



## The Message of Peace

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

Each celebration of Christ's birth brings with it anew the comforting message of peace. Men at this time, regardless of religious persuasion, pause and reflect with stirred hearts on the meaning of peace. But we need to ask ourselves: what does that "peace on earth . . ." Mean which the angelic hosts sang over the Manger of Bethlehem?

We join joyfully in that angelic hymn without grasping what that peace, which Christ brought into the world, really consists of. Peace is very often taken as meaning simply the absence of conflict or as the harmony which man succeeds in establishing between conflicting points of view or the resolving of differences in a give-and take dialogue.

But peace, as God reveals it to man, is a paradox. It comes with battle and is for man to have and to enjoy who has finished the conflict within the soul, or rather, who finds himself in the very process of conflict. **Christ is the "Prince of Peace" only because he engaged the Devil in a contest which was won on the Cross and in His triumphant resurrection.** Genuine peace demands a sacrifice. It necessitates contending with the powers of disturbance and disruption. Peace is man's to own as a gift of faith. But it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as Saint Paul tells us.

The price that man must pay for peace is warfare against sin. It is the spiritual battle in which each believing and practicing Christian is engaged. True peace comes with militant vigilance as over against false peace which flourishes on complacency. "Peace on Earth" does not look to re-

ducing all virtues to one unity. It does not seek to varnish over religious and ideological differences among men for the sake of togetherness. Peace which Christ promises to those who accept Him as Savior comes by surrendering the self of sin and renouncing false beliefs and lies that are inspired by that "father of lies" – the Devil.

Christ does not tell us to put aside all strife in the cause of peace. On the contrary – and this might appear strange – the peace that is of Christ is made possible to man only through conflict, the inner struggle of the soul against the powers of evil which separate him from God. There is a battle to be waged in the cause of Christ. It is the contest against the power that seeks to deceive man and to lead him to his eternal perdition.

Saint Paul teaches us that "Christ is our Peace", and yet Christ sets us clear on one point: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). And according to the evangelist Luke (12:49), Christ said: "No, I tell you, but rather division. I came to cast fire upon the earth". Is this a self-contradiction and an inconsistency? How can we reconcile Christ as our peace with Christ as a bellicose provoker?

The paradoxical truth spoken by our Lord can be understood only by the individual who has been regenerated in faith and baptism. **Christ came to disrupt false peace that knows no distinction between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between darkness and light, between the true God and the false gods.** Peace is divisive. It separates

man from sin and unites him with Christ. There can be no commitment to Christ without the rejection of the Devil and all his angels and followers.

Peace knows no compromise between truth and error. It shuns co-existence between believer and unbeliever. "What has a believer in common with an unbeliever"? (2 Cor. 6:15). The "peace on earth to which Christ invites all men is not a negotiated peace, but a peace effected by the blood which He shed on Calvary.

Christ is our peace because He is our reconciliation. To be reconciled with God is to be separated from God's enemies. Separation is part of the normal picture of Christian experience. If the kingdom of Christ is still at war with the kingdom of Satan, how can the follower of Christ content himself with truces rather than press on for victories? He must be prepared to reject prejudices, pride, and even popularity for the sake of Christ. *"For henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two or two against three; they will be divided, father against son, and son against father..."*

May God enlighten us during this holy season of the Nativity so that we might know the difference between genuine unity and false unity, between genuine peace and false peace. "Better an honorable battle than a dishonorable peace". No one can disagree that the unity of Christians is urgent in our present day of unprecedented peril. But to purchase that unity at the staggering price of surrendering the fullness of the truth is a mockery of "peace on earth". Our responsibility, as Orthodox, is to grow in that unity with Christ at the Holy Table and to that heavenly unity to call those who remain in ignorance of Christ's historical Catholic and Apostolic Church and deprived of the plenitude of the Spirit.

## Why is there such an Interest in the Millennium?

by Joseph Abbate / President

This article is designed to place the historical pieces together in order to better understand when, how and why certain teachings on the Millennium had developed. In researching the historical origins of the subject, we find that it had originated in the early Jewish traditions of the pre-Christian era. The teaching went hand-in-hand with the Jewish belief in the interpretation of the 6 day creation account found in the Book of Genesis. Such teachings may be found in the Jewish writings of the Epistle of Elijah, Baruch and Tana Debe Eliyyahu, that latter positions the world into 3 separate ages. "The Age of Chaos", "The Age of Torah", and the "The Age of the Messiah".

This belief that the Messiah would then reign for a thousand years was continued by the early Christian writers of the Apostolic Period. Since an early belief in a 6 day period of creation had been viewed as taking place in 6 literal days, and as interpreted in the 2nd Epistle of Peter (3:8), "...do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day". This tradition is also found in the early Christian writings of The Epistle of Barnabas, The Fragments of Papias, St. Justin Martyr and St. Irenaeus.

The interpretation was that the earth would therefore experience a six thousand year period, (one thousand years for each day of the 6 day creation period) until the Messiah returns to reign in a "Day of Rest", (Gen. 2:2) numbering one thousand years. Genesis reads: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Gen. 2:2).

Saint Irenaeus teaches in his work, *Against Heresies*: "For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded.... And in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an

*end at the six thousandth year" (Chap. XXVIII: 3). He then writes that a restoration of the earth will take place. "... it behoves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated" (Chap. XXXII: 1). It was believed that after the Millennium, that the "Descent of the New Jerusalem" would take place: "John, the Lord's disciple, says that the New Jerusalem above shall [then] descend, as a bride adorned for her husband; and that this is the tabernacle of God, in which God will dwell with men" (Chap. XXXV: 11). Regarding this event, Irenaeus emphatically exclaims: "nothing is capable of being allegorized".*

So, we can get a glimpse of this teaching during the Apostolic period in which it was believed that after the millennium, that an eternal period would ensue with the descent of the New Jerusalem and God being eternal with His creation: "And in all these things, and by them all, the same God the Father is manifested, who fashioned man, and gave promise of the inheritance of the earth to the fathers, who brought it forth at the resurrection of the just, and fulfills the promises for the kingdom of His Son; subsequently bestowing in a paternal manner those things which neither the eye has seen, nor the ear has heard, nor has arisen within the heart of man" (Chap. XXXVI: 8).

Another prominent early Church Father of the day wrote: "And along with Abraham we shall inherit the holy land, when we shall receive the inheritance for an endless eternity, being children of Abraham through the like faith" (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1 / Justin Martyr, Dialog with Trypho Pg.259*). Both Irenaeus and Justin Martyr were not Jewish by descent, and had no need to defend a millennial teaching on Jewish theological grounds other than that the teaching had been passed down to them.

Historically, what brought about the greatest change to this teaching is the fact that the End Time prophecies which had specifically pertained to Israel no longer held relevance, since it's destruction by the hands of the Romans had been followed by the Diaspora of the Jewish people. Unfortunately, growing antisemitism had also arisen during much of the Medieval period from such prominent figures from Jerome to Martin Luther. This often resulted in purges of Jewish communities from the order of some Christian and Muslim rulers alike. This also included a rejection of end-time prophetic fulfillments of the nation of Israel. As the persecution of Christians had ended and the greater establishment of the Church had become more prevalent in government matters, the Church had been seen to replace anything which had pertained to Israel in Bible prophecy. This is commonly known as Replacement theology.

The established Church centered more on paving important Theological foundations during a time of a number of Christological and Trinitarian controversies. Eschatological writings mainly diminished until major events would occur, such as barbarian invasions from the Huns or Vandals would be at the very gates of Rome. **While the Church of the Apostolic period had struggled to just stay alive during the persecutions and looked forward to an upcoming external kingdom of perfect peace and justice, the later Christians of the 4th and 5th Centuries concentrated more on the newly established "Triumphant Church" which had overcome its persecutors and now reigned in the Roman seats of government.** This did not mean that the early Church had purposefully dismissed the importance of the inner kingdom of each believer. The Church was merely dealing with the important situations it was facing at the time.

A restored heavenly kingdom centered in Jerusalem went against the

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grain of the Medieval mindset. Early Premillennial teachings had morphed to such an extent that many leaders of the Church began connecting the Millennial doctrines with famous heretical figures of Christological controversies.

To make matters worse, it is known that a number of Western scribes had completely omitted St. Irenaeus' last five chapters of his writings "Against Heresies" (footnotes pg. 561 The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1). Western Church Father's such as Augustine had become weary of early Church interpretations of the Mystery of Iniquity or Irenaeus' eluding to 666, the mark of the Beast being that of "Lateinos" or the very Latin Roman Empire in which Augustine was residing.

The Algian sect of that time, which was a cult predominantly located in Asia Minor rejected the Book of Revelation altogether, even going so far to state that St. John had not been the author of Revelation, but rather attributed it to Cerinthus the heretic. These occurrences had been on the rise due to the view that a restored heavenly kingdom centered in Jerusalem was just too carnal. The depictions of indulging in feasting and drinking of wine in the kingdom of heaven, which was described in some early writings was also viewed by some as an over indulgence.

Probably the most infamous figure accused of Millennialism was placed upon Apollinaris. However, besides a brief mention found in the fragments of Papias on the matter, we have no proof of what Apollinaris exactly professed regarding the Millennium since his writings were destroyed. A late interpretation regarding the 2nd Ecumenical Council written during latter part of the 18th Century from St. Nicodemus of the holy mountain are found in a work called The Rudder (Pedalion). Nicodemus references a number of writings to the condemnation of Apollinaris' millennial beliefs, such as found in letters between Apollinaris and St. Basil. However, these letters fail to make any correlation of Apollinaris' beliefs on the matter of his condemnation specifically related to Millennialism. We only know of the condemnation of his heresy in which he claimed that the Logos replaced the human nature of Christ. We do know that certain correspondence between Basil and Apollinaris had been lost or have even been found to be possible

forgeries (St. Basil, The Letters translated by Roy J. Deferrari Vol. IV, Pg. 330). Nicodemus pinpoints the heretical teaching that: *"the righteous are to reign here on the earth as kings for a thousand years together with Christ, and thereafter to ascend to heaven; and on this account they have been called millennialists"* (Pedalion Pg. 202-203). So he is describing a heretical teaching of the day, in which there was no further continuation of Christ's kingdom after the 1000 year period, or a descent of the New Jerusalem, but that the saints would simply ascend to heaven afterwards. The Apostolic Fathers would have whole heartedly agreed with Nicodemus' interpretation on this point. It was often Irenaeus' descriptions of the great amounts of food enjoyed during the Millennium which Nicodemus, as well as a number of other Church Fathers complained about.

Nevertheless, nowhere in the records of the 2nd Ecumenical Council do we find millennial doctrines being condemned, but there was an important figure which may have played a crucial role to the addition of an important clause to the Creed during the 2nd Council. Over three decades prior to the 2nd Council, the clause *"Whose kingdom shall have no end"* was added to the Creed of Jerusalem in the year 350 A.D. (The Creeds of Christendom by Philip Schaff, Vol. 2, Pg. 41). St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who was Patriarch of the city at the time, had battled against the heresy of Marcellus, who held the belief that God only appeared as a Trinity, and after the end of the age, that the role of the Trinity would end and revert back to a single manifestation. St. Cyril wrote in detail on the specific subject of the scripture *"Whose kingdom shall have no end"* in his Lecture XV (The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers 2nd series, Vol. VII).

Describing this teaching of Marcellus, Cyril writes: *"And shouldest thou ever hear any say that the kingdom of Christ shall have an end, abhor the heresy; it is another head of the dragon, lately sprung up in Galatia. A certain one has dared to affirm, that after the end of the world Christ shall reign no longer; he has also dared to say, that the Word having come forth from the Father shall be again absorbed into the Father and shall be no more; uttering such blasphemies to his own perdition. For he has not listened to the Lord, saying, The Son*

*abideth for ever. He has not listened to Gabriel, saying, And He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end"*. So, according to Cyril, he attributed Marcellus' teaching that the Logos, which would be absorbed back into God the Father, in effect, would also be ending the reign of Christ. So it was most likely because of Marcellus, not Apollinaris, to which this clause was added to the 2nd Council.

As far back as the writings of Origen, we can also find a belief that the very universe would perish after the reign of Christ's kingdom was completed. *"The Benedictine editor suggests that Cyril "is refuting those who said that the Universe was to perish utterly, an opinion which seems to be imputed to Origen"* (The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers Second Series, Vol. VII, Lecture XV Pg. 105 footnotes). The accusations of this teaching had been directly pinned onto both the figures of Apollinaris and Marcellus. This is apparent in Nicodemus' mention of Apollinaris (The Rudder Pg. 202-203), and Cyril's description on Marcellus' teaching (Lecture XV). Both Cyril and Nicodemus are describing the same apparent heretical charge to these figures. This heresy was specifically that the reign of Christ would be limited, and would come to a complete end after the 1000 year period (Millennium) was over. As Nicodemus claims that the saints would: *"thereafter ascend to heaven"*. Unlike the Millennial teachings of the Apostolic Fathers such as Irenaeus or Justin Martyr, who taught that after the Millennial reign, that the kingdom would merely continue in a new form in which God's reign still remained eternal, such as after the descent of the New Jerusalem.

These transmutations of the Millennial doctrine would have been totally unacceptable to the Apostolic Fathers of the early Church. Later, during the Medieval period, the eschatological beliefs would even evolve further into something which would become completely unrecognizable to the earlier teachings of the Church.

It is possible that the addition of the clause which St. Cyril had added to the creed of Jerusalem in 350 A.D. was simply carried over to the 2nd Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 381 A.D. since Cyril attended the 2nd Council as well. In general, it

is declaring that no one should place time limits on God who is beyond time. St. Cyril exhorts: “*For as we may not speak of the ‘beginning of the days’ of Christ, so neither suffer thou any should ever speak of the end of His kingdom*” (*The Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers Vol. VII, Second Series, St. Cyril / Lecture XV, Pg. 114*).

A number of Church historians admit that a good portion of those who attended the 2nd Ecumenical Council probably still held an early Apostolic view of the Millennium. These were most likely from the Asia Minor region where the early teachings were looked at in a more literal view instead of an allegorical school of thought which were found to be more prominent in Alexandria or Rome at that time. According to historical theologian, Jaroslav Pelikan, “*chiliasm beliefs escaped official anathema by all of the early councils because they did not deny the creed*” (*The Christian Tradition, a History of the Development of the Doctrine Vol. 1*). In other words, they readily accepted all of the doctrines which had been established at the Ecumenical Councils. Though after the 4th Century, the literal interpretation of the Millennium was no longer promoted, but replaced by an allegorical one of Christ’s reign through the “Church Triumphant”.

The addition of the clause, “*Whose Kingdom shall have no end*” to the Creed may seem too simplistic or vague to some writers. Yet, it is important to note that this clause describes an eschatological mystery. Just as the clause “*Who created the heavens and the earth*” may seem to be a limited description in the Creed pertaining to the matter of God’s creation. It does not exactly explain in depth how the creation period is to be interpreted. Yet, it did counter some of the earlier Hellenistic philosophical thinking which taught of a preexisting universe in which the gods used the elements at hand for the creation of the earth. It was later described in the 4th western Lateran Council that an eternal God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, (*Ex Nihilo*). Though there may have been some Church Fathers which had minor differences on the subject of the creation, one did not necessarily feel threatened by the other’s interpretation. The creation account is left as a mystery. Yet it was

important to profess that God was the One who created the heavens and the earth, just as it is important to profess that God’s kingdom will have no end.

**They tried to stress that there were no time restraints when it comes to God who is uncreated, and no one should attempt to limit Him.** The way in which God will reign is a mystery and cannot be comprehended. To quote Father Stephanou: “*The Book of Revelation ends with the account of the descent of the New Jerusalem that ‘comes down from God out of heaven’.* *It is truly an awesome and dramatic event that defies rational ex-*



*planation. It is a mystery that staggers the human imagination. Nevertheless, it is a reality revealed in scripture and an unmistakable occurrence every one of us will have to face sooner or later”.*

The physical restoration of Israel in 1948 is probably the most important reason why there is such a great return of interest on the teaching of the Millennium. The air-waves are rife with teachings on the subject. Some Bible scholars have even devoted entire video series or have written books on the matter. **This is because they feel more confident now that the literal interpretations and fulfillments of prophecy concerning Israel can once again pertain to the present nation of Israel which has literally been restored.**

We have sadly, also witnessed a number of times in which violent revolts or brutal rulers have tried to usher in their own ideas of a utopian kingdom on earth. The most devastating being through Communism or through Hitler, who tried to establish his Third Reich, which he claimed would last for a thousand years. But to quote the philosopher Karl Popper: “*Those who promise us paradise on earth never produced anything but a hell*”.

There was an uptick in eschatological fervor after the fall of Constantinople in the year 1453. Yet, it was during the latter part of the Middle Ages in which we can see a reemergence in Millennial teachings, but by this time it had morphed into something unrecognizable from the early Church teachings. Groups such as the Taborites, as well as others which were involved in antipapal reforms often took to millennial doctrines. Some groups were gnostic in nature. A number of these groups which held special millennial views would continue to this day, such as the Jehovah’s Witness’ which are still referred to as “millennialists” in Greece due to their abusive eschatological interpretations. This resulted in a number of Protestant denominations during the 16th and 17th Centuries downright condemning these types of cults which often held some sort of millennial doctrine. Historically, there was also a large growth in Millennialism during the 1700’s with the Great Awakening as well as the 1800’s from John Darby and the Scofield Bible.

At the same time, as the discovery of America and the exploration of the New World had gained momentum. Many Christian settlers thought it would be a new opportunity to proclaim the Gospel, which reinforced their ideas of the reign of Christ on earth through the Church, which is also a main component of the post-millennial view. The same ideal was reinforced with European colonialization which brought about a reinvigorated spread of Christianity through missionaries to the ends of the earth.

## A CHRISTMAS GREETING

At this special time of the year, all of the Board of Directors of St. Symeon’s Ministry want to wish you and your family a Blessed Christmas Season! We want to continue the important Christmas message which the beloved, late Father Stephanou so boldly proclaimed. That we have eternal life through Jesus Christ Who came to earth on our behalf because “*The Logos became flesh and dwelled among us*”. It is God’s greatest gift to us. That we may know that we are never alone because God is with us. We thank you for your prayers and support.