

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### HEAVEN AND THE ETERNAL STATE

#### 7.0 Introduction

As anthropological and eschatological conceptions developed, the life of the soul in heaven for all eternity became more prominent. The latter conception eventually eclipsed the millennial view, and the bodily resurrection became problematic. There was uncertainty as to the purpose of having a body in heaven, as the body was merely an instrument for earthly life.<sup>1</sup> Those Patristic writers who rejected an earthly millennium, and the hope of a renewed earth, expected eschatological life to be purely a heavenly existence.<sup>2</sup> This latter view prevailed and has persisted as the predominant eschatological doctrine ever since.

The causes of this shift include the increase in the use of allegorical interpretation of Scripture,<sup>3</sup> and a shift away from the this-earthly focus of the Old Testament to an other-worldly focus. Correlated with the latter was an increase in polemics against Judaism,<sup>4</sup> as well as against purported Judaizers. The exegetical methods used by proponents of millennial views came to be identified with the eschatological ideas of “carnal Judaism” (the Patristic writers did not appear to consider the possibility of a “spiritual Judaism”), and this strengthened their rejection of an earthly eschatological hope and bolstered their adoption of speculative ideas drawn from pagan Greek philosophy.

#### 7.1 The rejection of millennialism

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Augustine. *The City of God* 22.4. NPNF 1/2, p. 481.

<sup>2</sup> In Jewish apocalyptic and eschatological hopes there are also two distinct traditions: “...the natural expectation of a glorious restoration of Israel and the Davidic kingdom, and the apocalyptic idea of the second aeon, which has a thoroughly otherworldly character and will be inaugurated by a cosmic judgement executed by the Son of man.” Ragnar Leivestad. **Christ the Conquerer**, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that allegory appears to have originated in the attempt by pagan intellectuals to rescue the myths of the gods by removing the offence of a literal ascription of immorality and violence to the gods. The adoption of allegorical method by Christians to interpret the Old Testament shows a similar (unwarranted) reticence about the earthiness of the Biblical stories. R P C Hanson. **Studies in Christian Antiquity**, pp. 158-162. Cf. Walter J Burghardt. “Some could not resist the temptation to allegorize Scripture in the pagan sense, i.e., to deny the letter so as to escape an embarrassing dogma.” “On early Christian exegesis.” *Theological Studies* 11 (1950) 83. See the survey of Patristic reticence about such stories in John L Thompson. “The immoralities of the Patriarchs in the history of exegesis: a reappraisal of Calvin’s position.” *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991) 19-39.

<sup>4</sup> D J Constantelos points out that the Greek fathers condemned all opposing religions - Judaism was not specially singled out, but the Jews were of course condemned specifically for rejecting the Messiah. “Jews and Judaism in the early Greek Fathers (100AD - 500AD).” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 23 (1978) 147. See also G B Ladner. “Aspects of patristic anti-Judaism.” *Viator* 2 (1971) 355-363. R P C Hanson comments that in the Patristic era Christians always distinguished the Jews from the pagans, and their anti-Jewish polemic had little in common with their anti-pagan polemic. **Studies in Christian Antiquity**, p. 144.

Throughout the Patristic period there is a steady decline in the significance of the resurrection of the body and an increase in speculation about the soul and its qualities, although millennialism did not completely disappear.<sup>5</sup> This decline is correlated with the diminishing of the immediate danger of Gnostic heresies (and to some extent incorporation of aspects of these views into mainstream Christian thought), and a trend towards asceticism and away from the significance and value of life in this world.<sup>6</sup> This view can be seen in Prudentius, who expected the destruction of the earth and its abandonment by humankind. The spirit goes to heaven to enjoy the vision of God, while the body belongs in the grave. When the heavens and earth are destroyed, all that is left will be God with the saints and the angels.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, belief in a millennial reign of Christ on this earth lost its appeal as spirituality and theology moved more and more in a metaphysical and mystical direction. The characteristic elements of millennialist doctrine were either discarded or spiritualised,<sup>8</sup> so that the idea of an earthly eschaton was abandoned altogether by later Patristic writers, under the influence of Platonist thought, and the eschatological hope became other-worldly.

An important factor in the rejection of millennialism was the perception that this doctrine limited the reign of Christ and the saints to only the thousand years.<sup>9</sup> For

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<sup>5</sup> Quintus Julius Hilarianus composed a work called *The progress of time* in 397 AD, which gave a millennialist eschatology. B McGinn. **Visions of the End**, p. 51. I have found no evidence that millennialism was officially condemned by the church, in spite of a number of authors asserting that this had occurred at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. For instance, Norman Cohn. **The pursuit of the Millenium** (1957), pp. 12, 24. This reference to the Council of Ephesus has been removed from the 1970 edition of Cohn's book.

<sup>6</sup> This adoption of Gnostic thought-forms is made explicit by Eusebius. "And His disciples, accommodating their teaching to the minds of the people, according to the Master's will, delivered on the one hand to those who were able to receive it, the teaching given by the perfect master to those who rose above human nature. While on the other the side of the teaching which they considered was suitable to men still in the world of passion and needing treatment, they accommodated to the weakness of the majority, and handed over to them to keep sometimes in writing, and sometimes in unwritten ordinances to be observed by them. Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living; it admits not marriage, childbearing, property nor the possession of wealth, but wholly and permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone in its wealth of heavenly love. And they who enter on this course, appear to die to the life of mortals, to bear with them nothing earthly but their body, and in mind and spirit to have passed to heaven. Like some celestial beings they gaze upon human life, performing the duty of a priesthood to Almighty God for the whole race..." *The proof of the Gospel* 1.8. Translations of Christian Literature. Vol. 1, p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> Prudentius. *Crowns of Martyrdom* 10, 534-544. Loeb II, pp. 265, 267.

<sup>8</sup> One feature of the rejection of millennialism was the omission from many manuscripts of the chapters in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* where he propounded this doctrine. These chapters were recovered only in 1575, and not without considerable debate as to their authenticity. See G Wingren. **Man and the Incarnation**, pp. 188-189.

<sup>9</sup> Jerome, when commenting on Daniel 7:18, *And they shall possess the kingdom unto eternity, even forever and ever*, says: "If this should be taken to refer to the Maccabees, the advocate of this position should explain how the kingdom of the Maccabees is of a perpetual character." *Commentary on Daniel* 7.18. G L Archer, p. 81. This concern about limiting the reign of Christ was also expressed by Calvin. **Institutes of the Christian Religion** 3.25.5. Library of

instance, Jerome registered his objections in this regard: “I do not think the reign of a thousand years is eternal; or if it is thus to be thought of, they cease to reign when the thousand years are finished.”<sup>10</sup> According to Jerome, the millennium is to be understood as the number 1,000, the product of 10 and 100, which is interpreted as the Decalogue and virginity, so those who keep the commandments and guard themselves from impurity reign with Christ for in them the devil is bound.<sup>11</sup> Suggestions that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 were to be understood as a temporal reference were rejected.<sup>12</sup> Hilary of Poitiers gives an example of these ideas.

*Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever more. He sets no temporal limit to our hope, he bids our faithful expectation to stretch out to infinity. We are to hope for ever and ever, winning the hope of future life through the hope of our present life which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord...*<sup>13</sup>

This concern was implicit in the controversy over the views of Marcellus of Ancyra, who was condemned for teaching that the kingdom of Christ would eventually come to an end, basing this on his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.<sup>14</sup> Both the content of

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Christian Classics 21. Vol. 2, pp. 994-996. See the instructive study by Richard A Muller. “Christ in the Eschaton: Calvin and Moltmann on the duration of the *munus regium*.” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981) 31-59. See also T F Glasson. “The temporary Messianic kingdom and the kingdom of God.” *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990) 517-525.

<sup>10</sup> Jerome’s editing of Victorinus of Pettau. *On the Apocalypse* 20.6. ANF 7, p. 359. Cf. Augustine. “*Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they shall praise thee forever and ever.* On fire, so to speak, with this desire, and burning with this love, he longs to dwell all the days of his life in the house of the Lord; to abide in the Lord’s house all his days, not days that come to an end but days that last forever. For the word “days” is used in the same way as the word “years” in the text: *And thy years shall not fail.* The day of life everlasting is a single day which never closes.” *On the Psalms. Second Discourse on Psalm 26*.7. ACW 29, p. 266.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome’s editing of Victorinus of Pettau. *On the Apocalypse* 20.6. ANF 7, p. 359. His original text taught the millennium. PLS 1, 167.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. John of Damascus, who argues that there will be no days or nights after the resurrection, but unending day for the just, and unending night for the wicked. He then asks, “In what way then will the period of one thousand years be counted which, according to Origen, is required for the complete restoration?” *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.1. NPNF 2/9, p. 18. However, cf. Peter Steen’s insistence on the continuation of time in the eschatological age. “The Problem of Time and Eternity in its Relation to the Nature-Grace Ground-motive.” In: **Hearing and Doing**, pp. 141-142.

<sup>13</sup> Hilary of Poitiers. *Homilies on the Psalms*. Psalm 131.6. NPNF 2/9, p. 248. However, this objection had already been addressed by Justin Martyr, who in comparing Moses to Christ, says “For the former gave them a temporary inheritance, seeing he was neither Christ who is God, nor the Son of God; but the latter, after the holy resurrection shall give us the eternal possession.” *Dialogue with Trypho* 113. ANF 1, p. 255. Cf. Hebrews 3:5-6, and *passim* the contrast of the temporary dispensation under Moses with the eternal dispensation under Christ. Justin thus deals with both the supposed “temporary” nature of the millennial kingdom, and the “Jewish” character of that kingdom.

<sup>14</sup> Origen was also accused of teaching that Christ’s kingdom comes to an end, based on his exposition of the same passage in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. [Origen. *De principiis* 3.6.9. ANF 4, p. 348] J F Dechow. **Dogma and mysterium in early Christianity**, pp. 256, 260. Viviano states that this passage more than any other dominates his eschatological thinking. Benedict T Viviano. **The Kingdom of God in history**, p. 42. See also the discussion of Calvin’s

his views and his method of interpretation were denigrated as Jewish, as for instance in the claim of Basil of Caesarea that he was trying to introduce “corrupt Judaism” with his eschatology.<sup>15</sup> The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople expressly attacked the doctrine propounded by Marcellus by including the phrase “of his kingdom there shall be no end.”<sup>16</sup> However, Lienhard argues that in a later work (the *De Incarnatione*) attributed to Marcellus, he

...devotes a chapter (20) to 1 Cor. 15:24-28, the passage which was the basis of Marcellus’ theology. This chapter presents a refinement of Marcellus’ teaching. He had earlier taught simply that the reign of Christ would have an end and the Logos would return to God. In ch. 20 he explains that it is as the (human) head of his own members that Christ will be subjected to the Father. The Lord “received the human throne of David, his father according to the flesh, to rebuild and restore it, so that, when it was restored, we might all reign in him; he will hand over the restored kingdom to the Father, so that God might be all in all” and reign through him as through God the Word after He reigned through him as through a man, the Saviour. God’s kingdom exists forever; the “human kingdom” - Marcellus’ peculiar term - passes away.<sup>17</sup>

There are also other possible explanations for the antagonism of the Cappadocians towards Marcellus and his millennial views. Zahn, author of a significant monograph on Marcellus (published in 1867), claimed that “Marcellus deliberately broke with the prevailing Origenism of the fourth century and returned to biblical norms for Christology and the doctrine of the trinity.”<sup>18</sup> He gives a sympathetic description of the views of Marcellus.

In his total theological perspective he is a faithful disciple of Irenaeus. The development which lay between Irenaeus and himself, especially the Alexandrian theology, could only have seemed to him an aberration.<sup>19</sup>

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interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 in J F Jansen. “1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and the future of Jesus Christ.” In: **Texts and Testaments**, pp. 181-186.

<sup>15</sup> Basil. *Letter 263.5, To the Westerns*. NPNF 2/8, p. 303. In one place Basil did speak of “the life that follows on the resurrection,” and made it clear that an earthly life such as that expected by the millennialists was not what he had in mind. It is a purely spiritual life he describes. *On the Spirit* 15.35. NPNF 2/8, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> For details see Reinhart Staats. “The eternal kingdom of Christ: the apocalyptic tradition in the ‘Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople.’” *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 9 (1990) 19-30.

<sup>17</sup> [Marcellus of Ancyra. *On the Incarnation against the Arians* 20. PG 26, 1020C-1021A.] J T Lienhard. “Marcellus of Ancyra in modern research.” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982) 498-499. See also the study of Marcellus by J F Jansen. “1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and the future of Jesus Christ.” In: **Texts and Testaments**, pp. 176-181.

<sup>18</sup> J T Lienhard. “Marcellus of Ancyra in modern research.” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982) 493.

<sup>19</sup> T Zahn. **Marcellus von Ancyra: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Theologie**. Gotha: Freidrich Andreas Perthes, 1867, p. 217. Translation cited in: J T Lienhard. “Marcellus of Ancyra in modern research.” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982) 493.

In his significant re-assessment of Marcellus, Pollard suggests that the accusation of “Judaizing” levelled at Marcellus by Eusebius of Caesarea was because his doctrine of God, which Eusebius attacked, was influenced more by the OT concept of *debhar Yahweh* than the Greek concept of *Logos*. His theology is indebted to the Hebraic emphasis of Ignatius of Antioch, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus, and thus continues an ancient Christian tradition.<sup>20</sup> To see him as “Judaizing” is then to misinterpret his views, and this perhaps applies as much to his understanding of the millennium as it does to his doctrine of the Word. One possible factor behind the Patristic rejection of millennialism is that they saw Christ in terms of a Hellenised Logos-figure, and not as the promised Jewish Messiah. Thus the millennium, the reign of the Messiah, can be condemned as Jewish without denigrating the Logos-Christ.

Theodoret gives a typical example of the shift in concepts of time in association with millennialism and the eternal life in heaven.

The Munificent Giver promised that He would not give a perishable nor a transitory enjoyment of good things but an eternal one. For, unlike that of Cerinthus and of those whose views are similar to his, the kingdom of our God and Saviour is not to be of this earth, nor circumscribed by a specific time. Those men create for themselves in imagination a period of a thousand years, and luxury that will pass, and other pleasures, and along with them, sacrifices and Jewish solemnities. As for ourselves, we await the life that knows no growing old.<sup>21</sup>

There is also a change from an **historical** context for eschatological fulfillment to a **non-historical** (non-temporal) context in anti-millennialist thought.

The Jews believed the prophecies referred to something that would happen in historical time; they point to the actual return of the Jews to the land of Israel, the resettling of the land, and the building of a Jewish kingdom. Against this idea, Christian writers such as Jerome and Theodoret (and of course many others) offer a spiritual reading of the texts, which in this context means either the texts refer to the spiritual redemption in Christ through the church, or to a heavenly kingdom that will be discontinuous with life on this earth.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> T Evan Pollard. “Marcellus of Ancyra: a neglected father.” In: **Epektasis**, p. 190. Pollard suggests that Marcellus’ Christology was based on the completeness of Christ’s humanity, and rather than a Logos-sarx or Logos-anthropos schema, he held to a Word-man schema, in which the “Word” was understood in terms of the OT *debhar Yahweh* rather than the Greek “Logos.” This was in stark contrast to the views of Eusebius, who held to a Christology based on the union of a human body and the divine Logos which replaced the soul. For Eusebius to say that Christ was both human body and soul would on his terms make him a “mere man.” For this view in Eusebius, Pollard cites A Grillmeier. **Christ in Christian tradition**, pp. 180ff. T Evan Pollard. *ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>21</sup> Theodoret. *Compendium of Heretics’ Fables*, 5.21. PG 83, 520C. Cited in: W A Jurgens. **The Faith of the Early Fathers**. Vol. 3, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> R L Wilken. “The restoration of Israel in Biblical prophecy.” In: **To See Ourselves as Others See Us**, p. 467.

The major factors at work in the repudiation of millennialism were accusations of Gnosticism, anti-Jewish polemics, and the influence of allegorical hermeneutics.

### 7.1.1 The rejection of millennialism as Gnostic

In spite of the anti-Gnostic stance of noted millennialists such as Irenaeus, attempts were made to discredit this doctrine by tracing its origin to gnostic heresies. The most frequently named culprit was Cerinthus, a shadowy figure of the first century AD, widely believed to have been a Judaizing Christian who held to Gnostic teachings. The evidence for the nature of his Judaizing, his gnosticism and his millennialism is all extremely tenuous, and on examination of the available material some recent authors have asserted that we do in fact know almost nothing for certain about him.<sup>23</sup> Sabbath observance could have been ascribed to Cerinthus solely on the grounds that it was a standard Judaizing tendency.<sup>24</sup> Similarly Richardson suggests, citing Epiphanius,<sup>25</sup> that “If there were Judaic tendencies to be found in the doctrines of Cerinthus, they included circumcision.”<sup>26</sup> Certainly it would be unusual for a Judaizing heretic to adopt other aspects of Judaism and to neglect circumcision, the central distinguishing mark of that faith. However, it must be admitted that it is only assumed that Cerinthus adopted Judaistic beliefs; there is little proof one way or the other.<sup>27</sup> In spite of this, Cerinthus is still considered by some to be the originator of millennialism, as well as being the author of the book of *Revelation*, which therefore leads to the suspicion that this doctrine is tainted with Judaizing and Gnosticism.<sup>28</sup>

It was considered by many that the Gnostics taught a millennium which was to be a period of materialistic excess, with eating, drinking, marrying and all manner of such “carnal” activities.<sup>29</sup> This emphasis on material and fleshly delights was seen to be typical of “Jewish” understandings of the prophetic promises, and thus a close connection between Gnosticism and Judaism was postulated.

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<sup>23</sup> Simone Pétrement. **A separate God**, pp. 303-314.

<sup>24</sup> A T Lincoln. “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church.” In: **From Sabbath to Lord’s Day**, p. 259, and note 63, p. 290.

<sup>25</sup> Epiphanius. *Panarion Adversus LXXX Haereses* 1.2.28.5. PG 41, 384.

<sup>26</sup> C C Richardson. **The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch**, p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> C C Richardson. **The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch**, p. 85. L Gaston comments after describing the contradictions involved in the various accounts of the views of Cerinthus, “It is my conviction that the gnosticizing Christian Jews of Asia ought to be removed from all our history books and put back into the patristic polemical fantasy where they have their only real home.” “Judaism of the uncircumcised in Ignatius and related writers.” In: **Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity**. Vol. 2, p. 39. See also the discussion of Cerinthus in Simone Pétrement. **A separate God**, pp. 298-314.

<sup>28</sup> B G Wright suggests that attacks on the authenticity of the *Apocalypse*, ascribing it to Cerinthus, could be part of an anti-Montanist sentiment. “Cerinthus and Hippolytus. An inquiry into the traditions about Cerinthus’ provenance.” *Second Century* 4 (1984) 112-113.

<sup>29</sup> Athenagoras may be arguing against millennialism when he asserts that physical pleasures cannot be the end of human life, a common approach taken by later anti-millennialist Patristic writers. *Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead* 24.4-5. Oxford Early Christian Texts, p. 147. Michael Dulaey states that all comments against millennialism in antiquity attack those who expect to eat and drink in the kingdom. **L’Apocalypse. Augustin et Tyconius**, p. 371.

It is curious to note, however, that while the Gnostics such as Cerinthus were blamed by some for the materialistic conception of the millennium, others indicate that in fact the Gnostics **rejected** such views.

The Gnostics were the first to reject such conceptions (Marcion referred them to the prompting of the God of the Jews - the only resurrection possible was spiritual, partial here in this world, and in perfection hereafter). The Gnostics were followed by Caius and by Origen, who condemns the views as most absurd.<sup>30</sup>

The only explanation I can offer is that the “materialistic” view of the millennium, involving feasting and earthly pleasures, is associated with licentious Gnosticism (which encouraged enjoyment of earthly pleasures since the true spirit is unaffected by bodily sin),<sup>31</sup> while repudiation of the millennium is associated with ascetic Gnosticism (repression of the desires of the flesh so as to leave the spirit unhindered).<sup>32</sup> Whichever way we read the situation, Gnosticism is an important factor in the acceptability, or otherwise, of millennialism.

It is also important to note, however, that it was not only the association with Gnostic doctrines which brought belief in the millennium into disrepute. It is also evident that Gnostic asceticism and the correlated understanding of eschatology infiltrated the church through Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and that the polemics against millennialism by Origen and his followers owe much to Gnostic thought. Their Platonising eschatology is creation-negating rather than creation-affirming, and thus reflects the chief characteristic of Gnostic thought.<sup>33</sup> The suspicion on the part of Irenaeus that rejection of millennialism has its roots in Gnosticism is given support

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<sup>30</sup> J F Bethune-Baker. **An introduction to the early history of Christian doctrine**, p. 71. Note again the connection between Origen and gnosticism.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the critique of Gnosticism by Cyril of Jerusalem. “Suffer none of those who say that this body is no work of God: for they who believe that the body is independent of God, and that the soul dwells in it as in a strange vessel, readily abuse it to fornication. And yet what fault have they found in this wonderful body? For what is lacking in comeliness? And what in its structure is not full of skill? Ought they not to have observed the luminous construction of the eyes? [and so on through various parts of the body]. Who when man the human race must have died out, rendered it by a simple intercourse perpetual?” *Catechetical Lectures* 4.22. NPNF 2/7, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> F Bottomley comments regarding Gnosticism: “In practice, despising the flesh led to one of two extremes: libertinism on the principle that the body is so contemptible that its behaviour does not matter, or rigid asceticism because it must be utterly crushed.” **Attitudes to the body in Western Christendom**, p. 45. Similarly, D S Bailey states that Basilides attributed not only the material creation but also the moral law to the Demiurge. “Thus venereal licentiousness became in effect a demonstration, either of the superiority of the spiritual over the physical, or the freedom of the gnostic from the bondage of ordinances which had emanated from the Evil One.” **The man-woman relation in Christian thought**, pp. 37-38.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. the comments by Clement of Alexandria. “But sentiments erroneous, and deviating from what is right, and certainly pernicious, have turned man, a creature of heavenly origin, away from the heavenly life, and stretched him on the earth, by inducing him to cleave to earthly objects.” *Exhortation to the Heathen* 2. ANF 2, p. 178. “For those that are absorbed in pots, and exquisitely prepared niceties of condiments, are they not plainly abject, earth-born, leading an ephemeral kind of life, as if they were not to life [hereafter]?” *The Instructor* 2.1. ANF 2, p. 239.

from the fact that it was the Alexandrian theologians who first, and perhaps most heatedly opposed millennialism from within Christian circles.

One method of assailing millennialism was to deny canonicity to the book of *Revelation*, which clearly teaches a millennial reign of Christ. The early Patristic authors were almost without exception all millennialists, and accepted the book of *Revelation* as canonical. However, some later Patristic authors attacked the book and denied it canonical status.<sup>34</sup> While some anti-millennialists, like Origen, accepted the *Revelation* as coming from the hands of John the son of Zebedee,<sup>35</sup> others considered the book to be the work of a Gnostic author. Cerinthus was most often accused of forging the book, passing it off under the name of the apostle John to give authority to his views.<sup>36</sup>

It has been pointed out that it is unlikely Cerinthus would seek acceptance for his views by ascribing this work to his most bitter enemy. Irenaeus reports a curious (no doubt legendary) episode when the apostle John saw Cerinthus in the bath-house he had entered, and immediately rushed out saying “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.”<sup>37</sup> This legend indicates that Irenaeus was unaware that it had been claimed that Cerinthus had forged John’s *Revelation*,<sup>38</sup> since surely this would have been an appropriate place for Irenaeus to either accuse him of this deception, as both John and Cerinthus are spoken of together, or else to affirm that John was indeed the author. It would have been important to refute the idea that such a heretic, an opponent of John, could be considered the author.<sup>39</sup> While Irenaeus did see Cerinthus as a heretic,<sup>40</sup> holding to

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<sup>34</sup> Sulpitius Severus said of the apostle John that “secret mysteries having been revealed to him, wrote and published his book of the holy Revelation, which indeed is either foolishly or impiously not accepted by many.” *Sacred History* 2.31. NPNF 2/11, p. 112. Apart from attacks on the book by anti-millennialists, its path into the canon was not smooth. The book of *Revelation* was not part of the Syriac canon until the late fifth or sixth century, and the Greek church denied the canonicity of Revelation until the late middle ages. However, it was accepted as canonical in the West by the end of the fourth century. For a detailed account see N B Stonehouse. **The Apocalypse in the Ancient Church. A study in the history of the New Testament canon.** Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1929.

<sup>35</sup> Origen. *Commentary on John* 1.14. ANF 10, p. 305. Origen cites the Apocalypse 18 times in his commentary on John, once in his commentary on Matthew, twice in the *De Principiis*, and 4 times in *Against Celcus*. In every instance, apart from in the rather indirect reference in the *Commentary on Matthew* [14.13], and two references in the *Commentary on John* [1.42 and 6.35], Origen identifies John as the author. The preponderance of citations in his commentary on John could indicate he saw the two books as coming from the hand of the one and the same person.

<sup>36</sup> Eusebius reports the comments of Dionysius of Alexandria, who states that some took this approach in their attempt to refute millennialism. *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25. NPNF 2/1, p. 309.

<sup>37</sup> Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 3.3.4. ANF 1, p. 416.

<sup>38</sup> The Roman presbyter Gaius (late second-early third century) appeared to be the first to argue that *Revelation* was not written by the Apostle John but by Cerinthus. [Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 3.28. NPNF 2/1, p. 160.] D G Dunbar. “Hippolytus of Rome and the eschatological exegesis of the early church.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983) 323.

<sup>39</sup> O Skarsaune suggests that Cerinthus was proposed as the author of *Revelation* since Gaius wished to dissociate John from the *Revelation* and thus from millennialism. **The proof from prophecy**, p. 408.

many Gnostic doctrines, he does not comment on Cerinthus' millennialism, since Irenaeus would hardly have considered this either heretical or remarkable, unless Cerinthus had held to a heretical **form** of millennialism, that is, one seriously at odds with the views of Irenaeus himself. Even Daniélou, a fervent opponent of millennialism, has remarked on this: "It is strange that in his account of Cerinthus Irenaeus makes no mention of millenarianism, and one can only conclude that he did not regard him as heretical on this point."<sup>41</sup>

Dionysius of Alexandria denied that *Revelation* was written by the same author as the Gospel of John, and ascribed it to Cerinthus.

But (they say that) Cerinthus... desiring reputable authority for his fiction, prefixed the name (of John). For the doctrine which he taught was this: that the kingdom of Christ will be an earthly one. And as he was himself devoted to the pleasures of the body and altogether sensual in his nature, he dreamed that the kingdom would consist in those things which he desired, namely, in the delights of the belly and of sexual passion, that is to say, in eating and drinking and marrying, and in festivals and sacrifices and the slaying of victims, under the guise of which he thought he could indulge his appetites with a better grace.<sup>42</sup>

Dionysius said that the **Revelation** was obscure and unintelligible, and beyond his powers of comprehension,<sup>43</sup> and sought to interpret it using allegorical exegesis.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 1.26.1-2. ANF 1, pp. 351-352.

<sup>41</sup> J Daniélou. **A History of Early Christian Doctrine**. Vol. 1, p. 384.

<sup>42</sup> Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 3.28. NPNF 2/1, pp. 160-161. O Skarsaune suggests that Justin Martyr may be polemicising against Cerinthus in his *Dialogue against Trypho* 118 [ANF 1, p. 258] where he speaks of "spiritual sacrifices" being offered by Christ in the age to come. This would mean that Justin wished to distinguish his millennialist views from those of a heretic who superficially appeared to present the same doctrine. **The proof from prophecy**, p. 406.

<sup>43</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria. *On the Promises*. **St. Dionysius of Alexandria. Letters and treatises**, pp. 85-86.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. the comments of Origen on those who held a millennialist interpretation. "It happens in consequence that certain people of the simpler sort, not knowing how to distinguish and differentiate between the things ascribed in the Divine Scriptures to the inner and outer man respectively, and being deceived by this identity of nomenclature, have applied themselves to certain absurd fables and silly tales. Thus they even believe that after the resurrection bodily food and drink will be used and taken - food, that is, not only from that True Vine who lives for ever, but also from the vines and fruits of the trees about us." *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Prologue. ACW 26, pp. 28-29. Origen makes similar comments on the trees in the Garden of Eden. "And who is so silly as to imagine that God, like a husbandman, planted a garden in Eden eastward, and put in it a tree of life, which could be seen and felt, so that whoever tasted of the fruit with his bodily teeth received the gift of life, and further that any one as he masticated the fruit of this tree partook of good and evil?" *Philocalia* 1.17. **The Philocalia of Origen**. G Lewis, p. 18. However, Lawson comments on this passage that "...in such passages Origen, long under a cloud because of the Origenistic controversies, appears more and more as a protagonist of orthodox interpretation of Scripture and a defender of the Church against heterodoxy, e.g. millenarianism." R P Lawson. **Origen. Commentary on the Song of Songs**. ACW 26, p. 315, n. 27. To call Origen's views orthodox and millenarianism heterodox is scarcely accurate.

Eusebius comments Dionysius proves “that it is impossible to understand it [*Revelation*] according to the literal sense.”<sup>45</sup> Using his allegorical method of interpretation, Dionysius attacked the chiliasm of Nepos, bishop of Arsinoe in Egypt, who had written a book entitled *Refutation of the Allegorists*,<sup>46</sup> and managed to convince the disciples of Nepos that their method of interpretation was in error. Dionysius said that those who accept this book rely on it “too much as showing irrefutably that the Kingdom of Christ will be on earth,”<sup>47</sup> parading the teaching of *Revelation* “as if it were some great and hidden mystery,” rejecting any “high or noble opinion” about the resurrection in favour of “mean and passing enjoyments like the present in the kingdom of God.”<sup>48</sup> In his book *On the Promises*, Dionysius sought to disprove the millennial teaching of Nepos through accusations of Jewish content and Jewish methods of literal exegesis. Eusebius says that Dionysius greatly honoured Nepos, for the character of his life and his labours for the faith, but in spite of all that he has done, “the truth should be loved and honoured most of all.” He goes on to say that the true doctrine is “sublime and lofty thoughts concerning the glorious and truly divine appearing of our Lord, and our resurrection from the dead, and our being gathered together unto him,” contrasted with that of those who accept a millennium which is in his opinion “small and mortal things in the kingdom of God, and for things such as exist now.”<sup>49</sup> Eusebius goes on to quote at length from the works of Dionysius,<sup>50</sup> who argues that the *Revelation* was not written by the apostle John, and if this is so, then for Eusebius the main support for millennialism falls.<sup>51</sup> As a result of such attacks on *Revelation*, millennialism is considered of Gnostic origin.

<sup>45</sup> Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25. NPNF 2/1, p. 309.

<sup>46</sup> It is worthy of note that Nepos called his book *Refutation of the Allegorists* (i.e. Clement of Alexandria and Origen). Thus the debate was recognised by Nepos as one of hermeneutics and not simply of doctrine. It was of course the allegorical hermeneutics of Tyconius which triumphed. “Tyconius’ rejection of literalistic, millenarian interpretations is pivotal in the Latin tradition of Apocalypse commentaries. His vigorous insistence on a ‘spiritual’ interpretation of the prophetic texts, rather than the millenarianism of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Victorinus of Pettau, turned the tide in the Latin West and made his commentary the most influential of the Apocalypse commentaries in the Western Church.” P Bright. **The Book of Rules of Tyconius. Its purpose and inner logic**, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria. *On the Promises*. **St. Dionysius of Alexandria. Letters and treatises**, p. 82.

<sup>48</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria. *On the Promises*. **St. Dionysius of Alexandria. Letters and treatises**, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 7.24. NPNF 2/1, p. 308.

<sup>50</sup> Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25. NPNF 2/1, pp. 309-311.

<sup>51</sup> Eusebius claims it was probably the work of another John of Ephesus. *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39. NPNF 2/1, p. 171. See also *Ecclesiastical History* 3.24-25. NPNF 2/1, pp. 154-156. The attitude of Eusebius to the *Revelation* of John is not unequivocal. Mazzuco says that while in the *Ecclesiastical History* he criticises those millennialists who interpret it literally, and suggests it was not canonical, in other works chronologically both prior and subsequent to the *Ecclesiastical History*, he grants its authorship by John and suggests, in contrast to the literal interpretation he criticises in the *Ecclesiastical History*, an allegorical approach to the text. [*Demonstration of the Gospel* 8.2.31. Translations of Christian Literature. Vol. 2, p. 121. *Prophetic Eclogues* 4.30. PG 22, 1254c.] However, in the *Ecclesiastical History*, he does also give a literal interpretation to passages, such as when he uses it as a source concerning the sect of the Nicolaitans, and concerning the banishment of John to Patmos, as well as citing the application by Dionysius of Alexandria of the beast of Revelation 13:5 to the emperor Valerian. [*Ecclesiastical History* 3.29.1; 3.18.1; 7.10.2.] Mazzuco interprets this ambivalence

### 7.1.2 The rejection of millennialism as Jewish

In his debate with Trypho, Justin Martyr states that Judaism is truly fulfilled in Christ, and thereby holds the hope of the return to Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom. His dialogue was not a polemic against the Jews, but an apologetic for Christ in the face of their rejection of him as the Messiah, and an explanation of why those Jews who did not believe in Christ would not inherit the Land.<sup>52</sup>

However, for later detractors of the millennialist doctrine, the reign of Christ on earth appeared to differ little from Jewish messianic expectations, which did not expect the Messiah to be a crucified saviour, but a human political figure who would bring deliverance to Israel and inaugurate an age of material prosperity. This messianic figure would be human; sent by God it is true, but human nonetheless, and like all humans this messiah would eventually die and the messianic kingdom would then come to an end.<sup>53</sup> This hope of political sovereignty and material prosperity was based on the prophecies of the Old Testament which spoke of the glory of the city of Jerusalem in that age, and the wealth and prosperity of the Jews.

These prophecies were, to the later Patristic writers, interpreted in a materialistic, carnal and literalistic “Jewish” manner which had then been introduced into the church.<sup>54</sup> Ferguson suggests one way in which this could have occurred.

The debate with Jews could have favoured an emphasis on the church as a replacement of Judaism as the realm in which God’s kingship is presently exercised. The references to the kingdom of Christ (or Christ possessing the kingdom) occur primarily in an anti-Judaic context. On

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as resulting from using *Revelation* as an historical source in the *Ecclesiastical History*, while his interest elsewhere is theological. Another factor is that millennialist interpretations of *Revelation* are anti-imperial and anti-Roman, an approach which is anathema to Eusebius. He tries to defuse this tendency by citing passages from millennialists which are positive towards the empire, for instance Melito’s view of the providential character of the empire. C Mazzuco. “Eusebe de Cesaree et l’Apocalypse de Jean.” *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982) 318-320.

<sup>52</sup> Justin Martyr. “And besides, they beguile themselves and you, supposing that the everlasting kingdom will be assuredly given to those of the dispersion who are of Abraham after the flesh, although they be sinners, and faithless, and disobedient towards God...” *Dialogue with Trypho* 140. ANF 1, p. 269.

<sup>53</sup> See Ragnar Leivestad. **Christ the Conquerer**, p. 4. Geerhardus Vos. “The eschatological aspect of the Pauline conception of the Spirit.” In: **Biblical and Theological Studies by Members of the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary**, pp. 211-222.

<sup>54</sup> That anti-Judaism is not necessarily connected with rejection of the millennial hope can be seen in Commodian, whose forceful polemics against the unbelief of the Jews (and **not** against the Jews as a race), particularly their rejection of the Messiah, is found in the same text where he develops his complicated millennialist expectations. *Instructions* 37-40. ANF 4, p. 210. Clark M Williamson discerns anti-Judaism in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Aphrahat and Augustine, who use allegorical interpretations of the OT to appropriate Jewish traditions. However, they did not (apart from Augustine) see the millennium as “Jewish” in a negative sense as did later Patristic writers such as Jerome. “The ‘Adversus Judaeos’ tradition in Christian theology.” *Encounter* 39 (1978) 273-296.

the other hand, since the Jews no longer had a kingdom and Christians were in a precarious political situation in the empire, the debate with Judaism could also have shifted attention to the heavenly nature of the kingdom.<sup>55</sup>

The idea that Christ would reign on earth in a rebuilt Jerusalem was seen as a fulfillment of the earthly political hopes of Judaism, in contrast to the Christian hope of a spiritual kingdom not of this earth. The fact that the book of *Revelation* seemed to teach such a period of prosperity and peace did not deter them: that text, like Isaiah and the other OT prophets, should be interpreted “spiritually” not literally. Thus both the content of this belief, and the hermeneutical principles employed by its proponents, were considered unacceptable because of the Judaising which they implied.

Eusebius, who was influenced by Origen’s allegorical hermeneutics, condemned both Papias and Irenaeus for holding that in the millennium there would be feasting.<sup>56</sup> Eusebius suggested that the view of Nepos of Arsinoe was of a “millenium of sensual luxury on this earth,” which was a product of Judaising exegesis.

[Nepos] taught that the promises to the holy men in the Divine Scriptures should be understood in a more Jewish manner, and that there would be a certain millenium of bodily luxury upon this earth. As he thought that he could establish his private opinion by the Revelation of John, he wrote a book on this subject, entitled, *Refutation of the Allegorists*.<sup>57</sup>

Bietenhard comments “Once more the shibboleth is Judaism,”<sup>58</sup> and the Jewish understanding of eschatological life is seen as one of sensual luxury. This appears again in Rufinus. “...the Jews have such an opinion as this about the resurrection; they believe that they will rise, but in such sort as that they will enjoy all carnal delights and luxuries, and other pleasures of the body.” Rufinus says that this means they will thus have their “appetites stimulated and lusts inflamed.”<sup>59</sup> The accusation of constantly seeking gratification of the carnal and sensual appetites is common in Patristic polemics against the Jews. Ruether sees a general theme of attacking Jewish “sensuality” in the Patristics combined with an ontological dualism which contrasts the “letter” with the “spirit.” This is seen in terms of literalistic interpretation as opposed to allegorical interpretation, and Jewish sensuality as opposed to Christian

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<sup>55</sup> E Ferguson. “The Kingdom of God in early patristic literature.” In: **The interpretation of the kingdom of God**, p. 200.

<sup>56</sup> Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39. NPNF 2/1, pp. 172. R M Grant comments that Eusebius never criticised Justin for his millennialist views, reserving this for Papias and the influence he had on Irenaeus. “Papias in Eusebius’ Church History.” In: **Melanges d’histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech.**, pp. 211-212.

<sup>57</sup> Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 7.24. NPNF 2/1, p. 308.

<sup>58</sup> H Bietenhard. “The millennial hope of the early church.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953) 22.

<sup>59</sup> Rufinus. *Apology* 1.7. NPNF 2/3, p. 438.

asceticism.<sup>60</sup> It should be seen rather as an appreciation for the good things God has created for us to enjoy (Psalm 104:14-15), in contrast to the rejection of God's gifts which is sin (1 Timothy 4:3). The first is creation-affirming spirituality rooted in the revelation of God; the latter is creation-negating spirituality, rooted in Gnostic heresy.

Another follower of Origen, Jerome, also saw the marriage supper as something spiritual, and insisted that there would be no physical food in the eschaton.

Somebody may raise the question of whether we are going to eat after the resurrection, for Scripture says of the happy man: *You shall eat the labours of your hands*. My answer is quite simple. Man is composed of two substances: one of the soul, the other of the body; the soul is immortal, the body mortal. What is mortal necessarily requires food that is mortal; what is immortal, the soul, requires immortal food. Would you have proof that the soul has its own food? Our Lord and Saviour says so when He was eating: *My food is to do the will of him who sent me*. Would you know what foods the soul has? The prophet tells us himself: *Taste and see how good the Lord is*. Just as the body dies unless it is given its proper food, even so does the soul if it is not given spiritual food.<sup>61</sup>

Here an instrumentalist anthropology is correlated with a repudiation of the eating and drinking which millennialist writers expected after the resurrection. It is a view that does not appreciate the full scope of cosmic renewal. The millennial kingdom is rejected through falsely understanding it as a necessarily materialistic, sensuous, earthly life with which God could never be associated.<sup>62</sup> Conceptions of the resurrection body which permitted eating and drinking were understood in terms of revived earthly bodies and not transformed, glorified bodies, because the resurrection was conceived in Platonic terms in which earthly life itself is denigrated, and God is removed to some wholly-other realm which is dissociated from the creation.

We also find in Gregory of Nyssa repudiation of the idea of an earthly millennium, in which the resurrected saints will enjoy eating and drinking, when he says: "But some one perhaps will say that man will not be returning to the same form of life, if, as it seems, we formerly existed by eating, and shall hereafter be free from that function."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> R Ruether. **Faith and fratricide**, pp. 127-128.

<sup>61</sup> Jerome. *Homily 42, On Psalm 127* (128). FC 48, p. 319.

<sup>62</sup> However, a commentary on Matthew from the third century (possibly by Hippolytus) which while written by a millennialist, rejects the idea of a literal "feast" as superstition. C H Turner. "The early Greek commentators on the Gospel according to St. Matthew." *Journal of Theological Studies* 12 (1911) 101. Turner comments that if the text is not by Hippolytus, then it is probably by Victorinus of Pettau, depending on whether it was a translation or a Latin original.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Making of Man* 19.1. NPNF 2/5, p. 409. Cf. the view of Augustine, that in the resurrection we will not have "the gratification of fleshly desires as the foolish think" since the resurrection body will be spiritual, and no longer a "load upon the soul" [Wisdom 9:15], "nor does it seek any refreshment because it will experience no need." *Sermon* 212.1. FC 38, p. 120.

Gregory says that while Moses was on Mount Sinai talking with God, “He participated in that eternal life under the darkness for forty days and nights, and lived in a state beyond nature, for his body had no need of food during that time,” during which Moses was “participating in eternal life.”<sup>64</sup> However, it appears that Gregory was misunderstood in this regard, as he had cause to complain “What is the crime we commit, and wherefore are we hated? ...Do we romance about three Resurrections? Do we promise the gluttony of the Millenium?”<sup>65</sup> Gregory insists that the food of Paradise, to which we will return,<sup>66</sup> was not “transitory and perishable nutriment,” such as he would understand it from his anti-materialist approach to traditional millennialism, but was something “worthy of God’s planting.”<sup>67</sup> For Gregory the tree of life in Paradise, both formerly and after the resurrection, is to be interpreted symbolically, as meaning Wisdom, basing his argument on Psalm 37:4 and Proverbs 3:18.<sup>68</sup> Thus the idea that the food of Paradise consists of eating and drinking such as we now do, as was argued by Papias and Irenaeus, among others, is inconceivable for Gregory. Origen had earlier asserted that the “heavenly banquet” is to be understood as “the contemplation and understanding of God.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *The life of Moses* 1.58. Classics of Western Spirituality, p. 46.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *Letter to Eustathia, Ambrosia, and Basilissa*. NPNF 2/5, p. 544.

<sup>66</sup> Many Patristic writers expected that the eschatological life will be a return to the Paradisaical life lost by Adam. For example, Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 5.5.1. ANF 1, p. 531. Lactantius. *The Divine Institutes* 2.13. ANF 7, p. 62. *The Gospel of Nicodemus* 9-10. ANF 8, pp. 437-438. According to Young, for Gregory of Nyssa “man’s destiny is restoration to his original state and status in Paradise.” F M Young. “Adam and Anthropos: A study of the inter-action of science and the Bible in two anthropological treatises of the 4th century.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1983) 113. However, Severus of Antioch rejects the millennialism of Papias, Irenaeus and Apollinarius as foolishness, since while we may return to the primitive state in the eschaton, our hope is not simply to regain a lost Paradise but to be transformed to a greater likeness to God. Brian E Daley. **The hope of the early Church**, pp. 186-187. Cf. Tertullian. “Even if anybody should venture strongly to contend that paradise is the holy land, which it may be possible to designate as the land of our first parents Adam and Eve, it will even then follow that the restoration of paradise will seem to be promised to the flesh, whose lot it was to inhabit and keep it, in order that man may be recalled thereto just such as he was driven from it.” *On the resurrection of the flesh* 26. ANF 3, p. 564. Cf. *Against Marcion* 2.10. ANF 3, p. 306.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Making of Man* 19.2. NPNF 2/5, p. 409. Cf. Augustine’s view of the millennial rewards: “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 food 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.” *The City of God* 20.7. NPNF 1/2, p. 426. Cooper comments that Augustine did not reject millennialism on the grounds of its sensuality, as this was not intrinsic to the doctrine. He also cites Edwyn Bevan [**Christians in a world at war**. London: S.C.M., 1940, pp. 104, 122], who says that the idea of an earthly reign of Christ could hardly be unspiritual, unless the Incarnation itself is to be considered unspiritual, that is, a Docetic Christology. C Cooper. “Chiliasm and the Chiliasts.” *Reformed Theological Review* 29 (1970) 17.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Making of Man* 19.4. NPNF 2/5, p. 409.

<sup>69</sup> Origen. *De principiis* 2.11.7. ANF 4, p. 300.

Jerome several times gives stereotyped lists of the “Jewish” ideas which he saw as implicit features of millennialism.

...the golden and bejeweled Jerusalem on earth, the establishment of the temple, the blood of sacrificial victims, the rest of the Sabbath, the injury of circumcision, weddings, births, the bringing up of children, the delights of feasts, and the slavery of all the nations, and again wars, armies and triumphs, and the slaughter of the conquered, and the death of the sinner a hundred years old.<sup>70</sup>

However, in another place, while listing all the “Jewish” elements of millennialism that he rejected (which are common to his other comments), he had to stress that “Granted that we cannot accept this, neither, however, do we dare condemn it, because so many men of the Church and martyrs said the same.”<sup>71</sup> Dominant in the rejection of the earthly millennium and restoration of Jerusalem is the idea that it involved the rebuilding of the Temple and the reinstatement of the sacrificial system. It is interesting to note that the emperor Julian the Apostate was behind the moves to rebuild the Temple in the fourth century in a desperate attempt to counter the growth of Christianity. He tried to foster the re-introduction of the Jewish sacrificial system, and the attack on millennialism as a Jewish idea may also be a polemic against Julian.<sup>72</sup>

Apollinaris of Laodicea, condemned as a heretic for other reasons, was also criticised for his millennialism. For instance, Basil of Caesarea claimed that he taught a millennial restoration of Judaism, based on what Basil saw as a defective “Jewish” hermeneutical method.

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<sup>70</sup> Jerome. *Commentary on Isaiah*. Preface to Book 18. [PL 24, 627]. Translation cited from: L E Froom. **The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers**. Vol. 1, p. 448, n. 37. Jerome commented on this theme several times. *Commentary on Isaiah* 8.25. PL 24, 290. Ibid., 10.35. PL 24, 377. Ibid., 18.66. PL 24, 672. *Commentary on Ezekiel* 11.36. PL 25, 338-339. *Commentary on Joel*. PL 25, 982, 986. *Commentary on Matthew* 3.20. PL 26, 145B. Cf. the comments of Origen on this theme: “And consequently they say, that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children, imagining to themselves that the earthly city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt, its foundations laid in precious stones, and its walls constructed of jasper, and its battlements of crystal... And to speak shortly, according to the manner of things in this life in all similar matters, do they desire the fulfillment of all things looked for in the promises, viz., that what now is should exist again.” *De Principiis* 2.11.2. ANF 4, p. 297.

<sup>71</sup> Jerome. *Commentary on Jeremiah* 26.3. Translation cited in: W A Jurgens. **The Faith of the Early Fathers**. Vol. 2, p. 212. Daley comments that Jerome is careful [in his *Commentary on Ezekiel* 11.36] “to report the millenarian interpretation of Tertullian and Victorinus, Irenaeus and Apollinarius as a venerable tradition, not at all identical with ‘materialistic’ Jewish hopes.” Brian E Daley. **The hope of the early Church**, p. 102.

<sup>72</sup> See Ephrem of Syria. *Hymn against Julian* 4.19-22, where he condemns Julian for his aspirations to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. **Hymns**. Classics of Western Spirituality, pp. 255-256. For a discussion of the influence of Julian and his attempts to rebuild the Temple on Christian thought, see the instructive study by R L Wilken. “The Jews and Christian Apologetics after Theodosius I Cunctos Populos.” *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980) 451-471, esp. pp. 454-458. Regarding Julian’s attempt to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem see Robert Browning. **The Emperor Julian**, p. 176. G W Bowerstock. **Julian the Apostate**, p. 164. Bowerstock gives a chronology of the events surrounding Julian’s attempt, pp. 120-122.

And the theological works of Apollinarius are founded on Scriptural proof, but as based on a human origin. He has written about the resurrection, from a mythical, or rather Jewish point of view, urging that we shall return again to the worship of the Law, be circumcised, keep the sabbath, abstain from meats, offer sacrifices to God, worship in the temple at Jerusalem, and be altogether turned from Christians into Jews. What could be more ridiculous? Or, rather, what could be more contrary to the doctrines of the gospel?<sup>73</sup>

Gregory of Nazianzus attacked Apollinarius in a similar manner, using the same accusations of Judaizing in his hermeneutics as well as in the content of his doctrine, the one leading to the other. Gregory says that he explains the Scriptures “in a gross and carnal manner” and it is from this manner of interpretation that he and others “have derived their second Judaism and their silly thousand years delight in paradise, and almost the idea that we shall resume again the same conditions after these same thousand years.”<sup>74</sup> While Apollinarius was in error in his approach to the millennium, Bietenhard at least tries to give some account of how and why Apollinarius went wrong, and it is evident from his comments that Apollinarius was reacting against the spiritualising exegesis of Origen and others like him.

From these accounts we may conclude that Apollinarius kept to the letter of Scripture, that he did not try to evade the prophecies by spiritualising, and that he combined them with Revelation 20. His weakness was that he did not see how much of the OT law and promises had already been fulfilled by Christ (the Epistle to the Hebrews!). At this point his opponents could easily tear his teaching to pieces and condemn it as judaistic.<sup>75</sup>

However, “Epiphanius (Pan. 77.36.5), on the other hand, denies that Apollinarius was a millenarian: and the few allusions in Apollinarius’ extant writings to the second coming of Christ (*Kata meros pistis* 12) or to eternal life (*De fide et incarnatione* 1) suggest nothing unusual about his eschatology.”<sup>76</sup>

So while some see any doctrine of the millennium, no matter how innocuous, as a sign of Judaizing tendencies, Apollinarius had apparently given ample cause for this fear, even though the error in his views arose from an attempt to counter what he saw as error on the part of the “orthodox,” namely denial of the true reality of the doctrines of Scripture. It was unfortunate that, according to Bietenhard, “Apollinarius fell into Judaism pure and simple” and that with his abuse the correct use of the

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<sup>73</sup> Basil. *Letter 263.4, To the Westerns*. NPNF 2/8, pp. 302-303. H A Wolfson stresses, against criticisms from R M Grant, that it is the millenarianism of Apollinarius that is described by Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus as “Jewish” and not his theology proper. He insists that Apollinarianism was a Christological heresy that was not **necessarily** millenarian but happened to be such. “Answers to criticisms of my discussion of Patristic philosophy.” In: **Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion**. Vol. 2, p. 526.

<sup>74</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus. *Second Letter to Cledonius against Apollinarius (Letter 102)*. NPNF 2/7, p. 444.

<sup>75</sup> H Bietenhard. “The millenial hope in the early church.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953) 23.

<sup>76</sup> Brian E Daley. **The hope of the early Church**, p. 80.

doctrine was also discredited.<sup>77</sup> The disagreement concerning millennialist eschatology was thus based not on the competence or otherwise of the interpreters, and the adequacy of their hermeneutics, but involved a debate between two completely different hermeneutical systems.

Another aspect of the debate over “Jewish traditions” in millennialism involved the use of the Sabbath as a type of the “world-week.”<sup>78</sup> This divided history into seven periods of a thousand years, following the schema of the seven days of Genesis 1, based on the text “a thousand years are as one day.”<sup>79</sup> This tradition was present from the very beginning of the Patristic period,<sup>80</sup> but the correlation of the millennium with the “Sabbath” of the “world-week” led to the charge by anti-millennialists that this was a Jewish idea.<sup>81</sup>

The use of this image for the millennium was undermined by the allegorisation of the sabbath, first seen in Eusebius.<sup>82</sup> Those who rejected the millennium often referred instead to the **eighth** day,<sup>83</sup> as the day after the resurrection when the new age began,

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<sup>77</sup> H Bietenhard. “The millennial hope in the early church.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953) 23. A J Visser asserts that Apollinaris of Laodicea (ca. 310- ca. 390) was the last Eastern theologian to hold millennialist ideas. “Bird’s eye view of ancient Christian eschatology.” *Numen* 14 (1967) 18.

<sup>78</sup> For a detailed study of this theme see J Daniélou. “La typologie millénariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitif.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 2 (1948) 1-16. Cf. the comment by A T Lincoln. “While Gnosticism eliminated the Christian hope of the resurrection, catholic writers of the second century used the concept of eschatological Sabbath rest to refer exclusively to the state of future salvation after the resurrection, thereby reverting the traditional Jewish usage and abandoning the Christian tension of “already” and “not yet,” which the author to the Hebrews had applied to the concept of eschatological rest. In part this is to be attributed to these writers’ commitment to the typology of the worldweek, whereby the six millenia of world history were to be succeeded by an eschatological Sabbath... Thus for the chiliasts Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus, the millenium is the “rest” as well as the “kingdom” of the saints because it is the Sabbath rest of God [Genesis 2:2] interpreted typologically. Other writers, however, including pseudo-Barnabas, do not expect a millenium but picture the state of the saints in the next world as ‘rest’.” “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church.” In: **From Sabbath to Lord’s Day**, p. 254.

<sup>79</sup> Victorinus of Pettau. *On the creation of the world*. ANF 7, p. 342. Hippolytus. *Fragments of the Commentary on Daniel*. ANF 5, p. 179. Gregory the Illuminator. *The Teaching of Saint Gregory* 668, 670. R W Thomson, pp. 166-167. *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26. R H Connolly, p. 234. Methodius. *The Symposium* 9.5. ACW 27, p. 139.

<sup>80</sup> *The Epistle of Barnabas* 15. ANF 1, p. 146-147. Cf. Papias, who uses the imagery of the “week” but does not specifically apply it to the millennium. Fragment 9. ANF 1, p. 155. Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 4.16.1. ANF 1, p. 481.

<sup>81</sup> F F Bruce suggests the Christian use of the image is derived from the LXX chronology. “Eschatology in the Apostolic Fathers.” In: **The Heritage of the Early Church**, p. 87. This idea first appears in the *Babylonian Talmud*. Sanhedrin 97a. R van den Broek. **The myth of the Phoenix according to Classical and early Christian traditions**, p. 124.

<sup>82</sup> Eusebius. *Commentary on Psalm 91*. PG 26, 1168-1169. Translation cited in: A T Lincoln. “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church.” In: **From Sabbath to Lord’s Day**, pp. 282-283.

<sup>83</sup> That is, the day after the Sabbath, which is also the **first** day of the new week. Cf. Jerome. “...the eighth day after the sabbath is again the first day from the beginning...” *Homily 3, on Psalm 7*. FC 48, p. 26. Clement of Alexandria uses the idea of the “eighth day” as a symbol for eternity [*The Stromata* 5.14. ANF 2, p. 469; 6.16. ANF 2, pp. 512-513.]. P Plass. “The

although this was also seen in the millennialist **Epistle of Barnabas**, which placed the resurrection on the seventh day, followed by a millennium, and referred to the eighth day as the commencement of the new age.<sup>84</sup> Bruce suggests this is to modify the Jewish symbolism of the Sabbath, which Barnabas holds was abrogated by Christ.<sup>85</sup> But the anti-millennialists placed the resurrection itself on the eighth day, and by doing so they thus avoided the millennial connotations of the world-week, as well as its Jewish associations, while retaining something of the symbolism.<sup>86</sup> However, in the allegorisation of this imagery of the Sabbath rest, it is emptied of its OT connotations, and is seen in terms of an ethereal spiritualised eschaton which is static, not dynamic. For instance, Augustine says that the Sabbath rest is not to be observed in terms of the times, but the “eternal kingdom that it signifies.”<sup>87</sup> The Jews, says Augustine, interpreted the Sabbath solely in terms of abstaining from physical activity. Christians now observe it not on the carnal level, but in “its spiritual sense,” that is, as being fulfilled in Christ according to his words in Matthew 11:28-30. The true rest comes in the resurrection, of which the rest on the seventh day is only a shadow.<sup>88</sup>

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concept of eternity in Patristic theology.” *Studia Theologica* 36 (1982) 16. Methodius. *The Symposium* 7.6. ACW 27, p. 102. J Daniélou asserts that the Greek Fathers used the idea of the “eighth day” since it was outside the cycle of the seven-day week and therefore symbolised a new creation. **The Bible and the Liturgy**, pp. 278-279. Cf. Augustine. “For the seventh day of rest is connected with the eighth of resurrection. For when the saints receive again their bodies after the rest of the intermediate state, the rest will not cease; but rather the whole man, body and soul united, renewed in the immortal health, will attain to the realization of his hope in the enjoyment of eternal life.” *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon* 12.19. NPNF 1/4, p. 189.

<sup>84</sup> J E McWilliam Dewart. **Death and Resurrection**, p. 55. *Barnabas* states that the reason the Sabbath is a type of the millennial kingdom is because it can be kept only by the pure, which is why Christians now keep Sunday (the “eighth day”) instead of the Sabbath. *Epistle of Barnabas* 15. ANF 1, pp. 146-147.

<sup>85</sup> F F Bruce. “Eschatology in the Apostolic Fathers.” In: **The Heritage of the Early Church**, p. 87.

<sup>86</sup> Jerome. *Homily 3, on Psalm 7*. FC 48, p. 26. Cf. also *Letter to Cyprian the Presbyter* 8. [PL 22, 1172] L E Froom. **The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers**. Vol. 1, p. 448. Augustine. *On the Psalms* 6.1. NPNF 1/8, p. 15. *Sermon 259.2*. FC 38, pp. 368-371. Maximus the Confessor. *Chapters on Knowledge* 1.60. Classics of Western Spirituality, p. 138.

<sup>87</sup> Augustine. *Contra Adimantum* 16.3. Translation cited in: Marcel Dubois. “Jews, Judaism and Israel in the theology of Saint Augustine. How he links the Jewish people and the land of Zion.” *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989) 191. Note however that the Latin text in Migne has “aeternam quietem quae illo signo significatur” [PL 42, 157]. There is no mention of an eternal **kingdom**. Cf. also *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon* 12.8. NPNF 1/4, p. 185, where Augustine says that “the seventh day is the rest of the saints, not in this life, but in another, where the rich man saw Lazarus at rest while he was tormented in hell.”

<sup>88</sup> Augustine. *Contra Adimantum* 2.2. Translation cited in: Marcel Dubois. “Jews, Judaism and Israel in the theology of Saint Augustine. How he links the Jewish people and the land of Zion.” *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989) 190. Cf. also Ambrose. *On belief in the resurrection* 2.2. NPNF 2/10, p. 174. Dulaey suggests the reason Augustine rejects millennialism is the typology of the sabbath, which led Augustine to reject the scheme of history in six periods of a thousand years. While he does use the six periods of history, he does not in his later writings consider them periods of a thousand years since this would enable calculation of the date of the parousia, something not possible according to Scripture. Michael Dulaey. **L’Apocalypse. Augustin et Tyconius**, p. 373.

We cannot deny the definite influence from Jewish sources on early Patristic thinking about the millennium, as Bietenhard points out, for example the *Apocalypse of Baruch*.<sup>89</sup> However, this should not be seen as detrimental **in itself** (although some features of Jewish apocalyptic adopted by the Patristic authors may be speculative and incompatible with Scripture). Berkouwer has made some useful distinctions between Jewish apocalyptic and Christian eschatology which allow us to appreciate the inter-relationship without denigrating any elements in Christian thinking which may have had a Jewish origin.

The Old Testament portrays the day of the Lord in terms of the darkening of sun, moon and stars (Isa 13:10), the desolation of the earth (vs. 13), and the disruption of life (24:1, 3f, 18f). These and prophecies like these are repeated in the New Testament, where they serve as the basis of urgent appeals to remain steadfast and watchful. This does not mean to put Jewish apocalyptic on a par with the eschatological proclamations of the New Testament. The two are profoundly different. Late-Jewish apocalyptic exhibits definitely pessimistic strains that are not to be found in the New Testament. Eschatology undergoes a tremendous change in the New Testament when the “apocalypse” is centered in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.<sup>90</sup>

It is only the speculative and pessimistic character of Jewish apocalyptic literature which is to be rejected, not its focus on redemption events which take place on this earth. Thus the millennium does not need to be denigrated as “Jewish” since in itself it can be a completely Christian doctrine; nor are we forced to spiritualise Christian eschatology. One reason for the characterisation of millennialism as dependent on “Jewish” hermeneutics is given by Loewe: the suspicion that interpretations which were not Christological could not therefore be spiritual.

In spite of the growing awareness of the relevance of Jewish biblical exegesis which began to manifest itself in some Christian schools from the 12th century, Christian exegetes could rarely, if ever, exclude from their minds a conviction that an exegesis that was not Christological could not be spiritual; and this prejudice led them to the fallacy of lumping together all Jewish interpretation of the Bible as “literal” -

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<sup>89</sup> H Bietenhard. “The millennial hope in the early church.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953) 12-30.

<sup>90</sup> G C Berkouwer. **The Return of Christ**, p. 242. Visser also sees the place of Christ as the distinguishing feature of Christian apocalyptic thought. “The Jewish apocalypticist believes the Messiah has not yet come; the christian of the first generation expects the return of a Redeemer, who has made himself manifest before in humility but whose second coming will be in glory, according to the word of the prophets.” A J Visser. “Bird’s eye view of ancient Christian eschatology.” *Numen* 14 (1967) 7. Similarly, Oscar Cullmann suggests that Jewish apocalyptic places exclusive emphasis on the “When” of fulfillment. Cullmann sees Christian apocalyptic as lacking this emphasis, illustrating it with his analogy of D-Day and V-Day. “Where the certainty rules that the decisive battle has been fought through to victory, then only in the circle of understandable human curiosity is it still of importance to know whether the “Victory Day” comes tomorrow or later.” Oscar Cullmann. **Christ and Time**, p. 142.

generally in a pejorative sense - whatever aspect of the sense the Jewish exegete might in any given case be concerned to expound.<sup>91</sup>

Granted that this analysis is made with specific reference to mediaeval exegesis, the same can be said for Patristic exegesis, on which much of the mediaeval approach depended heavily.<sup>92</sup>

Christian eschatology does have its roots in distinctively Hebraic origins, but the importance of this is obscured through a false contrast between “spiritual” Greek conceptions and “materialistic” Hebraic conceptions of the future life. The problem can be seen in the comments of Lawson on the thought of Irenaeus.

The main interest in the Millenarianism of S. Irenaeus is that it illustrates one of the leading obscurities of historic Christian theology. The Gentile Church has never been very happy in its understanding of Eschatology, this most distinctively Hebrew element which is so clearly a part of Biblical religion, and which had at least some place in the message of our Lord Himself. We may say that the trouble is that the Greek or Greek-tutored mind has had to choose either to be much more or else much less materialistic in conception than the Hebrew.<sup>93</sup>

The distinction should be made not between “spiritual” and “materialistic” views (a false and unbiblical distinction), but between creation-affirming (resurrection-oriented) and creation-negating (other-world oriented) approaches to eschatology. The latter was introduced into Christianity through the influence of Hellenistic thought, and where such a conception does dominate, for instance in the views of Origen and his followers, then the millennial hope becomes difficult to accept. Hanson comments that while some see Origen’s view as Platonism Christianised, he considered it “not a Platonised form of Christian eschatology, but an alternative to eschatology, indeed an evasion of it.”<sup>94</sup> The Hellenistic origins of this difficulty, foisted upon the Scriptures, are brought out clearly by Harnack.

In [the Western] Church the first literary opponent of chiliasm and of the Apocalypse appears to have been the Roman Presbyter Caius. But his polemic did not prevail. On the other hand the learned bishops of the East in the third century used their utmost efforts to combat and extirpate chiliasm. The information given to us by Eusebius (HE 7.24) from the letters of Dionysius of Alexandria, about that father’s struggles with whole communities in Egypt, who would not give up chiliasm, is of the highest interest. This account shews that *wherever philosophical theology had not yet made its way* the chiliastic hopes

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<sup>91</sup> R Loewe. “The Jewish Midrashim and Patristic and Scholastic exegesis of the Bible.” *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957) 501-502.

<sup>92</sup> Robert L Wilken. **Judaism and the early Christian mind**, pp. 45-46.

<sup>93</sup> J Lawson. **The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus**, pp. 285-286.

<sup>94</sup> R P C Hanson. **Allegory and Event**, p. 354.

were not only cherished and defended against being explained away, but were emphatically regarded as Christianity itself.<sup>95</sup>

This then enables us to recognise the true roots of anti-millennialism, and the difficulties some Patristic writers had in accepting an earthly eschatological reign. It was not that they had to resist a doctrine foisted on the church through the influence of Judaisers; nor was it the result of simplistic and inadequate exegesis. It was the Hellenisation of Christianity, which divorced eschatology from its creation-affirming stance, that forced the use of the allegorical method to interpret away anything which referred to a concrete this-earthly eschaton.<sup>96</sup> Not only *Revelation* suffered this fate: much of the Old Testament also came under the stultifying grip of allegorising and spiritualising exegesis which denigrated earthly bodily life. As a result, the earthiness of the Scriptures was seen as Jewish, and in order to be acceptable in an environment of Greek speculation, the Scriptures had to be allegorised or otherwise “re-interpreted” and thus divorced from the Hebraic world-view in which alone they made sense.

Thus it is significant that this anti-millennialism appears to have developed in the Alexandrian stream of theology, a stream which in a Platonising manner, denigrated bodily and earthly life. The most important characteristic of “Jewish” thought was for the Alexandrian Christians its earthiness, something which they saw (correctly) as incompatible with the spiritualised eschatology focused on heaven,<sup>97</sup> but which earthiness they rejected. Anti-Judaistic views, in conjunction with allegorising, Platonising exegesis, are the true origins of anti-millennialism. The Patristic writers must take full responsibility for these views: they were primarily a product of their exegetical methods.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Adolph Harnack. **History of Dogma**. Vol. 2, p. 299.

<sup>96</sup> There has been some criticism of the idea of the Hellenisation of Christianity, developed most vigorously by Harnack. While aspects of his approach are open to question, the general problem of the influence of Hellenism on the development of Christian thought cannot be denied. See Chapter 9.3 for a discussion of Harnack’s concept of “Hellenization.”

<sup>97</sup> It must be stressed, however, that “heaven” as conceived in this stream of theology was not the Biblical heaven, but had more in common with the Platonic realm of the forms. This false opposition of the “earthly kingdom” and the “heavenly kingdom” is based on a distorted understanding of both. The one takes place in this world as we presently know it, the other comes about through a total transformation of our present existence.

<sup>98</sup> The Patristic doctrine of the millennium remained problematic throughout the middle ages for many of the same reasons. Augustine’s “spiritualised” view of the millennium continued to dominate eschatology, and it was not until the Reformation that expectation of the earthly reign of Christ was again a vital idea in Christian circles, although mainly in fringe groups. However, anti-Judaism was still influential at the time of the Reformation, and a number of Reformation confessions explicitly condemned millennialism as Jewish. The *Confession of Edward VI* (the *Forty-Two Articles* of 1553) calls it a “fable” and “Jewish delirium” [“Qui millenariorum fabulam revocare conantur, sacris literis adversantur, et in Judaica deliramenta sese praecipitant.”] *The Forty-Two Articles* 41. **Corpus Confessionum**, p. 401. Bicknell comments that this was one of the articles withdrawn from the *Thirtynine Articles* of 1571, “either because the errors attacked in them had now ceased to be formidable, or because it was seen that a greater latitude of opinion might be allowed.” E J Bicknell. **A Theological Introduction to the Thirtynine Articles**, p. 19. The *Augsburg Confession* [para. 17] describes millennialism as “Jewish opinions.” The Patristic identification of millennialism with Judaism was continued in the Reformation, and the polemics were as harsh then as they

### 7.1.3 The influence of allegorical hermeneutics

The debate about the millennium is therefore as much about hermeneutics as theology. The very **method** used presupposes or else precludes the acceptance of a millennial reign on earth, shared by the resurrected saints. For instance, Origen describes millennialists as believers “who refuse the labour of thinking, and adopting a superficial view of the letter of the law,” expect a millennial reign on earth.<sup>99</sup> They are “disciples of the letter alone” who expect the promises of the Old Testament prophets to be fulfilled in a literal and not a “spiritual” sense. These, he says, “are the views of those who, while believing in Christ, understand the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises.”<sup>100</sup> Origen, by contrast, wished to understand the Scriptures allegorically.<sup>101</sup> Bietenhard comments appositely in this regard: “For Origen the Chiliasts were visionaries, deluded fools, and what was worse, **literalists**.”<sup>102</sup> Origen holds that the millennialists use Jewish hermeneutics and thereby arrive at a Jewish doctrine. According to Wilken, “Origen presents Christian Chiasm and Jewish Messianism as a single phenomenon. The arguments he uses to answer the one are precisely those that he

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had been a millennium earlier. Anti-Judaism was still prominent in the anti-millennialist views of nineteenth century scholars [e.g. Adolf Harnack, Philip Schaff and W G T Shedd], who repeated all the derogatory epithets of the anti-millennialist Patristic writers, namely that such a doctrine was carnal, pleasure-oriented and materialistic. Their enduring influence must be taken into account when assessing the interpretation of Patristic eschatology by contemporary scholars. Such characterisations of Jewish religion have decreased since the Holocaust, and it would be difficult to maintain such anti-Judaism today. This is one aspect of the social embeddedness of theology, which is not immune to historical and cultural changes.

<sup>99</sup> This intellectual elitism is also found in other authors who assert that those who hold to millennial views are either intellectually deficient, uneducated, or both! The classic example is the opinion of Eusebius concerning the millennial views of Papias. “I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the Apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses. But it was due to him that so many of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion, urging in their support the antiquity of the man; as for instance Irenaeus and anyone that may have proclaimed similar views.” *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39. NPNF 2/1, p. 172. Cf. Jerome’s comments on Papias’ influence with respect to millennialism. *Of Famous Men* 18. NPNF 2/3, p. 367.

<sup>100</sup> Origen. *De Principiis* 2.11.2. ANF 4, p. 297. Bietenhard says of this passage: “We note again the customary charge of Judaism.” H Bietenhard. “The millennial hope of the early church.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953) 20.

<sup>101</sup> It is ironic that the allegorical exegesis of Scripture, which was foundational to Patristic anti-Judaistic polemics, was itself developed by the Alexandrian Jew Philo. The later Patristic writers also used the allegorical method to demonstrate against the Jews that the promises of the OT were not to be understood literally. This was the same allegorising method as their Gnostic opponents, which must have compounded the difficulty of defending the resurrection against an allegorical interpretation, as the Gnostics wished to do. A H C van Eijk. “Resurrection-language: Its various meanings in early Christian literature.” *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975) 276. See also James L Kugel. **The idea of Biblical poetry**, p. 139.

<sup>102</sup> H Bietenhard. “The millennial hope of the early church.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953) 20 (my emphasis).

uses to answer the other.”<sup>103</sup> It is interesting that both millennialists and anti-millennialists attacked Jewish hermeneutics. For instance, Methodius said:

The Jews, who hover about the bare letter of the Scriptures like so-called butterflies about the leaves of vegetables instead of the flowers and fruit as the bee does, understand these words and ordinances to refer to the sort of tabernacles which they build. It is as though God took pleasure in such ephemeral structures as they erect from the branches of trees and decorate, ignorant of the wealth *of the good things to come*. Such structures are as air and ghostly shadows, which foretell the resurrection and the building of our tabernacle once it has collapsed in earth.<sup>104</sup>

The kind of anti-Jewish allegorical reinterpretation of the earthly kingdom which came to dominate the later Patristic writers is seen as early as Tertullian, who attacks a materialistic concept of rewards drawn from the Old Testament, and allegorises the passages concerned.

In this way the Jews lose heavenly blessings, by confining their hopes to earthly ones, being ignorant of the promise of heavenly bread, and of the oil of God’s unction, and the wine of the Spirit, and of that water of life which has its vigour from the vine of Christ. On exactly the same principle, they consider the special soil of Judaea to be that very holy land, which ought rather to be interpreted of the Lord’s flesh, which, in all those who put on Christ, is thenceforth the holy land; holy indeed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, truly flowing with milk and honey by the sweetness of His assurance, truly Judaeian by reason of the friendship of God.<sup>105</sup>

Augustine, who unlike Methodius and Tertullian came to reject millennialism, expressed a similar view. “The cause for Jewish obstinacy according to Augustine is their failure to understand the Old Testament spiritually rather than merely

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<sup>103</sup> R L Wilken. “Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism and the idea of the Holy Land.” *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986) 302. Elsewhere Wilken comments: “Christian chiliasm and Jewish Messianism, however, are two sides of a similar phenomenon. Each envisions a future age in which the people of God will rule securely and will enjoy God’s bounty. The time of peace and prosperity - the future kingdom - will be established in the world as we know it, in this world. Against this view, either in its Jewish or Christian form, Christian writers such as Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Tyconius and Augustine argued for a spiritual kingdom, a heavenly Jerusalem which the saints would enjoy in a transformed existence.” R L Wilken. “The restoration of Israel in Biblical prophecy.” In: **To See Ourselves as Others See Us**, p. 450.

<sup>104</sup> Methodius. *The Symposium* 9.1. ACW 27, p. 132.

<sup>105</sup> Tertullian. *On the resurrection of the flesh* 26. ANF 3, p. 564. Jerome understood the “Holy Land” to mean heaven, and not Palestine. *Letter 129*. NPNF 2/6, p. 260. Augustine refers to the “heavenly Jerusalem” as “the land of promise overflowing with milk and honey.” *Sermon* 259.3. FC 38, p. 371. For a discussion of this image in Jewish thought, see J Duncan M Derrett. “Whatever happened to the land flowing with milk and honey?” *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984) 178-184.

literally.”<sup>106</sup> The fear of Judaizing implicit in the use of a literal interpretation of Scripture is seen in Jerome, who spells out this problem of hermeneutics exactly in his works.

Jerome’s view of the millenium was somewhat of a figurative character, and not well defined. He says more against the millenarian “dreams” of “the circumcision and our Judaizers,” than of his own view on this point. Possibly his reticence is explained by this significant remark: “If we accept [the Apocalypse] literally, [we] must Judaize; if we treat it spiritually, as it is written, we shall seem to go against the opinions of many of the ancients: of the Latins, Tertullian, Victorinus, Lactantius; of the Greeks, that I might pass by the rest, I shall make mention only of Irenaeus.”<sup>107</sup>

Jerome’s opposition to millennialism,<sup>108</sup> which is rooted in the influence of Origen, can be found in his commentary on Daniel, where he interpreted Rome as the last of the four earthly kingdoms to come before the end of the world.<sup>109</sup> There could not therefore be any further earthly kingdoms, including a millennial reign of Christ on earth.

The four kingdoms of which we have spoken above [Daniel 7:25], were earthly in character. *For everything which is of the earth shall return to earth* [Ecclesiastes 3:20]. But the saints shall never possess an earthly kingdom, but only a heavenly. Away, then, with the fable about a millennium!<sup>110</sup>

Jerome says that Papias was dependent on Jewish interpretations of Scripture (the *Mishnah*) for his millennial views, and for Jerome Judaism and millennialism are identical.<sup>111</sup> The future to be hoped for was not a “Jewish” millennium, but a purely

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<sup>106</sup> [Augustine. *In answer to the Jews* 7.9. FC 27, pp. 402-405.]. G B Ladner. “Aspects of Patristic anti-Judaism.” *Viator* 2 (1971) 360-361.

<sup>107</sup> [Jerome. *Commentary on Isaiah*. Preface to Book 18. PL 24, 627]. L E Froom. **The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers**. Vol. 1, p. 448.

<sup>108</sup> See however Lerner’s ironic discussion of the influence of Jerome on mediaeval (Joachimist) millennialism: “The originator of the tradition of expecting a period on earth between the destruction of Antichrist and the Last Judgement was not Joachim but St. Jerome. One might say, of all people St. Jerome, for Jerome was in fact a vitriolic opponent of chiliasm. He equated the literal reading of the thousand-year kingdom in Revelation with fleshly Judaism and went to the trouble of re-writing Victorinus of Pettau’s earlier commentary on Revelation to purge it of its chiliastic passages.” R E Lerner. “Refreshment of the saints: the time after Antichrist as a station for earthly progress in mediaeval thought.” *Traditio* 32 (1976) 101.

<sup>109</sup> R E Lerner. “Refreshment of the saints: the time after Antichrist as a station for earthly progress in mediaeval thought.” *Traditio* 32 (1976) 101. Jerome had also said that the Jews had received their inheritance at the beginning, while Christians expect to receive theirs at the end of the world. This seems to imply that while the Jews had had an earthly kingdom, the Christians would have a non-earthly kingdom. *Homily 2, on Psalm 5*. FC 48, p. 15.

<sup>110</sup> Jerome. *Commentary on Daniel* 7.17. G L Archer, p. 81. Compare the view of Augustine, who unequivocally stated that he did not believe in the resurrection in which the Jews were said to believe, namely a future material life in this world. *Sermon* 362.15.18. Cited in: J E McWilliam Dewart. **Death and Resurrection**, p. 173.

<sup>111</sup> [Jerome. *In Isaiam* 18, proem. *In Jeremiah* 4 (19.10f)] H Bietenhard. “The millennial hope in the early church.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953) 26.

spiritualised eschaton not of this earth. Jerome's anti-millennialism is illustrated by his editorial changes in the commentary on *Revelation* by Victorinus, bishop of Pettau (died 303), which is the earliest surviving commentary in Latin on that book. Earlier comments on *Revelation* had been in Greek.<sup>112</sup> Victorinus had no doubts about the Johannine authorship of the Revelation, and he even states that it was in response to requests from various bishops when he was released from Patmos on the death of Domitian that John wrote his *Gospel*, in refutation of "Valentinus, and Cerinthus, and Ebion, and others of the school of Satan," and he also at that time passed on the *Revelation*.<sup>113</sup>

In his editorial revisions of Victorinus' commentary on the *Apocalypse*,<sup>114</sup> Jerome "removed passages in which the author had expressed chiliastic views, substituting instead excerpts from other writers, who had interpreted the Millennium more in accordance with his own views."<sup>115</sup> The excerpts were especially from Tyconius.<sup>116</sup> Jerome said that his method was to consult earlier writers, "and what I found in their commentaries concerning the millennial reign I added to the work of Victorinus, removing from it what he understood literally."<sup>117</sup> Jerome interpreted the thousand years as extending from the first advent of Christ to the end of the age; a statement incompatible with the rest of the work.<sup>118</sup> An indication of the kind of alterations made can be seen in the following comparison.

By way of illustrating the two resurrections he quotes 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:52. The *trump of God* of the former passage - the signal for the first resurrection - is contrasted with the *last trump* of the other: this, he says, is sounded after the Millennium and heralds the second resurrection.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> F F Bruce. "The earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 (1938) 352.

<sup>113</sup> Victorinus of Pettau. *On the Apocalypse* 10.11-11.1. ANF 7, p. 353. The writings of Victorinus were condemned by Gelasius because of their millennialism. M P McHugh. "Victorinus of Pettau." *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, p. 927.

<sup>114</sup> Victorinus. *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. PLS 1/1, 103-172. Original version in parallel with edited version by Jerome.

<sup>115</sup> F F Bruce. "The earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 (1938) 354.

<sup>116</sup> F F Bruce. "The earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 (1938) 355.

<sup>117</sup> Jerome. *Letter to Anatolius*. PLS 1/1, 103. Translation cited from: F F Bruce. "The earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 (1938) 361.

<sup>118</sup> L E Froom. **The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers**. Vol. 1, p. 344. Cf. Jerome's edited version of Victorinus' commentary, where he says: "Therefore they are not to be heard who assure themselves that there is to be an earthly reign of a thousand years; who think, that is to say, with the heretic Cerinthus. [For the kingdom of Christ is now eternal in the saints, although the glory of the saints shall be manifested after the resurrection]." *On the Apocalypse* 22. ANF 7, p. 360. [PLS 1/1, 172, Recensio Hieronymi. Words in brackets found in CSEL 49, p. 153, but not included in PLS. "Nam regnum Christi quod nunc ait sempiternum erit in sanctis, cum fuerit gloria post resurrectionem manifestata sanctorum."]

<sup>119</sup> F F Bruce. "The earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 (1938) 359-360.

The original text of Victorinus' commentary was as follows:

We have heard a 'trump' mentioned; this is to be observed: in another place the Apostle mentions another trump. He says to the Corinthians: *At the last trump the dead will rise - they will become immortal - and we shall be changed.* He said that the dead for their part will rise immortal for the punishments which they must bear, but it is manifest that we shall be changed and clothed with glory. When therefore we have heard that there is a *last trump*, we must understand that there is a first one also. Now these are the two resurrections. As many therefore as have not risen beforehand in the first resurrection and reigned with Christ over the earth - over all nations - will rise *at the last trump* after a thousand years, that is, in the last resurrection, among the impious and sinners and evildoers of all kinds. Rightly did he go on to say: *Blessed and holy is he who has a part in the first resurrection: against him the second death has not power.* Now the *second death* is punishment in hell.<sup>120</sup>

Victorinus clearly holds the view that the righteous will be raised before the millennium in the first resurrection, and the rest of the dead raised to face the judgement at the end of the millennium; which is a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:4-6. Bruce says that this passage disappears in later recensions to be replaced by an explanation of the first resurrection in terms of Colossians 3:1, that is, it is interpreted as a reference to spiritual renewal experienced in this life.<sup>121</sup> The text as amended by Jerome reads:

There are two resurrections. But the first resurrection is now of the souls that are by the faith, which does not permit men to pass over to the second death. Of this resurrection the apostle says, *If ye have risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.*<sup>122</sup>

Jerome's edition allegorises the millennium, in which the reign of the saints is understood as heavenly, not earthly.

The most significant repudiation of millennialism was perhaps the change of mind on the part of Augustine who had earlier maintained that position,<sup>123</sup> but rejected it in

<sup>120</sup> Victorinus of Pettau. *On the Apocalypse* 20. Cited in: F F Bruce. "The earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 (1938) 360.

<sup>121</sup> F F Bruce. "The earliest Latin commentary on the Apocalypse." *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 (1938) 360.

<sup>122</sup> Victorinus of Pettau. *On the Apocalypse* 20.4-5. ANF 7, p. 359.

<sup>123</sup> Augustine's millennialist views can be found in *Sermon* 259. "The eighth day therefore signifies the new life at the end of the age; the seventh day the future quiet of the saints upon this earth. For the Lord will reign on earth with His saints as the Scriptures say [Revelation 20:4, 6], and will have His Church here, separated and cleansed from all infection of wickedness, where no wicked person will enter..." PL 38, 1197. *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXVIII*, 57.2. PL 40. "...separation takes place at the end of the age, just as it did on the edge of the sea, that is, on the shore [Matthew 13:47, 48], when the righteous reign, at first in time, as it is written in the Apocalypse [Revelation 20:4, 6], and then for ever in the city which is there described [Revelation 21:10-27]." Translations cited from Gerald Bonner.

reaction against Tertullian and Lactantius.<sup>124</sup> The *Rules for investigating and ascertaining the meaning of the Scriptures* composed by Tyconius influenced Augustine to reject the idea that the first resurrection was a bodily one at the eschaton, and he adopted Tyconius' view of the "first resurrection" as a spiritual resurrection in this life.<sup>125</sup> Thus the millennium was allegorised and understood principally as the reign of Christ from heaven in the church.

...through the influence of Tyconius and Augustine it was pushed completely into the background and replaced by another scheme of eschatology, which, since the fifth century, has been regarded more or less as the orthodox teaching.<sup>126</sup>

Another factor was the influence of Eusebius, who saw the kingdom of God fulfilled in the reign of Constantine and the exaltation of the church, and his polemics against millennialism arise from this identification. For him there was no literal **future** millennium to hope for.<sup>127</sup> Any expectation of a new order, even the direct reign of Christ on earth, breaking in to shatter the "Christian" Empire was unthinkable to his Caesaro-papist theology.<sup>128</sup>

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"Augustine and millenarianism." In: **The making of orthodoxy**, pp. 237-238. Augustine refers to his change of mind in *The City of God* 20.7. NPNF 1/2, p. 426. Daniélou says that Augustine first accepted the millennialist tradition, then when he had given thought to it, went beyond it. However, this interpretation must be seen in the light of Daniélou's view that millennialism was an archaic tradition paralysing Christianity that needed to be abandoned. **The Bible and the Liturgy**, p. 276.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Dulaey. **L'Apocalypse. Augustin et Tyconius**, pp. 371-372. In his rejection of millennialism, Augustine was not influenced by Tyconius, who does not give a polemic **against** millennialism, either in the *Rules* or in his *Commentary*. Augustine does not refer to Tyconius in his rejection of millennialism. Dulaey notes the influence of the commentary of Victorinus of Pettau on Augustine but not that of Tyconius, except in one place, which does not refer to the millennium. [Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine* 3.35.51. NPNF 1/2, pp. 571-572] Michael Dulaey. **L'Apocalypse. Augustin et Tyconius**, pp. 371-375.

<sup>125</sup> Augustine. *The City of God* 20.6-7. NPNF 1/2, pp. 425-428.

<sup>126</sup> P Toon. Introduction. **Puritans, the Millennium and the future of Israel**, p. 13.

<sup>127</sup> S N Gundry. "Hermeneutics or *Zeitgeist* as the determining factor in the history of eschatologies." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977) 50-51. Constantinople was seen as an eternal city, the New Rome, that would last to the end of the world, matching the earlier Eternal Rome. A Vasilev. "Medieval ideas of the end of the world, West and East." *Byzantion* 16 (1942-1943) 464-465. There was no place for another city within human history, even in an eschatological phase of that history, such as the New Jerusalem.

<sup>128</sup> It has been suggested that the decline of millennialism can be traced to sociological factors such as the decline in persecution and the increasing prosperity of the church. For instance, Isichei sees millennialism as something espoused by those undergoing persecution or excluded from the mainstream of society, commenting: "It is broadly true to say that in the early church chiliasm flourished in inverse proportion to the prosperity of the Christian community... When the church found a new prosperity under Constantine and his successors, and the simple passage of time changed the Lord's coming to a remote theological hypothesis, chiliasm became progressively discredited." E A Isichei. **Political thinking and social experience**, p. 23. But it is inaccurate to over-emphasise any external influences, such as persecution, as intellectual factors are possibly even more important. Thus Clement of Alexandria and especially Origen were hostile to millennialism, even though they still lived in the period of persecution, and Origen died after suffering imprisonment and torture.

His theme is the fulfillment of the Promise that the chosen people shall exercise territorial rule, and in the empire under Constantine he sees the Promise fulfilled in what was an extension of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, founded by Christ and ruled by Constantine under God. He sees Constantine as chosen by God alone and owing his position in so sense to the will of the people... Holding such a view of human history and its culmination, Eusebius rejected the chiliastic conceptions which were widely held during the two preceding centuries, pointing, as they did, to a very different culmination. The view of many, and among them considerable figures such as Justin and Tertullian, was that the second coming would inaugurate an earthly reign of Christ for a thousand years, a view which was incompatible with Eusebius' own conception of the end of man. For him, the last things had, up to a point, already begun.<sup>129</sup>

The millennial hope was obscured partly because it did not accept that the reign of the Christian Emperor was the fulfillment of human hopes, but looked for another, greater King who was yet to come.

When Rome adopted Christianity, the destinies of *Imperium* and *Christianitas* seemed to have been providentially united; many Christians felt that any expectation of the downfall of the empire was as disloyal to God as it was to Rome. Even more, on an exegetical level apocalypticism appeared to many to be a throwback to an outmoded, "Jewish," literal reading of the Scriptures. The Revelation of John was not to be understood as prophecy of the last events of history, but rather as an allegory of the conflict between good and evil in the present life of the Church.<sup>130</sup>

This is not to say, however, that Eusebius did not anticipate the return of Christ,<sup>131</sup> merely that this was not correlated by him with millennialist expectations concerning

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<sup>129</sup> D S Wallace-Hadrill. **Eusebius of Caesarea**, pp. 186-188. Cf. his comments further on: "It was doubtless not difficult for him to effect a partial abandonment of traditional eschatology. The impact of meta-physical theology upon Christian thought had done as much to discredit the accepted New Testament formulation of the idea as had the mere postponement of the event... Eusebius, nurtured in the tradition of Origen, paid respect to New Testament eschatology while setting his heart on a conception of the end which was radically different... For him, the culminating stage of human history had been reached, and it is this theme which appears throughout his work, gaining conviction as Constantine went from strength to strength." **Eusebius of Caesarea**, p. 189. Cf. also Daniel Stringer. "The political theology of Eusebius Pamphili, Bishop of Caesarea." *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 1 (1982) 140-142.

<sup>130</sup> B McGinn. **Visions of the End**, p. 25. Fredriksen notes that in 397 AD Hilarius expected the descent of the New Jerusalem in less than a century, "despite the benefit of Imperial patronage." P Fredriksen. "Apocalypse and redemption in early Christianity." *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991) 156.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Berkhof's comment: "Over against this future of humankind commencing immediately after death, the future of Christ is secondary... In this spiritualistic and essentially ahistorical system the completion of history can be no more than a supplement." [Dieser unmittelbar nach dem Tode anfangenden Zukunft des Menschen gegenüber, ist die Zukunft Christi sekundär... In diesem spiritualistischen und wesentlich unhistorischen System kann die

the end. According to Thielman, for Eusebius the return of Christ was “a *refutation* of Jewish error. It would give the lie to those Jews who mocked the humility of the Christian Messiah.”<sup>132</sup>

Consistent with rejecting the millennium as an earthly reality, allegorising Patristic writers conceived of the “New Jerusalem” as an ideal, heavenly state. For instance, Clement of Alexandria redefined the “New Jerusalem” with reference to the “Jerusalem that is above” of Galatians 4:26. The new “Jerusalem above,” which Paul refers to in terms of the present age, and the “New Jerusalem” of John’s *Revelation*, which is to descend to earth in the age to come, are the same.<sup>133</sup> But Clement understood the “New Jerusalem” in Platonic terms.

We have heard, too, that the Jerusalem above is walled with sacred stones; and we allow that the twelve gates of the celestial city, by being made like precious stones, indicate the transcendent grace of the apostolic voice. For the colours are laid on in precious stones, and these colours are precious; while the other parts remain of earthy material. With these symbolically, as is meet, the city of the saints, which is spiritually built, is walled. By that brilliancy of stones, therefore, is meant the inimitable brilliancy of the spirit, the immortality and sanctity of being.<sup>134</sup>

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Vollending der Geschichte nie mehr sein als ein Anhang.] H Berkhof. **Die Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea**, p. 158.

<sup>132</sup> F S Thielman. “Another look at the eschatology of Eusebius of Caesarea.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987) 235. Eusebius held that Christianity was a return to the true religion of the Patriarchs, and that Judaism was a decline from that as a result of the laws of God given to Moses for the sake of the Jews. “The one wrote on lifeless tables, the Other wrote the perfect commandments of the new covenant on living minds.” *The proof of the Gospel* 1.8. Translations of Christian Literature. Vol. 1, p. 48. See H Berkhof. **Die Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea**, p. 109. Thus Eusebius thinks of these “last times” as the time of the end of the Jewish people. Eusebius. *Proof of the Gospel* 8.1. Translations of Christian Literature, Vol. 2, p. 109. M Werner. **The Formation of Christian Dogma**, p. 37. His “realised eschatology” means that Eusebius does not seek a geographical “new nation.”

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Irenaeus. “Now all these things being such as they are, cannot be understood in reference to super-celestial matters; “for God,” it is said, “will show to the whole earth that is under heaven thy glory.” But in the times of the kingdom, the earth has been called again by Christ [to its pristine condition], and Jerusalem rebuilt after the pattern of the Jerusalem above, of which the prophet Isaiah says, *Behold, I have depicted thy walls upon my hands, and thou art always in my sight*. And the apostle, too, writing to the Galatians, says in like manner, *But the Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all*.” *Against Heresies* 5.35.2. ANF 1, pp. 565-566.

<sup>134</sup> Clement of Alexandria. *The Instructor* 2.13, p. 268. A number of Patristic writers thought that the dead raised at the crucifixion [Matthew 27:52-53] entered the **heavenly** Jerusalem. Origen stresses that those who came out of the tombs were to go into “the city which is truly holy - not the Jerusalem which Jesus wept over - and there appear unto many.” *Commentary on Matthew* 12.43. ANF 10, p. 473. *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3.13. ACW 26, p. 238. Rufinus. *Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed* 29. ACW 20, pp. 62-63. Eusebius. *Proof of the Gospel* 4.12. Translations of Christian Literature, Vol. 1, p. 186. By contrast, Leo the Great said that these “tokens of the coming resurrection” appeared in the “holy city, that is, in the church of God.” *Sermon* 66.3. **Select Sermons of St. Leo the Great on the Incarnation**, p. 62. John Cassian speaks of entering “the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem.” *Institutes* 5.18. NPNF 2/11, p. 240.

But the consequences of the “allegorising” of the New Jerusalem can be seen in the following comment by Pawlikowski.

Christian faith must always remain firmly implanted in the earth. Far too often concentration on the “heavenly Jerusalem” as a supposed replacement for the Jewish “earthly Jerusalem” has led to an excessively ethereal spirituality in the churches.<sup>135</sup>

However, this view of Clement’s concerning the New Jerusalem is found again in Origen,<sup>136</sup> and it was this allegorical interpretation which eventually predominated. The “realised eschatology” of Eusebius interpreted many of the events which earlier generations had expected to be fulfilled in the future as fulfilled already. The kingdom of Christ was understood to be the reign of Christ in the church, not an earthly “political” reign in Jerusalem. Thus Eusebius understood the “New Jerusalem” in realised terms. In the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates, the church built by Helena, Constantine’s mother, over the place of the crucifixion, was called the “New Jerusalem, having built it facing that old and deserted city.”<sup>137</sup> Eusebius in a fit of excess suggested that the newly built church was “that second and new Jerusalem spoken of in the predictions of the prophets.”<sup>138</sup> One of the reasons for the rejection of the New Jerusalem as an earthly city is perhaps the spectre of Montanism, which purportedly expected the new Jerusalem to descend in Pepuza in Phrygia.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> John T Pawlikowski. “The Re-Judaization of Christianity: Its impact on the Church and its implications for the Jewish people.” *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989) 65. This can be seen in the thought of Eusebius, who said: “Moses, too, promised a holy land and a holy life therein under a blessing to those who kept his laws: while Jesus Christ says likewise: ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,’ promising a far better land in truth, and a holy and godly, not the land of Judæa, which in no way excels the rest (of the earth), but the heavenly country which suits souls that love God, to those who follow out the life proclaimed by Him.” *The proof of the Gospel* 3.2. Translations of Christian Literature. Vol. 1, p. 105.

<sup>136</sup> Origen. *Commentary on Matthew* 12.20. ANF 10, p. 462. Elsewhere Origen refers the “new heaven and the new earth” to the resurrection. *Commentary on John* 10.20. ANF 10, pp. 400-401.

<sup>137</sup> Socrates. *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17. NPNF 2/2, p. 21. Cf. also 1.33. NPNF 2/2, p. 32.

<sup>138</sup> Eusebius. *Life of Constantine* 3.33. NPNF 2/1, p. 529.

<sup>139</sup> This view has been critiqued by D Powell, who has shown that there is no evidence the Montanists expected the New Jerusalem to descend at Pepuza. Rather, Pepuza **and** Tymion were named “Jerusalem” as a “recreation of the highly organized but Spirit-directed primitive church.” Powell also doubts whether Tertullian was ever a Montanist. “Tertullianists and Cataphrygians.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975) 44. Cf. the comments of G L Bray. “Tertullian says nothing and quotes nothing which is *distinctively* Montanist; in particular, the descent of the New Jerusalem at Pepuza is never mentioned. What he says about eschatology may have affinities with Montanism, but it is also paralleled in other Christian writers of undoubted orthodoxy, and Tertullian’s chiliasm is rather moderate when compared with that of Irenaeus, for example.” **Holiness and the will of God**, p. 61. Similarly J F Jansen says that Tertullian only uses Montanist prophetic sayings as illustrations of his view and supports for biblical revelation, but which do not add to that revelation but clarifies it. “Tertullian and the New Testament.” *Second Century* 2 (1982) 195. Even J Daniélou admits that “Tertullian bases what he has to say exclusively on Ezekiel 48:30-35 and Revelation 21:12-13 (*Adv. Marc.* 3.24.3-4).” His views are also related to his criticism of allegorical interpretations (*De res.* 26.1). **A History of Early Christian Doctrine**. Vol. 3, p. 144. D I Rankin asserts that

Gregory of Nyssa said that the important pilgrimage is not out of Cappadocia to Palestine, but out of the body towards God.<sup>140</sup> Similarly Jerome wrote that seeing Jerusalem did not confer any spiritual advantage over those who had not seen Jerusalem - access to God was as possible in Britain as it was in Jerusalem, since “the kingdom of God is within you.”<sup>141</sup> Similarly, in his *Conferences* John Cassian quotes the Abbot Moses who describes the new Jerusalem in allegorical terms. The “kingdom of God” he says is joy and gladness, as well as peace and righteousness. He qualifies his statement by saying that it is not just “joy” that is the kingdom of God, but “joy in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>142</sup> He goes on to specify more closely what he means by the kingdom of God.

In fact the kingdom of heaven must be taken in a threefold sense, either that the heavens shall reign, i.e. the saints over other things subdued, according to this text, *Be thou over five cities, and thou over ten*; and this which is said to the disciples: *You shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*; or that the heavens themselves shall begin to be reigned over by Christ, when *all things are subdued unto Him*, and God begins to be *all in all*; or else that the saints shall reign in heaven with the Lord.<sup>143</sup>

The allegorising of the New Jerusalem is rooted in the dualistic anthropology which placed the emphasis increasingly on the blessedness of the immortal soul, and not on the renewal of the earth and the resurrection life.<sup>144</sup>

Because the anti-millennial Patristic writers did not seem to appreciate the Old Testament emphasis on the goodness of creaturely life on earth, with its promise of cosmic redemption in association with the resurrection (the new heavens and new earth),<sup>145</sup> this was replaced in their theology with a Hellenistic yearning for release from this earth to a completely “spiritual” plane free from fleshliness and matter.<sup>146</sup>

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Tertullian always remained within the Catholic church. “Was Tertullian a schismatic?” *Prudentia* 18 (1986) 73-79.

<sup>140</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *On pilgrimages*. NPNF 2/5, p. 383.

<sup>141</sup> Jerome. *Letter* 58. NPNF 2/6, p. 120. Ferguson comments that the interiorization of the “kingdom of God,” found first in Origen [*On prayer* 25. ACW 19, pp. 84-87], accompanies the change from a general eschatology to an individual eschatology. E Ferguson. “The Kingdom of God in early patristic literature.” In: **The interpretation of the kingdom of God**, pp. 198-199.

<sup>142</sup> John Cassian. *Conferences* 1.13. NPNF 2/11, pp. 300-301.

<sup>143</sup> John Cassian. *Conferences* 1.13. NPNF 2/11, p. 301.

<sup>144</sup> The allegorical interpretation of the New Jerusalem is also found in Hilary of Poitiers [*Tractate in Psalm* 121.4. PL 9, 662c] and Ambrose [*Expositionis in Lucam* 10.19. PL 15, 1809a]. Ambrose says to the dead Valentinian: “Hasten with all speed to that great Jerusalem, the city of the saints.” *On the death of Valentinian* 65. FC 22, p. 292. Similarly, he says that “Theodosius hastened to enter upon this rest and to go into the city of Jerusalem...” *On the death of Theodosius* 31. FC 22, p. 321.

<sup>145</sup> See Donald E Gowan. **Eschatology in the Old Testament**, pp. 109-118.

<sup>146</sup> McDannell and Lang describe the heaven of which Augustine and Monica had a foretaste in a mystical experience [*Confessions* 9.10.23-24. NPNF 1/1, p. 137], as “the hereafter of

The latter view was seen to be in opposition to “Jewish” eschatology: the millennium which included a resurrection life on this earth. This was seen as a materialistic, carnal and unspiritual, rather repugnant doctrine. The resurrection life would surely be one of heavenly reward, not earthly pleasure. Such views were associated with fleshliness, as such a millennial life would necessarily involve, in the eyes of many, eating and drinking and in particular, marriage.<sup>147</sup>

## 7.2 The spiritual interpretation of the “first resurrection”

The “first resurrection” of Revelation 20:5-6 was understood by anti-millennialist writers as an intellectual, sacramental or spiritual rising at baptism, an idea which sometimes strangely parallels the Gnostic notions of resurrection through baptism or knowledge of doctrine.<sup>148</sup> This idea was found in Origen,<sup>149</sup> and later developed by Tyconius and Augustine. Tyconius rejects the idea of a resurrection of the righteous prior to the millennium, and a separate resurrection of the rest of the dead for the judgement. He maintains there will be but one resurrection in which all are raised, and he interprets the “first resurrection” as

...the growth of the church where, justified by faith, they are raised from the dead bodies of their sins through baptism to the service of eternal life, but the second, the general resurrection of all men in the flesh.<sup>150</sup>

Thus instead of two bodily resurrections, Tyconius sees the first resurrection as a spiritual event, while the second resurrection is that of all the dead prior to the judgement.<sup>151</sup> Tyconius uses Daniel 12:2 and John 5:25-29 to prove that there will be a general resurrection of all the dead, including the wicked, to face the judgement. The influence of Tyconius through the writings of Augustine contributed significantly to the complete eclipse of the millennialist understanding of the resurrection and

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platonizing Greek philosophy.” Another consequence of this experience was that Monica no longer cared to live, and within a fortnight she was dead [*Confessions* 9.10.26-9.11.27-28. NPNF 1/1, p. 138]. **Heaven: A history**, p. 56.

<sup>147</sup> For a curious and illuminating study of this latter theme see B Lang. “The sexual life of the saints. Towards an anthropology of Christian heaven.” *Religion* 17 (1987) 149-171. Also B Lang. “No sex in heaven: the logic of procreation, death and eternal life in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.” In: **Melanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M Mathias Delchor**, pp. 237-253.

<sup>148</sup> L Boliek. **The resurrection of the flesh**, p. 23. Cf. Clement of Alexandria who speaks of the Lord “raising up those who have wandered in error,” and cites in this connection Ephesians 5:4. *Exhortation to the Heathen* 9. ANF 2, p. 196.

<sup>149</sup> L Hennessey. “The place of saints and sinners after death.” In: **Origen of Alexandria: His world and his legacy**, pp. 300-301. One reason Origen is able to accept a spiritual interpretation of the resurrection is that he sees it already “interpreted” in such a way in the Bible. Referring to the gospels, Origen says that “the resurrection is in a manner Jesus, for Jesus says: ‘I am the resurrection’.” *Commentary on John* 1.10. ANF 10, p. 302. Cf. *Commentary on John* 1.41. ANF 10, p. 319.

<sup>150</sup> Gennadius. *Lives of famous men*, 18. NPNF 2/3, p. 389. While Gennadius comments at length on the views of Tyconius concerning the resurrection, he says nothing about his Donatism.

<sup>151</sup> Tyconius. *The Book of Rules*. W S Babcock, pp. 63, 65.

judgement, and it paved the way for the dominance of immediate individualistic eschatology, by interpreting the “first resurrection” as spiritual regeneration, in which we are justified, while the second resurrection is that of the body at the end of the age.<sup>152</sup> The first resurrection takes place in this life, and only those who are to be “eternally blessed” have a part in it. All the dead have a part in the second resurrection, which is a resurrection of judgement, in which everyone will be judged in the flesh.<sup>153</sup> Augustine understands the “first Resurrection” of Revelation 20 to be the renewal of the image of God in baptism which corrects the death of the soul as a result of sin, namely its separation from God, through the “resurrection of the soul.”<sup>154</sup>

Augustine changed to a “realised” eschatology which saw the reign of Christ as taking place now in the church. This can be seen in Tyconius.

Instead of two literal resurrections, Tichonius makes the first resurrection spiritual, that of the soul, as hinted by Origen, and the second corporeal, that of the body. The first is of those awakened by baptism from the deadness of sin to eternal life, and the second is the general, literal resurrection of all flesh. Consequently, he denies the reign of the literally resurrected saints for a thousand years after the second advent. Thus Tichonius spiritualizes the resurrection and secularises the millenium.<sup>155</sup>

This allegorical approach to the doctrine of the resurrection is followed later by Augustine, as well as others, who sees the resurrection not as an eschatological event of bodily renewal, but a present event of spiritual renewal and deliverance from sin. The consequences of this non-historical approach to the millennium can be seen in Augustine’s thought.

The theory of the spiritual, allegorical first resurrection lies at the foundation of Augustine’s structure - the resurrection of dead souls from the death of sin to the life of righteousness... So, according to Augustine, there is a single, simultaneous physical resurrection of all men at the last day, instead of a first and a second literal resurrection. Once this thesis was accepted, the historical millennialism was, of course, vanquished.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. the views of Gregory of Nyssa. “...without the laver of regeneration [baptism] it is impossible for the man to be in the resurrection; but in saying this I do not regard the mere remoulding and refashioning of our composite body; for towards this it is absolutely necessary that our human nature should advance, being constrained thereto by its own laws according to the dispensation of Him Who has so ordained, whether it have the grace of the laver, or whether it remains without that initiation: but I am thinking of the restoration to a blessed and divine condition, separated from all shame and sorrow.” *The Great Catechism* 35. NPNF 2/5, p. 504.

<sup>153</sup> Augustine. *The City of God* 20.6. NPNF 1/2, p. 425.

<sup>154</sup> [Augustine. *The City of God* 20.6. NPNF 1/2, pp. 425-426. *Tractate in John* 23.6, 13-15. NPNF 1/7, pp. 152-153, 156-157] Kari E Börresen. “Augustin, interprète du dogme de la résurrection.” *Studia Theologica* 23 (1969) 148.

<sup>155</sup> L E Froom. **The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers**. Vol. 1, p. 470.

<sup>156</sup> L E Froom. **The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers**. Vol. 1, pp. 479-480.

The millennium is intrinsically linked with belief in a physical, bodily resurrection, and a truly redemptive-historical theology, and not a spiritualising approach which renders creational life otiose. Denial of the millennium is therefore denial of the resurrection, and vice versa. The espousal of a spiritualised resurrection by Augustine, a doctrine which shaped the rest of the Patristic period and beyond, thus left no room for an earthly millennial reign, and the millennium itself was reinterpreted to refer to the reign of Christ in the Church. In this context, the spiritual resurrection made sense; but at the expense of a cosmic eschatology which anticipated the renewal of all things in Christ.

### 7.3 The eternal life of the soul in heaven

Those who rejected the millennium held that the saints would instead enjoy eternal life in heaven.<sup>157</sup> Eusebius emphasised the transition from earthly life to heavenly life, with little awareness of the resurrection evident. He describes the death of Helena, mother of Constantine, in the following way:

...to those who rightly discerned the truth, the thrice blessed one seemed not to die, but to experience a real change and transition from an earthly to a heavenly existence, since her soul, remoulded as it were into an incorruptible and angelic essence, was received up into her Saviour's presence.<sup>158</sup>

Similarly, Constantine was said by Eusebius to have been translated "from a transitory kingdom to that endless life which he has laid up in store for the souls of his saints..."<sup>159</sup>

McClain apparently approves of Origen whom he says was influential in stamping out millennialism in the East. As a result, the Cappadocian fathers held that the souls of the righteous immediately enter heaven after death. He states that "the error was more long-lived" in the West, and cites the view of Hilary of Poitiers, who held that the just are gathered into Abraham's bosom, until the day arrives for their entry to heaven. Similarly Ambrose refused to admit souls to heaven until the resurrection, apart from the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs.<sup>160</sup> Jerome on the other hand "appears quite orthodox" and did not seem to have taught there was any delay in the just soul's

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<sup>157</sup> However, a curious view was expressed in a commentary on *Revelation* by Oecumenius, who rejects the millennium as "a notion of 'the godless Greeks' that smacks of the Platonist theory of the transmigration of souls." But he expected a new heaven and new earth, when the saints will be with Christ forever in heaven, the wicked will be punished, and baptised believers "halfway between virtue and vice" who will remain on earth without further punishment. Brian E Daley. **The hope of the early Church**, pp. 180-181.

<sup>158</sup> Eusebius. *Life of Constantine* 3.46. NPNF 2/1, p. 531.

<sup>159</sup> Eusebius. *Life of Constantine* 1.9. NPNF 2/1, p. 484.

<sup>160</sup> [Gregory of Nyssa. *The Beatitudes* 8. ACW 18, pp. 173-174. "Let us therefore not be depressed, my brethren, if we are deprived of earthly things. For if a man is released from these, he lives in the palaces of Heaven... when we depart from here, we shall be translated to Heaven." Cf. also *The Lord's Prayer* 4. ACW 18, p. 61. "...in the restoration of all, this earthly flesh will be translated into the heavenly places together with the soul. As the Apostle says, *We shall be taken up in the clouds to meet the Lord, into the air, and so shall we be always with the Lord.*" Cf. also Hilary of Poitiers. *In Psalms* 120.16. PL 9, 660. Ambrose. *Death as a good* 10.47. FC 65, p. 103] J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 16.

entrance to heaven.<sup>161</sup> Augustine is ambiguous on this point, and states both opinions at different times.<sup>162</sup> In his *Retractationes* he revisits the problem, and says:

But who those blessed ones are, who are already in possession of that to which this life leads, is a great problem. That the holy angels are there is indeed unquestionable. But whether holy men who are dead are in possession of this happiness is rightly questioned. They have indeed gone out of the corruptible flesh which weighs down the soul; but they await, even they, the restoration of their body, and their flesh is at rest in hope; it does not yet shine in the future incorruption.<sup>163</sup>

According to McClain, Gregory the Great is the first to treat the question at length “and with unimpeachable orthodoxy.”<sup>164</sup> The righteous dead prior to Christ could not enter heaven, but now the Redeemer has come the righteous can enter heaven immediately after death. He expresses this explicitly in his commentary on Job.

But mark, forasmuch as we have been redeemed by the grace of our Maker, we henceforth have this boon of heavenly bestowal, that when we are removed from dwelling in our flesh, we are at once carried off to receive heavenly rewards; in that since our Creator and Redeemer, penetrating the bars of hell, brought out from thence the souls of the Elect, He does not permit us to go there, from whence He has already by descending set others free. But they who were brought into this world before His coming, whatsoever eminency of righteousness they may have had, could not on being divested of the body at once be admitted into the bosom of the heavenly country; seeing that He had not as yet come, Who by His own descending should unloose the bars of hell, and place the souls of the righteous henceforth in their everlasting seat.<sup>165</sup>

In another part of this commentary, Gregory cites 2 Corinthians 5:1 as proof that those who preach the gospel immediately enter heaven after death.<sup>166</sup> Similarly in the *Dialogues* Gregory uses Luke 17:37 to demonstrate that the righteous dead will be

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<sup>161</sup> [Jerome. *Letter 23.3. Letter 39.3.*] J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 17. Others who say that the saints enter heaven immediately after death, and remain there for eternity include Julius Firmicus Maternus [*The error of the pagan religions* 19.7. ACW 37, pp. 86-87] and Sulpitius Severus [*Letter to the Deacon Aurelius*. NPNF 2/11, p. 20].

<sup>162</sup> [The just enter heaven immediately: Augustine. *The City of God* 20.9. *On the Psalms* 119.6. *Confessions* 9.3.6. The just enter heaven after the resurrection. *The City of God* 12.9. *Enchiridion* 109-110. *On the Psalms* 37.10. *On the Psalms* 37.27] J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 17.

<sup>163</sup> Augustine. *Retractationes* 1.13.3. Translation cited in: J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 18.

<sup>164</sup> J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 19.

<sup>165</sup> Gregory the Great. *Morals on Job* 13.43.48. LF 21, p. 113.

<sup>166</sup> [Gregory the Great. *Morals on Job* 4.29.56.] J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 21.

with Christ after death. McClain asserts that Gregory stated this opinion in his *Dialogues* to refute the opinion still being maintained that the souls of the righteous do not enter heaven until the resurrection.<sup>167</sup> Gregory also asserts that the souls of the wicked are already being punished. If the souls of the righteous are in heaven, then it follows that the souls of the wicked are in hell, on the basis of God's justice which demands both conditions.<sup>168</sup> This argument does not deal with how sinners can be punished before the judgement, but asserts it is so on the basis of the logic of God's justice, who would not reward the righteous while leaving the wicked unpunished.

*Peter:* If the souls of the just are already in heaven, what is it that they will receive on the day of judgement as a reward for their sanctity?  
*Gregory:* In the judgement, this increase will be theirs: now only their souls, but after-wards even their bodies will enjoy beatitude. They will rejoice in the very flesh in which they suffered sorrows and torments for the Lord. Of this two-fold joy, it is written: *they shall possess double in their land* [Isaiah 61:7]. And it is written of the souls of the just even before the day of the resurrection: and there was given to *each of them a white robe; and they were told to rest a little while longer; until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete* [Apocalypse 6:11]. Those, therefore, who now receive one robe, will have two robes in the judgement, because now they have only the glory of their souls, but then they will be made happy by the glory of their souls and bodies at the same time.<sup>169</sup>

McClain claims that the source for the confusion among early Patristic writers over when the soul entered heaven was the doctrine of millennialism. He sees millennialism as springing from Jewish eschatology combined with the temporal application of the teaching of Christ on the kingdom of God, aspects of Pauline thought, and a too literal interpretation of *Revelation* 19-22. McClain states that even after the decline of millennialism as a significant influence, certain writers continued to hold that the soul did not enter heaven immediately after death. His negative assessment of millennialism is seen in his comment that even those writers who openly resisted millennialism sometimes still "suffered from its influences."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> [Gregory the Great. *Dialogues* 4.26.] J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, pp. 21-22. This passage is declared genuine by Clark, **The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues**, vol. 2, pp. 547-548.

<sup>168</sup> [Gregory the Great. *Dialogues* 4.29.] J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 16. This passage is declared genuine by Clark. **The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues**. Vol. 2, p. 550.

<sup>169</sup> Gregory the Great. *Dialogues* 4.26. Translation cited in: J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 100. Clark states that while the reply is a genuine Gregorian text, the question is spurious. **The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues**. Vol. 2, pp. 547-548. However, it is included here to clarify the logic of the discussion. McClain notes that the same thought appears in almost identical words in *Morals on Job* Preface 10.20, and 35.14.25 [LF 31, p. 678]. *Ibid.*, p. 100, note 61.

<sup>170</sup> J P McClain. **The doctrine of heaven in the writings of Saint Gregory the Great**, p. 13 and n. 1.

Those who say that it is only after the resurrection that the saints are taken into heaven include Leo the Great, who says that it is “the resurrection that is prepared for the faithful” which will raise them “to participate in the heavenly Kingdom,”<sup>171</sup> and Paulinus of Nola, who says that Isaiah [40:6-8] “longs rather for the surroundings in which the glory of the renewed body can remain eternal after the resurrection.”<sup>172</sup> He speaks for instance of the Queen of Sheba as “accounted worthy” of “the reward of blessed resurrection in heaven.”<sup>173</sup> He holds that this takes place after the resurrection and the judgement of the living and the dead,<sup>174</sup> when we will be granted immortality by Christ.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, Theodoret says that the saints will be “taken up to heaven at the time of the resurrection.”<sup>176</sup> Augustine held that the “spiritual body” is not one changed into spirit but “one which has been made subject to spirit in such wise that it is adapted to a heavenly habitation.”<sup>177</sup>

#### 7.4 The redundancy of the resurrection body

A problem which arises for those who believe that the saints spend eternity in heaven is the purpose of the resurrection of the body. Surely it is unnecessary for the saints to have a physical body in heaven, a spiritual realm? But since Scripture clearly teaches the resurrection of the physical body, an explanation of its purpose was required.

A question that will become acute in Augustine - the reason for the presence of the risen body in heaven - is implicit in this treatise [Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima*]. Macrina speaks in so disparaging a manner of the earthly body that the reader wonders if anything other than the Church’s teaching impels her to find a place for it - no matter how changed - in the afterlife. To put it plainly, what use and function will the body serve there?<sup>178</sup>

In his commentary on Genesis, Augustine asks:

But why must the spirits of the departed be reunited with their bodies in the resurrection, if they can be admitted to the supreme beatitude without their bodies? This is a problem that may trouble some, but it is too difficult to be answered with complete satisfaction in this essay.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Leo the Great. *Sermon 22.5*. NPNF 2/12, p. 131. Leo says that the earth which the meek shall inherit [Matthew 5:5] is in fact “the flesh of the saints... in a happy resurrection” which they shall enjoy in “our heavenly dwelling.” *Sermon 95.5*. NPNF 2/12, p. 204. Matthew 5:5 is interpreted in a similar way by Maximus the Confessor. *Commentary on the Our Father 4*. Classics of Western Spirituality, pp. 107-108.

<sup>172</sup> Paulinus of Nola. *Letter 25.6*. ACW 36, p. 76.

<sup>173</sup> Paulinus of Nola. *Letter 5.2*. ACW 35, p. 54. In another place Paulinus says that “with body entire we enter the realms of heaven, leaving empty the secret vault of the tomb covered by the empty soil.” *Poem 5*. ACW 40, pp. 35-36.

<sup>174</sup> Paulinus of Nola. *Letter 37.6*. ACW 36, p. 182.

<sup>175</sup> Paulinus of Nola. *Letter 38.1*. ACW 36, p. 185. Cf. *Letter 6.3*. ACW 35, p. 71.

<sup>176</sup> Theodoret. *On Divine Providence 5.12*. ACW 49, p. 63.

<sup>177</sup> Augustine. *On faith and the creed 6.13*. NPNF 1/3, p. 326.

<sup>178</sup> Joanne E McWilliam Dewart. **Death and Resurrection**, p. 156.

<sup>179</sup> Augustine. *The literal meaning of Genesis 12.35.68*. ACW 42, p. 228.

The problem is the beatitude of the soul does not seem to require the body, as it is with the spiritual vision that we behold God, not the physical eyes. The problem arose from prior acceptance of a Platonic anthropology, in which the intellectual soul contemplates the eternal ideas. While the eyes of the spiritual body are glorified, can they even then see the pure spiritual nature of God? Augustine's ideas on this subject changed over time. He held in 408 that God, as an incorporeal being, could not be seen by the eyes of the body, but only by the spiritual soul. The "image of God" in the soul is the basis of the capacity for this vision. Renewal of the image [Colossians 3:10] renders the soul capable of knowing God.<sup>180</sup> In 413, Augustine said that we see God as do the angels, by an interior vision of the spirit.<sup>181</sup> According to the *Retractationes*, it is in *The City of God* that we find the solution Augustine considered the best; the indirect vision perceived by the corporeal eyes of the resurrected body. We will see God active in the visible, renewed world, just as we now see with the eyes, through the exterior manifestations of their life, the activities of another person.<sup>182</sup> But why does the soul long for the body?

He allows that it is the case that souls cannot enjoy the beatific vision without the body, as angels can, but he is evidently perplexed as to why this should be so. Maybe, he suggests, it is because souls retain a natural desire to be reunited with their bodies, which prevents them from giving themselves up totally to the delights of heaven. Earlier still, without addressing the question directly, he had rather implied that it was only the presence of the body which hindered the soul from giving itself entirely to the enjoyment of truth, so that death was precisely what it most desired. In the *Retractationes* he still seems willing to leave it as a "big question" whether souls before the resurrection can enjoy the face to face vision of God. Augustine's difficulty is a real one, as we have already noted: it is not easy to make sense of souls being kept waiting in incomplete bliss or punishment.<sup>183</sup>

Augustine suggests that when the soul is again in perfect control of a body subjected completely to it, the soul will be satisfied and will not be distracted from the contemplation of God, as it would be if it was still yearning to manage the body,

<sup>180</sup> [Augustine. *Letter* 147.15.37. PL 33, 612-613. *Letter* 92.3. NPNF 1/1, p. 380-381] Kari E Børresen. "Augustin, interprète du dogme de la résurrection." *Studia Theologica* 23 (1969) 152.

<sup>181</sup> [Augustine. *Letter* 148, to Fortunatianus. NPNF 1/1, pp. 498-503] Kari E Børresen. "Augustin, interprète du dogme de la résurrection." *Studia Theologica* 23 (1969) 152.

<sup>182</sup> [Augustine. *Retractations* 2.67. *The City of God* 22.29. NPNF 1/2, pp. 507-509] Kari E Børresen. "Augustin, interprète du dogme de la résurrection." *Studia Theologica* 23 (1969) 152. In contrast to Augustine, Irenaeus holds that the *visio Dei* is granted to the resurrected person, and thus affirms the goodness of creaturely bodily life, against the Gnostics who hold that it is escape from bodiliness that we should aspire to. "For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God. For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God." *Against Heresies* 4.20.7. ANF 1, p. 490.

<sup>183</sup> Simon Tugwell. **Human immortality and the redemption of death**, pp. 116-117.

which is a normal task the soul seeks to satisfy.<sup>184</sup> The body is not in itself essential for eternal bliss, and thus the purpose of the resurrection is not for the sake of the body, but to satisfy the soul. This can be seen in the question Augustine put to Paulinus of Nola, asking his opinion as to “what the activity of the blessed will be in the next world, after the resurrection of the body.” Paulinus perhaps wisely declines to speculate on this subject, and instead stresses the importance of our spiritual walk in this world, doing what God wills, and thereby we “anticipate the dissolution of the flesh with a voluntary departure, retiring from the life of this world.”<sup>185</sup>

## 7.5 Conclusion

There was little chance for the earlier eschatological conception to survive the onslaught of a predominant allegorising hermeneutic, a fear of Judaistic influences, a theology which failed to take this earth seriously, and an introspective, ascetic spirituality. The church was moving inexorably away from creation-affirming, resurrection-centred eschatology, towards a mystical, other-worldly and spiritualised eschatology. Eventually the influence of Augustine prevailed, and the millennium came to be identified with the present rule of Christ, not with a future eschatological state.

Anti-Judaism was bolstered by the misconception that an earthly focus for eschatology was materialistic, carnal and pleasure-oriented. The Jews were falsely seen as desiring such a future kingdom through characterising them as pleasure-seeking, in contrast to the spiritual character of the ascetic Christian. The anti-Judaism which lies at the root of the repudiation of millennialism in the early Church is by no means extinct.

Through dismissing the expectation of the renewal of the heavens and the earth, as the locus of the eschatological life, attention shifted to an ethereal conception of heaven, and the blessed life of the soul. Much of the Patristic thought on this subject was rooted in speculation, together with the influence of pagan mythological ideas.

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<sup>184</sup> Augustine. *The literal meaning of Genesis* 12.35.68. ACW 42, pp. 228-229.

<sup>185</sup> Paulinus of Nola. *Letter* 45.4. ACW 36, p. 248.