

# Millennialism and the Catholicity of the Faith

by  
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I grew up a fundamentalist and a dispensationalist. I believed in the pre-tribulation, pre-millennial rapture of the church. I have since become convinced by the scriptures and the confessions that this is a grievous error. I'll grant that this is a bold statement, yet it is not merely an opinion of mine. The Athanasian Creed (which is our common confession) goes even further, stating that one who holds to a variant doctrine in this area cannot be saved. Personally, that is farther than I'd like to go, as my own parents are Millennialists still, but I must submit to that which has been the confession of the Christian Church for 1,600 years.

In 381 AD., the Second Ecumenical Council condemned Apollinarius (among other things) for his teaching about the thousand-year Kingdom of Christ. To put a stop to further attempts at introducing this teaching, the Bishops in Council inserted into the Nicene Creed the following declaration of the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary regarding Jesus: "His Kingdom shall have no end." This, too, is our common confession.

The Augustana echoes this condemnation when the confessors state that they reject "certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless" (AC XVII, 5). Please note that this is a general statement, not directed at a specific individual or group, as was AC XVII, 4.

As to the Lutheran fathers, the following evidence:

"Since the second advent of Christ, the general resurrection, the final judgment, and the end of the world are immediately united, and one follows the other without an interval of time, it is manifest that, before the completion of the judgment, no earthly kingdom and life abounding in all spiritual and bodily pleasure, as the chiliasts or Millenarians dream, is to be expected" (Quenstadt, IV, 649).

Regarding the errors of Millennialism, the following:

1. Millennialism, or chiliasm, teaches a twofold visible return of Christ: one to establish the millennium, and another to judge the world. Hebrews 9:28 expressly contradicts this.
2. Millennialism teaches two resurrections of the dead: a resurrection of the martyrs and pious Christians to join in Christ's millennial kingdom, and a general resurrection at the end of the millennium. However, scripture speaks of only one resurrection (for example, see John 6:40).
3. Millennialism warps the scriptural teaching on Christian hope. It presumes the rule of Christians over the world during the millennial kingdom---a kingdom which must be distinguished from the promised Kingdom of God. (See Acts 14:22; Matt 5:3 ff; 5:12; Phil 3:20-21; and many other such passages.) Our hope is in Christ, our reward is in heaven. "Peace on earth," the angels said at our Lord's birth (Luke 2:14). "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," our Lord told His disciples (John 14:27). The insistence upon a millennial kingdom destroys our peace, transferring it to some future reign upon the earth.

4. Millennialism is a theology of glory, in that it takes the eyes of faith off Christ and makes of faith something earthly and sensual. “Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you,” says our Lord (Luke 17:21). When Jesus says, “My kingdom is not of this world,” (John 18:36) the verb “is” means “never was, is not now, and never will be” of this world.
5. Millennialism is a rejection of the fundamental hermeneutic of Law and Gospel. The Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms is nothing more than a restatement or derivation of Law and Gospel. Thus Millennialism, by confusing the two kingdoms, ultimately fails to properly distinguish between Law and Gospel.
6. Millennialism is a rejection of the literal interpretation of scripture. When Jesus said unto Peter that he was to forgive his brother “seventy times seven” times, this was a synecdoche, where the specific (490 times) stands in for the general (always). In other words, since it would be next to impossible to keep track of 490 offenses and each subsequent forgiveness, Christ was saying to forgive without limit. In a similar manner we are to take the passage in Rev. 20 (the thousand years) as standing in for eternity. And how do we know this? By comparing scripture with scripture (Ps. 90:4; 2 Pe 3:8).

The application of sound hermeneutic principles is necessary to understand the Revelation of St. John. The Revelation provides us with that hermeneutical principle, and does so seven times (the number of divine perfection): “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.” The Holy Spirit works through means, and one of those means is the Church. Therefore if you want to understand the Revelation of St. John, you must look to the Church catholic for its interpretation, for no scripture is of any private interpretation (2 Pe 1:20). That is the sense of the final quote below.

“Because the Apocalypse is a prophetic book, full of most abstruse visions, as well as allegorical and quasi-enigmatic forms of speech, difficult to be understood, and therefore to be expounded according to the analogy of the faith, based upon clear and perspicuous Scripture passages” (Hollazius, 1259).

Therefore, on the basis of both scripture and the confessions, the teaching of a future reign of Christ upon a millennial throne is a grievous error, and has been justly condemned by the church.