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# The Death of Postmillennialism in the Holiness Tradition Following World War I

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The Death of Postmillennialism in the Holiness Tradition  
Following World War I

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## **The Death of Postmillennialism in the Holiness Tradition Following World War I**

*Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years. Revelation 20:4-6*

Millennialism is an ancient component of religion, taking shapes and forms that vary widely from culture to culture, yet sharing enough in common that historian Frederic Baumgartner can describe an end-time scenario that sounds too familiar to be a generalization, even as it slides easily into the faiths of Buddhists, Aztec Indians, Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike.<sup>1</sup> Over the centuries, generation after generation has found reason to believe theirs would be the last, and several millennial groups have risen with fervor and conviction, only to see the promised end time come and go, and life carry on without them. Whether meeting a violent end, such as the radical Anabaptists at Münster, or peacefully dissolving into a new denomination, such as the Millerites/Seventh-Day Adventists, history has shown that if the end is near, it has yet to be determined just how near it is.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederic Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 1.

Twentieth-century America has fallen comfortably into pace with its predecessors' millennial movements. In fact, millennialism has remained strong and widely accepted, even among non-religious individuals.<sup>2</sup> However, the millennialism of this last century is vastly different from that of the nineteenth century. Most lay Christians, I have found, are completely uninformed about the optimistic eschatology of the postmillennial movement that was a driving force in American culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both the Holiness and Evangelical traditions. Indeed, before I began this study, I took for granted that a premillennial understanding of Christ's return is all that has ever been, or ever will be, Scriptural truth. How did this shift take place, from the optimistic nineteenth century and social activism of these conservative traditions, to the pessimistic, apocalyptic sign-interpreting that is now so common in America as to be taken for granted as normative in American Christianity? I will attempt to show that several events, beginning with the Civil War, delivered cascading blows to the postmillennial view, culminating in the final knockout from World War I. While I will be focusing on the Holiness tradition, specifically using examples from Methodist periodicals and journals, I have found that research done in the Evangelical tradition has proved insightful into the parallel Holiness movement from post- to premillennial (or in the case of many Holiness groups, such as the Church of God, Anderson, non-millennial) eschatology. Therefore, I will be citing various Evangelical as well as Holiness sources throughout this study.

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<sup>2</sup> Brenda E. Brasher, "From Revelation to the X-Files: An Autopsy of Millennialism in American Popular Culture," *Semeia* no. 82 (1998): 281 ff. Brasher cites a Gallup poll that states that 62% of Americans express no doubt that Jesus will return.

## **The Roots of Postmillennialism**

It is necessary to understand the soil out of which postmillennialism grew in order to understand why the events of the twentieth century would mark its near-complete demise. In the history of Christian eschatology, postmillennialism is a rather young view of the end times. While there is at least one enthusiastic postmillenarian who claims Augustine as the father of the movement,<sup>3</sup> most historians agree that Augustine was in fact non-millennial.<sup>4</sup> The Reformers, likewise, were amillennial, as had been the eschatology of the Catholic Church since Augustine. It took a major shift in Western Culture, namely the Renaissance and subsequent Enlightenment, to nurture the optimism that would seep its way into Christianity in the form of postmillennialism. Postmillennialism, therefore, finds its foundation in three things: the Enlightenment; in the progress that was indeed evident following the Reformation and Enlightenment; and in Scripture.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a sense of optimism, rooted in a sense of humanity's "inevitable progress." This "Enlightenment" brought a fundamental shift in thinking that would forever change the way Western

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<sup>3</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers' Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 43-44. See also Todd Siedel, "Millenarian History: The Birth, Death and Resurrection of Neo-Christian Eschatology," [<http://www.crosslight.org/millmvmmt.htm>.]

humanity viewed itself and the surrounding world. It was a backlash reaction to the Church and its hold on all areas of intellectual, spiritual and scientific pursuits, and as is generally true with any reactionary movement, its initial ideals and goals were high, even grandiose. It began with an elevation of humans and their capabilities to understand the world around them through rational thought, and later, empirical evidence. Human reason, and not divine revelation, became the key to unlocking the mysteries of the world. Because humans possessed the ability to reason, they also possessed the ability to determine the true workings of the universe. Ultimately, Enlightenment thinkers believed by understanding nature, humanity can “[bring] life into conformity with the laws of nature.”<sup>5</sup> In doing so, there would be order from chaos, answers to questions, peace out of confusion. From this order would come harmony, a key principle of the Enlightenment. Harmony meant not only a working together in “reasonableness and orderliness,” but was the result of reason and “proper method” of discovery. This would bring a single, objective, overarching truth to which all humanity would submit, thereby creating a new world order of peace and unity.<sup>6</sup> While in retrospect we see this as grandiose, this ultimate ideal was the guiding directive in Enlightenment pursuits, including philosophy, science, and, in the religious realm, theology.

Historians understand that the Enlightenment was no friend to traditional Christianity, as it removed revelation (and therefore all things supernatural) from having

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<sup>5</sup> Stanley Grenz and Roger Olsen, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology* (Downers’ Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

any authority over truth, subjecting all claims of the text to reason.<sup>7</sup> Yet something that Protestants and Enlightenment philosophers had in common was a disdain for the Catholic Church. Therefore, when Enlightenment science began discovering answers to ancient questions (the order of the universe, the cause or cure for illness), Protestants were often receptive to these discoveries, rather than repulsed. John Wesley is a prime example of a Protestant leader who saw no conflict in utilizing the discoveries of science to relieve the suffering of the masses.<sup>8</sup> Doubtless he saw this as a gift from God. Later postmillenarians would also see scientific and technological advances as part of God's plan to bring a utopia to earth, particularly in the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> However, Boettner sees that it has been the spread of "Christian standards," and not modernism (as an offspring of the Enlightenment) that has brought about so many positive advances, bringing the world ever closer to the millennium of worldwide Christianization.<sup>10</sup>

American Postmillennialism found its start in England in the seventeenth century. Many scholars describe the Puritans as a resurgent premillennial group<sup>11</sup>, although their practices and motivations also look suspiciously postmillennial. They saw their desire for purification in the Church of England as the reform needed to bring about the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>8</sup> Wesley A. Hill, ed., *Primitive Physic by John Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1960).

<sup>9</sup> Boettner, 38-47. See also Emma Sellew Roberts in *Missionary Tidings* 23/7, July 1919.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>11</sup> See Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1983) and Frederic Baumgartner, *Longing for the End* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).



Millennium. Grenz writes, "As they saw it, their task was to root out Romish practices in the English church, so that it might become truly reformed, opening the way for the glorious era of the church of Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup> One leader in England, Thomas Brightman, began laying down a revised Reformed eschatology that presented two millennia, one that occurred from 300-1300 AD, and another that would follow certain events, including the destruction of the "enemies of the church" and the conversion of all the Jews. He referred to this as "latter day glory," which "later played a significant role in American millenarian thinking as late as the beginning of the twentieth century."<sup>13</sup> Another prominent Englishman, John Owen, adopted Brightman's "latter-day glory," believing that a time was soon to come when there would be a great advance in missions, a unity and purity of doctrine and worship, and great spiritual prosperity in the church. Grenz identifies these two postmillennial views as "pristine postmillennialism."<sup>14</sup> Historian Ernest Sandeen credits Daniel Whitby, the Salisbury rector in the late eighteenth century, with having "emphasized the continued success of the church, the steady improvement of man and society, and the eventual culmination of Christian history in the coming of a literal millennium. Only at the end of that blessed age was Christ's second coming expected."<sup>15</sup> These are just three early examples of what would become the dominant, reigning eschatology in the colonies and later the United States.

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12 Grenz, 52.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 53.

15 Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 5.

The failure of Puritan reform efforts in the Anglican Church led to a reworking of the postmillennial views. They soon came to believe that “human agents were to be involved in the work of overcoming antichrist and completing the Reformation. ... The time had come for the saints, the heirs of the kingdom, to take matters into their own hands, for the imminent kingdom was to be established *by* the saints.”<sup>16</sup> One radical group called themselves “The Fifth Monarchy,” referring to the final millennium as the monarchy of Christ following the four previous monarchies as outlined by Daniel (chaps. 2, 7). They believed that they had to “wrest the government from the opponents of Christ and thereby establish the millennial kingdom.”<sup>17</sup> However, this movement lasted only until the very beginning of the eighteenth century, and the reform-minded often found themselves migrating toward the growing Quaker faith, replacing the radical ambitions of their coup with an internal quietism that emphasized “the presence of a spiritual kingdom within the individual.”<sup>18</sup>

But by this time the initial enthusiasm for reform and ushering in the millennium had made it to the shores of the New World, the colonies, where disillusioned Puritans came to believe was to be the location of the New Jerusalem, not England, where the corruption in the church was too entrenched to be removed.<sup>19</sup> This belief in God’s divine

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>19</sup> Baumgartner, 124.

choosing of America carried into the nineteenth century, as sociologist James Davison

Hunter writes:

Another important aspect ... was the notion held by the majority that America was a nation set apart for a divine purpose. America was seen as the 'new' Israel; Americans, having a covenant with God, were the chosen people entrusted with the responsibility of establishing a 'righteous empire' or a Christian commonwealth within this new land. To be sure, the convictions derived to considerable extent from the historical precedent of Europe, where the notion of the Christian civilization had been firmly rooted since the fourth century. The nineteenth-century American Evangelical could scarcely view society as striving to be anything else. A further reason, however, could be that the larger part of the immigrating population was made up of dissenting Protestant groups. America was a place where such groups could escape social, economic, and often physical persecutions. The biblical metaphor of being led from captivity to a land of possibility and fortune was therefore bound to be a recurrent feature of American folklore, particularly in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

When there finally began to be success in converting the Native Americans to Christianity, this was a boon to the belief that the Jews were next to be receptive to the gospel, ushering in the Parousia. Richard Mather, son Increase, and grandson Cotton were all influential millennial preachers in New England. Richard's generation predicted that the millennium would come in their generation, but clearly never saw its arrival. His son, Increase, was a much more cautious millenarian, refusing to identify signs and predict dates, although toward the end of his life he saw certain world events, including earthquakes and the fall of the Turks to the Austrians as precursors to the coming age. His son, Cotton, was much more aggressive in pursuing the advent of the millennium, although he was not as convinced as his ancestors that the New World would be the site

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<sup>20</sup> James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p 24-25.

of its founding. On the other hand, he also did not see America as the location for the Antichrist (as Mede, a contemporary of his, did), but in the Turkish Empire. He was willing to predict dates of the steps toward the millennium, such as 1697 and 1716, but continued to find himself disappointed. He finally determined that Christians needed to be more active in bringing about the millennium, specifically through evangelization. He believed that “the Lord would come only when there were enough godly men infused with the Holy Spirit.” This understanding would prove highly influential in Puritan, and later American, understanding that “the faithful had a role, albeit minor, in creating the conditions for Christ’s return.”<sup>21</sup>

Ten years after Cotton Mather’s death, the Great Awakening hit the colonies with gale force. George Whitefield traveled the east coast, preaching revival and repentance, whipping the colonists into spiritual whirlwinds. His techniques of itinerant preaching, persuasive rhetoric and great orations were later picked up by “patriots” to “rally support for the American Revolution.”<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Edwards, a great Puritan preacher in the 1730s and 40s and called “the Father of American Postmillennialism,”<sup>23</sup> participated in the Awakening with great enthusiasm and hope. He, like Cotton Mather, was avid in date-setting and event-predicting, believing that when all was said and done, the millennium would begin in 2000, after Antichrist had been defeated (in 1866), enough had been

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<sup>21</sup> Baumgartner, 125-127. Baumgartner, unlike other historians of this period, believes Mather to have been premillenarian in contrast to Edwards.

<sup>22</sup> Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 64-65.

<sup>23</sup> Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, 56.

converted and society had been reformed.<sup>24</sup> He also saw the millennium as coming gradually, as the Holy Spirit moved in men's hearts, thereby changing society. He saw this coming "golden era" as "a time of great learning, universal peace and both spiritual and material enjoyment."<sup>25</sup> Baumgartner writes, "Those of the Great Awakening believed that all evidence indicated that the Church was becoming stronger and purer and that the New Kingdom was close at hand."<sup>26</sup> The fervor of the Great Awakening banded churches together under postmillennial expectations as they moved into the American Revolution; the independence won from England served to further implicate America as the scene of the coming millennium. Urban historian Harvie Conn notes, "Those denominations that had been built up by the revival, like the Presbyterian and the Baptist, almost unanimously took up the side of the colonies in the struggle."<sup>27</sup> Sandeen adds, "The eschatology of United States Protestants, reflecting their brimming optimism and hope, was expressed most frequently as a blending of millennialism and American nationalism. ... Reinforced by the War for Independence and the potentialities of the West, Americans vied with each other in producing grander and more glorious prospects for the United States."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Eugene Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs Through the Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 171.

<sup>25</sup> Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> Baumgartner, *Longing for the End*, 128.

<sup>27</sup> Harvie Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church: A Historical Overview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 36.

<sup>28</sup> Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 43.

While Edwards had always believed that the number of total saints entering the millennium would be small, two of his followers, Samuel Hopkins and John Bellamy, expanded the number greatly by indicating that the millennium itself would produce new converts.<sup>29</sup> Various descriptions of the new millennium cropped up, revealing hope in science and technology that would extend lives and health, prevent class envy and chasms between rich and poor (foreshadows of later socialist tendencies), and that would put an end to wars and the “waste [of] the lives of thousands of men.”<sup>30</sup> This vision became the reigning understanding of nineteenth century postmillennialism, fueling the social justice aspects that we will return to later for closer inspection. As America entered the nineteenth century, its newfound freedom, democratic government, and seemingly endless land to discover secured the sense of progress in Christians and non-Christians (or Deists) alike. Baumgartner writes, “By the end of the eighteenth century, the utopian notions [of postmillennialism and Enlightenment thinking] had begun to merge together to create the modern idea of progress.”<sup>31</sup>

Postmillennials also looked to Scripture for various hints that the world will improve before Christ’s final return. For example, Matthew 13:33, “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with the measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” The yeast, or the “Kingdom of Heaven,” is the gospel, and once it is

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

disseminated into the world, the whole world will be Christianized by it.<sup>32</sup> As for the parable of the mustard seed, it too begins small but spreads quickly and with great strength, just as “the presence of the gospel in human hearts results in the influence of Christian principles in society, which in turn brings about the long-expected era of peace and righteousness.”<sup>33</sup>

Also, Matthew 28:18-20 says, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”<sup>34</sup> Here are two points for postmillenarians: first, that “making disciples” indicates that when the gospel is preached, people will respond and accept its truth; second, that the “end of the age” is the Greek word συντέλεια, meaning “completion, end of the present age.”<sup>35</sup> This signifies the end of the millennium, after the disciples (all followers) have evangelized the whole world as commissioned by Christ. Second, because everything has been subjected to Christ’s authority, Christians – by possessing the gospel – have all that is necessary to make persons disciples. Grenz writes, “Consequently, we do not need to wait for a future kingdom beyond his catastrophic return as the era of his

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>33</sup> Grenz, 75.

<sup>34</sup> New Revised Standard, 1989.

<sup>35</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Second Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

rule over the earth. Instead that rule will begin in this age as the church is successful in fulfilling its mandate.”<sup>36</sup>

Princeton theologian and noted postmillennialist Benjamin Warfield, discussing Revelation 19:11-21, asserts that the sharp sword that comes out of Christ’s mouth indicates his victory over the world through the spreading of the gospel. Warfield references Hebrew 4:12 for this interpretation, as it states, “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.” He writes, “We are not to think, as we read, of any literal war or manual fighting, therefore; the conquest is wrought by the spoken word – in short, by the preaching of the gospel. ... Christ’s gospel is to conquer the earth; He is to overcome all His enemies.” He describes this conquest as taking place *in between* the first and second advents, during the age of the church and therefore not after Christ’s second coming, as premillennialists believe.<sup>37</sup> This is because in Revelation 19:11, John states that he saw “heaven standing open,” indicating that Christ is defeating his foes from heaven, not from earth, and again, that this is done through the spreading of his word, the gospel.<sup>38</sup> Grenz writes, “Because Revelation 19 depicts a process that occurs in history and not the Second Coming, the golden age precedes, rather than follows, the Lord’s return.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Grenz, 76.

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” quoted by Boettner, 31-32.

<sup>38</sup> Grenz, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



This understanding hinges on the interpretation of when and how the two resurrections about which John writes are to take place. One nineteenth century theologian stated, “The ‘first resurrection,’ then, refers to the future restoration and vindication of the cause for which the martyrs died.”<sup>40</sup>

Boettner references Psalm 110:1, “The LORD says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool,’” saying,

this means that Christ is to conquer all. ... His mediatorial reign from the right hand of God is to continue until all of His enemies have been subdued. ... God’s visible Church is destined to embrace all the nations that He has created on the whole face of the earth. The time is coming when they shall acknowledge the Lord as their ruler.”<sup>41</sup>

Boettner trusts the Psalms profoundly as he finds references to the earth’s submission under Christ, saying, “Nothing could well exceed the plainness, directness and precision with which the conversion of the nations is announced in the Psalms.” And again, after quoting from Psalm 2:8, 22:27, 47:2-8, 72:7-11, and 86:9, he says, “There is no mistaking the meaning of these announcements found in the Psalms. They are as unambiguous as anything that can be spoken by the most sanguine advocates of foreign missions in the twentieth century.”<sup>42</sup>

Postmillennialism grew and spread in rich soil that was a mixture of new thinking and an improving world environment. All things seemed to point to the world growing better and better, from science and philosophical discoveries, to a renewed look at

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<sup>40</sup> John Jefferson Davis, quoted in Grenz, 74.

<sup>41</sup> Boettner, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Scripture and what appeared to be God's plan for humanity in this light. If in fact God intended to usher in an era of peace and prosperity, based in the transforming nature of the gospel, Christians had a significant role to play in the unfolding of His plan. In the next chapter, I will explore how postmillennialism worked itself out in American Christianity, specifically with regard to the social activism that was a driving force in the Holiness Movement.

## **Postmillennialism and Social Justice in the Nineteenth Century: Bringing in the Kingdom**

Jonathan Edwards had a strong sense of social outreach as part of his postmillennialism. He believed “that we cannot deny help to the undeserving, since this would clash with God’s gift of grace to us and our consequent obligation to love even our enemies.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, other Christian groups, such as Quakers and Presbyterians, worked to provide education and assistance to blacks and poor whites in the late eighteenth century in response to the Great Awakening. Even George Whitefield established an orphanage in Georgia.<sup>44</sup> Postmillenarians had a basic syllogism, according to Eugen Weber: “Christians were benevolent. Benevolence increased the happiness of neighbors, of God, of all. Progress was converted to Christianity and living in brotherly love. Evangelism in its spiritual and social aspects prepared the millennium, where this progress would come true.”<sup>45</sup> And they had their work cut out for them, as church membership was on the decline, in spite of the efforts of the Great Awakening and subsequent missions. By 1776, membership was at seventeen percent of the population,<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Conn, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 34-5.

<sup>45</sup> E. Weber, 180.

<sup>46</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Starke, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 30.

even while there were more denominations to choose from than ever before. The taverns became a significant competitor to churches,<sup>47</sup> and would continue to be a primary target for reform in Christianity up through Prohibition in the twentieth century.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw churches clinging to Jonathan Edwards' postmillennial views, which were also strongly supported by revivalist Charles Finney. Historian Frederic Baumgartner writes, "Finney's stock-in-trade as a revivalist included all-night meetings and terrifying descriptions of hellfire, but he was a postmillennialist who hoped to frighten his audiences into reforming their lives and becoming saints. ... Out of the pulpit, Finney was a reformer who was convinced that the Millennium could be brought about quickly by an extensive agenda of good works and missionary work."<sup>48</sup> Finney is quoted as stating in 1835, "If the Church will do all her duty, the millennium may come to this country in three years."<sup>49</sup> But the emphasis on holiness in the years prior to the Civil War was rooted in personal salvation more than social activism. Revivalism historian Timothy Smith writes,

The rapid growth of concern with purely social issues such as poverty, workingman's rights, the liquor traffic, slum housing, and racial bitterness is the chief feature distinguishing American religion after 1865 from that of the first half of the nineteenth century. Such matters in some cases supplanted entirely the earlier pre-occupation with salvation from personal sin and the life hereafter.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Conn, 36-7.

<sup>48</sup> Baumgartner, *Longing for the End*, p 163.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Concern: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 148.

Smith explains further,

In many ways, of course, the evangelists' preoccupation with personal religious experience could nurture an exclusively spiritual faith. Their chief concern was to prepare men for another world, their most earnest prayer for a miraculous 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit' which would break the shackles of human sin. Opposition to social evil was often only an occasional skirmish in their war on personal wickedness.<sup>51</sup>

Even Finney, a staunch abolitionist who would later become president of Oberlin College, never considered himself as primarily a reformer, but a revivalist, awakening Christians who ought to be living more righteously.<sup>52</sup>

This did not keep Holiness Christians from seeing the connection between holiness, sanctification, and social reform, however. Even before the Civil War, preachers such as Samuel Schmucker, Albert Barnes and Matthew Simpson taught about "the relationship between personal salvation and community improvement," and "never tired of glowing descriptions of the social and economic millennium which they believed revival Christianity would bring into existence."<sup>53</sup> Phoebe Palmer expressed that "holiness made one a servant – at times a suffering servant – of his fellow men."<sup>54</sup> Many aid societies were developed during these early years, including the American Bible Society (which paid special attention to the new immigrants), the American Tract Society (which focused largely on the movements west as well as the cities' poor) and the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. See also Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Hendrickson, 1994), chapter 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, 158.

American Sunday School Union (seeking to maintain the good morals of young men moving into the cities). Targeting prostitution were the American Female Reform Society and the Penitent Females Society. There were also the Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged, Indigent Females, among several others promoting “good morals,” “suppression of vice,” and “encouragement of faithful domestics.”<sup>55</sup> Methodist William Arthur strongly admonished his fellow Christians that the doctrine of entire sanctification necessitated response to the needs of the people around them. He fiercely rejected the notion that salvation was “for the soul after it leaves the body,” but not from sin on earth. He said, “The gospel is come to renew the face of the earth.”<sup>56</sup> Several prominent leaders in the Holiness movement declared that passive, quiet piety was no piety at all, and that in fact, “more and purer piety” is what would lead to a total social renewal on earth. The doctrine of perfectionism aligned perfectly with this ambition, as all who would be sanctified from sin would no longer tolerate or experience the evils of social sin.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, most Holiness people saw both sin and sanctification as communal, not simply personal. Albert Barnes declared in 1842 that “Sin is never solitary, nor can it be banished piecemeal from society.” He believed that “The only power in the universe which can meet and overcome such combined evil is the power of the Spirit of God ... by a general revival of religion.”<sup>58</sup> Smith adds, “Even the doctrine of human depravity

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<sup>55</sup> Conn, *The American City*, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, 153-4

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Smith, 152.

seemed to such men a demonstration of the solidarity of the race and brotherhood of man.”<sup>59</sup> In short, Smith sums up that “the quest for perfection joined with compassion for poor and needy sinners and a rebirth of millennial expectation to make popular Protestantism a mighty social force long before the slavery conflict erupted into war.”<sup>60</sup>

Several missionary societies had been established and missionaries were all over the world, believing that their efforts in converting the world’s heathens were hastening the coming of Christ. Also active were temperance unions, as Christians saw alcohol as not only a perpetuator of poverty, but even a primary cause. Harvie Conn notes, “[for leaders like Beecher and Finney,] to banish drunkenness was to destroy pauperism. ... By the end of the 1830s, most cities had thriving temperance societies.”<sup>61</sup> There was even a move to outlaw alcohol through prohibition laws in the 1850s, but the opposition was too great from urban centers. Women’s rights activism was as strong as ever, although the ambitions of some Holiness leaders may not have been very high on this issue, or at least they were satisfied with small steps forward in the fight for equality for women. Smith records a Baptist minister who exclaimed, “The faith which had ‘swept away slavery from the earth, elevated women from a state of bondage,’ ... would ultimately triumph over every ill.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, 151.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>61</sup> Conn, 43.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, 153.

Yet social reform in the South was a different story altogether, argues Conn. Because the church and revivals came to a largely unchurched, rural population, its moral aspects served more as a stabilizing force, asserting self-control and civility, rather than aid to the poor, and certainly not in opposition to abolition. The North had to face crowding and neglect in the cities, as well as alienation from largely Roman Catholic immigrants, demanding active, generous response from the churches. The Southerner, on the other hand, “felt that his region of the country was already closer to millennial perfection than any other part of the country.”<sup>63</sup>

At this same time, premillennialists in the Evangelical tradition were also socially active. After suffering great embarrassment following George Miller and the “Great Disappointment” of 1844, premillennarians sought to reestablish respectability in the Christian community, and many did so through social activism, particularly after the Civil War. In many cases Holiness and Evangelicals worked side by side in a cooperative cross-denominational living out of the gospel. For example, Dwight L. Moody, who was influential in both camps despite being a staunch premillennialist, participated in several socially minded organizations, such as the YMCA in Chicago and the founding of a seminary for girls. Williams Jennings Bryan, who would later gain infamy for his part in the Scopes trial, believed that the key to social activism was in politics, and insisted that Christians be active in government to effect social change.<sup>64</sup> Moody’s revivals were very effective in bringing about conversions in the later years of

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<sup>63</sup> William McLaughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform*, quoted by Conn, 39.

<sup>64</sup> E. Weber, 191.



the nineteenth century, although he eventually became very uncomfortable in the despotic, impoverished urban slums and chose to stay outside the cities, either in the suburbs or in small towns.<sup>65</sup> He felt that the cities were hostile to the gospel message, and therefore he spent his time preaching largely to white middle and upper class who were primarily rural-born Americans, native to the United States and generally already Christian. He once stated, "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'"<sup>66</sup> This is a clear reflection of the rising premillennialism toward the latter half of the century, a movement in which Moody was a noted leader. It would not take long for premillennialism to begin to separate from social activism, particularly in order to distinguish itself from the increasingly liberal "social gospel." "The evangelical ambivalence about cities that Moody reflected hurt more and more as the new century dawned and the anti-urban theme grew stronger," observed Conn. He adds, "In the face of the city as a threat, the earlier optimism of the Puritan legacy of postmillennialism was fading and dispensational premillennialism was ascending."<sup>67</sup> Moody eventually recused himself from social action by concluding "that social problems could only be solved by divine regeneration and, fundamentally, by the Second Coming."<sup>68</sup> Dayton writes, "Some even argued that efforts to ameliorate social conditions would merely postpone the 'blessed hope' of

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<sup>65</sup> Conn, 60.

<sup>66</sup> Conn, 60.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>68</sup> E. Weber, *Apocalypses*, 190.

Christ's return by delaying the process of degeneration."<sup>69</sup> Shirley Jackson Case wrote a scathing review in 1918, summing up the disdain that liberal and socially active Christianity felt toward the pessimism of premillennialists:

[The premillennialist] scorns all efforts made in the name of religion to correct the ills of society. Society must not be redeemed; it must be damned. ... To inaugurate any program of social betterment or to set the church as a whole upon an upward course would be to thwart the divine purpose and to delay the advent of Christ. Both the world and the church must grow constantly worse in order to meet premillennial ideals. Viewed from this standpoint, the essential function of religion is to insure for a few select individuals a way of escape from the ultimate wrack and ruin to which the world is destined.<sup>70</sup>

While this kind of attack was common among the liberal set, conservative Christianity was still wavering between the hope for a better world and the rising sense of that hope being falsely laid. Yet the axe was not yet to fall on postmillennialism: dispensational premillennarians were not going to be given the last word in the setting days of the nineteenth century. Baumgartner writes, "As of August 1914, attitudes in the United States and most of Christendom were more receptive of postmillennialism than premillennialism. Most people in western culture were satisfied to live in a society where the expectation of the "end of time" largely meant a time when the human race, led by science and technology, would become perfect."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Dayton, 126.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted by Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1982*, Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1983, p 66.

<sup>71</sup> Baumgartner, p 194.

## **Meanwhile, The Fundamentals**

As we have seen, most Americans saw the nineteenth century as an era of progress and growth, holding promise for the future. Yet at the same time, there were a number of problems that the nation, and Christianity, had to address: the growing disparity between rich and poor resulting from rapid industrialization and leading to increased violence, epidemics of illness, and alcoholism. Christians had fiercely attempted to tackle these issues via the various societies, revivals, and shelters that they organized. But change was very, very slow in coming, and it began to look as though things were instead only going to get worse. At the start of the 1890s, the country was slipping into a depression, economically and morally.<sup>72</sup> While the Fundamentalist tradition grew out of Reformed Evangelicalism, it was soon to have a significant influence over all of conservative Christianity, including conservative members of the Holiness movement who were wavering under the weight of an increasingly troubled society and the perceived threats of liberal scholarship.

When Chicago won the privilege of hosting the World's Fair in 1893, the city set out to reestablish the greatness of both American society and industrialism in both its architecture and the events it hosted. This included the first ever, week-long Parliament of Religions, which invited not only Christian denominations, but several international

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<sup>72</sup> The impact these ills had on evangelical eschatology will be looked at in greater detail in chapter 4.

religions to come together to discuss their faiths and direction for the future. Julia Ward Howe, lyricist for the famed postmillennial song, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," spoke at the Parliament, and while she herself never claimed to be a postmillenarian, she shared the social activism that spurred on the movement, especially in the arena of women's rights. In her speech to the Parliament in 1893, she stated:

I think nothing is religion which puts one individual absolutely above others, and surely nothing is religion which puts one sex above another. Religion is primarily our relation to the Supreme, to God himself. It is for him to judge; it is for him to say where we belong, who is highest and who is not; of that we know nothing. And any religion which will sacrifice a certain set of human beings for the enjoyment or aggrandizement or advantage of another is no religion. It is a thing which may be allowed, but it is against true religion. Any religion which sacrifices women to the brutality of men is no religion.<sup>73</sup>

This pluralistic sense of religiousness was echoed by her colleague, Englishwoman Laura Ormiston Chant, who also spoke before the Parliament and said, "God, my Father, has made religious truth like the facets of the diamond -- one facet reflecting one color and another color, and it is not for me to dare to say that the particular color that my eye rests upon is the only one that the world ought to see."<sup>74</sup> While this sense of universalism was becoming characteristic of the influence of liberal scholarship on the religion of the day, it was a distinct threat to the growing conservatism that was a backlash to what was seen as the watering down of the Protestant theology. At the same time as the Chicago

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<sup>73</sup> Julia Ward Howe, "What Is Religion?" [[http://womenshistory.about.com/home/work/womenshistory/library/etext/bl\\_1893\\_pwr\\_howe.htm](http://womenshistory.about.com/home/work/womenshistory/library/etext/bl_1893_pwr_howe.htm)] 1893.

<sup>74</sup> Laura Ormiston Chant, "Duty of God To Man Inquired." [[http://womenshistory.about.com/homework/womenshistory/library/etext/bl\\_1893\\_pwr\\_chant.htm](http://womenshistory.about.com/homework/womenshistory/library/etext/bl_1893_pwr_chant.htm)] 1893.

World's Fair was promoting the universality of religious experience, a group of conservative Evangelical Christian leaders were convening the Niagara Bible Conferences, bringing together the men who would later lead the nation into full-blown Fundamentalism and dispensational premillennialism, among whom were D.L. Moody, C.I. Scofield, and James Brookes.

Although premillennialism had suffered severe embarrassment in the Great Disappointment of the Millerites in 1844, Irish-Anglican John Nelson Darby's dispensational premillennialism was beginning to gain significant popularity on the American scene. Due to its emphasis on "dispensations," it was distinct enough from the Millerite version of premillennialism that by the 1880s it was widely tolerated, if not altogether accepted. In 1878, Moody, Scofield, Brookes and several others met for the first Believers' Meeting for Bible Study Conference in Niagara Falls, Ontario, and set out what would become known as the "Niagara Creed." The point of this document was to begin to lay down doctrines that included dispensational premillennialism in a direct attempt to squelch what they saw as apostasy in liberal scholarship and evangelical optimism (postmillennialism).<sup>75</sup> This Niagara Creed defined fourteen points of doctrine, headed by this preface:

So many in the latter times have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; so many have turned away their ears from the truth, and turned unto fables; so many are busily engaged in scattering broadcast the seeds of fatal error, directly affecting the honor of our Lord and the destiny of the soul, we are constrained by fidelity to Him to make the following declaration of our

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<sup>75</sup> E. Weber, *Apocalypses*, 186.

doctrinal belief, and to present it as the bond of union with those who wish to be connected with the Niagara Bible Conference.<sup>76</sup>

With this preface, the Niagara leaders presented clearly their views of Scripture (inerrant in the original manuscripts and fully inspired in every part, Article I, and cohesive in pointing to Christ, Article IX), original sin and total depravity (Article III and IV), need for salvation and that through faith in Christ alone (Article V, VI and VII), perseverance of the saints (Article VIII), nature of the Trinity and of the Holy Spirit (Articles II and XI), eternal, material heaven and hell (Article XIII), and finally, the millennium (Article XIV).

In both Articles V and XIV, the doctrines take direct aim at postmillennialism and liberal Christianity (which would come to be known as the “Social Gospel”). Article V states:

We believe that, owing to this universal depravity and death in sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born again; and that no degree of reformation however great, no attainment in morality however high, no culture however attractive, no humanitarian and philanthropic schemes and societies however useful, no baptism or ordinance however administered, can help the sinner to take even one step toward heaven; but a new nature imparted from above, a new life implanted by the Holy Ghost through the Word, is absolutely essential to salvation.

This also set the Niagara Conference apart from Catholicism and other infant-baptizing, sacrament-honoring denominations. More directly related to postmillennialism, Article XIV states, as follows:

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<sup>76</sup> The 1878 Niagara Creed is quoted in its entirety in Appendix A of Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 273-7.

We believe that the world will not be converted during the present dispensation, but is fast ripening for judgment, while there will be a fearful apostasy in the professing Christian body; and hence that the Lord Jesus will come in person to introduce the millennial age, when Israel shall be restored to their own land, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; and that this personal and premillennial advent is the blessed hope set before us in the Gospel for which we should be constantly looking.

Not only did this group not believe that there was any human effort that could hasten a sinner toward salvation, but there was also no human effort which could hasten the advent of the millennium.<sup>77</sup> In fact, Sandeen writes, “the millenarians [premillenarians] were at the same time convinced of the irreversible downgrade tendencies at work in human society and the utter futility of attempts to ameliorate the effects of sin, while working for the success of their own movement when that success was defined as awakening Christians to their peril.”<sup>78</sup> James Brookes, one of the founders of the Conferences, noted in a sermon outline, “The state of the world at the time of our Lord’s return, and during the entire interval of His absence from the earth, shows the folly of the common expectation of a spiritual millennium, or the conversion of the nations by the Church.”<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, the Niagara Bible Conference members made no secret of their understanding of the end of time; one of the largest criticisms lobbied against them was

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<sup>77</sup> It is important to note here that, for dispensationalists in particular – such as these at the Niagara Conference were – the restoration of the Jews to Israel becomes key to understanding the imminence of Christ’s return, especially as we shall see during World War I.

<sup>78</sup> Sandeen, xvii.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Sandeen, 139.

that by denying the eventual Christianization of the world as postmillenarians understood to be the vision of the Great Commission, premillenarians instead robbed the gospel of its power. Missionary fervor was shared by both postmillennialists and premillennialists, but for nearly opposite motivations. Postmillennialists sought to spread the gospel to Christianize the world, bringing about the millennium of peace. Boettner writes:

We believe that the Great Commission includes not merely the formal and external announcement of the Gospel preached as a 'witness' to the nations, as the Premillennialists and Amillennialists hold, but the true and effectual evangelization of all the nations so that the hearts and lives of the people are transformed by it. That seems quite clear from the fact that *all authority* in heaven and on earth and an endless sweep of conquest has been given to Christ and through Him to His disciples specifically for that purpose. The disciples were commanded not merely to preach, but *to make disciples of all the nations*.<sup>80</sup>

Premillennialists, on the other hand, saw the efforts of missions as one to call the world to accountability. They cited Matthew 24:14, where Christ commissions the disciples to preach to the nations as a "witness." This is a key term to premillennialists, since being a "witness" is no guarantee of conversion on the part of the hearer. In fact, it expected that most would reject the gospel. Grenz writes, "It is certainly true, for example, that dispensationalists have stood at the forefront of efforts aimed toward world evangelization... However... the dispensational missionary challenge has tended to be that of dispersing information, in contrast to the challenge to Christianize the entire world that has marked the efforts of others."<sup>81</sup> Writing in 1867, Rev. J.A. Brown saw it this way:

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<sup>80</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 15.

<sup>81</sup> Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, 118-9.



They [premillennialists] discard the idea of the world's conversion by means of preaching the gospel, with the accompanying influence of the Holy Spirit. They do not expect the heathen to be given to Christ for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, while he remains in heaven at the right hand of the Father. But they announce the coming and personal reign of Christ as the great hope of a groaning and perishing world. They look for no deliverance or salvation for our race until he comes in power and glory to establish his kingdom and reign over the earth.<sup>82</sup>

He goes on to define the problem faced in the battle over eschatology when he writes:

It is easy to see that the truth on this subject must be of very great importance in the work of evangelizing the world. If our actions are to be moulded by our views, and our works to any degree correspond with our faith, then it is of vital importance whether we believe in the power of the gospel and the Spirit of God to regenerate the world, or whether we must look for some other agency for the accomplishment of this grand design. If the world is not to be converted to Christ, and sinners saved, by the foolishness of preaching, then we should know it, and should cease to look for such results. If the coming of Christ in person be indeed the grand remedy, then our attention should be directed to this as our only hope and confidence. But if Christ will not come until the end of this world, and then for a very different purpose from that of reigning here in person on the earth, our duty is to labor and pray that all the ends of the earth may see his salvation, and turn to the Lord. The difference between us and Millenarians is one therefore of the highest moment doctrinally and practically, and in regard to which the church cannot afford to be indifferent.

But it was not mere pessimism that led premillennialists to believe that the world was not in fact to be Christianized, it was a combination of certain Scriptural texts and simple observation of history. The Reverend Howard Pope, a postmillennial-turned-pre, surely spoke for his fellow dispensationalists when he lamented:

I was studying the general subject of missions, and reached the conclusion that this world would never be converted by the agencies now in operation. I recalled that New England had had some chance, having had

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<sup>82</sup> Rev. J.A. Brown, "The Second Advent and the Creeds of Christendom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 21, No. XCVI, 1867: 631.

the gospel for two hundred and fifty years and yet there was not a city, town, or hamlet in all New England where all the people had ever been converted. The thing began to look rather discouraging to me... I discovered that in the last one hundred years of missions about three millions of heathens had been converted; while during that same time three billions of people have been born, lived and died, and never heard that there is a Christ. ... I reached the conclusion, that it was simply a hopeless case; that this world would never be converted.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, the paradox of premillennial evangelization efforts is that, as Weber states, "the premillennialists were working with a new philosophy of missions which enabled them to deny that the world could ever be converted to Christ, yet work hard to evangelize it. Instead of cutting missionary involvement, premillennialism increased it, even when it denied that it could succeed."<sup>84</sup> Although they did not believe that the world would be converted as a result of their evangelizing, the aim was to hold non-believers accountable to having heard the gospel, and therefore conversion was secondary. As a result, "premillennialists with that outlook threw themselves body and soul into foreign missions. Their journals kept readers constantly supplied with news from the foreign fields and reminded them regularly that all believers in the premillennial coming of Christ had a large stake in the evangelization of the world."<sup>85</sup> One example of the extreme nature this aim took is the China Inland Mission, founded by premillennialist J. Hudson Taylor in 1853. A description of the technique and purpose of the CIM states:

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<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Dayton, Donald. *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*. Series, "Studies in Evangelicalism." Rowe, Kenneth E. and Donald W. Dayton, eds. No. 5. (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1987).

<sup>84</sup> T. Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, p 81.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p 73.

The main purpose of China Inland Mission was not to win converts or build Chinese churches, but to spread knowledge of the Christian gospel throughout the empire as quickly as might be. ... The aim was the presentation of the Christian message throughout the empire in the shortest possible time, not the immediate winning of the largest possible number of converts.”<sup>86</sup>

This new outlook was felt as a severe affront to the power of the gospel to postmillennialists. They found it dangerous and unbiblical to teach that the gospel preached would not transform those who heard it – and most importantly, that this could possibly be God’s plan from the start. Dayton explains:

Whereas the postmillennial vision had looked forward to the conversion of the world, hopes were now scaled down to worldwide evangelism with much more pessimism about the percentage of response. Evangelism became less a tool for transforming the culture and more and more a process of calling out a “select few,” the elect, who should be about the task of witness while preparing as a bride to meet the Bridegroom.<sup>87</sup>

Weber concludes, “Matthew 24:14 was the church’s rallying cry. The Lord Christ was poised on the battlements of heaven, waiting for the saints to complete their assigned task. Once the evangelization of the world was completed, the second advent would occur.”<sup>88</sup>

Methodism in particular reacted strongly against the pessimism of premillennialism, concerned that all missionary ambition would die if it was not to produce a renewed society, as postmillenarians had believed. When Methodists were vastly underrepresented at the First International Prophecy Conference in New York in

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<sup>86</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, quoted in T. Weber, p 75.

<sup>87</sup> Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 163.

<sup>88</sup> T. Weber, 72.

1878, their leaders were more pleased than rebuffed. Daniel Steele, a leader in the National Holiness Camp Meeting Association, wrote in *Antinomianism Revived*:

This is not a matter which we are disposed to cry over. It indicates that Methodists are in too close a grapple with the present wicked world to sit down and waste time in speculation upon the future. It indicates that as a Church we are by no means so discouraged with the progress of the Gospel as to pronounce the dispensation of the Holy Spirit as inadequate to the conquest of the world for Christ.<sup>89</sup>

But there were some Methodists who struggled with the optimism of postmillennialism and the apparent evidence to the contrary seen in the world around them. While it was not uncommon for Methodists to convert to premillennialism, they could not live in both worlds. In fact, Methodists who crossed over to premillennialism eventually left their denomination altogether.<sup>90</sup> Not only were Methodists “led astray,” as Faupel adds, but “By the turn of the century, the shift to premillennialism by the independent Wesleyan groups was almost complete.”<sup>91</sup> Included among these was the Church of the Nazarene, although its founder, Phineas Bresee, remained postmillennial.

Yet for the many conservative Protestants who had been feeling bombarded by the liberal scholarship from Germany, the Darwinists’ view of Creation, the rush of immigrants from unfamiliar lands and traditions, and the growing belief that the world was not improving, dispensational premillennialism offered a welcome set of stabilizing doctrines, particularly with regard to Scripture as the infallible, authoritative Word of

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<sup>89</sup>D. William Faupel. *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology: Supplemental Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 101.

<sup>90</sup> Sandeen, 163.

<sup>91</sup> Faupel, 102.

God. Timothy Weber writes, "Instead of placing God within the historical or evolutionary process, premillennialists still believed in a God who stood outside history and intended to intervene – soon."<sup>92</sup> A testimony given at the 1898 Niagara Conference stated:

The Rev. Mr. Ayres, from Illinois, mentioned how he had wandered through the mazes of the higher criticism until he came to disbelieve in what he had held dear, and finally began to consider the question of leaving the ministry. But God was very gracious to him and sent the showers of his Holy Spirit upon his dry heart. He told of the refreshment of his spirit, his acceptance of premillennial truth, the full inspiration of the Bible, the coming back of his love for the Word, and his faith in all he had previously held dear, and now he was continually preaching the doctrine of the premillennial coming of the Lord.<sup>93</sup>

Right in the thick of rising premillennialism, a new wave of millenarians was to hit the scene. In 1901, Topeka, Kansas saw a fresh outbreak of the Holy Spirit in the form of speaking in tongues. Charles Parham was a teacher at Bethel Bible College where his students determined that "scriptural evidence for the reception of the baptism with the Holy Spirit" was "speaking with other tongues."<sup>94</sup> After he prayed over one of his students, Agnes Ozman, she began speaking Chinese, and was subsequently left unable to speak or write anything but Chinese for three full days. Soon students and

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<sup>92</sup> Timothy Weber, "The Dispensationalist Era," *Christian History* 18, no. 61 (1999): 37.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Sandeen, 145.

<sup>94</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 91.

teachers alike were caught up in the fire.<sup>95</sup> The revival spread, and many believed that this marked the sign of Christ's return in reflection of the day of Pentecost.<sup>96</sup> One of Parham's later students at The Bible Training School in Houston, Texas, William Seymour, was convinced of this new faith and took it to Los Angeles, immediately becoming the leader in "the Azusa Street Revivals," which involved thousands over the next few fiery years. Tongues was also a major player in spurring on missionary work, as many believed that this new outpouring would empower missionaries with the gifts of foreign languages, enabling a new wave of conversions world-wide, another signal that Jesus was on his way.<sup>97</sup> The Reverend S. T. Gunter explained:

They teach that the Holy Ghost is calling the people from the larger churches to their missions, where the signs are, and getting them ready as the Bride to meet the Lord in the air. And if we reject the call it is the sin against the Holy Ghost and there is no pardon for us in this world or the world to come. The main reason for the latter rain is to speed on the universal, world-wide revival and hurl the gospel to all men and speedily usher in the second coming of Christ.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> E. Weber, 187.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Vinson Synan, "The 'Second Comers.'" *Christian History* 18, no. 61. (1999): 38-39. While in some ways this sounds more post than premillennial in the sense of greater evangelistic success before Christ returns, most Pentecostal movements at this time had a strong sense of an imminent, premillennial advent. Dayton, in his chapter in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, notes that nineteenth century Pentecostals identified this outpouring of the Holy Spirit as "latter rain," the kind that prepares the harvest. He writes, "This literal rainfall pattern provides the image by which Pentecostalism understands its own relationship to the apostolic church and to the imminent end of the age." 46.

<sup>98</sup> Rev. S.T. Gunter, "The Latter Rain," in *The Free Methodist* 50, no. 12 (March 20, 1917): 3.

Although many Pentecostals came out of the Holiness, entire-sanctification movement (which had been largely postmillennial), Pentecostal eschatology fit nicely into the doctrine of dispensationalism, since they saw the gift of tongues as a return to apostolic times. Because tongues had been so long absent from Protestantism (save for a few fringe movements over the centuries), “the long drought from post apostolic times to the present is seen to be a part of God’s dispensational plan for the ages.”<sup>99</sup> Although Pentecostalism remained a sect of the larger premillennial movement, it had a major impact on outsiders as the gifts of the Spirit were seen as evidence of something greater to come.

Not much later, in 1909, C.I. Scofield published his first commentated Bible, using the King James Version with his notes of interpretation alongside Scripture. Because of this new format, dispensational premillennialism gained a much larger audience, and coupled with a rise in dispensational Bible Colleges which trained ministers in premillennial eschatology, the word was spreading to all different denominations and organizations in several corners of the States.<sup>100</sup> Over the next few years, fundamentalist tracts began to be circulated by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, which were bound together in 1917 into The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth.<sup>101</sup> It is in these texts that the doctrine of premillennialism is delineated and clarified, most

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<sup>99</sup> Donald W. Dayton, “The Limits of Evangelicalism: The Pentecostal Tradition,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnson, eds. (Downers’ Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 47.

<sup>100</sup> T. Weber, in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, 11.

<sup>101</sup> E. Weber, *Apocalypses*, 186.

explicitly in two different chapters written by Charles R. Erdman of Princeton Theological Seminary (Vol. IV).

In Erdman's first chapter, "The Church and Socialism," he gives a rather balanced view of socialism as economic and political movements, distinguishing it from communism and anarchy; yet he also makes a clear distinction from Christianity, noting that Christianity has no political party or economic theory to which it ascribes.<sup>102</sup> He further distinguishes the two, as he writes:

"[Socialism] insists that better social conditions will produce better men; Christianity teaches that better men are needed to produce better conditions. Socialism endeavors to elevate individuals by elevating society; Christianity contends that society can be elevated only by the regeneration of individuals. To secure such regeneration is the supreme effort and function of the Church."<sup>103</sup>

Lest he begin to sound a little too close to his postmillennial cousins, however, he declares:

There are many who, in the name of Christianity, have been promising a new social order, a kingdom of God, which they declare the Church will introduce. The long continued failure to realize these promises has led to criticisms of the Church, and has done not a little to increase the bitterness of socialist attacks on her. The Church is now being held responsible for social sins and injustice, for the wrongs and grievances of the age; and for this unfortunate position she must largely blame herself. ... More important still it is to ask what predictions of Scripture support the assertion that the Church is herself to introduce the kingdom of God. ... The hope of the world is not in a new social order instituted by unregenerate men; not a millennium made by man; not a commonwealth of humanity organized as a

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<sup>102</sup> Charles Erdman, "The Church and Socialism," in *The Fundamentals*, vol. IV (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 101.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.



Socialist state; but a kingdom established by Christ which will fill the earth with glory at the coming of the King.<sup>104</sup>

In the previous chapter, Erdman's colleague, the Reverend John McNicol (principal of the Toronto Bible Training School) launches a direct attack on the missiology of postmillennialism when he writes:

The conversion of the world is not the object of the Church's hope. It is quite true that this glorious consummation lies in the future... but the task of bringing this about was not committed to the Church. On the contrary, the New Testament descriptions of the last days of the Church upon earth preclude the thought. They are depicted in dark colors. The history of the preaching of the Gospel in the world should be enough to show that this cannot be the object set before us, for, while whole nations have been evangelized, not a single community has ever been completely converted.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, Charles Erdman states unequivocally that Scripture, when taken with appropriate literalness, will show that "the coming of Christ will be *followed* by the universal reign of Christ"<sup>106</sup> (emphasis added), not the other way round. He declares gleefully:

Emperors and kings and cabinets are rapidly bringing to pass things that God has marked out in prophecy ages ago. But they know not what they do. There are 'signs in the heavens,' and on the earth there is 'distress of nations with perplexity and the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of the heavens

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 107-8.

<sup>105</sup> John McNicol, "The Hope of the Church" in *The Fundamentals*, vol. IV (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 288.

<sup>106</sup> Charles Erdman, "The Coming of Christ" in *The Fundamentals*, vol. IV (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 305.

shall be shaken. And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.’ (Luke 21:25-27).<sup>107</sup>

“The Scriptures,” he states, “teach us to expect another divine descent, not to bring history to a close, but to introduce new forces and to inaugurate a new dispensation.” In contrast, he says, “The theory of evolution, which dominates modern thinking, leads men to expect a gradual perfecting of the race under the laws of its own being, which will issue at last, with the beneficent aid of Christianity, in a perfect state of human society and the redemption of the race as a whole.”<sup>108</sup> But this is a fallacy, he argues, because the Scriptures declare that only with supernatural inbreaking will there be a triumph of the kingdom.

While discussing the imminence of Christ’s return (noting that “imminent” does not mean “immediate”), he takes another direct shot at postmillennialism, stating, “These Scriptural exhortations to watch seem to contradict, also, those who teach that a ‘Millennium,’ a thousand years or a protracted period of righteousness, *must* intervene between the present time and the advent of Christ.”<sup>109</sup> With reference to the postmillennial doctrine surrounding Christ’s declaration in the Great Commission, “All power and authority have been given to me,” he argues, “It is true that ‘all power’ has been given to Him ‘in heaven and on earth,’ but that power has not been fully made manifest; ‘we see not yet all things put under Him.’”<sup>110</sup> After demonstrating what he

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 304.

understands to be the Scriptural support for the pre-millennial advent, he concludes, "According to John, the coming of Christ *precedes* the millennium."<sup>111</sup> With this he definitively asserts what would become the dominant view of conservative American Christianity for the rest of the twentieth century, but not without the world first having to suffer immensely to make it so.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 312.

## **The Shift: The War to End All Wars, or The Beginning of The End?**

“It seems safe to predict that out of the great world war will come one of two things: either the personal return of our Lord and the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, or such radical political and economic changes as will go far toward the realization of that kingdom by natural means.”<sup>112</sup>

The decline of postmillennialism is not something one can clearly trace through Holiness history, but it is clear that several darkening factors led to a growing sense of uneasiness and gloom nationwide. Furthermore, by the time of the end of World War I, any real optimism still held for humanity was held outside Evangelical and Holiness circles. If this shift can be perceived, can it be understood?<sup>113</sup>

Eugen Weber writes, “[The Civil War] marked the beginnings of [postmillennialism’s] own decline and the return in force of rivals indifferent to social reforms that did not address the vital problem of original sin, to improvements that were

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<sup>112</sup> “Out of the World War, What?” in *The Missionary Voice*, September 1917, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Although Evangelicalism has its roots in Reformed theology, in contrast to the Wesleyan/Arminian roots of the Holiness movement, it shared with the Holiness movement the call to personal holiness and social reform throughout much of the nineteenth century. It wasn’t until after the Civil War and the introduction of dispensational premillennialism that Evangelicals drifted out of the social activist scene, while Holiness churches stayed in the “trenches” until after World War I. As both groups moved out of the social arena, Evangelicals generally moved with the Fundamentalist movement toward a focus on creedal theology, whereas Holiness groups continued to focus on personal piety with a new emphasis on individualism. Most adherents of both groups eventually accepted a premillennial eschatology.

no more than patches on gangrene, and to political activists who postured on volcanoes that were about to erupt... Pre-millenarians made the most of it.”<sup>114</sup> James Moorhead also argues, “Postmillennialism looked increasingly implausible because events had stubbornly refused to follow its scenario. The eschatology predicted that a pattern of improvement would be discernible in history and that evangelicalism would occupy a privileged place in this forward movement. Since the Civil War, much evidence had accumulated to the contrary.”<sup>115</sup> Scholars cite two major trends in American culture and religion following the Civil War which were instrumental in effecting a paradigm shift that shook Evangelical Christianity irreparably: the destructiveness of urbanization; and the growing prevalence of biblical criticism and liberal theology, called the “New Theology.”<sup>116</sup>

The Civil War served as a fulcrum under a teeter-tottering American story. America going into the war was a fierce mix of idealism and conquest, the North united against the South to defeat the evil of slavery. To many coming out of this war, the nation seemed to head downward, weighted by its own “coming of age.” While on the one hand the war indeed brought the end of slavery – a triumph for postmillennials – it

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<sup>114</sup> E. Weber, *Apocalypses*, 181.

<sup>115</sup> James H. Moorhead, “The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925,” *Modern American Protestantism and Its World Vol. 4, Theological Themes in the American Protestant World*, Martin Marty, ed. (New York: Saur, 1992), 219.

<sup>116</sup> See D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 111-114; David Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (New York: Lippincott, 1972), 34-36; T. Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, 42-64; Moorhead, 205-209, 214-218.

also introduced new horrors and suffering to the American landscape, lending support to the pessimism of premillennialists.<sup>117</sup> Dayton writes, “The Civil War helped to puncture earlier utopian visions and in doing so contributed to the dissolution of the reform impulse.”<sup>118</sup> Slavery had been the primary focus of pre-War postmillennialism, and when that institution was abolished (but the millennium had not arrived), Northern churches lost their one uniting cause, and without a common enemy, they fell into divisions and bickering. For Holiness groups, attention was then turned more inward, into a “purity crusade.” “One detects in the post-Civil War period a growing concern for personal purity, understood increasingly as ‘no smoking, no drinking, no dancing, and no gambling.’”<sup>119</sup> While these had been part of pre-Civil War revivalism, the emphasis was turned toward monitoring individuals, and away from improving society as a whole.

As for social reforms, Holiness churches found themselves scrambling to keep up with the needs, at a loss as to how to handle people and problems never before encountered. Specifically, immigration was the greatest challenge, not only because of sheer numbers, but also the types of immigrants being received by the nation’s shores. Timothy Weber paints a startling picture when he writes, “Between 1820 and 1900, over nineteen million people immigrated to the United States. Of those, over thirteen and a half million arrived *after 1865*”<sup>120</sup> (*italics mine*). Not only were the numbers staggering,

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<sup>117</sup> Baumgartner, *Longing for the End*, 173.

<sup>118</sup> Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, 124.

<sup>119</sup> Dayton, 124.

<sup>120</sup> T. Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, 84.

but these newcomers were primarily from eastern and southern Europe, and therefore consisted of Roman Catholics, German Lutherans, Jews, Orthodox Christians, and many non-religious. For American Protestants, the wave was overwhelming in many ways. “The immigrants congregated in city slums; they refused to keep the Sabbath according to evangelical standards; they preferred to send their children to parochial schools. In countless ways, it seemed, the immigrants resisted ‘Americanization’ and thus threatened the American way of life.”<sup>121</sup>

But this was not all. Rapid industrialization was swallowing the cities and its citizens into squalor and class warfare. Child labor was in full force, families were forced into crowded, filthy tenement slums, and pollution and traffic choked the air and roadways. Independent skilled workers and farmers had to sell their trades and farms, becoming “slaves of the wage system.” More and more, the chasm between the rich and the poor was spreading, and the number of the rich was dwindling in rapid proportion to the growth of the poor.

Yet Holiness and Evangelical Christians didn’t give up immediately. One of the great social efforts of this period was in the creation of the YMCA and YWCA, which sought to provide an alternative place of recreation and learning from the overcrowding taverns and slum houses. The Salvation Army movement developed during this period, serving the poor of the cities in numerous fashions. And at first, premillennialists worked alongside postmillennialists for these same causes, as well as temperance and missions. But as was seen in chapter two, it was not long before premillennialists found their efforts

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 85.

futile and even counter-productive to their eschatology. Randall Balmer, an historian of Evangelicalism, writes:

[Premillennialism] had broad implications for the social ethics of evangelicals. Society, this new rubric insisted, was careening toward judgment; it could never be reclaimed for Christ, short of his return to establish the millennium. Despite the continuation of some evangelical reform efforts, this notion relieved evangelicals of the obligation to labor for the amelioration of social ills. Evangelicals increasingly stood in judgment of culture and awaited its destruction, which would follow their translation into heaven.<sup>122</sup>

Indeed, the situation did seem to be only worsening, not improving. And while the Holiness churches fought to maintain their role in improving society, premillennial Evangelicals receded into the churches. As the decades wore on toward 1900, depressions, labor riots and strikes wracked the country. Where postmillennials saw hope and potential for ever-increasing progress, premillennialists found themselves in the role of “realist,” or “pragmatist.” The entire discussion of eschatology came to be hinged on one thing, as historian William Faupel notes: (single space quote)

Following the war, the debate between the two positions (post and pre) centered on the question, ‘Is the world getting perceptively better, or is it growing markedly worse?’ In response to this question, postmillennialists noted advances in science and technology; the spread of Western culture through the colonization of the Third World; and the renewed activity of mission work. Premillennialists readily conceded these issues. But they seriously questioned whether the moral climate was improving.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 35.

<sup>123</sup> Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 113.



Yet for historian James Moorhead, the change was even more subversive, owing not simply to the apparent failure of society to improve, but instead a rise in the power of the secular and a loss of the supernatural. He writes, "The once dominant eschatology appears not to have suffered outright rejection but to have ebbed away."<sup>124</sup> One of the chief factors in this decline is the rise of historical criticism in Germany, as postmillennial eschatology was shared by conservative holiness Christians and moderate-to-liberal Christians alike. It was this latter group which was most drastically affected by the German scholarship, as they were willing to accept its premises of how to approach the text as a piece of literature and without specially divine origin.<sup>125</sup> While at first these views remained in the higher academic circles, they began seeping into the pulpits, and by the 1880s it was not unusual to hear the basic tenets expounded upon in influential churches. One way that more conservative Christians tried to account for the growing skepticism was to "preserve their relevance by claiming less for them." In other words, they lightened the emphasis on prophecy and focused on "an inspired optimism as to the final struggle between good and evil in the race."<sup>126</sup> Eventually it came to the point where "In place of the apocalyptic vision was a new understanding of the Kingdom of God ...[in which] liberals perceived this kingdom as a present ethical reality rather than a dominion to be introduced in the future." Moorhead adds, "According to these liberals, apocalypticism had suffered a double discredit: not only had critical studies exposed its

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<sup>124</sup> Moorhead, 203.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 206.

fallacious predictions, but modern science, particularly evolutionary theories, rendered it irrational and repugnant.”<sup>127</sup>

Moorhead describes two concepts which result from a loss of the supernatural in Christianity as major blows to postmillennial eschatology in the late nineteenth century: the decline of the “conversion” and the emphasis on progress through process; and the rise of efficiency which secularized the Church. On conversion he notes that in the Finney revivals, there had been great emphasis placed on the need for an immediate, life-changing conversion that was often emotional and that drew a thick, black line between having once been damned and now being saved. As the century wore on, this kind of piety was slipping from its place in the Christian life. The fear tactics such as describing “the fires of hell already lapping at your feet,” were eventually slowly abandoned as “evolutionary process” concepts became more accepted as the norm for human experience. He writes, “Previously a rather clearly defined event marked by a period of deep anxiety for one’s soul and followed by a dramatic release from that fear, conversion was subsiding into something less terror-ridden.”<sup>128</sup> One area where this is seen most clearly is in a change of doctrine regarding the salvation of children. According to Moorhead, this began with the acceptance of a book by Horace Bushnell called *Christian Nurture*, which introduced the idea that “the slow nurture of children in Christian homes could imperceptibly roll back the influence of sin so that the adult would never remember

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 210.

a time when he was not a Christian.”<sup>129</sup> Along with this notion of process and nurture came a powerful diminishing of the reality of hell in liberal Christian circles. There had been a “softening of the doctrine of original sin” which made automatic punishment of sinners an uncomfortable conclusion. Adding to this was the concept that “damnation derived from natural moral laws which did not require the direct intervention of a vindictive God.”<sup>130</sup> With this rejection of the traditional understanding of hell came a rise in annihilation theories, and in the vein of process, the idea that hell was punishment “from which the wicked might ultimately be released.” Even conservative Protestants, Moorhead says, found the doctrine to have become an increasing “embarrassment,” and quotes Washington Gladden, the father of the Social Gospel, saying that when a preacher does come around to having to preach a sermon on hell, he would “fling the sermon into the drawer when it is preached, with the thankful feeling that nothing more on that subject will be required for some time to come.”<sup>131</sup>

Another weakening in the chain of postmillennialism was the growing segmentation among denominations and benevolent societies, which had the interesting effect of these groups becoming married to the American business ideal of efficiency. While on the one hand, Evangelical leaders believed that this increased efficiency would lead to a better evangelizing of the world, it seemed instead to make the “building of the Kingdom of God ... as much a matter of technique and program as it was of conversion

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

and piety.”<sup>132</sup> Moorhead captures a quote from *The Methodist Review* in 1914 in this rather twisted understanding of this efficient new direction: “Ah! The city which John saw! ... It will take considerable engineering as well as preaching to get the whole world there. Hail, Engineer, coagent of the millennium!”<sup>133</sup> While it may seem from this quote that the concept of efficiency was truly a boon to postmillennial Christianity, Moorhead describes it as one more step toward the wedding of science and the faith, which would eventually draw sharp lines between liberal “social” Christians and conservative Holiness evangelicals who would leave the failure of postmillennialism for the pessimism, or perhaps “realism” of premillennialism. Moorhead concludes, “In short, experience simply had not sustained postmillennialism. The product of an era when evangelicalism had enjoyed cultural dominance, it could not survive when that ascendance waned.”<sup>134</sup>

“But none of those things would have won over large numbers of evangelicals, had not optimism and the belief in progress declined,” wrote Timothy Weber. “As dispensationalists loved to point out, postmillennialism had not delivered on its promise of an imminent millennium. Despite massive evangelical efforts, the Golden Age seemed farther away than ever.”<sup>135</sup> By the end of the 1800s, postmillennialism had begun a slow decline, while Darby’s dispensationalism was gaining popularity, especially among the precursor theologians to Fundamentalism, including Dwight Moody, known widely as

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>135</sup> T. Weber, “Premillennialism,” 11-12..

“Mr. Evangelical.”<sup>136</sup> In an article for *Christian History* magazine, Weber wrote, “It was becoming harder and harder to read the morning newspaper and believe that the Millennium was right around the corner. What looked inevitable in the 1830s – the Christianization of the nation and the world through the success of revivals and reform – no longer seemed possible.”<sup>137</sup>

But what would bring this “failure” to a head in Christianity? While I grasp Moorhead’s explanation for the decline of postmillennialism, I submit that there is one more piece missing, a piece that would serve as the guillotine to the last of the surviving postmillenarians, who were found predominantly in the Methodist missionary movement and the Social Gospel movement prior to its complete giving over to liberal Christianity. This final blow would come in the terrible reality of World War I. The failure of postmillennialism (or modernism, for that matter) to produce a better world, so often described as the linchpin to the transition from optimism to pessimism in the American cultural mindset, culminated in the devastation wrought by the Great War. And while some lingering optimists described it as “the War to End All Wars,” nevertheless it served, in my opinion, to deliver the final blow to the hope of a coming “golden age.” A writer in a noted Holiness journal wrote ominously:

No student of these times doubts that we are at the watershed of modern history. Change and readjustment are in the air. Stir and restlessness are manifest all round the world. The old is giving way to the new and the most stolidly conservative peoples are turning from the past to the future. What that future is to be is not yet discernable, but this much is certain: it

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<sup>136</sup> Timothy Weber, “The Dispensationalist Era” in *Christian History* 18 no. 61. (1999): 34-37.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

will not be as the past. ... Commerce, science, invention and literature may have their fullest credit in creating unrest and breaking the shackles of the past. They have no power to mold a great civilization or to meet the higher hopes and deeper yearnings of men. They may even destroy a superstition or wreck a false religion, but they have no power to construct a faith or to furnish imperatives to dominate the conscience.<sup>138</sup>

The horrors of World War I were unlike any seen before in the world. Baumgartner states simply, "The outbreak of World War I would shatter the optimism [of the postmillenarians] and provide new opportunities for premillennialist prophets."<sup>139</sup> In a speech made at the second session of the full Peace Conference in January, 1919, President Wilson lamented, "Is it not a startling circumstance, for one thing, that the great discoveries of science, that the quiet studies of men in laboratories, that the thoughtful developments which have taken place in quiet lecture-rooms have now been turned to the destruction of civilization?"<sup>140</sup> A writer for the Methodist magazine, *The Missionary Tidings*, wrote, "The awful methods of warfare are so cruel that it hardly seems possible that any civilized people could engage in such wholesale slaughter of their fellow men. The manufacturing of such instruments could not but be demoralizing to a people and cause them to thirst for the opportunity to put into use the deadly weapons to prove their effectiveness."<sup>141</sup> Baumgartner adds, "The nature of the war with its enormous casualty

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<sup>138</sup> Anonymous, "The Decisive Hour in Christian Missions," in *The Missionary Voice* 1, No 1 (1911):9. Nashville, TN.

<sup>139</sup> Baumgartner, 194.

<sup>140</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *International Ideals: Speeches and Addresses made during the President's European Visit, December 14, 1918, to February 14, 1919* (New York: Harper & Brothers, no year), 99-100.

<sup>141</sup> "The Cry for Peace," in *The Missionary Tidings*, October 1914, 13.

rolls and use of such apocalyptic weapons as poison gas, zeppelins and airplanes convinced many who had not paid much attention to earlier predictions that the endtime was at hand.”<sup>142</sup>

Prior to the guns of August of 1914, as the tensions mounted in Europe and here in the States, several articles began appearing in Holiness magazines and journals, discussing what all this meant in God’s timeline for humanity. An English pastor lamented to his church in 1915, “I will frankly admit on this subject of the Gospel and the War that the Gospel ought by this time to have made the terrible crime of such a war impossible.”<sup>143</sup> Was the world about to overcome the last hurdle before humanity was ready to bring in the millennium, or was this to be the final catastrophe that would signal Christ’s return for his followers? Once the war began, the speculation only increased. In the journal, *The Free Methodist*, there were several articles that addressed this very question, and in an almost schizoid way, the opinions expressed by the editors and guest writers flip-flopped between the two opposite answers. In January of 1915 a series of articles began entitled, “Is the World Improving or Degenerating Morally?” The author, A. Sims, felt it best to allow various media publications to speak for themselves, and over the course of the next four journals he quoted dozens of publications, all indicating that

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<sup>142</sup> Baumgartner, 195.

<sup>143</sup> Rev. Arthur F. Winnington Ingram, *The Church in Time of War* (Milwaukee: The Young Churchman Company, 1915), 4.

the world is in fact worsening, due in great part to the failure of missions to “Christianize” the world, and the resultant crimes and sufferings.<sup>144</sup>

One featured author, Wilson T. Hogue, was especially vocal in favor of premillennialism, seeing the signs of the times as evidence of the end to come, and soon. He wrote a four-part series entitled, “The Last Days,” which was run in the early months of 1917. “If there ever was a time since the New Testament was written when men’s hearts are generally failing them for fear of those things which are coming on the earth, that time is now,” he wrote. “...The times are growing more and more perilous, signs grow darker and darker, and have been growing so for a considerable time; but the darker the signs become, the more hopeful it should be to every true saint; for the darker things get, the nearer the coming of our Lord.”<sup>145</sup>

Yet just two months earlier, *The Free Methodist* ran an article first printed in *The Christian Advocate* entitled, “After the War, What?” which carried the unmistakable optimism of postmillennials. The author wrote, “It is the divine plan that this old earth should progress forward, not backward. ... All through these black years which led up to the great war of nations, the religion of Jesus has been growing.” He goes on:

We look forward confidently to the great world-wide revival of religion; indeed, it has already begun. It will bring in, among other blessings, a new and larger statesmanship, in which the divine sovereignty will be recognized; a better sociology, by which human justice will be advanced; a nobler use of wealth, in which riches themselves will cease to be an ultimate object of attainment; and an international kinship, with all hatreds

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<sup>144</sup> A. Sims, “Is the World Improving or Degenerating Morally?” in *The Free Methodist* 50 Nos. 3-6 (January – February, 1915).

<sup>145</sup> Wilson T. Hogue, “The Last Days,” in *The Free Methodist* 50, No. 16 (April 17, 1917): 8-9.



and jealousies forever shut out. In these and manifold more ways will the divine wisdom bring good out of evil, and transform into blessing events which have seemed to be an unmitigated evil. The time is not yet, but it lies in the near future when men will say, with heart and soul, 'God's in His heaven, and all's right with the world.'<sup>146</sup>

Perhaps it was in some direct response that Hogue wrote, "But anyone who is familiar with conditions in the world to-day must be aware that these marks [from 2 Timothy 3:1-5] are much more generally and emphatically prominent to-day than they have been before. At all events, these are to be marks of 'the last days,' so that it does not look as though we were to have a thousand years of spiritual jubilee to introduce the Advent of our Lord."<sup>147</sup>

Harry Emerson Fosdick, a noted postmillennial socialist, showed his own struggle to make sense of the war when he wrote:

One of the most important battles of this generation is being fought behind closed doors, where men are making up their minds whether this war is to leave them social pessimists or not.... That many are becoming cynical, are growing dubious to practical skepticism the faith which they never would have surrendered to speculative doubt, is clear to anyone who talks much with men.<sup>148</sup>

But for premillennialists, all was going according to plan. Baumgartner describes them as "almost giddy with excitement" at the war's outbreak, due to the strongly held belief that this was a sure sign of Christ's return.<sup>149</sup> Weber writes, "The First World

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<sup>146</sup> Anonymous, "After the War, What?" *The Free Methodist* 50, No 9 (February 27, 1917): 1.

<sup>147</sup> Hogue, 9.

<sup>148</sup> Henry Emerson Fosdick. *The Challenge of the Present Crisis* (New York: Association Press, 1917), 2-3.

<sup>149</sup> Baumgartner, 196.

War... confirmed Fundamentalist mindsets, but had little impact on them.”<sup>150</sup> Yet as represented by the writers in the two Holiness magazines *The Missionary Tidings* and *The Missionary Voice*, postmillennialists remained hopeful throughout the war, and this tension between the waning optimism and the growing pessimism began to show itself as the violence and destruction wore on.

In October of 1914, the war was just two months old and America was yet two and one-half years away from joining. While the earlier-cited writer in *The Missionary Tidings* saw the horrors of war, he also believed that their “cry for peace” would be heard, and their hope vindicated. He wrote,

We seek the overthrow of the evils of war and beyond that those tendencies that occasion war in the hearts of men. We seek the establishment of righteous government and the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom on earth. In the depths of our inmost souls we feel that when nations have exhausted their powers, only to fail in their designs, the God of peace will cause his power to be recognized and his will to be obeyed. The coming of our Lord will draw near. The true Church will put on her strength and perform her mission under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.<sup>151</sup>

In this same publication one month earlier, in an article entitled “What Christianity is Doing for the World,” the author expounds on what he considers to be the powerful movement of the gospel around the world, improving living and working conditions, the rights of the oppressed (including women), the improvement of business practices and relations, and in general the social conditions of all who are touched by the faith, directly or not. America and its principles of government, personal freedom and

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<sup>150</sup> E. Weber, 187.

<sup>151</sup> *The Missionary Tidings*, 13.

Christian ideals is the vehicle to changing the world. He writes, "The Sermon on the Mount laid the foundation for democracy," and, he continues:

The present effort for a permanent arbitral court and for world peace is an effort to make our Christianity practical to every nation. When we make Christianity more and more dominant in our national policies, then will every missionary have his power and influence doubled, barriers and hates will be removed, and the angels' song of nineteen centuries ago, "Peace on earth, good-will to men," will be changed from prophecy to history.<sup>152</sup>

He concludes, "Christianity is the only superhuman religion given by God in the person of Jesus Christ to save the world."<sup>153</sup> One year later, in September of 1915, the magazine published "A Prayer for Missions in Time of War," which reads, "O God, who alone dost control the issue of this war, grant that peace and good-will may be established among Christians at home, and that the law of love which Christ thy Son has taught us may become the law of all the nations on the earth... so that the work of thy church may be advanced and thy kingdom established upon earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>154</sup>

This optimism was still strong in July of 1917, three months after America entered the war. *The Missionary Tidings* continued to encourage Holiness missionaries with admonishments toward piety and purity, as found in an article about how to strengthen our young men overseas so as to preserve them from temptation. The author is concerned about the prevalence of vices available to soldiers, stating, "War increases lust and its deadly consequences... All the churches will need to watch lest the

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<sup>152</sup> "What Christianity Is Doing for the World," in *The Missionary Tidings*, September 1914, 11, 23.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> *Missionary Tidings*, September 1915, 7

excitement and strain of the hour lower the sex standards of the community.” Also under fire was alcohol, and the author hopes that the Church can enforce “national prohibition as a war measure,” seeing the liquor industry as an “economic and moral waste.” He encouraged churches to financially support the YMCA and American Bible Society, both founded in the nineteenth century by Holiness groups. The author concluded, “One of the patriotic duties of the Christian pulpit is continuously to develop in the people the determination that this war shall end in nothing less than such a constructive peace as shall be the beginning of a world democracy.”<sup>155</sup> A key side-note to this article is that it was written by order of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, an ecumenical movement that was considered very liberal, and even dangerous, to the Fundamentalists.<sup>156</sup>

One month later, in August of 1917, another article appeared which stated, “The most powerful force on earth to-day is the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, which is transforming the entire social, domestic, intellectual, physical and religious life of the world. ... When the Prince of Peace becomes enthroned in the hearts of individuals the world over, then will world peace be a reality.”<sup>157</sup>

Yet all was not secure in postmillennial thought. In this same magazine, there began to appear articles and letters which show a struggle in eschatological thought, a shifting from the optimistic “going forward to the millennium” of the postmillennial

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<sup>155</sup> “The Duty of the Church in this Hour of National Need,” in *The Missionary Tidings*, July 1917, 13-14.

<sup>156</sup> Hunter, 41-2

<sup>157</sup> “The Mightiest Peace Movement,” in *The Missionary Tidings*, August 1917, 7.

mindset to the uncertain, and even decidedly premillennial view of the events of the period. In 1915, Gilbert A. Beaver wrote, “The future is jeopardized, not only by the slaughter and maiming of the strongest, by the spread of disease and misery, by the destruction of industries, and by the waste of great resources, but even more by the moral degradation which follows hatred, lust and other passions inseparable from war.”<sup>158</sup> He adds:

At the very time when those who know the love of Christ were uniting, as never before, to show its true meaning to the world, and when the races hitherto in ignorance or in doubt about it were becoming eager to learn its application to themselves – at this supreme time of transition, these races are called to witness professedly Christian peoples in a life and death struggle of brute force, and are even themselves drawn into a battle on both sides of the demoralizing conflict.

He concludes that prayer alone can save the world from its destruction, indicating a shift from the belief in the power of Christian social action to the wholly supernatural work of God.

Two pieces appear in the March 1917 edition, one a letter from a missionary who writes, “It is certain that we will never know again the kind of world that existed a few years ago, but to ‘occupy’ until *He comes* is our only business.”<sup>159</sup> This is a distinct departure from postmillennial belief and a clearly premillennial view, as seen in *The Fundamentals*.<sup>160</sup> She is not alone in this shift, as an adjacent article on heaven and peace

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<sup>158</sup> “The War and the Way Out,” in *The Missionary Tidings*, February 1915, 9.

<sup>159</sup> Kittie Wood Kumarakulasinghe, in *The Missionary Tidings*, March 1917, 5.

<sup>160</sup> John McNicol, “The Hope of the Church,” *The Fundamentals* vol. IV, 291. In this chapter, McNicol describes how Christ and the apostles directed new Christians to “wait” for his arrival, as there was nothing they could do to hasten it, and because no one would know the time of his return they must always be ready.

asks, “Is not heaven the goal of the Christian? Is not all our missionary work devoted to this end, really, that souls may be fitted for eternal existence beyond earth’s experiences?”<sup>161</sup> This is a decidedly new direction for a postmillennial publication, as the goal of missionary work had been the spreading of the gospel to bring about the millennium. The author continues:

...let us keep in mind the blessed fact that our citizenship is in heaven, that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, that we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth and that the city we seek hath foundations and is glorious beyond the imagination of mortals, “the city of angels and God,” the abode of the spirits of “just men made perfect,” the place of God’s immediate presence and glory.<sup>162</sup>

The author concludes by explaining that Christ alone, not Christians, will change the world, another reflection of the influence of McNicol and *The Fundamentals*. “Conscious of our inability to meet the enemy, we take advantage of his almighty power and trusting his grace and find our enemy a conquered foe.” She quotes from Martin Luther’s great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*, “Christ Jesus, it is he / Lord Sabboath is his name / From age to age the same / *And he must win the battle.*” (Italics mine)

In September of 1918, after America had been in the war for 5 months, an article appeared regarding “The Religion of the Trenches,” and notes that soldiers returning from the war will “take back with them something entirely new in theology.”<sup>163</sup> If they did, they would not be alone. Various events immediately following the war, including

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<sup>161</sup> “Heaven / Peace,” in *The Missionary Tidings*, March 1917, 9.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> “The Religion of the Trenches,” in *The Missionary Tidings*, September 1918, 7.

the discussion of the restoration of Jews to Israel and the revolutions in Russia, only added fuel to the fire when one might think that the end of the war would have disrupted a premillennial destiny. Author Richard Kyle noted, “In a century like ours, with more to survive than to rejoice in... premillennialism can thrive in a context like this.”<sup>164</sup>

Indeed, it was postmillennialism which suffered the most from the Great War, dying quietly amid the roaring twenties, while Fundamentalism and premillennial eschatology would set the tone for the apocalypse, even for non-Christians, in the twentieth century. While optimism still lived, it was held onto only by liberal Christianity and socialists. Conservative Holiness Christianity saw no hope in continuing to believe that God was improving the world through the gospel. Thus with the death of optimism in the conservative camps went the social activism that had been so effective in the nineteenth century, and it has yet to be recovered by mainstream Christianity. The challenge for the next generation of Christians would be to make sense of the eschatology in the face of the immediacy of the world’s needs, and where God stands in the midst. “But whatever our belief as to the Second Coming, we cannot doubt that out of the throes of these troublous times will come some wondrous thing. Let us watch and be ready, therefore, as our Lord so often admonished us, eager to hear his voice, to catch his spirit, to see the vision of the better day beyond, and to help, if we may, to bring it in.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Richard Kyle, “Hope Beyond the Details,” Interview in *Christian History*, Winter 1999, 43.

<sup>165</sup> “Out of the World War, What?”, 1917.

## Conclusion

World War I solidified the uncertainties of an improving world: society was not going to become Christianized through missionary efforts here or abroad; technology had the potential not only for progress, but for very real, evil uses; modern scholarship was more destructive than beneficial in its dealing with Scripture and orthodoxy; and the general feeling of comfort experienced by Protestants prior to the onslaught of immigration had dissipated into a feeling of helplessness and even disgust. The citations quoted in the last chapter from various Holiness journals offer a unique window as the writers experienced an “awakening” to the sad and difficult reality of their day, and the frequent acceptance of premillennialism that resulted (or simply a “dying away” into disillusionment or “liberal” Christianity). All of the above factors culminating in the horrors of the Great War brought the entire family of conservative Christianity to jettison postmillennialism in favor of either pre- or amillennialism. Therefore, the thesis has been proven that these several events that befell both America and Holiness Christianity culminated in the death of optimistic postmillennialism following World War I.

The next step is to ask, what does this loss mean for contemporary, conservative Christianity? While the death of postmillennialism had dramatic effects on Holiness eschatology, the most profound effect is seen in the withdrawal of Holiness churches and individuals from the arena of social action on behalf of the poor, needy, and disenfranchised. One need only look around at the proverbial fields and workers to see



that rarely do you find conservative Christians on the frontlines supporting those in need. And while they walked different paths, both Evangelicals and conservative Holiness churches have ended up in the same place: in isolation from and alienation of the world that they once sought to gather in. In fact, the two are so closely related that the historical roots are blurred, and today both are generally placed under the umbrella “Evangelical” term. Therefore, I have found it useful to utilize sources from across Christianity for instruction on where the Church is to go next.

Across Evangelicalism, as well as in mainline churches, scholars have written to address the issue of how personal holiness should be reflected in social activism. David Moberg’s book, The Great Reversal, rejects outright the notion that Christian activism belongs in the moral/political arena, and insists that the call of the gospel is in fact calling Christians to action on behalf of those in need. He writes that it is a “dichotomic fallacy [that] the Christian message must be either personal or social, either spiritual or social, and either this-worldly or other-worldly and cannot be both... which has led many selfishly to try to escape from the world and live lazily in separation from it while waiting for Christ’s coming instead of working until his return.”<sup>166</sup> He writes further:

If we truly are filled with the compassionate love of Christ, we ought to be the first to seek means of alleviating the suffering of the masses as well as of the few persons among whom we happen to discover. If we honestly are attempting to seek first the Kingdom of God, we ought to be the last to adopt sociopolitical positions which are selfishly oriented toward heaping up treasures on earth. If we truly are followers of the Christ Who came to proclaim good tidings to the poor, and if we heed scriptural admonition to

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166 David O. Moberg, The Great Reversal (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott, 1972), 37.

‘remember the poor,’ we ought to lift our voices on behalf of them who otherwise have few advocates or none in public life.<sup>167</sup>

For Moberg, there is not a choice *between* evangelism and social concern – they are inextricably intertwined. Citing what he calls “The Biblical Balance,” Moberg would seem to agree with John Wesley as Wesley sought to follow both Moravian pietism and the social concern that drew him to the poorest parts of the city. This balance, Moberg claims, is not a new direction for Christianity, but one that needs to be rediscovered.

Kenneth Leech, an Anglican priest and avid social activist in the United Kingdom, believes that Evangelical Christianity has become too comfortable in its acceptance of American “individualism” as normative, and instead he calls this acceptance “a cleavage with the world view of traditional Christianity.”<sup>168</sup> Christianity, he states, never meant to be a “private” faith, but a very social faith. He too admires Wesley, and quotes him as saying that there is “no holiness but social holiness.”<sup>169</sup> He identifies the crux of the issue, as well as the sad irony of the Church’s emphasis on both personal holiness and separation from the world, when he writes:

The potential of, and the problem for, Wesleyan tradition lies in the link between personal sanctification and the transformation of society. Does sanctification lead to dissatisfaction with the prevailing order? Can the stress on ‘scriptural holiness’ lead to an examination of what this means for communities which seek to embody holiness and justice?<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Moberg, 41.

<sup>168</sup> Kenneth Leech, *The Eye of the Storm*, (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1992), 5.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

But Leech sees both hope and leadership in the Wesleyan traditions, specifically Methodism, if they will return to their roots and begin again to carry out their founder's theology to its practical end. He writes, "Whatever happens to world Methodism, it is clear that the Wesleyan tradition, with its concern for perfection, its insistence on social holiness, and its roots among the common people, could make a major contribution to the renewal of spirituality..."<sup>171</sup> This is precisely the direction that both Moberg and Leech would pray that Evangelicalism would go in the next century. Holiness theologian Richard Taylor explains:

[God's holy person] cannot rest comfortably in a world of rapine and violence, bloodshed and debauchery, hunger and disease. Therefore he will suffer in ways many others do not, even other Christians. He will not be able to escape his sense of responsibility and involvement. This will go on as long as the sanctified believer is surrounded by lost souls and the enveloping desecration of sin. What breaks God's heart will break his.<sup>172</sup>

And brokenhearted is exactly how Moberg, Leech, and Taylor would have Christians be, because the suffering in the world demands response.

Whether or not the world is worsening toward a quick and devastating end, as premillennialists would have us believe, does not have a hold on whether or not one should work in the world for its improvement, according to Moberg.<sup>173</sup> I suspect that Leech would strongly agree. While Leech sees Christians playing an important role in politics, it is not in the current, sharply conservative arena in which most Evangelicals

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Richard S. Taylor, *The Theological Formulation*, "Exploring Christian Holiness, Volume 3" (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1985), 214.

<sup>173</sup> Moberg, 37.

currently abide, but on the side of social advocacy and change.<sup>174</sup> Instead he calls for what is in effect a return to nineteenth century, postmillennial-based social activism, eschatology aside. He writes, “A different kind of theology is that which sees the role of the Church as one of baptizing and sanctifying the social order.”<sup>175</sup> Later he says, “The Christian in politics must be joyful, celebrating the victory over injustice and oppression in the midst of failure and trial. ... the Christian in politics must be a person of hope.”<sup>176</sup>

But whether in politics or simply in one’s neighborhood, the Christian must be full of concern and love for society at large, not stand against it, as has been the trend since the First World War followed closely by the rejection experienced by Fundamentalists in the 1920s. Should Evangelical (umbrella term) Christianity deign to make an influential “come back” in American society, it will find its most ready listeners not in legislation or “moral courts,” but in the shelters, slums, and poorhouses. And it must begin in its own communities, the churches that make up the body of Christ. For only when the body is healthy can it fully comprehend and express hope, the hope that is in Christ and in his return, before or after – or completely without – a millennium of peace.

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<sup>174</sup> Leech, 15.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 138.

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