

Catholics and the End Times

There is a great deal of interest once again about the end of the world. People speak of "wars and rumors of wars" and with all the wars and threats of wars, people think that these are signs of the end. The verse in Matthew 24 actually goes like this, "You will hear of wars and reports of wars, see that you are not alarmed for these things must happen, but it will not be the end." There are many other things that will happen but they are only labor pains. The true sign of the end in Matthew is "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come."

It is safe to say that the gospel at the present time is being preached throughout the whole world. This same gospel has been preached throughout the whole world for many centuries now.

The end of the world is tied to the establishment of Christ's kingdom on the earth. So many Catholics when asked are you pre-, post- or a-millennialist by their Protestant brethren look like deer in the headlights. The question is based upon interpretations of Revelation 20 and 21. For Catholics who want the quick answer it is symbolic and not meant to be taken literally so we follow the tradition of Saint Augustine and are amillennialists.

The thousand years spoken of in Revelation is seen as the present period of Christ's rule in heaven and on the earth through His Church. We already have gone two thousand years so it is why some people panic at any years that ends in three zeros or is the first of the millennium to end in 33, the year of Christ's Ascension? As

noted we do not take it literally so a thousand years can just mean "a very long time". Amillennialists believe in that good and evil exist side by side on earth until the end. The tension that exists on earth

between the righteous and the wicked will be resolved only by Christ's return at the end of time. The golden age of the millennium is instead the heavenly reign of Christ with the saints, in which the Church on earth participates to some degree in the present in the communion of saints, though not in the glorious way it will at the Parousia. Further the text in Revelation nowhere states that Christ the Lord is on earth during this reign with the saints.

For those who want the long answer, Revelation points out a thousand years of the Reign of Christ. The question being asked is do you believe that this millennium will occur after, during or before the tribulation, which is understood as a period of persecution or the apocalypse?

The postmillennialists believe that there will be a thousand years of peace followed by the Second Coming (the Parousia), the general judgment and the final judgment.



This view was popular with those who believed that Christianity was making serious inroads in the conversion of the world and soon the world would be Christianized beginning the thousand years of peace. Like, but unrelated, views can be found in Catholics who felt that the conversion of Russia would bring about world peace.

Premillennialists also believe in the thousand years of peace, but this will occur following the Second Coming when Jesus will begin His reign and after the thousand glorious years there will be the final judgment.

The Catholic Church has not taken a doctrinal position on this issue since it is dealing with a Scriptural understanding that is outside the Catholic tradition. The closest the Church has come is in the 1940s when the Holy Office said that premillennialism "cannot safely be taught."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the teaching in this way:

675 Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah comes in the flesh.

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676 The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism.

In summary, "yes" to tribulation and "no comment" on the thousand years, but the warning that false teachers will lead the faithful away by claims that a new Messiah is offering the truth. So there are those who are trying to lead Catholics away from the Church, which is a sign of the end. Yet the evil one has been doing this for centuries. So we do not know if this is the end times, but we have to live as if it is not the end of the world, it may be the end of our life and we must be prepared to stand before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.

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