

MILLENNIALISM AND THE EARLY CHURCH COUNCILS *Was Chiliasm Condemned at Constantinople?*

Francis X. Gumerlock, Saint Louis University

In the area of millennial studies, the number of positions on the interpretation of the thousand years of Revelation 20:1–8 seems to be expanding. A few decades ago, a theological discussion of the major viewpoints regarding the millennium consisted of usually two or three positions, premillennialism, amillennialism, and sometimes postmillennialism.¹ Robert Clouse's 1977 book, *The Meaning of the Millennium*, expanded the discourse to four views—amillennialism, postmillennialism, and two premillennial positions, that of historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism. This "four views" approach was followed by Stanley J. Grenz in his 1992 work, *The Millennial Maze*. But more recently, Gary D. Long's *Context: Evangelical Views on the Millennium Examined* analyzed six millennial positions within evangelicalism alone, adding to Clouse's categories the millennial views of progressive dispensationalism, and a position distinguished from amillennialism called "new covenant non-premillennialism."² To these views can be added militant millennialism, termed not so much for its temporal relationship to Christ's second coming as much as for its violent method of bringing about earthly utopia, and secular millennialism, characterized by a humanistic vision of a new period of world history.³

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¹Charles L. Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* (Chicago: Moody, 1961); John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959).

²Robert Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977). Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992). Gary D. Long, *Context: Evangelical Views on the Millennium Examined* (Charleston, S.C.: Great Unpublished, 2001), available online at <<http://www.booksurge.com>>.

³Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently* (New York: Seven Bridges, 2000); Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000); R. J. McKelvey, *The Millennium and the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth, 1999), 17–18. Studies of secular millennial movements are included in Richard A. Landes, ed., *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (New York:

Despite this expansion of millennial views, the main locus of debate in Christian scholarship is between premillennialism and amillennialism. Premillennialists profess that when Christ returns there will be a literal thousand-year reign of Christ as king on earth. For amillennialists, Christ's thousand-year reign is a present reality, the number "one thousand" being interpreted as a synecdochic figure of speech. In other words, the limited number of a thousand conveys totality, similar to when the psalmist proclaimed that the Lord owns "the cattle on a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).

While the main playing field for debate between premillennialists and their opponents continues to be holy scripture, scholars seem to be increasingly employing Christian history in their polemics.⁴ For example, K. Neill Foster and David E. Fessenden arranged their 2002 publication, *Essays on Premillennialism*, so that its first four essays are historical considerations of the premillennial position. Advertised as "a modern affirmation of an ancient doctrine," the book begins with a study by Paul L. King on the antiquity of premillennialism in an article entitled "Premillennialism and the Early Church." King cites at least fourteen early church fathers from the first four centuries of Christian history who were adherents of chiliasm, a term used for early belief in a literal earthly millennium. He concludes that "the earliest church overwhelmingly maintained a premillennial viewpoint."⁵ In his assessment that premillennialism was the dominant viewpoint of early Christians, King echoes a host of contemporary premillennial authors, both popular and academic.⁶

Amillennialist Charles E. Hill's *Regnum Caelorum*, whose second edition was

Routledge, 2000), and are frequently featured in the interdisciplinary *Journal of Millennial Studies*, a periodical published by The Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University

⁴On scriptural grounds, Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids Baker, 2003), Robert L. Thomas, "The Kingdom of Christ in the Apocalypse," and Kenneth L. Barker, "Premillennialism in the Book of Daniel," both in *The Master's Perspective on Biblical Prophecy*, eds Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids Kregel, 2002), 140–64, 209–28, David J. Englesma, *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, Calif Reformed Witness, 2001), Donald Garlington, "Reigning with Christ Revelation 20 1–6 and the Question of the Millennium," *Reformation and Revival* 6 (1997) 53–100, Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Is the Present Age the Millennium?" and John F. Walvoord, "Is Satan Bound?" both in *Vital Prophetic Issues*, ed Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids Kregel, 1995), 68–82, 83–95

⁵These include the author of *The Epistle of Barnabas*, Papias, Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Julius Africanus, Commodian, Lactantius, Nepos, Methodius, Victorinus, and Apollinaris Paul L. King, "Premillennialism and the Early Church," in *Essays in Premillennialism*, eds K. Neill Foster and David E. Fessenden (Camp Hill, Pa Christian Publications, 2002), 1–12, quote p. 8

⁶Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to the Most Asked Questions About the End Times* (Sisters, Ore. Multnomah, 2001), 20, Grant R. Jeffrey, *Triumphant Return The Coming Kingdom of God* (Toronto Frontier Research Publications, 2001), 56, Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1999), 331, Larry Crutchfield, "The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers," in Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds* (Eugene, Ore Harvest House, 1995), 86, Larry Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism The Darby Factor* (New York University Press of America, 1992), 188, Harold W. Hoehner, "Evidence

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published in 2001, is devoted entirely to the early history of millennial positions. In this study, Hill rebuts the claim that there was a premillennial consensus in the early church, and shows that there was much more variety on the millennium in the early church than premillennialists are letting on. In the second century, he notes, Justin Martyr had referred to many “pure and pious” Christians who did not hold chiliast views. Hill gives them names and faces, identifying at least ten major Christian writers of the second and third centuries as non-chiliast. Their statements, Hill concludes, “enable us to say with little or no hesitation that all [of those whom he identified] held amillennial expectations of the return of Christ.”⁷

Hill’s work is significant because a great deal of literature touting premillennialism as “the” position of the early church, for the most part, had remained unchallenged by Christian scholars.⁸ Now if one places the number of chiliast early church fathers side by side with the number who were amillennial, the result is more or less a draw. Amillennialists, formerly on the defensive when it came to demonstrating the antiquity of their position, now seem to be turning the tables. Some, in an attempt to strengthen their position and disparage the validity of premillennialism, have focused upon early church councils, citing several that have allegedly opposed chiliasm. On the surface these historical citations appear to be trump cards demonstrating the doctrinal superiority of amillennialism. But upon closer scrutiny, the claims suffer from a severe lack of substantiation.

For example, several writers have asserted that the Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned belief in an earthly millennium as a heretical superstition.⁹ In making this claim, however, none of the writers had cited a canon or decree associated with that council upon which the assertion could reasonably be deduced. Norman P. Tanner’s 1990 reference work, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, provides the

from Revelation 20,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, eds. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 243.

⁷Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 249.

⁸Before Hill, Alan Patrick Boyd’s master’s thesis challenged the assertion that “premillennialism is the historic faith of the Church” (“A Dispensational Premillennial Analysis of the Eschatology of the Post-Apostolic Fathers [Until the Death of Justin Martyr],” [Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977]). It concluded that “seminal amillennialism, and not nascent dispensational premillennialism ought to be seen in the eschatology of the period” (91). D. H. Kromminga also argued against the claim that nearly the entire early church was premillennial (*The Millennium in the Early Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945], 29–50).

⁹Andrew Bradstock, “Millenarianism in the Reformation and the English Revolution,” in *Christian Millenarianism from the Early Church to Waco*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 77; Eugene Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 147; McKelvey, *The Millennium and the Book of Revelation*, 14; Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 17; William Alnor, *Soothsayers of the Second Advent* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1989), 55; Walter Price, *The Coming Antichrist* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 27; Peter Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600 to 1660* (London: James Clarke, 1970), 17; André Feuillet, *The Apocalypse* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1965), 119.

Greek and Latin texts of all the documents associated with the Council of Ephesus, with English translations Not only is there not one statement from this council condemning belief in an earthly millennium, there is not one hint that the subject of the millennium even came up at the council as a topic of discussion ¹⁰ The claim is totally groundless

A second early church council brought into contemporary Christian discourse on the millennium is the Council of Constantinople held in 381 Attempting to undermine premillennialism, several writers have stated that this council, also known as the Second Ecumenical Council, long ago condemned the belief that in the eschaton Christ will reign with his saints on earth for a thousand years

For example, Alexander Mileant, a bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, recently wrote,

Chiliasitic views in antiquity were spread chiefly among heretics The Second Ecumenical Council in 381 A D , condemning the heretic Apollinarius [sic], condemned his teaching about the thousand-year kingdom of Christ To put a stop to further attempts at introducing this teaching, the fathers of the Council inserted into the Creed the words about Christ "His kingdom shall have no end" ¹¹

In 1995, Averky Taushev wrote similarly, saying, "One should be aware and keep in mind that chiliasm was condemned by the Second Ecumenical Council in the year 381, and therefore to believe in it now in the twentieth century, even in part, is quite unforgivable " Again,

To hold Chiliasm even as a private opinion was no longer permissible after the Church, at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381, condemned the teaching of the heretic Apollinarius concerning the thousand-year reign of Christ At the same time this was confirmed by the introduction into the Symbol of Faith of the words "of His kingdom there will be no end" ¹²

In 1992, Columba Graham Flegg asserted likewise "In 381 the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople I) condemned the millenarian teaching of Apollinarius [sic] together with his Christology, and introduced into the Creed the words, 'And His Kingdom shall have no end' " ¹³

In summary these authors claim that the bishops gathered at the Council of Constantinople in 381 specifically condemned the chiliasitic teaching of Apollinarius of Laodicea (d 390), and in order to curb his teachings about a thousand year reign of Christ, they inserted into the creed the words "His kingdom will have no end "

That the Council of Constantinople condemned Apollinarians is evident from the first canon of the council, but did the council ever condemn the millenarian

¹⁰Norman P Tanner, ed , *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol 1 (Washington, D C Georgetown University Press, 1990), 37-74

¹¹Alexander Mileant, "The End of the World and Eternal Life Addendum The Inconsistency of Chiliasm" (La Canada, Calif Holy Trinity Orthodox Mission, 2001)

¹²Averky Taushev, "Sermon on 'Neo-Chiliasm'" in Taushev, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity* (Platina, Calif A St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1995), 288, 258

¹³Columba Graham Flegg, "Gathered Under Apostles" *A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford, UK Clarendon, 1992), 295

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teaching of Apollinaris? The council did insert the phrase “His kingdom will have no end” into the Nicene creed, but whether the phrase was introduced in order to stop the spread of millenarianism is worthy of investigation. Ascertaining the purpose for which the council was convened will assist in providing answers to these questions.

The Council of Constantinople was called because of issues related to the Trinity, Christology, and Pneumatology. In 325, the Council of Nicea condemned Arianism, which denied that the Son was not of the same substance as the Father. But for much of the mid-fourth century Arians controlled the episcopacy in Constantinople, especially during the reign of the emperor Valens. After the death of Valens in 378, the tide began to change in favor of those who held the Nicene faith, i.e. belief in the full divinity of Christ. The next year the new emperor Gratian made his former general, Theodosius, a joint emperor. One of the first orders of business for Theodosius, who was an adherent of the Nicene faith, took place in 380. He summoned bishops from different parts of the East to come to Constantinople. The purpose of this gathering, which is now recognized as the Second Ecumenical Council of 381, was to secure the triumph of the Nicene faith over Arianism and its offshoots, including some who were denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ Canon 1 of the council shows that the one hundred and fifty bishops in attendance adopted the Nicene creed and anathematized various heretics whose Christological views opposed the Nicene faith. This anathema included Apollinarians. It reads:

The profession of faith of the holy fathers who gathered in Nicaea in Bithynia is not to be abrogated, but it is to remain in force. Every heresy is to be anathematized and in particular that of the Eunomians or Anomoeans, that of the Arians or Eudoxians, that of the Semi-Arians or Pneumatomachi, that of the Sabellians, that of the Marcellians, that of the Photinians and that of the Apollinarians.¹⁵

The Council of Constantinople did condemn and reject the teaching of Apollinaris. However, all of the heretics mentioned in Canon 1 in some way contradicted the Nicene faith with respect to the doctrine of God, more specifically to the nature and relationship of the Son and Holy Spirit within the Godhead. The Apollinarians were no exception, as they too were teaching doctrine contrary to the Nicene faith.

¹⁴Recent literature on the Council of Constantinople I includes Norman P. Tanner, *The Councils of the Church: A Short History* (New York: Crossroad, 2001); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000); Peter L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996); Paul Onica, “The Council of Constantinople,” *Affirmation and Critique* 1 (1996): 45–46; Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, *Nicée et Constantinople*, trans. Francesco Masiello (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994); Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

¹⁵Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 31. An English translation of Canon 1 is also in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, 2nd ser., ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–1894), 14:172.

According to J N D Kelly, the heresy of Apollinaris "consisted in his refusal to admit the completeness of the Lord's humanity" Kelly continued,

At first he [Apollinaris] based himself on a dichotomist anthropology and taught that Christ's human nature consisted simply of a body, the place of the soul being usurped by the Word Later, becoming trichotomist, he admitted that Christ possessed an animal soul in addition to a body, but denied Him a human rational soul¹⁶

In response to this faulty Christology of Apollinaris, the council decided to add a phrase to its creed, a longer version of the Nicene Creed sometimes called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed¹⁷ One difference between this creed and the shorter version of the Nicene Creed, especially relevant to the question at hand, is an expanded section on the person of Christ To refute the teaching of the Apollinarians, the council did not add the words "His Kingdom will have no end", it inserted the phrase "who came down and became incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary"¹⁸ With this phrase, the council was conveying that the Son was not only fully divine, but also fully human, a teaching that the Apollinarians were denying¹⁹

A letter associated with the Council of Constantinople demonstrates that the object of the anathema against the Apollinarians was their Christology This letter, written in the name of the one hundred and fifty bishops of the council, was sent to Rome After condemning the blasphemy of the Eunomians, Arians, and Pneumatomachi for dividing the substance of God, the bishops addressed the issue of the Apollinarians writing, "And we preserve undistorted the accounts of the Lord's taking of humanity, accepting as we do that the economy of his flesh was not soulless nor mindless nor imperfect"²⁰ The Council of Constantinople rejected Apollinaris's teaching that Christ lacked a rational human soul And it was his Christology the council rejected, not his eschatology²¹

Concerning Apollinaris's eschatology, ascertaining his views is difficult because most of his literary works were destroyed If Apollinaris did teach chiliasm,

¹⁶J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed (New York Longmans, 1981), 334 Recent studies on Apollinaris include Kelly McCarthy Spoerl, "The Liturgical Argument in Apollinaris Help and Hindrance on the Way to Orthodoxy," *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998) 127-52, McCarthy Spoerl, "Apollinarian Christology and the Anti-Marcellan Tradition," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994) 545-68, Ekkehard Muhlenberg, "Zur exegetischen Methode des Apollinaris von Laodicea," in *Christliche Exegese zwischen Nicaea und Chalcedon*, eds Johannes von Oort and Ulrich Wickert (Kampen, Neth Kok Pharos, 1992), 132-47, Rowan Greer, "The Man from Heaven Paul's Last Adam and Apollinaris' Christ," in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed William S Babcock (Dallas Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 165-82

¹⁷F L Cross and E A Livingstone, eds, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed (New York Oxford University Press, 1997), 1145-46

¹⁸Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 333

¹⁹The Council of Chalcedon (451) was even more explicit saying, "This selfsame one is actually god [sic] and actually man, with a rational soul and a body" John H Leith, ed, *Creeds of the Churches*, rev ed (Atlanta John Knox, 1973), 35-36

²⁰Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 28

²¹Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents*, 5 vols (1883-1886, reprint New York AMS Press, 1972), 2 348

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these views may have been recorded in his commentaries on the prophets, but these works are no longer extant.²² Sources external to his own writings, however, indicate that he probably held chiliastic sentiments. These include Apollinaris's contemporaries, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, who accused him of "reintroducing a 'second Judaism' by espousing a chiliastic hope." On the other hand, at least one of Apollinaris's contemporaries, Epiphanius of Salamis, did not believe that he taught chiliasm.²³

Regardless of whether Apollinaris was a chiliast or not, from the records of the Council of Constantinople there is no evidence that Apollinaris's eschatology was even discussed at the council, much less his alleged chiliasm the subject of condemnation. The facts are these: The Council of Constantinople rejected the teaching of Apollinaris, and Apollinaris was probably a chiliast. But the Council of Constantinople rejected Apollinaris's Christology, not his chiliasm.

Whether the council introduced the phrase, "His kingdom will have no end," to stop Apollinaris's chiliast beliefs from spreading is another question that deserves consideration. The Council of Constantinople did insert this phrase into the creed, but according to the best patristic scholarship it had nothing to do with the millenarian teachings of Apollinaris. Rather, it was a reaction to the unorthodox Christology of Marcellus, a fourth century teacher from Ancyra in Galatia. The followers of his teaching were labelled "Marcellians" in Canon 1 of the council.

On the subject of the Trinity, Marcellus taught that the distinctions in the Godhead—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were not eternal, but only temporal. In a recent study of Marcellus, Joseph Lienhard described the standard understanding of Marcellus's Trinitarianism:

Most standard summaries of Marcellus's theology follow the same pattern. God is a Monad. For the purpose of creation He expands into a Dyad, and is Father and Logos. At a particular moment in history the Logos became incarnate in Mary the Virgin and thereby also became "Son." On Easter night Christ sent the Spirit, and God was now a Triad. At the end of

²²Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3 (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1986), 377–78.

²³E. Prinzivalli, "Il millenarismo in Oriente da Metodio ad Apollinare," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 15 (1998):138–51; Desmond A. Birch, *Trial, Tribulation & Triumph Before, During, and After Antichrist* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Queenship, 1996), lxi, n.30: "The heretic Apollinaris . . . was the last major Eastern advocate of Millenarism [sic]." Brian Daley, "Chiliasm," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1997), 1:240. Objections of Apollinaris's contemporaries to his alleged chiliasm are in Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 263.4 and 265.2 in *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1949–present), 28:241, 245–28; and Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letters* 101.63–65 and 102.14 in *Sources chrétiennes*, eds. Henry de Lubac and J. Daniélou (Paris: Cerf, 1941–present), 208: 65, 77; *Carminum liber* 2.1.30 in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857–1866), 37:1296–97. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 77.36.5 in *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis*, trans. Philip R. Amidon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 346: "Others have claimed that the old man [Apollinaris] said that in the first resurrection we will complete a thousand-year period in which we will live in the same way as now, so that we will observe the law and the other things and all the usages which exist in the world, participating in marriage and circumcision and the rest. Now we do not believe for one moment that he taught this, but some have affirmed that he said this."

time Christ will hand over the Kingdom to the Father, and God will be all in all, once again a Monad.

In other words, the Monad that expands by stages into a Triad and then contracts again into a Monad is taken to be the defining element of Marcellus's theology.²⁴

To summarize, Marcellus believed that for the purpose of creation and salvation, the one God expanded into two, the Father and Son. God then later expanded into three. At the end of the world, after the Son delivers all things to the Father, the Son will be absorbed back into the Godhead, at which time God would be strictly one again. Marcellus based this erroneous belief in a temporal Trinity on I Cor. 15:24–28, which says that the Son will deliver the kingdom to the Father, and God will be all in all.

Several local councils in the fourth century rejected this teaching of Marcellus as contrary to the Gospel, and inserted statements into their creeds to specifically counter his theology. By asserting that the Son was begotten of the Father before all ages, these local creeds already contained statements that the Son was eternal, in the sense of always existing in eternity past. However, to guard against Marcellus's teaching, churches now deemed it necessary to provide a statement that the Son of God will also continue forever and remain God and King in eternity future. It is in this context that Council of Constantinople introduced the phrase "His kingdom will have no end."

The historical development of this insertion can be traced back to the first and third creeds proposed at a synod in Antioch in 341, forty years before the Council of Constantinople. The first creed says, "(We believe) that He suffered, was raised from the dead, and returned to heaven; that He sits at the right hand of the Father, and shall come again to judge the living and the dead, *and remains God and King to all eternity.*" The third creed additionally professed that the only-begotten Son "will come again with glory and might to judge the living and the dead, *and abides for everlasting.*"²⁵ In these credal statements the focus of the anti-Marcellian phrases was the Person of the Son, and the firm belief that He will remain forever.

To counter Marcellus's teaching, a patriarch of the church of Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century named Cyril made use of the phrase in Luke 1:33—"His kingdom will have no end" (NASB).²⁶ Cyril's *Catechetical Lecture* 15 shows clearly that the introduction of this phrase had nothing to do with the teachings of Apollinaris, and everything to do with the unorthodox Christology of Marcellus. Cyril wrote,

And shouldest thou ever hear any say that the kingdom of Christ shall have an end abhor the heresy; it is another head of the dragon, lately sprung up in Galatia. A certain one has dared to affirm, that after the end of the world Christ shall reign no longer; he has also dared to say, that the Word having come forth from the Father shall again be absorbed into the

²⁴Joseph T. Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth-Century Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 49–50. Lienhard, however, differs with this traditional understanding of Marcellus's theology. Alastair H.B. Logan, "Marcellus of Ancyra, defender of the faith against Heretics—and pagans," *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001): 550–64.

²⁵Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, 2:76, 79–80 (italics added).

²⁶Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum*, 196.

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Father, and shall be no more; uttering such blasphemies to his own perdition. For he has not listened to the Lord, saying, "The Son abideth for ever." He has not listened to Gabriel, saying, "And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end" . . . David also says in one place, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."²⁷

Cyril did not mention by name the person who taught the heresy, but he does say that he was from Galatia, the region in which Marcellus resided. To counter Marcellus's doctrine of a temporary Trinity, in which the Son at the end of the world is absorbed into the Father, Cyril cited several Scripture passages affirming that the Son will remain forever. One of them was Luke 1:33. Several decades later, the ecumenical Council of Constantinople, drawing upon these local customs, also inserted the phrase from Luke 1:33, "His kingdom will have no end" into the expanded Nicene creed.

Several modern patristic scholars confirm that the council inserted the phrase in response to the theology of Marcellus, and not Apollinaris. John Voelker wrote that it was Marcellus who was forever remembered in the "pronouncement of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed of 381, 'and of His Kingdom there will be no end.'" Similarly Rebecca Lyman noted that the phrase "was inserted in the creed to refute his [Marcellus's] interpretation of I Corinthians 15:24–28."²⁸

In summary, the Council of Constantinople did introduce the phrase "His kingdom will have no end" into the creed. However, it was not done to stop the spread of Apollinaris's chiliasm. It had nothing to do with either Apollinaris or the millennium. It was inserted as a scriptural refutation of the unorthodox Christology of Marcellus, who taught that in the eschaton the Son would no longer exist.

It has been shown that in an effort to add historical arguments to their rejection of premillennialism, several contemporary writers have stated that the Council of Constantinople in 381 condemned the chiliast beliefs of Apollinaris and added to the creed "His kingdom will have no end" to counter belief in a literal thousand year reign of Christ. It has been demonstrated, however, that the council took issue with the followers of Apollinaris not because of their belief in an earthly millennium, but because of their faulty Christology. In Apollinarianism, the humanity of Christ lacked a full rational soul, and the bishops at the council saw this notion of Christ as inconsistent with the New Testament. Furthermore, the council's insertion into the creed of the phrase from Luke 1:33, "His kingdom will have no end," had nothing to do with Apollinaris's chiliasm. Rather, it was a way for fourth-century Christians to guard against the false Christology of Marcellus of Ancyra, who erroneously taught that in the eschaton God the Son will cease to exist as a distinct Person of the Trinity.

This is not to imply that the bishops present at the Council of Constantinople, all from the Eastern portion of the empire, were supportive of chiliasm, for this was not the case. While many church fathers of the second and third centuries held chil-

²⁷Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15:27–28, in *A Select Library*, 7:289.

²⁸John Voelker, book review of Joseph T. Lienhard's *Contra Marcellum*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8:1 (2000): 120. Rebecca Lyman, "Marcellus of Ancyra," in Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2:713–14.

ist beliefs, by the late fourth century chiliasm was generally looked upon with disfavor in the East. However, the fact that many Eastern church fathers considered belief in a literal millennium erroneous, is one thing. Saying that the ecumenical Council of Constantinople condemned chiliasm is another.

The learned seventeenth-century exegete, Cornelius a Lapide, who was not a premillennialist, said that he could not find any early council that condemned chiliasm as heretical.²⁹ More recently, Desmond Birch wisely distinguished between Apollinaris's Christology, which was condemned at the Council of Constantinople, and Apollinaris's millennial teachings, which were "not officially condemned" at the council.³⁰ Did the Council of Constantinople condemn chiliasm? The answer is "No."

As the patristic era came to a close, chiliasm fell more and more into disrepute. Most believed that its origins were suspect—that belief in a literal millennium had its derivation in Jewish apocryphal writings, the writings of the gnostic Cerinthus, or the unlearned church father, Papias.³¹ Others expressed disapproval, saying that chiliastic hopes were focused in the wrong direction, on the flesh and the world rather than on heaven and the world to come. They saw chiliasm, which held that in the millennial kingdom people will still eat, drink, marry, and propagate children, as contradicting Jesus' teaching that there is no marriage after the resurrection (Matt. 22:30), and Paul's statement that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink" (Rom. 14:17). Still others believed that chiliasm, with its notion of a future temple in Jerusalem complete with animal sacrifices, was a reversion to the practices of the Old Testament, shadows that had already been fulfilled in Christ.³²

²⁹Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Apocalypsin S. Joannis* 20:1–2, in Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram*, vol. 21 (Paris: Apud Ludovicum Vives, Bibliopolam Editorem, 1875), 346. "And so thus is the error of the Millenarians. I do not dare to say heresy because I have not uncovered any clear Scriptures or *Decrees of Councils* in which this opinion is condemned as heretical" (italics mine). According to J. R. Armogathe, "Cornelius states that it [millenarianism] is an error, which he would not tax as heretical, since the Councils never did it." ("Per Annos Mille: Cornelius a Lapide and the Interpretation of Revelation 20:2–8," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Karl A. Kottman [Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001], 49).

³⁰Birch, *Trial, Tribulation & Triumph*, lx, n. 30.

³¹On the relationship of early Christian chiliasm to ancient Jewish writings such as 1 Enoch, 2 Esdras, and 2 Baruch, Charles E. Hill, "Cerinthus, Gnostic or Chiliast? A New Solution to an Old Problem," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 165, n. 84; John Bray, *The Early Church and the Millennium* (Lakeland, Fla.: John Bray Evangelistic Assn., 2000), 6; Paula Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity from John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo," *Vigilae Christianae* 45 (1991): 152, 169, n. 7, 9; Michael Kalafian, "Historical Overview of the Millennium," in Kalafian, *The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks of the Book of Daniel* (New York: University Press of America, 1991), 35–36; Robert L. Wilken, "Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism, and the Idea of the Holy Land," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 298–307. Still helpful also are Jean Danielou, "Millenarianism," in Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. John A. Baker (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 377–404, and Leon Gry, *Le millenarisme dans ses origines et son developpement* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1904), 9–32.

³²Dionysius of Alexandria, *On the Promises* 3; Origen, *On First Principles* 2:9:2; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3:28, 3:39, 7:24; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 77:38; Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 263:4, 265:2; Gregory

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In the early middle ages, several Christian writers associated chiliasm with heresy. Nevertheless, the hope of a millennial kingdom survived in the East in certain Syrian circles, and in the West in the belief that there would be a time of rest for the saints after the death of Antichrist.³³ Chiliasm was revived in the late middle ages through the influence of the writings of the abbot Joachim of Fiore and his followers.³⁴ Later, certain Protestant exegetes of the seventeenth century popularized it in their respective communities of faith.³⁵

As for the early councils, none explicitly addressed the belief in an earthly millennial kingdom. This has already been shown in the cases of the Council of Constantinople I in 381 and the Council of Ephesus in 430. The Council of Constantinople II in 553 anathematized anyone who maintained that Christ's kingdom would have an end, but like the earlier insertion of Luke 1:33 into the creed, this statement was not directed against chiliast beliefs.³⁶ In this case it was directed against the Origenists' cyclical concept of time and belief in the eventual absorption of all things into God. Origenists believed that God from all eternity created a succession of ages, and that this succession and return of new worlds would eventually result in a single world of "intellects." Then God would be "all in all," and all humans, angels, and even Satan would cease to be God's enemies.

of Nazianzus, *Letters* 101.63–5; 102.14; *Carminum liber* 2.1.30; Gregory of Nyssa, *Letters* 3.24; and Jerome, *Epistle* 49. A complete list of Jerome's many anti-chiliast statements is in Hellel Newman, "Jerome's Judaizers," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 421–52. Hans Beitenhard also mentioned the early church's fight against Montanism and Marcionism as factors influencing its rejection of chiliasm ("The Millennial Hope in the Early Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 [1953]: 17).

³³Isidore of Seville, *Book on Heresies*, 9. *Patrologiae latinae, supplementum*, ed. Adalbert Hamman (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1958–1974), 4:1816; Beatus of Liebana, *Twelve Books on the Apocalypse*, Book 11, cited in Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 78–79. In the Syrian tradition, a form of chiliasm is evident in the writings of Stephen Bar Sudaili: A. L. Frothingham, Jr., *Stephen Bar Sudaili the Syrian Mystic and The Book of Hierotheos* (Leyden: Brill, 1886), 35–43. On how chiliasm survived in the West, Robert E. Lerner, "The Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 51–71; Lerner, "Refreshment of the Saints: The Time After Antichrist as a Station for Earthly Progress in Medieval Thought," *Traditio* 32 (1976): 97–144.

³⁴Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs*, 41–60; Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1985); William A. BeVier, "Chiliasm in the Later Middle Ages," (MA thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1955).

³⁵Kottman, *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*; Bradstock, "Millenarianism in the Reformation and English Revolution;" Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour: A Chronicle of Christianity's Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, Ga.: American Vision, 2000), 145–93; Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Jerry L. Summers, "Millennialism, Globalization, and History," *Fides et Historia* 31 (1999): 1–11; B. S. Capp, "The Millennium and Eschatology in England," *Past and Present* 57 (1972): 156–62; James A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640–1810* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1970).

³⁶Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, 4:228.

Opponents of the Origenists believed that such teaching implied Christ's kingdom would one day come to an end, and therefore, that the Son was inferior to the Father.³⁷ Therefore, they included the aforementioned anathema. According to Elizabeth Clark's study of the Origenist controversy, the anti-Origenists reasoned that "if Christ's reign were to end, so would his divinity, and then he would cease to be one with God."³⁸ Like Canon 1 of the Council of Constantinople in 381, the focus of the anathema was faulty Christology.

In the eighth century during the iconoclast controversy, an ecclesiastical council met at Hiereia in 754. Convened by iconoclasts who opposed the Byzantine practice of depicting the saints in frescoes and statues, the council passed Canon 18. It reads,

If anyone does not confess the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment and the recompense, according to the merit of each, judged by the just scales of God, and [does not confess] that punishment has no end nor does the kingdom of heaven, which is the enjoyment of God—for the kingdom of heaven is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit according to the holy apostle—anathema.³⁹

Interpreting the purpose of this anathema, Stephen Gero suggested that to iconoclasts, the practice of their opponents of setting up lifeless images of the saints had negative implications upon eschatology. For example, if one were to think that the saints, with all of their virtues, could be depicted in a painting or statue, such belief is equal to denying the glory of the saints in the sight of God, in the resurrection, and in Christ's heavenly kingdom.⁴⁰ As in the case of the councils mentioned previously, chiliast beliefs were not the subject of attack at the Council of Heireia. However, of all of the decrees of the early church councils, its description in Canon 18 of the kingdom as endless spiritual enjoyment of God, rather than as a thousand-year earthly reign, is perhaps the closest that any have come to endorsing a position resembling amillennialism. But there certainly is no condemnation of chiliasm. The Council of Heireia was eventually overturned by the iconophilic Council of Nicea in 787, and as a result its canons had minimal influence in subsequent Christian history.

According to historical theologian, Jaroslav Pelikan, chiliast beliefs escaped official anathema by all of the early councils because they did not deny the creed.⁴¹ My investigation of the canons of the early councils similarly has uncovered no condemnation of chiliasm by them.

³⁷Epiphanius, *Panarion*, preface, 64.

³⁸Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 112. Cf. Aloys Grillmeier, "The Twofold Condemnation of the Origenists," in Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, pt 2, trans. John Cawte and Pauline Allen (London: Mowbray, 1995), 385–410; John Meyendorff, "The Origenist Crisis of the Sixth Century," in Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), 47–68.

³⁹Quoted in Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V. Corpus Christianorum Orientalium 384* (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1977), 91–92.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 107–08. Cf. Canon 16 & 17 on p. 91.

⁴¹Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 129.

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Christian scholars who seek to use the historic creeds and councils to disparage contemporary belief in a literal millennium will find a more promising reservoir of condemnatory remarks in sixteenth-century Protestant creeds, for example, in the Second Helvetic Confession of the Calvinists and in an early version of the Articles of Religion of the Church of England.⁴² Pungent pronouncements against chiliasm have also been issued in the last century in several official Roman Catholic publications.⁴³ But neither the Council of Constantinople in 381 nor any of the ecumenical councils of the ancient church explicitly condemned chiliasm.

⁴²Forty-Two Articles of Religion of the Church of England (1553): "XLI. Heretikes called Millenarii. They that go about to renewe the fable of heretickes called Millenarii, be repugnant to holy Scripture, and cast themselves headlong into a Jewish dotage." Quoted in Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 244–45. Second Helvetic Confession (1566): "Moreover, we condemn the Jewish dreams, that before the day of judgment there shall be a golden age in earth, and that the godly shall possess the kingdoms of the world, their wicked enemies being trodden under foot; for the evangelical truth (Matt. Xxiv. And xx.v, Luke xxi), and the apostolic doctrine (in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians ii, and in the Second Epistle to Timothy iii. And iv.) are found to teach far otherwise." Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (1877; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 3:853.

⁴³Decree of the Holy Office (1944): "Millenarianism (Chiliasm). In recent times on several occasions this Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has been asked what must be thought of the system of mitigated Millenarianism, which teaches, for example, that Christ the Lord before the final judgment, whether or not preceded by the resurrection of the many just, will come visibly to rule over this world. The answer is: The system of mitigated Millenarianism cannot be taught safely." In Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1957), 625. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (1997): "The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the 'intrinsically perverse' political form of a secular messianism." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 177.