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Adveniat Regnum Tuum. **The Millenium between Relevance and Mystery**

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Abstract

Of all the books of the Bible, the Revelation approaches the subject of eschatology in the most forthright way. The present study does not aim to provide an exegesis of the entire book, but rather to focus on a concrete, controversial theme, debated since the patristic period, but which remains of interest to this day, namely: the millennium issue. The complexity of this subject is also given by the tangent with other deep biblical themes. In this regard, below we will follow the main theories created over time related to the problem of the thousand-year kingdom and try to provide some pointed answers.

Keywords

Revelation, millennium, eschatology, exegesis, theories

I. Introduction

The whole of Christian theology revolves around the theme of eschatology. Whether we consider the Old Testament prophecies, the Gospels, or the Pauline epistles, they all speak directly or indirectly of a reality that has been announced as already present, but not yet *fully* present. Therefore,

exploring eschatology is important because it represents the foundation of our faith. The very fact that our entire liturgical rite is concentrated on the Resurrection of the Lord is further evidence that the center of Christian theology is in the eschaton. As Professor N.T. Wright remarked, what we believe about the end is the foundation for what we think about the present and for how we relate to the past¹. Of all the books of the Bible, the Revelation approaches the subject of eschatology in the most forthright way.

The present study does not aim to provide an exegesis of the entire book, but rather to focus on a concrete, controversial theme, debated since the patristic period, but which remains of interest to this day, namely: the millennium issue.

In this regard, below we will follow the main theories created over time related to the problem of the thousand-year kingdom and try to provide some pointed answers. *How long will this kingdom last? When and in what manner will it be inaugurated? Who will be part of it?* These questions found at the confluence of the anthropology and the eschatology are the fundamental dilemmas that we propose to debate in the present paper.

Regarding the methodology of research used, we applied the diachronic method for the patristic texts and the synchronic method for the specialized literature. For the exegesis of the biblical texts, we used the method of inductive study and philological analysis. The tools used are the bibliographic resources that include patristic writings, specialized studies, different editions of the Holy Scriptures and Greek dictionaries.

II. The problem of the millennium in the patristic period

One of the earliest text susceptible to a millenarian touch is the Didache. However, the text is inconclusive². Millenarianism takes a more conclusive

¹ Tom WRIGHT, *Surprins de speranță (Surprised by Hope)*, transl. Florentina Galiger, Metanoia, Oradea, 2016, p. 23.

² Bartolomeu V. ANANIA et al., (eds.), *Învățătură a celor Doisprezece Apostoli (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 1, trans. by D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1979, p. 32.

shape, however, in the apocryphal Epistle of Barnabas. Besides, Pseudo-Barnabas is also the one who first brings up the main patristic argument for a sabbatical millennium. Thus, Pseudo-Barnabas, starting from the fact that God created the world in six days and from the quotation from Ps. 89(90), 4, concludes that the world will end when it reaches the age of six thousand years. As such, after six thousand years of active existence, there follows the sabbath, the seventh day, when evil will be removed from the world and the Sabbath will be truly sanctified, for the first time, according to the 4th commandment. In relation with this sabbatical millennium, Pseudo-Barnabas does not make any other clarifications than that this period will represent the reception of God's pledges, complete rest and will facilitate the sanctification of the Sabbath. At the end of this period will follow the eighth day, which will represent the beginning of a new world. Pseudo-Barnabas likens this eighth day to the day of the Lord's Resurrection, and directs the conclusions of his reasoning to the celebration of Sunday as the Lord's Day for Christians. Thus, we can see that with this epistle there begins to be a demarcation between profane history and a sabbatical period. The main argument for the choice of millennial intervals (six thousand and one thousand years respectively) is related to the ratio of days in the account of creation and the literal understanding of the fact that a thousand years is like a day with God. The perspective of Pseudo-Barnabas, although foreign to classical millenarianism, can be considered one of its roots through the temporal and qualitative delimitation of history.

One of the classical authors who is brought up in connection with early millenarianism is Saint Irenaeus of Lyons. Indeed, his work, *Adversus haereses*, seems to contain references to a millenarian view of the eschaton. However, there are no explicit references to this doctrine³. Saint Irenaeus, however, has made some harsh comments regarding the allegorical approach to exegesis, a fact that led some of his readers to consider him a follower of the literal reading of Scripture, and therefore of the fragment Rev 20, 1-6. Moreover, when he approaches the end of time, St. Irenaeus brings up the same reasoning that we also encountered in Pseudo-Barnabas, namely the ratio between the six days of creation and the

³ This may also be due to a lack of a well-developed millenarian doctrine at that time.

age of mankind correlated with the ratio between a day and a millennium. The sabbatical millennium in the vision of Saint Irenaeus is a period of rest and joy for God's Saints, a period in which God's people enjoy all the fulfillment of all His pledges. An essential focus of the fulfillment of these promises is the spatial setting - the New Jerusalem, which is earthly. The world will not be destroyed, but metamorphosed, and the New Jerusalem will come down to Earth to be the home of God's Saints. They will receive their reward on Earth because Earth is where they lived their lives for God⁴. To conclude, it is true that we can observe some parallelism between premillennialism and the eschatological vision of Saint Irenaeus. However, although the arguments that Saint Irenaeus presents develop in the direction of a millenarian eschatology, they do not seem to have the intention of drawing the boundaries of a distinct eschatological doctrine.

Another author of patristic date, contemporary with Saint Irenaeus, is Saint Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher. Saint Justin is also one of the ancient authors cited in connection with early millenarianism. If Saint Irenaeus's belonging to the millenarian doctrine can be questioned due to the lack of a specific language assumed, Saint Justin's situation is different. Saint Justin unequivocally expresses the belief in a millennial, earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, which will precede the general judgment and resurrection. The arguments he brings, in addition to the two temporal reports that we also encountered in Saint Irenaeus, are related to the text of Is. 65:17-25, a text on eschatological peace. Another argument that St. Justin makes, correlated with the temporal exposition of the 6 days-6000 years reports, is that Adam was not a thousand years old when he died. What is outrageous in Saint Justin's approach is the intransigence with which he proclaims the millennial doctrine as defining for the identity of Christianity. Thus, whoever denies millenarianism is not worthy to be called a Christian, although, he admits, there are bona fide Christians who have not heard of this teaching. In conclusion, if in the case of the Didache or in the case of Saint Irenaeus there could be doubts regarding a clear

⁴ Sfântul Sfințit Mucenic IRINEU AL LYONULUI, *Aflarea și respingerea falsei cunoașteri sau Contra ereziilor (Finding and Rejecting False Knowledge or Against Heresies)*, vol. 2, trans. by Dorin Octavian Picioruș, Teologie pentru astăzi, Bucharest, 2007, pp. 435-452.

argumentation in favor of millenarianism, in the case of Saint Justin the text is categorical⁵.

Origen begins his discourse about the promises with a criticism of the hedonism through which some authors interpret the eschatological prophecies. In this sense, Origen condemns the simple literal reading of the Scripture, which he attributes to the refusal of any intellectual effort to understand the spirit of the Bible. In addition to the intellectual latency he invokes, Origen also claims a passionate inclination toward the pleasure of the flesh that determines the material understanding of some spiritual promises. In this exegetical area criticized by Origen fits the image of an earthly Jerusalem⁶ determined by the abundance specific to the Old Testament eschatological prophecies. The conclusion Origen draws is that those who interpret the Scripture in this way, although they believe in Christ, understand eschatology in a Jewish manner⁷. The next part of the speech is dedicated to a spiritualization of the text. Origen explains that eternal food is not food *per se*, but divine wisdom, a nurture whose role is to bring man in the stadium of the image of God thoroughpaced in his likeness. In conclusion, although Origen makes no explicit reference to the millenarian doctrine, he criticizes the literal interpretation of Scripture that the millenarians claim. Also, Origen does not seem to indicate any temporal delimitation of time, other than the classical one, history-eternity. He shows how the eschatological promises will be fulfilled in a spiritual

⁵ Sfântul IUSTIN, *Dialogul cu iudeul Triphon* (*The dialogue with the Jew Triphon*), coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 2, trans. by T. Bodogae, O. Căciula, D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1980, pp. 187-190.

⁶ It is interesting that Origen specifies, as the material focus of the apocalyptic image of Jerusalem, the composition of the foundation of the city which will be made of 12 precious stones. Andrew of Caesarea in his commentary on the Apocalypse, however, sees in the 12 precious stones the portraits of the 12 Apostles.

⁷ The meaning of this statement remains an open question. What is the specificity of Jewish eschatology for Origen? What should be the specifics of Christian eschatology applied to the text of Rev 20, 1-6? Such questions, unfortunately, remain unanswered. However, a careful reading of the Old Testament eschatological passages can lead us to the observation that, most often, God's pledges to the people in connection with the eschaton are expressed in terms of material abundance. Thus, Origen's statement could be correlated with his criticism of the literal interpretation of Scripture. But this correlation remains only a working hypothesis for now.

manner that does not fit a literal and hedonistic reading of the scriptural text⁸.

Another author who addresses the theme of the millennium is Eusebius of Caesarea. More of a historian than an exegete, Eusebius presents the two major positions on millenarianism existing in his time. The two positions are represented by established authors. Although Eusebius attempts an objective historical exposition of the theme debate, his personal opinion can be seen in some of the mentions he makes. Eusebius begins his presentation with the position of Papias of Hierapolis, who is a millenarian. Papias, says Eusebius, believed in a literal and material kingdom of a thousand years. Eusebius states the possibility that Papias may have misinterpreted a passage in a literal way when the correct approach would have been a symbolic one. From this it appears that Eusebius did not agree with the literal interpretation of the passage Rev 20, 6, and therefore with the millenarian doctrine. Next, in order to clarify the doctrine, Eusebius uses the writings of Nepos to outline the thousand years in the form of a period of fulfillment of carnal pleasures. This is the same hedonistic perspective that Origen was disproving of. In what follows, Eusebius mentions Dionysius of Alexandria who, in his work *On Promises*, combats Nepos. Finally, Eusebius presents Cerinthus as the author of the chiliastic doctrine, which he mentions as being considered by some the true author of the Revelation. Eusebius concludes with some hermeneutical considerations in favor of the Johannine authorship of Revelation⁹.

A masterful approach to the problem can be found in St. Augustine's writings. He begins his excursus from the problem of the two deaths and the two resurrections raised by Rev 20, 6. He states that those who consider the first resurrection to be a bodily one are deeply influenced by millennialism. St. Augustine then presents the two sides of millennialism outlined up to his time, namely the sabbatical perspective of Saint Irenaeus and the hedonistic perspective of Cerinthus and Nepos. Following the

⁸ ORIGEN, *Scriseri alese (Selected Writings)*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 8, trans. by C. Galeriu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1982, pp. 179-181.

⁹ EUSEBIU DE CEZAREEA, *Istoria Bisericească (Church History)*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 13, trans. by Prof. T. Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1987, pp. 142-144, 293-299.

presentation of the two literal readings of the text, St. Augustine proposes two allegorical methods of interpretation. The first of them is based on a synecdoche by which Saint John would use the millennium as a part to talk about history as a whole, thus the period of eschatological peace understood as the millennial kingdom would, in fact, represent eternity. The second variant would be based on what current specialized literature calls amillennialism. Thus, the kingdom of a thousand years in Rev 20, 6 represents the Church period, the history of the world from the First Coming of Christ until His Second Coming. Finally, Saint Augustine offers a geometrical explanation for the reason for using the number 1000 as a perfect symbol for a plenary time, a rationale he considers sufficient for the allegorical interpretation of the millennial kingdom¹⁰.

Other patristic commentaries on the Revelation are, for example, those of Saints Ambrose of Milan and Andrew of Caesarea. Both of them provide succinct interpretations of the fragment Rev 20, 1-7 in an amilenarist manner¹¹. Also, the two make some remarks that are worth mentioning. Thus, Saint Ambrose, on the one hand, presents a universal interpretation of the priesthood explaining that the priests referred to in Rev 20, 5-6 are, in fact, the saints of God¹². Saint Andrew, on the other hand, is concerned with the problem of the two deaths and two resurrections in v. 6. Therefore, he states, there are indeed two deaths and two resurrections, but the first ones must be understood in a spiritual sense, and only the latter ones in the literal sense. This would be an indication for the positioning of Saint Andrew outside the boundaries of the millenarian doctrine, but in the absence of a clear delimitation, this indication can only give us a simple hypothesis¹³.

¹⁰ Saint AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, Books XVII-XXII, trans. by Gerald G. Walsh, Daniel J. Honan, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 1954, pp. 264-269.

¹¹ See Sfântul AMBROZIE EPISCOPUL MILANULUI, *Comentar extras la Apocalipsă* (*Commentary on Revelation*), trans. by Gheorghe Băbuț, Pelerinul român, Oradea, 1991, p. 244, respectively, Sfântul ANDREI ARHIEPISCOPUL CEZAREII CAPADOCHIEI, *Îlcuire la Apocalipsă* (*Interpretation of the Revelation*), trans. by Gheorghe Băbuț, Pelerinul român, Oradea, 1991, pp. 132-133.

¹² Sfântul AMBROZIE, *Comentar extras la Apocalipsă*, p. 244.

¹³ Sfântul ANDREI, *Îlcuire la Apocalipsă*, pp. 134-135.

To conclude, the patristic literature on the millennium dilemma is unable to provide a complete direction of exegetical analysis for several reasons. Firstly, the fact that we cannot place the emergence of millennialism as an established doctrine at a particular moment in history because of strictly allusive and tangential approaches, is a problem. Secondly, these tangential approaches are due to the fact that the topic of millennialism itself has not been given enough importance to be a topic of debate in its own right. Thirdly, since there is no debate focused on millennialism as a doctrine, the patristic literature does not provide any rigorous exegesis of the text of Rev 20, 1-7 correlated with the other scriptural texts of eschatological relevance. Thus, in the face of all these shortcomings, the patristic literature is not able to draw conclusions about the thousand-year kingdom, but only to open directions. These directions are, in fact, the modern theories that we will analyze in what follows.

III. Modern theories of interpretation

III.1. The premillennialism

The premillennial theory was, says Robert Clouse¹⁴, the predominant eschatological theory of the Church until the 4th century. It can be divided into two different doctrines, historical premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism. We will provide a brief presentation of both doctrines, pointing out the common characteristics and the differences between them. The historical premillennialism is, as George Ladd states, the doctrine that argues that the Kingdom of Rev 20, 1-6 will be inaugurated before the completion of Christ's plan of salvation. Here, then, are the first two characteristics: the millennium exists in its proper sense, and it will be inaugurated before the conclusion of the plan of salvation. A first consequence would be the fact that this statement implies two kingdoms of Christ, one temporary and one eternal. The notion of premillennialism refers to the fact that the thousand-year kingdom will unfold after the

¹⁴ Robert G. CLOUSE (ed.), *Semnificația miei de ani (The Meaning of the Thousand Years)*, trans. by Ramona Simuț, Logos, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, pp. 9-10.

Second Coming, but before the completion of the plan of salvation and judgment, postulating the defeat of evil as unfolding in two stages. The term “historical” explains the exegetical preference for literalism and historicism in interpretation. In this regard, Ladd makes statements such as: “The Old Testament is being reinterpreted in the light of the Christian event”¹⁵; “The Old Testament did not foresee clearly how his prophecies will be fulfilled”¹⁶; “the prophecies of the Old Testament about the first coming of Christ were fulfilled in a literal manner”¹⁷. It is not yet time to analyze the argument above, but we must mention that, although we agree with some aspects specified by Ladd, the existence of a contradiction in his speech is obvious. This is the exegetical working method, the literal approach to texts, implicitly that of Rev 20, 1-6, through which Ladd draws his conclusions. In the following, we will look at some punctual aspects regarding his theory. The skeleton of these aspects is built based on some queries that we will apply to each theory, namely: *How long will this kingdom last? When and in what manner will it be inaugurated? Who will participate in it?*

The answer to the first question is facile as it emerges precisely from the name of the theory, premillennialism. The prefix “pre-” does not refer to the temporal idea, but serves to place the kingdom after the Second Coming. The word millennialism refers to the concept of a thousand-year kingdom that would emerge from Rev 20, 1-6, thus the duration of the kingdom expected by premillennialists is one thousand years.

In relation to the following two questions, we take into consideration two broad possible directions. We are, therefore, talking about a spiritual direction and a worldly one. So, how will the establishment of the kingdom take place? George Ladd claims that Christ’s kingdom is a messianic, spiritual one. A crucial point he makes is that the kingdom was already inaugurated with Jesus’ coming to Earth. But what makes this kingdom still awaited is its hidden character from the world. The authority with

¹⁵ George Eldon LADD, “Premilenarismul istoric” (“Historical Premillennialism”) in: Robert G. CLOUSE (ed.), *Semnificația miei de ani*, trans. by Ramona Simuț, Logos, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p. 24.

¹⁶ G. E. LADD, “Premilenarismul istoric”, p. 30.

¹⁷ G. E. LADD, “Premilenarismul istoric”, p. 23.

which Christ will rule then is the divine one, and it will be established after the first Resurrection¹⁸. We notice, therefore, that in the present case we are talking about two literal resurrections. The first inaugurates the kingdom, and the second refines the eschaton. As to the time of the coming of the thousand-year reign, the author gives us no clue. The fact that the nature of the kingdom will be spiritual is relevant in relation to the fatalistic theories that announce wars and cataclysms at its inauguration or during the Great Tribulation. We will discuss this aspect in more detail when we come to dispensational premillennialism.

Participation in the millennial kingdom is reserved for the saints. Saints are those people who live according to the truth of the Gospel. They will be resurrected or metamorphosed into the post-paschal state and thus take part in Christ's thousand-year reign on Earth. But all the people the kingdom will find alive on Earth will live with them. The only ones left out of the equation will be those who are dead at that time and will not qualify for the first resurrection. A problem that arises here is the way in which the coexistence between the saints in glorified bodies and ordinary people will be possible. Another question that arises, especially for those familiar with the first epistle to the Thessalonians (cf. I Thess 4, 13-18), is why would the dead be excluded from the millennial kingdom? The Jewish people would represent another problem to analyze. Finally, other difficulties arise when we consider the issue of the Great Tribulation in this key. If the Church is not on Earth, how will be people saved? But if the people still turn to God, they convert, won't they constitute the Church? How will the Jews be saved, as part of the Church or as part of the chosen people? We therefore see that the exegetical questions that arise in this chapter are numerous. But we will discuss them in the analysis chapter.

The dispensational premillennialism, Hoyt argues, is the embodiment of the betterment of all mankind. The dispensational kingdom will be ushered in, says Hoyt, at the end of the Great Tribulation "in its fullness" in a supernatural and catastrophic manner¹⁹. The distinctions we had above in the case of historical premillennialism are also valid in the present case.

¹⁸ It is about the first resurrection in relation to the text of Rev 20, 6.

¹⁹ Herman HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist" ("The Dispensational Premillennialism") in: Robert G. CLOUSE (ed.), *Semnificația miei de ani*, p. 69.

Dispensationalists show a preference for a literal interpretation of the Old Testament, with the difference that, while they also support New Testament literalism, they often deviate from it. As in the case above, we are talking about two Kingdoms, or, as Hoyt calls them, two stages of the same reign. There is, therefore *the universal kingdom* and *the intermediate kingdom*, the latter representing the golden millennium of humanity²⁰.

As for our queries, we already have the answer to the first of them. Dispensational premillennialism, being still a premillennial doctrine at its core, presents the same temporal implications as in the case of historical premillennialism. We will see, however, that the term dispensationalism brings with it some specific characteristics. The Latin verb *dispenso*, *dispensare* denotes the action of directing, arranging or administering something. Dispensations, a term used by dispensationalists, means certain periods of time in the history of salvation. Thus, dispensationalism is the doctrine that presupposes the interpretation of biblical revelation in the light of progressive history reflected at the level of dispensations. This interpretation is based on a literal exegesis.

For the second question, Herman Hoyt places dispensationalism in the same period after the Second Coming. However, the mention that the inauguration of the kingdom will be catastrophic is frightening. In this case, Hoyt relies on the writings of authors such as Hal Lindsey, who constructs from the Revelation a real conflagration sprinkled with natural cataclysms of the most diverse kind²¹. Images like that of nuclear missiles that spring from texts like Rev 6, 2 delight contemporary fatalists²².

The latter question raises the same issues as with historical premillennialism. The kingdom is a spiritualized one. How will the coexistence between the saints and the unmetamorphosed people be achieved? One difference that appears in relation to Ladd's doctrine is the role of the Jewish people. The demarcation of the chosen people from the Church is a specific characteristic of dispensationalism that turned the independence of 1948 into a cosmic event. Thus, the Church represents

²⁰ H. HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist", p. 90.

²¹ See footnotes 23 and 50.

²² See, for instance, Hal LINDSEY, *Apocalypse code*, Western Front Ltd., Palos Verdes, CA, 1997, p. 72.

for Hoyt only a parenthesis to the history of the chosen people. Through the millennial reign with the chosen people, he argues, the covenant that God made with David was fulfilled. However, God promised David that his descendants would sit on an eternal throne²³. Indeed, a thousand years is a long period of time, but one that nevertheless has an end. In this sense, chapters 9-11 of Romans are relevant. Here we must define the eschatological entity through which salvation will be achieved during the Great Tribulation, which is described in this case by the grafted olive tree. Is Israel a distinct entity from the Church? Is the church grafted and assumed by the eschatological entity represented by the chosen people? Remains to be discussed.

III.2. The postmillennialism

The postmillennialism is, according to Loraine Boettner's definition, the doctrine of the deepest aspirations towards prosperity²⁴. Regarding the temporal idea, the postmillennialism argues that the millennium will be *before* the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, history will follow its natural course reaching a Christian climax, that climax will mark the beginning of the millennial kingdom, which will be purely spiritual and immaterial²⁵. At the end of this millennium, understood as an extension of history, the Second Coming will take place. We must specify from the beginning the fact that postmillennialism is the doctrine closest to amillennialism and, implicitly, to the orthodox vision regarding the kingdom of a thousand years. Thus, many of the exegetical problems raised by premillennialism will find their solution much easier. Postmillennialism placing the kingdom after the Great Tribulation has nothing to do but admit the fact that at the Coming of Christ the resurrection of the dead and judgment will immediately take place.

Regarding our inquiries, the first of them unravels in a similar way as in the case of premillennialism. Lexically speaking, millenarianism presupposes the existence of a kingdom of one thousand years. This also

²³ H. HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist", p. 89.

²⁴ Loraine BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul" ("*The postmillennialism*") in: Robert G. CLOUSE (ed.), *Semnificația miei de ani*, pp. 133-134.

²⁵ L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", p. 137.

cuts through a philological debate, namely that of translating the text of Rev 20, 6 as referring to a thousand years or thousands of years. However, Boettner unreservedly argues that the millennium that postmillennialists await is not necessarily to be taken literally. This fact is due to the preference that postmillennialists, unlike premillennialists, show for the figurative-symbolic interpretation of the Scripture. Boettner defines the millennium as a long and indefinite period, but leaves room for concessions only regarding a time interval longer than a thousand years²⁶.

In relation to the time and manner of establishing the millennial kingdom, postmillennialism brings one of the most novel perspectives. Postmillennialists do not foresee a physical reign of Christ and, therefore, do not expect His Second Coming to occur as the beginning of the kingdom²⁷. Rather, Boettner argues, the millennium is the spiritual reign of Christ in the hearts of men. Thus, the postmillennialism manages to solve several exegetical difficulties. If we are not talking about a physical coming of Jesus on Earth, and the renewal of the world will take place only after this coming, the problem of a catastrophic end of the world is eliminated. If the Parousia is placed at the end of the millennium, it will inevitably be accompanied by the judgment. Furthermore, if the establishment of the kingdom will not take place in a supernatural manner, the kingdom itself being only an extension of history, the resurrection of the dead may also be moved beyond the boundary of the Parousia. However, the postmillennialist discourse has its shortcomings. In this case, the argumentation of the direction of the historical world towards a Christian apogee must be followed. Is the world really getting better? What does the Bible tell us about the course of history?

The answer to the latter question is among the examples where the difficulties of interpretation are resolved with greater ease in postmillennialism than in premillennialism. If the postmillennial kingdom is not supernatural and spiritual in an extrinsic sense, if Christ will not have come to Earth yet, if the resurrection of the dead has not yet taken place, it means that the participants or witnesses of this kingdom will be all the people who are alive at that time. The Millennium, in this case, might as

²⁶ L. BOETTNER, "Postmilénarismul", p. 134.

²⁷ L. BOETTNER, "Postmilénarismul", p. 133.

well be now in full swing, the only problem with this hypothesis being the failure to meet the conditions to fit our times into what postmillennialists mean by the golden age of humanity²⁸.

III.3. The amillennialism

The amillennialism is the system closest to the Orthodox Church's vision of the millennium. In what follows, we will analyze Anthony Hoekema's amillennialist perspective, and then, in turn, give an exposition of Rev 20, 1-7 in an amillennialist manner within the exegesis section of our paper. Terminologically speaking, amillennialism appears to be a word close to premillennialism or postmillennialism. Millennialism has in all three cases the same meaning, which is nuanced by the specific prefixes. In the case of amillennialism, "a-" is not a proper prefix, but represents a privative "a", which has the role of canceling the meaning of the word with which it comes into contact. Thus, lexically speaking, amillennialism would be the doctrine that denies the millennium. In this sense, Boettner seems to misunderstand the definition of the amillennialism²⁹. Hoekema, on the other hand, counters this claim with a terminological observation. He draws attention to the fact that the term amillennialism is not exactly the most suitable for the meaning of the doctrine it defines. This mismatch is precisely related to the negative aspect the term amillennialism implies. Amillennialists do not deny, as Boettner argued, the existence of the millennium. No serious exegete can cut out pieces of the Scripture. However, amillennialists speak of a millennium that has already begun with the coming of the Savior to Earth. In this sense, Hoekema recalls the terminological proposal formulated by Jay Adams: *realized millenarianism*³⁰. In essence, the amillennialist perspective on the nature of the millennium is similar to the postmillennialist. What strikes us is the nonchalance with which Boettner makes the above statement, being blind

²⁸ L. BOETTNER, "Postmillenarismul", pp. 142-151.

²⁹ "The amillennialists, of course, reject both the postmillennialist and the premillennialist perspective. Most of them are content to say that the thousand years will not exist at all, neither literally nor figuratively", L. BOETTNER, "Postmillenarismul", p. 138.

³⁰ Anthony A. HOEKEMA, "Amilenarismul" ("The amillennialism"), in: Robert G. CLOUSE (ed.), *Semnificația miei de ani*, p. 176.

to the similar nature of the two perspectives. For amillennialists, as for postmillennialists, the millennium is not strictly limited to a period of one thousand years. In the case of amillennialism, one millennium has already passed, and in the case of postmillennialism, there is no limitation from the literal threshold that Rev 20, 6 would impose³¹. For both amillennialists and postmillennialists, the millennial kingdom represents a hidden hypostasis of the present history, which is unfolding in this world. It will not be ushered in by supernatural phenomena, at least not by any other than those which the Incarnation has already brought about. Thus, any attempt to fit the Apocalypse into the contours of a catastrophe is out of the question. Finally, for both amillennialists and postmillennialists, the end of the millennium will culminate in the Parousia, which will be followed by the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. The similarity between the two currents is already obvious. However, the existence of a relative compatibility between the two theories does not guarantee that no contradictions or exegetical problems arise between them.

Moving on to the part dedicated to the questions, we notice that although the answer to the first question seems to be a facile one, it is still impossible to formulate. The millennium does not exist in a literal sense for amillennialists, but the millennial reign of Christ is in full swing at the present time³². Considering the phrase *realized millennialism*, we come to the conclusion that the period of Christ's reign has already begun with the work of salvation that Jesus did on Earth. The present conclusion eliminates several questions that we faced above. The inauguration of the kingdom is no longer a mystery to be discerned because it has already taken place. Regarding the duration of the kingdom, however, we cannot give dates. We know that the reign has begun, we know that it will pass into a new stage of existence, but we do not know when this transition will occur. Amillennialists, like postmillennialists, do not understand Rev 20,

³¹ Boettner himself states: "It (i.e., the thousand years) will be brought about by forces now at work in the world and will extend over a long and indefinite period of time, probably longer than a literal thousand years". L. BOETTNER, "Postmillenarismul", p. 134.

³² A. A. HOEKEMA, "Amilenarismul", p. 192.

6 to mean a fixed period of a thousand years. For amillennialists, the reign has begun, a thousand years have already passed, but we cannot say more.

The second query may bring with it doubts about its relevance. If the amillennial kingdom has already been inaugurated, what is the point of debating the timing of its establishment as if it had not occurred? Consequently, the method of establishment would not be of any interest if we take things this way. Well, both the time and the manner are still relevant because they are the very core of all Scripture. If the moment of the inauguration of the kingdom is Christ's life on Earth, the relevance emerges precisely from the fact that it is His life that gives meaning to the world. He incarnated when God deemed history ready for God to reveal Himself to it by making Himself relevant to it. If the way in which Christ's reign began in the world is precisely His saving activity, we must realize that by excluding it we are left with nothing from Scripture³³. Indeed, these two aspects have already been realized, therefore we cannot speak of them as if we were still waiting blindly for them, but no doubt about their revelation is legitimate.

The answer to the last question seems to be the most obvious. If the kingdom has already been inaugurated, we are all part of it. However, premillennialism raises the question of the resurrection. If there will be no premillennial resurrection, where are the dead? If there is such a resurrection, where are those who are not worthy of the first resurrection? If, however, we are not talking about a first premillennial resurrection, how do we stand in relation to the text? Such questions will be addressed in the exegesis chapter.

III.4. Orthodox hypotheses

In addition to the above theories that we have presented using authors from protestant backgrounds, we will also analyze some synthesis fragments regarding millennialism extracted from orthodox works. We will, therefore, consider the Universal Church History manual of the Romanian Patriarchate and the commentary on Revelation by Savvas Agouridis. In the final chapter, dedicated to exegesis, we will also make

³³ See, for example, Anthony A. HOEKEMA, *Biblia și viitorul (The Bible and the Future)*, trans. by John F. Tipei, Societatea Misionară Română, Wheaton Illinois, USA, 1993.

use of an extensive and pertinent commentary by the orthodox theologian T.L. Frazier.

The Church History textbook, coordinated by Fr. Prof. Dr. Viorel Ioniță, offers a brief, ambiguous and superficial approach to the problem of millennialism. The few pages the textbook devotes to millennialism succeed in raising more problems than they solve. Firstly, the main argument that millennialism should represent nothing more than a misreading is that *Revelation is not talking about a thousand years, but thousands of years*. Indeed, the synodal Bible (BOS) offers such a translation. But most of the other translations talk about *one* thousand years, some examples would be: the Bădiliță edition, NTB, NTNS, SBB1921, VBRC, ECDR, BB1705, BRC, KJV. Also, neither the Vulgate nor the VBG give any indication that the thousand years should be understood, grammatically speaking, as a plural. Thus, without providing any grammatical analysis of the Greek text, the present argument is null. Secondly, the textbook briefly reviews the major interpretive theories of the millennium. The inclusion of different cults in the presented theories is interesting. Thus, the author claims, Roman Catholics and Calvinists are amillennialists, and most Protestant and neo-Protestant cults are premillennialists. What draws our attention is the fact that the Orthodox Church does not adhere to any theory, nor does it offer any alternative position. Moreover, the presentation of theories is yet another proof of the superficiality of the approach. Regarding premillennialism and postmillennialism, the author makes a confusion: the two theories are not placed, as he claims, before or after the end of the world, but before or after the Second Coming³⁴. Normally, the Second Coming would coincide with the end of the world, for premillennialists and amillennialists, but not for postmillennialists. For postmillennialists there is a period of about a thousand years between the Second Coming and the end of the world, which is precisely the millennial reign of Christ. In relation to amillennialism, the author of this chapter makes another confusion, he mixes it with preterism, which is an interpretive current that

³⁴ Regarding the absurdity of a millennial kingdom after the end of the world, we provided a more detailed approach below in the case of Savvas Agouridis' comment.

aims at the whole Revelation, not just the millennium³⁵. Finally, the chapter devoted to millennialism concludes with the statement that although there is still a growing interest in millennialism in the West, the early Church clarified this subject, a statement with which we also disagree³⁶.

Savvas Agouridis is the author of a volume of commentaries on the book of Revelation, also translated into Romanian. On the question of the millennium, Agouridis also has an ambiguous and superficial approach. Without offering any clear position on the text of Rev 20, 5-6, he asserts that the amillennialist version could be easily dismissed. In support of this statement, he brings several biblical quotations, almost devoid of relevance, to demonstrate the symbolic character of the millennium period. Proving that the millennium is actually a symbolical, allegorical period is what the amillennialists also do, but instead of pushing the boundaries of the millennium to a longer period, as Hoekema does, for example, Agouridis limits the millennium to a much shorter period than a thousand years. In fact, on an allusive level, the millennium for Agouridis could also be the length of a man's life. The reason why for Agouridis the amillennial thesis is impossible is the fact that during the millennium Satan must be bound, or, he says, in the early Church the devil had a very intense activity. The shocking part comes later. Also, in an ambiguous, but nevertheless assumed manner, he claims that the millennium is, in fact, an antechamber, a bonus prepared for the martyrs of the first Christian century, which will be given to them as a special reward after the Resurrection and the general judgment. Being in the same register as the postmillennialism of the Church history textbook, we must say that such a theory is simply nonsensical. Firstly, it is absurd to have a kingdom that is eminently temporary in its millennial sense in the midst of the eternal kingdom. Secondly, at the level of textual logic, the millennial kingdom appears in chapter 20 in v. 6, and the judgment in vv. 12-14. After the judgment Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death, while during the kingdom in v.

³⁵ Beniamin Farăgău makes a pertinent classification of the various interpretive theories of the book of Revelation, see Beniamin FARĂGĂU, *Apocalipsa 4-22 (Revelation 4-22)*, Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, pp. 13-16.

³⁶ Viorel IONIȚĂ et al., *Istoria bisericească universală (Universal Church History)*, vol. 1, Basilica, Bucharest, 2019, pp. 199-201.

6 he will only be temporarily bound. There is, therefore, no option of a millennial kingdom after the Judgment³⁷.

IV. Critical analysis

IV.1. The premillennialism

The premillennialism, as presented by Ladd and Hoyt, is indeed very similar to what the millennialists of the patristic period meant by chiliasm and the literal interpretation of Revelation. However, the occurrences of such perspectives are too few to lend credence to claims such as Clouse's³⁸. according to whom the premillennialism was the prevailing view of early Christianity. In his commentary on Revelation, T.L. Frazier argues just the opposite, namely the predominance of amillennialism in the patristic period³⁹. However, it is extremely difficult to determine which was the prevailing doctrine two thousand years ago and, given the decentralization of ideas and exegetical approaches correlated with the motivations behind the debate⁴⁰, it is almost useless to focus our attention on hierarchizing the popularity of interpretive directions in the patristic period. What should arouse our interest in relation to each individual theory is the possibility of fitting it into the textual logic of Revelation and Holy Scripture.

Ladd begins his exposition by stating that the premillennial idea that Jesus, after the Second Coming, will reign for a thousand years before the actual end of the world and before the Judgment, is the most natural way

³⁷ Savvas AGOURIDIS, *Comentariu la Apocalipsa Sfântului Ioan (Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John)*, trans. by Constantin Coman, Editura Bizantină, Bucharest, 2004, pp. 290-292.

³⁸ See note 14.

³⁹ T. L. FRAZIER, *A doua Venire a lui Hristos (The Second Coming of Christ)*, trans. by Tatiana Petrache, Egumenița, Alexandria, 2007, pp. 420-424.

⁴⁰ As we have seen above, the debates over the millennium were merely outgrowths of broader disputes such as the preference for literalism or allegorism, Johannine authorship, or the hedonistic interpretation of Old Testament prophecies. The fact that millenarianism was not debated per se resulted in less complex and focused approaches, sometimes even superficial.

to understand Revelation 20, 1-6⁴¹. He then goes on to explain the logic of Rev 20, 1-6 by claiming that the defeat of evil will happen in two stages, delimited by the two resurrections that vv. 5-6 imply⁴². Ladd's excursus is so loaded with intertextual references between Revelation and other biblical texts that the omission of texts such as I Thess 4, 17 or I Peter 4⁴³ is barely noticeable. In fact, given that for Ladd the premillennial version is the most natural way to understand Rev 20, he does not seem to consider it necessary to prove the coincidence between the establishment of the millennial kingdom and the Second Coming.

The naturalness of such an interpretation for Ladd is deciphered by his preference for the literal method of interpreting Scripture⁴⁴. We must note, however, that Ladd's literalism, as well as Hoyt's, as we shall see, is selective. In connection with chapter 20, for example, the period of the kingdom is literally a thousand years, and the two deaths and resurrections are both understood as such, but the binding of Satan in chains is not understood as a cosmic prison with shackles and bars, but as a limitation of the power of evil⁴⁵. Moreover, Ladd seems to have no problem allegorically interpreting the metaphor of the grafted olive tree in Rom 11⁴⁶ or the four beasts of Dan 7⁴⁷, but leaves no hint of doubt as to the literal reading of Rev 20⁴⁸. However, Ladd's preference for the literal method differs from that of dispensationalists in his greater emphasis on the New Testament over the Old Testament. In this sense, Ladd builds a whole argument about how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament beyond its own basic

⁴¹ G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", p. 19.

⁴² G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", pp. 19-20.

⁴³ This chapter speaks of the coming of the end and gives exhortations for spiritual living in preparation for the end, in tune with I Thess 4. It is interesting that, similarly to the text in I Thess 4, I Pet makes no reference to any intermediate kingdom. Was it such an unimportant aspect that it was not worth mentioning even on an allusive level? Shouldn't the reality of the intermediate kingdom have been revealed to St. Peter? Hard to believe.

⁴⁴ G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", pp. 22-23.

⁴⁵ G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", p. 45.

⁴⁶ G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", p. 31.

⁴⁷ G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", p. 37. Here a mention is necessary, the Romanian edition cites chapter 2 of the book of Daniel, in fact the text that Ladd paraphrases is from chapter 7.

⁴⁸ G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", p. 41.

meaning in light of the Christian event. Thus, he makes statements such as: “[The Old Testament is being reinterpreted in the light of the Christian event]”⁴⁹; “[The Old Testament did not foresee clearly how his prophecies will be fulfilled]”⁵⁰; “[the prophecies of the Old Testament about the first coming of Christ were literally fulfilled]”⁵¹. The question that inevitably arises from such statements is, if the Old Testament prophecies about the first Coming were fulfilled literally, how can we say that the Old Testament did not clearly foresee how the prophecies would be fulfilled? In fact, no prophecy, whether from the Old or the New Testament, is described in the smallest detail. An eloquent example can be drawn from the analysis of Pauline eschatology in the two epistles to the Thessalonians⁵². Revelation itself remains an almost indecipherable mystery, the book of Daniel is explicitly presented to us as a mystery (Dan 12, 4). Prophecies are not meant to be exact maps to the future, but compasses with which Christians can guide themselves.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the main ideas of Hoyt’s dispensationalism, we must mention the fact that Ladd succeeds in offering a reconciliatory and well-argued biblical perspective regarding the conflict between Israel and the Christian Church as eschatological entities⁵³. As for the millennium, however, the omission of relating the texts of I Thess and I Peter alongside a selective literalism leads us to believe that Ladd’s approach is subjective, therefore, unconvincing.

Dispensational premillennialism is similar in many ways to historical premillennialism. However, there are also specific characteristics such as

⁴⁹ G. E. LADD, “Premilenarismul istoric”, p. 24.

⁵⁰ G. E. LADD, “Premilenarismul istoric”, p. 30.

⁵¹ G. E. LADD, “Premilenarismul istoric”, p. 23.

⁵² The two epistles to the Thessalonians are a response to the eschatological turmoil of the world at that time. Although St. Paul addresses issues of interest to the community of Thessalonica regarding the last times, such as the temporal problem, the unfolding of events and the appearance of the man of lawlessness, we can see that the language is not specific, and the answers are not exactly punctual. For a broader approach to these aspects, see Dumitru-Adrian CIUREA, “Οὐκ οἶδατε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν. Perspective de eshatologie nou testamentară” (“Οὐκ οἶδατε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν. Perspectives of New Testament Eschatology”) in: Ion REȘCEANU et al. (eds.), *Opus Discipulorum*, vol. 13, Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova, 2022, pp. 144-150.

⁵³ G. E. LADD, “Premilenarismul istoric”, pp. 27-32.

the prominence of the fatalistic character, the interest in dating the end, and the different perspective on the eschatological relationship of the two entities - Israel and the Church. Also, the dispensationalist premillennialism also grants a special importance to the physical character of the intermediate kingdom, as well as an absolute literalism, at least at the declarative level, of the interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies⁵⁴.

The use of literalism in biblical exegesis has always been problematic⁵⁵. Since the first Christian centuries, there has been a conflict between the followers of literalism and the followers of allegorism. However, the two methods should not be opposite, but complementary. There are certainly passages that must be read literally, just as there are passages that cannot be understood other than allegorically. The most important constant in this equation, however, remains the discernment of using the appropriate method of interpretation for each text. Thus, the extremist preference for one of the two reading methods will never be able to provide a sound exegesis of the holy text. In fact, although Hoyt is an adherent of absolute literalism, especially regarding the Old Testament, it is very clear that he himself deviates from the proposed exegetical method. For example, like Saint Justin, Hoyt quotes the text from Is 65, 17 which he says describes the intermediate kingdom⁵⁶. The truth is that the text does not give us any clue that could lead us to the conclusion that the state of the world which the prophet describes is an intermediate one, and not the eternal one. Passages like Is 65, 19.23.25, do not fit the description of the millennium as it appears in Rev 20⁵⁷. During the millennium evil is not eradicated but limited, wars still exist, because the battle against Gog and Magog still has to be fought. Moreover, the millennium will come to an end, and after it will follow another short period in which evil will be unleashed, a period that does not even appear allusively in Isaiah's prophecy, just as the intermediate character does not appear, not even allusive. Additionally, the

⁵⁴ H. HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist", pp. 86-88.

⁵⁵ In relation to dispensationalists' consistency with the literal method, one can follow Lindsey's explanations of various images in Revelation. A short summary of the images deciphered by Lindsey can be found in LINDSEY, *Apocalypse Code*, p. 36.

⁵⁶ H. HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist", p. 92.

⁵⁷ Fragment which, as we already mentioned, is the only explicit mention of the millennium.

mere fact that Hoyt simultaneously supports the literal interpretation and asserts that the Old Testament prophecies describe the millennial kingdom in a physical way is sufficient evidence of his exegetical inconsistency⁵⁸.

The relationship between Israel and the Christian Church as eschatological entities is one of the important eschatological issues that any commentary on biblical eschatology should address. In Hoyt's view, the relationship between Israel and the Church is one of parallelism, therefore, Hoyt states that Israel and the Church are two separate eschatological entities whose destinies are not convergent, but parallel⁵⁹. Such a perspective is shaped by two principles that dispensational eschatology, as it emerges from Hoyt's exposition, follows. It is about the belief in a pretribulation rapture⁶⁰, based on the text of I Thess 4, 17 and about the view that all Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel are to be interpreted strictly literally. In relation to the first aspect, the pretribulation rapture, we will limit ourselves to presenting two counterarguments. On the one hand, the passage I Thess 4, 17 is the only biblical text that could refer to the rapture and only allusively. However, in our opinion, the text does not refer to a rapture that would have in mind the transition to an intermediate state, but the very transition to eternity. We have at least two reasons to support such a view. Firstly, the end of the verse is categorical about the permanent nature of the state to which the *rapture* makes the transition "[...] and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (KVJ). Then, the verb ἀπάντησιν, from ἀπαντάω⁶¹, to meet someone, to encounter someone, corresponds to a circumstantial sentence of purpose that limits the meaning of the rapture to the purpose of the meeting, of meeting the Lord, of the transition from the mundane reality to the spiritual reality. This meaning is reinforced by a second circumstantial sentence of purpose, coordinated with the first one by the copulative conjunction καὶ. Thus, the text of I Thess 4, 17 is clear enough about the eternal nature of the transition that the *rapture* involves.

⁵⁸ Because there is absolutely no explicit reference to the millennium anywhere else except in Rev 20.

⁵⁹ H. HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist", p. 76.

⁶⁰ H. HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist", p. 102.

⁶¹ cf. Henry G. LIDDELL, Robert SCOTT, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 178.

The preference for an uncompromising literalism in dealing with Old Testament prophecies runs the risk of ignoring the exegetical norm that the New Testament applies to these prophecies. There are numerous examples of the apostles interpreting Old Testament texts other than in a literal manner texts in the New Testament. Two well-known examples would be the texts of Hosea 11, 1 and Amos 9, 11. The respective text in Hosea, although literally, contextually, historically, refers to the return of Israel from Egypt, is interpreted by the Evangelist Matthew as a Christological text (cf. Matt 2, 15). Furthermore, the text in Amos also would refer to a first glimpse of a future restoration of David's tabernacle. If we were to read the prophecy of Amos literally, we should relate it to the rebuilding of the Temple, or by means of a moderate allegory, the restoration of the chosen people. However, Acts 15 presents a different perspective on the prophecy of Amos 9, 11. During the Apostolic Synod in Jerusalem, Apostle Jacob quotes this text in connection with the work of salvation that God performed through Jesus Christ and through which *he raised the fallen tabernacle of David*, precisely so that it *would open to the Gentiles*. The fact that the authors of the New Testament use the allegorical method to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament is a sufficient argument to legitimize the use of metaphorical interpretation in approaching Old Testament prophecies. Thus, Hoyt's approach according to which *all* Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel *must be* interpreted literally does not stand up. Moreover, the Pauline theology deals quite extensively with the eschatological relationship between Israel and the Church, and this is by no means a parallel one, but, on the contrary, convergent. The most eloquent example can be found in the epistle to the Romans. The whole of chapter 11 speaks of Israel's fall as being temporary (Rom 11, 25), of God not changing His mind about His promises to His people (Rom 11, 29), and of the fact that Israel will ultimately be saved (Rom 11, 26). Essential to the Israel-Church relationship is the image of the olive tree, into which the nations are grafted and into which Israel will be grafted again (Rom 11, 23). Thus, in the end, the Church and Israel will not represent two different hemispheres of God's redemptive work, but will constitute a unitary whole⁶², because the exclusivist barrier given by the status of

⁶² In relation to the final unity between Israel and the Church, we must note that it emerges primarily through the common way of entering eternity with God, namely, through faith, cf. Rom 11, 23, Rom 11, 20-22.

the chosen people has fallen (Eph. 2, 11-18), without Israel ceasing to be the chosen people of to God (Rom 11, 28). Therefore, this would be the biblical perspective on the Israel-Church relationship, presented in a succinct manner. The debate on this issue is extremely wide and is not the direct object of our paper, but our conclusion is that an absolute and eternal fault between the Church and Israel as eschatological entities cannot be argued.

The obsession with the physical nature of the kingdom described by the text of Rev 20 is perfectly consistent with the dispensationalist inclination towards fatalism and the gradual division of history that this doctrine practices. One possible explanation for the fatalistic inclination in approaching the inauguration of the intermediate kingdom would be that, in the absence of any explicit Old Testament prophecy regarding the millennium, dispensationalists tend to confuse prophecies regarding the messianic period and eternity with prophecies that would speak of the millennium⁶³. Addressing this issue must begin with the observation that Hoyt's exposition is flawed. While he asserts the manifest and future character of the intermediate kingdom, he omits a good part of the texts relevant to the present theme. Thus, we will use these very texts to evaluate the two ideas that emerge from Hoyt's presentation of the intermediate kingdom. Against both the physical character and the strict future character stand texts such as Matt 16, 28, Lk 17, 21 and Jn 18, 36. The fragment of Matt 16, 28 makes it clear that the Kingdom of God has already been inaugurated since the time of the Savior's life⁶⁴. On the other hand, the passage Lk 17, 21 points to a spiritual, intrinsic understanding of the Kingdom, emphasizing its hidden character, a fact that the text in Jn 18, 36

⁶³ An observation is necessary here. When it came to the announcement of the Messianic era that was to come, the prophets did not consider that it could be Two Comings of Christ and not just one. From the reading of the Old Testament, there is no allusion to the fact that the coming of the Messiah will not be the first and the last. For us there is no difficulty in understanding the role of the Two Comings, but the Jews, for whom the Old Testament represented the Scripture, considered that the appearance of the Messiah in the world would represent the Parousia. Hence the confusion and disappointment generated by the fact that Jesus did not immediately establish the promised eschatological Kingdom.

⁶⁴ Another option would be that people from the Savior's time would still be alive, which is implausible.

explicitly restates. However, even though the Kingdom is already here, it has not yet been fully inaugurated. St. Ap. Paul brings such a perspective if we read in parallel the fragments of Col 2, 12; 3, 1 and Phil 3, 11-12. The text from Colossians talks about the Resurrection, which is a coordinate of the Kingdom of God, as being already accomplished, while the text from Philippians describes it as a future reality constituting an exhortation to work with God in order to acquire it. The two passages are not contradictory, but complementary and circumscribe a paradoxical reality in which the present and the future are intertwined. Thus, taking these texts into consideration, we cannot agree with the physical, fatalistic and strictly future perspective of the intermediate Kingdom.

IV.2. The postmillennialism

The postmillennialism, as presented by Loraine Boettner, while a seductive perspective on eschatology, cannot be firmly grounded in the biblical text. To summarize Boettner's presentation, postmillennialism supports the idea that the world is on its course toward a general state of well-being⁶⁵. Christianity is to grow, wars to cease, the Gospel to become the norm and not the exception, and evil to reach minimum levels⁶⁶. This climax would be the boundary between world history as we know it for two thousand years, and the golden age of the apocalyptic millennium. This millennium would be a long and indefinite period, probably longer than a thousand years, would represent the spiritual reign of Christ in the hearts of men, and would end with the coming of the Lord marked by the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the passing of the world into eternity⁶⁷.

Before we discuss Loraine Boettner's arguments in favor of this theory, we must state a few points with which we agree. Firstly, we agree that the millennium spoken of in Rev 20, 4-6 is a long and indefinite period. Secondly, we agree with Boettner when he says that the Kingdom of Christ is already here in the hearts of men⁶⁸. We also agree with him regarding

⁶⁵ L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", p. 133.

⁶⁶ L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", p. 134.

⁶⁷ L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", p. 133.

⁶⁸ cf. "(...) the kingdom of God is within you" Lk 17, 21 (KJV).

the statement that the Second Coming of Christ will coincide with the Resurrection of the dead, the Judgment, and the world's transition to its eternal state of existence.

However, there are also aspects we cannot agree on. Firstly, as much as we would like to believe that the world is moving toward a Christian apogee⁶⁹, Boettner fails to prove this thesis biblically. The main argument he brings is the Great Commission of disciples to preach in which, he says, we should not only mean a symbolic proclamation of the universality of the Gospel, but a prophecy of the effective evangelization of the whole world⁷⁰. Beyond any philosophical argument regarding freedom, such a perspective collides head-on with numerous biblical texts that speak, on the contrary, about apostasy, the climax of evil, the world's departure from faith⁷¹, and which Boettner completely ignores. The other argument in favor of the thesis of the golden age of history is constituted by some demographic statistics and a laudation brought to the social and technological progress recorded in the last centuries⁷². There are two major problems with this argument as well. The first of them is the fact that, although on the one hand Boettner is right about the advance of society in certain areas, on the other hand, the world is not getting better. We must give him extenuating circumstances in relation to current events like the Covid pandemic or the

⁶⁹ It is interesting that while he supports the Christianization of the whole world at one time, he nevertheless antagonizes the papacy as one of the enemies of Christianity, see L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", p. 135.

⁷⁰ L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", pp. 134-136.

⁷¹ The eschatological discourse, whether we are talking about the Pauline epistles or the Revelation, has as a theme the conflict between good and evil. A component of this theme is precisely the moment of reaching the peak of evil. This moment, in fact, also represents the point where God, the good, intervenes and the final battle is fought that will result in the victory of God and his believers. The second epistle to the Thessalonians precisely identifies the apostasy and the appearance of the man of lawlessness as conditions for the coming of the end (II Thess 2, 3-4). The context of the end-time world is circumscribed by terms such as blasphemy, apostasy, and rebellion. Moreover, the Johannine discourse in Revelation abounds with images specific to war to illustrate the fight between good and evil (Rev 6, 2; 6, 4; 9, 16; 11, 7). In the Revelation, as well as in Pauline eschatology, the course is the same: increasing evil that reaches its peak and is finally defeated by good. Boettner's perspective, in this context, simply does not fit.

⁷² L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", pp. 142-151.

Ukraine crisis, as he didn't live long enough to witness them, but the 20th century was not exactly Heaven on Earth either. The Balkan Wars, the two World Conflagrations, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Spanish Flu, and Cholera are just a few examples where the 20th century showed no signs that humanity was heading for the golden age of history. Unfortunately, as with the previous argument, Boettner shows subjectivism by completely ignoring all these events in human history. The second problem with the present argument is that it has no relevance to the text of Rev 20, 4-6. Even if we were to agree that the world is moving for the better, this does not support the postmillennial perspective. The fact that, as we have seen, such progress has no biblical foundation forces us to abandon such certainties, as does the unpredictable course of history. Who could have predicted in 2015, for example, that in the next 5 years humanity will have to deal with a new pandemic? Who can predict today what will happen tomorrow, and how can we be sure of the ideal destination when even the Bible does not refer to it?

In conclusion, Loraine Boettner's presentation of postmillennialism lacks a solid biblical foundation. Boettner's exposition falls more into the category of fairy tale, promising what every man would like to hear, but without a credible argumentative basis. The final point, the one for which we cannot take this postmillennialism argument seriously, is precisely the fact that Boettner does not provide an exegesis of Rev 20, 1-7, which is the only biblical passage referring to the thousand-year kingdom. Taking into consideration all of the above, Boettner's postmillennial argument is not credible.

V. The exegesis of the fragment Rev 20, 1-7

V.1. General considerations on Revelation

The first consideration that we must keep in mind is the ratio between the relevance that the revealed character gives to the book and its mystery

aspect. The divine revelation, concentrated in the pages of the Holy Scripture and in the Holy Tradition, is the step that God takes towards humanity to reveal Himself to the world. The fact that the Revelation, like the other books of the Bible, is part of the Divine Revelation means that it was given to us for a purpose and that it is relevant. The notion of some, like Hal Lindsey, that Revelation is a code for the last generations is absurd. The divine message is universally relevant and transmitted precisely to be understood. Each book from the Bible has its own context, its own specifics, its own author and its own purpose, but all of them as a whole form God's message to humanity. To say that a part of this message is indecipherable for 90% of the history since Christ is absurd. On the other hand, the Holy Scripture, and especially prophecy in general, also has a mysterious character. It indicates a general direction, even predicts the future, but never in the smallest detail. Such an understanding of Christian prophecy as a literary genre is in total agreement with the dogmatic understanding of the relationship between man and God. Man can have knowledge of God, in so far as He reveals Himself, but man will never be able to understand with his mind the incomprehensible immensity of His Being. Thus, the reading of the book of Revelation must be one that proposes an understanding of the message in agreement with the other books of the Holy Scripture, but in a balanced manner, without trying to violate the mystery of God.

The literary motifs used in the Revelation are numerous and have deep reverberations throughout the Scripture as a whole. All this makes the interpretation of the text of Revelation a true journey through the entire Scripture. The typological approach is also specific to the Revelation. This involves the construction of portraits, a sum of characteristics that is applied to an object or a being, real or imaginary, and that describes a future reality that will meet all the archetypal characteristics of the model presented in the text.

V.2. The fragment Rev 20, 1-7

The first three verses of chapter 20 are important to the way we read Revelation, namely the chronological reading and the progressive-cyclical

reading. The progressive-cyclical reading assumes the existence of several spiral cycles that each develop the entire mystery of defeating evil from beginning to end. The fact that in vv. 1-3 the temporal connection of evil is presented, which is definitively defeated only in 20, 10 clarifies the belonging of chapter 20 to a distinct cycle from chapter 19. In chapter 19, the same defeat of evil takes place in v. 20, thus a reading chronologically from beginning to end would assume that in chapter 20 evil has already been defeated.

Verse 4 is relevant to delineate the framework in which the thousand-year kingdom is spoken of. The phrase we saw indicates the transition to a different spatial setting than in vv. 1-3. The spatial framework of vv. 1-3 is the earthly one, because John sees an angel coming down from Heaven, that is, to Earth. The presence in v. 4 of the image of thrones, which throughout the book of Revelation is a defining image of the heavenly framework⁷³, refers to the change of perspective from the telluric one to the heavenly one⁷⁴. This distinction helps us to clarify the two resurrections. Thus, as St. Augustine claimed, the first resurrection must be a spiritual one.

In connection with verse 5, Hoekema makes an interesting observation. The Greek *ἄχρι* translated *până ce* (BOS), *until* (KJV), refers to the permanence of death for the unbelievers throughout the millennium described by vv. 4 and 6. The conclusion of this observation, Hoekema continues, is that the second death has no power over believers who have died (Rev 20, 6), by way of consequence, it has power over unbelievers who have died⁷⁵. This would be an argument for the qualitatively different understanding of those two deaths and resurrections, as we saw, for example, in St. Augustine⁷⁶, or in St. Andrew of Caesarea⁷⁷.

Verse 6 presents the reality of the first resurrection in the form of a cause-and-effect relationship. The first resurrection therefore presupposes that man has led a holy life. As a result, he is happy and takes part in

⁷³ The heavenly specificity of the thrones that St. John sees is also noted by St. Ambrose, see Sfântul AMBROZIE, *Comentar extras la Apocalipsă*, p. 245.

⁷⁴ One such example is Rev 6, 9.

⁷⁵ A. A. HOEKEMA, "Amilenarismul", p. 191.

⁷⁶ Saint AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, pp. 164-169.

⁷⁷ Sfântul ANDREI, *Îlucuire la Apocalipsă*, pp. 134-135.

this spiritual resurrection that makes him safe from the second death. In connection with the two deaths, the first of them must be understood in a physical sense. The second, however, represents eternal death, the condemnation of hell, being cast into the lake of fire⁷⁸. Because of this, those who partake of the first resurrection, that is, the saints of God, are not subject to the final death. Also, in verse 6 we see another effect of the life of holiness, namely receiving the eternal priesthood. As St. Ambrose observed, in eternity there will be a universal priesthood of saints⁷⁹.

Verse 7 falls into the same category as the first 3, from a certain point of view. Namely, it presents the end of the temporary limitation of the power of evil, which in chapter 19 had already been definitively defeated. Thus, verse 7 is an additional argument for a cyclical reading of the Revelation⁸⁰. In connection with the BOS text of this verse, one further observation is necessary. The preposition *către* [towards], is totally inappropriate both for the logic of the text and for faithfulness to the Greek text. The conjunction *ὅταν*, which the BOS variant translates with the preposition *către* [towards], expresses an absolute finality. The BOS variant's choice of this preposition leaves room for an interpretation that Satan might be loosed before the end of the millennial kingdom. Such a translation, however, has a pastoral relevance. If Satan is only unbound at the end of the thousand/thousands of years, it means that he is bound for the entire period of Church History in the amillennial approach⁸¹. Or, the torments to which the Church is subjected, the temptations presented in the first 3 chapters, raise doubts about the fact that Satan is now bound⁸². This is an exegetical difficulty

⁷⁸ The fact that the second death is a spiritual and eternal reality, as well as the absence of any allusion to an intermediate state, is obvious from such texts as Rev. 2, 11; Rev. 2, 26.

⁷⁹ Sfântul AMBROZIE, *Comentar extras la Apocalipsă*, p. 244.

⁸⁰ A clear and pertinent description of the cycles that the method of progressive parallelism involves can be found in A. A. HOEKEMA, "Amilenarismul", pp. 177-179.

⁸¹ St. Andrew presents the binding of Satan in the same amillennial manner. He relativizes the thousand years to the entire period in which the Gospel is extended, and in the binding of Satan he sees the limitation of the power of evil for the Gospel to be preached, see Sfântul ANDREI, *Tilcuire la Apocalipsă*, pp. 132-133.

⁸² Saint Ambrose states that the binding of Satan was done through the death of Jesus on the cross, and the period of 1000 years that Revelation 20 speaks of is precisely the period from the first coming of Christ to His Second Coming, see Sfântul AMBROZIE, *Comentar extras la Apocalipsă*, p. 244.

that the amillennialist theory raises. The argument that amillennialists bring to the present problem is that in the Old Testament period, Israel was the only people that followed God. Thus, Hoekema, for example, correlates the expansion of the Gospel in the world with the binding of Satan, which he understands as a limitation of his power (Lk 10, 18), and not as an absolute abolition⁸³. For the relationship between the power of evil and the preaching of the Gospel, Hoekema manages to gather several New Testament texts that cannot be neglected⁸⁴. However, although these arguments are sound, he still fails to provide an unanimously accepted solution to the problem raised by this verse.

One of the essential aspects for understanding the relationship between past, present and future from the point of view of Christian eschatology can be summarized in the phrase *already, but not yet fully*. All four authors that we have analyzed in this paper build their theories starting, to a greater or lesser extent, from the fact that the Kingdom of God is already here, but for various reasons, not yet fully⁸⁵. We also offered such a perspective above. Thus, an additional reason to believe that the kingdom spoken of in Rev 20, 1-7 is a spiritual one is precisely the spiritual character which this report, *already, but not yet fully* assumes⁸⁶, both strictly in connection with the Kingdom, but also with the Resurrection⁸⁷. Moreover, Revelation itself, outside of chapter 20, leaves no hint of an intermediate kingdom. In the rest of Revelation, when the Kingdom is spoken of, it is spoken of as an eternal reality (Rev 11, 15).

⁸³ A. A. HOEKEMA, "Amilenarismul", pp. 181-184.

⁸⁴ In building that argument, Hoekema cites Matt 12, 28-29, Matt 13, 24-30.47-50, Lk 10, 17-18.

⁸⁵ G. E. LADD, "Premilenarismul istoric", pp. 33-34. H. HOYT, "Premilenarismul dispensaționalist", pp. 79-80. L. BOETTNER, "Postmilenarismul", p. 137. A. A. HOEKEMA, "Amilenarismul", pp. 198-200.

⁸⁶ In connection with this paradoxical speech that we also encountered in St. Paul, the following texts can be followed in parallel, Rev 1, 6; Rev 1, 9; Rev 2, 10-11; Rev 2, 26.

⁸⁷ By Resurrection we refer here to the same paradoxical discourse applied to the theme of the Resurrection by St. Paul the Apostle. Thus, texts like Col 2, 12 and Col 3, 1 cannot speak of any other Resurrection than a spiritual one, which brings with it the potential of the future actualization of the material Resurrection.

V.3. The problem (τὰ) χιλία

As we also saw when we analyzed the textbook of Church History, one of the possible arguments that could cut the issue of the millennium in an amillennialist way would be to translate the phrase (τὰ) χιλία by a plural. In this sense, Romanian specialized literature does not know many grammatical studies. However, there is a book written by Professor Vasile Gheorghiu that addresses this very dilemma, namely the translation of the phrase (τὰ) χιλία. However, Professor Gheorghiu's presentation has a major deficiency. Still, we cannot attribute the present lack to superficiality or ignorance, but rather to a lack of access to a material base sufficiently tender to facilitate a deeper understanding of the issue behind this translation. Professor Gheorghiu published this book in 1928. In the almost 100 years since the publication of his book, numerous studies have been written in the field, various translations of the New Testament have been made and pertinent critical editions of the Holy Scripture have appeared, at which, most likely, Gheorghiu did not have access. Indeed, as the author also claims, the noun χιλία is at first sight a plural form. But after more thorough research we concluded that, in fact, this noun is a defective singular. Thus, both the plural meaning and the singular meaning are rendered by plural forms. What would tip the balance towards the plural meaning would be the use of the neuter plural article τὰ, to which Gheorghiu also relates⁸⁸. The problem with the present article is that critical editions such as Nestle-Aland reproduce it in parentheses⁸⁹.

Such a rendering assumes that the word in question appears in too few manuscripts to be considered with certainty as authentic. Thus, in the absence of a thorough investigation of the manuscript bases of the Rev 20, 6 text, it is impossible to postulate the authenticity of the plural article. In the absence of this article, the meaning that the established dictionaries of the Greek language indicate is the singular one⁹⁰. Professor Gheorghiu's

⁸⁸ Vasile GHEORGHIU, *Împărăția de „mii de ani”* (“The kingdom of Thousands of Years”), „Glasul Bucovinei”, Cernăuți, 1928, pp. 6-29.

⁸⁹ See, Erwin NESTLE, Kurt ALAND, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Greek New Testament), editione vicesima septima revisa, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1993, p. 674.

⁹⁰ H. G. LIDDELL, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1992. See also Anatole BAILLY, *Dictionnaire Grec – Français*, nouvelle édition revue et corrigée, Hachette, Paris, 2020, p. 2513. Laurentiu Gabriel IONESCU, *Dicționar grec-român* (Greek-Romanian Dictionary),

perspective was unanimously accepted in the Romanian Orthodox Church, gaining momentum with the publication of this book. Beginning in 1979, synodal translations started to use the variant “thousands of years” for the Greek phrase (τὰ) χιλία, without further research. We believe that it is time for Orthodox theology to re-evaluate its position towards this translation and deal with a more detailed analysis of the original text and the manuscript bases, because Professor Gheorghiu’s arguments from almost a hundred years ago no longer seem to be supported.

Even though we cannot make a solid argument in favor of translating (τὰ) χιλία as plural, there are still arguments to support a symbolic reading of this numeral⁹¹. An analysis of the number one thousand is made by St. Augustine⁹². His exposition asserts that the number one thousand refers to a long and perfect period, a whole. Moreover, he says, the fact that one thousand equals 10^3 refers to depth, a dimension that appears only in three-dimensional geometric bodies. Further, we must bear in mind that the thousand years is not the only numeral used in the Revelation. Thus, a literal reading of the thousand of years would also imply a literal reading of numerals such as 144000 (Rev 7, 4-9).⁹³ Can we assume that the number of those saved from the people of Israel will literally be only 144000, considering the 11th chapter of Romans? No. But neither can we interpret literally or allegorically at will all the numerals in the Revelation. Thus, in the absence of a well-argued reason for one variant of reading or the other, the consistency with the logical, biblical meaning and which is in agreement with the reading of the other numbers in the book should be chosen.

Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuș, 2011, pp. 188-189.

⁹¹ It should be noted that the amillennialist theologians we have quoted so far, Frazier and Hoekema, do not attempt a grammatical argument in the direction of understanding the phrase (τὰ) χιλία as a plural, but, on the contrary, construct in the same way of allegorical reading that St. Augustine also used, cf. A.A. HOEKEMA, “Amilenarismul”, p. 181; T. L. FRAZIER, *A Doua Venire a lui Hristos*, pp. 420-427.

⁹² Saint AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, pp. 164-169.

⁹³ The very fact that following the presentation of the number of the saved from Israel the apostle mentions that the saved from the gentiles are so many that they cannot be counted should be an indication that the number 144,000 is also a symbolic one. Also, its 12x12x1000 composition refers to the same kind of perfection that St. Augustine was describing.

VI. Conclusions

To conclude, we noted in the first chapter how the patristic debate over the millennium was tangential rather than focused. The earliest occurrences of the millennial doctrine remain only at an allusive level. With the crystallization of the concept of millennialism, we noticed how patristic theology is moving towards the amillennialist theory. Patristic exegesis cannot represent a *sine qua non* argument for or against millennialism. This fact is caused by the lack of rigor in the exposition, by the fact that the approaches are tangential and not focused, and by the lack of consensus among the authors.

We then presented the main directions of interpretation of the millennium problem, namely premillennialism, with its two branches, postmillennialism and amillennialism. The presentation, along with the critical analysis chapter, managed to problematize the relevance of various arguments in relation to the exegetical issues that the text of Rev 20, 1-7 raises. Thus, we could see that although the four theories have many opposite points, they also have similarities. In this sense, we observed, above all, the similarities between postmillennialism and amillennialism, but also the concordance between the vision of historical premillennialism and amillennialism on the relationship between the Church and Israel as eschatological entities.

In the final chapter, we provided a brief exegesis of Rev 20, 1-7, which is the core of any doctrine regarding the thousand-year kingdom. In this exegesis, we have focused on an interpretive construction that starts precisely from the text of Revelation to other relevant texts and then to the related theological conclusions.

The conclusion of the present work cannot be a decisive one. Throughout the presentation and critical analysis chapters, we have evaluated each theory separately. Thus, we were able to observe that each of the four directions of millennialism raises still unresolved exegetical problems. We are talking, for example, about the rapture doctrine and the strictly literal interpretation in the case of premillennialism, about the inability to biblically substantiate the Christian peak of the world in the

case of postmillennialism, and about problems raised by the binding of Satan and the phrase (τὰ) χιλία in the case of amillennialism. Thus, for future research directions, an eclectic approach would be useful to evaluate all these ideas from a biblical point of view and to try to create an approach that takes from each theory the ideas that can be framed in the textual logic of the Holy Scripture.

The merit of this work, we believe, is not to indicate with surgical precision which is the immaculate millennial theory, but to provide a comprehensive presentation of early and current theories and to propose some critical directions for evaluating each of them. In the end, the question of millennialism remains open, somewhere between relevance and mystery.