

Contemporary Millennialism – Introduction

- Millennialism has been a topic of controversy in the church since the third century.
- No worldview is adequate which does not address this issue. Every church and denomination *has to* address this issue.

Views from the left

- *Liberalism* looks to the Scripture for ethical value and denies any literal interpretation of the Second Coming.
 - John A.T. Robinson: Jesus fulfilled all prophecies of the 2nd Coming in His 1st Coming.
 - Common: Paul and the early church were confused about the teachings of Jesus.
- *Neo-Orthodoxy* has been largely silent on the issue of the millennial kingdom but is mostly post or amillennial (and holds the same low-view of Scripture).
 - N.T. Wright: “Paul’s mixed metaphors of trumpets blowing and the living beings snatched into heaven to meet the Lord are not to be understood as literal truth”

The Millennial Views | Premillennialism

- The oldest of the millennial views, it was previously called *chiliasm* (from the Greek *chilias* meaning 1,000).
- This position requires the most literal view of Scripture.
- Anticipates a sudden and catastrophic future change of events.
- Distinguishes between God’s dealings with the church from His dealings with Israel.
 - Anticipates a “revival of the Jewish nation and their repossession of their ancient land when Christ returns” (pg 5).

The Millennial Views | Amillennialism

- The most popular modern view of the millennium.
- Traced to Augustine and Origen in the 3rd and 4th centuries.
- Denies a literal reign of Christ on the earth.
- Considers Satan to have been bound at the first coming of Christ.
- Two views within amillennialism:
 - The millennium is being fulfilled on earth
 - The millennium is being fulfilled in heaven
- Summary: “there will be no more millennium than there is now, and that the eternal state immediately follows the second coming of Christ” (pg. 6).

The Millennial Views | Postmillennialism

- Originated by Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), a Unitarian.
- “The present age will end with a period of great spiritual blessing corresponding to the millennial promises accomplished through preaching the gospel. The whole world will be Christianized and brought to submission to the gospel *before* the return of Christ” (pg. 7).
- Can be difficult to distinguish between postmillennialism and amillennialism, the major difference being the postmillennialism finds a literal fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of a kingdom of righteousness and peace.

The Trend Toward Amillennialism

- Prior to WWI, higher criticism and modern humanism converged to create the foundation of amillennialism in the “evangelical” church today.
 - “Liberals were outdoing each other in the race to see who could disbelieve the most” (pg. 8).
- During this same time, postmillennialism was giving “glowing accounts of the triumphant progress of Christianity” and the “universal brotherhood among men,” along with the “power of the church in world affairs” (pg. 8).
- World War II brought such a tremendous shock to post-millennialists that there were grave doubts if any progress whatsoever had been achieved by the church.
- Many concluded that there ever was in taking the prophecies of a kingdom to literally. Those who made this conclusion resorted to amillennialism.
- Rather than turn to premillennialism, the church turned to “The conservatism of the Reformation which made no pretense of being specific about the millennium”(pg. 10).
- The convergence of three streams of theology gave rise to the prominence of amillennialism in our day.
 - Old conservatism found refuge in the ancient creeds, which say nothing about the millennium.
 - “Their position was that the real issue was faith in the Bible and in the person and work of Christ.”(Page 10)
 - “The hope of future events is inseparable from the Christian faith and any vagueness weakens and limits the whole perspective.”(Page 10)
 - The resurgence of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - The failure of liberalism is one of the chief ingredients to the resurgence of the Catholic Church, with this “solid influence of tradition and continuity”(Page 10)
 - “Their very structure of church government in their program of works depend on the use of the Old Testament promises about the coming kingdom as fulfilled in the church.”(Page 10)
 - Liberal Protestant theology brought low views of the interpretation of Scripture and no concern for any consistent interpretation of Scripture.
 - In order to advance their cause, liberal Protestants attacked premillennialism, which aligned them with old conservatism.
 - “Liberals who could not stand examination of conservative Christian theology were found in the strange role of champions of reformed theology because they denounced premillennialism” (pg. 11).

The Attack on Dispensationalism

- The liberal attack on premillennialism itself eventually began to focus the attack on dispensational premillennialism, in order to strengthen their support in the amillennial camp and erode the support of dispensationalism.
 - Premillennialism is an eschatological view.
 - Dispensational premillennialism is a system of hermeneutics and theology.
- The *Scofield Reference Bible* became the “most hated” book among both liberals and non-dispensational premillennialists, with multitudes of authors writing refutations of Scofield’s work.
 - Amillennial scholars have written more attack on dispensational premillennialism than any defense of their own position.
- In the end, premillennialists separated from dispensationalism and adopted a lackadaisical attitude toward eschatology, followed by an *inaugurated eschatology* view that was friendly with amillennialism.

The Amillennial Attack

- “Amillennialists have also rightly argued that if they successfully disposed of their opponents who were pre-millennial they would have no effect of opposition to their own viewpoint.” (pgs. 12 -13)
- “The negative attitude was also one of necessity, as amillennialists are by no means agreed on the essentials of their own system of eschatology and millenarianism.” (pg. 13)
- The attack on dispensationalism has often been in a desperate attempt to point out, “Every aberration which has been held by any premillennialist” into take such aberration as a typically held view.

The Attack from Seminary

- Theological seminary's have rarely been thoughtfully pre-millennial in their eschatology.
 - Pre-World War I they were post-millennial.
 - Post World War I, they were amillennial.
- Until recent days, Bible colleges have been almost exclusively pre-millennial.
 - In recent days (after publication of Walvoord’s book) Bible colleges have backed away from pre-millennial theology.

The importance of millennial doctrine

- Premillennialism is more any disputes about Revelation 20.
- Premillennialism involves a complete system of Biblical interpretation, one which affects almost every area of theology and practical application of Scripture.
- Premillennialism is a “stubborn obstacle to liberal theology.” (pg. 15)
- Premillennialism is “utterly opposed to the principles governing Roman Catholic theology.” (pg. 15)