

Prime Time Preachers—Millennium Misfits

[Central Pastors Conference, Zion Ev. Lutheran Church, Columbus, Wisconsin, October 18, 1988]

by David E. Priebe

Millennialism is a false teaching that has plagued the Christian Church from before the time of Christ on earth to the present. In Old Testament times, Psalm 90:4 was interpreted literally. “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by.” The six-day creation becomes a six thousand-year life span for the earth. The seventh day of rest becomes a 1000-year period of rest and repose followed by the destruction of the earth.

The ministry of Jesus was not without millennium misunderstanding. As Jesus was about to ascend home to Heaven, his disciples asked, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) They were thinking about an earthly kingdom.

The creeds of Christendom addressed the same millennium concerns. “He (Christ) shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” (Apostles) “He shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.” (Nicene) “He (Christ) sitteth on the right hand of Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” (Athanasian) No millennium thoughts are allowed in any of these creeds.

The Lutheran Church of 1530 plainly rejected the millennium in Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession.

“Also they teach that at the consummation of the world Christ will appear for judgment, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly and devils He will condemn to be tormented without end...They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed.”

Our Wisconsin Synod echoed the same position in its confessional document “This We Believe”—Article IX Number 5 page 24.

“We reject every form of millennialism, since it has no valid scriptural basis and leads Christians to set their hopes upon the kingdom of Christ as an earthly kingdom. We likewise reject as unscriptural any hopes that the Jews will all be converted in those final days, or that all people will ultimately enjoy eternal bliss.”

We expect people like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons to be more interested in earthly kingdoms than Heavenly mansions through Christ. What is disturbing is that most Evangelical Protestants are Millennialists as well. What is most disturbing is that the inroads of millennialism are showing up in Lutheran circles as well. The current major debate among seminaries of our former sister Synod is not over the inerrancy of the Scriptures, but to what extent Christ is found in Old Testament prophecy. Not seeing fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies puts many Lutherans squarely in the middle of millennium mud.

The focus of this paper is to be the infiltration of millennium ideas through the popular media preachers. Are the millennium thoughts espoused from TV pulpits a threat to our people and to what extent?

According to Mort Grimm (substituting for Paul Harvey on July 21, 1983), “two out of three ‘religious persons’ go to church on TV because ‘the sermons and the singing are better’.” The strongest Christians in our Church body are in church on a Sunday morning. It is our shut-ins, the weak in faith, and non-churchgoing delinquents who are watching the tube services. If

two out of three are watching; many are being influenced. Truth is mixed with error. The Bible is authoritative along with personal experience. Christ is preached, but many say you can let Him into your heart. Faith is a work of man as well as a work of God. Original sin has many definitions and most are not the Bible's. Very few TV evangelists believe babies are sinful from conception. Prayer becomes a means of grace. Many believe in a second rank of spirit-filled Christians that are re-baptized in the Holy Spirit. Miracles happen. Politics are preached and religion is legislated. And yes, last but not least—the millennium is taught.

Even though you will not find all of the TV evangelists quoted in this paper, I believe we are on safe ground labeling the *Prime Time Preachers—Millennium Misfits*.

Before we can expose the errors of the Sunday morning pew snatchers, it would be good to briefly summarize the Bible's clear presentation of the end things. A number of confessional statements are offered to outline the major areas of millennium concern. Pertinent passages are offered first, what it means is humbly stated second and what it all disallows follows third.

Statement 1 **Christ's 2nd Coming Will Be In Judgment!**

The Bible Says:

Matthew 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”

Matthew 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.”

Acts 17:31 “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.”

Acts 10:42 “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.”

We Believe:

That Jesus' 2nd coming will be to judge those who are living and those who have died and return to heaven for eternity.

We Reject:

Any ideas of an earthly kingdom ruled by Christ for a thousand years or any other period of time. The Bible offers no alternatives between heaven and earth.

Statement 2 **Christ's Kingdom Is A Spiritual Kingdom!**

The Bible Says:

John 18:36 “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Colossians 3:2,4 “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Colossians 1:12-14 “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Mark 1:14-15 “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

We Believe:

Christ’s kingdom is not an earthly political kingdom. When the Gospel is proclaimed and people believe, we become members of the spiritual Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is ours through blood redemption and forgiveness of sins. When Jesus comes again we will appear with him in heavenly glory.

We Reject:

Jesus did not offer an earthly kingdom to the Jews which they rejected (John 1:11) and now he will come and try again. Christ will not establish a new earthly world of social reform, less disease, less death, no war, and nature changed. All passages used by millennialists apply to spiritual change and not physical. (Is. 2:4, 11:7, 65:25, Jer. 22:24-30, Mi. 4:1-8)

Statement 3

The State of Israel Does Not Have Special Significance For Christ’s 2nd Coming. There Will Be No Mass Conversion of Jews Before The Judgment!

The Bible Says:

Romans 11:25,26 “Israel has experience a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.”

Romans 11:7 “What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did.”

Romans 2:28-29 “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.”

Romans 9:6-8 “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel...it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.”

We Believe:

All Israel means all believers (Jews and Gentiles) in Christ. No general conversion of Jews before the end of the world is taught. Old Testament prophecies and promises are fulfilled in the New Testament Church. Old Testament promises to Israel like Jeremiah 18:7-10 were conditional upon their faithfulness to God. The temple will not be rebuilt in Old Jerusalem. Christ is our temple (Ephesians 2:20-21). Old Testament sacrifices will not be reinstated. Christ’s sacrifice is complete (Hebrews 9-10). Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel spoke of Israel returning from exile and not returning in a millennium. Many

have confused a magnificent blessing of heavenly Canaan and new Jerusalem with a small piece of real estate and geography over in the Middle East.

We Reject:

Any attempts to understand current Middle East politics as a direct fulfillment of prophecy. The establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 and the reclamation of Old Jerusalem in the six-day war of 1967 are not spiritually significant. The Messiah will not reign on earth. Israel will not become the leading nation of the world. The Temple will not be rebuilt. Old Testament sacrifices will not be reinstated. The promises given to the descendants of Abraham do not apply to Jews at the time of the Millennium.

Statement 4

It Is Impossible To Date The 2nd Coming of Christ!

The Bible Says:

Matthew 24:36 “No one knows about that day or hour...”

Matthew 24:44 “The Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

I Thessalonians 5:2 “The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

Mark 13:33 “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”

II Peter 3:10 “The day of the Lord will come like a thief.”

We Believe:

Christ will come unexpectedly. The date of Judgment Day is uncertain. Christians must be in constant readiness. All signs of the end have been fulfilled so Christ could come at any time.

We Reject:

Any and all attempts to date the coming of the Messiah. Spiritual Kingdoms are not dictated by current events.

Statement 5

The Millennium Is Now—The New Testament Age! Revelation Is Figurative, Picturesque Language And Not Literal.

The Bible Says:

Revelation: The description of Jesus is figurative (1)
Many other portions are also figurative
Visions are used
Non-mathematical use of numbers

We Believe:

The mathematical number 1000 is also figurative and refers to the New Testament age. The Gospel will be preached and then the end will come (Matthew 24:13). Interpretations that

violate clear portions of Scripture cannot stand (John 18:36). The devil is loosed now. The souls of believers are reigning now in Heaven with Christ (Rev. 20 vs. 4). We may very well be in the last days when Satan's activity increases.

We Reject:

The 1000-year literal earthly reign of Christ upon the throne of David with regathered Jews in Palestine.

Statement 6

No Rapture of Saints Will Perched Christ's 2nd Coming!

The Bible Says:

Daniel 12:2 "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake! Some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

John 5:28 "All who are in their graves will hear his voice."

John 6:40 "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

I Corinthians 15:51,52 "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

I Thessalonians 4:13-18 "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."

We Believe:

Jesus will come from heaven and not earth to judge believers and unbelievers at the same time. Jesus will come with great noise on Judgment Day, the real rapture day.

We Reject:

The noiseless, invisible removal (rapture) of believers before unbelievers. Any attempts to present a two-stage judgment are false.

Statement 7

Christ's Return Will Not Be Measured By Years of Great Tribulation Numbered In Years Prior To Judgment! The Life Of A Christian In A Sinful World Is One of Tribulation!

The Bible Says:

Acts 14:22 “We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.”

Matthew 24:21,22 “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”

John 16:33 “In this world you will have trouble.”

Revelation 7:14 “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Matthew 10:34-36 “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

We Believe:

The entire time of the New Testament will be a time of tribulation. No kind of tribulation years are spoken of by Christ. The elect will be present till judgment. There will be severe trials for the Christian Church just prior to Judgment.

We Reject:

Any and all variations of tribulation years after the rapture of the saints. Believers will not be won for Christ if the Holy Spirit is removed (I Corinthians 12:3). Any 2nd chance for unbelievers after Christ’s return in judgment is false.

Statement 8
The Pope Is The Antichrist!

The Bible Says:

II Thessalonians 2:1-12 “The man of lawlessness”

We Believe:

The Roman Papacy is the Antichrist of II Thessalonians 2:3.

We Reject:

Any references that describe the Antichrist as a future world dictator.

The teaching of the millennium is a clever tool of the devil to introduce teachings that compromise and endanger God’s offer of grace. It puts man’s hope on the temporal instead of the eternal. Such thoughts invent new purgatories, limbos, or twilight-zones between heaven and earth. No longer do unforgiven souls fear punishment but simply wait for Christ’s 2nd wordily kingdom or at worst look forward to annihilation.

Free books circulate to perpetuate millennium errors. A few may be read. Many of us received the book *88 reasons why the Rapture could be in 1988*. Most people can repel obvious errorists like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons. But the TV evangelists are more subtle. It is not as easy to spot. They too the prime time preachers—are Millennium Misfits. But don’t take my word for it. They can speak for themselves.

Billy Graham

In *World Aflame* Billy Graham says (p. 185): “A new world is being born. A new social order will emerge when Christ comes back to set up His Kingdom. Swords will be turned into pruning hooks, and the lion will lie down with the lamb. A fabulous future is on the way.” In fact, he calls it a Utopia (p. 180).

Dr. Graham insists (p. 182): “The longing and dreams of mankind will be fulfilled, as God establishes His glorious Kingdom on earth for the enjoyment of mankind.”

Graham says (p. 187): “The second coming of Christ will be so revolutionary that it will change every aspect of life on this planet. Christ will reign in righteousness. Disease will be arrested. Death will be modified. War will be abolished. Nature will be changed. Man will live as it was originally intended he should live.” Sounds good? Note: you will still be a sinner, still get sick, still die. Note the words in the quotation: arrested, modified. Later he speaks of this alleged millennium only as a time “when disease and death would be almost nonexistent” (p. 193) and “when sin and its evil deeds would be limited and restricted” (p. 194).

Oral Roberts

“The climax of all human thought and action will not only tell the TIME for the coming of Christ for his church and the signal for him to rapture the saints out of this world, but it will also signal the time for the rising of Antichrist, and the completion of Satan’s program on the earth, the last world dominion of man, the mark of the beast, and worldwide persecution of all who worship the true God. Antichrist will stamp his mark, the number 666 in some form, indelibly on either the forehead or the right hand of all people who are without faith in God. Though the world today is clamoring for Antichrist, a superman who can lead them in their sinful ways, this enemy of God cannot come as long as the bride of Christ is on the earth. Jesus will come first for the saints, then Antichrist can be revealed. The rapture of the saints will remove them from the sphere of Satan’s power (which is this world). It will also permit the rise of Satan’s champion, Antichrist, who in a brief period of months will bring to a complete climax all human evil on earth.” *The Oral Roberts Reader—1958*

Rex Humbard

The following excerpt from a Rex Humbard TV show was presented by Pastor Arnold Wolfgramm in his 1984 conference paper on the TV evangelists. “Rex Humbard sees nuclear war coming after the rapture. “If you were writing 2600 years ago, and you were going to describe an atomic warfare and a soldier on the field, I want you to listen to this and I ask you to describe it better. Ezekiel ((he means Zechariah)) chapter 14:12 - ‘And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet.’ While they’re standing, suddenly their flesh will all be gone. There’ll be nothing but a skeleton. ‘Their eyes will melt in the sockets,’ before that corpse can hit the ground.” (1/15/84) Rex continues to describe the atomic warfare from a Bible reference I was not able to find. “The Bible goes on and says, ‘And when someone comes by, and sees this corpse, they dare not go near, but they call the special carriers of the dead, who remove that body to a graveyard beyond the Dead Sea (over in Jordan) where no man dare go that way.’ How can you describe radiation any more than that?” (1/15/84)”

Pat Robertson

“Pat Robertson of CBN has identified the European Common Market countries with the ten-nation confederacy mentioned in the prophetic vision of Daniel in the Old Testament (Daniel 7:24). According to Robertson, the entry of Greece into the European Common Market brings its membership up to ten countries and sets the stage for the rise of the Anti-Christ, a charismatic and winning person who is simply Satan in disguise, it appears. This person, Robertson says, will promise to lead the world out of the economic and social collapse toward which it is headed: ‘Undoubtedly, God’s purpose is a world harvest. Nevertheless, He has set other forces in motion. Within five years there will undoubtedly be a currency collapse and world depression of alarming proportions. During the same period, Russia will probably invade the Middle East and strike at Israel, causing a major war. On top of that, some astronomers forecast unusual gravitational pull on our planet when all the planets line up in 1981—the so-called Jupiter effect. This planetary activity could trigger earthquakes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, and other widespread natural disasters. In short, we will soon be entering turbulent days and what is done in Jesus’ name must be done quickly.’” *Prime Time Preachers* p. 96

Robert Schuller

“Not all the TV preachers believe and say the same things about the coming ‘end time’. Some (notably Robert Schuller, who is not a fundamentalist) would disassociate themselves completely from any such speculation. Many of the major TV preachers, however—Falwell, Robertson, Robison, Bakker, Swaggart, and most of the lesser lights of gospel broadcasting—do believe in some form of millennialism. The ‘millennium’ is a prophesied thousand-year period of events on the earth surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus. Premillennialists believe Jesus will come before the millennium, to reign for a thousand years, finally defeat all the forces of evil, and claim the world for God. Postmillennialists believe that Jesus will come to reign after the thousand-year period of seeing the gospel finally conquer the world. Most TV preachers are premillennialists.” *Prime Time Preachers* p. 94-95

Robert Schuller’s basic approach has five basic emphases:

- A) Possibility thinking
ala Norman Vincent Peale—*Power of Positive Thinking*
- B) Leadership by the pastor is the key
- C) Impress the unchurched
- D) Don’t be controversial; always be positive
- E) Have a good staff and educational program

Robert Schuller is an ordained minister of the Reformed Church in America. He avoids preaching on anything that is controversial. In his efforts to reach the unchurched he believes the pastor who preaches on controversial subjects may be tempted to take a public stand that would be at variance with the thinking of half the congregation and thus turn them away. What would you expect from a man who doesn’t say anything about sin either? It must be said that he believes that the educational program of the church is the proper forum for controversial subjects. Here controversial issues are discussed with the 1100 members who come regularly. As far as Robert Schuller and the millennium—who knows?

Jerry Falwell

“A Soviet invasion of the Middle East will bring ‘some nuclear holocaust on this earth...And Russia will be the offender and will be ultimately totally destroyed.’ This will happen ‘on the mountains of Israel’; indeed, Falwell has even discovered that Ezekiel 39 predicts

that ‘five-sixths (83 percent) of the Russian soldiers will have been destroyed.’ But Falwell is more cautious than Lindsey in predicting dates, saying, ‘I do not think we have 50 years left. I don’t think my children will live their full lives out, as I probably will’ (quotations from Lang, p.5, and ‘The Rev. Jerry Falwell on Nuclear Armageddon’ (unpublished paper, The Christic institute).” *The Reformed Journal*—June 1987 p. 12

Herbert W. Armstrong

“According to Armstrong, the Bible reveals God’s master plan for humanity from its beginning on into eternity. This plan is primarily the history of the nation of Israel and of the system of gentile world empires from Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon down to the Second Coming of Christ. The purpose of the article is to show what Bible prophecy reveals about world events now leading to the end of the world. Revelation 13 is a message given to John ‘for you and me of this day.’ Like other premillennialists, Armstrong believes that the symbols of Revelation 13 stand for real, literal things. The interpretation of these symbols must be guided by the Bible itself. Since the figures appear also in Daniel 7 with an interpretation, that interpretation then applies to Revelation 13 as well. Instead of interpreting ten horns as representing a new phase of the fourth kingdom, as Lindsey does, Armstrong views them as ten succeeding kingdoms or governments growing out of the fourth kingdom (Dan. 7:24). Because of the sequence of kingdoms in Daniel 2, Armstrong concludes that the ten successive governments span the time between the end of the fourth kingdom and the Second Coming of Christ. According to Armstrong, nine of the ten governments succeeding the Roman Empire have already appeared. The tenth kingdom is still future: it will be a United States of Europe consisting of a federation of ten European nations.” *Interpretation*—July, 1986 p. 232-233

Had enough? I believe you have the picture. Most of the big-name TV evangelists are millennialists. Millennium errors salt and pepper their theology. Pastor Robert Zink calls millennialism a false hope and formidable threat in a 1978 paper delivered on the subject. He calls attention to five basic errors in teaching a millennium.

- 1) Millennialists do not follow Scriptural principles of interpretation.
 - a) Scripture is the Word of God. The correctness of a teaching comes from Scripture.
 - b) Jesus Christ as Savior is central to the Scriptures.
 - c) All doctrines must be based on clear passages.
 - d) No Scripture explanation is permissible which violates clear passages of Scripture.
 - e) No Bible passage must be lifted out of context.
 - f) Each passage has only one Spirit intended meaning.
 - g) God is truth. He will not contradict Himself.
 - h) Understand the Bible literally unless Scripture itself says it is figurative.
- 2) Millennialists clearly distort and contradict many clear and plain doctrines of the Bible.
- 3) Millennialism is more world centered than Christ centered.
- 4) Millennialists do not center on what God has done for us in Christ in the past, but mainly on what He will do for us in the future.
- 5) Millennialism refuses to see the Old Testament prophecies of Christ as being fulfilled already, and looks rather still for some future fulfillment.

We have our work cut out for us. In spite of the recent scandals among the TV evangelists, they are here to stay. Our people will continue to turn them on. The music is soothing and success is satisfying, but the doctrine is diabolical.

Bibliography

- 1) A combination of articles on the millennium from *The Northwestern Lutheran* entitled, "The Millennium—Is it Christian?" This is available at the Seminary bookstore.
- 2) *Millennialism: A False Hope and Formidable Threat* by Pastor Robert J. Zink—June 13, 1978 (conference paper).
- 3) *The Television Evangelists—What are our People Hearing?* by Pastor Arno J. Wolfgramm—February 9-10, 1984 (conference paper).

Numbers 2 and 3 are available through our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.