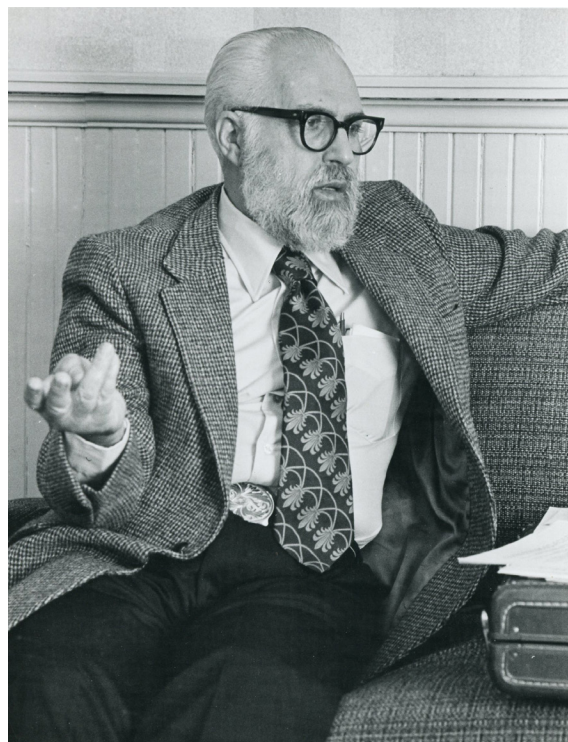


Transcripts of

POSTMILLENNIALISM IN AMERICA

A Lecture Series by R.J. Rushdoony



R.J. RUSHDOONY

(1916–2001)

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony (1916–2001), was a leading theologian, church/state expert, and author of numerous works on the application of Biblical law to society. He started the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965. His Institutes of Biblical Law (1973) began the contemporary theonomy movement which posits the validity of Biblical law as God's standard of obedience for all. He therefore saw God's law as the basis of the modern Christian response to the cultural decline, one he attributed to the church's false view of God's law being opposed to His grace. This broad Christian response he described as "Christian Reconstruction." He is credited with igniting the modern Christian school and homeschooling movements in the mid to late 20th century. He also traveled extensively lecturing and serving as an expert witness in numerous court cases regarding religious liberty. Many ministry and educational efforts that continue today, took their philosophical and Biblical roots from his lectures and books.

Learn more about R.J. Rushdoony by visiting: <https://chalcedon.edu/founder>

Postmillennialism in America, I

R.J. Rushdoony

In order to understand the American theological scene we must recognize its seventeenth century British roots. The American Puritans both acted and reacted to the British currents of thought. In eschatology in Britain, there were two schools at the time, premillennial and postmillennial. The curious fact is that most of the men who came to the colonies were postmillennial. This made a great difference. The premillennial thinking of the day was unlike the present in that there was no concept of a rapture, the thinking was covenantal, but they believed that Christ would at some point return and there would be a millennial reign before the end of the world. So they did not see as the postmillennialists did, the coincidence of the second coming and the end of the world. The premillennial thinking in the seventeenth century was deeply concerned with the any-moment second coming. A book could be written on how premillennialism over the centuries has been very certain in terms of all kinds of mathematical computations, and signs of the times, that the second coming was due within a few years. As a matter of fact, one of the great revivals in the Middle Ages came after the year one thousand, because the year one thousand was assumed to be the time of the second coming. And when our Lord did not come Christians realized they had a work to do, and they did it, so the results were dramatic.

But in the sixteen hundreds, the seventeenth century, many churchmen busied themselves with computing the year of the second coming. It was believed that Christ would return to establish his millennial reign, in the beginning of the six thousandth year of creation, and that was expected to arrive between 1583 and 1600. Later calculations altered this, reduced it to 1649 and 1660. As a result, at the time that the American colonies were first being established, in England a sizable segment of the Church was waiting for the second coming. Joseph Mede, a particularly great theologian, was prominent in such thinking. So it did command some of the finest minds of the day. There was, however, an important qualifier, the idea of a rapture before the end of the world, as I indicated, was not in their mind. Therefore the coming of the Lord was for the premillennialists also a triumph. Added to that there was the theonomic dimension which was common at that time to both schools of eschatology. Law, God's law was basic to Christian thinking, the antinomians were very, very few.

James Ussher in his *Annals of the World* published in 1758, written much earlier, used God's Sabbaths of the land and especially the Jubilee, as a framework for history. He went all through the Bible, up until the end of the New Testament era, calculating the times of the Jubilee, the Sabbath years, when they were not observed because of the nation's sins, and the judgments that fell upon Israel for disobedience to God's law. He thus linked God's grace, mercy, and judgment to the covenant law. The Puritans, especially the American Puritans, moved readily and easily into postmillennialism. As Ball noted:

"Protestant eschatological optimism deriving from the reformation, achieved its most lucid expression with English theologians in the Puritan era; that optimism included the certainty that time would see the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. It included belief in the triumph of good over evil, and hope in the ultimate realization of the will of God on earth."

The source of all this was John Calvin, whose commentaries on Daniel and Isaiah in particular are clearly postmillennial. According to Daniel Day Williams:

“Calvin’s rule of Geneva was based on the belief that the orders of the world could and should be made to conform to the will of God.”

The Westminster Standards assume the same faith. In a number of places the postmillennialism of the men who wrote it is apparent, as example in question and answer one hundred and two of the Shorter Catechism.

“Q: What do we pray for in the second petition?

A: In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come) we pray, That Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.”

The early colonists suffered great hardships. But they also, in a generation, created a successful economy, and began the structure which in time led to a powerful free nation. Their success, within a very few years, drew others to America, people whose goals were economic self-betterment and not a Christian commonwealth. As a result, within a few years, people were pouring into New England in particular, with a particularly bad character. So that when you read some accounts that tell you how terrible the Puritans were because incest, bestiality, sodomy, and other things were regularly in the court records the answer to that is it was these newcomers who came, not in terms of the, but in terms of bettering themselves economically. Now this is a very important fact, because that open door to anybody who wanted to come in, not only began in the early 1600’s but continued almost to World War II. Why? The people being brought in were hardly of the best character, some were very fine, but many of them were people who were given the choice by countries in Europe and in Britain of either going to America, or going to jail, so they came to America. What happened? People with a postmillennial hope welcomed them and converted them as fast as they could. That was their position, that was their optimism, assurance; that because God had said: “The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.” “Why! They’re just sending us potential converts.”

Well we can better understand the goals of the leaders not in terms of the cynical historians, but in terms of Captain Edward Johnson, who in 1654 had published in London a History of New England or Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England. This was a militant postmillennial statement which declared in part:

“Christ Jesus, intending to manifest His kingly office toward His churches, more fully than ever yet the sons of men saw, stirs up his servants as the heralds of a King, to make this proclamation for volunteers as following:

“Oh yes, oh yes, all you the people of Christ that are here oppressed”, this was published in London by Johnson who was in New England, “imprisoned, and scurrilously derided. Gather yourselves together, your wives and little ones, and answer to your several names as ye shall be shipped for his service in the western world, and more especially for planting the united colonies of New England where you are to attend the service of the King of kings, upon the divulging of this proclamation by His heralds at arms. Could Caesar so suddenly fetch over fresh forces from Europe to Asia, Pompeii to foil? How much more shall Christ who created all power call over this 900 league ocean at His pleasure such instruments as He thinks meet to make use of in this place. No, this is the place where the Lord will create a new heaven and a new earth, in new churches and a new commonwealth together.”

For Captain Johnson the new creation in Christ’s work with His people, a mighty step in creating a

new heaven and a new earth, was the colonization of America in terms of the Reformed faith. For him this was a major step forward, a break with the past, an effort in terms of God's work to start afresh, to create the new order of the ages: "God's kingdom in the Americas."

Even more, as I indicated earlier, Johnson's confidence in that of the colonists was so great that he specifically calls upon the oppressed, imprisoned and the scurrilously derided, to join the American colony as volunteers in the wars of the Lord. Instead of an exclusion of such peoples, Johnson specifically invited them. Every ship was met by people who represented the churches, who were eager to lead the newcomers to Christ, to be a material help to them, to acquaint them with how to live in the new world. Well, such people did come to America, they were a problem, they were amoral degenerates in great numbers, but they were also converted. They were welcomed in Christ's name because they were potential recruits for His kingdom.

For generations, exuberant Christians saw immigrants as potential recruits for Christ's kingdom, and it was only as postmillennial hope faded that fears of immigration arose. They were seen first as potential recruits for Christ, as potential citizens of His kingdom. And when that postmillennial faith waned they were seen as threats. Migration to America became a world-wide hope because of this postmillennial dream that marked, for generations, the United States and the colonies before it. That hope has circulated the world over, that the United States represented a Christian dream, a hope in the process of realization.

In recent years we have done everything to dishonor that worldwide expectation of us. Reformed Christians in that era were hostile to antinomianism. They believed that God's law is basic to God's order. It is a sad fact, by the way, that for generations until recently, almost the only one of the Puritan generation who was in print in the United States was Baxter, and Baxter was very different from the others because he had strong tendencies towards antinomianism. That's why he was popular in a way that he was not in his own day. But now the other Puritans are becoming well-known also. In Massachusetts on December, 10, 1641, The Massachusetts Body of Liberties was formulated. This was a summary statement of biblical law to be the law of Massachusetts. The hostility of the British crown to such a code made adoption impossible, but indirectly the substance of it became law. Let me add John Eliot, the missionary to the Indians created during Cromwell's years, villages of praying Indians as they were called; Indian communities of hard-working farmers and businessmen who governed themselves entirely and exclusively by Biblical Law. When King Charles II came to the throne he ordered Elliot's book burned by the public hangman, and the villages destroyed.

In America the connection between postmillennialism and theonomy was a strong one. Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of the world, made new by His atoning death and His victory over sin and death, requires they held, God's law. So the connection between postmillennialism and theonomy is a close and necessary one. How else is God's order to be established? In 1840 in this country James Henley Thornwell called attention to the fact that historic Calvinism is by nature hostile to antinomianism. It takes only a little thought to realize why this is so. Given the Reformed, or better the Biblical doctrine of predestination, salvation is entirely the work of God, of His grace.

Now the Reformed faith does not attempt to rationalize the faith. Our reason is too small to comprehend the immensity of God's being, and His mind. Therefore the Reformed faith declares that God absolutely predestined all things that come to pass, and yet we are responsible creatures. Our mind cannot reconcile it but we must accept it if we are to accept the wholeness of God's word. The Reformed faith recognizes God's total predestinating decree, and it also does full justice to man's responsibility. The Bible sets forth both. and we are not to choose one against the other.

Quoting again from Thornwell:

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“If, then, God has made our salvation dependent upon anything to be performed by us, it is not a matter of grace, but of works. The notion that legalism is avoided by ascribing our power to comply with the conditions to the grace of God is a mere evasion of the difficulty. A legal dispensation necessarily supposes power in its subjects to comply with its requirements. We would instinctively revolt at the tyranny involved in the supposition that Adam was destitute of the power necessary to fulfil the condition of the Covenant of Works. It is hardly conceivable that God would make a covenant with man, and solemnly ratify it, without giving man the power to obey its requirements. It signifies little whether this power come from nature or from grace (in either case it is from God); man must have it before he can be the subject or the party of a legal covenant. Neither is the principle affected by the thing required to be done; whether it be obedience to the whole moral law, or only sincere obedience, or only faith, repentance and perseverance which are required, something is to be done—a condition is prescribed—and God’s favour ultimately turns upon man’s will. The principle of works is as fully recognized in a mild law as in a strict one. He as truly buys who pays only a farthing as he who pays a thousand pounds. If these principles are correct, the Arminianism of Bishop Bull and Baxter, and all who coincide with them, is common ground with barefaced Pelagianism. There is no medium in principle between Pelagianism and Calvinism.”

Thornwell was emphatic. It is all of God, we are responsible, but everything is of God’s sovereign decree. So we cannot be selective in our approach to the Word of God. We cannot legitimately take human responsibility and separate it from God’s predestination. Both are true and both must be affirmed. The Bible declares that we are responsible and the law is the measure of our responsibility. Thornwell said further”

“Those who deny that the law of God is the measure of duty, or that personal holiness should be sought by Christians, are those alone who can properly be charged with Antinomian principles. The Scriptures are so pointed and explicit in pressing upon believers that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts they should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world,” that it becomes a matter of no little interest, even to the speculative inquirer, to account for the origin of Antinomianism.”

In other words, antinomianism, Thornwell held, is totally impossible to substantiate from scripture.

John Gill in *The Cause of God and Truth* exploded every text used by Arminians. If the law is denied, sanctification is denied, then holiness is no longer what the Bible is requiring of us, only easy-believism. But if the law has its due place as the way of holiness then we are able to sin a resting place in our lives. At the same time, our application of the law destroys the power of sin in our lives, and it also destroys its power in our society. By this means we extend Christ’s kingdom and succeed in obtaining the postmillennial vision of a restored earth as a great and marvelous realm of Christ, our King. The dual emphasis on God’s predestination and human responsibility helps us avoid what Thornwell saw as too common, saying:

“The Gospel, like its blessed Master, is always crucified between two thieves—legalist of all sorts on the one hand and Antinomians on the other; the former robbing the Saviour of the glory of his work for us, and the other robbing him of the glory of his work within us.”

Again, as Thornwell summarized it:

“Holiness so far from being the cause of salvation is a part of it... Holiness is a benefit received, and not a price paid...”

A doctrine of work sees man’s work as efficacious towards salvation. Whereas a doctrine faithful to

Scripture sees works as God's Spirit in our lives, a product of grace not a cause of it.

In 1676 Charles the II suppressed many colonial liberties and made the colonies more strictly under royal control. At the same time, colonial eschatological thinking had become premillennial and pessimistic. They looked too much to the events in Britain and the defeat of the Puritan cause, and less to Scripture and shifted their ground. But with Jonathan Edwards in the mid eighteenth century postmillennialism had a major revival together with the emphasis on theonomy. The two over the centuries have gone together.

In *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Defended Edwards said uncompromisingly:

“The law of God is the rule of right, as Dr. Taylor often calls it: It is the measure of virtue and sin: So much agreement as there is with this rule, so much is there of rectitude, righteousness, or true virtue, and no more; and so much disagreement as there is with this rule, so much sin is there.”

Do you see what Edwards was saying? We become world-conquerors, we exercise dominion by means of the law; and if our use of the law of God wanes, then justice wanes, then our postmillennial hope begins to disappear.

Now it is interesting that in his thinking about end times Edwards was emphatically God-centered. This was an emphasis that is gone in modern day eschatological thinking, especially among the premills. Some years ago, about thirty forty years ago in a church I will not mention, a very wealthy and powerful member ordered me to cease and desist from any more preaching about the Old Testament and its law and about victory in the postmillennial sense. Victory was only an inner victory. His wife exploded all over me because: “if I were right then Christians” she said, “won’t escape the tribulation and I’ll have to go through it” and she said “how can Jesus expect me to go through the tribulation when I gave up two things I loved so much; smoking and dancing”. The emphasis of Jonathan Edwards was not on what the Christian wanted, but only on God’s holy purpose, God’s own glory. As a result his writings are very alien to modern eschatologies. But Edwards was not too unusual in this. The modern concern is: “what will happen to me, and to the world?” Edwards in his postmillennialism had only one goal, to proclaim the holy purposes of the triune God and His victory. This one fact tells us how far astray our contemporary millennial thinking is. Thank you.

ENDNOTES:

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3. Alan Heimart and Andrew Delblanco, eds. *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985, 114.
4. James Henley Thornwell. *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell: Theological and Ethical*. Edited by John B. Adger, D.D. Vol. 2-Theological and Ethical. 4 vols. Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1871, 393. 394.
5. James Henley Thornwell. *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell: Theological and Ethical*. Edited by John B. Adger, D.D. Vol. 2-Theological and Ethical. 4 vols. Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1871, 393. 383.
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Postmillennialism in America, II

R.J. Rushdoony

There are fashions in historiography as in everything else. At the present time we have the work of a Yale Professor John Butler who claims that the Great Awakening was nothing more than a myth. However in the 1980's, another historian, Bushman, called attention to the fact that the War of Independence was made possible by the Great Awakening and the postmillennialism that Jonathan Edwards reintroduced in American life. An eschatology of victory prepared the way for a politics of victory.

Now a notable figure in the Edwardian school was Joseph Bellamy; born February 20, 1719, and dying on March 6th 1790, 72 years old. He was a powerful preacher, and strongly Reformed. He was disliked by the moderates, that is the compromisers of his day. His fellow-Edwardian, Samuel Hopkins, started the American Anti-Slavery Movement which Bellamy joined. This is something you rarely ever hear, namely that postmillennialists started the anti-slavery movement and theirs was a responsible movement. Bellamy's promise was that God would bless a country that obeyed Him. The golden rule was the premise of His anti-slavery cause. In 1758 Bellamy wrote *The Millennium*. It is regarded by historians as the classic statement of American postmillennialism together with Samuel Hopkins' work. It is important therefore to give attention to what these two men said, because it had a powerful influence on the course of American theology and history.

Bellamy saw the doctrine as a source of strength and comfort. He looked to Isaiah 40:1 "comfort ye, comfort ye my people saith your God." The embattled church, he held, needs the comfort and assurance of God's promises. He wrote:

"It must, therefore, be remembered, that, as the Son of God left his Father's bosom, and the realms of light and glory, and expired on the cross in the utmost visible contempt, that he might spoil principalities and powers, bruise the serpent's head, destroy the works of the devil; so his true disciples have imbibed a measure of the same spirit; and, as volunteers enlisted under his banner, have the same thing in view: they long for the destruction of satan's kingdom and these petitions are the genuine language of their hearts, 'Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"

Let me say parenthetically that after World War II some premillennial churches dropped the Lord's Prayer from use in the services and in the congregations. When I asked one person about it I was told it does not apply until the rapture and the millennium, therefore it is a sin to use it now. To continue

"Nor can the salvation of their own souls, although ever so safely secured, satisfy their minds, without a clear view and fair prospect of Christ's final victory over all his enemies."

Notice that, another emphasis of these early postmillennialist in this country.

If you sit back satisfied waiting for heaven because you've taken care of salvation, and you bought your life and fire insurance policy from Jesus, and then you pay no attention to the victory of Christ in history, something is wrong with you.

“‘But if our great GENERAL who has sacrificed his life in the cause, may but at last obtain a complete victory, notwithstanding all the present dark appearances; this is enough’ says the Christian soldier: ‘I am willing to risk all in his service, and die in the battle too. But if satan were always to carry the day, Oh who could live under the thought!’”

This was Bellamy's emphasis. The faithful Christian is not the one who rests contented in His personal salvation, he longs for Christ's total victory from pole to pole. This, said Bellamy, has been: "...the temper of good men..." throughout history.

Bellamy then called attention to a series of predictions in scripture. First in Genesis 3:15 we have God's promise that the Seed of the woman would in due time crush the serpents head. Second said Bellamy, in Genesis 3:12 we read:

“and I will bless them that bless Thee, and curse him that curseth thee and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Families mean nations. All the world's nations shall be blessed through Abraham's Seed. Third God makes clear, Bellamy said, that His promises are to be fully believed by His many wonderful works from the days of Moses to the time of Solomon. God's promises have more than a spiritual fulfillment; they are concerned with the totality of life, physical and spiritual. Fourth, Bellamy held, the Old Testament history gives us every assurance that it is God's design to give to His Son:

“...the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.”

as Psalm 2:8 declares. The prophecies of Isaiah clearly bear this out, said Bellamy.

Fifth: “...when shall these things be?” Bellamy asks. Too many predictions remain unfulfilled. We do not see the satanic powers trodden underfoot; therefore much time remains in history. Then sixth, Bellamy wrote:

“Nor is there the least reason to doubt the accomplishment of these things. For God in all times past has been faithful to his word, and is evidently sufficiently engaged in this affair; knows how, and can easily accomplish it; and it will be much to the honour of his great name to do it. God has been faithful to his promises to his church from the beginning of the world.”

God having sent His Son, Bellamy held, will finish the great work of restoration. Seventh Bellamy noted that Rabbis and Christian leaders have fallen into errors in dating the fulfillment of prophecies. This does not invalidate the fact of God's kept promises, nor His future action. We should keep our eyes on what God says, and not what men say about it. As Bellamy looked to the future he saw a marvelous triumph ahead, with Christians triumphant from pole to pole.

Now remember, when we read Samuel Hopkins and Bellamy we have to remember they were living in the difficult days when Britain began to oppress the colonies, when the War of Independence broke out, when the British troops were coming in and burning the churches of these postmillennial pastors. And the troops were mercenaries hired from the continent; they were not moral men, so that as they approached women would run to hide as far away as they could. This is a side of the war we're not told about.

The world's population, Bellamy pointed out, will vastly increase, as will the numbers of the redeemed.

Now he was writing when there were three million people in what became the United States. He predicted that by the year 2000 it would easily pass two hundred million. Everyone thought that was preposterous thinking on his part. Contrary to the popular myth, and it is a myth, that Calvinists believe that very few will be saved, Bellamy with others, held that in the final count few would be lost as the world's population increased, because so would the percentage of the redeemed increase. And because he believed that for centuries the world would be Christian from pole to pole with countless millions unimagined in his day the percentage of the redeemed as against the lost would be enormous. He wrote

"If it be granted that it is difficult to compute with any exactness in such a case as this, yet it is easy to make such a computation as may satisfy us in the point before us. [Rushdoony; Namely that far far more will be saved than lost] For in Egypt the Hebrews doubled at the rate of about once in 14 years; in New-England the inhabitants double in less than 25 years; it will be moderate, therefore, to suppose mankind, in the Millenium, when all the earth is full of peace and prosperity, will double every 50 years. [Rushdoony; a modest amount] But at this rate, there will be time enough in a thousand years to double twenty times ; which would produce such a multitude of people, as that although we should suppose all who live before the Millenium begins, to be lost; yet if all these should be saved, there would be above seventeen thousand saved, to one that would be lost."

Now remember there are more people living today than have ever died since Adam's time. So you can see what Bellamy had in mind. Bellamy held that Christian faith requires a strong hope and certainty about the future. God does not plan to surrender the world to Satan.

"We cannot" he said, "have hearts of stone where God's promises are concerned." He wrote:

"it therefore becomes all the followers of Christ, in their several spheres, under a firm belief of these things, to be of good courage, and exert themselves to the utmost, in the use of ail proper means, to suppress error and vice of every kind and promote the cause of truth and righteousness in the world; and so be workers together with God."

Bellamy's concern was not to convince men of the truth of postmillennialism, it was too obvious if anyone took the Bible seriously. For him the Lord's Prayer, with its petitions and affirmations: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen." Made clear that this hope was the obvious teaching of Scripture and should be the subject of our prayers. The Millennium was written by Bellamy in 1758. In 1763 he published A Blow at the Root of the Refined Antinomianism of the Present Age. Antinomianism was coming in with Arminianism. Bellamy's basic concern in this work was with the false doctrines of assurance being taught which had in essence two errors. First the antinomians placed their confidence with respect to assurance of salvation in man's experience rather than in God's objective work. They felt that because they had gone forward and said "yes" to Jesus they were saved. They were not putting their hope in the work of Christ, not their experience. "The Christian," he said, "must pray: "Lord, rather let me have no peace than a false peace."

What Bellamy's work tells us very clearly is that postmillennialism was tied then to theonomy. Samuel Hopkins who was born September 17, 1721, died on December 20th, 1803. He wrote a treatise on the Millennium, a much longer work than Bellamy's essay. The dedication of Hopkins' treatise is "to the people who shall live in the days of the millennium". He declared:

“Hail you happy people, highly favoured of the Lord.”

Hopkins pointed out in his treatise that millennial thinking was very prominent in the first centuries of the Christian era, but also commonly very fanciful. It still pursued the thinking of the Rabbis. As a result many theologians abandoned the subject until after the Reformation. Scripture however stresses the fact that God’s chosen people will in due time gain a great victory and enjoy a long era of prosperity for at least a thousand years. He took the term “a myriad of years” as symbolic of many centuries of triumph.

“From Abraham’s day to Malachi we hear of the latter day glory” he wrote. Certainly Isaiah has much to say on the subject. There are too many texts on the future victory and glory to be set aside. And so Hopkins rejected the premillennial view of Christ’s literal reign in that era, the Lord’s second coming will be at the end of the world. He wrote:

“He is gone to heaven in the human nature, that he might reign there, till his enemies are made his footstool, and all things shall be subdued under him.”

The Holy Spirit will be poured down on men more universally. Men will believe and obey God’s word, there will be universal peace and joy. There will be a spirit of obedience to God’s law word. Hopkins wrote that:

“But when the Millennium shall begin, the inhabitants which shall then be on the earth, will be disposed to obey the divine command, to subdue the earth, and multiply, until they have filled it; and they will have skill, and be under all desirable advantages to do it ; and the earth will be soon replenished with inhabitants, and be brought to a state of high cultivation and improvement, in every part of it, and will bring forth abundantly for the full supply of all; and there will be many thousand times more people than ever existed before at once in the world.”

Remember too that these men believed that as men drove back the power of darkness, the power of Satan, and brought the world under the rule of Christ and God’s law, it would push back also not only the power of sin but of death. And man’s life=expectancy would be greatly lengthened so that in Isaiah’s word, and they believed it literally, a man dying at a hundred would be accounted to be a sinner and to have died young.

Men by obeying and applying God’s word will establish His reign and fulfill the creation mandate. They will exercise dominion and subdue the earth. The millennium will be a return to life in the Lord, it will not be perfect obedience as in Eden before the fall, but it will be a time when dominion under Christ will prevail. Rebelliousness will be gone and there will be again one speech and one tongue. It will indeed be an era that can be called the day of salvation. The millennium will be a time Hopkins believed, of what can be called a “universal Sabbath,” a time of holiness to the Lord. While Hopkins indulged in some theorizing as to the time of the millennial time coming, he did not rest his thinking on such dating, it was just a personal hope. He did believe that the universal triumph of Christ’s rule would come by God’s grace and man’s faithful work unto the Lord. He did believe in a great falling away before the end, but his basic emphasis was not on that, but on the victory that God had promised and for which men must work.

Now we see in these men a very important emphasis that determined American history. Much more could be said because an important strand of American postmillennial thinking was exegetical. It came out in commentaries. Two very important commentaries stand out in this respect, and they have been read ever since their writing. J A Alexander’s Isaiah and TV Moore’s Zechariah, they are still very much in use and they are both classics in their field.

This postmillennialism marked America's Reformed believers. Earlier in this century the notable thinkers in this camp were Lorraine Boettner and J. Marcellus Kik. Their main works were *The Millennium*, by Boettner and *An Eschatology of Victory*, by J. Marcellus Kik. A great deal of postmillennial thinking has taken place since then. However, I am not going to deal with the contemporary elements except in a general way. I would like to call attention to another book by a still living man, who is not postmillennial; Iain Murray's book *The Puritan Hope* did much to draw attention to the postmillennial faith by calling attention to the strong puritan affirmation of eschatological victory. It rather surprised Iain Murray who was not altogether happy that he helped create a postmillennial revival when he does not share that opinion.

The influence of men like BB Warfield led to doctrines affirming that the prophetic passages in the New Testament had a first century fulfillment; whereas others have insisted, especially premill's, on a future fulfillment. You have both first century fulfillment, or contemporary fulfillment of the various prophecies in the Bible, and future fulfillment in a postmillennial camp. The two positions are not irreconcilable, by no means so. We can ask if Matthew 24, II Thessalonians 2:1-12, and Revelation, for example, all had their only fulfillment in the first century A.D. And if that is the case, what value are they for us today? Why are they in the Bible? If on the other hand their fulfillment is still to come, of what comfort were they to the suffering saints of those early years. It was given to them for their comfort.

Now a basic fact of Scripture confronts us at this point. The progressive fulfillment of prophecies; typology, which has fallen into disrepute because of the fanciful kinds of typologies that we have seen in this century. For example, God in Genesis 13:14-16 promises Abraham that his seed shall inherit the earth. We can say that this promise had a fulfillment in Israel's possession of Canaan. But its great fulfillment we are also told comes in Christ's blessed meek inheriting the earth. So we cannot say that it had a single fulfillment. Again the term "The day of the Lord" occurs very, very often in the Bible. In the Old Testament it signifies judgment again and again of a particular nation. The day of the Lord comes to that nation, judgment. But it also applies to the last judgment. What's the relationship? Each of these particular instances of judgment in the Old Testament "days of the Lord" typify the final judgment. So that with all the prophecies, and events for some times, of the Old Testament and of the New, we have progressive fulfillment. They are typological.

Another notable example is the Sabbath; one day in seven, one year in seven The Jubilee. But we are also told it refers to the possession of the Promised Land, and most fully of Heaven and the new creation. Hebrews 4 tells us plainly of this progressive fulfillment, and this is the way we are to approach all of the aspects of millennial eschatological prophecies in the Old and New Testaments. They are similar; they have a series of progressive fulfillments prior to the last days and in the second coming. We cannot limit them to a past or a future reference. They do speak to our time and to more than our time; to past present and future.

In recent generations no country has been more concerned with millennial thinking than the United States. This should not surprise us, after all we were born because of millennial thinking. The first settlers came here believing that they were going to build the beginnings of a new Heaven and a new earth. It was the Edwardian postmillennialist who were responsible as, non-Christian historians now are in some instances pointing out, for The War of Independence. So that the United States has a background of millennial concern that began with postmillennialism. And it has been rescued from very sorry waywardness again and again by postmillennial Reformed thinking.

So it is important to realize that millennial thinking is important; and the American concern with it, although both good and bad, is important. It can blind us to our present duties, but it can also stimulate us to action. Postmillennial beliefs have been especially strong stimuli for Christian hope and work. We

are a people called to victory, and it will not be handed to us. I mentioned this morning that the millennium was expected by countless multitudes to begin in the year one thousand, and when it did not come many turned away disillusioned, and you did have the development of a certain amount of sensate culture, culture interested only in enjoying life. But you also had a tremendous stimulus by other Christians who said: "we've been wrong! Let us get together and Christianize the world, let us hope and pray that as a present wave of premillennial expectation reaches a stage of disillusionment the same revitalization of our Christian mission will again begin." We once, in a postmillennial hope, began a vast missionary enterprise to the whole world; let us pray that such an enterprise with a broader scope return again to the American people. Thank you.

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Hope for the Future: the Millennium – Now or Later?

R.J. Rushdoony

[Introduction]

Rush' is one of the few men that I've ever heard speak for an hour at a time wishing that he would continue to speak. I never have tired of listening to him, he can't speak too long so far as I'm concerned. He says more in the time that he has than anyone I've ever heard. I have the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of the Chalcedon Report. It came out in October of 1990, and was the flagship publication of the Chalcedon Foundation. The name 'Chalcedon Report' was first applied to Rev. Rushdoony's newsletter April 2nd, 1969. With the issue number forty-four. It was two issues after that that for the very first time there was an article by a writer other than the Reverend Rushdoony. In his very first newsletter, Reverend Rushdoony set forth the essence of the work he had undertaken with the help of his supporters and the vision he had for the church worldwide.

Chalcedon and its publications, with God's help have striven not to deviate from that premiere expression of purpose. And in his first newsletter he said that he wanted to discuss the significance of what you, my supporters, are doing. And he went on to explain in that what was going on at that particular time, and it is still appropriate for today. He pointed out that our age was seeing a similar development that what had happened during the Renaissance. Emperors and kings very early began to subsidize writers and artists to promote a statist perspective and to saturate contemporary thinking with that view. And there were clearly religious and philosophical trends pointing toward humanism and statism but it was the heavy, steady, and long promotion of these things by subsidy that was responsible for the rapid spread and victory of these forces.

"Europe was steadily conquered by a rapacious and brutal statism," he wrote:

"The renaissance was period of showy art, but behind the facade it was an era of brutal terror."

He said that, "Our age was seeing a similar development."

"The major and minor developments have been extensively captured by the forces of humanism and statism and a new age of terror is developing all around us. Scholarship, arts, literature, being subsidized to serve the purposes of humanism and statism. And our schools and colleges have been largely captured by these forces as have been most publishers and periodicals. This movement has been a long time in developing"

He continued to write:

"It cannot be defeated overnight. It cannot be defeated by short sighted people who want victory today or tomorrow and are unwilling to support a long term battle. The future must be won and shall be won by a renewal and development of our historic Christian liberty, by an emphasis on the fact that the basic government is the self government of the Christian man, and by a recognition that an informed

faith is the mainspring of victory. History has never been dominated by majorities but only by dedicated minorities who stand unconditionally on their faith.”

“What you are doing in your support of me...” he wrote, “is to sponsor a countermeasure to the prevailing trends to promote by your support, interest, and study a Christian renaissance. To declare by these measures your belief that the answer to humanism and its statism is Christian faith and liberty. Our choice today is between two claimants to the throne of godhead and universal government; the state which claims to be our shepherd, keeper, and savior... and the Holy Trinity, our only God and Savior. You have made your choice by both faith and action.”

And then he signed his first newsletter.

Rush’ has never ceased to proclaim the truths of God’s word and today we’re looking forward to hearing ‘The millennium--Now or Later,’ by Doctor RJ Rushdoony, president of Chalcedon Foundation whom we welcome to this podium at this time.

[Rushdoony]

The subject of this conference is an important one and a dangerous one. The books of Scripture that deal with prophecy, promise both a curse on those who add or subtract to the words of those books, or who in any way falsify their meaning. And implicitly call a blessing on all those who take heed to them. So the subject is, in effect, both a very promising one, and a dangerous one.

One of the problems is that people tend to concentrate on timetables, on how to escape tribulation, like subjects. Rather than on what God requires of us! What are the marching orders in these sections of Scripture that deal with our future under God? Christians are so used to talking of the millennium, that they are unaware of, and do not appreciate the revolutionary character of this teaching. More than a few people in pagan antiquity believed in something comparable to a ‘millennium’ to a golden age. But in every case it existed for them in the past!

The Roman poet Ovid, in writing on the creation of the world in the *Metamorphoses*, sought as a development out of a time of primeval chaos. And man, as he developed and became man experienced in that early stage of history, when he was barely conscious of himself, a golden age. The Titans, Prometheus in particular, became an anime of the gods, and Prometheus was the one who created the golden age for mankind. In Ovid’s words:

“Then sprang up first the golden age, which of itself maintained
The truth and right of everything unforced and unconstrained.
There was no fear of punishment, there was no threatening law
In brazen tables nailed up, to keep the folk in awe.
There was no man would crouch or creep to judge with with cap in hand,

They lived safe without a judge, in every realm and land.
The lofty pinetree was not hewn from mountains where it stood,
In seeking strange and foreign lands, to rove upon the flood.
Man knew not other countries yet then where themselves did keep;
There was no town enclosed as yet, with walls and ditches deep.
No horn nor trumpet was in use, nor sword nor helmet worn,
The world was such that soldiers’ help might easily be for forborn.
The fertile earth as yet was free, untouched of spade or plow,
And yet it yielded of itself of everything enow.

And men themselves contented well with plain and simple food
That on the earth of nature's gift without their travail stood,
Did live by raspès, hips, and haws, by cornels, plums, and cherries,
By sloes and apples, nuts and pears, and loathsome brambleberries,
And by the acorns dropped on ground from Jove's broad tree in field.
The springtime lasted all the year, and Zephyr with his mild
And gentle blast did cherish things that grew of own accord.
The ground untilled, all kinds of fruit did plenteously afford.
No muck nor tillage was bestowed on lean and barren land,
To make the corn of better head and ranker for to spread.
Then streams ran milk, then streams ran wine, and yellow honey flowed
From each green tree whereon the rays of fiery Phoebus glowed."

Notice, that for Ovid all these blessings were the result of a world without law.

"No brazen tables nailed up, no threatening law."

This is the dream of paganism, the dream of Jean-Jacque Crusoe, the dream of the environmentalists! Destroy the world of Christianity and its law and the golden age will return again. It is not an accident that this resembles the ideas of our contemporary humanists and environmentalists. The natural order from Ovid and before Ovid to the present is seen as the ideal one not a fallen one. The golden age was that time when men lived without law, and therefore without problems. Food was not cultivated, it was there always. As one girl said at Berkeley in the sixties, when questioned about the work free world she wanted: "What about food production?" She looked at the reporter with contempt and said: "Food is!" This was the pagan view. And it is again the view of all too many around us.

Nature assured a perpetual spring, there was no armament, no national defense, only universal peace because there was no law. All men were equal and there were no judges of it. The environment went untouched and streams ran with either milk or wine if not with honey. Man did not by sin destroy this golden age, the gods did because they were jealous. The fault for all human ills thus rests with the gods! Man not being a sinner there was no need for him to be changed or to mend his life.

Now, of course, the complaint is against the God of scripture. As against this, biblical faith holds that the garden of Eden was a testing-place, and man failed the test! He sought to be himself a God, the determiner of good and evil, of morality and law. This means that humanity's basic battle is against its own nature. Man's hope is not in himself, but in God his redeemer. Man must be recreated by his savior, only then can he move away from his sin and his death-sentence to serve the kingdom of God. His life must be God-centered and God's purpose is first and foremost, His kingdom and His righteousness or justice. In terms of this, the pagan myth of a golden age destroyed by the gods is a myth. Man the sinner wants to blame everything and everyone except himself.

Because of the myth of the Golden Age pagan antiquity was past-bound. Its only hope for the future was a totalitarian kingdom of man which Plato's Republic is the classic statement. Wherein man, by totalitarian controls, builds an order against whatever gods may be. But that imagined order is a version of Hell.

On the other hand, Christian faith sees victory ahead. Nowhere in all of history, apart from biblical faith, have men seen victory in the future. Men have always, apart from God and His word, looked backward to a golden age when there was no law, and the gods were no problem. In the Great Commission we are given a governing task. In Campbell's words:

“The task and goal is nothing less than a Christianized world.”

This vision of victory marks all the Bible. For example, Psalm 47 declares:

“O clap your hands, all ye people [people being the Gentiles, the whole world, all the nations.]; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.

He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved.

God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.

For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.”

The psalmist celebrates God’s total victory before the event! We are also required, as part of our faith, to believe and to proclaim joyfully, that total victory in the face of all adversities and battles. Psalm 110:1 tells us that God has Christ sitting at his right hand until His enemies are removed.

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

This triumphant statement is joyfully sighted in the New Testament over and over and over again! The expectation throughout the New Testament is of Christ’s total victory in time, in history. In Psalm 72 David declares:

“In his days shall the righteous flourish;

And abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,

And from the river unto the ends of the earth.

They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him;

And his enemies shall lick the dust.

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents:

The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.

Yea, all kings shall fall down before him:

All nations shall serve him.

His name shall endure for ever:

His name shall be continued as long as the sun:

And men shall be blessed in him: All nations shall call him blessed.

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,

Who only doeth wondrous things.

And blessed be his glorious name for ever:

And let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.”

Many, many more verses can be sighted. But it is enough to say that the Bible does not look backward to the garden of Eden but forward to the promised land and beyond that to Messiah, to a worldwide triumph of the kingdom of God and then to Christ’s second coming. That the expectation of the early church was victory appears clearly in Revelations 6:9-10:

“And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the

word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

The saints expected judgment and victory very soon. They are told to wait, that it will come in God's time, and the promised outcome is proclaimed in Revelations 11:15.

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

In I Corinthians 15:24-27 we are told of the sequence of the events.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him."

Paul here speaks of the end of the world. He makes no reference to any coming of Christ before the end. During almost all of church history and only recently has it been believed to be otherwise. In verses 20-23 Paul tells us that at the time the general resurrection will take place. Basic to this text is the kingdom of God. Charles Hodge clearly sets forth its meaning in his commentary on 1 Corinthians:

"...when the end comes, Christ is to deliver up the kingdom to his Father. What does this mean? The Scriptures constantly teach that Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and of his dominion there is no end. In what sense, then, can he be said to deliver up his kingdom? It must be remembered, that the Scriptures speak of a three fold kingdom as belonging to Christ.

1. That which necessarily belongs to him as a divine person, extending over all creatures, and of which he can never divest himself.
2. That which belongs to him as the incarnate Son of God, extending over his own people. This also is everlasting. He will for ever remain the head and sovereign of the redeemed.
3. That dominion to which he was exalted after his resurrection, when all power in heaven and earth was committed to his hands.

This kingdom, which he exercises as the Theanthropos, and which extends over all principalities and powers, he is to deliver up when the work of redemption is accomplished. He was invested with this dominion in his mediatorial character for the purpose of carrying on his work to its consummation. When that is done, i. e. when he has subdued all his enemies, then he will no longer reign over the universe as Mediator, but only as God; while his headship over his people is to continue for ever."

Paul speaks here of an accomplished and triumphant kingdom, of the resurrection of the dead, the second coming of Christ, and the death of Death. John Calvin understood verse twenty-four to mean, as have most commentators, that Jesus Christ at the end abrogates and abolishes all other authorities than His own. The Great Commission calls for precisely this, all rule, all authority, and all powers outside of Christ are to be put down. And all nations are to be disciplined under the kingship of Christ. In verse twenty-five we are plainly told that Jesus Christ retains this kingship over the post-fall, pre-second coming world until all His enemies are put under His feet.

The second coming does not at once follow this triumph according to the prophets, an era of triumph known as the millennium, a myriad of years, precedes the end, and Christ reigns through His people. Then the last enemy, death, is destroyed. The destruction of death follows the destruction of the Fall's first consequence as well as its cause, sin. The prophet Isaiah tells us that children will not die

in infancy and anyone dying under a hundred years is seen as the cursed of God. The effect of sin is death and as Christ's kingdom triumphs in history not only is sin replaced with righteousness or justice but death itself is rolled back. Man's life-expectancy lengthens. Death is Christ's last enemy and at His coming again it is destroyed. Sin was nullified in its power and claims by Christ's atoning death. And as Christ's kingdom grows, sin is pushed back and a new humanity in Christ, our new Adam, is established in all its power. According to verse twenty-seven, before the end God puts all things under Christ's feet.

Hebrews 2:8 tells us this, this echoing Psalm 110:1 and 72:7-11 and 17-19. Of course, the words: "Thou hast put all things under His feet" come from Psalm 8:6. There is no limit to this dominion, the only exception is Jesus Christ Himself. All else is put under the Triune God. Calvin said of this verse:

"But Christ will then restore the kingdom which he has received, that we may cleave wholly to God. Nor will he in this way resign the kingdom, but will transfer it in a manner from his humanity to his glorious divinity, because a way of approach will then be opened up, from which our infirmity now keeps us back. Thus then Christ will be subjected to the Father, because the veil being then removed, we shall openly behold God reigning in his majesty, and Christ's humanity will then no longer be interposed to keep us back from a closer view of God."

We have referred to Isaiah 65:20-25 which speaks of the millennium peace, the longevity of life, prosperity, the end of sorrows, and much more, as marking the triumph of Christ in this world as men, women, and children, nations, gentiles, and all are made members of Christ's new heaven and new earth which began with His resurrection from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 Paul speaks of Christ's as: "the first fruits of the resurrection."

Calvin, writing on the blessings of Christ's triumphant history, in what is now called 'the millennium,' wrote in his comments on Isaiah 65:21-22:

"They shall build houses and inhabit them. In these verses He mentions what is written in the law, for these are the blessings of the law. That they that have obeyed God shall dwell in the houses which they have built and gather fruit from the trees which they have planted. On the other hand, the disobedient shall be expelled from the houses which they have built and give place to foreigners, and shall be deprived of the fruit of the trees which they have planted. The Lord says Isaiah shall protect you from that curse so as to enjoy your property."

These texts make clear that the biblical mandate is a call to dominion, to knowledge, righteousness or justice, and holiness. Man was commanded in Eden to work under God to make the Earth God's kingdom realm. And in the Great Commission man is reinstated in this dominion calling. Our federal covenant head in this calling is the Last Adam, Jesus Christ. We are the new humanity of the last Adam. The kingdom requires submission to Christ and faithful service to Him. A new creation, of which our Lord is the firstfruit, and of which we are all members, when fully instituted, is the eternal kingdom and the eternal victory of Christ. The millennium, coming as the climax of Christ's historical victory through us, receives the new heavens and the new earth. For us it is now imperative to see the Promised Land for us in history as this world. The Holy Land is now the whole earth! We must repossess it for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Amen, so be it.

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The Second Coming of Christ; the Blessed Hope

R.J. Rushdoony

A young man once told me that he was shaken when he met for the first time, well up in his twenties, one of his grandfathers. The resemblance in person, aptitudes, and habits, was so striking that it humbled him and took away his arrogant self-sufficiency. He couldn't see himself as self-made, he saw the part heredity had played.

The same is true in the area of beliefs. Many of our beliefs are not biblical but pagan, a part of our inheritance. One Greek idea which has profoundly influenced the church is the 'deus ex machina' concept. This latin phrase means literally 'the god out of the machine.' It refers to a device common in Greek and Roman theater, but it is found elsewhere also, in epics and poems. Instead of a moral and religious solution to a crisis, a god appears to rescue the person in trouble, even though justice is about to catch up with him. For example; In Homer's Iliad, Paris the adulterer, when about to be killed in battle by the angry Menelaus is rescued by the goddess of love Aphrodite, and brought into Helen's bedchamber.

According to Homer, Menelaus confronted Paris in battle

"So saying, he leapt upon him and caught him by his horse-hair crest, and swinging him around dragged him towards the well-greaved Achaeans; and he was strangled by the embroidered strap beneath his soft throat, drawn tight below his chin to hold his helm. Now would Menelaus have dragged him away and won glory unspeakable, but that Zeus's daughter Aphrodite was swift to mark, and tore asunder for him the strap of slaughtered ox hide, so the helmet came away empty in his stalwart hand. There at Menelaus cast it with a swing toward the well-greaved Achaeans, and his trusty comrade took it out and himself sprang back again eager to slay him with a spear of bronze. But Aphrodite snatched up Paris very easily, as a goddess may, and hid him in thick darkness and set him down in his fragrant perfumed chamber and herself went to summon Helen."

Now the basic elements of this episode was first that morality had nothing to do with divine action. The Greek gods acted never on a moral basis, only a personal one. Miraculous deliverance meant personal allegiance by a god, goddess, or the gods towards someone. Then, second, causality was set aside. In fact, causality in any biblical sense is alien to classical thought. Greek tragedies stress the fact that human beings are the helpless pawns of the gods. Ediphus suffered great horrors at no fault of his own, and so on and on in the Greek tragedies and epics.

This deus ex machina concept has infiltrated into the church. Over the years I have encountered examples of it both protestant and catholic, which are painful to hear or read! Some of the worst examples are St. Alphonsus de Liguori in his *The Glories of Mary*, 1750, which, we can be grateful, is now more or less forgotten. In that book, Saint Alphonsus told a story of a nun who for fifteen years was absent from her convent and living in sexual sin. During that time, supposedly, the virgin Mary took her place and appearance at the convent and she was able to return in due time without shame. Now this

tale of the nun Beatrice was a famous one in Liguori's day, and many believe it! Such deus ex machina stories have no relationship to the Bible, but, over the generations they have been popular in Catholic and Protestant circles. Of course some claim there are parallels to it and the Bible, the ascension of Elijah, but it is a radically different story in that Elijah is not being rescued from the consequence of sin, but entering into his reward. Or possibly the deliverance of Elishah from the Assyrian army but this is simply God's protection of His prophetic voice to that generation.

Paganism, with its deus ex machina perspective denied first that God's moral order governs all things, because paganism is radically antinomian where God's law is concerned it denied the essential fact of causality. Namely, that God, with His law and His causal moral order governs all things whether directly or providentially. For Liguori's nun, Beatrice, to resume her virginal status after fifteen years of whoring, was a denial of God's order.

Then second, the deus ex machina mentality is a denial of responsibility and growth. Men have only to appeal to or await the deliverance of the gods or god without any growth on their part nor any biblical faith. All this is relevant to our subject, 'The Second Coming of Christ; the Blessed Hope.' It is not a 'deus ex machina' deliverance from the mess we are in! we are not raptured out of the mess we have made! It is a culmination of God's plan, and a blessing to our faith, to our service. It is victory in and under Jesus Christ the King over all kings.

Our lord spoke repeatedly of his coming again, a single event.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also."

At the ascension the angels declared Jesus Christ would return again, a single return. Certain events would occur between the first and the second coming. First, the gentiles will be brought into the kingdom. As Louis Berkhof pointed out:

"This means a full preaching to all the nations, for the evangelization of all nations is the goal of history."

A great task confronts Christ's people before the end, and it will be a successful one, because he is with us in it 'til the end. Second, the fullness of Israel will be brought in. This does not refer to a national restoration of Israel, but to the salvation of all who are in the true Israel of God; His elect people. Third, there will be a great apostasy and tribulation, and while many will not agree with this as a sequential thing our intention here is simply to list these events, not to give a chronology. Then fourth, there is what Berkhof calls the coming revelation of antichrist, however with this I would disagree because 'antichrist' is mentioned only four times in Scripture and in none of these instances is he a single and exclusively future person. It is those who deny Christ, that he has come in the flesh. The reference II Thessalonians 2:3-5, to that man of sin is wrongly confused with antichrist. Many persons are antichrist, the man of sin is a person or a movement from within God's temple who makes ungodly claims for himself in the name of Christ.

Now, without going into the details of these intervening things it is clear that a worldwide conversion and triumph precede the second coming. Christians have to warrant to sit back and wait for an any-moment return, or to wait to be raptured out of tribulation. They have a world to conquer for Christ! and a world-order to establish for and in Him. Paul writes in Titus 2:11-14

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Look-

ing for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

Now too often the words: “that blessed hope” are abstracted from this text without giving the context. And as the old proverb has it: “a text without a context is a pretext”. Calvin said of Paul’s exhortation in all this chapter, Titus 2, that
“it aims at nothing else than keeping the law!”

For Paul that blessed hope was not escapism, it was victory after battle. Christ rescues us from the curse, to deliver us into his service. Our hope is blessed because it assures us of happiness and victory as Calvin in more than one place underscores. According to William Hendriksen:

“Our great God and Savior Christ Jesus to whose appearing in glory believers look forward with such hope and joy is the one who gave himself for us in order to redeem us from all lawlessness, and to purify for himself a people his very own with a zest for noble deeds.”

Hendriksen went on to point out, Paul tells us that Christ gave himself for us with a twofold purpose. First, to redeem us from the power of sin and death, from lawlessness. Second, to purify for himself a people for his service. Moreover, again quoting Hendriksen:

“Formerly, Israel was Jehovah’s peculiar people, now the church is. And just as Israel was characterized by zeal for the law, so now Christ purifies his people with this very purpose in mind, namely that it shall be a people for his own possession with a zest for noble deeds, deeds which proceed from faith, and are done according to God’s law and unto his glory.”

But the purpose of verse fourteen is very clearly; Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity in order that we might be a unique people zealous in obeying his law-word. By our good works we serve Him and further His kingdom. Thus that ‘blessed hope’ is inseparably linked to the appointment and to our response of faithfulness and zeal in obeying his law-word. We thereby further His kingdom and bring nearer the great day of His coming again.

The early church had its share of faults, and it must not be idealized, but it must be noted as great Graydon F. Snyder noted:

“that it often had a very strong Old Testament emphasis firmly linked with Christ.”

For example, one of the earliest preachers in the early church. Hermas identified Jesus Christ and the law saying:

“‘Listen,’ saith he; ‘this great tree which overshadows plains and mountains and all the earth is the law of God which was given to the whole world; and this law is the Son of God preached unto the ends of the earth.’”

Now anyone who has studied the preaching of the early church can tell you it was ‘two ways’ preaching. This was the great and popular theme. It was preached to pagans and it was simply this; on the one hand is sin and death, rebellion, lawlessness, rebellion, discord, God’s wrath and man’s malice. On the other hand, there is life and righteousness, or justice, God’s salvation, His mercy law and providential care. The ‘two ways’ have their conclusion in Hell and in Heaven. This was in the apostolic and post-apostolic church, the most popular preaching, to make clear to people that there was no middle ground, no place whereon to stand except either in terms of the way of death and Hell, or Christ and

eternal life.

That blessed hope has long meant victory in time and in eternity. Calvin, Hendriksen, and a host of commentators all through the centuries have been emphatic. The blessed hope is something that begins here and now, when we become converted, and are made members of Christ, who is the first-fruits of the new creation. And we when we are made a new creation in Christ, become members of that community, and our blessed hope is that beginning here and now we have eternal life, and it will culminate with his coming again and the glories of an eternity where we serve him, and there is no more curse, where sin and death are eternally abolished and his servants shall serve him joyfully.

Christ's state of exaltation began with his resurrection it continued with his ascension, His ascension to the right hand of God the Father, it continues as we His people exalt Him by governing in every sphere of life and so on as his covenant people obeying him when He says: "Occupy till I come." and it climaxes with his coming again to inaugurate creation in all its fullness.

Thus, the church over the generations has seen that blessed hope as something that begins here and now, with Christ's resurrection and our being raised up again from sin and death, and to life in righteousness in him, and it culminates in his coming again, so that we are now moving in that hope. A hope that: "maketh not ashamed," we are told, because having been redeemed in Him, we are citizens of a kingdom which has no end, whose ruler is Jesus Christ's, who is King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the blessed hope, amen.

ENDNOTES:

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