

Overview of Postmillennialism

There are three broad schools of thought regarding eschatology:

Premillennialism believes that the return of Christ will be prior to the reign of Christ on earth. This view believes in a future period of tribulation and a rapture of the church.

Amillennialism believes that there is no earthly kingdom.

Postmillennialism believes that as the coming of Christ approaches, Christ through the church will be bringing a long period of peace and righteousness.

The word "millennium" comes from the Latin words "mille" (thousand) and "annus" (year). So it is apparent how each system is named, depending upon when the millennium occurs.

Description of Postmillennialism

This view holds that "the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world is eventually to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the "millennium" (L. Boettner in The Millennium).

The difference between postmillennialists and amillennialists is that postmillennialists believe the time before the second coming of Christ is a glorious triumph of the church.

Doctrine Distinctives of Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists believe that God will work through the church to bring about the millennium on earth by fulfilling the Great Commission. At the end of the millennium, Christ will return, followed by a general resurrection of the dead and judgment.

The length of the Millennium is not necessarily 1,000 years, probably much longer. It will be a time of peace where Christian principles will dominate the earth and sin will be greatly reduced.

Postmillennialists believe the condition of the world is improving. Certain examples are cited:

- Social conditions are improving (ex. women)
- The money given to the church is growing
- The Bible is the best-selling book in the world
- The gospel is moving out further than ever

History of Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism began with the writings of Daniel Whitby (d. 1726), who was an Anglican clergyman. He believed that after the world was converted, the Jews would be restored to the Holy Land and then Christ would return. Whitby's writings on the Trinity were publicly burned and he was denounced as a heretic.

Whitby's popularity persuaded Jonathon Edwards who then influenced such Presbyterian stalwarts as Charles Hodge to postmillennialism. Jonathon Edwards (d.1758) considered the First Great Awakening to be the coming of the Millennium which would prepare the world for Christ's return.

Liberal scholars who believe the world is getting better by the power of man joined the camp of postmillennialism with their more conservative counterparts.

This system of eschatology began to fade as the twentieth century arrived. By the First World War, many became convinced that the world was not improving and postmillennialism fell out of favor to the point where it had practically no adherents.

Recently however, postmillennialism has been growing in popularity as some amillennialists have become attracted to postmillennialism under their belief in theonomy, which is discussed below.

Types of Postmillennialism

1. Liberal Postmillennialism

This view promotes the world as getting better through humanism rather than through the power of God and His Word.

2. Classic Postmillennialism

This view taught that the millennium is between the first and second coming of Christ and is introduced through the preaching of the gospel by the church.

Most viewed the millennium as coming at the latter part of the age between the first and second coming. A few viewed the millennium as being the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, only that the world is getting better.

3. Theonomic Postmillennialism

This view, also known as "reconstructionism" or "dominion theology", has become popularized in recent years through the writings of R.J. Rushdoony and several of his followers. This view believes that the millennium will come through the preaching of the gospel and the imposition of the Old Testament Law.

Theonomy (meaning "law of God") sees no distinction between the church and Israel and therefore believes the whole Mosaic structure is operative for today (in contrast to Dispensation-alism).

Furthermore, theonomists believe it is the duty of the church to bring civil powers into subjection to God's law, with its precepts and penalties.

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

As reconstructionist David Chilton writes:

"The Christian goal for the world is the universal development of biblical theocratic republics, in which every area of life is redeemed and placed under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the rule of God's law."

"The garden of Eden, the Mountain of the Lord will be restored in history, before the second coming, by the power of the gospel and the desert will rejoice and blossom as the rose (Isaiah 35:1)".

"The entire Gentile world will be converted to faith in Jesus Christ. The mass of the Gentiles will come into the covenant until the conversion of the Gentiles reaches the point of "fullness".

"As the gospel progresses throughout the world it will win, and win, and win, until all the kingdoms become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ: and He will reign forever and ever."

Analysis of Postmillennialism

We will direct our discussion to theonomy because it remains the champion of current postmillennialism.

- Theonomy suffers from the same problem of classic postmillennialism and amillennialism, adherence to a figurative interpretive method.
- Certain characteristics of the messianic kingdom pertain to the world (cf. Isaiah 11:5-9; 35:1-7; 65:20,25; Amos 9:13; Roms 8:19-22). It is difficult to imagine how the spread of the gospel will achieve the redemption of creation.
- The law of Moses was given to the nation of Israel, not to the church (2 Corinthians 3:1-11; Romans 7:1-6, 10:4).
- The close of this present age will be marked by apostasy, not by the triumphal success of the gospel.

Theonomy must be given credit for its attempt for consistency in its approach. It has been somewhat of an embarrassment to its heritage of Reformed theology, taking its mistaken understanding of the unity of the Church and Israel to its logical extreme.