An Overview of Millennial Systems, with a review of *The Man of Sin: Uncovering the Truth about the Antichrist*, by Kim Riddlebarger

Kim Riddlebarger, *The Man of Sin: Uncovering the Truth about the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006) 236 pp.

The Major Varieties of Millennial Systems

Millennial theologies take their name from the references in the Bible to a period of one thousand years. There are also groups of associated ideas, such as resurrection, judgment, visions of angels, and symbolic beasts, but the main organizing idea, and the one most clearly differentiating the different interpretations, has been the meaning of these references to the thousand years. The thousand year period, whether taken as an actual calendar one thousand year period, or as a symbolic reference to a more indefinite and perhaps much longer period, is called the millennium. The theological views about the millennium tend to fall into a variety of generally recognized systems, and the belief in such a system is called millennialism. A variety of terminology has to be recognized here. Sometimes this belief is called chiliasm, which is simply a preference of a word of Greek origin to a Latin one. Also the term "millenarian" is preferred by some. This used to be a sign of a liberal perspective, which disbelieved in the theories, as opposed to their advocates who spoke of millennialism. But from about the 1970s on, certain neoevangelicals, hoping to be accepted as scholars by their liberal peers, adopted a more snooty tone, and began to use "millenarian" along with other substitutions, such as "missional" for "missionary" (the adjective not the noun), or even "evangelicalism" for evangelism. (Originally these were a tacit acknowledgment by the liberals that their churches were up to something different than preaching the gospel in what they regarded as the vulgar fundamentalist sense.) For our purpose we can ignore this usage (millenarian) as it belongs to those whose interests are only sociological or pejorative.

The procedure here will be to introduce the major generally recognized types of millennial views. I will then consider some complicating factors, preterism and historicism, which usually are considered to be millennial views in themselves, but predominantly have actually appeared as aspects of the major types we will look at first. Next will be a different way of categorizing millennial views, according to their interpretive approach to symbols. At that point I will be ready to look at a specific writer's millennial ideas through a review of Kim Riddlebarger's book *The Man of Sin*.

The key idea, in reference to which millennialisms are defined, is Christ's second advent. "Second" means it is after the first which is the period of the life of Jesus narrated in the four Gospels. This first period ended with the ascension of Jesus into heaven. The account of the ascension is repeated in the opening of the book of Acts. First Jesus commands the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The response of the disciples is to ask: "Lord, will

You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?". Jesus answers that it is not for them to know the times or the seasons, but to be witnesses to him, after they have received the Spirit. "He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up to heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:4-11) The questions that define the millennial view are, *when* is the millennium in relation to the time of the Ascension and of the return of Jesus, both spoken of here in Acts 1, and *what* is the millennium compared to 1) the question on the disciples' minds, of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, and 2) the mission that Jesus gives them, instead of answering their question, to be his witnesses to the end of the earth. These topics are packed tightly together right at the opening of the book of Acts, which is the story of this mission from its beginning to its reaching the vital centers of the Roman world of the time. The book of Acts closes again on this theme. Paul speaks to the Jews at Rome "and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. … They departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly though Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, Go to this people and say: *Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive, …'* Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Acts 28:23-29) Where Acts begins with Jesus commanding the disciples to testify about him, it ends with Paul obeying this by testifying about the kingdom of God, with the Jews rejecting this testimony, and salvation then going to the gentiles. The whole trajectory of the book of Acts can be taken as an answer to the opening question: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The millennium questions, then, are related to the questions of a) w*hat* is the kingdom of God and, b) w*ho* receives it? Acts answers: a: salvation[1] and b: the gentiles. Is the millennium this kingdom?[2]

The main types of millennial theory are premillennial and postmillennial, that is does the return of Jesus promised in Acts 1 occur before the millennium or after the millennium.

Amillennialism

Amillennialism is a very old millennial view. The name means no millennium, but that does not mean that it is not a millennial view, because it is an interpretation of the biblical language of a thousand years that applies it to a period of time. Roughly it refers to the time from the founding of the New Testament church until the end of the world (and thus technically is a postmillennial view). This definition will not satisfy everyone. Some will want to question the starting point of the New Testament

1 This answer throws the weight of the question onto the definition of salvation. For those who think that salvation means "Ask Jesus into your heart so that you can go to heaven." this answer would preclude premillennial and postmillennial ideas of the kingdom.

2 An interpretive method is implied here. The biblical books are seen as literary works that are organized to address thematic material. In the perspective in which I was brought up, by contrast, Luke wrote down the disciples' question because that is what they happened to say at the time. The expositor then takes up the text, and says something like "See how the disciples are being silly again, probably because they don't yet have the Baptism of the Spirit." and then goes on to the next verse.

church, whether it begins with the resurrection of Jesus, with the Ascension,[3] with Pentecost, or from a transitional period where there is an overlap of ages from the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels up to as late as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and also question where the millennium begins compared to these. At the end of the world some might expect the occurrence of some prophesied events they might place at a time past the period that they consider to be millennial.

For amillennialism the announcement of the Kingdom by Jesus, the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers, the new maturity spoken of by Paul, compared to tutelage under the Law, all indicate the character of a new era that had been inaugurated. What is more difficult is to explain how the words of the Old Testament prophets apply to the millennial period. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom, it was because the term was very familiar to his audiences, and he was announcing the arrival of something long promised. The idea of the kingdom, accordingly, is one of the leading ideas of millennial theology and a major point of dispute between the different systems. The prophets had also spoken of the Christ, and Jesus applied this to himself, as did the apostles in their writing. Interpretive theories are therefor put forward to explain how to interpret the prophetic writings so as to understand the way in which they spoke of Jesus. Similarly, the way the prophets spoke of the kingdom announced by Jesus has to be explained. Some claim that the problem of the kingdom prophesies is a special problem for amillennialism as compared to premillennialism, but it is in fact the same task as that of explaining how the Old Testament speaks of Jesus. It is the premillennialists who have a problem here because they want to interpret the kingdom prophesies in a different way from the prophesies of the Christ and need to create and justify two interpretive schemes[4] as well as justify why they need to be different.

Augustine vs Luther

Augustine is considered the major figure behind the general acceptance of the amillennial viewpoint, and the one who articulated it most distinctly until long afterward. How this millennium consisted of an era in calendar terms is not yet clear with Augustine, as it competed with his other ways of thinking about time, including his scheme of dividing the world into seven periods.[5] The more important aspect of Augustine's millennialism was his view of time itself. The seventh of Augustine's periods included, and mainly consisted of, the great day of the Last Judgment itself. The linear time of the world from Adam onward led continuously up to the Last Judgment, when the dead would be raised and everyone would participate in the event as the world's last day.

Luther introduced a form of amillennialism that was based on a different view of time than Augustine's. Heaven was discontinuous with earthly time. With death people passed into the eternal

3 Mark 16:19-20, seems to offer the most succinct textual support for this position. "So then, after the Lord has spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs." At the Ascension Jesus sits down at the right hand of God, that is undertaking to rule, and this rule is expressed on earth through the preaching of the disciples.

4 The premillennial approach is that the prophesies blend two different eras, and what relates to the kingdom has to be fulfilled in a special separate period of time. Amillennialists and postmillennialists explain these ways of prophetic speaking as ways of describing what takes place in the present era before the second advent.

5 For an overview of Augustine's temporal schemes see the review of David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought*, pp. 4-5, at contra-mundum.org

state and to the resurrection and Last Judgment. Luther was nevertheless inclined to expect certain prophetic events which were to put an end to the age he lived in. He expected that temporal judgments and signs would signal the near end of the world and the soon arrival of the last judgment, in the sense that the world history would be closed out.[6]

Behind the millennial attitudes of Augustine and Luther was a common element, that of the times they lived in. Both were at fulcrum points of history where disruptions were created and when hopeful expectations were being dashed. Augustine was living though the Germanic invasions, where much of Roman imperial power in west was being destroyed, and the shared view of the world by the people of that times was destroyed with it. Rome had come to be viewed as a Christian empire, as essentially a world empire, and therefor the confirmation of the gospel. Because Rome had converted God had blessed it and the natural expectation was its continuation. Instead disaster had come, and a theology was needed which could accommodate the nature of a suddenly different course of history.

For Luther the problem was what he saw as the rejection of the Gospel. After his rediscovery of the doctrine of justification, the Reformation doctrine was disseminated very widely and rapidly. But not only was it rejected by the Roman hierarchy which still controlled large parts of Europe, in the places where the Gospel was allowed to be preached it with met with another type of rejection, in that the people did not accept it and live by it. There was not the altered character of the population the New Testament leads us to expect of Christians. Consequently Luther saw nothing ahead but the soon to arrive judgment of God bringing the world to an end in the manner depicted by Biblical prophesies of the end of the world. After Luther there was much similar speculation among the Lutherans.[7]

The Emergence of an Amillennial Distinction

The designation of “amillennialism” for this interpretive view is only about a hundred years old. Up until then it was considered postmillennialism. As the amillennial view places the advent promised in Acts 1 after the millennium, and in connection with the Last Judgment, strictly speaking it is postmillennialism. It is interesting that during the ascendance of the Puritan ideas of postmillennialism, the distinction from some sort of amillennialism was not felt to be necessary. As this Puritan view expected the millennium to be an extension of the Reformation, during which the remains of Romanism were crushed and evangelical Christianity was accepted throughout the world, and as by some time in the 18th century this hope was given up, it was by the 20th century no longer a significant factor on the theological scene which would push people to distance themselves from it by a new name for their system. The more recent revival of postmillennialism came about after the amillennial terminology was established, so that was not a factor either. For a period of time Reformed theology did not make a big production out of millennialism. For example, look at the brief treatment in William G. T. Shedd’s *Dogmatic Theology* published in the late 1880s.

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6 Luther was somewhat inconsistent on how he expressed his ideas, sometimes talking about the intermediate state (between physical death and the resurrection) as something like sleep, but if the dead are outside of earthly time, why should they need to pass some time period sleeping or doing anything else?

7 A detailed discussion of Luther’s ideas about prophesy as well as Lutheran developments through the rest of the 16th century is found in Robin Bruce Barns, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford University Press, 1988). He also has a comparison of the Augustianian and Lutheran ideas of time.

Two factors pushed people to distinguish their theology under the new name of *amillennial*. The first was the increasing prominence of a theology that is now nearly forgotten. With the Enlightenment some nonconformist churches in England, especially the Presbyterians, were taken over by Arians who not only denied the Trinity, but identified the progress of Christianity more and more with the progress of civilization realized by widespread education and by science.[8] In America there was a parallel movement with Congregationalists turning to Arminianism and then quickly to Unitarianism. By the early 20th century a widespread liberalism or "modernism", with this same mentality about progress (and seeing themselves as the vanguard of it), had taken hold in the major denominations in America. Postmillennialism became the name for the theological treatment of progress by this liberalism. This postmillennialism could be called meliorist millennialism, but is generally called liberal postmillennialism.

The second factor behind the amillennial name was the rise of premillennial views throughout the 19th century. The strange and uneven evolution of premillennial doctrines and groups is vastly complex, but the important thing is that by the late 19th century the Bible conference movement had widely established premillennial ideas in evangelical churches, and had identified premillennialism with those who held to the authority of the Bible vs the liberals who were postmillennial. How many of those liberals still believed in the second advent, and could still be postmillennial by the definition of the word in another question. The rise of premillennialism to the status of a leading doctrine claiming to distinguish biblical Christianity, put pressure on Biblical postmillennialists to give more prominence to the millennium in their theology, and to frame it in such a way as to sharply contrast themselves with the liberals. A new name was the best place to start. "Amillennial" underlined that they rejected the features of the premillennial system which the premillennialists now emphasized and justified under the claim of a literal interpretation of the Bible. At the same time it constituted a rejection of the liberal as well as the long departed Puritan postmillennialisms which considered the millennium to be distinguished by evident progress, although of very different sorts in the two cases.

Theologies Accompanying Amillennialism

Because the Bible speaks of a millennium, and because the Old Testament prophets spoke extensively about a coming kingdom, it is necessary for the amillennial theologians to still address this language and explain to what it applies. Their answer is a continuation of the postmillennial explanation that it described the kingdom of God as proclaimed by gospel and which existed through the new life brought to believers by Christ. Therefore amillennialism, despite its name, continues to be a millennial view. Because amillennialism explains this language in terms of what the believer has in Christ, a further complication becomes possible. Because the kingdom is not seen as a Jewish kingdom with a king enthroned in Jerusalem, this language is fulfilled during the present era of the Church on earth. But some of it could be taken to refer to the future eternal state. Sam Storms, for example, in his *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative*,[9] says he has been increasingly attracted by this

8 For an exposition of the views of a prominent exponent of the Enlightenment postmillennialism see *Richard Price, the Enlightenment, Education and the Millennium*, at via-moderna.com.

9 Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Mentor: 2015), 592 pages. Many consider this book to be the finest introduction to amillennialism.

interpretation for some texts. It is not correct, then, to define amillennialism as the view that the kingdom prophesies are fulfilled in the Church in the present age, as that is largely, but not wholly, the case.

Because amillennialism explains the millennium in terms of the gospel and of the nature of the church, it is inherently bound up with the way theologies organize what the whole Bible has to say about this. From this point I will consider covenant theology as the provider of these explanations, as the millennial controversies turn out to mainly involve covenant theologians either among themselves, or in debate with anti-covenant theologians such as dispensationalists. That is, I will leave out Lutherans, anabaptists and whatever other else exists that wants to call itself amillennial.

Covenant theology organizes human history according to covenants, of which there are two principal ones. A covenant involves commands and consequences binding two parties. Adam, in disobeying God's commandment is consider to have broken covenant with God, and in place of the life he enjoyed under God, he was cursed and faced earthly and eternal punishment. The second principal covenant is the covenant of grace, in which Jesus takes the place of Adam, and as keeper of the covenant he receives the reward for obedience and at the same time he accepts the punishment due to Adam for disobedience to the first covenant. Mankind, united with Adam, came under the curse along with Adam, but now those who are united with Christ are both freed from the curse and receive what was promised to Christ. There are also many subsidiary covenants in which this is worked out eternally and historically, such as the covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. These all depend on the covenant of grace, the basis for our justification at any point in history. Amillennialists, postmillennialists and some premillennialists explain the nature of the millennium and the meaning of Biblical texts about it by fitting it into this covenant system in appropriate ways, to explain the development of God's dealing with man across the course of history.

There have been particular developments beyond covenant theology that amillennialists, especially, have adopted to support their rejection of alternative understandings of the kingdom of God. The two I will look at here are Meredith Kline's two-register theology and the two kingdom two age theory. It is important to realize that these have nothing to do with the original development and prominence of amillennialism in Reformed and Presbyterian theology as existed by the early twentieth century, but they are a big factor in the defense of amillennialism by its advocates today against the arguments of the proponents of the other views.

Meredith Kline introduced his idea with what he called a two-register cosmology. He said that this is "to rebut the literalist interpretation of the Genesis creation week propounded by the young-earth theorists", but his theory is also directed against the Westminster Confession's view of the continuing equity of the law of Moses.[10]

> Central in biblical revelation is the relationship of God, whose dwelling place is heaven's glory (Ps. 115:16), to man on earth. A two-register cosmos is thus the scene of the biblical drama, which features constant interaction between the upper and lower registers.

10 "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony" https://meredithkline.com/klines-works/articles-and-essays/space-and-time-in-the-genesis-cosmogony/

> From the perspective of man (more precisely, of man in his pre-Consummation state), the heavenly register is an invisible realm. However, heaven is not to be thought of as occupying a separate place off at a distance from the earth or even outside the cosmos. Heaven and earth relate to each other spatially more after the manner of speculated dark matter and visible matter.
>
> Eden was the sacred center of the earthly reproduction of the heavenly reality….[11]
>
> Man's fall radically affected the way the replication of holy heaven on earth was to unfold. As a consequence of the breaking of the creation covenant, the Glory-theophany was presently withdrawn and the earth, though still under the sovereign control of the King of heaven, was left an unsanctified place. Only by way of redemptive intrusion does theophany-centered holy place reappear in the otherwise non-holy, post-Fall world — most prominently in the history of Israel.
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> At that consummation of redemptive history, prefigured by the Sabbath ordinance, the visible-invisible differentiation of space comes to an end as the heavenly Glory is unveiled to the eyes of redeemed earthlings, their perceptive capabilities transformed now by glorification. The boundary of heaven and earth disappears. All becomes one cosmic holy of holies. God's own Glory constitutes this final temple, the realization of the hope symbolized by its earthly replicas.[12]

Given this two-register theme as the basic reality of creation, Kline can interpret talk about the Kingdom as an intrusion of the upper register into history. Without repeating Kline's extensive writings, we can indicate the basic strategy. The Mosaic order is in his view a sort of temporary replication of the upper-register within the lower-register. The law in its entirety, the bloody conquest of Caanan by Joshua, etc. where all under this kingdom intrusion of the Mosaic model of the upper register. When anything in the Old Testament kingdom prophesies sounds out of place in time, it is a case of upper-register talk, which will not be realized here until the consummation of the age, but is a present reality in the upper-register. Since Kline's view is that the upper register is part of the same creation as the lower register, but has merely become invisible to the lower register, the present world order ends by bringing them back together. This fits Augustine's view of time and the relation of heaven and earth as far as time is concerned, not Luther's.

Jumping ahead of our narrative, we can look at the importance of Kline's theology for a type of postmillennialism. At the time of the heyday of Tyler Christian Reconstruction and its promotion of postmillennialism, part of the Tyler group, especially James Jordan, was heavily influenced by Kline's ideas. Gary North, on the other hand, was using a particular five point model of the covenant as the integrating idea for all theology and all eras. Jordan was interested in Kline's work on biblical symbols, which Jordan saw as integrating the upper and lower. These two ways of thinking eventually broke apart with Jordan and some associates developing the Federal Vision theology. How far Jordan's upper

11 This reference to Eden as a reproduction of a heavenly reality seems to contradict what he says that heaven is the upper register part of the cosmos, which was not yet separated from the lower register.

12 Ibid.

and lower followed Kline's upper and lower registers and how far North bought into the use of symbols remain unanswered questions. There was for a time, at least, a Kline influenced postmillennialism.

Kline's theology collided with the Westminster Confession's interpretation of the Mosaic covenant and the law, which forced it out of many churches and limited its influence. The two age theory is less radical and much more widely accepted. It bases itself on the New Testament's manner of speaking of "this age" on the one hand, and of "the age to come", on the other. This are spoken of as two successive ages, distinct in time and quality. This age is temporal, fallen, under the influence of Satan and awaiting judgment. The age to come is that of eternal life which God has destined to replace this age.[13]

The two age scheme is complicated by a "now" or "already" and the "not yet" scheme. The "now" and "not yet" are always described as being in "tension". The age to come is in some way already here in the "now" but at the same time the age to come is "not yet". The scheme gives the amillennialist a tool to explain how kingdom prophesies are fulfilled in the Church today, and yet not specifically fulfilled according to all the language of the prophesy. What is fulfilled is the "already" and what is not is the "not yet". This scheme is subject to abuse as in the Radical Two Kingdom Theology (R2KT). It allows the theology to filter the Bible. Thus those portions of the Old Testament that we want to apply today are "now" texts, and those we do not, such as ethical and political material that would bring us into conflict with the state, are "not yet" texts. Even the epistles of the apostles can be read as existing in an ambiguous now but not yet situation. The result is that the Bible does not speak a clear word to us, at least as far as ethics goes, as it cannot escape the now and not yet dialectic. Of course this dialectic can be brought up or left out as the occasion demands. A final feature of the two age theology is that it is static. The proportion of the "now" to the "not yet" does not increase over time during this age.

Of course these two supplementary theologies of either the upper/lower registers or the two age dialect are not going to impress premillennialists. Their use is really to help out some varieties of amillennialists with their own theological problems. Amillennialists who can interpret the texts without these theologies are going to be much more persuasive to outsiders who are committed to some other millennial view.

13 While Kline's intention from the beginning was to oppose the Westminster doctrine of the abiding equity of the moral law of the law of Moses, it was his more consistent followers who made the implications clear in both the theology and practice with the result that some were forced out of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Those who read the Westminster Confession with "Dutch" eyes, as though the moral equity were merely the Ten Commandments, were left alone. But others pointed to the prologue to the Ten Commandments, referring to the Lord God who brought "you" out of Egypt. The Ten Commandments, then, were also part of the kingdom intrusion only given to Old Testament Israel. As Kline's theology was unconfessional and causing division, two kingdom theology came in as a replacement. The critics accuse two kingdom theologians of creating a new theology that is not Reformed covenant theology and does not use the idea of two kingdoms as Reformed theology since the Reformation has, and call this new theology Radical Two Kingdom Theology (R2KT). Just how far two kingdom theologians go in this direction seems to vary from one to the next. They all deny being radical and un-Reformed. The problem for the critics is that almost none will accept the real Reformed view of the relation of the kingdoms either. Its systematic exposition is found in Althusius' *Politica*.

Postmillennialism

While, strictly speaking, postmillennialism describes any millennial view that places the millennium before the second advent of Christ, there are historical reasons why it has come to be used in a more restrictive sense. The problem is that there is not an agreement on what that sense is. When we look back at the Puritans we find an expectation of a change in history well after the Christian church had been established. This change was a triumph of Christianity throughout the world in the form of a pure theology and the defeat of the Antichrist, which was the power that opposed to it on earth in the form of temporary entities, almost always seen as the papal system. It was the era after the change that was thought of as the millennium. Thus the Puritan millennium was 1) only the later part of the Church age, not the time from the first advent onward as with amillennialism, and 2) indicated a belief an a change for the better in the form of spectacular victory for the kingdom of God before the second advent. But 3) whether or not this period would last for one thousand calendar years, or whether this language was symbolic of just a long period, was not something that was agreed on by Puritan postmillennialists. Exactly when the millennium starts was also not agreed on. It was seen as the triumph of the Reformation, eventually far beyond was had been seen to date, but where in the process the millennium should be considered begin was not clear.

Today, however, if you turn over enough stones, you can find postmillennialists of each type. That is, those who think that postmillennialism is to believe in a distinct period from Church age, and of a very evident different quality (better). Others think that the period of improvement must be an actual one thousand years. Still others think that postmillennialism is the fulfillment of the Gospel mandate to make disciples of all nations, that the millennium began with the apostles, and that what distinguishes postmillennialism from amillennialism is the expectation of the victory, in contrast to the prevalent amillennial attitude that the present evil age can only get worse. Within these types there are those who define only their own view as postmillennialism.

Besides direct exegesis of biblical texts, what supplementary theology can Postmillennialism add to covenant theology to strengthen its position? The Puritans started from the settled thought of their time. Christianity was established in the social order. The church as an institution was established and supported by the state. It was the duty of rulers to defend and enforce this establishment of Christian institutions and morals. The question was, what particular variety of what called itself Christian was the true one which the state should back? Once this was understood, it was simply a matter of joining in the struggle until the right side triumphed. In addition, the right side, because of its obedience to God, could expect the Providential support of God in the effort.

Today hardly anyone believes this. Thus, if a special theology is needed to buttress postmillennialism it must be found elsewhere. Gary North made the effort with his book *Millennialism and Social Theory*. Here he says that there are three possible foundations for social theory: organicism, contractualism and covenantalism. Under covenentalism he develops his particular model of the covenant, of sanctions and their effect in history. For those who wish to delve into this, the book is available free online.[14]

14 Gary North, *Millennialism And Social Theory,* 393 pages. http://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/sidefrm2.htm

Premillennialism

Premillennialism places the millennium after the second advent of Jesus, as promised in Acts 1. Jesus will then set up a kingdom under his personal rule, during which the kingdom prophesies found in the Old and New Testaments will have their fulfillment. The special interest of premillennialism is to have the prophesies fulfilled in specific historical events, which must therefore happen in a particular order. The challenge for premillennialism is to work out a chronology in which everything fits without a contradiction. The result is a large number of very complex schemes into which every text has to find it correct place. This makes it hopeless to try to lay out all the premillennial systems that have attempted this. What can be done is to introduce the most prevalent general types of premillennialism.

Historic (Covenantal) Premillennialism

The name historic, or historical, premillennialism refers to the type of premillennialism that was around up until the arrival of dispensationalism, which added special requirements for the chronology and significance they made of the events of the premillennial scenario. The historic premillennialism of course continued among those premillennialists who were not drawn into dispensational theology, and it produced a large amount of literature in the 20th century. The other name, covenantal, is due to the complexion that non-dispensationalist premillennialism as especially taken on since, which is to bring out with greater clarity the relation of its ideas to covenant theology. In other words, it doesn't just mean non-dispensational, but indicates some theological progress in its development, related to some basic Reformed ideas.

Dispensational Premillennialism

This premillennialism is formulated to satisfy the requirements of dispensationalist theology. Dispensationalism holds that history is divided into seven periods, called dispensations, in which God deals with people is distinct particular ways. The most important of these distinctions of dispensation is between these that concern the Kingdom (the Dispensation of Law and the Millennial Kingdom), and the Dispensation of Grace, the Church age. They hold that the Bible unfolds with a focus on the Kingdom Dispensation, but that when when Jesus offered the Kingdom to the Jews they refused it. This began a hitherto unrevealed period in Biblical history that dispensationalists call the Mystery Parenthesis, and it is the Church age. The Church age will end and then there will be a transition though a series of cataclysmic events back to the Kingdom agenda which was merely suspended. The Kingdom will continue with the millennium. It is very important to dispensationalism to maintain a clear distinction between Israel, which belongs to the Kingdom agenda, and the Church, which belongs to the church age.

The most crowded portion of the premillennial chronology are the seven years preceding the millennium, because of the large amount of Biblical texts they want to see fulfilled in this period. For dispensationalism this is especially tricky because the removal of the church so that the focus can go back on Israel must be done just right to satisfy all the texts. Here chronological differences separate

the dispensationalists from the historic premillennialists, because the latter see the church going through the cataclysms of the period, which more easily accommodates the texts, but the dispensationalists can't allow this for basic theological reasons.

The dispensational theology begin in the 1830s among people associated with the Plymouth Brethren group, especially John Nelson Darby. Darby (1800-1882) came from a wealthy Irish Protestant family. (They owned an estate with a castle.) He studied at Trinity College, Dublin, where he excelled at classics, and then trained in law at King's Inn and became a barrister. He underwent a conversion, however, and offered himself for the ministry in the Church of Ireland. For a time he came under the influence of the high church Tractarian or Oxford movement, thus his theological influences were definitely not from the Reformed side of the state church. He believed that the established church of England and Ireland had the apostolic succession, and were thus true churches, while Lutheran, Reformed and Dissenting churches lacked the succession and were not true churches. He begin to develop his own ecclesiastical ideas, however, and begin to associate with people who met together in small groups as simply "brethren" without the ministration of clergy, and after some time he separated from the Church of Ireland. The center of his theological thought was always ecclesiology. Along with the other "brethren" Darby came to believe that the true church was simple believers meeting together to "break bread" and worship. A clergy, a formal church government, formal church associates and set orders of service were signs of a false church "fallen to ruins". Instead people should simply follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Darby's narrow idea of the true church had narrowed even more. From this came one of the key ideas of dispensationalism, a theology whose basic structure was devised by Darby. The few hundred "brethren" (who eventually came to be known as Plymouth Brethren) were small in number even compared to Pentecost, showing the inevitable decline of the church. Darby believed that the reformers at the time of the Reformation had only concerned themselves with the doctrine of justification and had not thought about the church or about prophesy. This notion that neither the Lutherans nor the Reformed had an ecclesiology, and that it awaited discovery by the brethren, show the theological naivety with which Darby and his associates entered into the task of constructing a theology for their new group.

This group of brethren was part of a somewhat larger group of Irish evangelicals that had developed a strong interest in Biblical prophesy. Darby was anxious to relate this to his ideas about the church. He believed that he had discovered a Biblical teaching that the small church of the last days—in his mind the brethren—would be removed from earth in a "Secret Rapture" leaving behind the dead formal Christianity of the denominations (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational: all of them) which would then go through the tribulation. Of course, the idea that it would be secret depended on it being a tiny sect that would hardly be noticed. The *Left Behind* narrative, of the crashing cars and planes with no drivers or pilots and millions going missing, is a contradiction to the original dispensational idea that the church was declining and that in the 1830s it was already almost at its end in numbers as well as time.[15]

15 There was another group in London led by Edward Irving, which was also caught up in novel prophetic speculation, and who a few years earlier had announced a Rapture doctrine. The Irvingites were a sort of pentecostal group and were detested by the cessationist brethern, and there is no evidence that Irvingites inflenced the brethren on this matter.

Another aspect of Darby emerging dispensationalist theology was that of probation. Darby read the Bible as time broken up into a series of probations where God tested people under specific provisions. Darby came to call these periods of probation "dispensations", and he believed that each was a time of inevitable decline and failure, which issued in God introducing new new type of probation. The idea that man's time of earth is a probation was a commonplace of the time. Joseph Butler in his *Analogy of Religion* had a long section arguing that the purpose of life on earth was probation. All that Darby had to add was the idea of a series of historical periods in which the terms of probation for men in general underwent changes.

The last missing piece was a way of adjusting the interpretation of the Bible so as to allow these ideas to fit together. There is an account from another brethren leader, Benjamin Wills Newton, who Darby later had run out of the brethren movement, of how this came about, probably in 1832 or 1833.

> At last Darby wrote from Cork saying he had discovered a method of reconciling the whole dispute and would tell us when he came. When he did, it turned out to be the "Jewish interpretation". The Gospel of Matthew was not teaching Church-Truth but Kingdom-Truth —& so on. He explained it to me & I said "Darby, if you admit that distinction you virtually give up Christianity." Well, they kept on at that until they worked out the result as we know it. The "Secret Rapture" was bad enough but this was worse.[16]

Today it can be distinguished into different types. There is traditional dispensationalism which stays closer to Darby's ideas. Then, coming into prominence about in the 1970s was progressive dispensationalism,[17] which backed away from those aspects of dispensationalism that were theologically problematic (the differing ways of salvation implied by the Church alone being in the Dispensation of Grace), or exegetically unworkable. Thirdly there has been a vulgar dispensationalism that has made concessions to what can be popularized more easily in easy books, novels and films. As an example, the separation of Israel and the Church implies that the resurrected members of the church must be kept off the earth during the millennium, which belongs to Israel. The church members accordingly are confined to a big cube which hovers above the earth but never touches down. This sort of thing is gone in vulgar dispensationalism, such as that of Hal Lindsey's, *Late Great Planet Earth*. There are many minor varieties of dispensationalism with few adherents and little influence, which often limit the number of New Testament books that apply to the church. Finally there now seems to be an evolving Christian Zionism with an increasing indifference to the specifics of Darby's system that is trading them for an even more heretical pro-Judaism stance.

As a result it is only practical to talk about dispensationalism in general terms.

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16 Quoted in Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary Press, 2021) p. 102.

17 Some dispensational writers date progressive dispensationalism from 1990 or 1991. When I was in seminary in the early 1970s, however, it was already a going thing and being talked about. I took the eschatology course twice, once from a traditional dispensationalist (Paul Feinberg) and once from a progressive dispensationalist (Stanley Gundry). Gundry questioned hard boundaries to dispensations, and was open to overlapping ages. He was willing to judge dispensational ideas individually, apart from what was demanded by the system. The explanation may be that the term is now applied in a more limited way to a specific scheme of double, or "progressive" fulfillment of prophesy, introduced in the 1990s books, in contrast to the earlier people who simply did not feel bound to Darby's system, and were willing to make modifications, that is to accept theological progress, in response to exegetical considerations.

We can ask, though, about the basic governing idea of Premillennialism, especially the dispensational varieties. Is the unifying idea of the Bible the relation of Adam and of Christ to the covenants so that redemption can be accomplished and applied, or is the kingdom the principal idea running through the Bible? It seems that for premillennialism the kingdom is more the organizing principle, and in the case of dispensationalism this is more openly acknowledged.

Additional Components Added to Millennial Systems

There are additional millennial ideas that are sometimes considered to be millennial views in and of themselves, but they are not common millennial systems in themselves, and are most often found as an added element to one or more of the major millennial systems already introduced above.

Preterism

Preterism is the view that prophesy is fulfilled in the time leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Full preterism sees all prophesy fulfilled in that way, leaving no unfulfilled prophesy, as for example a future resurrection, or of Jesus coming in judgment at the end of the world. Such a full preterist view is contrary to the ecumenical creeds and is rejected as heretical by almost all churches, so it is far from a mainstream view. This sort of preterism, though, is a millennial view in itself, different from the other main systems we have looked at. The theological idea behind preterism is that these prophesies have a theological point. They point to events marking the end of an era and the inauguration of a new era, where Jerusalem and the temple no longer serve a purpose as a center of worship, but God deals directly with persons and with all nations. All the drama is about the appearance of a new order of things, and the destruction of the old order which would not accept the new.

Additionally, there are many time-relative prophesies. Many predictions are of things that are said to be “at hand”. Jesus said that “this generation” will not pass away until all is fulfilled. Preterism accounts for the time references.

Far more interesting than full preterism is partial preterism that holds that some prophesy is fulfilled between the Ascension of Jesus and the end of the events of 70 A.D. Take for example Jesus’s prediction in Matthew 24 of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. This is widely taken as a prediction of what would happen in 70 A.D., and the warning in v. 16 “let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” to be a warning to flee from the approaching armies while there is still a chance, a warning followed by the Christians in Jerusalem who fled to Pella across the Jordan. On this specific prophesy the preterist interpretation is very widely held. Partial preterism turns out to be a very ordinary view. On other texts, such as those that speak of a great tribulation, a preterist interpretation is far less commonly accepted.

Accordingly is makes more sense to speak of preterism relative to specific texts. The question becomes whether a preterist interpretation is the best, or perhaps not even plausible. First, though, we have to set aside those prophesies of the coming of Jesus that refer to the first advent, but do not go past the Ascension, as we have defined preterism so as to leave those out. Of those remaining, there is no

logical reason why some of them could not be accepted by amillennialists, postmillennialists and premillennialists as being fulfilled in the preterist time frame. Dispensationalists are especially resistant to this because of rules of interpretation that they have set up, that require the church age to be out of the picture for certain writings.

It is the postmillennialists who in recent times have made a big effort to give a preterist interpretation to large areas of Scripture. The reason why preterism has a special appeal for postmillennialists is that there is a lot of Biblical material about cataclysmic events or about the Antichrist (or texts assumed to be about the Antichrist) which project a negative expectation about the future. While some Puritans might have seen the battle with the Antichrist in terms of the Reformation battle against the Roman church, and the defeat of the Antichrist to be what brings in the millennium in full, these days these prophesies are seen as a prediction of evil still future and incompatible of the Postmillennial expectation of improvement. A preterist interpretation removes this prediction of future decline, and applies it to a doom for Israel, now long ago fulfilled.

Secondly, for the sort of postmillennialism that accepts the whole Church era to be the millennium as does amillennialism, the theological idea behind preterism, of a big demarcation between an age of expectation and the age of fulfillment, fits in very well. Not so much for premillennialism, which has to find a rational for why only a half-fulfillment has come about, and why some special millennial kingdom has to be reserved for the future and fulfilled separately.

But postmillennialism does not necessarily take on more preterism than other millennial views and not all postmillennialists do.

Historicism

Historicism is the view that the prophesies of the Bible are fulfilled throughout the course of history, from the time of Jesus until the end of the world. Of course, this is not *all* the prophesies. As with preterism they are concerned with a certain class of prophesy. As a millennial view historicism in itself it is something like preterism, in that the prophesies get “used up” during the course of history, and are not awaiting some future end times fulfillment. But historicism does not go as far as full preterism to deny a future advent of Christ and last judgment. Historicism has a large built in interpretive problem. No historicist lives at the end of history. In reviewing history and comparing the big events to prophesies, historicists are inclined to identify the events with things that they think sound like them in prophesy. So the Antichrist must be Muhammad, as that is the biggest attack on the Church in history. Or perhaps their perspective is altered by Reformation writings, and they think that the Antichrist is the institution of the papacy. Or perhaps they are living in the early nineteenth century and think that he is Napoleon. But whatever time they are living, there is still future history, and they do not know what will come along and match the prophesies even better.

Historicism, like preterism, usually comes in degrees. Some prophesies are associated with historical events since Christ, but not all. In a sense preterism is a historicism that narrows the relevant historical events to those up through 70 A.D. But, as seen above, preterism has a theological purpose in doing so (transition between eras), and historicism lacks such a purpose. There is a phenomenon, which is little

noted, but that I call hyper-historicism. I happened to come across some 19th century adventist writing, and the author was taking the admonitions to the churches in the epistles of the New Testament to be prophesies of future historical events, such as medieval church controversies and heresies.[18] Like allegorical interpretations based on a claimed double-sense in Biblical texts, there is no limit to how far historicism can go.

Historicism, however, generally features as an aspect of one of the other major millennial views. Puritan postmillennialism made heavy use of it in their interpretation of history, especially of the Roman church, in the events that they saw as a struggle that was preparation for the millennium, when the Antichrist had been defeated. Puritan historicism, then, could give an historicist interpretation of prophesy that applied it partly to the past, and partly to the future, but nevertheless a future time that was still before the millennium, but keeping it within a postmillennial scheme.

There is nothing to keep amillennialism making the same historicist use of prophesy as just pointed out in the case of postmillennialism, except the future historicist interpretations are not applied to the time leading up to the millennium, but to the time leading up to the end times.

There is a special type of historicism found in some amillennial and premillennial writers, who seem to be in full agreement here. In the book of Revelation there are letters to the seven churches in Asia. These are taken to be predictions of the characteristics of seven ages of the church. The ability to recognize all seven is based on the assumption that all seven have already come about, that we are in the last one, and consequently the end is near. While I have seen this thinking among Dutch amillennialists, I don't think it is prevalent among American Presbyterians. Considerable enthusiasm for this view is common among American premillennialists, sometimes with exact dates for each of the seven periods.

Historicism, then, is an interpretative strategy that has been used by some interpreters within all the major millennial views.

Chiliasm – Apocalyptic

A third type of thinking that mixes in with the major millennial views is harder to characterize than preterism and historicism. It consists of taking symbols in the Bible and making them refer to specific individuals and events. There is therefore a similarity to historicism, but the quality in view here is the transformation of the symbolic and general to the specific and transient. A couple of names might be applied to it. Chiliasm, a name deriving from the millennium, is sometimes used for this tendency to take prophetic language and apply to something limited by time and place, with the paradigm cases being one thousand years understood as calendar years making up a special period when strange things happen. Another name is apocalypticism. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines it as:

> eschatological (end-time) views and movements that focus on cryptic revelations about a sudden, dramatic, and cataclysmic intervention of God in history; the judgment of all men;

18 This hyper historicist material was part of what Charles Taze Russell was studying in his youth, before we went on to found the Bible Student sect that developed into the Jehovah's Witnesses among other things.

> the salvation of the faithful elect; and the eventual rule of the elect with God in a renewed heaven and earth.

The definition goes on to speak of the supposed origin as a speculative way of thinking originating in Zoroastrianism and then popularized among Jews.

There are many things wrong with this definition but its failures are instructive. While the last judgment and the end of the world are end time events, they are not cryptic, like vials of wrath and such in the Book of Revelation, which seem to belong to a different way of speaking. Further the dramatic interventions of God in history, described using cataclysmic language, do not necessary mean cataclysmic physical events. Whether that is the correct interpretation is a disputed question. Further, I would question how cryptic some of the language is. Perhaps symbols only become cryptic for those who insist that a symbol has to be a prediction of a particular person or event, and then the specific reference has to be figured out. When the disciples watched Jesus ascend into heaven, they were told that Jesus would return just like that. This is neither cataclysmic nor cryptic. Finally, there is a widespread idea that apocalyptic is some genre of literature that began with the Persians, was adopted by the Jews, and then made it way into the Bible. People with a certain training will assume that that is what is meant when the see the term. Chiliasm seems less descriptive, but also less loaded with wrong associations, so that is what I will use here.

This type of thinking, which enters into the construction of millennial views, is not literalism, though many call it that. For example, in Revelation 17 there is the woman wearing purple and scarlet, sitting on a scarlet beast, with seven heads and ten horns. Not even the dispensationalists, who pride themselves on the literalism, expect to see some lady come along riding this strange animal. Instead they go to work trying to figure out what entities the heads and horns, as well as the beast itself stand for. In fact it is difficult to give an exact account of the idea of literalism, it being itself a metaphor, as the letters themselves stand for sounds, not for meanings. A preterist might identify the beast with a particular Roman emperor who persecuted the church. A premillennialist would link it to some political power or its ruler in the end times. But this chiliast thinking wants to force a specific time-bound reference onto what might be a general representation of how political powers, especially empires, act throughout history.

This chiliast thinking is essential to premillennialism, all (modern) forms of which try to build up a chronology of specific actors and events which they think are the particular referents of this symbolic language in the Bible. (It is hard to characterize alledged premilliannialism of the early patristic age as so little is known of it.)

Postmillennialism is not immune to chiliast thinking either, as witness the Puritan attempts to historicize some of the prophetic texts to be indicating the beast as the institution of the papacy. In its late phase this type of postmillennialists was trying to decipher the political events around them through Biblical interpretations of the sort we now associate with the last days madness of the dispensationalists. The effect, then, of chiliasm is to create an intensification of the historicism

mentality, which tries to fit current events of historic scope into a prophetic calendar, which in turn is extracted from these symbolic depictions in the Biblical text.

The other millennial views also resort to chiliast thinking, and they see this as a support for their position as they think they are better able to accommodate the cataclysmic expectations than postmillennialism does.

Amillennialism is sometimes represented as the antithesis of this chiliast thinking and of its natural companion of last days madness. But take the case of the Protestant Reformed Church in the 1960s. Herman Hoeksema, expositing Revelation 13, writes using the title The Power of the Antichrist.

> There has been a great controversy all through the ages of the new dispensation about the question whether this beast, or the Antichrist, is a person or a power or a system or a kingdom. But it seems to me that this controversy is not necessary. Daniel tells us that the beast is both, the kingdom and the king. Or to speak a little more generally, it represents both the world-power and its government. ...
>
> The kingdoms of the world, ordinarily like wild animals, existing to their mutual destruction, have succeeded to form a unity. … so the world-kingdom that is represented by this beast is one that combines in itself all the power and glory and ambitions and spirit of all the kingdoms that have aimed at world-power in the past and that do aim at the present time. …
>
> In the second place, the text tells us that this Antichrist, this central government, in combination with its kingdom will do great things. … The Antichrist will be attractive and inspiring. The whole world will be fond of it. …
>
> How then shall the final formation of the beast come to its realization? In order to understand this, we must, in the first place, understand the expression that there shall still be a seventh powerful kingdom which has not yet been. For a time it was thought by some — and personally, we have been inclined to think — that Germany might become that seventh head. But evidently that is not the way in which God has it. Germany's aim was extension of her own power and the Germanizing of the world; and that was not the purpose of the Almighty. No, but a mighty nation is still to appear, it seems, in an entirely different light.

Hoeksema goes on to speculate how this state will be formed. But notice how close he comes to understanding the passage as a general description of empires through history, but then the chiliasm comes in and he has to speculate to whether it is Germany, or (as this is post World War II) some successor confederacy. This writing is from a series in *The Standard* in 1960, but the decade saw more chiliast speculations in *The Standard*, with an imminent expectation of the appearance of the Antichrist and the start of a severe persecution of the church.

Antichiliast Perspective

In the first section, on the major varieties of millennial systems, they are classified according to whether the millennium comes before or after the second advent of Christ. However, it was immediately clear that however a millennial system was classified, it was subject to many variations under the influence of other types of millennial thinking, of which preterism, historicism and chiliasm were distinguished. I now propose the classification be done differently. Millennial views can be viewed as to whether or not or the degree to which they are chiliast. Chiliasm is defined for this purpose as the interpretive practice of taking generalities and abstractions such as symbols, and requiring that their fulfillment is limited to some particular individual or event.

For premillennial systems, chiliasm is essential. Amillennialism and postmillennialism can be formulated without chiliasm, although most historical cases mix in the chiliast interpretations. An antichiliast perspective, then, could be amillennial or postmillennial. Since both actually take the millennium as referring to the present age, and thus are actually postmillennial, for classification the focus turns to their interpretation of the character of that age.

Both amillennialism and postmillennial systems have in the past made use of chiliast ideas to underline the ways they differ from each other. Some postmillennialists use chiliast interpretations of text to indicate the superlative conditions that will be realized on earth under the millennium, e.g. long lifespans. Some amillennialists, perhaps almost all of them, use chiliast interpretations to point to a time of tribulation and the rule of the Antichrist which concludes the downward trend that that they see in their millennium.

Antichiliast versions of amillennialism and postmillennialism would have to turn to more general theological ideas of the nature of the Kingdom and its specific implications for ordering life to distinguish their views from each other. This would bring about a different way of looking at premillennialism as well. The issue would become, what is it about the view of the kingdom of the premillennialists and the importance that they give it in relation to other theological ideas, that it takes the supreme place in organizing chronology? Why does Christ’s kingdom rule have to be separated from what Christ accomplishes in establishing and gathering his church? That is, on what interpretive principles is prophesy split into two tracts?

Organized in this way, eschatologies would turn on the important theological questions for the life of the church and the present mission of believers. The primary division would be between those who do or do not want to think in this non-chiliast way, and then the secondary division would be over real theological perspectives of what the kingdom is now. It is these theologies that are far more important than discussions over how to chiliase symbols into a detailed chronology of end times.

I suggest that Luther’s view of time be added to the antichiliast view. In fact, the question of the nature of time, and the relationship of the eternal state to earth should be included in the theology of millennial views, not just personal eschatology. These questions are often kept separate in systematic theology, when they are actually implicated in each other. Also implicated is the subject of world view, in the more strict sense of the nature of the cosmic order and its relation to God. Does the upper/lower

register view, for example, imply that God is in some way immanent in the upper register? Is the background of the scheme an idea of some sort of cosmic order that ties God and the world together, as is implicit in some theologies such as Thomism? Or is God transcendent to the upper register in the same way as to the lower register?

If so, what is really gained by the upper/lower register scheme? The eschatological story becomes one of man's alienation from and reconciliation with the ritual and angelic side of creation, not with respect to God. It begins to look like the relation of Middle-earth to Valinor in the Tolkien novels rather than like anything Biblical. When examined closely, the explanatory benefit of the register scheme dissolves. All the symbolic elements that might be in the Bible narratives, such as a holy mountain (such as Sinai), the tabernacle and temple, etc. are turned into replicas of upper register objects, and we find ourselves in the midst of something very much like what we have called chiliast thinking, where symbols are turned into referents to concrete events and objects. The upper register begins to look more and more like a puerile mythology, not a theological explanation.

Riddlebarger's *The Man of Sin*

Kim Riddlebarger is an amillennialist, a pastor in a congregation of the United Reformed Church,[19] and a participant in the White Horse Inn (whitehorseinn.org), along with Michael Horton of Radical Two Kingdom Theology ill-fame. His book about the Antichrist, *The Man of Sin*, came out in 2006, but he also published *A Case for Amillennialism* in 2003, widely considered one of the two best introductions to amillennialism (along with Sam Storms' *Kingdom Come*). The cover art of *The Man of Sin* is straight out of the last days madness cookbook. It shows a shadowy figure with most of his face out of the frame. Can we figure out who he is?

The first chapter mostly reviews popular ideas of the Antichrist, which need not detain us. He notes, however, that "The problematic nature of such speculative notions regarding Antichrist has created a reaction in the opposite direction." (p. 35) Here he has in mind the preterist interpretation, which he says is "the same kind of either-or interpretive error." We can expect, then some kind of both-and interpretive approach by Riddlebarger. He explains the either-or as on one side the dispensationalist interpretation making all prophesy future, and the preterist interpretation making everything past. His alternative is not, as we might expect, to say that some prophesy refers to what was fulfilled in the first generation and other prophesy still awaits a future fulfillment, but to offer an "already" fulfillment, vs the "not yet", which he calls an "eschatological tension." "Both preterists and dispensationalists find the tension between the already and the not yet to be intolerable." (pp. 35, 36)

He takes as his example the Antichrist.

> The apostles faced him. The martyrs faced him. We must face him. And in one final outburst of satanic evil right before the time of the end, Antichrist will make one last dramatic appearance before going to his doom.

19 The United Reformed Church has The Three Forms of Unity as its standard, not the Westminster Confession with its stronger view of moral continuity across the covenants. Also the Dutch background might explain its openness to chiliast thinking. Riddlebarger also has The Riddleblog, http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/welcome/

> Therefore, since Antichrist has already come, remains with us today, and will come again, understanding the tension between the already and the not yet is key to understanding what the doctrine of Antichrist actually entails, and understanding the tension enables us to know how we are to combat him. (p.36)

There are a couple of obvious ways to understand such a perennial antichrist. One is to say that the Antichrist in not a person, but a behavioral pattern or a type of person. Consequently the type keeps turning up, and we continually have to deal with it. But in the case of such a recurring antichrist there would not be a tension between the now and the not yet. Another possibility would be to understand the biblical references to the Antichrist as having a double meaning and a double fulfillment. One meaning would be of a general type of actor, who repeatedly turns up in history in the form of various individuals, while the second meaning and fulfillment would be a chiliast one with an eschatological super antichrist finally appearing. But here there is no tension either. Each meaning and fulfillment is simple and, although of different kinds, they are also separate and are not in tension with each other. Riddlebarger's language is indicating something else, something that is inherently paradoxical or dialectical. When you try to understand it, you might even get a tension headache!

Riddlebarger's second chapter begins with a discussion of Near Eastern literary ideas that he thinks form the background to the representation of the Antichrist in the Bible. Of course everything in the Bible has a background. If words and symbols did not mean anything, they would not communicate anything, and would serve no purpose. Yet when he tells us that "Jewish apocalyptic literature develops in a similar way to Near Eastern and Persian combat myths" (p. 38) and so forth, it does not help our understanding of the actual Biblical texts. It may, however, help Riddlebarger's project by preparing us for mythological ways of thinking that directs us toward chiliast interpretations. Anyway, when he says that this material "may lie in the background of the New Testament teaching on the Antichrist" (p. 39) he begs the whole question. What he has in mind is such symbols as the beast found on the book of Revelation (which never mentions the antichrist), and he just *assumes* that this is the same as the antichrists, man of sin, man of lawlessness, etc. mentioned in epistles. The assumption is his starting point for his interpretation of everything in this chapter.

The chapter continues with a review of biblical history to show the conflict between Gods people and their enemies, which he organizes under the general theme of the seed of the woman vs the seed of the serpent. (Genesis 3:15) Once he gets as far as the Babylonian captivity, there is much symbolic material available from the book of Daniel for Riddlebarger to incorporate into a foundation for his interpretation of similar material in the New Testament. Nebuchadnezzar, he says "prefigures the Antichrist". The reason is that Nebuchadnezzar set up a big statue of himself and compelled everyone to worship it on pain of death if they did not. As the statue was sixty cubits high and six wide, Riddlebarger can cite Irenaeus on this being "a clear foreshadowing of the beast and his number 666". (p. 47) I have no problem with this, as I think six as the symbol of man (in contrast to God) has an Old Testament background, for example the six fingers and toes of Goliath's brother, and it falls one short of the number seven which has a very rich meaning as a Biblical symbol for God's program.[20]

20 If fact, if we consider the two ages in this connection, the six takes it origin from the six-day creation which fell with Adam, and become the present age spoken of in the New Testament, with seven being the number associated from Noah

Riddlebarger, quoting Meredith Kline, then connects this to "a little horn from the Seleucids [an] archenemy of God's holy city and people (Dan. 7:8 and 11:36-45). He was a prototype of the antichrist power of the messianic age." (p. 48) At this point, Riddlebarger has done nothing to show that there is such an antichrist power of the messianic age in the Bible. He *assumes* it. Riddlebarger continues with Antiochus IV Epiphanes who set up a statue of Zeus in the temple which "became the basis" for the "so-called 'abomination of desolation' (NEB) mentioned in Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11), in 1 Maccabees (1:54-64), and in the Gospels (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20)." "Because of these despicable acts, Antiochus IV is surely a forerunner of Antichrist. The Gospels see him as such." (p.49) Really? Where is the Antichrist mentioned in the Gospels? After continuing in this vein for several more pages and he takes up Daniels seventieth week prophesy. He cites the text as follows:

> After the sixty-two "sevens," the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven." In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. Daniel 9:26-27.

Here is the same text from the New King James version (removing the versification format, and remembering that italicised words are not in the original, but are added to the English in bring out the intent of the original language).

> After the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself; And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood. And till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined. It is poured out on the desolate.

Quite a bit different, isn't it? The translators have been very active in deciding the meaning of this poetic material.

Riddlebarger is mostly occupied in saying what is wrong with the dispensational interpretation of this passage. But Riddlebarger thinks that it is Jesus who confirms a covenant, which "is a reference to the covenant of grace that God had previously made with Abraham and is now confirming by the Messiah on behalf of the many". (p. 55) It is Christ who put an end to sacrifice, and "the sacrifices that continued in the temple became an abomination to God. … From that moment forward, the temple became desolate and acceptable sacrifice ceased." (p. 56) Here, at last, Riddlebarger is on solid ground.

To see why this is the case we will go over some of this material. Nebuchadnezzar's business with the image does not prefigure the abominations of desolation, because God did not dwell in

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onward with divine rest, but also of the new creation and new age. Interestingly, the preterist Gary North emphatically rejects such suggestions of an Old Testament background (in an angry response to *Contra Mundum's* review of his book *Political Polytheism*.)

Nebuchadnezzar's temple, and then leave it because of the offensive image. In fact, no pagan invader of Jerusalem, either, had the power to drive God from his temple by putting up an image. Also, we might wonder, since Nebuchadnezzar was standing by during the whole image worshiping affair, why he simply did not have the people worship him in person? What preceded Nebuchadnezzar's image was his dream. He dreamt of a statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. It was "a great image … whose splendor was excellent, and its form awesome." "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." (Daniel 2:34-35) Daniel's interpretation was of a series of empires beginning with Nebuchadnezzar, but "in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."

The dream is given to the pagan Nebuchadnezzar and he sees things from his point of view. He is the head of gold on a great statue depicting the great empires. It seemed natural to his pagan mind that such an image should have a model made on earth and that people should worship it. How could such empires exist unless they had divine power? He was making concrete and public what God had revealed, and was calling on people to acknowledge this, in the usual pagan way. Later, already in the next kingdom, the Persian, a dream is given to Daniel. This dream shows things from God's point of view. He does not see a splendid image, but a succession of wild ravening beasts. The fourth beast is of particular interest because it has ten horns and resembles the beast in the book of Revelation. And though the beasts arise in succession, they are all present when God comes to judge them. Both in the case of the image and of the beast we see a succession of kingdoms, but a common judgment falling on all of them.

The common judgment where the whole image is destroyed at once indicates a system that, though it take different historical forms, is destroyed as a system and replaced by the kingdom of God. In case of the vision of beasts, there is more detail. Instead of ending with mixed iron and clay, which "will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay" there are a multiple horns on the beast engaged in a struggle. This final beast is destroyed, but as for the other earlier ones, "they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time." So we have kingdoms, which taken collectively lose their dominion but are allowed to linger on. Yet the culminating form, the forth beast, is killed right away, its body destroyed and burned.

Does this sound like the beast represents some final end of the world kingdom and ruler (which Riddlebarger calls the Antichrist)? No, because it actually is the first to go, and yet it is the culminating, most boastful blatant anti-God type of beast in its character.

To understand the abomination of desolation, the go to text should be Ezekiel chapters 8 through 11. Here Ezekiel (who like Daniel is beside a river in Babylon when he sees his vision, which includes much similar imagery) receives a vision (which is chronologically earlier than Daniel's) of Jerusalem.

Furthermore He said to me, “Son of man, lift your eyes now toward the north.” So I lifted by eyes toward the north, and there, north of the altar gate, was this image of jealousy in the entrance. Furthermore He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from my sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations.” So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. Then he said to me, “Son of man, dig into the wall”; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. And he said to me, “Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there.” So I went in and saw, and there—every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel were portrayed all around on the walls. And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazanial the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.’”

Chapter 10 of Ezekiel describes the Glory of the Lord departing the temple. Chapter 11 is about a judgment on Israel.

The abomination that causes desolation (the departure of God) is the false worship by the Jews themselves. When Ezekiel is told to dig and finds a hidden door into the dark area where he can see what is really going on, it means, I think, that what he sees are not the actions that one would observe when walking into the temple, but rather how God sees the real character of the hypocritical worship offered in the temple. Such worship is no better than worshiping idols and abominations.

The basic pattern coming out of the Old Testament, then, is that there are two things represented symbolically in prophesy. There are the ravening beasts, who are arrogant, boastful, but also self-destructive. These are the empires and rulers who constitute a system which is essentially destroyed by God’s kingdom, but whose form (the several beasts) lingers on. There is also, a second thing, the abomination of desolation which is the false worship by those who claim to be God’s people. Riddlebarger is right when he understands that the continuation of sacrifices in the temple by the Jewish priesthood was an abomination of desolation, but he is wrong when he mixes this up with beast symbolism to make his composite Antichrist. The dispensationalists are far more in the wrong when they urge on the Jews to rebuild the temple and restart the sacrifices, thus repeating the abomination. This is the deep evil in so-called Christian Zionism.

Chapter 3 is The Doctrine of the Antichrist in the New Testament Era, which is an introduction to material that he will cover in more detail in the next several chapters. He has a section on the Two-Age Model as an Interpretive Grid. The New Testament speaks of “this age” and also of “the age to come.” “This age” is the same period as the millennium, as is the one we are in now between the first and second advents. He says “This also means that the New Testament writers do not anticipate an earthly golden-age millennium (either before or after our Lord’s return) but expect the consummation of all things when Jesus comes back—the resurrection, the final judgment, and the creation of the new heaven and new earth.” (p.64) He has already admitted that this *is* the millennium and the kingdom of God. A golden age is the Greek idea that earth begin in ideal conditions and gradually declined to the

present. Nobody believes that. What he is getting at is the “tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’”. This tension is also apparent in the fact that the New Testament writers speak of a ‘spirit of antichrist’ already active.” (pp. 64-65) So he sees some kind of contradiction in what the New Testament says about present times that produces this tension for him.

Is the tension in the New Testament, or is it an artifact of Riddlebarger’s theology? “Antichrist is the supreme manifestation of the spirit of this present evil age.” But the present age is the millennium and the kingdom of God, yet its supreme manifestation is the Antichrist? No wonder he feels tension! But to prove this he cites a series of texts none of which mention the Antichrist! What makes Riddlebarger think they are about the Antichrist is the theology that Riddlebarger had already adopted as his interpretive assumption. One set of texts is about the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2). The others are from Revelation about the beast and of the beast’s false prophet.

The man of lawlessness is discussed, but not identified, in the Thessalonians passage in connection with an idea that had gotten around that Jesus had come, and the saints had been gathered. This is generally taken to mean the second coming and the resurrection of the saints. But it could mean Jesus coming in judgment and the gathering of the people into the church. Paul then says that this cannot have happened yet as first there has to be a falling away, and the man of sin revealed, “the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” Paul talks first about “He who restrains” until he is taken out of the way, and then talks of the destruction of the lawless one in terms reminiscent of descriptions of the destruction of the beast. Preterists have sometimes explained the man of lawlessness as Nero (Ken Gentry) or some individual active in Jerusalem in a way that affected the church there (Gary DeMar). It seems to me more likely that this is a general symbolic language, as is that used of the beast, and describes an aspect of the course of history that must take place before the end of the world.

If a preterist meaning is intended, however, it would best suit the 68 to 70 AD uprising of the Jews, an uprising which put their apostasy into action, and included leaders in Jerusalem urging them on in the name of God to do it. In this connection we need to consider Riddlebarger's next section on the abomination of desolation. He now considers that this is the desecration of the temple in 70 A.D. He cites Jesus’s words in Matthew 24 that when they “see the abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel standing in the holy place, they should flee to the mountains. If the abomination of desolation is the signal to flee, it must be something that happens before the Roman armies arrive and block escape. Therefore it must be something done by the Jews themselves. It might then plausibly be what is in view in 2 Thessalonians 2. Immediately after this warning Jesus warns of false prophets who come saying “I am the Christ.” These are not antichrists, either but false Christs. Riddlebarger, though, thinks that the idea of Antichrist is of a false Christ.

Riddlebarger argues in this section for multiple fulfillments and he suggests that the prophecy of abomination of desolation was fulfilled three times; by Antiochus IV, by Titus in 70 AD, and by an end-times Antichrist. He seems to have forgotten that he said it was fulfilled by the Jews continuing the temple sacrifices after Jesus’s atoning death.

A smaller detail is Riddlebarger's discussion of Jesus's warning in Luke 21 that "They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations." Riddlebarger comments "The desolation of Israel and the dispersion of the Jews to the end of the earth is a great tragedy." (p. 72) While some of the Jewish leaders were taken away, most famously Josephus, there seems to be no evidence for a general deportation of the population. Jesus cannot have been talking about everyone, for if it was all, then they all would have all fallen by the sword, and there would be no one to take as a prisoner. The argument against a general dispersion can be found in Schlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*. He thinks the bulk of the Jewish people stayed and today are the people known as Palestinians.[21]

Riddlebarger begins chapter 4 saying "Many people are surprised to learn that the word *Antichrist* (*anitchristos*) appears only in John's Epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John7) and is never even mentioned in the Book of Revelation." (p. 77) He would have done well to keep this more in mind himself. He goes to claim "The term Antichrist simply refers to a false thing (anti) taking the place of a real thing with great antagonism present between the substitute and the real—Christ and an archfoe." This is wrong. John spoke of "deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh." The antichrist, then, is someone who denies the idea of a Christ. They have a teaching against the incarnation. A false Christ, according to Jesus in Matthew 24, not only affirms that Christ has come in the flesh, but says that it is himself. Riddlebarger is confusing the false Christs with the antichrist, because his prior *assumption* that they are the same compels him to misrepresent the text. However, he goes on to point out, correctly, that "this phenomenon arises within the church—as opposed to some form of external persecution by forces outside the church." (p. 78) This is another contrast between an antichrist and the beast, which should have warned him off of his theory that they are the same. While we are on the epistles of John, take note of 3 John 9-10. He mentions a "Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church." This is another candidate for the apostasy mentioned by Paul to the Thessalonians, as already in the lifetime of an apostle the real Christians were being put out of the church by the false ones.

Riddlebarger then considers what B. B. Warfield had to say about the antichrists in John, and if anyone should have set Riddlebarger straight it was Warfield, but to no avail. Riddlebarger resorts to a chain of resemblances, John's antichrists are kindof like the Man of Lawlessness as they both teach falsehoods, and they are kindof like the false Christ's in Matthew, because false teachers hang out with false Christs, and then he says John provides an "interpretive grid" where we can fit in the historicist view of the Antichrist as the papacy, because they have a false gospel, and the pope as Vicar of Christ is a sort of false Christ, but tying them all together, and with the series culminating in the end time Antichrist, brings it all together. That is, if we first assume the conclusion, then any sort of argument will get us to the conclusion!

21 A review of this book is on via-moderna.com as *Do Jews Exist?*

Chapter 5 is much better. He has a section on Nero, and all the bad things Nero did. He thinks the "image of a despotic Nero lurks in the background throughout much of Revelation with good reason." (p. 93) Up to a point we can grant this, because all symbols have to have a background and the first readers of Revelation knew about what Nero and other emperors did against Christians, assuming a later date for the writing of Revelation. I think he goes too far though, when he brings in the myth of Nero coming back to life as the background of the beast in Revelation. Riddlebarger has much good material to say about the meaning of the beasts. "Clearly, then, what is in view is a state (government) that is empowered by Satan and that claims divine rights and prerogatives unto itself." (p. 96) He quotes Beal that "the manifestations of the beast … 'spans the time from Christ's death and resurrection to the culmination of history.' This means that the beast's efforts to oppose the gospel extend from the time of the Neronian persecution [it started earlier than that] into the present and will continue until the end of the age, when the beast is destroyed by Christ at his second advent (Rev. 20:10)." "John's point is that when empowered by the dragon, the state oversteps its bounds and deifies itself or its leader." (p. 98).

But then Riddlebarger slips up. "What is in view than is primarily an anti-Christian power, centered in the seat of government, using the resources of that government against Christ's church in an effort to thwart the preaching of the gospel." (p. 98) No, the beast is opposed to the kingdom. It is opposed to all of Christ's *rule*, not just to gospel preaching. Here Riddlebarger's narrow view of Christianity, his two kingdom theology, leads his interpretation astray.

He then takes up the second beast, who is the false prophet. He runs through various interpretations by others, then concludes "I believe that John is referring to the imperial power of Rome and the worship of its emperor in this vision but that the first-century Roman Empire does not fully exhaust the meaning of the vision." (p. 102) But why not say the beast represents all the persecutions since Christ? Why limit the reference and then try to stretch it? The purpose of a symbol such as this beast is the generality of what it represents. Riddlebarger repeatedly criticizes preterists for limiting the meaning of Revelation to the time of the early church. So why does he do it?

He points out that the beast from the sea with ten horns ties to the beast with ten horns in Daniel. He says the Daniel passage "likely indicates that the final destruction of this beast comes at the time of the end, which means that the beast will reappear immediately before the end of the age." (p. 103) But in Daniel the beast is destroyed before the others, who remain on for a while, though without dominion. So if there is a chronological indication in the passage it would be that the beast is *not* around at the end. Riddlebarger also notices that "John's vision incorporates the imagery of all four of Daniel's beasts" which he thinks means it "is ultimately greater than Rome, which is the beast's first historical manifestation after the time of Antiochus IV." This is to miss the point. The incorporation of elements from all of Daniel's beasts indicates the general way this symbol is being used Revelation. This beast does not represent particular empires, that keep popping up, now Greece, now Rome, etc. Rather it represents *all* such powers, regardless of their point in history or geography, the ferocious empires of Central America and Mexico as much as those of Euphrates or Europe. Riddlebarger cannot see this,

because with his two kingdom theology he will only consider opposition to and persecution of gospel preaching, not the civilizational scope of the opposition to God's rule.

Summing up his view of the beast in a section titled Is the Beast the Antichrist? Yes and No, he notes that the "identification of the beast as Antichrist has generated a great deal of confusion. John, whom I take to be the author of those three New Testament Epistles bearing his name as well as the recipient of the angel's vision and therefore the author of Revelation, never uses the term *Antichrist* of the beast. … The reason people identify the beast as Antichrist has to do with the connection between the possibility of a Nero *redivivus* and an eighth king, who is to come. … Without such qualification, we risk using the term in a confusing and even, perhaps, unbiblical way." (p. 109) Not perhaps.

Throughout the chapter Riddlebarger reviews interpretations that are preterist, futurist, that see a symbol of an ongoing historical reality, a multiple fulfillment, or a case of an Apocalyptic genre playing on popular conspiracy theories of the first century. In a given case he might choose any one of these, or not quite make up his mind. Preterist interpretations predominate, suggesting that when it comes to particular texts (as I earlier suggested preterism is best understood) he is a partial preterist.

A chapter on the man of lawlessness follows in which he runs through many interpretations, pronouncing against or in favor of them after brief summaries. He returns to his idea of a tension. This time he says that in 2 Thessalonians Paul says that the second advent cannot take place unless two things first happen, the apostasy and the appearance of the man of sin, whereas in 1 Thessalonians he said the advent was imminent. Also he said Jesus also taught the contradiction that his coming was near and yet also taught that signs such as the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth had to happen first. This paradox is a tension. He remarks: "The Thessalonians are about to get a lesson in understanding the already and the not yet!" (p. 123)

Riddlebarger argues that destruction of the man of lawlessness is on too big a scale to be fulfilled in 70 A.D., and so there must be an end times man of lawlessness and a destruction. The restrainer that prevents the man of lawlessness from appearing he says is the preaching of the gospel. This is the same restrainer that holds back the beast until the end. How the preaching of the gospel restrains is something that he does not explain. Once the preaching of the gospel stops the man of lawlessness/beast can appear, but what stops the preaching of the gospel itself before they appear? Riddlebarger does not consider this.

Chapter 7 is a long history of various views about the Antichrist from church fathers until recently. In the next he sums up his view of the Antichrist, and associated phenomena. It is the idea of a multiple fulfillment of prophesies with various ideas of the antichrists prefiguring an ultimate end time Antichrist.

> Will there be an Antichrist? Yes, there will. But we need to take note of Anthony Hoekema's caution in this regard: "We conclude that the sign of the antichrist, like the other signs of the times, is present throughout the history of the church. We may even say that every age will provide its own particular form of antichristian activity. But we look for an intensification of this sign in the appearance of the antichrist who Christ himself will destroy at his Second Coming." (p. 177)

The final chapter is an argument for a dating of the composition of Revelation to the 90s rather than before 70 A.D.

In general *The Man of Sin* lacks a consistent interpretive method. It does not seem to matter to Riddlebarger as any earlier meaning, even if a reference to the popular Nero *redivivus* myth, is a prefigurement with will ultimately combine with all the others in the end-time Antichrist. It is the *assumption* of such an ultimate point at the end of history that is needed to argue that everything else points toward it. As such the book makes for a poor argument for amillennialism. In addition to this, the discussion of other points of view is so perfunctory that it is a poor introduction to them also, even though these other views make up for most of the discussion in the book. Rather than giving us a consistent interpretation that contrasts with the either-or, as he promised at the beginning of the book, he is often preterist but his final word is generally the multiple fulfillment, ending in a particular chiliast one, long familiar from premillennial treatments of prophesy.

What we really have is a two kingdom theology eschatology, which requires a particular amillennial interpretation. Premillennial views and postmillennialism both hold to a redemptive mission and a kingdom mission for Christ. Premillennialism insists strongly on a fulfillment of prophesy in the form of a kingdom rule of Jesus, but it insists on a strong separation of this from Jesus's redemptive mission to the extent that it separates them into two different eras: that of the church and that of the millennium. Postmillennialism, with its covenant theology, keeps the kingdom and redemptive agendas together, not just in time, but as implicating each other in the command to make disciples of all nations. The two kingdom theology only believes in the church agenda, and must displace the kingdom to heaven. With this in view we can see that two kingdom theology is something radically different from previous millennial views, including we might add, the older covenant amillennialism.

The Situation Today

We are in very odd times. It used to be that millennial views and prophesy debates were an oddity (and they could be very odd) of Christian denominations and of sects purporting to be Christian. But now something like it has arisen broadly in English speaking culture. There is talk not of Christ's return but of the second coming of the aliens. Instead of the Antichrist we hear about the Reptilians. Instead of dispensations there are lost ancient historical eras. There are other groups who speak of demonic agendas. There are Satanists who construct demonic theologies for themselves, taking as their source of information the past and present speculations by Christian groups. Then there is another group of pop postdispensationalists who have taken various commonplaces of dispensation doctrines, mixed these with current ideas about aliens, or about demons, or about both, and have convinced themselves of scenarios based on this compound speculations. The sort of thing is all over internet channels. It is generally strongly combined with anti-establishment political views. It is also usually strongly anti-Zionist. In sum, there is now building up a secular apocalypticism that is opposed to the Zionist dispensatonal apocalypticism, which they assume to be the Christian teaching, as that is the type of millennialism that is noised all over.

The effect of this has been the same as that of millennial speculation throughout the centuries. It creates confusion, division, and prevents an understanding of what is really going on. What previously crippled the church today in a parallel manner now affects political movements.

It is necessary to have an idea of where history is going, of a goal, a purpose. However, the millennial theories proposed as an answer to this can instead cause disruptive disorder. Something has definitely gone wrong. But it is very hard to see how to fix it, as no millennial view has been generally convincing.