

Sunday, January 16, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 18 The Age of Christian Empire: Augustine on the Millennium, St. Patrick, and the Fall of Rome

### Augustine on the Millennium

- As we have seen before in a previous lesson one of the affects of Constantine’s Edit of Malian and the union of church and state had upon many believers was that their future hope in Christ’s coming was lost.
- “One of the many effects this new comfortable, status had on Christian thinking, philosophy and world view, is that the future hope of Christ’s coming was all but lost. After all, when Christ comes, according to the scriptures, he will destroy all his enemies, and then all God’s people will know peace, safety and comfort. But the ‘Christians’ living under Constantine’s had all those things already (or so they reasoned)! Why should they hope for something in the future when they already had it?” (Barlow, 170)
- R. Dawson Barlow quotes J.C.S. Hoylake to support his point:
  - “As the apostasy advanced, the new theory arose that the millennium was a present fact, or a state to be brought about by the continued conquest of the church to say nothing about the sword! The prophecies of the Second Advent began to be interpreted as the first advent! The Old Testament began to be appropriated by the empire of the fourth century and the New Jerusalem became the church.” (quoted in Barlow, 170)
- “In other words, it became the thinking of the Christian community that there was no future for the nation of Israel and consequently, no future millennium. The glorious descript of the future millennial kingdom of Christ was no longer understood as a future hope.” (Barlow, 170)
- Those familiar with Christian theology will recognize this view which denies the future reign of Christ on earth as a-millennialism. A-millennialism simply means no millennium.
- Utilizing the allegorical method of interpretation advocated by his predecessor Origen, Augustine firmly cemented the allegorical method into mainstream Christian thought and used it to deny the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.
- As we studied last week, due to his enduring influence, once Augustine denied the millennium subsequent generations followed suit.
  - “The church of God is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets; the Church of Christendom is built upon the foundation of the Latin Fathers. What the Apostle Paul was to the one, Augustine of Hippo was to the other . . . he was practically the founder of the Latin Church.” (Sir Robert Anderson. *The Buddha of Christianity*, quoted in Barlow, 172-173 )
- Philip Schaff, a committed post-millenarian painfully admits that the pre-millennial view was the wide spread view of the Church before the council of Nicea.

- “The most striking point in the eschatology (study of the last things) of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on the earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but was a widely held current opinion of distinguished teachers.” (Schaff quoted in Barlow, 174 exact citation unclear)
- This reality lends some historical creditability to the general order of departure from Pauline truth presented in Lesson 7.

### **Pauline Truths Lost (Order of Loss)**

- First—The Distinctive Message and Ministry of the Apostle Paul
- Second—The Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church the Body of Christ
- Third—The Difference Between Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ
- Fourth—Justification by Grace Through Faith Alone, in Christ Alone (Lewis, 1)
- “When Augustine wrote *The City of God* he formulated, in a theological setting, the a-millennial view of the end times. It was Augustine who gave theological credibility to to the still current political philosophy of a-millennialism which is still held by most of Christendom. He presented the philosophy with such authority that it became the standard world view of the Roman Orthodox, and late the Greek Orthodox, the Russian Orthodox, and, consequently, most of Protestant theology. At the very core of this ‘philosophy,’ was St. Augustine’s abject denial of any future dealings of God with the nation of Israel.” (Barlow, 175)
- While allegorizing virtually everything, He stated that the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 was the literal amount to time between the first coming and the second coming of Christ (i.e., the present church age).
- Augustine asserts without scriptural foundation that only carnal believers would believe in the Millennium.
  - “But as they (the millenarians) assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink, such as not only to shock the feelings of the temperate . . . such assertions can be believed only by the carnal. Those who believe them are called by the Spiritual ‘chiliasts,’ which we may literally reproduce by the name ‘millenarians.’” (quoted in Barlow, 176)
- By the 11<sup>th</sup> century it was clear that Augustine was wrong. Consequently, the theologians of the 11<sup>th</sup> century had to correct Augustine. They do so by saying that the 1,000 years were only a symbolic representation of the amount of time between the two advents of Christ. (Barlow, 176)
- R. Dawson Barlow is convinced that the reason why Augustine rejected the literal nature of the Millennium is because resurrected saints will be able to eat and drink. As we have already seen the above quote, Augustine maintained that who believed that people are

able to eat and drink in their resurrected bodies are carnal. Meanwhile, those who believed resurrected saints could not eat or drink were spiritual. (Barlow, 179)

- After reading the biographical information about Augustine, Barlow concluded that Augustine's logically extrapolated that if the resurrected saints can eat and drink, they will also carry on other normal bodily functions such a sexual activity.
- Augustine by his own admission struggled with his sexuality fathering at least one child out of wedlock and having at least one possibly two mistresses throughout this life. (Barlow, 179)
- Therefore, the proposition of struggling with this issue that had for so long troubled him after the resurrection was too much for him to bear thereby causing Augustine to deny the millennium. (Barlow, 179)

### **The Real St. Patrick**

- “Scotland and Ireland appear to have been blessed with Christianity about the same time as Britain. By means of soldiers, missionaries, and persecuted Christians from the south, the gospel was preached and many believed.”(Miller, 315)
- Unfortunately the early religious history of these countries is so overlaid with legend we will attempt deal only with people and events that are well authenticated.
- Patrick (Succath his given name) is supposed to have been born in 372 on the banks of the Clyde in Scotland. His parents were earnest Christians; his father was a deacon, and his grandfather was a presbyter. His mother, who sought to instill into his heart the doctrines of Christianity, was sister to the celebrated Martin, archbishop of Tours. (Miller, 315)
- After his parents left Scotland and settler in Brittany, at the age of 16, Patrick and his two sisters were captured by Irish pirates who sold them as slaves in Ireland. (Miller, 315)
- While suffering the hardships of slavery and reflecting upon some great unidentified sin, Patrick remembered the teachings of his mother and turned to Christ. Read passage on page 316 of *Miller's Church History*.
- In time Patrick secured his liberty and returned home to his family after spending some time traveling and preaching throughout Ireland. Once home, Patrick felt the desire to return to Ireland and preach the gospel to the pagans among whom he had found Christ. (Miller, 316)
- “After this he is known as Saint Patrick. He devoted the remainder of his life to the Irish, and labored among them with great affect, though amidst many difficulties and dangers. The conversion of Ireland is ascribed to his means. The year of his death in uncertain.” (Miller, 316-317)
- Based upon Patrick's letters (*The Confession*, 25 chapters; *The Letter to Coroticus*, 10 chapters; and hymn written in ancient Irish) he is clear on the following facts:

- He was not an Irishman
  - He never mentions Rome or the pope in connection with anything Biblical or Christian.
  - He was not born on March 17
  - He was not canonized (made into a saint) until four centuries after his death
  - He recognized only the Scripture as the final authority in matters of faith and practice and never appealed to a bishop, council, pope, or king for any religious advice regarding any spiritual issue.
  - He speaks of having baptized thousands of grown men (Ruckman, 266)
- Patrick labored in Ireland for 53 years. Unfortunately, legend surrounds his entire life and ministry. It is interesting to consider that the documents containing these fabrications were not gathered or published as facts until Patrick was Romanized by the Catholic church in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century. (Ruckman, 266)
  - Patrick is credited with having started at least 300 local churches which spearheaded a massive missions outreach. Missionaries were ordained and sent out in groups of 12 the 13 and sent all over Scotland, north Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland. (Ruckman, 267)
  - From the Catholic perspective these missions and their converts were total misfits. There is no evidence that any Celtic church before 600 AD venerated Mary or held the Catholic view of the Eucharist (transubstantiation). (Ruckman, 267)
  - Furthermore, the book these groups were actively using and preserving was not the text of Origen (*Hexapla*) and Jerome (*Latin Vulgate*) but *Old Latin* used by Patrick's father Calpurnius between 380 and 400 AD. Incidentally, this Old Latin text predates Origen's text used by Jerome to translate the Vulgate and includes I John 5:7-8. (Ruckman, 266-267)
  - The Bible believing saints of the Celtic churches did not line up with Jerome or the Roman Catholic Church which explains why many church historians refer to them as pestilent heretics. (Ruckman, 266)

### **The Fall of the Western Roman Empire**

- Rome had been fighting the barbarians (anyone who did not speak Latin or Greek) for as long as the empire had existed. In the 3rd century (200s) Rome saw renewed attacks from Germanic tribes to the north of the western empire. Their homelands were getting crowded and people began to move into new lands within imperial borders. (Hill, 93)
- The 250s Franks crossed the Rhine and the Alamanni were invading northern Italy and the Goths were moving into Greece but Rome held them off. (Hill, 93)
- Strong emperors such as Diocletian and Constantine were able to temporarily reverse the trend and keep the empire together.
- In the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (300s) Rome endured a second and more menacing wave of Germanic migration. For reasons that still remain unclear, the Huns from central Asia

began to migrate westward. These fearsome mounted warriors from what is now Kazakhstan using powerful composite bows appeared unstoppable. (Hill, 93)

- The westward movement of the Huns touched off a second wave of barbarian migrations similar to falling dominions. “Goths, desperate to escape the Huns, streamed over the borders of the empire into the Balkans. Visigoths (the western Goths) headed west, invaded northern Italy, and sacked Rome. Vandals, Alamanni, and others crossed the Rhine as they fled west, and moved across Gaul and even into Spain.” (Hill, 93)
- In 407, the Romans withdrew their garrisons from Britain to fight the barbarians that were invading Gaul. The withdrawal was intended to be temporary but Rome forces never returned to Britain. (Hill, 93)
- Finally in 410, the unthinkable happened Visigoth king Alaric and his barbarian hordes sacked the city of Rome and wasted it. While the political capital of the empire had already been moved to Constantinople in the east the fall of Rome shocked the empire to its core. (Price and Collins, 70)
- Pagans blamed the catastrophe on Christianity, claiming that the gods were angry and were refusing to protect the empire as they had in the past. Meanwhile Christians believed it was the judgment of God for their transgressions. (Price and Collins, 70)
- This was the political and religious climate in which Augustine wrote *The City of God*. Augustine explained the fall of Rome by stating that two realms exist on Earth—the City of God and the City of Mankind. “Even though these cities seem to mingle, God’s realm cannot ultimately be identified with any human regime; one day, the City of Mankind will fall and only God’s reign in the hearts of his people will remain. ‘The earthly city will not be everlasting,’ Augustine declared, ‘for when it is condemned to the final punishment it will no longer be a city . . . We have learned that there is a City of God: and we have longed to become citizens of that City with a love inspired by its founder.’” (Jones, 55)
- The Vandals went on to conquer most of North Africa in 430 as Augustine lay dying in Hippo, and Carthage fell in 439. (Price and Collins, 71)
- “In 452 Attila the Hun attacked Italy. As the Huns approached Rome, nothing stood in their way. No emperor. No army. No one but Leo the bishop of Rome. Leo met Attila on the road to Rome. Somehow, Leo persuaded the Huns to retreat. In 455 another barbarian tribe, the Vandals, besieged Rome. This time, Leo could not convince them to retreat, but he did persuade them not to rape or kill. Instead, they looted and—true to their title—vandalized the city.” (Jones, 58)
- Finally in 476, a barbarian named Odovacer deposed the last Western emperor and the Western Roman Empire faded into history. (Shelley, 153)

### **The Fall of Rome and the Power of the Papacy**

- Leo's (the so-called Great) ability to persuade Attila the Hun not to sack Rome increased the political position of the emerging papacy immeasurably.
- "Leo took every opportunity to underline the supremacy of the bishop of Rome, especially after 451, when the bishops at the Council of Chalcedon had voted that the city of Constantinople be regarded as second only to Rome." Leo wrote:
  - "Due to the preeminence of the Apostolic See, made certain by the merits of the prince of bishops, St. Peter, and by the prime position of the city of Rome, let nobody presume to attempt anything to contrary. Thus will the peace of the churches be preserved if the whole body acknowledges its ruler." (Price and Collins, 71)
- "Successive popes made ever more explicit claims to their universal role as chief pastor of the church. The fact that the emperors continued to endow the papacy with funds, despite the threats to the empire, demonstrates the high esteem in which the papacy was held." (Price and Collins, 71)
- "During his reign, Constantine had organized the church along the lines of his civil administration with territories divided up into areas called dioceses, each one supervised by a bishop. The bishops resided in a town, and the building – called a cathedral - where his 'see,' or official seat was located was a place not only of worship, but of bureaucratic power." (Price and Collins, 72)
- "With the breakdown of civil administration during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, people turned to the bishop and his court for help. The church was the only institution that would defend and sustain them." (Price and Collins)
- More on the power of the Papacy next week.

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