

## ***Protestant Approaches to History***

### I. Background

#### A. Biblical Patterns?

1. Nebuchadnezzar's Image
2. Six-day Millennial View
3. Seven Churches of Revelation as pattern of history

#### B. Forerunners

##### 1. Eusebius

- a. "Father of Church History" (because he was first but also because of new approach—history not "past politics" and wars but theology)

##### b. Approach

- 1) Tied church to "Eternal Rome": Kingdom of God comes to Earth
- 2) Stress on visible history & visible church (e.g., Apostolic succession)

##### 2. Augustine & *City of God*

- a. Written when pagans blamed Christians for barbarian sack of Rome (410)

##### b. Not a history but the first Christian *philosophy* of history

- 1) History: parallel stories of the city of man & the city of God
- 2) Story of two loves: love of God vs. love of self
- 3) Sacred vs. Secular

##### c. Emphasizes God's purpose in history

- 1) Separated the church from "Eternal Rome"
- 2) Put God, not man, at center of history
- 3) Linear view of history—God moving purposefully toward a goal
- 4) Church not tied to any earthly kingdom or system, such as the Roman Empire

##### 3. Joachim of Fiore

- a. Italian monk & prophetic writer (12<sup>th</sup> cent.)
- b. Trinitarian view of history
- c. Followers advocated 7 Churches of Revelation pattern
- d. Premillennial (Envisioned how prophecy & history overlapped)
  - 1) Millennium: New age before the end of time
  - 2) God's fulfillment & presence *within* history
  - 3) Futurist: Prophecy is basically still yet to come

### II. Protestant Interpreters

#### A. John Foxe

##### 1. Context

- a. Catholic challenge: "Where was your church to be found before Luther?"
- b. True Church: Catholic historical argument vs. Protestant biblical argument
- c. Protestant "Successionist" approach → Traced the true church in opposition to Rome

##### 2. Foxe's Work: *Acts and Monuments* ("Foxe's Book of Martyrs")

- a. Dependability: Only as good as his sources
- b. Historical/Historicist view of the book Revelation
  - 1) Saw the 1,000 years from Constantine to Wycliffe as the Millennium
  - 2) Papal corruption = loosing of Satan

##### 3. Contribution

- a. Thorough and careful in his sources

- b. Emphasis on suffering of God's people
- c. Created standard view of English Reformation & Church of Rome among English-speaking Christians
- 4. Considerations about his viewpoint
  - a. Based on valid concept of the remnant
  - b. Proper Basis for a "succession"
    - 1) Institutional separation not best basis
    - 2) Attention to person & work of Christ is key
- B. Cotton Mather (Puritans)
  - 1. Background
    - a. Second-generation Puritan leader in New England (1663-1728)
    - b. Often viewed as trying to stem decline
    - c. Prolific writer known for work in science (e.g., smallpox vaccine) & witch trials
  - 2. Puritan Approach to History: "History is a memorial of the mercies of God, so that posterity may know them, remember them, and hymn his praises." (Miller & Johnson, 82)
    - a. "Memorial": Christian historians to be "the Lord's *Remembrancers* or *Recorders*" (Urian Oakes in Miller & Johnson, 81)
    - b. Providential Approach
      - 1) Purpose in history (teleological)
      - 2) Source for worship
      - 3) Didactic: Lessons to be learned
      - 4) History extends to minutiae
  - 3. Mather's Magnum Opus: *Magnalia Christi Americana* ("Great Works of Christ in America")
    - a. "Works of Christ" → providential, Christ-centered
    - b. "In America" → special place of the Puritan experiment
- C. Jonathan Edwards
  - 1. Great theologian & leader of Great Awakening
  - 2. *History of the Work of Redemption*
    - a. Series of sermons based on Isaiah 51:8, "For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation,"
    - b. "A body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of an history"
    - c. Movement of history: Series of divine revivals
  - 3. Central Focus: Christ's life & work
    - a. *Period* not just *point* of Christ's life
    - b. Redemptive work of Christ not just Christ as center of history
    - c. Soteriology the theme of history

Concluding Principle: Not one way of looking at history biblically but many ways of regarding history through the lens of Scripture