AUREL PAVEL

DAN ȚĂREANU

THE TITLE AVATARS OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM. THE PATH OF MILLENARIANISM BETWEEN ANCIENT AND MODERN

Aurel Pavel
'Lucian Blaga' University of Sibiu, 'Andrei Șaguna' Faculty of Theology, Sibiu, Romania.
E-mail: aurel.pavel@ulbsibiu.ro

Dan Țăreanu
'Lucian Blaga' University of Sibiu, 'Andrei Șaguna' Faculty of Theology, Sibiu, Romania.
E-mail: dantareanu@yahoo.com

Abstract: There are serious arguments in favor of the fact that the significance of millenarianist-type eschatologies for the history of the Church (and in particular for the history of Christian dogmas) is more extensive than we are usually tempted to believe. Today it is acknowledged (with significant frequency) that the millenarianist exegeses were majority until the 3rd-4th centuries AD, partly regaining an audience starting with the first decades of the 16th century, with the emergence of the first communities affiliated with the radical tendencies of the Reformation. Given these circumstances, our study aims to explore some of the elements of continuity and/ or disparity between ancient and modern acceptations of millenarianist thought, with an emphasis on the theological basis of the eschatological interpretations and visions under discussion. Therefore, our approach will be a predominantly analytical one, in an attempt to make available to the specialized reader a few reference points that can be used and developed later on.

Key words: Religion, Christian Mission, Millenarianism, Eschatology.

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1. Introduction

After dominating - overwhelmingly but temporarily - the eschatology of the first Christian centuries, chiliasm returned to the forefront in the 16th century, with the so-called Radical Reformation. Since then, the biblical exegeses subsumed to it have gained more and more authority, becoming normative for many of the developments of Western dogmatics. In addition, modernity has found in the Marxist political-social utopia the secular correspondent of the Christian *millennium*, so that a comparative analysis of the theological aspects of the two great "versions" of the chiliast thought, the ancient one, respectively the medieval one, appears to us as welcome.

In the *New Testament*, the concept of *millennium* (gr. *chilia etē*) is first highlighted by the text of *Revelation* 20:2, which the Romanian translations connected to the Orthodox tradition prefer, for pastoral-missionary reasons, to render by the syntagma «thousands of years» ("And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him for thousands of years"). Noting, that this option is considered in some denominational settings to be relatively inadequate (because the unarticulated form of the «thousands of years» would be, rather, *chiliades eton*) (Bădiliță 2012, 350-351; Tatu 2015, 267-268), we will point out that the temporal interval in question, the *millennium*, is in a direct connection with a precise historical period (preamble to "... a new heaven and a new earth" from Revelation 21:1) and strictly delimited in terms of duration (but not necessarily identical to the 1,000 years). In the temporal space of *the millennium*, in the context of the Devil's bounding (Revelation 20:2-3; 20:7), the community of believers who will have overcome all trials will be able to share in the overabundant grace of the Savior ("they reigned with Christ for thousands of years" – Revelation 20:4), although no essential changes will occur in their existence. On the other hand, the diversity of particular visions of *the millennium*, together with the relative heterogeneity of modern millenarianist eschatologies, reveals their common elements to be: (i) the temporal connection of *the millennium* with *the Second Coming* of the Savior – in the sense that *parousia* will precede it, constituting its starting point or, on the contrary, will succeed it, exhausting it and opening it up to an atemporal eschatological future –, and with the action of the Antichrist, limited in time and doomed to failure, and (ii) its dimension as historically determined preamble to the new creation which, despite a theocratic-type institutionalization, does nothing but perpetuate, leaving practically unchanged, the ontological and anthropological infrastructure of the present time.

2. Ancient Millenarianism: Landmarks

"Probably convinced that the coming of Christ was imminent" (Brown 2019, 587), St. Paul wrote that "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [with the resurrected] in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (I Thessalonians 4:17). Conceptually, St. Paul puts the term *parousia* in relation to the royal quality of the Savior, somewhat trampling on its profane acceptation, related to the solemn descent of a sovereign in a certain place. In this way, the apostle was merely responding to an eschatological expectation sufficiently present among the believers of the Primary Church to be recorded by St. Luke ("Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" – Acts 1:6), as well as St. Peter (II *Peter* 3:3-10). This expectation would soon become acute, feverish and tension-generating (stimulated by the emergence, under Emperor Nero, of the first persecutions against Christians), so that the apostles had to repeatedly urge patience ("The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward", II Peter 3:9), indicating to the Church the need for a careful treatment of all matters related to the Savior's *parousia*.

The theme of the millennium is related to this state of expectation, even though it does not derive directly from it; moreover, "... from the second to the fourth century the eschatological hopes fade more and more" (Taubes 2008, 89). Nonetheless, by virtue of the fact that it raises the problem of the last days, the expectation of 1st-century Christians with regard to *parousia* constitutes the starting point of theological and ecclesiological evolutions in relation to which the millenarianist thesis has progressively established itself, openly claiming its primacy amongst eschatological visions of the first Christian centuries.

Throughout the 2nd-3rd centuries, *the millennium* characterized the thought of some remarkable personalities of the Church, such as Papias of Ierapolis (c. 60-160), St. Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher (c. 100-160), St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202), Tertullian (c. 150-220), Hippolytus (2nd-3rd centuries), Lactantius (c. 240-320), or Victorinus of Pettau (c. 250-304) (Taubes 2008, 94; Bădiliţă 2012, 27, 353; Daniélou 2008, 55, 255; Agouridis 2004, 291; Bădiliţă 2011, 26-27; Chiricuţă 2001, 356; Alexander 1993, 356). Thus, as Cardinal Jean Daniélou (2008, 255) states, the share of millenarianist eschatology gradually became majority, even more so since it was also adopted by Jewish Ebionites, by Cerint the Gnostic or heretics such as the Syrian Apollinaris of Laodicea or Montanus the Phrygian. Let us look at some of the key aspects of ancient millenarianist thought.

a) As it foreshadowed tangible and effectively experiential realities, the millenarianism of the early Christian centuries had strong "materialistic" (exclusively immanent) overtones, alluding to a horizon of eschatological expectation materializing in the earthly reign of the Savior. Implicitly, for the true believers, "the reward will take place ... here, on earth, not symbolically or in another world", i.e. in a concrete way, which perpetuates the existential data of the fallen man (Bădiliţă 2012, 352). Thus, although it does not possess ontologically distinct features, the millennial kingdom appears as a "transient" theocosmic space, which foreshadows the transfigured creation of the eighth day, precisely because it embodies the fundamental virtues of theocratic forms of social coagulation, in a sense reflected, for example, by the text from *Ezekiel* 37:26-28 ("I will make a covenant of peace with them...").

Designating a "period of great material prosperity, occurring at the end of history" (Bădiliţă 2006, 119), the earthly *millennium* partly folds into the ends of the prophetic eschatologies, from the Old and the New Testaments, for they " foresaw the coming of a Messiah from this world to restore good into rights and to end evil" (Tatu 2015, 269). Given its heavy Jewish coloring, this eschatological pattern fructified the numerous canonical and apocryphal references capable of accrediting the substantial (if not exclusively) material dimension of the theocratic Kingdom, illustrated by texts such as those from Isaiah 11:6-8 ("The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid"), Micah 4:3 ("Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"), Isaiah 65:20, but also Jubilees 4:30 or II *Baruch* 29.

It seems, therefore, that the *millennium* of ancient Christianity integrates the non-transcendental core of Jewish eschatology, rendering it relevant to Christian thought. However, nuancing is required, for, as Cardinal Jean Daniélou claims, "the obviously materialistic nuances" (Manlio Simonetti) characterizing these visions originate in the particularities of Christian faith in Asia Minor, a space which "will witness ... the development of an original type of Judeo-Christianity, in which millennial hopes will persist" (Daniélou 2008, 55-57). In fact, micro-Asian Judeo-Christianity, which will assimilate, after 70 A.D., a significant wave of Palestinian refugees, developed, through the work of the apostles John and Philip, along specific coordinates, which individualized it in relation to "Petrine" Christianity (dominant in Phoenicia, mainland Greece and Rome) or Mesopotamian Christianity, related to James and Thomas (Daniélou 2008, 54). Thus, for example, in Asia Minor, Easter was celebrated at 14 Nissan for a long time, in the form of "Easter of the Cross" (hence the name *quartodecimani* given to those believers) (Branişte 1993, 175). St. John the Evangelist himself "belonged to the group of those who attempted to renounce Judaism as little as possible" (F.M. Braun), if only because his overt reserve

towards "those sacrificed unto idols" (Revelation 2:20) surpasses St. Paul's clearly nuanced view. Finally, we will also mention St. Ignatius Theophorus' responses to recurrent Judaizing tendencies in Asia Minor, highlighting the determinant role of the Church's Christocentrism in shaping Christianity's position toward Judaism "It is outrageous to utter the name of Jesus Christ and live in Judaism. For Christianity believed not in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, in which people of every tongue believed and were gathered unto God" (Ignatius Theophorus 1995, 201-202).

Thus, the "genetic" relation of ancient millenarianism to Jewish eschatology mainly resides in the extent of the penetration of Judeo-Christian options (Agouridis 2004, 291) in the permeable space of micro-Asian ecclesial communities. An essentially "residual" Judaism, manifested both in doctrinal and cultural-liturgical terms, will leave its mark on a Christian thought still far from crystallizing its dogmatic particularities (Gheorghe Vlăduţescu). Thus, to some extent, the primacy of "materialistic" eschatology does nothing but "Christianize" the Jewish view of the messianic age, as it is described, for example, by the prophet Zechariah: "Thus said the Lord of hosts «In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you!»" (Zechariah 8, 23)

b) In the view of the ancients, the "materialistic" eschatology intertwined with professing interpretations that set the temporal duration of *the millennium* at 1,000 years, even though the rabbis repeatedly endowed the last days with other extensions in time as well (Tatu 2015, 269). Indeed, the authors of some of the inter-testamentary apocalyptic writings also proceed in this manner (400 years – IV Ezra and II Baruch, 10,000 years or 70 generations – I Enoch et al.) (Bădiliţă 2012, 351). Although, as a rule, opting for the 1,000 years of the Kingdom resides in applying a literal exegesis to the "classic" text from Revelation 20:1-10 (Bădiliţă 2006, 118), the teaching regarding the so-called "millennial week" has underpinned a significant part of this interpretive tradition.

Conceptually speaking, the "millennial week" integrates the tangible spatial-temporal dimensions of *the millennium*, quantifying the "materialistic" eschatology by fixing the "age of the world" at 6,000 years, to which the 1,000 years are added that, starting with the moment of the Savior's *parousia* and the establishment of the anticipated earthly theocracy, will represent "a period... of peace and well-being, by which only the saints will be benefited" (Bădiliţă 2006, 118-119). In other words, between the fall of Adam and *parousia*, 6,000 years will elapse; after another 1,000 years (corresponding to the

messianic age), history will be exhausted by the establishment of the new creation (Revelation 21).

In support of the chronology of "the millennial week" (whose distant Iranian origin was highlighted, among others, by Jean Daniélou and Franz Cumont), the canonical Revelation text was also invoked, as noted by St. Justin the Martyr "... [John] prophesied that those who believed in our Christ would spend a thousand years in Jerusalem" (1997, 249). However, Old Testament texts like the one from II Peter 3:8 ("that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day") or from Psalms 89:4 ("For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night"), in conjunction with the first two chapters of the *Genesis* (related to the seven days of creation), represented the forceful argument in favor of the concept, as explicitly stated by St. Irenaeus: " For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded", this is because the Book of Genesis is not just "...an account of things formerly created, as also it is a prophecy of what is to come" (Adversus haereses, V, 28.3).

By valuing the landmarks mentioned in the Old Testament, this underpinning of the "millennial week" seems to be autonomous in relation to the canonical Revelation, which St. Irenaeus's interpretation does not directly operationalize: "for the day of the Lord is as thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year" (Bădiliţă 2011, 91). However, the temporal dimension of *the millennium* from Revelation 20:1-10 increases its sabbatical dimension, which millenarianism has always endowed it with, tending to consolidate the "relevance" of the Old Testament texts used. Therefore, we believe that the "millennial week" does not entail the employment of an imperatively Judaizing exegesis, as its cohabitation with the "materialistic" eschatology would suggest at first sight. Besides, *The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* (late 1st century), a reserved text when it comes to Judaism ("all things having been made new by the Lord...; Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead"), also alludes to "the millennial week", for the six days of creation "implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years", so that "in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished", *the millennium* preserving its sabbatical dimension "when His Son will come ... then shall He truly rest on the seventh day" (***, Epistle of Barnabas, XV, 4-5 1995, 158).

On the other hand, the concreteness of the eschatological "calendars" based on the "millennial week" endows it with a special value, based on its "ability" to directly support speculative calculations regarding the last days. Thus, around the year 200, Hippolytus of Rome (Bădiliţă 2006, 138-141) assumed that between the creation of the

world and the birth of the Savior 5,500 years had elapsed, so *parousia* was to be expected in 500. A similar conclusion was reached by Lactantius, who, in parallel, considered that, at the time of *parousia*, the Roman Empire would have already dissolved. Finally, in the 4th century, Apollinaris of Laodicea placed the beginning of *the millennium* in 490; the last calculation of this type was performed in the 8th century by a Spanish monk, Beatus of Liébana, who placed *parousia* in 798 (Chiricuţă 2001, 132-137).

Consequently, it can be stated that "the millennial week" constitutes itself as a complement of "materialistic" eschatology, as the two themes reinforcing each other, constituting an essential characteristic of the ancient vision of the last days.

c) We will conclude this sequence by highlighting two other aspects we deem essential to the problem of ancient millenarianism. First, we will mention the markedly antignostic dimension of millenarianist theses, demonstrated by the fact that, while supporting the effective *parousia* of the Savior ("in the clouds of heaven", Mark 14:62) and placing the theocratic Millennial Kingdom within history, the "materialism" of the specific eschatologies was directly opposed to Gnostic "spiritualism". The Docetism, anticosmism and antisomatism of gnosis had both challenged the tangible character of the incarnation, the sacrifice, the resurrection and the ascension of the Savior, and denied the certainty of the eschatological resurrection of the bodies, for the Gnostic heresiarchs "had voided the idea of an incarnate and public *parousia* of Jesus, preaching an individual and spiritual *parousia*, in the soul of each chosen one", while the resurrection of the bodies remained only an unfounded hope, as long as it "took place in the soul of the pneumatic" (Bădiliţă 2011, 13). Reduced to the mystical dimension of the enlightenment of the chosen, Gnostic eschatology was emptied of all material concreteness, operating with fantasies and illusions and dominated by individualism and subjectivism. Thus, compared to the risk of devaluing the ontological role of the Savior's work generated by Gnosticism, millenarianism supported the practicality of the saving consequences of the resurrection, anchoring them in time and space and endowing them with historical (tangible) dimensions and meanings (Skiadaresis 2014, 347-354). Consequently, the "materialism" of millenarianist eschatology can be viewed as having responded to the pastoral-missionary demands of the 2nd-4th centuries, amongst which countering Gnosticism was paramount.

Secondly, the parallelism between the increase of millenarianist influence and the proliferation of Roman persecution against Christians must be mentioned, as "the rise of millenarianism" temporarily overlaps with the anti-Christian actions undertaken by the emperors Decius, Valerian and Diocletian (Daniélou 2008, 255), as Jean Daniélou emphasizes. This is explained by the fact that for many people "faith in

an immediate and material reward is almost instinctual" (Bădiliţă 2012, 253), so that the "materiality" of millenarianist expectations accounts for its attractiveness. Thus, given that it promised the effective "reward" of the steadfastly faithful, millenarianism catered to the expectations of believers always exposed to risks, strengthening their faith and ensuring their power to resist persecution.

3. Modern Millenarianism: Continuity and Discontinuity

Despite the pastoral-missionary "benefits" outlined above, the Church's opposition to growing millenarianism manifested itself early. After all, the "materialism" of this eschatological interpretation placed it amongst Judaizing heterodoxies, so that Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea, in the East, and Ticonius, Blessed Augustine of Hippo and Orosius in the West openly repudiated millenarianism, starting by rejecting the literal hermeneutics that underpinned it (Taubes 2008, 94-95). Consequently, after the Edict of Milan (313) (Boicu 2017, 19-37), the circulation of millenarianist interpretations evinces a continuous decline (not to be equated with the "death of the apocalyptic spirit", but with "its transformation" (McGinn 1999, 99)), which is why the Synod of Ephesus (431) explicitly condemned them, labelling them as "deviation and fabrication". In so doing, the Church "extracted" eschatology from history, thus rendering ineffective all the spatial and temporal "material" components attributed to it by millenarianism, reinvesting it with a compatibility with the transcendence of the new creation described by *Revelation* 21. In this context, Blessed Augustine of Hippo's contribution is widely acknowledged: by viewing history through the spectrum of the tribulations brought about by the dismantling of the man-Creator communion, he was able to highlight antinomy between *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena* (Löwith 2010, 208-209), thus rendering unacceptable the "crowning" of history through the "sheltering" of the military kingdom.

The Augustinian view of history is directly linked to an eschatological vision (Boicu 2018, 401-409), according to which *the millennium* is nothing but the time of the Church, i.e. time sublimated by the grace of the Holy Sacraments and by the tension of dwelling between *already* and *not yet*, "Messianic time", escaping profane time "without being outside it" (Agamben 2009, 66). This perspective remained normative throughout the Middle Ages (McGinn 1999, 79), so that millenarianism was apparently crushed. However, in the early 16th century, some of the exponents of the radical branches of the Reformation "rediscovered" it (simply by reading *The Holy Scriptures* subjectively), adapting it to the new social and confessional circumstances of Western Europe. Thomas Müntzer, Hans Hut, Melchior Hoffman, Jan Matthys, or Jan van Leiden are some of those who have

restored the old *millennium* at the time, often attaching it to theological approaches radical enough to be able to lead to the outbreak of the German Peasants' War or to the much-discussed "theocratic" phenomenon of Münster.

In the following, we will focus on the landmarks of modern millenarianism, emphasizing its relations with ancient millenarianism, in an attempt to be consistently analytical.

a) With regard to their theological content, the two millenariarisms overlap, as *the millenium* designates a well-defined historical period which, through the intercession of divine grace, "intermediates" the transition to the new creation only this having a transcendent dimension *per se*. Implicitly, modern acceptations of millenarianist eschatology also include the theocratic overtones already used in Christian Antiquity, as the thousand years at the end of history would benefit "from a healing and visible penetration [of grace] with divine powers and laws" (Grünzweig 2007, 485). Nonetheless, the modern *millennium* does not outgrow the theological status of an antechamber of "a new heaven and a new earth", as its world continuing to subsist in the theocosmic space opened up by the fall of the protoparents. Even though it places itself under the sign of theocracy (Revelation 20:6), this last sequence in history enables both the "release" of the Devil (Revelation 20:7), and the manifestation of the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2:3-4), thus pertinently reflecting its ontological imperfection. Therefore, the Millennial Kingdom will be nothing more than a historical era "too earthly to be already perfect", its outlines being those of a world apart with regard to spiritual and moral-ethical standards, whereas sin will still be present, remaining constitutive to human nature (Grünzweig 2007, 486, 494).

Should we be able to distinguish certain discontinuities in the content of the two types of millenarianism, these will be related particularly to the biblical basis of the specific teachings (to be detailed below). Thus, the modern millenarianist exegesis mainly relies on the first ten verses of the Book of *Revelation* (20:1-10), while the interpretations of the "millennial week" are rather scarce (with the exception of Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander, who "fixed" *parousia* around the year 1659 (Chiricuţă 2001, 50). Against this background, we will be able to conclude on the efforts of the modern *millennium* supporters to place their discourse under the banner of *the New Testament*, especially since, in the words of the Savior himself "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). However, we believe that Cristian Bădiliţă's observation that man's instinctual tendency to seek most predictable and concrete satisfactions and rewards, remains topical and must be related to modern millenarianist thinking.

b) Ancient millenarianism notably regarded *parousia* as residing in the superhuman event that will establish the Millennial Kingdom, as, according to St. Irenaeus, the prophetic "projection" of the Sabbath of the *Genesis* in the space of *the millennium* corresponds precisely to the theocracy established through *the Advent* of the Savior (Bădiliță 2006, 118). By contrast, in modern millenarianism, two distinct visions on the chronology of the respective events coexist, with the Second Coming preceding or, on the contrary, succeeding the Millennial Kingdom. Thus, the former exegesis determines the configuration of *pre-millenarianist* eschatologies, while the latter is *post-millenarianist* (Alexander 1993, 24-26; Enns 2009, 388-395; Popkin 1999, 138-140; Bauckham 1995, 410-411).

As George E. Ladd states, contemporary pre-millenarianism (Charles Spurgeon, John Piper et al.) is largely similar to ancient millenarianism, as their theological content, residing in the transitory yet non-transcendent character of the millennial Kingdom, is practically identical. Incidentally, leaning on the chiliasm of some theorists of Puritan settlers in 17th-century America (John Eliot, Cotton Mater or Nathanael Ward), Mircea Eliade will implicitly emphasize the strongly "material" dimensions of their eschatology, one based on the presumption according to which "the return to primitive Christianity [...] was to bring heaven back to earth" (Elliade 2013a, 144-145). Putting the millennium under the sign of restoring the original human condition, they - Eliade points out - only complied, too, with that "universal human datum of indisputable antiquity" represented by nostalgia and the feverish search for Paradise. Therefore, if, in order to impropriate their millennial Kingdom, the Puritan emigrants insisted on restoring the past, it is clear that projecting their eschatological future, they resorted to "a paradoxical return to illud tempus, a leap backwards abolishing time and history" (Elliade 2013b, 185-186).

In fact, pre-millenarianism "surpasses" its ancient counterpart only by the fact that the New Testament constitutes its preferred "conceptual" support, as modern Christianity is characterized by the biblical conformity of any cognitive element of faith. Thus, concerned with "prevent[ing] a flawed spiritualization of Christian hope" (Grünzweig 2007, 493), supporters of pre-millenarianism, convinced that *parousia* will occur in a world of widespread evil, seek to find the biblical "signs" of the last days, identifying them in the global expansion of Christianity (Matthew 24, 14), the perpetuation of human suffering (Matthew 24:6-12) or the work of *"the mystery of transgression"* (II Thessalonians 2:7-10) (Lavatori 2013, 86-89). Furthermore, the discourse on *the millenium* insists on the eschatological significance of faith (those who "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" – I Peter 1:5) and repentance (as God "granted repentance unto life" – Acts 11:18), justly regarding them as crucial to particular

judgment. Finally, pre-millenarianism entails the temptation to use *the Holy Scripture* for speculative "prophetic" calculations, a temptation emerging immediately after the Reformation (e.g. Thomas Müntzer, Hans Hut and Melchior Hoffman and *parousias* placed in 1526, 1529 or 1533) and manifested sporadically to the present day.

Conversely, post-millenarianism (initiated by Daniel Whitby in the 17th century) claims that *parousia* will be a time when the unprecedented progress of Christianity will radically change the world, reducing evil, suffering and pain to the status of mere exceptions to the rule of general good. The world of the Second Coming will therefore be a true "golden age of progress" that will encompass all of society (Enns 2009, 386), in an era of multilateral development of individuals and communities, with positive social dynamics paralleled by a similar evolution on a spiritual and ecclesiological level. Christ Himself would guarantee this heyday of humanity, preparing for His coming into a world replete with the fruits of faith, where evil and sin are almost absent. In the view of post-millenarianism, the essential source of this positive evolution of humanity lies in the global "success" of the Christian mission, as prefigured by the Savior Himself ("And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" – John 10:16). Entailing a spiritual and moral-ethical benefit, the preaching of the gospel of Christ "to every creature which is under heaven" (Colossians 1:23), can completely "reverse" the ever-increasing dynamics of evil with which pre-millenarianism operates, leading to a spiritually quasi-perfect world implicitly worthy of receiving Christ (Matthew 24:14). In its reasoning, post-millenarianism is underpinned by a series of biblical texts apparently conducive to its tenets, such as "and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the Euphrates even to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10). However, we are compelled to point out that its heyday (18th-19th centuries) coincides in Western Europe with an era of accelerated industrial and social development, which has generated a genuine movement of popular optimism with regard to the relentless progress of human society (Enns 2009, 386).

c) As he claims that, despite the conceptual differences separating them, "there is absolutely no difference" between the two forms of millenarianism (Bădiliță 2012, 351), Cristian Bădiliță undoubtedly considers the identical way in which they envisage "a fulfilment of Christian hope on the immanent level of history" (Stăniloae 1997, 250-251). Therefore, the ancient and the modern *millennium* can be said to become solidary in their assumption that, within those 1,000 years, history will reach its climax, even if, from the point of view of the Church's Christocentrism, "with Christ, history [itself] has become irrelevant" (Taubes 2008, 21) ("And He is before all things, and by Him

all things consist" – Colossians 1:17). Moreover, the atypical mixture of good and evil revealed by the *millennium* highlights a certain ambiguity and lack of ontological coherence, for, in the logic of millenarianism (ancient and modern alike), "the Kingdom of heaven [appears] as a developed face of this world", and "this world as an undeveloped face of the Kingdom of heaven" (Stăniloae 1997, 248-249). In trying to justify itself biblically, millenarianism tends to transpose into history much of the finalities of biblical prophecies regarding the last days, notwithstanding the fact that this kind of exegesis is sufficiently questionable (Popkin 1999, 411) to be considered veridical, as Anglican theologian Richard Bauckham claims. The *millennium* emphasizes the power of history to outgrow itself, endowing it with meaning and construing its chronological evolution as becoming (Blanchard 2007, 120). History, which is perfectly reducible to "a show of human vanity, pride and ambition" (Taubes 2008, 21) in Augustinian terms, for "they are all gone aside [...]; there is none that does good, no, not one" (Psalms 13:3), acquires a self-contained *telos*, that of knowing and hypostasizing something of the perfection of the Kingdom of God.

However, as Father Dumitru Staniloae claimed, "the meaning of history cannot be discovered in history..., because this would mean that it has reached its end while it still lasts, which is impossible", precisely because "history is essentially a journey, not final rest [...]; it is the realm of moveming toward perfection, not of perfection [itself]" (Stăniloae 1997, 248). Therefore, despite all attempts to separate it from the rest of the history and to endow it with the transcendent attributes of the Kingdom, the *millennium* is no more than the completeness of the messianic time of the Church (Bădiliţă 2006, 315-316), a time which, undergoing a "contraction that completely transforms it" (Agamben 2009, 66-67), dwells between *already* and *not yet* to complete itself *in* and *through* the coming of the Savior. As "...our fortress is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20), "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (II Timothy 4:18), eschatology can only be placed under the banner of transcendence and of the ontological change of man and the world (Stăniloae 1997, 251). Therefore, the eschatological is meant to surpass any spatial-temporal connotation and delimitation (as "it is not the historical world that will witness *parousia*" (Evdokimov 1996, 358)), thus placing itself not only outside, but also above history.

4. Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the theological acceptations of the two millenarianisms leads us to conclude that, beyond their temporal separation, the elements of similarity predominate. Modernity only

changed the biblical underpinning of the Millennial Kingdom, attempting to identify neo-testamentary sources able to overcome the rather speculative considerations regarding the "millennial week". The conclusion also stands (if we take into account the irreconcilable antinomy between contemporary exegeses regarding the chronological positioning of *parousia* in relation to the *millennium*. Therefore, both ancient and modern millenarianism are inscribed, despite the eleven or twelve centuries separating them, in the logic of that type of Christian eschatology justly described by Professor Manlio Simonetti, who emphasized its Judaizing connotations, as evidently "materialistic". Professing essentially compatible types of millenarianism, ancient and modern Christianity share the propensity for endowing history with the capacity to assimilate, at its end, the *millennium*, an era of maximum spiritual development.

On the whole, however, the insertion of the *millennium* at the end of history proves to be actually devoid of the eschatological overtones it claims *a priori*, as evinced by its lack of authentic ontological and anthropological implications. In this way, the two forms of millenarianism merely elude the fact that the biblically certified theophoric dimension of the Kingdom necessarily implies the transfiguration of the world and the Christomorphization of man, as "God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (I Thessalonians 4:7).

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