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MILLENNIALISM IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM IN LIGHT  
OF AUGSBURG CONFESSION, ARTICLE XVII

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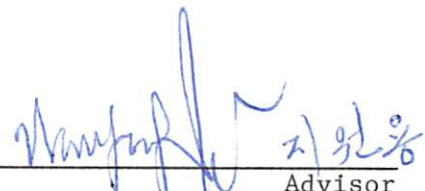
A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Theology


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Francis Wesley Monseth

May, 1986

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Reader

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## CHAPTER I

### AN INTRODUCTION

The history of Lutheranism witnesses to the existence of opposing interpretations of Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession. Many Lutherans, on the basis of the article, deny the confessional validity of any type of literalistic or futuristic millennium. Others, however, contend that the article is speaking to an immediate situation peculiar to the confessors' moment in history. On this score, they believe that the issue of millennialism or "chiliasm" in its subtle variety is an "open question" as far as the Lutheran confessions are concerned. There have been serious, earnest students on each side of this issue. American Lutheranism has experienced controversy and division because of differing conclusions regarding the interpretation of Article XVII. It is the purpose of this study to explore the defense of millennialism by some American Lutherans and to test that position in a careful examination of the Lutheran confessions.

#### Description of Methodology

Because of the different images and connotations induced by the term "millennialism," it will be of importance at the outset to give attention to its etymology and usage. A related term that will be studied is "chiliasm" since it is used frequently either interchangeably or at least in close connection with millennialism.

Early in the study, the chief text (Revelation 20:1-10) used to defend the doctrine of a millennium yet future will be introduced. Pertinent questions of a textual and contextual nature will be raised in preparation for a survey of the response of American Lutherans to the meaning of the text. Other texts purported to be of a millennialist nature will be listed. Again, the varying expositions of these texts will be of great interest in the study of American Lutherans in an ensuing chapter.

An identification and description of four historic interpretations of the millennium will complete the section dealing with definition of terminology. Classical millennialism, a-millennialism, post-millennialism, and dispensational millennialism will be surveyed briefly in terms of their historic setting, leading spokesmen, and biblical rationale.

Of major importance in this research is a sampling of millennial expression as it has appeared in American Lutheranism. Of concern will be an exploration of influences that may have led or at least contributed to the rise of millennialism in some parts of the Lutheran church in this country. The relationship to European Pietism as led by Philipp Jakob Spener and followed by Johann Albrecht Bengel will be studied. Contemporary influences such as American revivalism and socio-political factors also will be investigated.

Important figures in the history of millennial interpretation will form a large part of the study of American Lutheranism. Nineteenth-century representatives who will be included are Joseph A. Seiss, George N. H. Peters, and Georg A. Schieferdecker. In the

twentieth century, Revere F. Weidner, George H. Gerberding, Conrad E. Lindberg, J. N. Kildahl, and J. Michael Reu will be among those surveyed.

Of interest in this study also will be expressions regarding millennialism by certain "free" movements identified with millennialistic interpretation, namely, the Lutheran Bible Institute, and the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. Two smaller church groups with background in Lutheran pietism will also be surveyed for millennialistic comment, namely, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

A confessional examination of millennialism will comprise the last section of this study. The prime focal point will be Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession since it is the statement most often referred to in dealing with the confessional status of millennialism. It will be of interest to determine the historic setting of the article in terms of its medieval background and more immediate setting in the early years of the Reformation. The central concern will be to ascertain what is being condemned by the article. Is it millennialism per se or is it a certain brand of millennialism?

In the exposition of Article XVII, the attention will be given to the respective defenses offered by those who interpret the article differently. A textual study will weigh carefully the words employed by the confessors to convey their intent.

Though Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession is the only statement in the Book of Concord that treats millennialism specifically, it is noted that eschatological expectation and content encompasses the entire confessional structure. With this in mind, all of the

confessional material will be studied for commentary, though indirect, on the question of millennialism. Key eschatological concepts such as "kingdom" and "Antichrist" will be examined for their relationship to the issue.

A close look at Lutheran principles of interpreting the Scriptures also will be included in the study of the confessions. The hermeneutical axioms of sensus literalis est and the analogy of faith will be considered for their respective help in the approach to Revelation 20:1-10 as well as other pertinent biblical texts. The legitimacy of the Apocalypse as a source for eschatological data will also be studied.

A conclusion will seek to correlate and summarize the findings of the research as well as point to applications for future eschatological study.

#### Basic Bibliography

An important objective of this study is to allow millennialists in American Lutheranism to speak for themselves before seeking to determine the validity of their status as confessional Lutherans. Their own writings, therefore, will be primary sources. The nineteenth-century Lutheran, Joseph A. Seiss, published extensively in the area of eschatology. However, his two most important books for purposes of this research are The Apocalypse and The Last Times. Though not as well known as Seiss's writings, the three-volume set entitled The Theocratic Kingdom by George N. H. Peters gives evidence of the existence of dispensational millennialism in Lutheran circles in the nineteenth century.



Though the twentieth century has witnessed a decline in the amount of millennialistic material published by Lutherans, there are many allusions to this teaching from a variety of sources. Writings which will be examined include A Commentary on Revelation by Revere F. Weidner; The Lutheran Fundamentals by G. H. Gerberding; Beacon Lights of Prophecy by Conrad E. Lindberg; The Word of Prophecy by Samuel Miller and Tre Foredrag by J. N. Kildahl. The unpublished class lecture notes of J. Michael Reu will also be studied.

Two periodicals of interest because of their frequent millennialistic articles are The Bible Banner, published by the Lutheran Bible Institute, and Evangelize, published by the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. Articles dealing with the millennium will be surveyed from the inception of each periodical.

The views of Lutheran writers on the millennium will be tested by the Book of Concord, Lutheranism's statement of orthodoxy for four centuries. The Augsburg Confession, specifically Article XVII, will be a chief focus of the examination because of its particular reference to the subject of millennialism.

#### Statement on Value of the Present Study

While there has been a healthy emphasis in this century on the realization of the Kingdom of God in the "here and now," there has been a neglect of the complementary biblical teaching of the fuller manifestation of that kingdom in the future at the second advent of Jesus Christ. Modern theology, whether through C. H. Dodd's "realized eschatology," Albert Schweitzer's "consistent eschatology," Rudolph Buttmann's "existential eschatology," or Jurgen Moltmann's "theology of hope," seemingly

has lost interest in futuristic eschatology in the traditional sense. This represents a serious loss to the Christian faith in terms of Christian expectancy. Historic Christianity as enunciated in the Lutheran confessions is in dire need of re-discovery by our generation for its balanced emphasis on the Kingdom of God, presently, and in the future. It is hoped that this study will help to elucidate that balance.

Even though contemporary Lutheran scholarship has been productive of a number of serious confessional studies on such vital doctrines as the Word, justification, the means of grace, church and ministry, there has been a notable lack in the area of eschatology. It is necessary for the modern student to look to an earlier generation of Lutherans for understanding in this area. The problem is compounded in view of the flood of Reformed and dispensational literature being given wide circulation. Many Lutherans are confused as they read the current popular studies in the field of eschatology. Positive studies are needed. While the scope of the present study is limited, the writer hopes that the results will be a positive contribution to the field of Lutheran eschatology.

American Lutheranism has witnessed controversy and division relative to eschatology, specifically in regard to the understanding of the millennium.<sup>1</sup> While this writer knows of no current open debate relative to this issue, he believes that there are strong opinions held on both sides of the question (that is, whether we are now living in an

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<sup>1</sup>For example, the so-called "Four Points" debate which forestalled altar and pulpit fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the Iowa Synod and its descendants in the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.

indeterminate period of time called the "millennium" or whether there is a "thousand-year" reign of Christ yet in the future to be ushered in at His return). Presently, these contrasting views exist largely among conservative Lutherans with the futuristic concept tied most closely to pietistic circles. Because of the absence of a clear explication of the millennialist position at present, opponents tend to generalize the position, thereby failing to distinguish, for example, classical millennialism from dispensational millennialism. In an effort to clarify the position of millennialists who defend their views on the basis of the Lutheran confessions, this study is commenced.

Due to political, social, technological, and economic uncertainty, modern society is exhibiting a growing interest in the future. This interest is expressed in the vast expenditures of time, energy, and money for research on issues related to future eventualities and needs. The Church, while often sharing the same secular uncertainties, has a "blessed hope" for the future. That hope lies in the personal second advent of Jesus Christ, true to His promise. While all that one might like to know about the future is not revealed by God in His Word, the Bible, all that one really needs to know is given very clearly. It is in these certainties that the "blessed hope" rests. It is to these certainties that this study would point summarily.

Regarding the specific focus of this study and legitimacy of such investigation, the writer is encouraged by the following words of a nineteenth-century Lutheran:

The idea of a millennium is found, I believe, in every age of the Christian Church, and views, differing somewhat concerning it, seem to have obtained, in different centuries, among different individuals. That there have been, and are in this belief, many erroneous opinions, notions, views and sentiments in this world, or in the church, I have no doubt, and that all theories may, in some particulars, be wide of the truth, where once the reality is present, is more than probable. Nevertheless, it is a subject of revelation, and therefore a legitimate subject for humble, serious, patient, prayerful and unpretentious inquiry, and manifestly our privilege to endeavor to arrive as near the facts and truths in the premises, as possible. God has, in this instance, graciously vouchsafed to give us a glimpse of the future; of glory to be revealed, to excite the hopes of his people, to stimulate their holy desires, to challenge investigation, to console and comfort them under tribulations, buffetings, revilings, persecutions, in bonds, imprisonment and death.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Oswald, "Notes on Prophecy," The Evangelical Review, (April 1854):571-572.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MEANING OF MILLENNIALISM

Because of the variation in usage of the major terms to be employed in this study, it becomes particularly important to trace their etymology and usage, seeking to establish the best historic and contemporary consensus. Three words appear at the outset to be vital to define for purposes of this study: millennialism, millenarianism, and chiliasm.

#### Definition of Terms

##### Millennialism

Millennialism comes from two Latin words meaning one thousand years (mille--a thousand; annus--a circuit of the sun, a year).<sup>1</sup> The term "millennium" is not found in the Scriptures but is used in reference to the six-fold mention of a "thousand years" in Revelation 20:1-7. In the broad sense theologically, anyone who would believe in the veracity of Scriptures, thereby taking seriously such a concept as a thousand years or a millennium, could be called a millennialist. This millennialism would encompass the variety of interpretations of the text in Revelation, embracing those who understand the millennium as an indefinite period of time between the ascension of Christ and His second advent, those who speak of a "golden age" of the Church before the

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<sup>1</sup>D. P. Simpson, Cassell's Latin Dictionary (London: Cassell and Company, 1959), p. 372.

return of Christ, as well as those who envision Christ's return to be an ushering in of a millennium, whether a time period to be understood literally or not. Generally, however, millennialism is not used in the broad sense and therefore it becomes necessary to explore its further connotations.

Oswald Allis observes that there is "so much difference or opinion as to just what the word millennium (in the narrow sense) means."<sup>2</sup> This variety of understanding is illustrated in a comparison of sources which purport to be definitive studies. In the standard Webster's dictionary, millennialism is defined as "the thousand years mentioned in Revelation during which holiness is to be triumphant. Some believe that during this period Christ will reign on earth."<sup>3</sup> This is in contrast to the definition offered by the New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge which limits the millennium to the concept of an earthly kingdom. "The term millennium denotes in theology the thousand years of the kingdom of Christ on earth referred to in Revelation 20:1-6."<sup>4</sup> Since Revelation 20, the sedes doctrinae of millennialism, contains no reference to a reign on the earth by the saints and since not all students of Scripture so interpret it, the definition by Webster is to be preferred.

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<sup>2</sup>Oswald T. Allis, Prophecy and the Church (Nutley, N.J.: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), p. 236.

<sup>3</sup>Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (Cleveland: William Collins World Publishing, 1943), p. 1559.

<sup>4</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, 13 vols. ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 7:374.

## Millenarianism

Though millenarianism comes from the same etymological family as millennialism, it is used sometimes to distinguish a certain form of millennialist thought. Distinctly futuristic, it is often used interchangeably with the term chiliasm. Millenarianism, according to Bernard McGinn, as an apocalyptic system, contains such hopes as a "thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints on earth."<sup>5</sup> More concretely, millenarianism is "the belief that there will be a 1,000-year period at the end of this age when Christ will reign on earth over a perfect world order."<sup>6</sup>

Ernest Tuveson makes a unique suggestion regarding the distinction between millenarianism and millennialism. He proposes that those who followed Daniel Whitby's interpretation (post-millennialism) be referred to as millennialists and those who adhered to a return of Christ before things would get better (pre-millennialism) be termed millenarians. He notes that though the two terms were often used interchangeably in the nineteenth century, recent usage has distinguished them in the manner he suggests.<sup>7</sup> Tuveson's contentions have not been substantiated by the present writer. Rather, as has been indicated, millennialism appears as the broader term in reference to a futuristic outlook on the thousand years whereas millenarianism appears as the more

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<sup>5</sup>Bernard McGinn, trans. and ed., Apocalyptic Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, J. D. Douglas, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 659.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest L. Tuveson, Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 33-34.

restricted term to describe a particular school of thought under the umbrella of millennialism.

### Chiliasm

Chiliasm is derived from the Greek word "χιλιο" which literally means "a thousand."<sup>8</sup> It is the word consistently employed in Revelation 20:1-7 to describe a period of God's dealing with mankind. Where that time period is located historically and whether or not the number is intending to describe literally a span of time is the subject of earnest theological debate.

Though the term chiliasm is etymologically neutral in regard to a particular school of millennialistic interpretation, it has become tied most closely with the futuristic viewpoint, particularly of the millenarian variety. It has been customary for Lutheran theologians to distinguish three types of chiliasm; namely, crass, moderate, and subtle.<sup>9</sup> The crass is a millennium composed of carnal delights.

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<sup>8</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 890.

<sup>9</sup>Andrew Voight prefers the designations, sensuous, refined and spiritualizing in his distinction of the various forms of chiliasm. Biblical Dogmatics (Columbia, S.C.: Lutheran Board of Publications, 1917), pp. 238-239. Francis Pieper observes that though three types of chiliasm are typically distinguished, "there are many varieties of chiliasm, and there may be cases that do not fit perfectly into one of the usual three divisions." Further, he notes, ". . . individual teachers of chiliasm manifest various differences even in the fundamental ideas." Pieper refers to the major divisions as chiliasmus crassimus, chiliasmus crassus, and chiliasmus subtilis. Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:520. The present writer speaks for a "biblical millennialism" or chiliasm which interprets Revelation 20 from a futurist standpoint but which recognizes the Church's position in that perhaps indefinite period as a reign with Christ from heaven.



Evidences of the crass form are seen in certain false teachers of the early centuries such as the Montanists and in the radical reformers of the sixteenth century. The moderate type of chiliasm holds to a visible reign of Christ on the earth ushered in by a "first resurrection" and closing with a final resurrection. This viewpoint is represented in modern evangelicalism and is the type held by many Lutherans who believe in a millennial period in the future. The subtle variety of chiliasm looks ahead to "better days" for the Church before the return of Christ but does not speak of a physical reign of Christ on the earth nor more than one general resurrection. Daniel Whitby and his post-millennial interpretation fits this last category best.

It has been noted that chiliasm is used frequently in a pejorative sense and commonly connotes the crass, materialistic conception of millennial conditions.<sup>10</sup> Though there has been appeal for care in the application of the term,<sup>11</sup> it would appear that chiliasm continues to be employed most often in a negative sense. The crass form is described to encompass the whole.

In light of the predominant usage of the main terms used to describe a futuristic conception of the "thousand years" of Revelation 20, it would be most accurate to employ the term millennialism when referring to the futurist position in the broad sense, that is, a millennialist is one who merely believes that the thousand years is

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<sup>10</sup>B. W. Teigen, "Some Background Material for Understanding the Problem of Millennialism Among Lutherans" Lutheran Synod Quarterly, 12 (Winter 1971-72):43.

<sup>11</sup>Nathaniel West, ed., Premillennial Essays (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1879), pp. 313, 365, 395, 408.

still future.<sup>12</sup> Millenarianism would best describe the interpretation of the millennium as a future spiritual reign of Christ on the earth with His saints. This reign will be inaugurated at the return of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Chiliasm would most aptly characterize a carnal, materialistic society yet future in which temporal values receive most attention.<sup>14</sup>

#### Biblical Derivation

##### Revelation 20:1-10

The chief passage upon which the discussion of millennialism rests is acknowledged by all parties to be Revelation 20:1-10.<sup>15</sup> Sharp

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<sup>12</sup>It will be noted that this usage of the word can embrace both millennialist and post-millennialist thinking.

<sup>13</sup>Millenarianism would thus be equated with the millennialist position.

<sup>14</sup>Augustine's impatience with millennialism among his contemporaries was due to the "chilastic" overtones, that is, the conception of the millennium as a carnal, materialist state in which the Church would rule and reign over its enemies. He didn't object to holding a view of a future millennial period if it focused only on spiritual blessings for the Church. "The opinion might be allowed if it proposed only spiritual delights unto the saints during this space (and we were once of the same opinion ourselves); but seeing the avouchers hereof affirm that the saints after this resurrection shall do nothing but pleasure, this is gross, and fit for none but carnal men to believe. But they that are really and truly spiritual do call those of this opinion Chiliasts." Quoted by Peter Toon, Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel (Cambridge: James Clarke and Company, 1970), pp. 14-15.

<sup>15</sup>"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads, or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a

differences in the interpretation of this text divide Bible students into various schools of eschatological thought. The primary question is not how literally the components of this text are to be taken but rather if the text is describing a future eventuality, a present reality, or a past actuality. Questions of a secondary nature which must be faced in any careful study of the text include the following: How is the "binding" of Satan to be understood? Has it already occurred or is there a future fulfillment to be awaited? How should the "thousand years" be interpreted? Is the number to be taken figuratively or literally? Does it really matter if one is to understand the message of the text? In what sense are the "thrones" and the judging issuing therefrom to be taken? Who are the martyred ones spoken of and what is the nature of their reign with Christ? What is the "first resurrection" and how do other resurrections mentioned in the Scriptures relate to it? Why is there a release of Satan after the "thousand years" and how is the judgment of Satan related to the punishment of the beast and the false prophet?

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thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

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

Questions of a contextual nature also must be raised in a study of Revelation 20. Appropriate questions include the following: What is the nature of the Apocalypse? What is its purpose? How has that purpose been carried through in other parts of the book? What is the structure of the book? Are there indications that the text should be interpreted chronologically in whole or in part? What is the immediate setting of the text under discussion? What themes or key terms in the book provide insight into the meaning of the immediate passage?

The contextual questions must be widened to include ultimately the entirety of the Scriptures. Consideration must be given to texts and/or themes that are suggested from a study of Revelation 20. For example, what do the rest of the Scriptures teach regarding the resurrection? What texts might help in understanding the nature of the "binding" of Satan? Biblical texts of a specific eschatological nature also should be considered for possible comment on any or all of the questions posed since the "futurist" nature of at least part of the Apocalypse is acknowledged on all sides.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Samuel Miller distinguishes four main schools of interpretation relative to the Apocalypse--the Idealist, the Preterist, the Historical, and the Futurist. The Idealist viewpoint is that the Apocalypse is not dealing with definite facts and events either of a historic or prophetic nature. Rather, the book intends to depict the age-long conflict between the principles of good and evil, with good shown to be triumphing in the end. Chapters 20 through 22 would therefore be a portrayal of that victory in figurative language. The Preterist view confines the Book of Revelation to the first centuries with the greatest portion of the prophecies being fulfilled within the lifetime of the Apostle John. From the Preterist understanding, chapters 20 through 22 symbolized Heaven and the victory that has come from the triumph of the Church over pagan Rome. The Historical school holds that Revelation intends to describe great events that are to transpire in the world and in the Church from the time of the Apostle John to the second advent of Christ. Wide disagreement has existed as to which historical events are designated prophetically. A good grasp of history is presupposed for an

The preceding textual and contextual considerations will be observed through the eyes of American Lutherans of a Futurist persuasion as well as those who would defend a differing interpreting. It will be observed that the predominant alternative to the Futurist (or millennial) outlook is the Historical (a-millennial) school. Indeed, the latter has been the most influential in the Christian Church since the time of Augustine.<sup>17</sup>

#### Other Texts Cited

In addition to Revelation 20, the chief text cited by millennialist writers to teach a future millennial period, there are a host of others that are claimed by some to corroborate this interpretation.<sup>18</sup>

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accurate understanding of the imagery of the book. According to the Historical school, Revelation 20 through 22 deals with the final judgment, the millennium (not a future period) and the eternal state. According to the Futurist (or eschatological) school, the Book of Revelation is taken up almost completely with great events that shall occur immediately preceding, during, and following the second advent of Christ. The last chapters of the book (20 through 22) are interpreted literally to the extent that a future millennial kingdom is anticipated followed by a judgment of the wicked dead and the eternal state. It is this latter school of thought that is the subject of our investigation in this study. Samuel Martin Miller and H. G. Randolph, The Word of Prophecy (Minneapolis: Lutheran Bible Institute, 1937), pp.1-9.

<sup>17</sup>J. Barton Payne argues for a flexibility on the part of interpreters of Revelation in terms of schools of interpretation. ". . . the principle of refusing to be bound to any single school of interpretation is a sound one." Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973), p. 594. He believes that one should allow conclusions to be formed by the evidences that arise from each passage in respect to its own meaning. He envisions, therefore, a mixture of interpretations with the Futurist school in the pre-eminence.

<sup>18</sup>Among the texts purported to describe millennial conditions in the New Testament are Matthew 19:28; 25:31,34; Luke 1:31-33; 19:17,19; 22:29,30; Acts 3:20,21; Romans 8:19-23; 11:25-27; 1 Cor. 4:5; 6:2,3; 9:25; 15:24-28; Hebrews 2:6-8,14-15; 8:10-12; 1 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev. 1:6; 2:10,26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 7:16-17; 11:15-18; 20:14; 21:1-5,7; 22:1-5. Old Testament

It will be of interest in this study to observe the rationale for using these passages in seeking to establish millennialism by some American Lutherans and how those opposing this futurist interpretation responded to these claims.

### Interpretation of the Millennium

#### Classical Pre-millennialism

Four main views relative to the millennium can be traced in the history of Christian theology: classical millennialism, a-millennialism, post-millennialism, and dispensational pre-millennialism. The oldest of the four interpretations since the apostolic Church would be cited by most historians as classical millennialism. Sometimes termed "historic

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passages that are said to be descriptive of the same period include Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14,26-27; Jeremiah 3:17; 31:33-34; 33:5-6; 3:18-19; 23:3-8; 30:3-22; 33:12-28; Hosea 1:10,11; 2:17,18; 3:5; Zech. 8:3-23; 9:12-17; 10:6-10; 12:6,7; 14:8,9,17-21; 14:11,20,21; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; I Chron. 17:11-14; Psalm 2:6-12; 22:7; 72:8-19; 47:3; 49:14; 67:6,7; 96:11-13; 89:3,4,29-37; Isaiah 9:6,7; 27:1; 66:6,7,19; 2:2-4; 14:23; 60:1-22; 32:1; 11:6-9; 65:17-25; 66:2; 52:9,10; 55:12,13; 32:15-20; 35:1-1-; Ezekiel 34:23,24; 36:24-33; 37:23,28; 39:25; 43:7; 37:27,28; Gen. 12:2; Micah 4:1-7; Joel 3:16,17,20; Exodus 19:6; Daniel 7:21,22; Habakkuk 2:14; Lev. 26:11, 12; Amos 13:15. Listed by Joseph A. Seiss under the heading--"References to the condition of things on the earth after the Savior's return" --The Last Times. (Philadelphia: Smith, English and Company, 1883), pp. 374,375. Walter Koenig discusses several of these Old Testament passages and finds in them fulfillment in the Christian Church. Walter H. Koenig, "New Testament Light on Old Testament 'Millennialistic' Prophecies" (Concordia Theological Monthly), 19 (February 1948):81-92. Pieper likewise dismisses the millennialist content of the passages cited by many chiliasts, believing they are in reality speaking of the "spiritual glory" of the New Testament Church, "which dawned with the coming Christ into the flesh and the preaching of the Gospel in the world." In direct discussion of several passages, he demonstrates that the Christian Church may expect no "worldly" or "external" peace in the temporal realm. Pieper, 3:520-523. Pieper would concur with Johann Gerhard's analysis: "ita prophetae verbis Veteris Testamenti describunt res Novi Testamenti." Johann Gerhard, Loci Theologici, Tomus Nonus (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1875), p. 195.

pre-millennialism,"<sup>19</sup> it finds expression in the writings of many of the early church fathers. Among those who adhered to this futuristic understanding of the millennium in this period were Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Methodius, Commodianus, and Lactantius. Papias, the bishop at Hierapolis in the early second century, is frequently cited for his comments on the increased productivity of creation during the millennium. He affirms as his source the oral tradition of Christ's own statements in this regard.<sup>20</sup> Although Papias' claim for the authority of his statements is impressive, the student of Scripture must place his testimony in the category of mere

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<sup>19</sup>This is the term employed by Robert G. Clouse in the book, The Meaning of the Millennium (Downer's Grove, IL.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>("As the elders who saw John the disciple of the Lord remembered that they had heard from him how the Lord taught in regard to those times, and said): `The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five-and-twenty metretes of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me. In like manner, (He said) that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour; and apples, and seeds, and grass would produce in similar proportions; and that all animals, feeding then only on the productions of the earth, would become peaceable and harmonious, and be in perfect subjection to man.' (Testimony is borne to these things in writing by Papias, an ancient man, who was a hearer of John and a friend of Polycarp, in the fourth of his books; for five books were composed by him. And he added, saying, `Now these things are credible to believers. And Judas the traitor,' says he, `not believing, and asking, How shall such growths be accomplished by the Lord? The Lord said, `They shall see who shall come to them.' These, then, are the times mentioned by the prophet Isaiah: `And the wolf shall lie down with the lamb,' etc. (Isaiah 11:6 ff.)." Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 10 vols. (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886) 1:153-154.

extra-biblical speculation and hearsay. The canonical books comprise the sole source for divine truth.

It is unfortunate that the expectations of Papias are frequently taken as representative of millennialistic thinking in these early centuries. An examination of others with a futuristic outlook, however, reveals a more subdued, spiritual direction. For example, Commodianus, a bishop of North Africa in the middle of the third century, exhorts his readers,

Ye who are to be inhabitants of the heavens with God-Christ, hold fast the beginning, look at all things from heaven. Let simplicity, let meekness dwell in your body. Be not angry with thy devout brother without a cause, for ye shall receive whatever ye may have done from him. This has pleased Christ, that the dead should rise again, yea, with their bodies; and those, too, whom in this world the fire has burned, when six thousand years are completed, and the world has come to an end. The heaven in the meantime is changed with an altered course, for then the wicked are burnt up with divine fire. The creature with groaning burns with the anger of the highest God. Those who are more worthy, and who are begotten of an illustrious stem, and the men of nobility under the conquered Antichrist, according to God's command living again in the world for a thousand years, indeed that they may serve the saints, and the High One, under a servile yoke, that they may bear victuals on their neck. Moreover that they may be judged again when the reign is finished. They who make God of no account when the thousandth year is finished shall perish by fire, when they themselves shall speak to the mountains.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast with Papias, Commodianus emphasized the central verities of eschatological truth. The themes accented are resurrection and judgment rather than earthly bliss.

Justin Martyr is another of the early church fathers who identified himself as a millennialist but not of the chiliastic or carnal variety. Considered by some as the most important Apologist of the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 4:218.



second century, Justin spoke of belief in a future millennium as belonging to true orthodoxy.

. . . But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, (as) the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.<sup>22</sup>

Although accuracy at all points of doctrine does demand a futurist interpretation according to Justin, he is not willing to make his particular eschatological stance a test of one's faith in Christ. In his dialogue with Trypho, he concedes that "many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise."<sup>23</sup> Justin's admission at this early point in church history attests to the existence of Christians who had a different understanding of the meaning of the thousand years of Revelation 20. Millennialism perhaps was not as dominant a view as some modern exponents of this interpretation claim.<sup>24</sup> It is to be regretted that those who held a different position in regard to Revelation 20 did not put their views into writing. Aside from Justin's acknowledgement and allusions by other writers of a millennialist persuasion, it would be easy to assume that only one interpretation prevailed, that of millennialism. It is worthy of note, however, that the writers of the period are church leaders. Their position of author-

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 1:239.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Rene Pache, The Return of Jesus Christ (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955), p. 383. See also George N. H. Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978) 1:494-496.

ity and influence lends credence to the conclusion that millennialism indeed was the leading interpretation of Revelation 20.<sup>25</sup>

A frequent allusion in the writings of the early church fathers is a comparison of the six days of creation with a projected six "days" or millennia of world history culminating in a seventh period of a thousand years known as the millennium. This seventh millennium allegedly corresponds to the Sabbath of creation in which Christ renews the world and the righteous hallow this last day of the world's week. Paraphrasing the Epistle of Barnabas (a second century work), Reinhold Seeberg concludes, "Then dawns the eighth day, the beginning of the other world. The type of this is seen in the joyous celebration of Sunday, upon which day also Christ arose from the dead and ascended to heaven."<sup>26</sup>

The elements of classical millennialism (or pre-millennialism) as expressed by the early church fathers are essentially simple.

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<sup>25</sup>Though Kromminga claims to find a few more non-millennialists among the early church fathers than most historians, he admits, "The Chiliasm of the ancient period was primarily pre-millenarian." Diedrich Hinrich Kromminga, The Millennium in the Church (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1945), p. 27. Faulkner echoes this conclusion, "I think that no one will deny that the ideas underneath what we call Premillenarianism were perfectly at home in the early church, and so far as positive statements of church Fathers were concerned was the leading view. At least no Father for 300 years opposes it, even though some do not say one way or the other. But their silence cannot neutralize the assertions of others. Gieseler thinks the view is practically universal, and that in the second century only the Gnostics, who were fundamental heretics, opposed it." John Alfred Faulkner, "Were the Early Christians Premillennialists?" The Review and Expositor, 21 (April 1924):188. G. Schick documents the existing chiliasm of the early Fathers. "Der Chiliasmus etlicher angesehener Kirchenvater in den ersten Jahrhunderten." Lehre und Wehre, 3 (September 1857):298-303.

<sup>26</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, 2 vols. translated by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 1:73.

Revelation 20 is looked upon as a text to be interpreted quite literally. Thus, there will be a definite time in the future when Satan will be bound. This means that he will be totally incapable of deceiving the world. This time period will be "one thousand years."<sup>27</sup> At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be "loosed" for a short span of time for one last attempt to thwart Christ's purposes. According to the early fathers, there will be two bodily resurrections. The first will occur at the beginning of the thousand years and the second at the end of this time span. Christians will reign with Christ as priests of God the duration of the millennium. Whether this reign will be with Christ from heaven or upon earth is not seen as clearly revealed in the text. A spiritual restoration of Israel is also considered to be an important tenet of classical millennialism by most proponents. However, unlike dispensational pre-millennialism, classical millennialism confines its basis for this conclusion largely to the New Testament (for example, Romans 11:19-26). The Old Testament passages regarding the future blessedness of Israel are thought to be fulfilled in the main in the existence of the Christian Church. Classical millennialism demonstrates an unwillingness to set up a rigid timetable detailing all of the alleged events to transpire in connection with the return of Christ. It is content more often to live with the so-called "gaps" in the prophetic time-line.

Classical millennialism favors the so-called post-tribulational

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<sup>27</sup>Many classical millennialists do not consider a literal thousand year era as a necessity in their interpretation of Revelation 20.

view of the return of Christ.<sup>28</sup> That is, Christ will return at the end of the unprecedented time of tribulation and distress indicated in Matthew 24. The Christian Church, therefore, should be prepared to suffer for the cause of Christ at the hands of Antichrist and all other opponents of Christ. Though having passed from judgment to life under grace and thus no longer under the wrath of God, the Christian Church is ever and always a Church bearing a cross until the second advent. The doctrine of a secret "rapture" out of the coming world-wide distress is therefore considered foreign to a consistent biblical eschatology.<sup>29</sup>

#### A-millennialism

A second major view in regard to the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 is popularly called a-millennialism. It has been argued that the designation is really a misnomer since those who would be categorized under this heading do not deny the actuality of a "millennium."<sup>30</sup> The divergent understanding from that of millennialism originally involved

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<sup>28</sup>George Eldon Ladd amply documents the post-tribulationist millennialism of the early church fathers in his book, The Blessed Hope (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 19-31. He shows that their expectation was that of suffering for the Church at the hands of the Antichrist in the time of "great tribulation."

<sup>29</sup>Jay Adams believes the current trend is toward post-tribulationist, non-dispensational pre-millennialism. "Many--perhaps most--conservatives," he says, "are on the move eschatologically." The Time is at Hand (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>Adams opts for the designation, "realized millennialism." At the same time he would suggest that pre-millennialists might more aptly be titled, "unrealized millennialists." Ibid., pp. 7-11. Aaron Plueger laments similarly the term "a-millennialism" and suggests in its place simply "millennial" in contrast to pre-millennial or post-millennial. Things to Come for Planet Earth (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 8.

the nature of the period and the placement of this span of time in the historical spectrum. There has not always been agreement among its adherents whether "one thousand" should be taken in a literal or figurative manner. Whatever the length of time, it is agreed that the period spans the time between the cross of Christ and the second advent. It was at the cross that Satan was truly bound. It is near the return of Christ that he will be released for one last attempt at deceiving the nations. The "first resurrection" of Revelation 20 is a spiritual resurrection rather than a bodily one. There is only one general resurrection of the righteous and wicked. Those who are in Christ are reigning with Him now in the Christian Church. It is in this Christian church that the prophetic promises regarding "Israel" are completely fulfilled.

The rise of a-millennialism as a major view in eschatology is closely linked to the name of Augustine, the most influential of the leaders of the Western Church in the early centuries of the Christian era. Though he had earlier espoused the prevailing millennial thinking of his time, he became increasingly dismayed by the materialist overtones in regard to a future millennium as held by some of his contemporaries. In his City of God, Augustine outlined his revised outlook regarding end-time events. At the same time he did not object to fellow Christians holding a futuristic view of the millennium under an accompanying proviso.

And this opinion would not be objectionable, if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be spiritual, and consequent on the presence of God; for I myself, too, once held this opinion. But, as they assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the

temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal. They who do believe them are called by the spiritual Chiliasts, which we may literally reproduce by the name Millenarians.<sup>31</sup>

The location of the millennium in history is not the vital concern for Augustine; rather, it is the conception of what that millennium embodies that is of chief moment.

Though Augustine was the popularizer of the a-millennial theory, the source of much of his teaching was Tichonius, a little-known Donatist writer of the fourth century. Among other works, Tichonius wrote a commentary on Revelation, interpreted almost entirely in a spiritual sense. Rather than speaking so much of coming events, he argued that the Apocalypse primarily depicts the spiritual controversy concerning the kingdom of God. His "Seven Rules" are important to observe since they became the leading principles of many Bible expositors for hundreds of years. In his treatise, "On Christian Doctrine," Augustine discusses the seven rules, referring to them as "keys to open the secrets of Scripture."<sup>32</sup> Three uses of these rules particularly apply to the interpretation of prophetic themes. Augustine summarizes one of the rules in terms of "species and genus." Tichonius' contention is that it is permissible to take a "species" of the text, and to understand thereby the "genus" to which it belongs--to reach the abstract from the concrete picture. Revealing the influence of Origen here, Tichonius prepares the way for symbolical or mystical interpretations to a height-

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<sup>31</sup>Saint Augustine, The City of God, trans. by Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 719. Chapters 6-15 of Book 20 are particularly devoted to Augustine's interpretation of the millennium.

<sup>32</sup>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 13 vols. ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 2:568.

ened degree. Another of the rules is simply stated as "of times." Augustine says that by this rule, one can "frequently discover or conjecture quantities of time which are not expressly mentioned in Scripture."<sup>33</sup> He illustrates the use of this rule in a discussion of the mystical value of numbers, especially 7, 10, and 12. A final rule which Augustine believed could be applied is labelled the "recapitulation."<sup>34</sup> In application to the Book of Revelation, the conclusion is drawn that the narrative is not continuous, but repeats itself and goes over the same ground under new and different symbols.<sup>35</sup> Tichonius made the Book of Revelation the basis of his own particular philosophy of history. His conception of history resulted in a sharp division of the world into good and evil. The contrasts are between God on the one hand, and Satan on the other. Included on God's "side" are "Christ, angels, Civitas Dei, church, Jerusalem . . . the good," and so forth. Their counterparts under Satan are "Antichrist, demons and evil spirits, civitas diaboli, totality of the wicked, Babylon . . . the evil," and so forth.<sup>36</sup> These ideas, which are largely generalizations, supported Augustine in his growing disaffection for the historical interpretation of the Book of Revelation, determined as he was to find a biblical alternative for the distasteful views of the carnal chiliasts.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 571.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 572.

<sup>35</sup>LeRoy Froom remarks that it was this principle that led to the full premise of Augustinianism. LeRoy Edwin Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), 1:467.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 468.

Conditioned by the allegorizing techniques of Tichonius, Origen, and the Alexandrian school, Augustine could approach the Bible with reverence and still spiritualize passages such as Revelation 20. To the end of his days, he was willing to allow a futuristic interpretation of the millennium if it concentrated on its spiritual nature, but he was an arch-critic of the carnal conceptions which envisioned a utopia of fleshly delights.

It is remarkable how rapidly millennialism receded in terms of literary attention after Augustine. His profound leadership in the Church well may have been an important factor in its demise. Moreover, the degeneration of millennialism into the "carnal" variety to which Augustine was exposed may have become all too common and quite generally rejected. Further, the decline may attest to millennialism as the doctrinal domain of certain writers and leaders whose system their students failed to comprehend and appreciate. A final possibility is offered by those who suggest that millennialism is predictable in "war-time" situations. With the siege upon the Christian Church by the Roman Empire lifted at the behest of Constantine, it remained only for someone to offer an alternative to fill the vacuum. "Pie-in-the-sky" theology no longer appealed.

While there may be some credence to each of the above-mentioned factors for the ascendancy of a-millennialism, none of them are adequate explanations treated in isolation. Augustine's reversal is at last not sociological or psychological; his exegetical conscience compelled him to revise his previous interpretation. It is true that the hermeneutical insights of Tichonius may have helped to liberate him from what he came



to consider an extreme literalism, but his defense was on the basis of serious attachment to the authority of Scripture. Though it is impossible to analyze the rationale of every a-millennial interpreter after Augustine, it is assumed that the orthodox among them would offer the same apologetic.

The impact of Augustine's thinking in regard to the millennium was profound. The prevailing eschatological outlook relative to Revelation 20 was revolutionized. For more than twelve centuries, Augustinian a-millennialism occupied the central stage. The great reformers, Luther and Calvin, both followed the Augustinian line of interpretation.<sup>37</sup>

Though the impression is sometimes given that a-millennialism finds quite unanimous agreement among its adherents, several variations do exist. The Augustinian school has been altered by some modern exponents of a-millennialism. One contemporary interpretation is termed the "modified Augustinian school."<sup>38</sup> The departure from Augustine's thinking is noted at least in two points. The modern school insists that the reign of the saints in the millennium takes place in heaven rather than on earth, as in the view of Augustine. Another change is the idea that the millennium is not to be taken as a literal length of time. The duration of the millennium is perceived simply to be the length of the present age. This adjustment was inevitable for a-millennialism when the year 1000 A.D. had passed. Recent writers who

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<sup>37</sup>Luther's proximity to Augustinian eschatology is discussed below, pp. 149-151.

<sup>38</sup>This is the title employed by Robert Duncan Culver in his book, Daniel and the Latter Days (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 211.

have promoted this interpretation include Oswald T. Allis, G. L. Murray, Floyd Hamilton, and W. Hendriksen.

A second variation of a-millennialism is represented in the writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, a professor of theology at Princeton for many years. According to Warfield, the "thousand years" is a figurative expression signifying the "intermediate state." The millennium stands for the condition of the disembodied saints in heaven.<sup>39</sup> Had anyone but Warfield proposed such a view, it has been doubted whether much credence would have been accorded it. It is difficult to find any prominent writers holding to Warfield's understanding of Revelation 20.

Still another expression of modern a-millennialism is the so-called "William Milligan School." Milligan, the author of the commentary on Revelation in The Expositor's Bible, is somewhat cautious in expressing his view.

The thousand years mentioned in the passage express no period of time. They are not a figure for the whole Christian era, now extending to nearly nineteen hundred years. Nor do they denote a certain space of time, longer or shorter, it may be, that the definite number of years spoken of, at the close the present dispensation, and to be in the view of some preceded, in the view of others followed, by the second Advent of our Lord. They embody an idea; and that idea whether applied to the subjugation of Satan or to the triumph of the saints is the idea of completeness or perfection. Satan is bound for a thousand years, that is, they are introduced into a state of perfect and glorious victory.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, 2 vols. ed. by John E. Meeter (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 1:348-355.

<sup>40</sup>William Milligan, The Book of Revelation, The Expositor's Bible (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), p. 913.

Milligan concurs with Warfield that the "little season" is the whole Christian age, when, as regards the nations, Satan is loosed. This is contrary to the more common a-millennial interpretation that the binding of Satan means that during this period Satan is bound in his relationship to the nations.

The Preterist school represents another view within a-millennialism. Like millennialists, the advocates of this position recognize that the first resurrection, the binding of Satan, and the thousand years follow the defeat of Antichrist as related in Revelation 19. According to Henry Barclay Swete, the "thousand years" is a figurative expression signifying a great epoch in human history. He thinks that the millennium began with the dispersion of the beast ("Roman world power") and the false prophet ("pagan system of priestcraft and superstition"). This is followed by a long period of "Christian supremacy during which the faith for which the martyrs died would live and reign."<sup>41</sup>

The uniting factor in each of the a-millennial variations is the rejection of the possibility of a future reign of Christ and/or his saints in a millennial era. The departure from a futuristic outlook is on the basis on hermeneutical considerations. Granting that the passage in Revelation 20 may teach a future reign of Christ if taken literally, the a-millennialist remains convinced that the text and the context demand a figurative interpretation.

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<sup>41</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1906), p. 266.

## Post-millennialism

Post-millennialism is another non-literal approach to the idea of a millennium. The simplest of all historic eschatological systems, it affirms that "the world is going to get better as Christianity continues to spread world-wide. And as an increasingly large percentage of the world is Christianized, the millennium is said to have arrived."<sup>42</sup> One of the primary contemporary spokesmen for post-millennialism states, "Christ will return to a truly Christianized world."<sup>43</sup> There is division among post-millennialists as to the means by which the world is going to become Christianized. The conservative post-millennialists

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<sup>42</sup>Paul Lee Tan, The Millennium (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), p. 80. A biblical basis for post-millennialism is offered by Milton Valentine, a Lutheran theologian. The word, "millennium," he says, "is legitimate as expressing the following features of Christian longing and expectation suggested by various Scriptures: (1) That by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the established means of grace and their missionary use, a period will be reached marked by a very general and victorious power of the gospel over the earth. This is promised in both the Old and New Testaments (Isa. 49:6; Dan. 7:27; Hab. 51:14; Mal. 1:2; Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Rom. 10:18; Rev. 11:15; 20:1-3). The apostle Paul seems to have expected, before the end, a flowering and fruitful time of the Church's life (Rom. 11:15-25, in connection with Matt. 24:34). There is no hindrance to counting the prosperity of Revelation 20 but a part of the happy triumphs forecast by Paul under the normal and inherent consummating possibilities of the gospel. (2) This triumphant success will include the conversion of the Jews (Rom. 11:26-29). The long separateness of the once chosen people appears to index a preservation for a recovery to the spiritual issue of their original calling. (3) This period will continue about a thousand years. (4) Its close will be marked by some apostasy and violent conflict (2 Pet. 3:3-4; Rev. 20:7-8). (5) The consummating action of the history of redemption will include simultaneously, or, rather, in immediate succession, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, with the change of the living, and the general judgment, followed by the eternal state of the righteous and the wicked, and the new heavens and the new earth." Milton Valentine, Christian Theology, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1906), 2:413-414.

<sup>43</sup>Lorraine Boettner, The Millennium (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), p. 80.

believe that the kingdom will be brought through the preaching of the Gospel and its influence through the lives of Christians. The liberal group believes that the answer lies within education, social reform, legislation; in other words, humanitarian endeavor. The key word for both the conservative and the liberal is progress. Things will progressively become better.

Although the historic "seed-bed" of post-millennialism may be found in the middle ages in the teaching of Joachim of Fiore,<sup>44</sup> its modern definition is usually linked to Daniel Whitby, a seventeenth-century English Arminian theologian. Post-millennialism reached its highest point of popularity in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. Reformed theologians of the era such as Augustus Strong, C. A. Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and C. A. Briggs were post-millennial. Post-millennialism has witnessed a notable decline in the ensuing years of the twentieth century. Whether the optimism has been dimmed by the world wars or by other factors, one can find relatively few who hold this position. Loraine Boettner and Marcellius Kik have published books and essays of exposition and defense of post-millennialism. The view is not dead. In a time of prolonged peace in the world, a resurgence of interest may well take place.

#### Dispensational Millennialism

Of the four major interpretations regarding the millennium,

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<sup>44</sup>Infra, pp. 166-171.

dispensational millennialism is the most recent.<sup>45</sup> Like classical millennialism, it holds that the millennium is yet future. The following points are basic to the dispensational outlook on eschatology:

- (1) The millennium is that future period of human history during which Christ will reign personally and visibly with His saints on and over the earth for a thousand years.
- (2) A visible coming of Christ will precede it.
- (3) This coming will be in two stages, the rapture and the appearing, with a considerable interval of time between them, in which important events will take place.
- (4) The rapture may take place at any moment and will certainly precede the great tribulation.
- (5) The rapture is the blessed hope of the Church.
- (6) The Church is composed of those, and those only, who are saved between Pentecost and the rapture.
- (7) The Church age is a mystery period (a parenthesis dispensation unknown to prophecy) lying between the 69th and 70th weeks of the prophecy in Daniel 9.
- (8) Between the rapture and the appearing, the events of the last week of the prophecy of Daniel 9, of Matthew 24, and of Revelation 4-19 are to take place.
- (9) After the rapture a Jewish remnant will take the place of the Church as God's agent on earth for the conversion of Israel and the Gentiles.<sup>46</sup>

Of the nine points enumerated, only the second is characteristic of classical millennialism.<sup>47</sup> The remaining points are distinctive of the dispensational system. It is important to keep the two schools separate. Classical millennialism and Dispensationalism are not synonymous. "All Dispensationalists are Premillenarians, but it is by no means true that

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<sup>45</sup>The question of the "recency" of dispensational millennialism is discussed by Charles Caldwell Ryrie in this book, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), pp. 66-78. Ryrie acknowledges that as a systematized presentation, it is traceable to John Nelson Darby, the Plymouth Brethren leader of the nineteenth century, but defends its antiquity by claiming to find elements of dispensationalism as early as Justin Martyr.

<sup>46</sup>Allis, pp. 8-9.

<sup>47</sup>The first statement would be qualified by many classical millennialists who understand the reign to take place from heaven.

all Premillenarians are Dispensationalists."<sup>48</sup> Dispensational millennialism represents a definite departure from the views of historic millennialism. Small wonder that some of the most earnest opponents of dispensational thinking have come from this school.<sup>49</sup>

The dispensationalist view has received significant impetus through the circulation of the Scotfield Reference Bible, prepared by C. I. Scotfield and first published in 1909. Two million copies were sold in the first generation. It has been a standard text for many evangelical Christians. Within the accompanying notes of this Bible, the dispensationalist interpretation is promoted. Ernest Sandeen comments that the Scotfield Bible has been "subtly but powerfully influential in spreading those views among hundreds of thousands who have regularly read that Bible and who often have been unaware of the distinction between the ancient text and the Scotfield interpretation."<sup>50</sup>

Not only is dispensational millennialism the most recent of the four schools of thought relative to the millennium; it is also the most complex. It is at this point that James Barr has criticized the dispensationalists for hypocrisy in castigating the difficult nature of biblical criticism while promoting many intricacies themselves under the title of dispensationalism. He remarks, "The distinctions and separa-

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<sup>48</sup>Allis, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup>Allis observes that men like Alford, Bickersteth, the Bonars, E. B. Elliott, Gresswell, Guinness, Tregelles, and Nathaniel West were ardent millennialists. They were not, however, dispensationalists and some of them "took up the cudgels and wielded them vigorously against what they considered to be the errors of this modern doctrine." Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>50</sup>Ernest Robert Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 222.

tions of critical scholarship are models of clarity, simplicity and naturalness when compared with those involved in dispensational or other millenarian schemes."<sup>51</sup>

Although Hal Lindsey, author of several books relating to the second advent, fails to recognize the distinction between classical and dispensational millennialism,<sup>52</sup> he is easily identifiable within the latter category. Lindsey is credited with simplifying the dispensational system and making it more understandable for the average reader.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, attempting to master the intricacies of the dispensational approach is long and arduous. The rise of the prophetic conferences early in the history of dispensationalism witnesses to the acute need felt for Bible teachers to unfold the profundities of the system. In weighing the mass of published material in the area of eschatology in this century, the balance tips heavily on the side of dispensationalism.

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<sup>51</sup>James Barr, Fundamentalism (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p.195. Barr illustrates the kind of information required in order to comprehend dispensational eschatology. "In addition to the seven dispensations already mentioned, the reader has to know about the eight covenants with the distinct relation of Christ to each one of them (Scofield, note Heb. 8:8), about the eleven greater 'mysteries' (Scofield, note to Matt. 13:11), about the seven sorts of resurrection to be found in Scripture (Scofield, note to 1 Cor. 15:52) and so on. . ." Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>52</sup>Hal Lindsey, There's A New World Coming (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973), pp. 267-270.

<sup>53</sup>Perhaps the most definitive and comprehensive text promoting dispensational millennialism is J. Dwight Pentecost's Things to Come (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1958). Pentecost is a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary which remains a major center for dissemination of the dispensationalist view. John F. Walvoord, the president of the school, has also written extensively along dispensationalist lines. See, for example, his main text on the millennium, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959).



Again, this may be due largely to the demand for explanation of this viewpoint.

A system of prophetic interpretation bearing close resemblance to dispensationalism is known as ultradispensationalism. Devised and propagated primarily by E. W. Bullinger (1837-1913), its main distinction from dispensationalism is that it places more than one dispensation between Pentecost and the end of the Church age. Ultradispensationalists all agree that the Church did not begin at Pentecost but at some later point. While dispensationalists wish to dissociate their position from that of ultradispensationalism,<sup>54</sup> it has been observed that the latter view is "the logical and inevitable result of those very teachings upon which Dispensationalists have been insisting for years."<sup>55</sup>

An understanding of millennialism in its etymological and biblical setting as well as surveying the divergent views that have arisen relative to its interpretation has been considered of fundamental importance in the development of this study. It will be of interest to note how American Lutherans have related and responded particularly to the form of eschatological understanding termed millennialism, either from the classical or from the dispensational perspective.

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<sup>54</sup>Ryrie criticizes ultradispensationalism at four points--"in the basic concept of a dispensation, in exegesis of key passages, in understanding when the mystery was revealed, in the baptizing work of the Spirit." Ryrie, p. 204.

<sup>55</sup>Allis calls upon the dispensationalists to re-examine their principles which have led to the "ultimate conclusion" in the form of ultradispensationalism. Allis, p. 255.

## Chapter III

### **MILLENNIALISM IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM**

Though the Lutheran Church has advocated, for the most part, the a-millennialist interpretation of Revelation 20, there have been a significant number of Lutherans, beginning particularly in the eighteenth century, who have held to the millennialist viewpoint. American Lutherans have not been immune to the futurist position. Most branches of the Lutheran Church in the United States have felt the effects of millennialism at one point or another in their respective histories. It is of interest in this chapter to study the influences upon American Lutherans that have contributed to the rise of millennialism among them. A survey of the character of "Lutheran" millennialism will be included as well as the justification given for these views in light of the Lutheran confessions.

#### Contributing Influences

##### European Pietism

The nineteenth century represents a high point of interest in Bible prophecy in America. Prophetic themes were prominent in preaching, writing and discussion. Noting the growing acceptance of the millennial position by many Protestants, LeRoy Froom traces the development to the influence of European writers. Many millennial works by European expositors were re-published in America in the latter part of the

eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Ernest Sandeen reports the claim of two leading nineteenth-century millennialists who argued that the millenarian revival in that century was due largely to European theologians.<sup>2</sup> Among those cited, none was considered so influential as Johann Albrecht Bengel, the Lutheran pietist of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Bengel was born on June 24, 1687, in Winnenden, a small town in Wuerttemberg, Germany. It was through his stepfather's influence that he decided to prepare for the Christian ministry. He completed his theological studies at the University of Tuebingen in 1707. While at the university, Bengel was exposed to Philip Spener's exposition of the catechism<sup>4</sup> as well as exegetical handbooks by A. H. Francke. Spener and Francke, leaders of the Pietist movement in the Lutheran Church, had diagnosed the ills of American Lutheran theology as lying in a neglect of study in the Holy Scriptures and advocated a "resurgence of a truly

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<sup>1</sup>Among the authors and works cited by Froom are the following: John Gill's Three Sermons on the Present and Future State of the Church (1756), in Northampton (1797); David Imrie's Letter, in Boston (1756); James Purves' Dissertation on the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Vials, in New York (1788) and on the Apocalypse (1787); Thomas Newton's volume on prophecy, in New York (1787), and in Northampton (1796); Joseph Priestly, in Philadelphia (1794); and James Bicheno, at Providence, Rhode Island (1795), and in West Springfield, Massachusetts (1796). LeRoy Edwin Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, 4 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 3:146.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest Robert Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Another continental figure who is named as an important stimulus in renewed eschatological study is Franz Delitzsch. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>De impedimentis studii theologiae.

biblical method."<sup>5</sup> Prompted to serious exegetical study under this kind of stimulation, Bengel in later years published several contributions to the field of New Testament studies particularly. His work in the area of textual criticism has given him a prominent name in theological circles.

Bengel's opus magnum is his Gnomon Novi Testamenti.<sup>6</sup> One of the very few commentaries to outlast its generation, it has received the attention of laymen, students and scholars. Philip Schaff calls the Gnomon "a marvel of condensation and spiritual insight; it must always remain a classic."<sup>7</sup> Termed "the prince of Lutheran exegetes"<sup>8</sup> one of his translator's adds, "He [Bengel] must always stand pre-eminent for his keen and deep spiritual insight, and for that marvelously terse and pithy diction with which, as with a master-key, he so often throws open by a single turn the secret chambers of a word."<sup>9</sup>

It is in his commentary on Revelation that Bengel's eschatological conclusions are most clearly pronounced. In his study of Revelation 20, he comments,

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<sup>5</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, "In Memoriam: Joh. Albrecht Bengel. June 24, 1687 to November 2, 1752," Concordia Theological Monthly 23 (November 1952):786.

<sup>6</sup>Originally published as Gnomon Novi Testamenti (Tuebingen, 1742), the English translation is known as New Testament Word Studies (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971).

<sup>7</sup>Quoted on the book jacket of New Testament Word Studies, vol. 1.

<sup>8</sup>B. W. Teigen, "Some Background Material for Understand the Problem of Millennialism Among Lutherans." Lutheran Synod Quarterly, 12 (Winter 1971-72):9.

<sup>9</sup>Bengel, book jacket.

They who believe that the Millennium is coming, will be found to have the true meaning, rather than those who contend that this period has been the Millennium; nor do they delay the course of the sun, who speak against it. In the meantime let everyone see in what things he himself seeks a happy life. There is no error, much less danger in saying that the thousand years are future, but rather in interpreting these years, whether future or past in a carnal sense. The doctrine of the Son of God is a mystery, his cross is a mystery, and lastly, his glory also.<sup>10</sup>

Bengel does not envision an earthly millennial reign of Christians with Christ but rather a reign from heaven. He notes in regard to verse four of Revelation 20, "They shall be with Christ (verse 6), and with God (verse 6), not Christ and God with them. Therefore that kingdom will be in heaven."<sup>11</sup> This leaves the natural or earthly life essentially unchanged.<sup>12</sup>

According to Bengel, the "first resurrection" of Revelation 20 is a literal physical resurrection. He appeals to the early church Fathers to support his contention. Among those cited is Tertullian who

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 2:920-921. Despite Bengel's profession otherwise, Theodore Engelder believes his view is carnal in the sense that it appeals to the flesh which is occupied with material interests. "Notes on Chiliasm," Concordia Theological Monthly, 6 (June 1935):401-413 passim.

<sup>11</sup>Bengel, p. 921. It is on the basis of the same verses in the Apocalypse that Francis Pieper also argues against a temporal reign. "Turning to Revelation 20, we find that the passage, aside from all other points, cannot be used to prove a millennial reign of Christ on earth because the 'reigning with Christ a thousand years' (vv. 4-6) takes place in heaven." Pieper, however, believes this reign is not confined to the future. "But even now, before Judgment Day, this reigning of believers is a fact, though to all appearances they are oppressed, the dying, the slain." It is a reign presently of the "souls" of believers with Christ in heaven. Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:523.

<sup>12</sup>A unique aspect of Bengel's millennial view is his concept of two millennial periods. He believes there is a millennium in which Satan is bound (Rev. 20:2,3,7) and a millennium in which the saints are reigning (Rev. 20:4,5,6). He is unable to combine these two facets into a single millennial period as nearly all millennialists do.

is reported to have said, "Within an age of a thousand years is concluded the resurrection of the saints, who rise again at an earlier or a later period, according to their merits."<sup>13</sup>

It has been questioned how Bengel could arrive at his conclusions in a time when he stood quite alone in his interpretations. It is true that Bengel had been an avid student of the writings of Spener but Spener had not defined his eschatological viewpoints to the degree that Bengel was to do.<sup>14</sup> The primary influence of Spener upon Bengel lay in the former's stress on exegetical study of Scripture. In his writings, Spener constantly resorted to Scripture for support of his doctrinal views.<sup>15</sup> This is the appealing model that made such a profound impression upon Bengel.<sup>16</sup> Bengel's approach to Scripture was that of commitment to its authority in all matters. Coupled with this high view of the Word of God was a literalistic interpretation of its parts.

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<sup>13</sup>Bengel, p. 921. In direct response to Bengel's claim, August Althaus argues on the basis of John 5:28,29 that "der Frommen und Gottlosen" will rise simultaneously when Christ returns. August Althaus, Die letzten Dinge (Verden: Steinhöfel'sche Buchhandlung, 1858), p. 63.

<sup>14</sup>Spener's more general conception was characterized by his expressed hope for "better times" for the Church. An article in Lehre und Wehre in 1860 traces Spener's influence on his followers regarding the millennium. Among the leaders in the development of his seminal thoughts regarding the future of the Church were J. W. Petersen, superintendent at Luneburg, and Bengel. "Pietism" is viewed generally as "good soil" for millennialism. "Das sogen tausendjahrige Reich," Lehre und Wehre, July 1860, pp. 208-217.

<sup>15</sup>James P. Martin, The Last Judgment (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 64.

<sup>16</sup>Lutheran millennialists would defend the intrusion of millennialism into Lutheran circles on this basis. Indeed, Millard Erickson comments, "Not until pietism developed in the Lutheran church did pre-millennialism enter that body." Millard Erickson, Contemporary Options in Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 151.

Bengel's principle of interpretation was to ascertain the plain meaning of the Book of Revelation, rejecting the allegorizing and spiritualizing method of exposition which had been in vogue among scholars since the time of Origen. Having determined that the literal interpretation of the book was clearly Millenarian, Bengel adopted this view as authoritative for his own thinking . . . . His work is especially significant because it gave new stimulus to a distinctly academic tendency which constructs millennial speculations from biblical texts, and justifies them by affirming the verbal inspiration of Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

Bengel gave considerable attention to eschatology in his theological work. This was in contrast to the orthodox theologians before him who had been busily engaged in the defense and exposition of other doctrines. Certainly it was also unlike the theologians of the Enlightenment who dismissed the traditional view of the future in favor of a humanistically-wrought utopian society.<sup>18</sup> Bengel was "among the first in modern times to stress the significance of Eschatology for the Church's faith and works. His basic assumption was that the last things would be nothing more or less than the final fulfillment of God's

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<sup>17</sup>Shirley Jackson Case, The Millennial Hope (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918), pp. 195-196. Though it appears contradictory to Bengel's strong stance on the authority of Scripture that he would suggest a date (1836) for the inauguration of the millennium, he answered his critics by attempting to refute the notion that seeking to determine future dates is forbidden by Scripture. He drew a distinction between earlier and later revelation concerning the date of the end. "That which the apostles could not know at the time of the Ascension (Acts 1:7) was made known afterwards through the Apocalypse." It was on the basis of the Book of Revelation that his calculations were made. Martin, p. 65. Though Bengel's attempts to justify his prediction of the time of the second Advent might appear plausible to some, Francis Pieper correctly reveals Bengel's neglect of Christ's statement to the effect that the day and hour of His return would remain hidden. Pieper observes that Bengel's case "shows how deeply forbidden curiosity is rooted in the flesh of Christians." Pieper, 3:516, 517, n. 37.

<sup>18</sup>Pelikan, though differing with Bengel's millennial views, comments that "He was at least determined to take Biblical eschatology seriously--in the midst of a secularization of theology." Pelikan, pp. 793-794.

inviolable promises and ultimate consummation of His sovereign kingdom activity."<sup>19</sup>

The influence of Bengel's millennial views were widespread in his own time as well as later. E. W. Hengstenberg credits Bengel with virtually displacing the prevailing interpretation.

. . . the now current exposition, which is commonly regarded as the proper ecclesiastical one, and by which the millennium is held to be still future, was first rendered current by Bengel, and was adopted by the Pietists. . . . What led him to adopt the chiliastic views was above all his exegetical conscience. He believed he could not do otherwise, and contented himself with whatever was abnormal in the matter. . . . Bengel's reasoning was irresistible; and hence it came to pass, that after a feeble resistance from the orthodox, chiliasm obtained an almost universal diffusion through the church.<sup>20</sup>

Hengstenberg considered Bengel to be consistent with the so-called "Protestant interpretation" which held that the destruction of the "Beast" signals the onset of the millennium. If the "Beast" is the papacy, then it was obvious for Bengel that the millennium is still to come. This reasoning won many advocates.

The work of Bengel in the area of eschatology has been considered a "water-shed" in terms of the resurgence of millennialism. Nathaniel West comments late in the nineteenth century,

No doctrine has come to the front of Christian thought more prominently than that of the Pre-millennial return of Christ. Since Bengel's day, and the emancipation of exegesis from the fetters of a lingering medievalism and from a a priori anti-chiliastic inferences drawn from dogmatical systems, the advance has been simply surprising. The doctrine has attained not only, as Kliefoth observes, an ever increasing dissemination reaching down to our time, but

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<sup>19</sup>Robert F. Spieler, "The Theological Significance of Johann Albrecht Bengel," Th.D. dissertation, Concordia Seminary, 1957, pp. 172.173.

<sup>20</sup>E. W. Hengstenberg, The Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1852), pp. 286-289.



also, in contrast with the earlier, an incomparably more thorough exegetical and theological establishment.<sup>21</sup>

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, Edward Bickersteth listed hundreds of books on eschatology, most of them favorable to the millennial view. It is noteworthy that almost all of these came before the rise of the Plymouth Brethren but after Bengel.<sup>22</sup> Bengel's influence is seen as enormous in terms of millennial thought. His views made a significant impact upon American Protestants, not least, a number of Lutherans.<sup>23</sup>

#### American Revivalism

According to Sandeen, America in the early nineteenth century was "drunk on the millennium."<sup>24</sup> Even in secular usage, eschatological vocabulary was popularly employed. There was a spirit of optimism and hope which had been encouraged by the War of Independence and the vast potentialities in the West. It was on such fertile ground that the idea of a millennium still in the future found many adherents. Among the defenders of various types of futurism were the Millerites,<sup>25</sup> the

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<sup>21</sup>Nathaniel West, ed., Premillennial Essays (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1879), p. 386.

<sup>22</sup>Robert Duncan Culver, Daniel and the Latter Days (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 19.

<sup>23</sup>Otto W. Heick, "The Doctrine of Last Things in Lutheran Theology," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, 17 (October 1944):427. Heick comments, "It was mainly through him [Bengel] that chiliastic speculation became a favorite subject of Lutheran Pietism both in the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries." Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Sandeen, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup>William Miller and his followers are remembered best for their date-setting in regard to Christ's return in the 1840s.

Campbellites,<sup>26</sup> the Mormons,<sup>27</sup> the Shakers,<sup>28</sup> and the Oneida Community.

John Humphrey Noyes, the leader of the latter group observed,

It is certain that in 1831, the whole orthodox church has been in a state of ebullition in regard to the millennium. A feeling of expectation on this point lay at the bottom of that triumphant march of revivals which shook the land for several years from that time. The Millerites have since met with unbounded ridicule; but it should be remembered that all that portion of the churches who were spiritual, who believed in revivals, and who were zealous and successful in laboring for them had a fit of expectation as enthusiastic and almost as fanatical as the Millerites.<sup>29</sup>

It had been around the turn of the nineteenth century that a "simultaneous outbreak of revivalistic phenomena" had occurred among various denominations in the United States.<sup>30</sup> The revivals, which lasted well into the 1840s, touched all levels of society. From the frontier camp meetings to the colleges of the East, a profound impact was made. Evidence of this is seen in the many missionary movements that originated in the period. Among these movements were the American Tract Society (1814), the American Bible Society (1816) and the American

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<sup>26</sup>Similar to the Millerites but emphasizing "progress through destruction," the Campbellites believed the millennium would be ushered in only after a series of cataclysms.

<sup>27</sup>Reflecting intense eschatological fervor even in their official name, the "Latter-Day Saints" (Mormons), under the leadership of Joseph Smith, were strictly millennial.

<sup>28</sup>The Shaker's official name was the Millennial Church of the United Society of Believer's in Christ's Second Appearance. They believed the millennium had been inaugurated by the incarnation of "Mother Ann Lee." This group experienced an outbreak of charismatic activity in the 1830s.

<sup>29</sup>John Humphrey Noyes, Confession of Religious Experience (Oneida, NY: Oneida Reserve, 1849), p. 2. Not only doctrinal error but also moral laxity characterized Noyes' group. In later years, he adopted the view that the millennium had begun in 70 A.D.

<sup>30</sup>Frank Grenville Beardsley, Religious Progress Through Religious Revivals (New York: American Tract Society, 1943), p. 32.

Sunday School Union (1824). Thirty-seven religious periodicals traced their beginning to this time. Though there was no single individual around whom the "Great Revival" rallied, men like Timothy Dwight, president of Yale, Francis Asbury, a Methodist bishop, and Charles G. Finney, the lawyer-evangelist, were among those who gave stimulus and aid.

While the revival movement in the first part of the nineteenth century has been credited with saving the young nation from "French infidelity, crass materialism, rapacious greed, godlessness, and out-breaking of violence on the frontiers,"<sup>31</sup> its importance for this study is expressed in the words of Froom. The revival "opened wide the door for the great modern advances of the church--including the earnest and conspicuous study of the prophecies."<sup>32</sup>

#### Socio-political Factors

The nineteenth century represented a period of dramatic change in American society. These developments exerted influence on religious life as well. Among the developments, particularly in the first part of the century, were the invention of machines with the accompanying industrial revolution. Kenneth Latourette observes that this invention made possible the spreading of Christianity to an extent before undreamed

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<sup>31</sup>Benjamin Rice Lacy, Revivals in the Midst of the Years (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1943), p. 87.

<sup>32</sup>Froom, 4:41. Norman B. Harrison interprets the importance of the revival similarly and, quoting A. J. Frost, makes the application more specific. "Whenever the Church becomes biblical and spiritual, this doctrine of the pre-millennial advent revives. It seems to flourish in the most devout and religious atmosphere of the time." Norman B. Harrison, His Sure Return (Minneapolis: The Harrison Service, 1926), p. 121.

of . . . ."33 Additionally, an accent on democracy and individualism along with various intellectual currents such as Rationalism, Romanticism, the theory of evolution, combined to foster the idea of assured human progress.<sup>34</sup> With the continuing spirit of nationalism inherited from the eighteenth century and the absence of war among the great powers throughout the century, a distinct note of optimism prevailed. The expectation of greater accomplishments and increasing success in combatting the ills of society left an imprint also upon the Church. Hopes were renewed for an unprecedented expansion of Christianity even to the farthest parts of the earth.<sup>35</sup>

The positive future outlook of millennialism coincided with the national and religious mood. Better times lay ahead for Church and state. Commenting on the mood of the first part of the nineteenth century, Sandeen remarks, "The eschatology of United States Protestants, reflecting their brimming optimism and hope, was expressed most frequently as a blending of millennialism and American Nationalism."<sup>36</sup> While promoters of the millennial view would likely defend the independence of their conclusions, it must be said that at least they found themselves in harmony with the spirit of the times.

#### Exponents of the Nineteenth Century

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<sup>33</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, 7 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 4:10.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-15. Latourette discusses each of the factors at greater length.

<sup>36</sup>Sandeen, p. 43.

Confessional Lutheranism was at a low ebb in the late eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century. Sectarianism and subjectivism were two factors with which the early Lutherans had to contend. Abdel Wentz lays the blame for the confessional deterioration on the "spirit of the times."<sup>37</sup>

#### "American Lutheranism"

Believing there was a need for the Lutheran Church to adjust itself more adequately to the American religious situation, S. S. Schmucker became a leading figure in what came to be called "American Lutheranism." Though he had earlier been an ardent defender of the Augsburg Confession and the Lutheran church, he gradually became more broad-minded in his denominational outlook. As head of Gettysburg Seminary, he published his "Fraternal Appeal to the American Churches" in 1838. This was a call for the reunion of Protestant churches. He was willing to modify the Augsburg Confession so that it would be palatable to all Protestants. Others who sided with "American Lutheranism" were Benjamin Kurtz and Samuel Sprecher. As editor of the Lutheran Observer from 1833 to 1861, Kurtz exercised tremendous influence on English-speaking Lutherans.

During these years the pages of that paper brought repeated arraignments of Lutheran positions, particularly the Lutheran confessions. Even the Augsburg Confession was subjected to serious criticism. All liturgical worship was denounced as formalism. Revival methods were zealously advocated, and personal piety was exalted above everything else. Those who opposed these "new measures" were called "head Christians" and "catechism Christians." Dr. Kurtz was sure that prospective intolerance

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<sup>37</sup>Abdel Ross Wentz, Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), p. 127.

lay on the side of what he called the "Old Lutheran System" and to this he opposed the "evangelical" methods of "American Lutheranism."<sup>38</sup>

Sprecher had been a student of Schmucker and had followed the views of his teacher closely. As president of Wittenberg College for twenty-five years, he exerted a wide influence on behalf of this modified Lutheranism. The followers of "American Lutheranism" had as a chief contention that the Lutheran church could develop on American soil only if it adapted to its environment. This meant that "the Lutheran church in America must make wide concessions to the revivalistic and puritanic spirit of the surrounding denominations."<sup>39</sup> The concessions they were willing to make included denial of baptismal regeneration and the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. In light of this attitude of indifference toward Lutheran distinctives for the sake of "Americanizing," it is understandable that the prevailing views of "evangelical" America, in whatever field, would tend to be accepted by this element of early nineteenth-century Lutheranism.

In 1845 Schmucker published his Elements of Popular Theology, in which he commented on the articles of the altered Augsburg Confession of 1540. Quoting Article XVII, he proceeded to locate the party being condemned as the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. He concurred with the repudiation of the notion that Christ would come to establish a theocracy not unlike that of the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> However, he confessed

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 133,134. Among those who sought to defend the retention of the Augsburg Confession intact was W. J. Mann. "A Plea for the Augsburg Confession," Lehre und Wehre, 2 (March 1856):75-83.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>40</sup>S. S. Schmucker, Elements of Popular Theology (Philadelphia: S. S. Miles, 1845), p. 346.

belief in a future millennial period when "there will be an extraordinary and universal diffusion of the gospel over the whole earth, prior to the close of the present economy."<sup>41</sup> He did not see a universal acceptance of the Gospel, however. Though unwilling to fix a precise year for the commencement of the future millennium, Schmucker felt confident that the approximate time would be known. On the basis of calculations supposedly derived from Daniel's prophecy, he offered as possible starting points 1859, 1866, 1882, and even 2014. Though Schmucker initially was willing to allow for a millennium of indeterminate length, he at last opted for a literal thousand-year period.<sup>42</sup>

Joseph A. Seiss (1823-1904)

One of the most prolific writers among Lutherans in the nineteenth century was Joseph Augustus Seiss. Indeed, a contemporary, Henry Eyster Jacobs, termed him "the most industrious author whom the Lutheran Church in America has produced," adding, "next to Dr. (Philip) Schaff, he probably ranks as the most voluminous writer of the country."<sup>43</sup> Among the theological themes Seiss treated in his books and articles, none were so prominent as eschatology.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>43</sup>Henry Eyster Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), p. 493.

Born near Emmitsburg, Maryland on March 18, 1823,<sup>44</sup> into the home of a Moravian farm couple, Seiss had expressed interest early in preparing for the Christian ministry. Entering Gettysburg College in 1839, he later withdrew because of "the bad condition of the boarding"<sup>45</sup> and never continued formal education. Among Seiss' teachers in his stay at the college was S. S. Schmucker.

Though his formal education was limited, Seiss' "thirst for knowledge was intense,"<sup>46</sup> as it had been from childhood. After departing from Gettysburg, he continued to study theology and was licensed as a preacher by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Virginia in 1842. Two years later he was ordained. At the age of twenty-three, he published his first book, Lectures on the Epistles to the Hebrews, which commenced a long career as a writer and publisher.<sup>47</sup>

While Seiss' exposure and contacts in the Lutheran church were broad, his synodical affiliations were mainly with the General Council. In addition to his pastoral ministry,<sup>48</sup> he exercised a strong leadership

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<sup>44</sup>Seiss notes with pride that he and Charles Porterfield Krauth were born on the same night. Joseph A. Seiss, Notes of My Life, ed. Henry Horn and William Horn (Huntingdon, PA: Church Management Service, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>46</sup>Jens Christian Jensson, American Lutheran Biographies (Milwaukee: A. Houtkamp and Son, 1890), p. 701.

<sup>47</sup>More than two hundred books and articles were published during Seiss' ministry. An admirer describes these works as generally "remarkable for deep research and profound learning." Ibid., p. 704.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 706. His longest pastorates were in Philadelphia (St. John's, sixteen years; and Church of the Holy Communion, thirty years). St. John's was "the oldest and perhaps the largest and most influential English Lutheran Church in America." Ibid., p. 703.



role in the ministerium of Pannsylvania as well as in the entire General Council.<sup>49</sup> He labored as an editor and co-editor of the Lutheran Home Journal, the Quarto Lutheran, the Lutheran, the Lutheran and Missionary, as well as the Prophetic Times. Indeed, his service was extensive in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Seiss professed little affinity for the revivalistic theology and methodology of his day.<sup>50</sup> Further, he expressed aversion for the "American Lutheranism" of S. S. Schmucker.<sup>51</sup> Since millennialism was associated with many revival leaders and with Schmucker, how did Seiss arrive at his conclusions regarding eschatology? His claim was that he came to his own views quite independently of others and described the process as "one of the intensest mental struggles of my life."<sup>52</sup>

Samuel Sprecher,<sup>53</sup> his predecessor in the parish, made a visit

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<sup>49</sup>C. George Fry, A History of Lutheranism in America, 1619-1930 (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979), p. 116.

<sup>50</sup>A typical example of his assessment is found in the Lutheran while he served as its editor. "Self-constituted evangelists, having no regular charge, under no proper ecclesiastical responsibility, and claiming to be quite above the boundaries of denominationalism, or any settled faith by which to be tested, often without ordination, making nothing of sacraments or Church, floating themselves on popular sentimentalism, depleting organized congregations, and trampling down all discipline and proper pastoral care, could not have my approval or encouragement." Seiss, Notes of My Life, p. 215.

<sup>51</sup>In an article which appeared in the Evangelical Lutheran, Seiss lambasted the "Definite Platform" proposed by Schmucker and others, labelling it "deceiving," "unfaithful," and "equivocating." He said, "According to the Platform, people may mutilate and emasculate the Lutheran Creed and still be true Lutherans." Ibid., pp. 71,74.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>53</sup>Sprecher, a former student of S. S. Schmucker at Gettysburg, was president of Wittenberg College from 1849 to 1884. Though he had espoused the viewpoint of the "Definite Platform" during his ministry, he revoked this position in his retirement. He wrote, "It is true that I

and spent some days with Seiss. In the course of their conversation, Sprecher began to unfold his millennial views. Seiss tried to counter his arguments but later confessed

Point after point of objection which I raised was met with so much ease by direct citations from the Word of God that I was amazed and helpless. I could not yield what was so inrooted in all my thinking and feelings, and yet I could not hold my ground against his citations and arguments. A new world of ideas and of Scriptural interpretation was thus opened to me, and I was fully convinced that I must enter upon a fresh course of study in order to find my way to a clearer understanding of the whole field of biblical Eschatology.<sup>54</sup>

Seiss did commence an intensive investigation of the subject that lasted several months. He felt he had to settle the matter in his mind and therefore, could not push it aside. He professed that his resolve was

by the help of God to get at the truth in the premises, and to accept nothing but the truth as duly and fairly ascertained as far as lay within my power. And thus came the most anxious and agonizing battle of my life, which by the grace of God I fought through to some leading conclusions which have never since been shaken.<sup>55</sup>

His "leading conclusions" included millennialistic interpretation of Bible prophecy.

Though Seiss defended his millennialism on the basis of a number of Scripture passages, it is of special interest to observe his analysis of what has been referred to as the sedes doctrina on this subject,

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did once think the Definite Synodical Platform--that modification of Lutheranism which has been properly called the culmination of Melancthonianism--desirable and practical, and that I now regard all such modification of our creed as hopeless. In the meantime an increased knowledge of the spirit, methods and literature of the Missouri Synod has convinced me that such alterations are undesirable; that the elements of true Pietism--that a sense of the necessity of personal religion and the importance of personal assurance of salvation--can be maintained in connection with a Lutheranism unmodified by the Puritan element." Quoted by C. George Fry, p. 73.

<sup>54</sup>Seiss, Notes of My Life, p. 215.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

Revelation 20:1-10. His main work with this passage is found in his commentary, The Apocalypse and in a series of sermons published as The Last Times.<sup>56</sup> As a millennialist, Seiss sees Revelation 20 as descriptive of events transpiring wholly in the future. The "binding" of Satan (verses 1-3) by an angel is taken as a literal transaction. The angel's work is an act of Christ, whether done by Himself or by an angel. The "chain" used to bind Satan "is a chain of divine make, as the sword that proceeds from the mouth of the Son of God."<sup>57</sup> What it is made of or how it binds the freedom of spiritual natures, Seiss is not prepared to say, nor does he think it is important. The important matter is that it serves to render Satan helpless. The purpose of this binding is not so much for his due punishment as for the temporary restraint and prevention of his deceptions, according to Seiss. He notes verse three in this regard, "that he should not lead astray the nations any more until the thousand years be accomplished."<sup>58</sup> He cannot envision an interpretation of the binding of Satan as something which is a present actuality. He refers to Peter's warning of Satan's fierceness in 1 Peter 5:8.<sup>59</sup> He notes the corruption and darkness of society up to his own time, remarking,

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<sup>56</sup>Originally published in 1863 by Smith, English, and Company of Philadelphia, the book went through many printings and revisions. Seiss expressed his preference for the seventh edition of 1883.

<sup>57</sup>Joseph A. Seiss, The Apocalypse (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), p. 446.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>59</sup>"Your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (NIV).

If ever there was a time when the Devil was loose, active and potent in human affairs, that time is now, in the days in which we live. . . . No, my friends; the Devil, that old serpent is not bound. He is loose. He ranges at large, with his ten thousand emissaries, all the more active and earnest in his Satanic schemes as he seeth that his time is short. . . . And see how he induces men and women to usurp ministerial functions without ministerial responsibilities, and gives them power on the plea of breaking down denominationalism and making better saints without any church at all; how he prostitutes the pulpits to entertaining sensationalisms, how defying all sense and sacred decency, or narrows them down to sweet platitudes which serve to bury the true Gospel from those whom it was meant to save,--and how he stirs up Christian ministers of place and influence to say and make believe that all this attention to sacred prophecy is nothing but a stupid craze, that the holy writers never meant just what they said, and that all these ill-bodings touching the destiny of this present world are but the croakings of birds that love to fly in storms! And yet he is bound!<sup>60</sup>

In his reflections on the binding of Satan, Seiss does not address the possible relationship of this act to the triumph of Christ over Satan at the cross (compare Genesis 3:15; John 12:31-33). While affirming Calvary's redemptive victory, he connects Revelation 20 with a future extension or manifestation of the power of that same Victor.<sup>61</sup>

Seiss' exposition of Revelation 20:4-6 includes an analysis of what he believes is a single concept embraced in the terms employed, "thrones," "judgment," and "reigning." He believes fulfillment of earlier passages in the book (2:26,27; 12:5; and 19:5) is being announced. He opts for an administrative, "shepherdizing"--rendering of ποιμαίνω in each case rather than the idea of a final distributive judgment. He distinguishes between the destruction of "the kings of the

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<sup>60</sup>Seiss, The Apocalypse, pp. 451-453.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 445-446. Pieper confines the significance of Satan's "binding" (Rev. 20:2) to Christ's work at the cross. Because of Christ's propitiatory death, the lordship of Satan over the individual ceases "the very moment that man is converted through faith in the Gospel, that is, through believing that Christ fully expiated man's sin." Pieper, 3:523,524.

earth and their armies" at Armageddon and this thousand-year reign of Christ in which the Church shall share ("they shall reign with him a thousand years," verse 6). The judgment (κρῖμα) that is committed to the Church includes "the forming of sentences and the execution of the same."<sup>62</sup> Seiss finds allusions to this judgment also in Matthew 7:2; 19:28; John 9:39; Romans 2:2,3 and 1 Corinthians 6:7.

A subject of intense interest for Seiss in his treatment of Revelation 20 is the "first resurrection."<sup>63</sup> Anticipating the objections of those who would argue against this resurrection being understood as literal and bodily, he presents his case. Against those who speak of the "first resurrection" as signifying the regeneration of sinners, Seiss maintains that

The resurrection of which the text speaks is the resurrection of such as had already been raised spiritually, and now partake of this resurrection because they were before `blessed and holy.' It is the resurrection, not of those who sleep in sin, but of `them that sleep in Jesus;' not of those who had never known Christ, but of `them that were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and had not worshipped the beast.' It is the resurrection of those who were saints without it, many of whom had so loved Christ as to lay down their lives for him and his gospel.<sup>64</sup>

He dismisses other interpretations as well in favor of a literal interpretation. He believes it is arbitrary in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned to conclude that different types of resurrections

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>63</sup>"The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years." (Rev. 20:5-6, RSV)

<sup>64</sup>Joseph A. Seiss, The Last Times (Philadelphia: Smith, English and Company, 1883), p. 93.

are being discussed.<sup>65</sup> Of particular importance for Seiss is the designation of "martyrs" as those who would be joined to this "first resurrection." As these martyrs and saints literally and personally died, and in that sense are dead, so shall they again be literally and personally made alive in the "first resurrection;" while "the rest of the dead" sleep on "until the thousand years are finished."<sup>66</sup>

The usage of the term ἀνάστασις in the New Testament is observed by Seiss. He declares that the forty references to the term point exclusively to "the coming up again of the fallen body from the grave."<sup>67</sup> In light of this and other evidence for a literal "first resurrection," Seiss feels compelled to declare,

If these thrones, this royal judgeship, this reigning with Christ, this thousand years; dominion and rulership, this lifting of the holy martyrs including prophets and apostles into seats of sovereignty and shepherdizing of the nations, do not belong to the awards which only the Resurrection can bring, it is simply impossible to find any solid base in God's Word for any special doctrine of our faith which we claim to derive from that source.<sup>68</sup>

As the term "resurrection" in Revelation 20 was interpreted in a literal sense by Seiss, so also was the six-fold reference to a "thousand years." His particular concern, however, was not so much that exact numerical value be assigned as that a literal and futuristic construction be placed on the concept. In presenting the "Scriptural teachings" on the subject, he quickly sought to distinguish his views from that of the

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<sup>65</sup>Seiss, The Apocalypse, p. 461.

<sup>66</sup>Seiss, The Last Times, p. 97.

<sup>67</sup>Seiss, The Apocalypse, p. 462.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

"prevailing modern doctrine"<sup>69</sup> which was essentially post-millennialism. He criticizes this interpretation on the basis of its alleged lack of Scriptural and historical support.

It is certainly not taught in any respectable creed in Christendom. It is not to be found in any of the Church's books of devotion, liturgies, hymnals, or accepted songs, for the first fifteen centuries, including the period of its greatest purity and faithfulness. All the great confessions, either by implication or direct specification, are adverse to it, and unconstruable with it. The old theologians, such as Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, Knox, Hutter, Hunnius, Quenstedt, and even the Wesleys, are against it. . . . And the Scriptures everywhere, on every principle of just interpretation, negate and contradict it. The Church, in its very name and divine designation, is an Ecclesia, a body called out of from the rest of mankind, with the majority ever outside of itself. By every saying and foreshadowing of the Savior, it lies under the cross for the whole period of its earthly career, and from that state is never lifted this side of the resurrection. . . . Everywhere the last days are painted as the worst days, and man as waxing worse and worse till the end comes. . . . I therefore arraign all such teaching as full of chiliastic error, and as one of those subtle, plausible, but delusive insinuations of the great deceiver, by which God's people are beguiled from the truth to his ruinous lies.<sup>70</sup>

Seiss disassociates himself from any view that lends itself to a concept of theologia gloria for the Church before the second advent. He suggests that post-millennialism is the clear opponent in this regard and implies that the Lutheran confessions agree.

When then, is the biblical teaching regarding the "thousand years" according to Seiss? He summarized his understanding under five main headings. The first point is that the onset of this future period is connected with the "Battle of Armageddon" and the "binding of

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 473.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 474.

Satan."<sup>71</sup> The second factor also relating to the beginning of the millennium, is that it signals the end of the present age and, with it, the present objectives of the Church.<sup>72</sup> The third feature involves the new state of affairs resulting from the binding of Satan and the completion of the Church's present mission. The new order will be characterized by Christ's "shepherdizing with a rod of iron." It will be "an authoritative and invincible administration of right and justice on the part of Christ and those who reign with him."<sup>73</sup> Another difference in the coming millennial reign will involve the "vastly improved" general condition of the earth and man upon it. "It will not yet be the eternal state, called 'the new earth,' in which there is no more sin, nor death, nor curse, nor tears; but it will be a mighty stride toward it, and the next stage to it."<sup>74</sup> The final mark of the millennium relates to its conclusion, according to Seiss. It is not the cessation of Christ's reign that signals the end, for indeed, that is eternal. Rather, it is the letting loose of Satan for a short period to test "the loyalty and devotion of the nations" together with "the rebellion of Gog and Magog, the destruction of the rebels by fire from heaven, the casting of Satan is not the final hell, the calling up of all the wicked dead to judgment and final doom, and the putting forth of what further touches are

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>According to Seiss, those objectives include "the gathering together of an elect, the taking out of a people for the name of the Lord, the development and qualification of a particular number of the human family to be Christ's immortal king-priests." Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 475-476.



requisite to complete the restitution of all things."<sup>75</sup> This is the picture of the millennium that Seiss perceives in the Scriptures. He claims support for his views not only in Revelation 20 but also from many other passages.<sup>76</sup>

Seiss professed concern throughout his discussion of the millennium is to be true to the Scriptures. Wanting to be thoroughly biblical in his presentation, he says, "My purpose is to keep close to the law and the testimony. I will follow no guides but the inspired writers."<sup>77</sup> He believed this inspiration of the biblical writers produced an "unerring" book.<sup>78</sup> He believes Christ is speaking in the Scriptures. "But where is the difference, whether Jesus should thus come in person, or come to us in the written word, every sentence of which he has dictated, inspired, or delivered to us for our learning?"<sup>79</sup>

The Bible is not an obscure book in Seiss' estimation. He believes its clarity extends to its eschatological content as well.

I hold that the Bible is a book for everybody, in which God speaks for the purpose of being understood by everybody; that its language is conformed to the ordinary uses of speech; and that it is to be interpreted in the same common-sense way in which we would interpret the will of a deceased parent, or ascertain the meaning of a letter on business. It was not written to tax our ingenuity, or to test men's skill at learned exposition. Its design is to instruct, and in the most familiar way to express to men the mind and will of God. . . . Christ knew what he wished to say, and how to say what he

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 476.

<sup>76</sup>For example, Psalm 2:1-12; 45:16; 77; Isaiah 29:18, 19; 30:18-26; 32:17; 33:6, 24; 65:20-23; Matthew 19:28; and Romans 8:21,22.

<sup>77</sup>Seiss, The Last Times, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

meant; and I feel myself bound to understand him to mean just what he says.<sup>80</sup>

It is with such conviction that he felt constrained to interpret Revelation 20 in literal terms.

Seiss believed he was in full conformity with the Lutheran confessions in his interpretation of the millennium.<sup>81</sup> Further he defended his hermeneutical approach as being in full accord with Luther's principles and emphasis. In fact, he considered himself more in agreement with these principles than those who "spiritualized" Revelation 20. Seiss hailed Luther for his fresh enunciation of the importance of sensus literalis est, crediting him with virtually restoring this

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>81</sup>Seiss' confessional allegiance can be measured by his comments made on the subject close to the time that he formulated his eschatological views. He said the Lutheran Church has "her confessions of faith, her liturgies, her catechism, which she respects and loves, and which she expects all so who enter her communion to regard with due honor. But she enforces none of them upon her members in the form of rigorous and compulsory law. Here and there some particular exceptions may have occurred, and may still exist but it does not lie in the genius of our Church to enforce her utterances, in all their details, as if they were indispensable, either to Christianity or herself. She, indeed, demands the reception of every doctrine which enters into the essential life of Christianity, as combined in the Old and New Testaments, set forth in the ancient Catholic creeds, and again so lucidly exhibited and defended in her own great Confession; but, as declared by Reinhard, and maintained by the most conscientious theologians of our Church "Even he who has solemnly adopted and subscribed to the Symbolical Books, is by no means bound to adopt every unessential point, every interpretation of a scriptural passage, every argument or opinion which they contain." Quoted by J. A. Brown, "The General Synod and Her Assailants" The Evangelical Quarterly Review 69 (January 1867):132-133. It is important to observe that Seiss does not consider Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession to be dealing with "unessential" points and defends his full allegiance to that passage as will be demonstrated. However, his comments above lean too far in the direction of a "quatenus" subscription to the Confessions and are capable of being taken even farther than even he would have desired.

hermeneutical principle after the "long night" of allegorical dominance. He applauded Luther's dismissal of Origen and others, and quoted his words that they "are to be avoided with the whole of that Alexandrian school which abounds in this species (allegorical) of interpretation."<sup>82</sup>

Addressing himself particularly to Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession, Seiss noted that there were many who interpreted this article as a broad condemnation of all millennial viewpoints other than the Augustinian model. Referring to a translation of the Latin edition of the article, he maintained the condemnation was being directed "clearly against the doctrine of a Millennium of universal triumph for Christianity and the Church previous to the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead."<sup>83</sup> In other words, the castigation is against post-millennialism at least in regard to chronological considerations. Seiss admitted that a type of Chiliasm was being condemned by Article XVII. He felt he was joining with the confessors in denouncing any carnal conception of the millennium.

That those are in error, who say that a temporal kingdom (weltlich Reich) will be possessed by the saints and the godly, and that by them the ungodly will be rooted out of the earth, or subdued to servitude, we sincerely believe. With equal heartiness do we refuse to assent to those who teach that the partakers of the first resurrection shall spend their millennial reign upon earth in all sorts of corporeal gratifications.<sup>84</sup>

Seiss could endorse these identifications of error, but at the same time, he was committed to an understanding of the article which did not condemn all chiliasm or millennialism. He proposed several reasons why

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<sup>82</sup>Seiss, The Last Times, p. 253.

<sup>83</sup>Seiss, The Last Times, p. 326.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

Article XVII allowed for his conception of the millennium.<sup>85</sup> Based on these considerations, Seiss believed it was erroneous to conclude that all forms of chiliasm are rejected by the Augsburg Confession. He

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<sup>85</sup>These six points may be condensed as follows: "(1) Chiliasm, or Millenarianism, is not at all named in the Confession, nor anywhere in the Lutheran symbols. . . . By name, therefore, it certainly is not condemned. (2) The description of the opinions does not describe proper Millenarians. It is not the doctrine of Millenarians that the pious are to have a separate kingdom to themselves before the resurrection of the dead. The kingdom and administration for which they look and hope are after the resurrection. . . . (3) It is plain from the words themselves, that the Confessors here referred to a class of errorists living and active at the time the Confession was made. These were evidently the Anabaptists, who are named in another part of the Article, and who well deserve the censure that was passed upon them. . . . They taught, indeed, the speedy setting up of a kingdom, which they called the kingdom of Christ, but assigned it a character of outwardness and earthiness and other features, as much at variance with Millenarians as with spiritualizers. . . . (4) The best authorities on the subject (among them, Luther and Melanchthon are mentioned), also lead us to believe that it was the seditious and infamous Judaizing doctrines, and the perverted ideas of the kingdom of God, held and disseminated by the Anabaptists, which Confessors here intended to disown and condemn, and these alone. . . . (5) It is also a fact, which is not without consideration bearing upon the point, that some of the most intelligent, pious, and conscientious theologians of the Lutheran Church, who were sworn by their ordination vows to every Article of the Augsburg Confession, and who claimed to be faithful to those vows to the end of their lives, were Millenarians, and preached, published, and defended Millenarian doctrines. . . . It is hard to presume that such men and scholars were so foolish as not to know to what they subscribed as their creed, or so hypocritical as to profess to hold to what they did not receive,—one or the other of which we are bound to believe if the Augsburg Confession condemns Chiliasm (Among those cited by Seiss are Johann Albrecht Bengel, Philip Jacob Spener, Christian Augustus Crusius, Frederick Christoph Oetinger, Magnus Frederick Roos, Philip Frederick Hiller, Joachim Lange, and J. G. Schmucker). . . . (6) And then, again, who can conceive of the blessed Reformers and Confessors as sitting in judgment upon Barnabas and Papias, and Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Lactantius, and at least the great body of the orthodox for hundreds of years, and condemning them all as errorists of a class with the Zwickau prophets? . . . And as the ancient Fathers, with others who succeeded them, certainly were Millenarians, we are forced either to assign to the Confessors the absurd position of holding those to be pious and worthy Christians whom they at the same time denounce as pernicious heretics, or to conclude that it was not Millenarians, as such, that they here meant to condemn." Ibid., pp. 327-334 passim.

claimed it is "a mere assumption, made without proper discrimination in the first place, and repeated by enemies of Millenarian doctrine without proper scrutiny."<sup>86</sup>

Though Seiss found common cause with dispensationlists in the nineteenth century, in an effort to promote millennialism, he occupies a mediating position between their views and that of historical or classical millennialism. He doesn't concern himself with many of the dispensationistic categories. His chief goal was to establish a biblical and historical defense of a futuristic interpretation of the millennium. He believed he had abundant support for his conclusions and zealously presented them.

Because of respect for Seiss as a church leader, his millennial views were generally tolerated, at least among those he worked with closely.<sup>87</sup> Although his books and articles on eschatology were widely-read, there is little indication that he was successful in persuading many Lutherans to adopt his position, particularly among the clergy. At a large inter-denominational "prophetic conference" held in New York city in 1878, Seiss was the only Lutheran pastor who signed his name as

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>87</sup>Charles Porterfield Krauth, Jr. was claimed by Seiss as a close friend. The remarks of Krauth regarding his lectures on the Book of Revelation were important to him though he didn't claim Krauth as a fellow millennialist. "These lectures draw large and growing audiences; and when they shall have been completed, we venture the prediction that they will be more widely read by the people than any other work which has appeared upon the mysterious and fascinating Book which they are designed to elucidate." Quoted by Seiss, Notes of My Life, p. 118.

one who publicly backed the calling of the assembly.<sup>88</sup> Yet scores of other denominational representatives were willing to be identified as among those who endorsed the conference and its millennial under-pinnings.

Seiss was deeply involved in the so-called "Four Points Controversy" as a member of the General Council and as editor of the Lutheran and Missionary. These doctrinal points, which included a repudiation of chiliasm as an unscriptural and non-Lutheran position, were insisted upon by the synods of Ohio and Missouri particularly as vital to genuine Lutheranism. Although there were some in the General Council who felt similarly, Seiss served as a spokesman for those who desired to treat the four points as "open questions." He summarized his own perspective of the outcome.

The contestants were indeed very unequally balanced. In numbers and in prestige the extremists had the advantage all the while; but the good providence of God would have it that the General Council was preserved in that reasonable and scriptural conservatism, which stands firm to the Confessions and cultus of the fathers, without yielding to a legalistic and extreme exclusivism.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>West, pp. 12-14. Ernest Sandeen conjectures that the scarcity of Lutheran millennialists at the end of the nineteenth century was probably due to "the surge of Scandinavian and German immigrants whose confessional liturgical orientation and lack of English language swamped the syncretistic tendencies in the more Americanized part of the denomination." Sandeen, p. 163. While this factor may have contributed to the paucity of millennial thought, it is not an adequate explanation in light of the large English-speaking element in Lutheranism. Perhaps unwillingness to deviate from the traditional understanding of the issue coupled with reluctance to explore "new territory" may lie closer to the reason.

<sup>89</sup>Seiss, Notes of My Life, p. 277. Additional "chapters" in the controversy over the Four Points were yet to be written in American Lutheran church history. Some of these will be mentioned briefly at later points in this study. Infra, pp. 88, n. 133:115-116.

The alleged "scriptural conservatism" remains to be tested in a later consideration of the confessional validity of millennialism.

George N. H. Peters (1825-1909)

In contrast to the prominence of Joseph Seiss in nineteenth-century Lutheranism, George N. H. Peters occupied a place much in the background. Nevertheless, his name endures alongside of Seiss chiefly because of his massive work, The Theocratic Kingdom. These three volumes remain a standard reference work for modern students of millennialism.

George Nathaniel Henry Peters was born into the home of Isaac Cyrus and Magdalene Miller Peters on November 29, 1825, in New Berlin, Pennsylvania. At the age of ten, he moved with his family to Springfield, Ohio, where he received his grammar school and higher education, the latter at Wittenberg College. At Wittenberg, he was active in organizing the Philosophian Literary Society and participated in several public contests. In his junior year, he was forced to drop out of school because of the diseased condition of his eyes, caused by an explosion of gunpowder when he was younger. After his eyes improved he continued his studies, this time in the theological department at Wittenberg, under the direction of Samuel Sprecher.<sup>90</sup> He graduated from the seminary in 1850.

Peters became a member of the newly formed Wittenberg Synod after leaving the seminary. Later he was to serve as treasurer of this

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<sup>90</sup>Sprecher is remembered as the one who wielded considerable influence on Seiss in his subsequent adoption of the millennial interpretation. Supra, pp.53-54. Sprecher himself had studied under S. S. Schmucker at Gettysburg.

branch of the General Synod from 1853 until 1858. He was likely part of the proceedings at the Wittenberg Synod convention which unanimously adopted the American Recension of the Augsburg Confession which had been proposed by Schmucker, Kurtz, and Sprecher in their "Definite Platform" of 1855.<sup>91</sup> However, there is nothing to indicate that he did not join with that same synod in later retracting this endorsement.

Owing to increasing difficulties with his eyesight, Peters' career as a parish pastor was relatively short.<sup>92</sup> Advised by his physicians to retire from active ministry, he devoted himself to writing. In addition to his opus magnum, The Theocratic Kingdom, he wrote articles for periodicals as well as a number of volumes which were never published. Among these materials are expositions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and the Revelation. Two other manuscripts are titled, "The Lord's Supper," and "The Predicted Future."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>E. Clifford Nelson, The Lutherans in North America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 224.

<sup>92</sup>Peters served parishes at Mansfield, Springfield, Xenia, and Plymouth, all in Ohio. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, 1974 ed., s.v. "Peters, George N. H."

<sup>93</sup>John H. Stoll, who prepared a biographical sketch of Peters' life for inclusion in a 1972 reprint of The Theocratic Kingdom by Kregel, has examined these manuscripts and adjudges them equally as exhaustive as the published volumes. Stoll reports that Peters often spent eighteen to twenty hours per day for days at a time. Many times he wrote all night long. This helps to account for the arduous and diligent research evidenced in The Theocratic Kingdom. Wilbur Smith's comments are appropriate, "One does not need to agree with all of his statements, nor even with all of his interpretations, to recognize the greatness of this work that must have cost him a lifetime of research, prayer, investigation, and laborious writing--these were the days before typewriters." George N. H. Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978) 1:11-12.



In his exposition of Revelation 20, Peters demonstrates his agreement with Seiss on the futuristic nature of the passage. His special concern in treating the text is to establish the "first resurrection" as literal. He believes himself to be in "good company" with such a view, holding that the early Church Fathers actually arrived at their conclusions on the basis of the interpretation of the apostles and their associates. "Our doctrine is traced continuously from the Apostles themselves, seeing that the first Fathers, who present Millenarian views, saw and conversed either with the Apostles or the Elders following them."<sup>94</sup> He comforts himself with Justin Martyr's statement to the effect that "all the orthodox adopted and upheld it" (Chiliasm).<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, he argues not merely on the basis of tradition but particularly because of his exegetical deductions.

Contrary to the belief that the "first resurrection" represents a spiritual regeneration, Peters insists that it is descriptive of a resurrection of persons who had previously been martyred for their faith. The "souls," he said, are persons because "(1) they were 'beheaded,' which can only apply to such; (2) the language 'foreheads,' 'hands,' etc., indicates such; (3) the resurrection of the members is appropriately described in terms similar to that of the Head," and so forth.<sup>96</sup> Decisive also for Peters in his literal rendering of the resurrection is the term, ἐξήσαν. Referring to a lexicon by Robinson, as well as other sources, he reported that the "primary meaning" was "to

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 480.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Peters, 2:266.

live, to have life, spoken of physical life and existence . . .it may be applied to those who were before dead."<sup>97</sup> His final reason for accepting a literal view is that "the same word `lived` is applied to both the saints favored with the first resurrection, and to the rest of the dead, and must mean in both cases the same kind of a resurrection; i.e., a corporeal one."<sup>98</sup> Peters is sure that this interpretation is sustained by the analogy of faith. After reviewing a score or more of passages from both testaments, he summarizes his stance, "Now, taking all these considerations together, and how they so accurately correspond with the general tenor of the Word, with the Covenant and the promises based on the Covenant, it seems that the early Church faith was eminently logical, scriptural, and necessary, and that we have a literal Pre-Millennial resurrection of saints unmistakably presented."<sup>99</sup> Peters appears to be well aware of opposing arguments to his controversial conclusions. He lists and briefly discusses twenty-four objections to a literal "first resurrection," believing that they are well-answered in his defense.

In his presentation, Peters does not appeal to the Lutheran confessions in support of his leading conclusion regarding a coming "theocratic kingdom." Of particular concern in defending the main thesis is to point out what he considered a limitation of the confessions. The confessions have given too little attention to the doctrine of the kingdom, he asserted. He believed this doctrine was prominent in the Bible but had been unduly neglected throughout most of ecclesiastical

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 276-277.

history, including the formulation of the Lutheran confessions. The result of this neglect, he said, is that "many persons are prejudiced or biased by a confessional standard, and are thus poorly prepared for a dispassionate investigation."<sup>100</sup> It is not that Peters believes his "kingdom" theory is anti-confessional; rather, it appears to be "un-confessional" and that is his concern. However, he believes it is a mis-use of the confessions to be restricted to its categories. Rather, he maintained that the limits are bounded only by the Scriptures. One is free to investigate; indeed, the confessions underscore the need for exploration of all of God's Word.

Peters seeks to account for Luther's doubts regarding the clarity and relative worth of the Book of Revelation and his alleged neglect of the "kingdom" theme in the confessional documents with which he was associated. He suggests that his idea of the kingdom was "limited." Peters concurs with Olshausen that the Apocalypse "was obscure for him (Luther) from the fact that he could not thoroughly apprehend the doctrine of God's Kingdom upon earth, which is exhibited in Revelation, and forms the proper centre of everything contained in it."<sup>101</sup> This is an adequate explanation, Peters believes, why Luther often appeared to side-step the Apocalypse in biblical research though he theoretically allowed its canonical status. Had Luther been able to

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 1:128. Peters commented that "some are so confessional that they will reject a doctrine if not found in their creed, and virtually the instructions of the Bible are changed, so that they seem to read 'Search the Confessions' [not the Scriptures]--'Earnestly desire the sincere milk of the Confession [not Word] that ye may grow thereby.'" Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 3:366.

adopt a more literal approach to Revelation, Peters implies, there would have been reason to believe he would have become a proponent of millennialism.

It was Peters' belief that Luther and the confessors exhibited remarkable agreement with historic millennialism on several points.

Among these similarities were

. . . the duty of every believer to be constantly looking for the Advent, in a speedy Advent, in there being no future millennial glory before the coming of Jesus, in the church remaining a mixed state to the end, in the design of the present dispensation, in the principle of interpretation adopted, in unbelief again extending and widening before the Advent, in the renewal of the earth, etc.--doctrines in unison with chiliasm.<sup>102</sup>

No, regrettably for Peters, the confessors were not millennialists, but neither were they anti-millennialists, he insisted. In specific reference to Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession, Peters identifies the focal point of the second damnamus as post-millennialism as held by the sixteenth-century Anabaptists particularly. In addition to rehearsing Seiss' reasons why the Augsburg Confession is not condemning "chiliasm,"<sup>103</sup> Peters marshals a parade of supporters for his conclusion. Among these were the faculty of the University of Dorpat who, at the request of the Iowa Synod, had addressed the issue.<sup>104</sup> Finding the words of Koch confirmatory, he cites his statement as his own summary of the case.

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 1:527.

<sup>103</sup>Supra, pp. 64, n. 85.

<sup>104</sup>F. Harnack et al., "Confessional et Extra-Confessional," translated by E. J. Koons, The Evangelical Quarterly Review, 19 (January 1868):232-258. Others mentioned by Peters as supportive included Bengel, Stier, Auberlen, Delitzsch, Koppe, Spener, Ebrard, Lisco, Roos, Kohler, and Bauer.

Against this conception (the Anabaptist's) of the 1000 years' Kingdom--and only against this--was the 17th article of the Augsburg confession directed, which rejected the Jewish opinion that believers should enjoy on earth, before the resurrection, a worldly kingdom, after a general crushing of the wicked. But not merely the Augustana, but also by the Scriptures, is this false chiliasm condemned, because, as already shown, the erection of the Millennial Kingdom, according to the prophets's words, is not the result of any such church action, but comes only by means of the returning Lord.<sup>105</sup>

On the basis of these considerations Peters considered himself faithful to the Lutheran confessions. He believed the issue of millennialism had been left as an "open question" with the options being historic a-millennialism or the millennial position.

Though Peters' work exerted little impact upon his own generation, Wilbur Smith speaks of his "profound influence on the eschatological thinking of students of the Bible" in later years.<sup>106</sup> Smith, a millennialist student of eschatology, called The Theocratic Kingdom "the most exhaustive, thoroughly annotated and logically arranged study of Biblical prophecy that appeared in our country during the nineteenth century."<sup>107</sup> He found it incredible that such productivity had seemed to escape the attention of Peters' own generation, concluding, "No writer of a major work in the field of Biblical interpretation in modern times could have lived and died in greater oblivion, and experienced less recognition for a great piece of work, than the author of these

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<sup>105</sup>Peters, 1:534.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 10. J. Dwight Pentecost, a popular Reformed millennialist author of the twentieth century, recommended Peters' work to the present writer as "the most thorough treatment of eschatology from a pre-millennial perspective in American history." J. Dwight Pentecost, interview held at Grace Church, Edina, Minnesota, January 1980.

<sup>107</sup>Peters, 1:2.

three great volumes devoted to Biblical prophecy."<sup>108</sup> He even speculated whether there had been an "organized attempt" to ignore Peters' work. The lack of open and positive reception does give testimony to prevailing skepticism at least among Peters' contemporaries regarding the biblical and confessional validity of his leading conclusions. These conclusions remain to be examined more closely.

Georg A. Schieferdecker (1815-1891)

An early figure in the history of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod who was involved in the millennial issue was Georg A. Schieferdecker. The controversy surrounding his espousal of millennial views caused his associates on the congregational and synodical levels great concern in the infancy stage of the church.

Georg Albert Schieferdecker was born on March 12, 1815, at Leipzig, Germany, to Christoph Friedrich August and Christina Caroline Schieferdecker. His father, a businessman, died when Georg was still a young lad. Having received encouragement from his parents to become a pastor, he pursued a course of theological education which led to his graduation with "flying colors" from the University of Leipzig in 1836.<sup>109</sup>

While at the university, Schieferdecker was exposed to a textbook on dogmatics by Bengel. Containing millennialist allusions, it has been

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>109</sup>For a more complete account of Schieferdecker's early biographical data, see August Suelflow, "Georg Albert Schieferdecker and His Relation to Chiliasm in the Iowa Synod," B.Div. thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1946, pp. 1-18. Hereafter, Suelflow's thesis will be cited as SGAS.

surmised that Schieferdecker's acceptance of this eschatological interpretation is traceable to this early point. Regardless, it did not become a problem for Schieferdecker until several years after he came to America.

Schieferdecker became a teacher after his graduation and taught both publicly and privately for a short while. Because of his evangelical testimony, he lost one of these early positions. Soon after this, his beloved mother died. At this very difficult point in his life, he met C. F. W. Walther with whom he was to have close association for the rest of his life.<sup>110</sup>

Believing that he could serve Christ more effectively elsewhere than his homeland, Schieferdecker joined the group of Saxons under the leadership of Martin Stephan who were about to embark for America. Arriving in 1839, about a month before Walther and his party, he settled in Missouri and resumed teaching. After accepting a call to serve a congregation in Illinois in 1841, he was ordained by Walther in June of that year.<sup>111</sup>

Schieferdecker was a part of some of the earliest discussions that led to the organization of the Missouri Synod in 1847.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, he was to serve as the first president of the Western District from 1854 until 1857. In these years, Schieferdecker enjoyed the confidence of

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>112</sup>Lewis W. Spitz, Jr., The Life of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 84. Also part of some of the planning was Pastor C. F. Gruber, Schieferdecker's father-in-law, who also was a millennialist.

his friend, Walther, as is evident from a letter Walther addressed to Wilhelm Sihler in 1845 in which he speaks positively of Schieferdecker's doctrinal position and parish ministry. Speaking of several pastors by name, he is able to include Schieferdecker among whom there is

. . . a unity of faith and confession, . . . and we carry on correspondence in which we share our experience and mutually advise each other, admonish, comfort, discipline, and encourage each other. There is among us a relationship of the innermost friendship. . . . Our main objective thus far was only being mutually founded on pure Lutheran doctrine.<sup>113</sup>

In reference to congregations served by Ottomar Fuerbringer and Schieferdecker, Walther is able to tell Sihler that "the congregations present an increasingly optimistic prognosis of becoming a good Lutheran growth stock, especially that of Schieferdecker."<sup>114</sup>

Two years after the report to Sihler, a pastoral conference in St. Louis included discussion of millennialism. The pastors present, among them Walther, discussed opposing papers by Pastor Th. Brohm, representing the a-millennialist position, and Pastor Gruber, the millennialist. The consensus of those present was that millennialism "does not rest on Scripture but on the vacillating authority of human interpretation."<sup>115</sup> Soon after this conference, Der Lutheraner, edited by Walther, printed an article by Brohm entitled "Ist Der Moderne Chiliasmus Mit Dem 17th Artikel Der Augsburg Confession Vereinbar?"<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Roy A. Suelflow, ed. and trans., Correspondence of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: published by the editor, 1980), p. 34.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>SGAS, p. 9.

<sup>116</sup>Th. Brohm, "Ist Der Moderne Chiliasmus Mit Dem 17th Artikel Der Augsburg Confession Vereinbar?" Der Lutheraner, Jahrgang 4 (September 1847):112. The articles from Der Lutheraner (pp. 81-87), were cited by



In the article, Brohm traces the emergence of millennialism in the Lutheran church to Spener but recognizes Bengel, Spener's pupil, as the one who developed this interpretation more systematically and completely. Brohm insists that, contrary to Spener's and Bengel's opinion, all forms of millennialism or chiliasm are condemned by the Augsburg Confession, Article XVII. Brohm laments the growing acceptance of millennialism among Lutherans, even among some that were very close to him. While not mentioning any names, August Suelflow believes it to be "a safe assumption that Brohm wrote against Schieferdecker, and that Schieferdecker already at this time had his chiliastic tendencies, though perhaps not airing them openly."<sup>117</sup> It is likely Pastor Gruber was also an object of Brohm's concern.

In 1849, Schieferdecker accepted a call to serve a parish at Altenburg, Missouri. On Epiphany, January 6, 1850, he was installed by Gruber.<sup>118</sup> It was at Altenburg that his millennial beliefs were to become more open, and, ultimately lead to his dismissal from the synod. Though the first years at Altenburg were difficult, the problems appear to have resulted more from Schieferdecker's indecisive leadership than any doctrinal questions.<sup>119</sup>

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SGAS. The present writer has checked these sources. He is aware of the limitations of this survey but believes the articles are representative of the theological debate in the years before Schieferdecker's departure from the Missouri Synod.

<sup>117</sup>SGAS, pp. 12-13.

<sup>118</sup>August Suelflow, The Heart of Missouri (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 15.

<sup>119</sup>For an account of some of these early difficulties, see SGAS, pp. 19-24.

Having been elected to the presidency of the newly-organized Western District in 1854 in absentia, Schieferdecker first presided the next year. Among his recommendations for future conventions was that specific questions be addressed for mutual clarification. Though Schieferdecker had not put his eschatological views into writing up to this point, J. F. Koestering reports that he was expressing himself both in public and in private along chiliastic lines.<sup>120</sup> A sermon on Isaiah 60 preached at Altenburg in January of 1856, in which Schieferdecker openly identified with certain millennialist tenets, caused a reaction by at least one member. Objecting to a universal conversion of the Jews, and that there would be "better times" for the church, the member sought on the basis of Scripture to dissuade his pastor. Unimpressed with the parishioner's arguments, Schieferdecker proceeded to speak to others in the parish along the same lines. He specifically expressed support for an article in the Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche which claimed that the Augsburg Confession had directed its condemnation at "the strong teachings,"<sup>121</sup> of the Anabaptists rather than all chiliasm.

It was at the convention of the Western District in the spring of 1856, held at Altenburg, that the conflicting interpretations on millennialism began to receive more definite and direct attention. In his opening address as presiding officer, Schieferdecker appealed for

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<sup>120</sup>Johann Friedrich Koestering, Auswanderung der Sächsischen Lutheraner (St. Louis: A. Wiebusch, 1866). p. 164.

<sup>121</sup>SGAS, p. 28.

love to prevail among the delegates and that the Scriptures would be the sole arbiter of doctrinal matters to be discussed.

At the initiative of the Altenburg congregation, led by Schieferdecker, two questions were brought to the floor of the convention regarding the millennium. The first question asked for a definition of the synod's position on such matters as the universal conversion of the Jews, Christ's reign over all nations, the millennium, and related subjects. The second question involved the consequences from the synod's perspective of holding millennial beliefs. In other words, could a millennialist continue in fellowship? After lengthy discussion, in which the central issues concerned the conversion of the Jews and the nature of the millennium, the convention condemned chiliasm as "unscriptural, as one of Satan's lies and as a poison from hell."<sup>122</sup> Schieferdecker and Gruber remained unconvinced that all chiliasm was unscriptural. Addressing the second question regarding the implications of chiliasm for church fellowship, the convention determined that even though all chiliasm is unscriptural, it would not need to be divisive if someone who held such views would not try to promote them.<sup>123</sup> This last decision served to delay any immediate decision regarding Schieferdecker's future relationship with the Synod.

Schieferdecker took strong exception to an article appearing in Der Lutheraner shortly after the convention in which K. A. W. Roebbelen maintained on the basis of the uncertainty surrounding the canonical status of the Book of Revelation, that no doctrinal position was to be

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

derived from statements in the book.<sup>124</sup> Armed with supportive statements from the orthodox theologian, John Gerhard, Schieferdecker defended the canonicity of the book in his congregation and in the pages of Der Lutheraner.<sup>125</sup> Although the Altenburg congregation appeared to be at peace momentarily, the controversy continued to manifest itself, usually in connection with the voters' meetings of the congregation. Friedrich Wyneken, president of the Synod, after trying through personal representatives and correspondence with Schieferdecker to settle the dispute, invited him to come to St. Louis where there would be opportunity for a thorough discussion on the whole question of chiliasm.

The ensuing discussion, which for the most part included Wyneken, Walther, and Schieferdecker, lasted four days. The focal point of the discussion was an exegetical study of Revelation 20. Schieferdecker reports that the following matters were agreed upon:

- (1) that the text of Rev. 20 be accepted as God's Word;
- (2) that Rev. 20 be acknowledged as containing divine mysteries, which no one could interpret with complete sureness;
- (3) that no one should claim without doubt that the fulfillment of this prophecy had already taken place, or that it was yet to be fulfilled;
- (4) that, if on the basis of this and similar texts, anybody harbored hopes for better times for the Church in the last times, such hopes should not be classed as false doctrine.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>K. A. W. Roebbelen, "Die Offenbarung St. Johannis," Der Lutheraner, Jahrgang 12 (April 1856):137-140.

<sup>125</sup>Georg A. Schieferdecker, "Das Canonische Ansehen Der Offenbarung St. Johannis," Der Lutheraner, Jahrgang 12 (July 1856):177-180.

<sup>126</sup>Quoted by SGAS, p. 59. The apparent relative silence of Walther himself on the millennium in terms of public statements in the earliest years of the synod is of interest. Was he struggling with an element of sympathy for those who held millennial views due to his sustained association and seeming respect for Schieferdecker and his theology otherwise? Was his great-grandfather's identity as a millennialist also a factor in giving him a broader outlook than other early leaders of the

Wyneken sent Schieferdecker back to his congregation and urged them to maintain the peace that he felt had been established. He expressed confidence in Schieferdecker's willingness to restrain his views.<sup>127</sup>

Meanwhile, a series of articles were carried in Der Lutheraner in the following months which were intended to show the error of chiliasm. One of the articles expressly stated that all forms of chiliasm

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Synod? It is to assume too much to argue from Walther's silence that he was more tolerant than others on millennialism. In rehearsing his ancestor's biographical data, he is not positive toward his stance on eschatology. "My great-grandfather was Moritz Heinrich Walther, of Gladua in the Magdeburg neighborhood, from 1719 pastor at Oberlungwitz, between Hohenstein and Chemnitz, in the County Schoenburg-Glauchau. He died March 2, 1752. Unfortunately [he was] a chiliast." Quoted by Spitz, p. 3.

Walther was not tentative in his conclusions regarding Revelation 20 when he added in a footnote to his foreword to Lehre und Wehre in 1860, "Our Synod expressly did not condemn the so-called 'subtle chiliasm' if it is defined as Dr. August Pfeiffer did it. This thorough theologian writes in his Antichiliasmus (Luebeck, 1691; 2nd ed. 1729, p. 112): 'Under the term subtle chiliasm we understand the view of those who are of the opinion that the thousand years of Rev. 20 are not fulfilled as yet, that the glory promised there is still to be expected, but in this way: They specify no visible return of Christ for a kingdom on earth, no personal reign, no double resurrection, but only halcyonia (that is, a quiet period of rest) and a peaceful state of the church, and in this they leave the precise nature and also the time (the actual extent) to God, as Launaeus, Rallius, Coccejus, Brenius, and others do. To be sure, we consider this kind of chiliasm false and erroneous, but because the basic articles of the Christian faith are not attacked by it, we do not consider it heresy, especially when people deal with it problematic (that is, as a question for discussion) and do not burden anyone with it. Our concern will rather be about middle chiliasm, which we call crass chiliasm. Those who defended its basic features, we call crass chiliasts.'" C. F. W. Walther, "Fidelity to the Written Word: The Burden of the Missouri Synod," Concordia Journal, 1 (March 1975):85. Walther is incorporating Pfeiffer's comments as his own.

<sup>127</sup>SGAS, p. 59.

were condemned by the Augsburg Confession.<sup>128</sup> Schieferdecker and those who agreed with him appeared unmoved by these articles.<sup>129</sup>

The synodical convention at Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1857 proved to be the point where it was finally determined that the synod could not exist in a harmonious spirit as long as there were those like Schieferdecker who continued to hold eschatological opinions contrary to its understanding of Scripture and the confessions. In his opening address, Wyneken spoke of chiliasm as an "enemy" in their midst. A letter from Gruber, who was unable to attend, was read in which he expressed forthrightly his chiliastic understanding. The only one who defended his views was Schieferdecker. After discussion of Roebbelen's earlier article in Der Lutheraner, a motion was passed that Schieferdecker's subsequent article of protest was uncalled for. After several sessions in which Schieferdecker was asked a series of questions regarding his beliefs, the convention appointed a committee to weigh the situation and report back. Upon their recommendation, the following motion was passed: "Die Synode habe erkannt, dass Herr Pastor Schieferdecker nicht mehr mit ihr auf Einen Glaubensgrunde stehe, und sie sei darum genothigt, ihm die Synodal-gemeinschaft aufzusagen."<sup>130</sup>

The action against Schieferdecker resulted in the split of his congregation at Altenburg. Other congregations nearby reported some

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<sup>128</sup>"Die Augsburgische Confession Wider Den Chiliasmus," Der Lutheraner, Jahrgang 13 (July 1857):189, 190.

<sup>129</sup>SGAS, p. 62.

<sup>130</sup>"Verhandlungen uber die Lehre von den letzten Dingen, sonderlich den Chiliasmus," Neunter Synodal-Bericht der allgemeinen deutschen Ev. Luth. Synode - vom Jahre 1857 (St. Louis, 1876), p. 350.

loss of membership to Schieferdecker's group. A new congregation was formed of these followers. Meanwhile, Pastor Gruber changed his position on chiliasm after lengthy discussion. However, other pastors resigned or were forced to leave their congregations because of agreement with the interpretation of Schieferdecker.<sup>131</sup> Schieferdecker soon joined the Iowa Synod.<sup>132</sup> He served as a pastor in that group for eighteen years. In 1875, he recanted his millennial views and rejoined the Missouri Synod, serving as a pastor until his death in 1893. Since 1857, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has experienced a minimum of problems within its own ranks on the issue of millennialism. In its effort to establish a fellowship base with other synods, it has entered into repeated dialogue which frequently involved debate, particularly in the nineteenth century, on the question of the openness of the Lutheran confessions to millennialism. Its spokesmen have remained firm in

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<sup>131</sup>SGAS, p. 74.

<sup>132</sup>The Iowa Synod believed that so-called "fine" chiliasm was countenanced by the Augsburg Confession even though there is not indication of a central figure or body of literature promoting millennialism among them in the nineteenth century. The debate with the Missouri Synod on this issue, occasioned by mutual desire for church fellowship, centered on the confessional validity of millennialism; that is, is it really an "open question" as Iowa maintained or has the Augustana condemned it? For further reading on these proceedings from the Iowa perspective, see the following sources: Siegmund and Gottfried Fritschel, Iowa und Missouri (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, n.d.); George J. Fritschel, ed., Quellen und Dokumente (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, n.d.). Soon after the departure of Schieferdecker, a series of articles appeared in Lehre und Wehre which carefully defined the Missouri Synod position on the millennium. One of the most extensive studies appeared in several issues under the title, "Das sogen. tausend-jährige Reich," Lehre und Wehre, (July-October, 1860).

declaring the synod against every form of millennialism on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessions.<sup>133</sup>

#### Movements and Men in the Twentieth Century

Although not as much literature is forthcoming from any single millennialist among Lutherans in the twentieth century as was the case with Seiss and Peters in the nineteenth, there were still a number of leading figures who identified themselves as millennialists and defended it. Similar theological influences are traced in their apologetic for

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<sup>133</sup>Milton L. Rudnick, Fundamentalism and the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 88. In the twentieth century, the definitive statement on the position of the Missouri Synod also regarding millennialism has been the "Brief Statement" of 1932. Its position is unmistakable. "With the Augsburg Confession (Art. XVII) we reject every type Millennialism, or Chiliasm, the opinions that Christ will return visibly to this earth a thousand years before the end of the world and establish a dominion of the Church over the world; or that before the end of the world the Church is to enjoy a season of special prosperity; or that before the general resurrection on Judgment Day a number of departed Christians or martyrs are to be raised again to reign in glory in this world; or that before the end of the world a universal conversion of the Jewish nation (of Israel according to the flesh) will take place.

Over against this, Scripture clearly teaches, and we teach accordingly, that the kingdom of Christ on earth will remain under the cross until the end of the world, Acts 14,22; John 16,33; 18,36; Luke 9,23; 14,27; 17,20-37; 2 Tim. 4,18; Heb. 12,28; Luke 18,8; that the second visible coming of the Lord will be His final advent, His coming to judge the quick and the dead, Matt. 24,29,30; 25,31; 2 Tim. 4,1; 2 Thess. 2,8; Heb. 9,26; that there will be but one resurrection of the dead, John 5,28; 6,39,40; that the time of the Last Day is, and will remain, unknown, Matt. 24,42; 25,13; Mark 13,32,37; Acts 1,7, which would not be the case if the Last Day were to come a thousand years after the beginning of a millennium; and that there will be no general conversion, a conversion en masse, of the Jewish nation, Rom. 11,7; 2 Cor. 3,14; Rom. 11,25; 1 Thess. 2,16.

According to these clear passages of Scripture we reject the whole of Millennialism, since it not only contradicts Scripture, but also engenders a false conception of the kingdom of Christ, turns the hope of Christians upon earthly goals, 1 Cor. 15,19; Col. 3,2, and leads them to look upon the Bible as an obscure book." "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod" Concordia Theological Monthly, 2 (June 1931):414-415.



this interpretation. Later expressions positive toward millennialism have issued from certain "free movements" and church groups generally associated with Scandinavian Lutheran pietism.

#### Theological Leaders

Of those most ready to delineate their millennial understanding among Lutheran theologians, three representatives are connected with the synodical heirs of the General Synod, known as the General Council. Increasingly unhappy with the latitudinarian trends in the General Synod,<sup>134</sup> the General Council had rallied around the call of Charles Porterfield Krauth in his "Fraternal Address" and had organized in 1867. At its inception, the General Council was composed of ten "synods," among them, the Swedish Augustana Synod. This synod provided the most leadership in enunciating the millennial position. Among the spokesmen was Revere Franklin Weidner.

#### Revere Franklin Weidner

Weidner was born in Center Valley, Pennsylvania on November 22, 1851. He received his education at Muhlenberg College and at the Philadelphia Theological Seminary, graduating from the latter in 1873. Among his professors at Philadelphia was Charles Porterfield Krauth. Weidner's special interest was Hebrew and biblical exegesis and he later

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<sup>134</sup>For a survey of some of these trends, see Wilhelm Sihler's articles, "Einiges über Ausschluss an die sogenannte lutherische General Synode und über kirchliche Politik und expediency," Lehre und Wehre, 4 (May 1858):137-146. Regular articles tracing the confessional decline of the General Synod appeared in Lehre und Wehre in the 1850's and 1860s. Today, the Lutheran Church in America traces its historical moorings primarily to the General Council.

taught in those areas, although he lectured in dogmatics and ethics as well.

Among the pastorates served by Weidner prior to his career as a theological professor was as an assistant to Joseph Seiss in Philadelphia. Attesting to the close relationship with Seiss beyond this parish experience is his collaboration with Seiss in publishing a book in 1879 entitled Voices of Babylon.<sup>135</sup>

Serving as a professor at the Augustana Synod seminary at Rock Island, Illinois, for a few years, Weidner was later elected president of the newly-formed seminary of the General Council in Chicago. Through his efforts, the seminary attained an influential position even across denominational lines.<sup>136</sup>

Weidner was a prolific writer and published numerous books of a doctrinal and exegetical nature. Two of his books in which his reviews regarding the millennium are most pronounced are Biblical Theology of the New Testament and Annotations on the Revelation of St.

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<sup>135</sup>Jens Christian Jenson, American Lutheran Biographies (Milwaukee: A. Houtkamp and Son, 1890), p. 865.

<sup>136</sup>Illustrative of Weidner's trans-denominational outlook and influence is his association with a summer school in Northfield, Massachusetts, operated by Dwight L. Moody.

John.<sup>137</sup> He continued lecturing and writing at the Chicago Seminary until his death on January 6, 1915.<sup>138</sup>

In his commentary on Revelation, Weidner shows his dependence upon the writings of Bengel, Christoph Luthardt, Franz Delitzch and others. Weidner elsewhere applauds Bengel's hermeneutical approach, reporting that his main principle of interpretation was "to put nothing into the Scriptures, but to draw everything from them, and suffer nothing to remain hidden that is really in them."<sup>139</sup> That was a model Weidner wanted to emulate. He also acknowledges the contribution of Peters in his Theocratic Kingdom but complains of its length.<sup>140</sup>

Weidner outlined the requirements for a biblical interpreter. Beside the fundamental necessity of possessing a "living" faith, he must

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<sup>137</sup>Biblical Theology of the New Testament was published in New York by Fleming H. Revell Company in 1891. The commentary on Revelation appeared in 1898 and was published by the Christian Literature Company of New York. It was part of a large series entitled The Lutheran Commentary which was edited by Henry Eyster Jacobs.

<sup>138</sup>Fry, p. 117. For a more complete account of Weidner's life, though framed in the form of a tribute, see George H. Gerberding's character sketch entitled simply R. F. Weidner (Waverly, IA: Wartburg Press, 1916.)

<sup>139</sup>Revere F. Weidner, An Introduction to Dogmatic Theology (Rock Island, IL: Lutheran Augustana Book Concern, 1895), p. 224. Weidner's enthusiasm for Bengel is unrestrained. He characterizes Bengel as possessing "a profound reverence for the Bible, with an acuteness which let nothing escape him, and in strict conformity to grammatical rules, but untrammled by dogmatical or symbolical considerations, he sought to find out the exact meaning of Scripture. His exegetical principles left their impress upon his dogmatic system . . . --and this displays itself most fully in his views of the historical development of the kingdom of God, and in his realistic interpretation of the Book of Revelation." Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Revere F. Weidner, Annotations on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), p. 327. Weidner thought Peters' work would be much more effective if its 2100 pages were condensed to about 450 pages.

be guided by "the central truth of all Revelation, salvation in Christ, which is the very essence of Christianity and the material principles of Dogmatics."<sup>141</sup> He observed that the Lutheran Church had consistently emphasized the analogy of faith as "an inspired means of interpretation."<sup>142</sup>

The typical features of historic millennialism are observed in Weidner's discussion of the Apocalypse. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he agrees with Bengel and Delitzsch in locating the reign of the resurrected saints of Revelation 20 in heaven with Christ. Referring to the "thrones" mentioned in verse four of the text, he says, "The Father's throne, and Christ's throne is in heaven, and it is best, therefore, to regard these thrones which John saw as in heaven, and the risen saints will therefore reign with Christ from heaven, for they partake of His glory and Kingdom."<sup>143</sup> Weidner is not concerned whether the millennium is considered a literal one thousand years or not. His contention, however, is that it is a period still to come.<sup>144</sup>

Weidner displays a sensitiveness to any intimation that his views may deviate from confessional norms, particularly as presented in Article XVII of the Augustana. For example, in explaining his conception of the "thousand years" in Revelation 20, he comments, "By the thousand years is meant a great world-day. Not a fleshly rule (compare Augsburg

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<sup>141</sup>Weidner, An Introduction. . . , pp. 90-91.

<sup>142</sup>Quenstedt and Gerhard, orthodox Lutherans of the seventeenth century, are quoted in support of his comments. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>143</sup>Weidner, Annotations. . . , p. 282.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 283.

Confession, Article XVII), but a spiritual, heavenly reign of peace and state of blessedness on earth. . ."<sup>145</sup> He quotes approvingly a similar disclaimer offered by Franz Delitzsch.

The New Testament Apocalypse represents 'The Last Things' in their future successive temporal order and relations. It is, in this respect, the key to the entire prophetic word--for example, in the beautiful prediction in Isa. 24-27, which lifts itself up even to the destruction of death through victory. The triumph and the glory of that time form the Millennial age. I believe in the literal reality of this apocalyptic picture without pressing slavishly the letter (I Cor. 13:12). I am, therefore, a Chiliast; but the Damnamus in the seventeenth article of Augustana does not hit me.<sup>146</sup>

Elsewhere, Weidner affirms his concurrence with a quia subscription to the Confessions versus a quatenus posture which he considers "an evasion."<sup>147</sup> Clearly, he felt his understanding of the Augsburg Confession presented no obstacle to a futuristic conception of the millennium, particularly of the classical type as posited by the early church Fathers and echoed by Bengel.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>Weidner, Biblical Theology. . . , p. 308.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 303-304.

<sup>147</sup>Weidner, Introduction. . . , p. 100. The official statement regarding confessional subscription in the General Council is worded as follows: "We accept and acknowledge the doctrines of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession in its original sense as throughout in conformity with the pure truth of which God's Word is the only rule. We accept its statements of truth as in perfect accordance with the Canonical Scriptures. We reject the errors it condemns, and believe that all which it commits to the liberty of the Church, of right belongs to that liberty." Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>148</sup>Theodore Engelder, recognizing Weidner's millennial understanding to be non-dispensational, presents a critique of his position as well as other types of millennialism on the basis of Scripture and the confessions, concluding, "As long as other Lutherans teach millennialism, the Lutherans of America are not one in doctrine. And a unity effected by agreeing to ignore the difference and tolerate the chiliastic error as a harmless thing would be a sham." Theodore Engelder, "Notes on Chiliasm," Concordia Theological Monthly, 6 (July 1935):495. Compare also other remarks by Engelder regarding Weidner's eschatology in the March

George H. Gerberding

A colleague of Weidner who taught by his side in the seminary of the General Council in Chicago was G. H. Gerberding. Though his field of concentration was practical theology, his writing included popular texts dealing with subjects of a doctrinal nature. The two main books of this type are The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church<sup>149</sup> and Lutheran Fundamentals.<sup>150</sup> In the latter text, eight short chapters are devoted to eschatology. His millennialist persuasion in this discussion is evident.

Gerberding was born August 21, 1847 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He received his education at Thiel Hall and Muhlenberg College, graduating from the latter in 1873. At Thiel, a favorite instructor was Henry Eyster Jacobs. Gerberding's seminary training was at the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia where he studied under Krauth among others. Of no small influence also upon Gerberding during his seminary days was Joseph Seiss. Seiss was pastor of a congregation near the seminary. Gerberding summarizes his assessment of Seiss' ministry in his autobiography, "I thank God that it was my privilege during most of \_\_\_\_\_ through June issues of Concordia Theological Monthly of 1935.

<sup>149</sup>G. H. Gerberding, The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1917). This book has passed through many editions.

<sup>150</sup>G. H. Gerberding, Lutheran Fundamentals (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1925).

the morning services of three seminary years to sit under the powerful preaching of America's greatest preacher."<sup>151</sup>

After serving parishes in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and North Dakota, for a number of years, Gerberding was called to the Chicago seminary in 1894. He labored there until 1920 when he was called to a similar position at the Northwestern Seminary, eventually to be located in St. Paul, Minnesota. Gerberding was the author of a number of books and pamphlets, continuing his literary activity until his death in 1927.

In his exposition of "The Last Things" in Lutheran Fundamentals, Gerberding aims to translate these matters so that the "common man" can understand. The content varies little with what his immediate predecessors in Lutheranism said relative to the subject.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, he specifically names Weidner as one whose eschatology he followed and endorsed.<sup>153</sup>

Gerberding is quick to profess his distance from "gross" chiliasm which he describes as conceiving "a millennium so gross in its character that it would seem to be a carnal, earthly kingdom suited to men in the flesh."<sup>154</sup> This type is well-represented by the Anabaptists of the

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<sup>151</sup>G. H. Gerberding, Reminiscent Reflections (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1929) p. 54.

<sup>152</sup>One exception to this would be his concept of the Antichrist. Confessing the difficulty of the subject, he finally concludes that it is not so much an "Antichrist" as "antichrists" that are predicted in Scripture (cf. 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3). Gerberding, Lutheran Fundamentals, pp. 284-286. Though he is tentative in identifying "Antichrist," he was long convinced that it was not the Roman pope. He reports the dismay of his examining committee when he was graduating from seminary when he denied the papal connection. "I worried the poor comm They had to do without supper. They ordained me with my heresy!" Reminiscent Reflections, p. 76.

<sup>153</sup>Gerberding, Lutheran Fundamentals, p. 296.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

Reformation period, he maintains, and this is the chiliasm repudiated by Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>155</sup>

Gerberding directs the readers' attention to a number of Scripture texts which he claims have not been fulfilled yet but will be in connection with a future millennium.<sup>156</sup> However, it is Revelation 20 which is alleged to be "the most direct and graphic of all."<sup>157</sup> He appeals to the canonicity and inspiration of the Book of Revelation as ample reason not to "wipe out or belittle Chapter XX."<sup>158</sup> He suggests this may be the tendency of those who do not discover a futuristic conception of a millennium therein as he does. Without elaborating he warns, "Those who are prejudiced against Premillenarianism need to guard against doing violence to the Lutheran principles of Hermeneutics."<sup>159</sup>

Hesitant to go beyond the broad outline of the millennial scheme, Gerberding seems satisfied not to adopt a strict chronology of future events nor to insist on a literal numerical value of figures cited in Revelation 20. His chief contention is that Revelation 20 describes events yet future.

C. E. Lindberg

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Gerberding cites Is. 33:20-24, 62:1-7, and 65:19-25; Dan. 7:13, 14,27; Zech. 8:20-23, and 14:20,21; Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:29,30 and Acts 3:20,21. Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.



Another millennialist theological leader of the General Council with service primarily in the member Augustana Synod<sup>160</sup> was Conrad Emil Lindberg.<sup>161</sup> The two books in which his treatment of the millennium issue is most complete are Christian Dogmatics<sup>162</sup> and Beacon Lights of Prophecy.<sup>163</sup> Part of a survey of the full range of dogmatic categories, the former text includes a section on eschatology that comprises a full one sixth of the book. The latter text is devoted to a study of biblical passages related to the second Advent.<sup>164</sup>

Lindberg was born in Jönköping, Sweden on June 9, 1852. Receiving his college education in his native land, he came to the United States in 1871 where he first attended the seminary of the Augustana Synod, then located at Paxton, Illinois. After one year, he enrolled at the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia from which he graduated in 1876. Among his teachers was Charles Porterfield Krauth.

After serving a pastorate in New York City for a number of years, Lindberg was called as a professor to Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois in 1890. His main area of responsibility was in

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<sup>160</sup>The Augustana Synod withdrew from the General Council in 1918.

<sup>161</sup>B. W. Teigen incorrectly identifies Lindberg as against millennialism. Teigen, p. 12.

<sup>162</sup>Conrad Emil Lindberg, Christian Dogmatics (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1922).

<sup>163</sup>Conrad Emil Lindberg, Beacon Lights of Prophecy (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1930).

<sup>164</sup>Lindberg mentions forty-one books of the Bible in his study, including 545 Scripture references with 398 different passages. Passages from Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah, Matthew, Luke and Revelation are most frequent.

systematic theology.<sup>165</sup> There he labored until his death on August 2, 1930.<sup>166</sup>

Although Lindberg demonstrates awareness of a wide range of thought relative to the second coming and even recommends texts by such men as Seiss and Weidner,<sup>167</sup> he appears more independent of others in forming his conclusions. He apparently believed the pertinent Scripture passages were sufficiently clear in themselves and needed little support from others. This is not to say that Lindberg believed he could resolve every issue. Indeed, in his earlier writing on the subject, one notes a certain degree of tentativeness. Though clearly favoring millennialism, he ultimately says, "It is not possible for us to pass dogmatically on the question of the millennium."<sup>168</sup> After comparing various views on the last judgment, he concludes, "Whatever may be the course of events in the days of prophetic fulfillment, the day of judgment will come at the appointed time."<sup>169</sup> Though he ventures a broad outline in regard to

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<sup>165</sup>Lindberg has been characterized as "a conservative Lutheran who saw the theology of the sixteenth century through the spectacles of the seventeenth-century Lutheran orthodox scholastics." G. Everett Arden, *Augustana Heritage* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1963) p. 249. Among the orthodox Lutherans he referred to most often were Johann Gerhard, the "Arch-theologian," Quenstedt, and Hollazius. S. G. Youngert, "Conrad Emil Lindberg, An Appreciation," *The Augustana Quarterly*, 10 (January 1931):38.

<sup>166</sup>Arden notes the influence of Lindberg in this period. "It was this man who set the fundamental pattern of thought for the clergy, and through them for the laity, of the Augustana Synod for forty years." Arden, p. 249.

<sup>167</sup>Conrad Emil Lindberg, *Apologetics* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1917), p. 205.

<sup>168</sup>Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 532.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 559.

the order of events surrounding the second Advent, he hastens to remark that calculations of this sort are only of comparative value, inasmuch as the study of chronology in connection with prophecy is encumbered with difficulties the fulfillment of prophecy alone can solve."<sup>170</sup>

Lindberg is convinced of the canonical status of the antilegomena and assumes their apostolic authority.<sup>171</sup> At the same time, he laments the neglect of the Book of Revelation because of its alleged obscurity.

The book of Revelation is held by many to be a concealment instead of a revelation, but it is an apocalypse and not an apocrypha . . . It is true that there are many figures which are difficult to understand. On account of these difficulties in the way of interpretation there are many Christians and even preachers who rarely read this prophetic book, although the Master through John pronounced a blessing on those who read this book and keep the things written therein.<sup>172</sup>

Rather than giving up because of difficulties, Lindberg recommends consistent application of the analogy of Scripture, believing that many of the problems will disappear.<sup>173</sup> Repeatedly he urges a careful application of sound hermeneutical principles in handling prophetic truth.<sup>174</sup>

In a comparison of Lindberg's earlier millennial studies with those shortly before his death, there is evidence of more extensive

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 509, f.n.

<sup>171</sup>Lindberg, Apologetics, p. 57.

<sup>172</sup>Lindberg, Beacon Lights on Prophecy, p. 119. The author elsewhere remarks, "If Christ's return is not to be personal and visible and His glorious Kingdom a reality, the book of Revelation would be a greater mystery than many make it. The last book in the Bible is the new Genesis and the Apocalypse of Christ. It is the book that pre-eminently treats of the day of the Lord." Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., p. viii, 39; cf. Christian Dogmatics, pp. 543-544. A favorite expression of Lindberg's in this regard is "literal, grammatical exegesis."

development of earlier themes as well as some change in his views. While previously he seemed content to present the various interpretive options for the reader's ultimate verdict, he at last is actively promoting millennialism. He is convinced on the basis of Scripture that "a thousand years of a blessed millennium will not precede the return of Christ."<sup>175</sup> Whereas before he spoke of a reign of the saints with Christ "from the New Jerusalem,"<sup>176</sup> now he envisions an inter-communion of glorified saints and mortals during the millennial reign, though the central location of the former remains in the "New Jerusalem."<sup>177</sup> Though by implication he formerly advocated a single phase of Christ's return (post-tribulationism),<sup>178</sup> in the end he is on the side of those who speak of a pre-tribulation rapture of believers followed by a return with them after a period of great tribulation.<sup>179</sup>

Although Lindberg's eschatological system cannot be strictly categorized, he demonstrates affinity for the dispensational variety of millennialism. The typical treatment of a bodily "first resurrection," an indeterminate period called the "Last Day" or "Judgment" and a

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<sup>175</sup>Lindberg, Beacon Lights of Prophecy, p. 37.

<sup>176</sup>Lindberg, Christian Dogmatics, p. 533.

<sup>177</sup>Lindberg, Beacon Lights of Prophecy, pp. 235, 238-239. For a four-fold refutation of Lindberg's position on this "inter-communion," see Theodore Engelder, "Notes on Chiliasm," Concordia Theological Monthly, 6 (April 1935):241-254.

<sup>178</sup>Lindberg, Christian Dogmatics, p. 540.

<sup>179</sup>Lindberg, Beacon Lights of Prophecy, pp. 99-106, 118, 148-152.

general Jewish tone to the millennium are to be found in his presentation.<sup>180</sup>

Like other Lutherans before him, Lindberg believed his millennial interpretation was unaffected by the condemnatory statements of Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession. It is "gross Chiliasm," he holds, which is addressed. He explains that the adherents of gross Chiliasm "conceive of the millennium as being an earthly carnal Kingdom of glory and happiness, as though the kingdom of God were of this world."<sup>181</sup> He believed Melancthon had made the identity of this variety clear in his Variata of 1540. There he noted it is the Anabaptists who are named.<sup>182</sup>

Though it is difficult to trace the specific influence of Lindberg relative to the millennium on his constituency in the Augustana Synod,<sup>183</sup> it is clear that a position of toleration of these views persisted.<sup>184</sup> There were a number of Lindberg's students, moreover, who carried his convictions into certain "free" movements in Lutheranism,

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<sup>180</sup>For additional insight on Lindberg's convictions on the role of the Jews in the end-times, see his article, "The Second Advent and Its Outstanding Signs," The Augustana Quarterly, 6 (September 1927):197-204.

<sup>181</sup>Lindberg, Christian Dogmatics, p. 529.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., pp. 530, 533.

<sup>183</sup>This is not to imply that Lindberg was alone in his millennial views. For example, a fellow-professor at Augustana, C. A. Blomgren, published his similar position under the title, Thy Kingdom Come (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Theological Seminary, 1924).

<sup>184</sup>For those who remain interested in traditional eschatological categories, a position of confessional neutrality obtains in the derivative church body, the Lutheran Church in America.

particularly in association with the Lutheran Bible Institute and the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement.<sup>185</sup>

J. N. Kildahl

Another millennialist in the early quarter of the twentieth century was John Nathan Kildahl. He was active as a pastor, church leader,<sup>186</sup> and professor as a member of the United Norwegian Church and later, the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.<sup>187</sup>

Kildahl was born on January 4, 1857, in Trondhjem, Norway. As a young lad he came with his parents to America where he received his early education. After graduation from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, he attended Luther Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin, where he sat under the teaching of F. A. Schmidt.<sup>188</sup> After serving congregations in

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<sup>185</sup>Infra, pp. 110-119.

<sup>186</sup>Bernard Habel commented on Kildahl's position in the church, "Everybody listened when Kildahl spoke in the church conventions, and usually his advice was followed." J. N. Kildahl, Concerning Sin and Grace, translated by Bernard H. J. Habel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1954), p. v.

<sup>187</sup>Kildahl was an active leader in merger plans which resulted in the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1890 and also was a leading figure in the union negotiations that led to the formation of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America in 1917 (The NLCA changed its name to Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1946). E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold. The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 2:5-37; 129-225.

<sup>188</sup>Schmidt was closely connected with the controversy over the matter of predestination in the Missouri and Norwegian Synods that occurred in the later decades of the nineteenth century. At the same time, he was a staunch anti-chiliasm. At the organization of the Synodical Conference in 1871, he had declared, "As concerns chiliasm, our Church has in Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession expressly and emphatically rejected it. . . . Whoever therefore wants to be chiliasm cannot honestly want to be such within the Lutheran Church. . . . For the Lutheran Church, in accordance with its express confession once and for all wants to know nothing of this sectarian leaven, and does not want

Minnesota and Illinois for a number of years, he became president of St. Olaf College in 1889 and served in that capacity until 1914 when he was called as a professor of systematic theology at the United Norwegian Lutheran Seminary (later Luther-Northwestern Seminary). He served there until his death on September 25, 1920.

In his teaching and preaching, Kildahl has been characterized as an exponent of "living Christianity" as over against "dead orthodoxy."<sup>189</sup> Though never a member of the Hauge Synod, he was sympathetic and appreciative of the Haugean spirit.<sup>190</sup>

While Kildahl wrote many articles of a doctrinal and devotional nature, his chief work for the purpose of demonstrating his millennialism is Tre Foredrag.<sup>191</sup> It may be added that while the second Advent of Christ was a favorite theme in his preaching, he restricted his handling of this topic to what he deemed the major aspects of eschatology. His personal opinions on the millennium were of a secondary nature and therefore were omitted.<sup>192</sup>

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this false doctrine tolerated. . ." F. A. Schmidt, "Lutheranism and Chiliasm," Confessional Lutheran 9 (October 1948):121.

<sup>189</sup>Nelson and Fevold, p. 234. Fearful of an alleged scholasticism of orthodoxy, Kildahl is reputed to have "strove valiantly, but never quite successfully, to break out from the categories of orthodoxist thought." Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>191</sup>J. N. Kildahl, Tre Foredrag (Minneapolis: Minnehaha Publication Society, 1922).

<sup>192</sup>Note the absence of millennial overtones in his published sermons appearing under the title, Concerning Sin and Grace, even though these sermons are dealing directly with eschatological themes. See, for example, pp. 9-13; 411-417; 491-423; and 425-428.

Kildahl expressed the desire to approach the study of the millennium without presuppositions or biases. He said he would attempt

. . . to adhere in complete simplicity to what we discover in Scripture. . . And we will follow the old recognized Lutheran rule for scriptural interpretation, that the words of Scripture must always be understood literally, unless Scripture itself clearly shows us that it is speaking figuratively.<sup>193</sup>

It is on this basis that he professed to find a millennium in Revelation 20 yet in the future. Followed by a literal bodily resurrection of believers, there will be a "reign" with Christ for a thousand years. This reign, which includes "thrones" and "judgments," will involve a share in administration more than simple judicial action.<sup>194</sup>

Kildahl believed the Scripture is silent on the location of the resurrected saints during the millennium but he nevertheless expressed his personal suppositions. While recognizing that some believe earth to be the domain, he considered this unlikely for the following reasons:

The resurrected saints are perfectly sanctified; they are completely free from all that is evil; they have spiritual, heavenly and glorified bodies; and their mode of living is therefore so very different from that which is found here in this world. How they then could live here in this world together with men who live an earthly life according to the order of this present world, imperfect, sinful and suffering, is something which is not easy to understand; it does not seem reasonable. Neither does it seem reasonable to me that Christ would visibly live here on earth together with two such diverse types of people. It seems, therefore, to me more likely to assume that after having destroyed the regime of Antichrist, bound Satan, and awakened from death those who receive a share in the first resurrection, Christ would return with those last to heaven, where He would reign with them essentially as He previously has done.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup>Kildahl, Tre Foredrag, pp. 44-45.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., pp. 51-52.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54.



The glorious conditions predicted by the Old Testament prophets do not apply to the nature of the millennium in Kildahl's view. Projecting the prophets' descriptions on the millennium rather than seeing their fulfillment in the Church is what Article XVII of the Augustana is in general condemning.<sup>196</sup> While the millennium may begin on a high plane because of the destruction of those who have been leaders in ungodliness, it will degenerate into increasing worldliness and ungodliness, culminating in Satan's final release and ultimate banishment.<sup>197</sup> Kildahl is incredulous that anyone could picture the millennium as an idyllic situation. He concludes, "It is not on this earth cursed by sin that we expect the fulfillment of the Lord's promises to His children about the state of love for which they are longing. Instead, we expect according to His promise new heavens and a new earth and therein shall righteousness dwell (2 Peter 3:13)."<sup>198</sup>

Although there are relatively few publications dealing with the millennium by Kildahl's colleagues in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, one can find some who generally agreed with him and others who took definite exception. Among the former was Olav Lee, a professor of Latin and Hebrew at St. Olaf College, where Kildahl had worked for many years. In his book, The Second Coming of Christ,<sup>199</sup> Lee defended his millennialism on the basis of Scripture and the confessions. He felt to object to a

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<sup>196</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>199</sup>Olav Lee, The Second Coming of Christ (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1931).

future millennium on the basis of the Augsburg Confession was to misunderstand its intention.<sup>200</sup> On the other hand, there were men like Jacob Tanner who succeeded Kildahl on the Luther faculty in the systematic theology department who categorically rejected any form of millennialism. In his book, The Thousand Years Not Pre-Millennial, Tanner expressed his conviction that a proper hermeneutic would resolve the differences in favor of a millennium being realized by the Church until the second Advent.<sup>201</sup>

#### J. Michael Reu

While the name of Reu is remembered today chiefly because of his catechetical and confessional research, his broad interests and assignments included commentary on traditional eschatological categories. In his treatment of "last things," Reu clearly propounds the millennial interpretation.<sup>202</sup>

Johan Michael Reu was born in Diebach, Bavaria, Germany on November 14, 1869. He received his early education in the Latin School of Oettingen as well as through private tutors. He also studied at Wilhelm Loehe's Mission Seminary at Neuendettelsau before coming to the

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<sup>200</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>201</sup>Jacob Tanner, The Thousand Years Not Pre-Millennial (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1934), p. 7. Though the consensus of contemporary theologians of the Norwegian Lutheran Church tradition is in agreement with Tanner (See, for example, Hans Schwarz, On the Way to the Future [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972], pp. 151-155), millennialism still remains among the "open questions" in the American Lutheran Church.

<sup>202</sup>The most extensive discussion of eschatology in Reu's writings appears in his Lutheran Dogmatics, 2 vols. (Dubuque, IA: Wartburg Seminary unpublished lectures, 1941-42), 2:221-258.

United States in 1889.<sup>203</sup> After his ordination in September of that year, Reu served as an assistant pastor at Mendota, Illinois, for a short while until he was called to pastor a congregation at Rock Falls. Here he labored until 1899 when he began a teaching career at Wartburg Seminary of the Iowa Synod which lasted until his death in 1943.

In addition to his duties as professor at Wartburg, which included the subjects of dogmatics, homiletics, catechetics, and exegesis, Reu was editor of Kirchliche Zeitschrift from 1904 until his death. In this capacity he published numerous articles and reviewed a large quantity of theological works. He was also the author of many works in the field of Luther research, catechetics, ethics, and the history of the Lutheran confessions.<sup>204</sup> Reu's confessional studies earned him the respect of many Lutherans. His volume on the Augsburg Confession

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<sup>203</sup>Loehe's influence on his students was profound. John Becker reports that "this German pastor had fired his pupils with zeal for the extension of the Kingdom of God, with love of erudition and with something of the mystical nature of his character. . ." Johan Michael Reu: A Book of Remembrance (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 62. Additionally, Loehe imparted to his students his predilection for a futuristic millennium. Loehe's chiliastic views are countered by J. Diedrich in "Wider den Chiliasmus," Lehre und Wehre, 4 (November 1858):328-339.

<sup>204</sup>Included in his literary output were Old Testament Pericopes (1901-1906); Katechismusauslegung (1904); Wartburg Lehrmittel, 8 vols. (1915); Catechetics and Ethics (1915); Quellen zur Geschichte des Kirchlichen Unterrichts zwischen 1530 und 1600, 11 vols. (1904-1935); Thirty-five Years of Luther Research (1917); Dr. Martin Luther's Catechism, History of Its Origin, Its Distribution and Its Use, (1929); The Augsburg Confession. A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction, (1930); and Luther and the Scriptures (1944) For his "Quellen" he received an honorary Doctor of Theology from Erlangen University, the second American in history to be honored in such a way. John Mattes considered this text a "splendid example of painstaking scholarship. It is and will remain for years to come an indispensable adjunct for the study of the Confession." *Ibid.*, p. 107.

demonstrates thorough research.<sup>205</sup> At his death, many accolades centered on his theological scholarship in the Lutheran tradition.<sup>206</sup>

Reu considered his conclusions regarding the millennium as among the so-called "open questions," that is, there is neither endorsement nor condemnation of the subject confessionally. After presenting his futuristic interpretation of Revelation 20, he comments, ". . . one may be a member of the Lutheran Church and yet reject the above-given presentation of the preliminary perfection, and that on the other hand he must be recognized as Lutheran who feels that his conscience is bound

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<sup>205</sup>Johan Michael Reu, The Augsburg Confession (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983). Reu's work contains 258 pages of text and notes that give the results of scholarly research to date (1930). Additionally, there are 513 pages of sources, the greater part of which are given in English translations. Many of these sources are taken from volumes inaccessible to the average student and place at the disposal of one engaged in research work a collection of the more important documents that deal with the Augsburg Confession. Other works by Reu on the Augsburg Confession included several series of scholarly articles which appeared in Kirchliche Zeitschrift, some mimeographed studies for his students, and numerous essays seeking to interpret its teachings.

<sup>206</sup>The esteem for Reu's work in general is witnessed in the comments of several of his contemporaries. August Pieper noted that "he [Reu] is a thorough and truthful man, not satisfied with mere words or only a show of confessionalism, but demanding action and sincerity," Herman Preus wrote, "He represented the Lutheran tradition of theological scholarship at its best." Preus put Reu in the category of Walther, Krauth, and U. V. Koren in terms of theological scholarship. The Augustana Bulletin contained the following recognition: "We respected his erudition and looked on him as a stalwart champion of conservative Lutheranism." Theodore Graebner echoed like sentiments, ". . . I pray that the Lord will raise to the American Lutheran Church and Wartburg Seminary also in the future men as devoted to the cause of confessional Lutheranism." A Book of Remembrance, pp. 117,120,126. These positive expressions regarding Reu's theological scholarship and confessional activity are not to be interpreted as endorsements of all of his conclusions. This is certainly the case in his interpretation of the confessions generally and Augsburg Confession, Article XVII particularly, as containing nothing that would call into question his stance as a millennialist.

by the Scripture texts and therefore defends and upholds the views presented in this chapter."<sup>207</sup> Reu believed it was unwarranted to reject millennialism as "un-Lutheran" on the basis of Augustana XVII. He too professed to condemn without qualification the condemnation of the "juedische opiniones" found there. But his demand was that "these words be made to express no more than they actually do express."<sup>208</sup> He concluded that Melanchthon had not changed his mind as to the focal point of the damnamus when he identified the Anabaptists as the true opponents in the Variata of 1540.<sup>209</sup>

Reu's outline of eschatology included the typical millennialist categories of a future conversion of the Jews,<sup>210</sup> an individual Antichrist,<sup>211</sup> a "binding" of Satan for a thousand years, and a bodily "first resurrection." Rejecting a spiritual construction of this initial resurrection in Revelation 20, he queries his detractors, ". . . how could those who died for the sake of the Word possibly be spiritually

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<sup>207</sup>Reu, Lutheran Dogmatics, 2:246.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>209</sup>Ibid.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., pp. 229-234. His defense is based chiefly on Romans 9 and 11 but alludes to passages also in Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah and the Gospels.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., pp. 234-240. Reu considers Luther's identification of the Antichrist with the papacy as "purely a historical judgment; it is no exegetical or dogmatical statement." Ibid., p. 238. At the same time he concedes that one may find the biblical marks of the Antichrist to be the characteristics of the Roman papacy while expecting the culmination of anti-Christianity "in an actual person of the last days." Ibid., p. 238.

dead and in need of spiritual resuscitation?<sup>212</sup> He seeks to bolster his interpretation with other passages such as Luke 14:14 and Romans 11:15. In the latter text, he sees a definite resurrection of the dead after the "restoration of Israel."<sup>213</sup>

Of particular interest in this survey of Reu's eschatological system is his defense of a future millennium. Following very deliberately a literalistic construction of Revelation 20:1-10, he emphasizes the activity of the Church during the millennium as a "reign with Christ."<sup>214</sup> Not wishing to discount the present position of believers as "priests and kings" from the moment of their justification, he nonetheless considers a "still higher form of rule" is indicated.<sup>215</sup> Though he is somewhat hesitant, Reu believes the reign of Christ during the millennium will be from heaven. Sharing with Him in that reign will be the resurrected martyrs. Meanwhile, on earth missionary work may well be carried on among those unbelievers who have lived through the judgment upon Antichrist. This evangelism will be carried on, posits Reu, in complete dependence upon Word and Sacraments.

The order of salvation has not been abolished, nor have cross and affliction been removed from the church as appears from the fact that at the very end it will have to endure the onslaught of those who even during this time have closed their hearts against Christ. This picture of the future which is based upon the prophetic statements, is obviously toto coele different from the Jewish dreams of the millennium. . .<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

Evidence that the missionary activity during the millennium is not met with a great deal of success is witnessed in the final attempt of Satan and his followers against the kingdom of God. In this final scene of human history, "these last enemies of the church of God are destroyed . . . . And now follows the ultimate consummation of the individual Christian and the church."<sup>217</sup>

As a member of the Iowa Synod, Reu became involved in the longstanding debate between the Missouri Synod and Iowa regarding the so-called "Four Points." These doctrinal issues, which had originally included chiliasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and "secret" societies, had loomed to the forefront in efforts spear-headed by the General Council in the nineteenth century to unite all Lutherans into one body. Siegmund Fritschel, an early leader of the Iowa Synod, described the setting in which chiliasm entered the debate between Iowa and Missouri.

This controversy also was forced upon it from outside. When chiliasm, which had formerly been tolerated by the Missouri Synod, was proscribed by it, and the Reverend Schieferdecker expelled, the latter applied to the Iowa Synod, and asked whether they considered him a heretic, who must be denied church-fellowship on account of his view of the Millennium. As the Synod, according to its confessional standpoint, answered this question negatively, it was accused of holding an un-Lutheran view with regard to the Millennium. This compelled the Synod to defend its position on this question, and to explain the kind of eschatological opinions or doctrines for which it claimed the toleration of the Church.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup>Ibid, pp. 245-246.

<sup>218</sup>The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), p. 70.

In his own time, Reu was an earnest advocate of Lutheran unity.<sup>219</sup> As such, he was frequently involved in dialogue with representatives of other synods. Among the doctrinal questions that entered the discussions repeatedly, particularly with the Missouri Synod, was chiliasm. Missouri's historic anti-chiliasm stance appeared to waver when the convention at St. Louis in 1938 granted tolerance to chiliasm as well as the other "four points."<sup>220</sup> Amidst the protests of other Missouri members, however, a return to the firm stand of the "Brief Statement" of 1932 soon eventuated as a result of resolutions at the Fort Wayne convention in 1941.<sup>221</sup> Reu's efforts at promoting a toleration of the "four points" for the sake of unity had failed. Despite this setback, he continued to encourage what he believed was the confessional legitimacy of millennialism to the end of his life. The last article that Reu wrote for the Kirchliche Zeitschrift, which appeared in 1943, was entitled "Minimum Requirements of the Establishing of Church Fellowship." In his survey, Reu discusses the relationship of eschatology to the fellowship question.

To say, however, that the second antithesis in Article Seventeen would exclude every form of millennial theory is an untrue and unjust statement and shows a lamentable lack of historical knowledge . . . . Convictions, however, such as those that II Thess. 2 and

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<sup>219</sup>Two of Reu's lectures, combined under the title, In the Interest of Lutheran Unity, were sent to all the pastors of eight Lutheran church bodies in an effort to resolve differences impeding progress toward unity. J. Michael Reu, In the Interest of Lutheran Unity (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1940).

<sup>220</sup>J. Buenger, "The Dogmatic-Historical Background of the Present Union Movement," The Confessional Lutheran, 3 (February 1942):18.

<sup>221</sup>Paul H. Burgdorf, "The Doctrine of the Last Things in the American Lutheran Church," The Confessional Lutheran, 4 (February 1943):17.



other Scripture passages point to a still future personal Antichrist; that Rom. 11:25, 26 predicts the future conversion of Israel; that Rev. 20:4 prophesies the physical resurrection of the martyrs, and that the thousand years in Rev. 20 are still lying in the future--we do not hold as a church divisive and a hindrance for establishing church fellowship.<sup>222</sup>

Though evidence is lacking regarding the influence of Reu's eschatological convictions beyond the American Lutheran Church, it is apparent that there were some within the ALC who shared his conclusions. Among these was Emil Matzner whose article, "A Sane Eschatology" appeared in the Wartburg Seminary Quarterly in 1947. Matzner proves himself a thorough-going millennialist, following in the steps of his predecessor, J. Michael Reu.<sup>223</sup>

#### "Free Movements"

A history of millennialism in American Lutheranism includes a consideration of certain "free" movements that have existed as would-be partners with the various synods. Among these movements, the Lutheran Bible Institutes<sup>224</sup> and the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement are signifi-

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<sup>222</sup>J. Michael Reu, "Minimum Requirements for the Establishing of Church Fellowship," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, Jahrgang 67 (December 1943):598-599. The "historical knowledge" Reu refers to is that Article XVII is directed against the "Jewish opinions" of the Anabaptists. *Ibid.*, p. 598.

<sup>223</sup>Emil W. Matzner, "A Sane Eschatology," Wartburg Seminary Quarterly, 10 (September 1947):3-17.

<sup>224</sup>Although the focus of this study will be upon the Lutheran Bible Institute located in St Paul, and later in Minneapolis, affiliate schools have been located at Teaneck, New Jersey; Seattle, Washington; and Los Angeles, California. Only the latter two exist as distinct Bible institutes today. The Teaneck school closed as has Golden Valley Lutheran College, LBI's Minneapolis successor. Other Lutheran Bible schools currently operating exist at Omaha, Nebraska (inter-Lutheran), Fergus Falls, Minnesota (Church of the Lutheran Brethren), and Minneapolis (Association of Free Lutheran Congregations). All of these schools have had similar curriculum and structure. It is of interest to note

cant to our discussion. These movements have concentrated chiefly on Christian education and evangelism. Their eschatological orientation has been largely millennialist.

#### The Lutheran Bible Institute

The institution known in America as the "Bible school" has its roots in the great evangelical revivals which swept through Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The results of these revivals included renewed interest in the study of Scripture to the end that evangelism could be carried out more effectively. "Mission schools" were founded, for example, in Norway and Sweden which were of significant aid to the national churches in their home and foreign mission endeavors.

In the early years of the twentieth century, a number of non-Lutheran Bible schools had been founded in America, among them the well-known Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. These institutions attracted many Lutheran young men and women who were interested in practical training for service in the church. Concerned that these youth have a Lutheran setting for their education, an attempt was made to begin a Lutheran Bible school in Chicago in 1918. Because of the "superficial nature" of the instruction, this school closed within two years.<sup>225</sup> However, a similar attempt in Minneapolis--St. Paul resulted in the beginning of the Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI) in the fall of 1919. From the outset, LBI wanted to be an inter-Lutheran venture, "independent

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that all of them remain at least sympathetic to millennialism.

<sup>225</sup>G. Everett Arden, Augustana Heritage (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1963), pp. 312-313. Arden reports that some of the lecture series in the Chicago school were said to cover an entire book of the Bible in three hours.

of the control of any one church body, belonging to all Lutherans alike, and serving all churches equally."<sup>226</sup> The first dean of the institute was Samuel M. Miller.

A graduate of Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois, Miller expressed gratitude to C. E. Lindberg for his influence.

Dr. Lindberg was my spiritual and doctrinal teacher and mentor. When I was an immature student I accepted his guidance to an understanding of the doctrines of our Lutheran faith as based upon the Word of God. I have now studied the Bible independently for thirty years and I have never found any biblical reason for rejecting the Lutheran doctrine as it was taught by Dr. Lindberg. There are some minor details of eschatology in which my views have differed from those of Dr. Lindberg. So also at the Lutheran Bible Institute there have been differences of eschatological opinions amongst the faculty members. But on all the doctrines that are covered in the Confessional writings of the Lutheran church the LBI faculty stands as one.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup>Ibid., p. 313. Although LBI increasingly became inter-Lutheran in representation and practice, its early years were characterized by significant influence from the Augustana Synod.

<sup>227</sup>Samuel Martin Miller, "At the Dean's Desk," The Bible Banner, (June 1943), p. 1. The concern for confessional allegiance is attested to by Miller in one of his last editorials in The Bible Banner. "LBI must be confessional. We claim to be a Lutheran Bible Institute. We exist to train our Lutheran young people that they may serve Christ in the Lutheran church. The doctrines of the Lutheran church are tried and tested. We must never be afraid to positively assert them. They rest firmly on scriptural foundation. Our Lutheran young people must learn to know especially the Augsburg Confession and Luther's two catechisms so that they will be assured that our Lutheran church teaches doctrines that come forth out of the Scriptures." Samuel Miller, "The Future of the Bible Study Movement in the Lutheran Church," The Bible Banner, (October 1945), p. 3. In a tribute to Miller upon his retirement from active leadership at LBI, Lawrence Stavig validates the integrity of Miller's professed concerns. "We are grateful for the sound, confessional Lutheranism which has characterized the leadership of LBI . . . That the Bible Study Movement has remained distinctively Lutheran and a servant of the Church is no small degree due to the wise leadership God gave to it in Samuel Miller. Lawrence M. Stavig, "We Are Grateful," The Bible Banner, January 1946, p. 3. This approbation was echoed at the death of Miller by a long-time faculty member. ". . . the LBI under Dr. Miller took a confessional stance. Dr. Miller was strongly oriented to the confessional doctrines of the Lutheran Church." Wilson Fagerberg, "A Tribute to Dr. Samuel Miller," Evangelize, Sept.-Oct. 1975, p. 4.

Though the millennialist position was the most prevalent among the faculty at LBI, the latitude in the minor categories of eschatology was a reality. C. J. Sodergren, H. J. Stolee, among others, as colleagues of Miller, held the traditional Lutheran views regarding eschatology.<sup>228</sup> The faculty considered the millennial issue an "open question."<sup>229</sup>

While Miller wrote extensively on prophetic themes, his major text was The Word of Prophecy, which he co-authored with a colleague on the LBI faculty, Halvar G. Randolph. Espousing a millennialist interpretation, the authors explain that their conclusions are entirely personal and they do not intend to speak for the Lutheran Bible Institute as such.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup>Sodergren felt free to castigate the Scofield Bible with its eschatological system based on "crass literalism." He spoke of the "untold harm" by constructing a "complicated itinerary" of Christ's return. C. J. Sodergren, "Looking Forward," The Bible Banner, September 1937, p. 7. Sodergren also authored a text on eschatology entitled The Future Life in which the subject of the millennium is ignored. C. J. Sodergren, The Future Life (Minneapolis: The Lutheran Bible Institute, 1935). Stolee acknowledged he was "out of patience with dispensationalists." H. J. Stolee, "Holy Baptism--in Doctrine and Life," The Bible Banner, February 1938, pp. 8-9. Amidst a long series of articles on prophecy from a millennialist viewpoint by Miller and Randolph, Stolee responded to a reader's question regarding LBI's stance on prophecy. He said LBI had no "accepted view of prophecy" despite the impression that might be made by the articles of Miller and Randolph. H. J. Stolee, "Questions Answered," The Bible Banner, April 1936, pp. 8-9.

<sup>229</sup>In commending to The Bible Banner readership a book by Jacob Tanner entitled The Thousand Years Not Pre-Millennial, Sodergren commented that the Lutheran confessions are open on the millennium. He suggested that Tanner's argument must proceed on the basis of Scripture alone since the confessions neither condemn nor endorse a millennial position. C. J. Sodergren, "Book Review," The Bible Banner, October 1934, p. 15.

<sup>230</sup>Miller and Randolph, foreword.

After surveying various schools of eschatological study, Miller and Randolph proceed to enunciate principles of prophetic interpretation. Quoting Luther to the effect that a literal interpretation is preferential and that Scripture interprets itself, the authors attempt to illustrate the soundness of taking the meaning of the prophetic word to be "as literal as the form of language allows."<sup>231</sup> It is on this basis that they have opted for a futurist interpretation. Accordingly, they apply many Scriptural passages to a future spiritual and national restoration of Israel.<sup>232</sup> They see the Kingdom of God manifested during a future millennium as the "Kingdom of Justice," in contradistinction to the present expression of God's Kingdom in the Church and the ultimate manifestation as the "Kingdom of Glory."<sup>233</sup> They identify "two stages" in Christ's coming, one for His Church as it is "raptured" from the earth prior to the tribulation, and the second with the Church, as it descends with Him in His coming to judge the world.<sup>234</sup> They do not find it incongruous that the Roman papacy was identified by the Reformers as the Antichrist. However, they do not believe the papacy represents the complete development.<sup>235</sup> Revelation 20 is viewed as a picture of future events following the second advent. They defend a total cessation of

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<sup>231</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>232</sup>Among the passages cited are Hosea 3:4-5; Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1, and Ezekiel 36:24-30, Rev. 1:7, Rom. 11:26; Jer. 23:3-8, and Acts 3:19-21.

<sup>233</sup>Miller and Randolph, pp. 44-45.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-55.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

Satanic activity as he is bound for a thousand years;<sup>236</sup> they understand the chapter to speak of two bodily resurrections, one prior to the millennium and one after;<sup>237</sup> they envision a literal thousand-year reign of Christ which shall include a "theocratic government" on earth.<sup>238</sup> They profess to have derived each of these conclusions from a literalistic approach to Scripture. They appeal to early and late commentators on the subject in an attempt to portray a degree of historical continuity.<sup>239</sup> They acknowledge that earnest students of the Scripture disagree with their conclusions and they seek to answer some of the objections.<sup>240</sup> It is their conviction that their millennial position is allowed by the Augsburg Confession and they derive support from the comments of G. H. Gerberding to this effect.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>236</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-88.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid., pp. 89-98.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid., pp. 99-109.

<sup>239</sup>Reference is made to such early figures as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Lactantius, as well as modern Lutheran exponents such as C. E. Lindberg, J. A. Seiss, J. N. Kildahl, O. Hallesby, and G. H. Gerberding.

<sup>240</sup>Among those whom Miller and Randolph seek to answer in their defense of millennialism are Jacob Tanner and Conrad E. Bergendoff. However, they quote Bergendoff approvingly in his effort to place certain questions of eschatology in proper perspective for the sake of Christian unity. "Certainly then it ill behooves a Christian to make eschatological problems a standard by which to judge one's brethren." Miller and Randolph, p. 102.

<sup>241</sup>Supra, p. 91-92. In his abbreviated commentary on the book of Revelation, Miller speaks also of the alleged neutrality of the Lutheran confessions on millennialism, claiming that "the Lutheran Confessions do not dogmatize on prophetic subjects." Following that lead, Miller says, "I must respect the opinions of those sincere students of the Bible who differ with me on prophetic subjects and they ought to respect my opinions." Furthermore, the condemnation in Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession is, according to Miller's reading of Melanchthon, "directed

Other writers of a millennialist persuasion who were affiliated with the Lutheran Bible Institute in more recent years include A. W. Knock and Theodore Hax. Knock prepared a study guide on prophecy in which his millennialism is pronounced.<sup>242</sup> His doctrinal study, Pillars of Truth, also contains a chapter on "last things." He expresses his appreciation for the prophetic understanding of men like J. A. Seiss, C. E. Lindberg, M. Reu, and Samuel Miller.<sup>243</sup> Hax, as a teacher at the California Lutheran Bible School in Los Angeles, wrote a series of articles on prophetic subjects which appeared in the pages of Evangelize, a publication of the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement.<sup>244</sup>

Because LBI never adopted an official position on eschatology, its connections with millennialism tended to "ebb and flow" with the interpretation and emphasis of its faculty. In recent years, although millennialists still have been part of the faculties of the institutes, there has not been attention to the millennium in terms of publications

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against the fanatical Anabaptists who said that the time had come for them to prepare the world for the coming of Christ by killing off all who did not agree with them. They were post-millennialists" Miller insists, "believing that Christ would come after a millennium." Samuel M. Miller The Revelation of Jesus Christ (St. Paul, Minnesota: published by the author, 1926), pp. 86-87. Theodore Graebner decries the complexities foisted upon eschatology by millennial writers and uses Miller as an example of such complications. Theodore Graebner, War in the Light of Prophecy, A Reply to Modern Chiliasm (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), pp. 23-24.

<sup>242</sup>A. W. Knock, Prophecy (Minneapolis: The Lutheran Evangelistic Movement, 1962).

<sup>243</sup>A. W. Knock, Pillars of Truth (Minneapolis: The Lutheran Bible Institute, 1954), p. 3.

<sup>244</sup>Because of his close connections also with the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement, Hax's position will be reviewed in a subsequent survey of that movement. Infra, pp. 118-119.

and ministries. It is evidently considered inconsequential to its primary mission.

#### The Lutheran Evangelistic Movement

Evald J. Conrad is a major figure in the formation of what has come to be called the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. As a young parish pastor in the Augustana Synod, Conrad invited fellow pastors and other interested persons to his Minneapolis church for an evangelism conference in 1937. As a result of this conference, the Inter-Synodical Lutheran Committee on Evangelism was formed. The purpose of this committee was to encourage other congregations to host similar conferences. Incorporated in 1945 as the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement (LEM), the first president was Conrad himself.

Conrad was concerned to define the relationship of the LEM to the synods as well as to outline its doctrinal convictions. "Our Movement is not a separatistic movement. We love the Lutheran Church and want to do all we can to be a blessing in it.<sup>245</sup> His summary of the confessional position was brief and clear. "We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God. We adhere unreservedly to the doctrines and teachings of the Lutheran church as set forth in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small

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<sup>245</sup>Evald J. Conrad, "Testimony and a Challenge," Evangelize, July 1948, p. 3.



Catechism."<sup>246</sup> The publications of the LEM have professed a continued consciousness of these theological under-pinnings.

From the earliest moment of its existence, the LEM has demonstrated special interest in eschatology. Indeed, Conrad made an appeal for the study of prophecy in an early editorial.

We need to give ourselves to a deeper and fuller study of the prophetic word so that we are able to say, "Thus saith the Lord," concerning prophecy. There has been a great neglect here. So often our Lutherans hear the interpretation of the prophetic word from the Adventist, the Jehovah's Witness or some other sect. We gain nothing by just ridiculing all study of prophecy. Let us make a thorough search of the Bible on this subject.<sup>247</sup>

The pages of Evangelize over the years as well as the programs at conferences sponsored by the LEM give indication that an attempt was made to heed Conrad's plea.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup>Evald J. Conrad, "Doctrinal Standards," Evangelize, January 1947), p. 4. The limitation in confessional subscription to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism has been typical of churches and groups influenced by Lutheran pietism. No quarrel with other parts of the Book of Concord is specified. It is commonly believed that the above documents are a sufficient confessional base. Support for this limited subscription is derived from statements in the Lutheran confessions to the effect that the Augustana is sufficiently descriptive of the Lutheran interpretation of the Christian faith. The Book of Concord, ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), e.g., pp. 201, 502, 507-508, and 633.

<sup>247</sup>Evald J. Conrad, "Editorial," Evangelize, April 1946, p. 8.

<sup>248</sup>One of the first LEM "prophetic" conferences was held May 5-12, 1946 at St. Paul's Lutheran Church (ELC) in Minneapolis. It was led by J. O. Gisselquist and Joseph L. Stump. At the annual mid-winter conference in Minneapolis in 1947, E. L. Scotvold preached on "The Blessed Hope." He explained at the outset that while he respected the various views on prophetic subjects, he was a millennialist. "Pre-millennialism is not an un-Lutheran doctrine," he declared; "men like Skovgaard-Peterson, Hallesby, Odlund, Ludvig Hope and J. N. Kildahl are prominent Lutherans who are associated with pre-millennial views." Orloue N. Gisselquist, "The Mid-Winter Conference," Evangelize, April 1947, p. 9. At the 1952 mid-winter conference, Wilbur Smith, a Reformed millennialist, was a main speaker on the subject of Bible prophecy.

Four of the most prominent speakers and writers on prophetic subjects in the LEM have been J. O. Gisselquist, Theodore Hax, A. W. Knock, and Arnold Stone.<sup>249</sup> All have been millennialist in outlook. All have believed their position to be compatible with the Lutheran confessions. Hax specifically addressed himself to the relationship of millennialism with the Augsburg Confession, Article XVII. He asserted that in reality, the article condemns post-millennialism, not millennialism. Further, he maintained "No well-instructed futurist believes or teaches that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed." It was Hax's conclusion that the Anabaptists were the real target of Melanchthon's damnamus, according to his statement to that effect in the Variata of 1540.<sup>250</sup>

Among those Lutherans quoted by Hax in support of his millennial views are J. A. Seiss, C. E. Lindberg and Samuel Miller. Hax recognized that many conservative Lutherans disagreed with him on his literal rendition of Revelation 20. Nonetheless, he said, "Many other Lutherans, including the writer of this article are fully convinced that not only is there not a single Scripture which contradicts a literal thousand-year reign of Christ, but that the 20th chapter of Revelation taken at face

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<sup>249</sup>Gisselquist, Knock, and Stone have all served as official evangelists for the LEM, responding to invitations to conduct evangelistic services in local congregations. Hax was a teacher at the California Lutheran Bible School in Los Angeles and was also closely associated with the LEM as a Bible teacher at camps and conferences.

<sup>250</sup>Theodore B. Hax, "Signs of the Times," Evangelize, March 1964, p. 12.

value is in beautiful harmony with the total word of God."<sup>251</sup> Hax believed he was being consistent with the Lutheran hermeneutical axiom, sensus literalis est. Just as one believes the central verities of the Christian faith to be literally true (for example, the virgin birth of Christ, His bodily resurrection, and so forth) and just as one interprets the many Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ's first coming literally, so one should approach the prophecies concerning the second advent, Hax argued. He observed,

Indeed, there is not a single prophecy of the first coming that was fulfilled literally. Has not God Himself taught us how to interpret yet unfulfilled prophecy? Then why will otherwise sound evangelical Christians suddenly spiritualize prophecies the moment a literal interpretation would cause them to believe in a future age of righteousness under the personal reign of Christ?<sup>252</sup>

The pastors and teachers associated with the LEM add no innovations to the millennialism noted already among American Lutherans. Their concern is to convince their own generation that millennialism is not only an option for confessional Lutherans, but also a worthy one at that. There have been few arguments from their constituency.

#### Church Groups

It has been observed that a number of American Lutheran church bodies have defended millennialism or chiliasm as among the "open questions." They have not considered millennialism a barrier to church fellowship or even union. It has also been noted that other Lutheran groups have considered millennialism a hindrance to such fellowship. They have contended that the Lutheran confessions, specifically the

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<sup>251</sup>Hax, "Signs of the Times," Evangelize, November 1960, p. 12.

<sup>252</sup>Hax, "Our Blessed Hope," Evangelize, November 1957, p. 4.

Augsburg Confession, Article XVII, accurately reflect the biblical condemnation not only of carnal conceptions of a millennium but also of any construction which places the millennium in the future. Occupying a unique position among American Lutherans in openly advancing millennialism as an official doctrinal position is the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

#### Church of the Lutheran Brethren

Founded in 1900, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren traces its earliest roots to revival movements in Norway in the nineteenth century. The Haugean awakening, led by the lay-evangelist, Hans Nielsen Hauge, is identified as among the positive influences upon the spiritual forebears of the church. With warm approbation the Haugean principles are recounted,

Christianity is something to be experienced, which experience involves a spiritual awakening, conversion, and a separated life; worship is simple and informal in contrast to ritualism and formalism; lay activity, the practice of Christian testimony in public as well as in private, is to be encouraged.<sup>253</sup>

Similar impact is attributed to the so-called "Johnsonian revival" led by two theological professors at the University of Oslo, Gisle Johnson and Carl P. Caspari. This spiritual awakening was characterized by "a return to a serious, systematic, and careful Bible study, and manifested by an emphasis upon living a godly life."<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup>Quoted by Joseph H. Levang from E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold's text, The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960)1:126. Joseph H. Levang, The Church of the Lutheran Brethren, 1900-1975 (Fergus Falls, MN: Lutheran Brethren Publishing Company, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

Many pastors and laity who migrated from Norway to the United States in the late 1800's carried with them the Haugean and Johnsonian emphasis. It was among such people that the Church of the Lutheran Brethren was organized in December of 1900. Justification for its separate existence was attributed chiefly to the "critical issue" of church membership.<sup>255</sup>

In the "Constitution and By-Laws" of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, the eschatological convictions are framed succinctly. "He [Jesus Christ] will come a second time personally, bodily and visibly to gather the believers unto Himself, and to establish His millennial kingdom. Finally, He will judge the living and the dead and make an eternal separation between believers and unbelievers."<sup>256</sup> This millennialist interpretation of the second advent is no late arrival in the synod. Indeed, this position has been a constitutional item since its inception in 1900. Among the prominent supporters of millennialism was E. M. Broen, who was an early president of the synod. Though unable to document influences upon Broen's thinking in this regard, Lutheran Brethren church historian Joseph Levang suggests that Broen's involvement with large inter-denominational missionary conferences in the late 1800s may have at least stimulated his interest in eschatological subjects.

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<sup>255</sup>The church membership issue surfaced as a divisive factor between the former Lutheran Free Church and the founding fathers of the Lutheran Brethren. Influenced by leaders of the "Free Church" of Norway, the latter contended that the Biblical congregation "is composed only of true believers; the unsaved have no part in the government of the church." Ibid., p. 16. This point has continued to be the major reason for non-involvement in any merger negotiations with other Lutheran synods. Ibid., pp. 243, 382, 383.

<sup>256</sup>Constitution and By-Laws, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (Fergus Falls, MN: Church of the Lutheran Brethren, 1966), p. 1.

The imminent second coming of Christ was frequently alluded to in these conferences as a powerful incentive for world evangelism. Among the mission leaders of millennialist persuasion with whom Broen had contact was A. T. Pierson.<sup>257</sup>

Involvement with the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement in its camps, conferences, and evangelistic meetings has served to reinforce pastors and laity of the Lutheran Brethren in their millennial views. Leaders of the LEM who have been of special influence, according to Omar Gjerness of Lutheran Brethren Schools, were Evald J. Conrad and J. O. Gisselquist.<sup>258</sup>

Gjerness himself, as professor of systematic theology at Lutheran Brethren Schools since 1962, has exercised considerable influence in terms of validating and expositing the synod's eschatological position.<sup>259</sup> He recognizes the uniqueness of the synod eschatologically and traces the existing a-millennial position of most Lutherans to Roman Catholic theology. He considers a-millennialism inconsistent with the hermeneutical axiom, sensus literalis est. "We [Lutherans] insist on a literal interpretation of God's Word in every other doctrine. When it comes to the millennial kingdom, we begin to interpret allegorically.

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<sup>257</sup>As a Presbyterian minister, Pierson was a student of missionary history, comparative religion, as well as prophecy. His dispensational view served him well as a consulting editor for the Scofield Bible. J. D. Douglas, ed., The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 780.

<sup>258</sup>Supra, pp. 116-119.

<sup>259</sup>Gjerness styles the Lutheran Brethren synod as dispensational in prophetic outlook. Omar Gjerness, "Answers for Today," Faith and Fellowship, December 1984, p. 14.

However, our Lutheran Brethren Church is committed to the Pre-Millennial view of the return of the Lord."<sup>260</sup>

Aware that many Lutherans hold the conviction that millennialism is incompatible with the formulas of the Augsburg Confession, Gjerness suggests a more careful reading of Article XVII. "The condemnation is directed against post-millennialism," he asserts. "We thoroughly subscribe to Article 17."<sup>261</sup> H. Fred Nofer, also a faculty member at the Lutheran Brethren Schools in the early 1960s, concurs with Gjerness's judgment. He identifies the particular form of post-millennialism as directly associated with the Zwickau "prophets."

These groups were led by Thomas Münzer who taught that Christians should war, if necessary, to bring in the kingdom of God, which kingdom he and others claimed to have set up. The results of their teaching and politics were characterized by legalized polygamy, community of goods, lawlessness, and anarchy. All this was claimed to be a bringing in of the millennium. Hence, when in 1530, the Augsburg Confession was drawn up and the subject of chiliasm was dealt with, it was only natural that such practices as mentioned above should be condemned. And so they were in the seventeenth article. Of a certainty, we cannot say that the reformers had more than this in mind.<sup>262</sup>

Rather than condemning millennialism, Nofer believes that if any inferences are to be drawn from Article XVII regarding views of the millennium, "premillennialism alone fulfills the inference of the Confession."<sup>263</sup>

There are no indications that commitment to millennialism as an official stance is abating in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

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<sup>260</sup>Omar Gjerness, "Christ for Us in the Rapture," Faith and Fellowship, September 1960, p. 4.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid.

<sup>262</sup>H. Fred Nofer, "Chiliasm and the Augsburg Confession," Faith and Fellowship, February 15, 1958, p. 5.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid.

While there may not be unanimity regarding such aspects of millennialism as the relationship of the Church to the "Great Tribulation" (the Pre-Tribulationist and Post-Tribulationist debate), the synod remains firm in its interpretation of a future millennium.

#### The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

While there has been no official endorsement of an eschatological position relative to the millennium, a millennialist interpretation characterizes a majority of pastors and laity in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC). Tracing its theological mooring to the Lutheran Reformation as well as to historic Lutheran pietism, the AFLC originated in 1962 as a professed continuation of the polity and piety of the former Lutheran Free Church.<sup>264</sup>

Of Scandinavian extraction, the early Lutheran Free Church was largely composed of late nineteenth-century immigrants, many of whom had been profoundly influenced by the Haugean revival tradition as well as the later "Johnsonian" awakening.<sup>265</sup> A chief figure in the formation of the new church body was Georg Sverdrup, professor and president of Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis. His emphasis on the local congregation as "the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth." and the goal of working for "free and living" congregations shaped the course of the Lutheran Free Church in large measure. While a well-rounded theologian

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<sup>264</sup>The Lutheran Free Church was formed in 1897 after a group known as the "Friends of Augsburg" found difficulties in deriving support for the goals of Augsburg Seminary in the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Free Church merged with the American Lutheran Church in 1963. The most complete history of the LFC is Eugene L. Fevold's The Lutheran Free Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969).

<sup>265</sup>Supra, p. 120.



in terms of study and teaching, he was more interested in ecclesiology than eschatology.

Though millennialism was a decided option in the former Lutheran Free Church, this aspect of eschatological study received little attention in its publications.<sup>266</sup> Writers were satisfied to treat the major components of end-time events with little interest in debating the finer points.

A greater interest in the full-range of eschatological subjects is noted in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. The infusion of new pastors and professors into its congregations and schools from other Lutheran groups helps account for this situation at least in its earliest history. At its first pastors' conference in 1964, one of the presentations dealt with Bible prophecy and was led by a newcomer from the American Lutheran Church. The first professors of the seminary, which began operation in 1964, were millennialists. Clair Jennings came from the American Lutheran Church and Uuras Saarnivaara had taught previously at the Suomi Synod seminary in Hancock, Michigan. Their eschatological views were generally supported by fellow-professor, John Strand, who also served as the first president of the AFLC.

Saarnivaara belongs to that class of prophetic interpretation known as historic (or classical) millennialism. As such, he had little affinity for "Darbyan" dispensationalism which he believed erred in its espousal of a "pre-tribulation rapture." He understood the Scriptures

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<sup>266</sup>One of the few LFC pastors to publish his millennial views was Hamar Benson. In 1961 a devotional commentary on the Book of Revelation was released in which his futurist interpretation is manifest. Hamar Benson, The Coming Lord Jesus Christ. (New York: The American Press, 1961).

to teach a single second advent of Christ which would usher in the millennial reign. The Church, he maintained, would go through the "great tribulation" and likely suffer at the hands of a personal Anti-christ.<sup>267</sup>

It is Saarnivaara's opinion that those who hold to the a-millennial view are not cognizant that they are following an "invention" of Tichonius and Augustine. Before their time, he claims this interpretation was unknown to the Christian Church.<sup>268</sup> Saarnivaara is oblivious of any conflict of his millennial views with Article XVII.

This passage does not reject the biblical teaching of the millennium, but only certain Jewish opinions, which really are to be rejected. The Bible does not teach that the saints will possess the kingdom before the resurrection of the dead. The millennial kingdom will come after the resurrection of the righteous. It will not be a worldly kingdom, and the saints will not actually possess it. It is Christ who will then rule, and He will use His risen saints as His priests and judges (officials). The saints will not annihilate or suppress the godless; it is Christ who will destroy them in the battle of Armageddon before the millennium. Thus, this statement of the Augsburg Confession is in a complete harmony with the Biblical teaching of a millennium.<sup>269</sup>

Another early instructor at the AFLC seminary was Clair Jennings. As a seminary student, Jennings had become a millennialist after attending a conference of the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement.<sup>270</sup> His interpre-

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<sup>267</sup>Uuras Saarnivaara, "Ever Faster Toward Rome," The Lutheran Ambassador, December 1, 1964, p. 4; "Antichrist and Babylon the Great" The Lutheran Ambassador, February 9, 1965, pp. 4-6. Unlike many millennialists, Saarnivaara identifies the Antichrist as a religious figure, the Roman pope, and defends this view on the basis of the Smalcald Articles.

<sup>268</sup>Saarnivaara, Armageddon--Before and After (Minneapolis: Published by the author, 1967), p. 94.

<sup>269</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>270</sup>Supra, pp. 116-119.

tation is best characterized as dispensational millennialism. He distinguished a coming of Christ for His saints from a coming with His saints. A secret "rapture" of the Church precedes a seven-year "tribulation." "Following this period," Jennings writes, "Jesus comes . . . with those whom He took out of the world earlier (these are now robed in fine linen) and together they will reign on earth for a thousand years (this is called the millennium)."<sup>271</sup>

With the addition of Iver Olson to the seminary faculty in 1965, the traditional Lutheran understanding regarding the millennium, a-millennialism, was well represented. At the same time, Olson did not consider the millennial issue of sufficient worth to debate or belabor. He believed the essential features of eschatology constituted sufficient basis for unity and fellowship. This attitude has generally character-

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<sup>271</sup>Clair Jennings, "Signs of the End" Evangelize, April 1963, p. 13. Other millennialist writers and teachers in the AFLC have included Knut Gjesfjeld--"Christ or Antichrist?" The Lutheran Ambassador, June 11, 1968, pp. 13-14. Harvey Carlson--"At the Master's Feet" The Lutheran Ambassador, July 7-Dec. 8, 1981. In a series of articles relative to the second coming of Christ, the author urges his readers to test his conclusions for themselves in a diligent search of the Scriptures. He acknowledged the influence of the Augustana Synod and the Lutheran Bible Institute movement in helping to shape his convictions on the subject of prophecy. Herbert L. Franz--Sign of Our Times (Cloquet, MN: St. Paul's Lutheran Church, n.d.). Franz was a student of Saarnivaara at Suomi Seminary and has long been active in the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. His wide-ranging radio ministry frequently highlights prophetic themes. A doctrinal text published by the AFLC seminary also is millennial in eschatology--Carl F. Wisløff, I Know In Whom I Believe, trans. Karl Stendal. (Minneapolis, MN: AFLC Seminary Press, 1983). The author, however, acknowledges the varying interpretations throughout church history and concludes, "We cannot settle these questions here. When the day of fulfillment comes, we shall see which interpretation is correct. The Christian's primary calling is to be watching and ready when Jesus comes" (John 13:19; 14:29), p. 144. Arnold Stone, though not a member of the AFLC, taught the Book of Revelation in its Bible school for years. An outline of his millennial position appeared in Evangelize. Arnold Stone, "An Outline of End-Time Events," Evangelize, April 1964, p. 23.

ized the AFLC since the time of Olson's active ministry. While published materials on the subject have more often been millennialistic, an irenic spirit has prevailed. Robert Lee, while acknowledging the different understanding among AFLC members on prophetic subjects, expressed the potential for unity, amidst diversity . . .

Divided we stand . . . is it true? Yes, if this means that sincere Christians can come to different conclusions on the meaning of the prophetic portions of Scripture.

But, united we stand . . . not fighting about the future, but holding our convictions in love, certain that Jesus Christ is coming again, trusting in Him that we might be ready for His appearing, proclaiming the message of salvation that many might be saved while there is still time.<sup>272</sup>

The AFLC considers the millennium issue an "open question." That is, it is not convinced that the Lutheran confessions have determined a particular stance. It countenances each of the historic positions in its membership. It acknowledges the lack of unanimity among Lutherans historically on this matter and is content to wait for the final consummation for absolute certainty. In commentary on Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession, Larry Severson summarizes the outlook and emphasis of the AFLC.

. . . to this day tension exists among Lutheran Christians concerning the events surrounding the Second Coming of our Lord. Lutherans differ in opinion when we ask the question, how will Christ return for judgment? The controversy centers in the Book of Revelation, especially chapter 20, which speaks of a 1000-year reign of the saints with Christ, known as the Millennium. Certainly there are greater truths brought forth in Article XVII which we best heed.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup>Robert Lee, "The Return of Christ--Divided We Stand?" The Lutheran Ambassador, April 1981, pp. 3,12.

<sup>273</sup>Larry Severson, "Christ's Return for Judgment," in The Augsburg Confession: Its Meaning For Our Day, ed. Raynard J. Huglen (Minneapolis: Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 1980), p. 91.

It is clear that millennialism has found many adherents in the Lutheran Church in this country. This phenomenon has not been limited to a particular period of American church history or to a particular synod of Lutherans. In most church bodies there have been at least a few who have been sympathetic toward it if not endorsing it. Influences have been varied but the most predictable portion of Lutheranism that has embraced the tenets of millennialism have been those of the pietist tradition. Spener, the "father" of Lutheran pietism, who looked with optimism for "better times" for the Church, and Bengel, the seventeenth-century exegete, did much to lend credibility and respectability in some Lutheran circles. Rather than a backward step in serious exegesis, pietists claimed that the movement represented a "back-to-the-Bible" movement coupled with a willingness to test the traditional dogmatic categories with the Scripture. Mere tradition must give way to the "tried and true" in their outlook.

Millennialism is on the wane currently in American Lutheranism. This decline has coincided with the rising dominance of liberal scholarship in many Lutheran seminaries and colleges. The concept of a millennium, whether past, present, or future is relegated to the absorption of apocalyptic interpolations in the early centuries of the Christian era.

On the other hand, Lutheran orthodoxy has experienced a resurgence in parts of Lutheranism. The historic confessions have served as an encouraging bulwark against the onslaughts of critical exegesis. Fundamentals of the historic Christian faith have been the subjects of assault. The apologetic has addressed the pertinent doctrines. The idea of a millennium has not been deemed worthy of fresh biblical

research owing to the reverence for traditional interpretation as well as the seeming irrelevance of the issue in current debate. This satisfaction with the traditional viewpoint has been reinforced by the extravagances observed in some popular presentations published on the subject of millennialism. Lutheran orthodoxy is properly revulsed.

## CHAPTER IV

### MILLENNIALISM IN LIGHT OF AUGSBURG CONFESSION

#### ARTICLE XVII

The existence of millennialism in American Lutheranism is well established. Many Lutheran synods have had varying degrees of association with it. A few Lutheran church groups have determined a specific confessional stance. It is their conviction that the Lutheran confessions categorically reject every form of millennialism.<sup>1</sup> This rejection is based particularly on Augsburg Confession, Article XVII, and generally on the entire tenor of the Book of Concord. There are other Lutherans, however, who simply believe that the millennium is an "open question" as far as the Lutheran confessions are concerned.<sup>2</sup> They maintain that a particular brand of chiliasm is the subject of the confessions' condemnation. While some might wish the confessions had been so broad, they believe that a general examination of the validity of millennialism must proceed along other lines, namely, the Scriptures. On this basis, one group has adopted an official doctrinal position

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<sup>1</sup>Compare, for example, the position of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as outlined in the Brief Statement of 1932. Supra, p. 89, n. 134. Concurring with the Missouri Synod are the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, in addition to some smaller Lutheran church groups.

<sup>2</sup>This is the position of the Lutheran Church in America (Supra, p. 103), the American Lutheran Church (Supra, p. 102, n. 201), as well as the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (Supra, pp. 124-128).

favoring the millennialist interpretation.<sup>3</sup> In view of the divergent views which persist regarding the millennial issue, a fresh study is warranted. While the ultimate authority in assessing doctrinal points resides exclusively in the Scriptures, the concern is to establish how the Lutheran confessors understand those Scriptures. Have the confessions determined a particular posture regarding the millennium? Is the Lutheran student necessarily committed to the a-millennial position? If not, is there room for other millennial interpretations? What cautions may there be in an approach to the entire matter? These are the chief questions to be dealt with in this chapter.

#### Historical Background

The earliest and most influential document in identifying the distinctive doctrinal position of the Lutheran reformers was the Augsburg Confession. Attacked by the Roman church as an innovative, heretical sect,<sup>4</sup> the Lutherans were concerned to establish their historical continuity in the Christian Church. They sought to demonstrate their oneness with the fundamental tenets of Christianity in an outlined recitation. At the same time they wanted to disassociate themselves from aberrant views, both ancient and modern.

The occasion for the actual composition and presentation of the Augsburg Confession was an invitation issued in January of 1530 by the

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<sup>3</sup>Viz., the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (Supra, pp. 120-124).

<sup>4</sup>John Eck, the Catholic theologian, claimed to have found 404 errors in the theology of the reformers. Luther and Melanchthon were put in the same class with Ulrich Zwingli, Andreas Carlstadt, and the Anabaptists, such as Hubmaier and Denk. The purpose was to show that Luther and others were identical with recognized heretics. Eck had sent a copy of these theses to Emperor Charles on his way to Augsburg.



elector of Saxony to the Wittenberg reformers to prepare a declaration of faith which would be presented at an imperial diet to be held at Augsburg, Germany. The emperor's ultimate objective in calling for the diet was to achieve a united front in his military operations against the Turks. Desiring unity on all levels of society, the Catholic and Lutheran debate is addressed as well.

While the convocation at Augsburg failed to produce harmony among the churches, the reformer's confession did succeed in clarifying the Lutheran position and evolved into a fundamental statement of faith which has served the Lutheran church ever since.<sup>5</sup>

#### Its Origins

##### Authorship

Though the "final hand" in composing the Augsburg Confession is indisputably that of Philip Melanchthon, there has been debate as to the extent of his participation in terms of actual content of the confession.<sup>6</sup> Was Melanchthon chiefly a composer and stylist of existing

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<sup>5</sup>Holsten Fagerberg refers to the Augsburg Confession as "the basic confessional statement of the Lutheran church." Holsten Fagerberg, A New Look at the Lutheran confessions, 1529-1537. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>J. W. Richard believes Melanchthon has been the victim of the "anti-Philippists" and their heirs in the minimizing of his role in writing the Augsburg Confession. He compares Melanchthon's relationship to the confessions with that of Shakespeare to Julius Caesar and John Milton to Paradise Lost. The use of existing materials, Richard argues, is not unique and should not be used to belittle Melanchthon's part. Moreover, Melanchthon spoke of himself as the author of the Augsburg Confession as did his contemporaries. Further, the vocabulary differences noted between the existing materials and the Augsburg Confession's first seventeen articles attests to the important role played by Melanchthon. ". . . considerably more than two-thirds of the words of these seventeen articles are the words chosen by Melanchthon." James W. Richard, The Confessional History of the Lutheran Church (Philadelphia:

materials or was his contribution more substantial in theological content? How influential was Luther in the process of producing the confession?

It is true that Luther was not present at Augsburg when the last drafts were being formulated.<sup>7</sup> However, there is evidence of extensive correspondence with Melanchthon and others at Augsburg throughout their stay there.<sup>8</sup> A copy of Melanchthon's work was sent to Luther about six weeks prior to the readiness of the final draft. Although two articles were yet missing (Articles XX and XXI), the document was otherwise essentially the same as was read before the diet on June 25. Luther's reply to Elector John, who had sought his opinion of the contents, reveals his support, "I have read over the Apology of M. Philip. It pleases me right well, and I do not know what to improve or change in it; neither would it be proper, for I cannot tread so gently or quietly."<sup>9</sup> Without this approval, the confession would never have been presented. The changes made after this early draft dealt chiefly with the external form. Based on the evidence of this close association of

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Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup>Luther had remained at Coburg since he was still under the imperial ban.

<sup>8</sup>Krauth reports the existence of "about seventy letters of Luther written to Augsburg during the Diet, and we know of thirty-two written by Melanchthon to Luther, and of thirty-nine written by Luther to Melanchthon in the five months of correspondence, during the Diet, or connected with it in the time preceding." Charles Porterfield Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 228.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted by Theodore E. Schmauk, The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: General Council Publications Board, 1911), pp. 358-359.

Melanchthon with Luther during this period, Charles Porterfield Krauth concludes, "Luther, though absent in body, was the controlling spirit at Augsburg."<sup>10</sup>

### Sources

The influence of Luther in the composition of the confession is further observed in the extensive use by Melanchthon at Augsburg of three documents which bore the impress of Luther's theological stance in precise degree. These three statements were the Schwabach Articles, the Marburg Articles and the Torgau Articles.

The Schwabach Articles, seventeen in number, were composed by Luther, Melanchthon, and others, in the summer of 1529. Attempts were being made then to form a united front of evangelical states, and Elector John desired a doctrinal statement upon which they could agree. Luther's articles, in which the others had shared, were presented at a conference at Schwabach, but failed to win the acceptance of the southern Germans.<sup>11</sup> These so-called Schwabach Articles constitute the seventeen basic articles of the first part of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Krauth, p. 228. Gustav Plitt referred to Luther as "the father of the Confession" and Melanchthon as "the composer of the phraseology." In Schmauk, p. 432.

<sup>11</sup>Willard Dow Allbeck, Studies in the Lutheran Confessions, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 45.

<sup>12</sup>Krauth observes that the Schwabach Articles and the Augsburg Confession "coincide throughout, not only in doctrine, but in a vast number of cases word for word, the Augsburg Confession being a mere transcript, in these cases of the Schwabach Articles. The differences are either merely stylistic, or are made necessary by the larger object and compass of the Augsburg Confession; but so thoroughly do the Schwabach Articles condition and shape every part of it, as to give it even the peculiarity of phraseology characteristic of Luther." Krauth, The Augsburg Confession (Philadelphia: Lutheran Bookstore, 1869), p.

The eschatological significance of the Schwabach statement of faith is observed in three of the articles. Article XII presents the Church in terms of theologia crucis until the end of the world. This suffering and persecution is a result of the church's faithfulness in believing and teaching God's Word.<sup>13</sup> The second coming of Christ is confessed in Article XIII. This coming will be for judgment of the living and the dead. Faith in Christ ushers one into everlasting life. Unbelief results in eternal condemnation in Hell.<sup>14</sup> Article XIV underlines the life of the Christian in anticipation of the Lord's coming "to judgment." Though He will at last "do away with all power and rule," it behooves the believing citizen to honor the God-ordained government and even participate directly if occasion arises.<sup>15</sup> It is the Church that is the focal point in each of the references to the "last things." The confessors set forth a Church in mission, even as she awaits the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Johann Michael Reu, The Augsburg Confession, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>E. J. Wolf believes the sequence as given by Luther in the Schwabach Articles is important to observe. "In Art. XII it is maintained that there will always be a holy Church upon the earth; a Church that must endure suffering and persecution in the world, yet in view of the fact that this Church even in and by means of its struggles and afflictions is steadily advancing toward a triumphant goal, the parousia of her Lord and the completion of His kingdom, it devolves upon Christians to take comfort, and in the meanwhile, until this glorious deliverance and the supersedure of all worldly reign and authority, by the visible reign of Him whose right it is to rule, to submit themselves loyally and reverently to the worldly powers under which they are placed. It is not their province as Christians to revolutionize civil govern-

A colloquy between Luther and Ulrich Zwingli was the occasion for the Marburg Articles. Arranged by Philip of Hesse as an attempt at uniting the Lutherans and Zwinglians on matters of doctrine, Luther went to Marburg in October of 1529 with some associates to discuss differences with Zwingli. Agreement was reached on all the points of doctrine discussed but one. That dealt with the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Though Zwingli even signed his name in agreement with the Marburg Articles, his appended notes reveal his differences with Luther.<sup>17</sup>

Of interest in this study are the several allusions in the Marburg Articles to "last things." The second coming of Christ is confessed, a coming characterized by judgment of the living and the dead. Two destinies are acknowledged as alternatives for every person. The salvation wrought by Christ delivers from sin as well as from eternal death. Faith in Christ is crucial in actualizing the promises of the Gospel personally.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis in the Marburg Articles in regard to eschatology is on the necessity and sufficiency of Christ's atonement to prepare for life after death. Evangelical concern characterizes each article.

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ments. They are ordained of God for the time being. Yet does it behoove them at all times to discriminate between the rule of these and the reign of Christ. The internal connection in the Confession is therefore virtually the same even in the reversed order of the Articles" E. J. Wolf, "The Church's Future," (The Quarterly Review, July 1882):328.

<sup>17</sup>Martin Luther, "Word and Sacrament," in Luther's Works, 55 vols. edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 38:13. (Hereafter cited as L.W.)

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-89.

In preparation for the Augsburg Diet, Elector John had instructed Luther, Melanchthon, Jonas, and Bugenhagen to prepare a statement of their position as well as a precise rehearsal of the reforms they desired. This document, which was to be submitted to the emperor, was presented first to the elector for his inspection. Melanchthon met him at Torgau in March of 1530 and gave him the manuscript; hence, the name "Torgau Articles."<sup>19</sup>

The Torgau Articles deal chiefly with the correction of abuses. They are essentially the topics discussed in the articles on abuses in the Augsburg Confession (XXII-XXVIII). The only references to eschatological matters deal with complaints against the Roman mass for the dead and the invocation of saints as intercessors in prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Aside from the Torgau Articles, the major sources for the Augsburg Confession deal with the major categories of eschatological truth. There was no debate with Rome concerning the central issues. All parties were agreed on the reality of the second advent of Christ for judgment. All acknowledged the ultimate destinies of heaven and hell, heaven for those who trusted in Christ; hell for the unbeliev-

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<sup>19</sup>The original manuscript of the "Torgau Articles" was found at Weimar, Germany in 1830. Allbeck, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup>The Torgau Articles are reproduced by Reu in his collection of sources relating to the Augsburg Confession, Reu, pp. 79-91.

ing.<sup>21</sup> Comment on the millennium is conspicuously absent in these sources.

### The Purposes

#### Confession of Faith

It has already been observed that the Augsburg Confession evolved in the context of a desire on the part of the emperor for ecclesiastical and ultimately, political unity. That the confessors appreciated this immediate goal of accord is observed in the preface to the confession, ". . . we are prepared, in obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, our most gracious lord, to discuss with them [our opponents] and their associates, in so far as this can honorably be done, such practical and equitable ways as may restore unity."<sup>22</sup> The aim for unity immediately colors the approach of the confessors. They believe they have been misunderstood. They have been charged with errors and associations that they want to disavow. They are hopeful that if their detractors will hear their true confession of faith, that peace may be possible once again. Regarding his motive for participating in the debate, Melancthon said, "In these controversies I have always made it a point

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<sup>21</sup>The Catholic-Lutheran accord on these matters is attested to by the absence of any rebuttal to the Augsburg Confession's presentation in the Roman Confutation. The "Confutatio Pontificia" of August 3, 1530 says, "the confession of the seventeenth article is received, since from the Apostles' Creed and the Holy Scripture the entire Catholic Church knows that Christ will come at the last day to judge the quick and the dead. . . . Therefore they justly condemn here the Anabaptists, who think there will be an end of punishments to condemned men and devils, and imagine certain Jewish kingdoms of the godly, before the resurrection of the dead, in this present world, the wicked everywhere being suppressed." Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>22</sup>Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 25.

to stick as closely as possible to traditional doctrinal formulas in order to foster the attainment of harmony."<sup>23</sup> It is the Scripture that is appealed to again and again in support of their theological position. If the opponents can only recognize with them the historic Christian faith derived from the Scriptures, then the potential for unity is real.

The stinging attack of John Eck in his "404 Articles" apparently was in mind as the Augsburg Confession was finalized. Eck had classed Luther and his followers as "neo-Hussites" and "anabaptists."<sup>24</sup> He claimed they had revived "ancient heresies condemned a thousand or more years ago."<sup>25</sup> He summarized his case by anathematizing Luther and his followers as "heretical, scandalous, false, and offensive to godly ears, and misleading the simple, or entirely seditious and disturbing the public peace."<sup>26</sup> It was amidst such a climate of charges that the confessors produced their "apology." The effort to set forth their position in thetical as well as antithetical fashion is understood as their assailed reputation is considered. It was imperative that it be

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 99. Stuckenberg emphasizes the dominant purpose of the Augsburg Confession as a "peace-document." Far from desiring to form a new church on the basis of their confession, Melancthon, Luther and their associates wanted reformation within the Roman Church. While they were willing to make any concessions not directly in conflict with Scripture, "they never so disgraced themselves as to make to the Papists the concessions that they [the confessors], or any other body of men, had a right to fix the doctrines of religion." J. W. Stuckenberg, The History of the Augsburg Confession, (Philadelphia: Lutheran Board of Publications, 1869), p. 64.

<sup>24</sup>Reu, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 120. Eck's best-known and most important literary response to the Reformers, Enchiridion of Commonplaces, had been published five years prior to the "404 Articles." Translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).



made clear what they confessed and what they condemned. After presenting a "summary" of their doctrines, they conclude,

Since this teaching is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures and is not contrary or opposed to that of the universal Christian church, or even of the Roman church (in so far as the latter's teaching is reflected in the writings of the Fathers), we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above. Therefore, those who presume to reject, avoid, and separate from our churches as if our teaching were heretical, act in an unkind and hasty fashion, contrary to all Christian unity and love, and do so without any solid basis of divine command or Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

While an initial objective of the Augsburg Confession was to serve as an apology regarding the contemporary libels against the Reformers, it became secondary. Krauth notes, "Their distinctive object soon became the setting forth of the great points in the whole system of heavenly truth. . . . The Apology was transfigured into a Confession."<sup>28</sup> These "great points" find their orientation and perspective around the saving truths of the Gospel. It is justification by faith alone, the "chief article," that is the true center of each of the articles. Because of the confessors' concentration on the essentials, however, the Augsburg Confession should not be represented as fixing the bounds of the theological enterprise. E. J. Wolf aptly comments,

It is not the design of the Confessions to exhaust the content of revelation or to present a finished code of doctrine. Their subject matter does not properly consist in speculative opinions which may or may not be deduced from the Scriptures, nor in doctrinal problems that are remote from the centre of revelation and require for their solution the Church's riper experience and more perfect knowledge of the Scriptures, but in the obvious saving truths of the Gospel to the acknowledgment of which the Church has been brought by the Holy Ghost, and which she holds as clearly and firmly established.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Reu, pp. 47-48.

<sup>28</sup>Krauth, The Augsburg Confession, pp. xxx-xxxi.

<sup>29</sup>Wolf, pp. 389-390.

On surveying the contents of Article XVII of the Augustana, it is obvious that the intention of the confessors is not to present a complete doctrine of eschatology. In the words of Juergen Neve, "The aim of the Augsburg Confession, as we have found everywhere, is not at a doctrinal compendium (Like Melanchthon's Loci), but merely at offering a Confession with special reference to such points of doctrine that are characteristic to Lutheranism as a church."<sup>30</sup> This is the case in Article XVII. It is limited to the essential points. It highlights that which has a clear foundation in Scripture. It does not enter upon the speculative or the philosophical. Again, the conciliatory tendency of the entire confession is observed in this article. Nothing is said about Antichrist or purgatory even though the Lutherans had contrary views to the Roman doctrine. The confessors did not consider it appropriate to their purposes to mention these matters at this time.

The typical pattern in the presentation of the articles in the Augsburg Confession is to begin with a positive affirmation of the pertinent doctrine. The confessors are careful to establish the biblical foundation for the articles but they invite their audience to inquire further if they are not satisfied. They declare, "If anyone should consider that it is lacking in some respect, we are ready to present further information on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture."<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, in the articles themselves, they allude to many passages of Scripture to verify their testimony. They are convinced of the doctrinal

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<sup>30</sup>Juergen Ludwig Neve, A Guide to the Augsburg Confession, (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1927), p. 191.

<sup>31</sup>Tappert, p. 96.

reliability of their confession and speak without hesitation. If one is to challenge their statement of faith, he will have to do so in direct confrontation with the written Word of God.

Of additional concern in the thetical sections of the Augustana is to demonstrate that the doctrines presented are nothing else than the historic Christian faith. Sensitive to the charge of innovation and heresy, they deliberately acknowledge at many points their indebtedness to the formulations of early councils and church fathers who were in the orthodox tradition. The very first article, in its affirmations concerning God, contains the preface, "We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea . . . ."32 Among those referred to as in line with their confession are Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Jerome, and Irenaeus.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes the allusion is simply to "the writings of the Fathers"<sup>34</sup> or "the church from ancient times"<sup>35</sup> or "the ancient Fathers."<sup>36</sup> It is of utmost concern to the confessors, in their own words, "that it be made very clear that we have introduced nothing, either in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church."<sup>37</sup>

#### Condemnation of Error

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>33</sup>The most frequent authority cited is Augustine.

<sup>34</sup>Tappert, p. 52.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

At the same time as the confessors are eager to demonstrate their oneness with historic Christianity, they are equally zealous to measure their distance from heretical movements and personalities, past and present. Nearly all of the first seventeen articles are specific in condemning errors that stand in contrast to the truths confessed. Included in the damnamus sections of the articles are the Manichaeans, Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, Samosatenes, Pelagians, Anabaptists, Donatists, Novatians, and "Jewish opinions." Of those singled out for censure, the Anabaptists are mentioned most often. The deliberate disassociation from these groups is well understood in light of Eck's confounding of the Lutherans with heresies, ancient and modern.

The general pattern of the Augsburg Confession is exhibited in Article XVII. On the one hand, the declaration of faith regarding Christ's return is stated simply and positively. On the other hand, protagonists of specific errors associated with Christ's return are rejected. They do not want to be confused with the Anabaptists or with "Jewish opinions" in their confession.<sup>38</sup> Because the Augsburg Confession is primarily directed to a Roman Catholic audience, with whom a restoration of unity is desired, the confessors do not elaborate. They knew they were in consonance with Roman dogma on the central issues confessed. Hence, they do not offer substantiation from Scripture or tradition. They want to eliminate eschatology as a barrier to the desired reunion based on reformation in the truly controverted articles.

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<sup>38</sup>Whether all beliefs of the Anabaptists and all opinions of the Jews are intended for the damnamus will be discussed in an exposition of the seventeenth article. Infra, pp. 209-213; 225-230.

### Its Setting

Against what eschatological backdrop did the confessors frame their conclusions in the Augsburg Confession? What are the views that were rife in the ancient Church regarding the second coming of Christ and related events? What was the tradition from which they had come? What aberrations were they mindful of in their denunciations? What are the more immediate problems related to issues associated with eschatology? The Sitz-im-Leben is crucial in determining the true focus of the damnamus sections in Article XVII. The debate in Lutheranism regarding the scope of the condemnations has centered in the consciousness of the confessors of their historic precedents.

### Early "Tradition"

The avowed purpose of the confessors to identify with the historic Christian faith has been observed. Although they reveal a predilection for the Nicean faith and forward, they do not hesitate to offer testimony corroborating their confession prior to that point.

### Ante-Nicene Fathers

Among those whose position on certain points of doctrine is demonstrated to coincide with their own, the confessors name Irenaeus and Cyprian. Irenaeus, whose most productive years spanned the last quarter of the second century, was an arch-foe of the Gnostic heresy and devoted five books to the defense of historic Christianity against the same. He spoke as a representative of orthodoxy. Cyril Richardson termed him a "man of tradition," adding, "his highest aim was to state clearly what the church believed and taught, and to preserve that

teaching from corruption."<sup>39</sup> It is instructive to note Irenaeus' conception of "last things" particularly in relationship to the millennium.

Since the opinion of some have been affected by the discourses of the heretics, and they are ignorant of the dispensations of God, and the mystery of the resurrection of the just and the Kingdom which is the beginning of incorruption, by which Kingdom those who are worthy will gradually be accustomed to receive (the fullness of) God, it is necessary to speak about these things. For the righteous must first rise again at the appearance of God to receive in this created order, then made new, the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the Fathers, and will reign in this order. After this will come the judgment. It is just that in the same order in which they labored and were afflicted, and tried by all kinds of suffering, they should receive the fruits of [their suffering]--that in the same order in which they were put to death for the love of God they should again be made alive--and that in the same order in which they suffered bondage they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are his. It is right, therefore, for this created order to be restored to its pristine state, and to serve the just without restraint.<sup>40</sup>

Irenaeus attributes confusion and ignorance of these matters to the writings of the heretics and purports to set forth the orthodox teaching. He sees a future "reign" of the church in a renewed "created order." Irenaeus discusses both Old and New Testament passages which are alleged to support his position. He endorses the genuineness of Papias' claim that Christ Himself spoke of greatly-increased productivity in an earth to be renewed in the future.<sup>41</sup> In specific reference to Revelation 20, Irenaeus opines, "John therefore predicted precisely the first resurrection of the just, and [their] inheritance of the earth in the Kingdom."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Cyril C. Richardson, ed., Early Christian Fathers, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 350.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid, pp. 391-392..

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 394-395; Supra, p. 19, n. 20.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 397.

This Kingdom, according to Irenaeus, is still to come. While Irenaeus is not called to testify regarding eschatology in the Augsburg Confession, he is treated as a reliable witness to the faith of the early church period.

Cyprian, whose ministry covered the first half of the third century, is the only other ante-Nicene "father" to be recalled in the Augsburg Confession. As bishop of Carthage, he was embroiled in two major controversies, principally with schismatics.<sup>43</sup> In both instances, he has been adjudged as the defender of orthodoxy. Though Cyprian is classified as a millennialist,<sup>44</sup> his writings emphasize the major tenets of eschatology. His interests lie in eternal life in heaven rather than an earthly interlude. This is the "blessed hope" he wants his hearers to cherish.

Oh, what a day that will be, and how great when it comes, dearest brethren! . . . What will be that glory, and how great the joy of being admitted to the sight of God! To be so honored as to receive the joy of eternal light and salvation in the presence of Christ the Lord, your God!<sup>45</sup>

It is obvious that the Lutheran confessors do not intend to endorse the entire corpus of doctrinal conviction of either Irenaeus or Cyprian in their use of them on certain issues. This holds true for any other figure singled out for inclusion in the many appeals to tradition. However, it is clear that Irenaeus and Cyprian are treated as representa-

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<sup>43</sup>The first controversy involved the Novatians and the second dealt with the question of re-baptizing converted heretics.

<sup>44</sup>Leroy Edwin Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C. Review and Herald, 1950)1:331.

<sup>45</sup>W. A. Jurgens, ed. and trans., The Faith of the Early Fathers, vols. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1970), p 231.

tives of early orthodox Christianity with whom the confessors wish to identify. The former's eschatological views escape mention as significant in terms of defining orthodoxy.

Few historians debate the contention that not only Irenaeus and Cyprian, but also practically every major figure among the early Church fathers who wrote on eschatology was millennialist.<sup>46</sup> The persistence of this view obtained until Augustine.<sup>47</sup> Yet, even though the Augsburg Confession censures several contemporaneous movements in the early period, nothing is mentioned regarding the predominant eschatology. Rather, the rejection is directed against "certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance . . ."48 These "Jewish opinions" are specifically located among the sixteenth century Anabaptists, according to Melanchthon's Variata.<sup>49</sup> This lends credence to the view that chiliasm per se is not being condemned in Article XVII, but rather a certain type of chiliasm, as held among the Anabaptists, but certainly bearing resemblance to opinions originating among the Jews. If historic chiliasm had been the concern of the confessors, then their silence on that score is difficult to explain. However, if their damnamus is

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<sup>46</sup>Supra, p. 22, n. 25.

<sup>47</sup>C. A. Briggs considers the high point of millennialist exposition to be the last quarter of the second century and the first half of the third. This, he said, in reference to the theological efforts of Irenaeus and Tertullian was the "golden age of chiliasm." C. A. Briggs, "Origin and History of Premillenarianism." The Quarterly Review, 9 (April 1879):253.

<sup>48</sup>Tappert, pp. 38-39.

<sup>49</sup>Reu, p. 403.



directed against a particular error relative to the millennium, then their statements are appropriate.

#### Augustinian Eschatology

It has been observed that from the time of Augustine until the sixteenth-century Reformation, the prevailing interpretation relative to Revelation 20:1-6 was along a-millennial lines.<sup>50</sup> Aside from Augustine's interpretation of the millennium as a literal thousand years, his exegesis of Revelation 20 as entailing a present reign of the Church with Christ wielded great influence on those after him. The main tenets of a-millennialism have been consistent throughout its long history. These tenets also include a "spiritual" resurrection rather than two bodily ones as well as a present "binding" of Satan.

Schooled in the Augustinian tradition, Luther was exposed to the eschatology of this major theologian in the early history of the Church. The influence of Augustine's theology upon him is observed in his writing, particularly in his early days as a Reformer. For example, in his exposition of the Psalms, Augustine is quoted extensively. Julius Kostlin remarks, "Again and again are the works of this Church father [Augustine] quoted, whereas only occasionally do we find appeal taken to any other teacher of the Church."<sup>51</sup> Aside from a few modifications,

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<sup>50</sup>See pages 24-30 above regarding the occasion and content of Augustine's eschatological views.

<sup>51</sup>Julius Kostlin, The Theology of Luther, 2 vols. trans. by Charles E. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897)1:119.

Luther sought to transpose Augustinian theology to his students at Wittenberg.<sup>52</sup> This was no less the case in the area of eschatology.

In consonance with Augustine, Luther rejects the idea of a temporal kingdom in which the Church would reign supreme, all its enemies ("Gottlosen") having been destroyed by them.<sup>53</sup> He does not interpret Revelation 20 in terms of the end of history but as a description of the Church. A marginal note in Luther's Deutsche Bibel indicates his opinion that the arrival of the Turks or with the papacy's degeneration to the level of antichrist, there was a significant shift in terms of the Church's relationship to the millennium.<sup>54</sup> The Church, now hidden under a cross of suffering, awaits the consummation of all things in the personal Advent of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

Though Melanchthon's earlier formal education had been of strong humanistic orientation, Luther's influence led him to study theology at Wittenberg.<sup>56</sup> The profound impact of Luther upon Melanchthon at this

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<sup>52</sup>Luther's successful efforts are noted by Kostlin. "He [Luther] was permitted before long, to his great joy, to see his own theology and that of Augustine making marked progress and becoming dominant at Wittenberg . . ." Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>53</sup>D. Luthers samtliche Werke, 68 vols. ed. by J. Plochmann and J. K. Irmischer (Erlangen: Carl Heyder, 1826-57)45:110-111.

<sup>54</sup>Luther's marginal note to Revelation 20 reads as follows: "Die tausent jar müssen anfahren, da dis Buch ist gemacht, denn der Turck ist aller erst nach tausent jaren komen; In des sind die Christen blieben, und haben regiirt, on des Teuffels danck. Aber nu will der Turck dem Papst zu hülffe komen, und die Christen ausrotten, weil nichts helfen wil." D. Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe. Die Deutsche Bible, 12 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1931)1:469.

<sup>55</sup>Supra, pp. 24-30.

<sup>56</sup>Melanchthon received his Bachelor of Divinity degree at Wittenberg in 1519.

time is reflected in the theological agreement they professed as fellow reformers. Clyde Manschreck notes that though Melanchthon may have altered his theology later, "his stance was the same as Luther's" in the earlier years of the Reformation period.<sup>57</sup> This concord is witnessed in eschatology as well. Melanchthon shared Luther's conception of the millennium as a present reality.<sup>58</sup>

#### The Ecumenical Symbols

The inclusion of the ecumenical symbols in the Book of Concord published in 1580 is deliberate. Certainly the earlier confessors, Luther and Melanchthon, would have concurred. Indeed, they had made frequent references to these early creeds in the statements of faith attributed to them.<sup>59</sup> Beyond the value of the doctrinal content itself in the creeds, the Lutheran confessors were anxious to show their complete identity with the historic Christian faith they embodied.

The eschatological direction of the creeds is significant to the present discussion. Is this material instructive in terms of a particular interpretation of the millennium? Do these symbols serve as a commentary on the intentions of the confessors in Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession? Or are they sufficiently broad to embrace varying interpretations of the "thousand years"?

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<sup>57</sup>Philip Melanchthon, Melanchthon on Christian Doctrine--Locis Communes, 1555, trans. and ed. by Clyde L. Manschreck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. x.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 274-279.

<sup>59</sup>One or more of the three recent ancient creeds is quoted or mentioned in each of the Lutheran Confessions.

Though the complete Apostles' Creed in its present form is traceable to the end of the fifth century, the separate articles date back to the first three centuries. Philip Schaff reports the consensus of those who have researched the origin of the doctrinal contents of the creed, "they are all of Nicene or ante-Nicene origin, while its kernel goes back to the apostolic age."<sup>60</sup>

The pertinent articles in this treatment are the following: "he [Jesus Christ] ascended into heaven . . . whence he shall come to judge [zu richten] the living and the dead;" "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."<sup>61</sup> A comparison of the original Roman creed<sup>62</sup> as given by Marcellus about A.D. 340 and the received form of the Apostles' Creed, which came into general use in the seventh or eighth century reveals no significant difference.<sup>63</sup> Since these articles were descriptive of the orthodox faith also during the early centuries when millennialism was, at least, acceptable, it appears that the statements regarding "last things" created no controversy. The millennialists were accepted as orthodox. Conversely, when a-millennialism replaced millennialism as the dominant understanding, there is no indication that the Apostles' Creed served as a platform for

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<sup>60</sup>Philip Schaff, ed., The Creeds of Christendom, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1877)1:20.

<sup>61</sup>Tappert, p. 18.

<sup>62</sup>J. N. D. Kelly believes all the evidence points to the common use of the creed in Rome "somewhere within the second half of the second century." J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds (New York: Longmans, Green, 1950), p. 9.

<sup>63</sup>Schaff, pp. 21-22.

its promotion or sustenance. Its formulations were broad enough to include the old millennialism and the new Augustinian model.

When it is remembered that until the middle of the seventeenth century, the Apostles' Creed was considered by Roman Catholicism as well as Protestantism to be composed by the apostles in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost,<sup>64</sup> it is possible that the Lutheran confessors, in full realization of the eschatology of the early centuries, did not believe the Apostles' Creed was decisive on the millennium question in terms of negation.

The Nicene Creed is the Eastern expression of the Apostles' Creed, but with more definite and explicit statement on the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The original Nicene Creed dates from the first ecumenical council which was held at Nicaea in A.D. 325. The chief catalyst for the convocation was the Arian controversy which entailed a formidable challenge to the apostolic doctrine regarding the person of Christ. Decisively rejecting the Arian doctrine, the Nicene council presented its opinion in a creedal statement. The text of the Nicene Creed has remained virtually unchanged through the centuries with one important exception. In A.D. 589 at the Council of Toledo, the Western Church, believing that the Son was in danger of being subordinated to the Father in the original rendition, added the phrase, "and the son" (filioque). The so-called filioque doctrine continues to be a point of difference between eastern and western Christendom to this day.

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<sup>64</sup>Schaff reports that the apostolic origin of the Creed was claimed even until the nineteenth century. He notes that the Lutheran bishop of Denmark, N. F. S. Grundtvig (d. 1872), traced the Creed to Christ Himself. Ibid., p. 23.

In terms of its eschatological content the Nicene Creed offers little variance from the wording of the Apostles' Creed. Concerning Christ's return, it is declared, "he shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom shall have no end."<sup>65</sup> Further, it is stated, ". . . I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come."<sup>66</sup> The only real differences from the Apostles' Creed is the addition, "his kingdom shall have no end," and the substitution for "life everlasting," "I look . . . for the life of the age to come." Neither change alters the substantial teaching of the Apostles' Creed. The "life of the age to come" in the sense of the future aeon is a phrase affirming the reality of life after death, but leaves that future state undescribed. Willard Allbeck finds this reserve appropriate, commenting, "Such restraint is typical of the Scriptures, which teach of the resurrected life only by allusions and figures of speech, affirming what is otherwise indescribable."<sup>67</sup>

The concerns at Nicaea were Christological, not eschatological. The confessors there were content to simply restate the basic outline of futuristic expectation. Evidence is lacking for a necessity laid upon them to deal with the existing millennialism in the Church. Their confession leaves room for this position in its absence of specificity on such secondary matters.

Though the Athanasian Creed is named after the great bishop of

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<sup>65</sup>Tappert, pp. 18-19.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>67</sup>Allbeck, p. 36.

Alexandria,<sup>68</sup> the evidence against his authorship of this historic confession is conclusive. Kelly locates the date of composition about A.D. 500 in southern Gaul.<sup>69</sup> The particular problems addressed are Arianism and Nestorianism.<sup>70</sup>

In keeping with its concern, the Athanasian Creed is divided into two sections. The first part sets forth the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, to the exclusion of every kind of subordination of essence. It represents an advance over the Trinitarian formulations of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed in its explicit treatment of this subject. The second part contains a concise statement of the orthodox teaching concerning the person of Christ and reflects the consensus reached by the general councils of Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451. In this respect also, it is a valuable supplement to the Apostles' and Nicene Creed.

In contrast to the earlier creeds, the Athanasian Creed carries the sober warning that whoever does not subscribe to "the true Christian faith" as represented in its statements, "cannot be saved" and "will without doubt perish for eternity."<sup>71</sup> Allbeck points out that the

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<sup>68</sup>Athanasius' life and work spanned most of the fourth century (c. A.D. 296-373). He championed the cause of orthodoxy against Arianism.

<sup>69</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, The Athanasian Creed (London: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 109.

<sup>70</sup>This movement takes its name from Nestorius, whose false teaching in Christology, namely that there was no communion of natures in the person of Christ and that Mary, could not really be regarded as theotokos but Christotokos, that Christ was the Son of God, the eternal Logos, in name only, threatened the Church in the fifth century. Erwin L. Lueker, ed., Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 734.

<sup>71</sup>Tappert, pp. 19, 21.

intention is obviously to show that "the Christian faith is distinctly Christ-centered, trusting in Christ as Lord and Savior. The church knows no other way of salvation than by him and therefore must reject all teachings which deny his true deity or his real incarnation."<sup>72</sup>

After a clear statement of the orthodox teachings regarding the Trinity and Christ's person, the Athanasian Creed concludes with a section that corresponds with the Apostles' and Nicene Creed in speaking of Christ's victory and ultimate reign. In consonance with the earlier creeds, the coming of Christ to judge is confessed but a brief description of the nature and consequences of that judgment is added. "At his coming all men shall rise with their bodies and give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire."<sup>73</sup> Do these sentences prescribe a stricter view of the events attendant upon the second advent? Is there a sense of simultaneity that precludes the concept of an interval of time between a purported set of resurrections? One must acknowledge that the grammatical construction of these statements presents a problem for millennialists. If Christ's "coming" is considered merely as a passing moment, then a single general resurrection must be deduced. If, however, the "coming" is viewed not only in its initiatory state as epiphaneia but also as signalling an eternally-changed state of affairs, then the anxiety to determine the timing of the resurrection disappears. Then the millennialist finds

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<sup>72</sup>Allbeck, pp. 40-41.

<sup>73</sup>Tappert, pp. 20-21.



himself in harmony with the Athanasian Creed. Otherwise, he "cannot be saved."<sup>74</sup>

If the Lutheran confessors had considered that the Athanasian Creed or the earlier creeds intended to delimit a certain position on the millennium, certainly they would have made an appeal on that basis in Article XVII of the Augustana. Their damnamus would have been enlarged to include a host of individuals, particularly among the early Church fathers. As it is, however, they are content to pass by such an interpretation of the ancient creeds.<sup>75</sup> Their burden is with the contemporary "Jewish opinions" of the Anabaptists.

#### Medieval "Millennialism"

It has been observed that the a-millennial view as popularized by Augustine in his "City of God" prevailed as the dominant interpretation of the book of Revelation for hundreds of years thereafter. Indeed most of the medieval period contains little illusion to the millennium as envisioned by the early Church fathers. In the words of Henry Sheldon, "Scarcely any place was given to chiliasm proper in medieval thought."<sup>76</sup> At the end of the tenth century, there was an expectation by many that the end of the world was near, believing with Augustine

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>75</sup>West believes the objection that millennialism is not ecumenical faith because it is not found in an ancient creed is "valueless." He observes that "many true doctrines, Baptism, Lord's Supper, Election, Justification, Damnation of the wicked, were ecumenical faith, and not found in the Apostles' Creed." Nathaniel West, ed., Premillennial Essays (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1879), p. 397.

<sup>76</sup>Henry C. Sheldon, History of Christian Doctrine, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886)1:405.

that the thousand years of Revelation 20 were to be interpreted literally as the length of the Church era. However, this expectation bore no resemblance to classical millennialism. It wasn't until the twelfth century that fresh voices began to challenge the Augustinian tradition. It is instructive to note these developments, owing to the proximity to the Reformation period.

#### Joachim of Fiore

Joachim of Fiore has been declared to be "the most outstanding figure among the medieval expositors of prophecy."<sup>77</sup> With him comes a turning point in the history of prophetic interpretation. He is important not only contemporarily for the new views he advanced, but for his far-reaching influence upon exposition for centuries to come. Among those it is claimed he affected by certain of his principles were John Wyclif and the Lollards, Jan Hus and the Taborites,<sup>78</sup> as well as sixteenth-century personages of such diverse positions as Thomas Muentzer<sup>79</sup> and Martin Luther.<sup>80</sup> Born near Cozenza, Italy about A.D.

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<sup>77</sup>Froom, 1:683.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 685, 873.

<sup>79</sup>Hans Schwarz, On the Way to the Future (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), p. 153. If Muentzer is to be believed, he read only a commentary on Jeremiah written by one of Joachim's followers. Stayer notes that in his "Sermon to the Princes," Muentzer "shows no sign of distinctly Joachim ideas." However, there is agreement on all sides that the relationship between Joachim's and Muentzer's apocalyptic ideas is in need of closer investigation. James M. Stayer, Anabaptists and the Sword (Lawrence, KS: Coromadd Press, 1972), p. 83. n. 31. Eric Gritsch believes Muentzer's philosophy of history "went far beyond the speculations of Joachimite-Franciscan Spiritualism." He shows that while Joachimism was "a spiritual force," Muentzer called for "a political force which would cleanse the world of all evil through the sword of the elect." Eric W. Gritsch, Reformer Without a Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 108. Regardless of the question of the

1130, Joachim was abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Corazzo from 1178 to 1188. With the approval of the church, he founded his own order and died in his own monastery in 1202.

The three major books in which Joachim describes his eschatological position are Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti, Expositio . . . in Apocalipsim, and Psalterium Decem Cordarum.<sup>81</sup> Though he did not claim immediate revelation, he believed he had received a special illumination from God as he was working on his Concordia. He viewed the Triune God as the great pattern for the whole of human history. He spoke of an age of the Father as the initial period. This was of unknown length. The second period, the age of the Son in which he was living, was 1260 years and would end before A.D. 1260. The final age, the age of the Holy Spirit, was characterized as a "new, monastic, purely evangelical society, which would raise life to a new spiritual

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specific ideas Muentzer may have gleaned from Joachim, Marjorie Reeves documents the acknowledged respect Muentzer had for Joachim and his philosophy in general. Marjorie Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Gospel (London: SPCK, 1976), pp. 141-144. Infra, p. 172, n. 122.

<sup>80</sup>William Manson, ed., Eschatology (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, n.d.), p. 43. The link with Luther is in regard to the preparation Joachim made for an ultimate connection of the papacy with Antichrist. "Leaders of the Protestant Reformation carried the idea of the new age further by mixing it with an identification of Rome as the apocalyptic Babylon and the Pope as an agent of Antichrist, or as one manifestation of Antichrist." Delno C. West and Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, Joachim of Fiore--A Study in Spiritual Perception and History (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 107. Infra, pp. 239-246.

<sup>81</sup>All were probably begun about the year 1184, with the Concordia finished first, c. 1189, the Expositio next, c. 1196, and the Psalterium last, c. 1200.

basis."<sup>82</sup> He envisioned a new form of life with an altered state of the world.<sup>83</sup>

Even though Joachim did not recognize a conflict between his ideas and his loyalty to the church, his followers carried the implications of his doctrine to their logical conclusion. The prospect of "better times" in a "third age" cast doubt on the condition of the church in the present age. Later Joachimites spoke harshly against the church hierarchy for its failure to meet the standards their mentor had taught them to expect were coming. It was an easy step finally to see in the papacy the biblical Antichrist.

In Revelation 20, Joachim thought he saw the "third age" of the Spirit. This "third age," with the second coming of Christ likely at its conclusion and the saints alone left in the church, is a marked difference from Augustine's present millennium. Though Joachim insists Satan is to be bound, he seeks to reconcile his view with the traditional belief of the binding taking place at Christ's death.

The Holy Spirit has already bound the devil in part, and He will bind him more fully in that day, . . . . until the time is fulfilled which is signified by the thousand years, from the time of the Lord's resurrection to the time of his [Satan's] loosing; shutting him up in the hearts of the tribes of the Scythians.<sup>84</sup>

During the "third age," the saints, according to Joachim, will reign in the spiritual "vision of God" during the thousand years. The perfect

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<sup>82</sup>Froom, 1:697.

<sup>83</sup>Henry Bett demonstrates the parallels in Joachim's thought regarding a "new age" with views held among Jews during the Middle Ages. Henry Bett, Joachim of Fiore (Merrick, NY: Richwood Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 59-61.

<sup>84</sup>Quoted by Froom, p. 711.

number, "1,000," does not indicate a literal figure since this future period may be very short. At the end of the age, Satan will be loosed once again.<sup>85</sup>

. . . at the time of the end of the world the devil will lead[away] these nations, and will lead them against the church of the elect, which will be loved by Christ, just as Rachel by her husband, so that he [the devil] will bring upon them and upon himself temporal and eternal judgment, lest he further have time and place for persecuting the church.<sup>86</sup>

Though Joachim is credited with rejuvenating the idea of the millennium,<sup>87</sup> he is in reality constructing a completely new theory. D. H. Kromminga rightly adduces that what appears in Joachim for the first time in Christian circles is a form of post-millennialism. He links Joachim's views with certain millennial allusions of the Montanists. The important difference from Montanism, he suggests, is that in Joachim's system, "the kingdom-period following upon Christ's second advent, has significantly dropped out and all that remains is just the post-millenarian expectation of a period of the Holy Spirit previous to the second advent."<sup>88</sup> A separate distinction between the millennial views of the early Church fathers and Joachim's innovations is warranted.

The perpetuating of Joachim's views was largely carried on by the so-called Franciscan "Spirituals" who had originally gathered around the thought and life of Francis of Assisi. The Franciscans believed

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<sup>85</sup>Bernard McGinn, ed. and trans., Apocalyptic Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) p. 140.

<sup>86</sup>Quoted by Fromm, pp. 711-712.

<sup>87</sup>Schwarz, p. 152.

<sup>88</sup>D. H. Kromminga, The Millennium in the Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1945), pp. 130-31.

Joachim's predictions of a coming new age and were convinced their order had come into existence to assist in ushering it in.<sup>89</sup> Though the pseudo-Joachim writings produced by some of Joachim's followers often created false conceptions of his life and thought, the core of his convictions survived. His contribution, however, lay more in the forces he set in motion than in his extensive exposition. Indeed the final results of his influence were often far different from what he would have desired.

Though Joachim himself professed loyalty to the church, papacy and all, his expectation of days of halcyon ahead encouraged others to believe conditions should be different sooner. A chief obstacle in realizing reform and renewal in the church was perceived to lie often within the papacy itself. Schism and corruption in the ecclesiastical hierarchy helped to stimulate discontent and disillusionment.

Among the groups after Joachim's more immediate following who no longer felt constrained to reserve judgment regarding the papacy were John Wyclif and the Wycliffites and Jan Hus and the Taborites. The term "antichrist" was increasingly applied to the papal system and prepared the way for the Protestant adoption of this interpretation in the sixteenth century. As has been observed, herein lies the connection between Joachim's eschatology and that of Luther. While Luther would likely defend the independence of his conclusion that the papacy of his time was the realization of the Antichrist, he could derive support from his historic precedent.

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<sup>89</sup>Froom, 1:732. The Dominicans also shared this conception of their position in church history.

### The Wycliffites

John Wyclif (c. 1324-1384), an English reformer, was driven from allegiance to the papacy by the Great Schism of 1378. "The spectacle of two popes--each claiming to be the sole head of the church, each labeling the other Antichrist--horrified him."<sup>90</sup> The whole institution was evil, he concluded. From his earlier position of support, he became antagonistic. Then as he came to see the prophetic significance of the papacy, the remaining strands of loyalty were severed.

Wyclif regarded the pope as the true Antichrist of prophecy. His writings are replete with such references. In his De Papa he asserts that "the pope is antichrist here in earth," and the cardinals are "hinges to the fiend's [devil's] house."<sup>91</sup> Wyclif defended his conclusions relative to the papacy on the basis of prophecies in Daniel, Paul, and John. In 1382 the church council at London formally condemned his doctrines but he himself was allowed to remain free. He continued writing until his death in 1384.<sup>92</sup> His followers, the Lollards (Wycliffites), sustained his views, together with some of their own innovations, until their merger with Protestantism in the sixteenth century.

### The Taborites

The Taborites were a branch of the movement which arose as a result of the teaching of Jan Hus (1373-1415). Hus had become familiar

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 2:49.

<sup>91</sup>John Wyclif, The English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted, F. D. Matthew, ed. (London: Trubner and Company, 1880), pp. 458-459.

<sup>92</sup>In 1414 the Council of Constance ordered that Wyclif's bones be exhumed and separated "from the bones of the faithful." Froom, 2:61.

with the theological works of John Wyclif when they were brought to Prague and essentially agreed with them. After Hus was burned at the stake as a disciple of Wyclif, some of Hus' followers in south Bohemia continued to preach reform, again in the tradition of Wyclif. In addition to their identification of the Roman pontiff as the Antichrist, they were also militant "millennialists" who believed in an imminent second coming of Christ preceded by days of unprecedented turmoil.<sup>93</sup> Case reports that the Taborites were so convinced that the day of judgment was near at hand that "five cities of Bohemia were selected as centers of refuge to be spared in the day of world-conflagration because they had not yielded to the Antichrist."<sup>94</sup>

Intertwining their eschatological expectations with economic and social concerns, forty thousand villagers and peasants from all parts of Bohemia pooled their resources in 1419 and gathered to wait on a hill they named Tabor for the expected advent of Christ the next year. Repulsing the initial imperial crusades directed against them, they went on the offensive themselves, securing a degree of freedom until their eventual defeat and dispersion in 1434. Their remnant lived on to exert no small influence in the following century.

The medieval period was characterized by an increasing number of reform movements. Among the would-be reformers, eschatology was of vital interest. The representatives who have been sampled shared common

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<sup>93</sup>J. D. Douglas, ed. The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 951.

<sup>94</sup>Shirley Jackson Case, The Millennial Hope (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918), p. 189.



convictions relative to the end times. Joachim's influence resulted in a growing consensus that the Roman papacy embodied the biblical picture of the Antichrist. Though living in an increasingly troubled era, the medieval reformers looked ahead to a period of triumph for the true Church before Christ's advent. Of particular note in the review of medieval millennialism is the absence of all classical millennialism. Kromminga observes, "Its absence is as complete as was the absence of Post-millennialism from the ancient Church."<sup>95</sup> Yet, post-millennialism did not begin and die in the medieval age. Its influence extended well into the sixteenth century through the efforts of the radical reformers. Their positions remain to be explored in assessing the eschatological setting of the Augsburg Confession.

#### Contemporary Chiliasm

The efforts of Luther and Melanchthon at ecclesiastical reform resulted in the rallying of a variety of personalities around their general concerns. Among these would-be reformers were some with whom they eventually felt compelled to disassociate and condemn because of their departure from a Scriptural position. Included in these disavowals in the earlier years of the Reformation were Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Muentzer and his so-called "Zwickau prophets."

#### Andreas Karlstadt

Karlstadt, as a member of the theological faculty at Wittenberg,

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<sup>95</sup>Kromminga, p. 165.

had been an earnest supporter of Luther's "Ninety-five Theses."<sup>96</sup> Increasingly, however, he became disillusioned with the seemingly incomplete reformatory goals of Luther and set forth to finish the task in his own way. In the absence of Luther from Wittenberg in 1522, Karlstadt made many changes. While Luther considered certain matters to involve Christian liberty, Karlstadt deemed them necessary. Hence, he mandated the celebration of Communion in both kinds, the marriage of the clergy, and excluding music from the liturgy. He also believed infant baptism was unnecessary and Communion was merely a memorial service. When Luther returned to Wittenberg, Karlstadt made his exit for Orlamünde. Luther later visited Orlamunde and in a debate with him, Karlstadt claimed he spoke by immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit, rather than with the "papistical" talk of Luther.<sup>97</sup>

Though Karlstadt does not represent a direct alternative to the eschatological convictions of the Lutheran reformers, his incendiary approach influenced and encouraged others to adopt measures which ran counter to the Reformation spirit. Whereas Luther and Melanchthon envisioned the coming of God's Kingdom through the faithful preaching of the Word and right administration of the Sacraments, Karlstadt's impatience induced him to advocate external force to carry his views.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Karlstadt debated these principles against Johann Eck in 1529 and later wrote a tract against him. The papal bull, Exsurge Domine, which condemned Luther and other reformers included Karlstadt. Douglas, p. 193.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Although Karlstadt was not in direct contact with the "Zwickau prophets" at the time, he was blamed for inciting their vandalism of images and pictures in Wittenberg in early 1522. His writing, Von Abtuung der Bilder, had supplied the Old Testament arguments for the

Although his emphasis on Old Testament righteousness brought him near to the Spiritualist egalitarianism of Muentzer, he with his parish in Orlamunde turned down an invitation in 1524 to join with Allstedt in a program of that socialization of the gospel which would presently be merged in part with the peasants' uprising. Even so, Karlstadt's theories alarmed Luther and he was suspicious of a relationship between Karlstadt and Muentzer. The language he uses in his "Letter to Princes of Saxony" regarding Muentzer and his treatise against Karlstadt, "Against the Heavenly Prophets" is very similar.

Luther warns against Karlstadt, "our worst enemy," in no uncertain terms.<sup>99</sup> He accuses him of trying to "suppress with violence [gewalt] the whole doctrine of the gospel . . ."100 He classifies him as among "these honor-seeking [ersuchtige] prophets who do nothing but break images, destroy churches, manhandle the sacrament, and seek a new kind of mortification . . ."101 Advocating the destruction of images by first "tearing them out of the heart through God's Word and making them worthless and despised," he condemns the "wanton violence and impetuous-

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destruction of what was construed as idolatry. George Huntston Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 42.

<sup>99</sup>A significant collection of materials demonstrating the opposing positions of Luther and Karlstadt is found in Ronald J. Sider's text, Karlstadt's Battle with Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

<sup>100</sup>D. Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe, 58 vols., ed. by J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Herman Bohlaus, 1883)18:62. (Hereafter cited as W.A.) The translation is from the American edition, L.W., 40:79.

<sup>101</sup>W. A., 18:63 (L.W., 40:81).

ity" of Karlstadt.<sup>102</sup> The Karlstadtian manner, says Luther, is to arouse the masses, saying: "heigh, hew, rip, rend, smash, dash, stab, strike, run, throw, hit the idols in the mouth! If you see a crucifix, spit in its face, etc."<sup>103</sup> This is to make the masses "mad and foolish, and secretly accustom them to revolution."<sup>104</sup> It is an easy step from breaking images to taking the law completely into one's own hands. Luther warns,

This certainly is and must be called a seditious and rebellious spirit, which despises authority and itself behaves wantonly as though it were lord in the land and above the law. Where one permits the masses without authority to break images, one must permit anyone to proceed to kill adulterers, murderers, the disobedient, etc. For God commanded the people of Israel to kill these just as much as to put away images. Oh, what sort of business and government that would turn out to be! Therefore, though I have not said that Dr. Karlstadt is a murderous prophet yet he has a rebellious, murderous, seditious spirit in him, which, if given an opportunity, would assert itself.<sup>105</sup>

Again, Luther believed that Karlstadt's spirit and counsel regarding iconoclastic reform were "all pretty preliminaries to riot and rebellion, so that one fears neither order nor authority."<sup>106</sup> Luther's comparison of Karlstadt and Muentzer is unmistakable.

If it were really true, and I could believe, that Karlstadt does not intend murder and rebellion, I would still have to say that he has a rebellious spirit, like the one at Allstedt [Muentzer], as long as he continues with wanton image breaking and draws the unruly rabble to himself. I well see that he neither strikes nor stabs, but since

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<sup>102</sup>L.W. 40:85.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89 (W. A., 18:71-72).

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 101. The ensuing years revealed the accuracy of Luther's predictions. The Peasants' Revolt of 1525 is traceable to the Karlstadt mentality.

he carries the murderous weapon and does not put it aside, I do not trust him.<sup>107</sup>

By the "murderous weapon" he meant the false interpretation and understanding of the law of Moses. He appeals to Karlstadt to separate himself from the "heavenly prophets," his term for Muentzer and his followers. Meanwhile Karlstadt's refusal to take a stand against the "Allstedtian spirit" implicates him as one of them.<sup>108</sup>

Melanchthon, left with the responsibility of spiritual leadership during Luther's absence from Wittenberg, exhibited little discernment in his early assessment of Karlstadt. Personally fearing to render a verdict on the nature of Karlstadt's reforms, he at last appealed to Luther for help. He expressed fear "that the light which had risen in the world only a short time before would soon disappear before our eyes."<sup>109</sup> Through a messenger he informed Luther how tense the situation

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., pp. 105-106. Mark Edwards observes that Karlstadt "thus found himself indicted not merely for what he was alleged to have done, but also for what, given the opportunity, his spirit was capable of doing." Mark U. Edwards, "Suermerus: Luther's Own Fanatics," in Seven-Headed Luther, ed. Peter Newman Brooks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 135.

<sup>108</sup>W.A., 18:93. Loewen objects to linking Karlstadt and the "himmlischen Propheten" too closely, holding that they were far apart in their beliefs. "The prophets were highly mystical, believing in a sort of passive resignation to God, while at the same time advocating the use of the sword against the wicked. According to Stubner, the ungodly would be destroyed in about six or seven years. Then there would be at last one way, one baptism, an one faith. Karlstadt, on the other hand, was far from advocating the slaughter of the wicked; he wrote to Muentzer, for example, that he should abstain from all revolutionary notions. The prophets rejected on the whole the written word of God and relied on visions and dreams; Karlstadt, while believing like Luther in a personal experience of salvation, based his faith on the written Scriptures." Harry Loewen, Luther and the Radicals (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1974), p. 34.

<sup>109</sup>Quoted by Robert Stupperich, Melanchthon, trans. by Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 57.

had become and how little he could do against it. Luther decided he must return to Wittenberg.

A few days after his arrival in Wittenberg, Luther began a series of sermons in which he sought to restore order. He called for restraint and patience in working for reform.<sup>110</sup> He urged dependence upon the Word and Holy Spirit to accomplish what man-made pressure could not.<sup>111</sup> He counselled an emphasis on inward piety that would at last express itself in outward reform.<sup>112</sup> Luther's sermons were effective in bringing the immediate controversy incited by Karlstadt and others to an end. The way was once more clear for the Reformation to proceed; however, the struggles for a truly biblical Reformation were far from over. Meanwhile, Melanchthon now regarded Karlstadt with the deepest mistrust. Robert Stupperich reports a later encounter of Melanchthon with Karlstadt in which Melanchthon "separated himself from him in the sharpest possible manner."<sup>113</sup> He considered him a mystical fanatic, one lacking in integrity at that.

#### Muentzer and the Zwickau Prophets

During the turmoil in Wittenberg caused by Karlstadt's reformation measures, and while Luther was still absent, three laymen from Zwickau appeared. Expelled from their home town for holding unorthodox views and advocating radical measures, the trio, Nicholas Storch, Markus

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<sup>110</sup>W.A., 10:12.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 15. Luther confessed, ". . . I can drive [treiben] no man to heaven or beat him into with a club." Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>113</sup>Stupperich, p. 58.

Stubner, and Thomas Drechsel, claimed to be prophets of God who relied on the Holy Spirit rather than the Bible. Among their "revelations" was the program of erecting the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>114</sup>

Initially impressed with their biblical knowledge, Melanchthon gave them a hearing.<sup>115</sup> However, as their views increasingly collided with Reformation doctrine and practice, they were expelled from the city in 1522.<sup>116</sup>

Luther's personal contacts with the Zwickau prophets involved first, a meeting with Stubner in 1522 who brought with him one of his recent converts. Luther later told Spalatin that in this meeting he had uncovered Satan, who was indeed motivating these men.<sup>117</sup> His meetings with Storch and Drechsel were equally bad.<sup>118</sup>

Thomas Muentzer entered the circle of the Zwickau prophets shortly after his arrival in the city as one recommended by Luther to temporarily replace a local pastor. Influenced especially by Nicholas

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<sup>114</sup>In the new regime which they predicted, Storch confidently expected to be God's viceregent, for an angel had said to him in a dream, "Thou shalt sit on his throne." Clyde Leonard Manschreck, Melanchthon, The Quiet Reformer (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 77.

<sup>115</sup>That Melanchthon was enamored by the men from Zwickau is attested to in a letter addressed to the Elector: "I can scarcely tell you how deeply I am moved. But who shall judge them, other than Martin, I do not know . . . We must beware lest we resist the Spirit of God, and also lest we be possessed of the Devil." Quoted by Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), p. 208.

<sup>116</sup>Douglas, pp. 1072-1073.

<sup>117</sup>Edwards, pp. 24-25.

<sup>118</sup>Drechsel appeared one day on Luther's doorstep to bring him a message from God which he claimed had come to him by way of a small fiery cloud and a dream. Unimpressed, Luther poured a mug of beer over Drechsel's head. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Storch, Muentzer began to quarrel with the monks in the town and thus created a general disturbance. Hearing of his activity, Luther generally approved of Muentzer's zeal in advocating the Reformation cause,<sup>119</sup> unaware of his evolving convictions.

Muentzer's sermons in Zwickau emphasized the total corruption of existing church conditions and traced the departure from the true faith to the early centuries. He found support for his contention in the assessment of Hegesippus, an early Church writer, who labelled the post-apostolic church "an obscene adulteress."<sup>120</sup> Muentzer's revolutionary conclusion was that the church needed more than reformation. What was needed was a completely new Church.<sup>121</sup>

Compelled to leave Zwickau in 1521, Muentzer removed to Prague where he committed his new program to writing in what has been called his "Prague Proclamation."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Loewen, p. 51.

<sup>120</sup>In Ernst Benz, Evolution and Christian Hope, trans. Heinz G. Frank (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1966), p. 54.

<sup>121</sup>Cohn reports how Muentzer's contemporaries noted and lamented the change that had come over him, "the lust for blood which at times expressed itself in sheer raving . . . he now thought and talked only of the Book of Revelation and of such incidents in the Old Testament as Elijah's slaughter of the priests of Baal, Jehu's slaying of the sons of Ahab and Jael's assassination of the sleeping Sisera." Norman Rufus Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 236.

<sup>122</sup>Benz traces Muentzer's contact with the writings of Joachim of Fiore to his stay in Prague. Through the Hussite movement Joachim's views had found wide acceptance there. Muentzer's debt to Joachim is noted in his subsequent emphasis on a totally new beginning for the Church rather than simply reformation. The Holy Spirit justifies the new beginning, and Muentzer draws the revolutionary consequences. Benz, p. 56.



God will do wondrous things with those he has chosen, particularly in this country. The "New Church" will be established here. This people will be the mirror of the entire world. Therefore I appeal to everybody to help, that the word of God may be defended. Through the spirit of Elijah, I will show you those who have taught you to bring sacrifices for the idol Baal. If you will not do it, God will let you be slain by the Turks next year. Verily, I know whereof I speak, and this is so. And therefore I will suffer what Jeremiah had to endure.<sup>123</sup>

Here is evident the significant difference between the radical Reformation and the conservative Reformation of Luther. What Luther aimed for was a cleansing and renewing of the Church. For Muentzer, a new Church was imperative.

Not only was Muentzer's aim deviant from that of the mainstream Reformation. His method of achieving it also represented a radical break from the Word-centered reliance of Luther and the others. And here we meet a recurring concern in the writings of the conservative reformers. Indeed, it is this drive for complete ecclesiastical dominance in the name of ushering in the Kingdom of God that is recognized as alien the true biblical program of extension by the means of grace.<sup>124</sup>

In his "Sermon Before the Princes," delivered at Allstedt in 1524, Muentzer is clear as to what extent steps should be taken to eradicate the ungodly. Claiming to be the recipient of direct revelation from God, he declares,

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>124</sup>In a letter to Elector Frederic and Duke John of Saxony in 1524 warning of the potential danger from Muentzer's activities, Luther said, "for they are not Christians who would go beyond the word and appeal to force, even if they boast they are full of holy spirits." Preserved Smith, trans. and ed. The Life and Letters of Martin Luther (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911), p. 153. A comparative study of Luther's and Muentzer's views on the right to resist authority is offered by Carl Hinrichs in Luther und Muntzer (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Company, 1952).

For the pitiable corruption of holy Christendom has become so great that at the present time no tongue can tell it at all. Therefore a new Daniel must arise and interpret for you your vision and this [prophet] as Moses teaches [Deut. 20:2], must go in front of the army . . . Christ commanded in deep gravity saying [Luke 19:27]: Take mine enemies and strangle them before mine eyes. Why? Ah! because they ruin Christ's government for him and in addition want to defend their rascality under the guise of Christian faith and ruin the whole world with their insidious subterfuge. . . . Now if you want to be true governors, you must begin government at the roots, and, as Christ commanded, drive his enemies from the elect. For you are the means to this end. . . . Therefore let not the evildoers live longer who make us turn away from God [Deut. 15:5]. For the godless person has no right to live when he is in the way of the pious . . . the sword is necessary to wipe out the godless [Rom. 13:4]. That this might now take place, however, in an orderly and proper fashion, our cherished fathers, the princes, should do it, who with us confess Christ. If however, they do not do it, the sword will be taken from them [Dan. 7:26f].<sup>125</sup>

In his sermon, Muentzer interpreted Daniel's vision as predicting various epochs. He claimed he, a "new Daniel," was the chosen leader for a fifth epoch, after Christ the stone smashed the image. Unable to establish the Kingdom of the fifth epoch because the princes had hindered him, Christ had now committed the task to him. The princes are called upon to join with him in the effort to usher in the Kingdom of Christ. If they don't, they must accept the consequences. Muentzer himself was only too willing to be the one to take the "sword" from the princes if they failed to administer his brand of "justice." Indeed, he soon attempted to do just that.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>George Huntston Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, v. 25 of Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 49-70.

<sup>126</sup>Stayer notes the marked difference between Muentzer and the conservative Reformers on the place of "the sword" in executing justice. For Muentzer, the sword was ordained of God to protect the good and punish the wicked, not only in civil matters but in spiritual matters, too--"to make certain that the wicked did not obstruct the salvation of the good." For Luther and his associates, the sword belonged in the

Similar threats of divine retribution were used by Muentzer to intimidate the populace to revolutionary action, if need be, to accomplish his program of inaugurating a "new church." In a letter to a tax-collector in 1524 he warned, "Whoever want to be a stone of the New Church, must risk his neck. Otherwise, the builders will throw him away."<sup>127</sup>

Muentzer sought to bolster his appeals for aid in his cause by repeated claims of immediate revelation. It was no one else but God who had given through him the call to arms. In his "Sermon Before the Princes," he complained of theologians who "teach and say that God no longer reveals his divine mysteries to his beloved friends by means of valid visions or his audible Word, etc."<sup>128</sup> Counting himself among the very few "beloved friends" of God in his day, he compared the treatment he received with that of Jeremiah. "Thus they [the ungodly divines] stick with their inexperienced way (cf. Ecclesiasticus 34:9) and make into the butt of sarcasm those persons who go around in possession of revelation."<sup>129</sup>

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civil realm. Stayer, p. 90.

<sup>127</sup>Benz, p. 55.

<sup>128</sup>Williams, Mergal, p. 54.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid. In a pamphlet against Luther, "Thomas Muentzer's Answer to the Spiritless, Soft-Living Flesh at Wittenberg," Muentzer compared himself to Christ who like himself was persecuted by the Jews and Pharisees. He calls Luther, among other things, "Brother Soft-Life," "Doctor Liar," "Pope of Wittenberg," "Virgin Martin," "Educated Rascal," "Arch-devil," and "Arch-heathen." In Loewen, p. 57. Elsewhere, he labels Luther "the Beast of the Apocalypse" and the "Whore of Babylon." In Cohn, p. 243.

Tired of waiting for the inattentive princes to recognize the legitimacy of his appeal for action, Muentzer turned to the discontented elements in the general populace. In the name of God and claiming His special authority, he directs the miners of Mansfeld,

Dear brothers, how long will you sleep? How often have I told you as to how it is to be done! God can no longer reveal himself, you must act . . . Get to it! It is time! The wicked despair like dogs . . . You must strike now while the fire is hot! Don't let the swords cool from the blood of the princes. . . It is impossible to have peace and be free while the wicked rule over you . . . It is God's war and he will fight for you.<sup>130</sup>

Muentzer identified himself in his closing signature as "a servant of God against the godless."<sup>131</sup> In a letter to one of the princes, he informs him of his God-given prerogative, "The eternal living God has commanded that you be deprived of your power by force, which has been granted us."<sup>132</sup> He continued, "You are of no use to Christendom; you are harmful to the friends of God. . . We demand an answer at once, or else we shall move against you in the name of the hosts of God."<sup>133</sup> Muentzer did attempt to move against the government in 1525 along with his deluded followers and experienced bitter defeat.<sup>134</sup> Just before he was executed in May of that year, he recanted his radicalism and received the mass.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Loewen, p. 58.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>Five thousand of his company died at Frankenhausen.

<sup>135</sup>Many of Muentzer's writings and letters are contained in the following volume: Thomas Muentzer, Schriften und Briefe, kritische Gesamtausgabe, herausgegeben von Gunther Franz (Gutersloh: Gutersloher

The radical views of Muentzer did not disappear with the death of their instigator. There is evidence that his concept of an earthly Kingdom--building by force, extended well into the 1530s.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, Luther continued to warn people against the "spirit of Allstedt." In his "Letter to the Princes of Saxony," he exposes the aims of Muentzer and his followers in advocating the use of force to overthrow civil authority and make themselves "lords of the world." This is not Christ's teaching, Luther preached. "Yet before Pilate Christ rejected such an aim, saying that His kingdom is not of this world [John 18:36]. He also taught his disciples not to be as the rulers of this world [Matt. 20:25]."<sup>137</sup> Luther called on the princes to beware of the "Allstedt spirit" and be ready to take action. "But when they want to do more than fight with the Word, and begin to destroy and use force, then your Graces must intervene. . . . For we who are engaged in the ministry of the Word are not allowed to use force. Ours is a spiritual conflict [geistlich streit] in which we wrest hearts and souls from the devil."<sup>138</sup> Harry Loewen observes that the memory of Muentzer lingered with Luther all his life. "On several occasions Luther told stories about his former foe, and from time to time he referred to Muentzer's death as God's just punishment for rebellion, blasphemy and unbelief."<sup>139</sup> Melanchthon

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Verlagshau Gerd Mohn, 1968).

<sup>136</sup>Loewen observes that "Luther's sermons and writings after 1535 are filled with references to the Anabaptist's attempt to establish a kingdom on earth." Loewen, p. 100.

<sup>137</sup> L.W. 40:51 (W.A. 15:212).

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 57 (W. A., 15:219.).

<sup>139</sup>Loewen, p. 59.

shared Luther's deep concern regarding Muentzer and his "heavenly prophets." He had observed in Wittenberg with Luther the outcome of their teaching. To make clear to the people the consequences of fanaticism, Melanchthon wrote Die Historie des Thomas Müntzers in which he demonstrated the extreme to which someone with Muentzer's views would go to realize his goals.<sup>140</sup> Melanchthon's convictions remained firm: any claims to immediate revelation or any resemblance to "spiritualism" must be rejected. Stupperich points out that the judgment that Melanchthon formed of Muentzer and the Zwickauers was later carried over into his views of the Anabaptists. "Later controversies strengthened him in the view that with the Baptists one had to deal with the same phenomenon as with the Zwickau prophets."<sup>141</sup> Melanchthon held this conviction throughout his life.

The relationship of Muentzer and his Zwickau prophets to the Anabaptist movement has long been debated. The oldest view traces the origin of the Anabaptists to Muentzer.<sup>142</sup> Another opinion locates its inception to the first adult (believer's) baptism during the Reformation in 1525 at Zurich. A more recent view sees simultaneous beginnings in 1526 in both Germany and Switzerland of rather diverse groups, held together mainly by repudiation of infant baptism. Regardless of the precise relationship in terms of origin, there are definite similarities between Muentzer's views and those of the Anabaptists on more issues than

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<sup>140</sup>Philipp Melanchthon, Die Historie des Thomas Muntzers, des Anfang der thuringischen Aufruhr (Hagenau: Johann Setzer, 15\_\_).

<sup>141</sup>Stupperich, pp. 58-59.

<sup>142</sup>Karl Holl is perhaps the most able spokesman for this position.

baptism. This is readily evident in the area of eschatology. The dependence on Muentzer is termed "considerable."<sup>143</sup>

Among the early Anabaptists who demonstrate affinity for Muentzer's prophetic scheme was John Hut. Hearing Muentzer's preaching, he was deeply impressed by the proclamation of the imminent return of Christ, believing that the advent of Christ would occur during Pentecost in 1528.<sup>144</sup> Picking up the theme of impending judgment upon the ungodly, Hut declared, "The subjects should murder all the authorities, for the opportune time has arrived: the power is in their hands."<sup>145</sup> The uprising of the peasants, he believed, was premature. If it had been "in God's time," the righteous would be given the authority to rule and the ungodly would be overthrown. Hut's followers held that "in a short time Christ would come again to earth and institute an historical rule and would bestow upon them the sword of righteousness (as they call it),

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<sup>143</sup>John S. Oyer, Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 110. Fisher traces the introduction of "chiliastic theory" to Storch and concurs that it "prevailed extensively among the Anabaptists." George Park Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 319.

<sup>144</sup>Williams, The Radical Reformation, p.168.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 80. It is on the connection between Muentzer and Hut that Henry Bullinger (and later historians) have based their assertion that Muentzer was the father of the Anabaptist movement. Robert Friedman, however, believes it is unfair to connect Hut too closely with Muentzer in light of the profound change in Hut after his contact with Hans Denck in 1526. Friedman claims "From then on he [Hut] repudiated all Muentzerite-Schwaermer tendencies; above all, any efforts toward a violent overthrow of the 'godless' princes, and the ushering in of the kingdom by way of the sword." Robert Friedman, The Theology of Anabaptism (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), p. 105. Friedman's attempt to place Hut in "moderate" Anabaptism is questionable in light of Hut's sustained and bitter debate with Balthasar Hubmaier, another early leader. cf. Werner O. Packull, Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptists (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), pp. 100-106.

to root out and destroy all magistrates and those who did not accept re-baptism and were not related to their band."<sup>146</sup>

Another first-generation Anabaptist whose eschatological outlook and temper reflect the thinking of Muentzer is Melchior Hofmann. In 1526, he predicted that the end of the world could be expected in 1533.<sup>147</sup> In early 1530, he published several booklets in which he declared that the Apostle Paul was the angel who had bound Satan for a thousand years (Rev. 20:2). After the expiration of this period, Christianity had fallen into its current deplorable condition, now soon to be remedied. The reader was left with the impression that Hofmann himself was the returned Elijah, one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3. He declared that Strassburg would be the "spiritual Jerusalem," the center for the eventual one hundred and forty-four thousand heralds of world regeneration (Rev. 14:1). After a bloody siege of the elect city, the royal priesthood, the priestly kingdom of the persevering saints, would rally under their chosen, righteous pastors. That would be the breakthrough. Hofmann's "breakthrough" never materialized. Ordered arrested by the officials of Strassburg, he left the city to promote the Anabaptist cause elsewhere.<sup>148</sup>

Though it is unwarranted to place all of the early Anabaptists in the same theological and philosophical mold, there are certain generalizations that can be made. The anti-government mentality was not unique to

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<sup>146</sup>Franklin Hamlin Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), p. 28.

<sup>147</sup>Williams, p. 261.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., pp. 259-264.



Muentzer. Walter Tillmanns notes that "to a greater or lesser extent Hubmaier, Denck, Haetzer, Hut and Hoffmann were also opposed to government."<sup>149</sup> Feeling oppressed by the government for their uniqueness within the nominal Christian community, they waited for the day when the "wicked authorities" would be punished. Compounding their difficulties with their countrymen was their promotion and practice of Christian communism in the effort to realize a higher degree of spirituality. Finally, the religious fanaticism which compelled a large part of the movement to take up arms against the "godless" was a menace to society for at least a decade.<sup>150</sup> If other means fail, the Kingdom of God is at last to be taken by force.<sup>151</sup>

It was amidst this distant and immediate climate of eschatological expectation and excess that Melanchthon and Luther collaborated on a confession of faith to present at Augsburg. Conscious of Eck's confounding of their doctrines with the Anabaptists, aware of the accusation that they represented a novel heretical sect with little or no connection to historic Christianity, they state their position

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<sup>149</sup>Walter Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), p. 261.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., Clasen notes the predominant emphasis among the Anabaptists on the second advent as a day of retribution, a time "when the unbelievers would be mercilessly exterminated." This was diametrically opposed to the hopeful and confident expectancy which characterized the teaching of Luther on this subject. Claus-Peter Clasen, Anabaptism--A Social History, 1525-1618 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 120.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid. Clarence Bauman illustrates the optimistic temporal expectations for the Church held by the Anabaptists which contributed to the willingness to employ even violence as a last resort. Clarence Bauman, "The Theology of the 'Two Kingdoms': A Comparison of Luther and the Anabaptists," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, 38 (January 1964):37-49.

carefully. It is of critical importance in this study to observe their affirmations as well as their negations relative to eschatology.

### An Exposition

Though Article XVII in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology represent the only separate statement in regard to the second advent of Christ, it is observed that this doctrine actually pervades every confessional formulation. Edmund Schlink comments that one finds in the confessional writings so few specific eschatological paragraphs because "their whole doctrine in all articles is replete with eschatological expectation."<sup>152</sup> Holsten Fagerberg concurs with this assessment, adding "Reformation theology was shaped with eternal things in view, and it has a clear eschatological direction."<sup>153</sup> Clearly, the confessors demonstrate their deep and abiding interest in the doctrine of the "last things."

It has been noted that in her teaching on the prophetic content of Scripture, "the Roman Church is in agreement with conservative Protestantism as regards the consummation of the world."<sup>154</sup> This

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<sup>152</sup>Edmund Schlink, The Theology of the Lutheran Confession, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 270.

<sup>153</sup>Fagerberg, p. 297.

<sup>154</sup>Juergen Ludwig Neve, Churches and Sects of Christendom (Burlington, IA: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1940), p. 159. It should be noted however, that a great difference exists regarding the fate of the individual during the present order of things. The theologians at the Council of Trent, for example, spoke of additional divisions in the other world, additions, that is, to the historic confession of only two possible destinies, heaven or hell. Moreover, the fundamental cleavage between Roman Catholic and Lutheran theology respecting the doctrine of justification looms large in a comparative discussion of eschatology. The vital relationship of justification and eschatology is readily

conclusion is substantiated by the positive response to Article XVII in the Roman Confutation. Anticipating this accord and eager to limit the debate to the most salient points, the confessors proceed to affirm the cardinal elements in the historic witness to the second Advent.<sup>155</sup> At the same time, they are constrained to repudiate certain false views with which they have been associated by Eck and other detractors.

Though the original Latin and German texts of the Augsburg Confession as presented before the emperor on June 25, 1530, have been lost, there are many editions which are extant. The rendition of the Augustana which has achieved prominent status among many confessional Lutherans is the so-called Editio princeps of 1531. Melancthon had felt constrained to produce this edition because of the circulation of several alleged "authentic" copies which, in fact, were often erroneous. It is the Editio princeps in its Latin version that was incorporated into the Book of Concord in 1580. The work of Kolde, Tschackert, Bornkamm, Ficker and others has drawn attention to the existence of many additional copies of the Augustana dated before 1540. However, a comparative study of the extant versions reveals no substantive differen-

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evident as the former is recognized as the basis upon which eschatology achieves its real relevance. For a close examination of the relationship of justification to eschatological categories, see Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, Part I, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971).

<sup>155</sup>Wolf observes the "surprising brevity" of this article. "The whole domain of Eschatology is in its thetical statements couched in half a dozen lines, the Confessors aiming, as is well known, at the enumeration of only such points as were deemed necessary for the defense of their position, to wit, that they had adopted nothing, either in regard to doctrine or ceremonies, that is opposed to the Holy Scriptures or to the Christian Church Universal." Wolf, p. 329.

ces, particularly of doctrinal import. The seventeenth article is among the least affected by these variations.<sup>156</sup>

In 1536 Richard Taverner published the first English translation of the Augsburg Confession. Taverner, then secretary to Thomas Cromwell, prepared the text for broad distribution, "that the people, for whose sakes the book was commanded to be translated may the more greedily devour the same."<sup>157</sup> Though condemned under the reign of Queen Mary, copies survived and formed the basis for fresh translations also among American Lutherans in the nineteenth century.<sup>158</sup>

Because the Editio Princeps has been the common text of the Augsburg Confession among most of the historical subjects of this study, an English translation of the same has been selected as a basis for study and comparison. In 1911, the General Council issued a translation of the Latin Editio Princeps in cooperation with the General Synod, The

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<sup>156</sup>Cf. for example, the "oldest form" of the Augsburg Confession (May 31, 1530), the "revised form" (June 15, 1530), the "final form" (June 25, 1530) and the Editio Princeps (1530-31). The differences are negligible. A "side-by-side" reproduction of the above editions is offered by J. Michael Reu in his study, The Augsburg Confession, pp. 166-303.

<sup>157</sup>Richard Taverner, The Augsburg Confession, Henry Eyster Jacobs, ed., (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1888), p. iii. The text of the seventeenth article, entitled, "Of the Resurrection" is as follows: "Also they teach that Christ shall appear in the end of the world to judge, and shall raise up again all that be dead, and shall give to the godly and elect people everlasting life, and perpetual joys, but the wicked men and devils he shall condemn to be tormented without end. Heresies. They damn the Anabaptists which think that the pain of evil men and devils shall have an end. They damn also others which nowadays sow abroad Judaical opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the wicked shall be oppressed in every place, and the good men shall occupy and possess the kingdom of the world." Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>158</sup>E.g., The General Council adopted Taverner's work as a major source for a new English translation in 1888. Ibid., p. iv.

United Synod of the South, and the Joint Synod of Ohio. This translation, embodied in a fresh edition of the Book of Concord under the editorship of Henry Eyster Jacobs, reads as follows in Article XVII:

Also they teach, that, at the Consummation of the World, Christ shall appear for judgment, and shall raise up all the dead; he shall give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils he shall condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed [exterminated].<sup>159</sup>

It is of critical importance in this study to examine what is confessed by the Lutheran reformers and particularly what is condemned.

#### What is Confessed

If there is expectation of discovering a comprehensive system of eschatology in Article XVII there will be disappointment. Yet, as has been mentioned, the major categories receive careful and concise treatment.

#### The Second Advent

The opening sentence speaks first of a future manifestation of Christ, "Christ shall appear."<sup>160</sup> This simple witness is in consonance with the historic testimony of the Church to the repeated assurances of Christ and the Apostles. It was affirmed in the earliest expression of

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<sup>159</sup>Henry Eyster Jacobs, ed., The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1916), p. 42. The German translation substitutes for "suppressed" the word "exterminated."

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

the Church's faith in the Apostles' Creed and ever remained a constant feature, if not always consciously enunciated. There is every indication that the confessors understood Christ's future coming to be a personal one. It receives special attention because it is unlike any other "coming" of Christ in terms of a revelation of His grace and power. "Appear" is a translation of the Latin term, "apparebit," which can also be rendered to become visible, to show oneself, or to be manifest.<sup>161</sup> All of the meanings underline the uniqueness of this coming of Christ. It will signal a change in the Church's conception of and relationship to her Lord. The German verb form in expressing this future eventuality is "kommen wird" and is commonly translated "will come" or "will return." Again, the variations "will arrive," "will approach," "will draw near," and so forth, similarly suggest a personal, literal advent of Christ.<sup>162</sup>

Recognizing the folly of attempting to fix a date, precise or approximate, the confessors speak of Christ's return as occurring at "the Consummation of the World."<sup>163</sup> They are content to submit to the omniscient plan of God rather than to attempt calculations.<sup>164</sup> This is not to suggest indifference on their part to the prospect of Christ's

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<sup>161</sup>D. P. Simpson, Cassell's Latin Dictionary (London: Cassell and Company, 1979), p. 51.

<sup>162</sup>Helmut W. Ziefle, Dictionary of Modern Theological German (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 96.

<sup>163</sup>Jacobs, p. 42.

<sup>164</sup>Melanchthon, though not a date-setter, believed that the return of Christ was near. Declaring that the great day of God will soon come, and adverting to the 6,000 year theory--2,000 without law, 2,000 under the law, and 2,000 under the Messiah, Melanchthon adds: "It is settled that Christ was born about the close of the fourth millennium, and now 1545 years have passed. Therefore we are not far from the end." In Froom, 2:291.

advent. Rather, it is affirming the inscrutability of God's prophetic economy in this matter.

The expression, "consummatione mundi" is carefully chosen. Consummatio may be rendered in terms of "a finishing" or "a completion," or as translators of the Augustana typically express it, "a consummation."<sup>165</sup> Mundi may refer to the world or the universe.<sup>166</sup> In either case, the appearing of Christ will not only coincide with an alternate relationship of Christ with the world's inhabitants, but also with the world or universe itself.

On the "Last Day"

The German rendition of the article, "am Jungsten Tag," translated "on the last day," "on the Last Judgment," or "on Doomsday,"<sup>167</sup> depicts the solemnity of this all-encompassing confrontation with the coming Christ. At the same time, it echoes the ultimate nature of this event in terms of the world's survival.

The expression, "Last Day" is used consistently in the Lutheran confessions. In the explanation of the "Third Article" of the Apostles' Creed, Luther identifies the Last Day as the time when the resurrection and granting of eternal life will occur.<sup>168</sup> It is until the Last Day that the Holy Spirit will remain "with the holy community or Christian

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<sup>165</sup>Simpson, p. 144.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., p. 383.

<sup>167</sup>Harold T. Betteridge, Cassell's German Dictionary (London: Cassell and Co., 1978), p. 600.

<sup>168</sup>Tappert, p. 345.

people."<sup>169</sup> At that time His blessed ministry in this respect will have been finished. ". . . He (the Holy Spirit) will finally make us perfect and eternally holy."<sup>170</sup> Until the Last Day, however, He carries on His work unceasingly.

"Last times" was employed by the confessors to indicate that period preceding the Last Day. The appeal made to the emperor at Augsburg was made on the basis of urgency arising from the conviction that the "last times" were a present reality. ". . . Your Majesty will graciously take into account the fact that, in these last times of which the Scriptures prophesy, the world is getting worse and men are becoming weaker and more infirm."<sup>171</sup> Melancthon, in addressing the papal legate, Campegius, exhorted him to conduct his affairs with such a frame of reference. "You see, Campegius, that these are the last times, in which Christ predicted there would be the greatest danger for religion. You, therefore, who should sit as though on a watchtower to guide religious affairs, ought in such times to exercise unusual wisdom and diligence."<sup>172</sup>

The imminency of the second advent may have various effects on the believer. On the one hand, it may serve to sober him and give him a sense of urgency in following Christ. On the other hand, the contemplation of Christ's return may give him great cause for encouragement and joy. It is in the context of the latter reflection that Luther more

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., p. 417.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., p. 201.



often spoke, referring to Christ's return as "der liebe jungste Tag" (the dear Last Day).<sup>173</sup> It is an eternal day, manifesting the hidden majesty of God. It is a day of great expectation. Reflecting on the confessional stance, Werner Elert comments, "The Last Day is the end. But thereby it reveals not only the theme of world history but also its conclusion, that is, the collapse of the resistance. But it also reveals the victory of Christ over His adversaries, and, in accord with this, the victory of belief over unbelief."<sup>174</sup>

How does the concept of the "Last Day" with its apparent ultimacy correlate with a proposed future time-bound period beyond Christ's return known as the millennium? E. J. Wolf suggests that though "Last Day" certainly conveys with it the idea of a distinct act, complete in itself, yet the length of this "day" is not necessarily determined by the confessors. "How long the day of his coming may continue, what immense ages may be embraced in that eventful day into which all other days and periods are flowing, has not been revealed."<sup>175</sup> What is definite is that the Parousia itself will be the act of a moment, Wolf concludes. It will be instantaneous. J. A. Brown objects to any lengthening of the "Last Day" to include events not specifically prescribed in the affirmations of Article XVII. Speaking of the confessional use of "Last Day," he states,

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<sup>173</sup>Otto W. Heick, "The Doctrine of Last Things in Lutheran Theology," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, 17 (October 1944):421.

<sup>174</sup>Werner Elert, Last Things, trans. by Martin Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), p. 30.

<sup>175</sup>Wolf, p. 337.

It is not employed with reference to a time or period to precede the resurrection and judgment. The jungste Tag is the great day, the day of judgment, the day of all days in the history of the world; and the Confessors would not have employed it for any other day. Substantially the same may be said of the Latin. It is the consummation or end of the world. It would be to disregard simplest and plainest rules of interpretation to make the words in the Confession refer to any other time than that they indicated. To apply them to the beginning of a millennial reign of a thousand years, or of an indefinite period is too absurd to require serious consideration.<sup>176</sup>

Schlink epitomizes the Last Day as "the revelation of Christ's kingdom,"<sup>177</sup> even as the devil's kingdom is overthrown. May this revelation also embrace a millennial reign of Christ from heaven? May the Last Day not only be characterized by momentary resurrection and judgment but also by the inaugurating of Christ's eternal reign, though initially realized in terms of a "thousand-year" rule of Christ? Whether or not the confessors would allow such latitude in interpreting the extent of the Last Day is a moot question. The confessional usage is not determinative.<sup>178</sup>

#### Unto Judgment

The object of Christ's return is expressed by the confessors as "for judgment." The Latin expression (ad iudicandum) as well as the German (zu richten) are not significant in terms of demonstrating

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<sup>176</sup>Wolf, p. 337.

<sup>177</sup>Schlink, p. 271.

<sup>178</sup>Without discussing whether or not the Lutheran confessions allow a broad interpretation of the "Last Day," Pieper believes the biblical evidence is conclusive. "Christ, however, refers all who believe in Him only to the resurrection on the Last Day. John 6:40: 'Everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him may [R.V., should] have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the Last Day [τῇ ἑσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ].'" Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:526.

relevant nuances pertinent to this discussion. What follows in the affirmative section of Article XVII is encompassed under this general concept. The resurrection of the dead, the gracious bestowing of everlasting life to the "godly and elect," and the just consignment of the "ungodly men and the devils" to endless torment are all included. For the godly, the return of Christ will make manifest the judgment that is passed. For the ungodly, the judgment consists of executing the sentence which unbelief in Christ's atonement has earned. All parties are included under the broad heading of judgment.

The German version implies that the criterion of judgment is that of faith. While the Latin translation terms Christians the "godly (piis) and elect," the German speaks of them as "believers (Gläubigen) and elect." Even though both versions agree in calling the condemned the "ungodly," the antecedent Schwabach Articles referred to them in the corresponding statements as "unbelievers." Allbeck underlines the fact that the concept, the "elect," certainly recalls the fact that the source of one's salvation as well as one's faith is God.<sup>179</sup> Thus, evangelical doctrine is readily evident in terms used to describe the judgment.

Heinrich Willkomm has demonstrated the pervasiveness of the accent on judgment in the formulations of the entire Book of Concord. He comments,

. . . the whole manner of speech and thought of the confessors is determined by the expectation of Judgment Day. What they say, they say in such a manner as to be able to answer for it with joyous and fearless hearts and consciences before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. It is the joy of their heart that they have something to say to the Church, to troubled souls, that will stand in the fires and the terrors of the last judgment. The expectation of Judgment

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<sup>179</sup>Allbeck, p. 107.

Day gives firmness and determination to their speaking and their confessing. . .180

Willkomm's thesis is borne out even in the preface of the Book of Concord. "By the help of God's grace we, too, intend to persist in this confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with joyful and fearless hearts and consciences"181

That the ecumenical creeds contain clear reference to the reality of coming judgment has been noted previously. In demonstrating their oneness with these confessions of the early Church, the Lutheran confessors note that the dominant purpose of the return of Christ is "the judgment of the living and the dead."182

The confessions throughout emphasize that for the Christian, Judgment Day is not a day of terror. Rather, there is solid assurance that it will signal entrance into the joys of eternal life. In the Large Catechism, the accent is on the victory that has been won by Christ over the powers of darkness. "The devil and all powers, therefore, must be subject to him and be beneath his feet until finally, at the last day, he will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc."183 In the explanation of the second article of the Creed, the acknowledgment of coming judgment raises no qualms for the believer resting in the objective justification wrought

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180Heinrich Willkomm, "Jesus the Judge of the World," Concordia Theological Monthly, 25 (April 1954):257-258.

181Tappert, p. 9.

182Ibid., p. 30.

183Ibid., p. 414.

by Christ on the cross. The discussion is carried forward without fear of dire consequences. Propter Christum, the believer is accepted already. In this sense, his judgment is passed. This accounts for the confessors' emphasis on the blessedness of Christ's coming to judge for the Christian. Christ's return to judge the living and the dead means the beginning of service in "everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness . . ."184 This is in stark contrast to the unbeliever who "flees in terror before the judgment and punishment of the law . . ."185 Christ's coming will mean condemnation to hell and eternal punishment for the ungodly.186

The emphasis on judgment in the eschatological formulations of the Augsburg Confession, as well as in the entire Book of Concord, is no innovation. In such a focus, the Lutheran confessors were recognizing and embracing as their own the accents of the early Church fathers. T. F. Torrance remarks in this regard, ". . . Lutheran eschatology was mainly an eschatology of judgment, going back to early Latin fathers like Cyprian with their emphasis on the decay and collapse of the world."187 The absence of pessimism in this outlook on the part of the confessors, however, is appropriate. They looked beyond the crumbling of this world to eternal life with Christ.

#### The Resurrection

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184Ibid., p. 345.

185Ibid., p. 147.

186Ibid., p. 38.

187Manson, p. 40.

Article XVII confesses that as a prelude to the final judgment Christ will raise up "all the dead." The English translations of the Latin (mortuos omnes resuscitabit) and the German (alle Toten auferwecken) versions are identical at this point. No one is excluded from this all-encompassing action of Christ. The resurrection is unto judgment with the only alternatives being eternal life and joy or endless torment.

Elsewhere, the Book of Concord reflects the universality of the resurrection in terms of its subjects. In his explanation of the Apostles' Creed, Luther says, "I believe that . . . on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ."<sup>188</sup> While the resurrection is all-inclusive, only believers have eternal life with Christ. The Athanasian Creed likewise teaches the resurrection of every person at the second advent. "At his coming all men rise with their bodies and give an account of their own deeds."<sup>189</sup> The Apology of the Augsburg Confession adds nothing to its counterpart statements in the Augustana.<sup>190</sup> Aside from these statements concerning the subjects of the resurrection, the confessions concentrate on the meaning of the resurrection of the believer in terms of spiritual and physical change that he shall undergo.

For the Christian, resurrection will mean entrance into a state of perfection. This perfection will include not only the soul but also the body. "In that life are only perfectly pure and holy people, full

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<sup>188</sup>Tappert, p. 345.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

of goodness and righteousness, completely freed from sin, death, and all evil, living in new, immortal and glorified bodies."<sup>191</sup> It is interesting to observe that in the earliest draft of the Augsburg Confession (May 31, 1530) Melanchthon had written "that all deceased men shall be raised up with the same body in which they died."<sup>192</sup> He changed this before the delivery of the Confession at Augsburg to the present wording, "and shall raise up all the dead." There had been concern on the part of the Reformers as to the best way to express the true nature of the resurrection. Is it more correct to describe it in terms of a resurrection of the body or a resurrection of the flesh? The Apostles' Creed, in the original, was properly translated "auferstehung des Fleisches" (flesh) by Luther. Yet, on reflection he realized that this choice was capable of misunderstanding. In his Large Catechism, Luther described the issue. "But the term 'Auferstehung des Fleisches' (Resurrection of the flesh) here employed is not according to good German idiom. For when we Germans hear the word Fleisch (flesh), we think no farther than the shambles. . . . But in good German idiom we would say Auferstehung des Leibs, or Leichnams (Resurrection of the body). Yet it is not a matter of much moment if we only understand the words in their true sense."<sup>193</sup> And what is their true sense? The Formula of Concord is clear in its explanation: "In the article of the Resurrection, Scripture testifies that it is precisely the substance of this our flesh, but

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<sup>191</sup>Ibid., p. 418.

<sup>192</sup>". . . dass alle verstorbenen Menschen mit demselben ihren Leib, darin sie gestorben, wiederum werden auferweckt . . ." Reu, The Augsburg Confession, p. 184.

<sup>193</sup>Jacobs, pp. 446-447.

without sin, which will rise again, and that in eternal life we will have and retain precisely this soul, but without sin."<sup>194</sup> Melanchthon's early draft conforms to this fuller explanation of the matter. Perhaps he had recognized the potential for misunderstanding his intent in 1530 and had simply chosen to express this truth in broader terms, thereby eliminating possible offense.<sup>195</sup>

The perfection of the believer in the resurrection is described by the confessors as a complete renewal. The old nature, the "flesh of sin," will be put off entirely so that the resurrected one "will do his will spontaneously, without coercion, unhindered, perfectly, completely and with sheer joy, and will rejoice therein forever."<sup>196</sup> The action of being separated from the sinful nature is further described as God's work. "Not one except God alone can separate the corruption of our nature from the nature itself. This will take place wholly by way of death in the resurrection. Then the nature which we now bear will arise and live forever, without original sin and completely separated and removed from it . . ."<sup>197</sup> Not only is this spiritual renewal God's work

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., p. 548.

<sup>195</sup>That Melanchthon did not change his original thinking regarding the nature of the resurrection is verified in his Loci Communes of 1555. Commenting on Job 19:25-27 he says, "This is a very beautiful passage announcing that we in this flesh, and in this body, which we now have, will be resurrected, and that our body and entire nature will be renewed [verneuet], as St. Paul teaches." Melanchthon, Loci Communes, p. 283.

<sup>196</sup>Tappert, p. 573.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., p. 467.



but also the resurrection of the body. ". . . the bodily resurrection of the flesh is to be ascribed to God alone."<sup>198</sup>

Does the description of the resurrection in Article XVII necessitate a single stage or is there room for a broader construction, entailing, for example, a resurrection of deceased Christians at one point and a resurrection of the unconverted at another? Theodore Graebner is convinced that not only the Augsburg Confession but also all of the historic confessional writings of the Christian Church militate against the latter possibility. "The Christian Church, in all its confessional writings, consistently teaches one resurrection, not two."<sup>199</sup> J. A. Brown believes the content of Article XVII forbids any interval between the events mentioned. "The coming, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment, are so closely linked that there is no room to separate them by any great intermediate events."<sup>200</sup> Concurring with this interpretation, the orthodox Lutheran of the seventeenth century Quenstedt, says, "Since the second advent of Christ, the general resurrection, the final judgment, and the end of the world are immediately united, and follows the other without an interval of time, it is manifest that, before the completion of the judgment, no earthly kingdom and life abounding in all spiritual and bodily pleasure, as the Chiliasts or

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<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p. 538.

<sup>199</sup>Theodore Graebner, War in the Light of Prophecy--A Reply to Modern Chiliasm (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 71.

<sup>200</sup>Brown, p. 58.

Millenarians dream, is to be expected."<sup>201</sup> While not seeking directly to explicate Article XVII, J. Michael Reu argues for a broader conception of the "last day" to include a "first" and a final resurrection. "The universality of the resurrection, which is definitely asserted in the Gospels, does not necessarily require its absolute simultaneousness; hence, in assuming a first resurrection one does not contradict the analogy of faith and of the Scriptures; cf. moreover Matthew 27:52ff."<sup>202</sup> The crucial matter in Reu's estimation is that there is recognition of the Scriptural truth that all will be raised from the dead. In his literal interpretation of the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5, he distinguished an initial resurrection at the second advent involving believers and a final resurrection of the unsaved at the end of a millennial-period. Concurring in this interpretation as one also professing full subscription to the Lutheran confessions is Revere Weidner. He claims a number of the early Church fathers as well as two orthodox Lutherans of the seventeenth century as proponents of a literal understanding of the first resurrection.<sup>203</sup> In light of this

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<sup>201</sup>In Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. by Charles E. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 650. In similar language Johann Gerhard comments, "Ex immediata adventus Christi connexionione cum universali omnium hominum resurrectione, iudicii extremi administratione, hujus seculi consummatione, novi coeli ac terrae creatione, piorum in occursum Christi obviatione, piorum coelestibus praemis et impiorum aeternis suppliciis." Johann Gerhard, Loci Theologici, Tomus Nonus (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1875). p. 192.

<sup>202</sup>Johann Michael Reu, Lutheran Dogmatics, vol. 2 (Dubuque, IA: Wartburg Theological Seminary, unpublished lectures, 1941-42), p. 243.

<sup>203</sup>Revere Franklin Weidner, Biblical Theology of the New Testament, 2 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1891)2:311. Among those cited are Justin, Irenaeus, Victorinus, and Lactantius in the early centuries and Dannhauer and Selnecker in the seventeenth.

orthodox company, as well as his own exegetical deductions, he urges those who differ to "have at least so much Christian modesty as not to accuse a man, who prefers the literal interpretation--that of the Church Fathers, of a bodily resurrection of the martyrs to the kingdom of glory--as guilty of heresy in doctrine."<sup>204</sup>

If one judges the matter solely on the basis of Article XVII, either in the Augsburg Confession or its Apology, the determinative factor is the interpretation of consummatione mundi or Jüngsten Tage. Does this designation demand simultaneity in terms of resurrection and judgment? As has been noted, the answer must be found outside the confessions. An ultimate resolution is not discernible in the Book of Concord.

The only alternatives for mankind as the judgment of Christ is administered is "eternal life and everlasting joys" (vitam aeternam et perpetua gaudia) or condemnation "to be tormented without end" (ut sine fine crucientur).<sup>205</sup> The German version uses the term die Hölle (Hell) to designate where the eternal torment will take place.

### Eternal Life

According to the Lutheran confessions, regeneration is the beginning of eternal life. "This rebirth is, so to speak, the beginning of eternal life, as Paul says (Rom. 8:10), 'If Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of

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<sup>204</sup>Ibid.

<sup>205</sup>Jacobs, p. 42.

righteousness."<sup>206</sup> It is the Gospel that effects this blessed state. "But the Gospel brings not the shadow of eternal things but the eternal blessings themselves, the Holy Spirit and the righteousness by which we are righteous before God."<sup>207</sup> It is the forgiveness of sins through Christ that makes possible this beginning. "The Gospel . . . is the forgiveness of sins and the beginning of eternal life in the hearts of believers."<sup>208</sup> This forgiveness is applied by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, that work eternal life in the heart."<sup>209</sup> In heaven itself, the Christian will be completely holy and no longer in need of forgiveness. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian respecting his sanctification will have been completed. Now we are only halfway pure and holy. The Holy Spirit must continue to work in us through the Word, daily granting forgiveness until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness."<sup>210</sup>

The confessors teach that God wills no one's damnation but rather that all receive the gift of eternal life. "Therefore Christ has commanded to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name among all nations. For God `loved the world` and gave to it his only Son (John 3:16) . . . . `The Lord is not wishing that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance` (2 Peter 3:9)."<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>Tappert, p. 161.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>209</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., p. 418.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., pp. 620-621.

Eternal life in heaven is a gift of God. God does not owe us eternal life. It is purely of His grace in Christ. ". . . God owes us neither his Word, nor his Spirit, nor his grace; in fact, when he does graciously give us these we frequently cast them from us and make ourselves unworthy of eternal life."<sup>212</sup> The confessors were intent upon overturning the Roman Catholic concept of eternal life as a reward. They laid stress on the word "gift" in their rebuttal.<sup>213</sup> Yet, if the grace of God could be seen as fully responsible, they were willing to accept the usage of the term, "reward" in connection with eternal life.

We grant that eternal life is a reward because it is something that is owed--not because of our merits but because of the promise. We have shown that justification is strictly a gift of God; it is a thing promised. To this gift the promise of eternal life has been added, according to Romans 8:30. "Those whom he justified he also glorified." Here Paul's words apply, "There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me, etc. (2 Timothy 4:8). The crown is owed to the justified because of the promise. This promise the saints must know."<sup>214</sup>

It is in this sense that the confessors find it impossible to separate the concept of grace from reward. "In the proclamation of rewards grace is displayed."<sup>215</sup>

The main point of the confessors in relationship to the idea of reward is to show that faith in Christ properly precedes any consideration of it. Yet, in the keeping of the Law as one who is justified by grace through faith, the confessors acknowledge the biblical promise of

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid., p. 626.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., p. 161. Article XVII speaks of eternal life as something that Christ "shall give" (dabit - Latin; geben - German).

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

reward. They remind, however, that "this keeping of the Law would not please God unless we had been accepted because of faith. Since men are accepted because of faith, this incipient keeping of the Law pleases God and has its reward, both here and hereafter."<sup>216</sup> It is in this respect too that the Lutheran confessions speak of "distinctions in the glory of the saints."<sup>217</sup> The motivation of the believer, however, in his keeping of the Law is never to be on the basis of being rewarded. He is to "seek the will of God rather than the rewards."<sup>218</sup> By his good works which are fruits of his justification, he is not trying to "buy off eternal punishment but to keep from surrendering to the devil or offending the Holy Spirit."<sup>219</sup>

According to the Lutheran confessions, the Church is an inward fellowship of eternal blessings. To be a part of the Church is to be a member of the Kingdom of Christ. This is in contrast to all others who are part of the devil's rule. "Thus the church which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is, precisely speaking, the congregation of saints. The wicked are ruled by the devil and are his captives; they are not ruled by the Spirit of Christ."<sup>220</sup> Jesus Christ reigns in His kingdom, the Church militant on earth, and in the Church triumphant in Heaven.<sup>221</sup> It is His ultimate aim to bring His whole Church, the congregation of

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<sup>216</sup>Ibid.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., p. 499.

saints, together in His eternal kingdom. The Church awaits the consummation with joy.

### Eternal Punishment

For those who reject the grace of God, the coming of Christ will mean condemnation to be "tormented without end."<sup>222</sup> The German translation expresses the consequences as "hell and eternal punishment" (die Hölle und ewige Strafe).<sup>223</sup> The Athanasian Creed expresses the rationale for eternal judgment in terms of failure to hold the true Christian faith. "Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish for eternity."<sup>224</sup> This "true Christian faith" centers in the worship of "one God in three persons and three persons in one God."<sup>225</sup> Thus, the perdition of Saul is attributed to the departure of his heart from God in favor of confidence in himself and his own power.<sup>226</sup> This departure is exhibited in disobedience to God's will with no repentance evidenced. The disobedience of parents in failing to raise their children to "usefulness and piety" merits God's punishment, Luther declares. "You (parents) bring upon yourself sin and wrath, thus earning hell by the way you have reared your own children, no matter how

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<sup>222</sup>Jacobs, p. 42.

<sup>223</sup>Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, ed. F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 50.

<sup>224</sup>Tappert, p. 19.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid.

devout and holy you may be in other respects."<sup>227</sup> The reception of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner is another illustration of how a person invites condemnation. "Of course, it is true that those who despise the sacrament and lead unchristian lives receive it to their harm and damnation."<sup>228</sup> This unworthiness consists of the lack of repentance and faith on the part of the one coming to the sacrament.<sup>229</sup>

According to the Lutheran confessions, it is the office of the Law which brings Hell. "But where the law exercises its office alone, without the addition of the Gospel, there is only death and hell, and man must despair like Saul and Judas."<sup>230</sup> The message of the Law consists of condemnation. "The Law always accuses us, it always shows that God is wrathful."<sup>231</sup> The confessors never stop with the function of the Law. They hasten to the Gospel which sets at liberty the accused and frees from the condemnation of sin, death and hell. "The content of the Gospel is this, that the Son of God Christ our Lord, himself assumed and bore the curse of the law and expiated and paid for all our sins, that through him alone we re-enter the good graces of God, obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, are freed from death and all the punishments of sin, and are saved eternally."<sup>232</sup> Again it is Christ who has destroyed Hell for all who trust in Him. "He has snatched us, poor

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<sup>227</sup>Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>229</sup>Ibid., pp. 484, 572, 590.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., p. 561.



lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father's favor and grace."<sup>233</sup> It is in the context of Christ's descent into Hell that His victory is declared. "Christ went to hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and has redeemed them from the power of death, of the devil, and of the eternal damnation of the hellish jaws."<sup>234</sup> The gates of Hell are powerless against God's elect.<sup>235</sup>

Article XVII depicts the nature of Hell as endless torment (crucientur) or punishment (Strafe). The original usage of crucientur connotes not only physical torment or torture but mental.<sup>236</sup> The German term, Strafe, may also be translated judgment or chastisement, or retribution.<sup>237</sup> God's justice will be meted out forever upon those who resisted His grace in Christ. Apart from the deliberate choice of the descriptive words above, the confessors do not dwell on the eternal condition of the damned. Their concern is to announce the great victory Christ has won over Hell by His vicarious suffering and death on the cross of Calvary.

Besides the ungodly, Article XVII identifies "devils" (diabolos) as sharing the eternal torment in Hell. The confessors recognize no possession or control of Hell by the devils. Rather, Hell will be in control of them. Wolf remarks, "Devils and other damned spirits may have a hell within them, and at the same time be confined to a hell

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<sup>233</sup>Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid., p. 492.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid., pp. 495, 617.

<sup>236</sup>Simpson, p. 158.

<sup>237</sup>Betteridge, p. 588.

around them."<sup>238</sup> Adding to the miserable conditions of Hell for the ungodly will be the company of the devils. Certainly the presence of these loathsome creatures will serve to aggravate the situation. In light of all this, the remark is appropriate, "It must be an inconceivable, dreary, loathsome, horrible realm, an infernal prison-house, the blackness of darkness."<sup>239</sup>

#### What is Condemned

The confessors, in their anxiety to identify who they are in terms of creed, not only declare their positive Scriptural convictions; they also feel constrained to condemn positions, ancient and modern, which represent opposing viewpoints. As has been observed, this was considered to be all the more necessary in light of the accusations that had been levelled at them by Eck and others. In a concern to set the record straight, they disclaim two variations of their interpretations of eschatology.

#### Universal Restoration (apocatastasis)

The first damnamus is directed against a view that was associated with the Anabaptists. In the words of the Reformers, "They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils."<sup>240</sup> While they had already clearly confessed the eternity of reprobation for the ungodly, they wanted to illustrate in specific terms what they thereby denied.

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<sup>238</sup>Wolf, p. 372.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>240</sup>Jacobs, p. 42.

## Origen

The earliest form of the Augsburg Confession (May 31, 1530) had included Origen along with the Anabaptists as a focal point of the condemnation.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, it was Origen who was historically most closely associated with the so-called "theory of restoration" or apocatastasis as it is more commonly termed. Origen (185-253 A.D.) whose career as a Christian teacher included the catechetical school in Alexandria as well as Caesarea in Egypt, was a voluminous writer. It is in two of his most famous extant works, On First Principles and Against Celsus that his variant position on the duration of damnation appeared. Simply expressed, Origen taught that all souls would ultimately be saved as a result of God's discipline. Though punishment might be a necessary consequence of sin temporarily, eventually retribution would achieve the end for which it was designed, recovery or restoration of the soul to the eternal bliss of heaven.

In his text, Against Celsus, Origen instructs that the divine purpose for punishment is basically medicinal. While the subject of the chastisement may not immediately recognize the ultimate beneficial goal, nonetheless, "the doctrine of punishment is both attended with utility and is agreeable to truth . . ." <sup>242</sup> Origen's eschatology conceives of

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<sup>241</sup>Reu, The Augsburg Confession, p. 186. In 1540, Melanchthon reverted in his Variata to specifying Origen as among the class of errorists intended for the damnamus. "We condemn also the Origenists, who have imagined that there will be an end of punishments to the devils and condemned." Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>242</sup>The Ante-Nicene Fathers, "Origen Against Celsus," 10 vols., ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886), 4:495.

the conclusion of the vast cosmic evolution as identical with the beginning. The two guiding principles, by which he formulated his position were the alleged free will of man as well as the goodness of God. In his treatise, On First Principles, he teaches that temporary discipline will serve God's purposes of restoring all things to its pristine state.

But those who have been removed from their primal state of blessedness have not been removed irrecoverably, but have been placed under the rule of those holy and blessed orders which we have described and by availing themselves of the aid of these, and being remoulded by salutary principles and discipline, they may recover themselves, and be restored to their condition of happiness.<sup>243</sup>

Origen's theory envisions even the devil and his angels as subjects of the ultimate restoration. He describes the nature and extent of the recovery program as variable depending upon the degree of wickedness one was guilty of in the past. But finally, impious men as well as the devil and his angels will be fit beings to dwell in heaven. He believes that the Scriptures infer that "every rational creature may, in passing from one order to another, go through each to all, and advance from all to each, while made the subject of various degrees of proficiency and failure according to its own actions and endeavors, put forth in the enjoyment of its power of freedom of will."<sup>244</sup> Although most historians

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<sup>243</sup>Ibid., "Origen De Principiis," p. 261.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid. Exegetically, Origen relied mainly on 1 Cor. 15:25-28 (ὁ θεὸς πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν) and John 17:11 (ἵνα ὡσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς). The term is derived from Acts 3:21. Albrecht Oepke demonstrates in an analysis of the latter verse, that ἀποκαταστασις cannot refer to the ultimate conversion of persons but only the reconstitution (Neuordnung) or establishment of (Herstellung) of things. Albrecht Oepke, "ἀποκαταστασις," Theologische Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament, Erster Band, herausgegeben von Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1933), pp. 390-391. Paul Althaus refutes the application of 1 Cor. 15:25-28 in a universalistic sense and illustrates the theological

agree that the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553) condemned the whole of Origen's apocatastasis theory,<sup>245</sup> his view has persisted in various forms until the present.<sup>246</sup> However, it is among the Anabaptists of the early sixteenth century that it found some of its most vocal exponents.<sup>247</sup>

### Anabaptists

The apocatastasis theory emerged in the early days of the Reformation. In a letter to Hans von Rechenberg on August 18, 1522, Luther cautioned against the arrival in Wittenberg of some who promoted the ultimate salvation of all men, and even the devil and his angels; he proceeds to refute this view.<sup>248</sup> While this doctrine perhaps was not universally accepted by Anabaptists, it was held by so many of the party in Switzerland, upper Germany, and Alsace that Article XVII finds it

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of the eventual salvation of all. Paul Althaus, "Wiederbringung Aller," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Sechster Band, herausgegeben von Kurt Galling (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962), pp. 1694-1696.

<sup>245</sup>Cf. Berkouwer's evidence for a general ecclesiastical repudiation of Origen's theory. G. C. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 401-403.

<sup>246</sup>Infra., pp. 211, n. 253.

<sup>247</sup>It is ironic that although the Anabaptists embraced Origen's apocatastasis theory, they were diametrically opposed to his spiritualized construction of the millennium.

<sup>248</sup>Dr. Martin Luthers Briefe, edited by Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1826), Zweiter Theil, p. 453. The English translation of the pertinent comments are as follows: "For the opinion that God could not have created man to be rejected and cast away into eternal torment is held among us also, as it was at all times by some of the most renowned people, such as Origen and his kind." L. W. 43:51. Again, 1525, Luther warned against apocatastasis in a letter to the Christians in Antwerp. Dr. Martin Luthers Briefe, Dritter Theil, pp. 60-64.

appropriate to link them generically with this resurgence of Origen's position.

Hans Denck taught the apocatastasis theory in its most extreme form, agreeing with Origen that not only all mankind, but even the devil and his angels, would ultimately be saved.<sup>249</sup> Forced to wander from place to place because of his reputation as an Anabaptist, he finally went to Basel, Switzerland, where he died in 1527. Another Anabaptist exponent of Origen's view was Melchior Rink. Taking part in the Peasants' War as an ally of Muentzer, his life was committed to promoting Anabaptist tenets. He had helped formulate, together with Denck and Jacob Kautz, the "Seven Articles of Worms" in 1527. The fifth of these seven articles stated, "All that was lost in the first Adam is and will be found more richly restored in the Second Adam, Christ: yea, in Christ shall all be quickened and blessed forever."<sup>250</sup>

It is obvious that the notion of universalism, ultimate salvation for all, cannot be reconciled with Scripture. E. J. Wolf observes that the Anabaptists reasoned not from the Scriptures but from their own conception of God. God who is love cannot be otherwise than gracious even in his anger.

He must at last show mercy to all and the punishments he imposes can only be designed as means to ultimate reformation. Christ may not be able to save them, it was taught, but he will assign them to the

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<sup>249</sup>Williams, p. 157. Steinmetz remarks that though there is no evidence in Denck's own extant writing that he ever taught universalism, "the witness of his contemporaries cannot simply be discounted." David C. Steinmetz, Reformers in the Wings (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 216.

<sup>250</sup>Samuel McCauley Jackson, ed., The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, 13 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 1:211.

Father who is the everlasting fire, (!) the consuming fire. He can and will save the devil and you together. And further, whoever is with God is saved. But nothing can be forever separated from God, hence all the damned and devils must finally come to God and be saved.<sup>251</sup>

The espousal of apocatastasis is entirely consistent with the many aberrations of Anabaptist theology. Reliance on "pious consciousness" and reason rather than on the written Word of God results in biblical "eisegesis" instead of exegesis.<sup>252</sup> The outcome is predictable.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>Wolf, pp. 384-385. Reu, in repudiating the apocatastasis doctrine, acknowledges at the same time, "It is a mystery how it is possible that the universe will be God's own and there will still be some godless existence." J. Michael Reu, Lutheran Dogmatics, p. 256. In the face of the seeming reasonableness of final salvation for all, Willkomm rightly concludes, "It is not proper for us to philosophize to save God's honor, but we must, if we would honor Him, place our finger upon our mouth and worship in the presence of the Unfathomable and Incomprehensible." Willkomm, p. 273.

<sup>252</sup>O. Hallesby notes that "not one of the so-called proof-texts for this perverse doctrine (apocatastasis) is substantiated by New Testament intent; to read a universal restoration into the New Testament is in direct opposition to Matthew 12:32; 25:41; 26:41; Mark 9:48; 14:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; 2:3." O. Hallesby, The Last Things, trans. Einar P. Dreyer and ed. Albin H. Fogelquist (Minneapolis: Free Lutheran Theological Seminary, unpublished mss., 1972), p. 16. T. A. Kantonen shows that it is arbitrary exegesis to use some detached words of Scripture to set aside the whole substance of revelation. He concludes, "If the theory of apocatastasis were true, there would be no need to speak in such dead earnest about the peril of losing one's soul. Then the gospel which we preach would no longer be: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' It would be: God so loved the world that whether one believes or not he will have eternal life." T. A. Kantonen, The Christian Hope (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), p. 107.

<sup>253</sup>Matthius Loy speaks of the many followers of the Origenistic and Anabaptistic apocatastasis up to the twentieth century. He observes its incidence among modern Universalists and Unitarians, concluding, "They seem to think that their reason and feeling must stand as a higher authority than the Word of God, which all true Christians recognize as supreme and by which all men will be judged on the last day." Matthius Loy, The Augsburg Confession (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1908), p. 828. Among the later "disciples" of Origen cited by Oepke, in addition to Hans Denck and Friedrich Schleiermacher, is J. A. Bengel. Oepke, p. 392. It is true that Bengel's exegetical discussion of Acts

The German "verdamnten" is a stronger term and can also be translated "they curse" or "they anathematize."<sup>254</sup> The confessors are mindful that a denial of eternal punishment for the "ungodly" is at the same time a dismissal of the idea of eternal life for the "godly." As the Scriptures speak of eternal life and eternal damnation, employing the same language, so the confessors describe the final destinies of all men in identical terms. Schlink observes that "both eternal life and eternal damnation

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3:21 is capable of misunderstanding. For example, he says, "Omnium restitutio facta erit, quum omnes hostes scabellum erunt pedum Christi: I Cor. XV.25. quod sensum fit nunc, & celeriter aliquando confiet." D. Joh. Albrecht Bengel, Gnomon Novi Testamenti, Editio Tertia (Tübingen: Joh. Henr. Phil. Schrammii, 1773), p. 518. However, his acknowledgement elsewhere of the realities of eternal punishment for man and devils demonstrates his resistance to an Origenistic apocatastasis doctrine. Ibid., p. 180: "Sic damnati nil vitae aeternae videbunt." Origen's views receive sympathetic treatment from Paul Tillich. Dismissing a literal treatment of "heaven" and "hell," Tillich speaks of change or "transtemporal fulfillment" in eternity combined with the idea that "no individual destiny is separated from the destiny of the universe . . . ." Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3:415-419. Though Karl Rahner initially appears to equivocate in his discussion of the ultimate destiny of mankind, his conclusion is "Origenistic." "In the doctrine of hell we maintain the possibility of eternal loss for every individual, for each one of us, because otherwise the seriousness of free history would be abolished. But in Christianity this open possibility is not necessarily the doctrine of two parallel ways which lie before a person who stands at the cross-roads. Rather the existence of the possibility that freedom will end in eternal loss stands alongside the doctrine that the world and the history of the world as a whole will in fact enter into eternal life with God." Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, trans. William V. Dych (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), p. 444. Elsewhere, Rahner speaks of those outside the Church as "anonymous" Christians who really should be told in kindness who they are in Christ, though it isn't ultimately crucial to their eternal destiny with God. Karl Rahner, The Christian of the Future, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 85-97.

<sup>254</sup>Betteridge, p. 660.



are everlasting," according to the Lutheran confessions.<sup>255</sup> One must reject both if either is denied.

Does the Large Catechism lend support to some form of the apocatastasis position? Luther remarks in that document, "the devil's kingdom shall be utterly destroyed and sin, death, and hell are exterminated."<sup>256</sup> Is there not a suggestion here of at least an ultimate eradication of all evil, if not a final restoration? In the context, it is clear that Luther intends to encourage his readers with the assurance that for the believer these things no longer exist. They are done away with as far as he is concerned. The Christian's judgment is past. It is Christ who has destroyed hell for all who trust in Him.

Though the Lutheran confessions say little regarding the nature of eternal damnation, it's reality is unquestioned. The confessions demonstrate in their damnamus of Article XVII their oneness with the historic creeds of Christendom. The apocatastasis theory has no place in Christian theology. It represents a philosophical quest outside the bounds of God's revelation and is in direct contradiction to it.

#### Pre-advent Millennialism

While the initial damnamus of Article XVII has undergone minimal debate in terms of its intended class of errorists, the second has long experienced varying interpretations. The main issue is the extent the confessions intended to go in condemning "certain Jewish opinions." How broad is this classification? Do all conceptions of a future millennium

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<sup>255</sup>Schlink, p. 287.

<sup>256</sup>Tappert, p. 427.

fall under the anathema of this article? Is there within the article itself any qualifications as to the type of "Jewish opinion" castigated? Because of the importance of this section of Article XVII to the major question of this thesis--Is millennialism in any form compatible with the Augsburg Confession, Article XVII--the entire damnamus follows in the German, and Latin (Editio Princeps) as well as their respective English translations in footnotes.

Item, hier werden verworfen etliche jüdische Lehren, die sich auch jetzund ereignen, dass vor der Auferstehung der Toten eitel Heilige, Fromme ein weltlich Reich haben und alle Gottlosen vertilgen werden.<sup>257</sup>

In the Latin, the statement reads,

Damnant et alios, qui nunc spargunt Iudaicas opiniones, quod ante resurrectionem mortuorum pii regnum mundi occupaturi sint ubique oppressis impiis.<sup>258</sup>

Before considering the doctrinal position that is rejected in Article XVII, it is important to discuss the identity of the "alios" who were promoting their views among the contemporaries of the Reformers. Although the Variata of 1540 represents an alteration in the theology of Melancthon at certain points, there is no reason to ignore his assertion therein that it is indeed the Anabaptists who are also in mind in this

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<sup>257</sup>Triglot Concordia, p. 50. The English translation is as follows: "Rejected, too, are certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless." Tappert, pp. 38-39.

<sup>258</sup>Triglot Concordia, p. 50. In English, this statement translates, "They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed," Jacobs, p. 42.

second denunciation of Article XVII. The Variata expresses in no less certain terms its complete disavowal of these "Jewish opinions."

We condemn the Anabaptists, who now scatter Jewish opinions, and imagine that before the resurrection the godly shall occupy the kingdoms of the world, the wicked being everywhere destroyed or suppressed. For we know that, since the godly ought to obey the magistrates that now are, they must not seize their power from them or overthrow governments by sedition, because Paul enjoineth: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1). We know also that the Church in this life is subject to the cross, and shall not be glorified until after this life; as Paul saith (Rom. 8:29; I Cor. 15:49): We must be made like the image of the Son of God. Therefore we utterly condemn and detest the hollow and diabolical madness of the Anabaptists.<sup>259</sup>

While Melanchthon is offering in 1540 an edition of the Augustana which does not carry the official endorsement of the edition of 1530, the Variata is an enlightening commentary from the pen of one who by all accounts is the "final hand" of the original. Twice the Anabaptists are mentioned as bearers of the rejected doctrine. However, not all Anabaptists are necessarily accused of holding it. Condemned is the eschatological position of those Anabaptists who scatter the "Jewish opinions."<sup>260</sup> The content of these opinions will be observed later.

An over-arching concern in the whole of the Augsburg Confession is to demonstrate continuity with the faith of the early Church. Thus, the confessors endeavor to establish their doctrinal oneness with the early creeds in a positive manner. At the same time, they are eager to

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<sup>259</sup>Reu, The Augsburg Confession, p. 403. Melanchthon's description of the Anabaptists elsewhere, quoted by Johann Gerhard, confirms the former's acquaintance with the Anabaptist's teaching and its similarity to the errors condemned in Article XVII. "Anabaptistae affirmant, oportere ante novissimum diem in terris regnum Christi tale exsistere, in quo pii dominantur et omnes reges impios opprimant ac deleant." Gerhard, p. 184.

<sup>260</sup>Infra., p. 217, n. 268.

single out for censure the same opponents of the apostolic teachings. However, they do not stop with the ancient heresies. Having already been confused with certain deviant positions among their contemporaries, their condemnations are localized and immediate. The most frequent group whose teachings are condemned are the Anabaptists.

In Article I of the Augustana, as the confessors expose the many heretical movements whose teachings conflict with the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, they mention the Samosatenes, "old and new."<sup>261</sup> The new Samosatenes, according to Tappert were "ante-Trinitarian spiritualists of the sixteenth century like John Companus and Hans Denck."<sup>262</sup> Thus, Anabaptists are in view at the outset. In Article II, the opponents of the position that original sin is truly sin are identified as "the Pelagians and others."<sup>263</sup> It is well-known that the "others," in the judgment of the Lutherans included the semi-Pelagian Catholics as well as Zwingli.<sup>264</sup> That the Anabaptists who minimized the effects of original sin by their neglect of infant baptism, can be included is evident. Article V, "The Office of the Ministry," names the Anabaptists as among those who teach an immediate operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word.<sup>265</sup> Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenkfeld,

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<sup>261</sup>Tappert, p. 28.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid. See also Allbeck, pp. 60-61. Zwingli spoke of original sin as only "a defect which one derives from birth without his own fault." Reinhold Seeberg, The History of Doctrines, 2 vols. trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 2:309.

<sup>265</sup>Tappert, p. 31.

sixteenth-century Anabaptists, are representative of this view.<sup>266</sup> The Anabaptists are again named in the ninth article as those who wrongly denied the baptism of infants.<sup>267</sup> In Article XVI, it is the legitimate and rightful place of government that is opposed by the Anabaptists.<sup>268</sup> Thus it is no surprise in Article XVII when the Anabaptists again appear as worthy of rebuke for unbiblical teachings, in this case, regarding eschatology.

Students of the Lutheran confessions are agreed that the Anabaptists are at least part of the focal point of the second damnamus in Article XVII. The point of contention is whether the "Jewish opinions" they espouse are to be understood in terms of a literal interpretation of the article alone or whether a broader position is implied. That is, there a general condemnation of the whole of "Jewish opinions" or is the damnamus limited to the particular opinions specified by the present article?

#### "Jewish Opinions"

It is well to observe again that what the Augustana is condemning as "Jewish opinions." There are three aspects to this damnamus dealing with the time and the nature of the alleged coming kingdom. The first part of the rejected teaching concerns its time. It is supposed to

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<sup>266</sup>Ibid.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid., p. 34. In order to avoid an unfair characterization of all Anabaptists as holding the respective errors discussed in the Augustana, it is important to observe their frequent qualifying addition, Anabaptists "who teach," or Anabaptists "who observe." Thus, they avoid condemning all the party for the errors of some.

occur "before (ante) the resurrection of the dead."<sup>269</sup> It will be preceded then by no manifest divine intervention, by no Messianic arrival. It will simply occur as part of the historical process. The purported coming kingdom, moreover, will consist of a complete substitution of the "godly" for the "ungodly" as rulers of the temporal order. It will be a disposition of ungodly human existence in all spheres. Finally, the outcome of this new order will be the universal suppression (oppressis) of the ungodly. This "suppression" is expressed more specifically in the German translation of the Augsburg Confession as "vertilgen." This term may be translated "extermination," "extirpation," or "destruction,"<sup>270</sup> It suggests the total annihilation of the ungodly.

It is the view of many students of the Lutheran confessions that the condemnation of "Jewish opinions" in Article XVII embraces all forms of millennialism. Paul Althaus states without qualification, "Chiliasm is Christian Judaism. This holds for the view of the coming of the reign of the Church as well."<sup>271</sup> Walter Koenig believes millennialism represents an attack of Judaism upon the Christian Church, concluding, "Pre-millennialism is a recrudescence of Judaism."<sup>272</sup> Douglas Judisch also speaks for a broad interpretation of the damnamus on the basis of a narrow construction of the "last day." Since the resurrection of the

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<sup>269</sup>Jacobs, p. 42.

<sup>270</sup>Betteridge, p. 683.

<sup>271</sup>Paul Althaus, A Synopsis of Dr. Paul Althaus'--The Last Things, trans. unknown (St. Paul: Luther Seminary, 1963), p. 78.

<sup>272</sup>Walter H. Koenig, "New Testament Light on Old Testament 'Millennialistic' Prophecies," Concordia Theological Monthly, 19 (February 1948):92.

dead occurs therein, and includes necessarily believers and unbelievers at once, millennialism is precluded, he argues.<sup>273</sup>

Among those speaking for a limited content of the "Jewish opinions" is Schlink. Recognizing the lengthy debate regarding the scope of the damnamus, he concludes, nevertheless, "it must not be overlooked that the wording of A.C. XVII rejects only a definite perversion of the millennial idea."<sup>274</sup> He quotes approvingly Plitt's statement that "it would be a mistake to turn the point of the last sentence of Article XVII against anything beyond what contemporary history suggested."<sup>275</sup> Thus, Schlink views the condemnation in a sixteenth-century context. "Certain Anabaptists" under the influence of "Jewish ideas" are the focal point.<sup>276</sup>

In what way do the "etliche judische Lehren" outlined in Article XVII correspond to their historical antecedents? What are the sources of these views and how may they have influenced sixteenth-century Anabaptists who promoted them? V. Mennicke is among those who attribute Zoroastrian influences to the rise of millennialistic expectations among the Jews.<sup>277</sup> He suggests possible contact of the Jews with Zoroaster in

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<sup>273</sup>Douglas Mc.C. Lindsay Judisch, "Premillennialism and the Augustana," Concordia Theological Quarterly, 47 (July 1983):243-244. Judisch's historical evidence for the all-inclusiveness of the damnamus is doubtful if one admits the early church Fathers to a survey of eschatological interpretation in the Christian Church.

<sup>274</sup>Schlink, p. 284, n. 15.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid.

<sup>277</sup>V. A. W. Mennicke, "Notes on the History of Chiliasm," Concordia Theological Monthly, 13 (March 1942):192-207. Another writer who explores the Zoroastrian-Persian background of "chiliasm" is Case in The

his lifetime during their proximate Babylonian captivity. It is Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, who is identified in Jewish as well as Mohammedan tradition as the transcriber of Zoroastrian eschatology in the context of Jewish tradition. While he believes there is definitely Persian influence upon the Jews in eschatology Mennicke acknowledges that "no proof for the fantastic Baruch theory has been produced."<sup>278</sup> More convincing evidence of a Zoroastrian connection with the Jews, he suggests, is seen in the shift in eschatology observed after the exile as manifested in the Pseudepigrapha.<sup>279</sup> While there may well be connections between Persian and Jewish thought forms regarding the future, it is not until the second century B.C. that the idea of a temporal reign of the Messiah on the earth is found among the Jews. The pseudepigraphical writings of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch give evidence of the prevalence of this belief among them.

The fourth book of Ezra, published about 120 A.D. by an unknown redactor, is basically apocalyptic in content. Composed of at least six

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Millennial Hope.

<sup>278</sup>Mennicke, p. 196.

<sup>279</sup>Mennicke outlines the eschatological outlook of Zoroastrianism: "the bad [after death] fall over into the gulf of Duzahk, where they are tormented by the daevas. The duration of the punishment is fixed by Ormazd, and some are redeemed earlier by means of the prayers and intercessions of their friends, but many must remain until the resurrection of the dead. This period was to last three millennia. As a result of terrific cataclysms the earth is to be consumed in a general conflagration. But a thousand years before this, Ormazd will send his prophet (Sosiosch, Messiah) and bring about the resurrection. During this final millennium the righteous will walk about 'as in warm milk.' They will be 'with laughter on their lips, rejoicing over a victory so well won.' Upon earth 'there would be no more mountains or deserts or wild beasts or savages.'" Ibid., p. 194.



sources,<sup>280</sup> it sometimes offers conflicting testimony regarding the future. On the one hand, its older sources strike a dramatic contrast between the present evil age and the one to come. "The corruptible world, and all that is mortal, will dissolve and be succeeded by the incorruptible world and immortality."<sup>281</sup> On the other hand, the later redactor, according to G. H. Box, while not wishing to discard the older view, appended certain "visions" which offer an altered expectation, at least short-range. This compilation issues in the following scheme:

(1) the period of `woes` preceding the advent of the Messiah (iv. 56-v. 13a, vi. 11-28) will first occur. (2) The Messiah and his immortal companions (Enoch, Elijah, & c.) will then suddenly be `revealed,` the new Jerusalem will appear and a temporary Messianic kingdom, lasting 400 years, set up in which those who have survived the Messianic `woes` are destined to enjoy a period of felicity (vii. 26-8). (3) The temporary Messianic kingdom and the rule of the Messiah will terminate in his death and that of all human beings, and creation will revert to primaeval silence for seven days (vii. 29-30). (4) This will be followed by the Resurrection and the Final Judgment. (vii. 31-44).<sup>282</sup>

It should be noted that an additional vision, the so-called "Eagle vision" (chapters xi-xii), though not a part of the above outline, offers significant commentary on the nationalistic expectations inherent

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<sup>280</sup>This is the measured opinion of G. H. Box as stated in The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, 2 vols., gen. ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979)1:551.

<sup>281</sup>Ibid., p. 555. On the basis of the concept of the two ages mentioned in 4 Ezra, George Ladd argues for "some sort of interrelationship between New Testament and Jewish eschatological thought." He believes this evident relationship "dissipates entirely the force of the objection against the natural (literal) interpretation of Revelation 20 because it is `Jewish.`" At the same time, he concludes, "it has yet to be proved that the natural interpretation of the millennium was created by the influence of Jewish apocalyptic." George Eldon Ladd, Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 168.

<sup>282</sup>Charles, pp. 558-559.

in the system. This vision, which depicts the destruction of the Roman Empire by the "Lion of Judah" (that is, the Messiah), gives witness to the welcome prospect by Israel of the annihilation of her despotic oppressors.<sup>283</sup>

It is observed that the eschatological plan of 4 Ezra conceives of a general temporal kingdom ante resurrectionem. Further, the anticipation of the destruction of the ungodly, in this case, the Roman Empire, though accomplished by the Messiah, reveals a perverted Messianic expectation. Finally, the accent on the "felicity" of the citizens of this future kingdom betrays a carnal attitude. Certainly in these respects, Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession finds remarkable correspondence in its denouncement of "certain Jewish opinions."

Scholars have long noted a close relationship between 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. Likely published soon after 4 Ezra (sometime between 120 and 135 A.D.), 2 Baruch appears to represent an answer by a rival apocalyptic school to the content of 4 Ezra. Like 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch is a composite, made up of several independent writings, dating between 50 and 90 A.D. It has been noted that because of its apologetic content on behalf of Judaism, it gained wide circulation also among Christians.<sup>284</sup> Thus, the question of possible Jewish influence upon the early Church Fathers in the area of eschatology is certainly worthy of investigation.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup>Ibid., p. 559.

<sup>284</sup>Ibid., p. 470.

<sup>285</sup>While not dealing directly with eschatology, Hort demonstrates Jewish influence upon the theology of selected church leaders and groups of the first centuries. Fenton John Anthony Hort, Judaistic Christianity (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 164-202. Though Barnabas espouses the pre-millennial view, he appears aware at least, of the

Included in its outline of end-time events, 2 Baruch describes a period of tribulation involving "twelve woes." After these woes, during which certain dwellers "in this land" (Palestine?) will have been protected, the Messiah shall then "begin to be revealed."<sup>286</sup> Two great "monsters" will then come forth and be "food for all that are left."<sup>287</sup> At this point, the earth will become a veritable paradise restored, replete with multiplied productivity of its fruits and crops. The description of this renewal earth, according to Charles, includes "another fragment of an old Apocalypse, of which we find a version in Irenaeus, v. 33."<sup>288</sup> This is a portion of the very statement which Papias ascribed to Christ.

The earth also shall yield its fruit ten thousandfold and on each (?) vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster produce a thousand grapes, and each grape produce a cor (120 gallons) of wine. And those who have hungered shall rejoice; moreover, also, they shall behold marvels every day. For winds shall go forth from before me to bring every morning the fragrance of aromatic fruits, and at the close of the day clouds distilling the dew of health. And it shall come to pass at that self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time.<sup>289</sup>

It is after this period of earthly bliss that 2 Baruch depicts the "advent of the Messiah." It is when he comes that the resurrection of "all who have fallen asleep in hope of Him "shall occur. It is at this

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potential of Jewish influence in the Christian community. He denounces the Jewish expectation as carnal and "utterly vain." Quoted by West, p. 330.

<sup>286</sup>Charles, pp. 496-497.

<sup>287</sup>Ibid., p. 497.

<sup>288</sup>Ibid., p. 497, n. 5.

<sup>289</sup>Ibid., p. 497-498; Supra, p. 19, n. 20.

time also that the wicked "shall know that their torment has come and their perdition has arrived."<sup>290</sup>

Israel, as might be expected, looms large in the apocalyptic of 2 Baruch. It is her cause that is vindicated in the advent of the Messiah. It is her enemies that are destroyed in just retribution for all the evils that have been visited upon her by the nations. It is her friends that shall reap reward by their treatment of her.

Every nation, which knows not Israel and has not trodden down the seed of Jacob, shall indeed be spared. And this because some out of every nation shall be subjected to thy people. But all those who have ruled over you, or have known you, shall be given up to the sword.<sup>291</sup>

The same pattern as well as the same mentality in 4 Ezra is thus revealed in 2 Baruch. An earthly kingdom marked by complete satiation of the appetites will precede the coming of the Messiah and the subsequent resurrection. The Messiah's coming will mean horrible judgment for all the enemies of Israel. It is the satisfaction of the physical senses and the craving for revenge of one's enemies that marks the anticipation. In 2 Baruch the concluding remarks characterize the kind of "encouragement" he sends to offer his oppressed countrymen,

Therefore, my brethren, I have written you, that ye may comfort yourselves regarding the multitude of your tribulations. For know ye that our Maker will assuredly avenge us on all our enemies, according to all that they have done to us, also that the consummation which the Most High will make is very nigh, and His mercy that is coming, and the consummation of His judgment, is by no means far off.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup>Ibid., p. 498.

<sup>291</sup>Ibid., p. 518.

<sup>292</sup>Ibid., p. 522.

It is with malevolent glee that the Messiah is awaited. It is what he brings to pass that is anticipated. It is the personal and national peace and prosperity that He introduces that is of chief moment. That He, despite His gifts is worthy of honor and praise, escapes comment.<sup>293</sup>

Again, 2 Baruch in its like expectations as Ezra, demonstrates marked similarity to the "Jewish opinions" condemned by Article XVII of the Augustana. It is a world order appealing to the fleshly appetite that is anticipated.<sup>294</sup> It is a state of affairs in which the enemies are crushed and the oppressed are exalted. It is a period of time preceding the advent of the Messiah with its attendant resurrection.

#### Anabaptists

As has been observed, Melanchthon in his Variata of 1540 specifies the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century as the bearers of these condemned "Jewish opinions." Is it only coincidental that the Anabaptists present the same basic outline of prophetic events as 4 Ezra and 2

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<sup>293</sup>Briggs surveys several more Jewish sources of the early centuries as to their eschatological content, concluding, "Indeed the Jewish apocryphal literature and apocalypses show very clearly several streams of thought with reference to the whole department of Eschatology, which pass over into the Christian Church and reappear in all History." Briggs, pp. 221-222.

<sup>294</sup>It is observed in Luther's commentary on Psalm 110 that he was well aware of the content of the Jewish aspirations. "They [the Jews] have an extraordinary fondness for those verses which refer to the glorious Messiah and enjoy tickling themselves with them; for those verses tell them that their Messiah is to be king over all the heathen and that God will rebuke and smash (zuschmettern) those who will not obey Him, with the result that they, the Jews, will possess the reins of government and become mighty at the court of this great King. Furthermore, they dream and imagine that He will make Jerusalem His capital, rebuild the city, establish His kingdom at that place, and through the Jews extend its limits from these into all the world." L. W. 13:344 (W. A. 41:230).

Baruch? What associations may there be which help to account for this similarity? One the connections between sixteenth century Anabaptist theology and "Jewish opinions" has been observed in the former's approach to the Old Testament. George Williams notes that the revolutionary Anabaptists regarded the Old Testament as well as the New Testament church as "normative for the theology and especially the constitution of that church," adding, "they had gone so far in conceiving the church as God's Israel that when they came to extend the sway of the New Commonwealth (Gemeinde) in Munster, Amsterdam, and elsewhere, they found themselves drawing more and more upon the Old Testament in the regulation of their fierce and eventually polygamous theocracy."<sup>295</sup> Thus, it is suggested that the identification of the Church in society was oriented progressively around a pre-Christian Jewish conception of the Old Testament model.<sup>296</sup> The likenesses in Jewish and Anabaptistic eschatology find partial explanation in dependence upon a common source and in adopting a common hermeneutic.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup>Williams and Mergal, p. 29.

<sup>296</sup>In noting Muentzer's use of Scripture mainly for his ethical and social ideas, Oyer remarks that "he [Muentzer] relied in the first instance on Old Testament personages as examples worthy of imitation, or on Old Testament law." Oyer, p. 109. Manschreck attributes to Muentzer the claim that he would "make the old-time Mosaic law the rule of the land. . . . as Joshua smote the dwellers in Canaan with the edge of the sword, so should the ungodly rulers, the priests and monks, be smitten in order to establish the kingdom of God's elect." To the miners at Mansfeld he wrote: "Beloved brethren, do not relent if Esau gives you fair words; give no heed to the wailings of the ungodly. Let not the blood cool on your swords; lay Nimrod on the anvil, and let it ring lustily with your blows; cast his strong tower to the earth while it is yet day." Manschreck, pp. 123-124.

<sup>297</sup>Plitt believes the erroneous interpretations of the Anabaptists regarding the character of the millennium stemmed from their attempt to force the Scriptures to fit their presuppositions. Though some of them

Another explanation for the similarity between Jewish and Anabaptist thought on the future arises from the frequent associations that many Anabaptist leaders had with contemporary Jews. Nathaniel West comments in this respect,

The Anabaptist leaders are known likewise to have stood in close connection with the Jews, to have pursued Hebrew studies under them and to have been inoculated by them with unsoundness on the Church's doctrine of the Trinity. It is claimed too that in the midst of the commotions of that age the Jews were quite active in expressing among the excited masses their own hopes of future triumph, and of the government of the world under their Messianic king. It is therefore altogether probable that the Anabaptists largely imbibed from these their materialistic, carnal conceptions of the millennial reign.<sup>298</sup>

While it is difficult to verify West's placing of Anabaptists in close proximity to their Jewish countrymen, Luther's contacts with the Jews are amply documented. That the Jews were active in dissemination of their doctrine is evident from Luther's evolving attitude toward them. In 1523, he was hopeful that the Jews would be converted through the compassionate testimony of Christians to the Gospel of Christ.<sup>299</sup> However, by 1538, he is fearful of intrusions of Jewish teaching into

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possessed marked ability in biblical research, they were ruined by their prejudices. "Ludwig Hetzer, Martin Cellarius und Johan Denk wären wegen ihrer Studien in den Propheten mit Ehren zu nennen, wenn ihre irrthümlichen Voraussetzungen sie nicht von einem Misserstande zum andern verführt hatten." Gustav Plitt, Einleitung in die Augustana (Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Deichert, 1868), p. 421.

<sup>298</sup>West, p. 389. In May 1527, Michael Sattler, supposedly the spiritual head of Swiss Anabaptism, declared that all signs had been fulfilled and that the Lord would soon appear. Clasen observes that "Sattler's long quotations show that he was influenced by the prophecy of the Fourth Book of Esdras" (4 Ezra). Later Anabaptists, Clasen reports, also alluded to the Book of Esdras as an important source for their eschatological calculations. Clasen, pp. 119-120.

<sup>299</sup>W. A., 11:314-336 ("Dass Jesus Christus ein geborner Jude sei").

Christian circles and writes in vigorous opposition.<sup>300</sup> Finally, in 1543 he seems to abandon hope for any significant Jewish response to the Gospel and writes in harsh condemnation. His sustained refutations of their biblical interpretations evinces close familiarity with their arguments and reflects the seriousness with which he regarded them as potent propagandists for their views.<sup>301</sup>

An edited version of Luther's remarks on the content of the Jewish opinions condemned by Article XVII appeared in 1697 under the title, Lutherus Redivivus.<sup>302</sup> It attempts, through collating Luther's

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<sup>300</sup>W. A., pp. 312-337.

<sup>301</sup>L. W., 47:50:137-306. ("On the Jews and Their Lies"). Luther's sharp words against the Jews appeared at the same time that his Church Postils were still professing, ". . . those words of Holy Scripture concerning the conversion of Israel have not yet been fulfilled and must yet be." F. Harnack et al., "Confessional Et Extra-Confessional," trans. E. J. Koons, The Evangelical Quarterly Review, 19 (January 1868):232. It wasn't until 1547, after Luther's death, that a new edition demonstrated his modified expectations.

<sup>302</sup>Luther's edited remarks on the identity of the objects of the second damnatus are as follows: Die weil euch aber niemand besser sagen kan ich / was die Augsburgische Confession durch die Judische Lehren verstehe / indem ich selbst den ersten Aufsatz solcher Confession gemacht / so gebe ich euch hier von diese Nachricht: Die Juden begehren nicht mehr von ihrem Messia / denn dass er solle ein Cochab und weltlicher Konig senn / der uns Christen und Heyden todschlage / die Welt unter die Juden austheile / und sie zu Herren mache / und zuletzt auch sterbe wie andere Könige. Sein Kinder nach ihm auch also. Denn so sagt ein Rabbi, du solsts nicht im Sinn nehmen / dass zur Zeit Messia anders stehen und gehen werde / weder es im Anfang der Welt geschaffen ist ) das is / es werden Tagel Nacht Jahr / Monden / Sommer / Winter / Saar / Erndten / Kinder zeugen und sterben / essen / trincken / schlaffen / wachsen / dauern und auswerffen und alles gehen wie es ist gehet / ohne dass die Juden Herrn senn werden / aller Welt Gold / Guter / Freude und Lust haben / wir Christen aber ihre Knechte senn müssen . . . Die himmlischen Propheten wider welche ich geschrieben habe / lehren und hieltens auch / dass sie solten den Christenheit reformiren / und eine neue auffrichten auff diese Weise: Sie musten alle Fursten und Gottlosen erwurgen / dass sie Herren werden auff Erden / und unter eitel Heiligen auff Erden leben. Solches habe ich selbst und viel andere von ihnen gehoret. Weil man nun uns damahls unter andern Lasterungen auch dieses



discussion of relevant topics to give his authentic opinions upon every article of the Augsburg Confession. If this compilation of Luther's thoughts is accepted as an accurate description of his views, then he is merely consenting to Melancthon's similar naming of the Anabaptists, or in this case, "himmlischen Propheten," as the primary focal point in the second damnamus. Luther definitely connects the Jewish expectations for the future with those of the Anabaptists. He claims to have heard for himself the latter's "reformation" plans. He explains the utter necessity of dismissing any connection with the Anabaptists in light of the blame that had been placed upon him for fostering these rebellious notions by the gospel he preached.

It is apparent that a certain form of millennialism is being condemned by Article XVII. A future kingdom of this world controlled by the godly in which the ungodly are suppressed is irreconcilable with Scripture in the minds of the confessors. If one contends, however, for a literal interpretation of the article, the relationship of this kingdom to the resurrection is crucial. It is before (ante) the resurrection that this kingdom will appear. Neither classical nor dispensational millennialism would so locate its onset. It is at the second advent of Christ that the resurrection of the saved shall occur. It is no human kingdom that is inaugurated; it is Christ's eternal kingdom

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Schuld gab / also ob das Evangelium Aufruhr und Ungehorsam wider die Obrigkeit lehre oder hege / so haben wir durch diese Worte der Augsp. Conf. uns davon be - freyen müssen." Philip Jacob Spener, ed., Lutherus Redivivus (Berlin: Christoph Salfeld, 1697), pp. 384-385. The passages referred to in Luther's works as authority for putting these words into his mouth are from the Altenburg edition of 1661. The passages are reputed by Seiss to be "in every important particular nearly word for word . . ." Joseph A. Seiss, The Last Times (Philadelphia: Smith, English and Company, 1883), p. 331.

that is made manifest. Whether His glorious kingdom shall reign upon earth or from heaven has divided millennialists. The early Church fathers tended toward the latter understanding as do many of the Lutheran millennialists. This view embraces what is known as classical millennialism. Dispensational millennialism, on the other hand, rising rapidly to prominence in the nineteenth century, located the earth as the scene of Christ's millennial reign. A kingdom is envisioned upon the earth; however, it is no mere regnum mundi but Christ's great kingdom. He shall be "King of kings" and "Lord of lords" in complete visibility for all. Yes, believers will be reigning with Christ but, again, it will be His Kingdom that will be ushered in, not the supplanting of existing political rule. Strictly speaking, neither classical millennialism nor dispensational millennialism are affected by the damnamus.

Of chief moment to the confessors in the second damnamus are the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. Their conception of a coming kingdom corresponds precisely with the condemned position. Moreover, they have been shown to be reflecting the same views as Jews, both ancient and modern. In both cases, it is a kingdom managed by the "godly." It is a kingdom violently brought into being by the "godly." It is kingdom completely dominated by the "godly." It is a kingdom occurring before the resurrection of the dead. It is every type of pre-advent millennialism that is denied.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>303</sup>West summarizes all of the historic positions that are repudiated in the second damnamus: "(1) the carnal Jewish, denying Jesus as Messiah and setting up the kingdom of the 1,000 years by fire and sword 'before the resurrection;' (2) the carnal Anabaptist, confessing Jesus as Messiah, and setting up the Kingdom of the 1,000 years by fire and sword 'before the resurrection.' so also the fifth Monarchy men; (3) the spiritual and ecclesiastical Chiliasm (a) of the Constantinian, (b)

Relevant Concepts

There is no doubt that Luther and Melanchthon preferred the Augustinian model of the millennium. That is not a point of debate in the present study. What is of interest is whether they or the other Lutheran confessors intend to prescribe their position for all or whether they are content to omit mention of it because it is not an issue relevant to the aims of the respective confessions.

While Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology are the only explicit references to matters related to a millennium in the Book of Concord, it has been noted that issues important to eschatology are pervasive. Not only are there key terms that are instructive but also there are hermeneutical principles outlined which are incumbent upon the student of the prophetic Scriptures to apply.

"Kingdom"

An issue which both Lutheran and Melanchthon, among the confessors, are eager to delineate is that of the two kingdoms. They felt constrained in their outline of Roman abuses in the Augsburg Confession not only to lament the confounding of the kingdoms with its attendant

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of the Papal, Church, (c) of some Protestants, comprising all Praeterists, (2) all Whitbyans, (3) all compounders of these two theories--all confessing Jesus as Messiah, and all seeking for the Kingdom of the 1,000 years `before the resurrection.' None of these are Pre-Millenarians, nor can be. all are Post-Millenarians, or Pre-advent `Millenar-ies,' and, whether holding the gross or finer form of Chiliasm, their common fundamental heresy, viz., that the Millennium comes `before the resurrection' has been condemned by the primitive church and, in the most decided manner by the symbols of the Reformation." West, pp. 395-396.

negative results but also to emphasize the necessity of differentiating between these realms for the sake of effective Christian mission.

Suspicious of a potential resurgence of the medieval elevation of the papacy above civil rule, they earnestly exhort,

Therefore the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded. The power of the Church has its own commission, to teach the Gospel and to administer the sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another; let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the law of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgments concerning civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth. As Christ says [John 18:36]: `My kingdom is not of this world;` also [Luke 12:14]: `Who made me a judge or a divider over you?` Paul also says [Phil. 3:20]: `Our citizenship is in Heaven;` [2 Cor. 10:4]: `The weapons of our warfare are not carnal; but mighty through God to the casting down of imaginations.` After this manner, our teachers discriminate between the duties of both these powers, and command that both be honored and acknowledged as gifts and blessings of God.<sup>304</sup>

Referring to the failure to distinguish the kingdoms as among the "monstrous errors,"<sup>305</sup> Melanchthon in his "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope" is again insistent regarding the need for a proper perception of the matter.

. . . Christ gave the apostles only spiritual power, that is, the command to preach the Gospel, proclaim the forgiveness of sins, administer the sacraments, and excommunicate the godless without physical violence. He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession of, or transfer the kingdoms of the world. For Christ said, `Go therefore and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you` (Matt. 28:19,20), and also `As the Father has sent me, even so I send you` (John 20:21). Moreover, it is manifest that Christ was not sent to wield a sword or possess a worldly kingdom, for he said `My kingship is not of this world` (John 18:36).<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup>Jacobs, p. 62.

<sup>305</sup>Tappert, p. 326.

<sup>306</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

Of equal concern for the confessors in their discussion of the two kingdoms is the error of the Anabaptists and their forerunners. Stressing that Christ's kingdom is spiritual and needs to be retained as such, the Apology nonetheless recognizes the use by the Christian citizen of the "legitimate political ordinances of the nation in which we live . . ."307 In specific reference to Andrew Karlstadt, it continues,

The Gospel does not introduce any new laws about the civil estate, but commands us to obey the existing laws, whether they were formulated by heathen or by others, and in this obedience to practice love. It was mad of Karlstadt to try to impose on us the judicial laws of Moses.<sup>308</sup>

Melanchthon is no doubt recalling the phraseology of Luther when he had asserted in 1525 that "the judicial laws of Moses" were incumbent only upon the Jews and that later peoples were bound to observe the civil laws of their nations.<sup>309</sup>

In his explanation of Psalm 110, Luther identifies at once Romanism and the Anabaptist movement as promoters and practitioners of perverted views of the kingdoms.

One must not make out of this the kind of kingdom or seek the sort of church that may be governed on earth by external secular (weltlicher) power. The pope does this and praises it as the true church government. The Anabaptists and similar erring spirits dream that before the Last Day all the enemies of the church will be physically exterminated and a church assembled which shall consist of pious Christians only; they will govern in peace without any opposition or attack.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>307</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>308</sup>Ibid., pp. 222-223.

<sup>309</sup>W. A. 18:81 ("Wider die himmlischen Propheten").

<sup>310</sup>L. W. 13:263-264; W. A. 41:121.

Though Luther long recognized Rome's error in secularizing the kingdom, his own articulation of the two kingdoms waited the confrontation with the Anabaptists before he was compelled to carefully define and enunciate his position. Gerhard Ebeling comments, "Luther did not work out his real doctrine of the two kingdoms in direct confrontation with medieval Catholic social doctrine, but only when he was challenged by the radicalism of the enthusiastic sects."<sup>311</sup> Because of the obstinacy of the Anabaptists in their perception of the nature of the kingdom, a reasoned basis and justification of this fundamental duality was necessary. Of primary importance in this discussion is the nature of Christ's kingdom.

The kingdom of God, according to Luther, is "that God sent his Son, Christ our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil and to bring us to himself and rule us as a king of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience."<sup>312</sup> It is the spiritual rule of Christ in His Church that

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<sup>311</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to His Thought, trans. by R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 181. Against these Schwärmer Luther complained: "Zum andern ist ihr lere nichts anders denn weltliche guter, zeitliche, fleischliche und irdische verheissung, die der pobel gern höret, nemlich das sie wie die Juden und Turcken auff erden ein Reich ertichten, dar inn alle Gottlosen erschlagen, und sie allein gute tage haben sollen. Wer möchte das nicht? Das ist doch ja eine offentliche greiffliche lügen, denn Christus hat spricht: `Inn der welt werdet ihr angst und not haben,´ Item: `Mein reich ist nicht von dieser welt.´" W. A. 30:213.

<sup>312</sup>Tappert, pp. 426-427. Althaus marshals several biblical passages in support of a spiritual conception of the kingdom. "Die Natur des Reiches Christi, welches ein geistliches und ewiges, aber kein leibliches und irdisches ist, Joh. 18,36, auch nicht kommt mit ausserlicher Geberde, sondern es ist inwendig in euch, Luc. 17,20. So sind auch die Waffen unserer Ritterschaft nicht fleischlich, sondern geistlich, 2 Cor.10,4. Unser Leben ist mit Christo verborgen in Gott, Col. 3,3." Althaus concludes, "So lange diese Welt bleibet, soll es ein verborgenes Reich

comprises the essence of the kingdom. Luther sees the kingdom coming in two ways: "First, it comes here in time, through the Word and faith, and secondly, in eternity, it comes through the final revelation."<sup>313</sup> It is in response to the initial coming of Christ's kingdom that one is not only prepared for the final coming but also is eager for it. In a sermon on Luke 21:25-36, Luther instructs regarding the attitude befitting the child of God in anticipation of Christ's return.

Therefore we must above all things lay aside all hatred and abhorrence of this day and exercise diligence that we may really desire to have our sins taken away. When this is done, we may not only calmly await the day, but with heartfelt desire and joy (ganzen Begierden und Freuden) pray for it and say, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done."<sup>314</sup>

According to the confessors, the expectation of the coming of Christ's kingdom is intensified by the character of the present existence. The Church awaiting the second advent is a Church under a cross.<sup>315</sup> Its glory is presently hidden. It realizes no display of temporal power.

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bleiben, dass es immerdar eine Sache des Glaubens sei, zu Christo zu kommen, bei ihm zu bleiben." August Althaus, Die Letzten Dinge (Verden: Steinhöfel'sche Buchhandlung, 1858), p. 62.

<sup>313</sup>Ibid., p. 427.

<sup>314</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Church Postil (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 6 vols. ed. John Nicholas Lenker, 1:77. Dr. Martin Luthers Sammtliche Schriften, 24 vols. ed. Joh. Georg Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1882), 24 vols. 11:62 (Hereafter cited as S. L.).

<sup>315</sup>Among the seven ways Luther says the Church may be recognized in this world is the "holy possession of the sacred cross." L. W. 41:164. The German text describes the cross in its content and purpose. "Das es mus alles ungluck und Verfolgung, allerleh anfechtung und ubel (wie das Vater unser betet) vom Teufel, welt und fleisch, in wendig trauren, blöde sein, erschreckten, auswending arm, veracht, Kranck, schwach sein, leiden, damit es seinem Heubt Christo gleich werde." W. A. 50:642.

In his Loci Communes, Melanchthon reiterates his revulsion for the opposing position.

Therefore, the Anabaptists teach an odious, frightful error in imagining that before the Last Day of Judgment Christianity and the Church will be a worldly, magnificent kingdom on earth in which only the saints will rule and wield the sword, blotting out all the godless and capturing all kingdoms.<sup>316</sup>

It is nothing less than the "devil's doctrine" which is promulgated by the Anabaptists "and their ilk," asserts Melanchthon, when they contend that "before the Day of Judgment the kingdom of Christ must be established on earth with physical pomp, and that in this there will be neither godless men nor hypocrites, that only the saints will rule, and that they will forcibly subdue all the godless."<sup>317</sup> Speaking as sharply as he can, Melanchthon says, "A worldly kingdom of Christ is a Judaic dream and an odious error; it comes from the devil and does great injury."<sup>318</sup> The "injury" results when one loses sight of the fact that the great treasure and power of the kingdom of Christ is forgiveness of sins. If one's expectations are fixed on a physical kingdom on earth, Melanchthon fears, the outcome will culminate in unbelief and carnality.<sup>319</sup> One must accept the present reality of a spiritual kingdom,

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<sup>316</sup>Melanchthon, Loci Communes, p. 274.

<sup>317</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>318</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>319</sup>Ibid., p. 275. Pieper reflects Melanchthon's concern regarding the effect of expecting a future temporal kingdom: "By its assumption of a still future millennium on earth which includes world peace and the rulership of Christians over the unbelieving world, it centers the hope of the Christians first of all in a this-worldly felicity, the millennium of peace in this world and the Christians' reign of a thousand years over the unbelieving world. The Scriptures, on the contrary, describe the way ordained for all Christians from the days of the Apostles to Judgment Day as a via crucis." Pieper, 3:526.



hidden under the cross. A visible manifestation of the Church's glory before the Judgment is in opposition to the divine economy.

While Article XVII of the Augustana accentuates chronology (ante resurrectionem) in its final damnamus, it must be acknowledged that the confessors' intentions embraced more than concern with the simple timing of a coming kingdom. It is the consistent spiritual character of Christ's kingdom that is manifestly their thesis. They resist any connection of Christ's rule with a political organization, presently, or in the future. August Kimme's assessment of the chief focal point of the second condemnation is supportive. He observes that it "does not so much comment on Millennium but properly on the concept of 'theocracy' (or 'Christocracy') and its consequences."<sup>320</sup> The so-called "Union Theses" also recognize the wider concern of the article at this point. "In the final analysis the question concerns the spiritual character of Christ's kingdom in distinction from all secular kingdoms (Gal. 4:31) and the Gospel, which does not promise earthly joy and honor before the world, but spiritual, heavenly, and eternal blessings (I Cor. 15:19; Eph. 1:3)."<sup>321</sup> Treated in isolation from the broader context of the entire corpus of the Lutheran confessions, debate may be admitted

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<sup>320</sup>August Kimme, Theology of the Augsburg Confession (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1968), p. 78.

<sup>321</sup>"Union Theses: Of the Last Things." Concordia Theological Monthly, 19 (November 1948):837. Loy's commentary is also pertinent. "These theories (Jewish opinions/Anabaptists) ignore the spiritual character of the Church as a kingdom which is not of this world, which cometh not with observation, and which follows Christ in His humiliation, patiently bearing the cross and in faith preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments for the salvation of men until the Lord shall come again in glory to judge the quick and the dead, and receive His saints into glory prepared for them in heaven." Loy, p. 830.

concerning the nature of Christ's coming kingdom in an analysis of Article XVII. However, in survey of the whole, the confessors intentions are clear. An earthly theocratic kingdom on this side of the cross is incompatible with their understanding of its delineation in the Scriptures. Not only the sixteenth-century Anabaptists fall within their purview. All who entertain like carnal notions invite their earnest rebuke.<sup>322</sup>

Has every form of millennialism been eliminated as a Lutheran alternative on the basis of the conclusions above? Is the only remaining option historic a-millennialism? The present writer would contend that a qualified futuristic outlook, a "biblical" millennialism, also remains appropriate. While an earthly millennial reign of the Church with Christ is irreconcilable with the Lutheran confessions, a heavenly reign may be allowed. In the survey of Lutheran millennialists, it was found that many of them recognized the difficulties in reconciling an earthly reign of the Church exegetically and confessionally. Among those who located the future millennial reign in heaven were Bengel, Delitzch, Weidner, Lindberg, Kildahl, and Reu. Seiss, it was noted, rejected the

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<sup>322</sup>Brown rightly concludes, "But whilst it is certain that the Anabaptists are specifically the object of this condemnatory clause, it is a fair interpretation of the Confession, to apply it to all who hold and promulgate the Jewish opinion of a literal presence and sensible reign of Christ on the earth, prior to the resurrection. . . . A deliverance for the Church, on earth, to be brought about by Christ's personal advent, is far from the minds of the Confessors, as anything that can well be imagined." Brown, pp. 56-57. Again, the present writer would add that it is the consideration of the discussion and usage of "kingdom" in the entire body of the confessions as well as commentary by Luther and Melancthon in their other writings that must lead ultimately to the above interpretation of Article XVII. The confessors' conception of the kingdom in Article XVII is not as obvious as Brown and others suggest.

idea of a temporal kingdom possessed by the "saints" and "ungodly" as did Gerberding. At the same time, both of them allowed the inclusion of a coming "spiritual" kingdom in which the Church would reign with Christ. It is the conclusion of the present writer that they, as well as all others who place the future millennial reign of Christ with His Church on earth, exceed the confessional explication. While not falling directly under the damnamus of Article XVII, they are in contradiction to the general understanding of the kingdom in the remainder of the Book of Concord.

#### Antichrist

An additional confessional topic pertinent to the present discussion is that of the Antichrist (antichristi). The evil of the last times is intensified by the rule of the kingdom of Antichrist according to the confessions. Edmund Schlink paraphrases the confessions in saying this kingdom is "an inconceivably horrible display of its power and falsehood in a final grandiose revolt against God."<sup>323</sup> The insidiousness of the kingdom of Antichrist is compounded by its nature as a religious system. "The kingdom of Antichrist is a new kind of worship of God, devised by human authority in opposition to Christ."<sup>324</sup> Hence, it is not atheistic. It conducts its affairs under the form of religion. The kingdom of Antichrist is a "trumped-up" worship of God. Melancthon perceives the connection of the Antichrist with religion in a prophecy of the Apostle Paul. "Paul predicts that Antichrist will

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<sup>323</sup>Schlink, p. 280.

<sup>324</sup>Tappert, p. 217.

take his seat in the temple of God (II Thess. 2:4), that is, that he will rule and hold office in the church."<sup>325</sup>

The Lutheran confessors discover in the Roman papacy the marks of the Antichrist. Again, the Apostle Paul's description is cited as evidence for this conclusion.

But it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs and their adherents defend godless doctrines and godless forms of worship, and it is plain that the marks of the Antichrist coincide with those of the pope's kingdom and his followers. For in describing the Antichrist in his letter to the Thessalonians Paul calls him "an adversary of Christ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (II Thess. 2:3,4). He speaks therefore of one who rules in the church and not of the kings of nations, and he calls this man "an adversary of Christ" because he will devise doctrines which conflict with the Gospel and will arrogate to himself divine authority.<sup>326</sup>

The Lutheran confessors cite doctrines of Rome which "conflict with the Gospel" and add weight to their conclusion that the description of Antichrist coincides with the Roman papacy.

. . . it is most diabolical for the pope to promote his lies about Masses, purgatory, monastic life, and human works and services (which are the essence of the papacy), in contradiction to God, and to damn, slay, and plague all Christians who do not exalt and honor these abominations of his above all things. Accordingly, just as we cannot suffer his apostle, the pope or Antichrist, to govern us as our head or lord, for deception, murder, and the eternal destruction of body and soul are characteristic of his papal government. . . .<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>325</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>326</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>327</sup>Ibid., p. 301. Luther's inability to distinguish the pope from the biblical Antichrist was no late development. Though Hendrix's study reveals some fluctuation in Luther's sentiments toward the pope, his eschatological application remained relatively constant from 1521. He had written to Melancthon from the Wartburg, "Sitting here all day, I picture to myself the state of the church and I see fulfilled the word of Psalm 89 [:47]: 'Hast thou made all the sons of men in vain?' God, what a horrible picture of God's wrath is that detestable kingdom of the pope, worthy of the end and dregs of the ages! God have mercy upon us!"

The belittling, almost despising of marriage in favor of monastic life is viewed by the confessors to add to their contention that the papacy is indeed like the kingdom of Antichrist. "Thus the regulation about perpetual celibacy is peculiar to this new pontifical tyranny, and with good reason; Daniel says that it is characteristic of Antichrist's kingdom to despise women (11:37)."<sup>328</sup> The Roman papacy had shown itself in opposition to God's Word in this matter. In this respect also, the Antichrist spirit is evidenced. "The papists had neither authority nor right to prohibit marriage and burden the divine estate of priests with perpetual celibacy. On the contrary, they acted like antichristian, tyrannical, and wicked scoundrels . . ."<sup>329</sup>

The false doctrines of the papacy find their chief root in a denial of the truth of justification by grace alone. It is in the shift from God's grace exclusively in Christ to the addition of man's meritorious achievements as a contributing factor in the economy of salvation that the heart of the problem is found. The Mass was being used by the Romans in a way that diminished the concept of grace and exalted the alleged meritorious service of man.

So in the papal realm the worship of Baal clings--namely, the abuse of the Mass, which they apply in order by it to merit the forgiveness of guilt and punishment for the wicked. And it seems that this worship of Baal will endure together with the papal realm until Christ comes to judge and by the glory of his coming destroys the kingdom of Antichrist. Meanwhile all those who truly believe the Gospel should reject those wicked services invented against God's

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Scott H. Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 2.

<sup>328</sup>Tappert, p. 243.

<sup>329</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

command to obscure the glory of Christ and the righteousness of faith.<sup>330</sup>

It is in this addition of human rites which diminish the Gospel that the "very form and constitution of the kingdom of Antichrist is found."<sup>331</sup>

It is not with personal malice or spite that the confessors warn so severely against the Roman papacy. They are intent on preserving the true Gospel of Christ. The papacy is seen to be in direct opposition to the pure Gospel in its attempts, however sincere, to circumvent and deny what the Lutherans believe are the clear teachings of the Word of God. Because the papacy is a religious system which fits the biblical description of the Antichrist (Daniel, Thessalonians), the confessors do not hesitate to make the application. They warn all believers to flee this false kingdom of darkness. ". . . all Christians ought to beware of becoming participants in the impious doctrines, blasphemies, and unjust cruelties of the pope. They ought rather abandon (weichen) and execrate (vorfluchen) the pope and his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist. Christ commanded 'Beware of false prophets' (Matt. 7:15)."<sup>332</sup>

Schlink warns against an identification of the papacy with the Antichrist in an exclusive sense. Though he acknowledges Luther's more

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<sup>330</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>331</sup>Ibid., pp. 217-218.

<sup>332</sup>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherische Kirche (Göttingen: Verlag von Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), p. 1060. Hereafter cited as Die Bekenntnisschriften.

definite classification of the papacy with the Antichrist,<sup>333</sup> he points out that other confessional statements lead one to conclude that the papacy if it persists in its ungodly teachings, will also be a part of the kingdom of Antichrist.<sup>334</sup> Nevertheless, this sense of keen awareness of the kingdom of Antichrist by the confessors demonstrates their belief that the return of Christ was near. Schlink adds, "these statements (regarding Antichrist) are made in the conviction of living in the last times and days immediately before Christ's return."<sup>335</sup>

The linking of the papacy with the Antichrist was no innovation on the part of the reformers. It has been observed that Joachim of Fiore as early as the twelfth century had intimated as much in his criticism of the Roman pontiff and his hierarchy as obstacles to the inauguration of his predicted age of the Holy Spirit, the so-called

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<sup>333</sup>Luther, in his denunciation of the Roman papacy's elevation of itself over the rest of Christendom, stated, "This is a powerful demonstration that the pope is the real Antichrist, who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his own power, which amounts to nothing since it is neither established nor commanded by God. This is actually what St. Paul calls exalting oneself over and against God." (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4). Tappert, p. 300. Luther felt strongly enough about the matter to lament Melanchthon's omission of his identification in the Augustana. In a letter to Justas Jonas three weeks after the reading of the confession at Augsburg, Luther commented, "Satan still lives, and has observed that your Apology, treading softly, has passed over the Article of Purgatory, of the Worship of Saints, and most of all of the Pope as Antichrist." Schmauk, p. 48. Despite Luther's complaint, it is evident that Melanchthon was also personally convinced that the pope is the Antichrist. In his disputation on marriage, based on First Timothy, he says: "Since it is certain that the pontiffs and the monks have forbidden marriage, it is most manifest, and true without any doubt, that the Roman Pontiff, with his whole order and kingdom, is very Antichrist." Quoted by Froom, 2:288.

<sup>334</sup>Tappert, p. 217.

<sup>335</sup>Schlink, p. 282.

"third age."<sup>336</sup> Joachim's followers, and many others after them, attached eschatological import to their negative evaluations of the papacy. Nothing less than Antichrist was being manifested in the false teachings and practices of Rome.<sup>337</sup> The judgment passing from the lips of the reformers was but an echo of many before them. In the words of West,

the universal interpretation of the Reformers was only that of the purest Roman Catholics for ages previous, and that of Christ's martyrs, that the Church of Rome is the 'Babylon' of the Apocalypse, the 'Mother' of more like her, and the Papacy, the 'Antichrist' in the person of its Popes. It is the sole doctrine on the subject, consecrated not only in the theology, but also in the symbols of the Reformation wherever the subject is handled; in the Articles of Smalcald, the Formulae of the Geneva Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Homilies of the Church of England, the Irish Articles, and the Westminster Confession.<sup>338</sup>

The location of the Antichrist in the Roman papacy is significant to the millennial question. In fact, this so-called "Protestant" interpretation" has definite implications. Though not a millennialist, E. W. Hengstenberg believes a consistent application warrants a millennialist conclusion. Commenting on Bengel's deductions, Hengstenberg maintains,

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<sup>336</sup>Supra, pp. 158-162.

<sup>337</sup>Among those who asserted that the pope was Antichrist were the Wycliffites, the Hussites, and the Waldensians. West describes the mood of these pre-Reformation groups. "There is no doubt that Rome is the Babylon of the Apocalypse. The Reformation begins to be felt, an earthquake of nations, the time to 'Rise and measure the Temple of God' (Rev. 11:1). The Apocalyptic Beast is now seen to be a symbol figuring the whole history of the God-opposed and Antichristian World-Power as it passes through its Roman forms first Pagan, then Christian, then Papal, incorporate in an apostate Church, centralizing itself in the Ruling Head of the Seven-hilled City. The 'Man of Sin,' Daniel's 'Little Horn,' the Beast in its 'Eighth' head, and 'Antichrist' are recognized as identical, a Growth from the bosom of the Romans--Germanic Decarchy ascending to the sovereignty of Christendom." West, p. 356.

<sup>338</sup>Ibid.



Chiliasm is the necessary consequence of this view. For, the thousand years' reign, according to ch. xix.20, only begins with the destruction of the beast. Since, therefore, the destruction of the papacy has still not taken place, the thousand years must necessarily be transferred to the future. The common theology of the church had rescued itself from this consequence, with true ecclesiastical tact, but only by violently tearing the twentieth chapter from its connection. Bengel was too good an expositor to concur in such a procedure. And the theology of the church was unable to oppose him; this could only have become possible, if any one had the courage to abandon the false view of the Beast, which had in certain measure obtained the sanction of the church. Against those who stood fast by this interpretation, Bengel's reasoning was irresistible; and hence it came to pass, that after a feeble resistance from the orthodox, chiliasm obtained an almost universal diffusion through the church.<sup>339</sup>

If the Antichrist is indeed recognized as coincident with the Roman papacy, and if one admits a chronological character of the closing chapters of the Apocalypse, then a millennialistic scheme is necessary. West argues for the unassailability of this logic as well as the determination with which the church must hold fast to this understanding.

The Protestant interpretation being true, the Pre-Millennial Advent of Christ is a necessity, logical, historical, exegetical, which no 'New Hypothesis' of Whitby, and no exegesis of 'Parousia,' as a coming at death, or a spiritual presence, or of 'Anastasis' as a church establishment, or spiritual revival, or regeneration, or conversion of the world, or soul-ascension to heaven, can explain away. And this Protestant interpretation, so thoroughly grounded in the massive demonstrations of the Reformed Theology, must ever be held fast . . .<sup>340</sup>

Those who profess allegiance to the formulations of the Book of Concord with its definite connection of the Antichrist with the Roman papacy must come to terms with the events attending the second advent as portrayed in Revelation 19 and 20. In the immediate context of the glorious return of Christ unto judgment (καὶ ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ

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<sup>339</sup>E. W. Hengstenberg, The Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1852), p. 289.

<sup>340</sup>West, pp. 360-361.

πολεμῆι, verse 11), the "beast" (τὸ θηρίον) and the "false prophet" (ὁ ψευδο-προφήτης, verse 20) are consigned to everlasting punishment (ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ, verse 20). Repeating the identical connecting phrase used in the preceding chapter (καὶ εἶδεν, 19:11; 19:17; 19:19), John continues to describe his vision with no indication of other than forward movement. A millennial reign of Christ is envisioned during which Satan is bound (ἔδησεν verse 2). At the end of this period, the devil after having been loosed (λυθήσεται verse 7) for a short time, will be finally cast into the identical place where the "beast" and the "false prophet" already are (ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης verse 10). The narrative continues with the familiar καὶ εἶδεν which introduces the final judgment scene (verses 11-15).

Revelation 19:11 through 20:15 give outward appearance of describing the second Advent and events in close attendance with it. A literal approach to the text must conclude that the judgment of the Antichrist (the "beast") and that of Satan are not simultaneous. The "beast" is described as preceding Satan to perdition by a "thousand years" (χίλια ἔτη). If the beast is the papal Antichrist and if the thousand years represent the period from the first Advent of Christ until His second Advent, it is difficult to sustain the interpretation of the Antichrist as fixed in the papacy. However, if the thousand years are yet future, the assignment remains intact. The Lutheran confessors are vindicated.

#### Hermeneutical Considerations

All sides in the millennial debate are agreed that the application of hermeneutics is a major determinative factor in one's position.

On the one hand, G. H. Gerberding cautions his readers, "Those who are prejudiced against Pre-millenarianism need to guard against doing violence to the Lutheran principles of Hermeneutics or interpretation."<sup>341</sup> On the other hand, Theodore Graebner is convinced that chiliasm's misconception of hermeneutics is its most insidious feature.

It is, above all, the method of interpreting the Scriptures adopted by chiliasts, especially by the 'time-setting' variety, which is apt to lead people away from the very fundamentals of faith. The methods of interpretation employed in the treatises which we have reviewed, consistently applied, leave nothing of the Scriptures but a jumble of symbols, which each man may interpret to suit his fancy or let us rather say, to suit his Old Adam.<sup>342</sup>

While there is apparent consensus regarding the importance of hermeneutics in relationship to eschatology, there is earnest disagreement regarding the proper application of the interpretive principles. In fact, herein lies the chief cause of the differing viewpoints. Tanner observes that when Christians arrive at contradictory conclusions as to the teachings of the Bible, "one of the main reasons is that they do not follow the same rules and do not apply the same principles of

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<sup>341</sup>G. H. Gerberding Lutheran Fundamentals (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1925), p. 295. Samuel Miller quotes Gerberding's statement in the defense of his similar millennialist deductions. Samuel Miller and Halvor G. Randolph, The Word of Prophecy (Minneapolis: Lutheran Bible Institute, 1937), p. 105. Walter A. Maier, Jr. sets forth the following definition of hermeneutics: "Biblical or theological hermeneutics is the name applied to that theological discipline in which the principles and rules are set forth by means of which we may discover the true sense of the canonical Scriptures and give a correct exposition of the meaning the Holy Spirit has laid down in the words of Scripture." Appended to Raymond F. Surburg's text, The Principles of Biblical Interpretation (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, n.d.), p. 576.

<sup>342</sup>Graebner, p. 130.

interpretation."<sup>343</sup> It is for this reason that Teigen appeals for fresh enunciation of proper hermeneutical principles in specific application to the great eschatological themes. "It appears to me that contemporary Lutheran Confessions must spend considerable time laying out the Biblical principles of interpretation that should guide us, setting forth the exegetical material in some detail, and confessing the doctrinal aspects of the Kingdom of Christ and the Christian's hope."<sup>344</sup>

While confessional Lutherans are convinced that the Bible is to be approached on the basis of its proffered hermeneutic, they believe these principles of interpretation are also embodied in the Book of Concord. Moreover, confessional subscription means acceptance and

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<sup>343</sup>Jacob Tanner, The Thousand Years Not Pre-Millennial (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1934), p. 7. More recent Reformed writers of a millennialist persuasion recognize the important role of hermeneutics in handling the prophetic content of Scripture. Walvoord writes, "The debate between pre-millenarians and amillenarians hangs to a large extent upon the principles of interpretation which each group employs. This is commonly recognized by all parties. . . . In principles of interpretation the crux of the controversy is revealed." John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 128. Lightner concurs with Walvoord's judgment in his comment, "It is still true that the basic reason for the three millennial views (pre-, post-, and a-) relates to the method used by each system in its interpretation of those passages of Scripture dealing with prophecy." Robert P. Lightner, Prophecy in the Ring (Denver: Accent Books, 1976), p. 44.

<sup>344</sup>B. W. Teigen, "Some Background Material For Understanding the Problem of Millennialism Among Lutherans," Lutheran Synod Quarterly, 12 (Winter 1971-72):42. Terry also believes there is need for careful application of sound hermeneutics to the study of prophetic subjects, adding that eschatology demands "special" hermeneutics. "It is principally those portions of the prophetic Scriptures which forecast the future that call for special hermeneutics. Being exceptional in their character, they demand exceptional study and care in interpretation. Other prophecies, consisting mainly of rebuke, expostulation, or warning, are so readily apprehended by the common mind as to need no extended explanation." Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 407.

employment of these principles in all biblical exegesis. Reflecting on this conviction, Ralph Bohlmann sets forth the thesis that "subscription to the Lutheran Confessions includes acceptance of the confessional position on the nature and interpretation of Holy Scripture."<sup>345</sup> In particular reference to the Formula of Concord, Robert Preus demonstrates why the hermeneutics of the Book of Concord are highly relevant for Lutherans. "If the Formula of Concord professes to be an exposition of Scripture on the doctrinal points discussed, our subscription to this Confession will entail an acceptance of the exegetical conclusions offered in the confession and also the hermeneutical principles and method by which these conclusions were derived. Otherwise we do not subscribe the confession on its own terms."<sup>346</sup> The present goal is to elucidate the confessional principles of biblical interpretation which are particularly cited by the opposing parties in the millennial debate. Of special relevance in this study is the question of the doctrinal authority of certain "apocalyptic" portions of Scripture, as well as the proper application of the hermeneutical axioms, the analogy of faith, and the sensus literalis, in eschatological study.

#### The Source of Doctrine

The authority of Scripture in terms of sola Scriptura is recognized by students of the Lutheran confessions as one of their major accents. Although one fails to discover a separate article treating the

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<sup>345</sup>John Reumann, ed., Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 190.

<sup>346</sup>Arnold J. Koelpin, ed., No Other Gospel (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), p. 310.

doctrine of the Word in the confessional formulations, its position as the only legitimate source for authentic discovery of Christian faith and life is clear.<sup>347</sup> The Formula of Concord bears unmistakable witness to the exclusiveness of the Word of God in this regard.

. . . Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong. Other symbols and other writings are not judges like Holy Scripture, but merely witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood in the church of God by contemporaries with reference to controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned.<sup>348</sup>

The confessors' emphasis on the authority of the Scripture is exemplified in their abundant use of biblical references to establish their position. Bohlmann observes, "Of the more than 1,700 Scripture citations in the Confessions, the preponderant majority are simply direct quotations of the sacred text without explanation or extended commentary."<sup>349</sup> This treatment of Scripture underscores the confessional acceptance of the authority of Scripture.

While the modern position of the Apocalypse within the canon might seem to guarantee its validity as a source of doctrine for the

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<sup>347</sup>Ralph Bohlmann expresses the opinion of conservative interpreters that one point of universal agreement among all the sixteenth-century confessions was "the authority, the inspiration, and the inerrancy of the sacred Scriptures." He believes this accounts for the absence of an explicit article on the Scriptures in the Lutheran confessions. Reumann, p. 190.

<sup>348</sup>Tappert, p. 465. ". . . und bleibt allein die Heilige Schrift der einig Richter, Regel und Richtschnur, nach welcher als dem einigen Proberstein sollen und müssen alle Lehren erkannt und geurteilt werden, ob sie gut oder bos, recht oder unrecht sein." Die Bekenntnisschriften, p. 69.

<sup>349</sup>Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 1966), p. 25.

confessors, the extra-confessional writings of the Lutheran reformers testify to their hesitancy in regard to its adequacy as normative material. The reformers were no innovators in this respect. They simply reflected an ancient distinction between the so-called antilegoumena and the homologoumena. Up until the latter part of the fourth century there had not been universal acceptance by the Church of certain books of the New Testament. These books were James, Jude, 2 and 3 John 2 Peter, Hebrews and the Apocalypse.<sup>350</sup> These antilegoumena were set in distinction from the commonly-received books, the homologoumena. The medieval forebears of the reformers, though essentially satisfied with the ultimate resolution of the canon, nevertheless raised questions about four books, namely, Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation. The extent to which these questions affected Luther and the other reformers' in their approach to Revelation is instructive in the present study.

The preface in Luther's "September Testament" of 1522 as well as the editions of 1530 and thereafter, though demonstrating some adjustments in his assessment, nevertheless reflect apprehension as to the reliability of the Apocalypse as a doctrinal standard. In the 1522 preface to the book of Revelation, Luther would first advise his readers that he is expressing his personal opinion. He is not necessarily attempting to convert anyone to his point of view regarding the book. He is concurring with the general consensus of Middle Age scholasticism that the apostolicity of Revelation is doubtful at best. However, it is not without serious personal consideration that he follows this prevalent

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<sup>350</sup>West connects Origen's rejection of millennialism to his suspicions regarding the canonicity of the Apocalypse. Likewise he links the Gnostics' denial of chiliasm to similar doubts. West, pp. 335, 339.

view. He has definite reasons why he believes Revelation is "neither apostolic nor prophetic."<sup>351</sup> First of all, he believes it is not characteristic of the apostles to deal with visions but rather to speak and write with clarity. The alleged obscurity of the book is offensive to Luther. Convinced that the Holy Spirit would not be a party to such inscrutability, he confesses, "I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced [gestellet] it."<sup>352</sup> He found it difficult, moreover, to accept the author's high commendation of his own writing. This represents a departure, he believes, from the spirit of the other sacred books. But the most critical reason why Luther professes he cannot accommodate the book of Revelation is because "Christ is neither taught nor known in it."<sup>353</sup> If it had been apostolic, he avers, it would present Christ clearly and purely (hell und rein). Luther turns from the book in 1522 since he fails to discover Christ presented in such a manner.

By the last edition in which Luther had a part (1545), he is not quite as doubtful regarding the apostolicity of the book of Revelation. Though he still finds it unlikely that the Apostle John wrote it, he is now able to concede this as a remote possibility. Another change from the 1522 preface is Luther's attitude toward visions and images. Whereas he had previously considered it foreign to the aims of the

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<sup>351</sup>L. W. 35:398 (Erl. Ed. 63:169). Luther confessed he thought of the Apocalypse as almost in the same category of literature as the Fourth Book of Esdras (4 Ezra), Supra, pp. 232-234.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid.

<sup>353</sup>Ibid., p. 399 (Erl. Ed. 63:170: "dass Christus dar innen widder gelehret noch erkannt wird.").



apostles to write in imagery, he now admits that many "holy people" have had visions and images from the Holy Spirit.<sup>354</sup> Whereas Luther had earlier discounted the spiritual importance of Revelation because of its obscurity, he now is willing to offer an interpretation of the meaning of the various images. His method of interpretation is to compare events and disasters within Christendom with the images of Revelation. "If then, the two perfectly coincided and squared with one another, we could build on that as a sure, or at least unobjectionable [unverwerfliche], interpretation."<sup>355</sup> Luther proceeds to identify specifically various individuals and events in his "unobjectionable interpretation" of the images and visions in the book. He believes this kind of an interpretation may make Revelation profitable and useful. It is profitable in that it serves as a warning that there are many powers waging battle against Christendom. It is useful in that it comforts one that nothing shall conquer Christendom.

Luther is able to discern Christ in Revelation by 1545 whereas earlier he could not. He concluded this latter preface with the words, "For we see in this book, that, through and above all plagues and beasts and bad angels, Christ is with His saints, and wins the victory at last."<sup>356</sup> Because Christ is apparent to Luther in his later studies of the book of Revelation, the question arises whether he would at last grant apostolic character to its contents. His remarks still evince a

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<sup>354</sup>Works of Martin Luther, 6 vols. trans. P. Z. Strodach et al, ed. Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1932), 6:480. (Erl. Ed. 63:159). Hereafter cited as W. M. L.

<sup>355</sup>W. M. L. 6:481 (Erl. Ed. 63:160).

<sup>356</sup>W. M. L. 6:488 (Erl. Ed. 63:169).

non-committal attitude as he states, "no one should be prevented from regarding this as the work of St. John the Apostle," adding, "or of whomever else he will."<sup>357</sup> Luther appears inconsistent at this point in throwing open the selection since he had earlier intimated that whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic. If, however, he is limiting the options to the body of apostles, he is consistent. But then he has changed his position to that of accepting the apostolicity of Revelation whichever apostle wrote it.<sup>358</sup>

It is not on the basis of misgivings about canonicity that more recent interpreters discount the importance of the Apocalypse in eschatological inquiry. Convinced that the book should occupy a minor role in terms of establishing doctrine, Jacob Tanner suggests that millennialists interpret the book without regard for the Scriptural context. He warns, "As long as the subordinate relation of this book to the teaching of Christ is left out of the attempts at interpretation, no substantial agreement is possible."<sup>359</sup> It is the character of the Apocalypse which forbids its entrance as a standard equally as authoritative as the other

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<sup>357</sup>Ibid.

<sup>358</sup>In an effort to validate the doctrinal reliability of the Apocalypse, George Peters appears to ignore the earnest questions raised about its canonical status by Luther and several other teachers of the Church, claiming, ". . . the authenticity and credibility of the Apocalypse is the most powerfully sustained of any of the Scriptures, being fully endorsed by the earliest Fathers, by the Alexandrian fathers, [who were Anti-Millenarian], and by the admissions of the ablest critics of the destructive school. . . . no book of the New Testament is so fully proven to be genuine as this one; so much so that unbelievers of the schools of Bauer, Strauss, Schwegler, etc. (whatever motives may actuate them), stamp its genuineness as simply incontrovertible." George N. H. Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978), 3:367.

<sup>359</sup>Tanner, pp. 26-27.

parts of Scripture in Tanner's estimation. Furthermore, the statement, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10) is understood to teach that the Gospels serve as the norm for the interpretation of the prophetic visions.<sup>360</sup> In other words, the Apocalypse can add nothing to the eschatological data contained in the Gospels.<sup>361</sup>

While acknowledging the difficulties often involved in interpreting eschatological material, the millennialist believes the Apocalypse remains relevant as a source of prophetic truth. The words of Christ to His apostles shortly before the ascension are understood to indicate a further future unfolding of divine revelation, including matter of eschatological significance.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come [emphasis added]. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:12-15, NIV)

This pre-authentication of the apostolic Word suggests the need for expectant inquiry in exegeting all prophetic portions post-dating Pentecost. The interpreter may well find amplification and clarification of parts of the Scripture; indeed, he may discover truth which, although

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<sup>360</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>361</sup>In similar vein, William Cox reasons that a text veiled in obscurity is an inadequate basis for establishing a unique eschatological category. "In view of all we know about the characteristics of apocalyptic literature--especially its use of symbolism and numerology--it seems absurd to let one obscure passage in the apocalyptic book govern the entire Bible." William E. Cox, The Millennium (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), p. 5. Likewise Judisch remarks, "All forms of pre-millennialism necessarily collide with confessional Lutheranism, therefore, when they make Revelation 20 the fountainhead of millennial doctrine." Judisch., p. 242.

never contradictory, is unique heretofore in the prophetic economy.<sup>362</sup> Employing this concept as an analytic grid in a survey of biblical prophecy, O. Hallesby traces four stages relative to the unfolding of the prophecies of the second Advent. The first stage, the Old Testament prophecies, though descriptive of the Messiah's dual roles as judge and savior, do not clearly distinguish them in terms of separate actions. The second stage, embodied in the Gospels, reveals that a span of time divides Messiah's salvation and Messiah's judgment. Thirdly, the Pauline epistles give more detail regarding Christ's return with emphasis also on the attendant resurrection of the dead. Finally, the Apocalypse exhausts the intentioned divine revelation relative to Christ's return. At each stage, Hallesby sketches the additional aspects revealed. He concludes,

There are certain individuals who have doubts concerning the afore-stated layers of prediction. Let it be emphasized that there is no contradiction between them, only a difference in clarity. Likewise, there is a great difference in clarity between the Old Testament Messianic prophecies (e.g. Genesis 3:15: Isaiah 52:13-53:12)--but no contradiction.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>362</sup>George Ladd believes the late, perhaps even unexpected appearance of a doctrinal concept such as the millennium, is not altogether uncommon in Scripture. He comments, "It should not trouble us that the New Testament for the most part does not foresee the millennial kingdom any more than the fact that the Old Testament does not clearly predict the Church Age." Robert G. Clouse, ed., The Meaning of the Millennium (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 39.

<sup>363</sup>Hallesby, pp. 7-8. Froom concurs with Hallesby's schematic arrangement. Professing that "the revealings of prophecy have been progressive," he attempts to demonstrate this evolution by a survey of several passages of Scripture. The point he seeks to make is that although God is immutable, He has revealed Himself gradually as His people were deemed prepared to receive more. Froom, p. 161. Hebart queries those who would dismiss the ability of the Apocalypse to advance prophetic insight, "To what end, then, is the Apocalypse--if not altogether superfluous--if nothing new is given therein? If there is no progress in knowledge and understanding? What of the promise of the

Thus, the millennialist finds the Apocalypse a fruitful field of prophetic research. He is encouraged by its internal claims to be "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place" (Revelation 1:1a, NIV). He believes he must accept with John the invitation "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this" (Revelation 4:1b, NIV). Having followed with John the prophetic outline, he professes a contentment to neither add nor subtract from the whole.

#### The Analogy of Faith

Relating to the question of the validity of the Apocalypse as an adequate source for establishing doctrine is the hermeneutical axiom, the analogy of faith. Although the concept has a long history of acceptance in the Church, appearing most frequently under the heading, regula fidei, it has been employed since the Reformation under the designation, analogia fidei or the analogy of faith.<sup>364</sup> Presupposing the absolute reliability of the sacred text, the principle invites

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Lord to His Apostles, that the Spirit should guide them into the full truth, and show them things to come? If the design of the Apocalypse--a thing not controverted--was to give something new, it is a false principle to say that it must be explained only by what appears in other Scriptures. Far more correct is the principle of exposition, that the explanation of the Apocalypse must not contradict the other Scriptures." Quoted by West, p. 520.

<sup>364</sup>The term is derived from Romans 12:6, where the Greek reads: ἀναλογία τῆς πίστεως. The meaning of ἀναλογία is "in agreement with" or in "proportion to" the faith. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 56. Thus, to interpret the Scriptures according to the analogy of faith is to explain all passages so as not to conflict with other clear passages. The assumption is the fundamental unity of the Scriptures as a divine product.

comparison of Scripture passage with Scripture passage in an effort to ascertain the meaning of a given biblical text.<sup>365</sup> In this comparative study, precedence is granted to the clear passages in determining the sense. So-called "obscure" portions of the Bible await illumination from those which are considered perspicuous.

A frequent application of the analogy of faith principle for the Lutheran confessors was in reference to the chief article, justification by faith. In his article on monastic vows, Melanchthon appeals to the doctrine of justification to clarify the nature of the Rechabite vow.

Besides, examples ought to be interpreted according to the rule, that is, according to sure and clear passages of Scripture, not against the rule or the passages. It is a sure thing that our observances do not merit the forgiveness of sins or justification. When the Rechabites are praised, therefore, we must note that they did not observe their way of life out of the belief that they would merit forgiveness of sins by it, or that this work was itself an act of worship that justified, or that because of it—not because of the promised Seed, through the mercy of God—they would attain eternal life.<sup>366</sup>

Melanchthon simply believed that Scripture is internally consistent and that the fundamental truth of justification could never be controverted by another passage. This is not to say he arbitrarily imposed the doctrine of justification upon passages that seemed to be contradictory. Rather, he and the other confessors were convinced that inherent in the difficult text itself was the over-arching tenet of justification by faith, implicit indeed though it may be. The confessions afford abundant

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<sup>365</sup>Surburg observes, "The hermeneutical principle of the analogy of faith flows directly from the fact that the Holy Scriptures are verbally inspired, as well as from their self-taught purposes and clear attributes of inerrancy, perspicuity and sufficiency. The fact that the Bible from beginning to end is the very Word of God warrants the use of the hermeneutical rule of the analogy of faith." Surburg, p. 234.

<sup>366</sup>Tappert, p. 279.

witness to the use of the analogy of faith principle. In its light, many seeming doctrinal divergencies coincide.<sup>367</sup>

Millennialism has been frequently charged with ignoring the analogy of faith.<sup>368</sup> On the basis of the alleged novelty of the doctrine in Revelation, R. C. H. Lenski believes a future millennium is to be discounted.<sup>369</sup> B. W. Teigen believes a consistent application of the analogy of faith results in an interpretation of Revelation 20 in terms of the a-millennial scheme. "In view of the clear passages of Scripture, this is the only way in which to interpret Revelation 20."<sup>370</sup> He is convinced that the millennialist faces insurmountable difficulties in reconciling his construction of the Apocalypse with the rest of Scripture. One of the many difficulties, asserts C. H. Little, has to do with the resurrection.

In contradiction to the clear teaching of Scripture they [the Millenarians] abolish all ideas of a general resurrection and divide the resurrection into parts separated by a thousand years, placing the resurrection of the just before and the resurrection of the unjust after the thousand-year reign of Christ and His saints. Over against such views cf. Christ's own words in John 5:28-29 and Matt. 25:31ff.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>367</sup>Ralph Bohlmann illustrates with specific citations many instances of the confessional application of the analogy of faith. Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics. pp. 35-38.

<sup>368</sup>Perhaps the earliest Lutheran to advance this charge was Johann Gerhard. Gerhard p. 197.

<sup>369</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 574.

<sup>370</sup>Teigen, p. 23.

<sup>371</sup>C. H. Little, Explanation of the Book of Revelation (St. Louis Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 203.

In reference to the concept of a "first resurrection" as well as a proposed future earthly reign of Christ, J. L. Neve concludes, "This strange doctrine which grew on Jewish soil is at war with other clear passages of Scripture, with the analogy of faith, or the proportion of faith, according to Romans 12:6, and is, therefore, rejected by our Confession."<sup>372</sup>

Seeming to imply that eschatological matters universally lie in the realm of obscurity, C. Kuehne recommends approaching all prophecies pertaining to the last things with immediate reference to the analogy of faith. He believes the outcome will be a rejection of the idea of more than one future resurrection. "Through such a procedure we learn, for example, that Revelation 20 cannot be speaking of two physical resurrections of the dead which are separate in time, one of the believers and another of the unbelievers. . . . It is self-evident that the clear passages of Scripture must be used to illumine the obscure, not vice-verse."<sup>373</sup>

The claim that millennialists are in conflict with the central doctrine of justification by faith is of no small moment. R. A. Ofstedal reasons, "For if the Kingdom of Christ is to be visibly manifested upon earth during such a future Millennium, must it not follow that the people then living would have another revelation of God, another way of salvation, one in which sight and hearing would take the place of

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<sup>372</sup>J. L. Neve, The Augsburg Confession (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1914), p. 125.

<sup>373</sup>C. Kuehne, "Principles of Interpretation in Regard to Prophecy with Special Reference to Millennialism," The Journal of Theology 21 (December 1981):13.



faith?<sup>374</sup> He is concerned that people would be saved during the Millennium in another way than by simply hearing the Word and so coming to faith in Christ. This understanding would be in conflict with the fundamental touch-stone of all doctrines, justification by faith, he protests. Ofstedal is conscious, no doubt, of the emphasis in the Lutheran confessions on the hermeneutical value of the chief article. The confessors' oft-quoted testimony in this regard is from the Apology.

. . . in this controversy the chief topic of Christian doctrine is treated, which understood aright, illumines and amplifies the honor of Christ [which is of especial service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, and alone opens the door to the entire Bible], and brings necessary and most abundant consolation to devout consciences . . .<sup>375</sup>

It is on the basis of confessional statements like the above that a study document was released in 1965 to Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and American Lutheran Church pastors and laity which stated, "The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ is not only the praecipuus locus doctrinae christianae (main doctrine of Christianity), but it also determines the interpretation of all Scripture.<sup>376</sup> Ralph Bohlmann, however, objects to the use of the doctrine of justification as an all-encompassing hermeneutical principle. While he grants its validity and necessity in interpreting passages where the Law-Gospel distinction is at stake, he warns against an application of soteriological presuppositions which set aside objective grammatical-historical

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<sup>374</sup>R. A. Ofstedal, Ten Studies on God's Plan in Prophecy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1942), p. 104.

<sup>375</sup>Triglot Concordia, p. 121.

<sup>376</sup>The Lutheran Confessions and Sola Scriptura (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 17.

exegesis. Citing several examples of the confessors' approach to specific biblical texts, he concludes, "The Lutheran Confessions never arbitrarily impose the doctrine of justification by grace on any passage where it is not in fact taught."<sup>377</sup> The confessors' central intent is to honestly exegete the text at hand with due reference to corresponding passages. They do not expect the chief article of justification to be controverted or diminished in any way in such endeavor.

The question remains, does millennialist interpretation of Scripture indeed set aside the biblical and confessional principles of the analogy of faith? Is one involved in hopeless contradictions in deducing a future millennium? The millennialist professes to find in the analogy of faith a valuable key to the unlocking of many otherwise difficult passages dealing with the return of Christ. His employment of this principle is expressed in the concept that the entire body of prophetic truth should be allowed to be the guide for the interpretation of details. He acknowledges that the main elements of prophecy are far more clear than some of the details. Prophetic truth, such as in the book of Revelation, while admittedly difficult to interpret, may be understood by a study of related Scriptures.

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<sup>377</sup>Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 42. Elsewhere, Bohlmann continues to appeal for care that soteriological truth is not treated as "some kind of basic hermeneutical principle for deriving the meaning from the text. This is not done by the Confessions, he says, "in spite of their frequent appeal to the doctrine of justification or the law-gospel principle. For the confessors these two doctrines are the message of Scripture, not free-floating principles to be applied to a passage in order to derive meaning from it. . . . The meaning of a particular text can be discerned only through a careful exegesis of the text itself." Reumann, p. 208.

George Peters asserts that the analogy of faith sustains the millennialist doctrine; indeed, it is by this interpretative principle that the position is in part deduced. "But we justly claim that this doctrine of the Kingdom (pre-millennialism), instead of being antagonistic to other doctrines of the Bible, confirms, either directly or indirectly, other doctrines, or serves to explain and illustrate them, or exhibits them in their natural connection and proper relations."<sup>378</sup> He sees no doctrinal conflict between the millennialist view and the rest of Scripture--"unless we interpret unhistorically, ungrammatically, or one-sidedly."<sup>379</sup> He concludes, "One of the sweetest consolations that this doctrine of the Kingdom affords, is that it thus supports, strengthens, and elucidates the other doctrines of the Bible, and binds them into a symmetrical whole, required to attain to the majestic design held by the Divine Purposes."<sup>380</sup> Theodore Hax believes the absence of known controversy regarding the millennium in the early centuries suggests its compatibility with other doctrines, at least in the minds of the church Fathers.<sup>381</sup>

The uniqueness of the concept of a future "thousand years" is troublesome to many students of the Scripture. Why is the "millennium" given such meager attention in the Bible if it is to be understood literally? While it is true that some millennialists profess to discover

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<sup>378</sup>Peters, 3:344.

<sup>379</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>380</sup>Ibid.

<sup>381</sup>Theodore Hax, "Signs of the Times," Evangelize, November 1960, p. 12.

the millennium in many passages throughout the Bible, all will admit that in terms of specific reference to a "thousand years," Revelation 20 stands alone. Is not this limited treatment evidence that the doctrine is suspect? Should there not be more specific corroboration in other parts of Scripture?

While the relative frequency of a subject may often be instructive as to its importance within the entire framework of theology, Milton Terry argues for the validity of a doctrine, though its treatment be scant.

It is evident that no doctrine which rests upon a single passage of Scripture can belong to fundamental doctrines recognized in the analogy of faith. But it must not be inferred from this that no specific statement of Scripture is authoritative unless it has support in other passages. Nor can we set aside any legitimate inference from a statement of Scripture on the ground that such inference is unsupported by other parallel statements. Unless it be clearly contradicted or excluded by the analogy of faith, or by some other equally explicit statement, one positive declaration of God's Word is sufficient to establish either a fact or a doctrine. Hence the analogy of faith as a principle of interpretation is necessarily limited in its application. . . . it cannot govern the interpreter in the exposition of those parts of the Scriptures which are without real parallel, and which stand unopposed by other parts. For it may justly be inferred from the progress of doctrine in the Bible that here and there single revelations of divine truth may have been given in passages where the context furnished no occasion for further development or elaboration.<sup>382</sup>

The millennialist professes that the analogy of faith principle is not only compatible with his understanding of eschatology but also of definite utility in deducing his position. His unique conclusions find the most satisfactory answer in his consideration of apocalyptic material as adequate in conveying truth, even truth not previously revealed in the Scriptures. At the same time, he affirms that this progress in

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<sup>382</sup>Terry, p. 581.

revelation, which ceased with the completion of the canon of Scripture, may never contradict the rest of the Word of God.

Sensus literalis est

The chief hermeneutical apologetic for the recognition of a future millennium in Revelation 20 is the so-called sensus literalis. Frequently accusing his detractors of "spiritualizing" the text, the millennialist derives great assurance of the legitimacy of his approach in observing the urgency of Luther and the Confessions in this regard. Indeed, Luther did say, "The Holy Spirit is the simplest (allereinsältigst) in heaven and on earth. That is why His words could have no more than one simplest (einsältigsten) meaning which we call the written (schriftlichen) one or the literal (buchstabischen) meaning of the tongue."<sup>383</sup> He would grant the propriety of a figurative explanation under very few conditions.

No violence is to be done to the words of God, whether by man or angel. They are to be retained in their simplest [einfachsten] meaning as far as possible. We should take them in their grammatical [grammatischen] and literal [eigentlichen] sense, unless an obvious circumstance plainly forbids it, lest we give our adversaries occasion to make a mockery of all Scripture.<sup>384</sup>

Luther instructs regarding the possible occasion for accepting a figurative construction.

. . . Neither a conclusion nor a figure of speech should be admitted in any place of Scripture unless evident contextual circumstances or the absurdity of anything obviously militating against an article of faith require it. On the contrary, we must everywhere adhere to the simple, pure, and natural meaning [einsachen, reinen, und

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<sup>383</sup>L. W. 39:178 (Erl. Ed. 27:259).

<sup>384</sup>L. W. 36:30 (S.L. 19:25).

naturalichen Bedeutung] of the words. This accords with the rules of grammar and the usage of speech which God has given to men.<sup>385</sup>

Luther faulted Origen for his allegorizing approach to Scripture and affirmed the appropriateness of the condemnation of his writings. He said, "Hardly any of the ecclesiastic writers have handled the Divine Scriptures more ineptly and absurdly than Origen."<sup>386</sup>

The Lutheran confessors as a whole are equally insistent upon the application of the sensus literalis axiom. Reacting against the so-called "Quadriga" principle of the medieval period,<sup>387</sup> they urge a seeking of the "native" sense. It is in the delineation of the words of institution that this appeal is most eloquent and forceful. They are sure they are on solid footing in describing the body and blood of Christ in the Supper as literal. In specific reference to Christ's words, they explain:

We are therefore bound to interpret and explain these words of the eternal, truthful, and almighty Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Creator, and Redeemer, not as flowery, figurative, or metaphorical expressions, as they appear to our reason, but we must accept them in simple faith and due obedience in their strict [eigentlichen] and clear sense, just as they read. Nor dare we permit any objection or human contradiction, spun out of human reason, to turn us away from these words, no matter how appealing our reason may find it.<sup>388</sup>

Committing themselves absolutely to the plain grammatical construction of the text, they assert, "We shall not, can not, and should not permit any clever human opinions, no matter what appearance or prestige they

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<sup>385</sup>L. W. 33:162 (S. L., 18:182).

<sup>386</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>387</sup>This four-fold rule maintained that four levels of meaning are to be discerned in every Bible passage, the literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical.

<sup>388</sup>Tappert, p. 577. Die Bekenisschriften, p. 986.

may have, to lead us away from the simple, explicit, and clear understanding of Christ's word and testament to a strange meaning different from the way the letters read, but, as stated above, we shall understand and believe them in the simple sense."<sup>389</sup> They fault their sixteenth-century opposition who "twist many texts because they read their own opinions into them instead of deriving the meaning from the texts themselves."<sup>390</sup>

The Lutheran millennialist believes he is a faithful practitioner of the confessional recommendations regarding the need to prefer the literal approach. Indeed, he considers himself a debtor to this hermeneutical principle. Deriving great comfort from Luther's advocacy of the literal sense, George Peters confesses his dependence on this principle in the construction of a millennialistic scheme. "The literal, grammatical interpretation of the Scriptures must be observed in order to obtain a correct understanding (millennial, in his judgment) of this kingdom."<sup>391</sup> In specific reflection on Luther's "two rules" of biblical interpretation,<sup>392</sup> Samuel Miller concludes, "In accordance with these

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<sup>389</sup>Ibid., p. 586. The practical force of Luther's commitment to the literal interpretation of the words of institution is noted at the Marburg Colloquy when Luther and Zwingli discussed their differences. Removing a cloth covering his table, he revealed the words he had written in chalk--hoc est meum corpus, and then declared, "I have a sure [gewiss] word of God which no one can wrest from me." He took his stand on the basis of the literal sense. L. W. 38:67. (W. A. 30:147).

<sup>390</sup>Tappert, p. 138.

<sup>391</sup>Peters, 1:47.

<sup>392</sup>In Miller's words, they are: (1) "Every word should be allowed to stand in its own natural meaning and that should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to it." (2) "It is the attribute of Holy Scripture that it interprets itself by passages and places which belong together and can only be understood by the rule of faith." Miller, p. 11.

principles, when we study the prophetic word, we should take its meaning to be as literal as the form of language allows."<sup>393</sup> As previously noted, Miller's use of the literal method leads him to a millennialist view. Joseph Seiss credits Luther with preparing the way for the resurrection of millennialism through his re-discovery of the "millenarian method" of interpreting the Bible. Seiss claimed, "the hope of the millennial reign, with all other great doctrines of the Scripture, slept, until God called Luther, and the light of Christianity's renewal came."<sup>394</sup> He calls attention to Luther's castigation of Origen and others for the introduction of the so-called allegorical method.<sup>395</sup> The displacement of Origen's allegorical method by Luther's literal method, in Seiss' estimation, resulted in the millennialist revival. E. J. Wolf seeks to account for the "failure" of Luther to discern a future millennium by suggesting an inconsistent application of his own hermeneutical principles. Granting the advance in scientific exegesis by the Reformers, he nonetheless concludes they were in practice "still somewhat fettered by the allegorical method which spiritualizes all sensuous reality and thereby dissipates all history."<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>393</sup>Ibid. Miller added elsewhere, "Our preference is to take the Word of God as literally as the language allows, being assured that we are thus on safer ground of Scripture interpretation." Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>394</sup>Seiss, The Last Times, p. 253.

<sup>395</sup>Seiss reports Luther as saying, "Therefore, Origen, Jerome, and similar of the fathers, are to be avoided, with the whole of that Alexandrian school which abound in this species of interpretation." Ibid. It is to be remembered that Origen wielded considerable influence upon Augustine in the latter's willingness to conceive of a non-literal understanding of the millennium.

<sup>396</sup>Lectures on the Augsburg Confession (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1888), p. 683.



Despite the preference for the literal sense in approaching a biblical text, millennialists, in varying degrees, acknowledge the reality of figurative language, particularly in apocalyptic material. Hallesby, however, is intent to point out its doctrinal relevance nonetheless. "Prophetic symbols form an illustration of an actuality. Therefore I must side with those who think that the prophetic symbol here (the "thousand years") means a certain time period."<sup>397</sup> That actual period, short or long, lies in the future in his understanding. Hallesby professes allegiance to the Pauline emphasis on the profitability of all Scripture in terms of doctrinal importance,<sup>398</sup> including those parts which are not immediately apparent because of their literary form.

Illustrative of the millennialist's attempt to seek the simple, native sense of Scripture is Paul Tan's approach to Revelation 20:1-3. He advocates the need for a "normal reading" of this prophecy to understand it properly. "We take it that the apostle John visually sees the angel bind Satan with a chain and cast him into the pit for a thousand years. The fact that this is seen under an anticipatory vision makes no

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<sup>397</sup>Hallesby, p. 15. Terry, likewise, is not concerned to establish exact numerical value in the usage of "thousand years." On the one hand, he argues that the number bears no analogy in other Scripture portions. Thus, the immediate text itself (Revelation 20) is the sole witness to how this specific number should be understood. On the other hand, the number ten is indicative of "fullness, totality, completeness, so not improbably the number one thousand may stand as the symbolic number of manifold fullness, the rounded aeon of Messianic triumph, (ὁ αἰὼν μέλλων), during which he shall abolish all rule and all authority and power, and put all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. XV, 24, 25), and bring in the fullness (τὸ πλήρωμα) of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. xi, 12,25)." Terry, p. 390.

<sup>398</sup>2 Timothy 3:16.

real difference. Visional subjects are anticipated actualities, just as visional words are anticipated revelational words."<sup>399</sup> Dismissing a passage's doctrinal relevance because of the presence of figurative language is unwarranted and unsafe in Tan's judgment. This is to omit, or, at least, undervalue many parts of the Bible.

Contrary to the impression created by some millennialists, emphasis on the employment of the literal or grammatico-historical method is not their exclusive domain. A-millennialists are generally as insistent on the value, indeed necessity, of this hermeneutical axiom. If that be the case, wherein lies the problem? What accounts for the fundamentally different conclusions. A-millennialists attribute the opposition to a mis-application of the principle by millennialists.

Theodore Engelder accuses millennialists of inconsistency in applying the sensus literalis.

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<sup>399</sup>Paul Lee Tan, The Interpretation of Prophecy (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), p. 134. John Walvoord accuses a-millennialists of employing a "spiritualizing method" in interpreting passages of prophetic importance. Because of the subjectivism inherent in such an approach, he concludes, "as far as amillennialism itself is concerned, there is neither principle nor method to erect a self-consistent system of theology." He considers the spiritualizing method of interpretation an easy step into liberalism. "The spiritualizing method of interpretation has proved the Achilles' heel of amillennial conservatism. The amillennialian who wants to forsake conservatism for liberalism needs no change in method and the transition is not difficult. On the other hand, a premillennialian if enamored of modern liberalism would have to forsake all he had formerly stood for in order to adopt liberalism." Walvoord, pp. 73-74. Teigen is quick to defend his conservative position on Scripture as an a-millennialist. "some millennialists almost appear to think that if one takes a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, one must be a millennialist. We take an equally high view of Scripture, but our principles of interpretation do not allow us to be millennialists because we follow the clear passages of Scripture. Lutheranism recognizes that the Scripture is a literary document which uses historical language, allegories, imagery, and figurative language." Teigen, p. 20.

The iron-clad rule that one must never depart from the sensus literalis is put aside when the particular theory of a particular school demands it. And the distinction between the sensus literae and the sensus literalis seems to be unknown. We depart from the sensus literalis when Scripture tells us to do so. The pre-millennialist clings to the sensus literae or departs from it as his fancy dictates. He insists on clinging to the sensus literae, on taking figurative statements literally, in the face of Scripture's own repudiation of such interpretation. Chiliastic theology consists in great part of such literalistic perversion of Scripture.<sup>400</sup>

Nowhere is the inconsistency of the millennialist more apparent than in his treatment of Revelation 20, asserts the a-millennialist. Amidst an abundance of figurative expressions, the millennialist is accused of arbitrarily singling out the "thousand years" as worthy of literal interpretation. Little appeals for a closer look at the context which he believes "calls for its correspondence with the imagery of the other terms."<sup>401</sup>

In fairness to the millennialist, it must be reiterated that he acknowledges and affirms the presence of figurative language and symbolic expressions in prophetic truth. He agrees with Bernard Ramm that "in the interpretation of apocalyptic imagery a complete literalistic method is impossible."<sup>402</sup> The issue is not between exclusive use of spiritualization on the one hand, and the exclusive use of literalism on the

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<sup>400</sup>Theodore Engelder, "Notes on Chiliasm," Concordia Theological Monthly 6 (March 1935):166-167. Mayer speaks of millennialists as guilty of "literalism" when "passages which speak of future things in figurative language are taken just as they read." F. E. Mayer, "The Kingdom of God According to the New Testament," Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Convention of the Texas District of the Evangelical Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (1942), p. 47.

<sup>401</sup>C. H. Little, Disputed Doctrines (Burlington, IA: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1933), p. 36.

<sup>402</sup>Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 268.

other. Rather, it lies in varying degrees of reluctance to lay aside the literal sense in consideration of the context of a given passage. Historically, the millennialist has been the most reluctant. He defends his torpidity by an appeal to the literal fulfillment of most prophecies connected with Christ's first advent. He believes the New Testament interpretation and elucidation of the Old Testament prophecies is instructive in an approach to material associated with the second advent. As a predominantly literal interpretation was vindicated in the first advent, so he is expectant that most of the passages dealing with Christ's return will achieve similar outcome. George Ladd speaks for historic millennialism in summary of the case.

We must conclude therefore that there is no single interpretation in the study of prophecy, either literal or spiritual. The same laws of hermeneutics and exegesis are to be employed which are used elsewhere. Unless there is some reason intrinsic within the text itself which requires a symbolical interpretation, or unless there are other Scriptures which interpret a parallel prophecy in a symbolic sense, we are required to employ a natural, literal interpretation.<sup>403</sup>

While Lutheran a-millennialists and millennialists identify and uniformly acknowledge the biblical, confessional principles of interpretation, they diverge in the application of those principles particularly in reference to the Apocalypse. Admitting the book of Revelation to be canonical, the modern a-millennialist is hesitant to allow it to contribute anything of unique eschatological significance of a doctrinal nature. Its chief value lies in its corroboration of the more straightforward portions of Scripture. A proper application of the analogy of faith rules out any future construct of a millennium. Furthermore, the

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<sup>403</sup>Ladd, Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God, p. 141.

character of the Apocalypse in terms of its prevailing symbolism forbids its entrance as a purveyor of truth hitherto unmentioned in Scripture. Preferable as the literal sense usually is in understanding the Bible, its application to the Apocalypse, specifically the twentieth chapter, is unwarranted in light of the figurative context.

In contradistinction to the a-millennialist, the Lutheran millennialist is not as willing to surrender the doctrinal value of the Apocalypse. Granting its symbolism, he, nonetheless, applies the Apostle Paul's affirmation of the profitability of "all scripture" (πᾶσα γραφή) for "doctrine" (διδασκαλίαν) also to its text (2 Timothy 3:16). In view of Christ's promise to the apostles of further information to be imparted to them by the Holy Spirit, even of an eschatological nature (John 16:13), he professes no surprise by the introduction of information without precedent. A future "one thousand year-"period, though essentially an innovation in the Apocalypse, may be admitted to the corpus of divine revelation, even though its limited reference suggests its minor importance in the fund of eschatological truth.

The millennialist, moreover, finds the analogy of faith principle compatible with his concept of a future millennium.<sup>404</sup> He recognizes no abrogation of the divine economy of salvation until Christ returns for judgment. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ's vicarious death on the cross is ever the mode of entrance into the Kingdom of God. The Christian Church remains intact since its inception

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<sup>404</sup>The millennialism represented here is of the classical variety as also embraced by most Lutheran millennialists, at least in earlier American history.

in the eternal plan of God, its historic actualization in the death and resurrection of Christ, and its manifestation on the day of Pentecost. No truth of the Scripture is sacrificed for the sake of a future millennium.

Finally, the millennialist assures himself in his conservatism regarding the employment of sensus literalis. Though he may confess wonderment at the outcome of his broader application, he is sustained in observing the preponderance of literal fulfillment of prophecies related to the first advent. If he has been at first confounded by the options related to the application of hermeneutics, he has chosen what he considers in the meantime a safer course, the literal rendition, and hopefully remains open for further "light" from God's Word.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to explore the defense of millennialism within American Lutheranism and to test that position in an examination of the Lutheran symbols, particularly the Augsburg Confession, Article XVII.

It was observed at the outset that there is need for careful definition of terms employed relative to the varied attempts to specify the relationship of the millennium to the second advent. For example, the frequent neglect to distinguish classical millennialism from modern dispensationalism was noted with the attending consequence of injudicious characterization of the former. It was suggested that the a-millennial position has also suffered from lack of patient inquiry on the part of its detractors. Premature judgments based on generalizations have sometimes served to stifle constructive dialogue leading to mutual understanding and respect. There is need at this level for courteous and open-minded attention to the explanation of the respective views and their alleged basis in biblical revelation and corresponding witness in the Church. Attempts to project one's millennial position as sole occupant of the Church's interpretation in an unbroken line from the apostles will vanish in an objective survey of historic Christianity. It would be hoped that such admission would temper the harsh accusations

sometimes levelled by students of eschatology against each other and foster a deeper humility in approaching the subject.

While the historic survey of millennialism within Lutheranism concentrated on certain American church leaders and groups, it was observed that its roots are traceable to European soil. Serving as a catalyst in this regard was the Lutheran Pietist movement as led by Philip Jakob Spener. Spener's comments relative to the prospect of "better times" for the Church as well as his advocacy of an "unfettered" exegetical approach to the Scriptures served to stimulate Johann Albrecht Bengel ultimately to adopt and promote a millennialist interpretation. Though Bengel's system was not accepted without criticism and modification, his basic concept of a millennium yet future won many adherents within Lutheranism as well as among other Protestant groups, both on the continent and later in the United States. The acknowledged debt of many students of eschatology to Bengel's interpretation was observed as extensive.

Although the influence of revivalism and various socio-political factors upon American Lutheranism may often have been over-estimated relative to the emergence of millennialism in the nineteenth century, the spirit of the times certainly did not militate against it. The apparent dramatic advance of the Church united with an era of almost unbounded optimism within society served to stimulate hopes of an unprecedented future. Millennialism appeared to many as less incongruous with reality than it may have presented itself in another age. At the least, millennialism seemed more compatible with existential judgment.



Though millennialism has never enjoyed wide acceptance by American Lutherans, some of its adherents have occupied prominent positions in the Church. In the nineteenth century, the most well known advocate was Joseph A. Seiss. As a pastor and leader of the General Council, his fervent testimony on behalf of the millennialist interpretation was heard by thousands. Attempting to separate himself from "American Lutheranism" and other revivalistic efforts, he defended his Lutheran orthodoxy. He was convinced from his examination of the Augsburg Confession that he was vindicated in his freedom to hold and advance a minority eschatological interpretation within the context of Lutheranism. He did not believe the Lutheran confessions were definitive in regard to the millennial issue.

In the early part of the twentieth century, several theological leaders identified themselves as millennialist in prophetic outlook. Included in this group were Revere F. Weidner, C. E. Lindberg, J. N. Kildahl, and J. Michael Reu. While these men enjoyed commonality in their individual concentration on exegetical and/or systematic theology, they represented diverse synodical affiliations. All defended their interpretation as a legitimate option allowed by the Book of Concord.

Among the "lesser lights" in American Lutheran history who have promoted millennialism have been George N. H. Peters, Georg A. Schieferdecker, and George H. Gerberding. Of the three, Peters' influence has been most profound, primarily in Reformed circles. Schieferdecker, in his later years, recanted his previous position and returned to the Missouri Synod from which he had been expelled. Gerberding, not attempting to do much original work on the subject himself, helped to make

millennialism more palatable to some Lutherans in a popular defense of its alleged confessional integrity.

Millennialism continues to survive in the Lutheran church of the twentieth century. It has been sustained first, by certain independent movements within the Church. The Lutheran Bible institutes have numbered several millennialist teachers and authors on their faculties. Hundreds of students have at least become sympathetic with millennialism through association with these schools. A close affiliate of the Bible institutes has been the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. Many of its evangelists and teachers have openly espoused millennialist doctrine in its publications. It remains among the "free" movements until the present the most closely connected with millennial thought.

Two smaller church groups with millennial ties are the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. With distinct origins in the context of Lutheran pietism, both profess loyalty to the Lutheran confessions despite their eschatological uniqueness. Officially millennialist, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren believes its position is not only permissible by the Lutheran symbols; it is indeed, claimed to be more compatible than other interpretations of the millennium. While not constitutionally defining a particular stance on the millennium, a majority of the pastors and laity of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations embrace a millennialist understanding. Considering millennialism to be an "open question," it encompasses within its constituency a number of adherents of historic a-millennialism. The AFLC has not considered a certain interpretation of the millennium worthy of elevation to public creedal testimony. It

remains satisfied with the content of the ancient ecumenical symbols and the Lutheran confessions relative to "last things." It is to these accents it would summarily point. It is upon these statements that its unity is desired.

It has been of prime interest in this study to compare the basic tenets of millennialism with the formulations of the Book of Concord. The study is crucial to an assessment of the confessional loyalty of thousands of Lutherans, past and present. Is there sufficient latitude in the symbols to allow the historic views (millennialism and a-millennialism) to exist, even co-exist? Of chief moment in this matter is the Augsburg Confession of 1530, particularly its seventeenth article. Because of its clear witness to the second advent on the one hand, and its specific condemnation of opposing errors on the other, its relevancy to the question at hand is manifest.

It was observed that the Augsburg Confession was advanced initially as a unity document. Accord was desired by all parties meeting at Augsburg in 1530. The Lutherans prepared their testimony in full recognition of the content of Roman Catholic faith. Their selection of articles was discerning and deliberate. They avoided matters capable of creating needless debate. The "chief article," justification by faith, however, could not be tempered. It was clearly and forthrightly articulated, regardless of the ecumenical consequences. The remaining articles in the first part of the Augustana, however, accent the historic Christian doctrines in contradistinction not to Catholicism but to various heresies, ancient and modern. The Lutherans desperately wanted to establish their continuity with historic Christianity, amidst the

slandorous attacks of Eck and others. Promotion of a particular view on the millennium, such as a-millennialism, or castigation of an alternative, historic millennialism, is not in keeping with the intent of the confessors at Augsburg. Their purpose was to keep the issues broad that unity might be achieved on the truly essential matters. Moreover, the confessors' attention to the early Church fathers is devoid of reference to their prevailing millennial views. Orthodoxy for them appeared not to be measured on such a secondary issue.

The personal views of Luther and Melanchthon on the millennium are well known. Following the Augustinian model, they held that the "church age" constituted the millennium. The devil is "bound" presently following his decisive defeat by Christ at the cross. There is a single resurrection on the "last day" as Christ returns for the final judgment. A temporal kingdom of Christ is not to be expected at some future point. The Antichrist exists in the spiritually adulterous Roman papacy. While these are the confessors private eschatological views, do they purport to prescribe them as singularly orthodox? Are they intent on eliminating the historic alternatives in their confessional statements? These are the crucial questions explored in this study.

The major passage in the Lutheran confessions which speaks to the questions above is Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession. In its positive affirmations regarding the second advent of Christ, it was argued that the terminology employed is sufficiently broad to include not only a-millennialism but also millennialism. The concept of the "last day," though certainly conveying the idea of a distinct act, complete in itself, does not necessarily connote a certain duration.

While the universality of the resurrection on the last day is explicit, it was contended that this does not necessarily require an absolute simultaneity. A first and second resurrection (Revelation 20) may be encompassed under an extended interpretation of the "last day."

While the intention of the first damnamus in Article XVII has escaped debate in its focus on the continuation of Origen's apocatastasis theory among the Anabaptists, the second has been interpreted in one of two ways: either the confessors seek to condemn millennialism per se, or they are limiting their denunciation to a peculiar view of the millennium rife historically among the Jews and revived and promoted contemporaneously by the Anabaptists.

In a historical survey of the roots of the "Jewish opinions" alluded to in Article XVII, it was observed that the concept of a temporal reign of the Messiah on the earth ante-resurrectionem is not found among the Jews until the second century B.C. Its political and materialistic overtones find just censure by the Augsburg Confession. Indeed, all who entertain such notions regarding the millennium are expressly condemned by Article XVII. To be sure, its statements had immediate reference, Melancthon verifies in the Variata, to the sixteenth-century Anabaptists who held views corresponding to the Jewish opinions. But its broader application must be acknowledged. It was observed that a "worldly" kingdom of Christ prior to the resurrection can never qualify as confessionally, not to mention biblically, acceptable. While technically, all forms of millennialism may appear untouched by the article's timing of the kingdom's appearance "before the resurrection," yet the emphasis elsewhere in the Lutheran confessions upon the

consistently spiritual nature of the kingdoms must be recognized by Lutheran students of eschatology. The confessors recognize no point in time when the glory of the Church will be revealed. It remains until the "last day" a Church bearing a cross. This eliminates for confessional Lutherans the possibility of locating the Church upon the earth during a future thousand-year period. If one wishes to retain his confessional integrity as a millennialist, the future reign with Christ can only be conceived as taking place in heaven. There, and there alone, the glory of the Church is at last manifest.

There are few who dispute the strict confessional identification of the Antichrist with the Roman papacy. Not only does the papacy resemble the biblical description of the Antichrist; in their estimation, it is the Antichrist. A confessional Lutheran must examine the eschatological implications of accepting this "Protestant interpretation." If the papacy is the Antichrist, then one's approach to Revelation 19 and 20 needs careful attention. One must reconcile the destruction of "the beast" (19:20) at the second advent with the apparently attendant binding of Satan and inauguration of a "thousand year" reign of Christ (20:1-6). It may not be sufficient to simply dismiss the chronological intent of the writer; the exegete will want to examine the grammatical construction of the terms employed with the serious purpose of resolving the seeming discordancies. The present writer contends that a literal and linear interpretation of Revelation 19 and 20 commends the consideration of two alternatives: forsake the "Protestant interpretation" and thereby sustain the consistency of one's a-millennial view, or retain the traditional understanding and thereby be compelled to adopt a

millennialist view. This was the logic of Bengel and Hengstenberg, among others, and it cannot be dismissed casually.

The relevancy of the Apocalypse as a legitimate source of doctrinal truth has been significant to the present discussion. Does the preponderant symbolical nature of the Book of Revelation disallow any innovations it might contain? May one expect any advance in prophetic insight in its content? Or, of more fundamental concern, is there sufficient historical evidence to diminish its canonical status and authority if not eliminate it altogether? While reverent biblical scholars as late as Luther struggled with the latter question, the Church has since generally recognized the security of the Apocalypse within the canon. However, it is the nature of the Apocalypse that serves to reduce its doctrinal significance for many serious students of the Bible. It was argued in this study that Christ taught His apostles to expect additional truth through them to His Church (John 16:12-15), even eschatological truth. Through them, as with the prophets of old, the Holy Spirit would inspire their writings and God's revelation to the Church would at last be complete. With the Apocalypse, penned by inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the last apostle, John, the unfolding of divine truth ceased. One may thus expect to find doctrinal progress in the apostolic writings, including the Book of Revelation, as in the earlier Scriptures. It is not beyond credulity that the concept of a future millennium might even be outlined, albeit late in the pages of Holy Writ. While the hermeneutical axiom, analogia fidei, would disqualify the acceptance of the millennium as a major doctrinal category, its

"right to exist" might be acknowledged, providing it does not invite contradiction with other biblical testimony.

The confessional accent on the literal sense was observed in this study. The confessors advised an initial investigation of the native meaning of every passage of Scripture. Only an "obvious circumstance" could force a figurative construction. If doubt persisted, their counsel was to select the safer sensus literalis approach. It is on the basis of his professed preference for the literal sense that the Lutheran millennialist has drawn his conclusions. While he does not press for a material "chain" to bind Satan or a material "key" for the Abyss, cognizant of the fact that he is dealing with the unseen, spiritual world, nevertheless, he believes Satan is truly and literally curtailed by Christ in an absolute sense. While he does not insist on a literal "one thousand-"year span for the millennium because of the contextual numerical symbolism and because one thousand (or ten) is frequently employed to connote completeness, he does locate those years in the future. Otherwise, he accepts the idea of a literal angel coming down from Heaven, a literal devil, a literal Abyss, literal martyrs, a literal resurrection, and a literal reign with Christ.

Lutheran millennialists, along with their a-millennial counterparts, admit the presence of figurative and symbolic language in Scripture. It is the varying degree of reluctance to lay down the literal sense that distinguishes the two schools. The millennialist, though perhaps unable to understand the rationale for a millennium in the divine economy, holds nonetheless, to what he believes is the prudent interpretation. At the same time, he must remain open to all that the



biblical context might reveal to him. His view must be tested continually by the light of God's Word.

The present writer speaks for the so-called "classical millennial position as a permissible option for a confessional Lutheran in view of the silence of the confessions as to the location of the millennium on the historical spectrum.<sup>1</sup> While not endorsing a future millennium, the confessions do not prohibit such an interpretation under the following conditions: First, a worldly reign of the Church is without biblical and confessional warrant; indeed, it militates against the theologia crucis posture which is to characterize the Church in the world until the last judgment. Second, the Antichrist is properly conceived of as proximate with the dogma of the Roman papacy of the sixteenth century. A religious system unfaithful to the cardinal tenets of the Bible will continue to stand in antithesis to true Christianity until the second advent. Third, the means of salvation remain ever and only the Word and Sacraments until the last judgment. It is consistently by faith alone that the benefits procured by Christ at the cross and announced in the Gospel are transmitted. God has no alternative plan that would circumvent the all-sufficient atonement of His Son. Operating within the above confessional strictures, the issue of the millennium may thus be considered "open." One's loyalty to the confessions may remain unimpaired as a millennialist.

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<sup>1</sup>Because of the inevitable accretions and alterations suffered by the classical position in its long history, the present writer would recommend the term, "biblical millennialism" to describe what he believes remains an option for a confessional Lutheran.

Recent Lutheran millennialism lacks serious biblical and confessional explication of its views. The vacuum created is at least partially responsible for the uncritical acceptance by some Lutherans of interpretations of the millennium running "cross-grain" with their historic symbols. While this study professes to have validated the legitimacy of a qualified millennial position, it has only introduced some questions needing further research. One of these questions is the nature of the millennium itself. Granting the theory that the Church will reign with Christ from heaven during a future millennium, how can that era be considered a missionary period? Who administers the Word and Sacraments, at least initially? Moreover, is there not a sense of ultimacy indicated in the confessional testimony regarding the second advent? Are there not confessional limitations to the "day of salvation?" Does not the return of Christ signal the end of the opportunity for salvation? Would not the manifestation of Christ's glory at His advent alter the biblical and confessional emphasis on faith as normative? These are among the most critical issues needing biblical and confessional examination.

The neglect of contemporary Lutheran millennialism to publish also explains why observers find it difficult to make distinctions in analytical studies. Again, there have been fundamental differences historically among those who have accepted the millennial label. On the one side are the sixteenth-century radical Anabaptists who envisioned a bloody takeover of society by the Church. Article XVII of the Augustana is explicit in its denunciation of this and all similar prospects. Then there are the dispensationalists who speak of multiple resurrections,

raptures and judgments in the context of an earthly millennial kingdom complete with a renewed and domesticated creation in which resurrected and transformed Christians commingle with earth's inhabitants. The confessional witness regarding the nature of Christ's kingdom in relation to temporal existence removes dispensationalism as an eschatological option for the Lutheran. The only millennial option which appears to evade the confessional damnamus is what the present writer has termed "biblical millennialism." Considering the "thousand years" future, it understands this perhaps indefinite period to consist of a removal of the Church from the world at the second advent of Christ to reign with Christ from heaven over a relatively subdued earth. Satan is prevented from activity during this time until the end when he is permitted to make one last attempt to deceive the nations. His divine interception is followed by eternal consignment to Hell in the context of the similar fate of those unbelieving dead who have been resurrected at the end of the "millennium." The realities of either eternity in heaven or in hell are faced in direct connection with the temporal relationship to the Gospel of Christ.

The biblical millennialist, in his continuing study of the Scriptures, does well to heed certain cautions. First, even as he recognizes the prominence of the second coming of Christ in the Bible, yet he must not make it the foundation of his theological system. In the words of Loraine Boettner, "it should be studied after, not before, the other basic doctrines. Its purpose, and that of Eschatology in general,

is to bring into unity and to crown the unfinished edifice."<sup>2</sup> The chief article for Lutherans is the precious truth of justification by faith. It is in its light that the promise of the second coming and its attendant aspects takes on proper perspective and becomes truly meaningful.<sup>3</sup> Second, related to the first concern is the need to emphasize the central verities associated with eschatology. Rather than belaboring differences in eschatological details with one's ecclesiastical counterparts, it is needful to major in the central motifs, namely, the advent itself, death, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, heaven, and hell. The predominant mention of these truths in Scripture, as well as their clarity, should be instructive to the Bible student in terms of elucidating the doctrine. At the same time, the minor attention to other eschatological facets, such as the millennium, as well as its relative obscurity, should be informative in discerning the relative weight to be attached in achieving a biblical balance. History teaches that there has been a tendency among millennialists to eclipse other truths to the extent that, as Geerhardus Vos suggests, "the delusion has been created that eschatology and Chiliasm are interchangeable, the

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<sup>2</sup>Lorraine Boettner, The Millennium (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), p. 361.

<sup>3</sup>While granting the freedom of a confessional Lutheran to hold millennialist views, the faculty at Dorpat, responding to the Iowa Synod query, advised, "Moreover, it is not even remotely our opinion, that it is the task of the Church and her ministers to busy congregations with eschatological doctrines yet in dispute, especially with what we are able to comprehend under the name of Chiliasm; at least to the neglect of the great facts of God's redemption, and the central truths of the Gospel." "Confessional et Extra-Confessional" The Evangelical Quarterly Review, 19 (January 1868):255.

species has usurped the place of the genus . . ."4 Third, while the biblical millennialist student of God's Word must be true to the light he has received after careful exegesis and proper application of appropriate hermeneutical principles, he must concede that throughout the course of church history, many Bible students have not arrived at his conclusions. Equally conservative, equally confessional Lutherans have not achieved a consensus regarding the millennium.<sup>5</sup> This reality should encourage a certain reserve in setting forth one's position and elicit a respect for opposing views seeking to be true to the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessions. At the same time, it should create an openness to examine one's own interpretation in consistent exposure to sound biblical exegesis. It should also promote a continuing unity with those who may differ on eschatological details. One's millennial preferences need not be a divisive factor among Christians, yes, even among Lutheran Christians. The present writer agrees with the conclusion of Oswald Allis, who, after a serious study of the implications of the millennium in the life of the Christian Church said, "It does not seem to involve any

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<sup>4</sup>Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 228.

<sup>5</sup>Elert confesses that the Apocalypse "contains visions which no exegete has to date interpreted so convincingly as to get the meaning and message of the book incorporated into the Church's Confessions" Werner Elert, The Last Things, trans. Martin Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), p. 8. Cox, an a-millennialist, observes, "we might be surprised to find elements of truth in each of the camps [millennial]. Theological chauvinism is dangerous. Many practice the dictum: 'My school of interpretation, may she always be right, but right or wrong, my school.' This is spiritual pride, and is very sinful. Until conservative men drop this attitude and ask 'What saith the scripture,?' our divisions will continue." William E. Cox, The Millennium (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), p. 6.

issues sufficiently serious to warrant its being a divisive factor among those that are of the household of faith."<sup>6</sup> The often-repeated words of the pseudonymous Rupertus Meldenus are appropriate. Preparing a treatise in the early seventeenth century in which he appealed for unity among his fellow-Lutherans, he said, "In essentials unity, in uncertainties freedom, in all things love."<sup>7</sup> The present writer would speak for confessional neutrality toward a "biblical millennialist" position as well as the traditional a-millennial view, and in that recognition, appeal for mutual respect and love among confessional Lutherans.

At the same time that there are cautions to be observed, the confessional Lutheran possesses great freedom in his study of prophetic truth. Affirming and accenting the central verities relating to the "last things," in consonance with the Lutheran confessions, his investigation of eschatological questions is bounded only by God's Word.<sup>8</sup> Acknowledging the difficulties in his quest, he may, nevertheless, respond positively to the challenging prescription of a nineteenth-century Lutheran.

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<sup>6</sup>Oswald T. Allis, Prophecy and the Church (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), p. 261.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted by Robert Lightner, Prophecy in the Ring (Denver: Accent Books, 1976), p. 120.

<sup>8</sup>Lilje promotes extra-confessional (that is, biblical) pursuit of doctrinal themes in particular reference to the treatment of chiliasm in the Augsburg Confession. "When however, we reflect on the fact that the eschatological doctrine of the Augsburg Confession is incomplete, and that it is silent on many vital 'signs of the end' taught in the Bible, it is only fair to say that the attitude of the Confession as a whole is not as much one of 'rejection' as an abbreviatur. Therefore, we need not argue that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the Augsburg Confession and the Bible." Hanns Lilje, The Last Book of the Bible (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 252.

Must the Church relinquish the idea of ascertaining a definite faith touching her own bright consummation, and that simply by the appalling difficulties encountered by the very abundance of revelations? Was it by supineness like this that she won and established her great fundamental doctrines of Theology and Soteriology? Or is it with the temple of Christian truth as with the unfortunate tower suggested in the parable--the foundation having been laid, men are not able to complete its structure? Does not Providence itself call the Church of these latter days to bestow her most intense thought upon the problems of the future? With its undergirding immovable, its towering walls impregnable, what remains for theology, but to proceed with the dome and raise one by one its gilded stories until they strike the arches of they sky and complete the union of heaven with the earth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Lectures on the Augsburg Confession (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1888), pp. 695-696.

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