"An Heavenly Kingdom Shall Descend": How Millennialism Spread from New England to the United States of America

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Introduction

This volume on knowledge and power takes account of cultural factors in the assessment of geography. This chapter explains how millennialism—a theory about a 1,000-year kingdom and its relation to the end of time—influenced early American colonists. Timothy Dwight's poem "America" includes the line quoted in the chapter's title and presents the puzzle of its millennial vision of America as the "heavenly kingdom," as derived from Revelation 20.[1] By the eve of the American Revolution, this sense of being the nation destined to usher in the millennial age was clearly developed (Ahlstrom, 1972, p. 52). Timothy Dwight's poem "America," published in 1771 (Dwight, 1969; quoted by Tuveson, 1968, pp. 105–106), described the hopeless state of the world before the discovery of the new promised land and set forth the promise of the millennial peace that would soon be administered by the saints in America.[2] Dwight was a Congregational minister and poet (1752–1817) who became president of Yale University (see Dowling, 1999, pp. 192–194). His poem (see Dwight, pp. 11–12) was widely cited, which suggests that its breathtaking geographic extension was considered self-evident.

> With Freedom's fire their gen'rous bosoms glow'd,
> Warm for the Truth, and zealous for their God....
> By these inspired, their zeal unshaken stood,

[1] This essay draws on material from my study *Mission and Menace: Four Centuries of American Religious Zeal* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); German translation published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

[2] The material in this section is adapted from the book *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Jewett & Lawrence, 2003, pp. 55, 57–58).

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And bravely dar'd each danger—to be good. […]
Hail Land of light and joy! Thy power shall grow
Far as the seas, which round thy regions flow;
Through earth's wide realms thy glory shall extend,
And savage nations at thy scepter bend …
No more shall War her fearful horrors found,
Nor strew her thousands on th' embattled ground …
Then, then an heavenly kingdom shall descend,
And Light and Glory through the world extend.
And every region smile in endless peace;
Till the last trump the slumbering dead inspire,
Shake the wide heavens, and set the world on fire.

The idea of the heavenly kingdom descending to earth at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon comes from the book of Revelation. The glory and power will extend as "far as the seas," and "savage nations" will submit to the rule of the saints. Such peace, of course, could come only through violence that sets "the world on fire." Dwight pictures the American troops as joining with the heavenly host in the manner of the ancient Israelite ideology (see Dwight, 1969, p. 10). This idea spread from New England to the other colonies, which resulted in the establishment of the United States as the "new order of the ages," to use the wording of the national seal. How this came about is the subject of this essay.

The colonies outside New England as of 1740 were mostly non-millennial, and the sober religious orientation of their populations was generally consistent with the anti-millennial nature of European religion. New York, New Jersey, the Carolinas, and Delaware were settled for commercial purposes; Virginia's planter culture was Anglican and as uninterested in millennial politics as were the Lutheran and Mennonite immigrants in Pennsylvania. How could this European legacy have been replaced by Dwight's millennialism? How can we account for its geographic extension from New England to the rest of the colonies that formed the United States of America?

From 1789 to the present day, this millennialism remains evident in the peculiar orientation of Americans toward the future and peculiar belief in their alleged innocence and power, including their widespread conviction that they are in some sense a chosen people, destined to exercise global leadership. I begin my investigation at the point of origin, the Puritan colonies of New England.

New England as a Millennial Seedbed

Like other Puritans, the Massachusetts Bay colonists had an apocalyptic view of history, which held that their colony would play a central role in the final drama of world history (see Spillmann, 1984, pp. 55–73). New England saw itself as the millennial Protestant realm that fulfilled the ideal of the heavenly kingdom descending to earth, as in Revelation 20. A distinctive sense of mission to redeem the entire world marked the first generation of emigrants in New England. The Puritans

derived from the book of Revelation and portions of the Old Testament their dualistic worldview and their belief that violence would inaugurate God's kingdom. They thought of themselves as standing in the succession of Christian warriors and martyrs from the Bible down to seventeenth-century England. Between 1630 and 1640, when their cause was in decline in England, thousands of Puritans emigrated to New England with this mission in mind. It was the call to battle that quickened their spirits, and they were fully convinced that such warfare had to be waged in the civil realm against the forms of corruption they felt were afflicting England. John Fiske said they were animated with "the desire to lead godly lives and to drive out sin from the community" (Fiske, 1889, p. 147). Their hope was that with the successful completion of such a purifying campaign, the millennial kingdom promised in the book of Revelation would surely arrive.

The idea of a 1,000-year kingdom that would follow a great battle between the forces of God and the forces of the demonic realm originated in Jewish writings (Massyngbaerde Ford, 1992, pp. 832–834; for a helpful discussion of classic texts, see also Aune, 1999, pp. 136–137); it is mentioned only once in the Bible (Revelation 20:1–7), in one of the most influential passages in Holy Writ as far as American religion is concerned. In this grandiose vision of the future, after the great battle that destroys his forces, Satan would be disabled for a 1,000 years while the saints ruled the earth. The Puritans combined this idea of a millennial kingdom with their campaign against monarchy and episcopacy in England. Michael Walzer (1965) pointed out the decisive role of such ideas in the creation of the Puritan radicals:

> What finally made men revolutionaries, however, was … an increasingly secure feeling that the saints did know the purposes of God.... Beginning at some point before 1640, a group of writers, including Joseph Meade of Cambridge University, began the work of integrating the spiritual warfare of the preachers with the apocalyptic history of Daniel and Revelation. The religious wars on the continent and then the struggle against the English king were seen by these men as parts of the ancient warfare of Satan and the elect, which had begun with Jews and Philistines and would continue until Armageddon. (p. 291)

The zealous leaders whom Walzer described had shifted the 1,000-year kingdom of Revelation 20 from the past to the immediate future and had reinterpreted the role of the saints in martial categories. Thus, when the revolution came in England, preachers rose in Parliament to proclaim that the final battle with Satan was at hand. As one of them declared in 1643, "When the kings of the earth have given their power to the beast, these choice-soldiers … will be so faithful to the King of kings, as to oppose the beast, though armed with kinglike power" (Walzer, 1965, p. 294). Stephen Marshall exhorted the troops in Parliament in 1644: "Go now and fight the battles of the Lord.... Do now see that the question in England is whether Christ or Anti-Christ shall be lord or king." Henry Wilkenson wrote that Parliament's "business lies professedly against the apocalyptical beast and all his complices" (p. 294). The battle was directed, of course, not only against the Cavaliers but also against moral corruption everywhere. The purge of heretics, worldlings, and adulterers was viewed as part of the same battle by which "the whore of Babylon shall be destroyed with fire and sword" (p. 295). The terminology of this discourse derives almost exclusively from the book of Revelation.

When the revolution was overthrown in England in 1660, there was a sense among the Puritans that the American colonies had become the new bearers of Protestant destiny to usher in this millennium (Walzer, 1965, p. 296). Increase Mather returned to Boston the following year with this idea in mind, "believing it was the last stronghold of Protestantism," as Perry Miller (1967b, p. 72) described it. With such convictions, the New England colonists resisted the efforts of the Restoration regime to topple the rule of the saints. They evaded Charles II's letter of complaints in 1662, frustrated the royal commissioners in 1664, and evaded compliance with the Navigation Acts for the next 10 years.[3] Even after their charter was revoked in 1684, they resisted the efforts of Governor Andros and had the nerve to imprison him the moment they heard of the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Ernest Lee Tuveson traces the development of this theocratic millennialism in *Redeemer Nation*, noting the preachers' retention of the "fanatic notion" of overturning evil by the forceful rule of the saints (Tuveson, 1968, pp. 97–99). He notes the impact of Jonathan Edwards's idea that with the religious revival of the eighteenth century, "divine providence is preparing the way for the future glorious times of the church, where Satan's kingdom shall be overthrown throughout the whole habitable globe" (Edwards, 1989; cited by Tuveson, p. 100; see also Baumgartner, 1999, pp. 127–130). As J. F. Maclear (1971) shows, the idea that America was the millennial nation "gave to all succeeding American events a continuing cosmic importance" (p. 190). This orientation encouraged militant resistance against Anglicanism and other elements of British authority as the "Great Beast" of Daniel and Revelation. Although this millennial idea was not initially shared by other colonies, its impact was augmented by New England's superior educational system and the intellectual vigor of its clergy.

The Impact of the Great Awakening

Whereas earlier revivals in the colonies began in established churches and generally remained local in their effect, the so-called Great Awakening, which began in the late 1730s and came to a climax two decades thereafter, influenced the entire colonial culture (see Andersen, 2006, pp. 26–29). It was associated above all with the itinerant preaching of George Whitefield, whose techniques developed in the years prior to his first visit to the colonies in 1739. His visit is usually credited with inaugurating the Great Awakening, the first broadly based revival in American history (for a discussion of the terminology of "revival" and "awakening," see Cottret, 2000; Gäbler, 1989; Richey, 1993). In his well-organized tours of 1739–1741, 1744–1748, 1763–1765, and 1769–1770, George Whitefield preached to huge crowds in all of the American colonies. It is estimated that in his lifetime Whitefield preached more than 7,500 sermons, reaching literally millions of people.

[3] The English Navigation Acts were a series of laws between 1651 and 1847 designed primarily to expand English trade (after 1707, British trade) and limit trade by British colonies with countries that were rivals of Great Britain (e.g., the Netherlands, France, and other European countries).

The Great Awakening was the first experience shared by all of the colonies, providing a new sense of continental identity as God's New Israel, the millennial nation promised by Revelation 20. The Great Awakening provided a new form that Nathan Hatch identified as "civic millennialism" (Hatch, 1977, pp. 28–31). In 1743, some seventy New England clergy signed a manifesto stating that with the Great Awakening the 1,000-year kingdom had come. John Moorehead, a Boston preacher, proclaimed, "The Millennium is begun.... Christ dwells with men on earth" (cited by Boyer, 1992, p. 70, from Stein, 1984, p. 358; see also Ziff, 1973, pp. 303–311). Jonathan Edwards interpreted the remarkable revival as the coming of a spiritualized 1,000-year kingdom. In place of wars to overcome evil, the world was to be converted by the Gospel. Evident here is the emergence of the belief that not simply "New England" but all of the American colonies comprised in some sense a chosen people whose task was to usher in the new age.

The Great Awakening resulted in a new majority of Baptists and Presbyterians who were prepared to accept a millennial theology and had particular reasons to oppose established churches supported by public taxation. The groups that benefited the most from the Great Awakening were those that stressed the need for religious experience and allowed for the rise of charismatic lay preachers who were prepared to become itinerants (Finke & Stark, 2002, p. 50). These preachers went from house to house, revival to revival, camp meeting to camp meeting in the frontier regions, founding new churches in settlement after settlement. The various Baptist groups gained the most from the revival, growing from around 90 congregations in 1740 to more than 370 in 1776. Their loose, congregational structure and emphasis on believer's baptism as well as their Calvinist theology suited them well in following up on Whitefield's successes. Some of the more evangelistic forms of Presbyterianism also benefited, but their higher educational standards for the ministry tended to suit them less well to the frontier situation. The new religious majority was inclined to favor churches that were independent of government control. In Virginia, for example, which had been largely unchurched prior to the Great Awakening, despite an Anglican establishment supported by taxes, Thomas Jefferson estimated that two thirds of the inhabitants were associated with dissenting churches (Lambert, 2003, p. 226) that were the products of the Great Awakening.

One of the results of the rise of independent churches was to challenge the tax system supporting the established clergy in various colonies. By the end of the Great Awakening, Baptist congregations temporarily gained the right to be exempt from such taxes in Massachusetts. There were similar struggles in the other colonies against the Anglican tax system. Since the time of Roger Williams, the Baptists had argued for freedom of religion and the noninterference of the state in religious affairs. Isaac Backus (1724–1806), a Baptist itinerant preacher in Connecticut and Massachusetts (see Dunn, 1999, pp. 836–838; McLoughlin, 1967, pp. 110–192; Miller, 1988, pp. 210–216), wrote a book entitled *A Fish Caught in His Own Net* (1768), which argued that Congregationalists had violated their own principles in giving clergy associations the right to determine eligibility for ministry and to employ public coercion in order to enforce such decisions to disallow Baptist clergy. He argued for complete freedom of conscience and a complete separation of church

and state because religion should rely on "persuasion alone" rather than on coercion (Lambert, 2003, p. 201; McLoughlin, p. 127). This line of argument was taken up in Backus's appeal to the Massachusetts legislature in 1774, protesting the tax on Baptist congregations to support Congregational churches (see Gaustad & Noll, 2003, pp. 225–227). Baptists refused to pay such taxes because that would be "implicitly allowing to men that authority which we believe in our consciences belongs only to God. Here, therefore, we demand charter rights, liberty of conscience" (p. 227). Backus and his Baptist colleagues were demanding not tolerance in the Enlightenment sense but intrinsic rights of religious freedom. This demand reveals the link between the Great Awakening, which gave such growth to the Baptists and other independent churches, and the cause of political liberty. Leaders like Backus ended up supporting the revolution against England on religious grounds, in defense of their view of religious freedom that they felt the Anglicans and other establishment figures as well as the British government were threatening (McLoughlin, pp. 136–137). They fought this battle with the apocalyptic rhetoric of the book of Revelation, following earlier New England Puritans in identifying the British church and government as the Whore of Babylon and the Antichrist. The American colonies, on the other hand, began to be pictured as the nation that pioneered in religious freedom, a theme that surfaces in Timothy Dwight's poetry.

The Apocalyptic Interpretation of American Wars

The new form of civil millennialism surfaced in many colonists' interpretation of the so-called French and Indian War from 1754 to 1763 (Hatch, 1977, pp. 36–44). Because the French Catholics in Canada had allied themselves with Native American tribes to fight against the American colonists and their native allies, it was natural to employ the rhetoric that had been used in the Puritan revolution against England. The Whore of Babylon mentioned as the enemy of the church in Revelation 13 had long been identified with Rome and its alleged allies in the Anglican Church. Congregational minister and historian Thomas Prince (1687–1758) saw the French and Indian War as "opening the way to enlighten the utmost regions of America preparatory to the millennial reign" (cited by Maclear, 1971, p. 190). In *Longing for the End*, Frederic Baumgartner (1999) confirms that

> for the Puritans, the French and Indian War in North America also served as a millennial event.... The French and their native allies served Antichrist by waging war on the people of God, and their early victories were signs that the great tribulation was beginning. The British victory in turn confirmed the deeply held belief among the English colonists that they were a chosen people building the New Kingdom in America. (p. 131)

At first glance, it seems contradictory to view Britain as fighting against the Antichrist, but that appeared to make no difference. In a variety of ways through American religious history down to the present moment, victory against God's alleged enemies has assumed a high priority, whoever those enemies happen to be. The triumph was viewed as a confirmation of providential destiny, shared

now by all of the colonies. It was not long before this apocalyptic orientation turned against Great Britain itself.

While some churches were neutral or opposed the American Revolution, it was advocacy on the part of Protestants shaped by the Great Awakening that turned the conflict into a veritable "religious war." The Calvinist strain of North American religion stressed the sovereignty of God over human affairs and was thus inclined to believe that God takes sides in military conflicts. The Presbyterian minister Samuel Davies (1723–1761) blessed the Continental Army with the language of Old Testament holy war: "May the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, go forth along with you! May he teach your hands to war, and gird you with strength in battle!" (Albanese, 1976, p. 85). When Governor Hutchinson's house was burned by a revolutionary mob in Boston, one of the leaders explained his behavior to the court by claiming that he was excited by a sermon by the Congregational minister Jonathan Mayhew (1720–1766) and "thought he was doing God's business" (Lambert, 2003, p. 216). When the Continental Army was defeated, the preachers interpreted the defeat as punishment for the colonists' sins, while its victories were due to divine providence. In the Battle of Long Island, an unusual fog at 2 o'clock in the morning allowed the Continental Army to retreat in safety, and this "providential shifting of the wind" was viewed as a sign that God supported the revolution (Albanese, p. 86).

A popular song written by William Billings (1746–1800) included the stanza, "Let tyrants shake their iron rod/And slavery clank her galling chains;/We fear them not; we trust in God–/New England's God for ever reigns" (cited by Albanese, 1976, p. 25; see also De Jong, 1985; Morin, 1941). Here the God of New England's churches becomes the God of all thirteen colonies. In virtually claiming that the Deity was on the side of a political entity, Billings was expressing the "zealous nationalist" form of civil religion (Jewett & Lawrence, 2003, pp. 55–106). In the issue of slavery versus freedom, God takes sides. One sees this tendency to place the revolution in a context of holy war in various ways. One observer wrote,

> The clergy of New England were a numerous, learned and respectable body who had a great ascendancy over the minds of their hearers. They connected religion and patriotism, and in their sermons and prayers, represented the cause of America as the cause of Heaven. (David Ramsay quoted in Albanese, 1976, p. 37; see also Hatch, 1977, pp. 85–91)

Part of this fervor derived from the religious resentments held by free-church Protestants. The Congregationalists remembered former leaders burned at the stake by Catholic and Anglican authorities and resented Anglican efforts to reestablish their dominance in colonies that had enjoyed a form of democratic self-government for more than 140 years. The Baptists opposed all efforts to impose government control over churches (see Clark, 1994, pp. 372–381). The Scottish Presbyterians harbored centuries of resentment against English domination, and the Scotch-Irish had experienced forcible relocation to Northern Ireland followed by legislation that violated their rights to Presbyterian activities. They emigrated to the colonies with these resentments still fresh and unforgotten (Clark, p. 362).

The historian Catherine Albanese (1976) draws some of these themes together under the banner of the millennial context, in which the colonists were not just defending their rights but also advancing the cause of freedom for the entire world and thereby ushering in the 1,000-year kingdom:Oratory echoed with the millennial theme of the land of plenty where, as in Israel's dreams of a future of bliss, each man would dwell under his own fig tree in the shade of his vines, while his wife would be a fruitful olive branch surrounded by her joyful children. (p. 29) Further, she writes, "one hears" in these sermons and speeches, "the echoes of revivalist ardor and millennial zeal, for Armageddon was surely close at hand when divine enthusiasm was unleashed by righteous patriots against demonic British soldiers" (p. 42).

Hugh Henry Brackenridge based his *Six Political Discourses Founded on the Scripture* (1778) on the same set of premises observed with Timothy Dwight. He argued that King George was inspired by Satan and that Providence sided with the Americans in the great revolution. "Heaven hath taken an active part, and waged war for us.… Heaven knows nothing of neutrality.... There is not one Tory to be found amongst the order of the seraphim" (cited in Miller, 1967a, p. 95). In the revolutionary period, of course, the Tories supported the British Empire while the Whigs supported the revolution. In Brackenridge's argumentation, these political parties were based on eternal realities, and heaven was claimed to side with the Whig revolution. Historian Perry Miller has described "how effective were generations of Protestant preaching in evoking patriotic enthusiasm" during the revolution (Miller, p. 97; see also Butler, Wacker, & Balmer, 2003, p. 149). In particular he traces the precedents and implications of the "day of publick humiliation, fasting, and prayer" called by the Continental Congress in 1775. All over the colonies the belief was that God would respond to such repentance, bless the impending revolution, and usher in an era of peace for the saints. This belief provided a powerful motivation for carrying out a rebellion against the greatest power on earth. A widely distributed oration by John Allen, a Baptist preacher in Boston, proclaimed, "Liberty … is the native right of the Americans" because "they were never in bondage to any man" (Gaustad & Noll, 2003, pp. 221–222). He went on to argue that no institution of royal government had a right to tax the Americans without their consent, and that the Americans should stand "upon their own strength" in resisting such efforts. The Congregational minister Samuel Sherwood placed the revolution for the sake of liberty in the millennial context of the final battle of world history promised in the book of Revelation (see Gaustad & Noll):

> Liberty has been planted here; and the more it is attacked, the more it grows and flourishes. The time is coming and hastening on, when Babylon the great shall fall to rise no more; when all wicked tyrants and oppressors shall be destroyed forever.... These commotions and convulsions in the British Empire may be leading to the fulfillment of such prophecies as relate to his [i.e., Satan's] downfall and overthrow, and to the future glory and prosperity of Christ's church. (p. 228)

A noteworthy feature was that this religious interpretation of the national destiny correlated closely with the views of citizens who were more secular in outlook. In the eighteenth century, Deism developed a secular form of millennialism. It was a

religion that "assumes a correspondence between the rational structure of the physical universe and the rational capacity of the human mind, so that by discovering the universe one may come to know its creator" (Van Til, 1990, p. 347; see also Gestrich, 1981, pp. 392–406). Deists rejected Christian doctrines that are not supported by reason, such as the Trinity, the virgin birth, and the divinity of Christ, while at the same time maintaining the structure of divine sovereignty that guides history toward progress and freedom. Some accounts of Deism do not take the providence issue into account, but it played a major role among American Deists (see, e.g., Gaustad & Noll, 2003, p. 266). God was less personal than in classical Christian doctrine, but divine providence still guided history and struggled on behalf of justice and freedom. While preferring terms such as "providence" to the term "God," the Deists held a millennial view that enlightenment would change the entire world and usher in the golden age. It is well known that many revolutionary leaders, such as Benjamin Franklin, were inclined to Deism, but it is also clear that this inclination did not place them at odds with the more orthodox Calvinists with respect to issues of the revolution. Deists and evangelicals were on parallel tracks. They all agreed that government should be based on the consent of the governed—an idea derived from covenantal theology and developed in John Locke's theory of government. They all agreed that government must rest on freely chosen covenants in which the governed give consent to their governors, and that individuals must be free to make religious and political choices.

A belief in the possible attainment of human perfection linked the Deists with the revivalists, both of whom were inclined to millennialism by the latter part of the eighteenth century. For example, Benjamin Franklin wrote,

> It is impossible to imagine the Height to which may be carried, in a 1,000 years, the Power of Man over Matter.... Agriculture may diminish its Labor and double its Produce; all Diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured.... Men would cease to be wolves to one another. (cited by Lambert, 2003, p. 171)

This belief was a secular form of the biblical visions of the millennial age found in Isaiah and Revelation. After the revolution, the correspondence between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson addressed the Deist topics, on which they largely agreed (see Gaustad & Noll, 2003, pp. 269–271). Adams's letter of November 13, 1813, is particularly revealing. In it, the former president Adams claimed nothing less than millennial sainthood for Americans: "Many 100 years must roll away before we shall be corrupted. Our pure, virtuous, public spirited, federative republic will last forever, govern the globe and introduce the perfection of man" (cited by Kohn, 1957, p. 13; also in Jewett & Lawrence, 2003, p. 211).[4] The breathtaking optimism of this otherwise sober politician reveals the fusion of enlightenment enthusiasm, democratic ideology, and biblical millennialism that has shaped American civil religion since its beginnings in the early colonies (see Moorhead,

[4] See also John Adams's entry in his diary in February 1765: "I always consider the settlement of America with Reverence and Wonder—as the Opening of a grand scene and Design in Providence, for the Illumination of the Ignorant and the Emancipation of the slavish Part of Mankind over all the Earth" (Adams, 1961, p. 257).

1999, pp. xii–xv, 2–16). Strengthened by the constitutional establishment after the Revolutionary War, this civic millennialism made its way from New England to all thirteen colonies.

The United States as the Apocalyptic "New Order of the Ages"

The celebrations from city to city following the ratification of the Constitution focused on the inauguration of a millennial republic. In these celebrations, popular clergymen from Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches were typically asked to deliver the main patriotic addresses. They employed the word "miracle," which had been used by George Washington and James Madison in letters to their friends concerning the Constitutional Convention (Bowen, 1966, p. ix). That Providence had guided the process of debate, compromise, and public discussion was widely assumed and celebrated. The *Federalist Papers* noted the consensus that "Providence has in a particular manner" blessed the country, and a protégé of Washington wrote that America was the "theater for displaying the illustrious designs of Providence in its dispensations to the human race" (cited by McCartney, 2006, pp. 28–29).

This interpretation of the national destiny was anticipated in works such as Timothy Dwight's epic poem of 1785, "The Conquest of Canaan." The poem was dedicated to George Washington and celebrates the triumph of freedom over tyranny that Providence ensured. The poem fuses the biblical accounts of Israel's conquest of Canaan with the visions of the peaceable kingdom found in Isaiah and the book of Revelation, which Dwight believed were being fulfilled after the revolution. In contrast to earlier wars that had produced a legacy of destruction and tyranny, a new democratic world order is celebrated as spreading over an immense geographic realm (see Dwight, 1969, pp. 274–275):

> To nobler bliss yon western world shall rise.
> Unlike all former realms, by war that stood,
> And saw the guilty throne ascend in blood,
> Here union'd Choice shall form a rule divine;
> Here countless lands in one great system join;
> The sway of Law unbroke, unrivall'd grow,
> And bid her blessings every land o'erflow....
> Here Empire's last, and brightest throne shall rise;
> And Peace, and Right, and Freedom, greet the skies.

This fulfillment of the ancient visions resulted not from divine fiat but from a combination of divine providence and human "Choice," reflected in the union of the colonies. The idea of government by compact, which had animated the earliest colonists in New England and led to the doctrine of the consent of the governed, comes full circle to its perceived fulfillment, ushering in the peaceable republic of "Peace, and Right, and Freedom."

Two years after the publication of Dwight's poem, a fellow graduate of Yale, Joel Barlow (1754–1812), issued his epic poem "The Vision of Columbus," "to celebrate

the United States as the most advanced embodiment of an enlightened Republican culture" (Schloss, 2003, p. 139). In the final section of the poem, an angel reveals the rise of "a world civilization, a league of states resembling the United Nations with the individual member states all modeled after the newly established American republic" (p. 143). Here the Isaianic vision of the impartial world court on "the mountain of the Lord" that would allow nations to "beat their swords into plowshares" (Isaiah 2:3–4) is fulfilled by the Republican triumph. It is seen now to spread its influence over the entire globe (Barlow, 1970, pp. 256–257):

> From all the bounds of space (their labours done),
> Shall wing their triumphs to the eternal throne;
> Each, from his far dim sky, illumines the road,
> And sails and centres tow'ard the mount of God….
> So, from all climes of earth, where nations rise,
> Or lands or oceans bound the incumbent skies,
> Wing'd with unwonted speed, the gathering throng
> In ships and chariots, shape their course along....
> There, hail the splendid seat by Heaven assign'd,
> To hear and give the counsels of mankind....
> To give each realm its limit and its laws;
> Bid the last breath of dire contention cease,
> And bind all regions in the leagues of peace.

Barlow intended to show that "on the basis of the republican principle" not only "good government" but also the "hopes of permanent peace must be founded" (cited by Schloss, 2003, p. 143). Dwight's poem "Greenfield Hill" celebrates the equality provided by this republican system, and once again its geographic extension is described (cited by Schloss, 1999, p. 28, from Dwight, 1969, p. 511; capitalization of "heaven" in original):

> See the wide realm in equal shares possess'd!
> How few the rich, or poor! how many bless'd!
> O happy state! the state by HEAVEN design'd
> To rein, protect, employ, and bless mankind.

These themes reappear in the remarkable celebrations of the ratification of the Constitution. The most elaborate of these celebrations, analyzed by Dietmar Schloss (2001, pp. 44–62), was the Grand Federal Procession, which occurred in Philadelphia on July 4, 1788. The parade was divided into three parts, beginning with twenty-five groups illustrating American history, followed by fifty groups of farmers, workers, and artisans, and concluded by walking professionals. In place of marching soldiers, a triumphal arch, and a hierarchical social order, which were typical of European victory parades, some five thousand citizens presented themselves as supporting and being supported by the Constitution. The order of the professions was determined by lot, expressing the egalitarian ethos. The most elaborate float was the "Grand Federal Edifice," with its roof held up by thirteen columns and with a "cupola crowned by a figure of the goddess of plenty carrying a cornucopia" (Schloss, p. 53), symbolizing the golden age inaugurated by the Constitution. The biblical theme of Isaiah's peaceable kingdom was represented by the master blacksmith

hammering plowshares and pruning hooks out of old swords (p. 57). For contemporary witnesses it was particularly striking to see clergymen of different denominations, including a Jewish rabbi, "all walking arm in arm" (Schloss, p. 48), which conveyed the sense of divine providence blessing the tolerant enterprise. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* observed that this sight of "almost every denomination, united in charity and brotherly love," was a "circumstance which probably never occurred in such extent" (cited by Bowen, 1966, p. 308). At the conclusion of the parade, participants and spectators were invited to tables in a broad circle, where they were addressed by James Wilson. He concluded with ten toasts, the first addressed to the "people of the United States" and the last to "the whole family of mankind" (Schloss, p. 49), conveying the millennial sense that the democratic new order of the ages would be a blessing to the entire human race.

When the time came to create the national seal, a millennial motto in Latin was selected: *Novus ordo saeclorum*, which usually was translated as "the new order of the ages." The inscription *Annuit Coeptis* ("He has ordered our way") stands over the classical pyramid (Butler et al., 2003, p. 174). One could understand these references as purely political claims, in that the constitutional system was a new form of government, which was true at the time. One could understand them in Deist or enlightenment terms as the beginning of a democratic age of progress. Or one could take these references as the announcement of the beginning of the 1,000-year kingdom ruled by the Christian saints in North America. These political artifacts convey the millennial idea of America as the promised land where messianic hopes were being fulfilled.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the historical interaction of geography and ideology and the coalition between knowledge and power. At first only New England thought of itself as "God's New Israel," the arena in which the millennial destiny of Revelation 20 would be fulfilled. Within 120 years, this vision had spread to all of the colonies, as celebrated in the poetry of Timothy Dwight. The populations of the other colonies were initially uninterested in the political fulfillment of millennial ideals, and it seems highly unlikely that without the experience of the Great Awakening, the Indian wars, the conflicts over religious establishment, and dissatisfaction with British rule, this millennial viewpoint would have become dominant. It appears, moreover, that millennialism was closely linked with developing a national identity, as compared with the earlier colonial identities. Without this emerging identity as *Americans*, it seems unlikely that the Continental Army led by Washington could have prevailed after its many defeats. In this historical example, there is therefore a case to be made for a link between knowledge, in the form of millennial ideology, and power. In part because of the global dimensions of the biblical millennialism that inspired this development, this ideology also has a tendency toward geographic expansion. What started in New England spread throughout the other colonies. The descending "heavenly kingdom" envisioned by Timothy Dwight in his poem of

1771 extends itself over "countless lands" by 1785; Joel Barlow envisions the binding of "all regions in the leagues of peace," following the American example. Despite the disappointments, frustrations, and betrayals of later history, this idea of being a geographical region called to advance freedom, democracy, and peace around the world remains a characteristic feature of American civil religion.

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