



Mixology and Theology

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Week Eleven: Millennium Cocktail and Premillennial Dispensationalism

Mixology: Millennium Cocktail

Dale DeGross is one of the leading mixologists since the 1980's, and is known as "King Cocktail." www.kingcocktail.com. He created the Millennium Cocktail in partnership with Courvoisier to promote their Millennium bottling of their cognac. He later discovered it was similar to a cocktail from the 1940's called the East India Cocktail, with the addition of orange oil and nutmeg. He says it is one of his best.

Cognac is a specific type of brandy produced from distilled white wine from the Cognac region of France. It must be distilled twice, using copper pot stills, and aged in French oak barrels for a minimum of two years.

Millennium Cocktail

1 1/2 oz	cognac	1 1/2 oz	pineapple juice
1 oz	orange curaçao (or triple sec, Cointreau, etc.)	1 dash	Angostura bitters

Fresh ground nutmeg and orange twist for garnish

Add ice to a martini glass to chill. Add cognac, pineapple juice, Cointreau, and bitters to a shaker with ice. Shake until cold. Discard ice from glass. Strain drink into glass. Garnish with an orange twist and dusting of fresh grated nutmeg.

Millennium Mocktail

2 oz	orange juice	2 oz	pineapple juice
2 oz	club soda, or Sprite	1 dash	Angostura bitters

Fresh ground nutmeg and orange twist for garnish.

Add orange juice, pineapple juice, club soda, and bitters to a glass with ice. Stir gently. Garnish with orange twist and dusting of fresh grated nutmeg.

Theology: Premillennial Dispensationalism

Introduction

Whether you're familiar with the term or not, you are likely familiar with many of the terms and theological ideas of premillennial dispensationalism (I'm going to abbreviate it as PD after this): apocalyptic, rapture, tribulation, mark of the beast, second coming, end times, etc. You might be familiar with the *Left Behind* series of books and movies from the 90's and 2000's based on PD ideas, or before that *The Late, Great Planet Earth* book and movie by Hal Lindsay from the 1970's. The hugely popular religious tracts by Jack Chick are PD. Much of American fundamentalism and evangelicalism has been influenced by PD, and therefore American popular Christianity is shaped by it.

What is PD? It is a novel theology and biblical interpretation that emerged beginning in the mid 1800's and grew in popularity and formulation in the early 1900's, primarily in the United States. It is important to understand that, while Christianity has always had an eschatology (belief in an end goal for God's creation), the way PD interprets Scripture and theology were novel and not within traditional Christian ways of understanding Scripture, God, Christ, creation, and the end or goal of all things.

Some definition of terms will be helpful for talking about PD:

Eschatology: Theology concerned with the end or goal of God's creation.

Apocalyptic: The original meaning of the word from the Greek is "uncovering" or "revealing." So the last book of the New Testament is called "The Revelation to John," which could be called "The Uncovering to John of Things Hidden," or "The Revealing to John." In popular usage, however, the word is used when talking about catastrophic events at the end of the world, often thought of in destructive ways. While the book of Revelation includes scenes of destruction, that is by no means the point of the book or "the end" to which it points—just the opposite!

Futurism: The belief that biblical texts are filled with unfulfilled prophecies that must be fulfilled in the future in literal, historical ways. Much of the biblical interpretive work of PD is trying to decode what current and future events particular passages are referring to.

Millennialism: The belief in a literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth, taken from Revelation 20:4.

Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Premillennialism: A form of millennialism that believes Christ will return before (pre) the millennium begins. In this belief system, the world gets worse and worse with wars and disasters, then Christ returns suddenly to begin a reign of peace. It has most often gained popularity during times of strife, war, economic downturn, etc., giving a sense of hope in times of hopelessness.

Postmillennialism: A form of millennialism that believes Christ will return after (post) a thousand year period of peace. In this belief system, the world is progressively getting better and better and can become a world of peace. Christ returns as the culmination of this peaceful millennium. Postmillennialism has most often been popular during periods of progress and prosperity, giving a sense of optimism and affirming

the general direction of society.

Dispensationalism: The belief that history (biblical and after) is divided into periods or “dispensations” in which God works with distinctive administrative principles. Most dispensationalists believe in seven dispensations, but some hold to a different number. Each dispensation ends with a crisis and a discontinuity with the next dispensation. The seven dispensations are commonly described this way:

- Innocence – Adam under probation prior to the Fall. Ends with expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Some refer to this period as the Adamic period or the dispensation of the Adamic covenant or Adamic law.
- Conscience – From the Fall to the Great Flood. Ends with the worldwide deluge.
- Human Government – After the Great Flood, humanity is responsible to enact the death penalty. Ends with the dispersion at the Tower of Babel. Some use the term Noahide law in reference to this period of dispensation.
- Promise – From Abraham to Moses. Ends with the refusal to enter Canaan and the 40 years of unbelief in the wilderness. Some use the terms Abrahamic law or Abrahamic covenant in reference to this period of dispensation.
- Law – From Moses to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Ends with the scattering of Israel in AD70. Some use the term Mosaic law in reference to this period of dispensation.
- Grace – From the cross to the rapture of the church. The rapture is followed by the wrath of God constituting the Great Tribulation. Some use the term Age of Grace or the Church Age for this dispensation.
- Millennial Kingdom – A 1000 year reign of Christ on earth centered in Jerusalem, ending with God's judgment on the final rebellion.

Rapture: The belief that those who are “saved,” both living and dead, will be taken up, or “raptured,” into heaven with Christ at some point in salvation history. This is based on just a few biblical verses like 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

Tribulation: The belief in a seven year period of great strife and suffering that those who are “left behind” after the rapture will endure. Most versions of PD believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, so the saved will escape the seven year period. Others are post-tribulation or mid-tribulationist rapture believers.

PD in Brief

Here's a quick take on what PD believes, which is not easy to summarize, because it gets convoluted and complex pretty quickly, but here we go: PD claims to be a literal reading of Scripture and that prophetic and apocalyptic texts foretell actual historic events that must be fulfilled. With an emphasis on the books

of Daniel and Revelation, with a little First Thessalonians and some parables of Jesus thrown in, they teach that God acts in human history through seven periods, or dispensations. During these periods, God formed Israel to be God's earthly chosen people, and the church to be God's heavenly chosen people. We are living in the dispensation of grace, the period of the church, which is seen as a parenthesis or interruption in the carrying out of God's plans for Israel. This period lasts until the second coming of Christ, which is actually the second and third coming of Christ. Darby (see below) turned the notion of a rapture into a separate event from the second coming, so Christ will come first to rapture the faithful, then again to conquer and begin the millennium of peace. After the rapture, there will be a seven year period of tribulation, during which the Antichrist will appear and people have to choose whether to accept Christ or the Antichrist. The conversion of Israel to Christianity is essential for the Millennium to begin. The history of Israel is essential for God's plan to be enacted, so the politics of modern day Israel have become of great importance. At the end of the tribulation will come the great battle of Armageddon when Christ will return with the church and defeat Satan and begin his peaceful reign.

Got all of that? There's a lot more to it than this summary! Where did this all come from?

History

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was an Anglican priest in Ireland who became disillusioned with the church, which he said was "in ruins." He became part of a group called the Plymouth Brethren, a conservative, low church movement focusing on creating a pure, holy Christian fellowship. They were anti-clerical, anti-denominational, and focused on lay people interpreting Scripture. Using a literal approach to Scripture, and with a premillennial approach already in formation, Darby invented the idea of Dispensationalism. Between 1862 and 1877 Darby made at least five missionary trips to the United States and Canada, bringing PD teaching here.

Cyrus Scofield (1843—1921) was born in Michigan, moved to Tennessee as a teenager, and fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War. Soon after he married and moved to St. Louis, became an attorney, and converted to evangelicalism. He attended a church with a pastor who taught PD. He assisted with the missionary work of Dwight Moody of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute, a PD teaching group. In 1883 Scofield became an ordained minister in the Congregational Church and served a congregation in Dallas. He left there to serve in Moody's former Congregational church in Massachusetts. Scofield returned to Dallas in 1903 and then published his *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909, a version of the King James Bible with extensive notes throughout teaching the PD reading of the texts. This bible is the most influential publication for promoting PD and fundamentalism in America.

Lewis Chafer (1871-1952) was a Congregational minister who was mentored by Scofield. He ended up serving at Scofield's church in Dallas in 1921. In 1924 he founded Dallas Theological Seminary and served as president and professor of systematic theology until his death in 1952. He wrote a highly influential systematic theology based on PD teachings. Dallas Theological Seminary is a primary center for teaching PD.

Charles Ryrie (1925-2016) was a student of Chafer at Dallas Theological Seminary. He became a professor of systematic theology there and published the *Ryrie Study Bible*, an update and expansion of Scofield's

work, published by Moody Press.

Hal Lindsey (1924) attended Dallas Theological Seminary, led various evangelical ministries in Orange County, California, and published *The Late, Great Planet Earth* which used PD ideas to foretell the soon-to-be fulfilled biblical prophecies of the rapture, etc. all which were supposed to happen in the 1980's.

Criticism

Where do we begin? First I think American Christians have to recognize how heavily PD has shaped American popular notions of Christianity that many think this is simply what Christians believe and what the Bible and the church teach. Critical exposure of the problems and novelty of PD are important for changing the American imagination of what the Christian Gospel is.

Here are some important points of criticism of PD.

1. Invention of the idea of divided periods of God's activity, rather than a unity of purpose of God throughout creation and history.
2. Assumption that PD uses a strictly "literal" reading of Scripture and then filling in all kinds of gaps of interpretation with PD ideas that aren't biblical (e.g. rapture, two second comings, Israel's place in God's plan) and wildly inventive ways of making it all make sense. This fundamentalist, literalistic, inerrant approach to Scripture is itself an early modern invention.
3. Rejection of divine covenants made between God and people rooted in God's grace and justice.
4. The promotion of escapism and an anti-this-world view. Rather than seek justice, love of neighbor, and care for creation, PD sees the goal as letting the world go to hell and being saved from the mess.
5. The distortion of images of Christ from one who seeks and creates reconciliation and peace, to one who glorifies and depends on violence.
6. The use of Israel as a prop for Christian salvation schemes. God's covenant with Israel is merely earthly, and ultimately Jews must convert or be condemned. Modern politics of Israel and Palestine are seen as playing out the PD worldview. Support of Israel is a means of moving the world closer to the time when the rapture and second (or third) coming of Christ can happen. There is among some an embrace of a politics of war and violence because it will hasten the end. The lack of concern for Palestinians, even Palestinian Christians, is rooted in this view.
7. PD in its most American form is highly nationalistic, buying into the notion of a unique place for the United States in God's salvation plan.
8. Perhaps most essential in criticizing PD is its promotion of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty for people of faith. Rather than focus on the grace of God in Christ promised in baptism as the center of certainty in our relationship with God, PD focuses on the importance of decoding the hidden meaning of biblical texts, getting it right, not being fooled, and making correct choices.
9. PD is in many ways a view of the world that is absent of God until the end times are fulfilled. Humanity is left on its own while God is in heaven waiting for the right moment to return. The God known

through the incarnation and cross of Christ, who participates in the struggle and suffering of humankind, does not exist.

10. PD sacrifices living by hope in a living God for living by pre-determined prophetic predictions of the future which simply must play out. Even God is held captive to the narrative PD offers.

No one has done a better job of bringing that critical reflection than Lutheran professor of New Testament, Barbara Rossing, who is on the faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (my alma mater, but she came after I left). Her book *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* provides a thorough critical review of PD, its history, its errors, and its dangers. More than that, she provides a much-needed hopeful interpretation of Revelation and of the Christian Gospel and how we imagine the present and the future with God.

Rossing says that Revelation shows the end of the human empire, not the end of the created world. It reveals that the way of the empire is the way of death, and the way of the crucified Lamb is the way of life. It is a warning and a choice: A warning of what happens if the Roman Empire continues to hold power and people give it allegiance; a choice between the Roman economy fueled by injustice and violence, or the economy of God, rooted in mercy, justice, love. Revelation is written for people of faith in Christ who are already living in tribulation and persecution. It urges and invites them to continue to follow the way of the crucified Christ and the martyrs who follow in his name, because God will bring them through to a new day of justice, peace, and restored creation.

It occurs to me that Revelation may be more important for the church to consider now than it has been in the recent past. We are living through turbulent, confusing, trying times when choices must be made between trusting, supporting, and following the American empire, and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a world gone mad. We have to learn how to read the book in the way it was intended: as a means of stirring the Christian imagination toward faithful discipleship and deep trust in God, while rejecting human powers that seem to promise so much. I think the best analogy for how to read Revelation and other biblical apocalyptic texts is seeing them function how science fiction and horror function for us today.

Imagine reading or watching *Watchmen*, or *Lovecraft Country*, and taking them as literal predictions of the future! You would go into some pretty wild beliefs. But reading them as prophetic, critical examinations of white supremacy, American empire, and fear in facing them head on, and you get a sense of what Revelation was and can be for us today. Rather than *Left Behind* we need new literature that stirs the imagination for peace, love, justice, unity, and grace in and for this world now.

Further Reading / Viewing

<https://sojo.net/articles/how-did-we-get-here/conspiracy-theories-apocalyptic-rhetoric-and-evangelical-embrace>

<https://baptistnews.com/article/why-are-christians-so-susceptible-to-conspiracy/>

Barbara Rossing on Rapture and Revelation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V4lkH6TsR4>