

A Re-evaluation of Anglo-Irish Premillennialism 1789-1914: Part 2

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KEY WORDS

Historic Premillennialism	Dispensationalism		
Nineteenth Century	Charles Spurgeon	John Nelson Darby	Plymouth Brethren
Eschatology	Futurism	Historicism	

ABSTRACT

Contemporary premillennial interpretations of the last days and the kingdom of God have been largely dominated by two primary interpretations, often described by the nomenclature of “dispensational premillennialism” and “historic premillennialism.” The oft taught conclusion is that dispensationalism, though popular in the 19th and 20th centuries, has been replaced by historic premillennialism which is more akin to non-dispensational views of the 19th century and earlier, perhaps summarizing the views of the patristics as well. An evaluation of the patristics is outside of the scope of these articles, whereas I will focus primarily on the 19th century and beyond. Likely, one can find premillennial support for many views in the patristic writings though the evidence is scant enough to claim any contemporary perspective as identical to the early church writings, hence the formation of the term, “historic premillennialism.”

This second article of two posits the case that this conclusion is reductionist. And, to simplify the premillennial viewpoints to these two competing interpretations misses the overlapping theological concerns as well as the cultural and contextual milieus that contribute to developing theology. In order to demonstrate the aforementioned thesis, this article will focus on what is commonly called the “long 19th century” as a focus. Here, Irish premillennialist authors will be evaluated with a specific focus on the “Plymouth Brethren.” The resulting analysis will then be compared with British premillennial authors. Finally, the article will present some possible ways forward in theological discourse for premillennialism as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous article, I summarized the current context of premillennial research and outlined 19th century British premillennialism in order to demonstrate the complexity of premillennialism and to differentiate contemporary “historic premillennialism” and dispensationalism from that of 18th century British thought. In this article I will proceed to analyze 19th century Irish premillennialism with the same goal of highlighting the themes

contained therein. I will follow up with a summary and evaluation for further research to aid in establishing a better understanding of premillennial thought going forward.¹

¹ For sake of space, I limited this article to some of the most influential in forming Irish premillennialism. Noticeably absent is Andrew Robert Fausset, in which further research will be helpful. For an example of analysis that does include Fausset briefly, see “Crawford Gribben, and Andrew R. Holmes, *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790-2005*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.”

ANALYSIS OF KEY IRISH PREMILLENNIAL AUTHORS AND INSTITUTIONS

Any assessment of Irish premillennialism must include an analysis of the “Plymouth Brethren.” The Plymouth Brethren were founded when, “in the late 1820s, a number of Christians who were discontented with the Established Church began to meet together in small groups in Dublin.”² The most well-known of the early Brethren was John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), though there is some debate on how much he influenced the early meetings.³ In order to fully understand men like Darby (and William Kelly) and the broader Brethren movement, it is important to recognize the influences that came before these men, rather than treating their writings in a vacuum. In this regard, while the premillennial convictions found in certain men at Trinity College, Dublin are useful in their own right, they also provide a valuable understanding of the social and historical context in which the Brethren belong.

Stunt questions to what extent Darby’s early education may have played into his own perspectives as well as those of the other Brethren. Stunt cites his studies as being “classical as opposed to theological, and they were finished some time before his conversion.”⁴ Yet, this conclusion misses the point of how the cultural and theological milieu of a given thinker is shaped not just directly, but also indirectly. Stunt does at least acknowledge the

presence at Trinity College of John G. Bellett, a leading thinker of the early Brethren.⁵

In contrast, Wilkinson rightly elaborates the influence that Trinity College, Dublin had on shaping Plymouth Brethrenism.⁶ And, he further points out that Darby’s education as a classicist did include theological training.⁷ Thus, appreciating the overall perspectives that existed at Trinity proves useful. In this manner, it has been observed that men like Dean Graves, a dean at the college, also had an involvement with “the Dublin auxiliary of the London Society for the Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews.”⁸ While it is true that Graves was likely a postmillennialist, Graves was a literalist in terms of prophecy and the Jews.⁹

Other lecturers at Trinity, such as Edward Hincks and Thomas Elrington, also held interest in the Jews and prophecy.¹⁰ This focus likely was representative of the greater interests of the evangelical world on prophetic themes, the Jews and the millennium at large, thus giving rise to more detailed study in general. And, though the Anglo-premillennialists may not have held some of the more radical Church/Israel distinctions, these subjects were not unusual at the time, both in England and in Ireland (at Trinity College).¹¹

In understanding the impact of Trinity College, Dublin on the early Brethren movement, we must not limit ourselves to those who taught at Trinity. Rather, we must include those who studied there as well. “One of the most significant of these early ‘futurist’

2 Paul Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby: Studies in Evangelical History and Thought* (Eugene, Oregon: Paternoster Publishing, 2007), 76.

3 Wilkinson, 76.

4 Timothy C.F. Stunt, “Influences in the Early Development of John Nelson Darby,” *Prisoners of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880*, Gribben, Crawford and Stunt, Timothy, C.F. editors (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004), 48.

5 Stunt, 48.

6 Wilkinson, 73.

7 Wilkinson, 74.

8 Wilkinson, 74.

9 Wilkinson, 74.

10 Wilkinson, 74.

11 Wilkinson, 75.

premillennialists was William de Burgh.”¹² De Burgh evidently felt that the historicist view of Revelation was too speculative and did not rely on the self-interpreting power of Scripture open to the average reader.”¹³ It is this “literal and plain” reading of Scripture that appears to drive much of the incipient futurism, and is not dissimilar to the general conclusions concerning the prophecies related to the Jews, Israel and the kingdom that were on the minds of those in England. Therefore, De Burgh, along with Maitland, are pivotal thinkers in the transition from historicism to futurism in Ireland and England alike.

De Burgh likely published his *An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* in 1832.¹⁴ There, De Burgh holds the various *pericopae* for the seven Churches applies to all Churches in every age.¹⁵ De Burgh then proceeds to detail various historicist views of the book, including those of Edward Irving and presumably the same Mr. Cuninghame (Cunninghame?) of which Maitland wrote a polemic.¹⁶ To defend his futurism De Burgh gives a simple response, “I answer, in a word, that these symbolical prophecies are unfulfilled.”¹⁷

12 Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500-2000* (York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 82.

13 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 82.

14 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 82. William De Burgh, *An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. (London: Hodges, Smith & Co., 1857), vii.

15 De Burgh, 5, 18. Though many contemporary futurist dispensationalists do hold to a modified “historicist” interpretation of the seven churches being interpreted as symbolic of the ages of history leading to Christ’s return, this must be understood as a historicist approach to those particular *pericopae*.

16 De Burgh, 137-138. Though it cannot be proven decisively that this is the same Mr. Cuninghame albeit with different spellings, the time frame and rhetorical analysis suggest this is the same man. See, “S.R.Maitland, *The Twelve Hundred and Sixty Days in Reply to the Strictures of William Cuninghame, Esq. of Lainshaw, in the County of Ayr*. (J.G.&F. Rivington, 1834)”

17 De Burgh, 139.

What one can immediately notice in reading De Burgh’s work is the consistent way he reads the apocalypse, built on the literalism of the growing premillennial literature. For De Burgh, there is a literal last Antichrist and a literal two witnesses, which, in his view, are literally resurrected Moses and Elijah.¹⁸

Though these views had been held by some in the early Church,¹⁹ and we have already seen an openness to this possibility in Anglo-premillennialism, this still remains a transition from the more general historicist concept naming a papal succession of antichrists.²⁰ Further, De Burgh sees an end time trial where God gives a “judicial dealing with the Jewish nation” with a simultaneous “judgment of the Gentiles.”²¹ And, he seems to hold a broad “great day of the wrath of the Lamb,” where the series of trumpets are “synchronous with the Seals in their end,” a conclusion similar to, but more developed than that of Horatius Bonar.²² All of this leads to the “establishment of the kingdom of Christ, consequent on the destruction of the Anti-Christian Confederacy.”²³ While this does not infer a pre-tribulational rapture, the language is such that it should not be surprising that the Plymouth Brethren emerged with the idea.

Likewise, De Burgh speaks of two “distinct aspects under which the Church of the Advent-day is presented to us - *the heavenly and the*

18 De Burgh, 200-201.

19 For an example of patristic exegesis in this light, see “William C.Weinrich, tr. and ed. *Latin Commentaries on Revelation: Victorinus of Petovium, Apringius of Beja, Caesarius of Arles and Bede the Venerable*. (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 14.”

20 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 15

21 De Burgh, 208, 200.

22 De Burgh, 209.

23 De Burgh, 209.

earthly.”²⁴ Here, though not specified (or limited to) the Church and Israel, De Burgh posits in the marriage supper of the Lamb (which he seems to connect to the millennial reign) heavenly and earthly distinctions - distinctions developed further in the Plymouth Brethren.

Yet, De Burgh then adds another aspect to the marriage of the lamb “which should not be overlooked, and another signification of the Bride: - I allude to the restoration of the Jewish people, which is also frequently spoken of under this emblem.”²⁵ Here, De Burgh is consistent with the Jewish restorationists both in England and Ireland. In the context of his futurism and the earthly/heavenly distinctions he was developing, we see another example where premillennial thought was *evolving* already established ideas. This conclusion is essential in understanding the major thinkers of the emerging Plymouth Brethren movement, whose growing body of literature and teaching largely dominated the Irish premillennialism of the 19th century.

Thus, while it will be necessary to assess the views of two of the major thinkers such, John Nelson Darby and William Kelly, it will be helpful to summarize some of the emerging trends found in the broader movement. To do this, it is best to analyze more than just the previous influences, but to consider the broader ecclesiastical situation that the early Brethren came out from among. For “in the late 1820s, a number of Christians who were discontented with the Established Church began to meet together in small groups in Dublin.”²⁶ On one hand, much of the religious dissent “must be attributed to the alarming political events of the

time.”²⁷ Yet, on a more fundamental level, the change of conviction concerning the Erastian state Church and their actions seemed to play an even larger role on men like Darby and Bellett.²⁸ Consequently, the Brethren were a movement that placed eschatology in the greater context of ecclesiology and separation - a point that must be kept in mind when one unites them to later dispensationalism.

This attitude of ecclesiastical separation was largely spiritualized as one later Brethren writer attributes the change of these men completely to their advancement of knowledge in the Lord as they separated from the established church to study prophecy.²⁹ Throughout the writings of the Brethren, this pessimistic, separatist ecclesiology is pervasive and more pronounced than the pessimism of the premillennialists in England. Yet, this should not be understood in matters of contrast, but rather of degree. Separatism is seen amongst all of the premillennialists, yet the rigidity can be felt more when studying the Brethren. Bellett attributed the Church’s high calling and holiness to the reception of the grace of God as “our obedience to God therefore thus depends on our receiving the reconciliation,” as he speaks of the “the ever fresh and blessed truth

24 De Burgh, 316.

25 De Burgh, 319.

26 Wilkinson, 76.

27 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 103.

28 Wilkinson, 75.

29 See, “Henry Pickering, ‘J.G. Bellett’ (1795 - 1864) <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/j-g-bellett/henry-pickering/chief-men-among-the-brethren/hy-pickering/la129631/> accessed online March 16, 2023, where Pickering describes the formation of the brethren, “By the year 1827 each of these two earnest souls was attending the meetings for the study of prophecy at Powers-court House, in Co. Wicklow, and becoming detached from the conventional religion of Protestants around them as they advanced in knowledge of spiritual truth. In 1828 we find Bellett “breaking bread” with some friends like-minded-Francis Hutchinson and Edward Cronin, besides J. N. Darby, and, it would seem, Anthony Norris Groves, who had brought with him from England similar, yet independent, convictions.”

of the love of God our Savior.”³⁰

It is likely that their interpretation of the church’s calling contributed to the perhaps exaggerated Church/Israel distinction. It is not that *some* distinction did not exist in previous Bible students. It is that up until the Brethren there was less of a rigid dichotomy. Bellett writes of the saints (including those of the Old Testament) “[t]hey lived by faith, and they died in faith, and are laid up surely as children of the resurrection; no longer of the earth, earthy, but to bear the image of the heavenly, in the day when death is to be swallowed up of sic in victory.”³¹ He sees theirs as the heavenly country, while “Israel and the earth receiving blessing again in the restitution of all things,”³² when Christ returns. A careful examination of Bellett’s writings seems to differentiate between the Jews and Patriarchs already in heaven and those living at the time of Christ’s return.³³

Though not an Irish premillennialist, Benjamin Willis Newton (1807-1899) was a member of the Brethren who met John Nelson Darby during a visit Darby made at Exeter College, Oxford while Newton was a student.³⁴ It is widely noted that their early friendship was almost that of mentorship.³⁵ While some writers focus on the timing of the rapture in the eventual disagreements between Darby

and Newton, the disagreements may have been more likely due to Darby’s opinion of Newton’s Christology.³⁶ This conclusion was born out in later Brethren writings.³⁷

Outside of the perceived doctrinal error that divided the two men (and the potentially overstated emphasis on the difference they held on the timing of the rapture), their doctrine was quite similar. The assembly in Plymouth in which Newton was involved was modeled after the Dublin Assembly and likely gave the movement its name. Gribben acknowledges this connection when he writes “B.W. Newton (1807-99), an early leader of the Plymouth Brethren, agreed with Darby’s social pessimism, arguing in his commentary on Revelation (1843) that Scripture ‘assumes the path of human progress to be, at present, evil...’³⁸ Further, “[it] is important to note that the restoration of Israel lay at the heart of Newton’s own eschatology, a point conveniently omitted by critics like Sizer.”³⁹ For example, Newton takes a futurist view of the prophecies of Daniel as he states:

And can we, after all we have read in Isaiah and in Daniel respecting the history of Antichrist and of Israel in the latter day, doubt respecting the meaning of the passage before us? Are not the Jews to return to Jerusalem in unbelief? Will they not rebuild their temple.⁴⁰

Newton clarifies his understanding of God’s providential work as “different periods in man’s history,” making sure his readers do not conflate “the coming dispensation, i.e., the millennial

30 John Gifford Bellett, “The Heavenly Calling Foreshown.” <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/the-heavenly-calling-foreshown/john-gifford-bellett-jgb/christian-witness-volume-4/la57681> accessed online March 16, 2023.

31 Bellett.

32 Bellett.

33 This is an important concept to keep in mind when one evaluates the relationship of early Brethren with later dispensationalism. It seems clear that the early Brethren, though advocating a Church/Israel distinction, did not completely remove the Old Testament saints from all church privileges.

34 Wilkinson, 77

35 Wilkinson, 77.

36 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84. See also “Wilkinson, 83,191.”

37 For a later evaluation, see “Andrew Miller, *Miller’s Church History*. (Montreal: Bible Truth Publishers, 1999) 1183.”

38 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84.

39 Wilkinson, 130.

40 Benjamin Willis Newton, *Aids to Prophetic Inquiry* (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1848), 84-86.

with the present.⁴¹ For, “To confound a period in which Satan is to be bound, Israel converted and made a national witness for God,” is a mistake for Newton.⁴² This reveals the importance of “dispensational” distinctives held in right interpretation. One could argue that a pessimistic outlook on history, a national restorative place for Israel (much like Baron) and post-tribulational futurism define Newton’s premillennial theology. And, despite his view on the rapture, his convictions place him firmly in line with the Plymouth Brethren, including John Nelson Darby and William Kelly.

Having briefly surveyed Newton and Bellett, it is important to take a look at the more well known figures of the Brethren Movement such as John Nelson Darby and William Kelly. John Gifford Bellett informed Darby that he had met a group in London ‘who were warm and alive on prophetic truth, having had their minds freshly illuminated by it.’⁴³ And, “Groves, Bellett, Cronin, and Darby have all been cited by scholars as *the* founding father of Plymouth Brethrenism, but few have left a mark as indelible as that of John Nelson Darby.”⁴⁴ Thus, a survey of Darby’s premillennial interpretations is essential in understanding the evolution of Brethrenism along with *futurist* premillennialism.

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was born in Westminster, London, to an Irish Father and an Anglo/American Mother.⁴⁵ His heritage and the fact that he spent time both in England and Ireland has led most to consider Darby Anglo/Irish.⁴⁶ Yet, his subsequent education at Trinity College, Dublin, his ordination as a Church of

Ireland deacon and his ministry with the Irish Brethren make it appropriate to identify him as an Irish theological thinker in terms of assessing his premillennial doctrine.⁴⁷

Darby’s education at Trinity College Dublin was “during a period in which the traditional postmillennialism held by the British establishment was being increasingly questioned.”⁴⁸ And, Darby testifies that his true conversion came following a horse riding accident.⁴⁹ It was this conversion experience that led Darby “to look for the true Church which he did not find in Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism.”⁵⁰ Thus, Darby’s education and his conversion experience contribute to his own role as a pessimist in an age when Christian thinkers were re-examining all branches of the established Church.

Stunt makes a compelling argument concerning Jansenist/futurist influence on Darby’s thinking based on his visits to Paris.⁵¹ While a firm conclusion on this connection may evade us, the similarities of his “Irish futurism” and the Parisian Jansenist Catholicism provides a fuller picture of the cultural/theologico perspectives that surrounded Darby.⁵² Darby’s focus on grace was certainly found in the Puritan writings that would have been available to Darby, including that of a certain form of Jewish “Restorationism.”⁵³ In this sense he would have been part of the larger framework

41 Newton, 25.

42 Newton, 25.

43 Wilkinson, 108.

44 Wilkinson, 76.

45 Wilkinson, 66-67.

46 Wilkinson, 67-68.

47 Wilkinson, 67-68.

48 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 83.

49 Wilkinson, 70-71.

50 Wilkinson, 71.

51 Stunt, Darby, 62.

52 Stunt, 62. It is important to note that the Jansenist priests whom he was exposed to seemed to appropriate the “doctrines of grace” that would have been consistent with his Anglican background.

53 Wilkinson, 160.

of covenantalism.⁵⁴ Further, Darby emerged at a time that the fruits of the enlightenment and Scottish Common Sense Realism were taking root in the hermeneutical method.⁵⁵ These factors, along with the observation that the “fundamental distinction between Israel and the Church, along with the futurist interpretation of the last days, came into focus” during Darby’s time, provide a reminder that if we only see Darby through the lens of modern dispensationalism, we may fail to see how interconnected his thinking was to those during this century.⁵⁶

Thus, rather than being an innovator, Darby credited others for many of his interpretations. For example, Darby evidently credited his view of the rapture to a man named Tweedy.⁵⁷ Further, Wilkinson describes Darby’s appreciation for William De Burgh’s lectures, thus reinforcing Darby’s time at Trinity.⁵⁸ Yet, unlike De Burgh, Darby did not credit his futurist views of Revelation (and Daniel) to the Church Fathers. It is possible that this hesitation may be due to the fact that Darby held at least some disdain for the patristics. Of them he writes (after quoting the Anglican 39 Articles and Clement), “As the Fathers, I have read some, consulted almost all, and some a good deal. But when, many years ago, I set about to read them, I found them as a

54 Wilkinson, 98-99. It is helpful to remember that the interpretation of dispensations was already part of the standard covenantal framework, though it was emphasized more fully later “dispensationalists.”

55 See, Stunt, *Darby*, 44. See also Todd Mangum, “The Theology of the Scofield Bible,” *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church*, Mangum, R. Todd and Sweetnam, Mark S. editors (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2009), 104, for a brief discussion on the culmination of Baconian science on C.I. Scofield and Charles Hodge. Though it is outside the purpose of this article, the impact the Enlightenment and Scottish Common Sense Realism have had on both Covenantalism and Dispensationalism cannot be overstated.

56 Wilkinson, 160.

57 Wilkinson, 193.

58 Wilkinson, 131.

body, such trash that I gave it up as a study.”⁵⁹ The context of his statement lies in a letter to whom he was having a doctrinal dispute, evidently perceiving the recipient was over reliant on the Patristics for their point. It is here where Darby’s individualism serves as a reminder that though Darby was heavily influenced by others, he was also not one to capitulate to those whom he held strong antagonism for in doctrinal matters.

Therefore, understanding the complexity of Darby’s background and approach (with a proper historic assessment) yields a welcome addition to the research that has, perhaps unfairly, connected Darby to names such as historicist Margaret MacDonald and the Irvingites since the days of Samuel Tregelles.⁶⁰ What is most ironic in these supposed connections is that Darby has much stronger words against Irving than others, such as M’Cheyne in England, whose theology would have been much closer to Tregelles than Darby. Thus, it may be that Tregelles was more interested in defending his nephew Benjamin Newton from Darby’s charges than actually deciphering errors in Darby’s system.⁶¹

Ultimately, For Darby, both Irving and Newton had Christological problems, as can be found in his published letters.⁶² Thus, while he shared similarities to both men, he was not hesitant to speak out against them with a tendency toward obsession.

Darby, like those of this era, believed that God continued to have a role for national Israel. Yet, it is in the details of this contention where

59 John Nelson Darby, *Letters of John Nelson Darby*, Vol. 3. (Blijhamsterstraat, Netherlands: H.L. Heijkoop, 1971 reprint), 71.

60 Wilkinson, 192.

61 Wilkinson, 191.

62 John Nelson Darby, *Letters of John Nelson Darby*, Vol. 2. (Blijhamsterstraat, Netherlands: H.L. Heijkoop, 1971 reprint), 496.

he differed from others. Darby believed “that Jacob or Israel is elect for the earth,” and that the “nation of Israel would be restored.”⁶³ Yet, Darby clarified that only “the remnant would be saved,” essentially creating two classes within elect Israel, remnant (spiritual) and physical or ethnic⁶⁴ It is in these distinctions that Darby did believe in both a spiritual and physical seed within Israel, whereas men in England like the Bonar brothers simply saw the restored remnant of Israel as part of the larger Church.⁶⁵ Darby believed Christ was the only way of salvation, thus, his focus on the distinction between the spiritual and the carnal (and the spiritual vs. national Israel) may be connected to his view of the millennial kingdom in which Christ, the true vine will rule, so that “God may be all in all.”⁶⁶ Regardless, Darby’s views of the Church and Israel tended to be more literal than other exegetes’ interpretations, which Darby ascribed to misunderstanding on the part of others.⁶⁷

Wilkinson is correct in connecting Darby with the incipient Zionist movement, yet Wilkinson makes an even more important observation concerning Darby’s view of the Church in relation to the millennium as “Darby believed the Church, and not Israel, would govern the earth with Christ during this period.”⁶⁸ Darby believed the Jews would be restored, but the Church with the remnant of Israel would rule as part of their high calling in holiness. This high calling of the Church was connected to Darby’s view of holiness and zeal for real evangelism. Darby was concerned that those being superficially evangelized would be

hindered by “superficial work,” in such a way as to hinder their reception at the Lord’s Supper.⁶⁹ Thus, Darby sees holiness as an essential component of the marriage supper of the Lamb at the Lord’s return, in which “the assembly is presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle.”⁷⁰ It is Darby’s view of the Church that counters the oft misunderstood element of Darby’s theology of Israel and the supposed elevation of Israel above the Church found in Sizer’s accusation.⁷¹

Concerning eschatology, Darby does allow for a limited historicist reading of the first three chapters of the book of Revelation when he writes “the seven assemblies represent the history of Christendom.”⁷² Yet, his futurism becomes clear when he writes “the Assemblies are the ‘things that are;’ what follows, ‘the things after these... the saints, then, who will be caught up to meet Christ, are seen only on high here; they belong to heaven and are no longer on earth.”⁷³ Darby relates to his earlier writing when he says “but I gather from 2 Thessalonians 2 that the rapture will be before the apostasy.”⁷⁴ Darby’s earthly/heavenly dichotomy fuels his view of the pre-tribulational rapture. He does by connecting the rapture to the Church’s calling “where they would be with Him when the world was to be in the time of terrible trial.”⁷⁵ Thus, the Church will experience bliss and preservation while the Great Tribulation remains related to the earth and Israel’s restoration.⁷⁶

63 Darby, *Letters Vol. 2*, 440,443.

64 Darby, *Letters Vol. 2*, 440.

65 Darby, *Letters Vol. 2*, 441.

66 Darby, *Letters Vol. 2*, 442,443.

67 Wilkinson, 124-125.

68 Wilkinson, 115.

69 John Nelson Darby, *Letters of John Nelson Darby, Vol. 1*. (Blijhamsterstraat, Netherlands: H.L. Heijkoop, 1971 reprint), 256.

70 John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Volume 5, Colossians to Revelation*. (Addison, IL: Bible Truth Publications, 2004), 501.

71 Wilkinson, 129.

72 Darby, *Synopsis Vol. 5*, 447.

73 Darby, *Synopsis Vol. 5*, 468.

74 Darby, *Synopsis Vol. 5*, 468.

75 Darby, *Synopsis Vol. 5*, 464.

76 Wilkinson, 124ff.

This futurism and the Jewish connection to the Great Tribulation is also evident in Darby's view of Daniel's 70th week which remains "unaccomplished."⁷⁷ Yet, Weber overstates the novelty of this view when he says "the Plymouth Brethren received a shock at the third Powerscourt conference in 1833, when Darby introduced his teachings on the pretribulation rapture of the Church and the postponement theory, which argued for a 'parenthesis of prophetic time' between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel 9."⁷⁸ For, the writings of De Burgh and Maitland reveal the notion of a future time period marking at least half of Daniel's seventieth week was already in circulation.⁷⁹ Further, Darby's belief that the 1260 days of Daniel (and Revelation) were literal placed him squarely in a movement that rejected the year-day theories of historicism beginning with men such as De Burgh and Maitland.⁸⁰ Yet, in Darby we see the emergence of an almost scientific approach to words and phrases that continued on with other Brethren including men such as William Kelly.⁸¹

William Kelly (1821-1906) was a "close friend" of John Nelson Darby and the later

editor of Darby's "collected writings."⁸² He, as an early Brethren, sided with Darby in his doctrinal conflicts with Newton.⁸³ Kelly also denied the supposed reception of the rapture doctrine from Irving and MacDonald.⁸⁴ Having been a bit younger than Darby, we may see a coalescence of the Brethren futurist premillennialist doctrine in Kelly's writings.

William Kelly wrote a number of commentaries in various forms, ranging from summaries of his lectures to more full-scale expositions, as well as those on topical themes. In his book, "The Second Coming and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ," he makes clear some of the general conclusions that were forming in the Brethren movement.⁸⁵ He outlines the Jews, Gentiles' and the Church's relationship to the coming of Christ.⁸⁶ From there, he makes plain his doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture, followed by an exposition of those "left behind" who will pass through it.⁸⁷ In these lectures the doctrines are carefully sifted in such a way that one might see the systemization of eschatology that would later mark 20th century premillennialism as whole.

Kelly shared the pessimism of the age prior to Christ's return with other premillennialists in opposition to postmillennialism. Kelly demonstrates that all agree to "translation into 'the kingdom of God's dear Son.'"⁸⁸ But, he argues:

82 Wilkinson, 95, 91.

83 Wilkinson, 191.

84 Wilkinson, 191, 195.

85 See, "William Kelly, *The Second Coming and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ*. (Blijhamsterstraat: H.L. Heijkoop, 1970 Reprint)." Here Kelly gives a series of well categorized expositions formed from lectures originally given in an assembly but later written down.

86 Kelly, *Second Coming*, 87,133.

87 Kelly, *Second Coming*, 172.226.

88 Kelly, *Second Coming*, 290.

77 John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Volume 2, Ezra to Malachi*. (Addison, IL: Bible Truth Publications, 2004), 401.

78 Timothy P Weber, "Dispensational and Historic Premillennialism as Popular Millennialist Movements." *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to 'Left Behind Eschatology'*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). 10.

79 Earlier I cited De Burgh's position on this issue, as well as Maitland's in my previous article. The fact that pretribulation rapture was less known, and the "gap" between the 69th and 70th week may not have been articulated in the same ways as in Darby should not be used to undermine the above observation.

80 Darby, *Synopsis Vol. 2*, 406. See also, "Darby, *Synopsis Vol. 5*, 488" where Darby expounds on his view of a personal antichrist.

81 For example, see, "Darby, *Letters Vol. 1*, 521-523." Here, Darby distinguished certain phrases in Daniel referring to the desolation in general to be contrasted with the specific end time Beast.

Not merely will the kingdom be preached, and the word, mixed with faith in them that hear it, bring souls born of God to see and enter that kingdom morally (John iii), which no doubt is true now; but Scripture shews us also a change of immense importance for the world, which the appearing of the Lord Jesus will inaugurate.⁸⁹

Here Kelly draws from the text (Acts 3:19-21) the concepts he shares with Darby in making a firmer earthly/heavenly distinction in relationship to the coming of the Lord. Kelly goes on to write:

Now what this passage proves, beyond just question, is this, that God will send the Lord Jesus, and that the sending of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, according to the that fore-appointment which every Jew looked for, will introduce, or at any rate will be simultaneous with, the times of refreshing, of which the prophets are so full. Meanwhile, heaven receives Jesus until (not the destruction of the world; not the passing away finally of the heavens and earth; but contrariwise) the restoration of all things.⁹⁰

This Christological language of earth and heaven makes more sense if one knows that Darby had identified the Church with Christ in his view of the *parousia* in Revelation 12.⁹¹ This is a view that Kelly does not elaborate on, though he does mention the rapture repeatedly and the Church's union with Christ consistently.⁹² For Kelly, like all the futurists, the days of symbols of Revelation are to be taken literally.⁹³ Yet, Kelly does allow for the Beast as a

figure of "imperial power."⁹⁴ Thus, the end time Antichrist holds the "moral features that link him with the 'antichrist' of John, he is viewed here as an earthly power, and is thus connected with one of the beasts of Revelation."⁹⁵ Like the historicists, Kelly sees the Antichrist as a successor of sorts of those antichrists "who had once been in the family of God outwardly, had gone out from it, abandoning the blessed truth about the Father and the Son, which they seemed to have received."⁹⁶

Understanding Kelly's view of the place the true Church holds with Christ, it is not surprising to see him contrast the true Church with the spirit of Antichrist explicated in 1 and 2 John. He then discusses the thousand year reign in such terms as "They lived."⁹⁷ This is Kelly's way to describe those who did not worship the Beast sharing in privilege with those who were already raptured.⁹⁸ In contrast to later developments of "dispensationalism," Kelly allows for both Church and Old Testament saints to be gathered together in the rapture.

Kelly continued the growing trend that literalism played in lexical studies both in the Brethren movement and without. Kelly added an appendix to his printed lectures on the Second Coming, which included a discussion on the meaning of the Hebrew word שׂאֵר or "rosh." His lecture included a lengthy quote from Joseph Hammer-Purgstall's *Sur Les Origines Russes*, 'On the Origins of the Russians.'⁹⁹ Far

the figures such as the dragon in regards to Satan.

94 Kelly, *Revelation*, 275.

95 Kelly, *Revelation*, 296.

96 Kelly, *Revelation*, 293.

97 Kelly, *Revelation*, 417.

98 Kelly, *Revelation*, 417.

99 See the following quotation by Kelly in "Kelly, *Second Coming*, 394." In this extract Hammer-Purgstall draws on the extra biblical linguistics to prove the word does not mean head, but rather it is indicative of a people group

89 Kelly, *Second Coming*, 291.

90 Kelly, *Second Coming*, 291.

91 Darby, *Synopsis* Vol. 5, 485.

92 Kelly, *Revelation*, 248, 264.

93 See Kelly, *Revelation*, 267, 257 where Kelly interprets the days of Revelation literally like other futurists. From there we see Kelly also holds to a literal meaning behind

from a mere lexicographical curiosity, Kelly's inclusion of this portion demonstrates the flow of literal investigation even to the very words that defined the evangelical movement of the time, serving as one of the connecting strands of Anglo/Irish premillennialism.

Irish premillennialists, in contrast to those in England, were far more largely dominated by futurist thinking characteristic of the teaching at the Trinity College Dublin and the writings of De Burgh, and adopted by the thinking of the early Brethren. Darby and Kelly exhibit much of the futurist impact by their voluminous writings and the Brethren literature as well.¹⁰⁰

We also see an increasing emphasis in the futurists' writings on the literal interpretation of prophecy, especially in regards to the year-day theory, end time tribulation and certain prophecies concerning the Jews. Further, we see a more systematized eschatology especially in the writings of Darby and Kelly as:

It was in the 1830s and early 1840s that Darby's eschatological thinking began to coalesce. The next event on the prophetic timetable was the 'rapture,' he argued with increasing conviction, the secret catching away of all true believers by the return of the Lord 'in the air, of which believers should live in constant expectation; the rapture would be followed by the tribulation, the rise of the Antichrist and his bitter assaults on the new converts and the Jews, he continued; and the tribulation would end with the 'glorious appearing' of Jesus Christ, divine judgement and the commencement of the millennium."¹⁰¹

Yet, we should not place them outside of the broader thinking on these subjects at the time

when he states, "Etant constate que *Ros* or *Ras* associe trois fois dans Ezechiel aux peuples de Mosoc et Tubal est aussi un nom de peuple" 'Finding that Rosh or Rash is connected three times in the book of Ezekiel with the people of Meshach or Tubal and is also a people group's name'

100 Wilkinson, 244.

101 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84.

for Darby "His system retained its rough edges, and throughout his life Darby was much less of a dispensationalist than many of his followers have assumed."¹⁰²

SYNOPSIS OF THEOLOGICAL MOTIFS CONNECTING ANGLO/ IRISH PREMILLENNIALISM

Having provided brief summaries of the premillennial convictions of leading Anglo-Irish premillennialist thinkers of the "long 19th century," it is important to identify some recurring themes in both groups. With this in mind, it is helpful then to compare some of the shared transient themes that surfaced on both Anglo and Irish premillennialism. These may be broadly categorized as a literal hermeneutic in prophecy and Christ's return, a place for Israel in God's redemptive plan, and a firm missionary zeal coupled with a pessimistic view of culture that necessitates the mission movement.

On a foundational level, it seems that all the premillennialists were at least committed to some form of literalism in their view of prophetic teaching. There are examples of historicist readings of Scripture beyond those quoted earlier that "believed every word in its 'plain literal meaning,'" such as statements by Henry Drummond that reveal the literalness that marked the interpretive method used during this century.¹⁰³

I have already outlined ways that key figures interpreted prophecy literally. And, though the return of Christ was usually considered in a personal, visible way (especially in the flesh), there were some who did not accept this as established doctrine. This leads Bebbington to make such statements as the "visible return by

102 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84.

103 Wilkinson, 177.

Christ has been no part of accepted doctrine.”¹⁰⁴ Whether or not this conclusion is fair, it is true that during this time premillennialists of all types held “the kernel of what Irving called Christ’s ‘own personal appearance in flaming fire.’ The return, it was often stressed, would be a literal coming.”¹⁰⁵

Much of the focus on the literal sense of Scripture could be attributed to the increased focus on the inspiration of Scripture, where men like Robert Haldane “contended for a much higher view of biblical inspiration.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, a “a new and stronger understanding of Inspiration had been broached” with an “association with premillennialism.”¹⁰⁷ Yet, it is also true that linguistic study was shaping the prophetic movement, as men like William Kelly and Samuel Tregelles demonstrated interest in the study and embarked on textual criticism.¹⁰⁸ In this way evangelical premillennialism was interconnected to the larger scholarship taking place on both sides of the Atlantic.

It was this literal focus on the subjects of prophecy and the return of the Lord in the context of strong emphasis on biblical inspiration that likely fuelled interest in Israel’s place in God’s redemptive plan, and the simultaneous “desire for the conversion of the Jews.”¹⁰⁹ Men like David Baron, along with Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M’Cheyne were involved in Jewish mission work that played into an interest in the theological understanding of the Jews. Other men like “Lewis Way was inspired by the prophecies of the return of the Jewish people to their own land, and noticing the connection

drawn in the Bible between this event and the last things, came to believe in the nearness of Christ’s coming again.”¹¹⁰

Evaluating this growing emphasis on the Jews, we see again “there is a clear correlation between aspects of Darby’s theology and those of his contemporaries.”¹¹¹ Wilkinson ascribes this as a work of God “raising up men during the nineteenth century to proclaim the truth of Israel’s restoration and Christ’s return.”¹¹² Regardless of whether Wilkinson’s spiritual interpretation of history is accurate, there is evidence that the premillennialists all held to *some* distinction between the Church and national Israel, the key difference being whether or not the Jews were restored as part of the Church. This difference was largely based on the Plymouth Brethren ecclesiology, rather than their eschatology. This is a point I will elaborate later.

This distinction, along with the broader theological belief in a place for Israel, was coupled with a missionary zeal that motivated Jewish missions as well as evangelistic work to the whole world. To a certain extent, it was the mission work to the Jews that united many during the century. For example, the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews was founded early in the 19th century.¹¹³ This agency received support and correspondence from men like William Carey and was a connective tissue for “Christians who believed in the promised return of the Jews.”¹¹⁴ Thus, end times expectancy with a hope for the Jewish conversion via mission work and an overall sense that the return of Christ was near united much of the premillennial hope. David Baron provides an example of the

104 Bebbington, 83.

105 Bebbington, 83.

106 Bebbington, 87.

107 Bebbington, 88.

108 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84.

109 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 82.

110 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 82.

111 Wilkinson, 190.

112 Wilkinson, 190.

113 Wilkinson, 168.

114 Wilkinson, 168.

culmination of this thought in England.

For the premillennialists of the time, “expectations that the gospel would usher in a superior world order were dismissed by the new school as a sinister deception.”¹¹⁵ This position can be attributed to the rejection of postmillennialism as well as certain features of Catholicism, along with political and sociological ideologies shaping the Western world such as the “spread of Romanticism.”¹¹⁶ Rightly understood, one cannot consider the premillennialism of the 19th century without pausing to understand that which fomented the dissent that unified premillennialism in a common theological trajectory. Thus, it is a common attribute amongst the leading thinkers of the time like Ryle to state, “the world will not be converted when Christ returns: it will be in the same condition that it was in the day of the flood.”¹¹⁷

AREAS OF DIFFERENCE

While there are broad themes that were held by many of the Anglo-Irish premillennialists, there were a few areas of difference that must be identified. To some extent these divergences are outflows of how literal the writers took certain prophecies. Though these differences partially may be understood in the level of distinction between the Church and Israel (and the rapture question), they are more specifically connected to the greater question of the interpretation of the book of Revelation (i.e., futurism or historicism) which largely followed their literal exegesis.

115 Bebbington, 103.

116 Bebbington, 102-103.

117 J.C. Ryle, “Matthew” *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 261.

Specifically, the radical distinction of the Church and Israel separates the premillennialism of the Plymouth Brethren specifically in Ireland from other premillennialists. For men such as William Kelly, the “importance of distinguishing between the hope of the Christian and prophecy is significant?”¹¹⁸ It is the differing destinies between the Church and Israel at the time of the Second Coming of Christ that delineates this difference (though we have seen continuity in the writings when the Old Testament saints are concerned). It is not to say that there was no distinction in the other premillennialists’ thinking, for we already saw men like Charles Spurgeon allow for a very Jewish coloring to some of his expositions of prophetic Scripture that he believed would occur when Christ returned. But rather, it is in the level of degree of distinction. Men like Spurgeon allowed a certain level of spiritualization of the promises and principles of Old Testament prophecy to apply to the Church, whereas certain futurists like Darby (with a similar view to Kelly) saw that “prophecy supposes that the people of God are in a bad condition,”¹¹⁹ a conclusion Darby ascribes to a proper application of prophecy to Israel rather than the Church.

It is the Plymouth Brethren’s extreme view of the heavenly nature of the Church which undergirded much of their more radical separation of the Church and Israel.¹²⁰ Their view of the pure church led to more ecclesiastical separation and to a sharp church/Israel distinction. Thus, as stated earlier,

118 Kelly, *Second Coming*, 1.

119 Darby, *Synopsis Vol. 2*, 235.

120 See Miller, 1175, where he states, “Just about the this time the Spirit of God was evidently working in many minds, and in different parts of the country, and awakening many of His children to the importance, not only of prophetic truth, but of what He has revealed in His word respecting the Church as the body of Christ, formed and energized by the Holy Spirit.”

the radical Church/Israel distinction of the Brethren is essentially to be understood as ecclesiological in nature. This radical separation also lies at the heart of the rapture question, a question that Darby “argued with increasing conviction.”¹²¹ Darby’s conclusion was rejected by Benjamin Newton, though he remained a futurist, reminding us that the timing of the rapture is not indicative of one’s prophetic scheme for the entire book. Ultimately, it is the place of the Church (as it relates to Christ), and the Jews as a nation (as they related to the earth as yet unredeemed) that fueled Brethren thinking on the subject, with a robust focus as the “Lord’s personal coming is the only adequate answer to the Church’s hope.”¹²² Therefore, the rapture question may be understood in terms of application of the hope of the Lord’s coming, rather than forming a separate doctrine in itself.

The various interpretations of the book of Revelation and certain prophecies, such as those found within Daniel concerning the 1260 days, fall within the categories of historicism and futurism, and have already been outlined. But, it must also be remembered that forms of futurism existed outside of the Plymouth Brethren movement, and in both England and Ireland. Further, Gribben quotes Samuel Tregelles’ scathing judgment on Darby’s system of thinking.¹²³ Tregelles follows this critique with the expectation of error ‘when we remember that every day is bringing us nearer to the ‘end of the age’ - the period when right prophetic instruction will be most needed by the people of God, and when also the most delusive power of the Adversary shall be most

put forth.”¹²⁴ The irony of Tregelles’ statement should be evident as he interpreted an end time apostasy in much the same way Darby, Newton and others would have. Therefore, Tregelles’ polemical assumption about Darby failed to see the broader picture of similarities from an interpretive perspective.

The many futurists should be seen as part of a larger framework as opposed to the historicists who had a more nuanced and less systematic approach to the book of Revelation at large. For, the critical difference in the long 19th century amongst premillennialists in their eschatology was not the timing of the rapture. Looking back, we see a much greater development taking place within their exegetical conclusions based primarily on how literal one took the Apocalypse and other prophetic books. In other words, the more literal one interpreted prophecy, the more likely the person was to take at least some form of futurist interpretation. Yet, even historicism and futurism cannot be used to create strict categories, for some such as David Baron may have held a hybrid view, and others did not strictly interpret within their preferred scheme.

A PROPOSAL AND EVALUATION OF KINGDOM/PREMILLENNIAL THEOLOGY MOVING FORWARD

Thus, it has been demonstrated that Anglo-Irish premillennialism shares common themes that include a literal view of predictive prophecy built on a robust Biblicism, the place of Israel in the plan of God and consequent missionary zeal.¹²⁵ And, the primary area of contrast are

121 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84,

122 Kelly, *Second Coming*, 173. Note that this a statement in which post-tribulational rapturists would most certainly agree.

123 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84.

124 Samuel Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ’s Second Coming* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1886), 3, qtd. in ‘Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 84.’

125 These include shared nuances to certain sub themes such as the New Jerusalem, the time of tribulation, etc. I

namely the futurist vs. historicist views of the book of Revelation.¹²⁶ Further, it has been demonstrated that the premillennialism of the long 19th century is not synonymous with contemporary dispensationalism and “historic premillennialism.” Therefore, the future discussions concerning premillennial theology must be set forth in the context of this historical assessment. To accomplish this, I wish to set some guidelines to further allow for a more robust kingdom theology not constrained to particular theological “party lines,” allowing for a greater flexibility amongst believers and scholars alike to not “pick sides” as labels, but to understand the nuance found within the various viewpoints.

The historic precedent in approaching premillennialism is most readily appreciated by understanding the context of the authors surveyed. Each of the authors and teachers mentioned all were part of a larger evangelical movement. And, save the Plymouth Brethren who were leaving their denominational connections (even Spurgeon in the downgrade controversy remained a thoroughgoing Baptist), each of these saw themselves mostly part of the predominantly “Reformed” wing of the Christian Church. Thus, the precedent is to develop a kingdom perspective that may be seated well within the current context - rather than forcing a theology that must choose between categories that were not in vogue at the time in the way we understand them now.

Perhaps, even the two categories themselves

also described the consistent pessimism inherent in most of the influential teachers of the time, reflecting a reaction to the theological-social circumstance present in the age, along with a theology of premillennialism that looked for the Second Advent as a monumental event in coming history.

126 In addition, the timing of the rapture and the level that the Church/Israel distinction was embraced demonstrate what I perceive as a mild to moderate difference in the forms of premillennial theology of the eschaton.

should be abandoned in favor of emphasizing more closely the denominational categories they held, i.e., premillennial Baptist or premillennial Covenantalist (or Presbyterian) as Chung appears to be heading.¹²⁷ This would account for the historic precedent of allowing for various millennial views that would not necessarily define one’s theology.¹²⁸ Shantz cites various doctoral theses that have taken this approach in relatively recent history.¹²⁹ In some regard, Chung’s essay essentially was written to accomplish this, though he seems to miss the historic background for the very kingdom theology he proposes.¹³⁰ For, to achieve a responsible hybrid of traditional theological systems, such as Covenantal theology, along with a perspective not always shared by that system, such as premillennialism, the way forward is to understand not only one’s own theology, but that of those who went before.¹³¹ In this manner, the adjustments on kingdom theology may be that more of subtlety, rather than creating a whole new line of thinking and will require further research into the thinking of the 19th century premillennialists.

Further, one must shed the assumptions about certain doctrines. For example, the application of the New Covenant only to Israel is supposedly held by dispensationalists, though this was not always the case and has largely been

127 See, “Sung Wook Chung, “Toward the Reformed and Covenantal Theology of Premillennialism.” *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to ‘Left Behind Eschatology.’* Blomberg, Craig L., and Chung, Sung Wook. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 133-146.

128 Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550-1682* (Revised Edition) (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 244.

129 Douglas H Shantz, “Millennialism and Apocalypticism in Recent Historical Scholarship,” in *Prisoners of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* eds. Crawford Gribben and Timothy C.F. Stunt (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004), 40.

130 Chung, 133.

131 Chung, 133.

abandoned.¹³² And, the recognition that both dispensationalist and non-dispensationalists use similar terms such as the mediatorial kingdom is often overlooked.¹³³ More importantly, the conclusion that the non-dispensational premillennialist automatically holds to inaugurated eschatology, a conclusion impossible for those who predated Ladd's time, must be challenged as cited in my previous article. Thus, the next steps may be to simply understand premillennialism now, and in early ages (such as the 19th century), simply as one broad movement with many subviews.

Consequently, the way forward will become clearer in that "sides" are not chosen, but rather, one may self-identify more broadly as a premillennialist in general. For example, one's view of Israel, must not determine what type of premillennialism they ascribe. Even their interpretive framework of the book of Revelation (futurism vs. historicism) which largely differentiated the conclusions of the 19th century must not necessarily define the movement going forward. Rather, a broad premillennial stance, along with other criteria will shape the theology of the student of Scripture.

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