

The Gnostic Roots of Amillennialism & Dispensationalism

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A Clash of World Views

Within less than a century after John's death, some philosophically minded Greek Christians began to question some aspects of the historic premillennialism that was universally defended by the early Christian apologists. This primitive premillennialism (chiliasm) consisted of a posttribulation coming of Christ for His church, and a "millennial week" chronology – six millennia from Adam to the second coming of Christ, plus one millennium of Christ's reign over the nations from Jerusalem. It was not the millennial week timeframe of six thousand years plus the Sabbath Rest that annoyed them, but rather the implications of a resurrected material body and the Land inheritance within the restored material creation which God promised to Abraham and his 'Seed' – Christ.

Such an "earthly" hope clashed with the lofty philosophical ideas of the Greeks to which Gentile Christians were accustomed. Receiving the renovated Promised Land from the Nile to the Euphrates rivers as an everlasting inheritance did not sit well with many of them. In a way, they were not unlike modern dispensationalists who see God's promise to Abraham and his Seed as being beneath them. They had a more "heavenly" mindset, to which they attempted to make the Scriptures conform.

The Greek mindset, derived from Plato, and fully developed in Gnosticism which flourished in those days, held that physical matter was itself corrupt. Consequently, anything consisting of physical matter was inherently corrupt by its very nature. Greeks did not aspire to a resurrected material body because it would merely be continued entrapment within corrupt matter. Jerusalem had recently been destroyed by the Romans. And these philosophical Greek Christians did not desire an eternal city on earth, as the capitol of a Kingdom on the renovated earth. This too was continued entrapment within a physical world consisting of corrupt matter. Salvation in the Greek mind involved escape from the material creation and ascending into the heavens in a purely "spiritual" state of eternal bliss.

Plato and the Gnostics, however, were not the originators of this idea. The concept originated in the pride-blackened heart of Satan himself.

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Isa 14:12-15 NKJV

12 *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!*

13 *For you have said in your heart: **I will ascend into heaven**, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; 14 **I will ascend above the heights of the clouds**, I will be like the Most High.'*

15 *Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit."*

Satan's temptation of Eve was driven by the very same lust to be like the Most High. At the tower of Babel, where pagan worship seems to have begun, they said: *"Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven."*¹

The Egyptians built solar ships, which were buried with their departed rulers, to escort their souls through the heavens to the stars. Plato envisioned a series of heavenly spheres, through which one must pass in order to reach his ultimate destiny in the heavens. At the time of Christ, the pagan mindset of the afterlife was entirely bound up in the idea of escaping the earth and ascending to a supposed heavenly destiny.

The Jews knew no such "hope." There is absolutely nothing in the Old Testament Scriptures to suggest such a thing for God's covenant people. The Jews' hope was horizontal, awaiting the Messiah who would arrive at the end of the age to restore Jerusalem, Israel, and the whole earth.

The entrance of Jewish-Christian apostolic eschatology into this Greek world was bound to spawn a clash of contrary world views. The intention of the Apostles was to overthrow the philosophical speculations of the Greek mind with the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the simple hope of resurrection and the eternal inheritance. The message of Christ was cast against the backdrop of the promises to the Patriarchs and the prophecies of the Old Testament.

When pristine apostolic Christianity arrived in the Greek pagan culture, the presuppositions of the Greek mind did not immediately disappear. Some Greek Christians did not readily accept a completely new way of thinking. Instead, they read Scripture through a Greek lens, seeing in the text the Greek philosophical concepts of Plato, and interpreting the text using Greek methods which depended heavily on allegory and mysticism. This gave birth to Gnosticism, and created serious problems for the Apostles.

¹ Gen 11:4

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Both Paul and John had to grapple with the results of Greek presuppositions being imposed on Christian theology. Paul devoted the entire fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians to defending the very concept of the resurrection of the body of flesh, which many of the Corinthian Christians had already dismissed because of their taste for Greek philosophy.

1 Corinthians 15:12-15

12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up — if in fact the dead do not rise.

Such thinking is not really surprising given that Corinth was just a stone's throw from Athens, the center of Greek philosophy. It was the Greeks in Athens who mocked Paul when he began to speak of the resurrection of the dead.² And all Christians who received the Apostles' witness about Christ's resurrection and the future hope of our resurrection received the same kind of ridicule from the intellectuals in Greek society. This public scorn for apostolic Christianity, which was based on Platonic philosophical principles, was downright embarrassing to many early Christians who wished their new Faith to be viewed as intellectually acceptable, and even superior to the philosophies of the Greeks.

The error of the Corinthians gives us our first glimpse into the corruption of apostolic eschatology by the intrusion of Greek philosophy. After Paul's martyrdom, the same thinking quickly led to the rise of Gnosticism within some of the churches founded by Paul.

Gnosticism was the result of blending the Greek philosophy, that matter was inherently corrupt, with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The Gnostic doctrines were more extreme than merely the denial of the resurrection and inheritance on a restored earth. They also claimed that the Creator was not the supreme God, but a lesser god. This was a natural result of their aversion to physical matter, which the Creator had made. If matter was corrupt by its very nature, then the One who created matter must be in some way corrupt. Therefore, many Gnostics claimed that the Creator was not the "Father" Jesus proclaimed, but a lesser god. Some went so far as to claim that the "Christ" was pure spirit (not consisting of matter), and the man Jesus was a totally

² Acts 17:32

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separate person (consisting of matter). The two could not be the same person in Gnostic thinking because Jesus' fleshly humanity would mean He was corrupt. So, they invented a myth that the "Christ" Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism, and left Him at the crucifixion. Gnostics denied the body and blood of Jesus Christ provided atonement, because such flesh would also be corrupt, consisting of matter. Thus, salvation in Gnosticism was not atonement, but the gaining of philosophical knowledge which eventually allowed the Gnostic Christian to escape the bondage of the material body and this creation, and ascend through heavenly spheres into eventual union with the unseen God. This dichotomy between substance and spirit was pressed to extremes of heresy.

John set out to directly confront the developing Gnostic thinking in his Epistles and the prologue to his Gospel. He sought to root out this heresy from the churches. This is why he drew a line in the sand, writing that those who do not confess that "*Jesus the Christ has come in the flesh*" are of the spirit of Antichrist. Gnosticism was poison to pristine Christianity, it was of the spirit of Antichrist.

Within a century after Paul first corrected the Corinthian's error, many Christians again began to cave under the cultural pressure, and to succumb to the same thinking as the Corinthians.

Justin gives us an early peak at the rising dissent among those calling themselves "Christians" in his Dialogue with a Jew named Trypho. Justin described himself and others like him who were "*right-minded Christians on all points,*" others who questioned whether Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and others who denied the resurrection of the body and instead held to a heavenly destiny, which he called heretics.

"And Trypho to this replied, '... But tell me, do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came?'"³

The question posed to Justin by this unbelieving Jewish man concerned only the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which had recently been destroyed by the Romans, and whether Messiah would gather gentile Christians together with faithful Jews in restored Jerusalem. Justin's answer shows a divided opinion among Christians on this point in his day.

³ AD 150 – Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho (a Jew), chapter lxxx

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“Then I answered, ‘I am not so miserable a fellow, Trypho, as to say one thing and think another. I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.”⁴

This passage is often cited by amillennialists to prove that their view was widely held in the middle of the second century. Yet, as we will see in Justin’s further description, the only amillennialists known to him were the “heretics” of the various Gnostic sects. The eschatological division among Christians “*who belong to the pure and pious Faith, and are true Christians*” at this early date concerned only whether the city of Jerusalem destroyed by the Romans would be restored and then become the location of the gathering of Christ’s followers. Justin described many who did not agree with him, but also many who did agree.

What then did those who disagreed with Justin believe, if not the heavenly destiny of amillennialism? No doubt, like many premillennialists today, they thought that Jerusalem would be replaced (not rebuilt) by the city John described as the “New Jerusalem” descending out of heaven to the earth.

There were two opinions among Chiliasts about the New Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation. Justin, Commodianus, and Methodius believed that the New Jerusalem in Revelation was an allegorical way of describing the restoration of the present Jerusalem by God, and that the “New Jerusalem” in Revelation was the same city described in Isaiah 65-66, from which Christ and the saints would reign over the nations in the Millennium. However, others thought that it was a real celestial city which will descend to earth after the Millennium.⁵ Both groups were Chiliasts in every sense of the word. The disagreement about the rebuilding of Jerusalem destroyed by the Romans concerned only the interpretation of the prophecies in Isaiah and Ezekiel which describe the restoration of the city at Christ’s return,⁶ and how these Old Testament prophecies relate to John’s description of the “New Jerusalem” in the closing chapters of Revelation (whether they were the same city or different cities, and if different, whether the New Jerusalem in Revelation would descend at the beginning or end of the Millennium).

While including among the orthodox those who disagreed with him over the future of the ruins of Jerusalem, Justin denounced in the strongest terms all those who called

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Compare Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. V, xxxv, with Commodianus, *Christian Discipline*, XLIV & Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, Bk. VII, ch. xxiv

⁶ Isa. 52; Isa. 62; Isa. 65:17-25; Isa. 66; Ezekiel 40-44

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themselves Christians but held an eschatology which denied the future Kingdom on earth, and substituted a heavenly destiny. Because these so called “Christians” had an aversion to all things consisting of matter, they also denied that the same flesh corpse which was placed in the grave would be raised again to live within this creation.

“Moreover, I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistical, and foolish. But that you may know that I do not say this before you alone, I shall draw up a statement, so far as I can, of all the arguments which have passed between us; in which I shall record myself as admitting the very same things which I admit to you. For I choose to follow not men or men’s doctrines, but God and the doctrines [delivered] by Him. For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians.”⁷

Notice in Justin’s opinion, those who denied the hope of the resurrection of the flesh body in order to participate in the Land inheritance “blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Why did Justin say this? Why not just “they blaspheme God” or “they blaspheme the God of Abraham?” Why include Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? It is because the hope of God’s promise to Abraham, that the Land in which he lived as a pilgrim and foreigner would one day belong to him and his Seed permanently,⁸ was also repeated by God in person to Isaac,⁹ and then in person again to Jacob.¹⁰ The promised permanent Land inheritance was not only to Abraham’s descendants, but to Abraham himself,¹¹ to Isaac himself, to Jacob himself, and Abraham’s Seed, whom Paul indicated was Christ¹² and all who have been baptized into Him.¹³

Steven pointed out that Abraham never received one foot of this land while he was still alive,¹⁴ and Hebrews states that Joshua did not provide Israel with the fulfillment of this

⁷ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, chapter lxxx

⁸ Gen. 17:8

⁹ Gen. 26:1-5

¹⁰ Gen. 28:13-15

¹¹ Gen. 13:15-17

¹² Gal. 3:16

¹³ Gal. 3:26-29

¹⁴ Acts 7:2-5

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promise.¹⁵ This is why Irenaeus, when defending the hope of Chiliasm, anchored it squarely in the Abrahamic Covenant.¹⁶

Since the only way for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Abraham's Seed (Christ and those baptized into Him) to inherit the Land was by means of the resurrection of their flesh bodies, the denial of this hope was also a denial of the means of achieving it, through the resurrection of the flesh. Thus, Justin considered it blasphemy against the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to flatly deny His promise to the patriarchs and all believers who are the *"heirs according to the promise."*¹⁷ Justin then went on to describe the true apostolic eschatology.

*"But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare."*¹⁸

Justin drew a clear line of demarcation. Christians who held to Chiliasm, with its resurrection of the flesh and restoration of Jerusalem and the Promised Land (according to the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel) were *"right minded Christians on all points,"* following the doctrines of God declared by the prophets. Those who rejected the restoration of the city of Jerusalem destroyed by the Romans were in error by Justin's standards, but still Christians. However, those who follow *"men or men's doctrines,"* denying the future permanent Land inheritance promised to Abraham and the resurrection of the flesh bodies, who adopted the philosophy and hope of Plato and Gnosticism with its ascent into the heavens, these were not to be considered Christians, but heretics. That Justin's Dialogue was widely published and highly regarded in the middle of the second century shows that his assessment was most likely the opinion of most Christians at the time.

In another work devoted to defending the resurrection of the flesh, Justin described the philosophical basis the heretics used for rejecting the resurrection of the body of flesh.

"They who maintain the wrong opinion say that there is no resurrection of the flesh; giving as their reason that it is impossible that what is corrupted and dissolved should be restored to the same as it had been. And besides the impossibility, they say that the salvation of the flesh is disadvantageous; and they abuse the flesh, adducing its

¹⁵ Heb. 4:8

¹⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, ch. xxxii, quoted at the beginning of this chapter

¹⁷ Gal. 3:29

¹⁸ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, chapter lxxx

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infirmities, and declare that it only is the cause of our sins, so that if the flesh, say they, rise again, our infirmities also rise with it."¹⁹

Since salvation to the Platonic Greek mind involved escaping the matter of the physical creation, resurrection would not be beneficial but counterproductive because the soul would remain trapped within physical substance and continue to be corrupted by it. Likewise, living within a physical restored creation for a thousand years would also be corrupting to the soul. This aversion to physical substance was why the Greeks of Athens mocked Paul's preaching about the resurrection, and why the Corinthian church was in danger of abandoning the apostolic Faith. And it is why Chiliasm was eventually discarded and replaced with amillennialism, after the defenders of the apostolic Faith passed on.

From Conflict to Synthesis

As the second century droned on, Greek thinking continued its intrusion into Christian theology. Justin and Irenaeus were quite alarmed by this. They strenuously argued that Greek philosophical arguments held by some Christians needed to be expunged entirely from Christian thinking. These great apologists for the "*Faith once for all delivered to the saints*" pushed back against the tide with all their might until their lives were snuffed out in martyrdom.

*"Considering, therefore, even such arguments as are suited to this world, and finding that, even according to them, it is not impossible that the flesh be regenerated; and seeing that, besides all these proofs, the Savior in the whole Gospel shows that there is salvation for the flesh, why do we any longer endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments, and fail to see that we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument as this: that the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived? For this we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth."*²⁰

In Justin's opinion, Christianity was "retrograding" by entertaining "*such arguments as are suited to this world,*" those of the Greek philosophers. The arguments Justin was here refuting were those of Christians who increasingly interpreted the Scriptures through the lens of the Greek philosophers.

"If therefore the great God showed future things by Daniel, and confirmed them by His Son; and if Christ is the stone which is cut out without hands, who shall destroy temporal kingdoms, and introduce an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the just; as he

¹⁹ Justin, On the Resurrection, II

²⁰ Justin, On the Resurrection, X

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*declares, 'The God of heaven shall raise up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed,' — let those thus confuted come to their senses."*²¹

Towards the end of the second century, Irenaeus shows that this thinking was gaining a considerable foothold within the churches through the influence of the philosophical writings.

*"Since, again, some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond the prearranged plan for the exaltation of the just, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption, they thus entertain heretical opinions. For the heretics, despising the handiwork of God, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh, while they also treat the promise of God contemptuously, and pass beyond God altogether in the sentiments they form, affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens and the Demiurge, and go to the Mother (Achamoth) or to that Father whom they have feigned. Those persons, therefore, who disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man, and as far as in them lies remove it from the midst [of the Christian scheme], how can they be wondered at, if again they know nothing as to the plan of the resurrection?"*²²

Irenaeus bemoaned Christians *"who are reckoned among the orthodox"* yet were not satisfied with the destiny of the redeemed as revealed through the Abrahamic Covenant. Instead, they *"entertain heretical opinions"* of the Gnostics. He then described what the *"heretics"* (Gnostics) taught – an ascension into heaven, and the rejection of the resurrection of the flesh. Consequently, these otherwise *"orthodox"* Christians, in adopting any of the Gnostic thinking, were themselves in danger of joining the ranks of *"heretics"* outside the Christian Faith. The heretics had removed some of the essential tenets of the apostolic Faith from the body of received doctrines.

Irenaeus continued, pinpointing the source of the poison – the *"heretical discourses"* of the Greeks which these Christians insisted on consuming.

"Inasmuch, therefore, as the opinions of certain [orthodox persons] are derived from heretical discourses, they are both ignorant of God's dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the [earthly] kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption, by means of which kingdom those who shall be worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature; and it is necessary to tell them respecting those things, that it behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which

²¹ Irenaeus, Book V, ch. xxvi, 2

²² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book V, xxxi

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God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards. For it is just that in that very creation in which they toiled or were afflicted, being proved in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering; and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God, in that they should be revived again; and that in the creation in which they endured servitude, in that they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous; and the apostle has made this plain in the Epistle to the Romans, when he thus speaks: "For the expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation has been subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; since the creation itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."²³

The restoration of the creation at the end of six millennia, the resurrection of the flesh at Christ's coming, and Jesus' own bodily resurrection as the prototype for ours, were viewed by the early orthodox church leaders as a consistent and indivisible body of apostolic truth. The main cause for deviation from this truth was pressure from Greek philosophy and its mixture with Christianity as the Gospel spread throughout the Hellenized world. Christian consumption of the "heretical discourses" was poison as far as the earliest Christian Apologists were concerned.

The Rising Hatred of All Things Jewish

As Christianity spread among the Hellenized world, many Christian circles began to show signs of a rising sense of superiority over the Jews. For one thing, the Jews had been very antagonistic to Christ and His Apostles, as recorded in the Gospels. And to be honest, the Scriptures do not paint a pretty picture of the Jewish nation in the Torah,²⁴ the Prophets,²⁵ or the New Testament.²⁶ The recent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, and Jesus' accurate prediction of God's judgment upon them forty years earlier,²⁷ was seen as proof of Christianity's triumph over Judaism.

²³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, xxxii

²⁴ Israel's constant complaining in the wilderness and rebellion at Kadesh Barnea

²⁵ The worship of idols during the Kings and the prophets' rebukes, using terms like "adulterous wife"

²⁶ Jesus' charge against the Scribes and Pharisees as "hypocrites"; His referring to them as being "of your father the devil," and "of the synagogue of Satan"; Steven's charge against the Sanhedrin, "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

²⁷ Matt. 23:32-39; Luke 19:41-44; Luke 21:5,20-24

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At the same time, the Jews were feverishly trying to counter the early Christians' very successful use of the Septuagint²⁸ against the Jewish interpretations of the prophecies about Christ. Christian evangelism not only proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, but also proclaimed the Jews as His murderers. The more Christianity spread among the Greek speaking world, the more the Jews were pronounced guilty and disparaged by Christians. Jewish rabbis filled the need to develop alternate explanations about various prophecies of Christ. Justin even charged them with altering the text of some copies of the Old Testament itself, and provided specific examples of their attempt to expunge support for Jesus' being the Messiah²⁹ in order to justify His execution on grounds of blasphemy.

Unfortunately, Paul's compassionate attitude towards his erring Jewish brothers³⁰ became quite rare in Christian circles because of the continued and rising tension between the two groups. His prophetic command not to boast against the natural branches³¹ was largely ignored. Greek Christians' scorn for the Jews began to translate into scorn for all things Jewish. And that translated into denouncing the Sabbath, as well as all of the Jewish festivals.

Since Chiliasm saw the six days of the work week as prophetic of the six millennia of man's struggle under the curse, and the Sabbath as prophetic of the Millennial Rest, and since it was the Jews who were honoring the Sabbath, many Christians began to distance themselves from Chiliasm as they attempted to distance themselves from Judaism, Jews, and all things Jewish.

Christians living at this time were under tremendous pressure to be seen as separate from the Jews, as well as to be seen as intellectuals who could hold their own in any philosophical discussion with the Greeks. These combined pressures proved too much for the early churches to withstand as the familiarity with the Apostles receded into antiquity.

The Decline of the Apologists & Rise of the Theologians

The early Apologists whom we have quoted were mostly ordained bishops (pastors) entrusted with the care of local churches. They had direct or indirect linkage to the Apostles. These men considered it their sacred duty to preserve apostolic tradition

²⁸ The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the Old Testament made by 70 Jewish scholars about 250 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. It was the Bible of the Jews of the Diaspora, as well as the early Christians.

²⁹ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxxi - lxxiii

³⁰ Rom. 9:1-5

³¹ Rom. 11:11-36

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exactly as it was handed down within the churches founded by the Apostles. And many of them paid for their dedication with their own blood.

However, as the men who knew the Apostles or their disciples finished their courses in victory, a new breed of Christian leaders began to emerge around the end of the second century. These men were not bishops (pastors) of local churches (which had been intentionally patterned after the synagogue by the Apostles). They were not sworn to faithfully uphold and defend the traditions handed down by the Apostles. They were intellectuals and accomplished writers operating outside the local church. They established schools of Christian philosophy and theology patterned after the Greek philosophical schools. Enter the age of the theologian and the seminary.

The largest such school was in Alexandria, Egypt. Alexandria had come to rival Athens as the center of Greek philosophy and learning. The Alexandrian school and its theologians, Clement and Origen, sought to interact with the arguments presented in the “heretical discourses,” and to mold Christianity into a religion acceptable to the Greek intellectual without the kind of ridicule Paul encountered at Athens being heaped upon it or them.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement was called “*the ethical philosopher of Christians*” by the editor of his works.³² His extensive work, *Stromata*, begins by answering the anticipated objection concerning the plethora of quotations of Greek philosophers included in his work, and his defense of Greek philosophy as being good and beneficial to the Christian.

“In reference to these commentaries, which contain ... the Hellenic opinions, I say thus much to those who are fond of finding fault. First, even if philosophy were useless, if the demonstration of its uselessness does good, it is yet useful. Then those cannot condemn the Greeks, who have only a mere hearsay knowledge of their opinions, and have not entered into a minute investigation in each department, in order to acquaintance with them.”

Clement disarmed his critics’ objections with the same arguments that are often used today to defend unholy practices in the churches. Even if Greek philosophy is useless, it is beneficial for the Christian to study it so he can refute it. Those who have not studied Greek philosophy in great detail have no right to condemn it, according to Clement of Alexandria. This argument is not much different than one used by certain Gnostics, that

³² Ante Nicene Fathers, Roberts and Donaldson, Vol. II, preface to Clement’s Works

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Christians needed to indulge in every excess of the flesh so they could gain knowledge by experience. Such is the foolishness of such reasoning. Clement continues:

“... [He] who sets forth the most essential doctrines so as to produce persuasion in his hearers, engendering admiration in those who are taught, and leads them to the truth. And such persuasion is convincing, by which those that love learning admit the truth; so that philosophy does not ruin life by being the originator of false practices and base deeds, although some have calumniated it, though it be the clear image of truth, a divine gift to the Greeks; nor does it drag us away from the faith, as if we were bewitched by some delusive art, but rather, so to speak, by the use of an ampler circuit, obtains a common exercise demonstrative of the faith. Further, the juxtaposition of doctrines, by comparison, saves the truth, from which follows knowledge.”³³

Clement’s gratuitous praise of Greek philosophy demonstrates that he was going against the natural instincts of Christians, as well as the precedent set by the earlier apologists. By making the claim, *“nor does [Greek philosophy] drag us away from the faith, as if we were bewitched by some delusive art,”* he implicitly shows that many Christians believed it to be just that. And why would Christians have this opinion? It was because the Apostle Paul had clearly marked Greek philosophy as the road to apostasy. *“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge — by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.”³⁴* Note the two pronged defense that Paul prescribed for his protégé. Guard the apostolic tradition, and avoid Greek philosophy. Yet, Clement prescribed exactly the opposite. He disregarded apostolic tradition, and placed Greek philosophy on a par with the Jewish Scriptures!

“Philosophy came into existence, not on its own account, but for the advantages reaped by us from knowledge, we receiving a firm persuasion of true perception, through the knowledge of things comprehended by the mind.”³⁵

Philosophy is purely the exercise of human reasoning, the evaluation and judgment of things by the human intellect. Clement appears to be completely oblivious to the fallen state of man which has corrupted his mind so that it cannot be objective or perceive spiritual things.

³³ Clement of Alexandria, Book I, ch. ii

³⁴ 1 Tim 6:20-21. Irenaeus took the title for his 5 Volume massive work from this verse. It is usually abbreviated as “Against Heresies.” But Irenaeus’ original title was, *“A Refutation and Overthrow of What is Falsely called Knowledge.”* The stark contrast between Irenaeus as an apologist for the apostolic Faith, and Clement as an apologist for Plato, could not be more evident.

³⁵ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, Book I, ch. ii

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Paul's view of Greek philosophy, expressed to the Corinthians living just outside the world capitol of Greek philosophy, Athens, was precisely the opposite of Clement's.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

6 "However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ."

In contrast, consider Clement's opinion of Greek philosophy.

"Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration. "For thy foot," it is said, "will not stumble, if thou refer what is good, whether belonging to the Greeks or to us, to Providence." For God is the cause of all good things; but of some primarily, as of the Old and the New Testament; and of others by consequence, as philosophy. Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a schoolmaster to bring "the Hellenic mind," as the law, the Hebrews, "to Christ." Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ."³⁶

³⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Bk. I, ch. v

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The contradiction between Paul and Clement of Alexandria, head of the Alexandrian school, could not be more glaring. To Paul, Greek philosophy was *“the wisdom of this age,”* from *“the spirit of this world,”* and *“man’s wisdom.”* According to Paul, the Greek philosophers and their students could not comprehend God’s truth because *“the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.”*

Even Justin, who had studied the philosophers prior to his conversion, when proving to the Greeks that the philosophers were ignorant, wrote: *“I think we ought to examine the opinions even of these sages. For we shall see whether each of these does not manifestly contradict the other. But if we find that even they do not agree with each other, I think it is easy to see clearly that they too are ignorant.”*³⁷ He then went on to prove that they all disagreed with each other on a multitude of crucial points, and thus were ignorant of divine truth.

Yet, Clement of Alexandria viewed the writings of these men as a fountain of truth, *“being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith,”* on a par with the Law of Moses given by divine revelation. He even placed the writings of the philosophers on a par with the teachings of Christ, quoting both Jesus and Plato as fellow witnesses to the same truths.

*“For there are with the Lord both rewards and ‘many mansions’ corresponding to men’s lives. ‘Whosoever shall receive,’ says He, ‘a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet’s reward; and whosoever shall receive a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man’s reward; and whoso shall receive one of the least of these my disciples, shall not lose his reward.’ ... They shall work, therefore, in accordance with the appropriate mansions of which they have been deemed worthy as rewards, being fellow-workers in the ineffable administration and service. ‘Those, then,’ says Plato, ‘who seem called to a holy life, are those who, freed and released from those earthly localities as from prisons, have reached the pure dwelling-place on high.’ In clearer terms again he [Plato] expresses the same thing: ‘Those who by philosophy have been sufficiently purged from those things, live without bodies entirely for all time. Although they are enveloped in certain shapes; in the case of some, of air, and others, of fire.’ He adds further: ‘And they reach abodes fairer than those, which it is not easy, nor is there sufficient time now to describe.’ Whence with reason, [Jesus said] ‘blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted’.”*³⁸

It is easy to see that Clement’s treatment of Jesus’ words were not from the Jewish framework which the original hearers possessed. He commented here on the “many

³⁷ Justin, Hortatory Address to the Greeks, Ch. V

³⁸ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, Bk. IV, ch. vi

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mansions” which Jesus promised to His disciples at the Last Supper. Rather than interpreting this statement as Jesus’ Jewish disciples would certainly have, Clement instead saw Jesus as affirming Plato’s heavenly spheres and bodiless afterlife.

The Jewish disciples would have understood Jesus’ statement about “*My Father’s House*” containing “*many mansions*,” as referring to the Temple in Jerusalem. When Jesus drove the moneychangers from the Temple, He shouted, “*Make not My Father’s House a house of merchandise.*” When the disciples saw what Jesus did and heard His words, they remembered Psalm 69:9, “*The zeal for your house has eaten me up.*”³⁹ The house of the Lord, what Jesus called, “*My Father’s House*,” was clearly the Temple in the minds of the disciples, and everywhere else in Scripture. Solomon’s Temple contained “*many mansions.*” They were three story apartments for the priests to temporarily occupy while they fulfilled their week of service at the Temple.⁴⁰ Josephus also described them in Herod’s Temple,⁴¹ the same priestly apartments the disciples would have seen. Ezekiel’s prophecy of the Temple in the Kingdom also included these many three story mansions.⁴²

If we consider Jesus’ words from the perspective of His Jewish disciples, it is obvious that He was promising them a place of priestly service in the Kingdom Temple. According to Luke’s account of this discourse, Jesus promised them a place at His dinner table in His Kingdom, and a role judging the twelve tribes of Israel.⁴³ In the Law, the Temple priests served as the Supreme Court of Israel.⁴⁴ In the prophecies of Christ’s coming Kingdom in Jerusalem, believers were to be the new priesthood. “*But ye shall be called priests of the Lord, the ministers of God: ye shall eat the strength of nations, and shall be admired because of their wealth. Thus shall they inherit the land a second time, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head.*”⁴⁵ Revelation confirms this: “*Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*”⁴⁶ This of course would mean they would stay in these three story apartments during their week of service at the Temple.

Clement of Alexandria did not consider how Jesus’ statement would have been understood by His Jewish disciples to whom He was speaking, within their setting,

³⁹ John 2:16-17

⁴⁰ 1 Kings 6:5,10; 1 Chron. 9:33

⁴¹ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Bk. V, ch. v

⁴² Ezek. 41:5-11

⁴³ Luke 22:28-30

⁴⁴ Deut. 17:8-13

⁴⁵ Isaiah 61:6-7 LXX

⁴⁶ Rev 20:6

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culture, and background. Instead, Clement took Jesus' words in John 14 to His disciples as affirming Plato's heavenly spheres! This is an astounding perversion of Jesus' teaching. Instead of showing that Jesus affirmed the Hebrew prophets, Clement put Plato in the place of the prophets, as the forerunner of Christ! Jesus was affirming Plato. What blasphemy! Yet this connection between John 14 and Plato's heavenly spheres is the cause of the heavenly destiny beliefs of most Christians today, holding either to amillennialism or dispensationalism.

It was the influence of the Alexandrian school, and its method of interpreting Scripture through the presuppositions of Greek philosophy, and employing the allegorical method of Gnosticism to deny the plain sense of the text, which led to the demise of Chiliasm and the development of its replacement, amillennialism. The tools used to overthrow the apostolic Faith were these:

- elevating Greek philosophy on a par with Scripture
- viewing Scripture through a philosophical lens
- denying the plain sense of Scripture in favor of allegorical interpretations

One might argue that the early apologists who were Chiliasts also used allegorical interpretation at times. The fact is, the Bible does use allegory and non-literal speech sometimes. However, when it does, it can be easily recognized. There is a vast difference between the use of non-literal language, such as parables and figures of speech, or the recognition of prophetic types in Scripture (something widely used by the early Chiliasts), and denying the plain sense of the text. The early apologists did not deny the plain sense of the text, but only augmented the literal reading of Scripture with prophetic types. The methodology of the Alexandrian school, however, was the wholesale denial of the plain sense of Scripture in favor of an alternative mystical interpretation.

It was through the Alexandrian school's influence that Chiliasm was eventually expunged from Christian theology, with its hope rooted in the Land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, and its resurrection of the flesh in order to dwell in the restored Promised Land. It was replaced with Plato's heavenly spheres, and a denial of the resurrection of the body of flesh. All this was justified by a misinterpretation of the "many mansions" statement in John 14:1-3.

The resurrection was not overtly denied by the Alexandrian school, because it was a tenet of the Apostles' Creed which candidates for baptism had acknowledged for a very long time: *"I believe ... in the resurrection of the flesh."* Rather, like the Gnostics, the Alexandrian school began to redefine biblical terms. They claimed that the "resurrection" was spiritual, not physical.

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Origen

Clement's successor as head of the Alexandrian school was Origen. He followed in the footsteps of his predecessor. His fascination with Greek philosophy led him to propose many doctrines that are clearly heretical. For example, he was the father of universalism, the idea that all of God's creatures will be saved, including fallen angels and the devil himself.⁴⁷ He taught that the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, stars, planets, were living creatures with souls and a free will, and that they possessed life and reason.⁴⁸

Origen further developed Clement's adaption of Plato's heavenly spheres. Rather than seeing the heavenly spheres (Jesus' many mansions) as merely rewards, Origen viewed them as a series of heavenly classrooms. When departing this world, a Christian would begin a staged ascent into the heavens, graduating from one learning sphere (mansion) and ascending to the next until he at last reached the presence of God where he would make his permanent abode. Being in God's presence was only for those who had sufficiently learned philosophy.

"We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.' We are therefore to suppose that the saints will remain there until they recognize the twofold mode of government in those things which are performed in the air. ...

I think, therefore, that all the saints who depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth, which holy Scripture calls paradise, as in some place of instruction, and, so to speak, class-room or school of souls, in which they are to be instructed regarding all the things which they had seen on earth. ... If anyone indeed be pure in heart, and holy in mind, and more practiced in perception, he will, by making more rapid progress, quickly ascend to a place in the air, and reach the kingdom of heaven, through those mansions, so to speak, in the various places which the Greeks have termed spheres, i.e., globes, but which holy Scripture has called heavens; in each of which he will first see clearly what is done there, and in the second place, will discover the reason why things are so done: and thus he will, in order, pass through all gradations, following Him who hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who said, "I will that where I am, these may be also." And of this diversity of places He speaks, when He says, "In My Father's house are many mansions."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Origen, De Principis, Bk. I, ch. vi

⁴⁸ Origen, De Principis, Bk. I, ch. vii

⁴⁹ Origen, De Principis, Bk. II, ch. xi

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Notice that the instruction given to believers after death, making them worthy of ascending to the next heavenly sphere, concerns knowledge of the mechanics of the creation. One remains in some spiritual “paradise” on earth after death until he is instructed by angelic beings and understands biology, geology, botany, etc. Then, he ascends into the air where he remains and is instructed in climatology. He then ascends beyond the air into the next sphere where he is taught astronomy. He continues in this staged ascension through the “many mansions” (spheres) until he finally reaches the heaven of heavens.

Origen described Jesus as having ascended through this labyrinth of spheres. Like amillennialists today,⁵⁰ he claimed that Jesus did not retain His resurrected body of flesh when He ascended into heaven.

“He Himself is everywhere, and passes swiftly through all things; nor are we any longer to understand Him as existing in those narrow limits in which He was once confined for our sakes, i.e., not in that circumscribed body which He occupied on earth, when dwelling among men, according to which He might be considered as enclosed in some one place.”⁵¹

The natural inference of Origen’s scheme is that Christians follow in Jesus’ footsteps, and also no longer possess a body of flesh as they ascend through these heavenly spheres.

“When, then, the saints shall have reached the celestial abodes, they will clearly see the nature of the stars one by one, and will understand whether they are endued with life, or their condition, whatever it is. And they will comprehend also the other reasons for the works of God, which He Himself will reveal to them. For He will show to them, as to children, the causes of things and the power of His creation, and will explain why that star was placed in that particular quarter of the sky, and why it was separated from another by so great an intervening space; what, e.g., would have been the consequence if it had been nearer or more remote; or if that star had been larger than this, how the totality of things would not have remained the same, but all would have been transformed into a different condition of being. And so, when they have finished all those matters which are connected with the stars, and with the heavenly revolutions, they will come to those which are not seen, or to those whose names only we have heard, and to things which are invisible, which the Apostle Paul has informed us are numerous, although what they are, or what difference may exist among them, we cannot even conjecture by

⁵⁰ See my debate with Norm Fields, amillennialist Church of Christ minister.

http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/debate_fields.html

⁵¹ Origen, De Principis, Bk. II, ch. xi

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our feeble intellect. And thus the rational nature, growing by each individual step, not as it grew in this life in flesh, and body, and soul, but enlarged in understanding and in power of perception, is raised as a mind already perfect to perfect knowledge, no longer at all impeded by those carnal senses, but increased in intellectual growth; and ever gazing purely, and, so to speak, face to face, on the causes of things, it attains perfection.”⁵²

Origen did not derive such absurd ideas from the Scriptures, even though he used, or rather abused, the Scriptures to support them. They were derived from Greek philosophy. Origen provided a biblical basis for his ideas by employing the same interpretive methods as the Gnostics, allegorical interpretation. His use of allegory differed greatly from the early Chiliast apologists. Origen was willing to completely discard the plain sense of the text, claiming that only the “mystical” hidden meaning was true. He applied this mystical interpretation to the historical books as well as the prophets.

“Being taught, then, by him that there is one Israel according to the flesh, and another according to the Spirit, when the Savior says, “I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” we do not understand these words as those do who savor of earthly things, ... but we understand that there exists a race of souls which is termed “Israel,” as is indicated by the interpretation of the name itself: for Israel is interpreted to mean a “mind,” or “man seeing God.” The apostle, again, makes a similar revelation respecting Jerusalem, saying, “The Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” And in another of his Epistles he says: “But ye are come unto mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, and to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the Church of the first-born which is written in heaven.” If, then, there are certain souls in this world who are called Israel, and a city in heaven which is called Jerusalem, it follows that those cities which are said to belong to the nation of Israel have the heavenly Jerusalem as their metropolis; and that, agreeably to this, we understand as referring to the whole of Judah (of which also we are of opinion that the prophets have spoken in certain mystical narratives), any predictions delivered either regarding Judea or Jerusalem, or invasions of any kind, which the sacred histories declare to have happened to Judea or Jerusalem. Whatever, then, is either narrated or predicted of Jerusalem, must, if we accept the words of Paul as those of Christ speaking in him, be understood as spoken in conformity with his opinion regarding that city which he calls the heavenly Jerusalem, and all those places or cities which are said to be cities of the holy land, of which Jerusalem is the metropolis. For we are to suppose that it is from these very cities that the Savior, wishing to raise us to a higher grade of intelligence, promises to those who have well managed the money entrusted to them by Himself, that they are to

⁵² Origen, *De Principis*, Bk. II, xi

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have power over ten or five cities. If, then, the prophecies delivered concerning Judea, and Jerusalem, and Judah, and Israel, and Jacob, not being understood by us in a carnal sense, signify certain divine mysteries, it certainly follows that those prophecies also which were delivered either concerning Egypt or the Egyptians, or Babylonia and the Babylonians, and Sidon and the Sidonians, are not to be understood as spoken of that Egypt which is situated on the earth, or of the earthly Babylon, Tyre, or Sidon. Nor can those predictions which the prophet Ezekiel delivered concerning Pharaoh king of Egypt, apply to any man who may seem to have reigned over Egypt, as the nature of the passage itself declares. In a similar manner also, what is spoken of the prince of Tyre cannot be understood of any man or king of Tyre. And how could we possibly accept, as spoken of a man, what is related in many passages of Scripture, and especially in Isaiah, regarding Nebuchadnezzar? ... But let us see whether it may not be understood more fittingly in the following manner: viz., that as there is a heavenly Jerusalem and Judea, and a nation undoubtedly which inhabits it, and is named Israel; so also it is possible that there are certain localities near to these which may seem to be called either Egypt, or Babylon, or Tyre, or Sidon, and that the princes of these places, and the souls, if there be any, that inhabit them, are called Egyptians, Babylonians, Tyrians, and Sidonians. From whom also, according to the mode of life which they lead there, a sort of captivity would seem to result, in consequence of which they are said to have fallen from Judea into Babylonia or Egypt, from a higher and better condition, or to have been scattered into other countries.⁵³

This is pure and unadulterated *unbelief*. Origen erected a mystical parallel universe in the heavens, with places having the same names as those on earth. He claimed that the histories and prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures did not refer to the actual locations and events on earth, but to the mystical places and events in his parallel universe – Gnostic wonderland! Yes, this is the theology of the hero of amillennialism, the one who laid much of the groundwork for the rejection of Chiliasm. This is the wisdom of man in flights of fantasy, when the mind is not anchored to divine revelation or guided by the Spirit of truth.

There were many Greek Christians, like Clement and Origen, who could not turn loose of Greek philosophy, who were similarly infatuated with man's own intellect. Consequently, Origen was widely read in Christian circles, and his school flourished because Origen's brand of Christianity could compete in the Greek culture enamored with "*nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.*"⁵⁴ His impact on early Christian thinking was profound, and he churned out many disciples from his school, and a great deal of literature.

⁵³ Origen, *De Principis*, Book IV, ch. i (20)

⁵⁴ Acts 17:21

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However, not everyone was so easily persuaded by Clement's and Origen's philosophical arguments. There were still faithful men within the apostolic churches who would not allow the ancient apostolic beliefs to be overturned without a fight. Many bishops of local churches despised Origen and his philosophical school, even in his home town of Alexandria. Peter, bishop of the church in Alexandria, was quoted as saying in his last words just before his martyrdom, "... Origen, that framer of a perverse dogma laid many temptations, who cast upon the Church a detestable schism, which to this day is throwing it into confusion."⁵⁵

Other bishops of local churches strongly opposed Origen as well. Methodius was bishop of the churches of Olympus and Patara, in Lycia (Asia Minor). Like the early apologists and bishops, he too became a martyr. He is known best as the antagonist and nemesis of Origen. And he was as strong a Chiliast as were the earlier apologists.

*"For I cannot endure the trifling of some who shamelessly do violence to Scripture, in order that their opinion, that the resurrection is without flesh, may find support; supposing rational bones and flesh, and in different ways changing it backwards and forwards by allegorizing ... But it is evidently absurd to think that the body will not co-exist with the soul in the eternal state, because it is a bond and fetters; in order that, according to their view, we who are to live in the kingdom of light may not be forever condemned to be bondmen of corruption. For as the question has been sufficiently solved, and the statement refitted in which they defined the flesh to be the soul's chain, the argument also is destroyed, that the flesh will not rise again, lest, if we resume it, we be prisoners in the kingdom of light."*⁵⁶

*"That Origen said that the body was given to the soul as a fetter after the fall, and that previously it lived without a body; but that this body which we wear is the cause of our sins; wherefore also he called it a fetter, as it can hinder the soul from good works."*⁵⁷

*"That man, with respect to his nature, is most truly said to be neither soul without body, nor, on the other hand, body without soul; but a being composed out of the union of soul and body into one form of the beautiful. But Origen said that the soul alone is man, as did Plato."*⁵⁸

Methodius understood that Origen's errors did not only affect eschatology. Wrong eschatology reaches into the very fundamentals of biblical doctrine, the cause of sin, the

⁵⁵ Peter or Alexandria, The Genuine Acts of Peter

⁵⁶ Methodius, Discourse on the Resurrection, Part I, ii-iii

⁵⁷ Methodius, Discourse on the Resurrection, Part III, ii

⁵⁸ Methodius, Discourse on the Resurrection, Part III, iii

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nature of man's existence, and consequently the nature of the incarnation of Christ and the value of the atoning sacrifice of His flesh. Origen and amillennialists today see man as a soul, the body being only a temporary accessory. Chiliasts saw man consisting of both body and soul.

The implications of Origen's heresy on the incarnation of Jesus Christ, as well as his death and resurrection, are profound. It is an entirely different "Christianity" that has the Son of God assuming a flesh suit (instead of becoming flesh), and then disposing of His flesh suit when He ascended into heaven.

Peter indicated that Jesus' physical descent from David granted Him the right to the Throne of David, that His flesh body from David's seed would be raised to sit on David's throne. *"Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ."*⁵⁹

But the Jesus of Origen and amillennialism offered only His flesh suit as a sacrifice for our sins. His body of flesh will never sit on David's Throne. It was discarded when He ascended into heaven.⁶⁰ His blood is not "precious" in this scheme, but something to be discarded. And how could Jesus Christ come in the flesh and remain sinless if human flesh and its association with the soul is the real cause of sin? Origen's view was only one baby step away from full blown Gnosticism.

*"Origen, after having fabled many things concerning the eternity of the universe, adds this also: 'Nor yet from Adam, as some say, did man, previously not existing, first take his existence and come into the world. Nor again did the world begin to be made six days before the creation of Adam'."*⁶¹

Like Jewish Cabalists, Origen denied that souls began to exist when the body began to exist, claiming instead that all souls existed in heaven prior to conception or birth of the child. He claimed that the preexistent soul's entrance into human flesh is a temporary experience for the purpose of instruction. In Origen's theology, every person existed before Adam's body was created.

In a feeble attempt at countering Chiliast eschatology, Origen tried to turn the tables on Chiliasm. He took the Chiliast's claim, that the six days of creation are prophetic of six

⁵⁹ Acts 2:29-31

⁶⁰ See my debate with Norm Fields, amillennial Church of Christ minister.
http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/debate_fields.html

⁶¹ Methodius, Extracts from the Work On Things Created, IX

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thousand years, and insisted that it must mean that God took six thousand years to create everything. Since Chiliasts claimed that a day with God is a thousand years, and since God took six “days” to create the heavens and the earth, Origen concluded that if the Chiliasts were correct, God necessarily took six thousand years to create the material universe, creating man’s flesh (Adam) in the sixth millennium from the start of His creation project. Origen mocked Chiliasts as “clever arithmeticians,” claiming that their methods actually required thirteen millennia and not a week of seven millennia, (six millennia to create everything, and seven more millennia to bring everything to a conclusion). Methodius quoted Origen’s sarcastic argument as follows:

“But if anyone should prefer to differ in these points, let him first say, whether a period of time be not easily reckoned from the creation of the world, according to the Book of Moses, to those who so receive it, the voice of prophecy here proclaiming: ‘Thou art God from everlasting, and world without end.... For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night.’ For when a thousand years are reckoned as one day in the sight of God, and from the creation of the world to His rest is six days [that is, from the beginning of the creation until He completed it was six thousand years], so also to our time, six days are defined [in addition to the six thousand years of creation], as those say who are clever arithmeticians [here Origen mocks Chiliasts as “clever arithmeticians”]. Therefore, they say that an age of six thousand years extends from Adam to our time. For they [Chiliasts] say that the judgment will come on the seventh day, that is in the seventh thousand years. Therefore, all the days from our time to that which was in the beginning, in which God created the heaven and the earth, are computed to be thirteen days [rather than six days as the Chiliasts claimed]; before which God, because he had as yet created nothing according to their [Chiliasts’] folly, is stripped of His name of Father and Almighty.’

‘But if there are thirteen days in the sight of God from the creation of the world, how can Wisdom say, in the Book of the Son of Sirach: “Who can number the sand of the sea, and the drops of rain, and the days of eternity?”

This is what Origen says seriously, and mark how he trifles.”⁶²

The struggle over eschatology was between the bishops of local churches (who defended the pristine Faith) and the theologians (who insisted on blending Christianity with Greek philosophy). It continued to fester until after the conversion of the emperor Constantine.

⁶² Methodius, Extracts from the Work On Things Created, IX

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The New Roman Church-State Embraces Platonism

The Emperor Constantine's alleged conversion brought radical changes to Christianity. The persecution of Christians by the state suddenly stopped. Yet, the price of outward tranquility was the emperor's inserting himself into Christian theology.

Constantine's goal was to unite his empire. Any division could lead to serious political problems and revolts. Adopting Christianity, which had grown enormously during the persecutions, was seen as having the potential to unite the fracturing empire.

Under Constantine, the formerly persecuted churches were suddenly granted the favor of the emperor. Yet, the underlying doctrinal divisions that were still simmering were seen by Constantine as a threat to his power. This is why Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, to resolve doctrinal conflicts within Christianity. The primary conflict was between the Arians and Trinitarians. But the issue of eschatology was also addressed. The emperor was present at the proceedings, and personally oversaw the work of the bishops, imposing his long shadow over them.

In his opening address to the Christian bishops whom he had summoned, Constantine let his views be known regarding the Chiliasm controversy, siding with Plato and his Alexandrian devotees, Clement and Origen, and against the earlier apologists and martyrs.

“Plato ... plainly declares that a rational soul is the breath of God, and divides all things into two classes, intellectual and sensible: consisting of bodily structure; the one comprehended by the intellect alone, the other estimated by the judgment and the senses. The former class, therefore, which partakes of the divine spirit, and is un compounded and immaterial, is eternal, and inherits everlasting life; but the latter, being entirely resolved into the elements of which it is composed, has no share in everlasting life. He [Plato] farther teaches the admirable doctrine, that those who have passed a life of virtue, that is, the spirits of good and holy men, are enshrined, after their separation from the body, in the fairest mansions of heaven. A doctrine not merely to be admired, but profitable too. For who can believe in such a statement, and aspire to such a happy lot, without desiring to practice righteousness and temperance, and to turn aside from vice?”⁶³

“If indeed we in any sense aspire to blessedness like that of God, our duty is to lead a life according to his commandments: so shall we, having finished a course consistent with the laws which he has prescribed, dwell forever superior to the power of fate, in eternal and undecaying mansions. ... raising our affections above the things of earth, and directing

⁶³ Eusebius, Oration of Constantine, ch. ix

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our thoughts, as far as we may, to high and heavenly objects: for from such endeavors, it is said, a victory accrues to us more valuable than many blessings.”⁶⁴

Not a few bishops were dazzled by Constantine, including Eusebius, the church historian. Pleasing the Christian emperor became a very high priority among many church leaders. His royal favor was a great incentive to set apart their doctrinal differences, even overpowering for some the incentive to please Christ. And Constantine lavished church leaders with honor and wealth when they pleased him and assisted him in achieving his goals.

Constantine set out to enforce unity of the Christian religion with the use of law and force against all “schismatics” (meaning all who would not submit to the state approved Roman Catholic Church, and its official doctrines). He put everyone who would not go along on notice.

“Forasmuch, then, as it is no longer possible to bear with your pernicious errors, we give warning by this present statute that none of you henceforth presume to assemble yourselves together. We have directed, accordingly, that you be deprived of all the houses in which you are accustomed to hold your assemblies: and our care in this respect extends so far as to forbid the holding of your superstitious and senseless meetings, not in public merely, but in any private house or place whatsoever. Let those of you, therefore, who are desirous of embracing the true and pure religion, take the far better course of entering the catholic Church, and uniting with it in holy fellowship, whereby you will be enabled to arrive at the knowledge of the truth. In any case, the delusions of your perverted understandings must entirely cease to mingle with and mar the felicity of our present times: I mean the impious and wretched double-mindedness of heretics and schismatics. ... And in order that this remedy may be applied with effectual power, we have commanded, as before said, that you be positively deprived of every gathering point for your superstitious meetings, I mean all the houses of prayer, if such be worthy of the name, which belong to heretics, and that these be made over without delay to the catholic Church; that any other places be confiscated to the public service, and no facility whatever be left for any future gathering; in order that from this day forward none of your unlawful assemblies may presume to appear in any public or private place. Let this edict be made public.”

Eusebius then recounted the effect of the emperor’s edict on all “heretics and schismatics.”

⁶⁴ Eusebius, Oration of Constantine, ch. xiv

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“Thus the members of the entire body became united, and compacted in one harmonious whole; and the one catholic Church, at unity with itself, shone with full luster, while no heretical or schismatic body anywhere continued to exist. And the credit of having achieved this mighty work our Heaven-protected emperor alone, of all who had gone before him, was able to attribute to himself.”⁶⁵

It is true that the victors get to write the history books. And the chosen vessel for writing the history of the Christian Church under the emperor Constantine was Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, Constantine’s lap dog.

Eusebius’ speech on the festival honoring Constantine clearly demonstrates that the emperor was the real authority for Christian doctrine in this new Roman Catholic Church – State.

“He who is the pre-existent Word, the Preserver of all things, imparts to his disciples the seeds of true wisdom and salvation, and at once enlightens and gives them understanding in the knowledge of his Father’s kingdom. Our emperor, his friend, acting as interpreter to the Word of God, aims at recalling the whole human race to the knowledge of God; proclaiming clearly in the ears of all, and declaring with powerful voice the laws of truth and godliness to all who dwell on the earth.”⁶⁶

Eusebius fully supported the Platonic – Christian eschatology, as is quite apparent in this same speech.

“[T]he Word of God, ... by his Divine teaching, inviting the souls of men to prepare for those mansions which are above the heavens.”⁶⁷

“Who, like him, has persuaded multitudes throughout the world to pursue the principles of Divine wisdom, to fix their hope on heaven itself, and look forward to the mansions there reserved for them that love God?”⁶⁸

The writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen were abundant and popular in Eusebius’ day. In fact, Eusebius had high praise for Origen. Yet, the much older Chiliast writings of the earliest Christian apologists still remained in circulation, and were an embarrassment to the Roman Church – State. Chiliasm needed to be suppressed by more than just the emperor’s praise of the new Platonic – Christian eschatology.

⁶⁵ Eusebius, Constantine, Bk. III, ch. lxvi

⁶⁶ Eusebius, Oration, ch. ii

⁶⁷ Eusebius, Oration, ch. xiv

⁶⁸ Eusebius, Oration, ch. xvii

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Eusebius was chosen to write a history of Christianity (as Josephus had done for Judaism, also under the emperor's supervision). Eusebius' History of the Christian Church is clearly biased, resorting to historical revisionism when convenient, being skewed against the early Chiliasts. He charged the earliest bishop-apologist-martyrs with heresy.

Some Chiliast works were also revised by later editors to expunge their Chiliasm. This is evident in the surviving works of Victorinus, who wrote a commentary on Genesis and one on Revelation. His Genesis commentary shows plainly that he was a Chiliast, and that he expected Christ and the saints to reign on earth in the seventh millennium.

“And in Matthew we read, that it is written Isaiah also and the rest of his colleagues broke the Sabbath — that that true and just Sabbath should be observed in the seventh millenary of years. Wherefore to those seven days the Lord attributed to each a thousand years; for thus went the warning: ‘In Thine eyes, O Lord, a thousand years are as one day.’ Therefore in the eyes of the Lord each thousand of years is ordained, for I find that the Lord’s eyes are seven. Wherefore, as I have narrated, that true Sabbath will be in the seventh millenary of years, when Christ with His elect shall reign.”⁶⁹

Yet, his commentary on the twentieth chapter of Revelation has clearly been edited, making Victorinus contradict himself. The edited portion retains the six millennia of Chiliasm, but interprets the “first resurrection” as referring to salvation in the present age (like amillennialists). It places the reign of Christ and the saints during the sixth millennium (which the editor thought was present), rather than in the seventh (future) millennium, as in Victorinus' commentary on creation. The net effect is to retain the Millennial Week idea of Chiliasm, but deny the Kingdom on earth in the seventh millennium. Instead, the seventh Millennium would be a heavenly abode.

“Those years wherein Satan is bound are in the first advent of Christ, even to the end of the age; and they are called a thousand, according to that mode of speaking, wherein a part is signified by the whole, ... Moreover, that he says that he is bound and shut up, that he may not seduce the nations, the nations signify the Church, seeing that of them it itself is formed, and which being seduced, he previously held until, he says, the thousand years should be completed, that is, what is left of the sixth day, to wit, of the sixth age, which subsists for a thousand years; after this he must be loosed for a little season. The little season signifies three years and six months, in which with all his power the devil will avenge himself trader Antichrist against the Church.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Victorinus, On the Creation of the World

⁷⁰ Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, Ch. xx

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Thus in the edited commentary of Victorinus we have a blend of Chiliasm and amillennialism. The seventh millennium in this scheme would be the heavenly hope envisioned by the amillennialists. That the intention of the editor was to expunge the concept of an “earthly” Kingdom is quite clear from the statement added at the very end of the work, which has no connection to the context in which it is found.

“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.”⁷¹

Who the editor of Victorinus’ commentary was is impossible to say with certainty. However, without question the alterations were made by someone well acquainted with Augustine’s massive work, *The City of God*. The questionable words are almost a direct quote from Augustine’s commentary on Revelation 20 in his amillennial treatise, *The City of God*.

“Now the thousand years may be understood in two ways, so far as occurs to me: either because these things happen in the sixth thousand of years or sixth millennium (the latter part of which is now passing), as if during the sixth day, which is to be followed by a Sabbath which has no evening, the endless rest of the saints, so that, speaking of a part under the name of the whole, he calls the last part of the millennium — the part, that is, which had yet to expire before the end of the world — a thousand years; ...

*“For it is not said ‘that he should not seduce any man,’ but ‘that he should not seduce the nations’ — meaning, no doubt, those among which the Church exists — **‘till the thousand years should be fulfilled,’** — i.e., **either what remains of the sixth day which consists of a thousand years,...**”⁷²*

Compare to the edited commentary of Victorinus:

*“Moreover, that he says that he is bound and shut up, that he may not seduce the nations, the nations signify the Church, seeing that of them it itself is formed, and which being seduced, he previously held until, he says, **the thousand years should be completed, that is, what is left of the sixth day, to wit, of the sixth age, which subsists for a thousand years;...**”*

⁷¹ Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Ch. 22

⁷² Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. 20, ch. 7

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Augustine wrote more than a century after Victorinus, and the editor almost certainly lived contemporary with or after Augustine. The blending of the Millennial Week of Chiliasm with the new amillennialism, identifying the “millennium” of Revelation with the 6th millennium then thought to be present, was something Augustine had pioneered, as is evident in the quotes from *The City of God*.

The editor of Victorinus’ commentary on Revelation was no doubt also familiar with Eusebius’ *History of the Christian Church*, who also wrote after Victorinus but before Augustine. The unknown editor charged that Chiliasm was a heresy begun by Cerinthus. This was no doubt gleaned from Eusebius, who made this claim in his *Church History*, quoting two of Origen disciples as his sources, Caius and Dionysius.

“WE have understood that at this time Cerinthus, the author of another heresy, made his appearance. Caius, whose words we quoted above, in the Disputation which is ascribed to him, writes as follows concerning this man:

‘But Cerinthus also, by means of revelations which he pretends were written by a great apostle, brings before us marvelous things which he falsely claims were shown him by angels; and he says that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ will be set up on earth, and that the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem will again be subject to desires and pleasures. And being an enemy of the Scriptures of God, he asserts, with the purpose of deceiving men, that there is to be a period of a thousand years a for marriage festivals.’

*And Dionysius, who was bishop of the parish of Alexandria in our day, in the second book of his work *On the Promises*, where he says some things concerning the Apocalypse of John which he draws from tradition, mentions this same man in the following words:*

‘But (they say that) Cerinthus, who founded the sect which was called, after him, the Cerinthian, desiring reputable authority for his fiction, prefixed the name. 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 that 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 is appetites with a better grace.’

These are the words of Dionysius.”⁷³

It is curious that Eusebius used such recent sources in his attempt to link Chiliasm with the heretic, Cerinthus, since neither source could have had any firsthand information about the subject, living more than a century after Cerinthus.

⁷³ Eusebius, *Church History*, Book III, ch. xxviii

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Eusebius' first source, Caius, not only attributed Chiliasm to the heretic Cerinthus, but also the authorship of the book of Revelation!⁷⁴ No doubt his attributing Revelation to Cerinthus was because of the twentieth chapter which describes the Millennium on earth after the first resurrection. Clearly, Caius was vehemently opposed to Chiliasm, making him an unreliable source.

Eusebius second source, Dionysius, was a student of Origen, and became the head of the Alexandrian school after Origen. Since the Alexandrian school was the primary enemy of Chiliasm, Eusebius' use of such sources to link Chiliasm to Cerinthus is invalid. That Eusebius quoted these sources who lived very near his own day, who could not possibly have had any personal knowledge of Cerinthus, gives the appearance that he was merely packaging his own historical revisionism in the words of others, none of which give his statements any real historical credibility.

The charge that the early apologists adopted Chiliasm from Cerinthus is patently absurd. Cerinthus was a Gnostic who blended elements of Christianity, Judaism, and Gnosticism. He was the contemporary and nemesis of John the Apostle in his later years. It is believed by many that John wrote the prologue to His Gospel and his three epistles to counter the influence of Cerinthus. Yet, we learn of this heretic and John's disdain for him from Irenaeus, a Chiliast.

“But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by Apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the Apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time, — a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the Apostles, — that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, ‘Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.’ And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, ‘Dost thou know me?’ ‘I do know thee, the first-born of Satan.’ Such was the horror

⁷⁴ Catholic Encyclopedia, Caius, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03144a.htm>

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which the Apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth.”⁷⁵

This is the same Irenaeus who attributed Chiliasm, the Kingdom of Christ on the earth in the seventh millennium, to the same Polycarp and those like him who were acquainted with the Apostles. *“The presbyters, the disciples of the Apostles, affirm that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved.”⁷⁶* The *“presbyters, the disciples of the Apostles”* were all Chiliasts as far as we can tell, including Polycarp, Ignatius, and Papias (all taught personally by John). It is absurd to suggest that the early apologists who vehemently opposed the Gnostic heretics, including Cerinthus, derived their belief in Chiliasm from the very Gnostics they refuted as heretics! That Cerinthus held to some of the tenets of Chiliasm only shows that he had mixed some of the apostolic teachings with his own perverted blend of Christianity, Judaism, and Gnosticism.

Furthermore, it is easy to show that essential tenets of Chiliasm (which conflict with amillennialism) are to be found in the very earliest of writers who were intimate with the Apostles. The earliest of the Apostolic Fathers, Clement of Rome whom Paul called his *“fellow worker,”* was a Chiliast. He viewed the Kingdom of Christ as entirely future, to commence at the future resurrection of the saints.

“All the generations from Adam even unto this day have passed away; but those who, through the grace of God, have been made perfect in love, now possess a place among the godly, and shall be made manifest at the revelation of the kingdom of Christ. For it is written, “Enter into thy secret chambers for a little time, until my wrath and fury pass away; and I will remember a propitious day, and will raise you up out of your graves.”⁷⁷

He also held out the future inheritance in the Promised Land, quoting the Land inheritance promises in Psalm 37 as the hope of Christians.

“Let us be kind one to another after the pattern of the tender mercy and benignity of our Creator. For it is written, ‘The kind-hearted shall inhabit the Land, and the guiltless shall be left upon it, but transgressors shall be destroyed from off the face of it.’ And again [the Scripture] saith, ‘I saw the ungodly highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Lebanon: I passed by, and, behold, he was not; and I diligently sought his place, and could not find it. Preserve innocence, and look on equity: for there shall be a remnant to the peaceful man’.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. iii, 4

⁷⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. V, ch. xxxvi

⁷⁷ Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, ch. L

⁷⁸ Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, ch. xiv

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This Psalm states several times that the wicked will be cut off, but the righteous shall inherit the Land and dwell in it forever. That Clement pointed his readers to this Psalm as motivation for righteous living proves that he held the Chiliast hope based on the Abrahamic Covenant, as well as the Corinthian church to which he was writing.

Clement of Rome was a presbyter of the church in Rome while Paul was still alive, before the heretic Cerinthus had any contact with the early Christians. How then could Clement of Rome borrow Chiliasm from Cerinthus?

Like Polycarp, Ignatius was John's disciple. He was bishop of the church in Antioch (Paul's home church). He held the same Chiliast view as Clement of Rome and Polycarp, that the Kingdom of God was after the future resurrection.

"If any man follows him that makes a schism in the Church, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God."⁷⁹

On the way to his execution in Rome, Ignatius wrote to Polycarp, his fellow student of John's, (who would soon follow in martyrdom), encouraging him to press on to his inheritance in the Kingdom of God.

"Let not those who seem worthy of credit, but teach strange doctrines, fill thee with apprehension. Stand firm, as does an anvil which is beaten. It is the part of a noble athlete to be wounded, and yet to conquer. And especially we ought to bear all things for the sake of God, that He also may bear with us, and bring us into His kingdom. Add more and more to thy diligence; run thy race with increasing energy; weigh carefully the times. Whilst thou art here, be a conqueror; for here is the course, and there are the crowns."⁸⁰

The Epistle describing the martyrdom of Polycarp, written by the church in Smyrna where he was bishop, closes with a clear statement indicating belief in the same idea, that the Kingdom of Christ is to be entered in the future, at the resurrection of the just, rather than being present now, as amillennialism teaches. The members of Polycarp's church in Smyrna would certainly reflect the views of their pastor. And since this was an encyclical letter to be passed on to all the churches of Asia Minor, it no doubt reflects the views of these churches who had fellowship with one another.

"When, therefore, ye have yourselves read this Epistle, be pleased to send it to the brethren at a greater distance, that they also may glorify the Lord, who makes such choice

⁷⁹ Ignatius, Epistle to the Philadelphians, Ch. iii

⁸⁰ Ignatius, Epistle to Polycarp, ch. iii

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of His own servants. To Him who is able to bring us all by His grace and goodness into his everlasting⁸¹ kingdom, through His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, to Him be glory, and honor, and power, and majesty, forever. Amen. Salute all the saints. They that are with us salute you, and Evarestus, who wrote this Epistle, with all his house.”⁸²

After attempting to link Chiliasm to the heretic Cerinthus, by quoting the works of anti-chiliasts, Eusebius later contradicted himself, a telltale sign of lying and revisionism. He attributing Chiliasm instead to Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, who was a fellow student of John’s along with Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and Ignatius, bishop of Antioch.

“The same writer [Papias] gives also other accounts which he says came to him through unwritten tradition, certain strange parables and teachings of the Savior, and some other more mythical things. To these belong his statement that there will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth. 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 own support the antiquity of the man; as for instance Irenaeus and anyone else that may have proclaimed similar views. Papias gives also in his own work other accounts of the words of the Lord on the authority of Aristion who was mentioned above, and traditions as handed down by the presbyter John; to which we refer those who are fond of learning.”⁸³

Papias’ works, according to both Irenaeus and Eusebius, contained many firsthand accounts of Papias’ discussions with those who had heard Jesus and the Apostles teach. And these accounts gave many details about the future Kingdom of Christ and the saints on the earth for a thousand years. Papias’ five books have all perished; the Catholic Encyclopedia explains why. *“The cause of the loss of this precious work of an Apostolic Father was the chiliastic view which he taught.”⁸⁴* In other words, his works were destroyed because the Church did not like his attributing Chiliasm to Jesus and the Apostles based on eyewitness accounts.

Eusebius dismissed these many firsthand accounts as the results of Papias’ *“very limited understanding,”* not realizing that the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles which the

⁸¹ As in 2 Peter 1:11, the Greek reads, “αιωνιαν βασιλειαν” (“age enduring Kingdom” not “everlasting Kingdom” as in the English translation).

⁸² Martyrdom of Polycarp, ch. xx

⁸³ Eusebius, Church History, Bk. III, ch. xxxix

⁸⁴ Catholic Encyclopedia, Papias, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11457c.htm>

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eyewitnesses reported to him were not meant to be taken literally, but allegorically. That is, not only is the literal reading of the Hebrew prophets to be discarded in favor of allegorical interpretation, but so also were the words of Jesus Christ and His Apostles to be discarded, and those who heard and reported them. And since Papias was such an unsophisticated, stupid man, taking these sayings of Jesus literally, he must have been the one who concocted Chiliasm. And from him, all the other Chiliasts were led astray, according to Eusebius.

Of course, this does not take into account the Chiliasm of Clement of Rome, a companion of Paul, who served the church in Rome long before Papias was bishop in Hierapolis! Apparently Eusebius was doing his best to revise history in favor of the emperor's Platonic version of Christianity. But, revisionism always leaves a trail.

Modern Historical Revisionism

Modern day amillennialists frequently claim that Chiliasm was borrowed from the Jews. It is true that Jewish eschatology involved the resurrection of the body and an inheritance in the restored Promised Land. One must remember that the Apostles were Jewish, as were all the prophets. Why wouldn't their eschatology have a Jewish flavor? The New Testament clearly points out the mistake made by the Jews. It was not the belief in a physical resurrection, or the restoration of Jerusalem and the Land. In fact, these things are affirmed in the New Testament.⁸⁵ Rather, the mistakes of the Jews are clearly described in the New Testament – failing to see *“that Christ must first suffer”* before entering into His glory,⁸⁶ that remission of sins through Christ must be preached to all nations first⁸⁷ after which His reign on earth would commence, and supposing that their physical descent from Abraham guaranteed the second, eternal Land inheritance to them.

Furthermore, pre-Christian Jewish eschatology did not include the Millennial Week, Sabbath Rest theory, that God would instruct and discipline humanity for six millennia, after which the Kingdom would come and Christ would reign for a thousand years over the nations. Some of the Jewish apocryphal works had various timetables for the coming of the Messiah.⁸⁸ Yet, none made the connection to the six days of creation or the Sabbath Rest being the reign of the Messiah, or that man would endure six thousand years of toil under the curse to be followed by a millennium of Messiah's rule over the nations.

⁸⁵ Acts 1:6-8; Acts 3:19-21; Acts 28:20; Rom. 8:16-25

⁸⁶ Luke 24:26

⁸⁷ Luke 24:46-49

⁸⁸ The Book of Enoch has a 10 “week” scheme, ch. xci - xciii

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The complete absence of the Millennial Week idea from pre-Christian Jewish eschatology is really rather surprising. If anyone would have invented such a concept on their own, surely it would have been the Jews who were commanded to work six days and rest on the Sabbath. Yet, the idea seems not to have occurred to them. Instead, it sprang to life during the age of the Apostles, and is found fully developed among those who knew the Apostles⁸⁹ and who led apostolic churches.

The fact that this idea only appeared in Jewish writings centuries after the Apostles strongly suggests that it was borrowed from interaction with Christians. The Babylonian Talmud, written circa AD 300-500, is apparently the first clear mention of this theory in Jewish literature.

“R. Kattina said: Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. Abaye said: it will be desolate two [thousand], as it is said, After two days will he revive us: in the third day, he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

It has been taught in accordance with R. Kattina: Just as the seventh year is one year of release in seven, so is the world: one thousand years out of seven shall be fallow, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day,’ and it is further said, A Psalm and song for the Sabbath day, meaning the day that is altogether Sabbath — and it is also said, For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past.

The Tanna debe Eliyyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era.”⁹⁰

Jewish Cabbalists of the middle ages picked up the idea from the Babylonian Talmud and embellished it. The *Sefer Ha-Temunah*, a 13th century Cabbalist work, expands the Millennial week into a complete Jubilee cycle of 49,000 years (7 x 7 millennia).⁹¹

The early Christian writers did not adopt Jewish mysticism. The Apologists who strongly defended Chiliasm held the contemporary Jewish interpretations of the rabbis in contempt. This is particularly evident in Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho (a Jew). Justin was a converted philosopher, having studied under several schools of Greek

⁸⁹ Actually, as we will prove in a later chapter, it was clearly taught in Hebrews by the Apostle Paul. And the earliest full explanation of it is found in the Epistle of Barnabas which relies heavily on Hebrews.

⁹⁰ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, Folio 97a

⁹¹ Rabbi Nathan Slifkin, *The Challenge of Creation: Judaism's Encounter with Science, Cosmology, and Evolution*, 2006

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philosophy. Yet, coming to Christ, he rejected these philosophies in favor of the Christian interpretation of the Jewish prophets. He also had nothing but contempt for the interpretations of the unbelieving Jews. In his discussion with Trypho (a Jew), he repeatedly pointed out the blindness of the Jewish teachers and rejected their interpretations of the prophets.

*"I excuse and forgive you, my friend," I said. "For you know not what you say, but have been persuaded by teachers who do not understand the Scriptures..."*⁹²

*"Then I answered, '... be not confounded, nay, rather remain still more zealous hearers and investigators, despising the tradition of your teachers, since they are convicted by the Holy Spirit of inability to perceive the truths taught by God, and of preferring to teach their own doctrines'..."*⁹³

*"But I am far from putting reliance in your teachers, who refuse to admit that the interpretation made by the seventy elders [the Septuagint] who were with Ptolemy [king] of the Egyptians is a correct one; and they attempt to frame another..."*⁹⁴

*"He shall raise all men from the dead, and appoint some to be incorruptible, immortal, and free from sorrow in the everlasting and imperishable kingdom; but shall send others away to the everlasting punishment of fire. But as to you and your teachers deceiving yourselves when you interpret what the Scripture says as referring to those of your nation then in dispersion, and maintain that their prayers and sacrifices offered in every place are pure and well-pleasing, learn that you are speaking falsely, and trying by all means to cheat yourselves..."*⁹⁵

*"I quoted from the words of Jeremiah the prophet, and Esdras, and David; but from those which are even now admitted by you, which had your teachers comprehended, be well assured they would have deleted them, as they did those about the death of Isaiah, whom you sawed asunder with a wooden saw..."*⁹⁶

"But they are cisterns broken, and holding no water, which your own teachers have digged, as the Scripture also expressly asserts, 'teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.' 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

⁹² Justin, Dialogue with Trypho (A Jew), ch. ix

⁹³ Ibid. ch. xxxviii

⁹⁴ Ibid. ch. lxxi

⁹⁵ Ibid. ch. cxvii

⁹⁶ Ibid. ch. cxx

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flesh, although they be sinners, and faithless, and disobedient towards God, which the Scriptures have proved is not the case."⁹⁷

Since the early Christian apologists rejected the Greek philosophies, Gnostics like Cerinthus, and the Jewish misinterpretations of Scripture, how can we account for the sudden spontaneous appearance of Chiliasm among them unless it was indeed handed down by the Apostles?

The pressure from Justin's former philosophical pursuits would have led him towards amillennial tendencies, which are much more consistent with Greek philosophy. Yet, he argued against such. He also solidly refuted Trypho, a Jew, and explained the errors of the Jewish eschatology. It is not logical to suppose that Justin (or any of the other early apologists) would blindly follow a purely Jewish idea without clear apostolic precedent founded upon the Scriptures. Yet, no such theory existed among the Jews at this early date.

On the other hand, it is easy to see how an apostolic Chiliasm could quickly degrade into proto-amillennialism as Greek believers refused to abandon their own worldview and presuppositions (like the Corinthians), preferring to view Scripture through a Greek philosophical lens. That the heretic Cerinthus adopted some Chiliasm ideas is no surprise, since his theology was a blend of Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism.

Augustine eventually put the finishing touches on amillennialism, which provided the theological justification for Christianity's merger with the Roman state. The primitive eschatology of Chiliasm, with its future return of Christ to overthrow the kingdoms of the world (including Rome) and establish a world Kingdom in Jerusalem, was not compatible with Rome's military pursuits. Augustine gave Rome the needed theological structure. The Roman Empire became the Kingdom of God on earth. The emperor and bishop of Rome became partners in this new Christian kingdom. The bishop of Rome would declare the emperor to be God's chosen agent, and the emperor used the sword to enforce the unity of this Roman State – Church, and in so doing attempted to unify the empire. The emperor used the Church, and the Church used the emperor.

Augustine's development of amillennialism can easily be traced to the influence of Origen, and his own preoccupation with the philosophies of Plato. Even the Catholic Encyclopedia acknowledges that Augustine sought to blend Christianity with Platonism.

⁹⁷ Ibid. ch. cxl

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“Augustine gradually became acquainted with Christian doctrine, and in his mind the fusion of Platonic philosophy with revealed dogmas was taking place. ... It is now easy to appreciate at its true value the influence of neo-Platonism upon the mind of the great African Doctor. It would be impossible for anyone who has read the works of St. Augustine to deny the existence of this influence. ... But the method was a dangerous one; in thus seeking harmony between the two doctrines he thought too easily to find Christianity in Plato, or Platonism in the Gospel.”⁹⁸

When political Rome fell, the Church of Rome continued under the same theological claims, that the Roman Church was the Kingdom of God on earth, and the pope was the Vicar of Christ reigning on His throne. There was simply no room for Chiliasm after Constantine.

The Reformers also continued the Roman eschatology, but changed the names of the players, making Rome the Beast of Revelation, and Protestant Christianity the true Kingdom of God on earth. The Protestants were just as brutal with “heretics” as Roman Catholics, having no use for Chiliasm because it deprived them of their political power, placing all political authority in the future Kingdom when Christ returns.

An honest evaluation of the historical evidence weighs heavily in favor of Chiliasm being the apostolic teaching. All deviations from this eschatology can easily be accounted for by the pressures of Greek philosophy corrupting the apostolic teaching. Chiliasm was the view of the earliest Christians who had direct or indirect association with the Apostles. The men who defended it were traditionalists, insisting on preserving the Faith exactly as it was handed down. Its defenders were mostly bishops of local churches whose job it was to faithfully transmit the Apostles’ teaching to the next generation. These men were antagonistic toward the Jewish interpretations of Scripture, and would not have adopted them in opposition to the Apostles’ doctrine. Nor would they have adopted the opinions of the Gnostic heretic, Cerinthus, whom they vehemently opposed and denounced. The Millennial Week theory was not Jewish, and it was certainly not Gnostic. That leaves only one possibility, that it was Apostolic.

The amillennial view, which arose gradually along with the rejection of Chiliasm, was based on Christians adopting “heretical discourses” of the Greeks, and philosophical speculations of men who thought more of their own reasoning powers than of preserved apostolic tradition. Its “proof text” was Jesus’ statement about “*many mansions*” in “*My Father’s house*” which was blended with Plato’s heavenly spheres theory.

⁹⁸ Catholic Encyclopedia, St. Augustine

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The Alexandrian school laid the groundwork for Christianity's acceptance within the intellectual arena, not by proving its superiority over Greek philosophical foolishness, as Justin and Irenaeus had done, but by transforming the mystery of God into just another Greek myth. The merger between Church and state after the conversion of Constantine sealed the demise of ancient Chiliasm. Apostolic Christianity was dead, and a new Platonic Christianity had taken its place. What Satan could not destroy through persecution he destroyed through patronizing and flattery.

The Rise of Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism developed in the early 1800s amid a series of prophecy conferences, beginning at Albury Park House, south of London, and then at the Powerscourt House conferences in Dublin. Dispensationalism was developed (or at least promoted) primarily by Edward Irving, and John Darby. Both men were originally amillennialists. They also held the typical Protestant historicist view of the tribulation, that the 1260 days of the reign of the Beast was 1260 years of Roman Catholic domination.

These men and several others wrestled with their previous views, and with trying to come to terms with a more literal reading of the Old Testament prophecies of the restoration of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Land. Not being willing to depart from the established amillennial view of heaven being the hope of Christians, these men devised a scheme to segregate God's redeemed people into two classes, a "heavenly people" and an "earthly people." This required a dichotomy between "the Church" and "Israel," and between "Jewish" Scriptures and "Christian Scriptures." Much of the New Testament was allocated to Israel, not applicable to the "Church," as was all of the Old Testament. This was a radical idea, foreign to both amillennialism and early Chiliasm. It was, however, not unprecedented. It was essentially the view of the ancient Gnostic heretic, Marcion.

In the second century there was a similar battle raging. Because Gnosticism could not embrace a physical resurrection of the body or an eternal inheritance on a material earth, and because the Scriptures so plainly speak of such an inheritance in the Old Testament, Marcion imagined that the God of Israel, the Creator of this material world, was not the same Father God whom Jesus proclaimed, but a lesser god.⁹⁹ He envisioned a total dichotomy between the God of Israel with His carnal (physical) program for Israel, and the Father Jesus proclaimed who had a much more heavenly minded (spiritual) program for those who had knowledge (gnosis) of the mystery.¹⁰⁰ The followers of Marcion went so far as to claim that Paul alone received the revelation of

⁹⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. I, ch. XXIV, 2,4,

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. I, ch. VI, 1-2

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the “mystery,” not foreseen in the Old Testament, or revealed to the other (Jewish) Apostles.¹⁰¹ It is amazing that modern dispensationalists repeat the very errors that were espoused by the early enemies of Christianity, and refuted long ago by the earliest Christian apologists. Marcion’s eschatology is hard to distinguish from modern dispensationalism.

Conclusion:

Both amillennialists and dispensationalists have the same sacred cow – the *heavenly destiny* adapted from Plato’s spheres and attributed to Jesus’ “many mansions.” In accommodating this sacred cow, both systems mutilate the Scriptures.

When we size up the early Christian writers, there are two distinct groups who were light-years apart. And this distinction can be seen most clearly by the value each group placed on the Hebrew prophets vs. the Greek philosophers.

On one side we have the united chorus of the most ancient writers, ordained bishops of local congregations, men sworn to preserve the apostolic traditions exactly as they were handed down, men who shed their last drop of blood in pursuit of this mission. Like Paul and John, they fought hard against Greek philosophy and Gnostic fables. They considered themselves to be defenders of pristine orthodoxy. These men considered the Greek philosophers to be ignorant,¹⁰² relying on fallen human reason which is incapable of discovering divine truth. They had a very high view of divine revelation given through the Prophets and Apostles.

On the other side we have men hypnotized by Greek philosophy, enamored with their own reasoning abilities. These men were not anchored to the traditions handed down to them by the earliest shepherds and apologists. They were not afraid to deny the plain sense of the prophets’ writings, or radically modify “*the Faith once for all delivered to the saints.*” They were innovators, not defenders. They were not afraid to frequent the Roman emperor’s bed chamber, or drink the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

One group is the Virgin espoused to Christ, represented by the woman clothed with the sun. The other group is represented by the Whore of Revelation.

¹⁰¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. XIII, 1

¹⁰² Acts 17:22-30