

Varieties of Postmillennialism

Boyd Murrah, latest revision 12 Dec 2009

For those teaching the “restitution of creation,” rather than the “resurrection of creation,” the redemption in Christ essentially restores the Covenant of Creation. As some express it, this makes the destiny of the saved in Christ essentially the same in nature and glory as the destiny of man by original creation. What, then, comes of the glory of the Incarnation of Christ, his death on the cross, resurrection, ascension, session, etc.? In this view, these primarily serve to restore creation. Creation is restored through acts of glory for which God is glorified, but the final destiny of man is seen to be the same as the original destiny, without the adjuncts of Incarnation, etc. I assert that this downgrades the glory of God in the provision of redemption. It also changes the practical focus of the Christian religion away from glorifying God for redemption toward glorifying God for his creative power and government, as expressed in the original creation, rather than the new creation (resurrection). Thus, the abiding significance of the Incarnation is bound up with a work of the past. It served to restore our race to a state similar to the original creation, with blessings and destiny which would have been enjoyed without the Incarnation, if Adam had not fallen.

There is a different flavor to the worship and Christian worldview, when restitution rather than resurrection takes the lead. Redemption has its place, but falls into the background in the total picture of restitution, which becomes one of restoring the (original) world creation order, and seeing it perfected in this age, rather than perfected in a fully redeemed age of resurrection.

Varieties of Postmillennialism:

1. The kind of postmillennialism associated with the “restitution of creation” might see the creation restored by the holistic and thoroughgoing covenantal Law and Gospel, in some cases with a special emphasis on Mosaic case law. The emphasis on law becomes necessary because the restitution occurs in this age, with the powers available to the church in this age, with civil government, and the powers available to it, also. This absolutely means that Law is required. This would not simply mean ecclesiastical or spiritual influence over all institutions in the world, but rather would be seen as a legally unified social, political, ecclesiastical and economic movement of the redeemed humanity, progressing toward the destiny it would have had if Adam had not fallen. All this under the powers and stance vis-à-vis the world that the church enjoys in this aeon before the resurrection of the body. One might find certain brands of theonomy or full-preterism in this category.
2. On the other hand, a “Gospel” or New Covenant millennialism might see the millennium as produced by the spiritual fruit of the Gospel on the world scene and among the nations, with clear ramifications that extend to the social, political and economic orders. This millennium does not expect perfection on this earth in any sense, nor does it ever expect in this age complete closure and peace between life by the Spirit and fulfillment of the absolute requirements of the Law, but looks heavenward (and to the literal union of heaven and earth) for the final redemption of the Body of Christ at the resurrection. This is the vision that has produced “Christendom” in the past.

These are two substantially different varieties of postmillennialism, which are produced by two different orientations to history -- one to the restitution of the original creation, the other to the resurrection of creation which is to come. These different varieties must be distinguished.