

HISTORY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

BY
PHILIP SCHAFF, D.D., LL.D.
PROFESSOR IN UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK

Christianus sum : Christiani nihil a me alienum puto

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§ 158. *Chiliasm.*

- CORRODI: *Kritische Geschichte des Chiliasmus.* 1781. Second ed. Zürich, 1794. 4 vols. Very unsatisfactory.
- MÜNSCHER: *Lehre vom tausendjährigen Reich in den 3 ersten Jahrh.* (in Henke's "Magazin," VI. 2, p. 233 sqq.)
- D. T. TAYLOR: *The Voice of the Church on the Coming and Kingdom of the Redeemer; a History of the Doctrine of the Reign of Christ on Earth.* Revised by Hastings. Second ed. Peace Dale, R. I. 1855. Pre-millennial.
- W. VOLCK: *Der Chiliasmus. Eine historisch-exeget. Studie.* Dorpat, 1869 Millennialian.
- A. KOCH: *Das tausendjährige Reich.* Basel, 1872. Millennialian against Hengstenberg.
- C. A. BRIGGS: *Origin and History of Premillennarianism.* In the "Lutheran Quarterly Review," Gettysburg, Pa., for April, 1879. 38 pages. Anti-millennial, occasioned by the "Prophetic Conference" of Pre-millennialians, held in New York, Nov. 1878. Discusses the ante-Nicene doctrine.
- GEO. N. H. PETERS: *The Theocratic Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, the Christ.* N. York, announced for publ. in 3 vols. 1884. Pre-millennialian.

A complete critical history is wanting, but the *controversial* and *devotional* literature on the subject is very large, especially in the English language. We mention—1) on the millennial side (embracing widely different shades of opinion). (a) English and American divines: Jos. Mede (1627), Twisse, Abbadie, Beverly T. Burnet, Bishop Newton, Edward Irving, Birks, Bickersteth, Horatio and Andrew Bonar (two brothers), E. B. Elliott (*Horæ Apoc.*), John Cumming, Dean Alford, Nathan Lord, John Lillie, James H. Brooks, E. R. Craven, Nath. West, J. A. Seiss, S. H. Kellogg, Peters, and the writings of the Second Adventists, the Irvingites, and the Plymouth Brethren. (b) German divines: Spener (*Hoffnung besserer Zeiten*), Peterson, Bengel (*Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis, 1740*), Oetinger, Stilling, Lavater, Auberlen (on *Dan. and Revel.*), Martensen, Rothe, von Hofmann, Löhe, Delitzsch, Volck, Luthardt. 2) On the anti-millennial side—(a) English and American: Bishop Hall, R. Baxter, David Brown (*Christ's Second Advent*), Fairbairn, Urwick, G. Bush, M^{rs}. Stuart (on *Revel.*), Cowles (on *Dan. and Revel.*), Briggs, etc. (b) German: Gerhard, Maresius, Hengstenberg, Keil, Kliefoth, Philippi, and many others. See the articles "Millennarianism" by Semisch, and "Pre-Millennarianism" by Kellog, in Schaff-Herzog, vols. II. and III., and the literature there given.

The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment.¹ It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius; while Caius, Origen, Dionysius the Great, Eusebius (as afterwards Jerome and Augustin) opposed it.

The Jewish chiliasm rested on a carnal misapprehension of the Messianic kingdom, a literal interpretation of prophetic figures, and an overestimate of the importance of the Jewish people and the holy city as the centre of that kingdom. It was developed shortly before and after Christ in the apocalyptic literature, as the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, 4th Esdras, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Sibylline Books. It was adopted by the heretical sect of the Ebionites, and the Gnostic Cerinthus.²

The Christian chiliasm is the Jewish chiliasm spiritualized and fixed upon the second, instead of the first, coming of Christ. It distinguishes, moreover, two resurrections, one before and another after the millennium, and makes the millennial reign of Christ only a prelude to his eternal reign in heaven, from which it is separated by a short interregnum of Satan. The millennium is expected to come not as the legitimate result of a historical process but as a sudden supernatural revelation.

The advocates of this theory appeal to the certain promises

¹ *Chiliasm* (from *χίλια ἔτη*, a thousand years, Rev. 20: 2, 3) is the Greek, *millenarianism* or *millennialism* (from *mille anni*), the Latin term for the same theory. The adherents are called *Chiliasts*, or *Millenarians*, also *Pre-millenarians*, or *Pre-millennialists* (to indicate the belief that Christ will appear again before the millennium), but among them many are counted who simply believe in a golden age of Christianity which is yet to come. *Post-millenarians* or *Anti-millenarians* are those who put the Second Advent after the millennium.

² See Euseb. *H. E.* III. 27 and 28.

of the Lord,¹ but particularly to the hieroglyphic passage of the Apocalypse, which teaches a millennial reign of Christ upon this earth after the first resurrection and before the creation of the new heavens and the new earth.²

In connection with this the general expectation prevailed that the return of the Lord was near, though uncertain and unascertainable as to its day and hour, so that believers may be always ready for it.³ This hope, through the whole age of persecution, was a copious fountain of encouragement and comfort under the pains of that martyrdom which sowed in blood the seed of a bountiful harvest for the church.

Among the Apostolic Fathers BARNABAS is the first and the only one who expressly teaches a pre-millennial reign of Christ on earth. He considers the Mosaic history of the creation a type of six ages of labor for the world, each lasting a thousand years, and of a millennium of rest ; since with God "one day is as a thousand years." The millennial sabbath on earth will be followed by an eighth and eternal day in a new world, of which the Lord's Day (called by Barnabas "the eighth day") is the type.⁴

PAPIAS of Hierapolis, a pious but credulous cotemporary of Polycarp, entertained quaint and extravagant notions of the

¹ Matt. 5 : 4 ; 19 : 28 ; Luke 14 : 12 sqq.

² Rev. 20 : 1-6. This is the only strictly millenarian passage in the whole Bible. Commentators are still divided as to the literal or symbolical meaning of the millennium, and as to its beginning in the past or in the future. But a number of other passages are drawn into the service of the millenarian theory, as affording indirect support, especially Isa. 11 : 4-9 ; Acts 3 : 21 ; Rom. 11 : 15. Modern Pre-millenarians also appeal to what they call the unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the restoration of the Jews in the holy land. But the ancient Chiliasts applied those prophecies to the Christian church as the true Israel.

³ Comp. Matt. 24 : 33, 36 ; Mark 13 : 32 ; Acts 1 : 7 ; 1 Thess. 5 : 1, 2 ; 2 Pet. 3 : 10 ; Rev. 1 : 3 ; 3 : 3.

⁴ Barn. *Epist.* ch. 15. He seems to have drawn his views from Ps. 90 : 4, 2 Pet. 3 : 8, but chiefly from Jewish tradition. He does not quote the Apocalypse. See Otto in Hilgenfeld's "Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie," 1877, p. 525-529, and Funk's note in *Patr. Apost.* I. 46.

happiness of the millennial reign, for which he appealed to apostolic tradition. He put into the mouth of Christ himself a highly figurative description of the more than tropical fertility of that period, which is preserved and approved by Irenæus, but sounds very apocryphal.¹

JUSTIN MARTYR represents the transition from the Jewish Christian to the Gentile Christian chiliasm. He speaks repeatedly of the second parousia of Christ in the clouds of heaven, surrounded by the holy angels. It will be preceded by the near manifestation of the man of sin (*ἀνθρώπος τῆς ἀνομίας*) who speaks blasphemies against the most high God, and will rule three and a half years. He is preceded by heresies and false prophets.² Christ will then raise the patriarchs, prophets,

¹ *Adv. Hær.* V. 33, § 3 (ed. Stieren I. 809), quoted from the fourth book of "The Oracles of the Lord:" "The days will come when vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five-and-twenty measures 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 shall produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear shall have ten thousand grains, and every grain shall yield ten pounds of pure, fine flour; and that apples, and seeds, and grass shall produce in similar proportions; and that all animals, feeding on the productions of the earth, shall then live in peace and harmony, and be in perfect subjection to man.'" These words were communicated to Papias by "the presbyters, who saw John the disciple of the Lord," and who remembered having heard them from John as coming from the Lord. There is a similar description of the Messianic times in the twenty-ninth chapter of the Apocalypse of Baruch, from the close of the first or beginning of the second century, as follows: "The earth shall yield its fruits, one producing ten thousand, and in one vine shall be a thousand bunches, and one bunch shall produce one thousand grapes, and one grape shall produce one thousand berries, and one berry shall yield a measure of wine. And those who have been hungry shall rejoice, and they shall again see prodigies every day. For spirits shall go forth from my sight to bring every morning the fragrance of spices, and at the end of the day clouds dropping the dew of health. And it shall come to pass, at that time, that the treasure of manna shall again descend from above, and they shall eat of it in these years." See the Latin in Fritzsche's ed. of the *Libri Apoc. V. T.*, p. 666.

² *Dial. c. Tryph.* c. 32, 51, 110. *Comp. Dan.* 7: 25 and 2 *Thess.* 2: 8.

and pious Jews, establish the millennium, restore Jerusalem, and reign there in the midst of his saints; after which the second and general resurrection and judgment of the world will take place. He regarded this expectation of the earthly perfection of Christ's kingdom as the key-stone of pure doctrine, but adds that many pure and devout Christians of his day did not share this opinion.¹ After the millennium the world will be annihilated, or transformed.² In his two *Apologies*, Justin teaches the usual view of the general resurrection and judgment, and makes no mention of the millennium, but does not exclude it.³ The other Greek Apologists are silent on the subject, and cannot be quoted either for or against chiliasm.

IRENÆUS, on the strength of tradition from St. John and his disciples, taught that after the destruction of the Roman empire, and the brief raging of antichrist (lasting three and a half years or 1260 days), Christ will visibly appear, will bind Satan, will reign at the rebuilt city of Jerusalem with the little band of faithful confessors and the host of risen martyrs over the nations of the earth, and will celebrate the millennial sabbath of preparation for the eternal glory of

¹ *Dial.* c. 80 and 81. He appeals to the prophecies of Isaiah (65: 17 sqq.), Ezekiel, Ps. 90: 4, and the Apocalypse of "a man named John, one of the apostles of Christ." In another passage, *Dial.* c. 113, Justin says that as Joshua led Israel into the holy land and distributed it among the tribes, so Christ will convert the diaspora and distribute the goodly land, yet not as an earthly possession, but give us ((*ἡμῖν*) an eternal inheritance. He will shine in Jerusalem as the eternal light, for he is the King of Salem after the order of Melchisedek, and the eternal priest of the Most High. But he makes no mention of the loosing of Satan after the millennium. Comp. the discussion of Justin's eschatology by M. von Engelhardt, *Das Christenthum Justins des Märtyr.* (1878), p. 302-307, and by Donaldson, *Crit. Hist. of Christ. Lit.* II. 316-322.

² This point is disputed. Semisch contends for annihilation, Weizsäcker for transformation, von Engelhardt (p. 309) leaves the matter undecided. In the *Dial.* c. 113 Justin says that God through Christ will renew (*καὶνοῦργειν*) the heaven and the earth; in the *Apologies*, that the world will be burnt up.

³ *Apol.* I. 50, 51, 52. For this reason Donaldson (II. 263), and Dr. Briggs (*l. c.* p. 21) suspect that the chiliastic passages in the *Dialogue* (at least ch. 81) are an interpolation, or corrupted, but without any warrant. The omission of Justin in Jerome's lists of Chiliasts can prove nothing against the testimony of all the manuscripts.

heaven; then, after a temporary liberation of Satan, follows the final victory, the *general* resurrection, the judgment of the world, and the consummation in the new heavens and the new earth.¹

TERTULLIAN was an enthusiastic Chiliast, and pointed not only to the Apocalypse, but also to the predictions of the Montanist prophets.² But the Montanists substituted Pepuza in Phrygia for Jerusalem, as the centre of Christ's reign, and ran into fanatical excesses, which brought chiliasm into discredit, and resulted in its condemnation by several synods in Asia Minor.³

After Tertullian, and independently of Montanism, chiliasm was taught by COMMODIAN towards the close of the third century,⁴ LACTANTIUS,⁵ and VICTORINUS of Petau,⁶ at the beginning of the fourth. Its last distinguished advocates in the East were METHIDIUS (d., a martyr, 311), the opponent of Origen,⁷ and APOLLINARIS of Laodicea in Syria.

We now turn to the anti-Chiliasts. The opposition began during the Montanist movement in Asia Minor. Caius of Rome attacked both Chiliasm and Montanism, and traced the former to the hated heretic Cerinthus.⁸ The Roman church seems never to have sympathized with either, and prepared itself for a comfortable settlement and normal development in this world. In Alexandria, Origen opposed chiliasm as a

¹ *Adv. Her.* V. 23-36. On the eschatology of Irenæus see Ziegler, *Iren. der B. v. Lyon* (Berl. 1871), 298-320; and Kirchner, *Die Eschatol. d. Iren.* in the "Studien und Kritiken" for 1863, p. 315-358.

² *De Res. Carn.* 25; *Adv. Marc.* III. 24; IV. 29, etc. He discussed the subject in a special work, *De Spe Fidelium*, which is lost.

³ See § 111, p. 424 sq.

⁴ *Instruct. adv. Gentium Deos*, 43, 44, with the Jewish notion of fruitful millennial marriages.

⁵ *Instit.* VII. 24; *Epit.* 71, 72. He quotes from the Sibylline books, and expects the speedy end of the world, but not while the city of Rome remains.

⁶ In his Commentary on Revelation, and the fragment *De Fabrica Mundi* (part of a Com. on Genesis). Jerome classes him among the Chiliasts.

⁷ In his *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, IX. 5, and *Discourse on Resurrection*.

⁸ Euseb. *H. E.* II. 25 (against the Montanist Proclus), and III. 28 (against chiliasm).

Jewish dream, and spiritualized the symbolical language of the prophets.¹ His distinguished pupil, Dionysius the Great (d. about 264), checked the chiliastic movement when it was revived by Nepos in Egypt, and wrote an elaborate work against it, which is lost. He denied the Apocalypse to the apostle John, and ascribed it to a presbyter of that name.² Eusebius inclined to the same view.

But the crushing blow came from the great change in the social condition and prospects of the church in the Nicene age. After Christianity, contrary to all expectation, triumphed in the Roman empire, and was embraced by the Cæsars themselves, the millennial reign, instead of being anxiously waited and prayed for, began to be dated either from the first appearance of Christ, or from the conversion of Constantine and the downfall of paganism, and to be regarded as realized in the glory of the dominant imperial state-church. Augustin, who himself had formerly entertained chiliastic hopes, framed the new theory which reflected the social change, and was generally accepted. The apocalyptic millennium he understood to be the present reign of Christ in the Catholic church, and the first resurrection, the translation of the martyrs and saints to heaven, where they participate in Christ's reign.³ It was consistent with this theory that towards the close of the first millennium of the Christian era there was a wide-spread expectation in Western Europe that the final judgment was at hand.

From the time of Constantine and Augustin chiliasm took its place among the heresies, and was rejected subsequently even by the Protestant reformers as a Jewish dream.⁴ But it was re-

¹ *De Princ.* II. 11. He had, however, in view a very sensuous idea of the millennium with marriages and luxuriant feasts.

² Euseb. VII. 24, 25.

³ *De Civit. Dei*, XX. 6-10.

⁴ The Augsburg Confession, Art. XVII., condemns the Anabaptists and others "who now scatter Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed." The 41st of the Anglican Articles, drawn up by Cranmer (1553), but omitted afterwards in the revision under Elizabeth (1563), describes the millennium as "a fable of Jewish dotage."

vived from time to time as an article of faith and hope by pious individuals and whole sects, often in connection with historic pessimism, with distrust in mission work, as "carried on by human agencies, with literal interpretations of prophecy, and with peculiar notions about Antichrist, the conversion and restoration of the Jews, their return to the Holy Land, and also with abortive attempts to calculate "the times and seasons" of the Second Advent, which "the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1: 7), and did not choose to reveal to his own Son in the days of his flesh. In a free spiritual sense, however, millenarianism will always survive as the hope of a golden age of the church on earth, and of a great sabbath of history after its many centuries of labor and strife. The church militant ever longs after the church triumphant, and looks "for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3: 13). "There remaineth a sabbath rest for the people of God." (Heb. 4: 9).