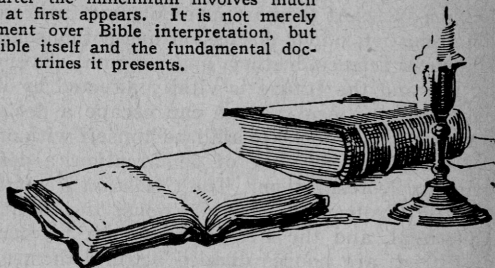


CHRIST'S COMING

Premillennial or Postmillennial?

The controversy that is raging in Protestantism over the question of whether Christ will come before or after the millennium involves much more than at first appears. It is not merely a disagreement over Bible interpretation, but over the Bible itself and the fundamental doctrines it presents.

by ALONZO L.
BAKER



ALMOST every epoch of the Christian era has seen the church convulsed with controversy. In the first century occurred the strife over the rite of circumcision, as recorded in Acts 15; the fourth century saw Arius and Athanasius in a battle royal over the station of Christ; the fifth century saw the Monophysite controversy; the eighth century witnessed the iconoclastic struggle; in the eleventh century, the East and the West split over the question as to whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father alone, or from the Father and Son together; the sixteenth century saw the momentous conflict that culminated in the Protestant Reformation; the seventeenth century was the time of the Arminian controversy over free grace; and the eighteenth century saw the beginnings of the conflict between science and religion.

And now in our day, especially during the past decade, we have been witnessing the crucial contest between those who hold the premillenarian view of Christ's second advent, and those who hold the postmillenarian view. So far as eternal consequences are concerned, the present struggle surpasses all those we have mentioned, with the exception of the Protestant Reformation.

A Dividing Line in Protestantism

The present crisis is not due alone to a disagreement over the chronology of Christ's second coming. The question is not

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merely as to whether He will come before or after the millennial period. If the issue were simply one of a disputed order of events, we would not devote one entire tract of this series to its consideration. But this comparatively unimportant point of the time of the second advent has been chosen as the field of a battle to the death between two antagonistic and mutually exclusive views of the past, present, and future of the human race. The question under discussion has a thousand ramifications. It embraces science, history, and religion. Every man's philosophy of life and the future is vitally affected by his decision in this controversy. And no one can escape a decision, for sooner or later he must choose to affiliate himself with one side or the other.

Already a new line of demarcation, a definite cleavage, has come in Protestantism. The *Christian Register* says, "The three leading Protestant denominations, the Baptist, the Methodist Episcopal, and the Presbyterian, not to mention the Disciples of Christ, are houses divided against themselves on account of 'the second coming.'" The *Northwestern Christian Advocate* some time ago made the statement that "church leaders on both sides of the discussion are predicting that the time is apt to come when the question of the second coming of Christ will be the dividing line between Protestants."

The Two Views Summarized

At this juncture, it may be well to state the respective beliefs of the two opposing camps. The premillenarian believes: (1) That ever since Satan caused the downfall of our first parents, sin and evil have been and they still are growing stronger and stronger in the world; (2) That the *régime* of sin will increase in power until Jesus Christ will be compelled to intervene personally, which He will at His second coming; (3) That when He comes to sit in judgment on sinners and to end sin's reign, the majority of men will merit eternal death rather than life, inasmuch as they have not availed themselves of the substitutionary death of Christ, and they therefore will be destroyed, for "the wages of sin is death"; (4) That after His second coming, Christ will set up His visible, objective kingdom in this world, and only those who have been subjects of His spiritual kingdom in this life will be subjects of His objective kingdom, which will endure throughout eternity.

On the contrary, the postmillenarian believes: (1) That sin is not so serious a thing as it has been portrayed, but that it can and will be overcome in the ever onward and upward march

of civilization and culture; (2) That the moral and spiritual progress of the human race as a whole is not to be considered as being on a descending scale, but that from a lowly and primeval beginning, it has gradually ascended to the present level, and will continue to ascend until a perfect world order is reached by reason of natural forces and tendencies now at work; (3) That because of these considerations, all men will be saved, and none lost; (4) That the coming of Christ is not an ultimate event, for He is coming continually at death, and through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, and through the gradual uplift of society; (5) That Christ's kingdom is only spiritual, and that He, visibly and personally, will never reign over this world.

In these summarizations, we have not introduced the theological details involved in the question, but have given the ultimates of the various phases of the argument. If the reader desires further information on what the Bible teaches regarding events before, during, and after the millennium, he should obtain tract No. 14 of this series, "The Bible Millennium," and tract No. 11, which discusses the question, "How will Christ come?" Also, in this connection, tract No. 15, "What and Where Is Heaven?" is enlightening.

Premillennialism in Harmony with the Bible

Now it will be seen at a glance by all who are acquainted with the Scriptures, that the premillenarian position is in absolute harmony with the Bible teaching on this question. The Bible is very explicit and contains abundant proof texts on the following points, which positively negate the doctrines of the postmillennialists:

1. That sin is a very serious and grievous thing (Genesis 2: 17; Romans 6: 23);

2. That sin is indeed so serious, and exerts such a power over mankind, that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to save men from their sins by dying in their stead (Matthew 1: 21; 1 Corinthians 15: 3; 1 Peter 3: 18; 1 John 4: 10);

3. That all men have sinned, and consequently will die unless they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5: 12; Galatians 3: 22; John 3: 16);

4. That sin will not diminish, but will "wax worse and worse," and abound the more as we approach "the end" (2 Timothy 3: 13, 1-5; Matthew 24: 12, 13);

5. That the world will not gradually move into an age of

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righteous tranquillity and serenity, but because of the increase of sin, will be brought abruptly to the second coming (Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36; Matthew 24: 27-31);

6. That when Christ comes the second time, a sharp line of demarcation will be drawn between the righteous and the unrighteous (Revelation 22: 11, 12; Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-42);

7. That when such a distinction is made, the majority will be found unrighteous and the minority righteous (Matthew 7: 13, 14, 21, 22; 22: 14; Luke 13: 23, 24; Revelation 1: 7; 6: 15-17);

8. That Christ has a spiritual kingdom now which exists in the hearts of all those who believe on Him (Luke 17: 20, 21; Romans 14: 17), and He will set up His objective kingdom when He comes the second time (2 Timothy 4: 1; Hebrews 9: 28; Revelation 11: 15; Daniel 2: 44).

The Bible Truth Openly Rejected

That those of the postmillenarian persuasion know and confess that the premillenarian view is in conformity with the Bible, can be seen from the following statements made by some of their outstanding leaders.

Dr. Brightman, of the Boston University (Methodist), was frank enough to declare recently in *Zion's Herald* that "the premillenarians are right if verbal inspiration is right." Dr. John Shannon, another Methodist divine, in commenting on the attitude of a brother pastor, said publicly that if the Bible was correct, then the brother was correct in his premillennial view, but he did not believe that the Bible was correct. The *Journal of Religion* says disparagingly, "For the devout millenarian the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God." The editor of the *Watchman-Examiner* writes that he has had a visit with one of the leaders in the postmillenarian wing of the Baptist denomination, in which he stated, "Of course the Bible teaches the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, and the visible, bodily return of Christ, but, in all honesty, I must say that I do not believe any one of these things."

Thus it can be seen at once that the issue between premillenarians and postmillenarians is not one of the interpretation of Scripture, but is a much wider and more serious one, that is, a conflict of views as to the worth of the Bible itself, and the reliability and value of the doctrines it presents. The two camps represent diametrically opposed conceptions of the nature and central beliefs of the Christian religion.

The real dividing line between Protestants is something a thousandfold deeper than the question as to when or even how the Lord shall come the second time. It is that of rationalism versus divine revelation. It is that of modernism versus evangelicalism. It is that of radicalism versus conservatism. It is that of "the new theology" versus the Bible theology. It is a question as to whether men's sins are merely the absence of evolutionary development, or whether they are the willful infraction of God's holy law and sovereign will. It is a question as to whether God will save the world, or whether man will save the world. And, as we stated near the beginning of this tract, the question of millennialism is merely a pretext for these two philosophies to meet in deadly conflict.

Postmillennialists, by the very force and logic of their position, have rapidly moved away from a postmillennial view of Christ's coming to a non-millennial view. In other words, the theory of the evolutionary development of the world and all things therein has swept them away from any trace whatsoever of adherence to Bible truth, so that now they are merely rationalists and materialists, as all evolutionists must eventually and inevitably be.

Postmillennialism a Menace to Church and State

Now this question of postmillennialism — using the word in its broader sense — is not an academic question, or one over which theological gymnasts only should exercise themselves. It presents a serious issue. In fact, *postmillennialism, with all that it connotes, is a grave menace both to the church and to the state.*

First, postmillennialism is a grave menace because, in discarding the Bible as a divine book, the postmillennialists have destroyed the one source of authority, and consequently have lost religion. Dr. Robert F. Horton has well written:

"The real difficulty of our time, when we come to probe it, is the dethronement of the Bible from its position of unquestioned authority. From the earliest period of Christianity, even in the writings of the earliest fathers, the sacred Scriptures were held to be the standard and the test of Christian truth. . . . Up to the middle of the last century the imposing fortress of the Book remained practically unquestioned and certainly unbreached. No one within the borders of the church hesitated to regard the Bible as effectively infallible. A quotation from any part of it carried unquestioned weight, and decisions drawn from its decretals were the settlement of all strife. *Protestants have lost their Bible, and in losing it have lost their religion.*"

The saintly Spurgeon said, many years ago, that "the turning point in the battle between those who hold 'the faith once delivered to the saints' and their opponents, lies in the true and real inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. This is the Thermopylæ of Christendom. If we have in the word of God no infallible standard of truth, we are at sea without a compass, and no danger from rough weather without can be equal to this loss within. 'If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do?' And this is a foundation loss of the worst kind."

We realize that we make a most serious charge when we declare that the modernist who does away with the standard and the source of authority in religion, the Bible, is contributing heavily to the spirit of lawlessness that is wrecking the foundations of stable governments the world over. A respect for authority in the spiritual realm is the only basis for genuine respect for authority in the sphere of civil affairs. If the first is taken away, the second automatically follows. So the post-millennialist is directly responsible, in a measure, for the rampant lawlessness of our age.

Would Do Away with Sin and Evil

Second, postmillennialism is a grave menace because it seeks to obliterate the sense of individual sin and guilt. The following paragraph, taken from a recent sermon by the general secretary of home missions of a leading Protestant denomination, sets forth the modern idea of sin:

"The thought that there is a kingdom of evil besides the kingdom of God is all wrong. There is only one kingdom and every man is a citizen of it. Since there is only one immanent life force, the world is a unit and man also is a unit. There is no room, therefore, for the old conception of sin. Furthermore, there should be no attempt made to draw a line of distinction between things religious and secular, holy and unholy, Christian and non-Christian, the church and the world. Sin is, in the last analysis, not a personal but a social evil. It is the result of improper social conditions. . . . If we accept the thought of divine immanence, sin and evil cannot be quite so bad as they seem to be. Considered from the viewpoint of the social gospel, the thought that God would damn a man because of sin is offensive."

Says a contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* of April, 1920: "Go into any church which calls itself liberal, or advanced, and you will be told in substance that it is not necessary to be right but only to think you are right. This is not only a very soft

doctrine, but it is softer than the facts. Upon the very fabric of life is stamped the stern command that you must be right at your peril. Not for nothing was it written that 'it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.'

When the sense of sin is done away, right and wrong become merely relative matters, which rest on nothing more enduring than personal opinion and inclination. This means that every man erects his own standards; and, pray tell, what could be more completely subversive of religion and society than such a course pursued by any considerable body of men? The world will be plunged irretrievably into civil and spiritual anarchy if such awful misconceptions become at all general.

Takes Away an Incentive to Right Living

Third, postmillennialism is a grave menace because it teaches the doctrine of universal salvation. Postmillennialists continually preach that in their plan for the future, no one will be lost ultimately, but all will be saved to live in a world made perfect through the natural process of evolution. Even so conservative a postmillennialist as James H. Snowden has written in a recent number of the *Biblical World*, "Not only is the kingdom a growth, but there are plain intimations that it will be a very long growth, for the leaven is to leaven *the whole mass of humanity*, and the preaching of the gospel is to make disciples of *all the nations* before the end comes."

This doctrine of universal salvation is the greatest possible deterrent to right living that could be invented. "If I am irresistibly borne along by some blind process that is slowly but constantly moving toward perfection," reasons the average man, "why should I not have a fling at the seamy side of life, so long as I will eventually be made perfect with the rest of men?"

This pernicious doctrine destroys the incentives to world evangelization. It would make the church of God a lifeless and inactive force in the world; for whether its efforts are great or few, strong or feeble, everything will come out all right in the end.

Fourth, postmillennialism is a grave menace because it induces the darkest hued pessimism and despair by postponing world perfection to the dim ages of a far distant future. If a perfect world is to be reached at no faster pace than we have been making during the past six thousand years, then the centuries that lie between us and our goal outnumber the sands

that glitter on the shores of the seven seas. Premillennialism says that Christ is coming in our day and generation, to establish His universal kingdom of peace and love and righteousness. Sin will come to an abrupt end, and "affliction shall not rise up the second time." How much more inspiring is such a lively hope, than to think that we nor our children nor our grandchildren will see Christ's kingdom established, but that it is reserved for future generations, a thousand millenniums from now! One is a flaming hope; the other is an awful despair.

A Stranglehold on Education of Youth

Fifth, postmillennialism is a grave menace because postmillennialists, almost exclusively, are the ones who are training the religious leaders of to-morrow. Read these alarming statistics from James H. Snowden: "I recently wrote to and received official replies from twenty-eight theological seminaries, the leading institutions in eight prominent denominations. In the faculties of these twenty-eight institutions there are at the present time two hundred and thirty-six professors in the various chairs of theological learning; and of these two hundred and thirty-six, only seven are premillenarians."

And here is a sentence from the *Religious Herald* of April 14, 1921: "There is no standard seminary nor first-class college in the North in which there is a single teacher who believes the doctrine of premillenarianism or uses the methods of interpretation by which premillenarians arrive at their conclusions."

It is only too patent that the religion of our day has been turned away from the Bible, the perfect revelation of God's will; from God, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe; from Christ, the Saviour of the race. Men have torn the Bible from its niche, God from His throne, and Christ from His cross, and have in their stead, apotheosized themselves. It is no small wonder that but a remnant shall be saved; for infidelity, garbed in the robes of Christianity, stands in the pulpits of the churches, and sits in the chairs of the schools, pouring into the minds and hearts of mankind a deadly poison that will eternally destroy both the giver and the receiver.

Now, if ever, is the time for everyone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ and His appearing and His kingdom, to work and pray mightily for the early establishment of that kingdom in the earth, for "the night cometh, when no man can work."