

1. C. E. Position Paper .

(July 1995)

THE LEGITIMACY OF REVIVAL

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The "Jewish dreams" of post-millennialism produce practical nightmares. The '(Christian Reconstruction' brand of post-millennialism introduces the fundamental heresy of judaizing into the circles where it is accepted.

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Dr. Engelsma is a theologian of the Protestant Reformed Church. Like modern Dutch Calvinists generally, the Protestant Reformed Church is amillennial. The Reformed churches on the European Continent adopted the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on the millennium, as did Lutheranism.

Calvin was an exception. His view was a mixture of amillennialism and postmillennialism. The postmillennial element of Calvin's thought was demonstrated clearly by Dr Greg Bahnsen in 1976 as part of a 57-page article titled, "The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism." It was published in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*. He included seven pages on Calvin, which showed at the very least that there was a postmillennial element in Calvin's theology.

In the seventeenth century, postmillennial Calvinists appeared in the British Isles and in Holland. The Scottish Presbyterian tradition had a postmillennial stream, as did the American Presbyterian and Congregational traditions. But on the Continent, the old Roman Catholic tradition still prevailed among those Protestant churches that were hierarchical. Sixteenth-century confessions had been amillennial, in reaction to premillennial Anabaptists. The deeply entrenched traditionalism of the Continental Protestant churches has kept them from revising their creeds, surrounded by apostasy and humanism, they fear to tamper with their received traditions. This is understandable, but it creates a mentality of "form a circle with the wagons." It creates a mentality which says that there used to be confessional progress in history, but this progress ended in 1619 at the Synod of Dort. This is also the mind-set of Eastern Orthodoxy, except its cut-off date is a thousand years earlier.

Denying the Possibility of Large-Scale Revival

Dr. Engelsma has written a brief trade masquerading as a serious theological essay. It is titled, "Jewish Dreams." It appeared in *The Standard Bearer*, a Protestant Reformed magazine, on January 15, 1995. He asserts this supposedly universal theological principle: "It is no part of the church's hope that a majority of humanity will soon be converted. . . , " This is an extension of his amillennial eschatology, which holds that there is no hope that a majority of humanity will ever be converted.

When he writes that "It is no part of the church's hope that a majority of humanity will soon be converted," he does not mean merely the church's present hope; he means the church's hope at any point in history. This is the familiar teaching of all amillennial schools of opinion: Eastern

Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Dutch Calvinist. They speak with one voice on this issue. There is no earthly possibility of the widespread success of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They insist that there will be no worldwide conversion and no transformation of society as a result of such a conversion. The gospel is seen as offering spiritual healing only to a comparatively few souls, families, and churches throughout history.

What this means is that the Church will remain a besieged outpost in the midst of an apostate civilization. The tremendous productivity offered by the division of labor is an historical blessing reserved by God exclusively for covenant-breakers. They will continue to dominate education, the news media, culture, politics, and all the other areas of life in which men express and work out their religion. Christians, as a tiny subset of this international apostate civilization, must content themselves with matters of heart and hearth, building little churches, little schools, and little businesses, having little influence, waiting patiently until the Antichrist comes to place Christians under mass persecution.

Unlike Arminian pessimillennialists, Protestant Reformed amillennialists are Calvinists who believe that all of this is predestined by God. It is not just that fallen men can reject the gospel, as Arminians insist; it is that God has foreordained that it come to pass.

There is a better way. There is a more optimistic alternate,

The Legacy of the Westminster Assembly

Dr. Engelsma identifies postmillennialism as a subset of the Anglo-Scottish tradition, a subset he says was not written into the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1646. Then he adds an historical observation which he says is significant. "It is surely significant that, immediately after the adoption of the Westminster Confession, the independents drew up their own creed, the Savoy Declaration of 1658, in which they explicitly affirmed their post-millennial hope" (p. 173). The Savoy Declaration declared:

... we expect that in the latter days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable, and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.

But where did the Independents - Calvinists all - get this language? Answer: from the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly - specifically, the section that discusses the Lord's Prayer.

Q. 191. What do we pray for in the second petition?

A. In the second petition, (which is, *Thy kingdom come*,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan,

we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in. . .

The Calvinist Independents a decade later announced that they expected God to grant to His church and the world what the Westminster Assembly had said that all Christians must pray for.

Now, if it is true, as Dr. Engelsma insists, that "It is no part of the church's hope that a majority of humanity will soon be converted. . ." then why did the Westminster Assembly instruct Christians to pray such a world-transforming prayer? Were the Westminster Divines heretical, which is what Dr. Engelsma calls postmillennialism? Surely, he believes that they must have been toying with heresy. But Dr. Engelsma refused to put his suspicion in print; it would have looked goofy.

The prayer in Answer 191 is clearly a postmillennial prayer. It was made mandatory by the Westminster Assembly. It calls for the visible establishment of the kingdom of God in history. Dr. Engelsma owed it to his readers to point out that the Savoy Declaration's statement was lifted from the Larger Catechism. But to have admitted this would have undermined the force of his statement in the previous paragraph that the Westminster Confession of Faith does not teach postmillennialism. He should have acknowledged that the Larger Catechism is a detailed extension of the Westminster Confession.

He writes: "We groan for the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23); the committed post-millennialist groans, if at all, for the millennial kingdom" (p. 174). Yes, postmillennialists do groan for this kingdom. Those of us who take seriously the Larger Catechism do pray that prayer, which is a prayer calling for the establishment of a millennial kingdom: "the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in." On this point, see Charles Hedge's comments on Romans 11, or Robert Haldane's, or John Murray's. Postmillennialists want to see God answer another prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). This refers to a pre-resurrection earth, our earth, in history: before the final judgment. We do not need to pray for a post-resurrection earth. The Lord's Prayer refers to the sin-burdened earth, which is in need of prayer.

Why did he fail to point out all this? Ignorance? Possibly. But I think it was something else. He had a subtle agenda: to tar and feather all postmillennialists with ecclesiastical independency. He says this specifically with respect to some members of a group of Christian Reformed congregations that has split from the Christian Reformed Church and are "loosely associated" with the Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC) "There is openness to these 'Jewish dreams' in the extraordinarily virulent form of 'Christian Reconstruction'" (p. 174).

Well, at least Christian Reconstruction is extraordinarily virulent. If you're a virus, you might as well not be wimpy, I always say.

Dr. Engelsma does not believe that Christians should pray the prayer of Answer 191. He thinks that such a prayer is predestined to failure. So does his colleague, Herman Hanko. In 1991, Rev. Hanko wrote an essay, "Ought the Church to Pray for Revival?" He answered in the negative. "Do we pray for revival? No. May we pray for revival? No." Why not? "Revival is wrong, Revival is contrary to the Scriptures. Revival

is at odds with the Reformed faith. To pray for revival is to go against the will of God and is to grieve the Holy Spirit." (This essay was published in John Robbins' newsletter, *Trinity Review* [May/June 1991]. Dr. Robbins now finds himself in a difficult position: a Calvinist faculty member at the College of the Southwest, a Church of Christ college located in Hobbs, New Mexico. The Church of Christ may be the most self-conscious Arminian denomination in the world, whose founders left Presbyterianism in the 1820's because they could not stand Calvinism. Dr. Robbins' problem is obvious: biting the hand that feeds him. He may not pray for revival, but I suspect that he prays for the continued financial success of the College of the Southwest. There is a problem with Calvinism today: not enough revivals and therefore not enough departments of political science that offer full-time employment to forthrightly anti-Arminian Calvinist professors.)

Prophecy Today: Date-Setting

Dr. Engelsma is a defender of immediate date-setting. This is the same emotional burden that has burdened Hal Lindsey and the pop-dispensational world for a generation. He writes "Not the least of the practical evils of post-millennialism is that it ill-prepares the people of God for the struggle that lies ahead, shortly before the return of the Lord. We do urgently warn our own people and all who will hear us that the kingdom of the beast will come. Indeed, it is coming now. Be prepared for the Antichrist!" (p. 175). Such a view paralyzes Christians, making them short-run planners who are on the defensive.

Dr. Engelsma does not respond to the detailed exegetical and historical work that Rev. Ken Gentry did in his Th.D. dissertation, which ICE published in 1989, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, or his shorter book, *The Beast of Revelation* (ICE, 1989). The beast of Revelation is behind us: Nero. Dr. Engelsma also does not respond to Dr. Gentry's other book, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (ICE, 1990). He does not even mention these books' existence. A serious Calvinist theologian who is doing his best to reform his readers about what lies ahead for the church would mention the existence of such books, written by a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America - certainly not an independent! This is especially the case when the critic is writing to people who are very insulated culturally and ecclesiastically, and who have not been exposed to the larger world of Calvinism - an oxymoron, I suppose - outside of the Protestant Reformed Church, a 71-year-old denomination that is a split-off of the Christian Reformed Church.

Conclusion

Someday, a theologian in the Protestant Reformed Church ought to write a detailed book on eschatology. Then he should follow this with a detailed academic critique of theonomic postmillennialism. I do not expect either challenge to be accepted. I suspect that Dr. Engelsma and Dr. Hanko will continue to write brief, unfootnoted essays critical of Christian Reconstruction, but without interacting in a scholarly way with the major primary sources of Christian Reconstruction. Once, again, their academic model is Hal Lindsey. Worse; Lindsey at least wrote an anti-theonomy book with footnotes, even though they were frequently inaccurate. Academically speaking, Dr. Engelsma is trailing Hal Lindsey on this issue.