

**THE MYSTERY OF GOD
SHALL BE FINISHED**

**THE
PHILADELPHIA
CHURCH AGE**

A STUDY IN THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

No 9

THE PHILADELPHIA CHURCH AGE

FOREWORD

The sixth Church age covers the 18th & 19th C.

After the major setback to the first (Reformation) incoming wave of restoration, the tide of restoration returns, continuing to gather momentum during the Philadelphia age.

In many ways this is a glorious age, especially as the sight of the final goal comes more and more clearly into focus the more the age advances.

Examined in the light of the *fulness* of God's desires and promises, of course, there are still shortcomings. But, there is a strong sense of an incoming tide that will eventually reach its full extent. This contrasts with the Reformation period, when there was more of a sense of a hard struggle to hold onto as much as possible of that which was initially possessed in the opening years of that age.

I have used the same approach with Philadelphia as with the other ages, analysing details of the Lord's words to the angel of the church to show how they match the historical circumstances of the age.

The particular parts of the letter to the church at Philadelphia which are examined are:

	Chapter Title	Verse
1	Christ Jesus our Sanctification	<i>v7a: These things saith he that is holy</i>
2	The Age of the Open Door	<i>v7-8a: These things saith he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth ... I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it</i>
3	Restoration of the Gifts of the Spirit	<i>v8: Thou hast a little strength</i>
4	Nicolaitanism in the Philadelphia Age	<i>v9: Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.</i>
5	Restoration of the Doctrine of the Second Coming	<i>v10b-11: I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.</i>

The Lord warned Philadelphia that the hour of worldwide temptation and the time of His coming were near. The admonition is solemn: “*hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*” DO NOT LOOSEN YOUR GRIP. DO NOT LOSE YOUR REWARD.

Happily, Philadelphia took heed.

They ran well. They kept His Word and did not deny His name (v 8c, 10a). Unlike Sardis, they did not relax or loosen their grip, nor lose things that they once held. Whilst there was not yet a complete recovery of the original full counsel of God and the fulness of the faith once for all delivered to the saints, they kept a tight grip on, and patiently held fast to, the measure of truth they had. And they did it right up to the end of their age.

This does not, of course, mean there were no pressures to slacken their initial firm grip. That is implied in the exhortation, “*hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown*” (v11b). Despite many winds of doctrine in the latter part of the 19th C, however, (e.g. higher criticism, modernism, the social gospel, the theory of evolution), they not only held true to the light received, they sought to advance further into even deeper things.

No wonder, then, that Philadelphia received no word of reproof.

But what of Laodicea?

Philadelphia brings us to the end of the 19th C. Having at last come this far, there is an anticipation of what the next century would see of the incoming tide of restoration. The final Laodicea age, however, is a contradiction. On the one hand, there is the hope of full recovery for they who remain true to the Word. On the other is the dark cloud of apostasy, spiritual blindness and a church with Christ on the outside.

A reconciliation of these two apparent contradictions must await the Laodicea study.

Much help has been gained in this study from the five volumes by Edwin Orr on worldwide evangelical awakenings (Bethany Fellowship). Other helpful sources have been:

- “*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*”, J Wesley (Beacon Hill Press)
- “*The Inextinguishable Blaze*”, A Skevington Wood (Paternoster)
- “*The Burning Heart: John Wesley, Evangelist*”, A Skevington Wood (Paternoster)
- “*Pathway to Power*”, L Davison (Fountain Trust)
- “*The Light of the Nations*”, J Edwin Orr (Paternoster)
- “*The Ministry of Healing*”, A J Gordon (Hodder and Stoughton, 1882)
- “*The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*”, V Synan (Eerdmans)

An innovation is the extensive Appendix at the end of the booklet. I hope this helps the reader by thinning down the main body of the text by removing around a quarter of the detail. Hopefully the Appendix will flow in its own right by the inclusion of occasional brief excerpts from the main text.

My grateful thanks must once more go to my late wife, Carol, for her faithful labours in typing much of the original manuscript in the days when word processors were still only a dream. (I first began this book in 1980/81, but felt checked from completing it at that time. More recently, however, I was guided to complete the work.) Thanks also to Howard, an experienced and longstanding friend of many years, for his useful suggestions.

Further copies of this or other studies in this series may be obtained by completing the Contact form on my website, www.endtimerestoration.com

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GLOSSARY OF END TIME TERMS

- Amillennialism
- Postmillennialism
- Historical Premillennialism
- Futurist Premillennialism
- Dispensationalism

1
“THESE THINGS SAITH HE THAT IS HOLY”
or
CHRIST JESUS OUR SANCTIFICATION

In the introduction to this age, we read:

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy... (Rev 3:7)

How is this title relevant to the Philadelphia age?

Introduction

a) *The Historical Recovery of the Knowledge of Christ*

One thing stands out above all else in Church history, that it is far more than:

- a list of historical events, places and names; or even
- the loss and recovery of certain truths.

The essence of Church history is:

- the loss and recovery of He whose Name is above all names; and
- the loss and recovery of He who is the Truth: Christ Himself.

So this series, whilst providing relevant historical data, has emphasised above all how the Church progressively relaxed her grip on Christ as the Source of every aspect of her life then began to tighten it again.

The progressive relaxation that began in the very first age of the Church reached its nadir in the awful depths of the Thyatira Dark Ages. The Reformation was the turning point. It was the start of the recovery of the full knowledge of Christ. But, it most certainly did not complete it. It was good as far as it went. But it did not go far enough. There was a very clear proclamation of Christ our Righteousness, but little vital appropriation of Christ our Sanctification.

A keynote of the Philadelphia age is the quest for, and experience of, the latter. This is hinted at in the attribute of Christ, highlighted in the opening words to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: *“These things saith he that is holy”* (Rev 3:7a).

A characteristic of the letters to the churches is that the attributes of Christ specified in each letter have a relevance to that church. And this is certainly no exception. The Philadelphia age saw a widespread understanding of, and hunger for, the sanctification of the Spirit: Christ our Sanctification.

Undoubtedly the Methodists made the greatest Spiritual impact on the 18th & 19th C. The various groups originating from John Wesley’s early Methodists shared a common emphasis on holiness. And for them holiness did not mean mere moral living. It meant an appropriation and tasting of the very holiness of Christ Himself.

This teaching was held by the early 18th C Moravians, the chief instruments in opening Wesley’s eyes to a living faith in Christ. But it was Wesley’s ministry that popularised the expectancy that all believers could partake of the divine nature. Not

only in Britain but also in the newly formed USA, and in early missions in the West Indies, South Africa and the South Pacific, Methodist lay preachers endeavoured to impart his consuming vision: *“to spread Scriptural holiness throughout the land”*.

To Wesley, this holiness was nothing less than the life of God in the soul of man, the mind that was in Christ and the image of God stamped on the heart. He considered the propagation of this vision as the chief reason that God had raised up the Methodists.

In addition to the newly emerging Methodist denominations themselves, the fastest growing groups in the 18th & 19th C, this vision spread throughout Christendom. The quest for holiness also deeply influenced existing denominations. So widespread was this blessed vision that, by the second half of the 19th C, it was being preached in every evangelical denomination with a fervour and revelation unknown for centuries. (See Appendix for fuller details.)

From the Reformation on, the Church generally was coming closer and closer to the divine image, Christ the Wisdom of God. She was growing deeper in the knowledge of the Son of God, unto that full maturity for which she was designed, a maturity measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ Himself. Step by step she was coming nearer to her high calling: to *“bear the image of the heavenly”* (1 Cor 15:49).

In short,

- The Reformation/Sardis restored Christ our Righteousness.
- Philadelphia restored Christ our Sanctification.

b) The Recovery of the Experience of the Holy Ghost

Parallel and closely linked to the progressive recovery of the full knowledge of the Son of God, the Church also began to experience once more an increasing measure of the Holy Ghost.

Squeezing out the Life of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Christ, from the believer’s experience is a key objective of the spirit of antichrist throughout the Church ages. Over the first four ages, step by step, Biblical doctrines were drained of their Spiritual life by blinding believers to the power of the Spirit to make those doctrines a reality in their daily lives.

- In some cases doctrines were made of none effect by the traditions of men, claiming they only applied to the apostolic age. For example, the ministry of apostles and prophets and the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit.
- In other cases, doctrines were retained but reinterpreted in such a way as to drain them of their spiritual power, leaving but an empty shell of their original Biblical glory. For example, the washing of regeneration of the Holy Ghost was metamorphosed into baptismal regeneration, whilst the renewing of the Holy Ghost became a mere self-attained morality (Ti 3:5).

From the Reformation, however, a process of reversing the accumulated depredations of the spirit of antichrist was begun. The Church was progressively restored to a living experience of the full ministry of the Holy Ghost.

This process was not so pronounced in the Reformation itself. In fact, there was a notable lack of Holy Ghost manifestation. Indeed, it is not without significance that the Lord twice warned of death in the Sardis church (Rev 3.1,2). Death is the absence of life. Life is the Holy Ghost (Jn 6.63; Ro 8.6; Rev 11.11). So, Sardis was greatly lacking in the Spirit.

Let us illustrate. A major achievement of the Reformation was to turn men to Christ as their Justification, their Mediator, their Advocate and their Surety, bypassing the vast Nicolaitan priestly system. The principle emphasis, however, tended to be on the forensic or judicial aspects of salvation. In other words, it emphasised **justification** (i.e. an acquittal in a law-court) rather than **regeneration** (i.e. the impartation of new life by the Holy Ghost).

In the Philadelphia age this imbalance was corrected. There was a growing proclamation and experience of the power of the Holy Ghost both in evangelism and in sanctification.

- In evangelism great stress was laid upon the new birth, the washing of regeneration ... **of the Holy Ghost** (Ti 3.5 cp Jn 3.6).
- In sanctification, the emphasis was on the sanctification **of the Spirit** (1 P 1.2; 2 Th 2.13), effected by the renewing **of the Holy Ghost** (Ti 3:5). It was described as the love of God shed abroad in the heart **by the Holy Ghost** (Ro 5.5), a progressive transfiguration from glory unto glory **by the Spirit of the Lord** (2 Cor 3.18).

(This process would later continue into the 20th C, when the Church would advance yet further into union with He Who “**shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost**” (Lk 3:16).)

Each of these stages brings the believer into a fuller life in the Spirit. And since the Holy Ghost is described as *the heavenly gift* (Heb 6.4; cp 1 P 1.12), then each imparts more of heaven into man:

- His original birth (or, regeneration) is **from above** (Jn 3:3, Margin).
- Every facet of his sanctification is an impartation of the very attributes and Life of heaven itself (e.g. wisdom **from above** (Jas 3:17)).
- Finally, the baptism of the Spirit imparts a power “**from on high**” (Lk 24:49).

How blessed that every attribute of the new man is from heaven above, and not of self. Truly the Church is a heavenly being, not only in destination, but also in nature.

So, the Philadelphia age witnessed a major advance both in the Church’s rooting and grounding of herself wholly in Christ and in her experience of the Spirit.

Let us now examine the historical development of the doctrine of sanctification in the 18th & 19th C, illustrating how Christ-centred and Spirit-imparted it was. Jesus Himself was clearly seen as our Sanctification rather than simply being our Teacher, Example or even Sanctifier. And the Holy Ghost was clearly seen as the Agent of that supernaturally imparted sanctification.

(I limit myself here to the *historical* development of this heart-warming doctrine. This is not a detailed *Biblical* study on the nature of sanctification.)

The Moravians, Precursors of the Sanctification of the Spirit

The Moravian Brethren, a small body of central European believers, played a key catalytic role in the awakenings and missionary advances of this age. Their influence on Wesley (and hence wherever his influence spread) was less pronounced in sanctification than in regeneration. This is because the question of how to attain holiness had exercised Wesley's mind long before he met them. Nonetheless, the Moravian emphasis on the centrality of Christ set the tone for the whole age. The same Spirit was at work in different believers' minds worldwide to restore the same revelation of Christ as our Sanctification.

One Moravian teaching was that faith in Christ brings freedom from the dominion of *present* sin as well as forgiveness from *past* sins. James Hutton, a supporter of the early Methodists who later joined the Moravians, wrote:

This was so very new to us...for most of us had earnestly striven against sin without effect, and (in) the preaching from pulpits...dry morality universally prevailed, and we who were the awakened had been just as far from Christ as had the generality of the preachers. For we tried to help ourselves, we dreamt not, we heard not and we knew not that our eternal welfare lay solely in Christ.

So, even those who looked only to Christ for justification had no idea He was not only their Example, but also their Source, of sanctification. Justified believers are not left to fulfil His commands in their own strength, relying on their initial conversion and the resultant desire to obey God that had been lacking in their unconverted state. Only in Christ are we sanctified just as in Him alone we are justified. This is what Hutton meant when he wrote of being ignorant of their eternal welfare lying solely in Christ.

Although Wesley's consuming passion for Scriptural holiness began ten years before he met the Moravians, he did gain insights from them. Peter Bohler told Wesley saving faith brought with it dominion over sin. After his conversion in 1738, Wesley visited Zinzendorf in Herrnhut. He was impressed with their apparent salvation "*from inward as well as outward sin*". The Moravians, however, believed this experience occurred at conversion, whilst Wesley looked for a subsequent blessing to impart this much-coveted power to overcome sin in the flesh. Although differing on the timing, Wesley absorbed deeply one key aspect of Moravian teaching:

- As he had recently learnt justification was the work of God without self-effort,
- So now he learned the key to release the power of that godliness he had so long and unavailingly sought after. Sanctification was not a moral code. It was the Life of Christ imparted through the Spirit. "*Salvation is of the Lord*".

John Wesley, the Arch Expositor

a) Introduction

Unquestionably the man whose ministry left the most far reaching and enduring mark on the Philadelphia age was John Wesley.

Justified by the Spirit

Together with other mighty men of God raised up in this day, Wesley's preaching to the unconverted was totally Christ centred, leaving no grounds for human boasting. Although he rejected the teachings of predestination and reprobation, Wesley proclaimed with great power the fundamental truth restored in the Reformation:

salvation by grace and justification by faith alone, wholly apart from works of righteousness. Before presenting Christ, Wesley first took from man all hope in himself for salvation. Man was utterly unable to make any contribution to his salvation. All that was good in man was ascribed to grace alone. Even man's response to the Gospel was founded on grace.

(How beautiful to come to an end of self and to taste Christ. Sometimes, when wading through the dreary Christ-less forms of medieval religion, I have felt like crying out like Mary, *"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."* (Jn 20:13). How good to feel again a fuller and fuller partaking of the fullness of Christ.)

Not only was all scope for human boasting demolished by the Christ-centred preaching of Wesley and his contemporaries, all power was attributed to the working of the Spirit.

This emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit was characteristic of Wesley's evangelistic ministry, whether in conviction, faith, assurance or regeneration. No scope was left for human boasting.

Convicted by the Spirit

Wesley both expected and saw deep conviction of sin fall upon the unconverted by the Holy Spirit (cp Jn 16.8). This was often so unbearable they could find relief only by crying out aloud for mercy.

Faith from the Spirit

Wesley's teaching on faith also was totally God-centred. Not only could man contribute nothing to his salvation, he could not even boast of his faith. For Wesley, faith, not just grace, was the gift of God. Saving faith in Christ was not a mere mental acknowledgement of His death for our sins. It was a coming to a place of despair of any hope in self, where all hope and confidence is thrown on and centred in Christ alone. It was not a mere mental assent to Bible truths, but a warm confidence in a pardoning God, *"a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for **my** sins."*

And how was such faith attained? Wesley taught it was not of man. It was imparted by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 4:13).

Inner Witness of the Spirit

One of Wesley's most distinctive teachings was a present assurance of a present salvation for all believers. And this, too, was the work of the Spirit (cp 1 Th 1.5). It was an inner assurance produced by the Spirit of faith. Wesley consistently emphasised a salvation that brings an inner sense of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. And that same Holy Spirit floods the heart with the love of God (Ro 5:5; 14:17). This assurance is not an opinion. It is a full assurance, the witness of the Holy Ghost within the believer (Ro 8:16).

Wesley's doctrine of the inner witness was a significant advance on the Reformation teaching of justification. He first learnt of a *"constant peace"* arising from *"a sense of forgiveness"* from the Moravians. Such an emphasis on *experiencing* sound doctrine was typical of Wesley. Little wonder his converts would frequently cry out for the conscious joy of sins forgiven.

Regenerated by the Holy Ghost

Whilst clearly teaching justification, stressing that all the merit was Christ's, Wesley also strongly emphasised regeneration, the new birth, in his preaching to the unconverted. In view of the regular experience of the operation of the Spirit in conviction, faith and assurance in Wesley's ministry, it is little wonder that he stressed *the washing of regeneration of the Holy Ghost*, i.e. that in this area also all power came from the Spirit.

And regeneration was not only *taught* as an imparting of new life. It was *experienced* as such. For Wesley, the new birth was *"that great change which God works in the soul when it is created anew in Christ Jesus; renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness."*

Sanctified by the Spirit

Wesley's preaching to the unconverted on regeneration as a new life from the Spirit led naturally to his teaching on the sanctification of new converts by the same Spirit.

Whilst never failing to emphasise the judicial basis of our salvation, Wesley's vision was fixed more than all else on his greatest passion: the achieving of a holiness which is nothing less than the image of God stamped on the heart.

For Wesley, regeneration imparted the Life that made such a transformation possible. It laid a solid foundation for his chief contribution to this age: his tireless proclamation of the need for and power of sanctification. For Wesley, sanctification was the logical outworking of that newly imparted Life as the new-born believer grew in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that Wesley did not consider his evangelistic ministry accomplished when the unconverted were convicted, repentant and bought to an assurance of sins forgiven. The essence of his ministry was his desire to take those so justified yet further into the grace of God, and how he taught it

Wesley's supreme life-long goal was to beget a people who had partaken of the divine nature, being transfigured from glory into glory until they reflected the image of God. His prime objective and ultimate goal was not justification, but sanctification. But he knew that justification was the basis for the experience of the sanctifying Spirit.

Throughout his ministry he proclaimed the possibility and reality of holiness in a way little heard for many centuries. It is not that the Puritans or the Anabaptists, for example, had not taught sanctification in the Sardis age. The significance of Wesley's teaching was not so much his emphasis on the **need** of holiness but on its **power**. He was profoundly conscious of the working of the Spirit of holiness and of its end product, Christ formed in the believer.

So, Wesley's teaching was far more than simply a revival of truths recovered during the Reformation. It was a significant advance on them. His teaching on sanctification had a very profound and growing influence throughout Christendom. It provoked a widespread quest that grew even more earnest in the 19th C for a vital experience of a sanctified life. The Reformation recovered Christ as our Justification. Philadelphia recovered Christ our Sanctification.

The tide of full restoration was continuing its advance. The Church was being rooted and built up in Christ more and more, learning to appropriate Him in yet fuller ways.

b) Early Quest for Scriptural Holiness (1725-1738)

Long before his transforming experience in 1738, John Wesley had desired holiness. From 1725 he began to seek an inner holiness rather than simply external forms. He brought himself under the iron rule of law and self-resolution in an attempt to eradicate all sin, whether in word, thought or deed.

In 1729 the famous Holy Club was set up at Oxford University by the Wesley brothers to further this aim among a few students of like mind. Wesley conceived holiness as:

- more than a complete dedication of the whole heart to God; it was *“having the mind which was in Christ”,* and *“walking as Christ also walked”.*
- not just living *for God;* it was living *God.*

In trying to bring his every thought and act into conformity to the Master, he came to see clearly his need for freedom from *“the law of sin and death”* which reigned within. Hence he was drawn to the promises of cleansing from sin and a circumcised heart.

So, a progressively clearer vision of the nature of sanctification grew inside Wesley. But until 1738 he did not have the key to experience it. Despite his sincerity and single-minded quest, the *power* of godliness eluded him. As with justification, he sought for sanctification in his own strength. As he said on returning from Georgia, *“I had the faith of a servant, but not of a son”.* He put this even more clearly on another occasion: *“I was striving, yea fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace”.*

c) The 1738 Experience & Subsequent Ministry

After meeting the Moravians and his 1738 conversion, Wesley discovered the faith he had so long struggled for. Not just a faith for forgiveness, but *“that faith which enables every one having it to cry out: I live not, but Christ liveth in me, and that life that I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God”.*

Whilst realising men are justified before they are sanctified, holiness was still his over-riding goal. Insisting on justification by faith was not true gospel preaching unless it also taught holiness. Justification alone was insufficient. It was necessary to declare the whole counsel of God.

Wesley said of full sanctification that it was, *“the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appears to have raised us up.”* Wherever he went, he emphasised conversion was not an end in itself. Holiness was the evidence of saving faith. He constantly warned of resting in an imputed righteousness that did not result in a holy life. For Wesley, evangelism and the call to holiness went hand in hand. Listeners were exhorted to expect a full salvation, not just forgiveness.

d) Distinctive Features of Wesley’s Teaching on Holiness

There were two distinctive features of his doctrine of sanctification:

- ***Its nature:*** not a legalistic morality but a supernatural impartation of divine Life.
- ***Its means of attainment:*** not by works but through the Spirit by faith.

For many years the *power* of godliness had been lost to the Church. In Pergamos, the sanctification of the Spirit was replaced by a man-made self-denial generally understood to be attainable only by a select few.

In his formative years, Wesley had many characteristics of a medieval monk in the way he sought the holiness he so earnestly coveted. His life was governed by rules. By continued effort he sought to keep the whole law. His journals reveal a relentless self-mortification and cross-examination. His most intimate motives and feelings were brought to the bar of a remorseless conscience. The failure of Wesley's Georgia mission revealed the fundamental weaknesses of his approach. He tried to impose on others the rigid discipline he was himself imprisoned by. His earnest searchings had led to a good understanding of what holiness was. But before 1738 he was ignorant of how to attain it.

When light finally broke, the faith that flooded his warmed heart revealed a Christ who could not only forgive and cleanse *past* sin, but also break the dominion of *present* sin. He saw Christ not only as his Righteousness, but also as his Sanctification. He wrote to his brother: "*till (conversion) sin had the dominion over me, though I fought it continually; but surely then, from that time to this it hath not, such is the free grace of Christ*". The salvation Wesley sought so long was not just a conscious forgiveness of sin. It was an enabling to fulfil the life of holiness he so desired, a deliverance from every fleshly desire and a cessation of all, even inward sins. The measure of faith he received matched his desire. Henceforth he was able to minister Christ as few had for many centuries in such a way that the man in the street could appropriate Him. Through his own lengthy inner struggles he learned well how to lead others to Christ. Teaching others how best to preach sanctification, he said "*always by way of promise; always drawing, rather than driving*". Sanctification was by receiving Christ rather than by self-effort. Attempting to copy Christ, without the supply of the Spirit of Christ, would only lead to frustration and self-despair.

So, the distinctive contribution of Wesley was not just his teaching on the nature of sanctification. It was also his ability to lead men to expect and to receive a supernatural endowment that enabled them to overcome sin and to reproduce Christ. More than any other up to that time, he popularised the expectancy and experience of the sanctification of the Spirit. He not only taught it; his listeners felt it was attainable. They were made conscious that there was a faith in the power of the Spirit that would enable them to draw deeply on the transforming life of Christ.

Wesley greatly popularised a recovery of understanding of both the power and the nature of sanctification. Hitherto holiness had generally been understood simply as an avoidance of obvious sin and the cultivation of Christian virtues. The Reformation doctrine of the total depravity of man had not helped. In their eagerness to emphasise that salvation is wholly of God, the reformers had left an unbalanced picture that inhibited expectancy of a fuller salvation than simply justification. They rightly emphasised the depravity of man *in himself*. But there was a failure to bring out the possibilities of a man *in Christ*. The Westminster Catechism, for example, says, "*No man even by the aid of divine grace, can avoid sinning, but daily sins in thought, word and deed*". Such teaching robs all hope of a sanctification whereby "*sin shall not have dominion over you*" (Ro 6:14).

Wesley clearly proclaimed a power capable of overcoming sin. He did not believe in a sinless perfection where a Christian *could* not sin. But he powerfully taught that a Christian *need* not sin, and that there was a supernatural power available to make this possible.

The Worldwide Spread of the Quest for Scriptural Holiness

a) America up to 1861

When Methodism entered the American colonies, the doctrine of entire sanctification went with it. Men were urged to press on beyond justification. American Methodists adopted the original goal of Wesley as their own: *“to spread Scriptural holiness over these lands”*. Francis Asbury, their first supervisor, strongly emphasised holiness of heart.

Starting with a powerful revival in Virginia in 1773-76, accompanied by dramatic scenes and an earnest seeking after the power of full sanctification, the Methodists spread rapidly both in the cities and on the rugged frontier. Circuit riders penetrated every corner of the land, urging their new converts to *“go on to perfection”*. These men carried the Presence of God, which contrasted starkly with the dour impersonal Calvinistic religion of the time. Their wide success was because they not only exhorted to moral living. They carried such a sense of *“the Spirit of life in Christ”* that men felt able to believe God could impart that same life to them that *“the righteousness of the law”* might be fulfilled *in* them (Ro 8:2,4).

The fervour that accompanied early 19th C revivals waned, but by the 1840s American Methodism began to restudy Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection. Hunger grew for holiness and the perfect love of 1 John 4:17-18. Periodicals to spread holiness teaching were begun, and by the Civil War ministers of most denominations were part of a national holiness crusade.

b) America from 1861 to 1894

The pursuit of holiness waned after the Civil War. Then, in 1867, a new nation-wide crusade for the promotion of entire sanctification began.

Although interdenominational, Methodists took a leading part. For a while it seemed Methodism (the largest denomination in America) would become the chief holiness group in the land. There was another upsurge in the proclamation and experience of instantaneous sanctification in Methodist churches.

Holiness literature flooded the land and holiness evangelists and Camp Meetings deeply influenced all sectors of religious life. All denominations were exercised by the question, *“Is it possible to live without sin?”* Although there were different interpretations of the means and nature of sanctification, the issue of holiness deeply concerned believers throughout the land, especially in the 1880s. Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection became popular far beyond Methodist borders.

(See Appendix for the ministries of Charles Finney, D L Moody, R A Torrey and A B Simpson.)

c) The Spread of Holiness Teaching in Britain, Germany & South Africa

As in America, early 19th C British Methodists began to lose interest in the Wesleyan teaching of entire sanctification, although lip service was paid to it in their creed. Holiness preachers from America in the 1840s and 1850s helped revitalise the home base until, by the end of the century, interest in holiness rivalled America.

Some examples were:

- **William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army**, had strong Wesleyan convictions. He saw a link between holiness and power to witness and preached the one to achieve the other.
- **The Keswick Convention for the Deepening of the Spiritual Life.** Evan Hopkins, early leader of the Convention, began to seek a fuller experience of God. The message of Keswick spread all over the globe. Its teaching was not strictly Wesleyan but a blend of Calvinistic and Arminian ideas to produce a doctrine of holiness acceptable to moderate (though not hyper) Calvinists. (In America the strong Wesleyan emphasis in holiness teaching provoked much Calvinist opposition.)
- **Other interdenominational conferences for the promotion of holiness** had far-reaching effects. Robert Pearsall Smith, led one in Oxford in 1874. He taught that holiness was the daily drawing in faith of the power of the life-giving Spirit. Those born again can abide in Christ and be daily freed from sin.

The effects of the Oxford conference reached German and Swiss Methodists, where many longed for the experience of 'fulness of love' proclaimed by the Wesley brothers. Pearsall Smith visited Germany. Believers began to seek the key to a holy life. By the early 20th C American holiness preachers had helped arouse a deep and widespread hunger among German evangelicals for the fulness of the Spirit.

One of those associated with the Keswick Conventions was Andrew Murray (1828-1917). For 20 years he was president of the holiness movement in South Africa, and regularly attended international conferences on this theme. He taught a two-stage way of salvation and the baptism of the Spirit. The latter was explained as distinct from conversion, and consciously received thereafter by those who were obedient.

d) The Rise of Holiness Denominations in America from 1895

Initially the American holiness movement was an interdenominational quest for a fuller and deeper experience of Christ. Although the Methodists were the first Wesleyan denomination, the movement reached all sectors of the evangelical world.

In the 1880s, however, schism led to the forming of separate denominations whose founding principle was holiness. The Methodist Church was traditionally tightly controlled, and tensions arose over lack of control over holiness associations, preachers, periodicals and prayer meetings. (Although the latter were interdenominational, Methodists were strongly represented in them.) There was also a growing call within holiness ranks for separation from the Methodist Church in view of increased worldliness and liberal doctrine.

The tipping point was reached in the mid-1880s with increasing resistance in the Methodist Church to the basic premises of the holiness movement. *Gradual* attainment of sanctification was emphasised and the "second blessing" theory questioned. At the 1894 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, the holiness movement was disavowed.

As a result, especially in the next decade, scores of new holiness denominations emerged whose chief aim was to proclaim the sanctification of the Spirit and the appropriation of the life of Christ.

Differences and Shared Understandings over the Meaning of Sanctification

During the years of his agonising quest for peace with God, Martin Luther little realised the immense blessings to mankind which would result. His inner sufferings and searchings qualified him uniquely to understand the heart's cry for justification, and to proclaim it with great power and authority.

Likewise John Wesley little realised the refreshing streams which would be opened to believers through his 13-year lonely quest for the meaning and power of sanctification.

From Augustine to Calvin, the chief theologians proclaimed that no one can be entirely free from sin and temptation, and that perfection could not be achieved in this life. Although there were a few who taught at least something of the purpose of God for His people – to be renewed after the image of God – generally speaking, there was little revelation or supernaturally imparted expectation of its realisation. George Fox and the early Quakers were blessed exceptions.

a) *The teaching of John Wesley*

What was so revolutionary about Wesley's vision of sanctification was not just the fact of it, but that it worked. As few for many centuries, Wesley ministered Christ our Sanctification. His listeners felt an imparted faith both to believe and to receive true holiness. The Spirit of faith imparted both the vision and the power of sanctification. The attraction of Wesley's doctrine was not just the goal he proclaimed but also the sense of the available power of the Spirit to fulfil that goal.

The Wesley brothers had different emphases on the manner of sanctification. Whilst Charles stressed being sanctified by one single instantaneous crisis experience subsequent to conversion, John put more emphasis on a gradual growth in sanctification before an instantaneous crisis experience, followed by a further subsequent growth. Crucially, both approaches conveyed a consciousness of the enabling power of the Spirit, a power that was seen and experienced.

This deep awareness of the power of the Spirit to sanctify enabled the eyes of the heart to perceive and believe the beautiful objective that Wesley proclaimed: the impartation of the divine nature. He called this Christian perfection. A conscious awareness of the operation of the Spirit in his ministry created a glowing faith in his teaching of a sanctified life in Christ in which sin was subdued by a superior power. The love of God was consciously felt to be poured out in the heart, and an expectation and hunger was aroused to be *made perfect in love* (1 Jn 4:18). For Wesley, when men experienced *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost* (Ro 14:17), they tasted the powers of the kingdom.

The conscious reality of the power of the Spirit, a reality little known for many long years, caused many to *abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost* (Ro 15:13). The sense of despondency that can so often accompany the doctrine of the depravity of man was dissipated. The veil was lifted to reveal more of that fullness of Christ so long lost to the Church. Men caught sight of a sanctifying power beyond conversion, which could enable them to live without sin having dominion over them. It subdued inbred sin and imparted *perfect love* to God and man.

It was sometimes taught that it could be attained by a single instantaneous crisis experience subsequent to conversion, but more usually that such an experience was preceded and followed by a gradual growth in grace.

This experience was often termed the “second blessing”.

There is often confusion over Wesley’s use of the word “perfection”. For him this term did not imply sinlessness or sinless perfection. He acknowledged that temptation, imperfect judgement and the ability to fall back into sin would continue until death. The sanctified believer could, however, through godly discipline and methodical devotion, experience victory over sin.

Even in his own day, Wesley’s view was often strongly rejected. The Calvinistic Methodists, for example, among whom George Whitfield was a key figure, rejected the “second blessing” teaching.

b) Later Differences of Understanding

With the passage of time, different emphases and understandings of the nature and means of sanctification developed, particularly in the 19th C.

In America,

- ***The early Methodist evangelists*** stirred many by their proclamation of the Wesleyan understanding of sanctification.
- ***Charles Finney***, however, later introduced a modified theology of entire sanctification. He taught it as attainable by exercising free will and cultivating right intentions. Living union with Christ, the Source of all Spiritual Life and power, was the secret of victory. Differences from Wesley were largely attributable to his Presbyterian (Calvinistic) background.
- After the American Civil War, ***The National Holiness Association***, although interdenominational, taught holiness in the Wesleyan sense, with entire sanctification as a second definite work of grace. Not all in the holiness movement accepted this interpretation, however. Some inclined more to Finney’s approach, particularly Presbyterians and Baptists with strong Calvinist leanings. (See Appendix for an example.)

In Britain,

- The newly formed ***Salvation Army*** adopted a strictly Wesleyan approach.
- ***The Keswick movement*** followed a median between Calvinistic and Arminian ideas in teaching holiness. All denominations were able to subscribe with only minor disputes between hyper-Calvinists or hyper-Wesleyans.

The principal understandings/teachings of sanctification may be summarised as follows:

- New believers are perfected and delivered ***from inward as well as outward sin at conversion*** (e.g. the Moravians).
- There is a second, perfecting ***crisis experience subsequent to conversion preceded and followed by a gradual growth*** in grace (e.g. John Wesley).
- There is a second, defining, perfecting ***crisis experience subsequent to conversion*** (e.g. many in the American holiness movement).
- There is a ***progressive*** growth in sanctification ***subsequent to conversion***.

c) Fundamental Shared Understandings

Despite significant differences in interpretation and presentation, in all cases there were commonly accepted essential underlying principles:

- **The nature of true Biblical holiness:** the recovery of the divine image; a present-day partaking of the very life of Christ resulting in victory over the power and dominion of indwelling sin. This experience of “*the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*” (Phil 1:19) enables the believer to say, like Paul, “*Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God*” (Gal 2:20).

(No attempt is made here to expound of the *doctrine* of sanctification. This is but a *history* of the recovery of this doctrine. There is, however, a partial Bible study in “*The Pergamos Church Age*”, chapter 4, section (i) (d).)

- **The means of attaining true holiness:** not of works nor of the flesh. It is a supernatural experience of the **power** of Godliness (cp 2 Tim 3:5; 2 P 1:3). And what *is* the power that imparts Godliness? The Spirit (cp 2 Tim 1:7). It is an imparted holiness, not an imputed holiness. It is an experience of the “**ministration of righteousness**” (2 Cor 3:9) by the Spirit of holiness (Ro 1:4). It is a sanctification **of the Spirit** (cp 2 Th 2:13; 1 P 1:2).

Whatever theory of sanctification was adopted, there was a looking to the Spirit to do a supernatural work. Talk of receiving by faith was not just a pious form of words. There was a deep awareness of the reality of the power of the Spirit to make men holy. Believers had a living faith that enabled them to enter into a deeper life of holiness than hitherto.

This is the heart of the issue. The Church’s restoration is not just a question of a recovery of certain truths lost over the years. It is a recovery of Christ Himself, Who *is* the Truth. The Philadelphia age experienced far more than a recovered quest for sanctification. It gained a living faith that enabled Christ Himself to be drawn upon for sanctification.

The Church’s roots were being dug down ever more deeply into Christ.

The Transition from Holiness to Pentecost

In view of the strong emphasis on an experience of the power of the Spirit in sanctification, it is unsurprising that many early 20th C Pentecostals had close links with the holiness movement.

Let us see how the one progressed naturally into the other.

The worldwide quest among believers for a fuller experience of the Spirit’s sanctifying power ultimately led to a yet fuller taste of *the powers of the world to come*.

Initially, attention was focussed on the ministry of the Holy Ghost effectually working within them in sanctification. This experience was described by different names:

- The original Wesleyan terms were usually “Christian perfection”, “entire sanctification”, or “perfect love”.
- Later other terms, such as “deeper life” and “fullness of the Spirit”, were used.

The Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification had given a deep awareness of the *power* of godliness as well as its *nature*. The revival atmosphere that frequently accompanied its expositors bred a mentality accustomed to experience the manifestation of the Spirit. Men learned that holiness was not a Christian legal code but an active power consciously subduing sin in the flesh, imparting Christ and reproducing the divine nature.

This experience of the reality of the supernatural power of godliness through the Spirit opened up a wider perspective. As believers’ faith was greatly quickened to expect and experience the working of the Spirit in their lives, there grew a hunger to experience the ministry of the Spirit in other realms.

In particular, there was a deepening quest for the full meaning and experience of the expression, “the baptism of the Holy Ghost”.

a) The Baptism of the Spirit

As the 19th C progressed, this newly discovered expression came to be increasingly used by such men as Finney, Moody and Torrey. Andrew Murray, the Dutch Presbyterian, also used it in his book “*The Full Blessing of Pentecost*” at the turn of the 19th C. During the closing decades of the century, the expression became more and more commonly used and discussed as hunger for yet more of the fullness of the Spirit grew apace.

At that time, however, this expression was not understood in the same way as among mainline 20th C Pentecostal denominations.

How, then, did they understand it?

There were those in the holiness movement who commonly used the baptism in the Spirit to describe a powerful sanctifying experience subsequent to regeneration. Others, however, began to interpret it in a wider sense. The belief grew that holiness alone was not enough and that there was a yet fuller experience of the Spirit beyond sanctification. So, the baptism in the Spirit came to be seen as implying power for *service* as well as for *sanctification*.

The healing ministries of J A Dowie and A B Simpson among others had conditioned minds to look for even more. The conviction grew that whilst a supernaturally imparted *character* was indeed possible and desirable, there remained a yet fuller experience of the outpoured Holy Ghost, a supernatural *service*. Believers were exhorted to seek the Lord for an enduement from on high to empower them to be effective witnesses as well as to live holy lives. (Fuller details will be found in chapter 3, in the section headed *The Restoration of Divine Healing*, c) The Philadelphia Age.)

Although, as yet, there was little conception of the possibility of a recovery of the gifts of the Spirit, the ground was being prepared to receive the idea that the Spirit was also given that signs and wonders may be done in the Name of Jesus.

For example, A B Simpson taught believers to seek an enduement of power. Before Christ's return he expected a supernatural visitation accompanied by signs and wonders. In his "advent baptism" teaching, Simpson emphasised the nearness of the Second Coming and an end-time missionary outpouring and revival to precede it. In it God would bestow "mission tongues" to hasten mission work. There would be a repeat of the supernatural imparting of other tongues by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in which the unconverted heard *the wonderful works of God* in their own tongue. This he expected on a scale scarcely dreamed of, and thousands of missionaries would go forth to bear swift witness of the coming Lord.

Unconsciously, these trends were also preparing the ground for the seeking not just of a *second* blessing, but of a *third* one.

One of the chief agents in this trend was a radical Holiness denomination, the Fire-Baptised Holiness Church, formed in 1895. Its founder, Benjamin Irwin, taught an experience beyond sanctification that he called "the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire". He arrived at this conclusion after a study of the writings of one of Wesley's colleagues, John Fletcher, who taught an inflow of divine fullness called "the baptism of burning love" given only to the sanctified and the pure in heart.

Most 19th C Holiness groups rejected this teaching. They maintained that the "second blessing" of entire sanctification and the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" were identical. As yet they believed there were only two major experiences: conversion and a subsequent "second blessing." Nonetheless Irwin's fervour ensured that the entire Holiness movement became familiar with his doctrine.

It is important to note that, whilst tongues were often experienced in his meetings, they were not taught as a necessary initial evidence of such a baptism in the Spirit. As yet, no particular theological significance was attached to this phenomenon. The expression "the baptism in the Spirit" was not at this time understood in the same way as among later mainline 20th C Pentecostal denominations. There was no stress on (nor even understanding or expectation of) speaking with tongues as accompanying this baptism.

b) From Holiness to Pentecost

An observer at Irwin's meetings was Charles Parham, the key figure in the 1901 Topeka pentecostal revival. He was impressed by Irwin's "third blessing" doctrine, contrasting his own unfruitful ministry with the signs, miracles, and evangelistic fervour of the Acts. Parham's quest for the experience and Biblical evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit later inaugurated the worldwide 20th C Pentecostal movement.

Tragically, however, as the flow of the restoration of the ministry of the Spirit to the Church continued, the progress of many groups was aborted at the rise of the infant Pentecostal movement with its teaching of the restored gifts of the Spirit.

Even front-line pioneer groups and individuals that had earlier taught divine healing (and suffered the ostracism so often associated with any freshly recovered truth), seemed to stumble at tongues and the other gifts:

- ***The Holiness groups***, although themselves the pioneer radicals of the late 19th C, often bitterly opposed the newly emerging Pentecostal movement. Sadly, they frequently ended in a twilight area of not denying the reality of speaking with

other tongues, and yet never having the confidence to plunge whole-heartedly into this further stage in the Lord's plan of restoration. It is tragic how frequently the pioneers of one day become the opposers of the next.

- ***The Christian & Missionary Alliance*** is one of the saddest examples. After much initial hesitation about tongues, the final fence-sitting dictum of its founder, A B Simpson, was, "*Seek not, forbid not*". Tongues were allowed, but not encouraged. How tragic in view of his earlier pioneering ministry on divine healing and sanctification, and his teaching of a supernatural endowment of "mission tongues" for end-time evangelism and missionary work. How tragic also in view of the revival in 1907 among the students and staff in his own Bible School in Nyack, N York. He had even been present in some of the glorious early meetings of the pentecostal revival, and was deeply impressed by some of the singing in the Spirit, even though much opposed to the pentecostal work. It is no wonder that whole Christian & Missionary Alliance congregations seceded and joined the new movement.
- ***R A Torrey***, despite his advocacy of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, claimed the new movement was "*emphatically not of God*".
- ***The Keswick movement***, despite its emphasis on the deeper work of the Spirit, not only did not teach, but also would not tolerate, the gifts of the Spirit.
- In ***Germany***, despite a strong impetus towards a deeper experience of the ministry of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit proved an insurmountable stumbling block to many.

How sad – yet how sobering – to see how so often in Church history there is a drawing back from that unto which the Lord calls.

There had grown a progressing, conscious and general awareness of the person and ministry of the Holy Ghost, beginning in the 18th C evangelical awakenings, unknown since the early years of Christianity. The tide was truly coming back in. But there was even more yet to be tasted of *the powers of the world to come*.

May He be merciful, and grant us the faith to respond to the ongoing move of restoration and to *go on to perfection*, whatever the cost.

2
“I HAVE SET BEFORE THEE AN OPEN DOOR”
or
THE AGE OF THE OPEN DOOR

The Key of David & the Opened Door

Another attribute of the Lord in the Philadelphia letter is found in Revelation 3:7b-8a:

These things saith ... he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth and shutteth and no man openeth; ... behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ...

This is a reference to Isaiah 22:22, where Eliakim is described as having the key of the house of David upon his shoulder.

A key symbolises authority and rule. In the East a key was sometimes carried on the shoulder, a custom referred to in Isaiah 9:6: *“the government shall be upon his shoulder”*.

A key also symbolises the power to grant or deny access. This ties in with the great opportunity given by the Lord to Philadelphia to advance the Gospel: *“...behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it...”* (Rev 3:8a).

The meaning of the open door is self-evident. This expression is used three times by Paul to denote an opportunity or opening in the service of the Lord.

- *“...a great door and effectual is opened unto me”* (1 Cor 16:9)
- *“...I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord...”* (2 Cor 2:12)
- *“...praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ.”* (Col 4:3)

So, prophetically, a characteristic of the Philadelphia age is to be an opened door for Spiritual service. And the One Who sets that opened door before them is He Who bears in Himself the authority and ability to govern (Isa 9:7).

The history of the Church in the 18th & 19th C confirms this is certainly the case. In every area of Christian service there is an expansion in successive waves of ever-increasing power and extent. Repeated awakenings in 18th C Protestant Europe and the American colonies led to a wonderful strengthening of the evangelical cause. This laid the foundation for a major missionary expansion in the 19th C.

In 1800, Protestant Christianity was confined to the American colonies, Britain, Scandinavia, minorities in Hungary and France, and parts of Germany, Holland, and Switzerland. Successive 19th C awakenings then sent missionaries to the ends of the earth. A whole series of able evangelists was also raised up to spread the Word in the home countries. Whether at home or overseas, the major emphasis was on evangelism. Evangelicals grew remarkably. It was a century of enthusiastic and victorious evangelicalism.

Let us now examine more fully the repeated waves of evangelical awakenings in Europe and America and the extensive missionary work made possible by the door opened by the Lord. The two are inseparably linked. The awakenings were the key to the missionary outreach. They culminated in a growing number of awakenings overseas reflecting those in the home countries.

The Great Awakenings

a) Historical Loss & Recovery of the Spirit & the Word

All through Church history the Nicolaitan antichrist spirit sought to progressively squeeze out the Spirit of Christ from control of, and influence in and over, both the Church as a whole and every facet of the lives of individual believers.

- An early loss from the original deposit of Truth safeguarded to the early Church was her supernatural form of government. The apostle and prophet are the two most important offices for bringing the Church to the full stature of Christ. They were squeezed out by the rising power of the local and regional bishop in the 2nd & 3rd C.
- At that same time came a decline in the gifts of the Spirit in local church life. Meetings became increasingly formal and liturgical. There was no longer scope for prophecy or tongues with interpretation for edification. No one gave a psalm or other song under the anointing of the Spirit. Rehearsed choirs replaced singing in the Spirit. No one brought a revelation, received perhaps by vision or dream, for the edification, guidance or warning of the assembly. Those with the gifts of healings or miracles gradually ceased.
- Of course, there was no need to squeeze out those gifts that were not obviously supernatural. These could be simply reinterpreted in a way that drained them of any manifestly supernatural content. Faith and the word of wisdom or knowledge, for example, could easily be so treated.
- Later teaching that these were limited to the early Church only further undermined the supernatural ministries and gifts of the Spirit.

In like manner, the antichrist spirit quenched the Spiritual power and effectiveness of other Scriptural truths. Things that in the Bible were revolutionary experiences became mere forms and ceremonies:

- The mighty baptism and infilling of the Holy Ghost was relegated to a church dignitary laying his hands on confirmation candidates.
- The sanctification wrought by the Spirit was replaced by self-mortification, ascetic self-denial and other acts of human endeavour.
- Regeneration, the very foundation of the Christian life, was robbed. All the Nicolaitan priesthood could offer in its place was a water sprinkling ceremony.

Stage by stage every last trace of the operation of the Spirit in ministering Christ to His body was squeezed out.

In exact proportion as the Spirit was squeezed out of the Church, so also was Christ. For in the measure that we drink in the Spirit, we partake of Christ. The Spirit ministers Christ. (Cp Phil 1:19)

- To lose the power of the Spirit leading the Church to her God-given goal through apostles and prophets is to lose the Headship of Christ.
- To lose the baptism of the Holy Ghost is to lose Christ the Baptiser.
- To lose the sanctification of the Spirit is to lose Christ our Sanctification.

The Holy Ghost ministers Christ in His many facets to the believer. Medieval ecclesiastics preached a Christ. Yet it was not the Christ Who walks among the candlesticks, but one of their own creation. The true Christ in all His fullness was robbed from the people by an antichrist, Nicolaitan, clergy.

From the time of the early Church, the spirit of antichrist achieved this evil objective to a greater or lesser degree in every branch of Christendom.

Protest groups arose seeking to restore Christ to His rightful place, but without lasting success. Not until the Reformation was there a permanent turnaround. But, this was only the *beginning* of the reversal of the work of the spirit of antichrist.

The authority of Scripture was re-established, and Christ presented as our sole Righteousness. It was clearly taught that "*Salvation is of the Lord*". Yet salvation was seen primarily as a judicial transaction making man righteous in the eyes of a holy God. The stress on justification (i.e. our legal acquittal) was not sufficiently balanced by teaching on regeneration (i.e. a Holy Spirit imparted new life). There was a serious deficiency in the doctrine and experience of the *power* of salvation and the *power* of godliness, and a very inadequate grasp of the indwelling life of Christ in the believer.

Even where holiness was taught, it was often as an enforcing of the new covenant law of Christ. It was as though this were simply a revised version of the old covenant law of Moses. Holiness was seen more as legally enforceable rules for Christian living, rather than the fruit and work of the Spirit of holiness.

In short, the Reformation laid a solid foundation of the sovereignty of God in salvation, and in particular of Christ our Righteousness. This is an indispensable starting point. But it is still only a *starting* point, only the *commencement* of a full recovery of Christ.

In the 18th C a major further development took place. Building on the Reformation foundation, there came a widespread consciousness and experience of the operation of the Holy Ghost, far beyond anything generally known since the first three centuries. As believers abandoned the idea of a Church-State union, ceasing to mix the political and the Spiritual as had the reformers, they experienced the power of the Spirit in hitherto undreamed-of ways.

A major, widespread, general awakening took place in Europe and the American colonies. The awareness this brought of the power of the Spirit increased believers' faith to receive yet more from God. Then, at the end of the 18th and during the 19th C there occurred three further general awakenings both there and, increasingly, on the mission fields.

Each successive awakening was more powerful and more extensive than the one before, and the after-effects more widespread. This increase is not by chance. The tide of the restoration of Spiritual Truth and power was definitely on the way back in. In the first decade of the 20th C there was yet another awakening. It was the most powerful and worldwide of them all, and led to yet further restoration of Spiritual power.

It is very important to understand this pattern clearly. Church history since the Reformation is not simply a series of successive revivals, each bringing men back to the same original doctrines. Each successive awakening has been accompanied by a recovery of yet more lost Truth, and also by an increase in Spiritual power. The Spirit

and the Word are one. The extent of our understanding of the full counsel of God will determine the extent to which we make effective use of the sword of the Spirit. As Truth increases, so does Spiritual power.

The following summary of the major 18th & 19th C awakenings will illustrate the Lord's work of restoration in the Philadelphia age.

b) 1st General Awakening

In the 17th C, great dissatisfaction with existing Protestantism arose among those who sought more of God, both in England and on the Continent.

In England, this need was met in measure by the early Quaker revival. On the Continent, the German Pietist movement helped satisfy the aspirations of many. It also paved the way for the most important and far-reaching awakening since the Reformation.

Whilst mostly remaining within the State Lutheran Church, the Pietists formed societies which fostered a warm, evangelical religion of the heart, much like the early Methodists. They were more in the Spiritual succession of the Medieval evangelical protest groups and of the Reformation Mennonites and Anabaptists than of the Anglicans, Lutherans and Reformed. Despite a formal affiliation with the Lutherans, they were free from many of the mental shackles and blinkers that the reformers carried over from medieval corruptions of the Word.

The Pietists inspired two groups: the so-called "radical" Pietists, and the Moravians.

The former had wide influence in Germany, Holland and Switzerland in the early 18th C, but much of their teaching was thought too radical for more widespread acceptance.

The Moravians were from South Germany. Their founder, Count Zinzendorf (1700-1760), was raised in a strongly Pietist atmosphere. They merged with remnants of the ancient Church of the Bohemian Brethren, a pre-Reformation evangelical protest group inspired by John Huss. So, whilst retaining loose formal links with the Lutherans, the early Moravians were in effect the Spiritual heirs of some of the best aspects of earlier Free Church, evangelical movements.

Although never very numerous, the Moravians played a highly significant catalytic role in the first general awakening. In 1727, in their very early days, they experienced a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit at the communion table. They left, *"hardly knowing whether they belonged to earth or had already gone to heaven"*.

The repercussions soon spread far beyond their own limited constituency:

- Firstly, they became the pioneers of the modern overseas missionary outburst.
- Secondly, through their influence on the Wesleys, they were one of the prime influences of the 1740s awakenings in England. Theirs was the prime influence on the Fetter Lane Society in the late 1730s where Whitfield, the Wesleys, and other future leaders of this awakening frequently met. Here outpourings of the Spirit similar to those already experienced by the Moravians were common. The anointing would fall with such power many fell to the ground crying for exceeding joy.

The Moravians were only one channel of the increasing Spiritual outpouring in the late 1730s and early 1740s. There were other evidences of a general awakening.

Already George Whitfield had been preaching to thousands in churches and in the open air in London and Bristol. Wherever he went, this brother had the ability not simply to reap converts. He seemed to carry the very flame of the awakening with him, and to leave it behind when he moved on. For example,

- In **Scotland**, his visits in 1741-42 saw astonishing scenes that opened a Spiritual reservoir that had been gradually building up during the previous few years. In Cambuslang and Kilsyth, crowds of up to 40,000 gathered, often praying through the night. From there the awakening spread far and wide across Scotland.
- In **the American colonies** Whitfield had a similar catalytic effect. Before his visits, there had already been some remarkable local awakenings, but these became general from 1740-43 with Whitfield sparking off revival wherever he went.

By 1742 the awakening was in full swing, both in the colonies and in England, Scotland and Wales. At the same time, a remarkable work called “the Inspiration Movement” was taking place in parts of Germany, Holland and Switzerland.

The years up to 1742 were the chief visitation period. Thereafter many godly evangelists, pastors and teachers were raised up to consolidate the fruits of the awakenings. The whole of the British Isles and the American colonies were covered by a host of well-known men such as the Wesleys, Whitfield and many others. The evangelical party in the Church of England grew tremendously in influence. Methodist societies in England and Wales spread rapidly. Scottish Presbyterians experienced a Spiritual quickening which strengthened them for a generation. Ireland experienced its most blessed visitation since the time of Patrick in the 5th C.

c) 2nd General Awakening

Spiritually, the last quarter of the 18th C was very difficult for the American colonies and Protestant Europe. The decline was arrested by a second general awakening at the turn of the century, more widespread in its effects than the first.

In the newly formed **USA** there were sporadic awakenings from 1792 on. By 1798 there was a general awakening affecting every State and evangelical church in New England. Scenes on the western frontiers were even more remarkable. A host of evangelists, especially Methodist and Baptist, took the Gospel far and wide in what was often a lawless society. The power of God was mightily present, often smiting down hundreds of hardened sinners in camp meetings in 1800-1.

Reports of remarkable scenes in the American camp meetings led to the rise of the Primitive Methodists in **England**, reviving the Methodist tradition of open-air ministry with significant results.

Meanwhile **Wales**, cut off from the rest of Britain by language, experienced a succession of powerful local awakenings in the 1790s. **Scotland** also experienced simultaneous awakenings in the 1800s in the Highlands and the Lowlands.

On the Continent, through the influence of one of the Scottish revivalists, Robert Haldane, there was a Spiritual quickening among Reformed churches in **France, Holland and Switzerland**. There was also a general reviving of Spiritual life in **the German states**. Scandinavia likewise experienced a powerful awakening. Lay preachers in **Norway** saw a unique nation-wide revival, whilst similar results occurred in **Finland**. In **Sweden**, itinerant preachers often experienced manifestations similar to those on the American frontier.

d) 3rd General Awakening

In many ways this was a continuation of the 2nd awakening that began in the 1790s and ran on intermittently for about fifty years affecting different areas at different times.

Scotland again experienced mighty times of visitation with the 1839-43 general Highlands and Islands awakening. **Wales** also saw continuing local revivals from 1820-1850. Meanwhile the Spiritual atmosphere remained encouraging in **Scandinavia, England and Ireland**, and among Protestants in **France, Holland and Switzerland**.

The remarkable advance of the Gospel in **America** continued apace. In 1830-31, for example, there were 100,000 converts, whilst in 1839-40 the Methodist Episcopal Church doubled its membership to 308,000.

Outside Europe and America, in **Hawaii** the remarkable great awakenings in 1837-42 saw 20% of the population become church members. Elsewhere in the Pacific there were blessed awakenings in **Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga**.

The 2nd and 3rd awakenings roughly covered about 50 years and led directly to the modern missionary outburst. By the 1840s, however, the Spiritual temperature was falling fast. Another outpouring was needed.

e) 4th General Awakening

The decline was halted by yet another still more powerful awakening in 1857-60, the most astonishing outpouring of the Philadelphia age concentrated in such a brief period.

- The first beginnings were experienced among **Ontario** Methodists in 1857.
- By 1858 this had spread across **the USA** with astonishing results, affecting every area of life. In 1860 there were one million converts, with 100,000 Methodist converts alone.
- News of the American awakening spread rapidly to **Ulster**, which experienced its most remarkable awakening. In 1859-60 there were 100,000 converts, 10% of the population.
- Similar awakenings in **Scotland** and **Wales** added another 100,000 converts from each during the same period. In **England**, one million were added to the churches.
- Elsewhere in Europe there were powerful awakenings on the Danish Island of **Bornholm** and in Orthodox Russia in the **Ukraine** in the 1860s. **Norway, Sweden** and **Germany** also experienced a quickening.
- On the mission fields mighty awakenings were experienced in 1859 in **Jamaica**, and in 1860 in **Tirunelveli (S India)**, and **South Africa**, especially among colonists.

Missionary Outreach prior to the Philadelphia Age

It is no coincidence that Philadelphia experienced a vast missionary expansion. There is a divine plan and progression behind Church history. Interest in missionary outreach did not simply happen to flag for a long time, then by chance to revive in this age. The receding tide of Spiritual power in earlier ages was the reason for the lack of missionary outreach. Likewise the vast resurgence of missionary interest and outreach in the 18th & 19th C was the direct result of the progressive restoration of the Church to her first love and the full counsel of God.

Let us briefly review pre 18th C missionary work to set 18th & 19th C outreach in context.

a) Ephesus & Smyrna Ages

In the first three centuries Christianity spread widely in the Roman Empire, particularly in Asia Minor and N Africa. Outside the Empire it spread to Syria, Armenia and S W India. Scattered groups of believers were also found in the Persian Empire, which later gave rise to the far-reaching missionary work of the Nestorian Church.

b) Pergamos Age

Outside the Roman Empire, the barbarian Goths north of the Danube were reached from the mid 4th C. Also at this time a group of believers was established in Ethiopia.

Meanwhile the faith was spreading in the British Isles, cut off from the mainstream of continental Catholic Christianity. The Word was preached with great effect in Ireland, most famously by Patrick. Arising from this fine work, independent Irish missionaries had the greatest impact on 6th and 7th C Europe. Columba evangelised the Picts of Scotland, establishing a training centre in Iona from which a large part of England heard the Word. From England their influence spread to the Low Countries, Germany, France, and even Northern Italy and Central Europe.

c) Thyatira Age

Despite the continuing geographical extension of Christianity, the growing power of the Nicolaitan spirit, especially in the churches of the Roman Empire, contained the seed that would prevent further *Spiritual* progress for a thousand years. The union of Church and State by Constantine was a major setback. Instead of relying on the power of the Spirit, the Word and the Name of Jesus, missionary work from Rome and Constantinople was closely identified with the power of the state. For example,

- The “conversion” of the Saxons by Charlemagne in the 8th C, was achieved by force of arms.
- Scandinavia likewise was christianised in the 11th C through the conversion of the monarchs.
- The independent Irish mission work was quenched by the arrival of Roman missionaries in Kent in 596 AD. By seeking firstly the conversion of the political rulers, the authority of the bishop of Rome was gradually enforced throughout the Irish mission fields.

Far gone were the days when Christianity spread spontaneously by the voluntary witness of individual believers. After the Nicolaitan clergy/laity distinction, evangelism

became the responsibility of an increasingly corrupt professional clergy. For 1000 years practically all missionary work was left to the monastic orders.

By 1500, the eve of the Reformation, Christianity was perhaps less extensive than 1000 years earlier. Although much of Northern and Central Europe (including European Russia) had been christianised during the Pergamos and Thyatira Ages, there had also been extensive losses:

- Muslim armies had extinguished Christianity from virtually all N Africa and Asia Minor, and reduced it to a minority in Palestine and Egypt.
- The once extensive Nestorian (Persian) missions had been virtually wiped out. Their vast missionary outreach had reached as far as India, Central Asia and China. But the growing Nicolaitan poison deeply affected this organisation also leaving it ripe for divine retribution.

Apart from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox systems, only two other small Christian communities existed, in S India and Ethiopia. These also, however, lacked Spiritual power due to infection by the same evils that had spread through all Christendom. They were, therefore, in no sense evangelistic or missionary-minded.

Towards the end of the Thyatira age several protest groups arose in Europe proclaiming the Gospel to the nominally Christian masses. Often these were widely received, despite official persecution. But there was no outreach beyond Europe. It was hard enough to maintain a witness in the oppressive darkness of “Christian” Europe, without the added responsibility of the rest of the globe.

d) *Sardis Age*

It is little known how very weak Reformation missionary outreach was. Even less known is the fact that the lack of missionary vision was not the fault of prevailing circumstances, political or otherwise, but the direct fruit of the reformers’ own doctrine.

I showed in *The Sardis Church Age* how the reformers aborted the full potential of the early Reformation by drawing back from their first understanding of the Truth. One consequence was a failure by the emerging Reformed (Calvinistic), Lutheran and Anglican denominations to develop any meaningful missionary vision.

It is not difficult to see why. After the Church-State union of Constantine, the expansion of Christianity was generally directly tied to the political progress of those rulers who had espoused the faith, rather than to the witness of individual believers. The conversion of foreign lands was considered the result of military success rather than of the power of the Spirit. Thus for 1000 years the Church grew or contracted along with the frontiers of the christianised state, and in no other way.

The reformers unwisely adopted this medieval concept of a state Church enforced by the political authorities instead of forming local assemblies of believers, independent of political influence and control. As a result they inherited the same attitude to missionary work. They also inherited the doctrine, first introduced at the time of the adulterous Church-State union, that the great commission was only for the apostles and their immediate successors.

This is the real reason for the failure of the Reformation in missionary outreach. Some claim the reason was the distractions of religious wars, the Protestant lands' lack of overseas colonies, and the control of the sea routes by Catholic Spain and Portugal. Not so. Persecution did not discourage the Quakers and Anabaptists from evangelising far and wide. Nor in later times have such difficulties prevented men carrying the Word wherever the Spirit leads. The reformers' lack of missionary interest sprung from their view that the state is responsible for spreading the faith. For example, when one Austrian nobleman tried to stir up missionary interest among Lutherans, his plan was for a society sponsored by the rulers. Even this was ridiculed. He finally went to Dutch Guiana alone where he laid down his life.

When the Protestant Dutch and English began to build up overseas colonies in the 17th C, minor attempts were made to reach the heathen. Chaplains were sent out, but mainly for the European colonists rather than the natives. In America a few colonists began to take an interest in the Indians. Foremost among these was John Elliot, who at one time had several thousand Christian Indians under his charge.

In conclusion, the Sardis age saw virtually no real missionary outreach.

- The only notable 16th C outreach was among the pagan Lapps, initiated by the King of Sweden.
- There were a few small 17th C outreaches in the Dutch and English colonies, although even these were primarily aimed at the colonists.

But radical change was coming. The error that the state was responsible for missions was overthrown. Interest grew apace among all believers, and an ever-increasing flow of volunteers took the Word to the ends of the earth. Instead of to the state, the Philadelphia age looked more to the Lord. There was an increasing discovery of the springs of Spiritual power. So, the results were progressively more fruitful and abiding.

Missionary Outreach in the Philadelphia Age

a) Early Beginnings

Early in the 18th C there were two Danish state-sponsored works. (See Appendix for brief details of these.)

The work begun in the American colonies was extended in the 18th C. Two Anglican societies ministered in a small way to Indian and Negro slaves in America and certain West Indian islands. But the primary aim was still to provide for Anglican colonists. Reaching the natives was secondary.

One of the most famous and influential missionaries to the native Americans was the Presbyterian, David Brainerd. His ministry amongst the Red Indians lasted from 1743 to his early death in 1747. Despite its brevity, this brother witnessed scenes similar (although in a much more limited degree) to those seen by Wesley and Whitfield at this same time. The same anointing among the Europeans in Britain and N America was present amongst the Indians. It is fascinating to observe, throughout history, the same effects by the same Spirit in different areas at the same time with no human collusion.

Firstly, Brainerd's interpreter began to agonise over his spiritual condition, unable to sleep and walking about crying out for salvation. In this state, he had a vision. Then

the audible voice of God spoke peace to his heart and he was freed from the power of sins that had bound him. The effects began to spread. In one village the whole Indian population of about 70 crowded round in speechless interest, falling down in frantic distress of soul. The air was full of cries for mercy. Some wept bitterly, including a medicine man and murderer. One woman lay crying out for mercy earnestly and incessantly for many hours. Even whites who came to gaze stopped to pray. From then on signs of awakening accompanied his preaching. The faces of his listeners would change. Weeping became common, many trembled and some were smitten speechless under the power of the Word. Converts were filled with a conscious assurance of sins forgiven, to such a degree that some publicly cried out for joy, overwhelmed by the revelation of the beauty and excellency of Christ.

How refreshing! Although numerically small, this is the best example for centuries of the glorious effects of the Spirit and the Word on the mission field. Now more and more common in the home countries, gradually they were to become increasingly so on the mission fields also. The refreshing waters of heaven were washing away centuries-old spiritual oppressiveness. There was an increasing turning from the state power and human endeavour so long associated with missionary outreach since the authority and anointing of the early Church were lost. Instead there was a growing Spiritual power originating, continuing and consummating the work.

b) The Moravians

The greatest 18th C boost to missions came from the Moravians, the chief precursors and inspirers of modern missions.

Their original inspiration came partly from the Lutheran Pietists (who were viewed with some suspicion by mainstream Lutherans) and partly from one of the pre-Reformation evangelical protest groups. So, they were free from erroneous Reformation missionary thinking. This, together with Zinzendorf's fervent devotion to the Saviour, led to the finest consistent outreach beyond Europe for centuries. At last a movement arose in which missions were not an occasional or incidental sideline, but at the heart of its Spiritual activities. Within 28 years, 226 missionaries were sent out, a remarkable proportion of one person for every 60 at home.

Even more far-reaching was their effect on the 18th C Church as a whole. They were one of the main inspirations of William Carey, often termed the founder of modern missions. He had read the Moravian missionary magazine from its inception, and quoted their example when seeking, in 1792, to prod his fellow Baptists into founding a missionary society.

From his youth Zinzendorf longed for men to experience the reality of Christ's saving power. At 15 he dedicated himself to the conversion of the heathen. He also believed much in the power of prayer. In 1727, a remarkable revival took place in the first Moravian community. It greatly deepened the desire for prayer. Even young children spent up to three hours praying for friends. For the next 100 years someone was always praying at every hour of the day.

In 1728, 26 young men came together for missionary work. The first went to the West Indies and Greenland in 1730. In quick succession others went out, often choosing the most inhospitable areas because of their deep love for the Master: Russia, the borders of Tibet, W & S Africa, Alaska, Labrador, the Miskito coast

(Nicaragua), American Indians, Dutch Guiana, Sri Lanka and the Nicobar Islands. There were successes and failures. In Greenland and N America, large numbers responded. In S Africa, however, the colonists forced them to leave, whilst in W Africa death took its toll.

Moravian outreach was remarkable for the commitment of its members. Only volunteers were sent with no political support. They spread the revelation of Christ as few others then knew it, admirably summed up by Zinzendorf: *"I have one passion. It is He"*. Dependence on God, so lacking in earlier mission work, was seen in their strong prayer ministry.

This was not the supernatural evangelism of Hebrews 2:4: *"God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost"*. But it was a major advance on the Reformation. The Lord was progressively restoring the full Word and the full knowledge of His Son.

c) The 19th C Outburst

The 18th C revivals in Protestant Europe and N America led to a far-reaching outbreak of missionary interest and activity. This grew stronger and stronger as the next century wore on. Instead of being limited to isolated individuals or movements, missionary outreach became a major concern of the whole Church.

The Moravians had already rediscovered one key: the Church was responsible for missions, not the state. In fact, they were to be pursued, if necessary, in opposition to the state. It is difficult for the modern evangelical to realise how radical this idea was. Casting off the Reformation state-church mentality was a further step in the return to the full Word.

A second key was William Carey's famous missionary appeal in 1792. His first endeavours to arouse interest were rejected by his superior with the words, *"When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine."* But his persistence shook inherited attitudes, causing believers' newly opened eyes to begin to grasp their responsibility to the unevangelised outside their own national boundaries.

Carey inspired the foundation of the Baptist Missionary Society and sailed to India in 1793. A chain reaction was set off. The next 25 years saw the start of the most extensive missionary advance since the early Church.

Within five years English Congregationals, Scottish Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed and evangelical Anglicans formed other denominational societies. More denominational societies were formed in Protestant Europe and N America as missionary interest spread rapidly, greatly boosted by further evangelical awakenings.

Each successive incoming wave of Spiritual power from the great evangelical awakenings was linked to a connected wave of missionary expansion.

- The Moravian endeavour ran parallel to the 1st general awakening of the 1740s.
- The 2nd awakening at the turn of the 18th C provided manpower and inspiration for the early pioneering work of the newly emerging denominational societies.
- The mid 19th C awakenings (now also experienced on some mission fields) helped provide further waves of volunteers and inspiration. Each incoming mini

wave both confirmed and revitalised existing missions and also extended the work to yet more distant and unreached shores.

How cheering to watch the returning tide of Spiritual life after seeing it progressively recede over the centuries from the high tide of the early Church.

Let us now look at the extent and effect of the chief 19th C waves of missionary outreach, in particular,

- The first phase stretching from 1792 to 1858.
- A second and mightier phase, in two waves, beginning with the 1858/9 revivals, which stretched up to the great worldwide revivals of 1904/6.

The latter led to yet mightier growth among unevangelised peoples outside Europe and N America. But this belongs to the early Laodicea age.

d) Outreach from 1792 to 1859

Early outreach was chiefly to pagan or animistic peoples, such as the South Sea islanders, African and West Indian Negroes, and Burmese, Indian and Indonesian tribespeople.

The greatest impact was made among the South Sea islanders, although useful beachheads were established elsewhere.

- In ***the South Pacific***, abundant fruit was reaped in the Society Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. The Wesleyans, especially, experienced periods of revival with deep conviction and other signs. They were rapidly evangelised and began sending native evangelists to the other islands.
- In Hindu ***India***, beachheads were established in many areas especially among animistic tribespeople. By mid-century there were about 100,000 Christians.
- In Buddhist ***Burma***, the Baptists had much success among non-Buddhist hill tribespeople. There were 10,000 converts by mid-century in a work that has flourished to the present.
- A most fruitful field was ***Madagascar***. Missionaries entered in 1820 but were expelled 26 years later, leaving only 200 converts to violent persecution. They returned 25 years later to find a thriving church of 20,000, which continued to grow apace during the rest of the century.

But there was virtually no impact at all on Islam in N Africa and W Asia, Hinduism in India, and Buddhism in S E Asia, China and the Far East. Roman Catholicism also jealously guarded her bondsmen in the Philippines and Latin America through political power.

Despite this, the missionary fruits of the 2nd awakening were not to be despised. A foundation and springboard were laid for its successor. The Reformation missionary psychology (or rather, the lack of it) was irreversibly rejected. The Lord had set before His awakened people an opened door. The second half of the century was to see even greater advances in two principal waves, one in the 1860s and the other in the 1880s.

(For fuller details of progress in this period, see Appendix.)

e) Outreach from 1859 to 1880

Following the 1858/59 revivals, missionary working forces were reinforced and extended by a renewed surge of volunteers and fresh Spiritual vigour. Major advances were made where previously only foot holds had been gained. In yet unpenetrated fields beachheads were established for later development.

Once again, among the chief beneficiaries were the Negroes of N America, the West Indies and Africa.

- Earlier evangelism in **Jamaica and other West Indian islands** was so blessed that some societies began to withdraw, considering their work completed.
- In **Southern Africa**, a revival in 1860 led to greatly increased missionary outreach. Pioneers penetrated deep inland.
- In **East Africa**, Anglicans entered Uganda in 1877. Their numbers grew rapidly to 60,000 in less than 20 years, despite persecution.

Progress continued in animistic and other areas:

- In **Madagascar** missionaries returned after the persecutions, and growth continued. By 1880 there were 70,000 members and 225,000 adherents.
- More success was seen in **Indonesia**, mainly in non-Muslim areas.
- **Inland China**, the greatest missionary challenge of the time, was at last invaded. Vast expansion took place from the 1860s, as far north as Mongolia.

But Korea, the Muslim world and Latin America remained virtually untouched.

(For fuller details of progress in this period, see Appendix.)

A significant feature of this renewed outreach was the rise of non-denominational or interdenominational mission societies. The China Inland Mission (CIM) was the first, starting in 1866. Although early 19th C societies were only loosely denominational, denominational control had later hardened.

f) Outreach from 1880 to 1904

Yet another wave of increased missionary interest came in the 1880s providing yet more dedicated volunteers. The effects lasted to the great 1904/06 worldwide awakenings, with a similarly powerful effect in many mission fields.

The 1880s' wave was chiefly the result of a great upsurge of missionary vision among British and American college students. Within three years, 3000 Americans volunteered for overseas work. This student movement was the principal stimulus for many years for new volunteers. It led to yet further penetration of unevangelised areas.

Advances took place in Buddhist E Asia. In Southern Asia, further advances were made among animistic tribespeople in NE India (Assam) and Burma.

Apart from China, the most extensive advances were made in Africa south of the Sahara. For example, in Madagascar a great revival spread, inspired by native believers mightily endued with power over demons and the gifts of healings.

The Muslim world was still very difficult and penetration of Catholic Central and S America was still extremely limited, though further pioneering was done in the 1890s.

Great gains, however, were made after the Spanish-American war of 1898 when Spain's last Caribbean colonies were ceded to the USA. Adherents were gathered very rapidly in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

(For fuller details of progress in this period, see Appendix.)

g) Review

In 1790, evangelical Christianity was limited to Protestant Europe and the American colonies. Yet within 100 years the Word had been taken to the ends of the earth. It was the most extensive missionary outreach for 1000 years, since the Nestorian and early Celtic churches.

The precursors of this great outburst were the Moravians. Not only were they themselves one of the most missionary conscious movements ever. They were also a source of deep inspiration for the missionary outburst that began in the last decade of the 18th C, when virtually every evangelical denomination in Europe and N America formed a missionary society.

There were three major advances in the 19th C, each the fruit of awakenings in the home countries. Each advance provided the foundation and springboard for the next, both confirming and consolidating existing gains, and enlarging the borders into as yet unreached territories.

The most significant advances were in:

- Africa south of the Sahara (except Catholic French West Africa, Orthodox Ethiopia and Muslim Somalia);
- Micronesia and Polynesia, the West Indies, Madagascar and the eastern islands of modern day Indonesia.

Useful gains were also made in India, Burma, China, Korea, Japan and Sumatra.

On the other hand, pioneering was either in its infancy, or impossible in vast areas due to political pressures. These included:

- **Asia/Oceania:** Asian Russia, Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Buddhist and Muslim SE Asia, Borneo, New Guinea and the Philippines
- **The Muslim world** (i.e. N Africa, Turkey, the Middle East, Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Central Asia), despite scattered footholds;
- **Catholic South and Central America.** Small beginnings had, however, been made (especially in Brazil and Mexico) in an area that was to experience such a spectacular manifestation of the glory of God in the 20th C.

h) Awakenings on the Mission Fields

In considering the vast territorial advances of the 19th C pioneers, geographical progress must not be confused with Spiritual progress. In many fields the work was very hard and bore little fruit for years.

The early Polynesian work, for example, saw little fruit, and when progress at last was made, there was little evidence of deep personal conviction of sin, repentance and inner assurance. Often initial moves towards Christianity were simply an embracing of a higher form of civilisation rather than the result of supernatural revelation.

Much more was needed than simply geographical expansion. The same Spiritual power experienced in the home bases was needed on the mission fields. At first, this was rare. But as the incoming tide of Spiritual power rose in volume in the sending countries, it is joyous to trace the progressively widening extent of its effects on the mission fields.

The first pioneers in the period between the 2nd & 3rd general awakenings (1790-1830) saw no significant missionary awakenings. From the 3rd awakening onwards, however, repercussions were increasingly felt overseas.

The first fields to experience the deep conviction, repentance, and assurance of the outpourings at home were the Pacific Island groups of Hawaii, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa.

- In 1834 in **Tonga**, a phenomenal revival began when men started to cry out for forgiveness. Prostrations were common, with as many as 200 on the church floor in one place. Often the sound of weeping and the shouts of joy of those finding the full assurance of faith could be heard some distance away. In one island there were 2000 converts in a few days.
- In the 1830s a great awakening also began in **Hawaii**. One fifth of the population were received into membership within five years.
- Evangelistic outreach commenced to other **central and north Pacific islands**. Vast crowds would often listen to travelling preachers until midnight, returning at daybreak. Trembling and prostrations often accompanied conviction of sin. Sometimes the sound of weeping drowned out the voice of the preacher.
- In **Fiji**, some of the worst cannibals were smitten with the most powerful conviction, the church floor being wet with tears. Despite frequent opposition, the Word prevailed mightily. On one occasion several young chiefs entered a church with murderous intentions. One by one they were smitten by the power of God, groaning in agony of conviction. Such displays of the glory of God led to many solid Biblical converts who then pioneered the remaining unevangelised islands. Their contribution was in no way secondary to that of the missionaries.

At the time of the 4th general awakening (1858-1860), even wider effects were felt on the mission fields. There were renewed awakenings in the Pacific, especially in Fiji, and blessed outpourings in other areas such as the British West Indies, S Africa and S India.

- In **Jamaica** a remarkable awakening began in 1860. It lasted 2 years but was effective for a generation. As many as 100 hardened sinners were prostrated in one place. Multitudes were stirred. Convicted sinners were even on occasions struck deaf and dumb, and some prostrated for days. There followed a great demand for the Scriptures and new converts by the hundreds went from door to door, day and night, begging others to repent. Remarkable visions were seen.
- Elsewhere in the Caribbean there was an unusual awakening in **the Miskito coast (Nicaragua)** in 1881. Every house in one town was affected, whilst workers in the forest also were seized by an overpowering conviction of sin. Even children knelt and prayed for forgiveness. Again there were tremblings, prostrations, visions and dreams.

i) Signs & Wonders on the Mission Fields

These awakenings were indeed glorious in their initial manifestations and lasting effects, but they must be kept in Biblical perspective to understand the overall historical progression and restoration of the Church to the full Word.

The 19th C had seen the greatest missionary advance for a millennium, with a growing geographical spread of the faith and a progressive increase in the depth and extent of the workings of the Holy Ghost. But, though certainly experiencing more Spiritual power than the Reformation, the signs, wonders and distributions of the Spirit of early Church evangelism (Heb 2:3-4) were still largely absent from the home and overseas awakenings. Compared with the original divine blueprint, Spiritual power was still small.

The same signs that followed Christ will accompany a Church walking in the fulness of the Spirit of Christ for, *“He that believeth on Me the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father”* (Jn 14:12). A Church fully restored to her first calling will be nothing less than *“the fulness of Him that filleth all in all”* (Eph 1:23).

And on those few occasions when Spiritual manifestations such as tongues, healings and exorcisms did appear in the Philadelphia age, they were often misunderstood or even discouraged or opposed. For example,

- In southern **India** there was a remarkable outpouring in 1860 on the Anglican field of Tirunelveli. Some prophesied whilst others beat their breasts, falling down and weeping bitterly for their sins. The outpouring led to prostrations and outcries with thousands of lasting converts. There were also cases of visions and speaking with tongues. At this time tongues were very rare and little understood. Early missionary reactions were often unsympathetic although the lasting results led to later acceptance. Native evangelists, who did not have the prejudices of the missionaries, did the real work, however.
- Around this time, a very fine native movement arose in **Madagascar** called the Disciples of the Lord. Although wholly independent of the missionaries it co-operated with them and fed converts into mission churches. Yet they strongly resisted the Disciples' practice of laying on of hands for healing. Two converted witchdoctors in particular had gifts of healing which they exercised in their extensive itinerant evangelism. Another feature of the Disciples' ministry was discerning of spirits. They regularly cast out demons, which the missionaries had ceased to believe in. As Edwin Orr so concisely puts it, *“The evangelists recognised the evil one and cast out demons in the Name of the Lord. Many missionaries were inclined to treat demon possession with pills”*. Despite the missionaries' opposition to healing and exorcism, they acknowledged heartily the benefits of the Disciples' ministry. But their opposition finally quenched the Spirit. Especially after the death of their leader, the native evangelists gradually abandoned those demonstrations of Spiritual power that had so amazed the multitudes. As a result, the Disciples lost out in Spiritual advancement.

Such examples help explain why the Lord said to Philadelphia that they had only “a little strength” (Rev 2:8). This was not so much a reproof, as a statement of fact.

Despite this, things were moving in the right direction. The ground was definitely being prepared for the signs, wonders and distributions of the Spirit of early Church evangelism (Heb 2:3-4).

Let us see how.

3
“THOU HAST A LITTLE STRENGTH”
or
THE RESTORATION OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Let us now look at the Lord’s reference to Philadelphia having “*a little strength*” in Revelation 3:8. How does this fit in with the historical situation?

Introduction

The letter to the church at Philadelphia contains not a single word of reproof.

This contrasts starkly with the preceding Sardis church. Sardis had relaxed its hold on and let slip the measure of Truth given her. She:

- not only failed to take the Reformation further into the full doctrine and experience of the Word;
- but also lost much of what was, at one time, within her grasp.

So, when the Lord told Sardis to “*hold fast*” (Rev 3:3), this was a warning not to loose her grip on any more than she already had. Although she began well on the road to full restoration, she had drawn back instead of bringing her potential to full completion. She even withdrew from territory initially repossessed.

Philadelphia was also enjoined to “*hold that fast which thou hast*” (Rev 3:11). Yet the context and implications were very different. Unlike Sardis, she *had* kept a tight grip on all she had received from the Lord. She remained faithful to the measure of the Word she was given: “*thou hast...kept my word, and hast not denied my name...thou hast kept the word of my patience*” (Rev 3:8b,10a).

To keep the Lord’s Word does not automatically imply keeping the *whole* counsel of God. It can apply to keeping that degree of the Word restored by revelation to a particular age. Gideon was faithful to the Word given him. Yet he certainly did not bring the nation to the full counsel of God like David did. David had a much deeper revelation of the purpose of God for Israel.

Likewise, Philadelphia did not have the fullness of that faith once for all delivered to the saints. But, there had been much progress since the dark days of Thyatira. The few faithful ones in that dreary age had also been enjoined to “*hold fast*” that which they had (Rev 2:25). They had even less than Philadelphia, but like her had maintained faithful testimony to the remnant of Truth that in her day had not been robbed from the people. This was, however, far from the full counsel of God proclaimed to the early Church.

Philadelphia, then, was faithful to what she was given. Furthermore the light received was not only retained, but spread far and wide. Yet in the overall context of the full purpose and heavenly calling of the Church, the extent of revelation and Truth given to Philadelphia was incomplete. Philadelphia had only “*a little strength*” (Rev 3:8) relative to the full potential. Spiritual strength is in proportion to the revelation and appropriation of the Word: “*I have written unto you young men because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you...*” (1 Jn 2:14). Since there was still more Truth to

be restored, the measure of the Spirit experienced by Philadelphia was proportionately less, for the Word is the sword of the Spirit.

This lack of Spiritual strength is not a rebuke. It is a simple statement of fact. It compares the achievements of the age with the original blueprint. Philadelphia had much Spiritual strength. But compared with all that was available, it was still little.

Although the Spiritual strength and power of Philadelphia was small in comparison with the full potential available, I do not belittle progress made in the 18th & 19th C towards the full recovery of the Church's lost inheritance bequeathed by the ascended Christ.

Although the Reformation brought a most blessed relief from the suffocating atmosphere of Thyatira, not until Philadelphia do we experience a sufficient measure of the Spirit to arouse hopes of finally regaining the fullness of the Word. The Spiritual endeavours of the Reformation were too intertwined with worldly political power to allow a refreshing sight of the Spirit's works apart from the hands of men. Philadelphia, however, experienced a most blessed increase in the operation of the Spirit in regeneration and sanctification. Gradually this progressing taste of the Spirit led to a growing realisation of the lost realm of Spiritual gifts, although their widespread exercise did not begin until the 20th C.

I have already examined different spheres of the increasing Spiritual power of the Philadelphia age in the last two chapters:

- The Holy Spirit imparting holiness in *"The Sanctification of the Spirit"*;
- The Holy Spirit convicting unbelievers of sin and quickening and empowering believers for outreach, both at home and on foreign fields, in *"The Age of the Open Door"*.

I now wish to look at progress towards a recovery of the hitherto lost gifts of the Spirit and a fuller tasting of *"the powers of the world to come"*.

These three divisions are purely arbitrary. In practice, they cannot be separated. Each contains within itself the potential of the others. To taste the power of God in justification begets faith in His power to sanctify. To taste the latter gives a foretaste of the powers of the world to come, enlarging awareness of the gifts of the Spirit and bringing a realisation of, and hunger for, a full baptism (or, plunging) into the Holy Ghost.

Oh, to drink fully of the wells of salvation, until we ourselves become mini-wells, gushing forth in every direction the blessed Holy Spirit, the heavenly birthright of the Church of the firstborn. *"Spring up, O well"* (Nu 21:17). *"All my springs are in Thee"* (Ps 87:7). Just to think of the Church's full inheritance brings a warm joy and hunger.

Spiritual Gifts before the 18th C

As the Church lost her first love, faith in her full blood-bought endowment diminished. Step-by-step she lost her grip on Christ and His full salvation.

Overtly supernatural manifestations such as tongues, prophecy, miracles and healings soon diminished to near extinction, both in teaching and in experience. Long gone were the days described by Dean Farrar, when persecuted Christians in Rome sang

and spoke in tongues. Speaking in tongues became considered evidence of demon possession. From the time of Augustine it came to be taught that Spiritual gifts were only for the founding of the Church and had since been withdrawn.

Unsurprisingly, from Constantine until the Reformation credible reports of Spiritual gifts are extremely rare. Protest groups seeking to return to the Church's original calling and purity, however, sometimes spoke in tongues in their first beginnings, e.g. the early Waldensians.

Tongues at the beginning of such movements is not a sign of unhealthy initial fanaticism before attaining maturity, as is often implied. It is because in early years faith is yet fresh and warm, unfettered by organisation and tradition.

As yet, however, the tide of restoration had not yet turned. At that time believers were hard pressed to hold firm even what little still remained of that faith once delivered to the saints, never mind pressing on to recover more Truth.

This situation recurred right up to the 20th C when, for the first time since the early Church, the awareness and experience of speaking with tongues and prophesying became common. Until then, such experiences were either limited to certain individuals or restricted localities, and for a short time only.

Even when the tide finally turned at the Reformation, there was very little advance in the recovery of Spiritual gifts among the mainline reformers, although Luther personally practised prayer for the sick.

Those who went further in their quest for a full return to New Testament doctrine and practice made more progress. Although a full doctrinal understanding of the gifts of tongues and of healings was unknown, there were instances of both. For example,

- **The early Quakers** experienced much Spiritual power. W C Braithwaite, describing an early meeting, wrote: *"While waiting upon the Lord, we received often the pouring down of the Spirit upon us and... spoke with new tongues"*. Also, George Fox's journal has many instances of miracles and healings after the laying on of hands.
- **John Welch, a Scotch Covenanter**, prayed over a dead man for 48 hours until restored to life. Another Covenanter, Robert Bruce, prayed for those past recovery and saw them fully restored.
- Among **the early Welsh Baptists**, Vavasor Powell taught anointing of the sick. Many dangerously sick were reported recovered through his prayers.

Although the Reformation period (16th & 17th C) saw a modest increase in the manifestation of the Spirit compared with the awful barrenness of the Middle Ages, the full recovery of the Church's lost inheritance in this realm was still in its infancy.

Growing awareness of the work and need of the Spirit in the Philadelphia age led to increased supernatural experiences and manifestations as the 18th & 19th C progressed. Although there was still little understanding of the general availability of the gifts, the growing taste of the Spirit laid a foundation for the 20th C worldwide awakening of the Church to her rightful inheritance.

Let us now see how the vocal gifts became more common in Philadelphia than for many centuries, and how divine healing became widely believed and practised.

The Vocal Gifts in the 18th & 19th C

a) The Camisards

The most widespread outbreak of tongues and prophecy since the 2nd C Montanists occurred among the persecuted Reformed (Presbyterian) Camisards in the late 17th C. Although belonging to the late Reformation period, they have links with later developments in the 18th C.

French Protestants were bitterly persecuted by the French Catholic king after he revoked religious freedom in 1685. Churches were burnt, pastors banished and laymen tortured. Some fled to the safety of the isolated Cevennes mountains. Their faith was sustained by remarkable Spiritual power. Men, women and children heard supernatural voices, received revelations and spoke with tongues. Many prophecies were published. Spirit-filled people who only knew their own dialect spoke French perfectly. Adults and children prophesied mightily as they preached under the anointing. Even their enemies testified to their prophetic gifts. By 1701 there were about 8000 of these “inspired” people.

Unfortunately, bitter persecution drove some to arms, and so Spiritual power diminished rapidly. Others fled to England, Germany, Holland and Switzerland taking their gifts with them. In England they were known as the “French Prophets”. As always, some brought disrepute such as through failed predictions. Yet there were others whose anointing commended them to the consciences of others.

b) The Inspiration Movement

Other fugitives from the Cevennes, bringing with them the gifts of tongues and prophecy, were kindly received at Wittgenstein (S Westphalia, Germany). There some radical Pietists joined them. The result was the Inspiration Movement. It swept over parts of Germany, Switzerland and Holland in the early 18th C. One of the chief figures was Hochman Von Hochenau (1670-1721), whose preaching was a great means of revival. In his constant journeyings he was heard by enormous crowds, attacked by mobs and imprisoned. Even critics acknowledged the remarkable Spiritual power and soundness of the Inspirationists’ preaching. One wrote: “*What they gave us surpassed many sermons*”.

The Inspirationists sought a very deep, living communion with the Lord by the Spirit, continuing the tradition of 17th C Pietists such as Labadie and the Seekers (who in England joined the Quakers). Like the Seekers, their chief aims were intimate communion with God and a unity of the Lord’s people. They looked for a recovery from apostasy, a restitution of the Spirit and doctrine of the early Church, and the soon return of Christ in power and glory. Their strong expectation of the latter was unsurprising. Outpourings of the Spirit and awareness of His coming in power go hand in hand.

Their deep hunger for a close inner walk with the Lord and the leading of the Spirit caused them to taste much that others more fearful failed to enjoy. There was a fusion of the experiences of the Camisards with the beliefs of the radical Pietists. The latter denied the Reformation theory that revelation ended with the apostles,

although, of course, no revelation must contradict the Word. Miracles were not limited to the past.

There are several accounts of speaking in tongues by the Inspirationists. They heartily believed God still revealed His mind through the Spirit by prophecy, tongues, dreams, visions and other similar means.

c) The Wesleyan/Holiness Churches

In the 18th C awakenings there is little evidence of the vocal gifts being either sought or taught. The Wesleys, for example, treated them with reserve, perhaps in part due to unfortunate encounters with certain “French Prophets”. For example, In 1744 John Wesley wrote:

Without busying ourselves then in curious, needless inquiries touching those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit (i.e. tongues, interpretation, healing) let us take a nearer view of these, his ordinary fruits, (i.e. the fruit of the Spirit), which we are assured will remain throughout all ages...

These words reveal two saddening misapprehensions:

- No inquiry about the gifts can be “needless”. Paul said: *“concerning spiritual gifts brethren, I would not have you ignorant”* (1 Cor 12:1).
- The idea that certain gifts were “extraordinary”, i.e. not meant as a permanent endowment of the Church, but that the fruit of the Spirit is merely “ordinary” is an error from the early centuries of Church history without Biblical support.

Yet within six years Wesley had had second thoughts. By 1750 he said the Montanists were genuine Christians (contrary to contemporary thought), and that,

the grand reason why the miraculous gifts were withdrawn so soon was not only that faith and holiness were well nigh lost, but that dry, formal, orthodox men began even then to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves, and to decry them all as either madness or imposture.

It is clear that Wesley did not reject the French Prophets on principle. When a famous contemporary denied any exercise of tongues since apostolic times, he referred him to the Camisards.

Yet, despite a theoretical acceptance of Spiritual gifts, Wesley found difficulty in accepting them in practice. In *“Further thoughts on Christian perfection”*, for example, he wrote:

...beware of enthusiasm. Such is, the imagining that you have the gift of prophecy or discerning of spirits, which I do not believe one of you has; nor ever had yet.

Doubtless he feared the influence of the extravagant behaviour of certain ones who professed to prophesy and have visions, dreams and other revelations. Like Gamaliel, he sat on the fence and would not commit himself. So, unsurprisingly, the first Methodists neither expected nor sought the gifts.

Despite this, the emphasis in doctrine and practice on a personal experience of the Spirit’s workings predisposed Methodists towards supernatural manifestations. For example,

- In conversion, they greatly stressed regeneration as well as justification, i.e. salvation as the receiving of a new life from the Spirit as well as a legal pardon.
- A cardinal Methodist doctrine linked conversion with the experience of the “*full assurance of faith*” through the direct witness of the Spirit.
- Holiness was taught in a similar vein. It was not an observing of moral rules but a personal appropriation of the life of Christ through the Holy Ghost.
- Finally, Methodists were well used to dramatic experiences accompanying both conversion and subsequent growth in grace. It was common for sinners to be smitten under the power of God as the Word was preached. Frequently the loud crying of the convicted would drown the preaching. Many frequently cried with strong cries for salvation or sanctification. Some would shout for the joy of a blessing received; others cried out in anguish of conviction.

So, although Methodist doctrine made no particular reference to the gifts of the Spirit, their emphasis on the reality of the work of the Spirit prepared them to accept and expect Spiritual manifestations, at a time when there was no general expectation or experience of the type of believers’ meetings described in 1 Corinthians 14. The foundation was thus laid to lead hungry souls yet further.

An early example of a Methodist speaking in unknown tongues is Thomas Walsh, one of Wesley’s best known preachers. In 1750 he recorded how, whilst in prayer, he spoke in a language he knew not of. Other 18th C instances have been recorded, but there was no real understanding of their *significance*. Tongues were seen as just another manifestation of the power of the Spirit.

The fervour of the early British Methodists was carried to America at the end of the 18th C. Scenes reminiscent of the early field preaching recurred, especially in the camp meetings. Tongues were occasionally reported throughout the 19th C, such as in the astonishing Cane Ridge meetings in 1800. In a remarkable revival in the University of Georgia inspired by the latter, students often shouted or spoke in tongues.

The growing 19th C quest in the USA for a deeper experience of God led many, of all denominations, to seek the cleansing and empowering of the Spirit. This was often termed sanctification or the baptism of fire. Men such as Finney and Moody testified to a remarkable supernatural endowment of power. On one occasion, in 1873, after addressing a group of young men in the Sunderland YMCA, Moody left them speaking with tongues and prophesying.

As the quest for a more holy and powerful Spiritual life intensified in the USA, tongues speaking increased in the 1890s. In the Fire Baptised Holiness Church (formed in 1895), for instance, tongues were quite common. The most remarkable 19th C instance, however, was in Camp Creek in 1896 when over 100, including children, spoke with tongues.

Despite the growing incidence of tongues throughout the 19th C, the logical conclusions were still not yet fully drawn. It was not until the 20th C that it became commonly understood that all the gifts of the Spirit were still freely available to the whole Church. They were to be actively coveted, not merely passively acknowledged, as a further stage in the full recovery of her original Blood-bought birthright.

d) Edward Irving & the Catholic Apostolic Church

One in this age who did understand the *significance* of the gifts was Edward Irving, an early 19th C minister of a London Scottish Presbyterian Church.

He was very interested in the pre-millennial coming of Christ, speaking for 2/3 years at the General Assembly in Scotland to packed halls on prophetic subjects. Closely linked with his strong consciousness of the return of Christ was an awareness of the Church's need of restoration to her first estate. In 1827 he declared Spiritual gifts should still be in operation. Their absence was due to unbelief not the Lord's will. He sought to stir the Church to recover her forfeited endowments, encouraging seeking and exercising of Spiritual gifts. This went against the pre vailing belief that the gifts were for the apostolic age alone.

In short, Irving laid a solid doctrinal basis for the present availability and purpose of Spiritual gifts that anticipated later developments.

Faith increased in his congregation. Prayer meetings at 6.30am began with over 1000 in attendance. In 1831 there were manifestations of tongues and prophecy.

Despite the support of the vast majority of his church, in 1832 Irving was expelled from his movement. A new assembly was formed. Unfortunately, a false spirit entered causing confusion. Self-professed apostles and prophets arose directing Irving and organising the Catholic Apostolic Church. So, a development of initial promise was aborted.

Some feel many of these gifts were spurious, whilst others consider them genuine. There was strong theological opposition. There is a strong spirit within Reformed Protestantism that ardently denies believers can possess supernatural powers as a part of the Church's permanent endowment.

(See Appendix for fuller details.)

e) Conclusion

Occurrences of the vocal gifts in the Philadelphia age were not limited to Britain and America. There are other examples from Sweden, Ireland, S India, Russia, the Balkans, Armenia and Norway. (See Appendix for details.)

The wide geographical spread is not without significance. Although there was virtually no teaching on tongues, their increasing incidence is a sign that this restoring was the work of the Spirit and not of man.

But, though this was a great advance over the dearth of the Middle Ages and the early Reformation period, the expectancy and experience of tongues was not widespread. Yet there had been progress. Tongues became more common for both private and public edification, and as a lasting gift among larger groups, rather than an isolated experience of certain individuals. Prophecy and other vocal gifts were also on the rise.

As the tide came further in restoring more and more of the Church's lost inheritance, so the significance of the gifts would become clearer. Scarcely any denomination specifically taught them as yet, but the growing Methodist/Holiness quest for the

meaning and experience of the baptism of the Holy Ghost would ultimately lead to a worldwide emergence from the prevailing ignorance.

In closing, note the devil's counterfeit. It is highly significant that at the very time that tongues appeared in 19th C American camp meetings, similar experiences occurred among the early Mormons. Unsurprisingly for a body whose founders had spiritistic powers, Brigham Young spoke in tongues and interpreted and in the early days whole days of "speaking meetings" were devoted to speaking with tongues. Mormon choirs were even known to sing in tongues in unison. In fact the 7th article of Mormonism is belief in prophecy, revelation, visions, healings, tongues and interpretation.

The Restoration of Divine Healing

a) Before the Reformation

The demise and rise of the gifts of healings parallel the vocal gifts. The NT and early Church fathers both testify to extensive exercise until Constantine.

From then on healings were not taught as a post-ascension gift of a glorified Christ to His living saints. Instead, as the emerging Catholic spirit grew in strength, they were increasingly associated with the relics and tombs of dead saints and martyrs. Anointing with oil for the healing of the living (Jas 5:14-16) was metamorphosed into extreme unction for the dead. How appropriate! How in keeping with the pattern of robbing the living of their birthright and binding them ever more closely to the spirit of death that swathed the growing ecclesiastical power of the institutional church.

From Constantine to the Reformation there were very few instances of the laying on of hands or anointing of oil for healing. A rare exception was the early Waldensians.

b) The Reformation Period

The mainline reformers, influenced by Augustine, generally taught that the gifts had been withdrawn and were no longer available. Where faith was found for healing, it was usually a general faith that God answers prayer, or in the teaching of James to call the elders to pray for the sick. There was scarcely any understanding of the Spirit's empowering selected persons with the gifts of healings in accordance with 1 Corinthians 12.

The Lutheran Pietist Bengel, for example, writing of God's power to heal in the early 18th C, said: "*It seems to have been given by God that it might always remain in the Church as a specimen of the other gifts*". For him, the other gifts had been withdrawn. Healing was the only remaining testimony to the full Spiritual manifestation promised in the Word. Although Luther prayed for the sick, the evidence points to a more general faith in prayer than to a regular practice of the laying on of hands, or the exercise of a permanent gift of healing.

Among the few who *did* experience Christ as Healer in this period in a measure were the early Baptists and Moravians, and especially the persecuted French Huguenots and early Quakers. The Quakers above all seemed to appreciate the true significance of healing as a sign of an abiding Spiritual power.

c) The Philadelphia Age

The experience of the power of the regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost in this age led to a growing consciousness of, and greatly increased faith in, the power of the Lord to heal, especially in the late 19th C.

This increased faith in healings then became a bridge that helped lead ultimately to acceptance and restoration of all Paul's Spiritual gifts:

- James 5 enjoins prayer for the sick in local churches, distinct from the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12. So, even if Reformation believers considered those gifts limited to the early Church, they could still pray for the sick. God still heard and answered prayer even if He no longer endued individuals with the gifts of healings. (So, even when opposition to Quakers' faith in the gifts of healings was at its greatest, their critics still prayed for the sick. Some Baptist elders even practised anointing with oil.)
- In the Philadelphia age, the acceptable belief that God could and would heal was greatly quickened.
- The next step was to accept that certain specific individuals were specially gifted of the Lord in praying for healing.
- This then posed the question: if the Spirit still endued men with the gifts of healings, why not with the *other* gifts?

The greatest advances in the recovery of the ministry of healing were among those with the least Reformed (Calvinistic) background. Philadelphia was above all the age of Methodism. Whether in Britain, N America or on the mission fields, it was often the Methodists who fared best since they were least fearful of the operations of the Spirit. Unlike the Reformed, John Wesley denied there was any Biblical ground for supposing miracles had ceased with the apostolic age.

How refreshing to break out of the Reformed Protestant straitjacket, favourably quoted by Warfield, that: "*Protestantism is a uniform disclaimer of any promise in the Scriptures that miraculous powers should be continued in the Church*". How strange that in the name of upholding the authority of the Word men should deny the very gifts which that same Word teaches!

After what Wesley and his contemporaries saw of the arm of the Lord in the 18th C, it is no wonder there are 240 cases of healings of every type of disease in his Journal. These include deliverance from demon possession. (This is a form of healing (Lk 6:18; 8:2).)

In the 19th C, faith in, and the teaching of, divine healing became yet stronger, especially in the latter half.

- Men such as the Lutheran Pastor Blumhardt in Germany, W E Boardman in England, and Dr Charles Cullis in the USA all contributed to the growing expectancy of divine healing.
- The strongly influential new holiness groups, both in Britain and America, often preached healing.
- Several set up divine healing homes to gather the sick to pray for their healing, e.g. Charles Parham in 1898.
- Major Pearson was one of many early officers and men in the British holiness group, the Salvation Army, who commonly practised anointing with oil and the

laying on of hands for healing. (General Booth's "*Orders and Regulations for field officers*" taught prayer for the sick.)

- A B Simpson, founder of the fine American holiness body called the Christian and Missionary Alliance, was healed in 1881 after being close to death. Faith grew after a deep inner revelation of Jesus as his sufficiency. Solemnly vowing to take Jesus for all his bodily needs, he was completely restored to health. For the rest of his life he pioneered preaching of divine healing and practised prayer for the sick despite its reproach and strong opposition. As with his teaching on sanctification, Simpson put his emphasis on divine healing in a Christ-centred context. For him, healing was not simply a benefiting from supernatural power; it was a receiving of Christ Himself for all his bodily needs just as we receive Him for our holiness.

One of the most unusual preachers of healing was the Australian Congregational minister, Alexander Dowie. It was still a major innovation in his day, and needed a strong pioneering spirit. From 1884, however, he began to proclaim healing regularly in Australia, and saw many wonderful deliverances. In 1888 he left for the USA and held an intensive series of healing campaigns. Settling in Chicago he met intense persecution, but this only served to publicise many testimonies of healing. (See Appendix for fuller details)

d) The Counterattack

Whilst the 19th C saw great advances in faith in the supernatural, this was not without cost. Pioneers always have a price to pay and there will be casualties. The Spiritual tide was truly returning, but those whom the Lord used at the forefront of each successive wave felt keenly the heat of the opposition of the serpent.

Mention has just been made of Dowie's persecution and Simpson's reproach and strong opposition after embracing divine healing. Let us look at two other examples, this time from Africa:

- Andrew Murray wrote a book on healing after being himself healed of a throat disease. This caused a great upsurge of faith among Dutch Reformed laymen in his adopted country, **South Africa**. But, because of the unbelief of the pastors, the book was withdrawn and Murray requested not to practise this. Yet the beneficial effect of his writings was such that during the Boer War an estimated 20% of the sick refused medical aid, requesting prayer instead. A "Divine Healing Corps" had to be set up!
- In **Madagascar**, although not taught this by the missionaries, the Disciples of the Lord proclaimed divine healing along with salvation and brotherly love. Prayer for the sick with the laying on of hands was common. Everywhere this blessed native movement went it grew. Though conscious of their debt to the missionaries and seeking to work in harmony with them, they were aware there were truths such as healing by the laying on of hands which the missionaries had not taught. As already mentioned (in the chapter on the Open Door), despite the humble attitude of the Disciples, the missionaries greatly hindered their healing and exorcism, and their strong resistance slowly squeezed the Spirit out.

These examples highlight the resistance from within to the recovery of the Church's lost endowment. The heat was truly on. Even godly men such as Jonathan Goforth,

who experienced blessed results in China at the turn of the century, were unable to find the faith to enter this realm and to take full advantage of the Church's birthright.

Such examples also highlight again why the Lord said to Philadelphia that they had only "a *little* strength" (Rev 2:8). Relative to the original, their Spiritual strength was small.

In addition to the opposition within, as in the case of tongues, counterfeits from without also arose to parallel the Church's growing recovery of divine healing. It is no coincidence that the rise of modern Spiritualism and Christian Science parallel almost exactly the revival of teaching of divine healing. It is no coincidence also that the early Mormons greatly mistrusted doctors and practised anointing with oil and the laying on of hands. In proportion as the Church grows in Spiritual power, satanic counterfeits exercise parallel false supernatural ministries. Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses by performing the same wonders as he did. But only up to a point.

e) Conclusion

The restoration of God's Truth to His Church is a direct and deliberate work of the Spirit. It is not coincidence or chance. All over the earth, whether in Europe and N America or in far off Madagascar, those who walked most closely to their Lord found their minds turning simultaneously to identical thoughts on divine healing, irrespective of any contact between them. The one mind of the Spirit is shared by all who mind the things of the Spirit.

The Philadelphia age experienced the most teaching and practice of divine healing since the early Church. The fuller measure of the Spirit evident in this age enabled faith to grow and to glimpse something of the Church's inheritance in the Spiritual gifts. But it was still only a glimpse. Even where faith was strongest, it was usually not based on 1 Corinthians 12 but on James 5 and on healing as part of the atonement.

A good illustration is A J Gordon, a staunch advocate of healing in the late 19th C. In "*The Ministry of Healing*", he speaks of the apostles possibly having secrets of power denied to later generations. Although advocating healing, he distinguishes it from other miracles. He said, "*Raising the dead is nowhere promised as a privilege or possibility for the believers of today*". He believed the gifts of Matthew 10:8 were not for us.

Despite his deficient understanding, Gordon had some lovely insights into the fuller significance of healing in God's plan of salvation. He did not emphasise healing in itself. He saw it as a firstfruit of the full redemption of the body. He said it is no coincidence that healing is promised in Mark 16 just as the Lord was about to be taken up to become Head over all things. He taught it as a birthright of the Church and part of man's full recovery from the Fall. Healings are signs of future perfect wholeness, reminiscences of an unfallen paradise, and prophetic of a paradise regained. They are exhibitions of divine recovery and order in nature, pointing upwards to a reigning Redeemer and forward to the day He will subdue all things unto Himself. They testify to the restitution of all things. They are a kind of firstfruits, samples, specimens and tokens of the kingdom. They are a foretaste of the redemption of the whole man by the promised Deliverer, and foregleams of the millennium. Gordon believed that to exercise healing is to preach the kingdom,

bearing in our hands the grapes of Eshcol. They give a foretaste in the present wilderness of the Promised Land to come. (Cp Nu 13.20c,23a; Heb 6.5b)

Although a full awareness of the extent of the gifts, powers and ministries of the early Church is lacking in Gordon's words, the foregoing is certainly a most glorious exposition of the purpose of those "*signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost*" (Heb 2:4) by which God desires to bear witness to our preaching.

The next century would at last see a general realisation across a wide spectrum of Christendom of the availability and purpose of the gifts of the Spirit.

4
PHILADELPHIA & “THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN”
or
NICOLAITANISM IN THE PHILADELPHIA AGE

The synagogue of satan

Let us now consider Revelation 3 verse 9:

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

In so doing we shall also see further significance in the name given by the Spirit to this age, Philadelphia.

Before looking at the relevance to the 18th & 19th C of this verse, let us firstly look at who these people are.

a) Who are they? Why do they say they are Jews if they are not?

Whoever these people are, they had been around for a very long time. They are first mentioned in Revelation 2:9 in the Smyrna age (2nd/3rd C):

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

From Smyrna to Philadelphia (18th/19th C) is around 1650 years.

But why do they say they are Jews? Are they saying,

- That they are *literal* Jews, by natural descent, after the flesh? Or,
- That they are *true* Jews, inwardly, the Israel of God and the true Spiritual circumcision (Cp Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:3)?

Whichever, why make this claim, anyway? In some way those making it must think it would confer respect, legitimacy or authority.

But how?

- Either, if they mean *literal* Jews, because the first Christians were Jews after the flesh, and so they (and no others) would carry an aura of respect and authority by claiming to be in the line of the original, first Christians.
- Or, if they mean *true* Jews, because that would mean that they, (and, once again, no others) are the true Israel of God, the only true children of Abraham. Once again they would be claiming the authority of legitimacy.

So, the reason for the claim seems to be to assert that **they** are the true, real Christians. By implication, therefore, all others are pretenders and frauds.

b) Why are they called a synagogue?

Because they are an *organised* group of professing Christians, not a disparate collection of disaffected individuals.

(Do not be put off by the Jewish connotations of the word “synagogue”. The Greek word means a bringing together, a gathering or congregation. As well as being used to describe the building where *Jews* gather for worship, in the New Testament it is also used for *Christian* church meetings (e.g. Heb 10:25; Jas 2:2, Greek).)

So, since this group called themselves Jews as a claim to authority, legitimacy and pure original pedigree, the synagogue of satan is an organised group professing itself to be the true Christian Church.

They claim to be the legitimate heirs of the heavenly birthright. Like Esau they claim direct descent from the true seed of promise.

But they are liars. They are not heirs of the promise. They are not the true “*church of the firstborn*” (Heb 12:23). They are “*children of the bondwoman*” not of the free (Gal 4:31), being “*born after the flesh*” and not after the Spirit (Gal 4:29).

c) *Why the synagogue of satan?*

Because their coming together is not simply not of God. The Word explicitly says it is in fact of satan. The awful truth is that the inspiration of their gathering is from the bottomless pit. So, whilst professing to be “*the churches of God*” (1 Th 2:14), they are in fact “*the synagogue of satan.*”

d) *What kind of people are they?*

We are told two things about them.

Firstly, whilst it is implied in Smyrna, in Philadelphia they are explicitly called liars.

Liars are not only found in the Smyrna and Philadelphia ages (Rev 2.9 & 3.9). They were in the Church from the very first age, Ephesus (Rev 2.2).

To be called a liar by the Lord is extremely serious. The source of lies is the evil one himself (Jn 5.44; Acts 5.3). Demons/spirits use lies in their deceptions (1 K 22.22-23; 2 Chr 18.21-23; 1 Tim 4.1-2). These people were not in good company!

Furthermore, the same Lord who specifically refers to liars being in the churches, later in the same book speaks solemnly of the final doom of liars (Rev 21:8,27; 22:14-15). So, although professing to be the true Church, in fact their end is not paradise but perdition.

Secondly, in Smyrna these same people are called blasphemers:

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. (Rev 2:9)

Concerning blasphemy,

- The words blaspheme/blasphemy, in Greek, do not automatically mean to use the Lord’s name in vain.
- Their literal meaning is, “to speak against”/“speaking against”.
- Clearly these people would not openly speak against/ blaspheme the name of the Lord if they were seeking to put themselves forward as the true circumcision and the Israel of God.

- What/who, then, were they speaking against? The Lord's true people and His Truth in their mouths. (Cp Acts 18:6; 1 Tim 1:13, 20; 2 Tim 3:2)

So, the synagogue of satan are antagonistic to and oppose the Truth and they who speak it, whilst at the same time lying that they are the authentic, true, original Church and depository of the Truth. They do not oppose the true Church from without but from within, professing, falsely, that they themselves are the one true Church of Christ.

e) In what way will they come and worship before the feet of the godly?

Antagonism and opposition to the Truth and they who speak it, together with fraudulent claims to be the authentic, true, original Church and depository of the Truth are not confined to the synagogue of satan. Such features have characterised what the antichrist Nicolaitan system has done through the ages.

In fact, the synagogue of satan and the Nicolaitans are but separate terms describing different facets/aspects of the same people. (Likewise with the godly. The same people are sometimes described with one term, sometimes with another.) So, the synagogue of satan of the 2nd and 6th ages (Rev 2:9; 3:9) is the same as the Nicolaitans of the 1st and 3rd ages. (Rev 2:6; 2:15) Now, if the Nicolaitans are the same as the synagogue of satan, the humbling of the latter in this age (Rev 3:9) is the same as the humbling of the former. And, as we shall see, the Nicolaitans, the enemies of the true Israel of God and of the true circumcision, were indeed humbled in the Philadelphia age.

Nicolaitanism before the Philadelphia Age

Before we look at this humbling in Philadelphia, let us review the working of Nicolaitanism in Christendom in earlier ages.

a) Catholicism: The Fullest Expression

The lying spirit found in the synagogue of satan constantly sought to portray itself as the sole legitimate successor of Christ and of the first apostles. Insistent claims were made to be the direct descendants of Peter, often "substantiated" by forgeries and downright lies. So well did this spirit do its work in the Middle Ages that those who sought to uphold the true testimony of Christ were often few and scattered. Furthermore, their reputation was so successfully slandered that it was only in recent times that the true nature of their doctrine has been unearthed. The self-proclaimed "one true Church" had either destroyed all records of their work, or seriously misrepresented it. Furthermore, in its lust for acknowledgement and legitimacy, fine men, who had no real part in the spirit of this emerging Nicolaitan system, were misrepresented as belonging to the self-professed one universal true Church.

It is important to realise that the Papacy is not an accident of history. It is the fullest outward expression of the true nature and objective of the spirit of antichrist. It is the result of a concerted deliberate plan of campaign originating in the bottomless pit and directed against Christianity wherever found, not just in Western Europe where Catholicism predominated.

b) Nicolaitanism in the Rest of Christendom

Although the Roman system is the fullest expression of the purpose and objective of the Nicolaitan spirit, the spirit of antichrist and Catholicism are not one and the same.

No one ecclesiastical system or denomination has a monopoly of this spirit. There are many antichrists (1 Jn 2:18).

The proof of this is that, wherever Christianity spread, the spirit of antichrist at work in Catholicism was equally at work in other, non-Catholic, Christian organisations, bringing about exactly the same stages of decline from the full counsel of God as seen in the Western (Catholic) Church. Furthermore, this decline took place,

- Not only, in the Persian (Nestorian) Church, the Greek (Byzantine) Church and other **pre Reformation** ecclesiastical groups;
- But also in the more recent **post Reformation** mainline Protestant denominations.

(For fuller details of the working of this spirit, see book 6 of this series (*The Thyatira Church Age*, chapter 5, The antichrist spirit in the rest of Christendom) for the two most significant non-Catholic **Pre Reformation** ecclesiastical groups, and book 8 (*The Sardis Church Age*, passim) for the **post Reformation** mainline Protestant denominations.)

Indeed, if the letters to the seven churches are prophetic of the successive ages of Church history, then this is how it should be. In each age what is described therein should apply throughout all Christendom, not just in Western Europe where Catholicism predominated.

Furthermore, the influence of this spirit in Protestantism is not restricted to the mainline Reformation denominations, which carried over much of the Nicolaitan ecclesiastical structure of the Roman system that they had left. It is also to be found in post Reformation Protestant ecclesiastical organisations.

Let us illustrate this by looking at the continuing work of the Nicolaitan spirit in the newly formed post Reformation Methodist denomination, the key organisation in the Philadelphia age. Let us also see how Nicolaitanism received a significant setback and was greatly humbled in this age.

Nicolaitanism in the Philadelphia Age

a) Continued Operations of Nicolaitanism

So far we have looked at who the synagogue of satan are and their identification with the Nicolaitans.

Although the tide of the Spirit was very strong in the Philadelphia age, the Nicolaitan spirit was not inactive. Its evil heart was unchanged, its power still real and its activities a constant hindrance and a thorn in the flesh.

Before considering its humbling, let us first look at a few examples of the very real retarding power of Nicolaitanism in the ministry of John Wesley and the Methodists.

John Wesley

Wesley had many inner personal struggles over the strongly Nicolaitan 18th C Anglican system. These illustrate well how difficult it is in each successive move of the Spirit for men to wholly cleanse themselves from inherited Nicolaitan traditions and prejudices.

- At that time open-air preachers or those who preached either unordained or outside their parish were punished. It is very difficult for the modern mind to understand the very real inner struggle Wesley had with Nicolaitan ideas when he first heard of Whitfield's open air preaching. He almost thought it sinful to save souls outside a church. Despite his strong scruples, the Holy Ghost led him to accept lay preaching in the absence of available clergymen.
- Deep-seated Anglican Nicolaitan prejudices hindered Wesley from founding churches on the New Testament pattern. In 1746 he wrote: "*I read Lord King's account of the Primitive Church. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education, I was ready to believe this a fair and impartial draught, but if so it would follow that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order; and that originally every Christian congregation was a church independent of all others!*" This was too much for Wesley's "vehement prejudice" to accept. Although frustrated by its systematic opposition, Wesley tried hard to remain within the Anglican structure.

The Methodists

After Wesley's death, the influence of Nicolaitanism continued among his followers. When the Methodists formally separated from the Church of England, they did not form churches on the pattern Wesley read about in 1746. Wesley's deep attachment to the Church of England meant the essence of its strongly centralised, Nicolaitan, episcopalian form of government continued in the new denomination.

And that form of government had itself been inherited from the earlier Roman Catholic structure. Like mother, like daughter.

The governing Methodist Conference was an entirely clerical body, jealous of privilege and resistant to lay representation.

During the 19th C, as the original anointing subsided, the Nicolaitan grip tightened on Methodist ecclesiastical government:

- The Conference increased its power at the expense of the lay preacher and local congregation.
- Attempts were made to control open air preaching, and to expel those who held "camp meetings" without permission.

Fortunately, however, as the tide of restoration continued to come in, the ability of the Nicolaitan spirit to control was greatly weakened. Ecclesiastical leaderships in the UK could no longer enforce their rule by the aid of the State. The worst they could do was to excommunicate. The Nicolaitan spirit could still bind a new denomination strongly to a central leadership if given the appropriate form of ecclesiastical government. It could not now, however, prevent men leaving its confines and freely proclaiming the Truth elsewhere.

b) The Humbling of Nicolaitanism

Despite the continuing very real influence of Nicolaitanism, its power was greatly humbled in this age as stated in Revelation 3.9.

Evangelical teaching and practice penetrated all Protestant groups, even those most strongly tied to Nicolaitan forms of church government. Strong inroads were made

among Lutherans, Presbyterians and Anglicans. Indeed, there was such a stream of godly Anglicans proclaiming the Word that one Anglican high-churchman wrote:

It would be no exaggeration to say that morally and spiritually the dominant religious power both inside and outside the Church of England at the close of the 18th C was that which had been evoked by the Evangelical Revival.

Never since the early Church had the evangelical message been proclaimed so widely and so prominently throughout Christendom. The effects of the 18th C Evangelical Revival were far wider than simply the rise of the newly emerging Methodist societies. At times it seemed the repeated waves of Spiritual power that initiated the great awakenings would also decisively change the direction of the existing Protestant denominations.

So, the 18th & 19th C was certainly a time in which those who were of the church of the firstborn saw much progress. Those of the Nicolaitan spirit had to yield much ground, acknowledging indeed that God was with the former, confirming the promise to Philadelphia: *“behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee”*.

Nicolaitanism seeks to exalt a special group (the clergy) to conquer and rule over the rest (the laity), quenching the rule of the Spirit. The clergy/laity distinction, and the formation of denominations with strong central control over their adherents, are cornerstones of Nicolaitanism.

Clear indications of the weakening of Nicolaitanism are seen in two key areas:

- the breaking down of denominational barriers between believers; and
- the rising power and influence of the laity with a parallel weakening of clerical dominance in church life.

Philadelphia: The Age of Brotherly Love; Denominational Barriers Weakened

The intense religious bitterness of the Reformation, with its many wars of religion, left within the hearts of many a deep desire for a genuine Christian unity and love. There was a growing weariness with the divisiveness and bitterness of Protestant denominationalism, and a quest for the unity of the Spirit and a communion with God transcending the bounds (and bands) of denomination. For example,

- Among others, the writings of the radical Pietist, Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), had widespread effect, awakening hope of a fellowship of all true believers. He taught that the Church is not to be identified with any one society or organisation.
- In the early 18th C there was a coming together of those seeking to escape the Babylonian confusion of denominations, each claiming to be the only true way. To this end, societies and churches were formed in different parts of Europe, significantly named “Philadelphia”. This was not a new denomination but a widespread movement within the existing churches. It aimed at uniting all believers in love. Denominations were seen only as outward shells and forms, among which the spirit of antichrist was hidden.

How significant that the name of these societies is identical to that of the age in which they appear. “Philadelphia” means, “love of the brethren”. As in other ages, the name of this age also indicates one of its key characteristics.

Brotherly love strikes a fatal blow at Nicolaitanism since,

- the essence of Nicolaitanism is to exalt one man over another; and
- brotherly love undermines denominationalism, which separates one from another, and draws believers together in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost (2 Cor 13:14).

Such developments characterise the Philadelphia age. The tide of restoration was flowing strongly. Barriers between denominations were being broken down. For example,

- The heightened Spiritual power of the great awakenings led to a growing inter-communion between evangelicals irrespective of denomination. Evangelicals in the Anglican system, for example, where Nicolaitanism had a far deeper hold than among Non-Conformists, began to advocate religious freedom and to cooperate actively with other evangelicals in missionary and social works. This would have been unthinkable before. Although it provoked a Nicolaitan reaction from the High Churchmen, the Anglican evangelicals persisted in their ways.
- Throughout the 19th C especially, there was much interdenominational co-operation, particularly in the great awakenings. Believers from different denominations formed common home and overseas missionary societies. A Nicolaitan reaction in the 1830s and 1840s saw many early societies come under increasing denominational control. But a new wave of independent faith missions was formed in the second half of the century. Interdenominational evangelistic campaigns were held, with members of different groups in co-operation
- Another token of the search for true Christian brotherhood was the formation in 1825 of the Christian Brethren (Plymouth Brethren). Their original aim was to escape denominationalism and to experience true Christian fellowship between all believers. Their influence grew out of all proportion to their numerical strength.

Clergy/Laity Distinctions Weakened

Edwin Orr highlights the link between denominational barriers being broken down and clergy/laity distinctions being strongly assailed in his comments on the 1858/59 revival:

As a natural corollary of the movement of the laity, the movement towards practical interdenominational unity developed rapidly. Most lay movements are interdenominational and most revivals of religion also are interdenominational. With scarce an exception, the churches were working together as one man... By common consent doctrinal controversies were left alone, and the idea worked well. At last the world was able to say without irony 'Behold, how these Christians love one another!' ('The Light of the Nations', p 167).

In a similar vein Bishop Candler also noted the rising role of the layman:

The working forces of the churches were immeasurably increased. The revival of 1858 inaugurated in some sense the era of lay work in American Christianity. Wesley's system of class leaders, exhorters and local preachers had done much at an early date in the same direction, but now the layman's day fully dawned on all the churches. (Id.)

Conclusion

To conclude, the historical facts accord with the above interpretation of Revelation 3:9. Philadelphia was truly an age when the evangelical message penetrated deep throughout Christendom. The children of the bondwoman had to retreat more in this age than for many centuries. Two powerful trends struck serious blows at the evil of Nicolaitanism:

- As the name of this age implies, Philadelphia was strongly characterised, by a quest for brotherly love and an experience of *“the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph 4:3).
- Clergy/laity distinctions were blurred, denominational barriers greatly weakened and new movements formed in the search for wider Christian fellowship.

5

“BEHOLD, I COME QUICKLY”

or

THE RESTORATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND COMING

Let us now consider the relevance of Revelation 3:10-11 to the 18th & 19th C:

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

How appropriate this reference is to the return of the Lord in this last but one Church age. It is true that the hour of temptation (which I consider a reference to the awful period of tribulation before His return in glory) would not come in this age. But both the tribulation and His return were now near. They would come in the next and final age, Laodicea.

How appropriate also is this reference because these words were spoken to an age when, for the first time in many centuries, Christians generally began once more to take great interest in the Lord's return, becoming convinced of its nearness.

The early Church had lived in hope of the Lord's return. Later, however, broadly speaking, the truth and expectation of the blessed hope of an imminent appearing of our great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, was all but extinguished. For example,

- In the Middle Ages, it was commonly thought that the millennial kingdom of Christ was synonymous with the current religious/political dominion of the Roman Church.
- After the Reformation, some looked for the establishing of Christ's kingdom on earth through evangelism, **before** the personal return of the King

In the Philadelphia age (18th/19th C), however, there was a major widespread recovery, among evangelical believers generally, of the teaching and anticipation of His coming. As in the early Church, the return of Christ became once more a living expectation in many pulpits and individual hearts.

Evangelical Awakenings & the Second Coming

The Link between the Coming of the Spirit & the Coming of the Lord

In a period when outpourings of the Spirit and evangelical awakenings were so prominent, it is no coincidence that there should come a greatly increased expectancy of the soon return of the Lord. There is a close link between an experience of the Spirit and a consciousness of His coming.

Consider, for example, the early 20th C Pentecostals:

- Significantly, often the first vocal expressions of the newfound pentecostal experience were declarations of His coming, even from those who had either little knowledge of, or were wholly ignorant of, this doctrine.
- In the Welsh Valleys, the early Pentecostals were actually called the “Second Comers.” This was because of their prominent testimony to this truth.

As Donald Gee, an early Pentecostal pioneer, wrote in 1924:

...there is an intimate connection between what we call "Pentecost" and the coming of the Lord. The baptism in the Holy Ghost has brought the whole glorious truth that Jesus Christ is really coming back again into a place of reality and personal expectation and apprehension never realised before.

Why should this be? To explain, consider the first disciples. Their personal experience of the Holy Ghost had a major impact on their lives. For them the resurrection was a conscious reality, not just an article of faith. Through the Spirit they were deeply conscious of the Presence of the risen Lord working both with and in them.

But the Spirit is also a consciousness of the *returning* Lord as well as of the *risen* Lord.

Shortly before He ascended, the disciples asked Jesus if the kingdom was to be restored to Israel (Acts 1:6-8). His reply meant that, *although* it was not for them to know the times and seasons, *yet* when the Holy Ghost came upon them they would experience a present foretaste of that future coming kingdom.

The penny clearly dropped. When Peter said on the day of Pentecost, "*This is that*" (Acts 2:16-21), he was quoting from Joel's prophecy of the last days. Why? Because the outpoured Holy Ghost was a foretaste of those last days, when the Lord Himself would bring to earth the powers of another world. In the upper room they experienced something of what Joel foretold for the future day of the Lord, when the kingdom would be ushered in. The day of Pentecost was not the day of the Lord. The sun was not turned into darkness nor moon into blood, for example. There was a future full fulfilment of these verses yet to come. But when the disciples received the Holy Ghost, they foretasted the realities and atmosphere of that future day. The kingdom was both present and future.

Consider another example. When the Baptist sent to ask whether Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus referred John to the works accompanying His ministry (Mt 11:2-5). Why? Because those works fulfilled the prophecy of what would one day happen in the future Messianic kingdom (Isa 35:5-6). Jesus not only *proclaimed* the kingdom was at hand. He *demonstrated* it. He displayed the works that were to accompany its full outward establishment on earth. Where He was, the kingdom was both at hand and to come. One final example. Speaking to Jesus after the death of Lazarus, Martha said: "*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" He replied: "*I am the resurrection.*" (Jn 11:24-25). Why did He say that? Because when Jesus comes, although the last day had not yet come chronologically, the powers that will be in operation on that day are already present among us. Even though the fulness of that day would finally come at some future date, at that moment the Resurrection Himself was present incarnate.

So, even now we may enjoy a foretaste of the glory to be unveiled fully at Christ's return in the clouds of heaven to reign. That foretaste is the indwelling Holy Ghost. Through the Spirit, the Church, in measure, reveals the kingdom. She is given power over all evil spirits and every kind of sickness and disease (Mk 16:17-18), revealing the kingdom in earnest.

The Holy Ghost, then, is not only the *guarantee* of our inheritance. He is the *foretaste* of it (Ro 8:23; 2 Cor 5:5; Eph 1:14). True, we *await* the world to come. Yet, even now, just as Israel tasted the fruit of *their* inheritance (Nu 13.23-26), we also may taste *ours*:

... and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. (Heb 6:4-5)

The term "*heavenly*" describes the *nature* of the gift as well as its *origin*. The Holy Ghost is a foretaste of what heaven is like. To partake of the Spirit is to taste here and now the reality and power of the world yet to come.

In conclusion, the Holy Ghost is very closely linked to a consciousness of His coming and kingdom. The Spirit is the believer's inner anticipation of the return and revelation of Christ in glory, not only of its *truth* but its *power* and experience.

(For a fuller exposition of this theme, see my article, *The Heavenly Gift*.)

How is this relevant to Philadelphia? Because it is an age of wave after wave of Spiritual power and life. And such Spiritual outpourings are accompanied by a strong awareness of the return of Christ in glory. ("In glory" since the Spirit is the "Spirit of glory" (1 P 4.14).) Such awareness is not just doctrinal. It is a revelation and consciousness of God's ultimate victory. Although the kingdom is not yet manifested, the Spirit is Himself the embodiment of the end of the age and of the coming kingdom. He is a constant and ever-abiding consciousness of the Presence of Christ. This consciousness is not necessarily associated with the *temporal* nearness of His coming, but with its atmosphere and power.

(For more details of the link between the Spirit, the coming of Christ in glory and the millennial kingdom, and also between the loss of a living expectancy in the blessed hope and the loss of Holy Ghost government and manifestation, see book 4 in this series, "*The Ephesus & Smyrna Church Ages*" (Part C, Downward progress of Church historically traced to the reign of Constantine, Section 9, Loss of the Millennial hope).)

Let us now see how,

- How both the teaching and expectancy of His coming came to be lost to evangelical believers generally.
- How the truth of His return was recovered in the Philadelphia age.

The Doctrine of the Second Coming before the Philadelphia Age

Two core Christian hopes are the expectation of the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The expectation of the coming kingdom is often called **Millennialism** from the Latin word *millennium* (= 1000 years). It is also sometimes called **Chiliasm** (based on the Greek word for 1000) or **Millenarianism**. This is because Revelation 20.1-7 speaks of a 1000-year reign on earth before the new heavens and the new earth.

(Although Revelation 20.1-7 is the only place that speaks of the *length* of the coming kingdom, other verses speak of the *fact* of a future earthly kingdom, particularly the Old Testament prophets.)

There are different interpretations of the nature of the coming kingdom and its timing relative to Christ's return. A brief summary is given below of the three broad approaches:

- **Premillennialism** teaches that a literal 1000-year kingdom would be set up *after* Jesus returns to rule visibly on earth with the resurrected saints from Jerusalem. The general resurrection and judgment would follow it.
- **Postmillennialism** teaches the millennial kingdom would *precede* His return.
- **Amillennialism** teaches there is no literal fixed 1000-year millennial kingdom on earth *whether before or after* His return. Prophecies relating to Israel and the kingdom are applied to the Church, the Church age and the blessings of the gospel.

(For a fuller explanation of these and other terms relating to end time prophetic interpretation, see the Glossary of End Time Terms.)

Before looking at the recovery of the doctrine of the Second Coming in the Philadelphia age, let us first look briefly at how the expectancy of the coming of the Lord was lost and its truth obscured by the many and varied interpretations which arose after the early years of the Church.

Ephesus & Smyrna (1st – 3rd C)

a) Hope of a Millennial Kingdom (1st & 2nd C)

In the first centuries of the Church, although Justin, the 2nd C millennialist, noted that many believers thought otherwise, generally speaking in the matter of prophetic interpretation premillennialism prevailed. There was a clear expectation that Jesus would return literally and bodily in glory and that immediately after He would set up a literal millennial kingdom. Hope of a coming King was bound inseparably to hope of a coming kingdom.

The earliest (1st & 2nd C) writings on the Second Coming confirm the expectation of a visible, bodily premillennial return to earth followed by a visible 1000-year reign of Christ in Jerusalem. (Detailed examples are given in the Appendix.) Of these,

- Most explicitly refer to a 1000-year kingdom **after** Jesus' return.
- Some make no specific reference to an earthly 1000-year kingdom.
- None offer any alternative to, or speak against, a 1000-year earthly kingdom **after** His return.

Students of early Church history acknowledge this:

- **Baker's "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology"** says end-times teaching emphasised the hope of direct divine intervention to overcome evil and establish a future millennial kingdom by a series of dramatic events based especially on Daniel and Revelation.
- **F Tatford** says the early Church was distinctly premillennial, living in hope of His visible return to set up a kingdom of peace for 1000 years.

Even more telling is the complaint of Eusebius, a 4th C antimillenarian church historian, about the influence of the millennial teaching of Papias, a 2nd C church father: *"it is partly due to him that the great majority of churchmen after him took the same view, relying on his early date; e.g. Irenaeus and several others, who clearly held the same opinion"*.

So, in the first two centuries, premillennialism was the *only* specific interpretation found in the preserved writings of the early Church. And anticipation of a coming millennial kingdom was closely associated with the blessed hope of the personal coming of the King.

(Of course, the fact that premillennialism was the only specific interpretation in the early Church does not automatically mean that it is correct. The ultimate authority is the Word, not the early church fathers. However, it is surely not without significance that this interpretation was held both by those who were disciples of the writer of the book of Revelation and by those who were themselves taught by those same disciples.)

Even adherents of differing prophetic interpretations, such as postmillennialism and amillennialism, acknowledge the widespread acceptance of premillennialism, up to and including the Nicene Council (325 AD):

- According to Dave Hunt, apart from a few Catholics, no true church historian agrees with the claim that **postmillennialism** was always the orthodox doctrine of the Church. Even Daniel Whitby, generally credited as the father of postmillennialism in 1704, admits that the early Church held to premillennialism up to and including the Nicene Council.
- As for **amillennialism**, Louis Berkhof, a Reformed theologian, in his "*History of Christian Doctrines*", admits some early fathers looked for a literal millennial kingdom before the second resurrection. He mentions Papias and Irenaeus especially and also Justin and Tertullian. Although he says it is wrong to claim premillennialism was accepted generally in the first three centuries since others never mention it, he can name no one who *opposes* it before the 3rd C.

So, in the 1st and 2nd C, premillennialism prevailed. Believers lived in the clear, blessed and purifying hope that Jesus would return, literally and bodily in glory, to rule over an earthly 1000-year kingdom.

Let us see how in the 3rd C the tide began to turn against premillennialism, and why.

b) The Waning of the Early Millennial Hope (3rd & 4th C)

In the 3rd and early 4th C, there were still those who wrote of a literal millennial hope, but from the 3rd C the influence of this belief, though still widely held, began to wane.

The literal premillennial interpretation was brought into discredit by its association with the excesses of the Montanists and their failed prophecies of the near return of Christ, along with vivid descriptions of a soon-to-come millennial reign.

As a result, the Church as a whole progressively turned from millennialism. Generally speaking, by the end of the 4th C, the hope of His coming and of a literal 1000-year reign had faded away.

What replaced it? The non-literal, allegorical, Greek Alexandrian spiritualising approach to interpreting the 1000 years of Revelation 20.

Millennialism was dismissed as a Judaising influence. In the 3rd C, for example, Origen scorned those who interpreted the prophecies of the New Jerusalem "*in a Jewish sense*." This view became more pronounced after the 4th C Church/State

union. (It was reiterated many centuries later in the three main early Reformation Protestant creeds.)

Unfortunately, the reaction to the excesses of Montanism meant that the baby was well and truly thrown out with the bath water. The progressive loss of the earlier, literal interpretation of Revelation 20 had serious consequences. It coincided with the loss of a living expectancy of the bodily appearing in power and glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to set up a literal, earthly kingdom. And with it came the associated loss of a living expectation of our appearing with Him in glory.

Pergamos (4th – 6th C)

a) End Time Prophecy Reinterpreted

The fading of a living hope of His coming in glory to establish an earthly kingdom accelerated greatly with the end of persecution and the sudden imperial patronage of the Church after the Church/State union.

4th and 5th C theologians continued the reinterpretation of prophecy:

- The Greek Alexandrian allegorical approach continued its advance.
- Constantine's legalising and favouring of Christianity in the early 4th C led to a reinterpretation of the place of the Roman Empire in prophecy. Israel was said to be cast off forever. Old Testament millennial kingdom blessings applied to the Church, and were being experienced now as a result of the Church/State union. The 1000-years of Revelation 20 had already been ushered in.

Such views gradually became official Church dogma, though initially it was difficult to proclaim the earlier premillennialism to be heretical, when notables like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus had taught it.

b) The Reinterpretation Concluded

The reinterpretation of the Second Coming and the millennial hope was finalised by Augustine of Hippo (354-430), the most influential opponent of millennialism.

Using the Alexandrian allegorical approach, he developed his amillennialist interpretation, which quickly became the generally accepted teaching of Latin (Catholic) Christianity. He moved away from the 4th C identification of the millennium as the union of Church and State under Constantine. For Augustine, the Church/State union was not the millennium. The Church entered the millennium at Pentecost. It was spiritual and inward. The Church/ believers were the kingdom of God, now reigning with Christ over the earth. The present age was a continual struggle between good and evil in the souls of men, but it would ultimately climax in the victory of the Church. So, from the 5th C, the pre 3rd C literal, premillennial interpretation of end time prophecy faded away. Amillennialism became firmly established. It prevailed for over 1000 years, dominating prophetic understanding through the Middle Ages and into the Reformation.

What difference did it make? Alongside this reinterpretation, a living expectancy and hope of the premillennial bodily return of the Lord was all but extinguished. Believers' attention was turned from a future expectation to the present.

Thyatira (7th – 15th C)

Little attention was given to end time prophecy from the 7th to the 12th C. If future events were considered at all, Augustine's amillennialism was the dominating prophetic understanding of the Middle Ages. Literal premillennialism was nowhere to be found.

Official teaching was that the present rule of the Roman Church was the kingdom rule of Christ. Christianity would produce a new heaven and a new earth. Political/historical aspects of end time prophecy were generally ignored. No major changes to the present order were expected before the Second Coming. There was virtually no expectation of a coming King.

a) Reviving Interest in the Literal Interpretation of Prophecy

Towards the end of the Dark Ages, some began to turn their attention to Revelation 6-19. The widely adopted approach was not the allegorical method of interpretation but historical premillennialism, or historicism. Whilst having similarities to the literal, premillennialism of the early ages, there were also significant differences.

For historical premillennialists, these chapters were not an allegory of the battle between good and evil through the ages. They predicted significant historical events through the whole Church age up to the end time. This differed from the widely accepted premillennialism of the early centuries, which applied these chapters not to the whole age, but only to events in the brief period around the bodily return of the Lord and His reign in a literal millennial kingdom on earth.

A widespread recovery of the latter more traditional teaching would not come until the mid 19th C, in the Philadelphia Age.

(For a fuller explanation of historicism, see the Glossary of End Time Terms.)

One example of medieval historicism concerned the identity of the Antichrist. Some, both within and outside the established Church, identified the papacy with the Antichrist, anticipating the Protestant Reformation interpretation.

b) Joachim di Fiore & Late Medieval Historicism

One of the most significant insiders to assess the Roman Church unfavourably was the man who many believe first systematically expounded historical premillennialism, Joachim di Fiore (1132– 1200).

He preached with an earnestness and conviction greater than any prophetic expositor since the fall of the Roman Empire. He said the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire would destroy the papacy (which he considered to be the Antichrist) and strongly urged Church reform, applying parts of Revelation to the corruptions of Rome.

These hitherto unknown views had a marked influence on prophetic interpretation, both within and without the Roman system:

- Some *within* the Roman Church quickly followed with yet bolder innovations, disregarding the fact that in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council ruled Joachim's writings heretical.

- Dissidents **outside** the system also began to effectively sound forth on at least some of Joachim's points, including two famous forerunners of the Reformation, John Wycliffe (c. 1320–1384) and John Huss (1369–1415). Joachim also influenced the reformers themselves.

Sardis (16th – 17th C)

a) Early Reformation Period (16th C)

The teaching of the mainstream reformers on Revelation, which came to be called the Protestant interpretation, was a mixture of two influences:

- ***The medieval historicism of Joachim on Revelation 6-19***, taking these chapters as an outline of the whole of Church history and the papacy as the great whore and Antichrist, the devil incarnate seated in the temple of God.
- ***Augustine's teaching on Revelation 20***, dismissing millenarianism as childish fiction and rejecting the idea of an earthly kingdom of Christ before the last judgement. (In fact, the three main early Protestant creeds all explicitly reject millenarianism as a Jewish fable.)

But the Second Coming was in no way central to first generation Protestant teaching. Apocalyptic ideas were at best secondary. There was no looking for of the blessed hope. In fact, in the early Reformation period, except among certain Anabaptists, it was extremely rare to find a fervent, living, loving expectation of Christ setting up a heavenly millennial kingdom on earth.

Unfortunately, some more radical Anabaptists greatly discredited such an expectation by teaching that force was acceptable to set up the earthly kingdom of Revelation 20.

Perhaps the early 16th C mainline reformers' anti-millennialism was, in part at least, a reaction to such teaching. It certainly did much damage to confidence in premillennial beliefs. Not until the next century was there a reawakening of interest in a literal earthly millennial kingdom.

b) Later Reformation Period (17th C)

In the 17th C, although millenarianism was rare, some again turned from the doctrine of the early reformers. Interpreting Revelation 20 in a non-allegorical manner, they taught Christ's personal return and a literal millennial kingdom on earth before the last judgement.

As in the early Reformation, however, there were again some who brought such teaching into disrepute. Certain radical Puritans in England, the Fifth Monarchy Men, sought to take over Parliament during the Civil War and to impose a theocratic kingdom based on Old Testament law.

Résumé of the Doctrine of the Second Coming from Ephesus to Sardis

To assist a clearer understanding of the changing interpretations of end time prophecy through the ages so far, a summary is given below. (A fuller exposition is found in the Appendix.)

Period	Prevailing Features
1st/2nd C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literal premillennialism prevailed. • Believers lived in the sure, blessed and purifying hope of Jesus' literal and bodily return in glory, to rule over an earthly 1000-year kingdom.
3rd C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montanist excesses discredited literal premillennialism. • This led to growing acceptance of the new, Greek Alexandrian allegorical interpretation of end time prophecy, spiritualising the millennium. • This coincided with, and contributed towards, a progressive loss of a living expectancy of the bodily appearing in power and glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to set up a literal, earthly kingdom.
4 th C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantine's Church/State union led to a reinterpretation of the place of the Roman Empire in prophecy. Revelation was now seen as an allegory of the age-long struggle between good and evil. • Israel was now said to be cast off forever and Old Testament millennial kingdom blessings were applied to the Church. • These blessings were said to be already experienced as a result of the Church/State union. The 1000-years of Rev 20 no longer followed the coming of the Lord. It had already begun.
5th C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He moved away from saying the Church/State union was the millennium. Instead, he said the Church entered the millennium at Pentecost. It was spiritual and inward. The Church/believers were the kingdom of God. They now reigned with Christ over the earth. Though the present age was a continual struggle between good and evil in the souls of men, it would ultimately climax in the victory of the Church. • Augustine's interpretation quickly became generally accepted. • So, the pre 3rd C literal, premillennial interpretation of end time prophecy, with its living expectancy and hope of the bodily return of the Lord, was all but extinguished. Believers' eyes were turned from hope of a future kingdom to the present.
6th/11th C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Augustine's amillennialism prevailed for over 1000 years, through the Middle Ages and into the Reformation. • No major political/historical changes to the present order were expected before the Second Coming.
12th/15th C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some turned from the allegorical approach to a modified version of premillennialism, historicism. • Unlike early premillennialism, this applied Rev 6-19 to all Church history, not just the very end. The papacy, not one man, was seen as Antichrist.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historicism sometimes coexisted with millennial views/hopes of Revelation 20, sometimes with Augustine's amillennial interpretation.
16th/17th C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mainline reformers adopted the medieval historicist interpretation of Rev 6-19 and Augustine's amillennial interpretation of Rev 20. • More radical groups sometimes held a literal interpretation of Rev 20.

The Doctrine of the Second Coming in the Philadelphia Age

Philadelphia covers the 18th and 19th C. The historical facts accord well with the references in Revelation 3:10-11 to His soon coming and to being kept from the hour of temptation to come. This was the last age before the final one, when He would return. In it, very significantly, there came among evangelical believers generally, and on a scale unknown since the earliest days of the Church, a restoration of teaching on, and anticipation of, the blessed hope of His coming.

Such teaching and living expectancy of the coming of the Lord in the clouds of glory, and of our own resultant glorification, had not generally been part of the wider Church's thinking since the 1st & 2nd C:

- During the long, dreary **Dark Ages**, only scattered small groups had maintained testimony to His literal bodily return.
- During **the Reformation**, though part of official Protestant creeds, it was not at the forefront of the minds of the mainline reformers or of believers generally.

But things were about to change dramatically.

In the 19th C especially, there was more widespread study of end times prophecy than at any time in Church history. There was a veritable explosion of books on the topic, which has continued to the present day. Anticipation of the soon coming of the Lord was a real, motivating, inspiring, and purifying hope, not just an academic doctrine.

This anticipation fired much of the worldwide missionary outreach of this age, such as the Brethren and A B Simpson's Christian & Missionary Alliance. Grattan Guinness, who played a major role in training missionaries, wrote nine major works on historicist premillennialism.

This anticipation also led to a strongly growing conviction, especially in the latter part of the 19th C, of the need to watch and pray in the light of an approaching unparalleled crisis as the end of the age drew near. It was as though the true believer could sense the coming of the worldwide hour of temptation, which the Lord spoke of in Revelation 3:10-11 when exhorting Philadelphia to constancy in the light of His soon coming.

Let us now look more closely at developments in Second Coming teaching in this age.

a) 18th C Historical Premillennialism

As mentioned earlier, extremist groups like the 17th C Fifth Monarchy Men did much to discredit the interpretation of the 1000 years of Revelation 20 as referring to a coming literal, earthly millennium (premillennialism).

Despite this, the historical premillennialism of the late Middle Ages and Reformation still persisted in some quarters into the 18th C.

Furthermore, prophecy became topical in early 18th C England due to the arrival of the persecuted French exiles, the Camisards, also known as the “French prophets”. (See Appendix for examples.)

Increased missionary activity and study of prophecy led to a revival of millennialism, especially premillennialism, among New England Puritans and European Pietists such as the school of Johann Bengel, a German Lutheran. Bengel (1687–1752) wrote a treatise on Biblical chronology, attempting to date the end of the world, and an *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, which enjoyed great popularity, and was translated into several languages.

John Wesley, the dominant figure of the 18th C, was influenced by Bengel. Though he preached little on the Second Coming, like Bengel, Wesley expected the overthrow of the papal Antichrist in 1836 followed by an earthly millennium, based on a historical premillennial interpretation,

Many 18th C Puritans and others, however, understood things differently.

Whilst still using the historical premillennial interpretation of Revelation 6-19, they adopted a new modified version of the amillennialism of Augustine to explain chapter 20. It taught that the millennium would come **before** the Second Coming rather than **after** it. It was called postmillennialism.

b) 18th & early 19th C Postmillennialism

In 1703, an Anglican cleric, Daniel Whitby, published his *New Hypothesis* of prophetic interpretation. He is considered to have systematised postmillennialism, although elements of his teaching were found long before in such as Augustine.

Though accepting the commonly held current historical premillennial interpretation of Revelation 6–19, Whitby differed regarding the 1000 years of chapter 20 by saying:

- The binding of satan was effected by the preaching of the Gospel and the reign of Jesus in His Church through the Spirit.
- As a result, evil was being reduced, the world gradually Christianised and the Church progressively bringing in the kingdom.
- Muslims would be overthrown, Jews converted and the antichristian papacy destroyed until the kingdom would finally be established and the Church would rule the world for 1000 years of righteousness.

The key difference from Augustine’s amillennialism was that whereas Augustine taught that the millennium was already here within the believer, Whitby said it was the increasing christianising of society that would lead into the millennial kingdom.

This “new hypothesis” was based on a growing optimism about the progress of the Gospel. Believing that Old Testament prophecies to Israel had a fulfilment in the Church, Whitby looked for a worldwide Holy Ghost revival before Jesus returned. He interpreted this period of blessing, whether or not for 1000 years, as the millennium of Revelation 20.

(For fuller details on postmillennialism, see Glossary of End Time Terms.)

Although Whitby was an Arminian, criticised for his views on the Godhead, many embraced and propagated his teaching on the millennium. It became associated with Calvinists. Early adherents included the Presbyterian, Matthew Henry, who published his popular commentary in 1708-10.

The optimism aroused by the rapid progress of the Gospel in the 18th/19th C evangelical awakenings and missionary movements increased confidence in Whitby’s optimistic interpretation. The remarkable Spiritual power of the 1st Great Awakening in the 1730/40s led many to believe the millennium was about to be ushered in. (There is, of course, a sense in which this is understandable. To taste the Holy Ghost is to taste the powers of the world to come (Heb 6:4-5).) Jonathan Edwards, for example, one of America’s most recognised 18th C Reformed theologians, emphasised the place of America in establishing millennial conditions on earth.

This theory spread rapidly among US and UK Protestants in the 18th C and into the 19th C. It was widely disseminated by the popular commentaries of Calvinists Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, and Methodist Adam Clarke. (See Appendix for more detail.)

This optimistic postmillennialism continued for longer in 19th C America than in Britain. For example, during the remarkable advance of the Gospel in America in the 1830s, Charles Finney wrote in 1835 that if the Church did her duty, the millennium might come in three years!

But, though Whitby’s postmillennialism exercised great influence, it was more an anticipation of a coming millennial kingdom than of a glorious appearing of the King. It lessened expectation of the return of the Lord Himself.

Then things changed in a way that has significantly affected prophetic interpretation and understanding to the present day. The dawn of a new century saw a movement that led to a return to the premillennialism of the early Church.

c) Later 19th C Widespread Revival of Interest in a Premillennial Coming

By the 19th C, millions in the English speaking world were reading the Bible. And one issue they began to look carefully into was Bible prophecy. Evangelicals widely discussed the Second Coming with a fervour unknown since the 1st/3rd C.

There was a strong reaction against the prevailing postmillennialism. Interest turned instead to premillennialism. There arose a large-scale interest in and an eager anticipation of a soon, bodily return of the Lord. His coming was no longer in the distant future. He was expected *before* the millennium not *after*. And He was expected *soon*.

For many, the blessed hope of the appearing in glory of our great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and of our own appearing with Him in glory to reign with Him on earth, became a living reality.

There were three stages in this resurgent premillennialism:

1. Whilst proclaiming Christ's imminent, premillennial coming, initially this resurgence began with a return to ***the historical premillennialist interpretation*** of Revelation 6-19 of the later Middle Ages, the Reformation and (to a limited extent) the 18th C. It was not the futurist premillennialism (futurism) of the 1st & 2nd C.
2. Soon after, however, attention turned to ***futurism*** leading to significant divergences from the *historical* premillennialist interpretation. It was essentially a return to the premillennialism of the earliest years of the Church.
3. Then, later in the 19th C, J N Darby propagated a modified version of futurism called ***dispensationalism*** or "***Darbyism***." It included additional teachings such as a two-stage coming and a pre-tribulation rapture, i.e. an initial secret coming of Christ to rapture the Church before the tribulation followed by a later coming in glory to set up the millennial kingdom.

(For a fuller explanation of futurist premillennialism and dispensationalism, see the Glossary of End Time Terms.)

Let us now look more closely at these three developments in the UK and America.

d) The Rise of Premillennialism in Britain

Initial Historical Premillennialism

In the early 19th C, there came a strong reaction in Britain against postmillennialism. Premillennialism became very popular again. In fact, it had never had so many advocates since the early centuries. The upheavals of the French Revolution and Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and the Holy Land in 1798 led many to believe the end time was near. They abandoned the optimism of postmillennialism, which taught a continual improvement in society and the world gradually being Christianised, leading into the millennial kingdom.

Initially they turned to *historical* premillennialism, i.e.,

- Revelation 6-19 was applied to the whole of Church history up to the coming of the Lord, not just to the short period around His return.
- The year/day method was still used to interpret prophetic time periods, not the literal method. Its use led to various speculations on the timing and nature of Christ's coming. For example, some thought He would return in the 1840s or the 1860s, linking the fall of Antichrist with Napoleon's treatment of the pope. (For more details on Napoleon and the pope, see the Appendix)
- Prophecies of Antichrist were applied to the papal system as a whole, not to a single man at the end of the age who would inflict severe persecution during the great tribulation.

A key figure in the move back to historical premillennialism was Edward Irving.

Influenced by Irving, evangelical Anglicans organised premillennialist prophetic conferences sponsored by Henry Drummond, a historical premillennialist, at Albury Park in Surrey from 1826–1830. Attendees were convinced the end times had arrived, Antichrist was about to be revealed and the personal, bodily coming of Christ was near.

Irving's historicist exposition also influenced the newly emerging Brethren movement. In later conferences in Dublin, many became enthusiastic teachers of premillennialism. (See Appendix for more material on Irving and his Second Coming teaching.)

Around this time many periodicals appeared proclaiming His soon premillennial coming, although views differed on its time and nature. Signs of its nearness were seen in:

- Worldwide missionary outreach (cp Matt 24:14).
- Growing apostasy among European Protestants (i.e. the postmillennial hope that the Church would gradually bring in the kingdom was abandoned) (cp 2 Th 2:3).
- Increasing numbers of Jewish converts, which gave hope of their imminent conversion as a whole (i.e. Old Testament prophecies to Israel were no longer viewed as having their fulfilment in the Church. Premillennial hopes and missionary work among Jews were fused. Interest awakened among a wide spectrum of UK evangelicals in the literal fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies to Israel. They looked for, and sought to facilitate, the restoration of the Jews to the Land, based on the belief that they must go back before Jesus returned.)

Later Futurist Premillennialism

Soon the revived interest in Britain in the historical interpretation of premillennialism was challenged.

In 1826, S R Maitland, an Anglican, issued his, '*Enquiry into the Grounds on which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John has been supposed to consist of 1260 Years.*' It rejected the medieval *historical* premillennialism of Joachim, appealing instead to the *futurist* premillennialism of the post New Testament early Church fathers. Maitland insisted upon a period of 1260 literal days (i.e. 3 ½ years) of tribulation for both Israel and the Church and a personal Antichrist before the return of Christ.

This resulted in a pamphlet war with the historicists. Interest in futurism quickly grew, often motivated by a revived interest in God's plan for Israel.

The tide now turned strongly in favour of a literal interpretation of the time periods of Revelation 6-19. These chapters were now understood to apply to a future brief period immediately around the return of the Lord.

This was essentially the prophetic teaching of the early Church fathers. In fact, the fathers were appealed to for support against the current historical premillennialist interpretation.

Dispensationalism: A Variation of Futurist Millennialism

Out of the revived interest in futurist premillennialism arose a modified version of futurism called dispensationalism.

One of those who attended the Albury Park meetings was Lady Powerscourt. She was so impressed she began similar meetings near Dublin in 1831–33. Here some of the characteristic doctrines of dispensationalism are first found. They originated with leading members of the newly emerging Plymouth Brethren movement, above all J N Darby.

The Brethren movement began in Dublin in 1825 when a small group, dissatisfied with the spiritual condition of the Protestant church in Ireland, began to meet for prayer and fellowship. Soon similar groups sprang up. In 1827, Darby joined.

At these meetings, Darby's leadership in prophetic interpretation was recognised. He developed and systematised:

- **Not only** a move from historical to futurist premillennialism (i.e. moving from a year/day to a literal day basis, thereby applying Rev 6-19 to the end times only and not to the whole Church age, and with a 7 year tribulation);
- **But also** a modified version of futurism dispensationalism. A key feature was that the Second Coming would be in *two* stages: a secret coming before the tribulation *for* the raptured saints, then a later coming in glory *with* the saints.

A pre-tribulation rapture is an essential element of Darby's system. He claimed his understanding of this doctrine came in 1828 when he saw the distinction between Israel and the Church in his study of Ephesians. Though Darby vigorously promoted a pre-tribulation rapture, however, there were strong disagreements. So, both traditional futurism and dispensationalism were both found among the early Brethren. (Although all dispensationalists are futurists, futurists are not necessarily dispensationalists.)

e) The Rise of Premillennialism in America

Decline of both Postmillennialism & Historical Premillennialism

In America, the late 18th and early 19th C was a period of great enthusiasm and confidence that it was leading the world into a new golden age. In the religious scene, this was reflected in the prevailing optimistic postmillennialist approach to prophetic interpretation.

But a reaction against postmillennialism arose in America just as in early 19th C England. Prophetic magazines appeared, heavily quoting the English premillennial prophetic awakening and reflecting its initial historical interpretation.

One who rejected postmillennialism, embracing this return to historical premillennialism, was the widely influential New England Baptist, William Miller. Between 1841 and 1844 he held conferences on prophecy attended by hundreds of thousands from different denominations, despite being widely attacked in the press. Based on the historicist year/day interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, Miller predicted the return of Christ to take His people and destroy the earth in 1844. (His teaching ultimately led to the founding of the Seventh Day Adventist movement.)

The failure of his predictions was a factor in the turning of the tide in America in the 1840s from historical premillennialism to a search for a more satisfying interpretation of prophecy.

Rise of Futurist Premillennialism & Dispensationalism

The newly rising futurist premillennialist interpretation seemed to meet the need in America, in particular its later dispensationalist variant.

Initially dispensationalism had little influence. Later, however, it spread dramatically, becoming a major influence on prophetic study. Darby's system of interpretation was eagerly adopted. Its basic futurism was seen as restoring something precious which had long been lost:

- **not only** a rediscovery of the precious Biblical truth of Christ's glorious appearing, restoring to this doctrine the importance it deserved;
- **but also** as a recovery of a sound, *literal* method of interpretation of prophecy at a time when liberalism questioned verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.

Once more, as in the early church, the return of Christ became a living expectation in the lives of American Christians and in the pulpit ministry of many a preacher.

Factors involved in the turning of the tide in America in favour of dispensationalism included:

- The growth of the Brethren after the 1859 revival.
- Darby's six visits to America between 1859 and 1874.
- The support of the post 1859 non-denominational faith missions and late 19th C independent Bible Schools. The latter overwhelmingly advocated the literal premillennial view due to their fidelity to the Bible and heavy emphasis on a literal interpretation of the Bible.
- The American prophetic and Bible conference movement: Interest in premillennialism so grew that great prophetic conferences were called, in particular, a series at Niagara from 1883-1897.
- Most importantly, the unprecedented circulation of the Scofield Reference Bible, with its succinct and clear notes embodying the dispensational system of interpretation. First appearing in 1909, it was revised by the author in 1917. It continues to be issued year after year in greater numbers than any of its critics.

Although initially dispensationalism was warmly received, later some, whilst retaining the basic futurism of Darby, rejected a pretribulation rapture.

In closing, it must be stressed that the key prophetic issue in America in the latter part of the 19th C was not details such as a pre or post tribulation rapture. The overriding concern was the awareness of the nearness of the coming of the Lord. Nor is this surprising in view of the increasing measure of the Spirit being experienced at this time. To taste the Spirit is to taste the powers of the world to come.

Résumé of the Doctrine of the Second Coming in the Philadelphia Age

To assist a clearer understanding of the changing interpretations of end time prophecy in the Philadelphia age, a brief summary is given below.

Period	Prevailing Features
18th C	• Historical premillennialism continued to be influential.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postmillennialism, a new interpretation incorporating elements of Augustine’s teaching, became very popular, especially in America, reflecting contemporary optimism over the progress of the Gospel. • Initially postmillennialism declined & <i>historical</i> premillennialism revived.
19th C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and expectancy of the coming of the Lord was more widespread than at any time since the 1st & 2nd C. • Then came a return to the <i>futurist</i> premillennialism of the early centuries. • Finally dispensationalism, a variant of futurism, spread widely, especially in America.

Conclusion

It is heart-warming to see the extent of interest in, and expectation of, the return of the Lord in this age. Although there were differences of understanding and interpretation, this recovery of the truth of the Second Coming was far more than an aroused intellectual interest in a long forgotten doctrine. It was a quickening of the heart of the Bride in anticipation of the soon coming of the Bridegroom she has never yet seen. (Cp SoS 2:8, “*The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh...*”)

The Second Coming was far more than just an awareness of, and interest in, all the events preceding and following His coming. It was a living, transforming, purifying, warm hope and anticipation. It was a progressive recovering of a conscious, present sense of the return of the Lord Himself, bringing Him nearer not only in timing, but in heart.

It is no coincidence that the doctrine of the personal, bodily return of the Lord should be restored in the Philadelphia age. This was the age that was told of His soon return and of the coming hour of tribulation on all the earth.

Nor is it a coincidence that the doctrine of the return of the Lord should be restored in the same age that the awareness and experience of the life and power of the Holy Ghost had greatly increased. As mentioned earlier, there is a close connection between an awareness of the coming of the Lord and an experience of an outpouring of the Spirit. A consciousness of the presence of the Spirit brings with it an awareness of the presence of Jesus. And a consciousness of the *presence* of He who will one day return leads to a growing awareness of the *doctrine* of His return. The presence of a living Christ brings an awareness of a coming Christ. So, it is no coincidence that the age of the great evangelical awakenings was also the age of a greatly increased interest in and expectancy of the soon coming of the Lord.

(In like manner, it is not surprising that much prominence was given to the Lord’s near return in the early 20th C pentecostal outpouring, nor that the first vocal expressions of the new-found pentecostal experience were often that Jesus was coming soon.)

In closing, let us look more closely at a crucial aspect of the doctrine of the Lord’s return.

In this chapter I have made no serious effort to expound or interpret end time prophecy or the doctrine of the Second Coming. My aim is not to give a Bible study, but a potted history of Second Coming interpretation through the ages.

From this history there are two things I would draw attention to:

- Firstly, the progressive falling from, then return to, the prevailing premillennialism of the very early centuries. (Of course, we must clearly distinguish between the teaching of the early Church and the Bible itself. The ultimate authority is the Word, not the early church fathers.)
- Secondly, the many and varied interpretations throughout the Church ages of the prophetic Scriptures speaking of the end times. These may be grouped into three main schools, premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism.

These differences have not just been between nominal churchgoers and true believers. Genuine believers also have differed markedly among themselves over the three schools of interpretation, not just between different ages but even within the same age.

This was so even in the 19th C, at a time when the true Church was recovering more and more of the original faith once for all delivered to the saints. Although from the mid 19th C there was a widespread return to the premillennial understanding/ interpretation of the early Church for the first time since the early centuries, yet among evangelical believers there were still significant differences between, and even within, these three schools.

For example:

- Do Old Testament prophecies to Israel now apply to the Church? Is Israel irrevocably cast off?
- Does Revelation 6-19 cover the whole of Church history or just the brief period around the coming of the Lord?
- Are the time periods of Revelation literal or to be interpreted on the prophetic year/day basis?
- Is there a literal 1000-year millennial kingdom?
- If so, will Jesus return before or after it?
- Will there be a literal rapture or not?
- If literal, will it be before, during or at the end of the tribulation?
- Will the Church, or at least a part of the Church, go through the tribulation?
- Is the Roman Catholic Church the Antichrist, or will it be an individual?
- If an individual, who will he be? Where will he arise?

And so on.

Now, it may be that failure to settle on a single majority interpretation of the details and order of events around the coming of the Lord was not critical in the 19th C. After all, despite extensive study and discussion of these, the prime concern of true believers was not the *details* but the *fact* of His coming and its nearness. More importantly, though it was not clearly known at the time, the Philadelphia age was not the last. It was not to experience the awful hour of trial that was to come upon all the earth.

But our age, Laodicea, will.

If ever there was a time when greater clarity and certainty about the details *is* needed, it is now. After all, if the details are not important, why are they recorded? Yet even in our own day, so near to His coming, there are still many interpretations and views among ostensibly sincere believers.

How do we reconcile and disentangle the mass of different views? Where can we find a sure light to clarify the issue?

What saith the Scriptures?

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 P 1:19-21)

So, prophecy was given to shine a light into darkness where no light is. How is it then that Bible prophecy seems to give rise to so much confusion and such a multitude of conflicting opinions and interpretations? Some say the best thing is to leave the issue. But how can this be? *All* Scripture is profitable, including the *one third* of the Bible that deals with prophecy. Clearly, therefore, it must be possible to profit from prophecy. And to profit fully, we need to know the God-intended interpretation.

But how?

The answer is in the same passage, “*no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man*”. So, just as the original prophecy is not by the will of man, neither is the interpretation. Prophecy is not of private interpretation, whether by the speaker or by the listener.

If it is not of private interpretation, then how *can* it be interpreted? By the same Spirit that first gave it. And how did He give it? By holy men of God, prophets, who spoke as the Holy Ghost moved them, *prophecy came not ... by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

So, as the time of His return draws very near, if we want a definitive interpretation of prophecies about end time events, we need a God-sent prophet to interpret the prophecies given by those God-inspired prophets.

We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. (Ps 74:9)

Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. (Am 3:7)

But where can the clear, trumpet-like voice of a true, God-vindicated prophet be found, someone who teaches as one having authority, and not as the scribes?

And even if found, will he be heeded? Or will he be treated like the prophets of old?

6

CONCLUSION: THE RESTORATION GATHERS PACE

Since the early days of the Church there had been a step-by-step progressive loss of the experiential knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the heart and essence of Church history is more about the loss and recovery of the knowledge of Christ, than about the loss and recovery of different truths.

In fact, to grow in the knowledge of Christ is the key to progress in the Christian life. After all,

- Did not Paul say, “*But ye have not so **learned Christ***” (Eph 4:20)? He did not say, “learned *about* Christ”.
- Did not Peter say, “*his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him** that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature*” (2 P 1:3-4)? So, such knowledge is the key to unlock the power of godliness, making us partakers of the nature of God.

The downward spiral of the Church’s loss of the truth of the Word, and in particular of He who is the Truth and the Word, reached its nadir in the awful “*depths of satan*” of the Thyatira age.

But the Church will be restored so as to experience the depths of God (cp 1 Cor 2:10).

The restoration began in the Reformation, the Sardis age, with the rediscovery of the truth that “*Christ Jesus ... is made unto us ... righteousness*” (1 Cor 1:30). Salvation was wholly of the Lord, not of man.

Unfortunately, however, Sardis faltered. Despite real and substantial gains, there was a later retreat from significant parts of the initial beachhead it established.

But restoration of the knowledge of Christ recommenced in earnest in the Philadelphia age. There were major advances, not only in the recovering of lost truths, but also in areas where the knowledge of Christ had been lost. The recovery of the truths of the sanctification of the Spirit and of the Second Coming was a major stepping stone in the continuing recovery of the knowledge of Christ:

- Concerning **holiness**, this was clearly proclaimed as not being mere morality. Holiness was supernatural. It was nothing less than the life of Christ in us. To recover this truth was to recover the experience of “*Christ Jesus ... made unto us ... sanctification*” (1 Cor 1:30).
- The truth of **the Coming of Christ** was proclaimed and studied more than at any time since the early Church. This renewed popular awareness and growing consciousness of the nearness of His return was not just a matter of the head. It affected the heart also. Believers were not only informed of the nearness and detail of His coming, they were inspired and warmed by it.

In addition to the growing awareness of Christ as our sanctification, and of the nearness of His coming, there was a growing consciousness of Christ our **power** (cp “*Christ the power of God*” (1 Cor 1:24)) in this age.

The rising Spiritual power of each successive wave of evangelical awakening increased awareness of the reality and nearness of the Holy Ghost, the life of Christ among us. As a result, awareness and acceptance of spiritual gifts, particularly healing, began to return.

How blessed. Philadelphia truly takes us a major step forward in the recovery of the full knowledge of Christ.

We are now on the threshold of the last age, and of the last stage of the restoration of the full knowledge of Christ and of all that has been lost over the Church ages. We are within sight of the finishing-post.

And what is that last stage? What is the result of coming to a full knowledge of Him? A perfect man, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ Himself!

*Till we all come in the unity of ... the knowledge of the Son of God, **unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ** (Eph 4:13).*

Note the link between coming to the (*full*, Greek) knowledge of the Son and coming to full stature.

And what *is* the finishing-post, the goal? **CHRIST HIMSELF!**

*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of **the knowledge of Christ Jesus** my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, **that I may win Christ**, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: **That I may know him**, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend **that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus**. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for **the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus**. (Phil 3:8-14)*

The opening phase of the next and final age, Laodicea, would see a continuation of the restoration of the knowledge of Christ.

Then something would go terribly wrong. Generally speaking, Christendom would descend into the prophesied end time falling away.

But this will not frustrate the ultimate conclusion of the pattern of restoration for those few who remain faithful to the Word.

But I am running ahead of myself. The detailed exposition of that must await the final Laodicea age study.

APPENDIX

Additional Material & Details

Additional details are given below which were cut from the main article to make it shorter.

The relevant chapter heads and subheads are repeated for ease of cross-referencing.

Where existing material is repeated for greater clarity, it is highlighted.

1

“THESE THINGS SAITH HE THAT IS HOLY”

or

CHRIST JESUS OUR SANCTIFICATION

Introduction

a) *The Historical Recovery of the Knowledge of Christ*

In addition to the newly emerging Methodist denominations themselves, the fastest growing groups in the 18th and 19th C, their early vision spread throughout Christendom:

- In the late 19th C **new denominations** were formed, especially in the USA, whose chief aim was to proclaim sanctification, and the appropriation of the life of Christ. Some examples are the Church of God (Anderson) in 1880, A B Simpson’s Christian and Missionary Alliance in 1887, the Church of the Nazarene and the Pilgrim Holiness Church. In Britain, the most famous was the Salvation Army, claiming holiness as its distinguishing doctrine.
- The quest for the sanctification of the Spirit also deeply influenced **existing denominations**. So widespread was this blessed truth that by the second half of the 19th C it was being preached in every evangelical denomination with a fervour and revelation unknown for centuries. For example,
 - ◆ The **Quakers** claimed to be a holiness Church since the doctrines of George Fox were similar to those of Wesley.
 - ◆ In Britain, the interdenominational **Keswick** movement was founded to enable believers to enter “the deeper life”. By this was meant not simply an exhortation to a higher Christian life, but an introduction to He Who *is* the Christian Life, the appropriation of the very Life of Christ.
 - ◆ In South Africa the Dutch Reformed (Presbyterian) minister, **Andrew Murray** popularised this teaching.
 - ◆ In the USA the anointed ministry of the Presbyterian **Charles Finney** was accompanied by a very strong and clear doctrine of sanctification.

The Worldwide Spread of the Quest for Scriptural Holiness

b) *America from 1861 to 1894*

Charles G Finney (1792-1875)

A major catalyst in the growing transdenominational quest for the sanctification of the Spirit was the mightily used evangelist Charles Finney. By 1836 he was convinced entire sanctification was possible in this life. He found a living union with Jesus was able to meet all his own needs and also to combat the frequent falling away of new

converts, enabling them to live above the world and sin. His teaching on the many relationships of Christ to the believer was unique up to that time.

Due to his Calvinistic background, Finney's theology on sanctification differed from the Wesleyans, but like the latter he led men to expect supernatural Spiritual enduements of power *after* conversion. Just as we were justified by faith, so by faith we may be filled with the Spirit, and "*walk in the Spirit in righteousness and holiness*". This was not just theory. Finney had himself experienced very powerful anointings of the Spirit. He taught continued outpourings of the Spirit after conversion, which he called "the baptism of the Spirit". (This term did not have the same meaning for Finney as for 20th C Pentecostals.)

D L Moody, R A Torrey and A B Simpson

Two famous men who urged believers to seek a deeper life in the Spirit were ***D L Moody and R A Torrey***. Moody did not enter his dynamic evangelistic ministry until after a deep experience of the Spirit in the 1870's. From then on both he and, later, Torrey emphasised the importance of not resting in conversion, but of seeking diligently a further experience, which they called "the baptism of the Spirit". Torrey systematically conducted meetings internationally in which he expounded the Biblical conditions for the baptism in the Spirit.

A B Simpson (1843-1919) was another brother who exemplifies the quest for the power of the Spirit for sanctification. He clearly saw holiness not as an end in itself, but as a further impartation of Christ to the believer. Simpson encountered an unfriendly attitude towards what was sometimes called "the deeper life." This led him to form an alliance of believers hungry for a better and more satisfying life in Christ, so as to lead them to their full inheritance in Him.

How beautiful to see the inroads of the spirit of antichrist over many centuries being pushed back. It is deeply refreshing to read how Simpson, along with other 19th C holiness teachers, presents Jesus Himself as our Sanctification.

Differences and Shared Understandings over the Meaning of Sanctification

b) Later Differences of Understanding

With the passage of time, different emphases and understandings of the nature and means of sanctification/holiness developed, particularly in the 19th C. ...

- After the American Civil War, The National Holiness Association ...taught holiness in the Wesleyan sense, with entire sanctification as a second definite work of grace. Not all in the holiness movement accepted this interpretation, however. Some inclined more to Finney's approach ...

Developments in the Free-Will Baptist Church illustrate the two views. Their 1883 "*Discipline*", revealing the influence of Finney, described sanctification as commencing at regeneration, and continuing with constant growth in grace. In 1889 this was amended to a more Wesleyan approach, showing the influence of the National Holiness Association, describing sanctification as an instantaneous work whereby the heart is cleansed from all sin by the blood of Christ.

2
"I HAVE SET BEFORE THEE AN OPEN DOOR"
or
THE AGE OF THE OPEN DOOR

Missionary Outreach in the Philadelphia Age

a) Early Beginnings

Early in the 18th C there were two Danish state-sponsored works:

- A chaplain of the King of Denmark, moved by the devotion of the Pietists, prompted the King to send Lutheran missionaries to **Tranquebar** (in SE India) in 1706 from the Pietist university of Halle. The Danish-Halle mission did a valuable work as the first Protestant mission to India, translating the Bible into Tamil. By 1800 there were around 18,000-20,000 adherents.
- In **Greenland**, a Lutheran pastor secured royal permission in 1721 to take a party of settlers who evangelised the local inhabitants. His vision sounded like rank folly to most, an attitude deeply ingrained in all but the most hardy pioneers and visionaries.

d) Outreach from 1792 to 1859

Early outreach was chiefly to pagan or animistic peoples, such as the South Sea islanders, African and West Indian Negroes, and Burmese, Indian and Indonesian tribespeople.

The greatest impact was made among the South Sea islanders, although useful beachheads were established elsewhere:

- In **the South Pacific**, abundant fruit was reaped in the Society Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji...
- In **the North Pacific** a great awakening in Hawaii led to the formation of a native missionary society.
- In **Australasia**, there was some success among the New Zealand Maoris, but little was achieved among the Australian aborigines.
- Advances among animists were also seen in the Dutch E Indies (**Indonesia**) with particularly remarkable success in the Moluccas and northern Celebes.
- Extensive advances occurred among **the Negroes** in the British West Indies, British and Dutch Guiana and British Honduras (Belize).
- In Hindu India, beachheads were established in many areas
- In Buddhist Burma, the Baptists had much success ...
- A most fruitful field was Madagascar. Missionaries entered in 1820 ...

Meaningful penetration was made among Negroes in Africa, although initially only in restricted coastal beachheads as the interior was unexplored. Although advances were relatively few, a foundation was laid for the future which has today turned Africa south of the Sahara, along with Latin America, into the areas where Christianity is spreading most rapidly.

- One solitary attempt to penetrate **East Africa** led to preaching in Mombasa and Zanzibar.
- In **West Africa**, missionaries went to Sierra Leone and Liberia, the English and American colonies for freed slaves. Elsewhere small inroads were made on the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria.

- **Southern Africa** saw the greatest advances. Several societies followed the Dutch and English colonists, also reaching out to the Africans. Advances were made among the Zulus in Natal and inland in Bechuanaland (Botswana).

But there was virtually no progress at all in other areas:

- In **Catholic** Spanish and Portuguese areas of Central & South America and the Philippines.
- In **Muslim** areas of N Africa, the Middle East, Persia, Afghanistan and India. Even in the few areas societies did go to, converts were nearly always from the ancient nominal Christian churches rather than the Muslim masses.
- Little fruit was seen among the **Buddhists** of East Asia. Korea and Japan were both tightly sealed, and French (Catholic) colonial policy prevented contacts in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Although Thailand was entered there were few converts. In the vast Chinese empire also, penetration was almost wholly limited to Hong Kong and the five treaty ports due to strong resistance to foreigners.

e) Outreach from 1859 to 1880

Once again, one of the chief beneficiaries were the Negroes of N America, the West Indies and Africa.

- **Earlier evangelism in** Jamaica and other West Indian islands **was so blessed ...**
- In **Southern Africa**, a revival in 1860 led to greatly increased missionary outreach. Pioneers penetrated deep inland, entering Nyasaland (Malawi), Fingoland (eastern S Africa), Angola, the Rhodesias and the vast Congo River basin.
- In **East Africa**, Anglicans entered ...
- Further advances were made in parts of **West Africa** such as the Cameroons and Nigeria, though still tied closely to the coast. French W Africa (Catholic), however, was virtually unreached.

Progress continued in animistic and other areas:

- In **the South Sea Islands**, earlier progress continued. Native missionaries took the Gospel to the rest of the South Pacific, and commenced work in the North. Unpromising beginnings were also made in New Guinea from 1871 on.
- In **Madagascar** missionaries returned after the persecutions, ...
- More success was seen in **Indonesia**, mainly in non-Muslim areas, though some were also won in the Muslim heartland of Java, a precursor of glorious things to come in the 20th C. Elsewhere there were advances in Sumatra, where an eminently successful mission among the Batak tribespeople led to a Christian community of 160,000 in 50 years. The work in Celebes and the South Moluccas continued to expand.
- In **Hindu India** advances continued, particularly in the south where Christianity was most established. Remarkable revivals occurred.
- Elsewhere in Asia, advances were made into unpioneered **Buddhist territory**. Japan was finally entered in the 1860s, though initial progress was slow. Inland China, the greatest missionary challenge and opportunity of the time, was at last invaded. Vast expansion took place from the 1860s, as far north as Mongolia. A significant factor was the arrival of the first China Inland Mission (CIM) workers in 1866.

But Korea, the Muslim world and Latin America remained closed and virtually untouched.

- **Korea** remained sealed off.
- In **the Muslim world**, footholds were finally secured in N Africa in the 1880s, but saw virtually no converts from Islam. Small beginnings were also made in Persia in the 1870s, and a tiny work in the 1880s in Aden.
- **Latin America** remained closed due to continuing strong Catholic opposition. But footholds were established, although as yet with no indication of the vast harvests to be reaped in the 20th C. Work began in Tierra del Fuego and the Falkland Islands. More substantial inroads were made in Brazil and northern Mexico especially in the 1870s.

f) Outreach from 1880 to 1904

Advances took place in Buddhist East Asia.

- In **China**, the CIM had 600 workers on the field 30 years after its start in 1866. At the same time other societies continued to extend deeper and deeper inland so that by 1900 there were about 100,000 communicants.
- In **Japan** there was a great extension of the initial pioneering in the 1880s, with 30,000 members by 1890.
- In **Korea** a permanent foothold was at last established. Within just a few years this was to lead to a glorious harvest.

...In Southern Asia, further advances were made among animistic tribespeople...

- A work was begun in **NE India (Assam)** which shortly experienced a glorious revival and became the most Christianised area of India.
- In **Burma**, the work began among the Karen tribes spread through missionary and native evangelists to the two other chief non-Buddhist tribespeople.
- Although there was no mass breakthrough among Buddhists in **SE Asia** the work among animists was to see significant expansion in the years to come.

Apart from China, the most extensive advances were made in Africa south of the Sahara... For example,

- In **Madagascar** a great revival spread....
- In **Southern Africa**, the Rhodesias (Zambia & Zimbabwe), Angola, Mozambique and the vast Congo River basin were entered.
- In **West Africa**, advances into the heart of Nigeria were made as explorers opened up the vast unknown interior. The most extensive was the Sudan Interior Mission in 1893, founding a chain of stations as far east as Ethiopia.
- In **East Africa**, Kenya, Tanganyika (Tanzania) and southern Sudan were entered.

The Muslim world was still very difficult:

- Toeholds in **North Africa** were extended but with almost no response from Muslims.
- In **Egypt**, meaningful results were achieved but nearly all from the ancient nominal Christian Coptic Church.
- Minor penetrations were made elsewhere in **the Middle East**. The most extensive results were in Turkey, but again only among nominal members of the ancient Gregorian and Armenian churches rather than the Muslim majority.

“THOU HAST A LITTLE STRENGTH”

or

THE RESTORATION OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The Vocal Gifts in the 18th & 19th C

d) Edward Irving & the Catholic Apostolic Church

... In short, Irving laid a solid doctrinal basis for the present availability and purpose of Spiritual gifts that anticipated later developments.

He taught that ignorance of Christ's return in glory led to a failure to appreciate the gifts as a continual demonstration and sign of that coming. But the Lord was restoring an awareness of His power and glory. The Church, clothed again in her first glory, would testify to an ascended and reigning Christ, demonstrating in and through herself the earnest of His power. It is *“the law and end of her being to embody a first-fruit and earnest of the power which Christ is to put forth in the redemption of all nature”*. The Church should be God's manifested fulness, *“the fulness of Him who filleth all in all”* (Eph 1:23). In every age she should exhibit the miraculous power of her Head, united with an enthroned Christ. Miracles were to demonstrate a living and glorified Christ, a visible foretoken of His coming kingdom. Signs were intended as the firstfruits of a world yet to come in its full consummation. The Church is to embody the earnest and firstfruits of the power that Christ will exercise in the redemption of all nature.

In 1830 Miss Mary Campbell, of Clydeside, Scotland, received the gift of tongues and was healed of consumption through James MacDonald of Port Glasgow. Then several others, including James and his brother George, also spoke in tongues. Their doctrinal preparation came from Irving's assistant minister, who taught that the baptism of the Spirit was distinct from regeneration.

Faith increased in Irving's London congregation due to these events. Prayer meetings began at 6.30 am with over 1000 in attendance. In 1831 there were manifestations of tongues and prophecy, firstly in homes, then in his church. (There were other contemporary cases in Non-conformist and Anglican meetings in London, Bristol and elsewhere.) Although initially exercised in a disorderly way (often by outsiders), Irving soon set time specifically for the operation of the gifts, enabling the remainder of the service to continue unhindered.

Despite the support of the vast majority of his church, in 1832 Irving was expelled from his movement. A new assembly was formed. Unfortunately, a false spirit mingled among them causing confusion. Self-professed apostles and prophets arose directing Irving and organising the Catholic Apostolic Church. Their utterances were very different from earlier ones. Failed predictions and contradictions emerged. Although Irving was the pastor, he was subject to the apostles and prophets. The Catholic Apostolic Church was not his creation. He merely accepted a modest role in it, dying soon after in 1834.

So, a development of initial promise was aborted. Those actually receiving Spiritual gifts were never numerous. Developments, especially after Irving's expulsion, brought much (deserved) criticism.

Some feel many of these gifts were spurious, whilst others consider the tongues and healings exercised by the MacDonalds as genuine.

There was strong theological opposition. There is a strong spirit within Reformed Protestantism that ardently denies believers can possess supernatural powers as a part of the Church's permanent endowment.

The famous Dr Chalmers, for example, said believers ought to be content with ordinary (as opposed to extraordinary) Spiritual manifestations. But Thomas Erskine hit the nail right on the head when he retorted that if they are God ordained, we should desire them. Erskine had seen first-hand the developments at Clydeside. He declared, contrary to the prevailing Presbyterian view, that it was unbelief and not their revocation that hindered a present experience of the gifts. Even after the sad London developments he still said, *"I hope I shall not be led to shut my ear against the true voice because I have been deceived by a false one"*.

e) Conclusion

Occurrences of the vocal gifts in the Philadelphia age were not limited to Britain and America. There are other examples:

- Tongues reappeared among the Readers (followers of Lasure) in **Sweden** in 1841-1843, and in the 1859 awakening in **Ireland**.
- In the blessed 1860 Tirunelveli awakening in **S India** there were tongues, visions and prophecies.
- Remarkable manifestations were experienced in **Russia** and **the Balkans** in the mid 19th C. There were outbreaks of revival with tongues, prophecies and other gifts such as healings. Russian believers would sing and dance in the Spirit raising holy hands and waiting for the anointing to come. Prophecy and words of wisdom would accompany them. In 1855, for instance, an 11-year old Armenian, under the power of the Spirit, wrote prophecies of a coming Turkish invasion and warning readers to flee to the USA.
- In 1885 tongues became normal for some Presbyterians in **Armenia**.
- In 1889 a revival in Oslo, **Norway**, saw many filled with the Spirit and speaking in tongues.

The Restoration of Divine Healing

c) The Philadelphia Age

One of the most unusual preachers of healing was the Australian Congregational minister, Alexander Dowie.

His first taste of the power of God to heal was in 1874 when a plague was sweeping through Sydney. He laid hands on one person racked with fever and immediately it left. Two others were healed and thereafter no others were affected. For ten years he still did not generally practise prayer for the sick. He considered it more for emergencies. It was still a major innovation in his day, and needed a strong pioneering spirit. From 1884, however, he began to proclaim healing regularly ... and saw many wonderful deliverances.

Feeling called to preach healing more widely, in 1888 he left for the USA and held an intensive series of healing campaigns. Settling in Chicago he met intense persecution, but this only served to publicise many testimonies of healing.

He also taught that apostles and prophets had not ceased at the end of the apostolic age. God still speaks through them today, providing it accords with the written Word.

Unfortunately Dowie succumbed to delusions of grandeur from 1900 on and his newly formed Christian Catholic Church and Zion City went badly wrong.

Even so, some very godly men such as F F Bosworth and John Lake owed much to Dowie's original inspiration. Lake experienced truly astonishing apostolic results early in the 20th C both in S Africa and the USA.

5
“**BEHOLD, I COME QUICKLY**”
or
RESTORATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND COMING

The Doctrine of the Second Coming before the Philadelphia Age

Ephesus & Smyrna (1st – 3rd C)

a) Hope of a Millennial Kingdom (1st & 2nd C)

Here are examples of comments on the Second Coming from 1st & 2nd C writings:

- **Clement of Rome** (c. 95 AD) spoke of the day of His appearing, a future resurrection and a coming kingdom. (No detail is given of the nature of that kingdom.)
- **Ignatius** (born c. 35 or 50, died between 98 & 117 AD) was said to be a student of the apostle John. His references to the Second Coming are very few and none to the millennium.
- **Didache** (c. 105 AD) makes no specific reference to the kingdom, but describes events around the return of the Lord. Lawlessness would increase until the world-deceiver appears working signs and wonders and committing hitherto unseen iniquities. Mankind would enter a fiery trial. Then the heavens would open and the trumpet sound. The dead would be resurrected, “*not, however, of all but as was said, ‘The Lord will come and all his saints with him’.*” (Note the clear distinction between the *first* resurrection and those raised in the later *second* resurrection of Revelation 20.) Then the world would see the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven.
- **Papias** (c. 60–130 AD) was believed to have been a pupil of John and a companion of Polycarp. His millenarian teachings were reported by Eusebius, a 4th C antimillenarian church historian, in these words: “*The Lord used to teach concerning the end times that there will be 1000 years after the resurrection of the dead and the kingdom of Christ shall be set up in material form on this very earth.*” According to Eusebius, Papias also spoke of a “*bodily reign of Christ*” on earth.

Very significantly, Eusebius added, “*it is partly due to him (i.e. Papias) that the great majority of churchmen after him took the same view, relying on his early date; e.g. Irenaeus and several others, who clearly held the same opinion*”. (Indeed, Irenaeus, whose own millennial expectations were inspired by Papias, claimed Papias’ writings described vividly a millennial kingdom.)

(So, from the pen of a clear opponent of millenarianism came the acknowledgement that *the great majority* after Papias believed in a coming literal 1000-year kingdom after the first resurrection.)

- **Epistle of Barnabas** (no later than 138 AD) was, among the Apostolic Fathers, perhaps the first to teach expressly a millennial reign of Christ on earth. The author explained the seven days of creation as a type of the six ages of labour for the world, each lasting 1000 years, followed by a millennium of rest. After 6 days (i.e. 6000 years) the present evil age would be destroyed and the Lord return to judge the ungodly: “*in 6000 years the Lord shall bring all things to an end; for the day with Him signifieth 1000 years...*” He would then rest on the seventh day, the sabbath of the millennial kingdom, with the glorified believers on earth in the kingdom of God. He said the words, ‘*He rested on the seventh day*’ prophesied of when Christ, coming again, “*shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the sun and the moon and the stars, then He shall truly rest on the seventh day.*” After the millennial sabbath would come an eighth and eternal day in a new world.

After Barnabas, the idea of a week of 7000 years was common, with the last 1000-year “day” being the millennial period.

- **Polycarp** (died 155 AD) was a disciple of John and claimed familiarity with those who saw the Lord. He looked forward to a resurrection when we would reign with Him but made no specific reference to an earthly millennial kingdom.
- **Justin Martyr** (c. 100–165 AD) referred several times to the 1000 years. He spoke of the coming man of apostasy who would speak blasphemies against the Most High and rule for 3 ½ years. Then the Lord would come in glory.

Although noting that many genuine believers thought otherwise, he spoke also of a resurrection of the dead followed by 1000 years when the saints would possess the millennial kingdom with Christ, ruling in a renewed Jerusalem adorned and enlarged as described by Ezekiel, Isaiah and others. A general resurrection and the last judgement would follow.

(Significantly, this was written years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Also, for Justin to believe in a literal Second Coming and 1000-year reign proves its widespread acceptance down to his time in view of his bias toward things Greek, for the Greeks favoured the non-literal, allegorical method of interpretation.)

- **Irenaeus** (c. 130–200 AD) studied under Polycarp, a disciple of John. He was one of the last of the early Church fathers belonging to the age of miracle and revelation and a living testimony that the Church could still walk in the full power of the Spirit.

Irenaeus was a full-blooded premillennialist who gave the first systematic detailed exposition of prophetic events since the New Testament.

His teaching was based on the testimonies of Papias, John the apostle, and the Old Testament prophets. He defended the millenarian hope taught by Papias and wrote strongly against tendencies to reject millennialism, both amongst the heretical Gnostics and those of orthodox faith. Irenaeus insisted that descriptions of the times of the kingdom should be interpreted literally not allegorically. God would fill the whole earth with His glory. Jerusalem would be rebuilt after the pattern of the Jerusalem above.

He wrote of the godly reigning on earth in a restored creation. Although Jerusalem had been destroyed decades before, he said, “*Antichrist will*

reign ...3 ½ years and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; then the Lord shall come from heaven and cast him into the lake of fire and bring to the saints the time of their reigning, the seventh day of hallowed rest, and give to Abraham the promised inheritance.”

Speaking of Antichrist, he said the last Gentile kingdom must first be divided into ten parts. Then he would kill three and rule over the other seven. He said that Revelation showed, *“what shall happen in the last times and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules (i.e. Rome) shall be partitioned.”* The coming lawless one would be endued with all the power of the devil, setting himself up as the only object of worship, *“concentrating in his own person the apostasy.”* After 3 ½ years Christ would come in glory, raise the dead saints and bring the living saints into the millennial kingdom, having bound satan.

At the end of the 1000-years, following a temporary liberation of satan, final judgment and retribution would come in accordance with Revelation 20 and 21.

- **Tertullian** (born c.165 AD), in about 207, joined the Montanists. He drew on the eschatological and millenarian views of Justin and Irenaeus. He taught the personal reign of Christ on earth for 1000 years in Jerusalem after the first resurrection, followed by the destruction of the world in a final judgment, i.e. premillennialism.

To summarise:

- Papias, Barnabas, Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian specifically refer to **a millennial kingdom on earth** after His coming.
- Clement refers to **a kingdom** (without details), which seems to be *after* His coming.
- Hermas, Ignatius, Didache and Polycarp make no specific reference to an earthly millennial kingdom.
- None speak *against* a millennial kingdom on earth after His coming, or give any explicit alternative.

b) The Waning of the Early Millennial Hope (3rd & 4th C)

In the 3rd & early 4th C, some still wrote of the millennial hope. Also, interest in premillennialism seems to have revived at the end of the 3rd C and during the final terrible pagan Roman persecutions of 303-313 AD.

- **Hippolytus** (c. 170–236 AD), in his commentary on Daniel, refers to a literal reign in an earthly kingdom. He wrote of ten toes arising from the Roman Empire after which Antichrist would persecute the saints and rule the world: *“Antichrist shall ... build the city of Jerusalem. Him shall the impious worship as god... He shall cut off the two witnesses and forerunners of Christ who proclaim His glorious kingdom.”* After the abomination of desolation, Christ would come and destroy His enemies, then the resurrection, then the eternal kingdom would be given to the saints.

Hippolytus' detailed comments on Daniel 9, such as references to a future literal Antichrist ruling from a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, bear many similarities to modern premillennialism, showing clearly that such beliefs are no modern invention.

He places the 70th week of Daniel 9:24-27 at the end of the age, dividing it into two halves, that of Elijah and that of Antichrist. In the first, the knowledge of God is established. In the second, sacrifice and offerings shall cease until Christ comes and slays him by the breath of His mouth. He wrote:

“... when the ten horns spring from the beast in the last times, then Antichrist shall appear among them”. Also, “when the 62 weeks (which follow the initial 7 weeks of Daniel 9) are fulfilled, and Christ is come (i.e. the first coming), and the gospel is preached in every place... there will remain only one week ... in which Elijah will appear, and Enoch, and in the midst of it the abomination of desolation will be manifested, that is Antichrist... and when he comes the sacrifice and oblation will be removed...”

- **Victorinus** (died 303 or 304) referred to a millennial golden age in his *Commentary on Revelation*. Though he warned against an overly materialist interpretation of the millennium and interpreted it in a mostly allegorical way, his concept is clearly literal, for Jerome, a 4th/5th C theologian, classes him as a millennialist. Regarding Revelation 20, Victorinus takes literally the promise of a first resurrection after which the godly will rule with Christ for 1000 years, followed by a second resurrection after which all the dead will be judged.

In 398 AD, Jerome revised Victorinus' commentary, adjusting those passages displaying interpretations he deemed to be millennialistic, an interpretation by then rejected by the Church at large. So, two versions of the commentary exist.

Concerning Revelation 13, Victorinus interprets the seven horns of the beast as the five Roman emperors immediately before Revelation was written, the one reigning while John was on Patmos (Domitian), and the one who followed. The eighth is an earlier emperor (Nero) come back who will be the final Antichrist. At first he will be received as Messiah by the Jews, but will later persecute them.

- **Lactantius** (died after 317) wrote of major worldwide political changes preceding the end. The Roman Empire must fall and ten kings arise from the ruins. Then Antichrist will appear and rule. After 3 ½ years of terrible persecution, Christ will appear to usher in an era of peace for God's people. The righteous dead will arise in the first resurrection, and the world will be renewed for the millennial kingdom.

He declares, *“since God, having finished His works, rested the seventh day and blessed it, at the end of the 6000th year all wickedness will be abolished from the earth, and righteousness reign for 1000 years”*. During this 1000-year reign, unrighteousness will be destroyed. After being chained, Satan will be freed to lead a final, fruitless assault against God's people. His final defeat will be followed by the complete transformation of the natural order and the second and final resurrection.

- **Commodianus** (mid 3rd C?) reflects the millenarianism of a very early age. He describes how, at the end of the age, amidst astounding natural phenomena, Christ appears and conquers Antichrist, converting all nations and taking possession of Jerusalem. The resurrected elect enjoy 1000 years of happiness. Afterwards, the world is destroyed by fire and the rest of the dead arise for the last judgment.

But from the 3rd C the influence of the literal premillennial interpretation, though still widely held, began to wane.

The first to explicitly reject it were the heretical Gnostics. Then its influence was further weakened by two more significant factors:

- Guilt by Association with the excesses and failed prophecies of the Montanists (late 2nd/early 3rd C).
- Opposition to a literal interpretation of prophecy from the Greek allegorical approach.

Guilt by Association with the Excesses & Failed Prophecies of the Montanists

The Montanists were a fervent group in Phrygia (C Turkey) who spoke in tongues and prophesied. They felt worldliness among believers was increasing and stressed holy living in the light of the expected imminent return of Christ.

Their prophecies emphasised the literal resurrection of the body and the near return of Christ, giving vivid descriptions of the soon-to-come millennial reign.

There were, however, some very questionable features. One self-professed prophetess said, “*After me there is no more prophecy, but only the end of the world.*” The New Jerusalem was allegedly to descend in Pepuza in Phrygia. Many streamed out to this place where Christ was expected to return.

As seen earlier, most of the earliest writers about end time events explicitly refer to a literal premillennial return of the Lord.

Early premillennial belief in a 1000-year kingdom after the return of the Lord was brought into disrepute by association with such questionable features. Opposition to Montanism became intermixed with opposition to millennialism. The influential church in Rome, for example, opposed both. By the time the struggle against Montanism was over, the Church as a whole had laid millennialism aside.

But the baby was well and truly thrown out with the bath water!

Opposition to a Literal Interpretation of Prophecy from the Greek Allegorical Approach

What replaced the early literal premillennialism? The non-literal, allegorical, Greek Alexandrian spiritualising approach.

Clement of Alexandria (died c. 215 AD) first questioned whether the 1000 years of Revelation 20 was literal. The reason, however, does not inspire confidence.

Alexandria, the second city of the Empire, was a major centre of the chief pagan philosophies. Whilst Christians elsewhere (rightly) viewed these with great suspicion, not so in Alexandria. A fusion was effected between Christianity and what was deemed best in ancient philosophy in a way not found anywhere else. Yet Paul specifically warned about the Greek love of wisdom and knowledge in 1 Corinthians (e.g. 2:1-5), and of philosophy in Colossians (e.g. 2:8). (See also 1 Timothy 6.20.)

Clement was typical of this approach. He wished to overcome the difficulty educated Greeks found in the simple style of the Scriptures. Influenced by pagan Platonism and

interpreting Christianity via philosophy, he embraced the Greek allegorical method of interpretation. As a result, he did not take kindly to belief in a physical resurrection to participate in a literal 1000-year kingdom on earth.

Origen (184–254) formalised what Brethren church historian Andrew Miller calls the “leaven” of the Alexandrian method. He emphasised the allegorical and spiritual at the expense of the literal and material. Though accepting the Bible as the sole authority, he aimed to harmonise Christianity with pagan philosophy by interpreting the Bible allegorically. He sought to present the Gospel in language familiar to Platonists, making it acceptable to the cultured heathen.

His approach sometimes leaves doubt as to whether he attributed any importance at all to the literal sense. For example, commenting on the different accounts of Christ cleansing the temple, he says the differences cannot be reconciled at the literal and historical level (!) but only at a spiritual.

Not surprisingly, then, Origen rejected literal interpretations of the Second Coming and the resurrection of our present physical body. He took much further Clement’s questioning of a literal millennium, zealously deriding it as absurd. He falsely attributed millennialism to a heretic, Cerinthus. For Origen, the millennium was the kingdom in the soul of the believer rather than literally in the world. The triumph of Christianity would be long and gradual with no direct divine interposition.

Origen’s attitude to the literal, physical body is very revealing. The evil of matter was a fundamental principle of the heresy of Gnosticism, a theory that pervaded all oriental pagan religious systems. The body was deemed intrinsically evil. The real world is the spiritual reality behind the visible. So, abstinence and severe bodily mortification were recommended. The influence of this unbiblical thinking on Origen may be seen in his own extreme ascetic practices. He would eat no tasty food, slept on bare floors and is even said to have emasculated himself. Many later monastic ascetics found in Origen a basis for their behaviour.

Origen’s speculative mind led many to consider him heretical. For example, he taught that all human souls would ultimately be saved. Bishop Methodius attacked his spiritualising of the literal resurrection of the body, and in later years a synod, an emperor and a general council condemned him as a heretic.

The allegorical approach to prophetic interpretation did not gain immediate widespread acceptance. It took time to establish itself. Even in 4th C Egypt, centre of the Alexandrian school, there was lingering strong support for the earlier literal view. An Egyptian bishop Nepos, a contemporary of Origen, attacked allegorical interpretation, defending the traditional, literal interpretation of the 1000-year reign of Revelation 20. His followers left the official church over this point.

By the end of the 4th C, however, generally speaking, Origen’s allegorical approach had won a complete victory.

Pergamos (4th – 6th C)

a) End Time Prophecy Reinterpreted

The end of persecution and sudden imperial patronage of the Church in the early 4th C led to a decline in yearning for the return of Christ to establish an earthly kingdom. This, along with the two factors mentioned above, led to a great acceleration in the fading of a living expectation of His coming in glory in this age.

4th & 5th C theologians not only showed little interest in end time issues, but reacted against them. There was a major reinterpretation of prophecy due to:

- The complete victory of the Alexandrian Greek allegorical approach; and
- Constantine's legalising and favouring of Christianity.

An example of the former is the way Jerome (c. 347– 420 AD) revised the commentary on Revelation by Victorinus. Jerome spiritualised the original material on chapters 20 and 21, erasing things interpreted literally as this was deemed millennialist and by that time rejected by the Church at large. (For more details, see *Victorinus* above.)

A good example of the latter is Eusebius (263-339), Constantine's court theologian and an ardent supporter of the Church/State union. The many privileges bestowed on the Church after the union led to a major reinterpretation of end time prophecy. Eusebius led the way in the rejection of millenarianism. He wrote contemptuously of the premillennial views of men like Papias. Eusebius interpreted Revelation not so much as a prophecy of the last times, but an allegory of the conflict between good and evil in the Church. Even its authenticity was questioned. Eusebius linked the destinies of State and Church, saying that under the rule of Constantine the kingdom had already come; the Church was a foretaste of the eternal kingdom.

Some key changes in the interpretation of end time prophecy followed:

- To interpret prophecy about the beast in such a way as to expect the downfall of the Roman Empire was disloyalty. So, the Empire was now no longer the seat of the Antichrist. The Antichrist was now interpreted as *pre Constantine* pagan Rome.
- The millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 no longer *followed* the coming of the Lord. The evil one was already bound; the millennial kingdom had already been ushered in. (How strange - a kingdom without a King!)
- God's covenant with Israel was deemed broken. She was cast off forever. Old Testament millennial blessings formerly promised to Israel were inherited by the Church, and were being experienced now as a result of the Church/State union. (Despite the plain words of Romans 11, this idea is still around today.)

Such views gradually became official Church dogma. For example, in 373 AD, according to D T Taylor, the bishop of Rome, Damasus, "*formally denounced chiliasm*". Initially, however, it was difficult to proclaim this to be heretical, when earlier notables, like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, had been millennialists.

b) The Reinterpretation Concluded

The reinterpretation of the Second Coming and the millennial hope was finalised by Augustine of Hippo (354-430), the most influential opponent of millennialism.

Originally a premillennialist, Augustine later rejected it as "carnal". He used the Alexandrian allegorical approach to develop his amillennialist interpretation, which quickly became the generally accepted teaching of Latin (Catholic) Christianity.

Especially after the sacking of Rome by the Goths, Augustine turned from Eusebius' link between the destinies of Rome and the Church. He reinterpreted end time prophecy as a depiction of the struggle between good and evil in the souls of men, not as prophetic of future political events. The present age was a continual conflict between the "City of God" and the "City of Satan," which would ultimately climax in the victory of the Church. Endorsement of Christianity as a state religion by the Roman Empire was a token that the Church was winning.

Though he believed in the antichrist, Augustine refused to speculate on the time of his coming or of the end of the world. He said:

- The Church entered the millennium at Pentecost.
- The millennium was spiritual and inward. It began with the Lord's first coming, and is fulfilled now in the reign of Christ in the Church by the Spirit and the Word.
- The first resurrection, at the beginning of the 1000 years, was regeneration and the establishing of the Church. So, the Church/believers were the kingdom of God now reigning with Christ over the earth.
- Based on Luke 10:18, the binding of Satan took place in the Lord's earthly ministry. Though hindered by the Spirit, he can still tempt. But finally even that will be taken from him.
- History would end when Christ finally returned, followed by the last judgement.

So, from the 5th C, the pre 3rd C literal, premillennial interpretation of prophecy faded away. Amillennialism became firmly established. It prevailed for over 1000 years, dominating prophetic understanding through the Middle Ages and into the Reformation. The political/historical aspects of end time prophecy were generally ignored. No essential changes to the present order were expected until the Second Coming.

Thyatira (7th – 15th C)

Very little attention was given to Revelation (or, indeed, to any other part of the Bible) from the 7th to the 12th C. As the light of God's Word was extinguished, the blessed hope of the literal return of Christ to the earth was eclipsed.

If future events were considered at all, Augustine's amillennialism generally prevailed throughout the Middle Ages.... Official teaching was that the evil one had been bound, the present rule of the Roman Church was the kingdom rule of Christ. Christianity would produce a new heaven and a new earth.... There was virtually no expectation of a coming King.

Arising out of Augustine's view that the 1000 years of Revelation 20 began with Christ's first advent, many in Europe predicted the end of the world in 1000 AD. All levels of society were affected. As the time approached, apprehension spread widely. Everyone was on his best behaviour; worldly goods were sold and given to the poor or to the Church; swarms of pilgrims headed east to meet the Lord at Jerusalem; buildings went unrepaired; crops were left unplanted; criminals were freed; armies warred against pagans in Northern Europe to convert them, by force if necessary, before Christ returned.

This was not, however, an eager anticipation of the blessed hope by those who loved His appearing. Instead, it was fearful apprehension of judgement. But, it all came to nothing.

a) Reviving Interest in the Literal Interpretation of Prophecy

Towards the end of the Dark Ages, some began to turn their attention to Revelation 6-19. The generally adopted approach, by both those within and outside the established Church, was not the allegorical method of interpretation but historical premillennialism, or historicism.

The essence of this approach is that for historical premillennialists, Revelation 6–19 predict significant historical events through the whole Church age up to the end time. (There were, of course, different interpretations in the attempt to match history with prophecy, depending on the standpoint of the interpreter.)

Throughout the Middle Ages, there were occasional references to a historical premillennialist rather than an allegorical interpretation of prophecy. One example ... concerned the identity of the Antichrist.

Interpretations differed sharply. The papacy, for example, during the 12th C Crusades, described the Saracens as the Antichrist and Mohammed as the false prophet. Others, however, both within and outside the established church, identified the papacy with the Antichrist, anticipating the Protestant Reformation interpretation:

- **From within**, the 10th C Catholic bishop Arnulf of Orleans was the first to apply the man of sin prophecy of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-9 to the papacy.
- **From without**, several small, radical evangelical fringe groups, deemed heretical by the established Roman religion, frequently applied predictions of an Antichrist to the papacy and held millennial hopes of an earthly vindication of the godly. (For example, according to Larkin, the Paulicians, Albigensians, and Waldensians all taught the Lord's premillennial return.)

b) Joachim di Fiore & Late Medieval Historicism

Arnulf was not alone in unfavourably assessing the Roman Church from within. There were others with similar views. One of the most significant was the man who many believe first systematically expounded historical premillennialism, Joachim of Fiore (1132–1200).

Joachim was perhaps the most reputable and influential medieval prophetic expositor. He was famed for Scriptural study and exposition. About 1180, he was elected abbot of a Calabrian monastery and, in 1183, gave himself more fully to Bible study for a year and a half, with the express permission of the pope.

Labouring night and day, he prepared a work on the Apocalypse.

In 1190, when the English king, Richard, was in Sicily on his way to the Holy Land, he heard Joachim propound his prophetic views. He preached with an earnestness and conviction greater than any prophetic expositor since the fall of the Roman Empire. Many of his views were novel, such as the great whore, the millennium and the 1260 days:

- He claimed a vision had told him the 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3 & 12:6, based on the year/day theory, foretold the events of Western history from the time of the apostles until the present.
- In 1260 AD, the Millennium, the age of the Spirit, would begin.
- An order of contemplative monks would initiate a reform that would usher in a Sabbath of humanity (i.e. the seventh 1000-year period of rest).
- Before this the emperor would destroy the papacy (which he considered to be the Antichrist, rather than a specific individual). He strongly urged Church reform, applying parts of Revelation to the corruptions of Rome.

These hitherto unknown views, proclaimed publicly and earnestly by one so respected as Joachim, had a speedy and marked influence on prophetic interpretation, both within and without the Roman system. Dissidents outside the system, despised as contemptible heretics, began to effectively sound forth on at least some of Joachim's points. Even some within the Roman Church quickly followed Joachim with yet bolder innovations, disregarding the fact that in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council ruled Joachim's writings heretical. For example,

- In 1241, the Catholic archbishop of Regensburg, Eberhard II, denounced Pope Gregory IX as *"that man of perdition, whom they call Antichrist, who in his extravagant boasting says, 'I am God, I cannot err.'"*

He said the ten kingdoms the Antichrist is involved with were the *"Turks, Greeks, Egyptians, Africans, Spaniards, French, English, Germans, Sicilians, and Italians who now occupy the provinces of Rome."* He also said the papacy was the little horn of Daniel 7:8:

A little horn has grown up with eyes and mouth speaking great things, which is reducing three of these kingdoms--i.e. Sicily, Italy, and Germany--to subserviency, is persecuting the people of Christ and the saints of God with intolerable opposition, is confounding things human and divine, and is attempting things unutterable, execrable.

- It was widely believed that the order of contemplative monks who would initiate reform predicted by Joachim was fulfilled by the revival of preaching begun by Francis of Assisi (1181/2 –1226) and the early Franciscans.

After the death of Francis, dissatisfaction arose with the way the new order was going. The more austere and spiritual section of the order, called the Spiritual Franciscans, separated. Jean Pierre d'Olive (1248–1298) was their leader.

Even after the passing of 1260 AD, Joachim's date for the coming age of the Holy Spirit, the now banned Spiritual Franciscans drew strength from his teachings. D'Olive moved the date to 1300 AD. He wrote a commentary on Revelation on the victory of the spiritual over the carnal. Following Joachim, he interpreted Revelation as relating to the papacy due to its corruption, affirming that the Church of Rome was the harlot of Babylon of chapter 17 and the chief Antichrist a pseudo Pope.

The historicism systematised by Joachim, and held by such as the Waldensians and the Spiritual Franciscans, was also held by two famous forerunners of the Reformation, John Wycliffe (c. 1320–1384) and John Huss (1369–1415). It also influenced the reformers themselves.

Sardis (16th – 17th C)

a) Early Reformation Period (16th C)

The Mainstream Reformers

The teaching of the mainstream reformers on Revelation, which came to be called the Protestant interpretation, was a mixture of two influences:

- the medieval historicism of Joachim on Revelation 6-19; &
- Augustine's teaching on Revelation 20.

Influence of Historicism

Protestants adopted the later medieval historicist idea that Revelation 6-19 was an outline of the whole of Church history, not just primarily the end time period. The antichrist was not a single individual, but a system, the papacy, seen as the great whore and Antichrist, the devil incarnate seated in the temple of God.

Luther, for example, though initially treating Revelation with indifference, published a commentary on it in 1528, identifying the pope with Antichrist. Since Luther believed the pope was the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, he also believed that Christ must soon come to slay him. Likewise, using the year/day historicist interpretation of the 1260/1335 days of Daniel 12, he said that the last judgement could not be far off.

But the nearness of His coming was certainly not central to Luther's teaching. For him, apocalyptic ideas were always secondary. In fact, the first generation of reformers as a whole did not pursue the study of the Second Coming closely. There was certainly no living, loving expectation or looking for of the blessed hope.

Influence of Augustine: Rejection of Millenarianism

Although the early reformers accepted a historicist interpretation of Revelation 6-19, when it came to chapter 20 they definitely did not accept the historicist idea of a coming earthly millennial kingdom. Instead, they were heavily influenced by the millennial interpretation of Augustine. Luther, for example, had been an Augustinian priest prior to his withdrawal from Rome. So,

- Luther scorned the idea of an earthly kingdom of Christ before the last judgement.
- Calvin dismissed millenarianism as childish fiction.

In fact, the three main early Protestant creeds all explicitly reject millenarianism as a Jewish fable:

- The **Lutheran** Augsburg Confession repudiated millenarianism as Jewish.
- The early **Anglican** confession states, "*Those who attempt to revive the fable of the millenarians ... throw themselves headlong into Jewish absurdities*".
- The **Presbyterian** Helvetic (= Swiss, Scottish, Hungarian & French Reformed) Confession speaks of the return of Christ but rejects, "*Jewish dreams that there will be before the Day of Judgement a golden age upon the earth, and that the pious will take possession of the kingdoms of the world after their enemies, the ungodly, have been subdued.*"

Despite adopting some of Augustine's millennial interpretation, however, the early reformers did not accept it all. They did not accept his teaching identifying the present millennial kingdom with the *visible external* Church. Instead, they identified it with the *invisible* Church. In other words, the kingdom was the inner reign of God as a present

reality in the hearts of the members of the true Church, not the external reign of the institutional Church.

The Anabaptists

The Second Coming was in no way central to first generation Protestant teaching. Apocalyptic ideas were at best secondary. In the early Reformation it was extremely rare to find a fervent, living, loving expectation of Christ setting up a heavenly millennial kingdom on earth without human effort. In fact, it was found almost uniquely among certain Anabaptists.

Melchior Hoffman, founder of Anabaptism in NW Germany and Holland, was one of them.

Hoffman taught the imminent establishment of the kingdom on earth by Christ Himself. He agreed with Luther that the unveiling of the pope as Antichrist meant that the man of sin had been revealed and so the end was near. This was the last invitation to the marriage supper. A time of apocalyptic tumult was at hand for the godless, the priests and the papacy followed by the return of the Lord in the clouds to judge the world in 1533.

From 1529, Hoffman came under the influence of professed prophets in Strasbourg. Later he stated all his actions were inspired by the prophecies/visions of others. In 1530 he proclaimed himself to be Elijah, one of the two witnesses. Strasbourg was to be the New Jerusalem from whence the 144,000 would prepare the earth to receive the Son of God. When the 1533 date failed, the date was moved. He died in prison in Strasbourg in 1543.

Hoffman spoke against the use of force up to the last. But one Matthijs, inspired by his ideas, discredited them greatly by teaching that force was acceptable. Gaining control of the Council of Munster, he attempted to set up an earthly kingdom there in 1534/35. With Munster as his New Jerusalem, he claimed to be Enoch, the second of the two witnesses, preparing the way for the Second Coming. This "kingdom" was overthrown militarily by neighbouring forces.

c) Later Reformation Period (17th C)

In the 17th C, although millenarianism was rare, some again turned from the doctrine of the early reformers...

- Two Reformed theologians **Alsted** (1588–1638) **and Mede** (1586–1639) Influenced many, interpreting Revelation in a non-allegorical manner. They taught Christ's personal return and a literal millennial kingdom on earth before the last judgement. The German Alsted predicted its beginning by 1694. Mede projected the end of the world by 1716, possibly 1654. (Such date setting was based on the late Medieval/early Reformation historicist method of interpretation of Revelation 6-19.)
- Some Westminster divines, clergymen who participated in the drafting of the Westminster Confession of Faith, were decidedly premillennial. One was **Thomas Goodwin** (1600–1680), an English Puritan, influenced by Mede, who served as chaplain and intimate adviser to Oliver Cromwell. He wrote his own exposition of Revelation.

As in the early Reformation, however, there were again some who brought such teaching into disrepute. Certain radical Puritans in England, the Fifth Monarchy Men, looked for an earthly kingdom. Believing the final apocalyptic battle and destruction of the Antichrist would take place between 1655 and 1657, they sought to take over Parliament during the Civil War and to impose a theocratic kingdom based on Old Testament law.

So, the 17th C reviving of interest in a literal millennium was linked to a historical interpretation of Revelation 6-19. It was not a return to the traditional premillennial end time teaching of the early centuries, when these chapters were understood as describing events in the brief period just before the bodily return of the Lord and His reign in a literal millennial kingdom on earth.

A widespread recovery of the latter teaching would not come until the 19th C, the second half of the Philadelphia Age.

The Doctrine of the Second Coming in the Philadelphia Age

a) 18th C Historical Premillennialism

Prophecy was topical in England in the early 18th C due to the settling there of the Camisards, persecuted French exiles, also known as the “French prophets”. For example:

- **William Whiston** (1667–1752), a one-time Anglican who became a Baptist, lectured on *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies* and published his *Essay on the Revelation of St John* (1706). He proclaimed the millennium for 1715, then 1734 and finally 1866.
- **Vitringa** (1693-1723), like Mede (1586-1638), believed wholeheartedly the millennium was yet to come. But he did not expect any immediate changes, relegating the end of the world to a remote future and strongly emphasising the New Jerusalem. Vitringa’s 1705 study of Revelation, drawing extensively on Mede, was considered a major event in the history of prophetic theology at the turn of the 18th C, the first major study to analyse Revelation as a structured, chronological outline of the whole history of the Church.

b) 18th & early 19th C Postmillennialism

... This theory spread rapidly among US and UK Protestants in the 18th C and into the 19th C. It was widely disseminated by the popular commentaries of Calvinists Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, and Methodist Adam Clarke.

- In America, over 200,000 copies of **Matthew Henry’s commentary** were circulating by 1840. He interpreted the first resurrection and millennium as the political restoration of those who had suffered at the hands of papal Rome and the second resurrection to be the revival of the political power of wicked men.
- **Thomas Scott’s commentary**, the most popular in early 19th C America, spread Whitby’s theory.
- **Adam Clarke** interpreted the stone filling the whole earth of Daniel 2 as a prophecy of the victory of the Church over the Roman Empire. This victory would extend until the Church filled the earth. Two of the most effective means in accomplishing this were the widespread Bible distribution and the contemporary missionary outburst.

c) Later 19th C Widespread Revival of Interest in a Premillennial Coming

Initial 19th C UK Historical Premillennialism

Initially this was historical premillennialism. ... For example, some speculated He would return in the 1840s or the 1860s, linking the fall of Antichrist with Napoleon's treatment of the pope.

(In 1796, Napoleon invaded Italy. His army later marched to Rome and demanded the pope relinquish control of the Papal States. On refusing, he was taken prisoner, dying six weeks later. His successor was in constant conflict with Napoleon. Though he attended Napoleon's coronation in 1804, Napoleon crowned himself, spurning the pope's intent to do the same. In 1808, the French occupied Rome, annexing 4 papal provinces, and the remainder in 1809. When he excommunicated Napoleon, the pope was kidnapped and confined for over six years.)

An influential figure in the move back to premillennialism was Edward Irving.

In 1824 Hatley Frere convinced Irving that Christ's coming was very near. Daniel and Revelation then became the centre of his ministry.

Invited to speak by The Continental Society, which worked in S Europe, he refuted the prevalent postmillennial optimism. He warned of catastrophic judgement, especially on the area of the old Roman Empire. It was judgement, not postmillennial missionary triumph, which lay before mankind.

Irving brought a generation with scarce any awareness of the reality of the Second Coming face to face with its truth. He:

- expounded prophetic themes to his London congregation of over 1000;
- toured Scotland to proclaim Christ's soon coming, winning the Bonar brothers to a millennial view and preaching sometimes to outdoor crowds of 10-12,000;
- wrote of a special outpouring and impartation of the ministry and gifts of the Spirit on at least part of the Church before the end;
- published several works on prophecy, including "*The Coming of Christ in Glory*" by a Jesuit priest named Lacunza (1731-1801). This greatly affected Irving's emerging millenarian views. He studied Spanish for the sole purpose of translating and publishing it. (This and the millennial question became the main objects of study at the 1827 Albury conference.)

A word to explain the influence of a Jesuit on evangelical prophetic interpretation may not go amiss, as this issue is sometimes used to discredit futurist premillennialism.

Although a Catholic, and a Jesuit at that, Lacunza was no ordinary Catholic. Where he does quote church teaching rather than the Word, his views fail the test of Scripture. But ultimately, the Word not the Church was his final authority. As he stressed several times, in questions of faith he made no concessions to the Church.

Lacunza was exiled from his native Chile due to measures taken against the Jesuits. He then gave himself tirelessly to intensive study, first of the Church fathers, then of Biblical prophecies. After 1779, he restricted himself solely to the Scriptures in their original tongues.

His early ideas were printed in a tract circulated widely in South America. The Inquisition banned it. Then, in 1790, Lacunza completed "*The Coming of Christ in Glory*". Repeated attempts to obtain royal approval for publication were unsuccessful. But the book circulated in manuscript form in Spain and South America. After his death, despite its prohibition by the Inquisition, it was secretly printed in Spain. Later it was published in London. In 1819 the Spanish Inquisition ordered it be removed from circulation, but in 1821 it was reprinted in Seville at great risk. In 1824, Leo XII placed it on the Index of Prohibited Books. Even as recently as 1941, the Holy Office (successor to the Inquisition) issued a condemnation of Lacunza.

Lacunza published under the Jewish pseudonym of Rabbi Juan Josaphat ben-Ezra. He said he took that name as he was a most learned rabbi who, like himself, was exiled.

Replacement Theology, as typified by Augustine and many of the Reformers, is still advocated today. Yet this was not found in early church writings. Lacunza believed the Church needed to look again at what the Word of God had to say. He went back to truth lost since the early fathers: a literal interpretation and a 1000-year kingdom of righteousness and peace on earth *after* the coming of Christ. At that time the Jews would be converted. After the 1000 years would come the resurrection of the dead and the last judgement.

Why was Lacunza, a Jesuit, so unpopular with the Roman authorities? A key clue was given earlier: the Word, not the Church, was his final authority. Here are some ways in which application of this principal brought about Vatican condemnation of Lacunza's work, despite the support of his peers:

- A prime reason for his work was to rebut the centuries-old claim that the Church had replaced the Jews in Old Testament prophecy. Again and again Lacunza goes back to the Scriptures and the teaching of the early Church to counter 14 centuries of replacement and amillennial theology.
- He applied the prophecy of the second beast in Revelation 13 to a corrupted Roman priesthood.
- Lacunza believed that during the period before the day of the Lord, there would be a general apostasy of the Catholic Church that would make it part of the Antichrist. This meant Rome would be on the wrong side in the final struggle between good and evil.

(See <http://www.birthpangs.org/articles/prophetic/lacunza-intro.html> for more information on Lacunza.)

Conclusion

Significantly, a demonic counterfeit of Second Coming doctrine arose at the same time as the true, just as Mormonism and Spiritualism counterfeited the newly restored tongues and healings. At the very time that widespread interest in the Second Coming arose among 19th C believers, a spurious Second Coming doctrine was propagated by the newly formed Adventists and the Watchtower Society.

GLOSSARY OF END TIME TERMS

A key issue in the interpretation of the Second Coming is the nature of the millennium and its timing relative to the coming of the Lord. There are three main evangelical schools of interpretation:

- **Amillennialism**, which supporters concede was first framed by Augustine in the 4th/5th C.
- **Postmillennialism**, the most recent of the three, originated by Daniel Whitby, an English Unitarian, in 1704.
- **Premillennialism**, the closest to the teaching of the 1st & 2nd C early church fathers.

Within each of these there are significant variations of interpretation.

Amillennialism

Some Key Features of Amillennialism

- Its central theme is the denial of a future literal millennium on earth, whether before or after His coming.
- Old Testament prophecies which premillennialists apply to a 1000-year millennium are considered as already fulfilled, e.g., Joshua fulfilled the promise of the land; the predicted return to the land was fulfilled in the return from Babylon.
- Prophecies concerning Israel and the kingdom tend to be spiritualised and attributed to the Church. Most Messianic millennial kingdom prophecies are considered as being fulfilled now by the Church on earth. So, in effect, the millennium is now.
- The 1000 years is not a literal fixed period of earthly peace. It symbolises the blessings of the gospel and the long rule of Christ in His Church between His two comings.
- Prophecies of His future reign are symbolical/figurative. The kingdom is spiritual and inward.
- The binding of satan is not future. It took place at the first coming. He is hindered by the present spiritual reign of Christ, though he can still tempt.
- There are few hints in prophecy of the times or events preceding His return.
- The Second Coming will be preceded by increasing evil and apostasy, climaxing in the appearance of the man of sin, Antichrist.
- At that time many of the prophecies of satanic political power and persecution of the saints will be fulfilled and the judgements will be poured out.
- Then Christ will appear and overthrow the final rebellion.
- The resurrection and judgement of the just and the unjust happen at the same time.
- The eternal state immediately follows. There will be no taking over of the earth. It will be burnt up and a new heaven and new earth will follow.

Some Observations on Amillennialism

- Augustine's amillennialism became the accepted interpretation of the Church of Rome, and so prevailed during Rome's medieval dominance.
- At the Reformation, the early reformers such as Luther and Calvin, who were admirers of Augustine, adopted his interpretation of Revelation 20.
- Amillennialism requires some unusual and questionable spiritualising.
- Though not all amillennialists are liberal, all liberals are amillennialists.

Postmillennialism

Some Key Features of Postmillennialism

- The millennium will be *before* His coming.
- The reign of Christ began with the ascension.
- The 1000 years is not literal but an extended undetermined period of time.
- During that time the world will get better and better until the whole world is ultimately transformed socially and politically by preaching in the power of the Spirit (cp the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed). Evil is being reduced, the world gradually being Christianised and the Church progressively bringing in the kingdom until the kingdom is finally established. A golden age will come on earth when Muslims will be overthrown, Jews converted and the antichristian papacy destroyed. All nations will become Christian and love God and their neighbour, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom. The Church will rule the world for 1000 years of righteousness.
- Postmillennialists consider both premillennialists and amillennialists as defeatist in not acknowledging that preaching in the power of the Spirit will ultimately transform society. They say that,
 - Contrary to Augustine's amillennial teaching, the millennium is more than the rule of Christ in the heart of believers.
 - Contrary to premillennial teaching, the coming of the kingdom will not be one cataclysmic event, but a slow, quiet ushering in of the kingdom.
- Israel/Zion is interpreted as being the Church. Old Testament promises of the restoration of Israel and reestablishment of the throne of David are applied to the Church. The submission of the Gentiles to the Jews means their conversion and entry into the Church. The idea of a visible kingdom in Jerusalem is deemed gross and carnal.
- The prophecies of Matthew 24 are deemed fulfilled by the Jews' rejection of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem.
- The binding of satan is effected by the preaching of the Gospel and the reign of Jesus in His Church through the Spirit.
- Then will come a short apostasy followed by the return of Christ.
- Christ will not return to earth to take it over or to rule from a particular location (Jerusalem) but to bring an end to the earth and to history.
- Then will follow the resurrection, the last judgement and eternity.

Some Observations on Postmillennialism

Believing that Old Testament prophecies to Israel had a fulfilment in the Church, Whitby, the father of postmillennialism, looked for a worldwide Holy Ghost revival

before Jesus returned. He described this period of blessing, whether or not for 1000 years, as the millennium of Revelation 20.

By the 20th C, however, confidence in postmillennialism, with its optimism that the world was getting better and better and about to usher in the kingdom, was almost wiped out after two world wars, the Great Depression, and a strong increase in moral evil. Many postmillennialists turned to amillennialism.

In recent years, however, postmillennialism has been undergoing a resurgence among Reformed Christians, Christian Reconstructionists and many neo-charismatic Third Wave Christians (especially those who emphasise “Joel’s Army” and dominion theology).

(Christian Reconstructionism is a movement among some Calvinists that seeks public, national ethics to be governed by the Law of God. The Third Wave is part of the larger recent “Neo-charismatic” movement. Although Third Wave Christians profess to have had pentecostal-like experiences, they claim no association with either the Pentecostal or Charismatic movements.)

Premillennialism

Within premillennialism there are three significant schools of interpretation:

- historical (or, historicist) premillennialism (= **historicism**)
- futurist premillennialism (= **futurism**)
- **dispensationalism**, a specific variation of futurism

Key features of the three schools are shown below.

Some Key Features of Historical Premillennialism (Historicism)

- The key issue distinguishing historicism from premillennialism is the interpretation of the time periods in Revelation chapters 6-19 (i.e. the 42 months and 1260 days of Rev 11:2-3; 12:6,14; 13:5).
 - The traditional premillennialism of the early centuries interprets them literally. Thus, the vast majority of the events of Revelation occur in a very brief period at the end of the Church age, just before the Second Coming.
 - In contrast, historicists interpret them using the year/day theory, treating the 1260 days as “prophetic days” i.e. years. (This approach is also used with the 2300 days of Dan 8:14 to give a yet longer period.) So, these events are interpreted as spanning the whole Church age, from John to the end times.
- Once historicism allegorised the time periods of Revelation 6-19, all associated predictions had to be allegorised also, including the reign, overthrow and doom of the beast (considered the same as the Antichrist) and the nature of the tribulation.
- Concerning the identity of the Antichrist,
 - Traditional premillennialism believes he is a specific individual who rules in the brief period immediately prior to the Second Coming.

- Historicists believe his reign covers the whole Church age. So, he cannot be a person. Since the Antichrist is usually interpreted as the Roman Catholic Church, this means applying references to the Antichrist not to one particular pope but to the system, to the papacy generally, through the Church age.
- Concerning the tribulation,
 - Traditional premillennialism believes in a great tribulation of 3½ years at the end of the age, during the reign of the Antichrist, in the brief period just before the Second Coming. This is during Daniel's 70th week.
 - Since historicists interpret the Antichrist as the papal system throughout the Church age, the tribulation cannot be just for 3 ½ years at the end of the age. It is believed to have begun in the 4th C following Constantine's Church-State union and to continue until the Second Coming. Daniel's 70th week is believed to have been fulfilled during the time of the Lord.

Some Observations on Historicism

- When the order of events of Revelation mismatches an interpreter's selected historic period, there is an inconsistent interpretative approach, switching from a literal to a spiritual/allegorical approach.
- Historicism has no agreed interpretation. Different historicists emphasise different historical events or geographical regions during the Church age.
- The differing results lead to much speculation. For example, it has frequently been used to predict the date of the end of the world:
 - ◆ **Charles Wesley**, based on his study of Revelation, predicted it would end in 1794.
 - ◆ **Adam Clarke**, author of a famous 1831 commentary, proposed a possible end date of 2015.
 - ◆ A Baptist, **William Miller**, said it would end on 22 October 1844, based on a historicist interpretation of Daniel 8:14. When this failed, some Millerites later organised the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which retains a historicist interpretation of Biblical prophecy.

The Development of Historicism

Historicism is not new. This interpretation of Revelation 6-19 is found over the centuries:

- In the 3rd C, Hippolytus, a premillennialist, also held some historicist views.
- Victorinus is said to be an early historicist since, in the earliest complete commentary on Revelation in 300 AD, he interpreted the beast with the deadly wound of Revelation 13 as Nero come back to life.
- A broad form of historicism is found throughout the Middle Ages.
- In the 16th & 17th C, historicism came to be called "the Protestant interpretation". Whilst interpreting chapter 20 according to Augustine's amillennial approach, the mainline Protestant reformers continued with a historicist interpretation of Revelation 6-19, linking predictions relating to the Antichrist to the rise, progress, and doom of the papacy.
- To rebut the Protestant claim that the papal system was the Antichrist, in 1591 a Catholic Jesuit, Ribera, devised an interpretation that went back to the

(futurist) premillennial interpretation of Revelation 6-19 of the early centuries. This made the Antichrist an individual whose coming was yet in the future.

- In the 18th C, historicism continued to have much influence among Protestants (e.g. the Wesley brothers), although the new hypothesis of postmillennialism gained wide acceptance, especially in America.
- Historical premillennialism regained the initiative over postmillennialism in the early 19th C. Later, however, it lost considerable ground to the revived interest in the literal (futurist) premillennial interpretation of the time periods of Revelation 6-19.

When interpreting Revelation 6-19, historicism is the traditional stance of:

- amillennialists (who spiritualise the 1000 years of Revelation 20), and
- postmillennialists (who apply the 1000 years to the Church age).

Although there have been premillennialists who are historicists, most modern premillennialists are futurists. (Futurism is found only in premillennialism.)

Today historicism is on the wane, because:

- it consistently fails to accurately match the events of history to our own time; &
- the variation in interpretation by its proponents has been so great that it tends to undermine its credibility.

Some Key Features of Futurist Premillennialism (Futurism)

- The key issue in the interpretation of Revelation is whether it is literal or symbolic. Wherever possible, futurism assumes a literal interpretation for Old and New Testament prophecy.
- So, it rejects the year/day interpretation of the 1260 days and 42 months of Revelation in favour of a literal interpretation.
- Consequently, Revelation 6-19 only cover events at the end of the age, immediately before and after His coming, rather than the whole Church age. Thus Revelation is primarily still to be fulfilled, particularly from chapter 6 on.
- Whilst postmillennialists believe the world will get better and better before His return, futurists believe He will return to a world of increasing apostasy and wickedness.
- The Roman Empire in its 1st C form would fall and rise again at the end time just before His return in the form of the ten toes, headed up by the beast.
- At that time, Antichrist will be revealed and there will be an unprecedented 7-year great tribulation.
- The 7-year period of Revelation 6-19 is dovetailed with the 70th week of the 70 weeks [i.e. 70 sevens of years = 490 years] of Daniel 9:24-27. Amillennialists, postmillennialists and historicists believe the full 490-year period came to an end about the time of the crucifixion. Futurists, however, believe there is a time gap between the 69th week (which was fulfilled in the week of the crucifixion) and the 70th week. That last week is the 7-year Tribulation period at the end of the age.
- At the end of the 7 years, and before the millennium, Jesus will return to earth, literally and bodily and destroy the beast.

- Satan will be bound and an earthly 1000-year kingdom set up, which Jesus will reign over with His saints before Revelation 21-22.
- In this kingdom all Israel's covenants will be literally fulfilled. The Jewish nation will be revived and their land repossessed.
- After the 1000 years, the Son will give the kingdom to the Father when it will merge with His eternal kingdom.
- The righteous will be resurrected before the millennium kingdom and participate in its blessings. The wicked are not raised until after the millennium.
- The eternal state will follow the judgment of the wicked.

The Origin of Futurism

- Many detractors suggest this is a relatively new theory, originating with men like J N Darby in the 19th C.
- Others claim a Jesuit, Ribera, initiated it in a commentary on Revelation in 1591 aimed at refuting the Protestant identification of the papacy with the Antichrist. It claimed Revelation 6-19 related not to the whole Church age (and thus to the papacy as an institution) but only to the end time. Thus the Antichrist would be a single evil person who would be received by the Jews and would rebuild Jerusalem, abolish Christianity, deny Christ, persecute the Church and rule the world for 3 ½ years. Several Catholic scholars espoused this interpretation, among them Bellarmine, the most notable Jesuit controversialist and the greatest adversary of the Protestant churches.
- But, Ribera did not originate futurism. He simply revived the basic futurist principles that prevailed in the earliest centuries of the Church (though not as systematically developed as modern futurism). With a few exceptions, they believed the tribulation, millennium, and Second Coming were in the future. Even Eusebius, the 4th C anti-millenarian church historian, had to acknowledge this when he complained of the influence of the 2nd C millennial teachings of Papias, saying, "*it is partly due to him that **the great majority of churchmen after him took the same view...***"
- Today futurism is the position of most premillennial Bible teachers.

Some Key Features of Dispensationalism

The essence of dispensationalism is:

- Taking the prophetic Scriptures literally whenever possible.
- The division of the Bible into seven dispensations.
- A strong emphasis on the distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church as a major key to rightly understanding Bible prophecy.
- Separate purposes for Israel and the Church.
- Rejection of replacement theology, the idea that the Church inherits the Old Testament promises to Israel.
- God's unconditional, eternal covenants with Israel, such as to Abraham and David, cannot be broken. Though still rejecting Jesus as Messiah, the Jews are still God's chosen people, and He continues to have a place for them. Israel will still inherit her promises.
- The Church age is a parenthesis, a "mystery" period, not directly revealed in the Old Testament. It will end with a pre-tribulation secret rapture of the Church, seven years before the Second Coming.

- The Jewish remnant will then enter the great tribulation, and by grace be brought to recognise the Messiah they crucified.

Darby claimed his understanding of a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church came as a result of seeing the distinction between Israel and the Church in his study of Ephesians. Few who do not make that distinction see a pre-tribulation rapture.

Key Differences between Futurist Premillennialism and Dispensationalism

Key distinguishing features or modifications of traditional futurist premillennialism by dispensationalism are:

- Although both accept Old Testament promises to Israel as literal, there is a much sharper distinction between Israel and the Church in dispensationalism than in traditional premillennialism. The latter anticipates a coming together of restored Israel and the Church. The Church inherits the Spiritual blessings and Israel the earthly.
- Dispensationalists believe that since God does not deal with Israel and the Church at the same time, the Lord comes for His saints in a secret, PRE-tribulation rapture (i.e. the Church does not go through the Tribulation). The temple is then rebuilt, then the beast turns on Israel leading to Armageddon, the return of the Lord with His saints and Christ's millennial rule. Traditional premillennialists do not believe in a secret pre-tribulation rapture but a POST-tribulation Rapture, i.e. the Church goes through the tribulation, then the rapture.

The post-tribulation view is older and more traditional. The pre-tribulation view is more recent, and almost invariably bound up with dispensationalism.

Currently futurism, or its variant dispensationalism, is very popular with evangelicals, especially non-denominational, Baptists, Pentecostals and Charismatics, though not as dominant as in the early/mid 20th C. Dispensationalism, however, is rejected by Protestants that embrace Calvinist covenant theology (e.g. the largest USA Presbyterian Church regards it as heretical).