HERMENEUTICS OR *ZEITGEIST* AS THE DETERMINING FACTOR IN THE HISTORY OF ESCHATOLOGIES?

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Discussions of the history of eschatology as a Christian doctrine generally take one of two directions. One we might refer to as the polemical use of history by theologians and exegetes to provide one's own eschatology with the credentials of Christian antiquity and to level the charge of novelty at opposing positions. We are well enough acquainted with the eschatological works of Berkhof, Allis, Walvoord, Pentecost, Ladd, Payne and Robert Gundry to know what I mean here without the necessity of illustration. Of course such discussions always insist that Scripture is the final arbiter, but it is nice to have antiquity on your side anyhow. This, however, is not my concern in this paper.

The history of eschatology is also often discussed in terms of the scheme for the historical development of theology suggested by James Orr in his book, *The Progress of Dogma.* In these lectures he argued that there is "a singular parallel ... between the historical course of dogma, on the one hand, and the scientific order of the text-books on systematic theology on the other." "The history of dogma ... is simply the system of theology spread out through the centuries." "The temporal and the logical order correspond. The articulation of the system in your textbook is the very articulation of the system in its development in history."[1] Orr says there is a logic behind this parallel between the systematic and historical development of doctrine. There is an order of logical dependence reflected in the manner in which most systematic theologies are developed. Some doctrines are the presuppositions of others. "So in theology the derivative doctrine cannot be exhaustively expounded till those which it presupposes have, at least in some measure, been explained."[2]

So also in the historical development of doctrinal discussions. The second century was the age of apologetics and of the vindication of the fundamental ideas of Christianity. Then came theology proper (third and fourth centuries), anthropology (Augustine and Pelagius, fifth century), Christology (fifth century and following), objective soteriology (Anselm and Abelard, eleventh century), subjective soteriology (Reformation era), and finally eschatology (nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

Of course Orr did not mean that there were no eschatologies before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rather, it was then that it

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[1]J. Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (London: James Clarke, 1901) 21.

[2]Ibid., p. 23.

became the focus of discussion and the subject of more systematic treatment. We might want to discuss the adequacy of Orr's scheme, and particularly his failure to fit ecclesiology into the historical development. But again the history of eschatology within Orr's framework is not my concern in this paper, although this sketch serves as necessary background to my discussion.

There is another aspect to the history of eschatology that I find intriguing, and somewhat sobering—an aspect I seldom find mentioned by evangelical scholars, though non-evangelicals have been quick to pick it up. To lead into my subject, it will be helpful to briefly sketch the historical development of eschatological positions, and for my purposes it will be sufficient to focus only on changing attitudes toward the millennial question.

Perhaps it is presumptuous for premillennialists to list Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John and Matthew as first-century advocates of their view (as Pentecost does, quoting G. N. H. Peters).[3] But it is equally prejudiced for Louis Berkhof, an amillennialist, to deny that premillennialism was generally accepted in the first three centuries and to assert that the adherents to this doctrine were rather limited in number.[4] It is now almost universally recognized that the eschatology of the second- and third-century Church was in fact generally, though not exclusively, premillennial. It is true that premillennialism was not set up as a test of orthodoxy; but to the extent that early Christian literature reveals an eschatology, it is usually premillennial. This is particularly true of the second century, less so of the third century. It held to the literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10, to the distinction between the first and second resurrection, with an intervening millennial kingdom inaugurated and ruled over by Christ. The coming of the Lord to reign on earth was looked for with fond expectation. There is no lack for names associated with this view—Papias, Polycarp, Irenaeus, *The Epistle of Barnabas, The Shepherd of Hermas,* Justin Martyr, Tertullian and the Montanists, and so on into the third century. While the Montanists were bemoaning the decline of the fervor with which Christians looked for the return of Christ, Origen's polemics against premillennialism and its hermeneutics in itself is evidence that premillennialism continued to be a view held by a significant number of Christians.[5] But forces were at work that eventually were to lead to the demise of premillennialism, and one of these was the very vividness with which its advocates portrayed the material blessings of the millennium. Papias is reported to have said, "The days will come when vineyards shall grow each with ten thousand vines, and on one vine ten thousand branches, and on one branch ten thousand shoots, and on every shoot ten thousand clusters, and in every cluster ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give twenty-five measures of wine; and when one of the saints grasps a

[3]J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1964) 374-375.
[4]L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975) 262.
[5]J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) I, 125.

cluster, another cluster will cry out, 'I am better, take me, bless the Lord on my account.' "[6]

A shift away from premillennialism was clearly under way. It had no place in the theology of the Alexandrian school. Origen in particular denied a future millennium by his allegorization of OT passages. Indeed, by absorbing Christ's coming into the cosmic processes, Origen came dangerously close to presenting an *alternative* to eschatology. Eusebius of Caesarea rejected Papias' millenarianism as "bizarre" and "rather mythological."[7] After the time of Constantine it becomes clear that the doctrine was waning, and "through the influence of Tyconius and Augustine it was pushed completely into the background and replaced by another scheme of eschatology, which, since the fifth century, has been regarded more or less as the orthodox teaching."[8]

This view is generally known as amillennialism. Augustine gave up the view that the one thousand years of Revelation 20 were to be understood literally as referring to a future reign of Christ on the earth between the two resurrections. The one thousand years referred to the history of the Church, representing the perfect period of time appointed by God for the Church's sojourn in the world. Then would come the last judgment. The Church was identified as the kingdom of God. The first resurrection (Rev 20:1-6) was thought to be the regeneration of the soul.

For hundreds of years following Augustine, all forms of millenarianism were regarded as heretical aberrations. Although there are evidences that it persisted in the world of popular religion, official Catholic doctrine had no place for it, and most leaders of the Catholic Church were determined to suppress it. In fact, attempts were made either to expurgate or revise the premillennial passages of earlier exponents such as Irenaeus and Victorinus.[9]

This adherence to the Augustinian concept of the millennium carried over into Protestantism. Calvin and Luther denied the possibility of a future, literal one-thousand-year reign of Christ, as did Lutheran and Reformed confessions. Though militant radicals such as Thomas Müntzer preached a type of literal millennium, it was not until the seventeenth century that deviations from Augustinian amillennialism became respectable.

In seventeenth-century England a new, optimistic variety of eschatology developed, the Puritan doctrine of the latter-day glory. Its earliest proponents were Thomas Brightman, William Gouge, John Cotton and John Owen. They often disagreed as to the details, but there were many characteristic points held in common. They dropped the Augustinian equation of the millennium with the whole age of the Church. They held an optimistic view of the last period of world history. It would be marked by the coming of the kingdom of God by the power

[6]R. M. Grant, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Nelson, 1965) 5, 95.
[7]Pelikan, *Tradition,* pp. 128-129.
[8]P. Toon, "Introduction," *Puritan Eschatology,* P. Toon, ed. (London: James Clarke, 1970) 13.
[9]Ibid., p. 17.

of the Spirit of God. But it would not be inaugurated by Christ's return. All people would confess that Jesus is Lord, and the influence of Satan in both politics and religion would be broken. Closely connected with the outpouring of the Spirit was the conversion of the Jews. In the mid-1600s, some even argued that Jews ought to be readmitted to England, so that they would meet some of the godliest people on earth (Puritans), be converted, and thus hasten the beginning of the latter-day glory or millennium. The goal of missions was the preparation for and bringing in of the latter-day glory. For the Church it would be a time of great prosperity as she enjoyed purity of doctrine, worship and practice. Indeed, Owen proclaimed that even Arminianism would be rejected and cast out. Governments would recognize that their primary purpose was the cause and existence of the Church. Only at the end of this time of glory, the millennium, would Christ return to be seen by all and to execute judgment on all who had opposed him. We now usually call this view postmillennialism.[10]

The Puritans brought the doctrine to *New* England. Some even considered the Indians of the Americas to be descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Thus their conversion to Christianity would have special significance for the bringing in of the millennial age. Through this Puritan influence varieties of postmillennialism were the dominant eschatology in American theology until at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Jonathan Edwards gave special place and development to that doctrine. In 1742 he conjectured that the Great Awakening, especially in New England, might "prove the dawn of that glorious day."[11] Charles Finney almost one hundred years later lamented that if Christians in the United States had gone to work ten years earlier, "the millennium would have fully come in the United States before this day."[12] This view was also reflected in the systematic theologies of Charles Hodge and Augustus Strong.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century postmillennialism was entering a period of decline, at least in North America. Some reverted to amillennialism, a shift that offered the least necessary adjustments. But others turned to forms of premillennialism. Actually, premillennialism had long been enjoying renewed respectability and interest. Even in the early seventeenth century, the influential German Reformed theologian, Johann Alsted, had advocated a form of premillenialism. At about the same time a similar doctrine was being preached in England by Joseph Mede, sometimes called the father of premillennialism in English-speaking churches. R. G. Clouse mentions John Milton, Thomas Goodwin and Isaac Newton among others as taking this position and says that virtually every Independent minister in England and Wales held to it. Even a few Presbyterian ministers followed Mede's

[10]P. Toon, "The Latter-Day Glory," *Puritan Eschatology,* pp. 23-41.

[11]J. Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival of Religion in New England,* in J. E. Smith, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* vol. IV, *The Great Awakening,* C. C. Goen, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 358.

[12]C. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Revell, 1898, reprint) 289-290.

interpretation of Revelation 20, and the view was represented in the Westminster assembly.[13] Representatives of the viewpoint were also to be found on the continent, such as Bengel in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

However, it was not until the early nineteenth century that premillennialism really began to come into its own again. You may be surprised to see *"early"* nineteenth century, for we have tended to think of the *late* nineteenth century as the time in which premillennialism reappeared in British and American evangelicalism. While it is true that that is when it began to enjoy its current heyday, recent research has conclusively shown that we have underestimated the strength of premillennialism in the first half of the nineteenth century.[14] Of course by mid-century the Plymouth Brethren were in the process of spreading their dispensational premillennial eschatology. As the century wore on they were to carry their eschatological views far beyond the bounds of their own movement in the British isles, Europe, North America, and even indirectly into Russia. Probably by the end of the century, and at least early in the twentieth century, premillennialism had become the most vocal eschatology among American evangelicals. Perhaps it would be unwise of me to enter into the statistical debate of whether or not the varieties of premillennialism have been numerically dominant. But the fact that every prominent American evangelist from the time of D. L. Moody to the present has been a premillennialist testifies to the pervasiveness of this viewpoint.

Perhaps you have noticed in this survey of the history of eschatology, especially as it relates to the millennial question, that I have said next to nothing about the factors operative to produce these shifts from one position to another. My silence is purposeful, for it is this aspect of things that fascinates me. Certain of these influences producing change are well known. We cite the allegorical method of the Alexandrian school, especially of Origen, as undermining the hermeneutics on which premillennialism depends. It is usually recognized that the extravagances of some of the millenarians through history have influenced more sober minds to fear all views looking for a future millennium. We all know the personal influence of Augustine on the history of theology, and particularly his view of history and eschatology as expounded in *The City of God.* And premillennialists are quick to argue that the return in principle to grammatico-historical hermeneutics in the Reformation provided the hermeneutical foundation for the eventual resurgence of premillennialism. Nor would we want to ignore the personal influence on others of such respected post-Reformation figures as Cotton, Owen, Edwards, Alsted, Mede, Bengel, Darby and Scofield. And we obviously have to give great place to

[13]R. G. Clouse, "The Rebirth of Millenarianism," in Toon, *Puritan Eschatology*, p. 62; cf. also pp. 42-65.

[14]R. K. Whalen, "Millenarianism and Millennialism in America: 1790-1880," unpublished Ph. D. thesis (State University of New York at Stony Brook; October, 1971) 21-27, 45-47.

the general Puritan influence in North America. And in the search for factors that have produced significant shifts in theological thinking, we certainly would not want to ignore the factor that is one of the most significant and yet most frequently ignored by historians—the honest efforts at accurate exegesis of the Scriptural text and exposition of the Christian faith.

But I am intrigued by another phenomenon related to this matter of causes and effects as it relates to the history of eschatology. It might be more appropriate to say I am troubled. Time and again there seems to be a connection between eschatology and the Church's perception of itself in its historical situation. Eschatologies have been a reflection of the current mood or *Zeitgeist* or response to historical conditions. In other words, in many cases eschatologies appear to have been sociologically conditioned. This suggests that factors other than purely exegetical and theological considerations have been more influential in the history of eschatology than we would care to admit.

I do not mean to suggest that this is always the case or that it is of necessity the case. I also recognize that it is often difficult to distinguish between cause and effect, and in some cases a given factor may be both cause and effect. Nevertheless, as we retrace some of our steps through the history of millennial views, there does seem to be a connection between eschatology and the Church's perception of itself in its historical situation.

The Church of the first three centuries was periodically threatened with destruction by persecution. These early Christians were outcasts, and they seldom exercised authority within the political system. The world system itself was a hostile place, and there seemed to be little hope of a rule of righteousness and peace apart from direct divine intervention. Christians of this period were generally premillennial, looking forward to Christ's return and the blessings of the millennial age. Toward the end of this early period, the intensity of the premillennial hope began to wane. Is it not interesting that although there were yet to be severe persecutions and although official toleration of Christianity awaited the time of Constantine, there were nevertheless long periods of practical toleration in which Christians began to feel quite at home in this world here and now?

The Constantinian era brought an even more radical change in Christian attitudes toward the empire and the world. Toleration was granted, and legal status was given to the Church. The link between Church and empire became even closer. Christians could now confess one God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one empire and one emperor. Constantine, who had conquered under the sign of the cross, was hailed as the Lord's anointed. Some asserted that "Constantine had fulfilled the promise of Isaiah that henceforth swords should be beaten into plowshares, and the nations should learn war no more." In fact, one of the participants at the Council of Nicea, who had survived great persecution a few years earlier, wondered whether the kingdom of God had come or whether he was dreaming, as he filed through the ranks of

Roman soldiers to sit down with the emperor.[15] And the trend away from premillennialism becomes more obvious, as in Eusebius of Caesarea. The dispossessed and the downtrodden are no longer dispossessed and downtrodden. God rules *now*. In the early fifth century Augustine gave up the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 and set the course for most exegesis in western Christendom for hundreds of years to come. His *City of God* was intended as an apologetic against the charge that the sack of Rome in 410 was due to the abandonment by a growing body of Christians of the gods that had made Rome great. But it did much more than that. It set forth a positive philosophy of history and an eschatology to go along with it. It was an affirmation of the Church's place as the kingdom of God in the universal history of the world.[16] The vivid expectation of Christ's soon return was lost, and amillennialism was to reign supreme for centuries. It is true that in the thought of Gregory the Great there was a sense of the immediacy of Christ's return. But is it not interesting, again, that it appeared when he faced the horrors of the invasion of Italy by the Lombards?[17]

Hopes of a future millennium instituted by divine intervention revived only occasionally through the medieval age and into the Reformation. Significantly, such hopes generally arose among the downtrodden whose only hope for peace, security and prosperity seemed to lie in the future and in divine intervention. But for the rest, it was enough that the kingdom of God was now.

As we noted earlier, the next significant shift in eschatology is that toward postmillennialism among the Puritans beginning in the late sixteenth century. This optimistic view of the future, among other things, seems to have developed a growing conviction in Reformed circles holding to an optimistic view of the last period of human history. In the seventeenth century it coalesced with the Puritan concern to root out popery and Arminianism and establish a rule of the saints. But I would also like to tentatively suggest that it parallels and perhaps is a theological reflection of the optimistic views of mankind's potential and opportunities with an expanding geographical horizon and an ever-growing confidence in the powers of man's reason. Be that as it may, it is significant that in England the preaching of the "latter-day glory," the postmillennial vision, reached its height in the late 1640s, and then it had a precipitous decline. This decline was preceded by the exclusion of Presbyterians from Parliament in 1648, the execution of Charles I in 1649, and the inability of the Rump and the military to rule the nation effectively and bring contentment. The hope that the millennium would dawn in old England faded into disillusionment.[18] But the experience of the Puritans in New England was different. Factors producing disillusionment were longer in appearing there.

[15]R. H. Bainton, *Christendom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) I, 95, 99.
[16]Pelikan, *Tradition,* p. 129; cf. A. Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York: Dover, 1961) V, 151-153.
[17]Toon, "Introduction," p. 14.
[18]Toon, "Conclusion," p. 128.

Although the theme was less frequent in the period of the jeremiads, it did not disappear. In the 1740s it received new vigor and prominence through Jonathan Edwards' influence.[19] Edwards still considered New England the place where the millennium was about to dawn and spread through the world. It remained the dominant eschatology in the United States until the late nineteenth century. In fact, this thinking so came to dominate the American scene that a secularized version of optimistic postmillennialism has characterized this country's historic understanding of its taming of the continent and its mission in the world. In this case, effect has become cause, which does reverse the point I am trying to make.

Even so, the fortunes of eschatologies in the American experience probably are the most clear demonstration that they tend to be responses to the times or reflections of sociological conditions. Up to 1860, postmillennialism reigned supreme in American evangelical theology and life. Evangelism and missions were encouraged from postmillennial motives, as we noted earlier in the case of Charles Finney. The involvement of evangelicals in social reform sprang in large degree from a postmillennial understanding of the course of history.[20]

But then came 1861—the Civil War. Its horrors brought disillusionment to many. The influx of immigrants from Europe who were Catholic or worse shattered the dreams of a Christianized America. The evils and inequities of industrialization and urbanization beclouded the vision of ever-advancing progress. The reform crusades turned from hope to despair. There seemed to be more cause for pessimism than optimism on the American scene. Precisely at this time the precipitous decline of postmillennialism began. And just at this time premillennialism made its big splash with ever-expanding ripples. Reflecting this negative assessment of the world's prospects apart from direct divine intervention, D. L. Moody said:

> I look on this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life-boat, and said to me, "Moody, save all you can." God will come in judgment and burn up this world, but the children of God don't belong to this world; they are in it but not of it, like a ship in the water. This world is getting darker, and its ruin is coming nearer and nearer. If you have any friends of this wreck unsaved, you had better lose no time in getting them off.[21]

From a strictly sociological perspective, most people would have found it difficult to disagree with the premillennialists' assessment of the direction of history. With social unrest, labor strife, anarchists, unemployment and financial panics, it was a quarter-century of socio-economic turmoil in the United States.

[19]See n. 11 above. Cf. also *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (third American complete and standard edition; New York: Eaton and Mains, n. d.) II, 95-96.

[20]See H. R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Hamden, Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1956) 155-160.

[21]D. L. Moody, *New Sermons* (St. Louis: N. D. Thompson, 1877) 535.

Looking across the Atlantic, we find that the situation was not so different. Many of the socio-economic conditions in the United States had their British and European counterparts. I have access to the 1875 volume of the well-known British evangelical and premillennial periodical, *Signs of Our Times.* I remembered that it contained frequent references to signs supposedly indicative of impending world crisis culminating in Christ's return. So I spent several hours going through its pages. Its contributors' premillennialism was as much tied to their assessment of history and its momentary course as it was to their exegesis. Premillennialism was tied to the impending dissolution of the Ottoman empire, the Franco-Prussian wars, the rising tide of revolutionary democracy, the multiplication of armies and armaments, the deepening antagonism between labor and capitalists, lawlessness, speculation on which Bonaparte prince was the Antichrist, ultramontane popery and possible alliance between the papacy and France, trouble in Ireland, the advance of Russia toward India, the Jewish population of Jerusalem, and what seemed to be an impending larger repatriation and conversion of the Jews. In the preceding century, Edwards and Wesley had both viewed the Great Awakening as possibly the dawning of the latter-day glory. But now, world conditions had so radically altered that contributors to *Signs of Our Times* interpreted the somewhat similar revival phenomena in the British Moody-Sankey meetings, 1873-75, much differently. This time religious awakening is not the dawn of the postmillennial hope; it is God's last visitation of mercy before the judgments preceding the millennium. One contributor to the periodical concluded: "The whole aspect of the world ... shows that the personal advent of Christ, accompanied with terrible judgments upon every nation, is close at hand, to raise the sleeping saints, to translate the living Christians, to destroy the Popish, Mahomedan, and Infidel Anti-Christs, and reign visibly over the earth for 1,000 years, as promised in Revelation xx."[22] Which is right or wrong theologically is not the point here. The fact is that postmillennialism was not suited to the mood and condition of the times, and it declined; premillennialism was, and it began to prosper. Even James Orr, although he does not reveal his eschatology by this statement, reflects this mood as he lectures in 1897. He said, "I formerly hinted, as a contributing cause to this deeper interest in eschatological questions, at the sense of exhaustion and sadness—the somewhat pessimistic temper—in which the century closes, as if human affairs were drawing to some final crisis."[23]

Time and space do not allow for further detailed consideration of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, I suggest the following instances to stimulate your thinking along these lines. Alsted, one of the earliest post-Reformation premillennialists, appears to have adopted the position at the very time he was recoiling from the horrors of what the

[22]P. B. Morgan, "The Coming Crisis," *Signs of Our Times* (November 9, 1875) 719.
[23]Orr, *Progress,* p. 348.

Thirty Years' War was doing to his land.[24] The premillennialism that began to flower in the late nineteenth century had roots that went back very early into the century. Are there any factors that might provide a sociological parallel to this period of early growth? Yes. Premillennialism revived very soon after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Thrones toppled, continents were conquered, expectations were reversed. Gradual progress did not seem so inevitable, and apocalyptic expectations seemed more realistic.[25] Even though postmillennialism was to remain dominant for some seventy-five more years, seeds of doubt concerning the inevitability of progress had been sown. Premillennialists began to insist on the "vanity and delusiveness of the expectations entertained by the world at large as to the progress of commerce and education, and the arts and sciences soon leading the nations to beat their swords into ploughshares, and to agree to general disarmament."[26] As premillennialism slowly grew in the first half of the nineteenth century, there is evidence in its literature that it appealed to the growing sense of threat and anxiety that its adherents experienced even in that optimistic age. They discerned the precursors of the late-nineteenth-century storm.[27]

Finally, I suggest that we look at the recent popular resurgence of interest in matters prophetic. Its literature is obviously premillennial. Can anyone seriously question that its current popularity is unrelated to the contemporary pessimism and doomsday mentality—a mentality brought on by the crises of our times: natural disasters, nuclear holocaust, food supply, energy supply, population explosion, regimentation and depersonalization, environmental pollution, and so on? Even the titles of some of the books appeal to this mentality: *The Late Great Planet Earth, Armageddon: Oil and the Middle East Crisis, Civilization's Last Hurrah.*

Now that I have probably alienated both my theological friends and enemies, what is the point of all this? Please remember that I am aware that I have not told the whole story of factors influencing shifts in eschatology. Nor am I saying that eschatologies have always been sociologically conditioned. Nor do I believe that they are of necessity sociologically conditioned. And I recognize that in some of the instances which I have cited it is difficult to distinguish between cause and effect. In fact, in some cases there may be no cause-effect relationship at all. I would also insist that millennial views of all varieties within orthodox Christianity usually spring fundamentally from a conviction of God's sovereignty and grace. In other words, millennial views, however conceived, are not merely Christianized versions of secular ideas of progress or decline.

[24]Clouse, "Rebirth," pp. 49, 54-55.
[25]E. R. Sandeen, "Millennialism," *The Rise of Adventism,* E. S. Gaustad, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 107-108.
[26]M. Baxter, "The Prophetical Outlook in Europe," *Signs of Our Times* (November 9, 1875) 719.
[27]Sandeen, "Millennialism," pp. 115-117.

However, even when we give due credit to certain basic Christian convictions that serve as the springs from which the various millennial views flow, we are still faced with the phenomenon of the correlation between changing currents within Christian eschatologies and the vicissitudes of the times generally. Aside from individual cases that you might want to debate with me, surely I have presented enough to suggest that we as Christian exegetes and theologians are susceptible to influences from the moods and conditions of our times, and especially so in our eschatologies. My concern is that we become doubly aware of our vulnerability lest we be unduly swayed by such pressures. Is it going too far to suggest that at least one of the factors in our past inability to achieve a basic consensus on eschatology is that we have not been sufficiently aware of this vulnerability?