

2.2 CHURCH FATHERS

The Early Church Fathers were almost exclusively premillennialists and taught an Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus. Consider the following testimony from the Fathers. *The Epistle of Barnabus*, written late first century/early second century and regarded as equal to Scripture by Origen, denotes the Creation Week as a pattern for human history—one day equals one thousand years—six thousand years of history and the Sabbath rest on the seventh day equates to the Millennium (*The Epistle of Barnabus* 15:4-5). Papias, an early second century Bishop and disciple of John the Apostle, was recorded by Eusebius (the Early Church historian) to have believed that “there will be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth” (*Fragments of Papias VI*). Justin Martyr also stated that he was taught his premillennial beliefs from John the Apostle and cited Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 20:35-36 and Revelation 20:4-6 as references for the Millennium and Psalm 90:4 to support the one day as one thousand years belief (Falls 1965:277).

Theophilus, a second century Bishop of Antioch, spoke of a millennial state which is “intermediate between earth and heaven” (Daley *Hope* 2003:24). Both Melito, a second century Bishop of Sardis, and Hegesippus maintained a chiliastic position (*Remains of the Second and Third Centuries: Melito the Philosopher, Hegesippus, 1 ANF* 8:755, 763). *The Didache: Teaching of the 12 Apostles* addresses the Apostasy, the Rapture of the Saints, the antichrist, the Tribulation, and the Second Advent, drawing on scriptures from Matthew 24; John 5:25; Acts 1:2; 1 Corinthians 15:23, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8; and Revelation 1:7; 19:11 (*The Fathers of the Church, The Didache: Teaching of the 12 Apostles*:183-4). Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John the Apostle, was a definite premillennarian. Irenaeus was also the first to detail prophetic events after the writing of the New Testament and

gave the Church the first system of premillennial interpretation (Ladd 1956:25-26). Tertullian was an avid premillennialist in the late second and early third centuries and wrote much about the millennial kingdom, even as a defense against heresy (Tertullian *Part First: The Apology* 48).

Early Church historian Sextus Julius Africanus and N. African Bishop Commodianus both wrote about six thousand years of history and the glorious Millennium following (much like *The Epistle of Barnabus*) around AD 240 (Julius Africanus 3:18:4; Commodianus *ANF* 4:209, 211-12, 218). Hippolytus, a disciple of Irenaeus, also taught about six thousand years of history, the Second Coming and then a resurrection kingdom of saints (Ladd 1956:30-1). Nepos, a third century Egyptian Bishop, defended chiliasm against the allegorical interpretation of the Millennium (as recorded by Eusebius 7:24).

Third century Father Methodius wrote about the millennial rest after the Tribulation and equated the Millennium to the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths). Methodius also vigorously defended the premillennial view against the allegorical view of Origen (Daley *Hope* 2003:61-3). Victorinus, Latin-speaking Bishop martyred under Diocletian, formed his premillennial beliefs under Papias, Irenaeus and Methodius. He used Revelation 20-21 as his main scriptural text (Daley *Hope* 2003:65-6). Lactantius, tutor in the courts of Diocletian and Constantine, believed and taught a six thousand year history followed by one thousand years of Christ reigning on earth (Lactantius 7:14, 25). Finally, and according to J. Dwight Pentecost, Cyprian, Severus and the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea (AD 325) are cited as advocates of premillennialism (1980:373-4) - (Hebert 2004b:3-5).

This testimony may best summed up by Ladd: “With one exception [Caius] there is no Church Father before Origen who opposed the millenarian interpretation, and there is no one before Augustine whose extant writings offer a different interpretation of Revelation 20 than that

of a future earthly kingdom consonant with the natural interpretation of the language” (Ladd 1952:23). Add to this the testimony of Justin Martyr (outlined in Section 1.3.3.1 above), the balance of testimony from Daley continued in an essay entitled “Apocalypticism in Early Christian Theology” (2003), and Richard Kyle’s section on “Early Millenarian Movements” (1998:35-40), and there remains conclusive evidence that the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ was a primary doctrinal concern and hope of the Early Church.

The following Patristic writings on both advents/comings of Jesus also serve to bolster this conclusion: Tertullian in Chapter 7 of Book 3 of *The Five Books Against Marcion* (ANF 3:326-7); Origen in Chapter 29 of Book 2 of *Origen Against Celsus* (ANF 4:443); Hippolytus in sections 1, 2 and 21 of *Appendix to the Works of Hippolytus: A Discourse by the most blessed Hippolytus, bishop and martyr, on the end of the world, and on the Antichrist, and on the second coming of our lord Jesus Christ* (ANF 5:242, 247); Gregory Thaumaturgus in Sections 6, 15, 17, and 18 of Part 2 of *A Sectional Confession of Faith* (ANF 6:42, 44, 45); Chapter 69 of *Recognitions of Clement Book 1 of the Pseudo-Clementine Literature* (ANF 8:95); and Augustine in relation to resurrection in Chapters 15 and 19 of Book 1 of *Contents of Christian Doctrine: Containing a General View of the Subjects Treated in Holy Scripture* (NPNF 1-2:526-7). This hope of the Eschatological Gospel was also perpetuated in the Early Church through the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism (as a sign of fulfilling the Great Commission) and the celebration of the Christian Festivals of the church year (liturgical calendar).

During Holy Communion, the Words of Institution were repeated, as cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:26: “For as often as you eat the bread and drink this cup, *you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes*” [emphasis added]. The Lord’s Prayer was also recited, which includes “*Thy kingdom come . . . For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen*”

[emphasis added] (Schaff 2002, 2:237-8). The Eschatological Gospel may also be confirmed in Holy Communion by the Eucharistic prayer in *The Didache* 10:6 (mentioned in section 1.4.3 above), by Ignatius, “the consecrated bread *a medicine of immortality and an antidote of spiritual death*” [emphasis added] (Schaff 2002, 2:241) and by Irenaeus, “strengthens soul and *body (the germ of the resurrection body) unto eternal life*” [emphasis added] (Schaff 2002, 2:242).

As part of fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:20), “. . . and lo, *I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” [emphasis added], the major creeds of Christendom were usually recited at the baptism of new believers: “. . . *And he shall come again, with glory to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end . . . And we look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come*” [emphasis added] (Schaff 1993, vol.1:21-8; 2002, 2:248). The significance of baptism relating to the future resurrection of the body of the believer was addressed by Augustine in his *Writings Against the Manichaeans and Against the Donatists*:

. . . and which the *sacrament of baptism teaches us to look forward to in our own resurrection . . . for our resurrection from the dead is still to come . . . because now a pattern of the eternal life which is to come is afforded us in the resurrection of Christ, and how much more should a Christian in our day be ready to suffer all things for Christ’s baptism, for Christ’s Eucharist, for Christ’s sacred sign, since these are proofs of the accomplishment of what the former sacraments only pointed forward to in the future! For what is still promised to the Church, the body of Christ . . . Is not the promise of eternal life by resurrection from the dead, and because in the resurrection our earthly bodies shall, by that change which Paul fully describes, become spiritual bodies, and so heavenly, that thus we may possess the kingdom of heaven* [emphasis added] (NPNF 1-4:242-4, 252).

The Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings was also represented by the “Christian Year,” which is “a yearly representation of the *leading events of the gospel history . . . a chronological confession of faith; a moving panorama of the great events of salvation*” and

which speaks specifically of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost: “All bear originally a Christological character, *representing the three stages of the redeeming work of Christ: the beginning, the prosecution, and the consummation*” [emphasis added] (Schaff 2002, 3:387, 389). Then, Philip Schaff speaking specifically of the Advent season states: “After Gregory the Great the four Sundays before Christmas began to be devoted to *the preparation for the coming of the Lord in the flesh and for his second coming to the final judgment*. Hence they were called ADVENT Sundays” [emphasis added] (2002, 3:397). Thus, the celebration of Advent, Easter and Pentecost were specifically used by the Early Church not only in remembrance of Jesus’ First Coming, resurrection and ascension, but also acted as precursors to or patterns for His *Parousia* and the resurrection and Rapture of His Body (Church).