

# The Sword & The Plow

Newsletter of the Bimillennial Preterist Association

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Vol. XVI, No.12 – December 2013

## America and the Great Millennial Hope Fringe Groups and Millennialism

*Editor's Note: This article is adapted from Richard Kyle's "The Last Days are Here Again – A History of the End Times." It is a survey of the seamy-side of futurism. It is interesting that Preterism finds its way into the story: the Oneida Community stands as a warning to Preterists to avoid the extremes percolating around the borders of Preterism (Universalism, Max Kingism, the Corporate Body View, etc.). However, when compared to Futurism, Preterism is tame stuff. Futurism has a long and recurring history of fringe groups.*

The millennial idea powerfully affected both mainstream and fringe religions throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Early nineteenth-century America witnessed an explosion of new religious movements such as had not been seen since the sixteenth century. Many of these bodies combined millennial ideas with beliefs common at that time, especially perfectionism and communalism. In doing so, these fringe groups gave a new twist to end-time thinking. A wave of communal social orders

came about in the early nineteenth century. By their very nature, communal groups separate from society in their quest for the ideal. The perfectionism so prevalent in antebellum (pre—Civil War) America found its way into the communal sects. Even if they did not believe that society could be perfected, they if endeavored to build for themselves a perfect way of life in their cloistered communities.

To a large extent, most of these groups were millennialists, though their eschatology cannot be neatly categorized as either pre- or post-millennial. In one form or another, they placed considerable emphasis on the return of Christ or the start of the millennium. Millennialism may not have been the distinctive for which these groups were best known, but it did provide the rationale for some behavior that otherwise would make no sense. Most notably, the belief that the millennium was at hand led some radical sects, including the Society of the Public Universal Friend and the Shakers, to adopt group celibacy.

### **The Society of the Public Universal Friend**

The Society of the Public Universal Friend was an early indigenous American communitarian movement with some millenarian characteristics. It flourished in New York, Rhode Island, and Connecticut from 1776 to 1863. Founded by Jemima Wilkinson (1752—1819), the daughter of a prosperous Quaker farmer in Rhode Island, this sect bore resemblance to the Shakers in a number of ways, including its millennial beliefs. Unusual circumstances surrounded the beginnings of the Society of the Public Universal Friend. At eighteen Wilkinson seemed to have died of the plague. Her body grew cold-but then warmed up, and she began to speak. The voice coming from within her claimed that Jemima Wilkinson had "left the world of time," and henceforth her body would function as a vehicle for the Spirit of Life, which; came to be known as the Public Universal Friend.

Wilkinson believed that the Spirit of God's descent to earth and inhabitation of her body was the second coming of Christ, who would reign on earth for a thousand years. For over forty years the Friend operated from within her body. Among other teachings she proclaimed a message of millenarianism and perfectionism. It was the eleventh hour, the last call of mercy ever to be made to humankind.

### **The Shakers**

The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, better known as the Shakers, was one of America's most successful and enduring communal groups. The Shakers originated in England, where they had connections with the so-called Shaking Quakers. Ann Lee Stanley (1736-84) led the group to America in 1774, where economic problems forced them to organize into a socialistic

Christian community. Developing in the context of the Second Great Awakening, the Shakers maintained doctrines common in revivalistic circles. Still, they articulated some unique teachings. Mother Ann believed that God is a dual personality. The masculine side of that personality had been made visible in Christ. Now in her a second incarnation of the Holy Spirit had appeared—the feminine element of God, which continued the work done by Christ. In admitting Ann Lee to the Godhead, the Shakers taught that God was a Father-Mother deity, a bisexual being. They considered Christ to be a spirit, appearing first in a masculine form and then much later in Mother Ann.

The Shakers were a millennial church. But it was a curious blend of millennialism and communitarianism that defies classification. Shaker millennialism can best be seen as a mystical and realized eschatology that experienced Christ's second appearing in the present and not at the end of time. For the Shakers, the second coming of Christ had already occurred, being consummated through Ann Lee, who was the feminine incarnation of God. They also believed that the millennium was at hand, and that they were the vanguard whose prayers and example would direct all humankind into a state of sanctity and happiness. Their mission was to gather in the elect, who could achieve perfection and salvation by denying the flesh.

The Shakers were fanatically antisex. Convinced that sin had begun with Adam and Eve's sex act in the Garden of Eden, Ann Lee insisted that sexual relations were the root of all sin. Men and women would achieve salvation only by overcoming this fleshly desire. They could not marry or cohabit. Married converts were "demarried" in an unusual ceremony. In fact, it was forbidden to watch animals or even flies mate.

Taking celibacy to extremes, the Shakers felt that they alone among the world's peoples were carrying out God's will. If this Shaker dogma prevailed, the human race would be eliminated. But such a possibility presented no problem for the Shakers—they believed that since the millerium was at hand, there was no real reason for the continuance of humankind.

### **The Mormons**

“We believe in the literal gathering of Israel, and the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this continent [North America],” said Joseph Smith—the Mormon leader. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormons, is one of the most successful millennial religions in American history. Many of the millennial groups encountered in this book have long since ceased to exist. Not so with the Mormons—they are still thriving. Mormonism began in the 1820s in western New York State, an area known as the Burned-Over District because it had experienced numerous religious revivals. Here Joseph Smith (1805-44) had a revolutionary experience: he was led by the angel Moroni to discover the Golden Plates, which developed into the Book of Mormon. Supplementing the Bible as sacred scripture, the Book of Mormon describes the emigration of the lost tribes of Israel to America before the birth of Jesus. According to the Book of Mormon, Jesus appeared to these people after the resurrection and set up a church among them. Thus the Book of Mormon established the Hebraic origins of American Indians and supplied America with a biblical past.

Having adorned America with a sacred past, the Mormons naturally Americanized the millennium. This millennial belief held up America as the Promised Land and as the place where the New Jerusalem would be erected. After all, America is where the lost tribes of Israel chose to migrate. This emphasis reflected the nationalism and optimism of American society as well as the postmillennialism so prevalent in nineteenth century religious circles. Yet Mormon millennialism was not this simple. It evidenced several tensions involving both pre- and postmillennial characteristics. At first Smith taught an apocalyptic, premillennial eschatology. But this seemed to fade as the Mormons began to concentrate more on the building of Zion as a place than on an imminent beginning of the millennial kingdom. Yet the Mormons expected their cause to triumph through a cataclysmic judgment rather than the gradual conversion of the world. They waited anxiously for the fulfillment of the signs of the times, while they also labored mightily to build the New Jerusalem in Utah.

All in all, the premillennial characteristics of the Mormons’ eschatology outweighed its postmillennialism. To be sure, they often urged human efforts to build the kingdom. Also, they

occasionally waned in their expectation of an imminent millennium. But they maintained an apocalyptic dualism, dividing the world into opposing factions. The Mormons believed that salvation would come swiftly rather than gradually, be accomplished with the help of supernatural beings, and completely transform life on earth. For the end to come, the Mormons held that three events must transpire. First, “the tribe of Ephraim, the Mormons themselves,” must gather in Zion—which they believed to be Independence, Missouri. (Despite their having been chased out of this Zion, this belief is still maintained.) Next, “the tribe of Judah—the Jews—will gather in Palestine.” Lastly, “the ten lost tribes of Israel will be found” and gather in Zion. “At this point, Christ will return” to begin the millennium.

### **Other Unusual Millennial Groups**

Nineteenth-century America witnessed the rise and fall of other unusual millennial bodies. A number of these groups combined perfectionism and millennialism with unorthodox sexual practices. The Universal Friend and the Shakers advocated celibacy, the Mormons polygamy; the Oneida Perfectionists and the Rappites went down similarly diverse paths.

### **The Oneida Community**

The Oneida Community, founded by John Humphrey Noyes (1811-86), was a very successful and widely publicized communitarian experiment with evangelical roots. The doctrine of perfectionism, that human beings could be without sin, propelled Noyes's innovations, including a new marriage system. Noyes believed that the traditional family relationship bred injustice, competition, and dissension. So he proposed a form of communal marriage in which every male was husband to every woman in the community, and every female was wife to every man.

The basis of Noyes's perfectionism resided in his postulation that Christ's second coming had occurred in A.D. 70. When the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, Christ had appeared spiritually to his apostles. Thus, liberation or redemption from sin was an accomplished fact for the followers of Jesus, who were potentially perfect beings. But the relationship of Christ's invisible coming in A.D. 70 to the millennium presented problems for

Noyes. Was the millennium now in progress? Or had it been delayed? On these questions Noyes was ambivalent and defensive. He even suggested that Christ would appear a third time in the not-too-distant future.

### **The Rappites**

The Rappites were also a communal group with imminent end-time expectations. Like the Shakers, George Rapp (1757-1847) insisted on rigid self-discipline, including strict celibacy and the holding of all property in common. Accordingly, the Rappites regarded themselves as a righteous remnant who would be judged holy when Christ returned in the near future. In fact, Rapp believed that the millennium had recently begun.

### **The Owenites**

Some communal movements with a secular orientation also looked for the millennium. For example, the rationalist Robert Owen (1771-1858) regarded communitarianism as a step toward a heaven on earth. Owen was not even a Christian, let alone a biblical millennialist. Yet he announced the arrival of a secular millennium or utopia. By the word millennium Owen meant a society free from crime, misery, and poverty—an ideal which he believed to be universally possible. For him, the end was the imminent collapse of the capitalist civilization. In the Owenite movement the line between social and religious millenarianism became blurred. Owen began to use religious language, and after 1835 the movement exhibited some trappings of a religious cult.

### **The Christadelphians**

The Christadelphians are a nontraditional religious group begun by John Thomas (1805-71) during the first half of the nineteenth century. Unlike other movements originating at this time, the Christadelphians are not communal, nor do they have any unusual views on sexual relationships. Rather, they are an antitrinitarian millennial group with some unusual doctrinal and social characteristics. They still exist in small pockets in America and in larger numbers in Britain. Thomas insisted that the central message of Scripture was the hope of the kingdom that would come with the second advent of Christ, which he believed to be imminent. The Christadelphians held that the

promises of Scripture related to the Jews and those who voluntarily became Jews.

Their eschatology thus had a Hebraic focus. They rejected any teaching of a heaven beyond the skies, instead believing that the saved will live on a renewed earth. Therefore, the Christadelphians emphasized the earthly promises made to Israel and expected the returning Christ to reign permanently in Jerusalem.

### **The Millerites**

Nearly every year we hear of some well publicized prediction regarding the end of the world. Occasionally, a prophet gathers a following, and an end-of-the-world panic results. In the mid-nineteenth century, northeastern and mid-western America experienced such an event. "I am fully convinced that somewhere between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation, Christ will come," declared William Miller (1782—1849). But March 21, 1844, came and went without the return of Christ. Miller confessed his error and acknowledged his disappointment, but still insisted that Jesus would soon return. Under great pressure Miller and his associates set another date—October 22, 1844.

Such were the predictions of William Miller, a simple farmer and Baptist layman from Low Hampton, New York. Ernest Sandeen has called Miller "the most famous millenarian in American history." Without a doubt, his preaching spawned the most popular end-time movement that America has seen. It is true, of course, that postmillennialism was the dominant end-time perspective until late in the nineteenth century. Increased knowledge, material progress, cultural advances, and the growth of democracy propelled the optimistic vision of America's millennial future. Hopeful Americans even saw the Civil War as but an interlude in which God punished the nation for slavery. Still, premillennialism was not dead in the early nineteenth century. It must be remembered that the line between pre- and postmillennialism was not hard and fast. The distinction in millennial studies between the pessimistic premillennialists who focused on catastrophe and the optimistic postmillennialists who focused on progress did not always hold up. Premillennialists often participated in social reform movements, and

some postmillennialists spoke of end-time events as if they were right around the corner. For example, the prominent evangelist Charles Finney had a postmillennial vision of the millennium as beginning in three years.

There were, then, always a number of individuals who taught pre-millennialism. Some events in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries increased their numbers. In particular, the French Revolution fostered an interest in prophecy. The turbulence of the revolution created an apocalyptic mood, causing many to believe that the end was near. The demolition of papal power in France was of special interest to Bible scholars in both Britain and America who believed that the papacy had to be destroyed before the millennium could come. Other European premillennial ideas reached American shores, especially from Britain, where historicist premillennialism surged in the nineteenth century. While there is no evidence that Miller encountered these ideas, his teachings bore a striking resemblance to British premillennialism. Even Miller's emphasis on 1843 as the year for Christ's return was not unique, for historicist premillennialists in Britain (and some in America too) believed that something cataclysmic would occur in 1843. Where Miller did disagree with the British premillennialists was over the issue of Israel. In Miller's end-time predictions, there was no place for the conversion of the Jews or their return to Palestine. Although at this time the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening was producing an optimistic postmillennialism, enough negative events were occurring to encourage premillennialism and its catastrophic view of history. Focusing on Christ's statement that wars and rumors of war would characterize the end times, premillennialists were always on the watch for war between major European powers. The fate of the Ottoman Empire and the advance of Russia into this area—events the Millerites believed were predicted in the Book of Revelation—occupied a special role in their calculations. On the domestic scene, a number of events generated a premillennial excitement. The influx of Catholic immigrants to America aroused apocalyptic feelings. Premillennialists drew dire inferences from disturbances in the natural world: the early nineteenth century witnessed a solar eclipse, dramatic meteor showers, great storms, fires, earthquakes, and crop failures. Economic problems intensified the end-time anxieties.

The prosperity of the Jacksonian years gave way to the Panic of 1837 and the following depression. The Millerite movement was actually a child of American evangelicalism. In fact, Millerism has been called evangelicalism with a twist. Except for predicting the exact date of Christ's return, Millerism did not substantially differ from its evangelical neighbors. The major impulses of antebellum evangelicalism—millennialism, perfectionism, voluntarism (emphasis on human choice), and revivalism—all helped shape Millerism. Indeed, even in respect to date-setting, the Millerites were not unique—others did the same.

This popular millennial movement did not originate with some raging fanatic or silver-tongued demagogue. Rather, Miller was a self-educated farmer with few charismatic qualities. For a while he flirted with deism. But in 1816 he was converted and returned to his Baptist roots. Miller began an intensive study of the Bible, which eventually centered on millennial prophecies and biblical chronology. By 1818 his end-time views were settled. Still, he restudied his conclusions for several years and in 1831 began to publicly present his ideas. Miller set forth a number of principles for understanding biblical prophecy. But his thinking rested on two basic approaches to Scripture. (1) He embraced a historicist interpretation of the Book of Revelation—the prophecies of the Apocalypse relate to various periods in history. This approach to premillennialism tended to lock the interpreter into a specific prophetic timetable. (2) Whenever possible, Miller interpreted Scripture literally. Figures, parables, and numbers were exceptions: they have a symbolic meaning. Employing these two approaches, Miller looked for the fulfilment of prophecy in both historical events and future developments.

Enlarging on historicist premillennialism, which said that Jesus would return before the millennium and that the millennium would not be ushered in by the gradual reform of human institutions, but by a catastrophic destruction of the world's kingdoms, Miller specified when all of this would happen. Miller's prophetic calculations were quite elaborate. But the key to his biblical arithmetic can be found in Daniel 8: 14: "And he said to me Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Miller believed that this sanctuary cleansing referred to the return of Christ, which would purge the world of evil and usher in the

millennium. On the assumption that one prophetic day equals one year, Miller theorized that Daniel's 2,300 days meant that 2,300 years must pass before Christ's return and the final cleansing of the earth. Using Archbishop James Ussher's chronology, Miller calculated that the 2,300-year period began in 457 B.C., when Ezra and seventeen hundred Jews returned to Jerusalem. This date in turn reflected Daniel 9:24: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people . . . to make an end of sins." Interpreting the "end of sins" to be A.D. 33—the time of Christ's crucifixion—Miller went back 490 years ("seventy weeks") to arrive at 457 B.C. Then, beginning the countdown in 457 B.C., Miller added 2,300 years (which included Daniel's seventy weeks) to arrive at 1843. Over the next few years, Miller continued to recalculate his figures, bolstering his conclusion that the end would come in 1843. But because so many changes had been made to the calendar over the previous two thousand years, Miller still hesitated to publicly designate an exact year for Christ's return. In fact, Miller said little about his discovery to anybody. But by 1831—when he was almost fifty—his friends persuaded him to go public with his message. Miller took to the preaching circuit throughout New York and Vermont, delivering eight hundred sermons by 1839.

Still, Millerism remained a small rural movement until Miller converted Joshua V. Himes to his biblical chronology. Himes, pastor of Chardon Chapel in Boston, proved to be a gifted publicist and organizer. Himes spread Miller's ideas by the extensive use of newspapers, camp meetings, and evangelistic tours. Millerism's greatest distinctive was the use of the biggest tents America had seen, seating up to four thousand. Himes made Miller a national figure and greatly expanded his movement through the Northeast and Midwest. Numbers vary, but Millerism is usually estimated to have ranged from thirty to a hundred thousand. Who were the Millerites? David Rowe defines them as people who not only believed in "the imminent apocalypse but acted on behalf of that belief to specifically support Miller's ideas. While millennial groups usually draw poor people from the lower social orders, this was not so with the Millerites. On the whole, they came from the middle classes and were probably better off than the average person. Moreover, the Millerites were generally sober people unmarked by fanaticism." Until 1842

Miller often qualified his predictions, looking for the second advent about 1843. Under some pressure to be more specific, at the beginning of 1843 Miller used the Hebrew calendar to calculate that Christ's return would occur between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. This more specific dating generated excitement, and Millerism became more popular." During 1843 and early 1844 the Millerites stepped up their activities and the crowds increased. Even the secular newspapers took notice of the Millerite doctrines. So did the mainstream clergy, who opposed the Millerites' date-setting.

As the year passed, the Millerites were often mercilessly ridiculed and lampooned for insisting that the end was at hand. Stung by such attacks, the Millerites identified both Catholicism and mainstream Protestantism as Babylon and partisans of Antichrist. March 21, 1844, passed and Christ did not return. The Millerites faced a crisis of faith. Miller made no attempt to excuse his mistaken date, but he did not give up his belief regarding Christ's imminent return: "I confess my error and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near." Although the movement was at a low ebb in the spring of 1844, many dedicated followers searched the Scriptures for evidence of a new date. Psychologically, it would seem that the Millerites were not satisfied with the belief that Christ would return shortly. They needed an exact date—"and they got one. As early as February 1844, one of Miller's followers, Samuel S. Snow, advanced the seventh-month scheme. According to Snow, the prophetic chronology fixed the date of the Lord's advent at the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish sacred year. The Millerites identified this date with October 22 of the Gregorian calendar. At a Millerite camp meeting in August of 1844, this new date became public. It infused the movement with new vigor. At first Miller hesitated to accept this new date for Christ's return, but events had snow-balled beyond his control. Despite lingering doubts he endorsed the new date on October two weeks before the end was supposed to come." The Millerites had now painted themselves into a corner. There was no setting a new date. From about mid-August to October the Millerites engaged in a frenzy of activities. They flooded the country with their periodicals, books, and pamphlets. Many withdrew from their churches in anticipation of the second advent. They were instructed to get their affairs in order. Many did—selling their

property, closing their stores, resigning their jobs, and abandoning their animals and crops. Even in such a frenzy few Millerites engaged in fanatical activities. To the end they were generally sane people.

But the Great Disappointment came. When the Lord did not return as expected, massive confusion and disillusionment set in. All millennial movements are disappointed when their predictions fail to materialize. But because the Millerites were so specific in their date-setting, their disappointment was even more acute. The Great Disappointment was the last straw. The Millerite movement fragmented and went in several directions. Some went back to their churches. Others were so disillusioned that they abandoned the evangelical faith. A few retreated to the ultimate refuge—they joined some separatist groups such as the Shakers. But most Millerites still believed that the second advent was near. These people formed various Adventist groups, the largest being the Seventh-day Adventists.

Despite its visibility the Millerite movement had little influence on subsequent end-time thinking. It did, however, have three long term effects: (1) Millerism spawned the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (2) it discredited historicist premillennialism, causing it to fade out almost entirely after 1844; and (3) the Millerite fiasco demonstrated the perils of setting definite dates for Christ's return.

Following any apocalyptic failure such as the Millerite disappointment of 1844, there are several options open to the faithful followers. One alternative is to disband the group and return to normal life. Spiritualization is a popular option; this entails “the process of claiming that the prophecy was in error to the extent of its being seen as a visible historical event, and the attempt to reinterpret it as a cosmic, inner, invisible, or heavenly event. A final alternative for the disappointed apocalyptic is to return to the source of revelation the Bible, and seek a new date. A less committed form of this option is to set a vague new date, such as in “the near future.” Following the First Disappointment of 1843, some minor recalculations of biblical chronology pointed to October 1844. This readjustment satisfied most Millerites. Even after the Great Disappointment of 1844, some Adventist leaders did more of the same. They set new dates for the second advent—1845, 1846,

1849, and 1851. But after the Great Disappointment this new arithmetic would not suffice. For most Adventists only a change in end-time thinking could soothe the disillusionment of 1844.

The Seventh-day Adventists did an about-face by resorting primarily to the spiritualization option. In doing so, they developed into a large religious organization. “Millenarians cannot last as millenarians,” notes Jonathan Butler. “The sooner the group can shed its short-term millenarianism, the sooner it can accommodate to the practical business of life in the world.” So the Seventh-day Adventists stopped setting dates for Christ's return and spiritualized the Great Disappointment. By shortening their millenarian phase, they became a stable religious denomination.

The Seventh-day Adventist eschatology had many strands. But its end-time thinking focused on two ideas—a spiritualization of the Great Disappointment and Sabbatarianism. After allegedly receiving a vision, Hiram Edson reexamined Daniel 8:14. With help from O. R. L. Crosier, he set forth the idea that only the event of October 22, 1844, not the date, had been misinterpreted. Miller had interpreted the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 as a prophecy that Christ would return to earth and purge it. The Adventists now believed that on that fateful day in October Christ actually entered into the most holy compartment of the heavenly sanctuary and performed his cleansing work. So the cleansing of the sanctuary referred not to the second advent, but to Christ's “investigation of the sins of God's people in preparation for the end of the world.” With this doctrine of investigative judgment the Adventists accomplished two things: they spiritualized the failed prediction of October 1844 and established a framework to order their lives while they waited for the end.

The early Adventists believed Christ had two distinct ministries. He had been forgiving sins since his work on the cross. Yet for the repentant sinner some sin still remained on the heavenly records. So on October 22, 1844, Christ entered the holy compartment of the sanctuary. Here he investigates the lives of those who have been forgiven to see if they merit eternal life. When this investigative judgment has been completed, Christ will leave the heavenly sanctuary, return to earth, and usher in the terrible Day of the

Lord. Following this judgment the millennium will begin.

Led by Ellen G. White and others, the Adventists soon began to associate Sabbath observance with the event of October 1844 and their new understanding of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. They believed that the message of the third angel in Revelation 14:6—12 forecast their movement. The angel called forth a people from the fallen churches to obey God's commandments, including Sabbath observance. The reason why Christ did not return in 1844 is that Christians had not kept the Sabbath. The second advent will occur only after two events have transpired—Christ has to complete his priestly work in the sanctuary, and God's people must observe the Sabbath. In fact, because the Catholics and Protestants worshiped on Sunday, the Seventh-day Adventists viewed them as the two horned beasts of Revelation 13.8.

### **The Jehovah's Witnesses**

"Ours has been one of the greatest 'Chicken Little' religions in modern history. For over a hundred years the sky had been going to fall shortly. Yet apparently Jehovah hasn't been listening," wrote one disillusioned ex-Jehovah's Witness." The Jehovah's Witnesses may be the most persistent date-setters in history. Most such groups make one or perhaps two failed predictions. But the Jehovah's Witnesses won't quit. Their leaders have earmarked the years 1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, and 1984 as times of eschatological significance. Although millenarians supposedly cannot last long as millenarians, the Jehovah's Witnesses seem to have defied this conventional wisdom. Indeed, "they have preached millenarianism longer and more consistently than any major sectarian movement in the modern world." The belief that God is going to bring an end to the world in the present generation propels their thinking. "Millions now living will never die," proclaimed Joseph Rutherford, one of their leaders." Movements that predict the end of the world in the near future have a short life span. How have the Jehovah's Witnesses explained their prophetic failures? First, they have spiritualized a number of eschatological events, claiming that they occurred invisibly. Second, they recalculate their numbers and insist that their predictions will be fulfilled in the near future. Third, the Jehovah's Witnesses reinterpret

their earlier prophecies, downplaying former predictions—even admitting mistakes. Finally, their organization is so autocratic that the rank and file have little choice but to accept the explanations.

But the Jehovah's Witnesses have done more than survive. They are one of the most successful and well publicized of the Adventist bodies. In the 1990s official members and affiliates numbered over 11 million worldwide. Actually, the Jehovah's Witnesses are the most prominent of about a dozen "Russellite" groups, the Adventist offshoots of the Bible studies conducted by Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). The Jehovah's Witnesses, also called the Watchtower Society, are set off from the Christian tradition by their unorthodox beliefs. They deny most traditional Christian doctrines, in particular the Trinity and the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Their lifestyle also erects some enormous barriers to any meaningful interaction with society. Since Satan dominates the world, especially the institutional aspects of business, politics, and religion, dedicated Jehovah's Witnesses separate themselves from social institutions." In addition, the eschatology of the Jehovah's Witnesses, which has been a basic theme of Watchtower literature from its early years, is confusing and contradictory.

In the years following the Great Disappointment of 1844, Russell came under the influence of several Adventist preachers, especially Nelson H. Barbour. Surpassing their Millerite predecessors, Barbour and Russell began to set dates for Christ's return.' Convinced that Archbishop Ussher's chronology contained errors, Barbour developed his own formula. This new biblical arithmetic concluded that 1873 was the six thousandth year from Adam's creation. Thus the millennial rule of Christ—the seventh day—was about to dawn. When nothing happened in that year, in Adventist style Barbour and Russell spiritualized the return of Christ. Pointing out that parousia (the Greek word used to designate Christ's return) actually meant "presence," they concluded that Christ's presence on earth had begun in 1874. However, until right before the battle of Armageddon, Christ's invisible presence will be known only to his faithful followers. At Armageddon Christ will appear physically and reveal his wrath to all humanity. Russell also taught that during the period of Christ's invisible presence the saints will be invisibly raptured—a view resembling

the teachings of John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren.

By 1878 Russell began to differ with Barbour, developing his own distinct views. While his ideas resembled those of the earlier Adventists and millenarians, Russell shaped a twisted form of premillennial eschatology; he drew his ideas from a literal, contrived interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, and one nonbiblical source—the Great Pyramid of Gizeh. Like certain medieval and Renaissance occultists he believed that God had designed the measurements of the Great Pyramid as an indicator of the end times. Russell also taught that Christ was choosing a church of 144,000 (Rev. 17; 14:1). These spiritual Israelites will rule with Christ as king-priests during the millennium, at which time all of humanity will be raised. They will then learn God's will and have the opportunity to accept or reject it. Those who accept God's teachings will pass through Armageddon and live on the new earth, the new Eden. At the close of the thousand-year period, Satan again will be loosed to deceive the nations. But God will destroy him. Russell believed that the harvest or gathering of the elect would be complete by 1881. Because Christ obviously did not return in 1881, Russell had to adjust his dates. Reinterpreting Daniel to his needs, he adjusted his biblical math forty years—from 1874 to 1914. Russell also added a new wrinkle to his eschatology. In addition to the 144,000 king priests, there will be a second class of heavenly servants, referred to as the great company or sheep. As the Russellite movement grew after 1890, the date 1914 assumed great importance and continues to be a landmark year. On that date “Christ's active rulership began,” commencing in his judgment and “his selecting the Watch Tower organization as his official channel” for governing his earthly interests.<sup>102</sup> Russell predicted that 1914 “would see the destruction of the Gentile nations and the time of troubles that would lead to Armageddon.” The saints were to be taken “up to heaven with Christ, and the millennial rule of Christ over the earth was to be inaugurated.” The booming guns of World War I in 1914 convinced Russell that his millennial calendar was on target. His followers grew excited. The end was right around the corner. When it did not come in 1914, Russell slightly adjusted his timetable to 1918. But Russell did not live to see his prediction fail. He died in 1916. His followers were not prepared to see their leader die before the end of the world. They were even more

disillusioned because Christ had not taken him physically up to heaven.

After Russell's death a power struggle ensued. Out of this dissension Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942) emerged as the leader of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Rutherford began a campaign to refigure some of Russell's eschatology, developing predictions of his own. Here we see clear evidence that “Biblical chronology is the play dough of millenarians. It can be stretched to fit whatever timetable is needed, or it can be reduced to a meaningless mass of dates and figures so that future predictions can be molded out of the original lump.”<sup>105</sup> Rutherford accounted for the failed predictions regarding 1914 and 1918 by repudiating much of Russell's teachings. He then set forth a new chronology based on his interpretation of Daniel and Revelation. Rutherford argued that Christ has been invisibly present since 1914, not 1874, as Russell had said. The time of the end began in 1914. On the whole, the rank-and-file Jehovah's Witnesses accepted this flip-flop with few murmurings. Rutherford now pointed to 1925 as a new date for the completion of all things. Inasmuch as the millennium was about to begin, he made his claim that “millions now living will never die.” Further, because by 1918 the ranks of the 144,000 king-priests had been filled, he gave added attention to the great company, the second class of servants who would live on earth and represent the earthly establishment of the kingdom of God. That the completion of all things did not come in 1925 became a serious problem for the Witnesses. Many had quit their jobs and sold their homes in the expectation that they would soon be living in an earthly paradise. This was another great disappointment, and thousands left the movement. Fifty years later, the Watchtower Society repudiated the 1925 prediction. The society even reported Rutherford's admitting “that he made an ass of himself over 1925.” But this debacle did not stop the Jehovah's Witnesses from making future predictions. To be sure, they held off for a while, waiting until 1966 to make another major prediction. In that year the Watchtower Society leaders pointed to 1975 as the probable date for the end of the world. Now declaring 4026 B.C. to be the date for creation, they counted forward six thousand years. But doomsday did not come in 1975. Once again, the disillusioned Jehovah's Witnesses defected in droves. The society's leadership apologized for the misunderstanding

over 1975. Still, they picked another date for doomsday—1984. Despite grumblings and defections the movement continues to grow. This growth is driven by the belief that the end of the world is right around the corner. But in the late 1990s the Jehovah's Witnesses appear to be taking a more fluid approach to eschatology. They still insist that the end is near, but are not making any specific predictions. In fact, the society appears to be retreating from its position that 1914 was the beginning of the end.

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## Questions from Our Readers

**Q:** Greetings Mr. Simmons!

Have only very recently come to see the preterist view and am rejoicing in this discovery! Not wanting to bore or burden you with details, but just to let you know briefly how this change came about.

The Lord dealt with me when I was 42, (didn't know Him and didn't want to!), and soon drifted into Calvinism and then high/hyper calvinism. That is a spiritual killer, as their double predestination is so stultifying. As their a-mill stance did not seem right and the current thought was that post-mill was dead since the two world wars, I looked at pre-mill. Soon got disillusioned on a diet of Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsey and John MacArthur, with their rapture, pre-trib, temple worship, etc. I started browsing the web and providentially found preterist sites. Having got hold of Glenn Hill's book "Christianity's Great Dilemma", I took a fresh look at Matthew 24, hence my interest in your two books I have ordered, which I look forward very much to reading. Looks like a veritable feast of good things!!

Thank you again for your kindness,

Yours in Christ Jesus by His wonderful Grace,

**A:** Your story is like many of ours; things just don't add up with the futurist paradigm. But you are on the right trail now and I think these books will be a great help to you. I have always felt that if Preterism was correct, there should be a

simple, convincing explanation from history for the imagery in Daniel and Revelation, even if it takes a little digging to get at. I think these books show that that is true.

Write anytime with questions or comments.

**Q:** Since you asked, I do have a question. I recently attended a gospel meeting where the preacher stated the main fulfillment of Revelation was the destruction of Rome in the 5th century. I talked to him after services and tried to make the point that the terms "at hand", "shortly", and "quickly" in the Revelation must point to a more imminent fulfillment (i.e. the destruction of Jerusalem). He quickly waved off my comments with a reference to Is 13:6 ("the day of the Lord is at hand") and said this passage proves that something can be "at hand" even if it hundreds of years off. I must say this passage has perplexed me for some time as Isaiah wrote around 750-720 BC and Babylon wasn't destroyed by the Medes for another 200-250 years. Is this an example of "at hand" being a long ways off or am I missing something?

**A:** There are a couple passages like this where "at hand" seems to refer to events in the distant future. In the passage you cited, 200-250 years elapsed before the destruction predicted occurred. Of course, that could not justify using the term for ten times as long, and saying the phrase is elastic enough to reach 2000 plus years! That would surely be a stretch!

But does "at hand" in Isa. 13:6 admit of a 200-250 year delay? No. When written, Babylon was not a world power; the Assyrians were. The passage "telescopes" to the future, to the time when Babylon will have grown into a world power and will have accumulated many national sins before God. In other words, the clock did not begin running on the "at hand" for several centuries until Babylon had become the "glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chalees' excellency" (v. 19). Thus, although God said Babylon's judgment was "at hand," the prophecy contemplates a future setting after Babylon had attained world dominion.

Something similar to this occurs regarding Israel in the Song of Moses, where God says the day of Israel's final destruction is "at hand" (Deut. 32:35), but the whole prophecy speaks of events

that belong to the "latter days" (Deut. 31:29). In this instance, use of "at hand" again telescopes into the future, looking to the time when God's wrath would overtake the nation. Once the nation's national sins made it ripe for judgment by rejection of Christ, persecution of the saints, suppression of the gospel, etc., then and only then would the day of wrath be "at hand."

We begin to see the time of wrath arrive with Malachi's warning of the approaching "day of the Lord" that would follow the arrival of "Elijah" (John the Baptist) and the "Messenger of the Covenant" (Christ) (Mal. 3:1, 2; 4:1-6). Joel also prophesied of the coming day of wrath, saying it would follow the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Ghost that fell on Pentecost, following Christ's ascension (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21)

The time for this judgment finally arrived in Jesus' day. Jesus began the gospel announcement saying the "time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel" (Mk. 1:14,1 5). Jesus later said that some of those then living would see the Son of man "coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16: 27, 28; Mk. 8:31; 9:1). Thus, the "at hand" of Christ's kingdom coming "in power" (Mk. 9:1) would find fulfillment in the disciples' lifetimes. The announcement of the soon-coming judgment is progressively intensified in the epistles as it grew toward AD 66-70, so that John could finally say "it is the last hour" (I Jn. 2:18). Revelation repeats this announcement, telling the saints that the time was now "short" and "at hand". It helps to remember, also, that the book was written to people living 2,000 years ago, and not to us. Hence, *prima facie* it applied to them and to their day, not ours.

Most people who say that Revelation is about the destruction of Rome fail to see the judgment that God visited upon Rome in AD 68-70. This was called the "year of four emperors." Following the death of Nero (June 68), four emperors came to the throne in the space of a year; the nation was immersed in civil war that left Italy in ruins and the Roman capital burned. Thus, God judged Rome at the same time he judged Jerusalem and the Jews. There is no need to skip ahead until the 5th century to find fulfillment!

Hope that helps.

**Q:** Kurt, just read your article in *Fulfilled Magazine*. I learned several things and it helped solidify my thinking that the CBV guys are not thinking this thing through. Good work!

**A:** Thanks. You're right: The CBV folks have not thought their position through very well. Hopefully, they will give it more thought.

Blessings,

**Q:** Please add me to the newsletter list. I just found your site (though I read Twilight of Postmil about a year ago, good stuff)

I've been a Preterist since 1988 and for years thought I was alone, it's great to see the 'movement' catching on the way it is.

**Q:** Hello Kurt,

Just a brief question following your article on baptism. Just what is sin? I John 3:4 says that is it lawlessness - but which law is in question?

**A:** Before there was the Mosaic Law, there was the Moral Law. This law required men to obey God and not to violate other basic moral commands, such as adultery, fornication, sodomy, murder, etc. To the Moral Law God added the Ceremonial Law, requiring blood sacrifices. Finally, to this was added the Mosaic Law which ordained a priesthood and temple service, established various feasts, etc. The Moral Law was the foundation; the Ceremonial and Mosaic Laws were "superadded" to the Moral Law. The Ceremonial Law and Mosaic Law have been done away. Today, we have only the Moral Law and the ordinances of the Gospel. Violation of the Moral Law has always been a sin and always will be. It is the Moral Law that convicts us of sin today.

Hope that helps.

**Q:** Kurt, I am writing to let you know that your book, *Consummation of the Ages*, has been a major blessing to me. I won't bore you with all of the details but I was raised Southern Baptist

and always held to a pretribulation view of eschatology. About six years ago I heard the word "preterist" for the first time; it changed my whole perspective. When I started studying from a fulfilled perspective, it all started to make sense.

I have struggled for a long time with making all of Revelation square up and have read a number of books and commentaries. Yours is the first one to make sense to me from cover to cover, but I do have a couple of questions and I am just looking for some clarification on a couple of things.

I really need some help getting the relationship of the woman in chapter 12 sorted out. I think what has me stumped is "what Mary was individually, Zion was nationally" and "the woman is the church in the form of OT Israel. I guess my question, in its most basic form is, "who is the church the mother of?" or "who is the mother of the church?" Also, when you say the woman is the church in the form of OT Israel does that mean the saints before Christ, like Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, etc. is the mother church that gave birth to the NT church? I feel like I am not asking the question very well but hopefully you can help me sort it out.

The next question is along the same line. In 19:9 you talk about those called to the marriage supper are the friends of the bride and groom and then there is a reference about the children of the bride chamber being in prayer, vigil and fasting. I find all of that confusing. If the wedding is between the church (bride) and Christ (groom), who are the friends that are referenced? Then if the children of the bride chamber are in prayer during the gap in Daniel, in my mind that is saying the children precede the wedding and my gut tells me that can't be right.

My final question is in regards to 18:7 and divorce. You said the Jews boasted they were the true wife of the Lord and Jerusalem is queen, when in fact she is Nero's mistress and was rejected and divorced. I have sort of sensed, intuitively, for a while that God is divorced but don't really understand how to explain it or make all the pieces fit. If I Google "God being divorced" all I end up reading is a bunch of nonsense. I am hoping you can help clear that up as well.

**A:** Thanks for writing. I am glad to hear that the book was helpful to you. Eschatology is a difficult topic and there are many erroneous views that throw people off the trail of truth. But if we allow the time statements of Christ and the apostles to guide us, everything pretty much falls into place. The historical fulfillment of various parts requires the study of history, but through the collective efforts of many people, the truth is easily within our reach.

To answer your questions as best I am able:

1) The woman in Revelation twelve is the OT church or community. The OT community was the wife of God by the Old Testament; God married Israel by entering a covenant with her. She brings forth the Messiah; Israel was the figurative mother of our Lord; God was Christ's father. The imagery of the woman begins in the garden, where she stands for God's people. The imagery of the woman is carried forward from there and picked up by John in Revelation. In Romans 7:1-4, Paul says that in Christ's death, the law of the first husband terminated, so that God's people could be married to new husband, the risen Savior. In other words, the Old Testament is analogous to the marriage covenant, which Paul says terminated in Christ's death so that his people could enter a new marriage relationship with the risen Savior under the gospel. Thus, the OT woman/bride becomes the NT woman/bride.

2) The bride is the church, who marries Christ by the gospel. The betrothal period began at Pentecost following Jesus' ascension; the consummation came when Christ returned in AD 66-70 to cohabit with his bride ("the tabernacle of God is with men" - Rev. 21:3). In the OT, God was espoused to Israel at Sinai, but the marriage was consummated when the tabernacle was constructed and his glory-cloud filled it (Ex. 40:34). Strictly speaking, the "friends" of the bride and groom would have to be the same people who make up the bride. The use of analogies to teach lessons cannot always consistently be taken to their furthest extremity; they are just analogies and break down when carried too far. Their purpose is to teach a basic lesson, even though some of their little details do not logically work completely out. For example, conversion is represented under the imagery of marriage (Rom. 7:1-4), rebirth (Jn. 3:3-6),

adoption (Gal. 4:5), waking from death (Eph. 2:1, 6), etc. Obviously, these cannot all be reconciled. How are we children by rebirth and adoption both? If we are God's children by rebirth/adoption, how can we also be his bride? The trick is to look for the core lesson in these analogies, and not to try to reconcile or work out all the little details.

3) God marries his people by covenant. The OT community was married to God by the OT law of Moses; God divorced Israel for adultery when he sent her into captivity in Assyria and Babylon (See Ezek. 16, and the book of Hosea). He then remarried her when he brought the nation back out of captivity. This is the meaning of Isa. 54, where the prophet speaks about Israel's "widowhood". God did not die, obviously; but divorce was considered equal to widowhood, which was necessary so a woman to remarry without being an adulteress. When he says "more are the children of the desolate than her that has a husband" (v. 1), he is saying that the children that Israel will produce after the captivity (through the gospel) will exceed the number of children before the captivity. (Here is a good example where the analogy cannot be taken too far - the wife gives birth to children who make up the wife!). In the NT context, the divorced wife is national, unbelieving Israel who clung to the law; the bride is the believers from both Jews and Gentiles. National Israel lost her status as the bride/wife when she murdered Christ (her husband). Believers obtained the status of wife/bride by obeying the gospel. See Rom. 7:1-4.

**Q:** Dear brother Kurt: I need to know more about the temporal ruling of the church today. I am reading the book you sent me and I am very interested in knowing and understanding about the role of the church today. I would appreciate any material you can share with me concerning this.

**A:** I am not sure what I can tell you about the temporal ruling of the church. Christ has ruled the nations with a rod of iron since his ascension and coming in AD 70. The church shares this reign indirectly. We have no mandate to seize earthly thrones, though we are not prohibited from occupying them either. Christians can and should seek to influence government, but I do not see any precedent for

revolution like the Puritans waged against Charles I in 1641. Christ's kingdom does not depend upon his people holding political power; he rules by virtue of his divine Sonship. I believe Christ's rule will always work to advance his kingdom and gospel, but wicked men can and do still resist. As we work to spread the gospel and Biblical morals and ethics, the borders of light will expand and the world will grow to be a better and better place, just as it has since the first century.

**Q:** Hi brethren,

I'm a Christian, full preterist. I've come across a series of interesting articles about so called The Great Commission. Arguments of the author are solid. In Matthew 28:19 "To all nations" = "to Jews". It becomes more evident that The Commission was fulfilled in the 1st century. Also the articles contains an interesting view on baptism -- the author argues that it was only for Jews. Maybe it will interest you. Hope to hear your opinions.

**A:** The view expressed by these articles is not new. The Old German Baptist Brethren/Dunkards and I think the Plymouth Brethren teach that the Great Commission was only for the Apostles, thus relieving themselves of the obligation to share the word. The idea that "nations" = "Jews" is not really defensible. Mark says preach the gospel to all creation/every creature - language hardly susceptible of applying only to the Jews. The Jewish nation was going to be destroyed. God's intention was that the gospel go into the world, not stay in Palestine. There is no basis for arguing that baptism is only for Jews: Peter and Paul both baptized Gentiles. Baptism is for remission of sins (Acts 2:38); our sins are washed away in baptism by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16). Peter wrote to Gentiles in the area of the Black Sea (Cappadocia, Pontus, etc.) saying "Baptism does also now save us" (I Pet. 3:21). Romans says that in baptism we are baptized into Christ's death (i.e., obtain its benefits; Rom. 6:3-6). These verses indicate baptism was not only essential for admission into the covenant community and salvation, but was taught to and performed on Gentiles by the apostles.

Novel ideas and arguments like those proposed by the author of these pieces are best avoided.

# Biblical Liberalism and Darwinism's Assault on God

Kurt Simmons

Christianity has experienced many reversals in the last 150 years. Chief among the forces responsible for decline of Christianity in the West is so-called "scientific Darwinism.

As long as men believed the Bible was verbally inspired and inerrant in its original autographs, it was received as authoritative. The moral judgments pronounced in scripture were taken as the norm, and society was drawn up along its lines. From the roles of the sexes, the structure of the family, marriage, divorce, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, individual responsibility, the work ethic, limitations upon the scope and power of government, you name it: the Bible was our guide. And we prospered.

However, with the dawn of Darwinism, the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible came under attack. Naturally, there had been attacks upon scripture before; the integrity of its historical narratives were challenged. Every now and then some skeptic would make brave and assert a historical figure from the Bible never actually existed. This sort of attack might gain traction for a while, until archaeologists unearthed proof vindicating the Bible record.

But Darwinism represented something totally different. Suddenly, the historicity of obscure names from the distant past was not in dispute, but the very foundations of theism itself. Forget about whether this king or that queen existed; Darwinism denies the very existence of God, and does so in the name of science!

The timing of the assault was a contributing factor to its success. Darwin's theory was floated in the midst of the scientific revolution, when science was making enormous strides in explaining our universe and harnessing its forces. Things unimagined in the past were

becoming suddenly possible! Science seemed omniscient and omnipotent. For many, science replaced God.

Darwin's assault came in the form of origins. Scripture claims God created life and all that exists in the space of six evenings and mornings (Gen. 1:1-2:3): "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Ex. 20:11). Darwin and atheistic science claimed the earth is billions of years old and that life evolved from simple to complex forms by natural processes. Man is not descended from God, but ascended from worms and monkeys!

In a word, scripture came under attack. Men lost confidence in the Biblical record; no longer could the Bible be trusted or taken at its word. The result was inevitable: With removal of the inerrant, verbally inspired word of God, moral collapse ensued. If the Bible was not authoritative about the age of the earth and the origin of life, then its moral mandates were no longer authoritative either. It was a brave new world: Man became the measure of all things; every man could do whatever seemed right in his own eyes.

Darwinism's assault on the Bible may be seen in liberal churches. Once Genesis was thrown out, it was only a matter of time before any number of Christian doctrines came into question. The virgin birth and resurrection of Christ came into dispute. Prohibition on women preachers, which had gone largely unchallenged for 1800 years (I Cor. 14:34, 35; I Tim. 2:11, 12), now became open to question. Since the Bible is no longer authoritative, culture mores and trends become a convenient and flexible guide. Rather than preach sexual purity, liberal churches began embracing homosexual sodomy! Others too up

the mantle of a woman's "right" to abortion. And why shouldn't they if the Bible is not our guide?

But if the Bible does not reign supreme in the church, where will it appear in society and culture? Little wonder the West is in decline when the church turns its back upon the Bible!

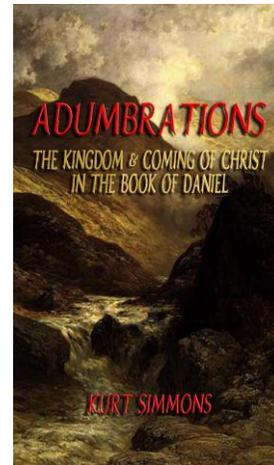
The good news is that Darwinism is in hot retreat. Where men once invented excuses for the Genesis record, bending the Bible to accommodate the claims of atheistic science, saying, that the days of creation actually represent long ages ("day-age" theory), today there is much evidence supporting a "young earth" less than 10,000 years old.

Darwinism claims that life evolved from the simple to the complex; from small, single-celled organisms to large, sophisticated ones. But the fossil record gives the lie to this assumption. There used to be more species than there are today and they were larger (dinosaurs) – just the opposite Darwinism predicts. The Cambrian Period evidences, not a gradual development of life from simple to complex, but an explosion in which all forms were present from the beginning; life appears suddenly and with immense diversity and sophistication consistent with creation, not gradually as predicted by evolution. The bones of dinosaurs science claims went extinct millions of years ago have been cut open only to find they contain soft tissue – red blood cells! And the missing links (intermediate steps from monkey's to men) that Darwin said should be lying around by the thousands? We are still waiting for paleontologists to produce even one.

The Bible claims to be the verbally inspired word of God. Christians have nothing to fear from Darwinism or science. Atheistic science uses big words and a lot of bluff, but their theories are all falling flat on their face and the basic assumptions underlying their dating methods have been shown to be unsound.

Christians may place full confidence in God's inspired and inerrant word.

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## The Puritan's Thanksgiving Heritage

With the approach of Thanksgiving, our minds are invariably drawn to the pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. The pilgrims were Puritans; a sect of religious nonconformists who fled England for Amsterdam, where they could practice their faith without penalty or persecution. Dissatisfied with life in Amsterdam, they returned to England where they obtained a charter and financial backing to colonize the American wilderness. Their purpose was to bring the gospel to these shores to expand the kingdom of Christ.

The crown was probably only too happy to be rid of them. In little more than twenty years, the Puritans would wage a revolution in England and commit the judicial murder of King Charles I, whom Oliver Cromwell beheaded. The religious liberty the pilgrims longed for themselves, they abruptly denied everyone else when they attained power, closing Anglican churches, outlawing Christmas, etc. The Puritan commonwealth lasted less than 20 years (1641-1660); with the death of Cromwell, "bonny prince Charles II," who was in exile in France, was invited home by the people to retake the English throne. Oliver Cromwell's corpse was exhumed and hung up for public execration.

Meanwhile in the colonies, the intolerance and severity of the Puritans differed little from its form in England and the Continent: Christmas was outlawed. The crowning act of tribute to Puritan fanaticism was probably the Salem witch hunts.

Still in all, the Puritans were not without their good points. At a time when religion for too many men consisted only in outward forms of ceremony, which evidenced no living relationship with Christ, the Puritans' deep piety and individual devotion was a wholesome corrective. Puritanism could not have gained traction unless mainstream Christianity had been sorely diseased and enfeebled. Christianity is not merely for Sunday morning, but a thing that permeates one's entire life, leaving no part untouched. Puritan New England for all its excesses is far preferable to modern atheistic American, replete with the sexual revolution, women's liberation, third and fourth generation children growing up in homes without fathers, at-will divorce, sexual license, abortion on demand, and sodomical marriages.

One of the greatest heritages the Puritan pilgrim's bequeathed to their descendants was the example of the sacrifice they made coming to these shores. What would it take for you to leave everything and try to carve out an existence in a total wilderness? Our faith and devotion is often so weak and tepid, that we can hardly be persuaded to sacrifice for Christ at all. Yet, the pilgrim's gave it all, and paid a heavy price. Fully half of the original settlers died the first winter from disease and starvation.

The first Thanksgiving was in 1621. The Indians contributed much to the survival of the pilgrims and shared their feast. The initial distress of the first settlers was exacerbated by collectivism: The memoirs of William Bradford, the second governor of the Plymouth Plantation, tell us that the pilgrim's practiced collectivism, farming the land communally. But as this only led to dissention and further necessity and want, the land was divided to each man and family a portion, to farm and keep what they produced. Now there was truly abundance, the plantation set upon profitable footing, and a second Thanksgiving feast was celebrated in 1623. Funny that all these years later, liberals are trying to sell us socialism to "correct" the abundance private enterprise produces.

We have so very much to be thankful for in these United States. Our lifestyle is unparalleled; our poorest poor are richer and more comfortable than the well-to-do in many lands. Far more important than the material blessings we enjoy, however, is the heritage of Christianity that has historically been embraced by the people of this land. Yes, we should be thankful for all that we have and possess, but let us be especially thankful that we are a Christian people, for that means more than all the rest.

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## Muzzling the Christian Pulpit: 501 (c)(3) Churches

Kurt Simmons

America's freedom stems almost directly from its Christian heritage. Limitations upon the power of government are not political, but moral constraints deeply rooted in the Christian faith. In pagan cultures, the emperors were considered divine and to be worshipped. The claim of divinity entitled the government to intrude into every aspect of the individual's life and family. Freedom of conscience was subordinated to state interest; the individual was lost in the collective mandate of the monarch.

Christianity established the value of the individual. Christ died to save individuals from the power of sin and death. Salvation happens individually, by personal response to the gospel. The Christian has a personal relationship with God, who receives us as adoptive sons and daughters in Christ. The individual is the basic unit of value; the law exists to protect him.

Christianity was born into the world of pagan Rome. The Roman Caesars were worshipped as gods; they had colleges of priests and temples devoted to their cults. Christianity directly challenged the power of the state over the individual. Christians refused to bend the knee to Nero, to offer incense to his statue, or acknowledge him as god.

The emperor threatened and fulminated; Christians were used as torches to light the emperor's garden parties; they were flayed alive; fed to wild beasts, and made a spectacle for the

masses. Still Christians refused to yield or obey. Thus, began the long history of Christian resistance to evil men in high places and the claim of the government to unquestioned obedience from the subject or citizen. Where would freedom be today if Christians had not taken their courageous stand back then?

The long struggle of the individual against the state is best comprehended in the “rights of Englishmen.” In other countries, men might be slaves to the government and made to tremble at its threatenings, but Englishmen resisted would-be tyrants and won a legacy of freedom. But despotic rulers did not willingly surrender their power to tyrannize over men’s minds and bodies: Every item in the Bill of Rights came only through long centuries of struggle, wrested from government at the point of a sword or musket.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an Establishment of Religion or prohibiting the Free Exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for redress of grievances” (Amendment I).

The First Amendment placed the church out of Congress’ control and forbade Congress to abridge religious and political speech. The problem: how to suppress the Christian pulpit and make it subservient to the state? Enter the 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

In 1954, Congress amended the Internal Revenue Code for nonprofit corporations. Prior to 1954, there were no limitations upon speech or political activity by churches. Churches are collections of people; people’s rights were not lost by joining together with others in church. But the 1954 amendment to IRS Code 501(c)(3) claimed the power to change all that. Under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, religious organizations may not “participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.”

Yet, churches had spoken and preached about political candidates from the very founding of the country, including sermons against Thomas Jefferson for his alleged deism and William Howard Taft for his Unitarianism. Churches have participated in every debate that have formulated the values of this country from the abolition of slavery to child labor laws. With one

fell swoop, Congress swept aside First Amendment protections, striking at the very soul of the country’s collective conscience as expressed in its churches.

However, since passage of the amendment to the IRS code, church participation in the moral debates of the day have been chilled; the IRS has consistently maintained that any political speech, including sermons, can result in loss of non-profit status.

Now, after 50 years of threats and intimidation in which minister’s cowered before lawless government agents intent upon tyrannizing God’s ministers, a generation of courageous souls is rising up and is pushing back. Hundreds of ministers and churches are directly challenging the IRS, publicly defying its threatenings. The bluff it up!

First, churches do not need to incorporate under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3) to enjoy non-profit status. Churches are automatically exempted from taxation by virtue of being churches, and members’ contributions are fully deductible just the same. If this form of incorporation gives the government a foot in the church door, then we don’t need it or want it!

Second, churches are entitled to all the protections of freedom of speech every other institution in the land enjoys. Churches are entitled to weigh in on every issue confronting its members. Churches may not expressly endorse a candidate or contribute funds or services to a candidate, but they are free to praise or criticize any candidate under “issue advocacy” exceptions long established by law.

Thus, churches are free to preach against homosexual marriage, abortion, immigration, war, taxation without representation, public schools – there are no issues the pulpit is prohibited to address.

The internet has many sources to help churches regain freedom from government tyranny through 501(c)(3) incorporation. It is time to quit bending the knee to Nero, and to reclaim the “rights of Englishmen” our forebears bled and died for.