

Early Church Fathers Eschatology

Eschatology: Study of God
Developing People in His Image
Dr. Leon L. Sanders



Early Church Fathers

From 100 to 500 AD
Through Medieval to Reformation

They Developed the Church

- + They were closest in time to the apostles and their writings
 - + At least two of them probably knew John
- + Considered to have the closest worldview to the apostles
- + Their writings developed the early church(es) that many consider to be the purest form of church worship

Church Fathers-Logical Fallacies

- + Logical Fallacies frequently used to develop eschatology
 - + Appeal to Authority-They were the closest to the actual events therefore their views must be correct
 - + Appeal to Majority-My view of eschatology must be right if most, or the "most important" church fathers, agree with my view

Church Fathers-Logical Fallacies

- + Logical Fallacies frequently used to develop eschatology
 - + Appeal to silence-Your view of eschatology must be wrong if the early church fathers did not discuss that view
- + These same logical fallacies are used in reference to the "Reformation or Reformed Fathers"
 - + Writings of men may guide our thinking; however, their opinions are shaped by their worldview

Epistolarity

- + Early Church Writers wrote in letter form emulating the writings of most of the New Testament writers
 - + If it was good enough for the Bible it is good enough for...
- + Letter format used to address multiple issues in the early church but lacked systematic analysis and continuity
- + Calvin credited with the "modern" systematic approach

Defining Church Doctrine

- + The main emphasis of these early writers was the defining of various, but not all, doctrines
 - + Church
 - + Christ
 - + Salvation

Church History is Doctrinal Definition

- + The Reformation was basically a redefining of the doctrines of:
 - + Church
 - + Salvation
 - + Grace

Eschatology Last Doctrine

- + Eschatology was not a major issue from the end of the New Testament writings until about the 18th into the 19th centuries
- + Most of the early writers did not directly address this issue, due to the imminent return of Christ, and thus did not develop a comprehensive doctrine of eschatology until the modern church era, as *Christ tarried*

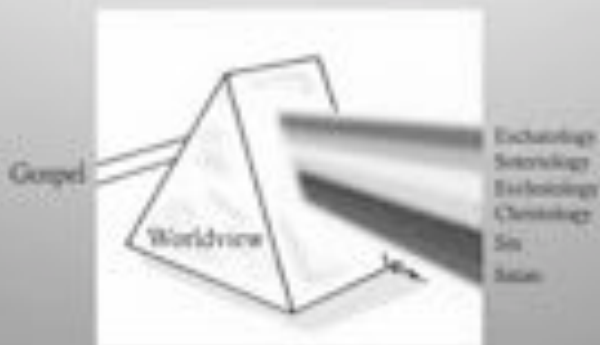
Understanding A Worldview

- † A world-view, as we understand it, is a system of generalised views of the surrounding world and man's place in it, of man's relationship to the world and himself, and also the basic positions that people derive from this general picture of the world, their beliefs, socio-political, moral and aesthetic ideals, the principles by which they know and appraise material and spiritual events

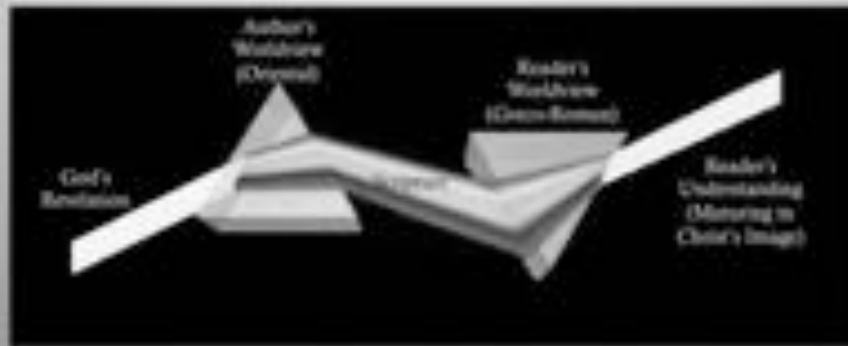
Understanding Our Worldview

- † The world-view influences standards of behaviour, a person's attitude to his work, to other people, the character of his aspirations in life, his everyday existence, tastes and interests. It is a kind of spiritual prism through which everything around us is perceived, felt and transformed.

Worldview is our Prism



Worldviews: Theirs, Yours



Eschatology's Basic Tension

- + The real issue in the millennial debate has to do with the tension between historical and transcendent ideals.
- + Is the kingdom of God to be understood as a this-worldly reality in history or as an eternal ideal that forever judges all earthly kingdoms until the consummation? (http://www.orthodox.org/orthodox/orthodoxy/Eschatology/John_20_1986.pdf)

Two Major Views

Chiliasm/Millennialism

- + Belief that world history would last 6,000 and then Christ would return for a 1,000 year Millennial Kingdom.
- + Based on 2Pv 3:8 coupled with their "worldview" of the days of creation being 6 plus the Sabbath.

Amillennialism

- + This view prevailed after Augustine accepted Origen's allegorical approach to hermeneutics.
- + The "Church" replaced Israel and all unfulfilled prophecy had allegorical, "spiritual", implications.

Current Major Views

- | Millennialism | Amillennialism |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Premillennialism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-tribulation - Mid-tribulation - Post-tribulation + Postmillennialism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Amillennialism + Preterism |

Remains Two Views

- | Millennialism | Amillennialism |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Majority of Baptists + Majority of Charismatics and Pentecostals + A few cults + Minority of Christians believe in this historical view | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Roman Catholic + Mainline Protestant Denominations + Greek Orthodox + Majority of Christians adhere to this transcendent view |

Allegorical Worldview

- + First major reference to this approach may have been Plato's "The Cave" from his "Republics"
 - Move from unenlightened to an enlightened state of knowledge
- + Greeks used this approach to explain why reality was different from their mythology (religion(s))

Allegorical Worldview

- ✦ The Hebrews at Alexandria after the Diaspora used allegory to interpret their Scriptures since prophecy was *not* being fulfilled (to their expectation)
 - ✦ Conquering Messiah had not materialized
 - ✦ They were not ruling the nations
 - ✦ They wanted to *preserve* the *validity* of their Bible

Allegorical Worldview

- ✦ Origen, a Christian who lived at Alexandria in 3rd century developed the allegorical interpretation method
 - ✦ Christ had not returned
 - ✦ Christ had not established His Kingdom on earth
 - ✦ Persecutions were continuing
 - ✦ He wanted to *preserve* the *validity* of the Bible

Allegorical Worldview

- ✦ Augustine popularized this approach through his work, "The City of God Against the Pagans" (Fall of Rome)
 - ✦ He developed "rules" for allegorical interpretation
 - ✦ The "spiritual" interpretation was above the literal one
 - ✦ He developed amillennialism to *preserve* the *validity* of the (Kingdom of Christ on earth contained in the) Bible

Allegorical Worldview

- ✦ Protestant Reformation refuted Roman Catholicism on salvation by works; however:
 - ✦ Reformation did not reevaluate every aspect of Roman Catholic dogma
 - ✦ The Reformation kept the Amillennial view of eschatology
 - ✦ The Reformers continued to use the allegorical hermeneutical approach to preserve the sufficiency of the Bible

Summary

Early Church Fathers Eschatology

Greco-Roman Worldview

- ✦ The Greco-Roman worldview dominated the development of church doctrine after the close of the New Testament
- ✦ Early, and Reformation, Church "Fathers" did not understand their Greco-Roman worldview; thus, their worldview changed their hermeneutics rather than Scripture change their worldview

Greco-Roman Worldview

- + From Origen and Augustine throughout the Medieval period the major writers mixed the Greco-Roman worldview with the Scriptures, often with allegorical hermeneutical techniques
 - + Scholasticism (Appeal to Authority)
- + They influenced the Reforming "Fathers" whose influence (error(s)) continue(s) today

Transcendence vs History

- + Does the Bible speak only about the transcendence (metaphysical) aspects of God that we may come to know in the hereafter?
- + Does the Bible speak about God in history that influences every aspect of life, now and later?

Election

- + Your worldview will *predetermine* your understanding which will *predetermine* your understanding of eschatology which will *predetermine* your choice of millennial positions currently available
- + My Goal: To *alter* your worldview to *alter* your understanding to develop a *unique* eschatological position ~ to turn you into *Biblicists*