

Princeton and the Millennium;
A Study of American Postmillennialism

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“It can be stated without fear of contradiction that the *postmil* position was the historic position of Princeton Theological Seminary.”² According to one loyal child of the Princeton tradition, J. Marcellus Kik, there is absolutely no doubt that the Princeton tradition is postmillennial in its eschatological orientation. There are more cautious assessments, however. Richard Gaffin of Westminster Theological Seminary, for one, argues that B. B. Warfield, one of a triad of Princeton theological giants, (Charles Hodge and son Archibald Alexander Hodge being the other two), cannot be so easily classified in this category.³ The reason for this dissenting opinion, Gaffin points out, is the complex problem associated with eschatological nomenclature as it developed in America from the middle of the nineteenth century until as late the 1940's.⁴ It is this difference of opinion regarding the interpretation of Princeton's overall eschatological position and the development of eschatological terminology during this period that this essay seeks to evaluate. In this essay, I will explore the problems associated with the term “postmillennial” as it is used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, and then set out the individual eschatological positions of the major Old

¹ This essay was originally written in 1997 for a Ph.D. seminar in historical theology conducted by Richard A. Muller at Fuller Theological Seminary. It was updated in November of 2005 for publication on the original Riddleblog. I have updated it yet again as to form with only minor alterations to content for publication here.

² J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1971), 4.

³ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “*Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism*,” in William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 199-201. Gaffin's brief discussion of this subject led to my interest to further develop this point. R. Fowler White, is another who agrees with Gaffin's assessment, arguing that while “Warfield's millennial position may be disputed. . . the influence of his essay [*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*] among postmillennialists is indisputable.” See R. Fowler White, “*Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1-10*,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* Vol. 51, No. 2 (Fall 1989), 319.

⁴ Gaffin, “*Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism*,” 198-202.

Princeton theologians, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, against the backdrop of this development.

Defining Post- and A- Millennialism

Defining the term “postmillennial” and identifying its distinctives is the place to begin. Yet, from the outset, we find that this is not an easy task. For one thing, postmillennialism took two distinct directions in nineteenth century America. One direction, generally associated with Protestant liberalism, saw the millennium largely in socio-religious terms.⁵ In these circles, the millennium was seen as a golden age of secular and religious progress—culminating in the anticipated utopian society. The second, and the object of this study, involves a thorough-going supernaturalism as the essential background to any discussion of eschatology. For these groups, the millennium is the direct product of the supernatural and eschatological intervention of God.

Another critical factor which must be kept in view as we proceed is that the term postmillennial is usually understood today as a distinct eschatological position from “amillennialism.” In fact, it is generally understood that one who adopts a postmillennial eschatology self-consciously rejects the amillennial understanding of the millennial age and nature of the reign of Christ. However, the term amillennial, as we will see, was not used in the nineteenth century, and the origin of the term is shrouded in mystery. Accordingly, Gaffin asks the obvious question, “Who coined the term *amillennial*?”⁶ Apparently, there is no clear-cut, defining moment when the term amillennial comes into standard usage and the position is recognized as something quite distinct from postmillennialism. This problem is identified by the venerable Louis Berkhof. Berkhof, himself a Princeton graduate and a student of B. B. Warfield, pointed out in his 1938 *Systematic Theology*, that “the name [amillennialism] is new indeed, but the view to which it has applied is as old as Christianity.”⁷ Historians of doctrine generally agree that what is now known as amillennialism is generally the eschatology of historic Christianity. Even B. B. Warfield, usually portrayed as postmillennial in his

⁵ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 146.

⁶ Gaffin, “*Theonomy and Eschatology*,” 198. Oswald T. Allis mentions that according to Albertus Pieters, the term amillennialism originated with Abraham Kuyper, but this supposition does not appear to be convincing to Allis. See Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1945), 280, n. 9.

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 708.

eschatology, remarked to his friend Samuel G. Craig, that amillennialism of the type held by his esteemed Dutch colleagues Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper “is the historic Protestant view, as expressed in the creeds of the Reformation period including the Westminster Standards.”⁸ What then are the differences between “amillennialism” and “postmillennialism,” and how do these terms develop unique distinctives?

Interpreting Revelation 20:1-10

There are several important factors regarding postmillennialism that must be considered before we investigate the eschatological positions of the individual Princeton theologians (the two Hodges and Warfield). The first of these is related to the key biblical text that inevitably comes into view in this discussion, Revelation 20:1-10. How one understands the nature of the period of time described in this passage frames all subsequent discussion. As Richard Muller points out regarding the history of the interpretation of this text,

The Protestant orthodox, both Lutheran and Reformed, denied the notion of an earthly millennium to dawn in the future and viewed the text as a reference to the reign of grace between the first and the second visible coming of Christ, the age of the *ecclesia militans*.⁹

From the time of the Reformation on, the Protestant orthodox generally understood Revelation 20 as descriptive of the present period of eschatological time co-extensive with the entire period of history between the first and second advent of Christ. There are several postmillennial writers who agree with this understanding of the period described in Revelation 20, revealing one of the problems intrinsic to this discussion. As Gaffin cautions, the historical development of eschatological terminology used by writers of the nineteenth century is quite tricky on this point.

In the past, then, especially over against premillennialism, “post” appears also to have covered what, in effect, was “a.” The possibility for that sort of usage lay in the obvious

⁸ See Samuel G. Craig, “*Benjamin B. Warfield*,” in B. B. Warfield, Biblical and Theological Studies (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), xxxix. Craig, who was close friends with Warfield, remarks that Warfield himself eschewed the standard “a,” “pre” and “post” millennial terminology, because “he regarded them as unfortunate terms that embodied and so perpetuated a misapprehension of the meaning of the opening verses of the twentieth chapter of Revelation.” Accordingly, Warfield had written that “‘pre-millennial,’ ‘post-millennial’ are therefore unfortunate terms, embodying, and so perpetuating, a misapprehension of the bearing of an important passage of Scripture.” See B. B. Warfield, “*The Gospel and the Second Coming*,” The Bible Magazine, III. 1915, 300-309; also reprinted in Selected Shorter Writings, Vol. I, ed., John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 349.

⁹ Richard A Muller, Dictionary of Greek and Latin Theological Terms (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), s. v. “*chiliasmus*.” What is clearly excluded by the Protestant orthodox is any form of premillennialism.

(though sometimes overlooked) consideration that the amil view is postmillennial in the sense that for both views Christ will return after the millennium: all amils are postmil.¹⁰

Those who consider themselves to be amillennarians or postmillennarians, are in agreement on this fundamental point. However we understand the nature of the millennial age, and regardless of its exact eschatological character, both views insist that the millennial age of Revelation 20, precedes the second advent of Jesus Christ. Both positions also agree that any form of premillennialism, in which it is argued that Christ returns to earth prior to the millennium, and that there are two separate resurrections, one before and one after the millennial age, is in error.

Since, therefore, amillennial and postmillennial writers are in general agreement about timing of the return of Christ (after the conclusion of the millennial age and in concurrence with general resurrection), what are the differences between them? Muller isolates a significant difference when he notes that confessional Protestants, who, by and large, were amillennial, contend that the present millennial period is the age of the church militant, not the age of the *ecclesia triumphans*.¹¹

Postmillennial Distinctives

The nature and character of the millennial age now comes into view as the point of contention as these two positions develop distinct theological identities. When asked, “is the primary distinctive of the millennial age to be seen as one of the universal triumph of the church over all forces of evil, including the advance of the kingdom of God into all the earth (including political and cultural dimensions), with the gospel bringing peace as a socio-political consequence to all the nations? The

¹⁰ Gaffin, “*Theonomy and Eschatology*,” 200.

¹¹ Muller, *Dictionary of Greek and Latin Theological Terms*, s. v. “*chiliasmus*.” Muller also points out that the Orthodox were critical of a distinct eschatological tendency toward a *spes meliorum temporum* (the hope of a better time), generally associated with the pietists, who expected to see an all-encompassing advance of the kingdom of God by means of the gospel through the agency of the church into all the earth. This advance was seen as characteristic of the millennial age.

postmillennial answer to that question is a resounding “yes.” As Kik remarks in this regard,

The *postmil* looks for a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of a glorious age of the church upon earth through the preaching of the gospel under the power of the Holy Spirit. He looks forward to all nations becoming Christian and living in peace with one another. He relates all prophecies to history and time. After the triumph of Christianity throughout the earth he looks for the second coming of the Lord.¹²

According to Kik, the characteristic feature of postmillennialism is that there will be a universal and decisive triumph by the church throughout the nations of the earth by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ, including peace coming to all nations as a result. This triumph, in turn, becomes the necessary condition for Jesus Christ to return to earth at the end of the millennial age. Robert Clouse, gives additional insight into the extent of the postmillennial vision:

The kingdom of God is now being extended through Christian teaching and preaching. This activity will cause the world to be Christianized and result in a long age of peace and prosperity called the millennium. The new age will not be essentially different from the present. It emerges as an increasing proportion of the world’s inhabitants are converted to Christianity. Evil is not eliminated but will be reduced to a minimum as the moral and spiritual influence of Christians is heightened. The church will assume greater importance and many social, economic and educational problems will be solved. This period closes with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement.¹³

Lorraine Boettner, another postmillennial advocate adds, “the world eventually is to be Christianized.”¹⁴

Another unifying factor in what is now designated “postmillennialism” is the idea of the millennial age as one in which the entire world is progressively subdued by the Christ through the church’s preaching with a near universal acceptance of the gospel. Boettner sees the result of this as follows;

This does not mean that there will ever be a time on this earth when every person will be a Christian, or that all sin will be abolished. But it does mean that evil in all its many forms

¹² J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 4.

¹³ Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 8.

¹⁴ Lorraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 14.

eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a Christianized world.¹⁵

Greg Bahnsen, echoing the same general theme, sees the defining essence of postmillennialism in contrast to both premillennialism and amillennialism as,

Its essential *optimism* for the present age. This confident attitude in the power of Christ's kingdom, the power of the gospel, the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the progress of the great commission, sets postmillennialism apart from the essential pessimism of amillennialism and premillennialism.¹⁶

Postmillennial and amillennial Christians agree that the millennium does not involve a visible and physical reign of Christ upon the earth. They also agree that Christ will return to earth after the millennial age has run its course. Some postmillennarians even agree with their amillennial brethren that the thousand years are not necessarily a literal one thousand-year period of time. But postmillennialism clearly sees Jesus Christ returning to a "Christianized earth," something to which modern amillennialists would not agree, given Jesus description of the end of the age as quite like the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37).

Amillennarians, on the other hand, generally agree that the kingdom of God will advance throughout the entire millennial age, but there is no corresponding reduction of evil anticipated. In fact, for many amillennarians, the advance of the kingdom of God by its very nature provokes the forces of evil to respond in opposition.¹⁷ Additionally, amillennialists are often very reluctant to equate the kingdom of God directly with the millennial age in geo-political or socio-cultural terms, fearing an implicit secularization of what is regarded in Scripture as something independent of human effort.

¹⁵ Boettner, The Millennium, 14.

¹⁶ Greg L. Bahnsen, "The 'Prima Facie' Acceptability of Postmillennialism," in The Journal of Christian Reconstructionism, Vol. III, No. 2, (Winter, 1976-77), 66-67.

¹⁷ Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 180.

The Two Reigning Categories: Postmillennial or Premillennial?

A second factor which must be considered in any discussion of American postmillennialism, is that the terminological problem is much more acute in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than at present. The clearly articulated distinctions that now exist between amillennialism and postmillennialism had not yet been formulated. The problem becomes very apparent when we turn to several of the standard theological reference works of the period. G. P. Fisher, was a professor at Yale, and the author of an article entitled “Millennium” for the massive work the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, first completed in 1881, and edited by John McClintock and James Strong. Fisher’s entry mentions by name only the “Millenarians” or “Chiliasts,” who interpret the period of time described in Revelation 20 as following the return of Christ. Fisher divides the interpreters of Revelation 20 and other “millennial” texts into two distinct camps; millenarians and “their opponents,” those whom Fisher categorizes as being “on the other side.” As Fisher describes the position held by the non-millenarians, presumably the orthodox, we can see the terminological difficulty implicit within Fisher’s comments.

The opponents of the millenarians rely principally upon the passages in which the millennium is spoken of as if it were simultaneous, or without any considerable interval of time imposed. They appeal also to the passages in the Gospels and the Epistles in which the general judgement is connected immediately with the second advent. Their conception of the prospects and destiny of the kingdom of Christ are derived from passages like the parables of the leaven, of the mustard-seed, and of the husbandman. That it was expedient for Christ to go away from his disciples in order that his visible presence might give way to his invisible presence and influence everywhere, and to the disposition of the Spirit, is considered an argument against the general philosophy on which the Millenarian tenet rests. It is thought to be more consonant with the genius of Christianity, as contrasted with the Jewish economy, to look for the triumph of the Gospel in the earth by moral forces and by the agency of the Holy Spirit within the souls of men, than to expect the stupendous miracle of Christ’s reappearance as a Ruler on this globe, for the spiritual subjugation of unbelievers and enemies.¹⁸

¹⁸ G. P. Fisher, “*Millennium*,” in John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Volume VI., Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 264-267.

There is nothing found within these remarks upon which orthodox amillennialists and postmillennialists could not agree. Even though there is an optimistic tone in Fisher's description of the millennial age which may cause some discomfort for some contemporary amillennarians, there is nothing here which is in principle contrary to the amillennial position as a whole. Fisher is content to describe the triumph of the gospel in strictly spiritual terms (i.e. "within the souls of men"). Now the terminological problem begins to come into view. As of the publication of this article (1881), Fisher does not seem to acknowledge any clear-cut distinction to be made between what is now designated amillennialism as distinct from postmillennialism.

This same difficulty can also be seen in an article on the millennium by Charles Augustus Briggs, written for the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, completed in 1907. Arguing emphatically that the "teaching of Christ is not millenarian," Briggs divides millennial views into two distinct positions: premillennialism and postmillennialism.¹⁹ For Briggs, the distinctives of postmillennialism are as follows:

(1) Through Christian agencies the Gospel gradually permeates the entire world and becomes immeasurably more effective than at present. (2) This condition thus reached will continue for a thousand years. (3) The Jews will be converted either at the beginning or some time during this period. (4) Following this will be a brief apostasy and terrible conflict of Christian and evil forces. (5) Finally and simultaneously there will occur the advent of Christ, general resurrection, judgement, and, the old world will be destroyed by fire, the new heavens and earth will be revealed (Westminster Confession, xxxii., xxxiii).²⁰

There is clearly an optimistic thrust here, so much so that many orthodox amillennarians would have trouble affirming points one and two above, if these points required a strict and literal interpretation. Point one would be problematic for the amillennial position if this "permeation" is understood purely as a political, and physical kingdom wrought by the church, and if this is the condition of the earth

¹⁹ Charles Augustus Briggs, "Millennium" in Samuel MaCauley Jackson, ed. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Volume VII, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 374-378.

²⁰ Briggs, "Millennium", 377.

required before Christ can return to earth. Point two is problematic for contemporary amillennarians for several reasons. The first is that if this thousand-year period is understood to be a literal one-thousand years of universal peace upon the earth wrought by the gospel before the second coming, then the millennium cannot span the entire interadvental period. A second, and related problem, arises if this age is still yet to dawn, that is, the millennial has not yet begun and is exclusively future. It must be mentioned however, that both of these points have been understood to be open to interpretation, and not all postmillennialists are in agreement about this. Kik, for one, is of the opinion, “the term thousand years in Revelation Twenty is a figurative expression used to describe the period of the Messianic Kingdom upon earth. It is that period from the first advent of Christ until His Second Coming. It is the total or complete period of Christ's Kingdom upon earth.”²¹

Many contemporary postmillennialists would not agree with Kik on this point, however, seeing the millennial age as something yet ahead for the church.²² Points three, four and five, that Briggs lists above, are amenable to both the amillennial and postmillennial positions.

Yet another indication of the confused state of eschatological terminology, and one that is certainly germane for a discussion of the millennial views of Old Princeton, can be seen in the 1915 edition of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by James Orr.²³ Here again there is

²¹ See Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 205. This adds to the confusion, since this statement is perfectly compatible with orthodox amillennialism. Greg Bahnsen also agrees with Kik, see Bahnsen, “*The ‘Prima Facie’ Acceptability of Postmillennialism*,” 63.

²² Boettner, for one, states that the present age “gradually merges into the millennial age as an increased proportion of the world’s inhabitants are converted to Christianity.” See Lorraine Boettner, “*Postmillennialism*,” in Clouse, ed., *Meaning of the Millennium*, 120. This means, I assume, that the millennium in its fullest sense still is yet future, even though the millennium may have already begun. In any case, it is impossible to see how the millennial age can span the entire interadvental period, if subsequently the millennium “merges” into the present age at some point after Pentecost. Norman Shepherd is of the opinion that the “golden age must be yet future, but prior to Messiah’s return,” and that “Revelation 20 describes a future binding and loosing of Satan.” See Norman Shepherd, “*Postmillennialism*,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), s. v. “*Postmillennialism*.”

²³ James Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume III, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 2052.

no distinct reference to the amillennial view. Instead of finding a single article on the millennium we find two individual references, one entitled “Millennium (Premillennial View),” and the other a cross reference under the heading “Millennium, post-millennial view” made to the article “The Eschatology of the New Testament,” written by Princeton Professor of Biblical Theology, Geerhardus Vos, who is considered by virtually all of his interpreters as “decidedly amil.”²⁴ John Warwick Montgomery, the author of the article on the millennium for the revised edition of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1986), notes that Geerhardus Vos is an important proponent of the amillennialism position.²⁵ What is particularly confusing about this is that Vos does not appear to recognize the amillennial position as a distinct eschatological option. As Richard Gaffin points out, Vos “seems to distinguish only between a premil and postmil position and to include himself in the latter.” In fact, Gaffin notes, “as late as 1948, a year before his death,” Vos “distances himself, apparently, not from postmillennialism as such but only from ‘certain types’ of it.”²⁶ Here is the terminological conundrum. One of the foremost specialists in eschatological study, noted for his ground-breaking and insightful

²⁴Gaffin, “*Theonomy and Eschatology*,” 199. Gaffin concludes that “Vos never calls himself or his views ‘amillennial’” (198 n. 3). To further complicate things, in the above mentioned article by Vos, which is decidedly amillennial, Vos refers his readers to B. B. Warfield’s article on the subject. The irony is that Warfield is considered postmillennial. See Warfield’s “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*.” See also Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed., Richard Gaffin (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 45, where this article has been reprinted. J. Marcellus Kik, perhaps the most vocal postmillennial apologist, laments that “it was not until the advent of Geerhardus Vos that the *amil* position was introduced.” Kik concludes that “I am personally sorry that the remarkable talents of Vos were diverted from the historic Princeton position.” see J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 6.

²⁵ John Warwick Montgomery, “*Millennium, The*,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume Three (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), s. v. “*Millennium*.”

²⁶ Gaffin, “*Theonomy and Eschatology*,” 198. Vos comments that “the trouble is that . . . certain types of post-millennialism leave too little room for eschatology.” See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 380. One instance in which Vos clearly delineates only two positions is found in his treatment of the “*Question of Chiliasm in Paul*,” in *Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 226, originally written in 1930. Vos asks whether “putting to ourselves the question, which of the two, pre-millennarianism or post-millennarianism, has done or bids to do more good to practical Christianity . . . the answer is by no means forthcoming.” Another instance can be found in an article “*The Second Coming of our Lord and the Millennium*,” originally prepared for *The Presbyterian* 86, 49 (December 7, 1916), in which Vos again distinguishes only between the two positions. “But all this certainly does not mean, not even in the mind of the most pronounced pre- or post-millennarian, that there will be a period before the end of the world when the power of sin and evil will be entirely eliminated.” Reprinted in Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 419.

exegesis, self-consciously refers to himself as “postmillennial” all the while teaching and defending what is now known as “amillennialism.” As we can see, at the point, there is not any clearly defined line of demarcation as contemporarily understood between amillennialism and postmillennialism through the end of the nineteenth century, and perhaps as late as the 1940's.

Allis’ “Augustinian View”

A very helpful approach in classifying the terms amillennialism and postmillennialism and dealing with their similarities and differences can be found briefly in Oswald T. Allis’ volume, *Prophecy and the Church*, written in 1945 as a polemic against dispensational premillennialism. Allis notes the many similarities between the amillennial and postmillennial positions, including both of them in what he labels the classical “Augustinian view.” Both views allow for only one advent and one judgment. But Allis also points out an important reason as to why these two positions begin to take on their distinctive identities.

It is to be noted that all forms of the Augustinian view, by which we mean, all views which discover the millennium in the inter-advental period or in some part of it, whether that part be past, present, or future, may properly be called both *amillennial* and *postmillennial*. They are amillennial in the sense that they all deny that after the present dispensation has been terminated by the resurrection and rapture of the saints, there is to be a reign of Christ on earth with the saints for 1000 years before the last judgement. But since they identify the millennium as a whole, or with some part, of the present gospel age, they may also be called a postmillennialist. In this sense Augustine was a postmillennialist. But while this is true, the word “postmillennial” has come to be so identified with the name of Whitby that as used by very many writers on prophecy it applies exclusively to that view which regards the millennium as a golden age of the Church which is wholly future, perhaps still remote, and which is to precede the second advent.²⁷

Allis contends that Daniel Whitby was responsible for the radical modification of the Augustinian

²⁷ Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 4-5. Allis, it is interesting to note, is mildly critical of Berkhof's use of eschatological categories. “When Berkhof, for example, describes Amillennialism as the historic faith of the Christian Church, he is referring to the Augustinian view in general” (6).

view, noting out that Whitby insisted “that the spiritual millennium described in Rev. xx. is not a ‘recapitulation’ of the entire Church age, but follows chap. xix. chronologically and is *wholly future*.”²⁸ As Allis understands the two developing positions (amillennialism and postmillennialism), (1) It is insisting that the millennial age is not co-terminus with the inter-advental period, (2) That the millennial age is not associated in any fashion with the present age, and (3) That the millennial age is wholly future, which moves this form of postmillennialism outside the orthodox “Augustinian” family lineage.

Daniel Whitby’s Postmillennialism

Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), was an eccentric Anglican writer, and the author of the two-volume work *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (1703), which contained an eighteen-page treatise discussing the millennial reign of Christ.²⁹ While generally following the traditional postmillennial line, Whitby additionally argued that “the world would be converted by the gospel, the Jews restored to the Holy Land, and the papacy and the Muslims defeated. This would lead to the thousand-year period of peace, righteousness, and happiness on earth.”³⁰ According to Robert Clouse, “Whitby’s postmillennialism became the leading interpretation for most eighteenth century

²⁸ Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 5. See also 286, n. 7, where Allis remarks that “Whitby’s insistence that the national conversion of the Jews must precede the millennium forced him to regard that age as still wholly future. In this respect his view differed radically from that form of the Augustinian view, which while regarding the millennium as already in progress looks forward to a climax, a glorious state of the Church, yet to be attained.”

²⁹ Daniel Whitby, *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament, With a Treatise on the True Millennium* (London: William Tegg and Co. 1899), 1117-1134.

³⁰ Robert G. Clouse, “Whitby, Daniel” in Walter A. Elwell, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 1169. Cf. Daniel Whitby, “*Treatise*” especially chapter II, 1123 ff.

English and American commentators.”³¹ What is distinctive about Whitby’s view, and which appears to become one of the distinctive features of much of eighteenth and nineteenth century American postmillennialism is his contention that the millennial age did not commence with the coming of the Messiah and the binding of Satan at our Lord’s first advent, but that the binding of Satan and the beginning of the millennial age is still future. That being said, not all postmillennialists follow Whitby on this point.³² As we will see, this difference is one of the important keys to understanding the various forms of postmillennialism.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the usefulness of Allis’ notion of seeing amillennialism and postmillennialism as distinct approaches falling within the broader boundaries of the “Augustinian view,” what is distinctive about American nineteenth century postmillennialism, certainly in contrast to contemporary amillennialism, begins to emerge. For one thing, postmillennialism, as a distinct eschatological position, holds that the millennial age is a time of the “Christianizing of the nations,” which includes the progressive weakening of societal evils. The nations of the earth will learn to live in peace with one another, and there will be a comprehensive biblical and Christian influence upon all aspects and sectors of life *before* Christ returns to earth. This stands in marked contrast from even those so-called “optimistic” forms of amillennialism, which holds that the kingdom of God will steadily advance into all the earth during the millennial age, yet which also expects to see a corresponding increase, or at least a continual perpetuation of evil, until the eschaton. For the so-called optimistic amillennialist—a term I find problematic³³—there is no increase in the glory of the church beyond that she presently possesses, short of the return of Christ and the resurrection and glorification

³¹ Clouse, “*Whitby, Daniel*.” See also Peter Toon, ed., Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600 to 1660 (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 1970), 41.

³² J. Marcellus Kik and Greg Bahnsen being major exceptions. See footnote 20 above.

³³ Kim Riddlebarger, “*Eschatology by Ethos*,” Modern Reformation Magazine, September/October 2011, 29-34.

of individual believers of which she is composed.

An important distinctive of American postmillennialism, at least in those forms influenced directly by Whitby, is the concept that the millennial age is not co-extensive with the entire period of time between the first and second advent, nor that the millennial age has already commenced but has yet to reach its zenith, but that the millennial age lies entirely ahead in the future. There is certainly a natural tendency to justify one's commitment to a "golden age"—a Christianizing of the nations—in the face of contrary evidence in the form of empirical evil all around us, by assigning this "golden age" to some distant point in the future. It is perhaps this distinctive which gives post-Reformation varieties of postmillennialism its reputation for militant optimism about the great triumph of the gospel, *yet to come*. Scottish theologian John Dick expresses this triumphal optimism when he writes,

However improbable it may seem that the whole world should be Christianized, we know that God is able to perform what he has promised A future generation will witness the rapidity of its progress; and long before the end of time . . . Christianity will gain a complete triumph over all false religions; and the visible kingdom of Satan will be destroyed, or reduced without narrow limits, during the happy period when, in the figurative language of the Apocalypse, "he shall be bound."³⁴

This explains the difficulties when using contemporary eschatological nomenclature apart from certain qualifications when evaluating the nineteenth century millennial viewpoints of Charles and A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield. All amillennialists are postmillennial, not all postmillennialists are amillennial. Neither are all postmillennialists in agreement about the timing of the millennium, since not all postmillennialists believe that the millennium is exclusively future. The common denominator then, among postmillennialists is the understanding that: (1) The world will be progressively overcome by the Christian gospel and culture, and (2) Jesus will return to a Christianized earth. It is in keeping these qualifications in mind that resolution of the difficulty associated with amillennial and postmillennial nomenclature that we can consider the historical background to the Princeton tradition.

³⁴ John Dick, Lectures on Theology (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1852), 156.

Jonathan Edward's Postmillennialism

The Princeton theologians inherited postmillennialism from their own theological fathers. While some premillennial voices existed among the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards moved in a pronounced postmillennial direction, leaving behind a strong postmillennial legacy at Princeton and upon American theology in general. Profoundly influenced by Daniel Whitby,³⁵ Edwards is considered by one historian to hold the “distinction of being America's first major postmillennial thinker.”³⁶

Edwards argued in his *A History of the Work of Redemption* (first published in 1773), that the millennial age will not arrive until “Antichrist is fallen, and Satan’s visible kingdom on earth is destroyed.”³⁷ However, immediately before this millennial age dawns, which in Edwards’ view may be imminent, “we have all reason to conclude from the Scriptures, that just before this work of God begins, it will be a *very dark time* with respect to the interests of religion in the world.”³⁸ This dark period, which Edwards may even have viewed as his own age, will witness the great work of God gradually though powerfully wrought by the Spirit of God, “poured out for the wonderful revival and promulgation of religion This pouring out of the Spirit of God, when it is begun, shall soon bring

³⁵ Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1982* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1983), 13. Also see Stephen J. Stein, “Introduction” to Jonathan Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 7. According to Stein, Edwards assimilated Whitby’s views indirectly through the writings of Moses Lowman (1680-1752), who was in turn heavily influenced by Whitby. Edwards left behind a series of notes entitled “*Extracts from Mr. Lowman.*” See *Apocalyptic Writings*, 219 ff. It is also interesting to note that Stein self-consciously avoids the “pre” and “post” millennial terminology, because they “are largely inappropriate for seventeenth and eighteenth century thought because they imply too rigid a set of opposing assumptions” (“Introduction,” 7). Also see C. C. Goen’s essay, “*Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,*” in *Church History*, Vol. XXVIII, March, 1959, No. 1, 25-41. Goen points out that while Whitby was Edwards’ arch-enemy in the Arminian controversy, nevertheless, he did influence Edwards’ overall eschatological outlook (37).

³⁶ Goen, “*Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,*” 38.

³⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “*A History of the Work of Redemption*” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1979), 604-05.

³⁸ Edwards, “*A History of the Work of Redemption,*” 604-05.

multitudes to forsake that vice and wickedness that generally prevails (*italics in the original*).”³⁹ But the cessation of evil conduct is not all that is in view. Not only will the Spirit of God restrain evil, but He . . .

Shall cause that vital religion, which is now so despised and laughed at in the world, to revive. The work of conversion shall break forth, and go on in such a manner as never has been hitherto God, by pouring out his Holy Spirit, will furnish men to be glorious instruments of carrying on this work; will fill them with knowledge and wisdom, and fervent zeal for the promoting the kingdom of Christ, and the salvation of souls, and propagating the gospel in the world. The gospel shall begin to be preached with abundantly greater clearness and power than had heretofore been Before Babylon falls, the gospel shall be powerfully preached and propagated in the world.⁴⁰

For Edwards, then, the promised glory which lies ahead for the church is immeasurably greater than the power and glory which the church presently possesses. The church’s “latter day glory,” her crowning jewel, is this great triumph promised by God. Therefore, the millennial age is entirely future and must be sought with eager expectation and prayerful fervor.

Yet, there are important eschatological events which must occur prior to this great outpouring reaching its ultimate consummation. The three pillars of Satan which must fall in “violent and mighty opposition,” though not in an immediate but gradual and unrelenting amelioration before the millennium can begin, are the Antichrist and false prophet (located in the Roman church),⁴¹ Islam (the satanically empowered “Mahometan kingdom”) and heathenism. In addition, Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah must cease in order for the fulfillment of the great promises in Romans 11 can come to pass. These satanically inspired forces of unbelief must be completely and totally overcome by Christ

³⁹ Edwards, “*A History of the Work of Redemption*,” 604-05.

⁴⁰ Edwards, “*A History of the Work of Redemption*,” 605-06.

⁴¹ Edwards had written that “the ruin of the popish interest is but a small part of what is requisite, in order to introduce and settle such a state of things as the world is represented as being in, in that millennium that is described Rev. 20 [sic], wherein Satan’s visible kingdom is everywhere totally extirpated, and a perfect end put to all heresies, delusions and false religions whatsoever, through the whole earth, and Satan thenceforward ‘deceives the nations no more’ [v. 3].” See Jonathan Edwards, “*A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Viable Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer*,” in *Apocalyptic Writings*, 410.

and his church through the means of the proclamation of the pure gospel.

The visible kingdom of Satan shall be overthrown and the kingdom of Christ set up on the ruins of it, everywhere throughout the whole habitable globe. Now shall the promise made to Abraham be fulfilled, that in him and in his seed, *all the* families of the earth shall be blessed.⁴²

Once the Abrahamic promise is fulfilled, even over what may be a very lengthy period of time,⁴³ then the millennial age, which Edwards describes in several places as the “sabbath of the world”⁴⁴ will reach its fullness. This is a time describes as the “kingdom of heaven upon earth,” in which we will see the literal fulfillment of “all of the prophecies which speak of the glorious times of the gospel in the latter days.”⁴⁵ It is not until the conclusion of this period, which Edwards seems hesitant to expressly call the millennium or the thousand years, only a period of “long continuance,” that the end comes with the great apostasy which Edwards believes is described in Revelation 20.⁴⁶ It is not until this rebellion occurs that Jesus Christ returns to earth to rescue the church which is greatly imperiled by its new apostate enemies. The general resurrection finally occurs and the new heavens and earth are created. Following Whitby, Edwards saw the millennium as exclusively future, beginning only after the fall of Antichrist (Rome), Islam, and heathenism. In addition, the fulfillment of the promises in Romans 11 regarding the conversion of the Jews, and as Edwards understood it, the realization of the Abrahamic promise, must also come to pass during the millennial age.

While there is some debate about the extent of the novelty in Edwards’ postmillennialism,⁴⁷

⁴² Edwards, “*A History of the Work of Redemption*,” 608.

⁴³ Edwards, “*An Humble Attempt*,” 410.

⁴⁴ Edwards, “*An Humble Attempt*,” 410. Elsewhere, Edwards speaks the same way, referring to the thousand years as the “sabbath of the earth.” See Edwards, “*Notes on the Apocalypse*,” in *Apocalyptic Writings*, 144.

⁴⁵ Edwards, “*A History of the Work of Redemption*,” 609.

⁴⁶ Edwards, “*A History of the Work of Redemption*,” 609-611.

⁴⁷ See Goen’s discussion of this in “*Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology*,” 35 ff.

Joseph Bellamy, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., Timothy Dwight, and Samuel Hopkins, the perpetuators of the New England theology “were content to follow their master in eschatology.”⁴⁸ And the “Old School” Presbyterians at Princeton did as well.⁴⁹

Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), who founded Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812, was postmillennial, as was his son, the distinguished professor of Old Testament, Joseph Addison Alexander (1809-1861).⁵⁰ In his commentary on Isaiah, J. A. Alexander clearly indicates that the prophecies of Isaiah, which describe an age of peace to come in the distant future, are to be understood in strictly postmillennial terms. In commenting upon Isaiah 2:2-4, Alexander sets out the following points:

The prophet sees the church, at some distant period, exalted and conspicuous, and the nations resorting to it for instruction in the true religion, as a consequence of which he sees war cease and universal peace prevail The prophecy begins with an abrupt prediction of the exaltation of the church, the confluence of nations to it, and a general pacification as the consequence This confluence of nations is described more fully, and its motive stated in their own words, namely, a desire to be instructed in the true religion. He who appeared in the preceding verses as the lawgiver and teacher of the nations, is now represented as an arbiter or umpire, ending their disputes by a pacific intervention, as a necessary consequence of which war ceases, the very knowledge of the art is lost, and its implements applied to other uses The event is suspended upon a previous condition, viz., the confluence of nations to the

⁴⁸ Goen, “*Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology*,” 35 ff..

⁴⁹ The Princetonians were not the only ones to follow in Edwards’ footsteps and adopt a postmillennial eschatology. The southern Presbyterians, including J. H. Thornwell and Robert L. Dabney, were both postmillennial and argued vigorously against premillennialism. See J. H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, Vol. II (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publications, 1881), 48; and Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Reprint ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 829 ff. Dabney, it should be noted, assigned readings on the subject from Scotsman David Brown’s postmillennial polemic against premillennialism, *Christ’s Second Coming: Will it be Premillennial?* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1853). Charles Hodge also cited Brown’s work as an important response to premillennialism. See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 863-64. Northern Presbyterians were also influenced by postmillennialism. W. G. T. Shedd, in his two-volume work *History of Christian Doctrine*, reprint ed. (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1981), 398, argues, as does Hodge, that postmillennialism, including the return of Christ after the time of the fullness of the Gentiles, the conversion of the Jews and the gospel being preached to all nations, is the historic position of historic Christianity. In addition, noted Baptist theologians A. H. Strong and James P. Boyce were postmillennial. See: Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1979), 1008-1015, where Strong admits that “Our own interpretation of Rev. 20:1-10, was first given, for substance by Whitby”; and James Pettigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, reprint ed. (n.p.: Christian Gospel Foundation, n.d.), 461.

⁵⁰ Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 5. See also Greg Bahnsen, “*The ‘Prima Facie’ Acceptability of Postmillennialism*,” 101.

church, which has not yet taken place; a strong inducement to diffuse the gospel, which, in the mean time, is peaceful in its spirit, tendency, and actual effect, wherever and so far as it exerts its influence without obstruction.⁵¹

According to Alexander, the great age to come for the church is an age of universal peace as the nations of the earth are brought to a state of pacification through the ministry of the church, an age which Alexander characterizes as one of the “exalted and conspicuous” rule of this church. Through means of instruction in the true religion and the gospel, the nations cease hostilities with one another and war becomes a lost art. But, as Alexander points out, this is also an age “which has not yet taken place.” The fullness of the millennium, and the exaltation of the church lies entirely ahead in the future. This aspect of Alexander’s postmillennialism has much in common with Whitby and Edwards.

Charles Hodge’s Postmillennialism – “Millennial Perfection”

Only fourteen years of age at the time and present in the audience during Archibald Alexander’s inaugural address marking the opening of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812,⁵² Charles Hodge (1797-1878) became perhaps the most influential of nineteenth century American theologians. Charles Hodge’s discussion of the millennium and related issues is set out in his *Systematic Theology*, first published in 1872-73. Hodge labels his own view, not as postmillennialism *per se*, but as the “common doctrine of the church.”

For Hodge, it would seem, the course of world history is to be understood in postmillennial categories, including a great optimism regarding the future advance of all branches of knowledge. In a most interesting and revealing passage, Hodge sets forth his perspective on the history of humanity:

⁵¹ Joseph Addison Alexander, Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953), 96-98.

⁵² Mark A. Noll, The Princeton Theology: 1812-1921 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 13-14.

It has, therefore, been almost the universal belief that the original state of man was as the Bible teaches, his highest state, from which the nations of the earth have more or less deteriorated. This primitive state, however, was distinguished by the intellectual, moral and religious superiority of men rather than by superiority in the arts or natural sciences. The Scriptural doctrine, therefore, is consistent with the admitted fact that separate nations, and the human race as a whole, have made great advances in all branches of knowledge and in all the arts of life. Nor is it inconsistent with the belief that the world under the influence of Christianity is constantly improving, and will ultimately attain, under the reign of Christ, millennial perfection and glory.⁵³

According to Hodge, humanity's highest state was the condition that existed before Adam's act of rebellion. Once the Fall had occurred, however, there was a marked deterioration among the nations, even though humanity will regain much of its moral and religious superiority. As Hodge understands the course of history, the human race as a whole is presently advancing. There is no mention of the kingdom of God in this instance by Hodge, though he does go on to speak of an advance of "all branches of knowledge and in all the arts of life." Here we see the implicit secularization of the millennium found among many postmillennarians. Through the influence of the church, the state of world affairs being couched in purely secular terms, and will constantly improve until it reaches millennial perfection and glory under the reign of Christ.

In another important passage in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge describes those events which are to precede the second advent of our Lord:

1. The universal diffusion of the Gospel; or, as our Lord expresses it, the ingathering of the elect; this is the vocation of the Christian Church.
2. The conversion of the Jews, which is to be national. As their casting away was national, although a remnant was saved; so their conversion may be national, although some may remain obdurate.
3. The coming of Antichrist.⁵⁴

As to the first point, Hodge describes the interadvental period as one in which the "Messiah was to come and establish an everlasting kingdom which was to triumph over all opposition." As far as

⁵³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* II.94.

⁵⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III.792. Cf. also 861. "The common doctrine of the Church stated above, is that the conversion of the world, the restoration of the Jews, and the destruction of Antichrist are to precede the second coming of Christ, which event will be attended by the general resurrection of the dead, the final judgement, the end of the world, and the consummation of the Church."

the predictions in the Old Testament regarding this messianic age, “much remains to be accomplished in the future more in accordance with their literal meaning.”⁵⁵ This is standard postmillennial exegesis of these texts. One can only assume, since Hodge does not make this point expressly clear here, that he is referring to a time yet to come, which elsewhere he describes as “millennial perfection.”

For Hodge, the “first great event” to precede the coming of Christ is the universal proclamation of the gospel, in direct fulfillment of our Lord’s words in the Olivet Discourse and the Great Commission.⁵⁶ In addition, he notes, the Scriptures very clearly teach that God will accompany his church in the power of the Holy Spirit. He will equip his ministers and missionaries with the only tool necessary for the complete fulfillment of their obligations, the blessed Comforter. Hodge concludes that “it is evident that the Apostles considered the dispensation of the Spirit under which we are now living, as the only one which was to intervene between the first advent of Christ and the end of the world.”⁵⁷ This comment seems to indicate that Hodge does not understand the interadvental period as something which includes two separate and distinct stages, i. e., the present dispensation of the Holy Spirit and a subsequent period, the millennium. Rather, he indicates that the entire course of the age in its entirety is one of the age of the Spirit, which, if his postmillennial expectations are correct, will end in the glorious perfections of the millennial age. This would mean, one, either the millennium is co-terminus with the entire inter-advental period and reaches its zenith at the end of that period, or two, that the millennium begins at some future point during the inter-advental period in such a way as to realize the fullness of the age of the Spirit. The latter understanding seems to me to be Hodge’s position, but in either case, it appears that there is some mild mitigation of Edwards and Whitby’s assignation of the millennium to a wholly future period. For Whitby and Edwards, the millennium does not begin

⁵⁵ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.797.

⁵⁶ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.800 ff.

⁵⁷ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.802.

until after Antichrist has fallen, and the Abrahamic promise and the promises given in Romans 11 are fulfilled. Hodge, then, appears to connect the millennial age in some sense to the present age, unlike Whitby and Edwards.

In fact, in an earlier review of an article, written for the *Presbyterian* by Dr. John T. Duffield, a premillennarian, Hodge states the following:

The common faith of the church has been, and is, that Christ has ordained the preaching of the gospel under the dispensation of the Spirit, as the means of converting the world; and consequently that when Christ comes, it will not be to convert men, but to take vengeance on those who obey not the gospel, and to be glorified in all them that believe; that he will come to judge the world, and to introduce the final consummation. The second advent, the general resurrection, the final judgment, and the end of the world, are represented in Scripture as synchronous events.⁵⁸

Here, Hodge speaks of the “conversion of the world” during the interadvental period, only this time *not* in secular terms, but purely in terms of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. There is no mention of a golden age, great secular advances, nor anything approaching it. Hodge makes no specific mention of a millennial age, and although he does speak of great gospel progress, he also indicates that the Lord must return in judgment upon unbelievers at final consummation. In his review of Duffield’s remarks however, Hodge does say that the “general prevalence of the true religion,” is to be found on the earth when Christ returns.⁵⁹

When discussing the same subject in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge hints at a more militant millennialism on his part when he notes that Duffield attempts to “disprove ‘the doctrine of a millennial era of universal righteousness and peace upon earth before’ the second coming of Christ.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Charles Hodge, Review of “*A Discourse Delivered at the Opening of the Synod of New Jersey, October 16th, 1866*,” by the Moderator, Rev. John T. Duffield, D. D., in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, Vol. XXXIX., (1867), 160-162. Hodge’s summation of Dr. Duffield’s argument against his own position, which he does not label as “postmillennial,” but as that “common doctrine of the Church,” appears in *Systematic Theology*, III.861, n. 1.

⁵⁹ Hodge, “*Review of Duffield*,” 160.

⁶⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III.861, n. 1. Hodge also points out that Duffield argues that postmillennialism was originated by Daniel Whitby, merely one-hundred and fifty years earlier.

But Hodge's remark is tempered by his later comments that "the millennium may be a great advance on the present state of the Church; but, exalt it as you may, it is far below heaven."⁶¹ Hodge's postmillennialism is certainly moderated from that of some of his predecessors and contemporaries.

As to Hodge's second point, the "second great event according to the common faith of the Church. . . to precede the second advent of Christ" is the national conversion of the Jews. Accordingly, Romans 11:25 is taken to mean "that the national conversion of the Jews is not to take place until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." The fullness refers to the full number of God's elect.⁶² Hodge largely argues his case based upon the promises made to Abraham, Isaiah, Joel, and Zechariah reading the re-gathering of Israel to the land that God had promised to them. Romans 11:25-26 is interpreted to mean that even though God had cast national Israel off, there "remains an election according to grace," those who had believed in the Messiah. But this rejection of national Israel was not to be final. Once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, "then all Israel would be saved."

Whether this means the Jews as a nation, or the whole elect people of God including both Jews and Gentiles, may be doubtful. But in either case it is, in view of the context, a promise of the restoration of the Jews as a nation. There is, therefore, to be a national conversion of the Jews.⁶³

So Hodge concludes, "this conversion is to take place before the second advent of Christ."⁶⁴

A problem arises in connection with his discussion in his *Systematic Theology* when Hodge deals with the question as to whether or not the Jews are to be literally restored to the land of Palestine.

⁶¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III.863.

⁶² Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III.803. Hodge also discusses this subject at great length in his commentary on Romans (1864), especially his treatment of Romans 11:25-26. See Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Reprint ed., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 371-74. Also see Hodge's "Review of Duffield," 160, where he remarks that "The great body of Christians, on the other hand, [hold] that the national conversion of the Jews, as foretold in the Old Testament, and by the apostle Paul in Rom. xi., and the preaching of the gospel to all nations, as predicted by Christ; and the general prevalence of the true religion, are all to occur before Christ comes again the second time unto salvation."

⁶³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III.807.

⁶⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III.807

In listing arguments against the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land, Hodge does not at any time say that he favors this view. And yet, by sheer force, length and weight of argument, it appears that he specifically and carefully refutes the idea of a literal restoration of the Jews as a people to the Holy Land. However, in his commentary on Romans written earlier in his distinguished career, Hodge clearly indicates that he does not favor the literal restoration idea, because “nothing is said of this restoration” in Holy Scripture.⁶⁵ What is problematic about this, then, is that under his stated reasons against the literal restoration, which Hodge apparently endorses, he makes the following comments:

The restoration of the Jews to their own land and their continued national individuality, is generally associated with the idea that they are to constitute a sort of peerage in the Church of the future, exalted in prerogative and dignity above their fellow believers; and again this is more or less intimately connected with the doctrine that what the Church of the present is to look forward to is the establishment of a kingdom on earth of great worldly splendour and prosperity. For neither of these is there any authority in the didactic portions of the New Testament. There is no intimation that any one class of Christians, or Christians of any one nation or race, are to be exalted over their brethren; neither is there the slightest suggestion that the future kingdom of Christ is to be of earthly splendour. Not only are these expectations without any foundation in the teachings of the Apostles, but they are inconsistent with the whole spirit of their instructions. They do not exhort believers to look forward to a reign of wealth and power, but to long after complete conformity to the image of Christ, and to pray for the coming of that kingdom which is righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost.⁶⁶

It appears from these remarks then, that Hodge qualifies his millennial view by carefully mitigating the secular nature of any of aspect of kingdom of God. The church is not to look for material prosperity, and worldly splendor. Neither is the church to expect to attain wealth or power.

It seems that once these qualifications have been made, there is little remaining that would distinguish Hodge’s view of the course of the present age from modern amillennialism which does not see the kingdom of God as secular in any fashion. So Hodge can argue that the kingdom of God is “not of this world” (John 15:19) and is instead “a matter of righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). This is problematic for Hodge, because elsewhere, he describes the future course of

⁶⁵ Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 380.

⁶⁶ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 811.

history as one of secular progress, toward “millennial perfection and glory.” And yet, here he makes himself very clear, that the kingdom of God is not secularized in any sense, although left unstated, he may believe that there are secular benefits to be derived from the advance of the spiritual kingdom. There is a marked tension here. “This state is described as one of spiritual prosperity; God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh; knowledge shall everywhere abound; wars shall cease to the ends of the earth.”⁶⁷ Notice that Hodge points out that it is spiritual prosperity that is in view, not material, yet the nations are to receive peace as a fruit.

This raises a question in my mind regarding several modern postmillennial interpreters of Hodge, such as Kik and Bahnsen,⁶⁸ who quote Hodge’s earlier more militant remarks regarding the course of world history, as though these remarks encompass Hodge’s postmillennialism in its entirety, without any reference to Hodge’s moderating comments here. In accurately describing Hodge’s position, both tensions must be included and evaluated, something contemporary postmillennial writers often do not do when looking to Hodge for proof-texts demonstrating historical antecedents for their own forms of postmillennialism.

Hodge does set out to resolve this tension. “Experience concurs with Scripture in teaching that the kingdom of Christ passes through many vicissitudes.”⁶⁹ In other words, “it has its times of depression and its seasons of exaltation and prosperity.” This is the character of the past, but for Hodge, the character of the future may be different:

Prophecy sheds sufficiently clear light on the future to teach us, not only that this alteration is to continue to the end, but, more definitely, that before the second coming of Christ there is to be a long period of time of great and long continued prosperity, to be followed by a season of decay and of suffering, so that when the Son of Man comes he shall hardly find faith on the earth. It appears from the passages already quoted that all nations are to be converted; that the

⁶⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III III.859.

⁶⁸ Kik, *Eschatology of Victory*, 4, and Bahnsen, “*The ‘Prima Facie’ Case for Postmillennialism*,” 101.

⁶⁹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III.858.

Jews are to be brought in and reingrafted into their own olive tree; and that their restoration is to be the occasion and the cause of a change from death unto life.⁷⁰

For Hodge, this tension is found in the biblical data. There will be alternate periods of blessing and prosperity, until such time as God sees fit to bring a long period of prosperity, in which the nations will be converted. We saw that Hodge located this in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, though in geo-political terms, peace among nations may result as a consequence. This state of peace, in turn, becomes the occasion for the great apostasy, also predicted by the same prophets. Regarding this period of great blessing,

Of this period the ancient prophets speak in terms adapted to raise the hopes of the Church to the highest pitch. It is true it is difficult to separate, in their descriptions, what refers to this 'latter day of glory' from what relates to the kingdom of Christ as consummated in heaven. So also it was difficult for the ancient people of God to separate what, in the declarations of their prophets, referred to the redemption of the people from Babylon from what referred to the greater redemption to be effected by the Messiah. In both cases enough is plain to satisfy the Church. There was a redemption from Babylon, and there was a redemption by Christ; and in like manner, it is hoped, there is to be a period of millennial glory on earth, and a still more glorious consummation in heaven. This period is called a millennium because in Revelation it is said to last a thousand years, an expression which is perhaps generally understood literally.⁷¹

While seeming to affirm the literal nature of the thousand years described in Revelation 20, Hodge again moderates his views. "Some however think it means a protracted season of infinite duration." Whether literal or not, since Hodge never says how he feels one way or the other, he concludes, "during this period, be it longer or shorter, the Church is to enjoy a season of peace, purity, and blessedness such as it has never yet experienced."⁷² Hodge sees a great age of spiritual prosperity ahead for the church. There is indeed future "millennial perfection" for the people of God.

Finally, Hodge's third point concerns the rise of Antichrist, who will most certainly appear before the second coming of Christ. He contends that the term "Antichrist" has different usages in

⁷⁰ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.858.

⁷¹ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.858.

⁷² Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.858-59.

Scripture. The first is that “there were to be many Antichrists; many manifestations of malignant opposition to the person and to the work of Christ; many attempts to cast off his authority and to overthrow his kingdom.”⁷³ The second, however, refers to the papacy, which fits the biblical data which sees Antichrist as more comprehensive than any one individual, but instead a religious institution of some sort.⁷⁴ Since the spirit of Antichrist was already present in the Apostle John’s own lifetime, it is clear that the papacy, while the supreme Antichrist, is not the only Antichrist. And because this phenomenon was already present in the apostolic age, “how long the period between the first and second advents of the Son of God is to be protracted is unrevealed.” This leads Hodge to conclude that “it has already lasted nearly two thousand years, and for what we know, it may last two thousand more.”⁷⁵ There is no explicit mention here of a future millennium, a thousand years, or any other such theme, though this is certainly implied. Hodge does connect the rise of Antichrist with the great apostasy predicted immediately before the days of our Lord’s return. But he is not quite sure how to handle the biblical data which apparently sees Antichrist as both an individual and an institution. He seems content to set out both sets of data, and leaves them for the reader’s judgment.⁷⁶ Again, there is no mention of a future golden age which arrives after Antichrist is destroyed, nor is there any mention of a “Christianizing of the nations,” associated with any of his discussion of Antichrist, or the final apostasy.

In all of Hodge's discussion, though definitely postmillennial, we see a good deal of evidence that Hodge’s views are significantly moderated from that of Whitby and Edwards, since he at no time states that the millennium is wholly future, nor do his views force us to that conclusion. In fact, as we

⁷³ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.812 ff.

⁷⁴ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.813-815.

⁷⁵ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.823.

⁷⁶ Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.836.

have seen, the evidence clearly falls on the other side. The millennial age appears to be the zenith of the present age, but which may or may not have already commenced, though certainly not yet realized in its fullness.

A. A. Hodge's Postmillennialism – Universal Expansion of Spiritual Prosperity

When Charles Hodge died in 1878 at the age of eighty-one, his son, A. A. Hodge (1823-1886), who was appointed to the chair of didactic and polemical theology at Princeton a year before his father died, now assumed the mantle of leadership that his father had passed on to him. In the words of one historian, Archibald Alexander Hodge “did not overawe observers like his namesake or impress them like his father, but he had the greatest capacity for precise and concise expression among the major Princetonians.”⁷⁷

A. A. Hodge did not write as extensively as had his father, or as would his successor, B. B. Warfield. Nevertheless, the younger Hodge generally followed his father and the inherited American postmillennial tradition in his understanding of the nature of the millennium. In his own important theological textbook, *Outlines of Theology*, first published in 1878, A. A. Hodge writes in response to the question, “What is the Scriptural doctrine concerning the millennium?”

1st. The Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, clearly reveal that the gospel is to exercise an influence over all branches of the human family, immeasurably more extensive and more thoroughly transforming than any it has ever realized in time past. This end is to be gradually attained through the spiritual presence of Christ in the ordinary dispensation of Providence, and ministrations of his church 2nd. The period of this general prevalency of the gospel will continue a thousand years, and is hence designated the millennium. – Rev. xx. 2-7. 3d. The Jews are to be converted to Christianity either at the commencement or during the continuance of this period 4th. At the end of these thousand years, and before the coming of Christ, there will be a comparatively short season of apostasy and violent conflict between the kingdoms of light and darkness 5th. Christ's advent, the general resurrection and judgment, will be simultaneous, and immediately succeeded by the burning of the old, and

⁷⁷ Noll, The Princeton Theology, 14.

the revelation of the new earth and heavens.⁷⁸

In his first point, A. A. Hodge summarizes that which his father had already stated, namely the optimism that the gospel would ultimately influence all aspects of human life and with continually greater effect. So much so, that the best days lie clearly ahead for the church, a condition that Hodge describes as “immeasurably more extensive and transforming” than anything at present. A. A. Hodge also comments regarding the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, that those who hold to this position are in error because “Christ has in reserve for his church a period of universal expansion and of pre-eminent expansion and of pre-eminent spiritual prosperity.” In fact, so great will this expansion be that, “the `noble army of martyrs’ shall be reproduced again in the great body of God’s people in unprecedented measure, and when these martyrs shall, in the general triumph of their cause, and in the overthrow of their enemies . . . reign in the earth.”⁷⁹

Notice too that the same tension appears again between the spiritual and the secular, that this prosperous condition is wrought by the “spiritual reign” of Christ with an overtly secular impact. What is also confusing is Hodge’s remark that this gospel influence will occur through the ordinary ministry of the church. Other postmillennial writers, such as Edwards, indicated that they expected this great advance through an extra-ordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It may be assumed that Hodge would agree that a supernatural influence is necessary and may be exerted through ordinary means, but this is not stated. The younger Hodge seems to reflect a more guarded evaluation of the future and the character of progress, writing in the years immediately following the catastrophic American Civil War.

A. A. Hodge also does not indicate, in point two above, whether or not he regards the

⁷⁸ A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1972), 568-69. It is important to notice that A. A. Hodge refers his readers to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapters 32 and 33. In his own commentary on the Westminster Confession, Hodge makes no mention of his millennial views. Since the confession itself does not treat this particular question, it may be argued that Hodge did not see fit to include any such discussion. See A. A. Hodge, The Confession of Faith (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978, 380 ff.

⁷⁹ Hodge, Outlines of Theology, 571.

millennial age as a literal one-thousand year period of time. He does state that this period comes after the gospel attains prevalency, meaning that the millennium, possibly in part, likely in its entirety, is still yet future. He does not state whether or not the millennium begins somewhat abruptly, or if the millennium gradually merges into the present age, though either is possible. In any case, the millennium age cannot be seen to be co-terminus with the entire interadvental period, though there is nothing said to support the idea that the millennium cannot begin until Antichrist has fallen and all of the other promises are fulfilled, making the millennium exclusively future. Here again, the younger Hodge follows his father in the moderation of the exclusively future one-thousand year millennium which precedes Christ's return, as held by Whitby and Edwards.

As for point three, A. A. Hodge again closely follows Charles, only with some additional qualifications. The senior Hodge had stated only that the Jews were to be converted at some point before the second advent, and related this event to Paul's comments regarding the full number of the Gentiles coming in as stated in Romans 11:25. A. A. Hodge, on the other hand, makes a more definite reference here to the millennium, seeing the conversion of the Jews directly in relation to the millennial age. The Jews will be converted either at the beginning or during the course of the millennium. This again leaves one wondering whether the millennium is entirely future, or whether its influence gradually expands to the point that the Jews are converted sometime during its course.

Points four and five are typical postmillennial arguments. A. A. Hodge regards the great apostasy as immediately preceding the second advent, which is synchronous with the resurrection, the final judgment and the creation of the new heavens and earth. On these points, he takes a view quite similar to that of his father.

B. B. Warfield's Postmillennialism – "A Saved Earth"

When A. A. Hodge died at the age of 63 in 1886, it was perhaps the greatest of the Princetonians who succeeded him. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) had the most to say on the subject of eschatology of any of the three great Princeton theologians. As such, he was also the most innovative and profound of the three in his understanding of the issues surrounding the millennium. Since Warfield did not produce a great systematic treatise which dealt with the subject, it is best to look at the common themes that run throughout several of his major articles dealing with eschatology in general and with the millennium specifically.

As far as Warfield's understanding of Revelation 20,⁸⁰ he makes clear that he sees himself as following Augustine, and accordingly advocates the recapitulation theory of interpreting the Apocalypse, "which seems to us to advance, so to speak, in a spiral movement."⁸¹ Warfield argues that "our own tendency is to return to Augustine in interpreting the thousand years . . . [as] the Christian dispensation looked upon from the standpoint of the saints in heaven."⁸² The millennial age, then, is seen to be co-terminus with the entire period lying between the two advents of our Lord. The same period is in view elsewhere when John (whom Warfield believes to be the author of the Apocalypse) speaks of this period from first one perspective as descriptive of death and conflict, (the three and one-half years), and then, from another, a period of triumph, (the thousand years). The number of years involved is symbolic according to Warfield, "whether the thousand be looked upon as the cube of ten

⁸⁰ Warfield describes Revelation 20 as an "obscure passage" and cautions against interpreting the rest of Scripture in light of "conceptions derived from misunderstandings of this text." See B. B. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," from *The Princeton Theological Review*, v. 2 (1904), 599-617; reprinted in *Biblical Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 643-664. In this, Warfield is bolder in his endorsement of the recapitulation theory than Charles Hodge had been. See Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 827-28.

⁸¹ B. B. Warfield, "Review of 'Studies in Eschatology.' *The Thousand Years in Both Testaments, By Nathan West*," in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, J1 (1890), 513-14. See also "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," 645.

⁸² Warfield, "Review of *Studies in Eschatology*, 514.

or (more probably) as twice ten jubilees.”⁸³

Warfield categorically rejects the premillennial view, but is surprisingly quite willing to admit that “though no doubt the extreme postmillennial view is equally untenable in view of the consistent Biblical teaching that we may not know when the Lord may come.”⁸⁴ Since the millennial age is co-terminus with the interadvental period, it cannot be seen to be a literal one-thousand year period lying exclusively in the future. This is a significant modification of the view of Whitby, Edwards, and to some degree of both Hodges’ who modified this idea as well. Warfield prefers to see the present dispensation in its entirety as the “last days,” the time during which “Christ makes his conquests” before his return.⁸⁵

The context for the millennial passage, the only such place in Scripture, argues Warfield, where a millennium as such is discussed at all, is the immediately preceding portion of John’s seventh vision (Revelation 19:11-21).⁸⁶ The passage is to be seen as the great vision of the “victory of the word of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all his enemies.” The language of combat here is obviously highly symbolic. “The conquest is wrought by the spoken word – in short by the preaching of the gospel. In fine, we have before us a picture of the victorious career of the Gospel.”⁸⁷ This is in accord with the Old Testament predictions of a “spiritual victory” during the messianic age and with other parallel passages such as Romans 11, which Warfield argues, describe “nothing less than a

⁸³ Warfield, “Review of *Studies in Eschatology*, 514. See also “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 654-55, where Warfield discusses the symbolism of the thousand years in much more detail.

⁸⁴ Warfield, “Review of *Studies in Eschatology*, 514.

⁸⁵ Warfield, “Review of *Studies in Eschatology*, 514

⁸⁶ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 643.

⁸⁷ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 646-47. Greg Bahnsen cites Warfield’s exegesis of Revelation 19 as evidence of Warfield’s “strong postmillennial convictions,” although Bahnsen conveniently ignores Warfield’s more decidedly amillennial exegesis of Revelation 20. See Bahnsen, “‘*The Prima Facie*’ Acceptability of Postmillennialism,” 101-02.

world-wide salvation,”⁸⁸ and I Corinthians 15 (though in symbolic form). “What we have here [Revelation 19:11-21], in effect, is a picture of the whole period between the first and second advents, seen from the point of view of heaven. It is a period of the advancing victory of the Son of God over the world.”⁸⁹

However, as Warfield sees it, Revelation 20 describes a dramatically different scene. The focus switches from warfare to peace, though peace is seen against the background of the warfare previously described. The vision begins with the binding of Satan, and the participants in the thousand years have entered “through the stress of this beast-beset life.” What, then, is this peace of a thousand years duration?

It is certainly not what we have come traditionally to understand by the “millennium,” as is made evident by many considerations, and sufficiently so by this one: that those who participate in it are spoken of as mere “souls” (ver. 4) – “the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God.” It is not disembodied souls who are to constitute the Church during its state of highest development on earth, when the knowledge of the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Neither is it disembodied souls who are thought of as constituting the kingdom which Christ is intending to set up on earth after His advent, that they may rule with Him over the nations. And when we have said this, we are surely following hard on the pathway that leads to the true understanding of this vision.⁹⁰

The proper interpretation of John’s seventh vision, then, is as follows. What must be in view in Revelation 20 is the immediate state. This is a picture of souls in heaven, and the “thousand years, thus, is the whole of this present dispensation, which is again placed before us in its entirety, but looked at now relatively not to what is passing on earth but to what is enjoyed ‘in Paradise.’”⁹¹ The binding of Satan is also seen as a symbolic event, indicating that those who are in view here are

⁸⁸ Warfield, “*The Gospel and the Second Coming*,” 354.

⁸⁹ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 648.

⁹⁰ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 648-49.

⁹¹ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 649. This is in full agreement with Charles Hodge’s remarks to the effect that John is describing souls in heaven, not a resurrection of the bodies of the martyrs. See Hodge, Systematic Theology, III.842.

protected from his attacks, and those who are not in view, i.e., those still upon the earth, are still subject to his wrath. Satan will ultimately be destroyed at the end of the thousand years. Those who are safe in Paradise are given the privilege of being seated with Christ, and “share his kingship – not forever, however, but for a thousand years, i. e., for the Messianic period.”⁹² The first resurrection is accordingly seen as the “state of the souls in Paradise, saved in principle, if not in complete fruition,” those awaiting the great resurrection (i. e., the “second resurrection”) at our Lord’s return to earth at the end of the thousand years.⁹³

Warfield concludes, “this vision as a whole (xx. 1-20), in sharp contrast with the preceding one (xix. 11-21), which pictured the strife of God's people in the world, brings us before the spectacle of the peace of God's saints gathered in heaven.” It must therefore, “embrace . . . the whole inter-advental period, but that period as passed in the security and glory of the intermediate state.”⁹⁴ Warfield’s understanding of Revelation 19 and 20 has much more in common with contemporary amillennial interpreters than it does with the postmillennialism of his predecessors Charles and A. A. Hodge.⁹⁵

This can be seen when Warfield summarizes the seventh vision as follows:

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to conquer the world to Himself, and this He does with a thoroughness and completeness which seems to go beyond even the intimations of Romans xi and I Cor. xv. Meanwhile, as the conquest of the world is going on below, the saints who die in the Lord are gathered in Paradise to reign with their Lord, who is also the Lord of all, and who is from His throne directing the conquest of the world. When the victory is completely won there supervenes the last judgement and the final destruction of the wicked. At once there is a new heaven and new earth and the consummation of the glory of the Church. And this Church abides forever (xxii. 5) in perfection of holiness and blessedness.⁹⁶

⁹² Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 651-52.

⁹³ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 652-53.

⁹⁴ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 652-53.

⁹⁵ See Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 223-238, for instance for a representative amillennial interpretation of this. Warfield’s friend, Samuel G. Craig, is also of the opinion that Warfield’s interpretation of Revelation 20 “readily fits into amillennialism.” See Craig, “*B. B. Warfield*,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, xl.

⁹⁶ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 661-62.

Therefore, “the millennium of the Apocalypse is the blessedness of the saints who have gone away from the body to be at home with the Lord.”⁹⁷ If Warfield had concluded his comments at this point, I would see sufficient reason to label him an amillennarian. But this we cannot do for several reasons. First, Warfield clearly acknowledges his differences with the Dutch amillennarians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.⁹⁸ Second, it can be argued that Warfield’s overall eschatological position is clearly postmillennial (as we will see). This conclusion is supported by the fact this is not Warfield’s final remark on the subject. He wraps up noting, “but this conclusion obviously does not carry with it the denial that a ‘golden age’ yet lies before the Church, if we may use this designation in a purely spiritual sense.”⁹⁹ Seeing parallels elsewhere, Warfield adds, “as emphatically as Paul, John teaches that the earthly history of the Church is not a history merely of the conflict with evil, but of the conquest over evil: and even more richly than Paul, John teaches that this conquest will be decisive and complete.”¹⁰⁰ Warfield sees this as the ultimate meaning behind our Lord’s words in the Great Commission. “The world is to be nothing less than a converted world.”¹⁰¹ This, Warfield believes, was the whole purpose of John’s vision in Revelation 19:11-21. The Gospel will conquer the world! In what perhaps are Warfield’s most militantly postmillennial remarks, he echoes the same theme:

Enough has doubtless been said to show that the assumption that the dispensation in which we live is an indecisive one, and that the Lord waits to conquer the world to himself until after he returns to earth, employing then new and more effective methods than he has set to work in our own time, is scarcely in harmony with the New Testament point of view. According to the New Testament, this time in which we live is precisely the time in which our Lord is conquering the world to himself; and it is the completion of this conquest which, as it marks

⁹⁷ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 662. See also, Warfield, “*The Gospel and the Second Coming*,” 348.

⁹⁸ Craig, “B. B. Warfield,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, xli.

⁹⁹ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 662.

¹⁰⁰ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 662.

¹⁰¹ Warfield, “*The Gospel and the Second Coming*,” 350, 353.

the completion of his redemptive work, so sets the time for his return to earth to consummate his Kingdom and establish it in its eternal form.¹⁰²

This same concept can be seen elsewhere in Warfield's writings. Warfield is fond of referring to a "saved world," the world to which our Lord returns at the second advent.

If you wish, as you lift your eyes to the far horizon of the future, to see looming on the edge of time the glory of a saved world . . . and that in His own good time and way [God] will bring the world in its entirety to the feet of Him whom He has not hesitated to present to our adoring love not merely as the Saviour of our own souls but as the Saviour of the world The scriptures teach an eschatological universalism, not an each and every universalism. When the Scriptures say that Christ came to save the world, that He does save the world, and that the world shall be saved by Him They mean that He came to save and does save the human race; and that the human race is being led by God into a racial salvation: that in the age-long development of the race of men, it will attain at last unto a complete salvation, and our eyes will be greeted with the glorious spectacle of a saved world.¹⁰³

In his illuminating article on I John 2:2, written shortly before his death, Warfield again speaks of a "saved world."

John means only, he says, that Christ is the Savior with abiding power for the whole human era; through all ages He is mighty to save, though He saves only His own. It is much more common silently to assume that "by the whole world" John has in mind the whole race of mankind throughout the entire range of its existence in time Where the expositors have gone astray is in not perceiving that this salvation of the world was conceived by John – any more than the salvation of the individual – as accomplishing itself all at once. Jesus came to save the world, and the world will through him be saved: at the end of the day, He will have a saved world to present to His father.¹⁰⁴

While the context of the last two of the above comments is Warfield's defense of the Calvinistic system, especially the particular nature of the atonement, there is no doubt that Warfield sees the

¹⁰² Warfield, "*The Gospel and the Second Coming*," 355. It is important to note Samuel Craig's comment that this particular essay was written in response to a publishers request that Warfield "set forth a postmillennial view," on the subject. See Craig, "B. B. Warfield," xli.

¹⁰³ B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 99-103.

¹⁰⁴ B. B. Warfield, "*Jesus Christ the Propitiation for the Whole World*," from *The Expositor*, XXI. 1921, 241-253, reprinted in *Selected Shorter Writings*, Vol. I, 167-177. See also Warfield's *Saviour of the World* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), 129, where the almost identical language is used. In another article, "*Predestination*," originally written for the *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 47-63, Warfield writes in reference to Romans 11 that "there is undoubtedly a universal salvation proclaimed here; but it is an eschatological, not individualist universalism. The day is certainly to come when the whole world – inclusive of all the Jews and Gentiles alike, then dwelling on the globe – shall know and serve the Lord." Reprinted in Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, 52.

universal aspect of the atonement in eschatological terms. In both cases, Warfield admits that he is not an “each and every” universalist, but an eschatological universalist. That is, the world, even if this does not include each and every individual in it, will be saved before Christ returns.

Another important difference between Warfield and his predecessors is his treatment of the eschatological “men of evil,” specifically Paul’s Man of Sin and John’s Antichrist. Paul’s Man of Sin (II Thessalonians 2:), for example, is seen as a reference to a phenomenon “contemporary, or nearly contemporary” with the time of the apostle Paul himself. “The withholding power is already present.”¹⁰⁵ Warfield relates this event to the Roman empire – “we cannot go wrong in identifying him with the Roman emperor.”¹⁰⁶ Likewise, the Antichrist of John’s first epistle is connected with a purely contemporary phenomenon, the rejection of the fully divine and fully human Jesus. Antichrist is, for Warfield, not at all related to the other evil personages in the New Testament. He is not even an individual. He is anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is God come to earth in human flesh. He is a heretic, or even a heresy for that matter, and John “reduces him from a person to a heresy.”¹⁰⁷ His arrival in the first century, and his diminishing presence throughout the age, distances Antichrist from the standard Reformed identification of him primarily with the papacy. Therefore, Warfield on purely exegetical grounds modifies the usual interpretation of these events, and sees them largely in preterist terms as fulfilled in the apostolic age. As for any future role for Antichrist, Warfield writes,

[John] does not even suppose that Antichrists will always exist in the world. He tells us plainly enough that Christianity must fight its way to victory. But he tells us plainly enough that it is to victory that it fights its way John already sees a time when the Antichrists who swarmed around him and who are now swarming around us, shall no longer exist, because the

¹⁰⁵ B. B. Warfield, “*The Prophecies of St. Paul*,” in *The Expositor*, 3d ser. v. iv, (1886), 30-44, 131-148, 439-452. Reprinted in *Biblical Doctrines*, 609 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Here, I think, Warfield did indeed go wrong. Warfield, “*The Prophecies of St. Paul*,” 610.

¹⁰⁷ B. B. Warfield, “*Antichrist*,” in *The Expository Times*, XXXII. (1921), 358-360. Reprinted in *Selected Shorter Writings*, Vol. I, 356-62.

light which he saw already shining, shall have broadened into the fullness of day.¹⁰⁸

This is a definite move away from both Whitby and Edwards, and certainly a marked reinterpretation of the view held by the Hodges. Antichrist is not yet to come, he and his hosts already have.

It is because of this overall eschatological framework that Warfield could argue that “the possibility of an extended duration for the conquered earth lies open: and in any event a progressively advancing conquest of the earth by Christ’s Gospel implies a coming age deserving at least the relative name of ‘golden.’”¹⁰⁹ Warfield seems to see that such comments are in need of qualification. “Perhaps a distinction may be made between a converted earth, and a sanctified earth.” Warfield thinks this preferable to the common distinction often made between a witnessed-to earth and a converted earth. For “the Gospel assuredly must be preached to the whole world as a witness, before the Lord comes.” The result of which is that “these visions seem to go further and teach that the earth – the whole world – must be won to Christ before He comes: and that it is precisely this conquest of it that He is accomplishing during the progress of this inter-advental period.”¹¹⁰ Here again, the tension arises between the winning of the earth and the elimination of all evil, which it seems is implied by such a view of the triumph of the gospel. Again, Warfield must issue a qualification. “Whether they go so far as to say that this winning of the world implies the complete elimination of evil from it may be more doubtful.”¹¹¹ Christ’s enemies will all be overcome, but since the perfecting of fallen mankind awaits

¹⁰⁸ Warfield, “*Antichrist*,” 362.

¹⁰⁹ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 663. See also Warfield, “*The Gospel and the Second Coming*,” 349, where Warfield states that “the Scriptures do promise to the Church a ‘golden age,’ when the conflict with the forces of evil in which it is engaged has passed into victory.” In fact, there is additional evidence that Warfield considered the church of his own times as still “the primitive church,” certainly implying that this golden age is not yet realized in any fashion in the present. See Warfield, “*Are they Few that be Saved?*” from the Lutheran Church Review, (1915), 42-58. Reprinted in Biblical and Theological Studies, 347.

¹¹⁰ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 663. Cf. also Warfield, “*The Prophecies of St. Paul*,” 623-24. Here, Warfield argues that Romans 11:25 and following is to be interpreted as referring to “the universal Christianization of the world – at least the nominal conversion of all the Gentiles and the real salvation of all the Jews. In any understanding of it, it promises the widest practical extension of Christianity, and reveals to us Christ going forth to victory.”

¹¹¹ Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 663.

the arrival of the New Jerusalem and the perfected world, Warfield simply opts to leave the matter open and he declares himself “content to leave the text to teach its own lessons, without additions from us.” But the overall lesson of the text is clear for Warfield, and whatever earlier qualifications he made earlier, he now seems to disregard. According to Warfield,

There is a “golden age” before the Church – at least an age relatively golden gradually ripening to higher and higher glories as the Church more and more conquers the world and all the evil of the world; and ultimately an age absolutely golden when the perfected Church is filled with the glory of the Lord in the new earth and under the new heavens.¹¹²

Warfield, then, strangely enough, appears to be both the most moderate of the Princeton postmillennialists, adopting virtually an amillennial view of Revelation 20, while at the same time, the most optimistic. He clearly expects a golden age yet ahead for the church which he describes in the strongest of language. Warfield expects a complete triumph over evil, the conversion of the world (in eschatological terms), and he most definitely expects our Lord to return to a “saved earth.” The irony in this is that by interpreting Revelation 20 in the manner in which he does, in effect, Warfield becomes a transitional figure among postmillennarians. Once his exegesis of Revelation 20 is adopted, it seems to me, the postmillennial understanding of the outcome of redemptive history is seriously weakened. It appears to be no accident then that Geerhardus Vos was able to move the intellectual children of Old Princeton, including Westminster Theological Seminary, in an amillennial direction. Vos was simply sowing in the field that Warfield himself had plowed.

Postmillennialism at Princeton: Modification and Moderation

In summarizing how nineteenth century American Reformed theology in general, and Old Princeton in particular, understood the concept of the millennial age, I would have to conclude that that

¹¹² Warfield, “*The Millennium and the Apocalypse*,” 664.

J. Marcellus Kik's original assertion "that the postmil position was the historic position of Old Princeton" is largely correct. Since the eschatological nomenclature for distinct differences between amillennialism and postmillennialism did not yet exist for much of the period in which they lived and worked, it is pointless to attempt to determine if Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, or B. B. Warfield, fit into modern categories such as amillennialism. Given the nineteenth century definitions, it would be perfectly natural for the Princetonians to hold simultaneously to amillennial exegesis of certain texts, and yet still remain self-consciously postmillennial, since the competing view was premillennialism, not the amillennialism of a Louis Berkhof or an O. T. Allis.

Yet, as we have seen, there is also a sense in which the Princeton position is evolutionary. Certainly this is true if we take the postmillennialism of Whitby and Edwards, which Princeton had inherited, and compare it to the form that postmillennialism eventually took under B. B. Warfield. There is clear evidence of a moderating trend over the eighty-years from 1841-1921, so much so, that Gaffin's reservations in calling Warfield "postmillennial" in an unqualified sense, has much merit. Geerhardus Vos (and we might include Lois Berkhof) did not perpetuate Princeton's earlier postmillennialism. In fact, the unsubstantiated legend still circulates that Vos and Warfield openly debated before students at Princeton about whether Jesus returned to "save the world" (Vos) or if he returned to "a saved world" (Warfield).

If, however, Greg Bahnsen's unqualified identification of "eschatological optimism" as the essential essence of postmillennialism is correct, Warfield must be seen as militantly postmillennial. And this, despite Warfield's exegesis of Revelation 20, his preterist tendencies as seen in his understanding of the eschatological men of evil (the Man of Sin in II Thessalonians, and the Antichrist of John's epistles) as phenomena of the apostolic age, which, in effect, cuts away much biblical support for belief in a future millennium which looks to see these foes conquered at a time yet future. Some will argue that since Warfield identifies the entire interadvental age with the millennium, he ought to

be classified as an “optimistic” amillennialist—a category which, as I stated previously, is not particularly helpful in distinguishing among contemporary varieties of postmillennialism and amillennialism. I think such a designation does not properly explain the evidence we have just explored.

In the end, there is ample evidence that Warfield considered himself postmillennial in the nineteenth century understanding of that term, and that he saw salvific optimism as the essential nature of his own thoroughgoing supernatural eschatology. Warfield is perhaps best understood as the chief moderator and modifier of the postmillennialism Princeton inherited from Whitby and Edwards. There is no doubt that he sees himself as postmillennial, he speaks of a “saved world” like a postmillennarian, yet he clearly rejects standard postmillennial exegesis at several key points. Warfield, it must be noted, does not leave behind a self-conscious postmillennial tradition as do the Hodges. Vos, with the exception of a few die-hards, such as Kik, moves the tradition in an amillennial direction, much more typical of the Dutch Reformed churches (Bavinck, Kuyper, and later Berkhof).

As pointed out by many interpreters of the American Evangelicalism of the period, or those who concentrate upon Old Princeton in particular, the horrors of the Civil War, followed by the Great War in 1914-1918, squelched much of the cultural optimism of the period. No doubt, these two horrible wars eroded much popular support for postmillennial hopes and expectations among American Christians. These events revealed the rather embarrassing truth that whatever the glories and conquest millennial age would usher in, the millennial age of postmillennialism was not yet underway, nor near at hand. Ironically, it was the great optimist, B. B. Warfield, who, on exegetical grounds, helped prepare the way for the shift in the Reformed tradition away from postmillennialism. To embrace Warfield’s exegesis of the critical passages is to severely compromise the postmillennial reading of Revelation 20 and the expectation of a future millennial age.

If O. T. Allis’ “Augustinian View” category is valid, then Warfield clearly would be placed

within the historic Augustinian understanding of the millennial age. While Warfield truly believed in a future golden age for the church, it was closely identified with the present age according to his exegesis of Revelation 20, and it was through the present ministration of the church that it would reach its zenith. Warfield spoke of a saved earth in the sense of gospel triumph, but not tied to cultural, economic, or societal progress. The Hodges, on the other hand, may or may not fit into Allis' Augustinian category. Neither Charles nor his son were clear about when the millennial age would begin and were both vague on the specifics of what such an age would entail. It may or may not be entirely future, and the demise of Antichrist and the fulfillment of Romans 11 may or may not be connected with the beginning or the continuation of the millennium. There is no doubt that Whitby and Edwards do not fit into Allis' definition of the Augustinian category, since they both believed that the millennial age was entirely future, and could not commence in any fashion until Antichrist, Rome, and Islam had fallen and the great promises in Romans 11 were fulfilled.

When all is said and done, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, were self-consciously postmillennial in their understanding of the millennium. Charles and A. A. Hodge were content to moderate the tradition that they inherited from Whitby and Edwards. B. B. Warfield, on the other hand, significantly modified that which the Hodges had handed down to him. So much so, that not only is Warfield the last of the "Old-Princetonians," he is also perhaps the last of the great American postmillennialists.