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Interpreting the Role of America in New England Millennialism, 1640 to 1800

I. Themes and Arguments

Millennialism or chiliasm in the early history of English-speaking North America is a very broad and rich field of scholarly investigation that has been examined very productively from a variety of perspectives,¹ some of which I have touched upon in my short introduction to the respective segment in the anthology.² In this companion-piece I want to focus on what seems to me the most pertinent

¹ Like most scholars I use the Latin-derived term 'millennialism' (from Latin *mille*, 'a thousand,' and *annus*, 'a year') and the Greek-derived term 'chiliasm' (from *khilioi*, 'a thousand') interchangeably. Unlike some scholars, however, I do not employ the distinction between millennialism/millennialist and millenarianism/millenarian. Particularly in some of the older studies, 'millennialism' is used to refer to those who believed in a gradual progress towards redemption, while 'millenarianism' signifies the expectancy of the world's (imminent) destruction before its apocalyptic regeneration. In my view, this binarism is not helpful in dealing with the theological complexities one encounters, especially in the apocalyptic literature before 1800.

² The scholarship on New England millennialism, even of the pre-nineteenth century period, is extensive, so all I can give here are a few general hints. The first and foremost perspective is that of the religious historian who examines in close detail the development of 'local' theological debates over the biblical prophecy of Christ's thousand-year reign. An excellent and very reliable survey of New England millennialist theology from this perspective is offered by Smolinski's article (2003), which will also introduce students to more specialized studies. Another rewarding take on the subject was defined by myth-studies, which highlight the cultural function of millennialist rhetoric, the ways in which it addresses certain fundamental existential anxieties or needs of believers. The most prominent studies of early American millennialism from this perspective are Davidson (1977) and O'Leary (1994). Thirdly, millennialism has been investigated as a discourse of community-building and identity-formation which exerted considerable power in American history, especially in conjunction with other discourses such as anti-Catholicism, the Puritan jeremiad, or, later on, revolutionary republicanism, nationalism and the manifest-destiny discourse. This is the predominant perspective on millennialism in the classical studies by Miller (1956), Heimert (1966), Tuveson (1968), and Bercovitch (1975, 1978). For the revolutionary period in particular, see Hatch (1977) and Bloch (1985); for the use of millennialist discourse as a symbolic reservoir for the creation of enemy-images, see Fuller (1995). A broad cultural studies-approach with a focus on identity-issues is also taken by many of the essays collected in Engler, Fichte, and Scheiding (2002).

and, at the same time, the most perplexing question raised by the millennialist texts that have been excerpted for the anthology. As you will notice, all of the selected documents were written in New England, and all of them, in one way or the other, seem to have a regional dimension in the sense that they reflect on the place this region, and later the United States at large, might occupy in the last age prophesied by the Scriptures.³ What specific role then, I will ask throughout my readings of the documents, did the successive generations of New England divines assign to their own colonies and America during the millennium?

Considering that America had been unknown to biblical authors and earlier Christian exegetes alike, I will begin my inquiry by looking at the ways in which Puritan theologians attempted to place the newly found continent and their colonies within the existing "*Christianography*" (KC, 182-3) of the Last Times.⁴ Were they indeed, as it has often been claimed, hoping to give an eschatological centrality to a region whose political institutions and churches occupied no more than a peripheral position in the factual geography of worldly power and spiritual influence at the time? Was the faith and identity of seventeenth-century Puritan emigrants really predicated on the assumption that the New England churches would play a leading part in Christ's thousand-year reign? As we move into the second half of the eighteenth century in section IV of the essay, my guiding question will then lead us to explore the complex intersections of traditional New England millennialism with Enlightenment philosophy, the revolutionary ideology, and the discourse of nationalism that is reflected in the last documents in the section.

In pursuing this line of inquiry I hope to demonstrate that, contrary to a very dominant model of interpretation, there was no high road from the purported Puritan belief in a millennial errand into the wilderness to the establishment of a

³ The fact that all the respective texts in the anthology are of New England origin should not mislead students into the assumption that millennialism did not play a significant role in the cultural history of colonial America outside the British settlements on the northeastern seaboard. On the contrary, scholars have long found millennialism to have been an important factor in the discovery, early exploration and colonization of the New World by the Spanish and Portuguese. Christopher Columbus's writings from and about the New World, for instance, clearly show the impact of Franciscan and Joachimite millennialism (cf. Milhou 2003 and Schilson 1995). Similarly, the subsequent Franciscan missions in New Spain (cf. Philan 1970) and those of the French Jesuits in New France were informed by chiliastic expectations. Also, the earliest British colonization efforts in Virginia were by no means purely commercially motivated. At least some people connected to the Virginia Company, such as Samuel Purchas, saw the English colonization of the New World as part of the latter day events leading to the millennium. And later on, Britain's southern colonies were also swept along by the revivals of the Great Awakening, which, like in New England, had a strong millennialist dimension. Moreover, many of the German-speaking Pietist sectarians settling in Britain's mid-Atlantic colonies during the eighteenth century believed that the last age was at hand (cf. Roeber 1995).

⁴ The term was used by Cotton Mather to refer to the geography of salvation as defined by Christ's redemptive work (cf. doc. 81).

post-revolutionary ideology of American exceptionalism and messianism.⁵ Even though, as my readings will show, Puritan millennialism was indeed later appropriated by patriotic discourse and, once divested of its original context, did become an important component of America's national identity, the latter was not a direct outgrowth of the former. Instead, American nationalism, like Enlightenment progressivism, should be regarded as a distinct discourse which originally even contradicted many of the convictions central to traditional millennialism. It was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that millennialism entered a complex relationship with these other discourses, resulting in the nineteenth century beliefs in America's manifest destiny and role as a world redeemer.⁶

⁵ Students should be aware that the thesis of a direct causal connection between Puritan millennialism and the American nationalism of the nineteenth century has formed the foundation of one of the master-narratives of American studies. According to some of the founding fathers of the discipline, among them Perry Miller, Alan Heimert, and Ernest Tuveson, the first Puritan emigrants already conceived of themselves as God's new chosen people predestined to establish an ideal church polity that would take a leading role in the unfolding of the millennium. Some Puritan divines are even said to have propagated the vision of New England as the seat of the New Jerusalem itself, which would stand at the center of Christ's earthly kingdom. Following this master-narrative, the 'apocalyptic exceptionalism' of the Puritans then underwent a nationalization process during the second half of the eighteenth century, at the end of which it became one of the main ideological driving forces behind the Revolution. In the nineteenth century, the Puritan belief in their Errand into the Wilderness and the promise of its fruition in an American New Jerusalem is understood to have finally transformed into the belief "that the United States has been called to be a chief means of worldwide redemption, and that as a chosen people it was assigned a new promised land" (Tuveson 1968, 91). With his famous studies *The Puritan Origin of the American Self* (1975) and *The American Jeremiad* (1978) Sacvan Bercovitch, who is probably the most renowned Americanist of his generation, gave a new sophistication to this time-honored model and guaranteed its continuing impact on the scholarly community. Although much more critical of America's exceptionalist identity than his scholarly predecessors, Bercovitch affirmed their interpretation that the millennialism of the Puritans already contained the "protonationalistic tendencies" (Bercovitch 1978, 105) which were simply drawn out by their eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' successors.

⁶ Information was drawn from the revisionist critique of the 'From Puritan Millennialism to Manifest Destiny' master-narrative propagated by traditional American Studies. During the last two decades, scholars such as Theodore Dwight Bozeman (1988) and Reiner Smolinski (1990, 1995) started to challenge this narrative, which they regard to be in many respects a backward projection of a nation-centered (no matter how critical) historiography in search of an origin of a distinct American identity. While these scholars do not deny that millennialism did play a significant role in the theology as well as the popular imagination of American Puritanism, they no longer see millenarian ideology as the decisive reason for the first wave of emigration between 1620 and 1640. Also, the revisionists emphasize that the undeniable concern of late seventeenth-century Puritan exegetes with placing America on the millennial map must not be interpreted (or rather overinterpreted) as an attempt to associate the prophecies of Christ's glorious reign on earth exclusively with New England history and territory. In short, the Puritan exodus from England was not conceived of as a mission to reform the world and inaugurate the millennium. Nor did any traditional New England theologian ever proclaim Boston as the future site of the New Jerusalem. Consequently, Puritan eschatology

II. The Origins of Puritan Millennialism and the Eschatological Self-Definition of the Early New England Churches

As so many discussions about millennialism (especially in the classroom) are hampered by false presuppositions and definitional problems, I want to begin this section with a short reminder of what the term actually means, or is supposed to mean, when employed in a theological context or used to talk about traditional Scripture-centered forms of Christianity such as New England Puritanism. Here, one has to stay clear of modern practices using the term as a fit-all metaphor for any kind of ideology invested in notions of historical progress, or as an expression referring to the vague hopes and anxieties associated with the calendar event of the millennium. Instead, one should only talk about millennialism to denote the religious belief in a quasi-paradisiacal interval of a thousand (actual or figurative) years in the cosmic battle between good and evil over the redemption of mankind, which is how the Bible describes all of history. According to Christian millennialists, this interval will be brought about by Christ's Second Coming, whether abruptly in the body or gradually in the spirit, and the bliss and glory that is promised to the true believers (also called saints) for this period will be the effect of his reign on earth, during which Satan will not be allowed to further persecute mankind. One must be careful, however, to distinguish this hope for a millennial reign on earth from the hope of a paradisiacal afterlife or "a new heaven and a new earth" which will occur only after Judgment Day and hence after the end of history, but, much to the confusion of the modern reader, is sometimes also called the (eternal) millennium.

Millennialism or chiliasm, in the strict sense, thus designates the belief, to quote Tuveson's succinct definition,

that, before the final judgment of all mankind, Christ [either in the body or as a spiritual ruler] will return to the earth and, together with resurrected saints, will reign over a glorious kingdom which will last a thousand years. The authority for this belief is Revelation 20:1-5, which relates how the cosmic battles between the divine and the Satanic powers will in part end with the fall of the latter's stronghold, 'Babylon.' An angel will come down from heaven and imprison the 'dragon' for a thousand years [...]. After this millennium Satan is to be loosed once more. He will gather the nations of the earth for one grand last stand at 'Armageddon,' but he will be defeated. Then he will be thrown into the 'lake of fire' and the universal judgment will occur, followed by the establishment of the eternal heavenly state. (Tuveson 1973, 223)

While they always integrated many other parts of the Old and New Testament into their readings, Christian exegetes, as suggested by Tuveson, mainly derive this vision of the latter days from St. John's Book of Revelation, particularly

cannot be said to be the main root from which the later ideology of American exceptionalism and messianism grew. Rather, the existing millennialist tradition of Puritan theology was appropriated and radically re-interpreted by the new nationalist discourse.

chapter 20.⁷ Needless to say, they differed widely in their interpretations of the prophetic events described there. Yet it is the basic assumption that these events, in one way or the other, referred to a historical reality that constitutes the core of traditional Christian millennialism.

It should be emphasized, however, that millennialism was by no means embraced by all traditional, Scripture-centered forms of Christianity. In my introduction to the anthology (*KC*, 159-62), I have already suggested that it was rather a very controversial aspect of Christian eschatology; i.e., those parts of Christian thinking and teaching which concerned the 'last things.' Among early Christian communities of the first centuries AD, expectations of Christ's immanent return (*parousia*) and the advent of his thousand-year reign were rampant. Speculations about the literal fulfillment of John's prophecies surrounding the millennium can also be found in the writings of some of the major early Christian theologians, like Lactantius, Tertullian, and Irenaeus. But after the institutionalization of Christianity as a state religion, the spokespersons for the church usually maintained a distance, or were openly opposed, to any kind of chiliastic enthusiasm. Most of the church fathers also worked towards a theological "'taming' of apocalyptic thinking in order to integrate it into a larger picture of a Christian world order" (Daley 2003, 223). This Christian world order, as it was now conceived most prominently by Augustine of Hippo in his *De civitate Dei* (413-26), rested on a fundamental distinction between those actions and events which directly concerned God's relationship to mankind and were recorded or prophesied by the Bible (*historia sacra*) and the vain affairs of the world (*historia profana*). With Creation, the original Fall, the incarnation of Christ, his crucifixion, and his resurrection all in the past, the *historia sacra* would "no longer contain decisive turning-points" (Markus 1970, 20-1) until the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. Until then the slow and gradual progress in the relationship of man and his heavenly father, which had been made possible by the intervention of the Son, would occur only inside and through

⁷ Students who wish to study the development of American millennialist theology in more detail should familiarize themselves with the most important scriptural passages on which the exegetical debates were focused. Obviously the starting point has to be the Book of Revelation, especially chapter 20. Of central importance among the Old Testament texts is the Book of Daniel with its famous visions of the compound image (Dan. 2.31-45), the four beasts and the ten horns, as well as of the advent of the Son of man (Dan. 7). Moreover, the vision of the 2,300 prophetic days, of the seventy prophetic weeks and of the duration of the end times in the Book of Daniel (8.14; 9.24-7; 12.1-13), were often connected with the 1,260 days prophesied by the two witnesses in Rev. 11.3 in the ongoing speculative computations of the advent of the millennium. These computations were usually based on the biblical equation of thousand years with a day before the Lord (Ps. 90.4), which was combined with Gen. 2.2 into an overall understanding of earthly history as comprising a 6,000 year time-span before the millennial Sabbath of the world. Also significant is the 'small apocalypse' in Isa. 24-7 and 65.17-25. Among Jesus' own prophetic teachings millennialist theologians drew in particular on Matt. 24-5. The most relevant passages from the letters are the following: 1 Cor. 15.20-8, 1 Thess. 4.13-8 and 2 Thess. 2.1-12. With regard to the belief in a future conflagration of the earth, 2 Pet. 3.10-4 is essential.

the *civitas dei* or 'invisible church' of true Christians. By way of contrast, the affairs of the profane world and its political institutions (*civitas terrena*), even though superficially they changed constantly, were deemed to lack any inherent potential for significant change.⁸

Befitting such a cosmology, in which worldly history was without any real meaning, the church quite early on adopted an allegorical and spiritual reading of the biblical prophecies concerning Christ's millennial reign on earth. According to this reading, the millennium and the eschatological events surrounding it merely signified the last stage in the history of redemption, which had begun with Christ's first appearance on earth and would be brought to a close when he returned on Doomsday. In other words, the allegorical reading put forth by Augustine and others placed the beginning of the millennium in the past (interpreting it in a 'preterite' fashion), and viewed the thousand years not as calendar years, but as symbolic of 'a long time.' The proponents of such an allegorizing approach to the prophetic events also rejected the literalist belief that there would occur a physical binding of Satan, a military defeat of the Antichrist and his legions, or a corporeal first resurrection of the saints who would reign over an earthly dominion under King Jesus. They rather claimed that Christ's spiritual reign would come to be exercised gradually by and through the church as it became ever more pure and powerful through the grace of God, who, in His infinite mercy, had sent His son to restrict Satan's power of deceiving men. Having already begun with Christ's redemptive sacrifice on the cross, the millennium, then, had to be understood as the progressive convergence of the *civitas dei* with the institutional church and the outward spreading of true Christianity.⁹

Generally speaking, this Augustinian 'solution' of interpreting the millennium in an allegorical and preterite fashion became the orthodox position in the medieval church. Still, the literalist and futurite strand of early Christian millennialism never completely vanished and was regularly taken up by church re-

⁸ In such an eschatology, there was relatively little room for a belief in man's meaningful historical agency, let alone in historical progress or human self-perfection through advancements in moral civilization and the sciences. If the orthodox position, following Augustine, assumed that the millennium had already begun and Christ's kingdom was growing in and through the members of his church, this notion of their spiritual betterment or *profecus* through the grace of God was not historical in the sense that the passing of time itself was understood as a meaningful continuity leading towards the desired regeneration of the world. Nor did it imply the idea of human capacity for meaningful innovation or real self-improvement inside worldly history. Medieval theology did not conceive of a history of redemption in the sense that human history was understood as a causal continuum in which the progress of time itself could assume a redemptive function because it would have marked a progress in man's moral nature and salvific knowledge. Such an integrated concept of redemption history came into being only as the combined result of previous radical changes within Christian, particularly Protestant theology, and the philosophy of the Enlightenment since the seventeenth century.

⁹ According to such an allegorical reading, the apocalyptic tribulations of which the Scriptures spoke were to be decoded as the painful rebirth from spiritual death to be undergone by members of the 'invisible church.'

formers or radical sectarians, such as Joachim of Fiore and his followers, the Fraticelli, Girolamo Savonarola in Florence, the Lollards in England, or the Hussites and the Taborites in Bohemia.¹⁰ Then, around the turn of the sixteenth century, a general revival of chiliastic beliefs occurred. This revival grew from and simultaneously fed into the various ecclesiastical movements and social upheavals we now call the Reformation, which swept across Europe under the wide-spread expectation that the latter days were at hand. Virtually all the reformers who challenged the authority of Rome associated the Pope and the established ecclesiastical system with the forces of Satan. More specifically, they identified them with the Antichristian "deceivers" of 1 John, the "Beast" described in Rev. 13, and the "Man of Sin" of 2 Thess. 2. Concomitantly, they interpreted their revolt as signifying the pending overthrow of the Antichrist and the downfall of Satan as foretold in the prophetic Scriptures. Whether or not the downfall of Satan would be followed by a millennial period of earthly bliss before Doomsday, however, remained a hotly contested issue. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin had been careful to curb any enthusiastic expectations of a terrestrial kingdom of Christ in the future.¹¹ But a number of their own followers and several of the popular movements, which historians associate with the term 'the radical Reformation' (such as Anabaptists groups), did embrace a futurite, sometimes even a literalist type of millennialism.

In the late sixteenth century, the hope for a future, if not earthly then at least a spiritual, millennium, was also adopted by some of Calvin's heirs, including those churchmen who would define English reformed theology, which, during the reign of Elizabeth, was eventually institutionalized by the Anglican Church. Indeed, English reformed theologians such as John Bale, Thomas Brightman, and most importantly Joseph Mede as well as popular religious authors like John Foxe in his famous *Actes and Monuments* (1563), did much to foster a conviction among their followers that English Protestantism had been preordained to serve as God's vanguard in the battle against Antichristian Rome. If England would faithfully perform its role, people were told by countless tracts, books, and sermons, it could expect to play a central role in the advancement of Christ's kingdom and to share proportionally in its glory.¹² Thus, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as historian Barry Coward notes, the belief in the imminent defeat of Satan, and the advent of Christ's reign on earth, "far from being the creed of a few

¹⁰ For an excellent survey of chiliastic movements during the Middle Ages and late Middle Ages, see McGinn (2003) and Potestà (2003). The classical study on the subject is Cohn (1957).

¹¹ On Luther's apocalyptic (but not millennialist) worldview, see Oberman (1989). Orthodox Lutheranism emphasized the imminence of universal judgment and deliverance, but rejected chiliastic expectations. Article XVII of the Augsburg confession of 1530 denounced "certain Jewish opinions which are even now making their appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless." For a similar denouncement, see Article XI of the *Confessio Helvetica*.

¹² On English apocalypticism and millennialism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Lamont (1969), Bauckham (1978), and Firth (1979).

cranks, was part of the mainstream of English intellectual life [...] and was widely diffused throughout society at all levels" (1994, 239). Among members of the Puritan movement, which pressed for further reforms within the Anglican Church (cf. Spahr in this vol., 56-9), such chiliastic beliefs were particularly pronounced and occasionally took a turn towards radical literalism. This is particularly true for the period of the English Civil War and the Interregnum (c. 1642-1660) which produced such anarchic communitarians as the Diggers or the Fifth Monarchy Men (to which Oliver Cromwell was connected), who saw themselves as laying the groundwork for Christ's terrestrial kingdom through the erection of an English republican theocracy based on Old Testament laws.¹³

To be sure, the majority of English Protestants, including those associated with the Puritan cause, refrained from such hyperliteralist excesses, and interpreted the coming millennium as a spiritual transformation in the hearts of its individual followers and the *civitas dei* at large, in which they hoped a purified Anglican Church would play a central part. Nevertheless, English millennialists across the board viewed the political conflicts and tumults of their time through the lens of Scriptures as being part of the latter day tribulations leading towards spiritual regeneration. Especially among the Puritans, there was a tendency to blur the old line between *historia sacra* and *historia profana* into an integrated concept of history as a providentially controlled continuum of events leading towards redemption (cf. Obenland in this vol., 89-95). After all, to conceive of their own fight for ecclesiastical and parliamentary reforms in apocalyptic terms ultimately meant ascribing higher meaning to worldly events, and, at least potentially, to their own revolutionary actions and the changes wrought thereby. In other words, the period's acute sense of an ending went along with an altered sense of history, its sacred significance, and man's role in history.

This new historical consciousness was most forcefully expressed in the extensive commentaries written by English theologians on the prophetic Scriptures, particularly the Book of Revelation. In their works, Bale, Brightman, and Mede all continued a general trend in Protestant hermeneutics and historiography which, partly as an attempt to justify their revolutionary break from the Church of Rome and also to establish a central role for the Reformation in ecclesiastical history, had already begun to move away from Augustine's interpretation of salvation history.

Instead of Augustine's dissociation of salvation and history, Protestant historians developed a new mode of historical consciousness based upon the utmost association between prophecy and history, providence and historical occurrences, grounded in an apocalyptic interpretation of history. [...] E]schatology and apocalypse – and hence the millennium – were again brought within history. Divine providence works within history, and in fact, determines the whole process, in order to advance God's redemptive plan for fallen humanity. Salvation is inseparable from and intrinsic to the historical process, and vice versa. (Zakai 2003, 179)

¹³ For these movements and groups see Hill (1971, 1972) and Capp (1972).

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of this theological revolution in historical consciousness, at the heart of which was an understanding of the Book of Revelation as a symbolic abridgment of history from Christ's time to the world's end. All history since Christ's departure, therefore, was viewed as having sacred or, more specifically, eschatological meaning, as Protestant interpreters causally linked all ages through a chain of prophetic events symbolized by the cycles of visions (seals, trumpets, vials, and woes) described in the Apocalypse. Inversely, the parallelization of historical occurrences and figures with the visions of the prophetic Scriptures was seen as the key to unlocking the mysteries of St. John.

Numerous English exegetes followed the general trend among Protestant theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to decode the Book of Revelation and thereby to identify their own (temporal) position in the history of salvation. They all subjected the book's vision-cycles to a form of historical exegesis, in which they attempted to connect the specific prophecies with specific events in the past and present. In this way, they sought to identify those prophetic events which had yet to occur, and thereby obtain clues as to when the millennium would begin. Among the substantial number of such commentaries on Revelation, Mede's *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627) in particular deserves further analysis here, if only because it would have such a lasting impact on Puritan millennialism in New England.

Translated into English as *Key of the Apocalypse* in 1650, Mede's commentary went to great lengths to demonstrate the inner order of the Book of Revelation by systematically synchronizing the different visionary cycles and their symbolic elements. Mede understood these to refer simultaneously to events in secular and church history, which he believed to be increasingly converging since the Reformation as the Protestant countries (presumably with England as a spearhead) developed into a holy polity that would reach its utmost purity during Christ's thousand-year reign. More importantly, however, Mede was the first renowned academic theologian in England to break with the preterite tradition of Augustine in his reading of Rev. 20.¹⁴ Like many exegetes in Old and New England after him, Mede based his millennium mathematics on the basic assumption that the prophetic forty-two months, or 1,260 days of Rev. 11.2-3, each of which he interpreted as years, circumscribed the historical period of the rise and fall of the Antichrist in Western (church-)history. In order to know when the Antichrist would fall and the millennium begin, the decisive question to answer, therefore, was when to date the first rising of the Antichrist. Mede thought this

¹⁴ In many respects, Mede's futuristic interpretation followed the ideas of the German Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638) from the college of Herborn, whose tract *Diatriba de Mille Annis Apocalypticis* (1627), according to recent historians, has to be seen as a watershed in the development of radical Calvinist millennialism. Alsted's commentary on Rev. 20 used complex mathematical computations to predict the final realization of saintly rule in 1694.

had happened during Genseric's sack of Rome in 455 AD or with the dethroning of Rome's last emperor in 476 AD.

With this fulcrum in place he calculated that, except for the seventh vial, all of John's visions already lay in the past, and thus assumed that, following the fall of the Antichrist, the onset of millennial reign would occur sometime in the early eighteenth century. In placing the beginning of the millennium 'back into the future,' and a not-too-distant future to boot, Mede set an example that most New England exegetes would follow. Although succeeding generations of Puritan theologians in the British colonies differed considerably from Mede (as they did from each other) in the details of their calculations and had to push back the dates for the expected advent of Christ's glorious reign as the decades and centuries elapsed, they all followed Mede's basic example of a futurite interpretation situating their own times on the verge of the latter days.

Yet Mede also left an extremely problematic and long-lasting theological legacy to American Puritans. Contrary to many other exegetes of the time who had sought to fit the New World into their millenarian cosmologies, Mede claimed in an appendix (doc. 75) to the enlarged English edition of his *Key to the Revelation* (1650) that the "blessed kingdome" would only encompass the territory of Daniel's four empires, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 2.31-45), making the Old World sole "partaker of the promised instauration." Whereas earlier Portuguese, Spanish, and English theologians had frequently interpreted the colonization of the Americas as the final stage in God's plan of redeeming the world and had seen it as a prerequisite to Christ's *parousia* (cf. Scheiding in this vol., 3-5), Mede emphatically insisted that "the inhabitants of the land of *America*, both Northern and Southern" could never join the "camp of the Saints" (KC, 165-6). On the contrary, he identified the inhabitants of the Americas as the apocalyptic people of Gog and Magog (cf. Rev. 20.8-9), writing that at the end of the millennium Satan's "army shall come from those nations, which live in the Hemisp[h]ere opposite to us" (KC, 164) to fight the armies of the saints in the battle of Armageddon. For at least four generations, Puritan theologians in the colonies would struggle in their commentaries on the Apocalypse to refute Mede's influential arguments for consigning not only the Native Americans, but also the European settlers in the New World to the outer darkness beyond the saving influence of Christ (cf. Smolinski, 1990).

For the first Puritans who would make their way across the Atlantic in the Great Migration (1620-1640), the notion that they might be leaving the future boundaries of the kingdom of Christ was not yet a serious concern, since Mede's view would only gain prominence in the last third of the seventeenth century. Neither were they driven, however, by the idea that they had been called by God to the howling wilderness of the New World to erect a new millennial Zion there while the corrupt Old World went down in flames. To be sure, like virtually all their English fellow-believers, the emigrants were convinced that the fall of the Antichrist, the binding of Satan, and the advent of the thousand-year reign were

at hand. But like the majority of Puritans who stayed home, their goals were largely restorationist in nature (cf. Bozeman 1988). They were driven by the conviction that the church had to be restored to the original purity of the first Christian churches in Asia Minor. The Puritans believed that only by following this path could English Protestants fulfill their special role in the completion of the Reformation and escape God's wrath during the imminent apocalyptic tribulations. To achieve this desired purity, the Anglican Church had to be purged of all accretions since the Apostolic age, including the episcopal structure, as well as certain liturgical forms which had been established in the medieval church all over Europe and had survived the Reformation in England.

From the Puritan point of view, these remnants of Roman Catholicism tied the Church of England to the forces of the Antichrist. Hence, the leading Puritan theologians regularly couched their critique of the Anglican Church and its episcopal system in apocalyptic terms, as did John Cotton's *An Exposition upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation* (doc. 76). Here, "[t]he visible Catholicke Roman Church" (KC, 166) is shown to be the Beast of Rev. 13.1-2, whose monstrosity (a monster is literally an unnatural being composed of heterogeneous elements) is defined by its unlawful intermixing of spiritual and temporal power held by the English monarch, who, after all, was head of the church, and the bishops.¹⁵

Most of the Puritans who left England, then, did so during the reign of Charles I, who was widely perceived as having Catholic leanings, since they increasingly despaired over the present feasibility of their great goal of creating a church free from the monstrosities of intermixed power in England. Under the rule of Archbishop William Laud (1633-1640), things went from bad to worse, as the Puritans were now persecuted more actively and were increasingly less free to worship as they saw fit even within their own circles. On the far-away shores of North America they thus hoped to escape the pending wrath of God and continue their project of purifying English Protestantism of all postapostolic pollutions. Indeed, John Winthrop's famous sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" (doc. 62) testifies to the dream of setting up an exemplary model of a primitive Christian commonwealth that might eventually be adopted back home. John Cotton's 1642 *The Churches Resurrection* (doc. 74) illustrates how, and to what extent this project of mainstream Puritanism was tied into a millennialist framework. The text was written at a time when a first wave of chiliastic fervor hit the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which happened, however, only a full decade after the first groups of settlers had arrived. The main cause was the news of the

¹⁵ Only the most radical of the Puritans, the so-called separatists, who founded Plymouth Colony in 1620 and later settled in Rhode Island, thought that the Anglican Church was irredeemably Antichristian in nature, and that England would inevitably be dragged into the general downfall of the Antichrist. Hence, they no longer worked towards a further reformation of the Church of England and called rather for a complete separation of the New England churches from the mother country so that they could, in the words of William Bradford, "reverte to their anciente puritie, and recover their primative order, libertie, and bewtie" (KC, 109).

burgeoning Civil War at home, which would continue to stir up apocalyptic expectations in the Puritan community on both sides of the Atlantic for the next two decades, actually inspiring many New Englanders to return home (cf. Holifield 2003, 48-53).

Following Mede's synchronization approach to the Book of Revelation, Cotton came to the conclusion that the Antichrist's fall, Satan's binding, and the dawning of the millennium would occur even earlier than his colleague had conjectured, probably sometime around 1655. While insisting on an at least partially literalist interpretation of the millennial reign as such – which he subdivided into a celestial city in the heavens, where Jesus would rule with his martyrs, and an earthly, inchoate Christian dominion comprised of the regenerate among the saved nations – Cotton retained the Augustinian tradition of reading the saints' first resurrection (Rev. 20.4-6) in an allegorical fashion. For him, the resurrection therefore signified a spiritual rebirth, a "Resurrection [...] of mens soules and bodies dead in sinne" (KC, 163). More precisely, Cotton thought that following Christ's spiritual coming would be a rebirth of "particular persons" and also of specific churches within the Christian nations, "as they are recovered againe from their Apostatical and dead estate in [Roman Catholic] Idolatry and Superstition" (KC, 163). The gradual binding of Satan thus symbolized the increasing purification of the regenerated *civitas dei* which, however, would never include the world's entire nominal Christendom, and would not be completed before the end of the millennium when Christ would return in person for Judgment Day (cf. Smolinski 2002; Fichte 2002).

Since Cotton and his New England colleagues saw a demonstrable conversion experience as a prerequisite to the redemption of individuals and held that only the bodies of such reborn Christians could form truly regenerated churches, the Puritan concern over restricting church membership to converted persons was therefore directly linked to their millennialist theology. Puritan leaders like Cotton urged their fellow colonists not to relent in the great outward renovation of their churches in terms of church government, doctrines, ordinances, and liturgy, and, most importantly, to ensure by means of official tests that they would consist mostly of 'visible saints' because they thought the time was nigh when God would separate his sheep from the goats that would be slaughtered. To be sure, they took pride in the idea that, by setting up a Congregationalist system (cf. Spahr in this vol., 62-7), they had already taken their churches to a higher degree of primitive purity than could be found anywhere in contemporary Europe. Contrary to what many Americanists have claimed in the past, however, their church reforms were not motivated by any hopes of establishing a literal New Jerusalem on American shores, nor did they claim that they alone were God's new chosen people.¹⁶ Rather, the first generation of Puritan di-

¹⁶ Hence, when Cotton related the beginning emigration of the English Puritans to the 'colonization' of the promised land by the ancient Israelites in his famous 1630 sermon *Gods Promise to His Plantation* (doc. 16), he did so in terms of an analogy, and not to suggest that God's

vines, represented by John Cotton, Richard Mather and John Davenport wanted to ensure that their New England congregations would escape the brunt of cataclysmic catastrophes preceding the fall of the Antichrist, and would have a part in Christ's millennial church on earth. Their understanding of this future church therefore remained strictly universalist, i.e., they thought that it would be comprised of the reborn saints from all nations and would not be restricted to specific localities or peoples. And as most of them opted for an allegorical reading of Rev. 20, they also believed that this inchoate millennial church could do no more than anticipate the heavenly New Jerusalem that was to be established only after Christ's bodily return at the end of the thousand years in 2655.

With its figurative reading of the first resurrection and its emphasis on the remaining imperfection of the millennial church on earth, Cotton's *The Churches Resurrection* (doc. 74) marks the starting point of one of the two main developmental lines in New England millennialism. Influenced by a tendency to allegorize and hence spiritualize the millennium and the prophetic events surrounding it, this first tradition would later come to be associated with the term 'postmillennialism' because many of its representatives emphasized the fact that Christ would only return in the body for Judgment Day after the end of the inchoate millennium. The other main line of development, by way of contrast, can be distinguished by its penchant for literalist interpretations, and would come to be subsumed under the umbrella term 'premillennialism.' Like postmillennialism, the label premillennialism is somewhat reductionist because the expectation of Christ's corporeal *parousia* at the onset of his terrestrial reign of glory is only one of the convictions held by some, but not all, representatives of the literalist tradition. Indeed, this literalist tradition produced a great variety of beliefs (such as the bodily resurrection and the rapture of the saints), which are all characterized by a heightened supernaturalism.¹⁷

During the closing decades of the seventeenth century, the literalist tradition, which later on was pushed outside the boundaries of mainstream Protestantism to the evangelical fringes, temporarily came to dominate the eschatology of American Puritanism. By this time the earlier chiliastic fervor, expressed in John Cotton's writings, had long cooled down in the aftermath of the Stuart Restoration (1660-1688), which had dashed the high hopes of the Puritan community on both sides of the Atlantic. When millennialism now returned as a major cultural force to New England, it was more the symptom of a widespread anxiety about the colonies' future. From a religious point of view, Puritan orthodoxy was on the defense and many Congregationalist ministers perceived

covenant with the New England churches would be the typological fulfillment of the broken covenant with Old Israel. For the difference between analogical and typological readings, see the next section of this essay.

¹⁷ The difference between the allegoric or figurative, and the literalist tradition in New England millennialism is well explained in the excerpt from Samuel Hopkins' *Treatise on the Millennium* (doc. 86), a postmillennialist tract written in 1793.

a general decline in doctrinal purity and popular piety. From a political point of view, the colonies had to face forceful integration into the administrative system of the British Empire, a process which considerably curtailed their rights of self-government and re-defined their former identity as a mostly independent religious commonwealth.

III. In Defense of America's Place in Christ's Glorious Kingdom: Second and Third Generation Puritan Millennialism

It has been argued by prominent Americanists that, in this critical situation, the conservative Congregationalist clergy utilized millennial discourse as a means of controlling and counteracting the fearful changes it was confronting. As the established Puritan theocracy threatened to disintegrate under the Second Charter of 1691, these divines are said to have revitalized popular expectations of an imminent apocalypse and whipped their parishioners back into line by telling them that New England stood in danger of losing God's special favor at the very moment that He was about to unleash His wrath upon the unregenerate world. Overcompensating for the perceived religious backsliding and the political marginalization of the New England colonies, the second and third generations of Puritan theologians aggressively pushed ahead with an Americanization of the millennial promise that had allegedly been started by their predecessors. According to Bercovitch and others, its leading representatives, such as Increase and Cotton Mather, claimed in their reading of the Scriptures that God had finally left the Old World to its ruin in the coming apocalyptic tribulations and had assembled His new chosen people in the wilderness of the New World. They purportedly told their congregations that if they only stayed true to the faith of their fathers and continued on their millennial errand, it would soon come to its fulfillment in the form of an American New Jerusalem.¹⁸

Scholars have suggested that key to this arrogation of the role of God's chosen people were the ways in which Puritans expanded their typological readings of Old Testament prophecies beyond their traditional scriptural limits by identifying themselves as the antitype of Old Israel.¹⁹ In other words, they saw them-

¹⁸ Bercovitch mainly based his thesis on textual evidence drawn from sermons belonging to the so-called jeremiad genre. The jeremiad was a very popular type of exhortative sermon loosely modelled on the rhetorical patterns of the prophet Jeremiah, who had chastised the people of Israel for their backsliding while simultaneously reminding them of their role as God's chosen people and the original promise connected with this role. For Bercovitch's understanding of the millennialist ideology at work in the Puritan jeremiad, see his *The American Jeremiad*, 75-83.

¹⁹ Typology is a method of scriptural exegesis which had already been developed by the church fathers who drew on St. Paul's definition of Christ's role as savior in relation to persons and occurrences described in the Jewish Scriptures (most importantly Adam, and the original Fall). Originally, then, typology was a way of reading events, personages, ceremonies and objects of the Old Testament as having foreshadowed Christ's redemptive work, in which they

selves as the New Israel literally assuming the place and the prerogatives of the ancient Jews. This arrogation, or so the argument goes, allowed exegetes to connect the biblical revelations about the Last Times with the new continent and the historical development of the New England churches, which they believed to have entered the new covenant with God when the old one had been forfeited by the Jewish people. More specifically, they viewed the scriptural prophecies concerning Israel's restoration before the advent of the millennium – as predicted in Rom. 11.26 “And so all Israel shall be saved” – in typological terms as referring to their own election and purification.

Today, some leading experts on Puritan theology disagree with this interpretation.²⁰ As they see it, the New England Puritans of the second and third generations, in the tradition of their forebears and English Protestantism in general, continued to understand the eschatological meaning of Old Testament types as referring to Christ's true church, which was conceived as a transnational community of the saints and was never identified with a specific secular society, such as a colony or nation. In other words, they never thought of themselves as exclusive heirs to the old covenant of ancient Israel because the new covenant would encompass the whole community of the elect, who would be saved in Christ. It was only in a much more limited, analogous sense that the Puritans assumed to have entered, like other Christian churches of the time and before them, into a special ‘national covenant’ with God, which was described as similar to the national covenant with Israel. As such a covenanted people, they saw themselves under special obligations to carry out God's will, but also expected, when obedient, to have their share in the millennial glory that would be bestowed upon all the members of Christ's new covenant during the latter days. This “covenantal framework” of Puritan theology, as David Hall has written, “allowed them to

were also fulfilled. Or, to quote from the definition given by the Puritan divine Samuel Mather in his *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament* (doc. 46): “A Type is some outward or sensible thing ordained by God under the Old Testament, to represent and hold forth something of Christ in the New” (KC, 88). The two parts of the Bible were thus seen as corresponding to each other in terms of ‘type’ and ‘anti-type,’ thereby forming a larger unit, which, as David Hall put it, “thematically and structurally [organized] around the fulfilling of prophecy: Christ's coming is anticipated in the Old Testament and completed in the New” (2004, 327). For reformed theology, typology, especially in combination with the idea of the covenant, was of central importance. In accordance with the general trend of Protestant exegesis to correlate scriptural prophecy and history, Calvinist divines extended the ancient method of reading Scripture to the historical development of the Christian church. In this way, the Reformation could be seen as a prophetic event leading towards the establishment of Christ's true church of the saints, which would constitute the typological fulfillment of God's old covenant with Israel.

²⁰ Undoubtedly, the Protestant trend towards typological readings of church history was continued by New England theologians. But, “[d]espite what has been said by some modern historians, most English Protestants and the colonists limited the meaning of type to the church (the saints, or the elect) and did not extend it to encompass society (nation) as a whole” (Hall 2004, 327-8).

speak *as though* the colonies were a new Israel and to assume that events and situations in their own days were replays of previous episodes in Christian history" (2004, 328). Yet, these historical comparisons, should "be characterized as 'examples' as distinct from 'types,' the major difference being that examples did not directly recapitulate salvation history" (2004, 328; emphasis mine).²¹

These fine, but very important theological distinctions, which are implicit in all of the late seventeenth century millennialist texts collected in the anthology, are explicated by Nicholas Noyes' 1698 *New England's Duty and Interest* (doc. 80), which comments upon Jeremiah's vision of a future restoration of Israel. Firstly, Noyes reads Jer. 31.23 typologically as foreshadowing the 'new covenant,' or the reconciliation of God and His fallen creation through Christ's redemptive work, by which the elect members of "the Catholick Church" (here in the sense of the true church) will be saved. Secondly, the Old Testament passage is read "by way of *Analogy*" to refer "to Kingdoms, Countries & Places, Nations professing the Christian Religion" (KC, 178). In this manner, Noyes argues, "the New Testament teacheth us to interpret, accommodate and apply to our selves [i.e., in New England], Texts of the Old Testament" (KC, 178). Hence, Puritan divines of the late seventeenth century, such as Noyes, looked for God's guidance by comparing events and situations in contemporary New England with those recorded in the Bible, or the succeeding history of Christianity. Despite their very frequent references to the national covenant of the Jewish people for purposes of admonition, none of the leading second- or third-generation exegetes, "assumed that New England was the antitype of ancient Israel" (Holifield 2003, 77), but they maintained the view of the first New England theologians: Israel's eschatological antitype was still the true church of the elect among all nations. As a matter of fact, they would not even grant a privileged position to New England within the true church come the millennium, but were rather seeking to establish, in the words of Noyes "*Grounds of Hope, that America in General, & New-England in Particular, May Have a Part therein*" (KC, 178). For literalist exegetes such as Noyes or the Mathers, the leading role in the latter day events was still reserved for the Israelites, whom they expected to convert before the advent of Christ's glorious reign.²²

²¹ For the crucial difference between typological and exemplary or analogical readings of Scriptures, see also Morrisey (2000). The Puritan clergy, as Holifield puts it, "drew a clear distinction between typical and exemplary readings. Types were outward signs of future spiritual realities; examples were not. Types pointed beyond themselves; examples bore their meaning on the surface. The visible types were abolished when they found fulfillment in their Christian antitypes; examples endured as perpetual models. Yet almost everyone agreed that some types could be partially exemplary and some examples partially typical" (2003, 30).

²² Or, as Smolinski succinctly put the revisionist argument: "The special role that modern critics attribute to American Puritans and their New English Jerusalem in Boston, Puritan millennialists bestowed upon the Jewish nation in Judea" (1990, 381-2). These millennialist expectations were the reason for a pronounced attitude of philosemitism among the Puri-

In his 1669 tract *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation Opened* (doc. 77), Increase Mather explained in great detail the dominant view on the connection between the coming of the millennial age and the national restoration of Israel. When he wrote that "surely the day will not be long before the Lord appear in glory to build up *Sion*" (KC, 169), he did not mean this as a version of New England's future. What he asked his fellow Puritans to pray for was the speedy conversion of the diasporic Jews to the faith of the savior they had once rejected and their return to Judea before the Second Coming. New England's relation to Israel is understood in analogous terms (the Puritans also being "in an exiled condition in this wilderness"), and the hope expressed is to be among "the Elect amongst *all Nations*" when Christ would return (KC, 168).

Taking their cues from the providential "signs of the times," such as earthquakes, comets, ominous deaths of religious leaders, both Mathers, like many Puritan ministers at the time, assumed that these events were not far off, expecting to witness during their own lifetime the onset of the fearful catastrophes during the apocalyptic "day of trouble" that would precede the millennial dispensation. "We are in expectation of glorious times," Increase Mather told his congregation in two sermons published in 1673 under the same title (doc. 78), "wherein Peace and Prosperity shall run down like a River [...]; but immediately before those dayes, there will be such horrible Combustions and Confusions, as the like never was" (KC, 171). In his scheme for synchronizing the prophetic events of the Scriptures with the course of history AD, Mather linked the present age with the pouring out of the fifth of the seven apocalyptic vials, which would entail the destruction of Rome. The sixth vial, for him, signified the imminent conversion and national restoration of Jews, which would then be followed by the first resurrection leading to the millennium.

As representatives of a new kind of hyperliteralism, which marked a decisive departure from the allegorical readings of John Cotton, Increase Mather was certain that not only would there be a literal restoration of Israel in the future,²³ but also that the apocalyptic tribulations would entail very real calamities of cataclysmic proportion, which would climax in the conflagration of the globe predicted in 2 Pet. (for a later representation of the conflagration see doc. 90). He equally foresaw a corporeal first resurrection of the saints, who would then rule the world from a divine metropolis during Christ's thousand-year reign in which, in contrast to the inchoate millennium of the allegorists,

tan clergy, which, of course, was always connected with efforts for converting Jews in America and elsewhere.

²³ Only towards the end of his career did Cotton Mather part ways with his father and the majority of his theological colleagues in New England by arguing against a literalist and futurite reading of Israel's national conversion. This is evident in his final millennialist tract *Trip paradisus* (ed. Smolinski 1995). Here, he also developed a radical new interpretation of the globe's apocalyptic conflagration and the saints' escape from this holocaust by means of their 'rapture' (cf. Smolinski 1995, 295-318, and 2003, 452-3).

evil, sin, death, or even religious imperfection would have been banished from the earth, renewed by the supernatural power of God's grace.²⁴

As is the case with most millennialist writings of the literalist tradition, Increase Mather could mean several different things (often at once) when speaking of the New Jerusalem. He equally used the term to refer to the "church triumphant" in the highest heaven, the 'metropolis' of the new millennial world, and the 'state of the church on earth' during the millennium" (Holifield 2003, 76; cf. Smolinski 1990). With regard to second meanings, Increase Mather, unlike his son Cotton, who unequivocally pointed towards Judea, never specified the location of Christ's millennial throne. But one thing is certain: He did not situate it in Boston. In *The Day of Trouble Is Near*, he emphasized the analogical meaning of his words in writing about New England that God had "as it were" caused "New Jerusalem to come down from Heaven" (KC, 173) by entering a covenant with the colonists and allowing them to establish their exemplary church system. Half a century after their forebears had crossed the Atlantic, Mather, like many of his colleagues at the time, was worried that New England was not fulfilling its part of the covenant since he felt an increasing worldliness and "great decay as to the power of godliness amongst us" (KC, 172). With "the troubles of the last times" (KC, 171) looming in the near future, Mather and his fellow ministers feared the consequences could be dire. The question that concerned them most was how hard America would be hit if things continued to deteriorate. In the typical fashion of the Puritan jeremiad, Mather, simultaneously raises the specter of annihilation and asserts the original promise of the covenant in order to turn his wayward flock back to the godly way. He assures them that, though they certainly would be punished for their backslidings, there is still hope. If they reformed, God would not let them perish, but allow them to participate in the glory of the *civitas dei* during the last age.

But the perceived waning of "the old *New-England Spirit*" (KC, 174) was only one reason for the anxious and defensive tone in many of the millennialist writings of the second and third generations. The other reason was, as has been suggested above, the mounting weight that Joseph Mede's condemnation of America carried in the international circles of millennialist theologians. Consequently, New England divines felt extra pressure to assert the possibility that their home region would be included in the millennial boundaries of Christ's saving in-

²⁴ Increase Mather described "the first resurrection as an event in which the bodies of the departed righteous would rise to be reunited in a celestial form with their souls, which had ascended to heaven. The risen righteous and the living saints would then, in accord with 1 Thess. 4.17 be caught up in the air in a divine rapture while God destroyed the wicked through fire in which the returning Christ appeared from heaven. Then the New Jerusalem would descend to the earth for a 'dispensation' of at least a thousand years, during which the saints in heaven would return to this lower world, the church would flourish, and pain and death would cease. Mather expressed doubts that Christ would reign personally, but he thought that the saints of the New Jerusalem would rule the world" (Holifield 2003, 76).

fluence. As Noyes did before him (KC, 180), Cotton Mather in the opening chapter of his ecclesiastical history of New England *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), as well as in a number of other publications, would go to great lengths to show that Native Americans also belonged to the posterity of Noah (cf. Scheiding in this vol., 15-6). The purpose of this argument, was to refute the assumptions of Mede, who "conjectures that the *American Hemisphere* [...] will not have a share in the Blessedness which the *Renovated World* shall enjoy [...] and that the Inhabitants of these Regions [...] will be the *Gog and Magog* whom the *Devil* will seduce to Invade the *New-Jerusalem*" (KC, 183). As far as a special role for New England was concerned, however, Cotton Mather, like his father, would not go beyond mentioning "some feeble Attempts made in the *American Hemisphere* to anticipate the State of *New-Jerusalem*, as far as the unavoidable *Vanity of Humane Affairs*, and *Influence of Satan* upon them would allow of it" (KC, 183).

If Puritan divines of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were, generally speaking, not inclined to challenge the centrality of Judea in the last age, Mather's friend, the judge Samuel Sewall, is one notable exception to this rule. First written in 1697 and revised in 1727, his *Phenomena quaedam Apocalypticæ* (doc. 79), did indeed go beyond a mere rebuttal of Mede by propounding "the *New World* [...] as being so far from deserving the *Nick names* of *Gog and Magog* [...] stands fair for being made the *Seat of the Divine Metropolis*" (KC, 175). What Sewall had in mind, however, was not the Atlantic seaboard of the Northeast, but the Mexican American Hemisphere of "*New-Spain*." Sewall, President of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to the Indians, was convinced that the "aboriginal Natives of *America* are of *Jacob's* Posterity, part of the long since captivated *Ten Tribes*" (KC, 176), who upon the general restoration of the dispersed Jewish nation would be joined by their converted brethren from around the world and supply New Jerusalem with its citizens. Although Sewall agreed with most of his colleagues in insisting on the centrality of a literal restoration of the Israelites, he nevertheless ascribes a special role "to *New English Planters*" in the advent of the millennium (KC, 175). He felt entitled to this because they introduced the genuine gospel into the American hemisphere, thereby breaking the hold of Antichristian Spain on the New World and making possible the conversion of America's 'Indian Jews' to the true faith. This is why he associates them with the scriptural "*Morning Star, giving certain Intelligence that the Sun of Righteousness will quickly rise* [...] upon this despised Hemisphere" (KC, 175).²⁵

²⁵ Yet, as his millennialist poem of 1701, *A Little before Break-a-Day at Boston of the Massachusetts* (doc. 20) makes clear, Sewall's vision of the millennial church remains staunchly universalist. After all, he envisions that "*Asia and Africa, / Europa, with America; / All Four, in Consort join'd shall Sing / New Songs of Praise to CHRIST our KING*" (KC, 31). Sewall's theory that the indigenous peoples of the New World were the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel was widely held in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The notion had first achieved prominence through José de Acosta in his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (1590) and later was further popularized by Menasseh ben Israel's *The Hope of Israel* (1652).

IV. New Light Eschatology and the Rise of Civil Millennialism

Tellingly enough, Mede's arguments continued to reverberate even in the eschatological writings of Jonathan Edwards, the great renovator of American Puritanism, who provided the theological basis for a new Evangelical kind of Calvinist theology (also called New Light Calvinism) during the second half of the eighteenth century and beyond. In his posthumous *A History of the Work of Redemption* (preached in 1739, publ. in 1774), Edwards still felt the need to disprove the eschatological exclusion of America as the home of Gog and Magog (cf. Edwards 1989, 9:434-5). It is in the context of an ongoing defensive debate that we should view his 1742 *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England* (doc. 82). Therein Edwards – swept up by the enthusiasm of the massive revivals that had started to flare up since 1739 along the Connecticut valley (cf. Kelleter in this vol., 171-7) – expressed his hope to the world that the regenerated churches in the British colonies of North America would do “some great Thing to make Way for the Introduction of the Churches Latter-Day Glory, that is to have its first Seat in, and is to take its Rise from the new World” (KC, 185). Until quite recently, these speculations were regarded by many scholars as a milestone in the nationalization and democratization of the millennial promise in North America.²⁶ Today, most scholars agree, however, that *Some Thoughts* is an exceptional work for Edwards and that he quickly came to regret his rashness. Especially in his later works he did not ascribe a special role to America in the events of the last days. When envisioning the millennial reign itself, Edwards certainly did not think in (proto-)nationalist terms. Rather he predicted that during Christ's reign all people and nations of the earth would be, as he put it in his *Notes on the Apocalypse*, united in “sweet harmony,” as the saints from across the globe would gather around a renovated Judea which, after the conversion of the Israelites, would be “at the center of the kingdom of Christ, communicating influences to all other parts” (Edwards 1977, 5:134).

While Edwards's eschatology is certainly not the most original aspect of his theology, the importance of his thoughts on the ‘last things’ lies in the fact that,

For a detailed reading and contextualization of Sewall's *Phaenomena*, see Scheiding 2002. In the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Cotton Mather throws a skeptical light on the ‘Indians as ten lost tribes’-theory (doc. 34) so emphatically embraced by his friend Sewall and many of his Puritan forebears, including the ‘Indian apostle’ John Eliot.

²⁶ Jonathan Edwards's millennial conjectures seemed to fit perfectly in their construction of the Great Awakening as a key event in American religious history because of the emphasis it put on equality in mass conversions, its purported social perfectionism, and its alleged focus on America's role in the latter day events. Edwards, therefore, was seen as a central figure who connected the Puritan idea of a holy errand with the republican spirit of egalitarian freedom, provided an ideological groundwork for the American Revolution, and powerfully contributed to the later national identity as a redeemer nation. For Edwards's role in American culture and his function in the foundational narrative of the nascent American Studies movement, see Conforti 1995.

due to his strong influence, it greatly helped to rejuvenate and re-popularize the allegorical strand in the American millennialist tradition. Drawing heavily on earlier works of English exegetes such as Joseph Mede, Daniel Whitby, and particularly Moses Lowman's *Paraphrase and Notes upon the Revelation* (1737), Edwards argued for a figurative as well as a gradualist understanding of the millennium and the prophetic events leading up to it. Spiritualizing the fall of the Antichrist, the binding of Satan, and the first resurrection allowed him and his disciples, including Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, to keep God's supernaturalist interventions into earthly affairs to a minimum and thereby to reconcile, in certain respects, their apocalyptic outlook with the progressive view of history propagated by the new Enlightenment philosophy. But instead of primarily defining historical progress through the unfolding of human rationality, as many Enlightenment philosophers did, the gradual spiritual progress which the Edwardians read into the course of history had its beginning in the workings of God's grace. More precisely, Edwards's so-called postmillennialism was predicated on the notion that “the whole course and progress of history are based on the effusion of the [Holy] Spirit as manifested in periods of decisive revivals” (Zakai 2007, 91).

Adopting “an afflictive model of progress” common among eighteenth-century postmillennialists (Davidson 1977, 260), Edwards and his disciples viewed human history since the days of Christ as a seesaw of revivals and declensions which would continue in slow ascension until the great regeneration of Christianity which was figuratively foretold in the Book of Revelation by the first resurrection. After the collapse of Roman Catholicism, symbolized by the downfall of the Antichrist, the actual millennium would begin, marked not by an interruption of history or a complete overthrow of the historical order, but by an intensification of spiritual progress. The onset of the millennium, which Edwards and his followers expected around the year 2000,²⁷ was understood as the beginning of Christ's spiritual reign on earth which would continue to grow and improve unperturbed over the course of the thousand years of Satan's figurative binding. As it had been for the seventeenth-century allegorists, however, “Edwards' millennium remains inchoate, a mixture of the saints in heaven ruling through their spiritual successors over their mortal and sinful counterparts in the earth” (Smolinski 1998, xxix). This natural, if much improved, state of affairs would continue until the closing of the millennial era at the end of history in the description where Edwards shifted to a literalist reading of the prophecies.²⁸ Sig-

²⁷ Edwards calculated that the 1,260 prophetic days of Revelation had started in 606 AD when the Pope became universal bishop, and that the year 1866 would bring the downfall of the papacy which would pave the way for the commencement of the millennium that would occur around the year 2000.

²⁸ In these readings, he indulged in a supernaturalism worthy of the Mathers: Satan would be released from bondage to harass the world once more with a vengeance, and Christ would come down from heaven as the dead rose to be reunited with their souls (an event signified by the scriptural second resurrection) for the Last Judgment which would bring the literal

nificantly for many later millennialist texts, Edwards also applied a double interpretation, one figurative, the other literalist, to Rev. 21.1-2, which he read as simultaneously referring to the New Jerusalem of the inchoate millennium and to the saints' heavenly abode that would be located in a literal "new heaven and new earth" at the end of history.

Its remaining imperfections and the continuing blight of death notwithstanding, the millennial reign, according to Edwards, would be a time not only of unprecedented piety and perfection of the Christian church across the globe, but also of great temporal prosperity for all its people. In his 1793 *A Treatise on the Millennium* (doc. 86), Samuel Hopkins undertook the task of describing these earthly improvements in great detail. Conjecturing about continuous betterments in the areas of physical health and ease, material wealth, as well as spectacular advances in the arts and sciences, Hopkins' text in many ways betrays the influence of the utopian projections of the Enlightenment. Yet the gradualist or developmental postmillennialism propagated by him and other New Light Calvinists should not be misread as smoothly blending into an ideology of secular progressivism, let alone one that was nation-centred. In stark contrast to the Enlightenment prophets of man's perfectibility, Edwards and his pupils consistently emphasized how limited the redemptive possibilities of human behavior actually were, due to man's natural depravity. Concerted praying was usually advertised as the adequate means to prepare for the advent of the millennium. History did not appear to them as an open field of possibilities for human self-realization stretching into an indefinite future, but was understood as the manifestation of God's glorious work of redemption in the course of history. This course, however, would by necessity be brought to an end by the Second Coming.²⁹ By the same token, secular forms of progress, such as the accumulation of knowledge or social reforms, were always presented as a byproduct of and as sec-

conflagration of the globe. Then the wicked would be cast into hell for eternal punishment, while the saints would enter the celestial city descending upon a supernaturally transformed and relocated 'new earth' to live there happily forever in the presence of God (cf. Smolinski 2003, 458).

²⁹ Thus, despite all the points of intersection and mutual influence, there are at least two irreconcilable discrepancies between the new secular progressivism and the spiritual progressivism of a gradualist postmillennialism. The first is a fundamentally different understanding of historical agency. Calvinist eschatology, whether old or New Light, held the triune God to be the sole and sovereign ruler of history, by whose free grace the elect would ultimately be allowed to redeem themselves from history. Enlightenment philosophy, in contrast, was characterized by a belief in man's reason and capacity for self-redemption in history, and hence emphasized his moral freedom and ability to control as well as to improve his own fortune. In his polemical remarks on "Predestination" (doc. 99), Thomas Paine highlights this first discrepancy in very aggressive form. Secondly, Enlightenment secular progressivism tends to represent history as an indefinite continuum stretching into an open future. In contrast to this, a traditional, Scripture-based millennialism (both post- and pre-) was characterized by an acute sense of the finiteness of history, the end of which was already determined and foretold by the Book of Revelation.

ondary to an increase in true Christian faith.³⁰ And how little conservative theologians such as Edwards or Hopkins had to do with the nineteenth-century advocates of America's millennial destiny as the republican empire of liberty, is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that *The Treatise on the Millennium* does not even once mention the American Revolution or the future of the newly founded United States.

As a general tendency, "[u]ntil about midcentury Protestant theology and republican discourse remained mostly distinct" (Noll 2002, 78). Only in the second half of the eighteenth century, after the final collapse of Puritanism as an integrated worldview and a comprehensive life system,³¹ a close alliance between evangelical Protestantism (with its millennialist eschatology) and civic republicanism came into being. Mixed with notions of Enlightenment progressivism this hybrid ideology would then provide a new comprehensive framework for America's future national identity. This hybridization was effected not so much by the elaborate scriptural commentaries of academic theologians who are famous today, such as Edwards, Bellamy, or Hopkins, but the cultural work of a host of lesser known clergymen, mostly New England Congregationalists and Presbyterians. In the aftermath of the French and Indian War (a conflict which had re-ignited millennialist expectations all over New England), these men increasingly employed republican arguments in the religious contexts of their preaching, especially when addressing the political controversies created by the widely detested fiscal measures passed by the British parliament. Often apocalyptic in outlook, their sermons were thus characterized by an unprecedented

³⁰ In his *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards would thus argue with regard to man's gradual improvement in history before and during the millennium: "God will improve this great increase of learning as an handmaid to religion, a means of a glorious advancement of the kingdom of the Son, when human learning shall be subservient to understanding the Scriptures and a clear explaining and glorious defending the doctrine of Christianity" (1989, 9:441). This stands in stark contrast to the largely utilitarian concept of knowledge and self-improvement as well as the predominantly technological understanding of progress put forth by someone like Benjamin Franklin (cf. doc. 104).

³¹ In his insightful study *America's God*, Noll argues that the specifically American synthesis between evangelical Protestant religion, political republicanism, and Enlightenment philosophy, which would come to characterize the cultural life of the new nation at least until the Civil War, only began to emerge as the existing Puritan canopy collapsed around the middle of the eighteenth century. In the following century, this amalgamated Christian republicanism, according to Noll, replaced the Puritan covenant-theology as the "long-lived and explicitly biblical construct for linking together God, self, church and society. In its place came a mixed set of modern alternatives that used social or political, but not primarily theological, categories to unify existence" (Noll 2002, 32). Following Noll, the New Light theology of Jonathan Edwards and his academic disciples must not be misinterpreted as the cause for the disintegration of traditional Puritanism and the new alliance of Pietism and republicanism. Even though Edwardian evangelicalism in the long run probably helped along this alliance against its own intentions, it did aim at restoring the covenantal theology of Puritanism in its original purity. For an older, but still useful study of the convergence of Protestant theology and republican patriotism in America, see Berens (1978).

priority of civil issues which clearly sets them apart from traditional eschatology of New England Puritanism. Simultaneously, between the mid-1760s and the mid-1780s historians have discovered a more and more “ready use of traditional religion by the political leaders of the Revolution” (Noll 2002, 78), who, even where skeptical of traditional religion, did not shy away from fostering latter-day anxieties and hopes as the conflict escalated. Finally, we can say that the (pre-)revolutionary period established a new form of discourse informed by powerful popular amalgam of religious and political ideas, which has been labeled by cultural historians “apocalyptic Whiggism” (Tuveson 1968, 24) or “civil millennialism” (Hatch 1977, 23).³² While the exact importance of chiliastic beliefs relative to other ideological sources remains an object of debate, most historians of the period today agree in seeing a politically refashioned millennialism as an important “structure of meaning through which contemporary events were linked to an exalted image of an ideal world” and that was thereby “basic to the formation of American Revolutionary ideology in the late eighteenth-century” (Bloch 1985, xiii).³³

Samuel Sherwood’s 1776 *The Church’s Flight into the Wilderness* (doc. 85) is a striking example of the ways in which the vocabularies of millennialism and eighteenth-century Whig ideology were drawn together in the pulpit rhetoric of the period. Moreover, the text illustrates the high degree of theological license which revolutionary clergymen like Sherwood assumed for themselves in creating this potent mixture of enthusiastic end-time expectations and political propaganda, which so galvanized the colonists in their rebellion.³⁴ In contrast to many later propagators of America’s millennial destiny, Sherwood is very self-conscious. He allows a perhaps unduly “large, extensive sense and latitude” in his interpre-

³² Basic to the ideological formation as well as to the rhetorical power of Christian republicanism in late eighteenth century America is a synthesis of the ideas of religious and political liberty. “The terms of the synthesis,” as Moorhead puts it, “were simple: Civil liberty created conditions favorable to the flourishing of the gospel, and the gospel in turn secured the voluntary order without which society – religious or secular – could not endure” (1984, 532-3). A striking historical exemplification of this synthesis is Ezra Stiles Connecticut election sermon, where the president of Yale college argues that “true RELIGION” is necessary to perfect “our system of dominion and CIVIL POLITY,” while “the diffusion of virtue” provided the “greatest secular happiness of the people” (1783, 7; cf. *KC* web site).

³³ Whereas Hatch and Bloch see millennialist or apocalyptic ideas as absolutely central to the American Revolution, Endy, for instance, de-emphasizes their role for the majority of colonists, arguing that “only a small minority [...] came close to seeing the colonies as a crusading theocracy like ancient Israel” (1985, 12).

³⁴ Although most leaders of the Revolution leaned towards a highly rationalized form of Protestantism or deism that had moved far away from the Puritan tradition, they did not hesitate to utilize the rhetoric of millennialism. In many of their speeches and writings, they defined the Revolution and the new American nation in “a grand apocalyptic interpretation of universal history, the only conceptual framework acceptable to a people still rooted in the providential assumptions of the English Reformation” (McLear 1971, 183); see, for instance, Thomas Paine’s vaguely millennialist rhetoric in his 1776 *Common Sense* (doc. 130).

tation of the apocalyptic Scriptures by assuming “that many of them have reference to the state of Christ’s church in this American quarter of the globe; and will sooner or later, have their fulfillment and accomplishment among us” (*KC*, 191). But even though in theory he still claims to observe the traditional distinction between typological and analogical readings, he effectively collapses that difference in his rhetorical practice.³⁵ For all intents and purposes, he identifies the “United Colonies” as the eschatological fulfillment of the true church symbolized by the women in the wilderness (Rev. 12.14-7), while interpreting the British crown as the latter day antitype of the persecuting dragon.

To a degree inconceivable in the writings of his Puritan forebears, Sherwood extends his apocalyptic reading of history beyond the realm of the church, freely blending politics and religion. According to his interpretation, “the dragon, sometimes called the beast, and the serpent, satan, and the devil” does no longer exclusively signify Roman Catholicism with its ecclesiastical corruptions (*KC*, 194). It also stands for all political manifestations of “the design of the dragon [...] to erect a scheme of absolute despotism and tyranny on the earth, and involve all mankind in slavery and bondage” (*KC*, 194). Inversely, the cause of the true church, persecuted by the dragon throughout history, is understood by Sherwood to be the realization of “that liberty and freedom which the Son of God came from heaven to procure for, and bestow on them” (*KC*, 194).³⁶ This kind of view, of course, enabled revolutionary clergymen like Sherwood to demonize doubly the king, parliament and British politics: The alleged attempts of the Church of England (which, especially after the Quebec Act of 1774 was perceived as increasingly Popish) to forcibly ‘Anglicize’ the colonies, and the curtailment of civil liberties in form of the coercive acts passed during the 1760s by the British government are interpreted as parts of one big Antichristian conspiracy against America. At the same time, America is presented as the divinely preordained city of refuge for the true church, where she was to enjoy “her liberties and privileges, civil and religious, that no power on earth can have any right to invade” (*KC*, 193).

In this manner, as Sherwood’s formulations demonstrate, the revolutionary clergy worked effectively towards endowing a local conflict in the British Empire

³⁵ Sherwood’s wavering between a traditional exegetical method (demanding differentiation between type and example) and a rhetorical purpose that demands ignoring the fine points of theology can be seen most clearly in doc. 85 (*KC*, 192).

³⁶ Sherwood’s sermon is also an early example of the way in which the revolutionary generation, for the purpose of legitimization, began to construct a new historical narrative about the colonial past, according to which their Puritan forebears had emigrated to “this then howling wilderness” because “the cruel hand of oppression, tyranny and persecution drove them out of their pleasant seats and habitations [...] and that the purest principles of religion and liberty, led them to make the bold adventure across the wide Atlantic ocean” (*KC*, 193). Guided by divine providence, they then, like Old Israel in “the land of Canaan,” turned “an uncultivated wilderness” into a “pleasant field or garden” of plenty (*KC*, 192). For a further discussion of this construction of a Puritan Errand into the Wilderness, see section II of this essay, 124-34.

with cosmic significance. In their sermons and tracts, they represented the civil war following the Declaration of Independence as the last act in the apocalyptic battle between good and evil, which would be followed by a millennial reign of earthly bliss. They also managed to establish an intimate connection in the minds of their audiences between an American civic republican ideology and Christian virtues opposed to British tyranny, which they effectively associated with sin and the forces of Satan. In so doing, men like Sherwood helped to create the synthetic ideology of a Christian republicanism which, during the nineteenth century, would be instrumental in integrating an extremely heterogeneous American people under the canopy of a new national self-definition and would endow the nation with a strong sense of historical purpose.

Of central importance in this respect was the millennial promise that North America would "make a great and flourishing empire" (KC, 191), where Christian piety would thrive with civil liberty and would grow in worldly power beyond anything recorded in history. Already shortly before and during the war, this promise of America as the millennial "abode for unadulterated christianity, liberty and peace" (KC, 193) was routinely evoked in the pulpit oratory of ministers such as Sherwood and became a stock motif of contemporary political speeches and literature (cf. docs. 143, 152-3). In the field of literature, the elaboration of this promise even developed into a distinct lyrical genre, the so-called vision poems; an umbrella term under which all of the remaining documents (docs. 83-4, 87-9) can be subsumed. Usually, these poems were publicly declaimed at academic or political occasions (such as graduation or commencement ceremonies of universities, or political celebrations like the Fourth of July) and consisted of detailed visions of the rising glories of America.

The excerpts from Timothy Dwight's very popular poem *America* (doc. 84) contain in condensed form all the structural and thematic elements that are typical of most vision poems, including those by Freneau, Richards, and Humphreys. Published in 1780, Dwight's patriotic poem is dedicated "[T]o the *Friends of Freedom, and their Country,*" and addresses the still struggling colonies but soon-to-be nation as

O Land supremely blest! to thee tis given
 To taste the choicest joys of bounteous heaven;
 Thy rising Glory shall expand its rays,
 And lands and times unknown rehearse thine endless praise. [...]
 "Hail Land of light and joy! thy power shall grow
 Far as the seas, which round thy regions flow;
 Through earth's wide realms thy glory shall extend,
 And savage nations at thy scepter bend [...]
 Round thy broad fields more glorious ROMES arise,
 With pomp and splendour brigh'ning all the skies;
 EUROPE and ASIA with surprise behold
 Thy temples starr'd with gems and roof'd with gold. (KC, 190)

Firstly what makes Dwight's poem exemplary is its apostrophe of America as a "Land supremely blest" in which "more glorious ROMES [will] arise" and outdo the civilizations of "EUROPE and ASIA." This calls upon the traditional notions of a providentially prescribed westward movement of the true church as well as a *translatio imperii, religionis et studii* from east to west.³⁷ Secondly, the poet and later president of Yale college invokes the United States' divinely preordained role to expand and rule over the entire (North) American continent, an idea that would later be associated with the term manifest destiny. Thirdly, and most importantly for our concerns, Dwight not only envisions a gloriously exalted American nation as playing an essential part in bringing about the millennium, because it will bring civilization and the gospel to "savage nations." Without mentioning any specifics, such as the location of the New Jerusalem, he also predicts the last great empire of America to hold a central position in the "heavenly kingdom" that "shall descend" upon the world (KC, 190), if only in the spiritual sense, sometime around the year 2000.³⁸ While it is certainly true to say, then, that earlier vision poems such as Dwight's *America* began to nationalize millennial discourse in the sense that they ascribed a special role to the US in the last age, they by no means argue that the millennium would be confined to their national borders, or principally exclude the peoples of the Old World. In other words, the American empire of liberty and Christian righteousness, which supposedly would take shape in the near future, was imagined only as a part, albeit a central one, of a general reign of bliss on earth.

Also, one must not overlook the careful eschatological distinctions and qualifications which at least a traditionalist Calvinist theologian like Dwight still thought important to make. True to the postmillennialist tradition of Edwards, Dwight continued to differentiate between an inchoate spiritual millennium and the literal new heaven and earth to be established after the Second Coming and Judgment Day, when "the last trump" will announce the corporeal resurrection of "the slumbering dead" (KC, 191). Following the conflagration of

³⁷ The *translatio*-motif has a long history going back to Renaissance culture and beyond. After George Herbert's "The Church Militant" (1633), its most famous expression in English is probably George Berkeley's 1752 "On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America" (doc. 21). For a variation of the *translatio*-motif, see also George Richards's "Anniversary Ode on American Independence, for the Fourth of July, 1788" (doc. 87). Here the voice from the heavenly throne addresses his angels with the following lines: "To the WEST your cares be transferr'd. / That *Vine* which from Egypt to Canaan I brought, / With an outstretch'd, omnipotent arm, / In AMERICA's soil, from Britannia's bleak isle, / Shall flourish – and brave ev'ry storm" (KC, 199-200). In a way, then, these visions of a rising American empire combine a secular model of the cyclical rise and fall of great nations with a Christian postmillennialism that sees a gradual spiritual progress at work in history.

³⁸ In his millennium mathematics, as in most other aspects of his eschatology, Dwight leaned on his grandfather Jonathan Edwards. Hence, Dwight envisioned that the rising American empire of piety and liberty would blend into the progressive realization of a spiritual, inchoate millennium during which the true church would triumph across the globe until Christ would finally return in person.

the earth upon Jesus's descent in a "flaming cloud," "GOD's happy children" will be allowed to ascend to the actual New Jerusalem to "[d]rink streams of purest joy and taste immortal love" (KC, 191). At least for Dwight, nations and nationality would no longer matter at this stage.

On the Rising Glory of America (doc. 83), which the young Philip Freneau wrote together with his fellow Princeton student Hugh Henry Brackenridge as a university commencement poem in 1771, is equally careful to describe the glorious future of the American empire before and during the inchoate millennium only as a "blissful prelude to Emanuel's [personal] reign" (KC, 189). Hence, in contrast to Freneau's later deistic poems and many nineteenth century evocations of an indeterminate process of human perfectibility, the co-authored poem envisions a millennial reign of progress. It is circumscribed by the apocalyptic termination of history which they expected to occur in a not-too-distant future. Only after history's "rolling years are past":

A new Jerusalem sent down from heav'n
 Shall grace our happy earth, perhaps this land,
 Whose virgin bosom shall then receive, tho' late,
 Myriads of saints with their almighty king,
 To live and reign on earth a thousand years
 Thence call'd Millennium. Paradise a new
 Shall flourish, by no second Adam lost. (KC, 189)

What Freneau and Brackenridge (herein following Edwards's double application of Rev. 21.1-2) call the "Millennium" in this potentially misleading passage designates the actual celestial city after its descent to earth, in which there will be no more death or sin, and Jesus will personally reign together with "Myriads" of resurrected saints until the end of time itself. For the most part, then, *On the Rising Glory of America* puts into verse a fairly conventional Edwardsian theology. What is truly remarkable and, certainly for its time, quite exceptional about the poem, however, are its speculations about America as a possible seat of Christ's millennial throne on the supernaturally transformed new earth.

By their truly daring suggestion that "perhaps this land" might be at the very center of the new earth, Freneau and Brackenridge anticipate by several years a significant shift in American millennialism that would occur, as I already suggested above, during and after the revolutionary period. In this shift towards a millennialist nationalism, the formerly important fine points of eschatology, such as the Edwardsian double application or the basic distinction between typological and analogical sense, were increasingly neglected, at least outside the confines of academic theology. If the postmillennialism of the Edwardsian school had paved the way for a predominantly figurative readings of Revelation, many later writers of popular religious literature indeed took this allegorizing tendency one decisive step further. Instead of engaging in any methodical interpretations of the Scriptures, they increasingly drew on the vocabulary of traditional millennialism as a kind of metaphorical reservoir for their patriotic and progressivist

rhetorics. This is especially true for authors who leaned toward deism or very liberal forms of Protestantism, such as Universalism or Unitarianism, which self-consciously rejected the biblicism (reliance on the Bible as the literal and ultimate revelation of truth) and Christocentrism (emphasis on Christ's redemptive work as the heart of true religion) of the evangelical majority. Looking at such works, it becomes indeed questionable whether their largely metaphorical and free-wheeling references to biblical prophecies should still be called millennialism at all, or whether this does not constitute a new cultural practice which is informed by philosophical assumptions and ideological goals that are clearly distinct from the scriptural beliefs outlined in the previous section of this essay.³⁹

For example, the imagery of an imminent future in which "the bright golden-age shall triumphant return," and "Millennium's new paradise bloom" (KC, 200), with which the Universalist pastor George Richards concludes his "Anniversary Ode on American Independence, for the Fourth of July, 1788" (doc. 87) is employed rather casually. The poet no longer feels the necessity to distinguish between a first inchoate millennium of earthly progress and a second millennium of the new earth. Ultimately, Richards seems to make the same use of Christian millennium as he does of the Greco-Roman myth of a golden age: as tropes expressive of his belief in humanity's progress and America's rise to the status of the world's leading power. Free from exegetical restraints, writers such as Richards or Humphreys thus pushed forward with the nationalization of the erstwhile universal promise of millennialism which for centuries had extended to the invisible church comprised of all the peoples of the earth. Where the Puritans had always thought in transatlantic terms and hoped to be part of the international community of true saints who would share in the glory of Christ's kingdom, their

³⁹ One decisive difference between the traditional millennialism of Puritanism (both of the post- and pre-kind) and this new metaphoricized postmillennialism thus seems to be that the latter is no longer based on a closed biblical worldview. In other words, it no longer unquestionably assumes that the Bible accurately foretells and literally contains the whole course of history which was predetermined from the moment of the world's creation. Instead, metaphoricized millennialism tries to integrate an important and very powerful concept of an existing religion into a new worldview defined by Enlightenment philosophy and the modern sciences which claimed that history is an open, ever-evolving field. In its 'poetical' approach to the Book of Revelation, this new kind of millennialism follows the general trend of liberal Protestantism and especially of deism to view the prophetic Scriptures as ancient cultural documents which have to be subjected to rational criticism and whose potential truth-value lies in expressing ethical wisdom as well as spiritual insights about nature or history in highly figurative language. McLear convincingly argues that the most important factor in this metaphoricization of postmillennial eschatology may have been the work of the new biblical critics leading to an increasing historicization of the concept after 1800: "Doctrinal historicization of the millennium combined with revivalistic yearning for its realization to foster confidence in man's ability to reach the glorious historical state. Gospel preaching, mass conversions, and prayers for the millennium passed quickly into the reform crusades designed to achieve the ultimate perfection of men and institutions" (1971, 191).

descendants imagined a new, national community which had been collectively chosen to become the world's most glorious empire.

Significantly, there is also not much in Richards's poem to remind the reader of the cataclysmic catastrophes which used to be such an integral part of millennialist eschatology. Only the last two lines vaguely nod to the traditional notion of history's end. Reflecting the predominant optimism of the period, progress appears as a seamless continuum, and no expectations of any imminent apocalyptic afflictions disturb the "confidence in the future felicity and glory of [... our] country," to quote from the introduction to David Humphreys's 1804 *"A Poem on the Future Glory of the United States of America"* (doc. 89). As with Richards and the older, deistically inclined Freneau of "On the Emigration to America and Peopling the Western Country" (doc. 88), Humphreys's reference to "heav'n's millennial year!" has little to do with the Scripture-based hopes in Christ's glorious kingdom harboured by the Puritans, but simply signifies a "better æra" of advancement and prosperity for the United States (*KC*, 203-4). This era, moreover, is given an indefinite duration since Humphreys calls his millennium "heav'n's perennial year" (*KC*, 204), so that the ultimate closing of the drama of history, which the poem does at least mention in passing, is deferred indefinitely.

In the writings of many liberal Protestants and deists, who no longer subscribed to a traditional biblical worldview, the civil millennialism of the Early Republic thus ultimately merged with Enlightenment discourse about human perfectibility and continuous historical betterment brought about by man's own efforts. What better illustration for this than the fact that Humphreys, in the full version of the text, supports his poetic prophecy about the future greatness of the American people with statistical tables documenting the feats that have already been achieved in the areas of land improvement, growth of the population, economic expansion, and military strength. Both the belief in the efficacy of human agency and the belief in history as an uninterrupted, indefinite continuum of progress, which inform the metaphoricized postmillennialism of these later vision poems, mark a significant departure from, if not an actual break with, the Puritan tradition.

Yet even during the revolutionary era and even more strongly after 1800, hyperliteralism, which had shaped the apocalyptic vision of many second- and third-generation Puritan divines, would return in the beliefs held by many Protestant sects outside the mainstream. These included Shakers (United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming), Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Millerites, and later Seventh-Day Adventists (cf. Stein 2003). For the nineteenth century, one can thus speak of a basic bifurcation in American millennialism: On the one hand, we find the strict scripturalism and hyperliteralism of the so-called premillennialists groups. Generally speaking, they expected the more or less imminent Second Coming of Christ, who would return in the body to establish his millennial reign, the corporeal resurrection and/or rapture of the saints as well as the literal fulfillment of many other scriptural

events. These expectations are, of course, still characteristic of many so-called Fundamentalist churches in the US today.⁴⁰ On the other hand, we find a gradualist type of postmillennialism in which belief in the historical truthfulness of the scriptural prophecies was increasingly supplanted by a loosely metaphorical approach to Revelation, and that easily glided into an essentially secular progressivism. Initially, the postmillennialism of the Edwardsian school had been an attempt to strike a balance between a new progressive view of history and the traditional apocalyptic outlook. Already during the period of the Early Republic, however, postmillennialism increasingly turned into "an understanding of history as gradual improvement according to rational laws that human beings could learn and use. It was becoming a faith in an orderly ascent of history into the golden age" (Moorhead 2003, 73). In the course of the nineteenth century, the original conviction that historical progress would ultimately come to a close at the end of the millennial age frequently lost its hold on mainstream Protestants as "the progressive elements of the older postmillennial vision displaced its apocalyptic features. What remained was the notion of an immanent, this-worldly kingdom of God from which the sense of a definitive end had been removed" (Moorhead 2003, 86). With this sense of an ending lost, the vocabulary of traditional millennialism had at last become purely metaphorical and freely interchangeable with the ideas and terms from neighboring discourses. This shading away of millennialism into the discourses of Manifest Destiny and American world redemption is powerfully exhibited in John L. O' Sullivan's famous 1839 "The Great Nation of Futurity" (doc. 169), which invokes the vision of an ever-improving "boundless future," in which America "is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High – the Sacred and the True" (*KC*, 387).

Instructional Strategies and Classroom Issues

I. Key Concepts and Major Themes

1. The 'futurite turn' in seventeenth century English millennialism (docs. 74, 76)
The Reformation era saw a general revival of chiliasm, which had long been marginalized by the church. In the theology and popular culture of English Protestantism, beliefs in a future reign of Christ on earth became widespread. They were especially important for the Puritans, who confronted the king in the English Civil War, or who, like John Cotton, propagated emigration to the New World.

⁴⁰ The millennialist theology of the Shakers is discussed at length in Stein (1992); the best general introduction to the Millerites and their cultural context are the essays edited by Numbers and Butler (1987). For Seventh-Day Adventism and the Mormons, see Gaustad (1974) and Underwood (1993) respectively. The classical study on millennialism in contemporary evangelical churches is Boyer (1992); see also Hochgeschwender (2007).

2. Reassessing the millennial impulse behind the Puritan migration and church reforms (docs. 74, 76, 80-1)

Contrary to what many scholars have claimed, New England Puritans did not think of themselves as God's New Israel sent into the western wilderness to erect a millennial New Jerusalem. Their exodus from England was never conceived of as a mission to reform the world and inaugurate Christ's reign in America, but rather intended as an escape from the perceived corruption and increasing restrictiveness of the Anglican Church. Seeking to restore church and society in their primitive purity, i.e., in accordance with the ordinances of biblical times, the Puritans hoped to share in the glory that would be bestowed on all true followers of Christ during the millennium.

3. The Puritan argument against America's exclusion from the millennium (docs. 75, 78-9, 81-2)

The undeniable concern of seventeenth-century Puritan exegetes with placing America on the millennial map must not be interpreted as an attempt to associate exclusively the prophecies of Christ's glorious reign on earth with New England history. Instead, this concern should be understood as expressive of an anxiety and resistance against the eschatological marginalization of America in the millennialist discourse of contemporary English theologians such as Joseph Mede.

4. The partial intersections as well as major differences between eighteenth-century postmillennialism and the new Enlightenment philosophy of history (docs. 83-4, 86, 88)

During the second half of the eighteenth century, a new type of millennialism becomes dominant in British North America which holds that human history AD has been a gradual spiritual progress which will finally lead towards Christ's millennial reign. This so-called postmillennialism is partly influenced by new secular views of historical progress, but also contradicts them in many respects.

5. The amalgamation of republican ideology and millennialist beliefs in popular religious literature and sermons of the revolutionary period (docs. 83, 85)

Between the 1760s and 1780s, many clergymen and popular writers hybridized in their rhetoric idea(l)s of republican liberty, patriotic resistance, and religious expectations about apocalyptic struggles, and a subsequent reign of earthly bliss. This so-called civil millennialism provided an important motive and interpretative framework for the American Revolution.

6. The convergence of millennialism and nationalism in the formation of American nationalist ideology (docs. 83-5, 87-9)

Following a shift from theological, Scripture-based millennialism to a popular, metaphoricized millennialism, this vague religious belief in an ongoing progress of humanity towards a new earthly paradise freely blends into a re-

ligiously charged American nationalist ideology. This ideology propagates the notion of the US as the torchbearer of progress destined to enlighten the American continent in the process of national expansion and, ultimately, to redeem the entire world.

II. Comparison – Contrasts – Connections

Examples: Docs. 87-8, 169-70, 174, 176, 178

One of the central aims of the first part of this article was to caution the reader against the traditional master narrative that constructs a direct causal or developmental continuity between seventeenth-century Puritan eschatology and modern nationalist ideology. Having gained a heightened appreciation of the often subtle, but very significant, differences that separate traditional Scripture-centered millennialism from its later cultural derivatives, students can then be encouraged to explore on their own the much more obvious continuities between the civil millennialism of the (post-)revolutionary period and the religiously charged American nationalism of the nineteenth century.

Students may begin this study unit by comparing Philip Freneau's 1795 poem "On the Emigration to America and Peopling the Western Country" (doc. 88) to three selected documents from the section on "Expansionism" (169, 174, 176). Similarities and lines of influence should become readily apparent between the metaphoricized millennialism of Freneau and the nationalist discourse propagated by John L. O'Sullivan and William Gilpin with its key notions of Manifest Destiny and American world redeemership. On the road to this national messianism of the nineteenth century, Freneau's text represents a significant intersection between a residual Calvinist eschatology, new Enlightenment philosophy, republicanism, and early American patriotism. In the poem, one can also see how the traditional *translatio imperii, religionis et studii*-motif was being extended at this time into a larger concept of man's progressive (self-)redemption in history, and how the role of humanity's vanguard was being ascribed to the United States. According to the concept of historical progress suggested by Freneau, mankind had always advanced in a westward direction and would reach its final destination with the establishment of an American civil millennium in which the principles of reason and freedom reign, and the arts, sciences, as well as commerce would flourish.

In the later documents, this embryonic 'national religion' has developed into the full-fledged form of an aggressively self-assertive American exceptionalism and messianic imperialism that we commonly associate with the concept of Manifest Destiny. O'Sullivan and Gilpin not only assert the United States' claim to 'civilize' the continent, but openly tout the belief in American civilization as the ultimate fulfillment of humanity's entire history. In their texts, the United States are simultaneously represented as being destined to bring to completion humanity's past accomplishments and to forever transcend all its historical en-

cumbrances. Drawing on proto-Darwinian notions about the destiny of races, the American people are thus hailed as “the great nation of futurity” (KC, 386), the redeemer nation providentially chosen to deliver mankind from its benighted state and lead it into a future golden age. In the words of William Gilpin, the United States are to become the last of the world’s great empires that is providentially preordained

to establish a new order in human affairs – to set free the enslaved – to regenerate superannuated nations – to change darkness into light – to stir up the sleep of a hundred centuries – to teach old nations a new civilization – to confirm the destiny of the human race – to carry the career of mankind to its culminating point – [...] to perfect science – to emblazon history with the conquest of peace – [...] to unite the world in one social family – to dissolve the spell of tyranny and exalt charity – to absolve the curse that weighs down humanity, and to shed blessings round the world! (KC, 396)

Where Freneau had taken a decisive step in nationalizing earlier millennialist beliefs in the sense of ascribing a special place to the new republic in the final age of the world, the United States have now become the primary agent of redemptive history. The Puritan hope to be part of Christ’s true church during the millennium has ultimately metamorphized into the vision of an American millennial empire.

Obviously, this ideology of Manifest Destiny and world redeemership serves to give higher meaning and historical legitimacy not only to the expansion of the United States all the way to the Pacific coast, but also to the ruthless means employed in the process, including the displacement of Native American tribes of the west. Even war and military annexations appear justified “by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty” (KC, 397). In this respect, Freneau also appears as a forerunner. After all, he invites his audience in 1795 to imagine the newly opened territories east of the Ohio as part of the national domain that would soon be peopled by armies of European immigrants. Moreover, in its imaginary territorial expansion, his poem describes a necessary cultivation of the hitherto idle or unused western wilderness, which will inevitably entail the retreat of the “unsocial Indian” (KC, 201). Thus, the millennialist vision poem already rehearses the same basic rhetorical strategies which would be used with even greater force by the later advocates of Manifest Destiny: It interprets the geography of the American continent through a framework of providentialism and thereby represents its gradual inclusion into the national territory as a predestined, necessary event in the progressive history of mankind that, as a matter of course, will be accompanied by the disappearance of ‘lesser races’ blocking the Euro-American advance, be they Mexicans or Indians.

In the second half of this study unit, students will read George Richards “Anniversary Ode” (doc. 87) side by side with Robert Charles Winthrop’s “Address” (doc. 170) and the anonymous “The Destiny of the Country” (doc. 178). Looking at the mid-nineteenth-century documents first, they will learn how the idea of America’s Manifest Destiny, for all its ostentatious orientation towards the future,

was simultaneously being projected onto the past. Evoking a providential model of national history, myriad writers and orators like Winthrop celebrated “this wonderful rise and progress of our Country, from the merely nominal and embryo existence which it had acquired at the dawn of the seventeenth Century, to the mature growth, the substantial prosperity, the independent greatness and National grandeur in which it is now beheld” (KC, 387). More specifically, they often engaged in (mis-)construing the providential narrative of the Puritan Errand into the Wilderness. In this narrative, the Pilgrim Fathers appeared as direct precursors of the revolutionary Founding Fathers of the nation, as they were said to have been driven from the mother country “by the love of religious liberty and political freedom” alike (KC, 402).⁴¹ Indeed, the Puritans were imagined as having settled in the new world inspired by their self-definition as the new chosen people, who were being led by God into the promised land to establish a reign of freedom and piety that would pave the way for and stand at the center of Christ’s coming millennial kingdom. From the perspective of the nineteenth-century ideologues, the purported Puritan sense of a millennial mission to erect a New Jerusalem in the American wilderness was thus seen as having been fulfilled by the founding of the American nation state and its ongoing rise to power. Unimpaired by the strict scripturalism of their forebears, which had insisted on a distinction between analogy and typology, the American people were now hailed without any reserve as the New Israel and the United States as “a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” (KC, 401).

Working their way back in time to Richards’s ode, students will then be able to see that the civil millennialism of the late eighteenth-century vision poems is one important root from which this popular, nationalistic historiography of the nineteenth century grew. Freely appropriating his imagery from Ps. 80, Richards identifies the first Puritan colonists as the new Israelites, who were guided by God’s providential rule to escape the persecutions in England associated with Egyptian bondage, and to conquer their New World Canaan, where their children would build a new reign of liberty. Only five years after the Peace of Paris (1783), the poet already engages in a historical revisionism that interprets the American Revolution and its final victory over the old “tyrant” (KC, 200) as the quasi-typological fulfillment of the Puritans’ millennial Errand into the Wilderness.

III. Reading and Discussion Questions

1. Read Freneau’s and Brackenridge’s *On the Rising Glory of America* (doc. 83) and the poem “Columbia, the Pride of the World” (doc. 157), which was written half a century later by Samuel Woodworth during the era of expansionism.

⁴¹ For earlier examples of texts engaged in the construction of the ‘Puritan Errand,’ see documents 85 and 149.

Discuss continuities, but also radical changes both in terms of the underlying beliefs and the rhetorical strategies that are employed.

2. Compare Samuel Hopkins's non-nationalist speculations about the millennium in his *A Treatise* (doc. 86) with later, more secularized visions of the millennium that represent America as the spearhead of progress and as the land of plenty (docs. 155, 158).
3. Discuss the fundamental differences between a traditional apocalyptic worldview, as illustrated in Increase Mather's *The Day of Trouble Is Near* (doc. 78), and the kind of historical consciousness exhibited in nineteenth-century texts such as John L. O'Sullivan's "The Great Nation of Futurity" (doc. 169).
4. Discuss the different roles ascribed to Native Americans by Puritan millennialists (docs. 34, 79) and later representatives of a secularized civil millennialism (docs. 88, 177).

IV. Resources

a. Recommended Reading

Sacvan Bercovitch. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975. While very critical of modern US nationalism, this influential work, together with Bercovitch's *The American Jeremiad* (1978), gave new argumentative strength to the time-honored narrative that conceives of Puritan millennialism as directly leading towards the nineteenth-century ideology of American exceptionalism and world redeemership.

Ruth H. Bloch. *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. The most extensive study of millennialism during the second half of the eighteenth century. While emphasizing the general importance of millennialist thinking for the American Revolution, it simultaneously demonstrates the great diversity of theological standpoints and highlights their often conflicting political implications as well as their different relations vis-à-vis Enlightenment thinking, republican ideology, and nationalism.

Theodore Dwight Bozeman. *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. A far-reaching critique of established views on the Puritan emigration as being primarily driven by millennialist hopes for the future. Instead, it argues that the intentions of the colonists are best understood as a specific form of Christian primitivism reclaiming the authority of the New Testament and seeking a return to the 'first times' of the Apostles in America.

John J. Collins, Bernard McGinn, and Stephen J. Stein, eds. *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*. New York: Continuum, 2003. A selection of essays from the three-volume *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (1999), which provides a com-

prehensive guide to the history of apocalyptic thought in all world religions, and, more specifically, to Christian millennialism. The high-profile essays in the one-volume edition provide students with an expert account of apocalypticism and millennialism from the days of early Christianity to the present time and give easy access to scholarly literature and debates. Especially pertinent for our concerns are the essays "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America" (Smolinski, 441-467), "Apocalypticism in Mainstream Protestantism, 1800 to the Present" (Moorhead, 467-492), and "Apocalypticism Outside the Mainstream in the United States" (Stein, 493-515).

Bernd Engler, Joerg O. Fichte, and Oliver Scheiding, eds. *Millennial Thought in America: Historical and Intellectual Contexts, 1630-1860*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002. An important collection of essays examining the transformations of millennial thought in America from the 1630s to the 1840s. Most of the essays take a cultural studies-approach to their subject and focus on the complex interaction of millennialism with other discourses, such as reform ideologies, evangelicalism or nationalism, in defining the collective identities of colonists and, later on, US citizens.

E. Brooks Holifield. *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. A magisterial contemporary survey of the history of theology in British North America that is also very helpful for students who want to study the development of American millennialism in a larger religious framework.

Perry Miller. *Errand into the Wilderness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956. Probably the single most influential work among a number of related studies from the post World War II-era that transformed the existing cultural myth about the Puritans' belief in their millennial errand into a scholarly master narrative that argues for the Puritan origin of modern American nationalism.

Reiner Smolinski. "Israel Redivivus: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England." *New England Quarterly* 63.3 (1990), 357-395. A path-breaking revisionist essay that convincingly challenges the widely-accepted idea that the Puritan settlers hoped to establish a millennial New Jerusalem in America.

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