

MILLENNIAL HOPES AND FEARS: GREAT BRITAIN, 1780-1960

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“Not a little of the fascination of Victorian religion derives from the co-existence within it of an urgent sense of intermingled crisis and confidence, revival and decline.”¹ We can fairly say this of the period from 1790 on.

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 and the outbreak of the French Revolution seemed to indicate that the equilibrium of both Nature and the Age of Reason was breaking up. John Kent has noted the watershed of 1789.² Was it bliss to be alive in that dawn, or would godless revolution spread throughout Europe? The captivity of the Pope in 1798 was short-lived good news for Protestants and secularists. Optimism and pessimism existed side by side. The Postmillennialism (the Second Advent follows the golden age) popularized by Daniel Whitby was countered by a powerful wave of Premillennialism (the Second Advent inaugurates the millennium).

This essay will address seven main topics. First it looks at the place of Millennialism or Millenarianism (there is no consistency in usage) in church history and other disciplines, and finds a curious silence among historians of mainstream churches. The second section looks at the political, social, and religious background and the upsurge in interest in apocalyptic prophecy at the end of the eighteenth century. The third topic concerns Edward Irving and the Albury prophetic conferences, a meteoric, brief, and tragic career set in the background of the most influential prophetic study group. A glance at five Restorationist (back to the NT) groups illustrates the frequent link between radical Christianity and apocalypticism. Religious ideas flowed both ways across the Atlantic. William Miller bestrides the American scene like a colossus. The fifth topic examines his impact on Britain. His direct impact was comparatively small, but several movements, “his spiritual children,” are more significant and growing, even today. The sixth section looks at dates and figures for the rise, extent, and decline of Millenarianism, a rather amorphous movement. These are

¹Gerald Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 4 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 2:214.

²John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 115.

seldom precise, but 1845 may be considered the apogée. The final main heading brings together a number of movements that do not fit comfortably into the categories above.

This sequence results in some lack of chronological order as Restorationists and Millerites are followed from their beginnings to the twentieth century. The thematic approach seemed preferable to dividing each small narrative into artificial periods.

Millenarianism: A Topic to Avoid?

Biographies of significant churchmen who were millenarians tend to omit that aspect of their subjects, as if avoiding an embarrassing indiscretion, as for example, biographies of Joseph Priestley (1733-1804).³ This in itself is evidence of a shifting paradigm concerning "last things." The older standard histories of religion in Britain tended to concentrate largely on the Church of England, with only peripheral concern for Scotland, Wales, and Ireland and the Nonconformist bodies, while concern with last-day events has been largely ignored in surveys of religious history by clergy.

It has largely fallen to sociologists and historians of religion as a phenomenon to write the history of Millenarianism, Millennialism, Chiliasm, or Adventism, however defined. J.F.C. Harrison covers the period 1780-1850, but he is concerned "not with the intellectually sophisticated millennialists . . . respectable, orthodox, scholarly . . . but with the popular, largely self-educated, adventist millenarians . . . popular (folk) millennialism."⁴

W. H. Oliver engages with the "mainstream" of Millennialism and, like Harrison, came to the subject through his interest in the secular Millennialism of Robert Owen, the Scottish industrialist, philanthropist, and utopian.⁵ Clarke Garrett deals with the scholarly background, but his main emphasis is quasimesianic figures such as Richard Brothers (1757-1824) and Joanna Southcott (1750-1814).⁶

³H. I. Dunton, "The Millerite Adventists and Other Millenarian Groups in Great Britain, 1830-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1984), 45; Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore* (London: Longman, 1980), 23-31.

⁴J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 5.

⁵W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978), preface; Harrison, xv.

⁶Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

In 1789 France sneezed and all Europe caught cold. The Established Church in Britain felt threatened. It was natural that in the prolonged crisis people should turn to the Bible, especially apocalyptic prophecy, for guidance. Unfortunately, there was no agreement on the correct interpretation. Some writers saw signs of hope and progress (Postmillennialists), yet for others, only the Second Advent could avert disaster (Premillennialists). Why such diversity among interpreters? Sociologists of religion have tried to find what motivated these "students of prophecy." Deciphering apocalyptic passages presupposed a high view of biblical inspiration, with some scholars suggesting that the Parousia would occur at the end of the 6,000 years since Creation. Lastly, there were those like Robert Owen who looked for a secular millennium.

The European Crisis and the British Crises

Europe moved from equilibrium to revolutionary instability, political, social, religious. Isaac Newton had explained the laws of nature, enlightened despots ruled, Christianity had been demonstrated to be "reasonable." Then came the collapse of the old order of church and state in France into atheism, terror, and war; and the rise of the strong man, Napoleon, extended the collapse to much of Europe. Where did such a catastrophe fit into God's plan for the world?

Even among Methodists the 1790s created some millenarian or postmillennial speculations, though this does not appear to have been widespread or long-lasting.⁷ A number of Bible expositors, including Joseph Priestley, the Unitarian and scientist, believed the French Revolution was the fulfillment of Rev 11:13. Priestley saw three great events in preparation in the French Revolution: the fall of the Antichrist, the fall of the Turkish empire, and the return of the Jews to their homeland.⁸ These three issues were to be the stock-in-trade of most millenarians in the years to come. Other expositors saw Napoleon himself, and later the Napoleonic dynasty, as fulfillments of prophecy. The association of revolution and atheism helped create or confirm political conservatism among the majority of the clergy.

Britain had its own peculiar problems. First were the social and economic conditions created by the industrial revolution, especially the wartime boom and subsequent postwar slump. The proletarian masses in their hovels clustered around the dark satanic mills of the sprawling new towns, inspired pity and dread. Until the failure of the Chartists in 1848 there were fears of a

⁷Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1992), 337, 339, 341, 382, 472, 475, 447, 491.

⁸James K. Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), xv; Garrett, 136.

revolution. A "moral panic" gripped England in the 1790s with the perceived spread of licentiousness reinforced by the French example.⁹

Second, there were religious tensions. In the 1820s and '30s, the Church of England felt threatened by Catholic Emancipation (1829), which seemed to imply that all creeds were equal.¹⁰ The widened franchise (1832) included middle-class Nonconformists, threatening the Established Church. In 1844 Edward Miall founded the Liberation Society to fight for disestablishment of the Church of England. "To the Church, union with the state was the most powerful temporal fact in its life."¹¹ The Whig government of 1832 began a process of removing the civic disabilities of the Nonconformists, while the uniting of a number of dioceses of the Church of Ireland roused John Keble (1792-1866) to preach a sermon on "National Apostasy."

There were four possible reactions to the apparent crisis in church, society, and state. The Oxford Movement, the Anglo-Catholic revival which followed Keble's sermon, found refuge and security not in a Second Coming, but in the idealized splendors and certainties of Catholic tradition, deprecating the Reformation. They bitterly resented state interference in church affairs, yet would not relinquish Establishment. For J. H. Newman (1801-1890) and others the road led to Rome.

The second and third reactions were those of Evangelical Anglicans, numbering five-hundred to eight-hundred. As they studied the Bible to find a meaning for events, they divided into Meliorists (Postmillennialists) and Premillennialists.¹² Premillennialists believed the "signs of the times" indicated that the world was sliding into ruin from which only the Second Advent could save the righteous. Postmillennialists saw signs of progress—inventions, missionary societies, Bible societies—preparing the way for a golden 1,000 years before the Second Coming.

The fourth reaction was withdrawal. "Restorationists" such as Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and his son Alexander (1788-1866), founders of the Churches of Christ, went back to the NT for their model, publishing *The Millennial Harbinger*. John Nelson Darby (1800-82), a minister of the Church of Ireland, declared in 1827 that the whole Christian church was "in ruins." The only way was to start again with small fellowships of believers breaking

⁹Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), 277-278.

¹⁰Henry Drummond, comp. and ed., *Dialogues on Prophecy*, 3 vols. (London: Nisbet, 1827-1829), 1:251, 375.

¹¹P. T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 147.

¹²Rack, 324; Terence Thomas, ed., *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, 1800-1986* (London: Routledge, 1988), 86, 87; Oliver, 68-98; D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 85.

bread together.¹³ Joseph Smith (1805-44), prophet of the Latter-day Saints, claimed to have recovered hidden, extrabiblical truth. The Millerites were not the first nor the last to sound the call to come out of Babylon.

One Book, Many Interpretations

“For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle” (1 Cor 14:8, NKJV). It is even worse if there are many trumpets giving different signals. Writers on prophecy are divided into different and sometimes warring camps. Preterists believe that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation have already been fulfilled. Futurists look to a fulfilment yet to come, avoiding interpreting past events. Historicists believe that “The difference between history and prophecy is, simply, that in the one case, the events are written down before they come to pass, and in the other, they are recorded afterwards.”¹⁴

Other elements to be fitted into the pattern are the nature of the millennium and events around it: a time of tribulation, the last judgment, and the special role, if any, of the Jews. Bebbington correctly states that Premillennialism at this period was more adventist than millenarian, that is, it had comparatively little to say about the events and conditions of the 1,000 years. G. S. Faber, writer of at least eleven books on prophecy from 1806 to 1853, “was more interested in calamity than [millennial] happiness.”¹⁵ Henry Drummond was curiously vague about the millennial state, drawing a distinction between unbelievers, Jews, and the church. This opened the way for J. N. Darby.¹⁶

Historicist interpretation is necessarily political, religious, or social comment, as it involves the identification of the symbolism of Daniel and Revelation with historical persons or organizations. The temptation to shoehorn current events to fit a prophecy was irresistible, with need to readjust when the predicted events did not occur.¹⁷

What Motivates “Students of Prophecy”?

Having looked a little at what students of prophecy taught, the question comes, Why did they teach it? The interest in apocalyptic prophecy has

¹³J. N. Darby, *On the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (1827); cf. *Dialogues*, 2:99.

¹⁴*Christadelphian* 14 (1877): 354; H. Grattan Guinness, *History Unveiling Prophecy* (New York: Revell, 1905).

¹⁵Bebbington, 83; Oliver, 63.

¹⁶Drummond, 1:198; 2:238; 3:40.

¹⁷Drummond, 1:198, 308, 312-314, 317.

operated at different levels: the scholarly; the sectarian autodidactic (Christadelphian and Millerite papers were demanding reading); the popular, with little theoretical structure and an appeal to emotion; and the messianic, where some extrabiblical revelation or quasimessianic status is claimed for the leader, e.g., Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and Joanna Southcott. This fourth category is only peripheral to this article.

Though interest in the Second Advent slackened after the Restoration in 1660, it never entirely ceased. Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) made Postmillennialism the prevailing view in the eighteenth century, but Joseph Mede's *Key of the Revelation* (1627), still being read in the 1790s, provided the framework of scholarly Millenarianism.

At another level, Richard Brothers, though mentally deranged, "helped to generate, throughout England and in all social classes, an intensive examination of the prophecies of the millennium, the like of which had not been seen since the days of the Commonwealth."¹⁸ Some Swedenborgians held millenarian views, though these were contrary to the founder's teaching.¹⁹ The millennium idea, however defined, was common currency, but the context of each writer must be carefully examined. It is easy to read preconceptions into what was meant by various users of the term. William Blake and S. T. Coleridge, for example, were millennialists in their own way. Although many writers were clearly in one camp or the other, they sometimes switched or wavered. James Bichino "remained an optimistic postmillennialist with pre-millennial hesitations."²⁰

What caused the huge upsurge of writing on Bible prophecies in the last decade of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries? A simple millenarian answer would be that the movement arose at the end of the 1,260 years, the beginning of the "time of the end," which many dated to 1793 or 1798. Yet these dates were events in the French Revolution. W. H. Oliver writes of "Responses to Revolution."²¹ Was the crisis felt by many Anglicans and others, concomitant or cause of millenarian searches?

Three influences worked on Edward Irving (1792-1834), a key player in Premillennialism: a concern for social welfare and justice, a very conservative political outlook, and Premillennialism. All these are brought out in his writings. His deep desire for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in preparation for the Advent caught him up in the

¹⁸Garrett, 146.

¹⁹Garrett, 156-161.

²⁰Oliver, 49.

²¹Oliver, 42-67; W. Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (London: Black, 1970), 1:36.

“prophesyings” which began in Scotland, spread to his own London congregation, and would contribute to his ruin. Sandeen stated that J. N. Darby’s doctrine of the ruin of the church was shaped by early-nineteenth-century social conditions, although Darby never realized this.²²

Is it true, then, to say that the Premillennialists were frightened men, pessimists? David Brown, a notable Postmillennialist, believed temperament or training predisposed to Post- or Premillennialism.²³ Henry Drummond, Edward Irving, and the group that met in the Albury prophetic conferences were concerned with “the apostate nation, inter-related social, political, religious and moral disorders, despair at the present situation, hope only over the bridge of calamity, judgement, wrath and purification, the saving power of a faithful remnant, and the millennium as the ultimate righter of wrongs.”²⁴ They repeatedly denounced evangelicals, religious societies, and working-class missionaries.²⁵ Drummond and Irving hint clearly that they were ready for some radical break with tradition. The land was “ripening for destruction.” Persecution could be expected. Infidelity was increasing among the lower orders, and among the higher orders, infidelity “of a less offensive character” to fastidious clergy. Infidelity in religion led to insubordination in social life. The new system of education was to blame—a strangely modern echo! On the other hand, the Albury group were aware of the evils of slavery abroad and social injustice at home.²⁶

Millennial expectations are often a blend of hope for the future and fear of the malign Antichrist. Paranoia rather than hope seems to fuel some groups. Traditional fear of the papacy still exists among some Protestants, but new targets present themselves to the fevered imagination.²⁷ Extreme fundamentalism often contains more fear than hope. Zeal, right-wing or left, is not a strong British characteristic, and Antichrist has a smaller role than in the American psyche.²⁸ Distrust of change and modern evils was not just a Premillennialist concern. “Chemin de fer, chemin d’enfer,” remarked Pope Gregory XVI (1831-46).

²²Oliver, 106; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 79.

²³Oliver, 68, 69; Dunton, 52.

²⁴Oliver, 141.

²⁵Drummond, 1:57, 75, 76, 136, 209-213, 360, 367; 2:348.

²⁶Drummond, 1:85-86, 252-255, 260, 261; 2:67; 3:361-363.

²⁷Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony on “False Ecumenism,” *Watching and Waiting* 25, no. 8 (October-December 1998), 124.

²⁸Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

John Kent notes that the original members of adventist and holiness groups were religion-centered people who failed to find satisfaction within their older religious bodies.²⁹ On one level there were spiritual pilgrims like J. H. Newman; among the less educated there was a population of "seekers," who moved from one small group to another.

With some notable exceptions, the majority of early-nineteenth-century writers on Bible prophecy were Anglicans; and a disproportionately large number of these, including Futurists, were educated at Trinity College, Dublin.³⁰ John Wesley (*Notes on the New Testament*, 1755) mentioned but did not promote Johann Bengel's 1836 date, and time-setting seems to have had little impact on Methodists.

Was Premillennialism a reaction in the Established Church to perceived threats? In the case of Ireland, one may speculate that Millennialism would flourish in a milieu where the Church of Ireland was an ineffectual and alien force confronting an Irish nationalism synonymous with Catholicism. Bebbington sees the belief in the personal return of Christ as "an innovation in the Evangelical world of the 1820s, . . . part of the Romantic flow into Evangelicalism. . . . Adventism was a symptom of Romanticism."³¹ Yet many of the millenarian writings were more head than heart.

Evangelicals had another interest: Sabbatarianism, which experienced a resurgence in 1827. Some writers were both evangelical millenarians and Sabbatarians—for example, Edward Bickersteth, H. M. Villiers, and Daniel Wilson.³²

John Wigley noted that the Sabbatarians of the nineteenth century appeared to come from those who had felt financial insecurity and had been threatened by new sources of wealth and political strength, and came from a highly introverted religious culture. Would this apply to the students of prophecy?³³

However, Clarke Garrett and W. H. Oliver warn against simplistic socioeconomic, sociopsychological, or "chiliasm of despair" explanations.³⁴

²⁹Kent, 307.

³⁰Sandeen, 38 no. 64, 90.

³¹Bebbington, 84, 85.

³²John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 33-35.

³³Dunton, 56, 57; "Europe's Continental Sunday has Squeezed the Spiritual Life Out of Us," *B.I.W.F. Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (July-September 1998): 13.

³⁴Cited in Hopkins, xii, xx, xxi.

Biblical Inspiration and Literalism

In evangelicalism, Word plays a higher role than sacrament. Finding history written in predictive prophecy presupposes an infallible Bible. But how should the Bible be understood? In the 1820s a new doctrine of biblical literalism was accepted by many evangelicals. Prophetic interpretation reinforced the need for an inerrant text.³⁵ Literal interpretation (with such conventions as the year/day principle and the symbolic nature of the apocalyptic menagerie) must not deny a spiritual application.³⁶ The temptation to unbridled symbolism was too strong for J. H. Frere, who ventured into numerology, squares, and geometrical progression, a minefield where few followed.³⁷ Comparing Scripture with Scripture would unlock the interpretative door. The literal interpretation was proved correct empirically by finding events to fit the prediction. On the basis of fulfilled prophecy the exegete could use the key to unlock the future.

This high view of Scripture was undermined by critical scholarship, "German neologism," and philosophy. Hegelian thought "supplied the key concept of the whole era, the principle of evolution, long before 1859."³⁸ Although F. D. Strauss' *Life of Jesus* appeared in English in 1846, it was not until Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Essays and Reviews* (1860) that the storm broke, made all the worse by the fact that all but one of the essayists were Anglican clergy. Daniel was redated to ca. 166 B.C., and the Revelation was treated as merely another example of the apocalyptic genre.

The new views were not ultimately resisted, except by comparatively small movements, such as the Christadelphians, Plymouth Brethren, and determined minorities within mainstream churches.³⁹ Millennialism depended on biblical inerrancy, so it is not surprising to find men like Bishop J. C. Ryle and W. R. Fremantle defending both. The British-Israel World Federation held to "the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures." Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony deplored modern versions of the Bible.⁴⁰

³⁵Bebbington, 88-91; Sandeen, 107, 108 n.8; cf. Reardon, 29.

³⁶Drummond, 1:157; Fuller Gooch (1886) in Bebbington, 190; "Where the literal sense is good sense, it is the right sense," *Watching and Waiting* 25, no. 8 (October-December 1998): 125.

³⁷Drummond, 1:331-335.

³⁸Reardon, 6, 285-320.

³⁹*Christadelphian* 14 (1877): 168, 212; 18 (1881): 230; 22 (1885): 299-310; 30 (1893): 46-49; Bebbington, 188-191.

⁴⁰*Declaration of the Inspiration of the Word of God* (Oxford, 1864); *B.I.W.F. Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (October-December 1998): 8; *Watching and Waiting* 25 (October-December 1998): 128.

The Great Millennial Year

The Great Millennial Year was a Jewish eschatological speculation, which featured in some of the speculations (a loaded word!) of nineteenth-century interpreters. It appeared to give a clue to the date of the Parousia.

The first link between the six days of Creation followed by a Sabbath and 6000 years of earth's history followed by a Sabbath of 1,000 years appears in the Slavonic Enoch and was taken up by several of the Fathers. The "proof texts" are Ps 90:4 and 2 Pet 3:8. How much did this period feature in nineteenth-century calculations? Robert M. Johnston states, "All premillennialists of the nineteenth century believed in the cosmic week,"⁴¹ though this does not appear strongly in Froom's encyclopedic work. Is this because Froom was not looking for it? My own less extensive reading of sources does not reveal much emphasis on the 6,000 years. It was one of William Miller's lesser-used proofs for "about 1843," but it did not appear on the 1843 prophetic chart. The Campbellite *Millennial Harbinger* believed the 6,000 years would end in 1996, and Frederick Nolan, another Trinity Dublin man, mentioned it without stressing it.⁴²

In the 1880s some Seventh-day Adventists became interested in the millennial Sabbath, predicting the Second Advent about the end of the century, though not setting precise dates. Jehovah's Witnesses have calculated the end of the 6000 years of man's existence for the autumn of 1873, 1972, and 1975. The 1975 disconfirmation considerably discouraged many members. The approach of A.D. 2000 is a golden chance for speculation posing as calculation. For "serious Bible students the seventh Millennium which we are about to enter is of great significance," according to a British-Israelite writer.⁴³

The Secular Millennium

Nineteenth-century belief in progress, material and intellectual, fostered belief in a secular "new day dawning," even if in the case of

⁴¹LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946-1954), 1:195-196, 211, 250, 278, 359; Robert M. Johnston, "The Eschatological Sabbath in John's Apocalypse: A Reconsideration," *AUSS* 25 (Spring 1987): 39-50; Robert Johnston, "6,000 Plus 1,000: Are We Relying on Ancient Speculations to Set Time for the Advent?" *Adventist Review*, 29 October 1998, 54-56.

⁴²Froom, 4:258, 609.

⁴³*Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1966), 28-35; M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 199-200; *B.I.W.F. Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (July-September 1998): 11.

Robert Owen, Karl Marx, and others there was a tinge of biblical apocalypticism. Christian Millennialism shifts the emphasis from the "intermediate state" between death and resurrection, and from heaven to earth. The joys of heaven are difficult to depict realistically, whereas the Bible describes a material new earth (Isa 35, 65, 66; Rev 10:10-21). In an attempt to be comprehensible, Gerald Noel and Irving described a very earthly millennium. It was an alleviating hope for "poorer Christians."⁴⁴ It was not too difficult a transition from this to a secular millennium. James Elishama "Shepherd" Smith moved from preacher to Wroteite to social Millennialist. He came to believe that "whenever the fundamental character of Christianity, namely social love and equality, was received as a basis of political government, then it might be positively asserted . . . that the Messiah had begun to reign."⁴⁵ Robert Owen rejected all religions except his own understanding and increasingly identified himself as a quasimeshianic figure. Trade unions and early socialism used the language of millenarian faith. Secular churches were formed, though with limited appeal. Good times were coming, but "wait a little longer, boys, wait a little longer."

Irving and Albury

Personal magnetism rather than intellectual force made Irving notable among students of prophecy. The prophetic conferences at Albury Park, in which Irving took part, brought together a significant group of mainly Premillennialists and set a precedent for such conferences.

The Importance of Edward Irving

In his prophetic views Irving acknowledged his debt to J. H. Frere. In his published sermon, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed* (1826), Irving thought the millennium would begin in 1822-23, but this would be a spiritual, not a physical event. It may have been the effect of reading and translating Manuel de Lacunza's *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* (1827) that converted Irving to the belief in a literal, bodily return. Irving found that this seemed a "novel and strange doctrine," an innovation in the evangelical world of the 1820s. Iain Murray notes that he won over Henry Drummond (1786-1860) to his views; and became the center of a Premillennialist circle.⁴⁶ It is equally likely that Drummond

⁴⁴Oliver, 76, 78, 102.

⁴⁵Harrison, 157.

⁴⁶Bebbington, 82, 84; Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 188-192.

recruited Irving into his circle. Drummond, already deeply influenced by his experiences in Geneva, and by Lewis Way's views in *The Jewish Expositor*, 1822-23, concerning the return of the Jews to Palestine, founded the Continental Society, an itinerant missionary organization, in 1819.⁴⁷

Was belief in the personal return a novelty among evangelicals? In 1813 Dr. Bogue thought Premillennialism an oddity. Froom shows that there were many writers on prophecy before 1826, but he has concentrated on interpretation of times and symbols rather than showing the nature of the Advent expectation.⁴⁸ The truth may be that Irving brought the premillennial personal coming of Jesus from study to fervent expectation by means of the Albury conferences being the vehicle. Abstract opinions raised no opposition; fervent Advent preaching did.⁴⁹

Irving accepted glossolalia (though he never received the gift himself) and ultimately withdrew into the Catholic Apostolic Church, in which he was to be upstaged by Drummond. His Christology also damaged the Millennialist cause. From personal pain he exclaimed, "To have more light in divine things than his fellows is the crucifixion of a man if he be meek, and the driving him mad if he be without meekness."⁵⁰

The Albury Conferences

The Albury Conferences were convened by Henry Drummond, a wealthy banker, annually from 1826 to 1830 at his country estate. Of the forty-four who attended, twenty-six were clergy: nineteen Anglican, two Dissenters, one Moravian, and four Church of Scotland. The conferences prepared the way for J. N. Darby and the Catholic Apostolic Church, both in withdrawal and doctrine. Albury again foreshadowed the Catholic Apostolic Church by asserting that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased because the faith of the church grew cold and dead. Lady Powerscourt, influenced by Irving, hosted conferences in Ireland, 1831-1833, which were significant for the number of interdenominational participants, about four hundred in 1831, and J. N. Darby's presence.⁵¹

Five Restorationist Groups

Restorationist is used here to mean a body of beliefs that claimed to go back to NT practice and belief, without later corruptions. As noted earlier,

⁴⁷Bebbington, 83.

⁴⁸Murray, 187, 188; Bebbington, 184; Froom, 3:283-297.

⁴⁹*Dialogues*, 3:416.

⁵⁰*Dialogues*, 2:333.

⁵¹*Dialogues*, 1:361, 370, 379; Sandeen, 34-36, 61-62.

Restorationism is one of the possible reactions to a sense of social, religious, and moral crisis. A return to gospel belief, order, and simplicity was seen as a prerequisite for a millennial life, whether before or after the Advent.

The Catholic Apostolic Church

The Catholic Apostolic Church (CAC) was a sequel to Albury, but was only indirectly Irving's child. Besides tongues, there seems to have been time-setting among Irving's followers, who provided the early members of the CAC.⁵² His acceptance of tongues, his lack of leadership, and his temperament allowed a movement to arise which marginalized him. The charismatics who led the CAC were restorationists with a difference, a blend of ecstatic gifts and adapted High Anglican ritual. By its decision not to appoint new apostles as the original twelve died off, the movement condemned itself to what it calls the time of silence. Two splendid neo-Gothic churches, in Albury and Gordon Square, London, remain as architectural memorials.

Churches of Christ (Campbellites)

The disunity in the Scottish Secession Church, of which he was a minister, led Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) to dislike sectarianism. Preaching a very simple creed, Campbell and his son Alexander (1788-1866) founded the Disciples of Christ in America in 1832, once again demonstrating that those who denounce sects often end by founding them. The Campbells' paper, *The Millennial Harbinger* (1830-1864), was reprinted in part in the *Christian Messenger and Reformer*, later *British Millennial Harbinger*. A number of Restorationist groups coalesced to form a British Campbellite movement. Some Campbellites became Millerites, notably in Nottingham, as Miller's eschatology was more clearly defined. Disconfirmation sent a number back to the Campbellites.⁵³ The *Gospel Banner*, another Campbellite paper, invited articles from advocates of both the spiritual reign and personal reign of Christ. The Churches of Christ were able to survive, as their looser eschatology was not subject to successive disconfirmations. Membership peaked at 16,596 in 1930. The fact that the Disciples of Christ magazine in 1917 mentioned a member's fascination with millenarian speculations suggests a shift away from these interests.⁵⁴

⁵²Robert Baxter, *Narrative of Facts Characterizing the Supernatural Manifestations in Members of Mr. Irving's Congregation: And Other Individuals in England and Scotland, and Formerly in the Writer Himself*, 2d. ed. (London: Nisbet, 1833), 18, 19.

⁵³Dunton, 311-317.

⁵⁴*Bible Advocate*, 30 November 1917, 571.

Plymouth Brethren

Plymouth Brethren, dominated by their chief founder, John Nelson Darby, have had an influence on Christianity out of all proportion to their numbers, attracting able writers and scholars. Dispensationalism and the "any time" rapture of the Church have a greater urgency than when there is a sequence of signs to watch. Dispensationalism, a form of Futurism, was making strong headway by the 1850s. It is now the dominant eschatological theory among evangelicals, although Darby's ecclesiology has not found wide acceptance. The Scofield Reference Bible (1909) has been influential in disseminating Dispensationalism.

Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony

Benjamin Wills Newton, an associate with Darby in Plymouth, disagreed with him over the rapture. The parting came in 1845.⁵⁵ It is less well known that the works of B. W. Newton, S. P. Tregelles (the textual scholar), and others (i.e., a reprint of Andrew Bonar's *The Development of Antichrist*, 1853) are preserved and promoted by The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, which is "Reformed, Protestant, Puritan, Prophetical, Expository, Doctrinal." The first of its seven listed objects is "To teach the nearing approach of our Lord's return." The manifesto sets out more detailed beliefs. The "times of the Gentiles" will end at the Second Advent, and Israel will be converted nationally at that time.⁵⁶ *Watching and Waiting* (which commenced in 1918, incorporating *Perilous Times* [began 1899]), frequently includes reprints of earlier articles, including the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* (QJP). The handover of Hong Kong to the Chinese was seen as a demonstration of B. W. Newton's accuracy of interpretation.⁵⁷

The Latter-day Saints (Mormons)

The LDS are *sui generis* in the authority given to Joseph Smith's writing. Parley Pratt, a leading Mormon, met some English immigrants in Canada who had been influenced by Edward Irving. He was struck by similarities in the teachings: general apostasy of the church after apostolic times, the need for divine authority in church organization, renewal of the gifts of the Spirit, the

⁵⁵Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren, 1825-1850* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1867), 231, 236.

⁵⁶*Watching and Waiting* 25, no. 1 (January-March 1997): 4, 5; George H. Fromow, ed., *Teachers of the Faith and Future*, 2d. ed. (Chelmsford, Eng: Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1969), 15-22, 44-46, 165-170.

⁵⁷*Watching and Waiting* 25, no. 8 (October-December 1998): 120-124; 25, no. 4 (October-December 1997): 62.

gathering of Israel, and the premillennial Advent. The Mormon mission to England arrived in 1837, and by 1840 there were 4,000 believers, peaking in 1851 at 33,000. Millerites were sometimes mistaken for Mormons. Both groups appealed to millennial expectations, although as time went by, the Mormons replaced time with space as they encouraged emigration. By 1890, some 55,000 had left for America. Some reasons for Mormon success in England were a lively paper, *The Latter-day Saints Millennial Star*, beginning in 1840; strong organization; stories of miraculous healings; and news from America seeming to offer great opportunities.⁵⁸

William Miller's Family, Then and Now

Although they might not all care to admit it, there is a cluster of denominations that may be called Miller's children or stepchildren.

Millerite Adventists

Millerite literature was circulating in England by 1841. Robert Winter, an Englishman converted in America to Miller's views, found an interest already awakened. Winter was followed by other Millerite evangelists, some returning expatriates, some converted in England. Short-lived papers were published, some known only by the title, as no copies have survived. Up to 250,000 pieces of literature may have been given out, and a following of two- to three-thousand believers was built up. No congregational records seem to have survived.

The movement disintegrated around 1848 for lack of leadership and concerted effort. Successive disconfirmations made the believers vulnerable to the confident teaching of Dr. John Thomas, founder of the Christadelphians, and also to the Mormons. Help from America, when it came in 1846, was too little and too late. There were fourteen or fifteen congregations at one time, some of them recorded in the Religious Census of 1851. None seems to have survived long after this, except Piltown.⁵⁹

The Advent Christian Church

These Millerite survivors kept in touch with the Piltown congregation. Miles Grant visited England in the 1870s and early 1880s, and established a church in Wimbledon which survived into the 1980s. In 1916 there were five

⁵⁸Parley P. Pratt, *Voice of Warning, and Instruction to All People* (Manchester, 1854); Dunton, 317-330; Harrison, 176-192.

⁵⁹Louis Billington, "The Millerite Adventists in Great Britain, 1840-1950," *The Disappointed*, Jonathan Butler and Ronald L. Numbers, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 59-77; Dunton, 334-345.

affiliated churches with 182 members. There was little growth, as the policy was not to proselytize from other churches, but to "instil the Advent doctrine into the churches." These believers in other denominations "do not dare to come out and ally themselves with the weak churches."⁶⁰

Seventh-day Adventists

It is noteworthy that, so far as can be traced, there was no connection between any surviving Millerites and the arrival of Seventh-day Adventists in Britain. The tiny Sabbatarian Adventist group in America did not have the resources to bring their new understandings to the Millerites in Britain. In any case, they would have found no mailing list. British Millerism faded away in the hiatus between 1848 and 1860, when the first Seventh-day Adventist literature arrived in England. As with the Millerites, literature preceded the evangelist, but when J. N. Andrews made the first official visit in 1874, he found little interest and worked with Seventh Day Baptists. The enthusiastic reports of a layman, William Ings, returning to visit relatives in 1878, led to a sponsored mission that year. From its earliest years, the Seventh-day Adventist cause in Britain was weakened by emigration to America. That was the place to receive training, but very few ever returned. Ellen G. White, visiting Europe in 1887-1888, recognized that it was extremely difficult to win and hold Seventh-day Adventists in Britain, though the early members sold an extraordinary amount of literature. Growth has always been slow but steady.⁶¹

Christadelphians

Dr. John Thomas, an English emigrant to America, was for a while attracted to the teachings of Alexander Campbell, breaking with him in 1844. Thomas may have been influenced by William Miller, but never acknowledged any connection. The Second Advent was predicted for 1868 (a favorite date with millennialists) and the resultant delay was explained by incomplete chronology. There was "no need of much discouragement at this." Could the day of the Lord be hastened? 2 Peter 3:12 refers to the ardor of the believers, not shortening the time. There must be a set number of faithful before the time. God has so organized that there will be the right number at the right time.⁶²

⁶⁰*World's Crisis*, 4 March 1903, 5; A. C. Johnson, *Advent Christian Church* (Boston, 1918), 553, 560, 561.

⁶¹Hugh Dunton et al., *Heirs of the Reformation* (Grantham: Stanborough Press, 1997), 30-43.

⁶²*Christadelphian* 17 (1880): 459-461; 18 (1881): 1-5; 19 (1882): 515-516; 22 (1885): 390-396; 26 (1889): 479-485; 35 (1898): 202.

Some elements were characteristic of the withdrawing sect. Marriage was to be endogamous. Trade unions were best avoided, for certain temporal advantages to the members would be outweighed by other considerations.⁶³ Their literature sets no date for the Advent, but it "will be swift, sudden and unexpected," heralded by a great tribulation and the restoration of Israel in 1948. At the Advent, Christ will reign for 1,000 years from Jerusalem, followed by a final desperate rebellion. "Our lives and our teaching should not be a denial of the comment that the Advent is still awaited with eagerness, but with less direct confidence than marked the early period of the body." Much had worked out differently from Thomas' predictions, but they had not failed on the whole.⁶⁴

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Society first commenced publishing in Britain in 1881. It grew from 5,496 publishers in 368 companies (1935) to 64,434 publishers and 905 congregations in 1972. The average congregation had grown from fifteen to seventy-one members. Jehovah's Witnesses are still remarkable for their door-to-door zeal, uniformity of teaching, and single-minded devotion to Kingdom affairs. Their ubiquity makes a longer mention unnecessary.⁶⁵

Bible Students after the Schism

British dissenters from Judge Rutherford's leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses organized in 1919. In 1930 there were around 240 regular assemblies with a conservatively estimated four thousand active members. By 1939 some were arguing for a future Advent as an instantaneous occurrence, with the church being caught up. A journal, *Maranatha*, devoted to these views, ran from 1952 for thirty-six years. An annual joint conference of both groups, beginning in 1950, was discontinued in 1980 because of diminishing attendance, an ominous sign. By 1970 the membership was only 60 percent of the 1930 figure, and the number of regular meetings halved. The *Bible Study Monthly* was started in 1924 to serve the seceders from the main body of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1958 it was decided to advertise it to a wider readership. Was it better to spread

⁶³*Christadelphian* 35 (1898): 201; 37 (1900): 241.

⁶⁴*One Hundred Years of the Christadelphian: A Century Review of the Magazine and Community, July 1864 to July 1964* (Birmingham, Eng: The Christadelphian, 1964), 36: 22, 23; Tecwyn Morgan, *Christ is Coming* (Birmingham, Eng: Christadelphian Publishing Office, n.d.), 9; Stanley Owen, *The Kingdom of God on Earth* (Birmingham: Christadelphian Publishing Office, n.d.), 15.

⁶⁵James A. Beckford, *The Trumpet of Prophecy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 43, 62; see Penton, cited in n. 43 above.

the message "without thought of bringing them into another fold?" In 1975 the fellowship published *Future Probation in Christian Belief*, which argued that "acceptance of Christ . . . must be achieved during the period between the first preaching of the Gospel at Pentecost and the end of the Day of Grace at the close of the Millennial Age." The last large-scale convention was in 1986. But "the dawn gleams on the horizon."⁷¹

The Worldwide Church of God

Herbert W. Armstrong was at one time a minister of the Church of God (Seventh-day), a very early offshoot or cognate of Seventh-day Adventists, and he certainly was directly acquainted with Seventh-day Adventism. His autobiography claims that he was indebted to no one for his doctrines, which included British Israelism. The church began broadcasting to Britain in 1953. The listeners provided the large crowds attending Armstrong's 1954 lecture tour in Belfast, Glasgow, Manchester, and London. The first church in Britain was organized in 1956. The free magazine *Plain Truth* was widely available. A European headquarters and Ambassador College were established northwest of London in 1959. Armstrong was notable for the way he read himself and his organization into Bible prophecy. Although authoritarian, he never claimed more than human status. There is a clear parallel with Jehovah's Witnesses in this respect. With the death of the founder and change of doctrinal emphasis, the movement has fragmented.

The Extent of Millenarianism to 1845 And Its Subsequent Decline

How widespread and influential were the "students of prophecy"? In 1849 the *Evangelical Magazine* proposed that the great interest in prophetic subjects shown by many good men must indicate "some special periods of prophetic development close at hand."⁷²

Extent

From the publication years of the prophetic journals we might conclude that interest peaked in the 1840s. E. B. Elliott (1793-1875), author of the 2,500-page, four-volume *Horae Apocalypticæ* (1844), felt that Premillennialism was no longer a strange doctrine as in 1827, but was "gradually marching on to triumph." In 1845 Mourant Brock, an Anglican clergyman, wrote of seven

⁷¹A. O. Hudson, *Bible Students in Britain* (Hounslow, Eng: Bible Fellowship Union, 1989), 181-194; Beckwith, 25, 44, n.3.

⁷²Dunton, 57-58.

hundred Anglican ministers preaching Premillennialism. Joshua Himes, a Millerite leader visiting Britain in 1846, felt that agitation on the subject had waned since Irving's time. The truth of these conflicting views may depend on a definition of terms. There were 150 works on prophecy in the first half of the century, with the peak in the 1840s, but Froom may not have searched so assiduously the period after ca. 1849.⁷³ However, books on prophecy continued to appear.

Within the Church of England the study of apocalyptic prophecy was largely confined to the evangelical wing. The Broad Church and High Church (admittedly inexact categories) had other concerns. To a considerable extent, the decline of the evangelicals coincided with the decline in Premillennialism. The later revival was on a non- or interdenominational basis. It is noteworthy that the Evangelical Alliance, formed in London in 1846, mentioned neither Second Coming nor millennium in its statement of belief.⁷⁴ There were a number of local societies for the investigation of prophecy in the 1820s and 1830s. It is difficult to assess how far Premillennialist writers and preachers, Millerites apart, moved their hearers to a sense of urgency, although Edmund Gosse (*Father and Son*, 1907) recorded the eager "any day" hope of the Plymouth Brethren. The Millerite movement in Britain probably had little impact on the majority of the "students of prophecy."

Millennial expectations among the various Nonconformist bodies seem to have been largely on the fringes, and so are not well documented. The battle against disabilities and then the disestablishment of the state church absorbed a great deal of energy.

Decline

The historicist school was open to attack from many quarters: association with "Irvingism," the Oxford Movement, scholarly biblical and scientific criticism. Attacks on Premillennialists began even in the 1820s, urging that more sobriety, humility, or caution was needed. The learned and pious were silent on the topic. There were criteria for the proper study of prophecy. The *Evangelical Magazine* attacked Irving and his circle, especially when tongues appeared, but in the name of Postmillennialism.⁷⁵ Speculation was going too far. Critics argued that if

⁷³Murray, 197; Dunton, 58; Froom, 3: 283, 707, 744.

⁷⁴Denis Fortin, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism in Early Adventist Beliefs," *AUSS* 36 (Spring 1998): 51-67.

⁷⁵*Christian Observer*, May 1823, 281; July 1823, 408-410; Oliver, 73, 96, 97; cf. *The Christian Herald*, Dublin, September 1833, 194-200, 250, 251.

the prophecies were as clear as the "students of prophecy" claimed, then there should be some unity on interpretation. Instead, readers were confused by the endless varieties, all claiming scriptural warrant. Was it 2,300 or 2,400 days in Dan 8:14, for example? Failure to agree, and the polemics involved, seemed to reduce a "saving doctrine" to an intellectual puzzle. James Grant had a good deal of fun at the expense of the millennialists in his acutely observed *The End of All Things: Or, The Coming and Kingdom of Christ*.⁷⁶

Several dates may be used to indicate a decline or change in millenarian interest. There is some indication of a peak and decline in the 1830s. The *Christian Herald: A Monthly Magazine Chiefly on Subjects Connected with Prophecy* closed in 1835, after five years. The reasons were listed: a diminishing subscription list; and questioning of the year-day principle, the papal Antichrist, and the validity of the decree of A.D. 533 as a significant date. Further, there were extremism, "mutual recriminations," and prejudice against the study of prophecy.⁷⁷ Other journals were *The Investigator* (1831-1836) and *The Morning Watch* (1829-1833), the organ of the Albury group. There were, of course, many short-lived religious journals in the period. It might be instructive to plot their titles, interests, and years of publication to see what patterns emerge.

The manifestation of tongues in Irving's congregation helped to discredit the Albury group and led to the founding of the Catholic Apostolic Church. *Modern Fanaticism Unveiled* (anonymous, 1831) attacked both tongues and the overemphasis on prophetic interpretation.

Both Pre- and Postmillennialists (except the Millerites) generally agreed on the continuing and future importance of the Jews in the end time. Both Pre- and Postmillennialists were also agreed on the need for missions, despite the claim by an opponent that Premillennialism "paralyzes exertion for the spiritual benefit of mankind."⁷⁸ Edward Bickersteth, a millenarian writer, recognized the danger of passively waiting for the Advent.⁷⁹ Iain Murray considers that Premillennialism leaves no hope for winning vast numbers to Christ. The imminent Advent "totally forbids all working for earthly objects distant in time."⁸⁰

⁷⁶James Grant, *The End of All Things: Or, The Coming & Kingdom of Christ*, 4th ed., 3 vols. (London, Darton, 1866).

⁷⁷Froom, 3:587, 743-747.

⁷⁸Oliver, 80; cf. Grant, 1:xxi.

⁷⁹Dunton, 53.

⁸⁰F. W. Newman in Murray, 203, 205, 264; on Moody, Premillennialism and social action, see Kent, 358-359.

Yet Millenarianism and mission have gone hand in hand. Do millenarians concentrate on the conversion of individuals, rather than planting institutions, and directly inhibit social action? One cannot generalize here. The Seventh-day Adventist approach is radically different from that of the Christadelphians and Jehovah's Witnesses, though all three groups have some characteristics of a withdrawing sect.

The Anglican S. R. Maitland's sustained attack on the year-day principle evoked less response from the "students of prophecy" than the Scottish Free church minister David Brown's rebuttal of Premillennialism, perhaps because Brown accepted historicist principles. Maitland was also difficult to answer as, in naval parlance, he "carried too many guns for his enraged opponents."⁸¹ Maitland's Futurism, followed by James H. Todd, J. H. Newman, and William Burgh, served to deflect attention from Rome, the traditional Protestant Antichrist. The Futurist views of J. N. Darby, very different from Maitland's, gradually gained currency among evangelicals during the 1840s.

The year 1844 was clearly a watershed in American Premillennialism, seriously impugning date-setting. Kai Arasola considers the Millerite movement "the end of historicism."⁸² However, the Millerite "Great Disappointment," October 1844, attracted little notice in Britain. It damaged the small British Millerite group, but not irreparably. William Cuninghame wrote in 1843 that the "voice of prophecy . . . has been, in some measure, quenched by Irvingism and Puseyism."⁸³ *The Prophetic Herald, and Churchman's Witness for Christ*, edited by John Baylee, lasted only two volumes, 1845-1847. More enduring was the *QJP*, edited by Horatius Bonar, a convert of Irving's, which ran 1849-1873. Sandeen considers this the best of the prophetic journals. Bonar declared, "The circle of enquirers is widening every day,—interest is rising, prejudices are breaking down, and even the unwilling are compelled to listen. . . . The increase of inquirers, especially in Scotland, during the last five years, is most cheering."⁸⁴

The *QJP* was open to a variety of views, though hostile to J. N. Darby. Historicism faded from the *QJP* in the sixties, and Futurism and dispensations with the two-stage Advent became the predominant teaching.⁸⁵ *The Rainbow*, 1864-1875, published by William Leask, spread Darbyite views. After 1873

⁸¹Samuel Roffey Maitland, *An Enquiry into the Grounds on which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John Has Been Supposed to Consist of 1260 Years* (London, Hatchard and Son, 1926), and subsequent works on the same theme; David Brown, *Christ's Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1859); Oliver, 79.

⁸²Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism* (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1990); Sandeen, 60.

⁸³Froom, 3:372.

⁸⁴Sandeen, 84; *QJP* 1 (1849): iv, cited in Sandeen, 81.

⁸⁵Sandeen, 87.

Leask's emphasis switched to annihilationism. In Torquay, R. A. Purdon edited the millenarian periodical, *The Last Vials*, from 1846 to 1872.

The 1850s were "an age of profound subjectivity," of "heart speaking to heart," rather than reasoned argument.⁸⁶ "Later in the century not only the doctrine of hell, but also the very possibility of any future life appeared increasingly implausible," and the blood Atonement was questioned.⁸⁷ These doctrines seemed to go against the sense of natural justice. Was God's law harsher than the reformed criminal law? The Victorian church was embattled within and without.⁸⁸ Millenarianism was the least of its worries or concerns. Some Premillennialists introduced the concept of a repentance after death.⁸⁹ The divide between saved and lost, saint and reprobate, seemed too sharp.

Drummond opened the door to Futurism by suggesting that they should not overlook the views of Ben Ezra and S. R. Maitland that the greater part of the Apocalypse was yet to be fulfilled in a literal period of 1260 days, a double fulfilment of the prophecy.⁹⁰ Joseph Tyso declared himself a Futurist in 1838, after fifty years of historicism, though he had not accepted the historicist schemes of others. G. S. Faber had changed from Pre- to Postmillennialism by 1851.⁹¹

Acceptance of historical-critical scholarship, the influence of Schleiermacher, and the philosophical implications of evolution were inimical to Millenarianism. Beatrice Neall states, "If we destroy protology [the doctrine of beginnings], we destroy eschatology."⁹²

After 1845

Sandeen divided his study of British Millenarianism into two phases, 1800-1845 and 1845-1878. After this, his main emphasis is on events in America. Premillennialism did not die after 1845, although it became increasingly

⁸⁶Thomas, 57.

⁸⁷Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 13, 14, 29.

⁸⁸Peter T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England, 1868-1882* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969).

⁸⁹A. O. Hudson, *Future Probation in Christian Belief* (Hounslow, Eng: Bible Fellowship Union, 1975).

⁹⁰Drummond, 2:377.

⁹¹J. A. Oddy, "Eschatological Prophecy in the English Theological Tradition, c. 1700-c.1840" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1982), 150-152; *Church of England Quarterly Review* 30 (1851): 266.

⁹²Beatrice S. Neall, "Prophecy—What's It All About?: You Don't Have to Be a Scholar to Appreciate Its Message," *Adventist Review*, 29 October 1998, 12.

diversified. E. B. Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticæ*, which went through five editions, introduced secondary dates for events fulfilling the time prophecies. Despite the hedged bets, disconfirmation came in the end.

H. M. Villiers, Rector of St George's Bloomsbury, London, hosted an annual series of twelve Millennialist lectures which ran from 1843 to 1858. Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850), in his preface to the 1843 collection, noted that all [twelve speakers] expect a millennium yet to come . . . the personal return of the Lord before that millennium . . . the political restoration of the Jews to their own land, the first resurrection, and the glory of the saints before the millennium.⁹³ W. R. Fremantle noted wistfully in 1854 that "no new field has been opened to awaken fresh expectations, or excite curiosity. . . some may feel disappointment that more progress has not been made, and that more light has not been given in the elucidation of long considered truth. Still, we may be thankful that no ground has been lost." The last sentence sounds a little like whistling in the dark.⁹⁴

Villiers, by now Bishop of Carlisle, was thankful "that the subject of Prophecy . . . obtains increased prayerful attention, from the Church. . . . The Lord is at hand . . . now is the time for working for the Lord himself, by zealously endeavouring to bring in the whole number of the elect."⁹⁵ On the other side, Bishop Waldegrave had established the Bampton Lectures in 1854 to oppose the Premillennialism of a possible majority of Evangelical clergy.⁹⁶

The Prophecy Investigation Society (was this the same society founded by Frere in 1826?) began its twice-yearly meetings in November 1842, its membership including many of the Bloomsbury lecturers.⁹⁷ The society's *Centenary Book*, as might be expected, continued to interpret current events as fulfilment of prophecy. The suggestion for rebuilding Babylon as the commercial center of the world would appeal to Saddam Hussein. The 1,000 years might begin in A.D. 2000. The *Bible Magazine*, edited by John Bayford, was keeping alive the prophetic interest in 1848.⁹⁸

⁹³Edward Bickersteth, *The Second Coming, the Judgment, and the Kingdom of Christ* (London: Nisbet, 1843), vi.

⁹⁴W. R. Fremantle, ed., *Present Times and Future Prospects* (London: John Farquhar Shaw, 1854), vi, vii.

⁹⁵H. M. Villiers, *The Titles of Christ* (1857), iii, iv.

⁹⁶Bebbington, 85; but cf. Murray, 285, n.21; Froom 3:498-500.

⁹⁷Bebbington, 85. The Women's Branch of the Society was still going in 1913. An Edinburgh Society met in 1841.

⁹⁸*Facing the Future: 15 Studies in the Groundwork of Prophecy in the Old and New Testaments* (London: CSSM, 1943), 92, 99-101, 108; *Church of England Quarterly Review* 23 (April 1848): 452.

There was a flood of literature on prophetic subjects in 1860, following Italian unification. Islam and Rome both seemed about to fall.⁹⁹ One of the most enduring publications was *Coming Events and Present Duties* by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), later bishop of Liverpool. The indestructible optimism of some expositors is illustrated by the career of Michael Baxter (1834-1910), son of Robert, a disillusioned Catholic Apostolic follower. Baxter, editor of *The Christian Herald and Signs of the Times* (1867-1875) combining historicist Millenarianism with belief in the secret rapture, "managed to predict incorrect dates from 1861 to 1908, presumably being saved by death from an infinite series."¹⁰⁰ His *Forty Future Wonders* sold 126,000 copies, and the fifteenth edition asserted the age would end with the last day of the Jewish Passover week, May 2, 1929, or April 9, 1931.¹⁰¹

In 1873 there was a London Prophetic Conference chaired by the Earl of Shaftesbury. Udenominational conferences were held at Barnet and then Mildmay Park from 1856 on. The topics were personal holiness, foreign missions, home missions, and the Lord's coming. Three Mildmay Second Advent Conferences were held: "Things That Shall Come to Pass" (1876), "Our God Shall Come" (London, 1878), and "The Sure Word of Prophecy" (1879). A variety of views was expressed with at least six Plymouth Brethren contributing. Mildmay and the Keswick movement led to conventions in many parts of the country.¹⁰² At Clapham, the former evangelical stronghold, an annual conference for the Study of Prophetic Truth was held from 1884 until at least 1891.¹⁰³

The conference initiative was noted and taken up in America. British authors also found readers in America, and may have been influential. A. R. Faussett, Canon of York; Andrew Bonar; and Archibald G. Brown were among the speakers in Chicago, 1886.¹⁰⁴ Edward H. Bickersteth's poem, *Yesterday, Today, and Forever* (1866), a mini "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained," went through seventeen editions by 1885. Henry Grattan Guinness (1835-1910), a Nonconformist, published nine books on prophecy between 1878 and 1905. The appetite for such books is evident

⁹⁹Kent, 95.

¹⁰⁰Sandeen, 59, 98.

¹⁰¹Michael Paget Baxter, *Forty Future Wonders of Scripture Prophecy* (London: Christian Herald, 1923), 480.

¹⁰²Froom, 4:1193, 1194; Bebbington, 159-161.

¹⁰³Sandeen, 145, 147; Froom, 4:1204.

¹⁰⁴*Prophetic Studies of the International Prophetic Conference, 1886* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1886).

in the number of editions, eleven in Britain for one of his earlier books. He also found a good market in America. His later works had fewer editions, a possible sign of decay of interest in the subject. The dogma of papal infallibility and the end of the papacy's temporal power (1870) seem to have been the spur to Grattan Guinness's writing. Numerology was introduced; 1,260 and 2,300 are supposedly perfect astronomical cycles, following De Cheseau's theory. Four termini were propounded for the 2520 years, the "seven times" of Dan 4:23: 1751, 1798, 1844, 1923, all valid according to his astronomical theories. The six-thousand-year theory surfaced. It is hard to take Guinness seriously.¹⁰⁵

Light for the Last Days, written by Guinness and his wife (first edition 1886), was reissued in a new edition, edited and revised by E. P. Cachelmalle, author of *Present Day Papers on Prophecy*.¹⁰⁶ Guinness considered E. B. Elliott's work "the most important and valuable commentary on the Apocalypse."¹⁰⁷

Millenarians are not necessarily oblivious of the theological currents of the day, although they may not always be conscious of holding sets of ideas that may seem to sit together incongruously. F. B. Meyer, a leading Baptist, a favorite speaker at the Keswick conventions, and a member of the Advent Testimony and Prophetic Witness, nevertheless "could strike the immanentist note within history as forcibly as any on occasion." Meyer showed the tension between concentrating solely on the Second Advent on the one hand, and the need for social action on the other.¹⁰⁸ There is still a tension between concentrating on individual conversion, and combining spiritual and humanitarian concerns.

In the closing years of the last century and the early twentieth, several currents were at work within evangelicalism. First was a reaction to the growing acceptance of biblical criticism, with emphasis on verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Second, revived creation-evolution debate in the 1920s, although the creationist party remained very small. Third came the eclipse of the social gospel, in part because it was thought to be socialist and associated with unbelief. The adherence of Christabel Pankhurst, formerly a prominent suffragette, to the Advent Testimony movement (see below), may be an example of disillusion with the political process.

¹⁰⁵Henry Grattan Guinness, *The Approaching End of the Age: Viewed in the Light of History, Prophecy and Science*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1880), vii, 230, 281, 338, 373-374, 388-460, 577. Frere and Cuninghame had earlier shown a fascination for cycles, fractions, and squares (Froom, 3:365).

¹⁰⁶E. P. Cachelmalle, *Present Day Papers on Prophecy* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1918).

¹⁰⁷H. G. Guinness, *History in the Light of Prophecy* (1905), 297.

¹⁰⁸Keith W. Clements, *Lovers of Discord* (London: SPCK, 1988), 24-25.

A fourth trend was the fading of Postmillennialism into a mere aspiration. A fifth was the revival of Premillennialism until it became the dominant belief among those who studied prophecy. "The Spirit declares the Second Advent of Jesus to be drawing near."¹⁰⁹ Sixth, the Keswick holiness movement became intertwined with Advent teaching, giving the latter a larger platform. From Murray's viewpoint, "The mood of pessimism had come to settle heavily among many evangelical Christians at the dawning of the twentieth century."¹¹⁰ Historicism lived on, but Darbyite Futurism was the majority teaching. Futurists in particular seem to have been against social engagement by the church. Yet they remained socially conservative.

Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement— A Reaction to World War I?

The original statement of belief, November 8, 1917, declared: "That the present Crisis points to the close of the Times of the Gentiles and the any-moment literal appearance of the Lord. The completed Church will be translated to be 'forever with the Lord.' Israel will be restored to its own land in unbelief, and afterwards be converted by the Appearance of Christ on its behalf." (General Allenby had captured Jerusalem from the Turks that year.) Human schemes of reconstruction must be subsidiary to the Second Coming of the Lord. Under the reign of Christ, there will be a further great effusion of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh.¹¹¹

In September 1919 the movement published an analysis of its 1,103 members: 395 male, 708 female, 2 bishops, 132 clergy and other ministers, 18 military and naval officers; 54 percent lived in Greater London and the Home Counties. Speakers identified include Anglicans, a Congregationalist, Baptists, and the Methodist Dinsdale Young, who was also interested in British Israelism.¹¹² The current periodical *Your Tomorrow* incorporates *Prophetic News and Israel's Watchman*.

Other Movements

British Israelism

British Israelism, an interdenominational movement, is hard to classify. It is the meeting of several streams of thought: the English as the elect nation, concern for the role of Jewry in end-time events, and

¹⁰⁹*The Seventh Evangel* (Plymouth), 18 October 1911, 3.

¹¹⁰Murray, 206.

¹¹¹*Advent Witness*, November 1917.

¹¹²*Advent Witness*, September 1919.

speculation on the descendants of the ten "lost tribes."

Bishop John Jewel (1522-1571), John Foxe (1516-1587), and John Milton (1608-1674) wrote of England as a nation favored by God. John Sadler laid the foundation of the British Israel theory in *The Rights of the Kingdom* (1649). Lewis Way, a barrister turned parson, was the prime mover in the revived interest in the Jews in the early nineteenth century. The future return of the Jews to Palestine was accepted by most millenarians and a number of nonmillenarians, including S. T. Coleridge.¹¹³ Ralph Wedgwood, a London stationer, wrote in 1813 that Napoleon, the Antichrist, would be defeated by Russia, the power from the North, and "'British Israel' . . . the peculiar possession of the Messiah since the time of the Druids." Other writers echoed this.¹¹⁴

British Israel manuscripts were known to Drummond and John Bayford. Were these precursors of John Wilson's *Our Israelitish Origin* (1840)? Or was this the survival of seventeenth-century ideas?¹¹⁵ Wilson's idea, the millenarian interest in the conversion of the Jews as a people, and Premillennialism all combined in *The Time of the End and Prophetic Witness for Christ, Recognising the Israelitish Origin of the English Nation and Advocating the Pre-millennial Coming of the Lord and Resurrection of the Saints and the Blessed Reign over All Nations*.¹¹⁶

The apparently innocuous and eccentric theory was given potentially virulent expression by Edward Hine in a farrago of pseudoscholarship and racial arrogance. "It is absolutely impossible for England to lose any of her rightful Possessions, without doing violence to Scripture." "Aborigines of the colonies must be pushed to the corner, and are to die out." There is also crude anti-Semitism, which resurfaced in the 1930s.¹¹⁷

The millennial aspect comes out "with the near expectation of a national outpouring of the Holy Spirit." The Great Pyramid, "a visible material monument of Divine Inspiration," the Stone of Scone ("Jacob's Pillow"), and Stonehenge have not lost their fascination.¹¹⁸ Admittedly, predictions sometimes failed. "Events have not transpired in quite the way

¹¹³Sandeen, 11 n. 16.

¹¹⁴Garrett, 212; Drummond, 1:260, 319; 3:249, 250, 433; Oliver, 54.

¹¹⁵Drummond, 2: 144, 145.

¹¹⁶Nos. 1-8, 1844-1845.

¹¹⁷Edward Hine, *The English Nation Identified with the Lost House of Israel by Twenty-seven Identifications* (London: C. J. Stevenson, 1870), 17-27, 43-44, 83-84, 161, 266; Bebbington, 225.

¹¹⁸Hine, 239, 223-231, 292; Bonne Gaunt, *Stonehenge . . . A Closer Look: A Search for the Origin and Purpose of Stonehenge, Its Amazing Correlation with the Great Pyramid, the New Jerusalem, and the Universe* (New York: Bell, 1982).

he then envisaged." The time of the Advent depends on Israel's response.¹¹⁹

The British Israel movement is interdenominational, a little church within a church (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*). Dinsdale T. Young, a Methodist, and J. A. Mountain are examples of the overlap between British Israelism and the Advent Testimony Movement. George Jeffreys, cofounder of the Elim Pentecostal Church, laid increasing emphasis on the British Israel theory, a source of disagreement with the rising leadership.¹²⁰ Always a minority interest, the belief system relies heavily on nostalgia and the need of moral reformation. Only when perverted into militant white-supremacist attitudes by extremist groups outside its fellowship is it dangerous.

The Pentecostals

The Advent expectation was one component of the Holiness movements. The religious needs that led to Holiness teachings prepared the ground for Pentecostalism, which "arose in an atmosphere of fervent expectation of the second coming of Jesus,"¹²¹ as was the case in Irving's congregation. This is illustrated by the early titles of their journals. From the fissiparous nature of Pentecostalism it is not surprising that there is disagreement of details of how the end will occur. George Jeffreys expected 1932 to be the very end of time.¹²² In most Pentecostal eschatological schemes the Jewish nation and the land of Israel play a significant part.

Hollenweger noted of the Pentecostals, and it is true of other adventist groups, "As social conditions improve, the fervent expectation of the imminent second coming disappears. It is still taught in theory, but is no longer a matter of experience. . . . As the expectation of the second coming of Jesus declines in the older Pentecostal denominations, new Pentecostal churches, which once again stress the second coming, become necessary."¹²³

¹¹⁹*B.I.W.F. Quarterly* (October-December 1997): 24; A. S. Brown, *The Hidden Treasure of the Parables* (1931); H. G. Mason, writing in 1966, in *B.I.W.F. Quarterly*, 11, no. 3 (July-September 1988): 13.

¹²⁰Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London: SCM, 1972; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 199; John Wilson, "The History and Organization of British Israelism: Some Aspects of the Religious and Political Correlates of Changing Social Status" (D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1966); Bryan Wilson, *Patterns of Sectarianism* (London: Heinemann, 1967), chap. 10.

¹²¹Kent, 295; Hollenweger, 415.

¹²²*Elim Evangel* 43, no. 37 (15 September 1962): 581.

¹²³Hollenweger, 417.

Coda

The perceived significance of Millenarianism depends on the faith perspective of the viewer. Christians do not agree on the subject. Contradictory voices weaken the witness now, as in earlier years. So should Millennialism be treated as a theological aberration? Amid the "solid joys and lasting treasures" of the later nineteenth century it was easy to think so. The prophetic predictions concerning the 1840s had manifestly failed. Date-setting and the sense of imminence faded in the 1860s (another terminus for time prophecies), if not earlier, though some writers persisted in calculations. Eternally burning hell appeared morally unjust by late Victorian times. Fiery irrevocable judgment at the Second Advent was replaced by many with hopes of a second chance during the messianic era. To the adventist, of whatever stripe, the nineteenth-century movement was a torch that flickered, but is part of the present believer's heritage. Heritage, yes, but fervent hope is more doubtful. It is hard to maintain eager expectation into the third and fourth generations.

With the rise of the social scientists, Millenarianism could be coolly dissected in a search for social, economic, and psychological factors and explanations. The social scientists now have a new wave of widely varying versions of apocalypticism to deal with, many not arising from a reasoned study of the Bible, some with little or no Christian basis, some syncretistic. The evidence of paranoia in some modern (quasi-Christian?) movements seems far removed from the closely reasoned texts and arguments of most of the nineteenth-century groups studied above.

Much remains to be explored. We still do not know why a disproportionate number of the scholarly writers on prophecy were Anglicans, although suggestions have been made earlier in this essay. The Nonconformist churches, which showed little interest in adventist themes, were growing faster than the Church of England, whose evangelical wing was in decline from the mid-1860s. By 1880 church attendance was falling relative to population growth. World War I brought disillusion rather than revival.

Millenarian movements are usually small, outside the mainstream churches, or minorities within the mainstream. The revived Premillennialism of the earlier twentieth century declined from the 1960s on, disappearing from the Keswick platform, and among the Brethren, opening the way for social engagement. Iain Murray urged a return to Postmillennialism, the "Puritan Hope." In practice, many evangelicals are, for practical purposes, Amillennialists.¹²⁴ And yet, *pace* Bebbington, there is still a great expectation of the Second Advent, or the

¹²⁴Bebbington, 264.

Rapture, among a considerable sector of evangelicals. After all, the return of Christ is embodied in the Apostles' Creed. To gauge the nature and extent of Millennialism in the 1990s would take a book in itself. The temptation of time-setting for 2000 A.D. may prove irresistible, with the usual sad disillusion.