
RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Progress and The Apocalypse

"Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Re-assessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880" by James H. Moorhead, *Journal of American History* (Dec. 1984), Ballantine Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind. 47405.

Amid the numerous religious revivals of the early 19th century, America's Protestants turned toward a new "postmillennial" theology.

Many earlier Protestants had held that the Apocalypse and Second Coming would be followed by the millennium, a 1,000-year-long earthly paradise. The postmillennialists reversed the order: The millennium would *precede* the Apocalypse. That was an important difference, writes Moorhead, of the Princeton Theological Seminary, one that must be grasped "to understand the world as it appeared to many persons only a few generations ago."

America's pastors and preachers quickly wed postmillennialism to the secular gospel of progress. "Since the Kingdom of God would not arrive by a supernatural destruction of the world," explains Moorhead, "only the labors of believers could bring it about; and if they proved laggard in their task, the millennium would be retarded."

Evangelizing would speed its coming, but Protestant ministers saw "sophisticated technology, greater prosperity, and the flourishing of the arts and sciences" as signs of its approach and worthy of church support.

By the end of the 19th century, the postmillennialist day was done. To conservative Protestants, disturbed by the direction of secular progress, "the postmillennial hope of historical advance seemed fatuous." Among liberal Protestants, millennial beliefs also withered. "What remained was rather like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat, [with] faith in moral and social improvement constituting the residual grin."

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Pole Vaulting

"Polar Flip-Flop" by Subir K. Banerjee, in *The Sciences* (Nov.-Dec. 1984), 2 East 63rd St. New York, N.Y. 10021.

Among the few things that human beings can count on in life besides death and taxes, one of the surest is that the sun will rise in the east and set in the west. Or will it?

According to Banerjee, a University of Minnesota geologist, the Earth's north-south magnetic field has "flipped" at least 25 times during the last five million years, or roughly once every 200,000 years. The most recent turnabout came some 730,000 years ago, so the next "flip" is already long overdue.

The evidence of past polar flip-flops has been around for hundreds of years. As early as 1538, sailors noticed that their compasses went hay-