

PREFACE

Since this book is a collection of essays by several scholars and not the treatise of one author, it is perhaps necessary to state briefly its theme and basic thesis so that each contribution may be seen in its proper context. First of all it is shown that the first reformers of the sixteenth century, be they Lutheran or Reformed, adopted the traditional Augustinian eschatology. They equated the millennium of Revelation 20 with the period of Church history from the time of Christ to the end of the world, or with a specific period of 1,000 years of that Church history. They totally rejected the millenarianism or chiliasm of the early Fathers, Irenaeus and Justin for example, and found the militant chiliasm of the German Anabaptists deplorable. Yet Luther paved the way for the modification of eschatology by his historicist approach to the last book of the Bible, which he adopted in the second edition of his Notes on the New Testament. Henceforth most Protestant writers who commented on the Apocalypses of John and Daniel followed his lead and saw in their highly symbolic visions and dreams 'prophecies' of the downfall of the Turks, of the destruction of the city of Rome, of the demise of the Papacy, and of the ultimate triumph of the protestant Biblical religion. As it was widely believed that the end of the age was near these 'prophecies' seemed all the more relevant.

The Augustinian historicist approach continued to be popular throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and amongst its more able exponents were John Bale, John Napier and William Guild. But amongst some Calvinists it was modified by the inclusion of the doctrine (which was not explicitly taught by either St Augustine or Calvin) that near the end of the age large numbers of Jews, or perhaps the whole Jewish people, would be converted to Christianity from Judaism, and by their conversion bring great spiritual blessing to the Church on earth. This modified Augustinian historicist approach to eschatology probably owed its origin to the influence of Theodore Beza's Notes on the New Testament, in which he interpreted Romans 11: 25ff. as meaning the future conversion of the Jewish people to Christ. William Perkins, Elnathan Parr and Robert Baillie were amongst the large number of English and Scottish divines who followed Beza.

In a further development of the modified Augustinian eschatology the optimistic aspects were elaborated and strengthened. It was taught that there would be a period of 'latter-day glory' at the end of the age after the collapse of the Papacy and the conversion of the Jews. Spirit-filled preachers would be God's instruments in accomplishing this great revival of Christianity in the world. Some people today call this type of thinking postmillennialism but the Puritans themselves did not use this term. Its more famous Puritan exponents included Thomas Brightman, William Gouge, John Cotton and John Owen, and the Congregationalist churches made it part of their official creed.

Perhaps the most interesting and revolutionary development of Puritan eschatology was that which led to the wide acceptance in Cromwellian England of the doctrine of the future millennium. It was the influential writings of John Henry Alsted, the German Calvinist, and Joseph Mede, the Cambridge Puritan, which suggested to Puritan preachers that sound Biblical exegesis demanded that the millennium of Revelation 20 be viewed as in the future, not in the past or present. Social conditions in England made millenarianism, connected with an historicist approach to the books of Revelation and Daniel, most attractive, and, though the conservative millenarianism of Mede always had its supporters in the 1630s and 1640s, an extreme chiliasm appealed particularly to radical, sectarian politicians and preachers. Therefore, we look at the teachings of the militant Fifth Monarchy Men; and also, by way of contrast, at the eschatology of the Quakers.

The book ends with a study of the efforts made by friends of the Jews in the 1650s to have them readmitted to England and finally, in an appendix, a study of Dutch Calvinist attitudes towards the future of the Jewish people is made in order to show that interest in eschatology and the conversion of the Jews was a European Protestant phenomenon.

To set the whole subject in context the introductory chapter surveys attitudes to the doctrine of the millennium from the days of the New Testament to the time of the Protestant Reformation. And to help the reader follow the references to the Book of Revelation an outline of its contents is given in Appendix I.

As editor I am most grateful to the contributors for their readiness to join me in the production of this book. Also I am grateful to James Butterworth Esq., L. F. Lupton Esq., Gerald Bonner Esq., Professor H. R. Trevor-Roper, Professor F. F. Bruce, and various other people who gave advice and help.

We only intend this book to serve as an introduction to the subject of eschatology in the seventeenth century and we commend our readers to the book by Dr Van Den Berg for more information on Dutch views and to the forthcoming book on the Fifth Monarchy Men by Dr B. S. Capp. We hope others will be inspired to look into matters we have raised for we believe that the so-called Puritan Revolution cannot be wholly understood without a good knowledge of eschatological views prevalent in England and Europe at that time.

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