The History of Millennialism in the Restoration Movement

-- Understanding the longterm thought of Apocalyptic thoughts.
Before Christ - religious beliefs focusing on an end-of-time age of peace and prosperity. It has always been found amongst persecuted people.
Before Augustine - Church fathers we see some discussion
After Augustine - a-millennial view is predominant for most of Christian history, though there is a segment of historical premillennialist.
Since 1900s -
In the 1900s postmillennialism was highly favored and predominant until the Civil War.

Post-millennialism is optimistic. From bad to good.
Pre-millennialism is pessimistic. From good to bad.

In the last 120 years
Dispensational pre-millennialism has taken over. Founded by John Darby. Popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible. It has been promoted by Hal Lindsay and the Left Behind Series of books.

-- Understanding the 19th Century Views
Campbell - Postmillennial
Stone and Scott - Premillennial

-- Understanding the 20th Century views
Harding and Boll - Premillennial
Lipscomb - commented rarely, but focused on living the kingdom today. Felt it should not be an issue of contention. Some feel he was a premillennialist.
Whiteside, Boles, Foy Wallace - a millennial

It became a very divisive and contentious issue. With a millennial perspective winning in most of the churches.

-- Understanding our present situation in the church of Christ

The book *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn and its premise that heaven is a renewed and recreated earth has had significant influence.

**Kingdom Come** by John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine

See John Mark Hicks blog and writings - johnmarkhicks.com

Rich Atchley Sermon series on Revelation - sermon on 21-22 taught this view of heaven.

(The Kingdom theme has been on a subject of lectureships at ACU and Lipscomb in recent years.)

For a refutation of this position see Wayne Jackson

Will Heaven Be On Earth - at www.Christiancourier.com

This is connected with . . . (an many of these are good)

A renewed interest in the Kingdom of God

A renewed emphasis upon the sermon on the Mount and “kingdom living.”

A renewed emphasis in pacifism and viewing governments as kingdoms of the world.

A renewed focus on peace, mercy, and love.

See FHU’s Kingdom Journal - www.fhu.edu/kingdom

See vol. 2., No. 2 - Alexander Campbell and the Kingdom of Heaven

I have an article on Campbell’s view of the King of the Kingdom

See - Edward Fudge article from 1968-1970 timeframe in the Gospel Guardian

**Millennialism In The Restoration Movement**

http://www.wordsfittlyspoken.org/gospel_guardian/v21/v21n12p5b-9a.html

Religious issues do not exist in a vacuum. Or, as the Apostle Paul might put it, they do not occur "in a corner." Issues are a part of religious history. And history, religious or otherwise, involves many varied factors. Among these are great men, economic conditions, and the prevailing social and political philosophies.
One cannot expect, then, to cover thoroughly even one issue (millennialism) in one environment (the American Restoration Movement) in a single article. This article must be summary. It may be divided into five areas: (1) the thought-climate in which the Restoration Movement began, (2) Millennial views of early Restorationists, (3) R. H. Boll and his influence on Restoration millennialism, (4) Millennialism since Boll, and (5) A summary of attitudes in the Restoration Movement toward the millennial question.

This is a historical study of millennialism in the Restoration Movement. It is hoped that our distance from the story will be of assistance in achieving objectivity while telling it. It is fascinating story.

The Early Restoration Climate

The spirit of the early 19th century was one of optimism and action. Someone has described it as "a forward-looking, dynamic period, still sustained by a deep-rooted belief in the perfectibility of society. America was growing and thriving. Social justice was an increasing concern and men dreamed of a perfect society.

Darwin's evolutionary ideas were only one sample of the spirit which permeated almost all of life. Marx and Engels wrote in England and Brussels of a worker's paradise along communistic lines. Infidel Robert Owen created experimental communities, first in Scotland, then in New Harmony, Indiana, which he set forth as the hope of the future. Religious people were also working toward and looking for the perfect day. The liberal ones were just beginning to develop the Social Gospel. More conservative ones talked of a millennium.

Historian David E. Harrell points out that before 1830 "both Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone linked their religious reform efforts with the eventual spiritual and social regeneration of the world." In fact, the future of America itself was frequently conceived as fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Walter Scott went so far as to say that America was the "first of the Messianic nations," and affirmed that it would soon be followed by all others.

Against the secular background of general optimism and utopian dreams, religious millennialism was a natural expression on the part of those who wanted to center their expectations in Christ. It is of historical interest that this same hopeful climate of the early and mid-19th century provided common nurture for such diverse groups as the Shakers, Mormons, Millerites, Adventists and Christadelphians, as well as the Restoration Movement.

Millennialism In The Restoration Movement

It is well here to distinguish between postmillennialism and premillennialism. Postmillennialism expects Christ to return after the millennium, which usually is to come through the preaching of the gospel. This outlook is optimistic (the world will be converted), not particularly mission-minded (God will work it out in His own time) and is unspectacular enough not to attract special attention.
Premillennialism looks for Christ to return before the millennium and to bring it about, saving man from his own destruction in the process. It is generally pessimistic (the world is getting worse every day; only Christ can save it), often is very mission-minded (not much time is left), and is frequently associated with spectacular announcements and movements (this all will come through climactic, supernatural events when least expected by mankind).

Alexander Campbell

Campbell looked for a utopian society, and his Millennial Harbinger was to be a herald of it. In the first issue he wrote:

*This work shall be devoted to the destruction of sectarianism, infidelity, and antichristian doctrine and practice. It shall have for its object the development (sic) and introduction of that political and religious order of society called THE MILLENNIUM, which will be the consummation of that ultimate amelioration of society proposed in the Christian Scriptures.*

Campbell explained his postmillennial views during 1841-42 in 18 articles in the Harbinger. He expected a millennial reign of Christ through the gospel, after all nations were converted and all sectarians had returned to the "ancient order of things." This was one basis of his appeal for restoration. When men accepted this platform, divisions would cease. When divisions ended the gospel would be preached by a united church. Then (he believed) the nations would be converted and men would enjoy 1000 years of joy and peace under the gospel. At the end of the millennium Christ would return, the resurrection would occur and judgment would take place for eternity.

Campbell rejected a literal resurrection before the millennium. He also disliked setting dates for the Lord's return, and wrote a review of William Miller's ideas. In later life he was disappointed to see the sects still thriving and the world unconverted.

Barton W. Stone

According to his writings in the Christian Messenger, Stone apparently began a postmillennialist, but soon adopted premillennial views. He believed the millennium would be 365,000 years (a thousand years is to the Lord as one day). During it no wicked person would be alive on earth, Satan would be bound, and the resurrected righteous would enjoy with the living saints the bodily presence of the Lord.

Other Early Leaders

Walter Scott and Robert Milligan shared Campbell's postmillennial views with modifications. Scott's thinking included certain premillennial elements, and Milligan expected the Jews to return to Palestine. Elias Smith, a New England Restorationist, was firmly premillennial. Smith expected a literal thousand years reign of Christ on earth, the return of the Jews to Palestine, and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.
Campbell's postmillennial views prevailed in the Movement until the mid-century. When war clouds began to gather, many Americans (including some Restorationists) lost their optimistic view of history. And with the growth of the destructive Higher Criticism of the Bible, a number lost their faith as well. Postmillennialism gradually became identified with modernism and the new Social Gospel. Premillennialism, largely through reaction, became associated with "evangelicalism" and the conservative "Bible prophecy" groups. For the Restoration Movement, the heyday of millennialism had come to an end.

Robert H. Boll And His Influence

Robert H. Boll was born in Germany. When his father died his mother remarried, and the stepfather was cruel to young Robert. At the age of 17, he came to America and settled near Smyrna, Tennessee. Soon he enrolled under James A. Hardin at the Nashville Bible School (later David Lipscomb College). Those who knew him said he was a devout and conscientious person who (as one acquaintance put it) "breathed spirituality." David Lipscomb once said of Boll that he would never intentionally do anything to diminish love for Christ or obedience to Him. Charles R. Brewer recalls that Boll was "a very good man — he just had a lot of mule in him." His final judgment rests with God alone.

About 1911, Boll began to talk some about Bible prophecy, suggesting that not enough teaching was done on it. During 1915, he preached three or four chapel sermons on the history of the Jews, bringing in some of his ideas on their future. Then Lipscomb spoke. "It was an interesting story..." he said. "May or may not occur according to our ideas of it." He suggested that Boll preach, "now" to "help these young people be saved." Boll accepted the suggestion with grace. Lipscomb himself was "openly disinterested in millenialist speculation" and was "persistently unwilling to discuss the subject."8

For seven years Boll edited the front page of the Gospel Advocate. During 1915, he began to discuss prophecy in his column "Word and Work." Controversy ensued, and the June 3 issue of that year included no less than five separate articles on the subject.

Then on July 22, 1915, without comment, Boll's name was dropped from the masthead of Advocate editors. In an August 12 editorial entitled "The Gospel Advocate and the Issues in the Current Controversy Over Prophecy," M. C. Kurfees explained why Boll had been dropped. The next month saw the first of seven articles by J. C. McQuiddy entitled "Premillennialism."

In November, Boll's front page column reappeared. An editorial explained that "an amicable understanding and satisfactory adjustment of differences" had been reached, "without any sacrifice of principle on anybody's part." Nineteen days later a Firm Foundation editorial suggested that Boll's reinstatement was "unmistakable evidence" that the other Advocate editors considered any doctrinal differences with Boll to be "trivial." The implication was plain: the others must be in agreement with Boll's views on prophecy!

The next month Boll was dropped again. This time an unsigned editorial explained that he had broken a verbal agreement not to teach his prophetic views. There was also a statement from Boll
denying any agreement, except to be guided as "a matter of conscience between me and the Lord Jesus Christ, in the love of the truth and of the brethren." The February 24, 1916 Advocate contained letters from J. C. McQuiddy, A. B. Lipscomb, F. W. Smith, M. C. Kurfees and G. Dallas Smith on the "private agreement" between Boll and the other editors. Smith concluded like this:

I... do not think that Boll is in any sense a "Russellite," or that he is a "dangerous teacher" because of his peculiar views on the kingdom and unfulfilled prophecy... I do not understand that there was a positive agreement on the part of Brother Boll to cease teaching the things over which the trouble arose; but there was a clear understanding on my part at least, that his better judgment in the matter led him to refrain from such teaching.

In 1916, Boll began publishing Word and Work, taking with him the name of his former column in the Gospel Advocate. He continued with it until his death 40 years later. In Nashville most brethren continued to regard him highly and had fellowship with him as opportunities arose, while maintaining their own views on the controversial questions.

Several years went by. Then in 1927, S. H. Hall proposed a written discussion between Robert H. Boll and H. Leo Boles, then president of David Lipscomb College, on the millennium. This exchange took place in the Gospel Advocate from May 19 to November 30 of that year. It ended with both men still the best of friends and regarding each other as brethren in Christ. In the debate Boll affirmed the national restoration of Israel, Christ's earthly reign with His saints and the premillennial and imminent return of Christ. He denied that Daniel 2:35-44 "began to take place" on Pentecost, or that Christ is now on "David's throne." After the debate Boll visited Nashville and accepted Boles' invitation to speak in chapel at the college. Brother Rufus Clifford was a student then, and remembers that Brother Boll spoke on the twenty-third Psalm.

When Boll was dropped from the Advocate in 1915, the paper carried advertisements for salves to cure boils, chills, dandruff, corns pellagra, itch and gray hair. Or for $2.00 one could order ten gallons of mineral water which boasted comfort from indigestion, dyspepsia, rheumatism, biliousness, kidney trouble or gallstones. By the 1927 debate, Advocate advertisers were selling primarily books, china, dress patterns and laying hens. Time marches on!

More Recent Controversies

With time, positions grew more fixed and attitudes more militant. In the late 1930's brethren began to be branded as "premillennialists" or "Bollites," and "sympathizers." By the 1940's, the issue had become a general point of fellowship with many on either side.

"The Kingdom of Heaven" was the theme of the 1940 lectures at Abilene Christian College.

That week a small group of visiting preachers charged Brother Charles H. Roberson, the venerable head of the Bible department, with teaching premillennialism. A public meeting was
called, and Brother Roberson "capably defended himself in the minds of the large majority of the listeners."  

These were years of honest opposition to error. It was almost inevitable that there should be a measure also of extremism. There were "firings," resignations, charges, pressures, and threats. A number of faithful brethren were victims of irresponsible slander, and more premillennial brethren who would never have pressed their opinions suffered because of others who did.

Other efforts were honorable. The *Gospel Guardian* began in 1935 under Foy E. Wallace, Jr. to oppose all error, especially premillennialism. In 1938, Wallace began the *Bible Banner* for the same purpose. Word and Work continued as the chief voice of the millennial viewpoint.

The best-known brotherhood debate on the question during this period was held January 2-6, 1933, in Winchester, Kentucky. The disputants were Foy E. Wallace, Jr., then editor of the Gospel Advocate, and Charles M. Neal, preacher for the Main Street Church of Christ in Winchester. God's Prophetic Word represents a series of lectures delivered by Wallace January 21-28, 1945, in Houston, Texas, "Exposing Modern Millennial Theories." The printed Neal-Wallace debate and the Houston lectures remain among the most exhaustive and convincing treatments of any controversial subject within the Restoration Movement.

At present the premillennial brethren operate one college — Southeastern Christian College, in Winchester, Kentucky. According to college president LaVern Houtz, they number from 8,000 to 15,000 members in approximately 120 congregations. These are divided over some of the same issues which divide amillennial brethren.

There are indications that some premillennial brethren have modified certain views since the times of Boll or even Neal. Little communication exists today between premillennial and amillennial brethren. A recent appeal for more fellowship by premillennial editor Richard Ramsey has met with general suspicion and mistrust. No one knows, of course, what the future will hold.

**Attitudes Toward The Issues**

Alexander Campbell believed strongly in postmillennialism, but he did not make his views a part of the gospel or a matter of fellowship. Barton W. Stone was premillennial, but he, too, felt that one's understanding of these matters was not necessarily a matter of salvation. This seems to have been the general attitude of the pioneers on either side of the question.

Robert H. Boll repeatedly affirmed that his views were not matters of salvation so far as he was concerned. When H. Leo Boles debated the issue with Boll he began his part, too, by saying that both he and Boll could "live faithful to God, enjoy Christian fellowship, die and go home to heaven," whether they ever agreed "on all the issues" which were involved in their discussion. And Boles concluded the exchange by naming areas still held in common.
We both believe that our Lord will return again, that we do not know when he will come, and that we should ever be ready for his coming. We both believe that his coming will be a blessing to all who love his appearing, and that it will be a condemnation to the wicked. We both believe that the Bible is the word of God, and that it is the complete revelation of God to man." 12

Other equally sincere brethren on both sides have considered the millennial questions to be a matter of salvation of fellowship. Perhaps the particular position and attitude of the millennial teacher involved accounts for this different approach toward the subject. 13

Brother W. W. Otey exemplified what seemingly has been the "mainstream" attitude in the Restoration Movement throughout. When he considered the millennial brethren to be factious, he invoked Romans 16:17, and called on brethren to "mark and avoid" them.14 But regarding the interpretation of Revelation 20 he had this to say:

Some say that the 1,000 years began... on Pentecost... and will continue till Christ returns.. If that is true, then why stress it? How to become Christians and how to serve is easily understood. When the 1,000 years began, or begins, belongs to God, not to us.

Others affirm that the 1,000 years is in the future... Much strife and disturbance has been caused by persistently stressing this theory. Now just suppose that this theory turns out to be right. In that case, it cannot have any bearing on our lives now.. Again, that is God's side, not ours.

.. Is it not good to know the Lord, whom we so imperfectly serve, is able to bind Satan for a time called a thousand years? ... Why should we worry, argue and cause confusion when the thousand years will be, and whether it is just a thousand years as we record time, or a period of much greater length? All that belongs alone to God. It is ours to faithfully serve him, and leave to him all matters that are not within our powerful to perform.15

Footnotes


10 For Example, that the church was part of God's eternal purpose. See "An Interview With LaVem Houtz," Mission, II (February, 1969), pp. 24-25.


12 Ibid., Nov. 3, 1927, p. 1038.

13 Such as whether or not Christ is now Lord over all things; and depending on whether the millenialist is factious or not.


15 W. W. Otey, The Tree of Life Lost and Regained (Bellaire, Texas: Bible Bulwarks, 1965), pp. 138-139.

— 948 S. Geyer Rd. 63122