

Will Enoch and Elijah Return to Earth to Preach to the Jews?

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There is a lot of talk today, both in Catholic and Protestant circles, predicting that Enoch and Elijah will return to earth sometime in the future before the Second Coming of Christ to preach to the Jews and convert them to the Christian faith. Indeed, many people believe that Christ *cannot* return to earth unless these events take place. Although anything good is certainly possible for God, it is time that we scrutinize this somewhat fanciful yet popular belief and uncover both its origin, its history and problems that are associated with it. Sometimes ideas and conjectures float around the Catholic Church for many centuries and many people accept them as doctrine without the Church ever declaring them to be so. Few take the time to substantiate the claims, especially in the more esoteric areas dealing with the return of Christ and the events that will transpire before his appearance. As this study delves into the claims about Enoch and Elijah, we will see that the notion of their future return is at best questionable and most likely erroneous.

The Fathers of the Catholic Church on Eschatology

Catholic study of eschatology starts with Scripture and goes through the Fathers of the Church. Although there was not a consensus among them, nevertheless, a small but significant portion of the Fathers believed in the return of Enoch and Elijah. The first thing any faithful Catholic would want to know is if the belief is well founded, and if so, is he required to accept it as true. In that light, a word of caution regarding the Fathers' views on theology and Christian doctrine is in order.

Often we are tempted to think that support for a doctrinal truth can be garnered simply by finding a representative sample of Fathers of the early Church who held the same opinion. Often the Catholic interpreter will quote one, two, or perhaps even a dozen Fathers on a matter of doctrine and consider the case closed. Unfortunately, it is simply not that easy. Unless the Fathers had a consensus wherein all of them agreed on a certain matter of Christian doctrine, the doctrine is neither established nor required for belief. The Catholic should consider the testimony of the Fathers influential and valuable, but certainly not final. The reason is that the Catholic Church does not regard the Fathers as

possessing an inspired gift for deciding matters of doctrine, nor does the Church regard the Fathers as superior interpreters of Scripture compared to exegetes of a later time. Truth be told, some of the Fathers were poor at exegeting Scripture. Some of them did not even know the languages of the Bible, Greek and Hebrew. At other times the Fathers not only contradicted one another, but a Father would sometimes contradict himself, or give two or more opinions on a certain passage of Scripture. In fact, some of the Fathers held beliefs that were later regarded as dubious or even heretical by the Church.

The main reason the Church invests the Fathers with a certain degree of influence or authority regarding Catholic doctrine is that their consensus on a certain belief is a strong sign that the doctrine originates from Christ and the Apostles.¹ If their teaching is unanimous, such that they all interpret a text of the Bible precisely the same, then it can be assumed, barring some intervention by the magisterium, that the teaching was inspired by the Holy Spirit, either by written revelation (2Tm 3:16) or oral revelation (1Th 2:13), which were both commanded to be preserved in Tradition (2Th 2:15). It is the divine origin of a particular doctrine that makes the doctrine a requirement of belief for salvation, not the majority or common opinion of the Fathers, the medievals or theologians and prelates of today.

There are instances in which the Fathers held to a consensus on various points of doctrine, but the Church, who is the final authority, has not chosen to dogmatize the consensus into a requirement for personal belief and salvation (e.g., geocentrism, the sons of God in Gn 6:1-2 were fallen angels, etc). There are other instances in which there exists very little testimony from the Fathers on a given doctrine, yet the Church has chosen to dogmatize the doctrine and make it a requirement for salvation (e.g., the Assumption of Mary). Sometimes there is a germ of doctrine in the Fathers which is enhanced by the medieval theologians, but which the Church eventually rejects (e.g., limbo).² Additionally, there are cases in which an absolute consensus exists very early

¹ “We say [the Fathers] are of supreme authority whenever they all interpret in one and the same manner any text of the Bible, as pertaining to the doctrine of faith or morals; for their unanimity clearly evinces that such interpretation has come down from the Apostles as a matter of Catholic faith” (Encyclical, Providentissimus Deus, II, 1893).

² The case of Limbo is especially significant since Pope Benedict XVI recently approved a papal commission document that essentially removed Limbo from the teaching of the Church. This shows that

among the Fathers on a given doctrine and which the Church dogmatizes early in her history (e.g., baptismal regeneration), yet other times there is a developing consensus which the Church dogmatizes rather late in her history (e.g., transubstantiation, justification, canon of Scripture).

Hence, when we enter into a study of the patristics, we must tread lightly. As reliable as they often were, the Fathers were fallible men just like theologians of today. In fact, with the tools of biblical exegesis we have today, as well as the exegetical knowledge and easy access of Greek and Hebrew not available to some of the Fathers, contemporary exegetes of Scripture have a distinct advantage in discovering the truths of Holy Writ that were not always available to the Fathers. What the Fathers had to their distinct advantage is their close proximity to the Apostles, and thus we would expect that, if and when there was a bridge from the Apostles to the Fathers on a certain point of doctrine, the Fathers would most likely provide us with consensual testimony to that divine source, yet even then, they may not do so in every case.

The Fathers on Eschatology

These matters are important when we study the more esoteric areas of theology, especially eschatology. Except for the Four Last Things, few eschatological details have been dogmatized by the Church. Few Catholics are aware of the fact, for example, that the early Fathers of the Church had a diametrically opposed view of eschatology than the latter Fathers. The early Fathers, based on a literal interpretation of Apocalypse 20, believed in Chiliasm – a future millennial kingdom on earth wherein Christ, after he appears for his Second Coming, will reign in Jerusalem for 1,000 years (e.g., Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius, et al.). The latter Fathers rejected that view and interpreted the millennium of Apocalypse 20 as a symbolic period of time transpiring from the First Coming until the Second Coming of Christ, wherein the Catholic Church would reign, with Christ as the head and the pope as his vicar (e.g., Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, et. al), and which view was

even cherished theological ideas from tradition, if not officially accepted and dogmatized by the Church, can be eliminated by a future pope or council.

followed by the medievals (e.g., Venerable Bede, Theophylact, Thomas Aquinas, Rabanus Maurus, et al.). In fact, Chiliasm was officially rejected by the Catholic Church under the reign of Pius XII as a system of interpretation that “cannot be taught safely.”³

Hence, we can understand why we need caution in assessing the interpretations of the Fathers on eschatology, since it is an historical fact that there was a major issue of contention among them on a major doctrine of belief. If we were required to give allegiance only to the earliest view as having the authentic pedigree from the inspired teaching of the Apostles, obviously the Chiliastic view of the second and third century Fathers should have the greater influence and authority. As it stands, however, the Catholic Church, for all intents and purposes, rejected the claim that Chiliasm came from the Apostles, despite the fact that some of its most honored Fathers believed in it. Basically, Augustine’s influence on eschatology held sway, as it did in many other areas of doctrine. The Church was basically Augustinian. Often whatever he concluded was what the Church believed, whether officially or unofficially, despite the fact that he may have been wrong on a few issues here or there.

Will Enoch and Elijah Return to Earth?

Consequently, when we come to even finer details of eschatology, such as whether Enoch and Elijah will return from heaven and preach to the last generation of Jews on earth and convert them to Christ, we must tread even more cautiously. Such caution is especially needed in light of the fact that the source for the Enoch/Elijah prediction originates from the Chiliasts among the early Fathers, and was later popularized in an assortment of apocryphal and pseudepigraphal works circulating in the first centuries of the Church (e.g., *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, *The Gospel of Joseph the Carpenter*, etc). Suffice it to say, no Catholic can merely quote a Father here or there who

³ The Chiliastic view was officially renounced in the pontificate of Pius XII due to its resurgence among Protestants espousing Dispensational Premillennialism (Scofield, Ryrie, Chafer, Walvoord, et al.). “In recent times on several occasions this Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has been asked what must be thought of the system of mitigated Millennarianism, which teaches, for example, that Christ the Lord before the final judgment, whether or not preceded by the resurrection of the many just, will come visibly to rule over this world. The answer is: The system of mitigated Millennarianism cannot be taught safely” (Pius XII, Decree of the Holy Office, July 21, 1944, Denz. 2296).

held to the idea that Enoch and Elijah will return to earth and consider the matter closed. As we will see, there are not only source problems with the Enoch/Elijah scenario, but exegetical problems as well.

There are only about a dozen or so Fathers who give commentaries related to these specific eschatological issues (e.g., Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Hilary, Jerome, Origin, Pelagius, Prosper, Tertullian, Theodoret).⁴ Many others simply did not care to address them. There is no testimony, for example, from Basil, Clement of Rome, Epiphanius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ignatius, Polycarp, Dionysius, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Methodius, Arnobius, Aphraates, Ephraim, Athanasius, Cyril (Jerusalem), Theodore, Didymus, Optatus, Pacian, Rufinus, Paulinus, Cassian, Vincent, Fulgence, and many other lesser-known Fathers in this particular time period. In this study we will analyze most of the Fathers who wrote about Enoch and Elijah. If a certain Father is not covered it is because his particular view is already represented by another Father.

To begin the analysis, since Tertullian was one of the more vocal proponents of both Chiliasm and the Enoch/Elijah theory, we will begin with him. He writes the following:

...for Christ is the proper and legitimate High Priest of God. He is the Pontiff of the priesthood of the uncircumcision, constituted such, even then, for the Gentiles, by whom he was to be more fully received, although at his last coming he will favor with his acceptance and blessing the circumcision also, even the race of Abraham, which by and by is to acknowledge him.⁵

Although Tertullian was quite prolific, this is the only statement in his writings that addresses the issue of a future Jewish conversion. Similar to many other Fathers who speak on this passage, however, Tertullian does not offer any detailed exegesis of the key passage in question, Romans 11:25-27; rather, he seems to be reiterating an idea that

⁴ Others who spoke on these issues, in what we deem as the very late patristic period and beginning the medieval period, are: Cassiodorus, Gregory, Isidore, Præniasius, Bede, Anselm, Bernard.

⁵ *Tertullian Against Marcion*, Book 5, Ch. 9, ANF, p. 448.

came prior to him. As it stands, Tertullian is writing the above lines from his *Adversus Marcionem* between 207 and 212 A.D., hence, he is very close to the time of Papias (c. 130 A.D.); Irenaeus (140-202 A.D.), Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.) and later Lactantius (250-317 A.D.), who were all promoting the Chiliastic view of eschatology, i.e., that Christ would reign on earth for a 1,000-year period after his Second Coming; and that the Jews would be converted and reign in the millennium.

Justin Martyr: “But I and such other Christians as judge rightly in everything believe that there will be...a thousand years in which Jerusalem will be built up, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezechiel and Isaias and the other declare.”⁶

Irenaeus: “that it behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards.”⁷

“The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth: as the elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times, and say: The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches...And these things are bone witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book; for there were five books compiled by him. And he says in addition, ‘Now these things are credible to believers.’”⁸

⁶ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80, JR, vol. 1, p. 61.

⁷ *Against Heresies*, 5:32:1, ANF.

⁸ *Against Heresies*, 5:33:3-4, ANF.

Lactantius: “But He, when He shall have destroyed unrighteousness, and executed His great judgment, and shall have recalled to life the righteous, who have lived from the beginning, will be engaged among men a thousand years, and will rule them with most just command. Which the Sibyl proclaims in another place, as she utters her inspired predictions....Then they who shall be alive in their bodies shall not die, but during those thousand years shall produce an infinite multitude, and their offspring shall be holy, and beloved by God; but they who shall be raised from the dead shall preside over the living as judges....About the same time also the prince of the devils, who is the contriver of all evils, shall be bound with chains, and shall be imprisoned during the thousand years of the heavenly rule in which righteousness shall reign in the world, so that he may contrive no evil against the people of God. After His coming the righteous shall be collected from all the earth, and the judgment being completed, the sacred city shall be planted in the middle of the earth, in which God Himself the builder may dwell together with the righteous, bearing rule in it.”⁹

Tertullian had been promoting Chiliasm in his own writings, and it is only natural to expect that he would attempt to fit a conversion of the Jews into his Chiliastic end-time scenario. In the very book from which Tertullian says that, at the Second Coming, he expects Christ “will favor with his acceptance and blessing the circumcision,” he writes of his belief in a future kingdom on earth:

As for the restoration of Judaea, however, which even the Jews themselves, induced by the names of places and countries, hope for just as it is described, it would be tedious to state at length how the figurative interpretation is spiritually applicable to Christ and His church, and to the character and fruits thereof; besides, the subject has been regularly treated in another work, which we entitle *De Spe Fidelium*. At present, too, it would be superfluous for this reason, that our inquiry relates to what is promised in heaven, not on earth. But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem, “let down from heaven,”

⁹ *Divine Institutes*, Book 7, Ch. 24, ANF.

which the apostle also calls “our mother from above;” and, while declaring that our politeuma, or citizenship, is in heaven, he predicates of it that it is really a city in heaven. This both Ezekiel had knowledge of and the Apostle John beheld. ...Of the heavenly kingdom this is the process. After its thousand years are over, within which period is completed the resurrection of the saints, who rise sooner or later according to their deserts there will ensue the destruction of the world and the conflagration of all things at the judgment: we shall then be changed in a moment into the substance of angels, even by the investiture of an incorruptible nature, and so be removed to that kingdom in heaven of which we have now been treating, just as if it had not been predicted by the Creator.¹⁰

Combining Tertullian’s two above quotes, we can see that he envisioned a future 1000-year kingdom that would house the Jews who had been converted to Christianity. But Tertullian was not the first to espouse this unique viewpoint. The earliest was probably **Papias** (c. 130 A.D.) The historian **Eusebius** (263-340 A.D.) writes about the eschatological views of Papias in his famous book on Church history:

And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, confesses that he received the words of the apostles from those that followed them....The same writer gives also other accounts which he says came to him through unwritten tradition, certain strange parables and teachings of the Savior, and some more mythical things. To these belong his statement that there will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth. I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to be of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses.¹¹

Origen is also suspected to have accepted the Chiliastic view, although his words on this matter are rather obscure for us to know precisely what he believed. From his

¹⁰ *Tertullian Against Marcion*, Book 3, Ch. 25, ANF.

¹¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Ch. 39, “The Writings of Papias,” ANF.

testimony we can at least understand why there were many divergent views on eschatology. He writes:

But what existed before this world, or what will exist after the world, has not become certain knowledge among the man; for no clear statement in this matter is to be found in ecclesiastical teaching¹²

In any case, we can see rather easily where the combined prospects for a future millennial kingdom and an *en masse* conversion of the Jews to inhabit that kingdom originated. It did not originate with a thorough and detailed exegesis of Rm 11:25-27 or any other passage of Scripture, but with a idiosyncratic tradition passed down by Papias to which other Fathers of his era glommed on. This anomaly is not surprising if we consider that even in St. Paul's day there were various erroneous propositions circulating in the churches concerning the end of time. At one point, the bodily resurrection was being doubted (1Co 15:1-19). At another point it was believed that Christ would return in the first century (2Th 2:1-4). Paul squelched both of those movements. Somehow, however, the idea of a future millennial kingdom persisted beyond the middle of the second century until about the late third century. So prevalent was this teaching that two thousand years later modern evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants refer to the eschatology espoused by Papias, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Lactantius and Origen to support their Dispensational Premillennial views of a future millennial reign of Christ on earth in which the Jews will convert to Christianity and rule over the Gentiles for 1,000 years. They also use this early patristic testimony to undercut the Catholic Church's dependence on Augustine, *et al.* and the Amillennial view of eschatology – the view that rejects a future millennial kingdom for the Jews.

¹² *The Fundamental Doctrines*, 1, Preface, 7, JR, vol. 1, p. 192. Origen also doubts other important details. On the meaning of "all Israel," he writes: "What all Israel means or what the fullness of the Gentiles will be only God knows..." (*Commentary on Romans*, 4:304).

What to do with the ‘Enoch and Elijah’ Prediction?

Considering the erratic and unsettled history of patristic eschatology, it is not difficult to consider that even the Fathers who took a more symbolic approach to the millennium might have held on to some of the more literal and fanciful interpretations of the Apocalypse popular among the early Fathers. For example, some of the Fathers who espoused the Amillennial position and rejected Chiliasm still promoted the idea that the Jews would convert near the end of time. As noted above, the idea that Rm 11:25-27 is teaching a future conversion of the Jews had its origin in the Chiliasm of the early Fathers.¹³ The unfortunate fact is, not one of the latter Fathers produced a detailed exegesis of Rm 11:25-27 to prove the theory; rather, they seemed to have adopted some of the same unsubstantiated conclusions that began with Papias in the early second century. Of the dozen or so Fathers that speak about a future conversion of the Jews, only superficial and question-begging assertions are made of Rm 11:25-27, and often with some obvious blunders. For example, beginning with Augustine, there persists a strain of thought that Elijah will be transported from heaven to earth in order to preach to the last generation of Jews for their conversion. Augustine attempts to support this view by a tenuous interpretation of Malachi 4:5, which speaks of “Elijah” returning before the “Day of the Lord” in order to turn the hearts of fathers and sons toward each other.¹⁴ As opposed to his penchant to interpret almost all other prophetic passages symbolically, Augustine insisted on interpreting Ml 4:5 literally. By his own admission, he did so because he was influenced by the translation of the Greek Septuagint that specified a return of “Elijah the Tishbite.”¹⁵ Augustine said that the appearance of “Tishbite” led him to believe that the real Elijah would have to return from heaven in the distant future since only one person could satisfy being originally from Tishbi. Not being privy to the

¹³ Tertullian’s view of Rm 11:25 was stated as: “although at his last coming he will favor with his acceptance and blessing the circumcision also, even the race of Abraham, which by and by is to acknowledge him” (*Tertullian Against Marcion*, Book 5, Ch. 9, ANF, p. 448).

¹⁴ Malachi 4:5-6: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.”

¹⁵ Ηλιάν τον Θεσβίτην.

Hebrew text (which was the only divinely inspired version of Malachi), Augustine was not aware that Mt 4:5 merely said “Elijah the prophet.”¹⁶ This blunder forced Augustine to miss the symbolic interpretation of Mt 4:5, which is quite astounding in light of the fact that according to Jesus’ own words, Mt 4:5 was to be applied to John the Baptist, not the actual Elijah (cf., Mt 11:14; 17:10-12; Lk 1:17).¹⁷ The unfortunate result of Augustine’s interpretation was that not only did the “Deliverer” of Rm 11:26 and at least one of the two witnesses of Ap 11:5-8 suddenly become “Elijah the Tishbite,” but his error was carried over to a few other Fathers and medievals who, like Augustine, didn’t bother to exegete the passages in question but merely accepted what Augustine had left them. One example is John Damascene:

But Enoch and Elias the Thesbite shall be sent and shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, that is, the synagogue to our Lord Jesus Christ and the preaching of the apostles: and they will be destroyed by him. And the Lord shall come out of heaven, just as the holy apostles beheld Him going into heaven perfect God and perfect man, with glory and power, and will destroy the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, with the breath of His mouth. Let no one, therefore, look for the Lord to come from earth, but out of Heaven, as He himself has made sure.¹⁸

Here we see Damascene using the very wording Augustine employed to identify “Elias the Thesbite” from the LXX translation of Mt 4:5. Interestingly enough, whereas Augustine then sought to identify the “Deliverer” of Rm 11:26 with Elijah but makes no mention of Enoch, Damascene mentions both Enoch and Elijah, most likely because he wanted to provide two respective names to the two witnesses of Apocalypse 11:5-8 who

¹⁶ אֵלִיָּהּ הַנְּבִיאַ

¹⁷ As Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott concurs: “The conversion of the Jewish people is frequently brought into a causal connection with the coming-again of Elias, but without sufficient foundation...Jesus does not speak explicitly of a future coming of Elias before the General Judgment, probably not even in Mt. 17, 11 (“Elias indeed shall come and restore all things”), in which the prophecy of Malachias is simply reproduced. Jesus sees it already fulfilled in the appearance of John the Baptist (Mt 17, 12)” (FCD, p. 487).

¹⁸ *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book IV, Chapter 26.

supposedly preach to the Jews for 3.5 years (i.e., the “1260 days” of Ap 11:3). Similar to Damascene, a few other Fathers accepted the ‘Enoch/Elijah’ end-time scenario, yet with no exegesis of Scripture to prove the prediction. In fact, in this somewhat helter-skelter search for the main character of the end-time plot, some would predict only Elijah’s coming, some only Enoch, and some Elijah and Enoch together. No one was quite sure just how it would all play out or who would be conducting the show.¹⁹

Where did the ‘Enoch/Elijah’ interpretation originate? Obviously with the same early Fathers who believed in Chiliasm, such as **Lactantius**: “...affirming that the two prophets Enoch and Elias have been translated into some remote place that they might attend our Lord when He shall come to judgment,”²⁰ and **Tertullian**: “Enoch no doubt was translated, and so was Elijah; nor did they experience death: it was postponed, (and only postponed,) most certainly: they are reserved for the suffering of death, that by their blood they may extinguish Antichrist.”²¹

¹⁹ For example, **Venerable Bede** shows his confusion on the subject: “In qua quidam Iudaeorum male decipiendi et decepturi, alii autem Heliae magni prophetae monitis legem spiritaliter intellecturi et ecclesiae membris incorporati...” (“and some of the bad Jews will deceive and be deceived, but others through Elijah the great prophet will know the spiritual warnings of the law and will be incorporated as members of the church”) (Bedaes Presbyteri, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, CCSL, CXXI A, Cap. IV, p. 269) and “Quidam duos prophetas Enoch et Heliam interpretantur, qui tribus semis annis praedicantes contra mox secuturam antichristi perfidiam fidelium corda conferment” (Some interpret the two prophets as Enoch and Elijah, who will preach for three and a half years against the deception of the Antichrist to strengthen the hearts of the faithful” (*ibid*, Cap XVII, 132-134). Bede, in fact, creates a significant contradiction against St. Paul’s “all Israel” stipulation in Rm 11:26. In the same section Bede writes: “Indeed, Elijah destroyed his adversaries by fire, and was hidden for three and a half years...in the end, when the false prophets were killed...he converted Israel to the Lord. All of this will be repeated” (*ibid*, Book II, Cap XVII, pp. 379-381) But the fact is, Elijah *did not convert Israel during this time*, and certainly nothing close to an “all Israel” for Bede to make a comparison to Rm 11:26! The incident of Elijah calling down fire from heaven occurs in 1 Kings 18, but just one chapter later, 1Kg 19:10, Elijah is complaining to God: “...the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” It is this very passage that St. Paul employs in order to prove that only a remnant of Israel believed in God. This small number did not appreciably change during Israel’s entire history, since St. Paul insists that the same remnant also exists “in this present time,” that is, the first century (Rm 11:5). So if Bede insists that: “All of this will be repeated,” then he should have only expected a remnant of Jews to believe in God when his future Elijah returned before the Second Coming. Better yet, he should have relinquished the prospect of Elijah returning altogether, for Rm 11:25-26 was already fulfilled in the First Coming of Christ.

²⁰ *The Manner in Which the Persecutors Died*, Chapter 2, ANF.

²¹ *A Treatise on the Soul*, Chapter 50, ANF.

The Apocryphal Literature on Enoch and Elijah

Even more intriguing is that the supposed return of Enoch and Elijah was also a fixture in the apocryphal apocalypse literature of that day, such as *The Revelation of Paul*: “And he said to me: This is Enoch, the witness of the last day.”²² In fact, the idea that Enoch and Elijah would return at the end of time was actually more popular and more prevalent in the apocryphal and non-canonical books than in the early Fathers. Another source is the apocryphal Gospels, such as *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*:

And I say to you, O my brethren, that they also, Enoch and Elias, must towards the end of time return into the world and die – in the day, namely, of commotion, of terror, of perplexity, and affliction. For Antichrist will slay four bodies, and will pour out their blood like water, because of the reproach to which they shall expose him, and the ignominy with which they, in their lifetime, shall brand him when they reveal his impiety.²³

The Gospel of Nicodemus even refers to Elijah as “the Thesbite,” the same term Augustine would eventually adopt:

One of them answered, and said: I am Enoch, who was well-pleasing to God, and who was translated hither by Him; and this is Helias the Thesbite; and we are also to live until the end of the world; and then we are to be sent by God to withstand Antichrist, and to be slain by him, and after three days to rise again, and to be snatched up in clouds to meet the Lord.²⁴

The apocryphal *Revelation of St. John the Theologian* states:

²² *The Revelation of Paul*, ANF, Vol. 8, p. 577.

²³ *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, 31, ANF, Vol. 8, p. 394.

²⁴ *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, Chapter 9, ANF, Vol. 8, p. 420.

And then I shall send forth Enoch and Elias to convict him; and they shall show him to be a liar and a deceiver; and he shall kill them at the altar, as said the prophet, then shall they offer calves upon thine altar.²⁵

It is quite evident that the tradition espousing the return of Enoch and Elijah to fulfill the imagery of Apocalypse 11:5-8 originated among: (1) the Fathers who held the Chiliastic view of eschatology, and (2) about a half-dozen apocryphal or pseudepigraphal books that often contained exaggerated and fanciful accounts of biblical figures. In short, the idea that Enoch and Elijah would return in the future to preach the gospel to the last generation of Jews has a dubious, and very possibly, a fallacious pedigree.

The Difficulty of Fitting Enoch and Elijah into the Amillennial Schema

To their credit, however, at least the early Fathers who held to the eschatology of Chiliasm had a rhyme and reason for wanting the return of Enoch and Elijah to earth. Since they believed there would be 1,000 additional years on earth after the Second Coming, the Jews that were converted by Enoch and Elijah would naturally be expected to inhabit the new Millennial kingdom and raise progeny of the same allegiance to Christ during that whole time period. This is similar to what is believed today by the Protestant Dispensationalists, although most of them claim that the two witnesses of Apocalypse 11:5-6 who convert the Jews are Moses and Elijah rather than Enoch and Elijah. Some even see a possibility of Jeremiah returning, due to a third description of prophetic miracles in Ap 11:5-6.²⁶

²⁵ ANF, Vol. 8, p. 583.

²⁶ The choice of Enoch as one of the two witnesses is dubious in itself, since the language of Ap 11:5-6, if it were to be interpreted literally as referring to two actual human beings, favors Moses and Elijah, not Enoch. John says one witness can turn water into blood (which resembles one of the plagues of Egypt in the days of Moses) and the other can stop rain for the entire 1260 days (which resembles Elijah's 3.5 year feat in 2 Kings 18; Jm 5:17-18). Enoch had no such powers, but was merely translated into heaven one day (Gn 5:24; Hb 11:3; Es 44:16; 49:14). Enoch was probably chosen as the second witness because, unlike Moses, he did not die. It seemed proper to the early interpreters to have two men who had not died previously to be the best candidates to return to earth, despite the fact that Enoch did not fit the description of Ap 11:5-6. Jeremiah is chosen by some interpreters because of the description regarding fire coming out of the mouth of the witnesses (see Jr 5:14).

As noted, it is not surprising that Augustine and some of his more ardent followers who ventured into the difficult area of eschatological interpretation would retain some of the unproven hypotheses from their Chiliastic precursors and the apocryphal writings. At this early juncture in history, the Church was bombarded by many esoteric ideas and interesting hypotheses that simply had not been given enough time to be analyzed, much less approved. Often this inadequacy led to some forced interpretations of Scripture that may or may not have been correct, especially as we see the paper trail laid out before us. First, it is an undeniable fact that the early Fathers (e.g., Papias, Justin, Irenaeus, Lactantius, Tertullian) had a view regarding the Millennium of Apocalypse 20 that was diametrically opposed to the latter Fathers (e.g., Augustine, John Damascene, Chrysostom). Second, as the latter Fathers retained some elements of the Chiliastic view in their new Amillennial interpretation, one of the products of the amalgamation was Augustine's strained interpretation of the "Elijah" of Mt 4:5 and the "Deliverer" of Rm 11:26, both of which he envisioned as being fulfilled by the actual Elijah coming back from heaven. In fact, Augustine himself says that he was moved by "*a familiar theme in the conversation and heart of the faithful,*" to believe that "in the last days before the judgment the Jews shall believe...by means of this great and admirable prophet Elias..."²⁷ With the foregoing evidence at our disposal, we now know the origin of this "familiar theme." In the main it came from the dubious eschatology of the Chiliast Fathers and the fanciful writings of the apocryphal apocalypses. Surely, however, Augustine knew that the "familiar theme" of his patristic forefathers was Chiliastic and that he was rejecting their view for his own eschatological schema. Why he wasn't as discriminating over the equally fanciful idea that Enoch and Elijah would return to earth is anyone's guess. Perhaps the fixation over his idiosyncratic view of Mt 4:5 was too much to overcome. It would not be the first time in Augustine's career where his peculiar interpretation of one verse of Scripture would put the breaks on alternate interpretations of other Scriptures. Augustine, to say the least, was a very complex man of God.

Although Augustine may not have been prudent in discriminating what eschatological predictions he would retain from his Chiliast forefathers, nevertheless, he

²⁷ *City of God*, Book XX, Chapter 29. NPNF1, Vol. II, p. 448.

and his colleagues had little rhyme or reason why ‘Elijah and/or Enoch’ should return to earth. The simple fact is, their new Amillennial eschatology left no room after the “fullness of the Gentiles” (Rm 11:25) and prior to the return of Christ for the Jews to be converted, much less any time for these new Jewish converts to spread their faith to the rest of the Gentile world. In fact, one of the basic questions that surfaces as we analyze the somewhat eclectic eschatological views of Augustine is: why would Augustine be so apt to interpret Apocalypse 20 in a stridently figurative manner (*viz.*, the 1,000-years as a symbolic period of time), but interpret Apocalypse 11 in a staunchly literal manner (*viz.*, the two witnesses as being the actual Enoch and Elijah)? As a result of this exegetical duplicity, Augustine and his followers subsequently produced many forced interpretations of Ap 11:5-8 and Rm 11:25-26 to make room for both a Jewish conversion and a Jewish evangelism to the Gentiles. For example, Augustine writes:

The time will come, the end of the world will come, and all Israel shall believe; not they who now are, but their children who shall then be. For these present walking in their own ways, will go to their own place, will pass on to everlasting damnation.²⁸

The obvious question that should surface in a proposal like Augustine’s is: why would God allow all previous generations of Jews to go to “everlasting damnation” but save only one generation prior to the end of the world? This is especially troublesome when we consider that for the last four thousand years beginning from Abraham, there were approximately 5 generations of Jews for every century. This amounts to about 200 generations of Jews which, according to St. Paul’s testimony in Rm 11:5, only a small remnant were being saved at any given time. In effect, millions upon millions of Jews are kept in their hardness so that only one generation, the last generation, can enjoy the real benefits of God’s mercy. In short, Augustine’s view makes little sense. Having only the last generation of Jews become token converts in order to make a display of God’s

²⁸ Sermons, 72, NPNF1, Vol. VI, p. 472.

tremendous mercy to the Jews (see Rm 11:28-36) seems to be somewhat cheap for divine standards.²⁹

We see another problem in Augustine’s description of the conversion:

...in that day the Jews – those of them, at least, who shall receive the spirit of grace and mercy – when they see him coming in his majesty, and recognize that it is he whom they, in the person of their parents, insulted when he came before in his humiliation, shall repent of insulting him in his passion.³⁰

There are several issues here. First, Augustine says: “...*at least*, who shall receive the spirit of grace and mercy,” but St. Paul says that “all Israel shall be saved,” not a portion of those who comprise the group.³¹ Actually, Augustine’s equivocation is just a forecast of what is to come regarding the interpretation of “all Israel” in the patristic and medieval period. Some will attempt to minimize the phrase to refer to something a lot

²⁹ **Prosper**, an ardent follower of Augustine, has the same problem, and describes it quite well: (et tamen illis saeculis quibus unum Israel emendabat innumerabiles populos impiorum illuminare distuleri; et nunc eundem Israel, donec universitas gentium introeat, oboecatum esse patiatur, pereuntem in tot millibus nascentium atque morientium, et salvandum in eis quos mundi finis invenerit): “He delayed for centuries, while he was educating Israel, to enlighten the countless peoples of infidels; and now he allows that same Israel to go blind until the universality of the Gentiles enter the fold. He allows so many thousands of this people to be born and die to be lost, when only those whom the end of the world will find alive will attain salvation” (*De Vocatione Omnium Gentium*, Bk 1, Caput XXI, 874, D (*The Call of All Nations*). Unfortunately, this cataclysmic imbalance in the mercy of God doesn’t seem to bother Prosper. But as **Pelagius** rightly objected: “Some interpreters regard all these events as future. To them one must reply...what will become of those who are now perishing as unbelievers” (*Commentary on Romans*; PCR 129-30).

³⁰ *City of God*, Book XX, Chapter 30, NPNF1, Vol. 11, p. 450.

³¹ Augustine shows his equivocation regarding “all Israel” in several places. In one place he says that Rm 11:26 applies to the remnant of Israel and spiritually to the Church: “Not all the Jews were blind; some of them recognized Christ. But the fullness of the Gentiles comes in among those who have been called according to the plan, and there arises a truer *Israel of God...the elect from both the Jews and the Gentiles*” (*Letters* 149; FC 20:253). **Bede**, taking Augustine’s cue, shows the same inconsistency. He first takes Ap 3:10 out of context and applies it exclusively to the Jews of the future, and then equivocates as to how many Jews will be saved: “...the hour of temptation and the humiliation of the Jews in the time of antichrist is portrayed...it is believed that wicked Jews will be deceived as well as deceive, but others will understand the law spiritually through the teaching of Elijah the great prophet, and will be added as members of the Church” (op. cit., *Expositio Apocalypseos*, Book I, Cap IV, p. 269). **Aquinas** goes a step further and says: “all Israel will be saved, not merely individuals as a present, but the whole nation as a body” (*Epistle to the Romans*, Ch. XI, lect. 4, cited in Fahey, p. 108).

less than “all,” while others will insist that it not only refers to all the Jews but the nation of Israel as well, and some will hold ideas in the middle of these two extremes.

Second, Augustine claims that these Jews will “repent of insulting him in his passion,” but not only is there no intimation of repentance in the passage to which he alludes (i.e., Ap 1:7: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him”), but Augustine seems to be saying that a bulk of the conversion of the Jews is not taking place *before* the Second Coming, but *during* the Second Coming itself. But Rm 11:27 does not offer room for a spontaneous repentance and conversion of Israel; rather, it speaks of the Deliverer making or implementing a “covenant” with them to take away their sins, much like St. Peter said to the Jews in Ac 5:32 at Christ’s First Coming: “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins,” and which he said in Hb 10:16-17 and which also applies to the First Coming:

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more.”

Covenants are not made or implemented retroactively, as it were, nor would we expect a covenant to be made at the Second Coming, for Scripture is clear that the Second Coming is the time of judgment for those who have not already repented of their sins (cf. 2Pt 3:9-10; Mt 24:14-51; 25:1-46). To posit, as Augustine does, that repentance comes to the Jews on the Last Day when Christ returns to earth simply has no Scriptural or traditional support. In fact, it contradicts Augustine’s previous view which has Elijah coming to preach to the Jews for 1260 days, for it is during that 3.5 year period that the Jews are supposed to be repenting of their sins, not at the Second Coming itself.³² But

³² Hilary has the same problem. According to J. Michael, Hilary says: “The Jews will receive the faith of Christ before the end of the ages – but it will be because of the following: they will look upon him whom they have pierced” (*Tractate on the Psalms*, PL 9, Psalm LVIII, 0379c-0380a, translation by Tom Evans). If Hilary is referring to Zc 12:10, the main problem for him is that this prophecy is fulfilled for the Jews in Jn 19:37 at the First Coming of Christ. If Hilary is referring to Ap 1:7 (as Augustine did above), then it is too late to “receive the faith of Christ before the end of the ages,” simply because Ap 1:7 describes the exact day of the “end of the ages,” not an interlude prior to the end. One problem is that Hilary doesn’t appear to say this at all. The Latin of PL 9, 58, c is “quia cum regni Coelestis possessio Israeli

Augustine's forced interpretation of these passages illustrates quite well the dilemma into which he was forced when he rightly rejected the Chiliasm of his patristic forefathers yet wrongly kept some of their more fanciful baggage.

In retrospect, before any conclusions can be drawn about a future conversion of the Jews, a thorough and complete analysis of the writings and reasonings of the Fathers is warranted. As we will see, not one Father addressed the exegetical details of the passages in question, much less could any of them come to firm conclusions about their interpretations. To illustrate the problem more thoroughly, let's analyze some of the more popular citations from the latter patristic era that side with the Chiliastic idea from the early patristics that there will be a future conversion of the Jews. Pope Gregory the Great wrote:

With the receiving of the fullness of the Gentiles, at the end of the world, the hearts of the Jews will be converted to her. This therefore has been written: 'Until the fullness of the nations shall enter, and as follows all Israel shall be saved (Rm xi:25). Afterwards receiving double because they will finish their present labor, not only in the salvation of joyful souls, but also of the beautiful body that ascends. Therefore, it is said well through the prophet, 'In their land they will possess a double portion.' [Is 61:7].³³

But Gregory, not offering any exegesis of the passages from which he quotes (Rm 11:25 and Is 61:7), has little in the way of proof for his assertion. In fact, Gregory's treatment of both Rm 11:25 and Is 61:7 contain obvious blunders. For example, Gregory

praedicaretur, fides tamen gentium possessionem hanc sibi Israel diffidente praeriperet." Perhaps Mr. Evans was interpolating and Mr. Michael understood it as a quote from Hilary.

³³ *Moralium Libri*, Job, Ch. X, PL 75, col. 528. Latin: cum susceptis plene gentibus, in fine mundi Judaeorum etiam ad se corda convertit. Hinc enim scriptum est: *Donec plenitudo gentium intraret, et sic omnis Israel salvus fieret* (Rm xi, 25). Duplicia et postmodum recipiet: quia finito labore praesentis temporis, non solum ad animarum gaudium, sed etiam ad beatitudinem corporum ascendit (my translation). In the next few sentences, Gregory goes on to claim that Ap 6:11 refers to a time before the bodily resurrection in which Israel will receive its glory. This is certainly not the correct interpretation, since Ap 6:11 refers to the "souls" of all Christians who have died and are awaiting the end of the world, which is the same identity of the "souls" in Ap 20:4, of which Catholic tradition has said applies to the present millennium (from the First Coming to the Second Coming), not a future millennium or future glory for Israel. Apparently, Gregory would have interpreted the next chapter, Apocalypse 7, in the same way as his Chiliast precursors (Papias, Irenaeus, Justin, et al.) and the Dispensationalists of today, since the remnant of 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel would have fit nicely into his interpretation of Ap. 6:11.

interprets the Greek word οὕτως in Rm 11:25 as “and as follows,” as if the adverb is denoting a subsequent conversion that will occur *after* the “fullness of the Gentiles” is completed.³⁴ But as we noted previously, οὕτως does not mean “then” or “afterwards,”³⁵ and unless it can be shown otherwise, the “fullness of the Gentiles” takes the world right up to the Last Day and the beginning of eternity. There is no interlude of time after the Gentile “fullness” and prior to the Second Coming – an anachronistic dilemma that perhaps Augustine had not contemplated when he adopted his newfound Amillennialism.

In addition, Gregory’s citation of Is 61:7 as applying to a conversion of Jews in the future is undercut by the very fact that the Gospels show Jesus quoting from Is 61:1-3 as referring to his First Coming, not his Second Coming (cf. Lk 4:18-21; Mt 11:5; 12:18). After reading from Isaiah 61, Jesus

³⁴ Other Fathers attribute the same kind of sequence to Rm 11:26, but without the slightest exegesis to prove the point. **Jerome**, for example, says: “Cum inquit crediderit gentium populus, et omnis orbis ad meam fuerit fidem adductus, et intraverit gentium plenitudo, **tunc etiam** reliquiae Israel salvabuntur, non illae reliquiae, de quibus est scriptum in Regnorum libro: Dereliqui mihi septem millia virorum, qui non curvaverunt genua Baal” (*Commentariorum in Michaeam*, PL 25, Lib. 1, Cap II, col. 1176) reads: “and the fullness of the Gentiles will have come in, **then** even the remnant of Israel will be saved, then also the remnant of Israel shall be saved, not that remnant, of which is written in the book of Kings: I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (my translation). Or “Quod offendit, ait, Judaicus populus, ut plenitudo gentium subintraret, dispensationis Dei est, **ut postea**, credente Israel, omnes salvi fierent, et universi Dei misericordia indigerent (*Commentariorum in Michaeam*, PL 25, Lib. 1, Cap II, col. 1170), reads: “Because the Jewish people stumble, he says, that the fullness of the Gentiles may come in, the dispensation of God, **so that afterwards**, when Israel believes, all may be saved, and all may stand in need of God’s mercy” (my translation). Here we see Jerome interpreting the Greek adverb οὕτως as if it were the word “then.” It seems that the Fathers were so conditioned by the Chiliasts that went before them, even when the definitions of Greek words were staring them in the face, that they didn’t see the real meaning of the word. In fact, not one Father addressed the precise meaning of οὕτως. **Cyril of Alexandria**, who knew Greek, skips right over it. He writes: “Ὅτι μέλλει σώζεσθαι καὶ ὁ ἀπόβλητος Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ καιροῦς. Βεβαίον τὰ τῆς ἐλπίδος, λόγιον παρατιθεὶς ἱερόν. Σωθήσεται γὰρ κατὰ καιροῦς ὁ Ἰσραὴλ, ἔσχατος καλούμενος μετὰ τὴν τῶν ἐξ ἔθνῶν κλήσιν (*In Epistolam ad Romanos*, Rm XI, 26, PG 74, col. 849), reads: “Because about to be saved even the worthless of Israel according to the proper time, to confirm the hope, to commend the oracles of the temple. For they shall be saved according to the time of Israel, being called last after those called out of the nations” (my translation).

³⁵ The Greek adverb οὕτως in Rm 11:26 (“so,” which modifies the verb σωθήσεται: “shall be saved”) explains the manner in which Israel will be saved, not when. If Paul wanted to denote “then” or “afterwards” he could have used a number of words to get the point across rather easily, e.g., the Greek ἄρα (“then”), δέ (“then”), ἔπειτα (“then”), or οὖν (“then”). The Greek οὕτως appears over two hundred times in the New Testament and is never understood as “then” or “afterwards.” It always means “so,” “thus,” “in this way,” “in this manner,” etc.

...closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Moreover, Is 61:4-9's reference to "rebuilding the ancient ruins" has been understood by many others to be fulfilled at the First Coming of Christ, since Peter quotes from Isaiah and Amos 9:14 in Ac 15:16-18 regarding the newly established Church as the rebuilding of the ruins of David:

¹⁴Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, ¹⁶'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, ¹⁷that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, ¹⁸says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.'

In actuality, Gregory's interpretation of Is 61:7 seems to fall into the same erroneous category of interpretation that Eusebius categorized of Papias' literal interpretation of the millennium of Apocalypse 20: "I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures."³⁶ The same type of problem is evident in Isidore of Seville:

1. Indeed, the carnal Jews of this time are transitioning to this, afterwards, in the last times, their sons will believe in Christ, as Hosea's prophecy give testimony: 'For the children of Israel shall sit many days without king...' (Ose. iii 4, 5). Indeed, this is now to be seen, then afterwards the following: 'And after this the children of Israel shall return and shall seek the Lord, their God, and David, their king: and they shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the last days.'³⁷

³⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Ch. 39, "The Writings of Papias," ANF.

³⁷ Latin: "Transeuntibus quidem istis carnalibus Judaeis, postea in novissimis temporibus filii eorum in Christo credituri sunt, Osee propheta testante: Quoniam diebus multis sedebunt filii Israel sine rege, sine

The problem here, of course, is that Isidore's treatment of Hs 3:4-5 is anachronistic. Where Isidore attempts to apply the passage to the end of the world, no such Scripture can be found to support him, except perhaps the question-begging interpretations that the Chiliasts had already put on Rm 11:25-27 and Ap 11:5-8. The only "last days" that Scripture specifies are those that started at the First Coming of Christ, not the Second. In fact, the only references to the word "last" that Scripture makes regarding the end of time is the singular "last day," which appears seven times in the New Testament.³⁸ This is precisely why Ac 2:17 says that the events of Pentecost are a fulfillment of the plural "last days," the prophecy of Joel which said:

¹⁷'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

This makes perfect sense when we stop to inquire who was being saved on Pentecost Day, which, according to Joel and Peter, was the beginning of the "last days." It was none other than the very Jews prophesied by Hosea 3:4-5, since Jews from fifteen surrounding nations who had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast heard the Gospel from Peter's lips and 3,000 of them were saved and baptized in one day (cf. Ac 2:22-39). Prior to Pentecost, the Jews were, as Hosea said, "without a king, a sacrifice, an altar," etc. It was Christ and his sacrifice on the Cross who gave them their new sacrifice and altar, which was the Eucharist that the New Covenant provided for them (Ac 2:46-47; 1Co 11:24-33; Hb 8:13; 10:16-18; 13:10). Pentecost is the very fulfillment of Lk 1:68-73

principe, sine sacrificio, sine altari, sine sacerdotio, sine manifestationibus (Ose. Iii, 4, 5). Utique quemadmodum nunc esse videntur; deinde sequenter adjunxit: Et postea revertentur filii Israel, et inquirent Dominum Deum suum, et David regem suum, et stupescant in Domino, et in bonis suis, in novissimis deibus (my translation). *De Fide Catholica Contra Judaeos Liber II, Caput V, PL 83, col. 508.*

³⁸ Jn 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 7:37; 11:24; 12:48, all except 7:37 referring to Judgment Day when Christ returns to earth for his Second Coming. Conversely, the "last days" (in the plural) has its beginning at the First Coming (cf. Ac 2:17; Hb 1:2; 2Tm 3:1; 2Pt 3:3).

which promised “Israel...redemption for his people...to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham,” and which Peter said in Ac 5:31 was: “to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” This is precisely why the “Deliverer that comes from Zion” in Rm 11:26-27 is not Elijah the Tishbite but Christ himself who came with the “covenant” that would “save all Israel” by “taking away the sins of Jacob.”

Notice also that Joel uses apocalyptic language (e.g., the darkening of the sun and moon) as it literally occurred at the First Coming of Christ:

¹⁹And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. ²¹And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

The Gospels are clear that at the crucifixion of Christ, the sun was darkened for three hours, which, in turn, would turn the moon to a dark color. As Luke puts it in Lk 23:44-46:

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.³⁹

Thus Joel and Peter are quite correct in applying the restoration of Israel to the First Coming of Christ, since their focus is the spiritual restoration of Israel, not the national/ethnic restoration for which so many are searching. Once it is understood that the “last days” begins at Christ’s First Coming, all the problems are solved and the difficulty with trying to squeeze in the conversion of the Jews is dissipated.

Unfortunately, the same problem that started with the early patristic Chiliasts also found its way into some medieval thinking. Thomas Aquinas, as good a thinker as he was

³⁹ cf. Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Ac 2:20.

on many issues, followed the Chiliast line and produced an even more illogical scenario. He writes:

What, I say, will such a winning accomplish if not to make the Gentiles rise again to life? The Gentiles are the faithful who will have grown weak in the faith. ‘Because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold.’ Or those who, deceived by Antichrist, will have completely fallen away will be restored to their pristine fervor by the converted Jews. Or even, as by the fall of the Jews, the Gentiles who had been enemies were reconciled, so after the conversion of the Jews near the end of the world, there will be a general resurrection by which men will rise from the death to immortal life.⁴⁰

This scenario ignores a host of Scriptural evidences, particularly the sequence of events established in Rm 11:25-27. Whereas Thomas implies a second revival of the Gentiles after their initial “fullness,” St. Paul speaks of only one such event, without any indication whatsoever of a second revival of the Gentiles by the evangelistic efforts of converted Jews.⁴¹ In short, Thomas’ schema forces him to adopt two “fullnesses” of the Gentiles, but St. Paul only speaks of one. But not only does Thomas’ interpretation contradict Rm 11:25-27, it also contradicts the many passages in the Gospels and elsewhere which speak of the end times as a *loss of faith*, not a restoration of the faith wherein Jew and Gentiles, *en masse*, are awaiting the return of the Last Judgment.⁴² In fact, there are no passages that speak of a resurgence of faith near or at Christ’s Second Coming.

⁴⁰ *Epistle to the Romans*, XI, Lecture I and II, cited in Fahey’s *Kingship of Christ*, p. 105.

⁴¹ Rm 11:25-26: “a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved.” Similarly, Fr. Lémann implants the suggestion that the Gentiles will fail by saying that Paul could have added the words “When you shall have fallen into incredulity,” and Fahey adds: “The tenderness of St. Paul for the Gentiles, however, prevented him from adding that phrase, but several Fathers of the Church have expressed the thought in their commentaries” (*ibid.*, p. 110). Fahey cites only three Fathers that make such a suggestion (Origen, Jerome and Chrysostom). The fact is, Paul says no such thing. He never singles out the Gentiles as having sole responsibility for the apostasy.

⁴² Lk 18:8; Mt 24:14-28; Mk 13:1-27; Lk 21:1-28; 2Th 2:1-11; 2Pt 3:3-13; Ap 11:5-19; 20:7-15.

Modern Views on the Conversion of the Jews

The same exegetical problems have carried over into contemporary treatments of Romans 11 and the prediction for a conversion of the Jews before the Second Coming. A survey of these beliefs and propositions are contained in Fr. Denis Fahey's treatment of the question.⁴³ One of the leading proponents of interpretations of Scripture predicting a conversion of Jews is Jewish convert Fr. Augustine Lémann in his book *Histoire Complète de l'Idée Messianique*.⁴⁴ Fr. Lémann goes so far as to make the claim that the conversion of the Jews is "certain," although he is not the first Jewish convert to make such an unqualified prognostication. In the wake of his belief, he petitioned the Vatican in the late 1800s with his *Postulatum pro Hebraeis*, seeking for Church sanction to organize a concerted effort to evangelize the Jews, but his request was not granted.

One of the main problems with Lémann's thesis was the same problem confronting Augustine when he rejected the Chiliasm of the early Fathers yet kept the idea of a future conversion of the Jews and their subsequent evangelistic efforts to the world – there was no room in the Amillennial timetable for such a series of events. As noted, the Chiliasts had at least a 1,000 years after Christ's Second Coming in which the Jews could convert, breed and evangelize in the blissful earthly kingdom, but this was almost impossible to fit into the anti-chiliast view. Fahey remarks on this problem, stating:

In order that the repentant Jewish nation may work for the conversion of the people of the Orient and the return of the apostate nations of the West to Christ the King, there must be a certain interval between the conversion of the Jewish nation and the end of the world.⁴⁵

⁴³ *The Kingship of Christ and the Conversion of the Jewish Nation*, The Christian Book Club of America, 1953, 1987, 1993.

⁴⁴ Translated: "Complete History of the Messianic Idea," as explained on pages 443-465 of Lémann's book.

⁴⁵ *The Kingship of Christ*, p. 112.

The two Fathers [Lémann] gave several answers to this objection, and their arguments seem to go far towards proving that there will be a considerable lapse of time between the conversion of the Jewish nation and the Last Judgment. Two things are certain. The first is that, however short the time, the newly-converted Jews will not remain idle. The second is that if the Jews as a body sincerely accepted the true Messiah and put all that restless energy and unshakeable tenacity into the furtherance of the Kingship of Christ, which they now display against his rule, the conversion of the world would be rapidly advanced.⁴⁶

Here we see that the Lémann brothers knew their eschatological scenario required a “considerable lapse of time” between the conversion of the Jews and the Last Day, for during this time, according to their belief, the Jews would be busy converting the Gentiles to the faith. According to Fahey, two of the chief scriptural supports that were proposed for this scenario were Hosea 3:5 (“Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king...in the latter days”) and Zechariah 12:10 (“And I will pour out on the house of David...so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him”), both of which, as we saw earlier, will present huge anachronistic and exegetical problems to the Lémann brothers, since these verses apply more appropriately to the First Coming of Christ than the Second Coming. A third passage proposed was Rm 11:15 (“For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?”) but as noted in footnote #263 Paul envisions no such *en masse* conversion of Jews based on this statement. Contextually, the Jews’ “acceptance” and “life from the dead” is merely the metaphor Paul uses to describe his own success in saving “some” of the Jews in his own ministry (Rm 11:14: “in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save *some* of them,” see also 1Co 9:20). In fact, Fahey notes Père Lagrange’s objection to Lémann’s use of Rm 11:15, stating: “It must, however, be admitted that the expressions employed are not very precise and that one could not establish a definite relation of time between the conversion of the Jews and the General Resurrection from the dead...”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *The Kingship of Christ*, p. 113.

⁴⁷ *The Kingship of Christ*, p. 112.

Fahey records Lémann also employing the following passages as proof texts for a future Jewish conversion, yet none of them, however, prove to be speaking either of the Jews alone or of the end times:

- Dt 4:30-31: “When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice.”

But the “latter days” can more easily apply to the “last days” of Jl 2:32 and Ac 2:16-17, which speaks of the First Coming of Christ and Pentecost.

- Jr 31:1-2: “At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.”

But the promise of Jr 31:1-2 is in the context of the New Covenant (Jr 31:31-33), which applies to the First Coming of Christ (Hb 8:13: 10:16-18).

- Dn 12:1: “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered.”

But Dn 12:1 applies to all the world, not just the Jews, and it provides no time for Jewish conversion or evangelism of the Gentiles by the Jews.

- Mi 2:12-13: “I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the remnant of Israel.”

But the New Testament applies passages similar to the First Coming of Christ (cf. Lk 1:68-79; Ac 5:31; Is 10:22; Jr 31:7; Rm 9:27).

- Ml 4:5-6: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.”

But this passage, as noted previously, applies to John the Baptist at the First Coming of Christ. Lémann posits that from Mt 4:5 and Mt 17:12 Jesus is saying that the “prophet Elias, then, shall return upon the earth to bring the Jews to the Saviour. Our Lord Himself has clearly affirmed it (St. Matthew, XVII, II).”⁴⁸ But in Mt 11:13-14 Jesus had already discounted the idea that the Elijah of Mt 4:5 predicts the future return of the actual Elijah, as he said: “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” As Ott notes: “Jesus does not speak explicitly of a future coming of Elias before the General Judgment probably not even in Mt 17:11 (‘Elias shall come and restore all things’), in which the prophecy of Malachias is simply reproduced. Jesus sees it already fulfilled in the appearance of John the Baptist (Mt 17:12).”⁴⁹

Some of the more modern Catholic commentaries have reiterated the same conclusions about a possible future Jewish conversion. On Rm 11:15, Rev. Leo Haydock says the following:

...how much more glorious will be the fullness of them? That is, according to the common interpretation, will be the re-establishment and conversion of the Jews hereafter, before the end of the world...the receiving of them into the Church, and their conversion of Christ, shall be like life from the dead, when the Jewish nation in general, shall rise from the death of sin.⁵⁰

What we have seen thus far, however, is that the “common interpretation” is one that found its origin in the dubious Chiliasm of the early Fathers and the concurrent apocryphal literature of that day. The “common interpretation” is one that has little if any vigorous and thorough exegetical analysis applied to the very passages that are used as proof of the theory, as well as producing much contradictory information depending on

⁴⁸ *The Kingship of Christ*, p. 106.

⁴⁹ FCD, p. 487.

⁵⁰ *The Douay-Rheims New Testament*, p. 1494.

which interpreter is consulted. Paul does not speak about the “Jewish nation...rising from death,” but of individual Jews slowly but surely coming into the Church (Rm 11:5, 14, 23). As we noted in the detailed exegesis of Romans 11, all of it is appropriately applied to the First Coming of Christ, not the Second Coming. The Second Coming is merely the completion of what was already prophesied and begun at the First Coming.

Magisterial Statements Regarding the Conversion of Israel

Finally, we shall address the one statement in the 1994 Catholic Catechism published by John Paul II regarding the conversion of Israel:

The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by 'all Israel,' for a 'hardening has come upon part of Israel' in their 'unbelief' toward Jesus. St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: 'Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.' St. Paul echoes him: 'For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?' The 'full inclusion' of the Jews in the Messiah's salvation, in the wake of 'the full number of the Gentiles,' will enable the People of God to achieve 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,' in which 'God may be all in all.'"⁵¹

Some have utilized the above paragraph in an attempt to secure the Catechism's approval of a future mass conversion of Israel. If we look carefully at the paragraph, however, it makes no such concession. Essentially, the Catechism strings together quotes from various Scripture passages without giving any explanation of their meaning. For example, as the Catechism says the "Messiah's coming is suspended...until his recognition by 'all Israel,'" this merely agrees with St. Paul's blunt statement in Rm 11:26 that "all Israel will be saved" prior to the end of time. The Catechism does not specify *how* or *when* all Israel will be saved, but only that the salvation of Israel will occur before the Second Coming. As it stands, then, the Catechism would not disagree with the view that "all Israel" refers to all the Jews in history beginning from the time of Abraham who will be saved prior to the return of Christ. Since individual Jews will not cease becoming saved until Christ returns, all the Jews that God intends to save must be saved prior to his Second Coming, and thus the Catechism is satisfied.

⁵¹ Catholic Catechism, 1994, ¶ 674.

The same can be said of the remaining statements in paragraph 674. The Catechism merely quotes from St. Peter's sermon (Ac 3:19-20) and St. Paul's statement in Rm 11:15 but without giving any commentary. As such, the Catechism is not siding with one view or another, but is only reiterating, verbatim, the teaching of the Apostles but leaving the rest to interpretation of a third party.

Interestingly enough, the Catechism's metaphor that the "full inclusion" of the Jews in salvation *in the wake of* "the full number of the Gentiles" would not disagree with the view presented in this commentary on Romans, since it implies that the "fullness of the Gentiles" can occur at the same time as "all Israel is saved," rather than the latter coming chronologically after the former.

Also important in rounding out the thinking of this issue are the statements from Vatican II concerning the Church being the "New Israel," as well as the covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31 and elsewhere as being fulfilled in the New Testament Church, not national Israel:

All these things, however, were done by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant, which was to be ratified in Christ, and of that fuller revelation which was to be given through the Word of God Himself made flesh. "Behold the days shall come saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel, and with the house of Judah...I will give my law in their bowels, and I will write it in their heart, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people...For all of them shall know Me, from the least of them even to the greatest, saith the Lord. Christ instituted this new covenant, the new testament, that is to say, in His Blood, calling together a people made up of Jew and gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God."⁵²

From the very beginning, the Lord Jesus "called to Himself those whom He wished; and He caused twelve of them to be with Him, and to be sent out preaching (Mk 3.13; cf. Mt. 10.1-42). Thus the Apostles were the first

⁵² *Lumen Gentium*, II, 9:

budding-forth of the New Israel, and at the same time the beginning of the sacred hierarchy.⁵³

Also relevant are the statements from recent popes (especially those who seemed to have a great love for the Jewish people) that reiterate Vatican II's teaching that the Church is the New Israel and fulfills the promises of given to Israel from the Old Testament:

“The Church ‘like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God,’ announcing the Cross and Death of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1Co 11:26).” “Israel according to the flesh, which wandered as an exile in the desert, was already called the Church of God (cf. Nh 13:1; Nm 20:4; Dt. 23:1ff.). Likewise the new Israel...is also called the Church of Christ (cf Mt 16:18).⁵⁴

“This is how the special covenant of spousal love is made, in which we seem to hear an unceasing echo of the words concerning Israel, whom the Lord “has chosen as his own possession.” For in every consecrated person the Israel of the new and eternal covenant is chosen. The whole messianic people, the entire Church, is chosen in every person whom the Lord selects from the midst of this people; in every person who is consecrated for everyone to God as His exclusive possession.”⁵⁵

“From the moment of Christ's coming, the expectation of the People of God has to be directed to the eschatological Kingdom which is coming and to which he must lead “the new Israel.”⁵⁶

⁵³ *Ad Gentes*, I, 5.

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, Part 2, 25:

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptionis Donum*, III, 8

⁵⁶ *Mulieris Dignitatem*, VI, 20

“But the fullest expression of the truth about Christ the Redeemer’s love, according to the analogy of spousal love in marriage, is found in the Letter to the Ephesians: “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (5:25), thereby fully confirming the fact that the Church is the bride of Christ: “The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer” (Is 54:5). In St. Paul’s text the analogy of the spousal relationship moves simultaneously in two directions which make up the whole of the “great mystery” (“sacramentum magnum”). The covenant proper to spouses “explains” the spousal character of the union of Christ with the Church, and in its turn this union, as a “great sacrament,” determines the sacramentality of marriage as a holy covenant between the two spouses, man and woman....This is easily seen in regard to the person of the “bride.” According to the Letter to the Ephesians, the bride is the Church, just as for the Prophets the bride was Israel. She is therefore a collective subject and not an individual person. This collective subject is the People of God, a community made up of many persons, both women and men. “Christ has loved the Church” precisely as a community, as the People of God.”⁵⁷

“From the beginning of his public life, Christ called to himself those whom he desired, and they came to him. He appointed twelve to be with him in a special way, and he sent them out to preach even while he was still among them before his passion and death. Thus the apostles were the seed of the new Israel and at the same time the origin of a sacred hierarchy.”⁵⁸

Vatican Council II also called for the conversion of the Jews to Christ:

“In virtue of her divine mission, and her very nature, the Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world (*Ad Gentes*, n. 2). Lest the witness of Catholics to Jesus Christ should give offense to Jews, they must take care to live and spread their Christian faith while maintaining the strictest respect for religious

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, VII, 23.

⁵⁸ Catholic Catechism, 1994, ¶ 551

liberty....Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.

“As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading. Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle.⁵⁹

Other Councils and Popes spoke of the spiritual plight of the Jews:

“For he who imputes this, imputes nothing other than the falsehood of the Jews, who say that he could not have been born of a virgin.”⁶⁰

“If anyone thinks well of the Father and the Son, but does not rightly esteem the Holy Spirit, he is a heretic, because all heretics who think erroneously about the Son of God and the Spirit are found in the perfidy of the Jews and the pagans.”⁶¹

“These things, therefore, having been determined by us with all caution and diligence, we declare that no one is permitted to introduce, or to describe, or to compare, or to study, or otherwise to teach another faith. But whoever presumes to compare or to introduce or to teach or to pass on another creed to those wishing to turn from the belief of the Gentiles or of the Jews or from any heresy whatsoever to the acknowledgement of truth, or who (presumes) to introduce a novel doctrine or an invention of discourse to the subversion of those things which now have been determined by us, (we declare) these, whether they are bishops or clerics, to be excommunicated, bishops indeed from the bishopric, but

⁵⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, 4.

⁶⁰ Pope Siricius, Denz. 91.

⁶¹ Pope Damasus I, Denz. 87.

priests from the priesthood; but if they are monks or laymen, to be anathematized.”⁶²

“Faithful to His precepts, the Apostles, although He Himself granted “signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Ac 14:3), nevertheless used with the greatest effect the sacred writings, in order to persuade the nations everywhere of the wisdom of Christianity, to conquer the obstinacy of the Jews, and to suppress the outbreak of heresy. This is plainly seen in their discourses, especially in those of St. Peter; these were often little less than a series of citations from the Old Testament making in the strongest manner for the new dispensation. We find the same thing in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John in the Catholic Epistles.”⁶³

“Pagans, Jews, heretics, and others of this kind do not receive in any way any influence from Jesus Christ, and so you will rightly infer from this that in them there is a bare and weak will without any sufficient grace.”⁶⁴

“...they plead the cause of the human race before divine Clemency, and while the whole Church laments with them, they ask and pray that the faith may be granted to infidels; that idolaters may be delivered from the errors of their impiety; that the veil of their hearts may be removed and the light of truth be visible to the Jews; that heretics may come to their senses through a comprehension of the Catholic faith; that schismatics may receive the spirit of renewed charity; that the remedy of repentance may be bestowed upon the lapsed.”⁶⁵

“It firmly believes, professes, and teaches that the matter pertaining to the law of the Old Testament, of the Mosaic Law, which are divided into ceremonies, sacred rites, sacrifices, and sacraments, because they were established to signify something in the future, although they were suited to the divine worship at that

⁶² Council of Constantinople, Denz. 293.

⁶³ *Providentissimus Deus*, 1b

⁶⁴ Pope Alexander VIII, Denz. 1295.

⁶⁵ Council of Ephesus, Denz. 139.

time, after our Lord's coming had been signified by them, ceased, and the sacraments of the New Testament began; and that whoever, even after the passion, placed hope in these matters of law and submitted himself to them as necessary for salvation, as if faith in Christ could not save without them, sinned mortally. Yet it does not deny that after the passion of Christ up to the promulgation of the Gospel they could have been observed until they were believed to be in no way necessary for salvation; but after the promulgation of the Gospel it asserts that they cannot be observed without the loss of eternal salvation. All, therefore, who after that time observe circumcision and the Sabbath and the other requirements of the law, it declares alien to the Christian faith and not in the least fit to participate in eternal salvation, unless someday they recover from these errors."⁶⁶

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⁶⁶ Council of Florence, Denz. 712.