

THE THOUSAND YEAR REIGN.

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Chiliasm (*Χίλιοι* a thousand, singular *Χίλια*, used with collective nouns) is the name generally applied to the belief in the thousand-year reign of Christ in person on earth, after which comes the end. The doctrine has assumed large importance in modern times by an active propaganda in tracts, pamphlets, books, conferences, conventions, etc., and the claim is frequently made that this was the regular belief of the whole church in the first centuries. It is an aspect of the Second Coming of Christ doctrine, which has now three forms: (1) Christ is never coming in person at all, His Second Coming having been fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish Church-State in A. D. 70, or in similar historical catastrophes, and that His coming is really His Presence (*παρουσία*) which is not to be interpreted as a visible and external act, but as His spiritual working in the world. I think the first to set forth this view was the Rev. Israel P. Warren, Editor of "The Christian Mirror," Portland, Me., an eminent Congregational minister, in his "The Parousia," Portland 1879, 2 ed. 1884, and it has able supporters in the Rev. Dr. J. Stuart Russell, of the Congregational church in London, in his "The Parousia," London, 1887, and in the late Dr. Wm. S. Urmy, of the California Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in his "Christ Came Again," N. Y., 1900. The fact that Dr. Urmy was never compelled to retract his opinion or withdraw his book, and never tried for heresy, has the significance of a revolution in the attitude of the Methodist Church towards heresy. For speaking historically, it is hardly too much to say that the belief in Christ's first Coming has not been more general, more firmly held, more a part of both the consciously or uncon-

sciously held doctrinal possessions of the Church from the apostolic times till now than the belief in His Second Coming at the end of the Age or of the World (not simply in 70), for reign or for judgment or for both. The denying that is something like Kalthoff's denial that Christ ever existed. (2) Christ is coming at the end of the world to wind up the affairs of mankind, to judge the evil and the good, and to deliver over the Kingdom to God the Father. (3) Christ is coming at the end of the first Christian world-age to reign in the world for a thousand years (interpreted strictly or loosely), when His saints shall reign with Him in gladness and peace, when His Kingdom shall win universal obedience, after which shall come the end. This is sometimes called Premillennialism or Chiliasm, though it must be remembered that early Chiliasm must not be charged with all the views of later teachers of the same trend.

Chiliasm is generally associated with a belief in the visible return of Christ for the setting up of an earthly theocracy as the middle point of a perfect world-rule which belongs to Christianity as such, and which is a preparatory step for the Other Life. It includes annihilation of godless world-powers, which must be ruled by the godly, and generally a double resurrection, that of the pious for the thousand-year Kingdom, and that of the rest of the dead at the end for general judgment. The doctrine was commonly thought of as meaning that the pious would have perfect enjoyment of spiritual and physical blessings, and share Christ's rule over sinners or men who do not partake of His glory. Of course the view has suffered various modifications, but in general it may be said that it rejects the idea of a normal historical development for Christianity, for the Millennium is not the result of spiritual work and spiritual laws, but the sudden invasion of Christ and Other Life conditions on this bank and shoal of time.

Chiliasm is not, however, to be confounded with any

special theory of the time of Christ's return. It is well known that there was a general expectation of the early Coming of Christ in the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic times. Men who held that expectation might not necessarily be Chiliasts or Premillennialists, though they doubtless often were. The indispensable note of the Chiliasts is the intermediate world-period of a thousand years under the interesting and imposing auspices of the personal bodily reign of the Lord. Chiliasm certainly presented a fascinating program: one cannot be surprised at its wide vogue. What were its sources?

Parseeism, the religion of Persia as reformed by Zoroaster, was the first to proclaim the thousand-year reign, when the evil kingdom would be overthrown. Old Testament prophecy did not have the idea. "It simply promised a Kingdom of the Messiah in which, after restoration of the Jewish state and uniting of all people in the common worship of Jehovah, the happiness of the improved nation would be manifested by external prosperity and glorified peace. Out of this picture of the future the materializing spirit of later Judaism, which interpreted the prophets in a sensuous way without distinguishing between fact and picture, took hold with preference of the political side, under pressure of the civic position. But this hope of the future received still a more transcendental character. The idea of world judgment and world destruction, of the resurrection of the dead, of the Other Life, obtained shape and influence. An opposition developed between this life and the Other, between the old Jewish hope of a happy life of the pious in the Holy Land and new conceptions of a heavenly kingdom, before which the present world passes away. In the interest of overcoming this opposition, the idea of an intermediate kingdom (Chiliasm) in which all earthly expectations would be satisfied and upon which the final joys of the Other Life would follow, may have arisen. It was not the prevailing sentiment of the Jews in the

time of Christ. According to Dan. 2:44 and Psalms of Solomon 17:4, the Messianic kingdom is the eternal and final one. But the Chiliastic sentiment is present in the prophecy of the ten weeks in Enoch 93, 91:12-19, in 4 Ezra 7:28f, and in the Apocalypse of Baruch 40:3. The sketch is the most complete in 4 Ezra: The last oppression, the advent of the Messiah, the war of the nations against the Messiah and their overthrow, the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, gathering together of the scattered Israel, the 400-year kingdom of the Messiah, the seven days silence, the renewing of the world, the general resurrection, the last judgment, eternal salvation and eternal damnation. With such an apocalyptic there went the reckoning of the world-periods. The later favorite reckoning in the Church of 6000 or 7000 years was already met with in the translators of the Pentateuch, placed by Lagarde about 280 B. C., and then in the Book of Enoch, c. 33. (Semisch-Bratke, art. "Chiliasmus" in Herzog-Hauck, 3Aufl., 1897, iii, 806-7). For the sake of readers who have not at their elbows these Apocryphal books of later Judaism I gave the words or the tenor of the passages referred to. Ps. of Sol. 17:4 (B. C. 65-40; to be distinguished from the Odes of Solomon recently discovered and published by J. Rendel Harris): "And the Kingdom of our God shall be over the Gentiles for ever [unto judgment]". Enoch 93 (perhaps B. C. 166-98) gives the seven weeks of sacred history and what will occur at the end of each. At the end of the seventh week the elect will receive sevenfold instruction concerning God's whole creation. Enoch 91:12-19 gives the doings at the end of the 8th, 9th and 10th weeks. "In the 10th week in the 7th part there will be the great eternal judgment, in which He will execute vengeance among the angels. And the first heaven will depart and pass away, and a new heaven will appear, and all the powers of the heavens will shine sevenfold for ever. And after that there will be many weeks without

number forever in goodness and righteousness, and sin will be no more mentioned for ever." 4 Ezra or Esdras: 2 Ezra 7: 28ff (after 70 A. D.): "For my own Jesus (better reading, Messias) shall be revealed with those that are with him, and they that remain shall rejoice for four hundred years. And it shall come to pass after these years that my Son Christ shall die, and all men that have breath. And the world shall be turned into the old silence seven days, as in the first beginnings, so that no man shall be left. And it shall come to pass after seven days the world, that yet awaketh not, shall be raised up, and what is corrupt shall die. And the earth shall restore those that are asleep in her, and the dust those that dwell in silence in it, and the chambers shall deliver those souls that were committed unto them. And the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgment, and mercy shall pass away, and long suffering shall have an end; but judgment only shall remain, and truth shall stand, and faith shall grow strong, and one's work shall follow, and one's reward shall be shown, and righteous dealings shall be awake, and unrighteous dealings sleep (received text, rule) not. Apoc. of Baruch 40:3 (after 70 A. D., to be distinguished from the well known Book of Baruch): "And his principate will stand for ever, until the world of corruption is at an end, and until the times aforesaid are fulfilled." Enoch 33 is probably a misprint for 93.

Christ was no Chiliast. In Mk. 1:15, He proclaims that the time of the coming of the kingdom is fulfilled, but of a provisionary kingdom, of a distinction between His and His Father's, He knows nothing. His return is no other than the final judgment itself, which He Himself is to carry out, until which the wheat and the tares grow together (Mt. 13:30, 41f; 16:27; 24; 25:11f, 31ff). The "resurrection of the just" (Lk 14:14), does not issue in another world-period which goes before the final Coming. With the final judgment there is united the world-

renewing (Mt. 19:28). In the portrayal of the glory of the kingdom of heaven he uses ideas or figures easily comprehended by every one, describes the future consummation in phrases easily gotten hold of, and instead of mystical suggestions He comforts His own with the intimation that according to place and condition there is a connection between the highest earthly joy and the happiness of the Messianic time (Mk. 10:40; 13:27; Mt. 5:4; 8:11; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Lk. 13:29; 14:15-24; 22:16, 30). But as He earned the ingratitude of His people because He disappointed their sensuous hopes, so He had to make clear to the Sadducees (Mk. 12:24f) that they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God if they believed that the Other Life could and would only repeat the earthly world-order, and no new spiritual order set in its place; and in His parting hour He had to bring home to the disciples the fact that the future joys of the Kingdom of God are to be spiritual or supersensuous, when He promised to them that in the consummated Kingdom of God He would drink of the fruit of the vine "new", that is, not again, but as glorified.

The Jewish Christians of course were open to appeal from apocalyptic, chiliastic visions, hopes and beliefs. The New Testament as a whole is remarkably free from them. There is the famous passage in Rev. 20:4ff, which has been both a starting and returning point for any amount of speculation in this territory. Its true interpretation I turn over to exegetical scholars, though I must confess I have considerable sympathy with the remark (p. 807) of the writer already quoted that "with the difficulty of distinguishing between picture and object (or fact) the Chiliasm of the Apocalypse remains a hieroglyph, which, in spite of the intensive investigating work which that book has recently received, still awaits satisfactory solution". It is interesting that the later Chiliasts did not build much on that passage, but generally on the views and visions of the Old Testament,

which, in the lack of scientific exegesis, could be easily turned to their purpose.

No doubt persecutions were another factor in turning the mind to the delights of an earthly reign of Christ. As martyrdom was the sowing, so the Kingdom of Christ was the great harvest day of the Church. From the afflictions of the present, the gaze was fixed upon the coming thousand years of joy. If we may believe a quotation in Eusebius (H. E. 3:28,2) the great heretic Cerinthus, a contemporary of John, was a strong and realistic Chiliast, and the views also existed in other sections of Jewish Christian heretics.

Among regular Church teachers also, views partially or wholly Chiliastic prevailed. Thus Barnabas (placed by Weizsäcker and Lightfoot 70-79, by Hilgenfeld 96-98, by others later) speaking of God resting after His six days' labor says (c. 15): "He meaneth this, that in 6000 years the Lord shall bring all things to an end; for the day with Him signifieth a thousand years; and this He Himself beareth me witness, saying, 'Behold, the day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years' (2 Pet. 3:3). Therefore, children, in six days, that is, in 6000 years, everything shall come to an end". Commenting on "He resteth on the seventh day", he adds: "This He meaneth: when His Son shall come, shall abolish the time of the lawless one, shall judge the ungodly, shall change the sun and the moon and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day". Here we have a definite teaching of Christ's return at the end of 6000 years, but no statement of an earthly Kingdom. The Coming seems to bring the end. The "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" (about 100-125) believes firmly in the Coming, but says nothing of a millennial reign. "May grace come and may this world pass away" (c. 10). Speaking of the signs of the end (c. 16): "Then all created mankind shall come to the fire of testing, and many shall be offended and perish; but

they that endure in their faith shall be saved by the Curse himself [compare Gal. 3:13]. And then shall the signs of the truth appear; first a sign of a rift in the heaven, then a sign of a voice of a trumpet, then of a resurrection of the dead; yet not all, but as it was said: The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him [Zech. 14:5]. Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 24:30). The same certainty of the End breathes in the "Ancient Homily" ("2 Clem.") 120-140, c. 12, where the writer says: "Let us therefore await the kingdom of God betimes in love or righteousness, since we know not the day of God's appearing. For the Lord Himself, being asked by a certain person when his kingdom would come, said: When the two shall be one, and the outside as the inside, and the male with the female, neither male nor female" (quotation probably from Gospel of the Egyptians). Here also is silence as to the thousand-year kingdom.

Papias of Hierapolis, said to have been a hearer of John the Apostle, who wrote "Exposition of Oracles of the Lord" about 130, unfortunately lost except fragments, had a sufficiently sensuous idea of the kingdom. His description fairly makes one's head swim. Irenæus (160-180) quotes him (5:33): "The days will come in which vines shall grow each having 10,000 shoots, and on each shoot 10,000 branches, and on each branch again 10,000 twigs, and on each twig 10,000 clusters, and on each cluster 10,000 grapes, and each grape when pressed shall yield 25 measures of wine. And when any of the saints shall have taken hold of one of their clusters, another shall cry, I am a better cluster; take me, bless the Lord through me. Likewise also a grain of wheat shall produce 10,000 heads, and every head shall have 10,000 grains, and every grain ten pounds of fine flour, bright and clean, and the other fruits, seeds and the grass shall produce in similar proportions; and all the animals using these fruits which

are products of the soil shall become in their turn peaceable and harmonious, obedient to man in all subjection". Papias does not here in so many words connect this fruitfulness of the earth and quiet subjection of the animals with the personal reign of Christ on earth; but it may fairly be assumed that the connection exists. Irenaeus himself, a much heavier weight, assents heartily to Papias's faith, and adds on his own hook: "The blessing thus foretold belongs undoubtedly to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall rise from the dead and reign, when, too, creation renewed and freed from bondage shall produce a wealth of food of all kinds from the dew of heaven and from the fatness of the earth".

In this "Dialogue with Trypho" (about 145-150) c. 80, the question is put to Justin Martyr: 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? Justin replies that many are of this opinion, among others himself, but by no means all; for "many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians think otherwise". Still, "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, Isaiah and others declare". I cannot but feel that there is a good deal of plausibility in the remark of Harnack (Art. Millennium in *Enc. Brit.* 9th ed. 1884, xvi: 328) to the effect that a "philosopher like Justin, with a bias toward a Hellenic construction of the Christian religion, should nevertheless have accepted its Chiliastic elements is the strongest proofs that these enthusiastic expectations were inseparably bound up with the Christian faith down to the middle of the second century". They were certainly bound up with it in the thought of some, but Justin himself admits that they were not absolutely essential, as good Christians did not

share them. On the other hand, in the writings of Ignatius, Polycarp, Tatian, Athenagoras and Theophilus of Antioch, there is not a trace of the millennial faith, but perhaps we ought not to build too much on this silence, which may have been due, some suggest, to political caution. From words quoted in Eusebius 5:24,5 concerning Melito, bishop of Sardis about 160ff, "who lies in Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven, when he shall rise from the dead", it has been supposed that he too was a Chiliast. Tertullian belonged to this school as well, perhaps independently of his Montanism (c. *Marc.* 3:24), as well as Hippolytus,—two great names in Church History.

Chiliasm broke on the spiritual ideas of the Alexandrian Fathers. Matter was too much connected with evil to satisfy the lofty idealism of Origen. Therefore the end of redemption must be an entire doing away with the sensuous and all the rosy-tinted pictures of material bliss painted by the Chiliasts. Origen looked upon all that as stories of Jews or idolatry of the letter (*De Prin.* 2:11). Other forces were working against the millennial hope. Just as today a theory of evolution and the whole scientific trend is steadily undermining supernatural religion among many minds, so in the second and third centuries philosophical and theological thinking was getting beyond the reach of the old catastrophic faith with its fantastic attachments. Montanism was a reaction against this new theology. The influence of the Alexandrian teachers was dead against the old views. An Egyptian bishop Nepos bounded into the breach to save the day for Chiliasm in his books *ἄλεχος ἀλλήγοριστῶν* (about 260). Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria came out against him and proved that the prophets must be interpreted allegorically. In this fight the book of Revelation was appealed to, and Dionysius felt that he must get that book thrown out of the canon of the Bible. He succeeded. "At the time of Eusebius, the Greek

Church was saturated with prejudice against the book, and with doubts as to its canonicity. In the course of the 4th century it was removed from the Greek canon, and thus the troublesome foundation on which Chiliasm might have continued to build was gotten rid of". So Chiliasm died in the Greek Church, as well as many other Christian things much worthier of life. But the Latin theologians were faithful to the millennial tradition much longer, and by them the Apocalypse of John was maintained without a doubt. But after the end of the 4th century the tradition gradually disappeared. This was due to the influence of Greek theology, and to the altered political relations of the Church and world which seemed to give no place to the early hopes. History was teaching another lesson. Augustine the Great, bishop (395ff) of Hippo in North Africa, got hold of this idea, and with it brought in a new era. The actual Catholic Church is the eternal kingdom of God which He is to set up in the world, and which He has set up; there is no other. The millennial kingdom began when Christ came, and it is already in the world. The Church must step in and take its rights which the falling empire is bequeathing to it. With these thoughts Augustine destroyed Chiliasm as a faith of intelligent men. It still existed here and there, but it had had its day.

Can there be any doubt that in this matter history is a better teacher than misinterpreted prophecy, a safer foundation than an inverted pyramid built on an obscure text of an obscure apocalypse? The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal. That seems the divine plan, the divine philosophy. To work with all our powers to secure the progressive penetration of the world by Christ is both more rational and more Christian than to expect great things from a colossal stroke of state to bolster up a failing cause. But the end shall come and the judgment, but the times and seasons God has placed in His own power.