

CHILIASM : AN ESCAPE FROM THE PRESENT INTO AN EXTRA-BIBLICAL APOCALYPTIC IMAGINATION

J C de Smidt
Vista University

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the origin, history and philosophy of chiliasm/millennialism. The origin of this concept is ascribed to an erroneous interpretation of Jewish apocalyptic imagery.

Christianity is shown to have been influenced via Judaism. Currently three versions of the concept are observed, namely, premillennialism, amillennialism and postmillennialism. The conclusion arrived at is that chiliasm/millennialism is an escape from the present into an extra-biblical apocalyptic imagination. Chiliasm does not fully appreciate the historical character of the Bible.

Chiliasmic thoughts about a reign of peace on earth have a profound influence in our day. Not only in churches and schools, but also in the cargo religions and in phenomena such as contemporary revolutionary movements. Their ideal would be a perfect state on earth. It is important, therefore, to accord attention to chiliasm.

With due consideration of the theme of this congress (the Bible, theology and our context) concentration in this paper is focussed on the extra-biblical apocalyptic imagination in the end-time scenario of chiliasm/millennialism. The exegesis of Revelation 20 (Rv 20) has been done but is not included in this paper.

1. The concept 'chiliasm' or 'millennialism'

The term 'chiliasm' is derived from the Greek word '*chiliasmos*' (*chilias* = thousand) whereas the term millennialism derives from the Latin *mille annus* = thousand years. The concept of a thousand years arises from the use of the

Greek $\text{Cilia } \epsilon\tau^n$ (accusative of duration) in Rv 20:1-7 where a period of a thousand years is mentioned six times (Winkler 1989:360; Townsend 1983:206).

Rv 20:1-7 forms the *locus classicus* of the millennium controversy (Gourques 1985:677; Hazelip 1975:229).

2. The doctrine of chiliasm in a nutshell

Chiliasm/millennialism as a school of thought regarding the end-time scenario displays many variations. And yet, within chiliasm we find basic points of similarity.

Chiliasm is a belief, derived from the imagery of Rv 20 in which the writer describes a vision of Satan being bound and of Christian martyrs being raised from the dead and reigning with Christ for thousand years. The idea of the millennium, linked with prophetic visions such as those recorded in Is 55-66, is viewed as a time during which man's yearnings for peace, freedom from evil, and the rule of righteousness upon earth are finally realized through the power of Christ (Sandeem 1982:200; Derham 1974:659). According to this model, Rv 20 and the $\text{Cilia } \epsilon\tau^n$ is interpreted literally (Du Rand 1990:231). The chiliastic interpretation is a component of the *endgeschichtliche* or futuristic (eschatological) approach (Du Rand 1990:235; De Smidt 1983:53).

3. Chiliasm a philosophy of history

Chiliasm is a philosophy of history viewed from a Christian theological standpoint and a religious movement associated with many segments of Christian and other traditions (Sandeem 1982:220).

As a branch of eschatology - that area of theology dealing with last things - millennialism is concerned with the earthly prospects of the human community. Chiliasm is the cosmology (study of order) of eschatology, and its chronology is one of future events, comparable to the historical record of the past (Sandeem 1982:200).

Chiliasm has had a profound impact on history (Sweet 1973:9). The phantasm of a future millennium exerted significant influence in specific times in history *via, inter alia*, various social, political, religious and literary movements affecting broad sections of society.

Some periods and occurrences which could be mentioned are the year 1000 A.D.; the crusades; the harrowing years of 1348, when even Petrarch was convinced that the end of the world was imminent; the monastic movements inspired by the cloister head Joachim of Fiore in the 13th and 14th centuries; the Renaissance and the Franciscan colonization of the new world.

Others are: Lollardy and the radical reformation, especially Thomas Müntzer. The most famous 16th Century millenarian outburst came at the city of Münster in Westphalia, where refugees from persecution managed to gain control

of the city, ejected unbelievers, and, while the community was besieged, attempted to establish a prototype of the New Jerusalem (Winkler 1989:366). Mention could also be made of the calculations made by Queen Elizabeth I that her rule was taking place in the last days. This view was adhered to by many of her subjects, amongst others, John Fox. The British, French and American revolutions and other revolutionary periods should also be included (Sweet 1973:10).

In his prophecies, based on Revelation, Joachim of Fiore (1150-1207 AD) divided world history into three periods, with the millennium as the third and final dispensation of the Holy Spirit (Du Rand 1990:231). He had developed a philosophy of history which dominated the history of Europe up to and including the rise of Marxism. Philosophers such as Comte, Lessing, Fichte, Hegel, Schelling and Marx himself had Joachistic underpinning and the secularized Joachistic undertones in the phrase 'The third reich' of Hitler did not escape attention (Sweet 1973:10; Winkler 1989:366; De Villiers 1987:13). Even Columbus had seen himself as a messenger of God who had to prepare the way for the millennium. Joachim of Fiore was his patron.

Recently, various historians have, for instance, exploited a rich mine of millennialism in the alleged 'Communitistic ideal' of D G Winstanley (Sweet 1973:10; Winkler 1989:367.)

4. A brief review of the historical development of the chiliasm

The idea of a millenarian world period is found in ancient Parcism, in the doctrine of the old Iranians, such as the Zoroastrian concepts. This idea had no influence on the author of Revelation (De Villiers 1987:44-45; Sandeen 1982:200; Russell 1976:271; Fensham 1952:52; Dijk 1933:18).

There are three specific periods in the Judeo-Christian millennial tradition.

4.1 The rise and development of apocalyptic millennial views (200 BC - AD 200)

4.1.1 The rise of apocalyptic

From the time that one world power after another suppressed and dominated Israel, the Old Testament prophecy restricted Israel's expectations of a coming prosperity mainly to the immanent world. Israel had to expect a earthly kingdom of glory with the Messiah on the throne of David (De Smidt 1983:5). It was specifically this fallacy that influenced the hearers of Jesus (Brewer 1990:44).

The two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, however, came to an end. In the school of suffering and disappointment the post-exilic visionaries or idealists in Israel (a minority group against the hierocrats or pragmatists) realized that this corrupt world was not suitable for the messianic kingdom (Hanson

1975:260-263; Vorster 1986:161). An apocalyptic futuristic perspective took shape (De Villiers 1987:41; Vorster 1986:161). This perspective originated after the exile, *inter alia*, from the Old Testament prophecy and wisdom traditions (Du Rand 1990:175; De Villiers 1987:31; Taylor 1974:52). It contains a transcendental concept of the messianic kingdom (Du Rand 1990:170). The chasm between this world ('*olam hazzeh*') and the future world ('*olam habba*') expanded. This culminated in the appearance of apocalyptic literature (writings of which Daniel 7-12 and the later Revelation, are the most important); apocalyptic (the thought content of the writings) and apocalypticism (the historical movement and system which occur within apocalyptic groups. (See Du Rand 1990:164-167; De Villiers 1987:28-32; for the non-canonical apocalyptic writings, see Taylor 1974:52.)

From this literature it is evident that the apocalyptics expected that the new future would have a completely different appearance to that of the world in which they lived and that earthly life would be destroyed. They fixed their hopes on a new world which would come in the place of the present, evil world (Brewer 1990:44; De Villiers 1987:51). Against prophetic eschatology, which expected the restoration of Israel, on earth and in history, the apocalyptics interpreted and experienced the present, the past and the future, from the expectation of a new century and a new world (Vorster 1986:163; Taylor 1974:52; Bauckham 1978:10; Rowley 1950:510).

In this devolution of the earthbound messianic kingdom to a transcendental apocalyptic kingdom, the roots of the millennium are found in a compromise between the expectations of an earthly and of a heavenly salvation (Heyns 1978:418; Barclay 1976:187; Charles 1976:142; Russell 1976:269; Van Schaik 1971:232; Swete 1960:234; Van Rensburg 1946:27).

Chiliasm is, however, not a creation of Judaism. The Old Testament is definitely not chiliastic (Bavinck 1967:636). Chiliasm is a purely Christian school of thought. The rise thereof could well be ascribed to Judaism.

4.1.2 Millennialism within Judaism around the first century AD

From Jewish literature of the first century, which reflected the thought of people who had not acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, it is evident that there were differing viewpoints about the coming messianic kingdom. Some examples are submitted:

In some parts of the apocalyptic literature (i.a. 2 Enoch, Ascension of Moses) the concept of an earthly messianic kingdom was abandoned. The kingdom was transferred in total to the hereafter (Wikenhauser 1966:177). Charles (1976:184) is of the opinion that the interpretation of the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 Enoch 33:1ff is regarded as the key to determine the duration of the world. On the basis of Ps 90:4, in which it is stated that a thousand years is as one day to God, it is now alleged that an interpretation of 2 Enoch 33:1 would show that the world, according to the seven days of creation,

would exist for seven thousand years. The supposition here is that the history of the world will last for six thousand years. Thereafter there will be a 'rest period' of a thousand years, when God will establish his kingdom. In this regard Swete (1960:264) states:

This conception of a week of 'millennia' took root in early Christian thought, and support for it was found in an allegorical treatment of Gn ii.i ff coupled with Ps 90:4.

D S Russell (1976:293) is of the opinion that here we have the beginnings of a belief in a millennium in the literal sense of a kingdom which is to last a thousand years. This idea would play a significant part in Christian expectations in later periods.

Other scholars adhered to an earthly national messianic kingdom (Wikenhauser 1966:177). According to this expectation the messianic kingdom is a kind of interim kingdom, between the present and eternal kingdom of God. Only the pious Jews who will experience its coming would share in it. Thereafter will follow the resurrection and the day of judgement (see the end vision of 4 Ezra 12:34 and 2 Baruch). This literature appeared at approximately the same time that Revelation was written. Chiliastic thoughts are also to be found in the Talmud (Russell 1976:291; Van Rensburg 1946:28; Dijk 1933:22).

Chiliastic viewpoints are expressed in the teaching of certain rabbinic scholars as well (Swete 1960:264; Van Rensburg 1946:28). Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanos (- 90 AD), at approximately the time of the origination of the Revelation of St. John - was the first rabbinical authority who represented the concept of the millennial reign of the messiah. Swete (1960:265) and Van Rensburg (1946:29), are of the opinion that the author of Revelation had formulated the millennial reign of Christ in connection with the Jewish tradition

... yet he employs them with considerable reserve. St. John does not commit himself to a reign upon earth (Swete 1960:265).

Ancient Judaism therefore did have a chiliastic viewpoint. Others in Judaism rejected these concepts (De Smidt 1983:12).

4.1.3 Chiliasm in the early Christian church

The idea of a millennium entered Christianity through post exilic Judaism. Several scholars proposed a glorious earthly future in which believers would reign over the nations with Christ. However, this was not a universal viewpoint and did not influence the author of Rv 20 (Barclay 1976:189). It was, at best, part of the exegesis of the post-apostolic church.

The receptivity of Jewish millennial concepts in the Christian world can be well understood. The first Christians originated particularly from Judaism and, like the disciples, they expected a messiah who would restore the throne of David (Ac 1:6). The first Christians were persecuted. They had to defend

their faith against gnosticism which posited a purely spiritual notion of salvation (Collins 1986:229). This made an earthly millennium acceptable (Van Munster 1946:222).

Although chiliasm was violently opposed in the early church, it did have some adherents. Some of them, such as Cerinthus of Asia Minor, with his viewpoint that it would be a period for the gratification of carnal lust, lived in enmity with the church (Jones 1975:11). Certain patriarchs were also advocates of chiliasm. Justin Martyr (- 150 AD), however, never elevated it to a church doctrine (Barclay 1976:189; Dijk 1933:28). Papias of Hierapolis (2nd century) in his remark about the wonderful revival of nature during the millennium, possibly derived his viewpoint from 2 Baruch (Barclay 1976:190; Van Munster 1946:222). Others were Irenaeus and Tertullian (Collins 1986:229). Irenaeus, however, did not arrive at his concept by means of independent exegesis of Revelation, but took his view, *inter alia*, from Papias (Dijk 1933:29). Other patriarchs excluded chiliasm.

Jones (1975:10) is of the opinion that in his opposition to the Judaizers from Galatia in Phlp 3:3-11, St. Paul in fact provides a report of his rejection of the Jewish millennium. Jones (1975:10) mentions that chiliastic views were held by some of the so-called Christian sects developed from the Judaizers of Paul's day. These views were not from the Scriptures but from such Jewish and Jewish Christian writings which neither Jews nor Christians regarded as canonical.

In 156 AD Montanus declared himself the prophet of a third age, a new age of the Holy Spirit. This concept, the new day of the Spirit of God, has been one of the most consistent features of millenarian history, reappearing, for example, in Joachim of Fiore's philosophy of history during the 12th century. However, Montanism was later stigmatized as a heresy (Sandeen 1982:201).

In the first three centuries the early church was not chiliastic. It was merely the doctrine of individuals (De Smidt 1983:16,17).

4.2 From the third century to the Reformation (allegorical millennialism)

During the third and fourth centuries the doctrine of chiliasm found favour with a few patriarchs, such as Cyprianus, Commodianus, Lactantius (Jones 1975:13). Among the apologists there were very few convinced chiliasts (Dijk 1933:35). The influence of chiliasm diminished, especially when Christianity was declared to be the state religion after the victory of Constantine the Great (313 AD). With a few exceptions, the church never confessed chiliasm as its doctrine.

In the Eastern church it was Origen (230 AD), the head of the Alexandrian school who, with his allegorical interpretation of Scripture, dealt chiliasm a death blow. His focus was not upon the manifestation of the kingdom within this world, but within the soul of the believer, a significant shift of interest

away from the historical towards the meta-physical, or the spiritual (Sandeen 1982:201). Origen was of the opinion that the mysteries of Revelation should be sought more deeply than the historical or literal meaning. For almost a thousand years the allegorical method was the accepted interpretation for understanding Revelation. From the rise of the allegorical interpretation, it was the belief that the so-called millennium had already commenced with the historical Jesus (Du Rand 1990:231).

In the Western church, St. Augustine (- 396 AD), with his allegorical interpretation, was the man who subjected chiliasm to devastating criticism. He interpreted Revelation allegorically in his *De civitate Dei*. He expected that ultimately the history of this world would end, but for him the millennium had become a spiritual state into which the church collectively had entered at Pentecost and which the individual Christian might already enjoy through mystical communion with God (Sandeen 1982:202). The reign of a thousand years was understood as the Age of the Church which would be followed by the second coming of Christ (Collins 1986:231).

The subsequent reformers' doctrine can be traced directly to the view of St. Augustine, namely that the thousand years is already a reality and that the binding of Satan is nothing else but the church's victory over hell (Jones 1975:13; Dijk 1933:213).

St. Augustine's view remained dominant up to the twelfth century. Gradually the number one thousand came to be understood symbolically rather than literally. The notion of an earthly reign of Christ or new age remained dominant until it was revived by Joachim of Fiore (See par 3: Collins 1986:230); the Cathari (1017 AD); Albinese, Waldenses (1210 AD) and the Taborites (1414 AD), the most radical branch of the Hussite movement. Their eisegesis, erroneous calculations of the world's end and apocalyptic fantasies, crippled their doctrine. During the Middle Ages chiliasm had no right of existence as a dogma (Jones 1975:13; Heyns 1963:67).

4.3 From the Reformation to the twentieth century (progressive millennialism)

The protestant reformers (16th century) of the Lutheran, Calvinistic and later Anglican traditions were not chiliasts but remained firmly attached to the allegorical millennialism ('realized eschatology') of St Augustine (Sandeen 1982:202). The reformers strongly denounced chiliasm (Heyns 1963:- 67,68). Only individuals such as Oetinger, Lange, Kurtz, Rothe and sects such as the anabaptists, and others were adherents of chiliasm (Jones 1975:13; Van Munster 1946:223). Luther, for example, vigorously opposed enthusiastic prophets of the millennial age, (Winkler 1989:366), such as the radical reformer, Thomas Müntzer.

Sandeen (1982:212) draws attention to the fact that the Augustinian millennial world view, though it survived the Reformation, did not survive the intellec-

tual revolution of the 17th century. Behind the development of science lay a profound reorientation of Western thought that involved, in the first place the rehabilitation of nature. Satan should not be seen as the only world ruler. Secondly,

European intellectuals were becoming far more interested in measurement and quantification. Allegory fell into disrepute when the medieval interpretation of the nature of the heavenly bodies was proved to be erroneous by the facts discovered by the use of the telescope. A new concern with calculation and literalism spread to biblical scholarship and resulted in the creation of the third type of millennialism found in the Christian tradition - progressive millennialism (Sandeen 1982:202).

Joseph Mede, a 17th-century Anglican biblical scholar, was the pioneer in this movement. Taking a fresh look at the text of Revelation he concluded that Revelation held the promise of a literal kingdom of God. The work of redemption would be completed within human history on the stage of this world. The Book of Revelation itself seemed to contain a historical record of the progress of that kingdom. Soon scholars were speculating where in the prophetic timetable the modern millennialist might locate himself. For progressive millennialists it seemed that the progress of history had been continuously upward and that the kingdom of God was coming ever closer. Whitby (1638-1726), Edwards (1703-58) and others were adherents of progressive millennialism. S H Vox (1840's) was later of the opinion that the USA is close to the ideal of God's millennium (Sandeen 1982:202).

Apart from the above viewpoints, Cromwell (-1658) and his followers in England adhered to the doctrine of chiliasm (Van der Waal 1981:4). Spurgeon was also an exponent of this doctrine. From England, America was influenced. The dispensationalism of the Plymouth Brethren (Darbyists) and others, had penetrated into American conservative circles by means of the Scofield Reference Bible. In 1918 the American laymen came together however, and denounced chiliasm (Dijk 1933:165).

In Dutch circles chiliasm was denounced, *inter alia*, by Kuyper and Bavinck. (Van der Waal 1981:119; Bavinck 1967:844; Heyns 1963:68).

During the 19th century the great dawn of industrialization of the West encouraged a new wave of millennialian sects. Amongst them were the Catholic Apostolic Church, the Latterday Saints (Mormons) and others who have already been mentioned. The chiliasts in general contributed to the rise of the biblically orientated and conservative movement known as fundamentalism (Sandeen 1982:203). The appeal of these groups increased during times of national crisis or peril, commercial and urban development, social and political change and the wars of the 20th century. Sandeen (1982:203) is of the opinion that no one who is wealthy, powerful, or well integrated into his social system will find much appeal in a chiliastic world view that is focussed on crisis and a pessimistic future.

Therefore, the three variations of Western millennial thought are: the apocalyptic millennialism of the early church, the allegorical millennialism of St. Augustine and progressive millennialism. However, there are many more variations. These schools of thought have repeatedly announced the end of this dispensation, several resurrections, and the coming of the millennium on the grounds of their own calculations. These have evoked criticism and are theologically unacceptable.

5. Chiliasm today

Currently the following thought trends may be differentiated (especially in the USA), namely premillennialism, amillennialism and post-millennialism (Brewer 1990:46; Collins 1986:231; Boettner 1980:3; Van der Waal 1981:113).

There are many similarities between the three systems in respect of Scriptural authority, soteriology, visible return of Christ, and judgement, etc. Each of these viewpoints is adhered to by valued believing scholars (Boettner 1980:3).

The differences are not as a result of a deliberate misrepresentation of Scripture, but exist primarily as a result of the various methods which each of them applies in respect of Scripture interpretation. The concept $\text{Cilia} \epsilon \tau^n$ is therefore accepted by some as an interim kingdom, while others regard it as existing beyond historical bounds and yet others see it as the current dispensation (Fensham 1952:250).

5.1 Premillennialism

'Pre' means before, that is the coming of Christ will be before the millennium. The writings of Joseph Mede (1586-1638) and J A Bengel (1687-1752) were probably the spark in the revival of this trend of thought (Jones 1975:13). This trend's end-time scenario also shows many variations, namely historical or fundamentalistic premillennialism and dispensationalism or reconstructionism (Brewer 1990:46; Du Rand 1990:231; De Smidt 1983:23-25).

5.1.1 Historical premillennialism

This view amounts, briefly, to the fact that Christ will return twice to earth. On the grounds of Old and New Testament prophecies, this school is of the opinion that the nations of the earth will confront each other in an armed conflict immediately before the first return of Christ. Initially the various nations on earth will fight amongst themselves, whereafter they will unite to march against Israel. The final battle between the nations of the earth and Israel will take place south-east of Haifa, in the vale of Armageddon. At that moment Christ's return will take place on the Mount of Olives. He will then personally become involved in the strife to the advantage of the old covenant people.

Subsequently, the period of the millennium will commence, a period of world-wide peace and righteousness during which Christ will reign as King in person on this earth (Boettner 1986:4; Jones 1975:12). Together with this first coming, the resurrection will take place in which only the believers (with emphasis on the martyrs) will participate. They will reign with Christ on earth. Satan will be bound so that he cannot lead the nations astray. Then the Jews will return to the Holy Land whereupon a mass conversion of Israel is expected (Stumpfer 1967:107). In Jerusalem they will gather around the re-instated throne of David. The prophecy of Ps 69:36,37 will be fulfilled, namely the deliverance of Zion and the rebuilding of the cities of Judah.

After the conclusion of this period, Christ with His bride will return to heaven, whereafter Satan will be loosed on earth for a short period. The great persecution of the 'unfaithful church' will then take place. Those who did not accept the first offer of Christ's 'gospel of mercy', will now be given a second opportunity to accept Christ, but they would have to atone with their lives. Then Christ will come again with his bride, whereupon the second resurrection will take place, and the deceased unbelievers will rise from the dead. Thereafter the last judgement will take place and the new heaven and new earth will dawn (Du Rand 1990:235; De Smidt 1983:1-3; Visser 1975:276).

This viewpoint also has its adherents within reformed protestantism. It was also prominent amongst the German pietists, within the so-called Ehrlanger School, as well as with the wellknown Zahn. Well-known advocates of this view are also R H Charles (1920), G E Ladd (1956), J R Michaelis (1976), M Rissi (1972), and others (see Boettner 1980:388; Jones 1975:13; Fensham 1952:250).

This trend of thought evoked much criticism as it tends to make the Bible a textbook of ready reference. It thrives best and makes its greatest gains in time of war or of national crisis when people are anxious and worried about the future (Boettner 1980:7). Verhoef (1964:80) also voiced vigorous criticism of the chiliastic concept of the present and the future of Israel. This view refuses to acknowledge that the Old Testament prophecies were centrally fulfilled in the first coming of Christ (His birth).

5.1.2 Dispensational premillennialism

Dispensationalism (to which reconstructionism is closely related), is a radical form of premillennialism (Jones 1975:12,13; Brewer 1990:47). It is an exceptionally complex explanatory system. Although there are divergent viewpoints between the adherents, the most important conformities could be expressed as follows: (see Clapp 1991:27; Boettner 1980:5,6; Hazelip 1975:229; Jones 1975:13-16).

The Bible period is divided into seven dispensations, namely (i) innocence (paradise condition) (ii) guilt (to the deluge), (iii) human governments (deluge

up to Abraham), (iv) promises (from Abraham to Sinai), (v) the Law (Sinai to the cross of Jesus), (vi) mercy and the church (from the crucifixion up to His first coming for the saints - the rapture) and then the seventh dispensation, the millennium, the last of the ages when Christ will reign on David's throne in Jerusalem, (for a thousand years) over the restored Israel. We find ourselves, according to this viewpoint, in the sixth dispensation (Hazelip 1975:23).

Prophecies should be interpreted literally, especially those which refer to the Jewish nation (Jones 1975:14). Apart from Verhoef (1964:80), Coetzee (1965:231) mentions that in no instance in Revelation does the name *læoj* mean Israel. It is obviously used in respect of the universal people of God (Sidey 1992:30).

Dispensational premillennialists maintain that the period of the church lies between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel 9, or between Pentecost and the rapture of the saints. During Christ's 'coming for the believers' (rapture) and his 'coming with the believers' (second coming) the occurrences of the last week of Daniel 9 will take place. This is the period of seven years during which the antichrist will enter into a covenant with the remainder of the Jews who had returned to Palestine. This covenant will be violated by the antichrist in the middle of the last week and the great persecution will take place (De Smidt 1983:26,27).

During the second coming of Christ, the antichrist will be conquered. Satan will be bound and Christ will begin His reign of a thousand years in Jerusalem.

The progress of the millennium, the turning loose of Satan, the second coming, the second resurrection (unbelievers) and final judgement, agree in broad terms with that of historical premillennialism (De Smidt 1983:27).

The arising of dispensationalism could be traced back to a commentary on Revelation by the Spanish Jesuit F. Ribeira (1591) and a book by a certain Jew, Rabbi Ben-Ezra, who became a Jesuit under the *nom de plume* of Lecunza (1812). Lecunza's theories of the seven dispensations were popularized in 1909 in the Scofield Reference Bible via the Plymouth Brethren group. In 1967 a new Scofield edition was published and a revival of dispensationalism followed (Jones 1975:15; Sidey 1992:49; Du Rand 1990:235).

A few advocates of dispensationalism are, *inter alia*, Morgan G Campbell (1898); Dwight J Pentecost (1958); J A Seiss, J F Walvoord (1967); Billy Graham; Tim la Haye, Rev W H M Oosthuizen (1972) F W C Nesor (1978) and Bennie Kleynhans (1980). The premillennial faith has a great impact, *inter alia*, amongst American evangelical church groups, and is taught, for example, at Dallas Theological Seminary where Hal Lindsey studied (Collins 1986:231). For an exposition of Graham and Lindsey's books and films, see Hazelip (1975:229.) Herbert W Armstrong has more or less the same view as Lindsey (Collins 1986:232). In addition, John MacArthur (1989:20, 48, 54) is also an adherent of dispensationalism.

Criticism on this viewpoint is overwhelming (Collins 1986:235). Two divine programmes, namely, one for Israel and one for the church are read into Revelation. Du Rand (1990:236), Boettner (1980:5) and Hazelip (1975:23) regard it as a false system of Biblical exegesis (for criticism on the concept 'rapture', see Coetzee 1991:14).

5.2 Amillennialism

This concept is derived from the *alfa formans* 'a' and means 'no millennium'. It is a now-millennium or a nunc-millennium (Visser 1975:236). Amillennialism discards the idea of a visible earthly, mortal reign of Christ on earth. It rejects a literal interpretation of Rv 20, and regards it figuratively or symbolically. This agrees with St. Augustine's view. The thousand years in Rv 20 indicates the period of the church and the reign of Christ, which is now (between the first and the second comings of Christ), taking place in a visible manner in the hearts of men (Jones 1975:10).

According to Müller (1960:649) this view is held by all Reformed confessions. Other advocates are, *inter alia*, W Hendriksen (1939); S Greydanus (1926); H B Swete; Townsend (1983:220) and many others.

Criticism has been expressed on this trend of thought (see König 1980:170; Jones 1975:17).

5.3 Postmillennialism

'Post' means 'after', that is, the second coming of Christ will occur after the millennium. In spite of differences, the predominant idea is that the world will, under the influence of the preaching of the Gospel and the works of the Holy Spirit, improve to such an extent and progress so that even the Jews and heathens will be converted. A millennium will therefore develop on earth, and thereafter Christ will come. The thousand years are still in the future (Du Rand 1990:231; Boettner, 1980:4). The reign of Christ is interpreted in a spiritual sense (Visser 1975:235).

According to Brewer (1990:46), this vision made postmillennialists both optimistic in outlook (since the kingdom of God would surely be realized on earth) and activist in evangelism and mission (as it gave human activity a significant role in God's purpose of establishing the kingdom), thus inspiring the modern missionary movement.

Some advocates of this view are, *inter alia*, D Whitby (England 1638 and the father of this view); J Edwards (18th century); C Finney (19th century); R J Rushdoony (1971); Boettner (1980). Jones (1975:11) is inclined to regard St. Augustine as a postmillennialist.

Criticism has been voiced against this view (Danner 1963:235). Jones (1975:11) is of the opinion that the recent wars and general confusion of the atomic age have almost obliterated this view.

5.4 Modern Trends

Several modern day conceptions of political theologies (black theology, white theology, exodus theology, theology of liberation, the Marxist interpretation of the Gospel, the theology of the revolution) as well as the New Age Movement (with which organizations such as Greenpeace, Unity Church, the Buddhist Association, Foreign Relations and the Hunger Project find close links), could be interpreted as a philosophy of millennialism (De Vos 1989:7; De Smidt 1983:47). Chiliasm is also associated with certain reformed and pentecostal circles, as well as with the Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses (Sandeem 1982:200; De Villiers 1987:4-12; Zegvaart 1988:3; Thompson 1990:26).

6. Conclusion

The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic in outlook and style (Du Rand 1992:75,79; Puskas 1989:151; Collins 1986:240). Its complex and bizarre imagery continues to be a source of fascination and chiliasts regard the entire book as a blueprint of future events (Puskas 1989:150). The apocalyptic symbols and images in Rv 20 are interpreted by chiliasts/millennialists as code words for historical realities, which are literally calculated on an historical timetable (Collins 1986:233, 234). Both chiliasm and amillennialism make Rv 20 a report of advanced written history (König 1967:111).

Apocalyptic imagination, like dynamite, is always dangerous (Clapp 1991:28). Similarly, apocalyptic hopes and fears kept in their proper place or context can be responsibly owned and used. The most important context for the responsible interpretation of apocalyptic imagination in Revelation is the biblical context: the biblical narrative; the great Christ story that encompasses creation, fall, redemption and consummation (Clapp 1991:28).

Responsible exegesis of Revelation recognises that, in Jesus, the future has already invaded the present and (in the sense of fulfilling creation), the past as well. The Book of Revelation and the rest of the New Testament recognizes that a new age or history has come in Christ. Therefore the key event of the Christian story is not ahead of us. Responsible exegesis focusses on the future, but the future crucially encompasses the past and the present.

Chiliasts/millennialists, dislocate the apocalyptic imagination of Revelation from this context and concentrate, myopically, on one part of the story: the second coming of Christ and consummation. In this fashion, chiliasts concentrate solely on the future, disconnecting the second coming from the rest of the biblical story. They become obsessive about the coming eschatological cataclysm. They find time only to dash from one crisis to the next; like the coward who dies a thousand deaths, they suffer a thousand ends of the world (Clapp 1991:29). Neff (1990:15) calls them 'escape artists' and their eschatology 'escape - hatch eschatology'.

The conclusion arrived at here, is that chiliasm is an escape from the present into an extra-biblical apocalyptic imagination. Chiliastic views are problematic and does not fully appreciate the historical character of the Bible (Brewer 1990:47).

The Book of Revelation is first and foremost an interpretation of the situation of Christians in Western Asia Minor towards the end of the first century (Collins 1986:240). According to the total message of Revelation, Rv 20:1-6 merely indicates the triumph of Christ over evil, in which the deceased believers also share. The so-called thousand years should rather be understood symbolically (Du Rand 1990:232).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armstrong, H 1985. Who or what is the Prophetic Beast? *The Good News of the World Tomorrow*. Oct-Nov, 3-6, 2-22.
- Barclay, W 1976. *The Revelation of John*. Vol 2. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press.
- Bauckham, R J 1978. The rise of apocalyptic. *Themelios* 3 (2), 11-23.
- Bavinck, H 1967. *Gereformeerde dogmatiek. Band 4*. Kampen: J H Kok.
- Boettner, L 1980. *The millennium*. Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.
- Brewer, D C 1990. The kingdom of God: significant recent developments and some educational implications. *Journal of Christian education* 98, 41-54.
- Charles, R H 1976. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St John*. Vol 2. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Clapp, R 1991. Overdosing on the Apocalypse. *Christianity today* 35 (12), 26-29.
- Coetzee, J C 1965. *Volk en Godsvolk in die Nuwe Testament*. Potchefstroom: Pro Rege Pers.
- Coetzee, J C 1991. Die 'wegraping' - is dit Bybels? *Die Gereformeerde Vroueblad* 7, 13-14.
- Collins, A Y 1986. Reading the book of Revelation in the 20th century. *Interpretation* 40, 229-242.
- Derham, A M 1974. Millenarianism, in Douglas, J D (ed), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- De Smidt, J C 1983. *Die duisendjarige vrederyk. 'n Analities-eksegetiese studie van Openbaring 20*. Universiteit van Suid-Afrika: M Th-verhandeling.

- De Villiers, P G R 1987. *Leviatan aan 'n lintjie. Woord en wêreld van die sieners*. Kaapstad: Lux Verbi.
- De Vos, W 1989. 'ew Age'-beweging. *Die Kerkblad* 9, 7-8.
- Dijk, K 1933. *Het rijk der duizend jaren*. Kampen: J H Kok.
- Danner, D 1963. A history of interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10 in the restoration movement. *Restoration Quarterly* 7, 217-235.
- Du Rand, J A 1990. *Johannese Perspektiewe Deel 1*. Pretoria: Orion.
- Du Rand, J A 1992. An Apocalyptic Text, Different Contexts and an Applicable Ethos. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 78, 75-83.
- Fensham, F C 1954. *Grondprobleme van Openbaring 20 in die lig van die Ou en die Nuwe Testament*. Universiteit van Pretoria: D D-Proefskrif.
- Gourgues, M 1985. The thousand-year reign (Rev 20:1-6): terrestrial or celestial? *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (4), 676-681.
- Greijdanus, S 1965. *De Openbaring des Heren aan Johannes*. Kampen: J H Kok.
- Hanson, P D 1975. *The dawn of apocalyptic*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Hazelip, H 1975. Revelation 20 and the millennium. *Restoration Quarterly* 18 (4), 229-235.
- Hendriksen, W 1952. *Visioenen der voleinding*. Kampen: J H Kok.
- Heyns, J A 1963. *Die chiliasme of die duisendjarige ryk*. Pretoria: N G Kerkuitgewers.
- Heyns, J A 1978. *Dogmatiek*. Pretoria: N G Kerkboekhandel.
- Jones, R B 1975. *What, where and when is the millennium?* Michigan: Baker Book House.
- Kleynhans, B 1980. *Die Koning kom*. Pretoria: Promedia Publikasies.
- König, A 1969. 'Die duisendjarige ryk' - Beeldspraak vir 'Die Koninkryk van God'. *Theologia Evangelica* 11 (2), 103-114.
- König, A 1980. *Jesus die Laaste*. Pretoria: N G Kerkboekhandel.
- Lindsey, H 1970. *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- MacArthur, J F 1989. *The rise and fall of world powers*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- Müller, J J 1960. Die boeke word geopen. *Die Kerkbode LXXXV* (18), 649-651.
- Neff, D 1990. Apocalypse when? *Christianity Today* 34 (18), 15.
- Neser, F W C 1978. *Die verlore tien stamme van Israel*. Vereeniging: Prestige Kunsdrukery (Edms) Bpk.

- Oosthuizen, W H M 1972. *As die Seun van die Mens kom*. Brakpan: Verenigde Gereformeerde Uitgewers.
- Puskas, C B 1989. *An introduction to the New Testament*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Rissi, M 1972. *The future of the world*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Rowley, H H 1950. *The relevance of apocalyptic*. London: Butterworth Press.
- Russell, D S 1976. *The method and message of Jewish apocalyptic*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Sandeen, E R 1982. Millennialism. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (12), 200-203.
- Sidey, K 1992. For the love of Zion. *Christianity Today* 36(3), 46-50.
- Stumpfer, J P la G 1967. Esegïel 37: Fondamentsteen van die Chiliasme. *N.G. Teologiese Tydskrif* 8 (2), 107-116.
- Sweet, L I 1973. The Revelation of Saint John and history. *Christianity Today* 17 (91), 9-10.
- Swete, H B 1960. *The Apocalypse of St John*. Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Taylor, J B 1974. Apocalyptic Literature, in Douglas, J D (ed), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Thompson, L T 1990. *The Book of Revelation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Townsend, J L 1983. Is the present age the millennium? *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (559), 206-224.
- Van der Waal, C 1981. The last Book of the Bible and the Jewish Apocalypses. *Neotestamentica* 12, 111-132.
- Van Munster, H Th 1946. *Zie, Hij komt met de wolken*. Amsterdam: S J P Bakker.
- Van Rensburg, S P 1946. Die Millennium. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 3, 24-36.
- Van Schaik, A P 1971. *De Openbaring van Johannes*. Roermond: Romen.
- Verhoef, P A 1964. Moderne beskouinge oor Israel. *N.G. Teologiese Tydskrif* V (2), 68-81.
- Visser, A J 1975. *De Openbaring van Johannes*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Vorster, W S 1986. Tekste met 'n apokaliptiese perspektief, in Deist, F en Vorster, W S (reds) 1986. *Woorde wat ver kom: Die literatuur van die Ou Testament, deel 1*, 158-176. Kaapstad: Tafelberg.
- Walvoord, J F 1967. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Chicago: Moody Press.

Wikenhauser, A 1966. *De Openbaring van Johannes*. Antwerpen: Patmos.

Winkler, G B 1989. *Chiliastische Ideen und christliche Wirklichkeit*. *Theologisch - Praktische Quartal Schrift* 137 (94), 335-346.

Zegwaard, H 1988. Apocalyptic Eschatology and Pentecostalism: The Relevance of John's Millennium for Today. *Pneuma* 10 (1), 3-25.