

WERE THE FATHERS AMILLENNIAL? AN EVALUATION OF CHARLES HILL'S *REGNUM CAELORUM*

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ABSTRACT

Charles Hill's Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity seeks to reverse the one-time consensus that the earliest church fathers held to a millennial, rather than an amillennial, viewpoint. At the heart of Hill's argument is the claim that early millennialism and amillennialism were part of systems of eschatology in which fathers who held to the millennial position also held to a subterranean intermediate state, whereas fathers who held to the amillennial position also held to a heavenly intermediate state. Working from this claim, Hill asserts that a number of early fathers, along with the New Testament writers, held the amillennial position. This study demonstrates the linkage of millennial views and views of the intermediate state to be faulty on the grounds that the early Irenaeus held to both a heavenly intermediate state and to a millennium.

REVIEW OF HILL'S ARGUMENT

ACCORDING TO MANY CHURCH HISTORIANS, millennialism played a dominant role in the eschatology of the early church fathers.¹ In *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, Charles Hill seeks to reverse the historical argument. He asserts that amillennialism dominated the early church and, in fact, preceded millennialism. Hill's work is foundational for other amillennialists, who appeal to it to argue

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¹ Noted in Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 2–3.

that premillennialism “was not the most widely held view” in the first centuries of the church.² However, a full-scale critique of Hill’s argument has not yet been written.

Though the earliest writers who explicitly addressed the millennium held a millennial view, Hill argues that both Justin and Irenaeus observed that some orthodox Christians were amillennial.³ He proposes that these people can be identified by locating the place of millennial views within wider systems of eschatology. Those who affirmed a millennium also held that the redeemed exist in a subterranean intermediate state as they await the resurrection of the body. In contrast, early Christian writers who opposed millennialism all held that in the intermediate state the soul ascends to God’s presence in heaven.⁴ Hill grants the theoretical possibility that a person could have simultaneously affirmed a heavenly intermediate state and a millennium, but he argues that no evidence exists for such a position within the early church.⁵ He also sees a certain logic in the link between the intermediate state and millennial views. It would be “a serious and unconscionable retrogression” for a soul in the presence of God to return to earth for the millennium.⁶

Based on the link between a heavenly millennial state and amillennialism, Hill concludes that Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Athenagoras, Melito of Sardis, and others were amillennialists.⁷ The most significant name on that list is Polycarp. Polycarp is the link between the apostle John and Irenaeus—between the apostle whose writing contains the key New Testament millennial text, and the chief early defender of millennialism.

If Polycarp held to an amillennial position, how did his student Irenaeus come to hold a millennial position? Hill argues that Irenaeus changed to the millennialist position in the course of writing *Against Heresies*. According to Hill, the early Irenaeus held to only one resurrection, after which there would be no procreation (1.10.1; 2.33.5; 3.23.7); the later Irenaeus taught a first resurrection, after

² Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 923.

³ Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 3–4, citing Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80.2 and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.31–32.1.

⁴ Hill, 245–57.

⁵ Hill, 249.

⁶ Hill, 19–20.

⁷ Hill, 249.

which those in resurrected flesh would be able to procreate (5.31.1). In 2.22.2 Irenaeus taught that the consummation would be followed immediately by judgment, but in 5.32.1 he said the judgment would follow an earthly reign. In 4.4.2 Irenaeus explained that the earthly Jerusalem was done away with in the new covenant, but in 5.34.4–35.2, Irenaeus spoke of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the millennium.⁸ Hill also argues that early in *Against Heresies* Irenaeus held to a heavenly intermediate state (3.16.4; 4.31.3 4.33.9) while later he insisted on a subterranean intermediate state (5.31–32).⁹

If Hill is correct, Irenaeus inherited from Polycarp an amillennial position that he later abandoned. Since Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, this would strengthen claims that John was not a millennialist. Indeed, Hill argues that John (and the rest of the New Testament authors) taught a heavenly intermediate state at odds with the millennial position's subterranean intermediate state.¹⁰ He follows this observation with an amillennial reading of Revelation 20.¹¹

The mainstay of Hill's argument is that early millennialism and amillennialism were systems of eschatology involving consistent views on the location of the intermediate state. Hill concludes that amillennialism was normative in the early church, and that it is the view traced back to the New Testament itself.

If it can be demonstrated that at least one early father held to both a heavenly intermediate state and to the millennial position, Hill's argument becomes less compelling. Such a demonstration would challenge Hill's claim that early millennial positions entailed specific, consistent positions on the intermediate state.

IRENAEUS'S MILLENNIAL POSITION: CONSISTENT OR CHANGING?

Hill's argument hinges on the claim that Irenaeus changed his position from amillennial to millennial while writing *Against Heresies*. To evaluate Hill's claims we must examine his argument that Irenaeus changed his position on five points: the resurrection, the order of eschatological events, Jerusalem, hermeneutical method, and the role of tradition.

⁸ Hill, 254–55. Hill also says that Irenaeus “accepts a non-chiliastic exegesis of Isa. 11 in the *Proof* 61.” He suggests that the *Proof* was written at the same time Irenaeus was writing book 4 of *Against Heresies*. Hill, 255, n. 2.

⁹ Hill, 17–18.

¹⁰ Hill, 211–27.

¹¹ Hill, 227–42.

THE RESURRECTION

At the end of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus clearly placed a resurrection directly after the tribulation and directly before an earthly millennium. He taught that the resurrected and the unresurrected saints who were on earth at the time of the Second Coming will live together in the millennium (5.35.1).

Hill holds that, in earlier books, Irenaeus affirmed only one resurrection at the consummation of all things. The earliest text Hill points to reads:

The Church, indeed, though disseminated throughout the world, even to the ends of the earth, received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and the seas and all things that are in them; and in the one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was enfleshed for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets preached the Economies, the coming, the birth from a Virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, and His coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to recapitulate all things, and to raise up all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, Savior and King, according to the invisible Father's good pleasure, *Every knee should bow [of those] in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess Him*, and that He would exercise just judgment toward all; and that, on the other hand, He would send into eternal fire the spiritual forces of wickedness, and the angels who transgressed and became rebels, and the godless, wicked, lawless, and blasphemous people; but, on the other hand, by bestowing life on the righteous and holy and those who kept His commandments and who have persevered in His love—both those who did so from the beginning and those who did so after repentance—He would bestow on them as a grace the gift of incorruption and clothe them with everlasting glory.¹²

This summary doctrinal statement should not be expected to distinguish, number, or order the end-time resurrections. To say that Christ will come again and will “raise up all flesh of the whole human race” is not to deny that this resurrection will occur before a

¹² Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, ed. and trans., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Walter J. Burghardt, et al. (New York: Newman, 1992), 48–49 (1.10.1). Quotations from Irenaeus utilize the Ancient Christian Writers translation of *Against Heresies*, for *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, and for books 1–3 of *Against Heresies*. Quotations from books 4 and 5, which have not yet been translated for the Ancient Christian Writers series, utilize James Payton's updated revision of selections from the Roberts and Donaldson text, or the Roberts and Donaldson text itself (James R. Payton Jr., *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies* [Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2011]; and Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885]).

millennium for some, and after a millennium for others.

In addition, given that this is a statement of what the church catholic believed, and given Irenaeus's view that tradition passes on accurate interpretations of Scripture,¹³ it is unlikely that Irenaeus would have departed from this statement of doctrine.

Hill appeals to a second passage that he gives special weight (2.33.5):

And so, when the number [of the elect] that God himself ordained beforehand is complete, all who are enrolled for life will rise with their own bodies and souls and spirits with which they pleased God. Those, however, who deserve punishment will depart into it; they too will have their souls and their bodies with which they rebelled against God's goodness. Both classes will cease to beget and to be begotten, to marry and to be given in marriage, so that the calculated multitude of humankind, predetermined by God, might when completed preserve the harmony of the Father.¹⁴

Hill sees in this passage evidence of a single resurrection, after which no procreation happens. He contrasts this with 5.35.1, in which procreation may still continue after the resurrection.

However, there is no need to posit a contradiction between the two passages. The resurrection in 5.35.1 occurs at the beginning of the millennium. The events of 2.33.5 must take place at the end of the millennium, since their time is "when the number [of the elect] that God himself ordained beforehand is complete," and when the "calculated multitude of mankind" is completed. If 5.35.1 refers to a resurrection of the righteous preceding the millennium, and if 2.33.5 refers to a resurrection at the end of the millennium, there is no contradiction between these two passages.

The third text noted by Hill comes from book 3 (3.23.7):

By this [quotation from Ps. 90:13] he pointed out that sin (which had made humanity cold), which rose and spread itself out against the human race, would, together with death that held sway, be deprived of its power; and it would be trampled on by Him in the last times, namely, when the lion, that is, the Antichrist, would rush upon the human race; and He would put in chains the ancient serpent, and make it subject to the power of the human race, which had been conquered so that humanity could trample down all his [the dragon's] power.

¹³ See A. N. S. Lane, "Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey," *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975): 39–40.

¹⁴ Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, ed. and trans., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 3*, Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Boniface Ramsey, et al. (New York: Newman, 2012), 108 (2.33.5), brackets supplied by translator.

Now Adam had been conquered, and all life had been taken from him. Consequently, when the enemy was again conquered, Adam received life. *And the last enemy to be destroyed is death*, which had first taken possession of humankind. Wherefore, when humanity has been freed, *shall come to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'*¹⁵

Some point out that the “last times” in Irenaeus refer to “the entire period after Christ’s ascension until his second coming,” therefore denying that this phrase refers to “the period after the coming of Christ.”¹⁶ This is true of many of Irenaeus’s uses of the phrase, but he can also use the same phrase to refer to the very end (5.26.1). In this case, the connection with the Antichrist, whom Irenaeus held to be an eschatological figure, indicates Irenaeus is speaking of the very end. This text is not dissimilar from 5.35.1: “The resurrection of the righteous takes place after the coming of Antichrist and the destruction of all nations under his rule. In that resurrection the righteous will reign on the earth.”¹⁷ There is no reason to conclude that Irenaeus has done anything in 3.23.7 other than summarize the events of the end, as the prophets often did.

THE ORDER OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS

Hill holds that in book 2 of *Against Heresies* Irenaeus taught that the final judgment directly followed the consummation, whereas Irenaeus later held that the judgment followed the millennium.¹⁸

The early text is found within an argument by Irenaeus that the “acceptable year of the Lord” is not a twelve-month period nor the “day of vengeance” a twenty-four hour period that occurred during Jesus’s ministry:

So *the day of vengeance* spoken of is a day on which the Lord will render to each according to his deeds, that is, the judgment. *The acceptable year of the Lord*, however, is the present time, in which those who believe in him are called and become acceptable to God: that is, the entire time from his coming until the consummation, during which he acquires as his fruit those who are saved.¹⁹

¹⁵ Dominic J. Unger and Irenaeus M. C. Steenberg, ed. and trans., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Boniface Ramsey et al. (New York: Newman, 2012), 109 (3.23.7). First brackets are mine and second brackets are translator’s.

¹⁶ Unger and Steenberg, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, 208, n. 34.

¹⁷ Payton, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith*, 193 (5.35.1).

¹⁸ Hill, 254.

¹⁹ Unger and Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, 72 (2.22.2).

Hill argues that this text from book 2 places the judgment directly after the consummation. This, he says, is in conflict with the following text from book 5, which places the judgment some time after the consummation:

Since, then the views of certain orthodox persons are influenced by heretical discourses, they end up ignorant of God's plans, of the mystery of the resurrection of the righteous, and of the kingdom which will be the beginning of incorruption, that kingdom in which those who are accounted worthy will be gradually enabled to partake of the divine nature [2 Pet 1:4]. Consequently, it is necessary to tell them about those things, that it is proper for the righteous first to receive the inheritance which God promised to the fathers and to reign in it when they rise again, to behold God in this renovated creation, and that the judgment will take place subsequently.²⁰

Again, there is no real conflict here. If "the acceptable year of the Lord" is the time in which people are still being saved, in a millennial view this time would extend through the millennium, and the judgment would follow the millennium. Whether or not Irenaeus has correctly interpreted Isaiah 61:2 and Luke 4:19, his statements are not contradictory.

THE ROLE OF JERUSALEM

Hill also claims that Irenaeus shifted his position about the role of Jerusalem. Whereas earlier Irenaeus claimed that Jerusalem's role was obsolete in the new covenant era, he later claimed that Jerusalem would be rebuilt for the millennial kingdom.²¹

The passage about Jerusalem's new covenant obsolescence is at the beginning of book 4:

The law originated with Moses but terminated with John. Christ had come to fulfil it: "the law and the prophets were in effect until John" [Luke 16:16]. Therefore Jerusalem, which had received its commencement with David [2 Sam 5:7] but had fulfilled its purpose, was eclipsed when the new covenant was revealed.²²

Irenaeus's statement about the rebuilding of Jerusalem occurs in book 5:

Then again, speaking of Jerusalem, and of Him reigning there, Isaiah declares, "Thus saith the Lord, Happy is he who hath seed in Zion, and servants in Jerusalem. Behold, a righteous king shall reign, and princes shall rule with judgment [Isa. 31:9; 32:1]. And with regard to

²⁰ Payton, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith* 190 (5.32.1). Brackets supplied by translator.

²¹ Hill, 254–55.

²² Payton, 88 (4.4.2), brackets supplied by translator.

the foundation on which it shall be rebuilt, he says: . . . [Isa. 54:11–14; 65:18]. If, however, any shall endeavour to allegorize [prophecies] of this kind, they shall not be found consistent with themselves in all points, and shall be confuted by the teaching of the very expressions [in question]. . . . Now all these things being such as they are, cannot be understood with reference to super-celestial matters, “for God,” it is said, “will show to the whole earth that is under heaven thy glory.” But in the times of the kingdom, the earth has been called again by Christ [to its pristine condition], and Jerusalem rebuilt after the pattern of the Jerusalem above.²³

Once again, Hill sees conflict between two passages where no conflict need be found. In the first, Irenaeus maintained that the desertion of Jerusalem was no argument against Christianity. In that context, Irenaeus argued that Jerusalem need no longer be the center of true religion, since the Mosaic covenant is no longer in effect.²⁴ This argument about the present salvation-historical insignificance of Jerusalem need not negate the future significance of a rebuilt Jerusalem, from which the Messiah will reign.

IRENÆUS'S METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

Finally, Hill says that Irenaeus shifted from nonmillennial to millennial exegesis in his interpretation of Isaiah 11.²⁵ In *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, Irenaeus wrote:

But as regards the union and concord and tranquility of the animals of different kinds, and by nature mutually hostile and inimical, the elders say, that it will really be even so at the coming of Christ, when He is to be king of all. For he now tells in parable the gathering together in peaceful concord, through the name of Christ, of men of different nations and like character; for the assembly of the just, who are likened to calves and lambs and kids and children, will not be hurt at all by those, both men and women, who at an earlier time had become brutal and beastlike because of selfish pride, till some of them took on the likeness of wolves and lions, ravaging the weaker.²⁶

In contrast to this parabolic interpretation, Irenaeus adopts a lit-

²³ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, Ante-Nicene Fathers (1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:564–65 (5.34.4–35.2). References in brackets supplied by author; other brackets supplied by translator.

²⁴ Payton, 87–88 (4.4.1).

²⁵ This theory depends on Hill's supposition that *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* was written between books 3 and 4 of *Against Heresies*, a position debated among scholars. Hill, 255; Joseph P. Smith, trans. and ed., *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York: Paulist, 1952), 6, 117, n. 18.

²⁶ Smith, *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 88 (§61).

eral interpretation of Isaiah 11 in book 5 of *Against Heresies*. However, instead of positing a conflict, some scholars believe that in the *Proof*, Irenaeus simply added a parabolic interpretation of Isaiah 11 to the literal interpretation, which he affirmed came from the elders.²⁷ Indeed, Irenaeus may articulate precisely this position in *Against Heresies*:

I am quite aware that some persons try to refer these words to savage peoples of different nations and various habits who come to believe and, when they have believed, act in harmony with the righteous. But although this is true now with regard to some people coming from various nations to the harmony of the faith, nevertheless in the resurrection of the righteous the words will also apply to the animals mentioned.²⁸

These passages do not represent a change in position. Rather, Irenaeus was willing for Isaiah 11 to be read as a parable for the present, as long as the literal futuristic reading was not denied. Again, passages that Hill sees as conflicting are actually in harmony.

IRENÆUS, THE ELDERS, AND THE ROLE OF TRADITION IN IRENÆUS'S THOUGHT

The supposed contradictions between the early and later Irenaeus become even less likely when placed in the context of Irenaeus's view of tradition.

Irenaeus is the key figure in the post-apostolic church's developing view of tradition. In the face of Gnostics who claimed access to a secret apostolic tradition, Irenaeus argued that the apostolic tradition was passed down from the apostles, to the elders, to the bishops of the church.²⁹ He developed this view of tradition to adjudicate which interpretations of Scripture were correct. In his view, the correct interpretation was the one that had been publicly taught generation after generation from the time of the apostles.³⁰ This view of tradition may be labeled the "coincidence view," because in this view Scripture and tradition share the same content. Tradition confirms the correct interpretation of Scripture, but it does not add authoritative content.³¹

Hill admits that Irenaeus's concept of tradition leads to a puzzle:

²⁷ Smith, 196, n. 270.

²⁸ Payton, 192 (5.33.4).

²⁹ Unger and Steenberg, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, 31 (3.2.2).

³⁰ Unger and Steenberg, 32–34 (3.3.1–4.1); Payton, 124, 135 (4.26.5; 4.33.8).

³¹ Lane, "Scripture, Tradition and Church," 39–40.

In part I we determined that when he wrote *AH* V.31 Irenaeus was countering both heretical and orthodox dissenters from chiliasm. We may, from our analysis above [which concluded that a father's position on the intermediate state indicates his millennial position], be confident that he knew very well with whom he was differing. Judging from the *Epistle of Vienne and Lyons*, they included many from his own churches in Gaul. They must have included his venerated master Polycarp, Clement of Rome, whose letter to the Corinthians Irenaeus knew and esteemed (*AH* III.3.4), and Hermas (IV.20.2). . . . He was cognizant of the eschatology of Ignatius. . . .

This all leads to the somewhat puzzling conclusion that Irenaeus had to have known he was departing from a very widespread, traditional Christian eschatological hope when he undertook his rigorous defense of chiliasm. Only one momentous cause, towering above all others, is capable of accounting for this departure: the increasing urgency of the confrontation with Gnosticism.³²

Would Irenaeus's battle with Gnosticism account for this "puzzling" departure from "a very widespread, traditional Christian eschatological hope"? This is most unlikely. One of his chief arguments against Gnosticism was that he stood in line with the tradition of the elders that reached back to the apostles. But on Hill's reading, at a fundamental point of debate (a point important enough to provoke a "momentous" change), the Gnostics stand in the traditional position, and Irenaeus outside it.³³ It is difficult to believe that Irenaeus would undercut a major part of his argument from book 3 in this way.

In addition, the claim that Irenaeus changed millennial positions and departed from the teaching of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, and others is inconsistent with Irenaeus's own statements. In *Proof* 61 Irenaeus attributed the millennial reading of Isaiah 11 to the elders. The parabolic reading was attributed merely to "some persons," and allowed to stand beside but not to supplant the interpretation of the elders.³⁴ Indeed, Irenaeus identified Papias (who he linked to Polycarp and the apostle John) as one who taught a millennial kingdom. By mentioning Polycarp and John, Irenaeus was indicating that these millennial teachings were relayed from the Lord, to John, to the elders.³⁵ This is precisely the kind of tradition that Irenaeus had earlier argued ought to be au-

³² Hill, 256–58.

³³ Hill does grant that Irenaeus could appeal to Papias, Justin Martyr, and Jewish apocalyptic literature for precedent (258).

³⁴ Payton, 192 (5.33.4).

³⁵ Payton, 191–92 (5.33.3–4).

thoritative.³⁶ Irenaeus did not grant that he changed his position from the one handed on to him by Polycarp and others. Rather, he stated that the orthodox believers who did not hold to a millennial position were “influenced by heretical discourses.”³⁷

IRENÆUS'S INTERMEDIATE STATE POSITION: CONSISTENT OR CHANGING?

Hill also detects a difference between the earlier and the later Irenaeus on the matter of the intermediate state. This possibility is not as unlikely as a shift in millennial position, because Irenaeus does not indicate the existence of a specifically traditional view of this issue.

Hill notes five passages that support a heavenly intermediate state:³⁸

And for this reason four principal covenants were given to the human race: the first, of Adam before the deluge; the second, of Noe after the deluge; the third, the law under Moses; and the fourth, which renews man and recapitulates in itself all things, that is, which through the Gospel raises up and bears men on its wings to the heavenly kingdom.³⁹

On this account, too, He snatched away those boys of the House of David who had the happy lot of being born at that time, that He might send them on ahead into His kingdom [a reference to Herod's slaughter of the innocents]. For, when He Himself was yet an infant, He prepared the infants of human parents as witnesses [*martyras*] who, according to the Scriptures, were slain for the sake of Christ who was born in Bethlehem of Judah, in the city of David.⁴⁰

[T]he Church also, which is the salt of the earth, has been left behind within the confines of the earth, and subject to human sufferings; and while entire members are often taken away from it, the pil-

³⁶ This, of course, raises the question of whether Irenaeus was truly passing on tradition that came from the Lord, through John, to the elders. Once the figurative nature of these millennial promises is understood (that is, there is no prediction that clusters of grapes will really speak), these predictions of fecundity, peace between animals, and the subjection of all things to humankind are plausible. Each element of these predictions could be substantiated from the Old Testament (Isa. 11:6–9; Amos 9:13–14).

³⁷ Payton, 190 (5.32.1).

³⁸ Hill, 17–18.

³⁹ Unger and Steenberg, 57 (3.11.8).

⁴⁰ Unger and Steenberg, 80–81 (3.16.4), first brackets are mine and second brackets are translator's.

lar of salt still endures, thus typifying the foundation of the faith which maketh strong, and sends forward, children to their Father.⁴¹

Because of her love for God, the Church in every place and through all time sends forward a multitude of martyrs to the Father.⁴²

This was a sign that souls should be born aloft (ἀναγωγῆς ψυχῶν) through the instrumentality of the wood, upon which He suffered who can lead those aloft that follow His ascension. This event was also an indication of the fact that when the holy soul of Christ descended [to Hades], many souls ascended and were seen in their bodies.⁴³

The first of the passages (which Hill relegates to a footnote), could conceivably refer to eternity rather than to the intermediate state, since Irenaeus held that in eternity some will dwell in heaven, some in paradise, and some in the New Jerusalem (5.35.2; 5.36.1–2). The sending of the slaughtered children ahead into Christ’s kingdom is likely a reference to sending them to heaven. The third and fourth passages clearly refer to a heavenly intermediate state, because deceased believers are sent to be with the Father. At least in part, the fifth passage refers to bodily translation as it concerns those who were raised bodily on the day of Jesus’s death. Yet if not all those “borne aloft” in the fifth passage were resurrected, then the fifth passage would also teach a heavenly intermediate state.

In book 5, Irenaeus clearly held to a subterranean intermediate state:

If, then, the Lord observed the law of the dead, that He might become the first-begotten from the dead, and tarried until the third day ‘in the lower parts of the earth,’ then afterwards rising in the flesh, . . . how must these men not be put to confusion, who allege that ‘the lower parts’ refer to this world of ours, but that their inner man, leaving the body here, ascends into the super-celestial place? For as the Lord ‘went away in the midst of the shadow of death,’ where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up [into heaven], it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiv-

⁴¹ Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, 1:505 (4.31.3).

⁴² Payton, 135 (4.33.9).

⁴³ *Fragment 26* as translated in Hill, 17–18. Hill notes that the authorship of this passage is disputed.

ing their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come into the presence of God.⁴⁴

Two passages from Irenaeus clearly, and two somewhat less clearly, teach a heavenly intermediate state. In contrast, *Against Heresies* 5.31.2 clearly teaches a subterranean intermediate state. A reasonable conclusion is that Irenaeus changed his mind on this matter.⁴⁵ This change can be understood as an effort to deprive the Gnostics of any claim that souls in the presence of God have arrived at their ultimate good. On Irenaeus's later view, entering the presence of God does not happen until the resurrection.⁴⁶

This change in position is not problematic in the way a shift on millennial views would have been, since Irenaeus does not claim the support of tradition for either view.⁴⁷ It may be that there was no settled tradition about the intermediate state at this point.⁴⁸

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IRENAEUS'S CONSISTENT MILLENNIAL POSITION AND CHANGED INTERMEDIATE STATE POSITION

The key plank of Hill's argument is that no evidence exists for an early Christian who held to both a heavenly intermediate state and a millennium.⁴⁹ Yet if Irenaeus remained consistent in his affirmation of the millennium (something he claims to have received from the elders), but changed his position regarding the intermediate state (an issue on which he makes no appeal to the elders), then the early Irenaeus would have embodied Hill's missing position: a heavenly intermediate state and a millennium.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, 1:560 (5.31.2).

⁴⁵ Hill notes that some scholars attempt to harmonize the two views by positing that martyrs were permitted a heavenly intermediate state, whereas everyone else experienced a subterranean intermediate state. In response, Hill observes that in book 5 not even Christ escapes the subterranean intermediate state, and that not every heavenly intermediate state passage is about martyrs (7–18).

⁴⁶ Hill, 257–58.

⁴⁷ The only time Irenaeus appeals to what the elders taught was in reference to the heavenly dwelling of those who were translated, and Hill holds that that passage has no bearing on the discussion of the intermediate state.

⁴⁸ Justin Martyr's writings also contain conflicting positions regarding the intermediate state (Hill, 25).

⁴⁹ Hill, 249.

⁵⁰ It is possible that Justin Martyr also simultaneously held, at least at one point, to a heavenly intermediate state and a millennium. Hill's conclusion that Papias must have held to a subterranean intermediate state because he was millennialist (despite admitting that "we have no scrap of tradition under the name of Papias

Given that the link between a heavenly intermediate state and amillennialism does not hold for one of the earliest fathers, Hill's conclusion that Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Melito, and Athenagoras were amillennial is called into question. Each of these men's belief in a heavenly intermediate state is Hill's only argument that they held an amillennial position.

Polycarp is the most significant of these figures, because he stands as a link between the apostle John and Irenaeus. Once the heavenly intermediate state is removed as an indicator of millennial view (at least prior to Irenaeus), Polycarp's position on the matter becomes an open question. Indeed, given Irenaeus's emphasis on receiving his millennial view from the elders, it becomes likely that Polycarp, along with Papias, was a source for Irenaeus's millennial views.

CONCLUSION

Hill's basic assertion is that a link between millennial views and views of the intermediate state enables interpreters to identify early amillennialists. Based on this link, Hill concluded that many early Christians, including Polycarp and the New Testament authors, were amillennial. However, this study has shown flaws in Hill's linkage of millennial views and views of the intermediate state, at least prior to Irenaeus. The early Irenaeus held to both a heavenly intermediate state and to a millennium. Thus the attempt to discern a given father's millennial view based on his view of the intermediate state fails. In the end, it is probably wisest not to attempt to discern the millennial views of the fathers for whom there is no direct evidence. The failure of Hill's case returns the discussion to the *status quo ante*. Based on the available evidence, millennialism played the dominant role in the eschatology of the earliest church fathers.

that directly concerns the intermediate state of the righteous dead") must also be questioned (see Hill, 22).