uqhsontai) and explains that the basic elements “will melt” (thketai). Two participles, puroumenoi and kausoumena, indicate that fire will be the means used by God to effect this destruction.

Hebrews 1:10-12, quoting Psalm 102:26-28, states that the heavens “will perish” (apolutai), that they “will wear out like a garment” (wv iation pal aiwqhsontai), and that they “will be changed” (alaghontai). John says that “the world and its desires pass away” (paragetai, in I Jn 2:17), that “the earth and sky fled” (efugen) “and there was no place for them” (Re 20:11), and that “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (aphēqan, in Rev 21:1).

None of the expressions used in these passages compel one to think of a material annihilation. On the contrary, the verb in Hebrews 1:12 (alaghontai) strongly suggests some kind of transformation.

We note also that in 1 Corinthians 7:31, Paul says that this world *in its present form* is passing away” (paragei gar to sxhma tou kosmou toutou). In Romans 8 he states that the whole creation, which “has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (v. 21), “waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (v. 19) and that “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (v. 21). Jesus describes the change that will take place as “the renewal (pal iggenesia) of all things” (Mt 19:28), and Peter uses the term “restoration (apokatastasewv) of all things” (Ac 3:21). Add to all of this the fact that our human bodies, as we have heard, though they will be changed, will be the very same ones that we had in this life, and the scriptural evidence tends to indicate that a transformation and renovation of God’s original creation will take place, rather than an annihilation of its substance.

Nevertheless, such a change will be a radical one. The nature of the new heaven and earth lies entirely beyond our comprehension since our thinking is limited by the categories of space and time. We have no experience, outside these categories, and therefore we can not visualize the new creation in which these dimensions will be abolished, any more than we can conceive of the “spiritual bodies” we will then possess. To our way of thinking, “spiritual bodies” is a *contradictio in adiecto*.

When the intricate, precisely moving mechanism of the universe begins to rattle and the stars begin to reel, “men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world” (Lk 21:26). But we Christians need have no fear. Jesus bids us to stand up and lift up our heads because our redemption (apolutrwsiv) is drawing near (Lk 21:28). When we see the universe coming unglued, we will know that our Savior is returning as Judge.

The Father has given Jesus “authority to judge because he is the Son of Man” (Jn 5:27). All nations, including every human being who has ever lived, will stand before him (2 Co 5:10). The fallen angels, too, must appear before his judgment seat (2 Pe 2:4). Then the holy angels will separate the believers from the unbelievers, placing the believers on his right hand and the unbelievers on his left.

Eternal life or eternal death—those are the alternatives. And since all have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, the verdict hinges on the question of faith. “Did you or did you not believe in Jesus as your Savior from sin?” is the one question that will decide each person’s eternal destiny. “Whoever believes and

is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:16). He “is not condemned” (Jn 3:18). He does not come into judgment (ouO krihetai). In the words of Paul, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Ro 8: 1).

On the other hand, “whoever does not believe will be damned” (Mk 16:16). Those who have rejected the Gospel of their salvation will taste the full fury of God’s wrath, for Jesus says, “The very words which I spoke will condemn him at the last day” (Jn 12:48). As evidence of their unbelief, Christ will cite the record of their evil deeds. They will be called to account for every careless word that they have spoken (Mt 12:36).

Does this mean that the righteous, too, will be embarrassed by hearing the shameful record of their many sins publicly exposed? Indeed not! Not a single one of their sins will be mentioned. For Jesus’ sake God has cast them all behind His back (Isa 38:17). “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins” is his assurance through Isaiah (Isa 44:22). He will not remember them (Isa 43:25) because he has cast them into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19).

Christ will mention only the fruits of faith in the lives of the righteous (Mt 25:34). Those fruits are the visible proof of their faith. “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Mt 25:34) will be his invitation to the saints. The wicked, on the other hand, will be banished from his presence forever, committed to eternal punishment in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41).

A question that perplexes us in this connection concerns the state of the soul after death. At death the soul leaves the body (Ecc 12:7). Does it go directly to heaven or hell, or is it in some intermediate state until it is reunited with the body at the resurrection? For us this poses a problem because we see the body that is laid into the grave, and the question arises: Where is the soul?

The Bible assures us explicitly that at death believers go directly to heaven and unbelievers to hell. “Today you will be with me in paradise” was Jesus’ unfailing promise to the penitent thief on the cross (Lk 23:43). Paul says that he “would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Co 5:8). He has a desire “to depart and to be with Christ” (Php 1:21). The rich man in Jesus’ parable, on the other hand, was in hell the moment he died (Lk 16:23).

For us this creates a difficulty because we are creatures of time. We can not conceive of eternity, where there is no time. At the moment of death one passes out of time into the timelessness of eternity. For the soul there is, therefore, no period of waiting for the resurrection. For this reason the letter to the Hebrews states that “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Heb 9:27). Since he is no longer in time, the one who dies immediately experiences the judgment. Obviously, however, this “solution” does not fully satisfy our minds. We still ask: How can the soul be in eternity when the body is still in the realm of time? How this can be we must simply leave to God, who gives us his promise that those who die in the Lord are blessed “from now on” (ap arti; Re 14:13).

One of the doctrines in eschatology that is most vehemently attacked today is the doctrine of hell. By no stretch of the imagination can these attacks be the result of a misinterpretation of biblical prophecy, however. They are nothing less than an outright refusal to accept what the Bible clearly teaches.

Jesus closes his account of the final judgment in Matthew 25 with the words, “Then they [i.e., the wicked] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Mt 25:46). The two members of this statement are completely parallel. Deny the reality of eternal punishment and you deny the reality of eternal life.

Damnation is essentially perpetual separation from God. The Bible calls it “the second death” (Rev 20:14). Death is basically a separation. As physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, and as spiritual death is the separation of the heart from God, so eternal death is the endless separation of a sinner from the blissful presence of God. “Depart from me” (Mt 25:41) is the awesome sentence of him in whose presence alone there is fullness of joy and at whose right hand alone there are pleasures forevermore (Ps 16:11).

These words “Depart from me,” also make it clear that hell is a definite place. It is not merely a state or condition. It is called a “Place of torment” (topon tou ton thv basanou; Lk16:28). Judas, we are told, went to his own place (eiO ton topon ton idion; Ac 1:25). But where this place is or whether it is a physical or spiritual

place, God has not revealed to us. Chrysostom has well said, “Let us not strive to find out where it is, but how we may escape it.”<sup>42</sup>

The damned in hell are not merely deprived of the blessedness enjoyed by those who are in God’s glorious presence; they also suffer actual torment (Lk 16: 23,28). Their agony is described most vividly as a continual “weeping and grinding of teeth” (Mt 13:50). The fire of hell, which is mentioned, frequently in the Scriptures (e.g., Isa 66:24; Mk 9:43, 44, 46, 48; Mt 3:12; 18:8,9; 25:41), and the worm of decay point to the reality and intensity of this suffering, which will be without intermission (Lk 16: 24,25; Isa 34:10; Rev 14:11; 20:10) and without end (Isa 66:24; Mt 25:41).

Such never-ending punishment is not, as some suppose, incompatible with the love of God. His is a holy love. He is a just and righteous God, who in his absolute holiness can not permit sin to go unpunished. Sin is nothing less than the crime of lese majesty against the eternal God and the penalty for it is therefore also eternal. Those who argue that eternal punishment for a single, temporal act is unfair fail to recognize the true nature of sin. Sin is no minor misdemeanor. It is in reality an attempt to dethrone God. Eternal suffering in hell is a fully deserved punishment in view of the true nature of the offense.

We also know from Scripture that there will be degrees of punishment in hell. Jesus indicates that the people of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, wicked as they were, will not be punished as severely as the unbelievers of Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum; who received a special measure of grace in that the Savior came to them in person with his message of salvation (Mt 11:21-24).

In concluding this summary of the Bible’s eschatological prophecies, we turn our attention finally to those that speak of heaven, the goal of all of us who are participating in this Pastors’ Institute. We might easily have devoted this entire lecture to this subject—the Bible is so rich in prophecies describing our eternal home. It seeks to comfort us in our earthly struggles and sorrow and to heighten our anticipation, as it were, of the joys awaiting us in our heavenly Father’s house.

In reality, human language can not fully portray those joys. Paul, who was caught up to Paradise and had a foretaste of those joys, tells us that he “heard inexpressible things,” things that a man is not able<sup>43</sup> to tell” (2 Co 12:4). Our experience is wholly limited to this present world and so Scripture uses many pleasurable experiences from this life to depict the joys of heaven to us in terms we can grasp. It compares heaven to a wedding (Mt 25:10), to a banquet (Lk 22:30; Rev 19:9), and to receiving an inheritance (Rev 21:7). In heaven we will have “salvation” (1 Pe 1:9), “everlasting life” (Da 12:2), “eternal glory” (2 Ti 2:10), “fullness of joy” (Ps 16:11), and “rest” (Heb 4: 9-11). There we will reign with Christ as kings and lords (2 Ti 2:12; Rev 19: 16; 22:5). There we will “see” God (Job 19: 26,27), “see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2), and live with him in close and continual fellowship (Rev 21:3).

In heaven we will be separated forever from sin and all its dire consequences—sickness, sorrow, pain, and death (Rev 21:4). Nothing will ever dim, interrupt, or end our joy (Ps 16:11). We will join the angels in glorifying and praising God through all eternity (Rev 7:9-12).

As there are degrees of punishment in hell, so there will also be degrees of glory in heaven (Da 12:3; Mt 25:21,23, 28, 29; Lk 19:17,19; 2 Co 9:6; 1 Co 15: 40-42; Rev 14:13). “All the saints will have the same salvation but there will be differences in glory” was the old Latin fathers’ summary of the passages that teach this truth.<sup>44</sup>

Although heaven, like hell, is somewhere, we must not conceive of it in crass material, physical terms. The angels are sent to watch over God’s children here on earth, yet at the same time they are in heaven and always see the face of the Father in heaven (Mt 18:10).

In Scripture, the eternal home of the blessed is designated by various names. It is called “heaven” (Mt 5:12), “the third heaven” (2 Co 12:2),<sup>45</sup> “Paradise” (Lk 23:43), “Abraham’s side” (Lk 16:22), the “Father’s

<sup>42</sup> Hoenecke, IV, 313.

<sup>43</sup> eod. cf. the discussion in Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1963), p 291.

<sup>44</sup> *omnibus una salus sanctis, sed gloria dispar* (Hoenecke, IV, 336).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, p 291: “It may be assumed that he counted the clouds and the starry skies as first and second heavens; or, perhaps, he did not count at all, and used the numeral merely to denote eminence.”

house” (Jn 14:2), “the Most Holy Place” (Heb 9:12), “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22), “the heavenly country” (Heb 11:14), and finally “a new heaven and a new earth” (Isa 66:22; 2 Pe 3:13; Rev 21:1). It is called a new heaven and a new earth because it will be God’s new creation. It will be our new home in contrast to our present home, the heaven and earth which are now and which will pass away. The new heaven and new earth will be free from all sin, evil, and curse (2 Pe 3:13; Rev 7:16,17; 21:41). It will be the home of righteousness, where God’s saints will “shine as the brightness of the firmament” (Da 12:3), as the stars (Da 12:3) and as the sun (Mt 13:43) forever and ever. Through all eternity they will live in perfect holiness, bliss, and glory.

Summarizing now the truths derived from our study of these eschatological prophecies in the scriptures, one may say that the following ten points are clearly established:

1. God has not revealed to anyone when the last day will come.
2. The ever-present signs of the end serve as a warning to us to be prepared for it at all times.
3. As the end approaches, conditions in nature, in society, and in the church will become increasingly worse, not better.
4. The destruction of the present world by fire will coincide with Christ’s return, not follow it by a thousand years.
5. Christ’s return in glory will be universally visible, not secret.
6. Believers and unbelievers will be raised from the dead in one simultaneous, universal resurrection, not in two or more at various times.
7. The final judgment will take place at Christ’s return, not a thousand years later.
8. Christ’s kingdom is spiritual and heavenly, not political and temporal.
9. At death unbelievers enter at once into hell and believers into heaven, not into some intermediate state.
10. The punishment of the damned in hell and the joys of the saints in heaven will never end.

By way of conclusion then, it may be said that in the Gospel God announces that by his vicarious and atoning life and death, Christ has opened the gates of Paradise for all sinners. Those who reject this salvation reject the only escape there is from the wrath of God, and so his wrath remains on them (Jn 3:36). “Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (Jn 3:18). But “he who believes has everlasting life” (Jn 6:47). He has it now and he will have it forever.

Lord, bring us safely to your heavenly kingdom (2 Ti 4:18)!

### **III. Millennialism Examined in the Light of Holy Scripture**

The term “millennium,” derived from the Latin words *mille* and *annus*, means “a thousand years.” The word “chiliasm” comes from the Greek *χιλία*, meaning “thousand.” In the first seven verses of Revelation 20 there are six references to a period designated as “a thousand years” (Rev 20: 2,3,4,5,6,7). During this period, John says, Satan will be bound and Christ will reign. Those who have part in the first resurrection will reign with him.

Millennialists suppose that this thousand-year period will be a golden age of universal peace, prosperity, and righteousness. It is obvious, however, that Revelation 20 says nothing about such utopian conditions during this period. Millennialists do not draw their dreams out of the text; they read them into the text.

As was mentioned in a previous lecture, millennialists are divided into two principal schools of thought, the premillennialists and the postmillennialists. Premillennialists hold that Christ will return and inaugurate the millennial age. Postmillennialists believe that he will return at the end of the thousand years. Before his return, they say, the church will transform society by preaching the Gospel so that war, poverty, crime, and disease will

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be eliminated. During this time the church will enjoy unprecedented success. At the end of the millennium Christ will reappear, will raise the dead, and will preside at the final judgment.

Postmillennialism has had among its advocates some theologians whose names are highly revered in Reformed circles, including Charles and Archibald Hodge, W.G.T. Shedd, and Benjamin B. Warfield, J. Marcellus Kik, a former associate editor of *Christianity Today* and Loraine Boettner professor of Bible at Pikeville College, Pikeville, Kentucky, are more recent representatives of the postmillennial school.

Premillennialism is enjoying greater popularity than postmillennialism at present, especially in its dispensational form. Some representatives of this school are John D. Darby (*Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*), C. I. Scofield (*The Scofield Reference Bible*), William E. Blackstone (*Jesus is Coming*), Lewis Sperry Chafer (*Systematic Theology*), John F. Walvoord (*The Millennial Kingdom*), and Hal Lindsey, author of the best-seller *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Characteristics of the millennium, according to Walvoord, are the reign of Christ as the supreme King of the millennial kingdom, the prominence of Israelites in this kingdom, the glorious presence of Christ as the center of worship, the widespread knowledge of God's truth, universal righteousness, peace, and joy, the salvation of the majority of men, the lifting of the curse on the earth, general prosperity, health, and healing, phenomenal longevity and an increase in the birth rate, and various topographical changes in Palestine, including the physical elevation of the city of Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup>

Premillennialists disagree among themselves about the sequence of events and various aspects of the millennial Kingdom, but they are firmly united in their opposition to postmillennialism and what is known as amillennialism, the view that there will be no millennium at all in the generally accepted sense of the term. Representatives of amillennialism among the Reformed include Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*), Geerhardus Vos (*The Pauline Eschatology*), Albertus Pieters (*Studies in the Revelation of St. John*), Floyd E. Hamilton (*The Basis of Millennial Faith*), George L. Murray (*Millennial Studies*), Abraham Kuyper (*Chiliasm, or the Doctrine of Premillennialism*), William Hendricksen (*More Than Conquerors*), and Oswald T. Allis (*Prophecy and the church*).

Among Lutheran dogmaticians of the twentieth century W. Rohnert (*Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 1902) opposes millennialism but is in error on the conversion of the Jews and the doctrine of the Antichrist. Hoenecke (*Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, 1909), Pieper (*Christliche Dogmatik*, 1917-1924; English translation, 1950), J. T. Mueller (*Christian Dogmatics*, 1934), and Edward W. A. Koehler (*A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, 1939) are anti-millennial. Reu (*Lutheran Dogmatics*, 1941-1942) is millennial. On the pre- or post-millennial question Reu is ambivalent, but he inclines toward a form of the latter.<sup>47</sup> Regin Preter of Denmark (*Creation and Redemption*; Danish, 1955; English translation, 1967) is existential, entertaining an eschatological error we hope to discuss briefly in our final lecture.

Of Lutheran commentaries, that of Lenski of the ALC is strongly amillennial while *The New Testament Commentary* edited by Herbert C. Alleman of the LCA is millennial. Lutheran authors, especially English speaking Lutherans, have not written as profusely on the subject of eschatology as have the Reformed. Mention may be made, however, of T. A. Kantonen of Hamma Divinity school, Springfield, Ohio (*The Christian Hope*, 1954; *Life after Death*, 1962). The Germans have produced such books as those of Paul Althaus (*Die letzten Dinge*, 1933-and 1964), Walter Künneth (*The Theology of the Resurrection*, German, 1951; English, 1965), and Oscar Cullmann (*The Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead*, 1958).

Millennialists boast that they apply the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation to the Bible's eschatological prophecies.<sup>48</sup> They accuse amillennialists of allegorizing or spiritualizing these prophecies, which they say, describe a future righteous government on earth, Israel's restoration as a national and political entity, and Christ's reign on earth for a thousand years. The literal interpretation, they insist, is the only proper

<sup>46</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), pp. 296-323.

<sup>47</sup> Reu, II, 241.

<sup>48</sup> Walvoord, pp. 70-74, 128-133.

interpretation of these passages. Walvoord, for example, denounces the spiritualizing method of interpretation as “a blight upon the understanding of the Scriptures.”<sup>49</sup> Hal Lindsey states that the real issue is “whether prophecy should be interpreted literally or allegorically.”<sup>50</sup>

It is true, of course, that the allegorical method of interpretation has done untold damage in the church. It belonged to the genius of Luther’s Reformation that God led him to recognize the untenability of the traditional fourfold interpretation according to which each passage was supposed to have a literal, an allegorical, a tropological, and an anagogical sense, referring, respectively, to Christ, to the church, to the individual, and to the future. “It is the historical sense alone which supplies the true and sound doctrine,” Luther declared.<sup>51</sup> At the same time it is understandable that Luther, in view of his theological training, had to struggle with himself to practice what he preached.

Scripture itself indicates, however, that it is at times speaking figuratively, symbolically, or allegorically. Then that which lies behind the figure is the literal or native, historical-grammatical sense. To fail to recognize figurative or symbolical language when it is used results in as flagrant a misinterpretation as to allegorize non-figurative, direct speech. Millennialists are guilty of crass literalism. They misinterpret prophecies of the Old Testament, which have a figurative or symbolical sense because they ignore the clues that Scripture itself gives for the proper interpretation of these passages. Thus they see in prophecies which speak of Christ’s spiritual New Testament kingdom a prediction that He will have a visible, political kingdom on earth.

Consider a few examples. In Isaiah 2:2,3 we read: “And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills: and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, ‘Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.’”

According to Walvoord, this is a prophecy of the physical elevation of the city of Jerusalem above the surrounding territory.<sup>52</sup> That is also Delitzsch’s view. He writes, “The prophet here predicted that the mountain which bore the temple of Jehovah, and therefore was already in dignity the most exalted of all mountains, would one day tower in actual height above all the high places of the earth. The basaltic mountains of Bashan, which rose in bold peaks and columns, might now look down with scorn and contempt upon the small limestone hill which Jehovah had chosen (Ps. LXVIII. 16,17); but this was an incongruity which the last times would remove, by making the outward correspond to the inward, the appearance to the reality and the intrinsic worth.”<sup>53</sup> Hal Lindsey cites this passage together with Zechariah 14:16-21 and Micah 4:1-3 as proof that “Jerusalem will be the spiritual center of the entire world and that all people the earth will come annually to worship Jesus who will rule there.”<sup>54</sup>

Millennialists ignore the fact that Scripture is its own interpreter.<sup>55</sup> The New Testament explains how Isaiah’s prophecy has been and is being fulfilled. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews plainly tells his Christian readers, “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24). “Mount Zion,” “the heavenly Jerusalem,” and “the city of the living God” are names for the church. Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled as believers joyfully stream into the Christian church.

<sup>49</sup> Walvoord, p 73.

<sup>50</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p 176.

<sup>51</sup> *LW*, 1:233.

<sup>52</sup> Walvoord, p 321.

<sup>53</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, translated by James Martin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1867), Vol. I, p 113.

<sup>54</sup> Lindsey, p 177.

<sup>55</sup> Luther: *sui ipsius interpres* (Erlangen edition, 36:161).

Hosea indicates that the prophecy of his contemporary, Isaiah, is not to be understood of a particular geographical place when he writes, “It shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God” (Hos 1:10). Both Paul (Ro 9:2,26) and Peter (1 Pe 2:10) testify that this is a prophecy of the Gentiles’ entrance into the Christian church.

It is Isaiah also who describes the peace that the Messiah will bring in graphic pictures: “He shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa 2:4).

Is this a prophecy of a universal political peace during the millennium? Isaiah himself provides the key to the interpretation. The peace he is speaking about is the spiritual peace that the Messiah will bring at his first coming into the world. This is clear from chapter 9:2-5, where he speaks about the light and joy and peace the coming savior will bring. In the following verse (9:6) we have the familiar prophecy of the Child to be born whose name will be the Prince of Peace. Then in verse seven Isaiah describes his kingdom: “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever.”

Is this a kingdom that will continue for only a thousand years? Clearly not! It is everlasting. Is this an earthly, political kingdom? Not at all! It is that spiritual kingdom of which Jesus testified to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). It is the kingdom in which he rules by testifying to the truth of the Gospel, and in which those enjoy the blessings of his rule who listen to his Word (Jn 18:37). Is Christ’s kingdom a visible, millennial state? Indeed not! Here are Jesus’ own words: “The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:20). What a travesty of Christ’s kingdom the millennialists’ dream of a thousand-year reign on earth is! What a perversion of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies and their New Testament fulfillment the millennialists’ interpretation is!

Here is Hal Lindsey’s description of the kingdom: “God’s kingdom will be characterized by peace and equity, and by universal spirituality and knowledge of the Lord. Even the animals and reptiles will lose their ferocity and no longer be carnivorous. All men will have plenty and be secure. There will be a chicken in every pot and no one will steal it. The Great society which human rulers throughout the centuries have promised, but never produced, will at last be realized under Christ’s rule.”<sup>56</sup> Compare this carnal, materialistic hope with Paul’s statement, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Ro 14:17).

Kantonen, while rejecting the “secularization of the millennial hope,” nevertheless asserts that “it is just as arbitrary to go to the opposite extreme and reject altogether the truth which the millennial hope contains.” According to him, “the conviction that God’s purpose for the corporate life of mankind will come to a fulfillment within history, and not only beyond it, has a strong foundation both in the prophecies of the Old Testament and in the gospel. Seen in the total context of revelation, the millennium symbolizes God’s control of the future on earth as well as in heaven.”<sup>57</sup> Since Kantonen also believes in a double resurrection,<sup>58</sup> his chiliasm is of the type designated as *crassus* by our dogmaticians, in contrast to the *chiliasmus crassissimus* of Lindsey, and the *chiliasmus subtilis* of men like Spener who entertained the hope of better times before the end of the world.<sup>59</sup>

In another beautiful prophecy of the Messiah’s kingdom of peace Isaiah writes, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den” (Isa 11:6-9).

<sup>56</sup> Lindsey, p 177.

<sup>57</sup> T.A. Kantonen, *The Christian Hope* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1954), pp, 66,67.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p 99.

<sup>59</sup> Pieper, III, 520.

Here again Isaiah provides the key to the interpretation of his prophecy in the preceding verses, 1-5, he foretells the coming of a Rod out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch that shall grow out of his roots. That the peace he is describing is that of the New Testament era is clear from the following verse (v. 10), where he says that the Root of Jesse “shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” This is the rest Jesus offers to sinners in his gracious invitation. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will, find rest for your souls” (Mt 11: 28,29).

Through the forgiveness of sins Christ’s disciples enjoy that perfect peace which Isaiah portrayed in such warm and vivid colors. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you,” (Jn 14:27) is the Savior’s assurance to all who have come under the influence of his saving grace, (cf. also Jn 16:33). At his birth the angel of the Lord announced the coming of peace on earth (Lk 2:14). This peace is proclaimed in “the Gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15). It is “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding” (Php 4:7).

Christ’s disciples enjoy this inner, spiritual peace despite persecutions that may rob them of their outward, earthly peace. For Jesus warns, “if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (Jn 15:20). Men will be divided over him, and therefore he advises, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10:34).

Zechariah, too, foresaw the advent of the Messiah-King. “He is just and having salvation,” he declares (Zec 17:9:9). Then he describes his worldwide kingdom of peace in these striking terms: “I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth” (Zec 9:10). The Savior brings this peace by bringing salvation.

In another frequently misinterpreted Messianic prophecy Isaiah announces that when the Messiah comes, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9; cf. Hab 2:14). Jeremiah is obviously speaking of the same time when he writes, “They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34). Through Joel God likewise says, “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, and also upon the servants and upon the hand maids in those days will I pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28,29).

That Joel’s prophecy has been fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost Peter testifies in his sermon recorded in Acts 2: “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Ac 2:16). In John 6:45 Jesus refers to the prophecies of Isaiah (Isa 54:13) and Jeremiah (Jer 31:34) and declares that they are fulfilled when people come to faith in him! “It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.” (Cf. also Jn 1: 17,18). John is also obviously alluding to these prophecies when he writes, “You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth” (1 Jn 2:20). The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord because the Gospel of Christ will be carried to the ends of the earth.

In spite of the clear statements in the New Testament interpreting these prophecies, Walvoord insists that they refer to the millennium. He says, “This is a strong contrast to the prevailing ignorance of the Lord in the present age and the contemporary failure of missionary effort to reach everyone even in Christian countries. Only a millennial kingdom in which Christ is visibly and gloriously present could provide such a context for the fulfillment of this covenant.”<sup>60</sup>

It is noteworthy that none of these Old Testament prophecies that supposedly describe the millennial kingdom of Christ mentions the thousand years. This number is found only in Revelation 20, a chapter to which we now turn our attention.

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<sup>60</sup> Walvoord, p 211.



Revelation is a book that teems with symbols, pictures, and figurative language. Some of these are explained in chapter one, for example, the seven stars which John saw “are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches” (Rev 1:20). Other symbols are not interpreted. Nevertheless, careful study often indicates that there are clues to the interpretation in the context. Whatever interpretation may be given, it is important to remember, however, that an interpretation of a symbolical passage must never be at variance with the truths taught in clear, non-figurative passages. When David, for example, in 2 Samuel 23:3 describes the God of Israel as “the Rock of Israel,” this is obviously a metaphor, for “God is spirit” according to the non-figurative words of Jesus in John 4:24.

It may be said of the Book of Revelation in general that it is a description of the travail and triumph of Christ’s church from the apostolic age to its consummation in glory. Its theme is “Look, he is coming!” (Rev 1:7; 22:20). It records “what must soon take place” (Rev 1:1). In vivid imagery it delineates the struggle foretold in Genesis 3:15 between the Seed of the woman and Satan, between the disciples of Christ and the disciples of the Dragon.

It is obvious, however, that Revelation is not a chronological table of events. If it were, Christ’s statement that “the Son of Man will come at an hour when he is not expected” (Mt 24:44) would be only partly true. Particular events could be checked off as they occur; and if certain prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, one could well conclude that the day of Christ’s second coming is still in the distant future. In this very book, however, Jesus says, “Behold, I come like a thief” (Rev 16:15). The eschatological signs of his coming have been and are being continually and cumulatively fulfilled in the history of the New Testament church. We may therefore expect Christ’s return in glory at any time.

In approaching chapter 20, we will do well to bear in mind what George Murray says:

We believe that in seeking to interpret this chapter, one should try to remember that it was meant to have a message for suffering people of God in that day, as well as for all the suffering people of God until the end of time. For this, as well as for other reasons, we believe that God led the Seer of Patmos to present here a brief summary of the entire Gospel dispensation, from the first advent of Him who claimed to have come down from heaven, until the second advent, when the kingdom which he has founded shall be established in all its glory.<sup>61</sup>

Prof. John Meyer likewise states, “All of Revelation has significance for the church of all times.”<sup>62</sup>

Chapter 20 consists of four visions. John clearly marks these visions with the words “and I saw” (Καὶ εἶδον, v. 1, 4, 11, 12). These visions do not, however, as was mentioned above, describe successive eschatological events. Rather, each presents a close-up of some particular detail in the prophetic panorama that unfolds. This is apparent from the fact that while the last vision describes the final judgment, the dreadful outcome of it for the devil and his cohorts is already indicated at the close of the second vision.

John describes what he saw in the first vision in these words:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. (Rev. 20: 1-3)

That the “angel” mentioned here has the key to the Abyss indicates that he is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself, who asserted in chapter 1:18, “I hold the keys of death and Hades.” He is

<sup>61</sup> Murray, p 176.

<sup>62</sup> Joh. P. Meyer, “*Das Koenigtum Christi*,” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (July, 1935), p 185.

the uncreated Angel of the Lord, the second person in the Trinity, who appears so often in the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 3:2,4,6; Mal 3:1). This is confirmed also by what he does, namely, that he successfully binds the Dragon, Satan, who is himself a powerful spirit. He seizes him, shackles him with a great chain, throws him into a dungeon, and securely locks and seals the prison.

This is, of course, symbolical, figurative language. John is describing what he saw in a vision. It would be a serious mistake, therefore, to understand the pictures he paints literally.

The devil, Scripture tells us, is a spirit, a fallen angel (Jude 6). Obviously, he cannot be bound with a material chain of iron or steel. Neither does hell, his prison-house, have brass doors that are opened and closed with a large brass key. The chain and key represent Christ's glorious victory by which he freed us from the power of the devil and closed the gates to death and hell.

When the devil and his angels fell from the holy state in which they were created and rebelled against God (Jn 8:44; Jude 6). God "sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment" (2 Pe 2:4). Since then he has kept them in darkness, "bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day" (Jude 6; Mt 25:41).

The devil's doom was sealed when Christ came in the flesh. In the Protevangel given in Eden God had already promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Ge 3:15). In the fullness of time that promised Seed appeared and announced, "Now the prince of this world will be driven out" (Jn, 12:31; cf. also Rev 12:7-9). At the return of the disciples whom he had sent out on a preaching mission Jesus declared, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18). He had come "to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8), "to destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery" (Heb 2:14,15).

Through his sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection Jesus proved himself to be the Stronger One who entered the strong man's house, effectively bound him, and carried off his possessions (Mt 12:29). "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col 2:15). He led them as captives in his train (Eph 4:8). Thus the Holy Ghost now testifies, "The prince of this world now stands condemned" (Jn 16:11).

Since his defeat the devil is like a snarling, vicious dog on a leash. He can go no further than the Lord permits (2 Co 12:7; Lk 22: 31,32). He cannot harm Christ's disciples. His power is broken (Ro 8:37; 2 Th 3:3; 1 Jn 5:18). Only in those who are disobedient is he still free to work his will to a limited extent (Eph 2:2). But even as he "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pe 5:8), he drags along the chains that bind him to hell. No longer is he free to deceive the nations of the earth as he formerly did (v 3).

Before his crushing defeat at the hands of Christ, the devil had the heathen under his uninhibited control (Ac 14:16). He led them into every kind of sin and vice (Ro 1:28; 1 Co 10:20). From Ur of the Chaldees, where Abraham's ancestors "served other gods" (Jos 24:2), to Canaan, Egypt, Greece and Rome the nations were steeped in idolatry. But during the thousand year, when Satan is bound, he is powerless to prevent what Jesus foretold, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Mt 24:14). Through the preaching of the Gospel the devil's captives are set free (Jn 8:31,32). They are turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Ac 26:18), as God fulfills his promise to his victorious Son, "I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Ps 2:8).

Millennialists expect the binding of Satan to take place at some time in the future. They set aside the mass of scriptural evidence that we have cited with the charge that this "is a notable illustration of spiritualized and strained exegesis."<sup>63</sup>

But what are the thousand years? Are they to be understood literally or figuratively? Are these actual years, as millennialists claim, or is this a symbolical number? The *terminus a quo*, as we have seen, is Christ's first Advent when Satan's tyranny was broken. The *terminus ad quem* is the final judgment when, as verse 10

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<sup>63</sup> Walvoord, p 51.

shows, the devil will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur to be tormented for ever and ever. The thousand years thus span the entire period of the New Testament, from the coming of Christ to the end of the world. It is a definite period of time, as we see from verse 3 where John uses the definite article, *ta\_xil ia eñh*. But its actual duration is known only to God.

The number ten represents completeness. We think of the ten plagues, the Ten Commandments, the ten virgins, ten minas, ten servants, and ten cities in the parables of Jesus (Mt 25:1; Lk 19: 13,17). So a thousand, which is ten raised to the third degree, represents the highest degree of completeness.

Despite the insistence of chiliasts that “year” must mean a period of 365 days, “year” is used in the Scriptures in Luke 4:19 to designate a period other than an actual year. The “year of the Lord’s favor” is the New Testament time of grace. It is identical to the thousand years of Revelation 20.

As the thousand years come to a close, Satan will be “set free for a short time” (v. 3). Opinions differ as to whether the short time comes after the thousand years or is included in them. The context seems to indicate the latter.<sup>64</sup> Although Satan is turned loose before the final judgment, the reign of Christ and his saints continues, according to verse 6, without interruption to the judgment when the second death will have no power over them.

The second vision provides a fuller picture of the thousand years, as the recurrence of this expression indicates. This vision is divided into two parts, verses 4-6 and 7-10.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4-6)

The thrones that John saw remind us of Jesus’ promise to his disciples, “I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk 22:29-30). Seated on these thrones are those who were beheaded because of their loyalty to Christ. They sealed their faithful testimony with martyrdom. They had not worshiped the beast or its image. John described this beast in chapter 13. It represents the brute force of all forms of antichristianity at work in the world. It opposes and persecutes Christ’s church (Rev 13:7). The saints had not received the mark of the beast on their foreheads or their hands. They did not permit the world’s antichristian principles to govern their thoughts or their actions.

Who are these martyrs? They are not only those who, like John the Baptist, were actually beheaded. They represent by synecdoche the entire assembly of believers who have remained faithful to the end and received the crown of eternal life. Throughout their life on earth Paul’s words to the Romans applied to them, “For your sake

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Theodor Hanszen, “Feststellbare Daten zur Offenbarung Johannis,” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1935), p 27. The use of the subjunctive *tel esqh=* which is the mood of indefiniteness, the timelessness nature of the aorist, the undetermined length of the thousand years, and the fact that the four visions cover the time from the first Advent to the final judgment strongly suggest that the short time comes toward the end of the thousand years. Prof. John Meyer holds that the question cannot be decided from the text and states that it is not of great consequence whether one says: toward the end of the thousand years, or: after they have ended (*Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 32, No. 3, July, 1935, p 194f). Pieper is of the opinion that the thousand years *plus* the little season constitute the entire New Testament era (III, 524). This is also Hoenecke’s view (IV, 288). The phrase *oBan...tel esqh=* may, however, mean simply “while the thousand years are coming to an end, being ended.” The aorist subjunctive stresses the verbal idea of ending, not the completion of the act. This is the interpretation of W. Peters, who says, “The ‘little season’ is enclosed in the New Testament time of grace, which is here being designated with the symbolical number, one thousand years; it is the very end of this time, namely, the very last days” (*The Judge Is at the Door*, translated by Helma Stenske; Glendora, Calif., n.d., p 179).

we face death all the day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Ro 8:36, quoting Ps 44:22). Every disciple of Jesus is, like Paul, “always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake” (2 Co 4:11; cf. 2 Co 6:9).

These saints have died. Nevertheless, they live and reign with Christ during the thousand years (v. 4). The verbs  $\epsilon\lambda\eta\sigma\alpha\nu$  and  $\epsilon\theta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\nu$  are constative aorists. The action is viewed as a whole, irrespective of the time involved.<sup>65</sup> In this instance it is durative as not only the sense of the words but also the accusative of time ( $\chi\iota\lambda\iota\alpha\epsilon\tau\eta$ ) used with them shows.

Some interpreters take  $\epsilon\lambda\eta\sigma\alpha\nu$  to be an ingressive aorist (so Robertson) and translate, “they began to live,” or “they came to life” (NIV). This is then understood by some as a reference to their conversion. They came to life when they came to faith. It is, of course, true that conversion is described in the Scriptures as a resurrection, a transition from spiritual death to spiritual life (Jn 5:24, 25; Eph 2:5; Col 2:12). That can hardly be the meaning here, however, since these saints have already given evidence of their faith by laying down their lives for Christ. They have died, yet they are not dead. They have eternal life. They have experienced the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise, “Whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:26). They are now living with Christ.

How cruelly a man like Kantonen robs Christians of their comfort and hope when he writes, “According to popular opinion when a man dies he goes directly to heaven or hell. But this view does not express accurately the teaching of the Bible.”<sup>66</sup> Kantonen teaches “the existence of an intermediate condition between the death of the individual and the general resurrection of the dead.”<sup>67</sup> In this intermediate state the believer who is in “Paradise” or “Abraham’s bosom” (which, according to Kantonen, does not mean “heaven”) has only a foretaste of heaven, as the unbeliever in Sheol or Hades has only a foretaste of hell. What a different picture John gives us!

The saints are reigning with Christ. This, too, is a fulfillment of his promise, “To him who overcomes will I give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev 3:21). Paul assures Timothy, “if, we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Ti 2:12).

Through faith in Christ we Christians have even now become “a royal priesthood” (1 Pe 2:9), kingly priests and priestly kings, serving the King of kings and Lord of lords, who, in the words of John, “has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father” (Rev 1:6). The twenty-four elders in heaven, representing the church of the Old and New Testaments, sing the praises of the Lamb, who has purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and has made them to be a kingdom and priests who “will reign on the earth” (Rev 5:10).

How will they reign on the earth? Will it be by wielding a worldwide political power in a millennial kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem, as millennialists claim? By no means! Neither Christ’s reign nor that of his saints is like the rule of the kings of the earth; who maintain their power by force of arms. It is, rather, as was explained earlier, a spiritual reign. Christ reigns by testifying to the truth (Jn 18:37). His disciples reign with him by their testimony to and their confession of his Gospel. During their life, by their death, and even after their death Christ’s followers testify to the truth of the Gospel. Through their testimony Christ enters men’s hearts with His saving grace. His Gospel continually proves itself to be “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes it” (Ro 1:16) In times of persecution, again and again the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. To this day the testimony of faithful witnesses of the past of men like Luther and Chemnitz, Gerhard and Quenstedt, Walther and Hoenecke, the Piepers, Schaller, and Meyer, and the many other orthodox teachers of the church continues to bear fruit and to extend Christ’s royal reign of grace in the hearts of men.

Referring to this living and reigning with Christ during the thousand years, John says, “This is the first resurrection” (v 5). That he is not using the word “resurrection” in the ordinary sense is clear from the fact that he specifically states that he saw the *souls* of those who were beheaded. “Resurrection” in the ordinary, everyday sense refers to bodies that are restored to life. In 1 Corinthians 15, the chapter in which Paul discusses the resurrection at length, he takes up the question, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they

<sup>65</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York and London: Harper, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1931), p 832.

<sup>66</sup> T.A. Kantonen, *Life after Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962), p 31.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p 32.

come?” (1 Co 15:35). By applying the term “resurrection” to the souls he sees in his vision John indicates that he is using this word in a different sense. He is using it figuratively.

Millennialists dream of two bodily resurrections, the first, according to some, being that of the believers and the second that of the unbelievers. Jehovah’s Witnesses even speak of four resurrections.<sup>68</sup>

Reu holds that the first resurrection will be that of the martyrs, the second that of the remaining dead. “The universality of the resurrection, which is definitely asserted in the Gospels,” he says, “does not necessarily require its absolute simultaneity.”<sup>69</sup> Reu’s view is also that of *The New Testament Commentary* published by the Muhlenberg Press of the United Lutheran Church (now LCA).<sup>70</sup> Kantonen also teaches a double resurrection. Citing Revelation 20, he writes, “Here two widely separated resurrections are recognized, one for the blessed martyrs who are resurrected from an intermediate state to participate actively in the kingdom on earth, the other the general resurrection in connection with the last judgment a thousand years later.”<sup>71</sup>

Those who teach a double resurrection often quote the words of England’s Dean Henry Alford (d. 1871): “If in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned.... the first resurrection may be understood to mean a *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means a literal rising from the grave, then there is an end to all significance language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.”<sup>72</sup> In this very chapter of Revelation, however, the expression “the second death” (v. 6, 14) refers to eternal torment in hell, a kind of death that is different from the death of the body which God’s saints also experience.

Those Lutherans who teach a double resurrection are in obvious disagreement with the Lutheran Confessions. In the Small Catechism Luther in his explanation of the Third Article plainly confesses that the Holy Ghost “will at the last day raise up me and all the dead.” There will be one resurrection on the last day of all the dead.

In verse 5 John says, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.” This does not mean that they will begin to live when the thousand years are over.<sup>73</sup> There is no second chance for those who die in unbelief, as Jehovah’s Witnesses and many others suppose. John merely says that those dead had no life during the thousand years. From verse 15 we know that they had no life after the thousand years either. At the judgment they were thrown into the lake of fire, that is, into hell.

The fire of hell, which is the second death (v. 14), cannot touch Christ’s saints, however (v. 6). They are eternally blessed. In God’s sight they are holy. As priests they offer to God their sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. That brings us to the second part of this vision.

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Rev 20:7-10)

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<sup>68</sup> The first is that of the 144,000 who by their obedience have earned immortality. The second is that of the Old Testament believers (Heb 11:35). The great multitude who die before Armageddon will experience the third resurrection. The fourth is the resurrection of the unjust, those who were ignorant of God’s theocratic law and who will receive a second chance. Not all will be raised, however. Adam, Judas, and the Pharisees will remain dead forever. (Cf. F. E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies Of America*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1954, p 468).

<sup>69</sup> Reu. op. cit., II,243.

<sup>70</sup> *The New Testament Commentary*, Herbert C. Alleman, editor (Philadelphia Muhlenberg, 1944), pp 706-707.

<sup>71</sup> Kantonen, *The Christian Hope*, p 99.

<sup>72</sup> cf. William E. Biederwolf, *The Second Coming Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), p 697.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. 2 Sa 6:23, “Michal the daughter of Saul had no child until the day of her death.” This does not mean that she had a child after her death.

These verses enlarge on the “short time” when Satan will be released from his prison. This “must be” (dei=v. 3) according to the counsel of God. This loosing of Satan, is a judgment of God on the earth because of its unbelief. Now Satan once again has permission to deceive the nations. He gathers them for a final assault on the church of God. This is the great battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16) which judgment day brings to a halt. God intervenes. John sees fire come down from heaven and devour the enemies of the church. For the sake of his elect God will shorten those last evil days of persecution and tribulation (Mt 24:22).

Can there be any doubt that Satan has been released from his prison and that we are now living in that “short time”?<sup>74</sup> Consider how Satan is deceiving the nations in our day. Consider the fact that the preaching of the Gospel is virtually prohibited in Moslem areas and in the Communist countries behind the iron and bamboo curtains. India and other countries prohibit expatriate missionaries from doing Christian mission work within their borders. Science, education, art, literature, law, politics, entertainment, communications, commerce, finance, religion—any and every field of human endeavor is under the effective control of the god of this world. The church of Jesus Christ is a little flock (Lk 12:32). The gates of hell have been thrown open, and its fiendish hordes are besieging the city of God.

These hordes John calls Gog and Magog. This is an allusion to Ezekiel 38 and 39, where Ezekiel also foretells this final attack on the church of God by the combined forces of the devil. Ezekiel compares it to the invasion of the civilized world by fierce barbarian tribes, Gog and Magog, who came from the distant north. The Greeks called them Scythians. According to Genesis 10:2 they were Japhethites. In the second half of the seventh century B. C., according to Herodotus,<sup>75</sup> they swept southward like a swarm of locusts from their homeland between the Black and Caspian seas, plundering and pillaging wherever they went. They were a terror to the whole oriental world, overrunning Media, Assyria, Mesopotamia, Syria, and, during the reign of Josiah, Israel.<sup>76</sup> In Ezekiel’s prophecy these barbarians from the north are allied with Persia on the East and Ethiopia and Libya on the south (Eze 38:5).

These ancient pagan hordes are a type of the enemies of Christ’s church who will join forces in an attempt to destroy God’s people in the last days. Ezekiel states that the invasion he is describing will take place “in the latter days” (Eze 38:8,16), a standard expression in the prophets for the days of the New Testament.

Chiliasts see in Ezekiel 38 and 39 a forecast of the rise of Russia world power. In a chapter entitled “Russia is a Gog” Hal Lindsey declares, “Russia will arm and equip a vast confederacy. This powerful group of allies will lead an attack on restored Israel.”<sup>77</sup> *The Scofield Reference Bible* has this note to Ezekiel 38:2, “that the primary reference is to the northern (European) powers, headed up by Russia, all agree....The reference to Meshech and Tubal (Moscow and Tobolsk [an Asiatic province of the USSR] ) is a clear mark of identification.”

One may wonder: How do chiliasts find a prophecy of modern Russia in these chapters? To answer this question we compare Ezekiel 38:2 in the KJV, which reads, “Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him,” with the NASB translation, “Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him.” The NASB reads the Hebrew word #) ג, translated in the KJV with “chief,” as a proper name. That this is the name of a people is by no means certain, however. And even if it were, there is no demonstrable connection between the Hebrew word #) ג, and the name Russia, as chiliasts claim.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> cf. Prof. Joh. P. Meyer: “It does not require any special prophetic insight, any extraordinary enlightenment by the Holy Spirit to recognize how this word of Revelation is being fulfilled before our very eyes” (“Das Koenigtum Christi,” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 32, No. 3, July, 1935, p 199). Also Pieper, op. cit., III, 524: “Since the opposition to this foundation of the Christian Church is general in our day, our conviction is that we are now in the ‘little season.’” He is speaking about opposition to the Gospel.

<sup>75</sup> Book I, 103-106.

<sup>76</sup> Ploetz’ *Epitome of History*, translated by William H. Tillinghast (New York: Blue Ribbon, 1925), p 16.

<sup>77</sup> *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p 71.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. e.g., Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p 64f; John Wesley White, *Reentry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p 146; Salem Kirban, *Guide to Survival* (Huntingdon Valley, Pa.: Salem Kirban, 1968), p 228ff. That this is a false etymology Theodore

It is clear that the campaign of Gog and Magog must be understood in a figurative, spiritual sense. The stupendous struggle described by Ezekiel under the imagery of Gog and Magog is referred to also in such other old Testament prophecies as Joel 3:9, "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles: Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up"; and Micah 4:11, "Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." (Cf. also Isa 25; Jer 30:20.)

In Daniel 11:41 Moab is mentioned as one of the enemies of God's people. But Moab no longer existed as a nation in Daniel's day. It is obvious that Daniel is using the name Moab, together with Edom and Ammon, as a symbol for the future enemies of the Christian church. So also in Revelation 20, as Graebner states, "Gog and Magog are not a certain tribe or nation but stand for the hosts of evil, led by Satan, which assail the New Testament Israel from every side."<sup>79</sup> God preserves his church, however, and hurls the unholy trinity, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, symbolizing the devil and the antichristian power and propaganda of the world, into the lake of burning sulfur, to be tormented forever.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. (Rev. 20:11)

The third vision is very brief John sees the great white throne of judgment. Its gleaming white color represents the purity, holiness, and righteousness of the Judge who occupies it. Heaven and earth have passed away. The judgment itself is described in the fourth vision.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:12-15)

All the dead, both small and great are summoned from their graves, whether in the earth or the sea (v. 13), into the presence of the Judge. The record books in which all their deeds are recorded are opened. These books symbolize God's omniscience. He knows and remembers every thought, word, and deed of the ungodly, and he holds them accountable for every transgression of his law.

But there is another book called "the book of life." In it are written the names of God's elect. It was this book to which Jesus referred when he assured his disciples, "Your names are recorded in heaven" (Lk 10:20). Their sins have been blotted out by the atoning blood of Christ, and their names are written in shining gold letters in the book of life. Their inheritance is life, life without end in their heavenly Father's house.

Death and Hades, on the other hand, meaning here the state of death or the grave were thrown into the lake of fire (v.14). Death and Hades are personified. "These two great enemies of mankind," to quote Kretzmann, "that have dogged its footsteps ever since the first sin, will be disposed of in a punishment which fits their crime."<sup>80</sup> As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:26, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (Cf. Hos 13:14; 1 Co 15: 54,55).

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Graebner demonstrates in *War in the Light of Prophecy* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), p 84; "To derive 'Russia' from 'Rosh' is an impossible etymology. Not until the ninth century does the word 'Rus' appear as a name for the inhabitants of what is now a part of Russia. Nor is the name of oriental but Scandinavian origin. The 'Rus' were the Normans who invaded Russia in the ninth century. They came from Sweden, and their name Rothsmenn (Rudermaenner, rowers, seafarers) was mispronounced by the earlier (Finnish) settlers of Russia as Ruotsi, soon abbreviated into Rus. To this day the Finns call Sweden Ruotsemæ (*Encycl. Brit.*, XXIII, p 868)."

<sup>79</sup> Graebner, p 96.

<sup>80</sup> Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1922), Vol. 11, p 649.

Those whose names were not written in the book of life were likewise hurled into the lake of fire. They suffered the second death, eternal death. Their doom was never-ending torment in the fire of hell.

Thanks be to God that by his grace our names are written in the book of life! Our hope is not for some temporal, earthly, millennial kingdom, promised neither in the Old Testament nor the New, but for life without end in our Savior's heavenly kingdom of glory.

#### **IV. Antichrists and the Antichrist**

Noteworthy among the eschatological prophecies of the Bible is the prophecy of the Antichrist. Like the others, this has been the subject of much misinterpretation.

According to the Bible, Christ and his church have many enemies. David says in the second Psalm, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Ps 2:1-3). Again in the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm we hear David say, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Ps 110:1,2).

In His valedictory to his disciples Jesus reminded them, "If the world hates you, it hated me first" (Jn 15:18). Among the enemies of Christ will be imposters and deceivers of various kinds. In his Olivet address Jesus warned, "False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (Mt 24:24).

Paul likewise foretold the coming of false teachers. He warned the elders of Ephesus, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Ac 20:29,30). We think of the Judaizers, who troubled the congregations in Galatia, Colossae, and elsewhere with their demand that Christians submit to the laws of Moses. We are reminded of the beginnings of gnosticism that appeared in the Colossian church where Christians were told: Don't touch this; don't eat that! (Col 2:21).

"The Spirit clearly says," Paul also writes to Timothy, "that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Ti 4:1-3; cf. also 2 Ti 3:1-9).

Some passages of the Bible speak of these opponents of Christ and his Word as "antichrists." In his Second Letter John writes, "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 Jn 7), or rather, translating this last sentence more exactly, "a deceiver and an antichrist," since the article is generic.

John was warning especially against the errors of the heretic Cerinthus. From Irenaeus we learn something about the teachings of Cerinthus. He writes:

Cerinthus, again, a man who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated from him, and at a distance from that Principality who is supreme over the universe, and ignorant of him who is above all. He represented Jesus as 'having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless, was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then



Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, Cerinthus did not recognize Jesus as true God, the incarnate Son of the Father.

Irenaeus also tells the story that when John once went to bathe at Ephesus and noticed that Cerinthus was in the bath house, he rushed out without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.”<sup>82</sup> John recognized Cerinthus as a deceiver and an antichrist.

In his First Letter John urges his readers, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the spirit of God every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but ever spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world” (1 Jn 4:1-3)

John is warning in these words not merely false teachers who deny the doctrine of the incarnation. Christ’s coming in the flesh involves also the reason for his coming, the work he did at his coming, the results he achieved by his coming, and the Word that tells of his coming.<sup>83</sup> The spirit of antichrist denies the gospel, attacking it from one angle or another. That spirit was already at work in John’s day. It is obvious that it is at work also in our day.

Hal Lindsey has written much with which one must disagree. One can hardly quarrel, however, with the thesis expressed in the title of one of his books, *Satan Is Alive and well on Planet Earth*. Satan, the archenemy of Christ, is behind every antichrist, including Hal Lindsey insofar as he makes propaganda for the devil’s lies. Every false teaching originates with the devil, “the father of lies.” (Jn 8:44). Some is disseminated by his agents outside the Christian church, by philosophers like Karl Marx, scientists like Charles Darwin, educators like John Dewey, and pagan prophets like Mohammed. Some is broadcast by his dupes within the visible Christian church, by learned theologians holding prestigious professorships at leading universities and seminaries and their misguided parrots in parish pulpits.

Obviously, these false prophets don’t step up and say, “Hear ye, hear ye, I’m a false prophet, so don’t believe a word of what I’m about to say.” They come in sheep’s clothing, but inside they are ferocious wolves. That is why it is so important for Christians to be able to recognize them. They must continually “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” Congregations must check on their pastors and teachers; synods must check on their professors and executives.

In chapter two of his First Letter, John distinguishes between one great Antichrist and many lesser antichrists he writes, “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour” (1 Jn 2:18).

John’s readers had heard that the Antichrist was in the process of coming ( ἐφθεται - present tense!). The apostles warned in their preaching that he was coming. Paul had written about this also in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians, a letter that was circulated in the apostolic church as a part of the New Testament Scriptures (2 Pe 3:15,16). According to John, the appearance of various antichristian teachers and movements proved that the last hour, the final period of the world’s history had begun. How long this “last hour” would last he does not say.

Of the many antichrists who appeared in his day John informs us, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (1Jn 2:19). These antichrists had formerly been a part of the church, but they withdrew from it. They had not really embraced the truth in their hearts.

<sup>81</sup> “Against Heresies,” Bk. 1, Chap XXVI,1. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p 351f.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. III, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Luther: “The pope confesses the statement that Christ came in the flesh, but he denies its fruits. But this is the same as saying that Christ did not come in the flesh.” (Am. Ed., 30:285).

Errorists today usually do not withdraw voluntarily. They try to remain within the fellowship of the church so as to bring it around to their views. The church must therefore admonish them and, if they do not renounce their error, expel them (Ro 16:17; Tit 3:10). It must do this for its own sake, as well as for theirs.

“But you have an anointing from the Holy one,” John says to his Christian readers, “and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the son has the Father also” (1 Jn 2:20-23).

Denying that Jesus is the Christ is denying the very foundation of our Christian faith. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” was Peter’s forthright confession in response to Jesus’ question to his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” (Mt 16:15,16). “You are the Christ” is Mark’s abbreviated form of this confession (Mk 8:29). The name “Christ” always implies that he is the Son.

Cerinthus considered Jesus of Nazareth to be a mere man. His error lives on in modern theology. A man like Bultmann shows himself to be an antichrist, therefore, when he writes, “What a primitive mythology it is, that a Divine Being should become incarnate, and atone for the sins of men through his own blood.”<sup>84</sup>

The climax of antichristianity is to be found, however, in the one archantichrist who, as John warned, was even then on his way. Paul gives a more complete picture of him in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

In his First Letter Paul had instructed the Thessalonians concerning the second coming of Christ. He admonished them not to grieve for their loved ones who had died in the Lord, as those do who have no hope. On the last day their loved ones would rise again, and then they, together with the believers who were still alive at that time, would be snatched up into the clouds to meet Christ in the air (1 Th 4:13-18).

Some of the Thessalonians began to spread the rumor that the day of the Lord had already come. They even claimed that Paul had said so. Members of the congregation lost their heads, so to speak. They panicked! Some quit their jobs. They became dependent on others for their support.

So Paul in his Second Letter takes up the matter of Christ’s second coming once more. He reminds them of what he had told them previously when he was in Thessalonica. The day of the Lord would not come until an apostasy had occurred and the Antichrist had been revealed.

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report, or letter supposed to have come from us.... Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Th 2: 1-4).

Paul speaks in one breath of the apostasy, a massive defection from the Christian faith, and the revelation of the man of lawlessness, or man of sin. There is a relation between the two. This man, the very embodiment of wickedness, arises because Christians no longer love the truth, and he in turn incites and promotes further apostasy. Paul also describes him as the “son of perdition.” He is doomed to eternal destruction in hell.

Paul does not use the term “antichrist,” but he uses the synonymous expression ο(α)ντικειμενον. This individual is a rebel against God, his bitter antagonist.’ He dares to exalt himself above God and all his duly authorized representatives. He crowds God out of his sanctuary and acts as if he were God. He claims the authority that belongs to God alone. He demands that men recognize him as God. This is the ultimate in lawlessness. This is the *ne plus ultra* of wickedness. There can be no question that the one he is speaking about is the Antichrist John said was in the process of coming.

<sup>84</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, in *Kerygma and Myth* edited by Hans Werner Bartsch, (New York and Evanston: Harper Row, 1961), p 7.

The sanctuary of God into which the antichrist forces his way is the heart where God dwells and reigns. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul says, “We are the temple (ναοῦ) of the living God” (cf. also 1 Co 6:19; Eph 2:19-22). In the verses that follow Paul sketches three periods in the history of the Antichrist.

Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (Th 2:5-12)

From Acts 17:1-10 we know that Paul spent three Sabbath days, less than four weeks, in Thessalonica. During that brief period of instruction he had told the Thessalonians about the Antichrist. In other words, this subject was included in Paul’s “basic course in Christianity for new converts.” It is easy to see why Paul considered this so important. Unless these new converts were warned, they could easily fall victim to the Antichrist’s lies.

The first period in the Antichrist’s history was one of clandestine, underground development. The secret power of lawlessness is already at work,” Paul warns his readers (v. 7). Even in apostolic times it was growing like a malignant, subcutaneous tumor.

Commentators have puzzled over Paul’s statement, “And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time” (v. 6). In verse 7 Paul uses the masculine ο(κατεκων for the neuter he used in verse 6, τοκατεκον. The restraining force is personal. Some have supposed this to be an oblique reference to the Roman emperor. As long as the Roman emperors could instigate persecutions, no bishop of the church could lay claim to temporal power.<sup>85</sup>

In verses 10-12 Paul explains, however, that the emergence of the Antichrist is a judgment of God imposed because men “refused to love the truth and so be saved.” It is clear from this that so long as men believed and loved the truth of the Gospel, the spirit of Antichrist could not gain a foothold in their hearts. But when the Christians initial ardor cooled, when their first love for the Gospel of Christ gave way to complacency and apathy (Rev 2:4; 3:16), their lukewarmness provided the climate that enabled the Antichrist to come into the open and boldly assert his claims.

This is the second stage in the Antichrist’s history. In 1:7 Paul mentioned the revelation (αποκαλυψις) of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Antichrist has an αποκαλυψις of his own (2:3,6,8). Some understand this to mean that he will be unmasked, exposed. The context suggests, however, that he was forced to remain underground during the first period much against his will. He would have preferred to come out into the open, but the Christian’s love of the truth made this impossible. When this restraint was removed, he was free to do as he pleased.

The second period of the Antichrist’s activity is followed by a crippling setback, described in verse 8: “whom the Lord Jesus will over throw (αδελειψις) with the breath of his mouth.” The word αδαιρειν means “to kill,” “execute.” The Gospel of Christ breaks the tyranny of the Anti Christ. Despite this mortal blow, he does not pass from the scene until Christ puts him out of commission (καταργησει) once for all and completely destroys him by his glorious epiphany at his second coming.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. e.g., Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament*, Vol. II, p 363.

This sketch of the Antichrist's history demonstrates clearly that he is no one man, some ruthless, godless ruler in the final period of the world's history, as current misinterpretations of this prophecy maintain. He is an adversary of Christ whose activity continues from the days of the apostles to the day of judgment. In other words, this is a movement or institution directed by a succession of individuals."

This antichristian activity is instigated by Satan (v 9). The Antichrist is his tool. As the devil is a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44), So also his agent, the Antichrist, establishes and maintains his power by means of lies (v 9). As Christ will have his parousia (v. 8), so the Antichrist will have a counterfeit parousia (v 9).

We may ask: Why does God permit the Antichrist to arise and wield such destructive, despotic power? According to verses 10-12, God permits men to be deceived by the Antichrist's lies because they rejected his truth. The Antichrist comes as a judgment of God on the unbelief of men.

The question now arises: Who or what is this Antichrist? It is obvious that there is only one phenomenon in the history of the church that has all the marks of the Antichrist given in Paul's prophecy. That is the Roman papacy. It is not possible for us to trace here the details of its historical development. The papacy's fingerprints identify it, however, as the criminal. Its anathema on the biblical doctrine of justification is the very acme of lawlessness. We cite only the following two canons adopted by the Council of Trent:

If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else that confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema.<sup>86</sup>

By making this solemn declaration at Trent, the papacy demonstrated that it was under God's judgment of obduracy. It had hardened itself against the teaching of the Scriptures "that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Ro 3:28), a truth reaffirmed by the Reformation.

The devil's doctrine of work-righteousness had reared its ugly head already in the days of the apostles. Repeatedly Paul wielded the sword of the spirit against it in his letters to the churches. It is an error that inheres in the sinful heart of man by nature. In the Apology Melancthon calls it the *opinio legis*.<sup>87</sup>

Closely connected with this false teaching in the development of the papacy was the lust for power, position, and prestige in the church. The desire for preeminence manifested itself even in the circle of the apostles and received Christ's sharp reprimand (Mt 20:20-28; 23:8-12; Mk 10:35-45; Lk 22: 24-30 cf. also 3 Jn 9). It reached its apex in the presumptuous claim of the papacy, that, as Boniface VIII states in his infamous bull, *Unam Sanctam*, of 1302, "it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff."<sup>88</sup>

With this unconscionable demand the Roman pontiff was in fact "proclaiming himself to be God," as Paul had foretold (v. 4). He enforced his outrageous claim by imposing excommunication or the interdict on those who dared to oppose him. We recall how in 1077 Henry IV, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, stood for three days outside the pope's residence at Canossa, barefoot and bareheaded in the bitter January cold, begging the forgiveness of Gregory VII whose authority he had defied. The pope claimed that he alone, as the vicar of Christ and successor of Peter, possessed the keys to the kingdom of heaven. This was his key to power. With this weapon he tyrannized men's consciences and set himself up in God's temple.

Then came the Reformation. Wielding the pen of his servant Luther, Christ toppled the Antichrist's triple tiara, the symbol of the power he had usurped over heaven, earth, and hell. "With the breath of his mouth" he

<sup>86</sup> Sess. VI, Canons XI and XII, Canons and Decrees of the Council of the Council of Trent, H. J. Schroeder, translator (St. Louis & London: Herder, 1941), p 43.

<sup>87</sup> *Triglotta*, 197:144.

<sup>88</sup> *Documents of the Christian Church*, edited by Henry Bettenson (London: Oxford, 1963), p 161.

restored the Gospel of salvation *sola gratia* and *sola fide* and reestablished the principle, *sola scriptura*. Thus the papacy suffered a mortal wound from which it has not recovered to this day. Its doom is sealed, a doom that will be consummated at Christ's great epiphany on the last day.

"That the pope is the very Antichrist," as we confess with Luther in the Smalcald Articles,<sup>89</sup> is no mere historical judgment. Neither is it an open question. It is an article of faith.<sup>90</sup> As the works which Jesus performed served to identify him as the promised Christ (Mt 11:2-5), so the works and words of the papacy serve to identify it as the expected Antichrist.

In 1959 our synod adopted a "Statement on the Antichrist." It concludes with the following sentence: "Since Scripture teaches that the Antichrist would be revealed and gives the marks by which the Antichrist is to be recognized (2 Th 2:6,8), and since this prophecy has been clearly fulfilled in the history and development of the Roman Papacy, it is Scripture which reveals that the Papacy is the Antichrist."<sup>91</sup>

As little as one can prove the doctrine of the incarnation or the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ to the satisfaction of human reason, so little can one prove the doctrine that the pope is the Antichrist. But those who treasure the doctrine of justification, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, will also with the eyes of faith recognize the archantagonist of this doctrine as the Antichrist.

Time permits us to allude only briefly to the visions of Daniel (chapters 7-12) in which he foresees the coming of the Antichrist. In chapter 7 he tells of seeing four terrible beasts, a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a fourth with ten horns. These beasts symbolized the world empires of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The fourth beast developed another little horn that had the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things (Da 7:8,20). This horn "made war with the saints and prevailed against them" (Da 7:21). It continued its attack on the saints until the final judgment (Da 7:22,24-26).

In a later vision Daniel describes this Adversary of the church as a king who "shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all" (Da 11:36,37).

In the light of Paul's characterization of the antichrist, are not these words pregnant with meaning and remarkably descriptive of the blasphemous arrogance of the papacy? What can be more presumptuous than for a human being to claim that he possesses the divine attribute of infallibility, as the pope has done?

Revelation 13 is strongly reminiscent of Daniel's prophecy. Here John tells of seeing two monsters. The first one rose out of the sea, the second out of the earth. The first had ten horns, each wearing a crown, and seven heads, each emblazoned with a blasphemous name. It embodied all the hideous and savage features of the four beasts in Daniel's vision. It had the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. With its mouth it uttered proud words and blasphemies. One of its heads suffered what seemed to be a fatal wound, but this was healed. Satan, the dragon, gave this beast its power and authority.

The second beast had the appearance of a lamb but spoke like a dragon. It exercised all the authority of the first beast in its behalf. It caused all the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast and ordered them to set up an image of the first beast that was wounded yet lived. It caused all who refused to worship this image to be killed.

This vision has been interpreted by our forefathers in various ways. Some have said that the first beast represents the Roman Empire and the second beast the papacy, which grew out of it.<sup>92</sup> Stoeckhardt considers the

<sup>89</sup> *Triglotta*, 475:10.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Joh. P. Meyer, "Papam Esse Ipsum Verum Antichristum," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol 40, No. 2, (April, 1943), pp 102ff.

<sup>91</sup> *Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, authorized by the Commission on Doctrinal matters, 1970, p 67.

<sup>92</sup> Variations of this basic interpretation are offered by Kretzmann, op. cit., p 628f; J. T. Mueller, *Concordia Bible with Notes* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952) p 1478f; W. Peters, op. cit., p 117f; Carl Manthey-Zorn, *Offenbarung St. Johannis* (Zwickau: Johannes Herrmann, 1910), p 183ff.

first beast itself to be the papacy and the second beast its agents, scholasticism and Jesuitism.<sup>93</sup> Another interpretation sees the first beast as representing the hideous monster sin, combining in itself all the forces of evil and ungodliness. The second beast is then believed to symbolize the many false prophets that have appeared and will appear.<sup>94</sup> Still another interpretation regards the first beast as symbolizing all the antichristian forces in the world, including all political, military, philosophic, cultural, economic, and social power. The second beast is said to represent the antichristian propaganda in the world.<sup>95</sup>

To your essayist this last interpretation seems to be the best. It seems clear from the authority exercised by these beasts “over every tribe, people, language, and nation” (v. 7, cf. v.8, 12, 16) that the whole diabolical monster of antichristianity is represented, both in its ability to harass and persecute the church by brute force and in its attempt to counteract the Gospel by an incessant, massive barrage of false teaching, human philosophy, and antichristian propaganda.

Unquestionably, the tyranny of the papacy, the Antichrist κατ' ἄνθρωπον, is part and parcel of the activity of these beasts. It is represented, I believe, by the head which received what seemed to be a fatal wound but which was healed (cf. 2 Th 2:8). The reference to the Reformation seems unmistakable.

To my mind, the first beast symbolizes the whole array of forces that have attacked and persecuted the church through the course of the New Testament era. From the blood bath instigated by Nero and the scourge of Islam, which swept across northern Africa and the Middle East, down to the systematic effort by the Communists in modern times to eradicate the Christian faith from the hearts and lives of their people, the kings and rulers of the earth have been the devil's instruments in making war on the saints. The second beast calls to mind the word of Jesus about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ferocious wolves (Mt 7:15). With the appearance of a lamb, this beast is a caricature of Christ, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).

This interpretation of Revelation 13 agrees with John's statement that there are many antichrists in addition to one major Antichrist (1 Jn 2:18). In his vision John sees this entire godless coalition, which includes the papacy, as a fierce, Hydra-headed monster thirsting for the blood of God's saints.<sup>96</sup> Economic sanctions are also used in the beasts concerted campaign to force all men to worship him (Rev 13:16,17). His number is 666, “man's number” (v. 18), symbolizing the continual failure of man's efforts to dethrone God and to deify himself. He perpetually falls short of seven, the divine number (Rev 4:5). The grand opera, composed by the dragon and conducted

It will be of interest to see how Rome interprets the prophecy of the Antichrist. Romanists are incensed, of course, by the charge of the Lutheran Confessions “that the pope is the very Antichrist.” Bristling, Bellarmine retorts, “With great impudence the heretics make the Roman Pontiff the Antichrist.”<sup>97</sup>

Some Romanists have adopted the preterist view of Luis de Alcazar of Spain (1554-1613), who held that the prophecies of Revelation were fulfilled in the Roman Empire and that Nero was the Antichrist. Generally, however, they have accepted the futurist interpretation first proposed by Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), also of Spain. Ribera taught that the Antichrist would appear shortly before the second coming of Christ. He would be a single individual who would abolish the Christian religion, rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, and be received by the Jews. His work would continue for three and a half years (cf. Rev 13:5). Ribera's interpretation was adopted by

<sup>93</sup> George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, translated by H. W. Degner (Lake Mills, Ia.: Graphic, 1964), p 49ff.

<sup>94</sup> Joh. P. Meyer, “Eternity: Chiliasm,” *The Northwestern Lutheran*, March 20, 1955, p 85. Prof. Meyer prior to this held the first of the views described above. Later he preferred the last of the interpretations suggested in our discussion.

<sup>95</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1943), p 413. M. Franzmann, *Concordia Bible with Notes* (St. Louis & London: Concordia, 1971), p 529.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. The Apology, Art. XV, 18, *Triglotta*, 319: “The kingdom of Antichrist is a new service of God, devised by human authority rejecting Christ, just as the kingdom of Mahomet has services and works through which it wishes to be justified before God; nor does it hold that men are gratuitously justified before God by faith for Christ's sake. Thus the Papacy also will be a part of the kingdom of Antichrist if it thus defends human services as by the beast, which is entitled “The Apotheosis of Man” is a wretched performance in which the orchestra and chorus are invariably flat.

<sup>97</sup> Hoenecke, IV 230.

Bellarmino.<sup>98</sup> Commenting on 2 Thessalonians 2, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* likewise states, “It would not be false to Paul’s thought to see here an expectation that when the final assault of evil does materialize, it will be headed by an individual who incarnates, so to speak, the power of evil in this person.”<sup>99</sup> Ribera’s interpretation has also become that of a large proportion of Protestantism.

Despite the clear statement of the Lutheran Confessions, most Lutherans of modern times are unwilling to identify the pope as the Antichrist. Like Ribera, Reu expects him to be a single individual who will appear at some time in the future. Here is his argumentation:

Unquestionably the Antichrist is an actual individual, one person; John speaks of him as such (1 John 2:18-22); Paul implies the same; especially since the description which he gives in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 is based entirely upon Daniel chapter 11, where from v. 36, the Antichrist is described as a secular ruler, i.e., an individual person. The view here presented can by no means be invalidated by a reference to Luther’s well known statement in the Articles of Smalcald. For Luther’s statement is a purely historical judgment; it is no exegetical or dogmatical statement, and it is possible that one finds the biblical marks of the Antichrist to be characteristics of the pope of Rome and still expects the culmination of anti-Christianity in an actual person of the last days. Whether this actual person proceeds from the institution of the papacy or whether he is a secular ruler is hard to define beforehand especially since the pope has strong aspirations for secular power.<sup>100</sup>

Rohnert, a Lutheran pastor of the former Breslau synod at Waldenburg who published a dogmatics in 1902, is refreshingly orthodox in many respects. But his discussion of the doctrine of the Antichrist is a disappointment. He lists five reasons why the papacy cannot be the great Antichrist. His reasons are:

1. The use of the singular (e.g., 2 Th 2:3,8) points to an individual, not to an institution such as the papacy.
2. Since Paul considered it possible that Christ would return during his lifetime (1 Th 4:15-17), the papacy would have had to exist in Paul day because the revelation of the Antichrist was to precede Christ’s parousia (2 Th 2:3).
3. According to Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5 the reign of the Antichrist is to last only 3 ½ years, but the papacy has existed for centuries.
4. According to Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 the Antichrist is to be a world ruler, evolving out of the ten kingdoms that would rise from the ruins of the Roman empire—a prophecy not yet true of the papacy.
5. The papacy does not represent the total apostasy from Christianity that Scripture attributes to the Antichrist (1 Jn 4:3), nor has it yet brought down fire from heaven (Rev 13:13).

How does Rohnert reconcile his views with the Lutheran Confessions? He writes:

We can understand these statements taken as a whole only in such a way that the Confessions are expressing the firm conviction: the papacy with its many false doctrines and false practices, which the Reformation attacked, is not Christian but antichristian; it is a part of the kingdom of the Antichrist. They are obviously using the word antichrist in a broader sense, including Islam also under the term. But they do not say that the ultimate Antichrist is already present in the papacy.

<sup>98</sup> cf. Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Grand-Rapids: Baker, 1958), p 367f. Also *Present Truth*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (September, 1974), p 27.

<sup>99</sup> *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York; McGraw Hill, 1967), Vol. I, p 617.

<sup>100</sup> Reu, op. cit., II, 236f.

They leave the possibility open that Antichristianity will finally come to a climax in one single person. It is reserved for this archantichrist to fulfill the remaining prophecies concerning the Antichrist which have not yet been fulfilled. We for our part believe it likely that in the last days the papacy will unite with a world power hostile to Christ and in league with this under a powerful head, the true Antichrist, achieve its final victories.<sup>101</sup>

Regin Prenter, author of one of the most recent Lutheran dogmatics, regards it as an error to teach “that the antichrist is only the pope or only some political tyrant.” According to him, “‘the mystery of the antichrist’ is a wide variety of manifestations of the devil’s opposition to Christ, an opposition which takes place everywhere, both in the political and religious realms.”<sup>102</sup>

Prenter is right as far as he goes, but he is wrong in failing to recognize the one special Antichrist of whom Daniel, John, and Paul speak and who sits in the very sanctuary of God.

For Paul Althaus of Erlangen the antichrist is whatever in any given period of history embodies the demonic forces of evil and hostility to Christianity. He says:

The church must continually look for the antichrist as a present reality or as a threatening possibility in the near future. The diversity of the biblical pictures of the antichrist suggests that there is need to beware of various forms of antichristian power. Thus it is the demonic in the state, in society, in religion, in the church.<sup>103</sup>

This is essentially what Prenter is also saying when he writes, “The mystery of the antichrist is a demonization of life, whether it takes place in the political, religious, economic, or cultural realm.”<sup>104</sup>

Althaus believes that the thought of a climax of antichristianity in the last epoch of history is not a matter of future developments but an existential question that confronts the individual believer and the church in every age. “We don’t know what is going to happen,” he says.<sup>105</sup> For that reason he does not want to commit himself on the question whether antichristianity will finally be embodied in a personal antichrist.

That such a person will appear in the end-time is, however, the consensus of premillennialists of all shades. Because of the sensation created by Hal Lindsey’s best seller, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, we shall give him the floor to present his description of the Antichrist.

The time is ripe and getting riper for the one we call the “Future Fuehrer.” This is the one who is predicted in the Scriptures very clearly and called the “Antichrist.”

The Bible gives a perfect biographical sketch of the future world leader.

Then Lindsey cites the description of the beast in Revelation 13 and continues:

This person, the Antichrist is called the “beast” because from God’s viewpoint that is exactly what he is. The passage is obviously talking about a person because the personal pronoun “he” is used. He is also described as a person of great authority.

After explaining the symbolism of the leopard, bear, and the lion features of this beast, he says:

<sup>101</sup> W. Rohnert, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Braunschweig and Leipzig: Hellmuth Wollermann, 1902), p 588, translated.

<sup>102</sup> Regin Prenter, *Creation and Redemption*, translated by Theodor I. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) p 556.

<sup>103</sup> Paul Althaus, *Die Letzten Dinge* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1964), p 283f translated.

<sup>104</sup> Regin Prenter, op. cit., p 556.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Althaus, op. cit., p 295.



Now we are beginning to see, little by little, the picture emerging of the Future Fuehrer. His conquest will be rapid, he will be very strong and powerful, and there will be an air about him which is self-assured and proud...

We read that the dragon is going to give the Antichrist his power. In other words, Satan himself is going to give him fantastic power.... It is said that Satan is going to send this man, his masterpiece, with all sorts of signs and wonders and miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

The second thing that will be given this man is a throne. This means world government. This throne was offered to Jesus Christ.... Now we are studying a man who will accept this throne wholeheartedly. He will be worshiped as Satan is worshiped, with forms of idolatry that we can only guess in our wildest leaps of imagination.

Citing the increase in occultism in recent years, Lindsey opines:

However, the Satan worship which will be initiated at the time of the world reign of the Future Fuehrer will make today's antics of the cultists look like nursery school.

According to Lindsey, the nearly fatal wound suffered by the beast will be a physical injury suffered by the Antichrist, "the Great Roman Dictator":

The way in which this dictator is going to step onto the stage of history will be dramatic. Overnight he will become the byword of the world. He is going to be distinguished as supernatural: this will be done by an act which will be a Satanic counterfeit of the resurrection. This writer does not believe it will be an actual resurrection, but it will be a situation in which this person has a mortal wound. Before he has actually lost his life, however, he will be brought back from this critical wounded state. This is something which will cause tremendous amazement throughout the world.

We could draw a comparison to the tragic death of John F. Kennedy. Imagine what would have happened if the President of the United States, after being shot and declared dead, had come to life again! The impact of an event like that would shake the world.

It is not difficult to imagine what will happen when this coming world leader makes his miraculous recovery.... After that the whole world will follow him.

He will have a magnetic personality, be personally attractive, and a powerful speaker. He will be able to mesmerize an audience with his oratory.

On the basis of Revelation 13:5, Lindsey holds that the Antichrist will rule for three and one half literal years prior to Christ's personal, visible return to this earth. Since he will have the absolute authority to act with the power of Satan Lindsey asserts:

This period of time will make the regimes of Hitler, Mao, and Stalin look like Girl Scouts weaving a daisy chain by comparison.

During this time in Lindsey's scheme of things, the saints will be absent from the earth. They will have been "raptured." But, Lindsey goes on:

After the Christians are gone God is going to reveal himself in a special way to 144,000 physical literal Jews who are going to believe with a vengeance that Jesus is the Messiah. They are going to be 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams turned loose on this earth—the earth will never know a period of evangelism like this period. These Jewish people are going to make up for lost time.

They are going to have the greatest number of converts in all history. Revelation 7:9-14 says they bring so many to Christ that they can't be numbered.

However, the Antichrist is going to unleash a total persecution of these people.

“And it was given to him....authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.... ”  
(Revelation 13:7b NASB).

He will be the absolute dictator of the whole world!

This is the Future Fuehrer.<sup>106</sup>

More scholarly millennialists present a more sober less sensational description of the Antichrist, but essentially their conception of the Antichrist is not far different from Lindseys. There are some who think that he may be Judas Iscariot resurrected!<sup>107</sup>

What are the consequences of not recognizing in the papacy the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Antichrist? Does the belief that the Antichrist will be an individual who will appear at some time in the future pose any threat to Christian faith?

It certainly does! On the one hand, those who say, as Blackstone does, “The Popes have received their exaltation, and power as the pretended vicars of Christ, and not as his opponent. It is a great mistake, therefore, to call them the antichrist,”<sup>108</sup> do not fully understand or appreciate the Gospel of justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>109</sup> If they did, they would be horrified, nothing less, at Rome's blasphemous curse on those who teach this doctrine that constitutes the heart of the Gospel and the only way to salvation. To fail to recognize the menace of the papacy is to aid and abet the enemy. If Rome can convince Christians that it is a gentle lamb, they can be swallowed alive before they realize that they are the hapless victims of a ravenous wolf. With his 580 million adherents (nearly two thirds of Christendom!) the pope is a well-fed beast!

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Spener once wrote, “Whoever does not recognize the kingdom of the Pope as the kingdom of the Antichrist is not yet standing firm that he may not by this or that seduction be converted to it.”<sup>110</sup>

On the other hand, those who look for the Antichrist to appear in the future are lulled into a false sense of security by their failure to be prepared for the last day and Christ's return which may come at any moment. Paul warns, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” (1 Th 5:2,3). “Be ready, Jesus urges us therefore, “because the son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Mt 24:44). God help us to heed that warning!

## V. A Devil's Brew of Eschatological Heresies

In the previous lecture in this series we have surveyed the biblical doctrine of eschatology in its entirety, and we have discussed several basic eschatological prophecies in detail. We have exposed such widely held false teachings as the belief in a millennium and in the coming of a future Antichrist. Eschatological aberrations are so many, however, that one could easily write a rather thick book if one wished to discuss them all. In this final lecture we must of necessity restrict ourselves to discussing only a few additional heresies.

### I. *The Restoration of Israel and Conversion of the Jews*

<sup>106</sup> Hal Lindsey, op. cit., pp 103-111.

<sup>107</sup> R. Ludwigson, *A Survey of Bible Prophecy*, p 26.

<sup>108</sup> William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* (Chicago, New York, Toronto: Revel 1908), p 110.

<sup>109</sup> W.H.T. Dau: “The reason why modern Lutherans and others deny that the pope is the very antichrist is because they do not know what the Gospel, and hence, what Christ really is” (*Doctrinal Theology*, n.d., Part II, p 182).

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Pieper, III, p 467.

God chose Israel to be his people. That was grace sheer grace. He revealed himself to them as “the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex 34: 6,7). This was God’s own exegesis, of his glorious and awesome name, יהוה. As the Lord their God (Dt 28:58), he had established his covenant with Israel freely. He did this for no other reason than, that He chose to be gracious and merciful toward them. (Ex 33:19, Dt 7:6-8).

But God’s grace was not intended only for Israel. Strategically located on the crossroads of the Ancient East, Israel was to be a beacon light of salvation to the nations of the earth that were shrouded in the darkness of heathenism. God entrusted them with his very words (Ro 3:2) that they might “declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people,” as David exhorted his fellow Israelites to do (Ps 96:3).

Deuteronomy 28 records the many blessings with which God would bless his people if they received his covenant promises with believing hearts and served him in thankful faith. But it also records the dire consequences if they despised his grace and broke his covenant. If they did not serve the Lord their God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart (Dt 28:47). Moses warned, “The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other” (Dt 28:64). There they would live in perpetual insecurity, sorrow, and fear.

History records the grim evidence of the appalling fulfillment of these curses. The Assyrians deported the Ten Tribes of Israel, and the Babylonian and Roman conquests led to the diaspora of the Jews scattering them over the face of the earth. According to the 1971 Britannica Book of the Year there are 13,537,000 Jews in the world. They are distributed as follows:

North America -----	6,035,000
South America -----	705,000
Europe -----	4,025,000
Asia -----	2,460,000
Africa -----	238,000
Oceania (including New Zealand and Australia) -----	74,000

Through the centuries the Jews have repeatedly been the victims of shocking pogroms and persecutions. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* estimates that nearly six million died in what is called “the holocaust,” the systematic Nazi extermination campaign.<sup>111</sup> Ever since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus in the year 70 A.D., the Jews have been a homeless and hapless people.

Then on May 14, 1948, the inconceivable happened. On that day David Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence announcing the establishment of the modern State of Israel. A half-century of effort by the Zionist movement was capped with success. This movement received its impetus from a call in 1897 by an Austrian newspaperman named Theodore Herzl for the reestablishment of a homeland for the Jews. In the Balfour Declaration of 1917 Great Britain threw its weight behind the plan to establish such a homeland in Palestine. Jews began to immigrate to their ancestral homeland in increasing numbers. By 1948 there were 650,000 in Palestine. Increasing prosperity attracted many Arabs also. Conflict between the two groups created the so-called Palestine problem.

Britain, which had a mandate over the territory, turned the problem over to the United Nations. It was decided to partition the country, giving a part to the Jews and a part to the Arabs.

The establishment of Israel as an independent Jewish state was greeted by Christian millennialists with unrestrained enthusiasm and support. They saw in this development the fulfillment of prophecies such as these:

<sup>111</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 8, p 890.

Dt 30:1-6: And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice, according to all that I command thee this day, thou and, thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven or unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: and the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Isa 11:11,12: And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Jer 16:14-15 Therefore, behold, the, days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said. The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.

Eze 37:21: And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them unto their own land.

Amos 9:14,15: “And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord

Zec 10:10 I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and the place shall not be found for them.

These passages are but a sampling of what is a recurring theme in the Old Testament prophets: The Lord will gather his people together again from the many lands where they have been scattered.

What do these promises of the Lord mean? It is clear from passages like Jeremiah 25:11 that God did promise to bring his people back to the Promised Land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. they were scattered again, however. Was God promising another restoration? We note that some of these Promises, like Isaiah 11:12, speak of a return not only from Babylon, but from the four corners of the earth. Do these promises mean that God will bring the Jews back to Palestine as a prelude to Christ’s second Advent, as millennialists maintain?<sup>112</sup> Are they to be understood as Blackstone supposes when he writes:

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<sup>112</sup> cf. Ludwigson, op. cit., p 161.

It may be that you say, “These prophecies were fulfilled in the return from Babylon.” Not so, that was the *First Time*. But there is to be a *Second Restoration* (Isa 11:11).

In the first restoration only those who were MINDED came back from Babylon (Ezra 7:13), while many remained both there, and in Egypt and elsewhere. But in the future, or second restoration, not one will be left...

In the first restoration it was only the Jews who returned. In the second or future restoration, it will be both Judah (the two tribes) and Israel (the ten tribes)....

At the first restoration they returned to be overthrown and driven out again. But in the second, they shall return to remain no more to go out. They shall be exalted and dwell safely, and the Gentile nations shall flow unto them.<sup>113</sup>

Are these prophecies being fulfilled in our time by the establishment of the modern state of Israel and the migration of many Jews to it, as Walvoord insists in the following remarks:

The foundation of the state of Israel in recent years has been a part of the predicted regathering of scattered Israel back to their ancient land. Previous discussion has pointed out the three predicted dispersions of Israel as already having been fulfilled along with two predicted regatherings.<sup>114</sup> The present movement of Jews back to Palestine in a movement that parallels in many ways the Exodus from Egypt is tangible evidence which cannot be ignored reasonably. The significance of the regathering is that it justifies the literal interpretation of prophecy which anticipated just such a movement. If the regathering is to be taken literally, as present history would indicate, it would naturally follow that the predicted golden age is ahead, following the second advent of Christ.<sup>115</sup>

Let us take one of these passages and examine it more closely Isaiah 11:11,12 may serve as an example. Does it say what the millennialists claim it says?

From verse 10 we see that Isaiah has his prophetic eye on the coming Savior: “In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” It is the New Testament age then, the time when that Savior has come, to which he is referring when he says in verse 11, “it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left.”

From the context it is obvious also that Isaiah is not prophesying the return of all of Israel. He specifically mentions that he is speaking about a *remnant*. In 10:22 he clearly distinguishes between the nation as a whole and the remnant: “Though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return.”

Will this “return” be a physical return to Palestine? Again the previous chapter shows clearly that Isaiah is speaking of a spiritual return, of repentance, of conversion: “The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God” (10:21). In other words, in the messianic age, the New Testament period, some of the Israelites would turn to the Lord in faith and become his true people.

We are reminded of Pentecost, when 3000 “from every nation of the world” (Ac 2:5) heard the preaching of the disciples in their own languages, repented of their sins, and were baptized. These included “Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs” (Ac 2:9-11). In verse 12 Isaiah states that the Gentiles, too, will rally around the banner around which the outcasts of Israel and Jews from the four corners, of the earth will gather. The rallying point

<sup>113</sup> William E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, pp 167-169.

<sup>114</sup> Walvoord’s three dispersions are: 1) the sojourn in Egypt; 2) the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities; and 3) the diaspora in 70 A.D. after the destruction of Jerusalem (op. cit., p 176).

<sup>115</sup> John F. Walvoord, op. cit., pp 185-186.

will not be the land of Palestine but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, “the root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people” (v. 10).

“But,” millennialists charge, “you are spiritualizing what is stated in plain and simple words. Look at what the Ezekiel passage says: ‘I will bring them unto their own land’ (37:21), and the Amos prophecy, ‘I will plant them upon their land’ (9:15). Why don’t you stick to the words of the text? Why do you depart from the literal meaning?”

The answer is, of course, that Scripture itself indicates that these passages are to be understood figuratively. In the Ezekiel passage God declares in verse 24, “And David my servant shall be king over them.” Obviously, he is not referring to the son of Jesse who reigned from 1011 to 971 B.C. “David” is the Messiah, great David’s greater Son, of whom David, the son of Jesse was a type. “And they shall have one shepherd” is likewise obviously a figure of speech. Only those who are blinded by their millennialistic prejudice, do not see that this is all prophecy which finds its fulfillment in the words of Jesus, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me...I have other sheep that are not of this flock. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (Jn 10:14,16).

That the Amos passage has been and is being fulfilled right now as Gentiles like you and me come into Christ’s church. James clearly stated at the Council of Jerusalem in 51 A.D. citing verses 11 and 12 of this messianic prophecy James declared, “Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild the fallen house of David. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ that have been known for ages”(Ac 15:13-18).

The return of God’s people from captivity, the rebuilding of the waste cities, the planting of vineyards and the reaping of a rich harvest, of which Amos speaks in 9:13,14, like the establishment of Israel in its own land, is all a description of the savior’s work in the hearts of men as he draws them into His kingdom of grace and blesses them with his gifts of salvation and everlasting life. “In that day” in the prophecy of Amos (9:11), like the same words in Isaiah 11:11, points to a fulfillment in the day when the promised Savior has come. In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus read the first two verses of Isaiah 61, a chapter in which Isaiah describes the Messianic age in language strikingly similar to that of his older contemporary Amos.<sup>116</sup> Then He declared, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:21).

The idea of the millennialists that the prophets are foretelling a literal return of the Jews to Palestine, a literal rebuilding of the waste cities of Judah and Israel, a literal harvesting of phenomenal crops, a literal restoration of the temple in Jerusalem with the reinstitution of the Mosaic sacrifices and ceremonies—all this is a tragic misinterpretation of deeply significant and beautiful prophecies of the coming Savior and his reign of grace.

The key passage cited by millennialists for their belief that there will be a mass conversion of the Jews to Christianity before the end of the world is Romans 11:25-27. This passage reads: “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”

In chapters 9 -11 of his letter to the Romans, as you know, Paul discusses God’s dealing with Israel, his chosen people. Emphasizing God’s grace in calling them, Paul recalls God’s word in Exodus 33:19, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (Ro 9:15). Nevertheless, the majority despised the riches of God’s grace. Paul cites the prophecy of Isaiah (10:22,23) we referred to earlier, “Though the number of the Israelites should be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Isa 61:4, “And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair waste cities, the desolations of many generations.”

be saved” (Ro 9:27). Only a remnant will believe God’s message of salvation. To Paul’s deep sorrow, the rest are “a disobedient and obstinate people” (10:21).

Did God then reject his people (Ro 11:1)? “By no means,” Paul replies, “God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew” (Ro 11:2). There is still “a remnant chosen by grace” (Ro11:5). These sons of Abraham belong to God’s elect. Paul himself was one of them. God extended his salvation to the Gentiles so as to make Israel envious and eager to receive it also (Ro 11:11). Wild olive shoots were grafted in to take the place of the branches that had been broken off. Those Israelites who do not persist in unbelief, will, however, again be grafted in (Ro 11:23), to join the Gentiles in Christ’s church “And so,” Paul concludes, “all Israel will be saved” (Ro 11:26).

Does this mean, as millennialists claim, that a mass conversion of the Jews will take place? Charles Hodge argues:

Israel, here, from the context, must mean the Jewish people, and *all* Israel, the whole nation. The Jews as a people, are now rejected; as a people they are to be restored. As their rejection, although national, did not include the rejection of every individual; so their restoration, although in like manner national need not be assumed to include the salvation of every individual Jew but the whole nation, as a nation.<sup>117</sup>

But Hodge overlooks a vital point. Paul does not say, “And then” (kai\to\te), but “and so” (kai\ou\bwv) all Israel will be saved. Reu makes the same mistake as Hodge when he translates the passage as follows: “A partial hardening has come upon (the people of) Israel to last until that point in time when the fulness of the Gentiles has come in, and then all Israel shall be saved.”<sup>118</sup>

The word ou\bwv does not mean “then.” It means “so, in this way, in this manner.”<sup>119</sup> It sums up what Paul has said. In the preceding he emphasized, as has been mentioned, that there is still a remnant chosen by grace from among the Jews. The hardening of Israel, the blood descendants of Jacob, is only “in part.” It does not include the whole nation. Through the years some will come to faith. But also the elect from among the Gentiles will come into Christ’s church. By adding the full number (to\pl h\rwma) of these Gentiles to the remnant of Jewish believers all of God’s true Israel, the full number of his elect, consisting of believers of both Jewish and Gentile stock, will be saved.

In Romans 9:6 Paul makes the important point, “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” It is not physical descent from Jacob or Abraham that determines who belongs to God’s true Israel, his spiritual Israel. This is determined solely on the basis of faith. In Galatians 3:7 Paul stresses this same truth, “Understand, then, that those who believe are the children of Abraham.”

Millennialists also misinterpret the “until” in Paul’s statement, “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.” Paul is not saying that all the Gentiles who are to be saved will come to faith and that then, after this, a mass Jewish conversion will take place. The word “until” does not imply that a change will take place in the hardening of the majority before the end of the world. It does not suggest this any more than the statement in 2 Samuel 6:23, “Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child until the day of her death,” implies that she had child after her death. Gentiles will continue to come to faith until the day of judgment, as Jesus indicates in Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world

<sup>117</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: H. B. Garder, 1883), p 589.

<sup>118</sup> Reu, op. cit. II, 229.

<sup>119</sup> None of the passages that Reu cites (op. cit., p 232) prove that ou\bwv means either “therefore” (supposedly in Ro 9:20) or “only after this has been accomplished” (supposedly in Acts 17:33; 20:11; 27:17. In each instance it means “in this manner.” Cf C.F.W. Walther, “Wird Röm. 11, 25, 26, 27, eine noch zu erwartende solenne Judenbekehrung gelehrt?” *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. V., No. 11 (November 1859), p 324.

as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” The remnant of the Jews will also be gathered during this period, while the rest of the Jews and Gentiles remain in unbelief.<sup>120</sup>

Millennialists boast that theirs is the literal interpretation. Some of them, to be sure, do teach that all that are Israelites in the physical sense will be raised and will be converted to faith in Christ. Most of them, however, restrict the “all” to those Jews who will be living at Christ’s return, and many limit the term even further and say that a great number, but not all, of these will become Christians. But Paul is contrasting “all Israel,” which will be saved, with the “Israel in part” that will be hardened. In such a context “all” can be nothing less than universal. Any interpretation that restricts the “all” is hardly literal!

The teachings of Reu are therefore unsubstantiated and unscriptural when he claims, “The proclamation of the gospel among all nations is followed by the conversion of Israel. The Lord predicts the coming of a long night of hardening and resistance, but at the remotest point of the horizon he sees the dawn of day.”<sup>121</sup>

All who, like Reu, teach this eschatological error or the related error that God has promised to gather the Jews from the four corners of the earth and reestablish them in Palestine as a prelude to Christ’s return—and the number of such errorists is legion—act as the devil’s waiters in serving his brew of eschatological heresy to mislead and deceive the unwary.

## II. The Rapture

“There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy.... cars going in all directions.... and not one of them had a driver ... I mean it was wild! I think we’ve got an invasion from outer space!”

“It was the last quarter of the championship game and the other side was ahead. Our boys had the ball. We made a touchdown and tied it up. The crowd went crazy. Only one minute to go and they fumbled—our quarterback recovered—he was about a yard from the goal when—zap—no more quarterback—completely gone, just like that”<sup>122</sup>

These are only two of a number of examples Hal Lindsey gives to explain his conception of the rapture. Some day Jesus will come suddenly, unexpectedly, and snatch away all those who believe in him.

But Lindsey is by no means the only one who holds and disseminates these views. There is a veritable flood of tracts, periodicals, books, and spellbinding preachers pouring out steaming cups of this sensational devil’s brew to be consumed by a gullible public.

On the cover of a book by Salem Kirban one is told, “Sometime in the near future several *million* people will suddenly *disappear* from this earth ‘in the twinkling of an eye.’”<sup>123</sup>

Kirban points to Matthew 24:40,41, “Two men will be in the field; one will be taken, and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.” In this passage Jesus is describing the separation of the believers from the unbelievers to which he referred a few verses earlier when he said that he would send his angels at his return on the last day to “gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Mt 24:31).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Luther: “Concerning the whole nation [of the Jews], whoever wishes may entertain his hopes; I have no such hopes, and know of no Scripture to that effect. We can hardly convert the vast majority of ‘Christians’; we must content ourselves with the small remnant. Much less is it possible to convert all of these children of the devil. That some draw such dreams out of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans means nothing: St. Paul means something entirely different” (St. Louis, XX, 2030-2031). On the term “Israel” Luther writes: “The apostles and other disciples of Christ who came from the Jews were the true Israel and inherited the name Israel from the whole people, just as Paul inherited the name Benjamin. Therefore the name Israel subsequently remained with the apostles and was inherited by all their disciples, so that now all of holy Christendom, and we also and all who believe the word of the apostles and are their disciples are called Israel” (St. Louis, VI, 883-884).

<sup>121</sup> Reu, op. cit., II, pp 229-234.

<sup>122</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p 136.

<sup>123</sup> Salem Kirban, *Guide to Survival*.



But Kirban has the same misconception of the rapture as Lindsey. Here is a sample of his description of the experience of a man traveling on a supersonic jet:

I just about got on the plane. These new supersonic jets carry 1000 people but I was the last one to get a seat. I was happy I had made the late afternoon flight. I would be home shortly. And I had a lot to tell Helen.

Just then, Bill shouted excitedly, “George, look out that window.... I tell you that’s not just a cloud. I’ve never seen the sky so funny looking. It’s as though it was opening up.... George, IT IS OPENING UP.... PEELING BACK LIKE A SCROLL.... George what’s happening!”

He was shouting now.... and I felt embarrassed. But I looked around and everyone in the plane was standing up and pointing with excitement.

And then it happened.... Almost like a twinkling of an eye.

It seemed like the plane got much lighter.... turned abruptly and went into a dive from 80,000 feet high.

I lost consciousness.... I don’t remember exactly what happened. There had been two stewardesses standing next to me; but when I awoke only one was there!

I picked her up off the floor and she rushed to the pilot’s cabin. When she came out she was ashen white.... And put her hand to her mouth to a scream.

Just then the intercom came on and we heard a voice “Ladies and Gentlemen something rather unusual has happened. We are not sure what.... but please be calm....everything is under control. Our pilot has vanished.... perhaps some mysterious celestial illness. This caused the abrupt dive...but your co-pilot now has full control of the aircraft. Please keep your seatbelts fastened.”

Why should that make the stewardess shout with fear...I wondered.... and then I looked around me and she pointed with trembling hands....

“Look....,” she screamed. “HALF THE PASSENGERS ARE MISSING!”

I’ll never forget the chills that ran up and down my spine.

HALF OF THE PASSENGERS ARE MISSING. It wasn’t half... but it looked as though 100 or so just disappeared. And I turned to tell Bill. BUT BILL WASN’T THERE!<sup>124</sup>

And so the story continues Kirban’s traveler gets home and finds his wife and children gone. Suddenly it dawns on him: “THE RAPTURE! That’s it! This is the RAPTURE!”

Now Scripture does, to be sure, teach that there will be a rapture. Lindsey, Kirban, and other chiliasts are mistaken not as to the fact, but as to the nature, time, and circumstances of the rapture.

In I Thessalonians 4:15-17 Paul writes, “According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

Accordingly, at Christ’s return he will awaken and raise the dead. The voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God will summon them out of their graves. All the dead will rise (Da 12:2; Jn 5:28,29), as we demonstrated from Scripture in our second lecture. Paul concerns himself here in his words to the Thessalonians only with the believers, however. He says nothing about the unbelievers who will rise from their graves at the same time because his one purpose is to relieve the anxiety of the Thessalonian Christians that their loved ones who had died would be at a disadvantage at Christ’s Parousia. They were afraid that they would miss out on the joys of witnessing his return. Paul assures them that this is not true. Their loved ones who have fallen asleep in

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp 139-140.

Christ will also participate in that joyous event. They will be snatched up together with the believers who are alive at that time to meet the Lord in the air.

The verb Paul uses to tell us what will happen is ἀρπαγησόμεθα. This means “we shall be snatched, seized, caught.” The word “raptured” conveys the same thought. It is derived from the Vulgate, which uses the word *rapiemur*, “we shall be snatched” or “seized,” in this passage.

Nowhere does Scripture say, however, that this rapture begins “the seven year countdown before the return of Jesus Christ to the earth,” as Lindsey supposes.<sup>125</sup> He holds that the rapture will mark the beginning of a seven-year period of tribulation during which the Antichrist and the False Prophet will be in charge, prior to Christ’s descent to the earth to begin the millennium. He claims that before the Great Tribulation, “the period of the most ghastly pestilence, bloodshed, and starvation the world has ever known,” believers will be removed from the earth.

From I Thessalonians we see, however, that the believers will rise to meet Christ in the air, not prior to, but on the last day, on the day when the trumpet of God will signal the end (compare 1 Th 4:16 with Mt 24:31). Neither do the Scriptures know anything about a double return of Christ, one being secret and a second one visible a number of years later. There will be only one parousia. On that day, according to Matthew 24:30, all the nations of the earth “will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” On that day, according to Revelation 1:7, “every eye will see him.” The Christians will not mysteriously disappear while life goes on as before on the earth. As Christ’s ascension into heaven was visible (Ac 1:11), so his descent in the clouds of heaven and his saints ascension to welcome their returning Lord and Savior in the air will be visible to all.

Lindsey’s and Kirban’s view of the rapture is known as pretribulationism. It is the most generally held view among millennialists. But there are also those who teach posttribulationism, the belief that the rapture will follow rather than precede the tribulation. Others teach a midtribulation rapture, expecting that the church will be raptured before the great tribulation but not before some of the preceding events. Still another view is the partial rapture theory, the belief that especially qualified saints will be raptured before the tribulation, and that others will be raptured during the tribulation or at its close as they qualify spiritually through their good works.<sup>126</sup>

Walvoord, an ardent advocate of pretribulationism, states that “two important presuppositions, however, are essential to the pretribulation position: (1) the definition of the church as a separate body of saints distinct from saints of other ages: (2) the doctrine of a future tribulation of unprecedented severity.”<sup>127</sup> Neither one of these presuppositions is scriptural, however. That the church is a separate body of saints distinct from saints of other ages is such an obvious error stemming from Walvoord’s unscriptural dispensationalism that one can only shudder at the blindness of those whose understanding of the Scriptures is hindered by the pernicious fog of faulty, preconceived notions (cf. Jn 10:16; Ga 3:6-9, 28-29; Eph 4:4-6; Rev 4:4; 7:9). The fatal flaw in Walvoord’s second presupposition lies in the word “future.” That the last days of this world’s history will be times of unprecedented distress and trouble is beyond dispute (Mt 24:21,22). But to assert that these times without question still lie in the future means to deny the truth so strongly emphasized throughout the New Testament that the end of the world could come at any moment, even before I begin reading the next sentence, (Mt 24:29, 36, 42, 44; 2 Pe 3:10).

Pretribulation rapture theorists, posttribulation rapture theorists, midtribulation rapture theorists, partial-rapture theorists—the whole pack of these wolves in sheep’s clothing falls under the condemnation of Paul’s words in Galatians 1:8. “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” *Caveat emptor!*

### ***III. The Return of Christ***

<sup>125</sup> Hal Lindsey, op. cit., p 137.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Walvoord, op. cit., pp 248-251. See also his book *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957).

<sup>127</sup> Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p 252.

The biblical doctrine of Christ's return to judgment has been presented in earlier lectures in this series. It is not our intention to review that here. It is our purpose, however, to call attention to a few current misinterpretations of the biblical prophecies of Christ's return that constitute a deadly potion in the devil's brew of eschatological heresies.

We have previously expressed our criticism of T.A. Kantonen's eschatology. One can only commend him, however, for scoring the reluctance of many contemporary theologians to take the second coming of Christ seriously. He cites the following statement of Georgia Harkness as typical: "Few American Christians would dispute the truth and supreme importance of Christ 'first' and 'continual' coming. Many are obliged to doubt that a 'second' coming—whether conceived naively or in sophisticated terms is essential to the Christian hope of Christ's final triumph."<sup>128</sup>

One must agree with Kantonen's comment and observations:

This writer, like many others, seeks to eliminate any reference to "clouds" and whatever else might suggest a visible return of Christ to the earth as belonging to an obsolete and mistaken apocalyptic, and to confine Christ's coming to a gradual spiritual process leavening the present world. But the same deemphasis of an actual future advent of Christ is achieved by the "sophisticated" interpretations which relegate his final triumph to a supratemporal realm entirely beyond history. The two-world eschatology of Karl Barth, for example, with its insistence that the end is always equally at hand and the lordship of Christ already has its transcendent realization, deprives the end of the world and the second coming of any real significance. The same is true of Bultmann's interpretation of Jesus' teaching on the end of the world as a mythological expression of the meaning of existence and Lohmeyer's treatment of it as symbolizing timeless truth. Even Althaus, in defining the *parousia* as an altogether otherworldly event, tends in the same direction.<sup>129</sup>

Both those who outrightly deny the church's hope of Christ's return to judgment and those who, as Kantonen puts it, "transport it into the stratosphere of their own esoteric speculations" belong to the scoffers who, Peter warned, would come, "scoffing and following their own evil desires" (2 Pe 3:3).

Regin Preter evinces his existentialism when he writes in his *Creation and Redemption*: "It would be a mistake to think that the second coming must necessarily take place at some particular point in the historical process, whether we think of that point as being close at hand or far away."<sup>130</sup> Rejecting both of the alternatives that "either the second coming will transpire at a definite date, or it will never come to pass," Preter opts for "the absolute transcendence of the second coming."<sup>131</sup> In other words, he consigns it to the never-never land of non-intelligibility. But to deny that the second coming will take place at some particular point in the historical process, on a definite day which will mark the end of the world in the absolute sense of the word, is to violate the laws of language and logic. It is to deny the clarity of Scripture. It is a foolish and futile attempt to make Jesus a partner in the neo-gnostic speculation of neo-orthodoxy. In a word, it robs Christians of their hope.

John A.T. Robinson, Anglican author of *Honest to God*, the heretical shocker that rocked the religious world a decade ago, in his earlier book, *In the End, God*, attempts to demythologize what he regards as the myth of the Day of the Parousia or Second Coming. Setting Mark in opposition to Matthew and Luke, he claims, "One catena of sayings (represented generally, in the Gospels, by Mark) suggests that things will very definitely 'work up' towards the final act of the Divine drama.... On the other hand, there is another tradition (represented, for

<sup>128</sup> Georgia Harkness, "Progress in Eschatology," *Christian Century*, Jan. 14, 1953, p. 45, cited in T. A. Kantonen, *The Christian Hope*, p 72.

<sup>129</sup> T.A. Kantonen, op. cit., pp 72f.

<sup>130</sup> Regin Preter, op. cit., p 551.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp 552f.

instance, in the source common to Matthew and Luke) which speaks of the Day of Christ cutting suddenly and unexpectedly across the normal processes of this world.”<sup>132</sup>

Indulging in a spate of theological double-talk, Robinson writes:

The day of the Lord is equally something which can only happen as the climax of the world-process *and* something which is the truth about the world-process now and at every time. The Parousia cannot be pictured simply as an event in the future: it takes as it were a cross-section of the universe at every age... The myth of the Parousia universalises and clarifies, as in an inset, what must happen and is already happening, whenever the Christ comes in love and comes in power wherever are to be traced the signs of his presence, wherever to be seen the marks of his cross. Judgment Day is a dramatized, idealized picture of every day. And yet it is not simply every day. The Parousia and the Judgment are not merely cross sections. They must also be represented, as in the other tradition as realities which consummate as well as transect the historical process. If this understanding of the mythical character of eschatological statement is accepted it will become clear that the Christian has no more knowledge of or interest in the final state of this planet than he had of it's first. The illusion that the Bible vouchsafes him such information if he can but interpret it aright, requires to be buried as deeply as similar illusions about the beginning of the world derived from Genesis.<sup>133</sup>

In his 1957 Volume *Jesus and his Coming*, Robinson attempts to show that the prophecies of Christ's second coming were actually fulfilled in His first coming and that Jesus Himself never predicted that he would actually come again. Robinson is aping Bultmann who in a statement that Barth quotes with approval, insists, “The *parousia* has already taken place.”<sup>134</sup> To deny the historical nature of the return of Christ is an error as soul-destroying as the denial of the historicity of his resurrection. Jesus foretold both his resurrection and his return, as actual historical events when he told the Jews, on the one hand, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (Jn 2:19), and, on the other hand, “In the future you will see the son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64).

We can be certain that it was not theological obfuscation of the kind that Robinson perpetrates that engaged Mary rapt attention as she sat at Jesus' feet, or that enabled Martha to confess concerning Lazarus, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (Jn 11:24). To insist, as Robinson does, that “Judgment Day is a dramatized, idealized picture of every day,” is to compound confusion with delusion.

Even more bold and blatant is the unbelief of J. Schoneberg Setzer, an LCA pastor teaching at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. Setzer writes:

One of the most picturesque and constant doctrines of Christianity since the first disciples began testifying about Jesus has been the claim that he will return in heavenly splendor to be the judge of the living and the dead in a great drama of resurrection and judgment.... But after two thousand years this claim has still not been fulfilled.... Traditionally the church has decided in its perplexity that the New Testament writers were correct about the *fact* of Jesus' return but wrong about the *nearness* of it. Or, the church has simply avoided the issue by labeling all the “coming soon” passages as unfathomable mysteries. But today we must more honestly admit that if the New Testament writers could be wrong about the fact of the early return of Jesus, they could also be wrong about the fact of the second coming of Jesus itself. So today there is generally a consensus

<sup>132</sup> John A.T. Robinson, *In the End, God* (London: James Clark, 1950) p 68.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid* pp 69f.

<sup>134</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1961) IV, 3/1:295.

among biblical scholars and theologians that the second coming of Jesus was an erroneous doctrine of the early, church.<sup>135</sup>

For Setzer all the great eschatological prophecies of the Bible are purely symbolical:

Jesus believed that the great judgment is taking place right now and at every moment in history as the thousands of people who die every day pass in an unending stream before the eternal Father into the destination for which their kind of living with God and man has prepared them.... After his death Jesus has indeed returned among us in greater glory than ever. For every passing generation of history bears witness that the revelation of God's truth that he brought is the secret to noble and stable and fulfilled living... Yes, the Nicene Creed is at least very correct in a metaphorical way when it declares that "he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead."<sup>136</sup>

One can only say of the theological brew prepared in hell's kitchen by modern theologians like Robinson, Setzer, and the rest, "There is death in the pot!" (2 Ki 4:40).

#### *IV. The Resurrection*

We have previously discussed the error that there will be multiple resurrections instead of the one, universal resurrection on the last day taught by the Scriptures. It is our purpose at this time merely to call attention to two additional errors currently in vogue in this area of eschatology.

As representative of the first we cite the teaching of Reinhold Niebuhr, who does not take literally the prophecies of scripture regarding the resurrection. He refers to "the myth of the resurrection." He declares, "The idea of the resurrection of the body can of course not be literally true." For him the resurrection of the body is merely "the idea of social fulfillment."<sup>137</sup> Heretical thoughts like this are naturally closely related to the almost universal denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ by modernist theologians. They are the direct descendants of the philosophers of ancient Athens who, when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, sneered (Ac 17:32).

The second error does not deny that there will be a resurrection, but it denies the resurrection of the body, which we possess in this life. Despite Job's statement, "Yet in my flesh [yr #50] shall I see God" (Job 19:26), and despite the clear words of the resurrected Christ, "A ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Lk 24:39), these errorists reject the resurrection of the flesh.

As an example of this error we cite the oft-quoted statement of a former graduate of our own seminary currently teaching at Seminex, Gilbert Thiele: "We think it is consequently fair to say, to put it very bluntly, that when a man dies, he is dead."<sup>138</sup> Ridiculing the belief in the resurrection of the body which is laid into the grave, Thiele writes, "Will there be some sort of mass peregrination to the throne of God, out of the depths of the sea, out of the innumerable graves, catacombs, crypts, urns, and other places of disposal? Is this not too fanciful to bother us, really?"<sup>139</sup> He is highly critical of the phrase in the German version of the Apostles' Creed, "*Auferstehung des Fleisches.*"

In other words, Thiele denies the identity of the body that is raised with the body that is buried. For him the resurrection is "but the continuation of the process of creation of a divinely ordered but now eternally

<sup>135</sup> J. Schoneberg Setzer, *What's Left to Believe?* (Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1968) pp 157-166.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p 170.

<sup>137</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, cited in Walvoord, *op. cit.*, p 107.

<sup>138</sup> Gilbert Thiele, *The Resurrection of the Body and the Immortality of the Soul*, A conference paper, 1957, p 10.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p 27f.

reconstituted humanity.”<sup>140</sup> He raises the specter that when the sarcic element is brought in, “the way is too easily open for the carnality of millennialism at its grossest and cheapest level.”<sup>141</sup>

These aberrations were not original of course with Thiele. Essentially the same thoughts are expressed by Oscar Cullmann in his book, *The Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead*, by Walter Künneth in his *Theology of the Resurrection*, and others. For Künneth there is a problem as to the continuity between this man and the man of the resurrection,”<sup>142</sup> but not for Job or for Paul (Job 19:25-27; Php 3:21)! In the resurrection our bodies and those of all believers will be the very same ones we had in this life, but they will be transformed so that they will be like Christ’s glorified body. Any modification or denial of that truth has the pungent odor of sulfur that betrays it as stemming from the father of lies.

## V. Hell

Current aberrations in the doctrine of hell range all the way from Jehovah’s Witnesses’ denial that there is an eternal punishment for sin to the belief in an apocatastasis, the teaching that in the end all will be saved. Rutherford stated bluntly, “A Creator that would put in operation a system of endless torment would be a fiend and not a reasonable God.”<sup>143</sup>

Setzer supposes that Jesus believed that “those who persist in rebelling against God’s rule of love which continues on beautifully for ever will be punished at death in a destruction that ends in their non existence, or else will be punished at death in a measure necessary for their conversion and restoration.”<sup>144</sup>

Though you may be horrified to hear the blasphemy in the quotations from Setzer I am about to read, I don’t think I should spare you lest you fail to realize with what vehemence this Lutheran professor opposes the teaching of the Augsburg Confession that God will condemn ungodly men and the devils “to be tormented without end.”<sup>145</sup>

In a chapter headed “Is There Really a Hell?” Setzer writes:

That a just heavenly Father would condemn a child of his to burn in agony for all eternity, which is trillions and trillions of years unending because that child misused a mere seventy short years has always been appalling to many... A heavenly Father who would fry his enemies to all eternity would seem to be infinitely worse than the monster Adolf Hitler who gassed and cremated at places like Buchenwald and Belsen some six million Jews whom he counted as his enemies... Modern biblical scholars and theologians simply do not believe that Jesus said the things about Hell that are attributed to him in the Gospels, because these passages contradict everything that Jesus was and stood for. Jesus, for instance, exhorted us to love our enemies with a perfect—or complete—love such as the heavenly Father has.... could this same Jesus really have agreed with the common opinion of his day that God overpunished his enemies after death with an everlasting grudge that roasted them in an eternal oven? No! I do not believe that Jesus would have agreed with that. For such a vengeful God, rather than being the marvelous deity of love and mercy and forgiveness, is in my eyes a Frankenstein of hatred and pitilessness and revenge who orders his children to be more moral than he is willing to be.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p 28.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Walter Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) p 287f. Cf. also the discussion in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp 192ff.

<sup>143</sup> Joseph F. Rutherford, *Harp of God*, p 62f, quoted in F. E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1954), p 465.

<sup>144</sup> Op. cit., p 170.

<sup>145</sup> Art. XVII, 3. *Triglotta*, p, 51.

<sup>146</sup> Op. cit., p 137.

Since for Setzer “the doctrine of a literal Hell for the eternal torment of souls cannot hold any more water than the literal eternal Hell itself was supposed to hold,”<sup>147</sup> what is his concept of hell? He explains:

Today Christian theologians and preachers usually speak of Hell symbolically as a this world reality. Today Hell is described as the mess—either individual or social—that men make out of this life.... A battlefield, a prison cell, a hate-filled marriage, or a broken friendship is Hell.<sup>148</sup>

As the devil’s cunning strategy is to convince people that he does not exist, so he knows that he has doomed another soul to hell if he has persuaded his victim that there is no hell. Those millennialists who teach universalism in one form or another have also become his hapless victims.

## *VI. Heaven*

The doctrine of heaven is a correlate doctrine of hell. It is inevitable that those who err in the one err in the other. Thus Setzer dismisses the biblical picture of heaven as an ancient myth or fable, and as folk lore that “has obviously been disproved by the scientific discoveries of modern man.... The Bible, which we have for centuries depended upon as the absolute Word of God has been demonstrated?” in his view, “to contain a considerable amount of unreliable reports and opinions in this area.”<sup>149</sup>

So Setzer sets about to build a 20<sup>th</sup> century doctrine of heaven. He conceives of it as a fifth dimension that is present in all reality. His heaven is a condition in which souls, which are individualized electrical charges, are held together at death by God, the highest form and most complex pattern of energy. Others are permitted by him to disintegrate into their basic parts, as a random discharge of electrical particles.

What a dreary, uninviting prospect Setzer’s heaven is! A paradise, at best, for electrical engineers! Those who are acquainted with Greek philosophy will recognize Setzer’s speculation as a souped-up 20<sup>th</sup> century version of ancient Stoicism.

What, on the other hand, is the millennialists’ hope of heaven? Some of them hardly mention it! O, to be sure, Christian chiliasts do believe and teach that the believer in Christ will finally enter the eternal bliss and glory of heaven. But what is their chief hope, interest, and concern? It is the earthly happiness, the earthly peace, the earthly prosperity, the earthly glory that they dream of in the millennium.<sup>150</sup>

“Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things,” Paul admonishes the Colossians (3:2). The hope that sustained Paul in all his sufferings was “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). The patriarchs of old longed, not for a heaven on earth, but “for a better country a heavenly one” (Heb 11:16).

With the Christians of the early church you and I fervently pray, “Maranatha!” “Come, O Lord!” (1 Co 16:22). Eagerly we await his second coming. Ours is not the empty hope of those deluded by the figment of a millennial kingdom here on earth. Ours is the firm assurance that we shall live and reign with him in glory as kings and priests in his eternal kingdom in heaven. That we may not be robbed of that joy may God preserve us from the devilish and destructive errors of current misinterpretations of the Bible’s eschatological prophecies!

Oh grant that in Thy holy Word  
We here may live and die, dear Lord;  
And when our journey endeth here,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p 141.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p 152.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. the mass of evidence cited by Th. Engelder in “Notes on Chiliasm” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, VI, No. 6 (June, 1935), pp 407ff.

Receive us into glory there. (292:9)  
AMEN.