

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

Vol. XIV, No. 3

No copyright, reprint anywhere

April/May, 1992

GHETTO ESCHATOLOGIES

by Gary North

And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words, And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny [denarion], that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him (Mark 12:13-17).

There are few passages in Scripture that are quoted more enthusiastically by pietists, statist, and humanists than this one: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Why? Because this passage initially seems to separate the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Caesar, thereby granting autonomous authority to Caesar.

Once Caesar has received this supposed grant of authority, however, he and his disciples seek to expand that kingdom. Step by step, law by law, tax by tax, intrusion by intrusion, the messianic kingdom of the State grows at the expense of the messianic kingdom of God. No judicial barrier to Caesar's kingdom is acknowledged as sacrosanct by Caesar's worshipers; no realm of autonomy from Caesar is acknowledged except the conscience, and only if conscience never utters an audible word of protest. Every barrier to Caesar's kingdom is regarded as subject to future revision. The foreign policy of the messianic State is clear: "What's Caesar's is Caesar's, and what's God's is negotiable."

But why should Christian pietists cite this passage with equal enthusiasm? Because it is perceived as relieving them from any personal responsibility to resist the relentless expansion of Caesar's kingdom. They follow the lead of the statist and humanists: Caesar's kingdom is defined as everything external, while God's kingdom is exclusively internal. Conscience must always remain internal. It must never be allowed to display its presence by public acts of resistance. This view of civil law justifies life in the Christian ghetto, far from the seats of influence. Yet Jesus said to His disciples: "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30). Ghetto-dwelling Christians resent this degree of responsibility.

Whose Coin Is This?

Jesus was being challenged by Pharisees who wanted to compromise Him publicly. They asked Him about paying taxes to Rome. If He told them that this payment was war-

ranted, the people would abandon Him. If He told them that such taxes were not warranted, the Romans would arrest Him. This looked like a perfect trap. It wasn't.

He asked them to bring Him a coin. When they did this, He sprung their trap on them. The coin was a Roman *denarius*, a silver imperial coin used for paying taxes, according to numismatist-theologian Ethelbert Stauffer (*Christ and the Caesars*, 1955, p. 123). Tiberius Caesar's picture was on one side, with an announcement in Latin, which in the Greek provinces was transcribed as "Emperor Tiberius august Son of the august God." On the reverse was an image of Tiberius' mother seated on a throne of the gods, with the words "Pontifex Maximus," meaning high priest. Stauffer writes: "The coin, in brief, is a symbol both of power and of the cult" (*Ibid.*, p. 125).

If the Pharisees possessed such a coin, or even handled it, they were implicitly acknowledging that Caesar had lawful authority over them. Coinage then (as now) was a mark of State sovereignty. It was Julius Caesar who had first placed his own picture on Roman coins, and this was seen as an assertion of divinity. He was then assassinated. In 132-35 A. D., during Bar Kochba's rebellion, the Jewish revolutionary leader had the imperial *denarii* collected, the faces beaten flat by hammers and replaced by pictures of Hebrew Temple vessels (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

The Pharisees had either polluted themselves ritually by using a coin with Caesar's image on it or else were acknowledging that they were under sovereign authority, and therefore compelled to use such a coin. The coin symbolized both the power and the benefits of Roman rule. It therefore symbolized the historical condition of Israel in Jesus' day: under God's judgment.

What Does God Own?

The Jews knew very well what God owns: everything. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10). When Jesus told them to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's, He could not possibly have meant that Caesar possessed an autonomous kingdom with autonomous claims on men's obedience or assets. He meant only that Caesar was a lawful monarch whose coins testified publicly to the Jews' position of political subordination to Rome. To deny this fact in public would have constituted an act of rebellion. The Pharisees, who served as civil agents of the Roman state, knew this all too well. They kept prudently silent.

By speaking of things belonging to Caesar, Jesus was affirming the existence of legitimate political power in history. God delegates political power to specific men to manage as stewards, just as He delegates ownership of property to specific individuals and families. As the ultimate sovereign Owner, God is at the top of a hierarchy. Power is delegated to men. It is never held autonomously by men. By telling men to render to Caesar what belonged to Caesar, Jesus

was **identifying Caesar as a ruler** under God: the **recipiant** of **delegated** power. Jesus was denying the supposed right of Caesar to command worship as a god.

Jesus' answer drove home the economic point: **ownership** and **authority** are **never** autonomous. They are always delegated by God. This hierarchical pattern of ownership is basic to economics, politics, and all government. A sovereign God delegates limited power to His subordinates. The existence of a hierarchy of authority therefore leads to the question that constitutions and courts must answer: Where are the God-established **covenantal** boundaries of power separating State, church, family, and individuals?

More to the point, where are we given **authoritative answers** to these questions regarding judicial boundaries, in nature or in the Bible? This is what the pietists prefer not to discuss. This question raises the issue of the biblical legitimacy of natural law theory, the implicit alternative system to biblical law in Christian political theory. The obvious answer – obvious to everyone except millions upon millions of humanist-educated Christians – is that the Bible is the place where we must begin our search for these boundaries. But to say this is to reject the judicial foundations of natural law theory and its corollary, political pluralism. American pietists resent any such challenge. They much prefer to abandon at least five-sixths of the Bible, and so they have.

Then what is to prevent Caesar from demanding five-sixths of whatever Christians own or produce? Mere tradition? The threat of a tax revolt? Well, then, Caesar will remain content – this year – to take only 40% of his servants' income: twice what Pharaoh extracted from the Egyptians (Gen. 47:16), which was twice what Samuel identified as political tyranny (1 Sam. 8:15, 17). Caesar knows that his pietistic Christian servants will not quote the Old Testament at him. They have abandoned it.

They have also abandoned **earthly** hope. They have devised **eschatologies** of inevitable failure – ghetto **eschatologies** – that match their ghetto political theory.

A Letter from the Fundamentalist Ghetto

In my ICE cover letter of January, 1992, I began with this statement:

The decline of Christian scholarship in this century has been **disgraceful**. What began as an erosion of scholarship in the late sixteenth century has become a collapse today. Things are so bad that in the field of history that humanists are generally producing better works of scholarship on Christianity's role in history than Christians are.

I want on to report on the availability of a CD-ROM version of Migne's Latin Church Fathers, which I recommended for purchase by every Christian college (not, it needs to be said, every Christian individual). Then I made a prediction: "I doubt that a dozen will buy it, even if they all hear about it. So abysmal is the level of Christian education today that there are no students and few faculty members who can read Latin well, let alone understand the theology of the Church fathers and assess its development through the centuries." Why did I say this? Because of my understanding of pietist theology and its effects on the modern church.

We have closed off ourselves from the history of the Church because we have abandoned faith in the future of the Church. We are **present-oriented**. Therefore, according to political scientist Edward Banfield, we are **lower class**. Banfield defines an upper-class person as **future-oriented**. It is not how much money a person has, but rather what his view of the future is, which determines his **class position**. By this definition, the modern Church is lower class.

I have heard Christian parents ask the rhetorical ques-

tion: "What good is Latin, anyway?" In short: "What good is 'accurate knowledge of the past?'" To a **present-oriented** person who would be content with his place in life with a steady job but not a time telling before God, not much. To a present-oriented church whose pastor would be happy to have a congregation filled with such people, not much. This is the problem we face today.

In late January, I received a letter from the leader of an Oklahoma **parachurch** ministry. He got onto the ICE mailing list in January. (So far, he has ordered no books.) Legally, I can name him and limit my extracts to 10% of his letter. I can also quote it in full, but not name him. I have decided to do the latter, since I feel certain that nobody in my circles has ever heard of him or his ministry, and his letter is just too choice to exclude a single word.

As you read it, think to yourself: "If future-orientation is upper class, then what is this?" Think also: "If he is right about how to fund missions, then why should Christians ever build a college, or even attend a college?" Here is the entire text of his letter, which was printed out on a cheap dot-matrix printer. (Nothing like a dot-matrix printer to identify yourself as an under-funded, one-man operation!) This letter is, I assure you, a rigorously consistent application of the pietistic, premillennial theology of modern fundamentalism.

• • • • •

Enclosed is a short paper on a "Christians politics". A true follower of Christ will lay down the fleshly ambitions that the world offers and work for eternal things instead. I have yet to see true evangelism taking place amongst the reconstructionists. It concerns me to see a great degree of compromise in proclaiming the gospel, amongst the kingdom now teachers. I wonder if you claim allegiance with the prosperity teachers, the charismatic and ecumenicalism we see all around us today? I noticed your latest offer of the Church Fathers on CD-ROM for \$60,000. Couldn't this sum be better spent on missionaries? The Bible (*solascriptura*) is or should be sufficient for us. Each of us will stand before God someday and account for our time, money and what we did with the truth and light we possess!

What happened to Abraham Kuyper's Holland? What was the result of Constantine's "inversion"? Is the Roman Catholic Church the mother church or the mother of harlots? Do you condone the political allies of "Christians" with Moonies as we've seen in the American Freedom Coalition? Were the Declaration of Independence signers Master Masons by coincidence? Is America getting better or worse?

Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:13. I believe we are seeing this before our very eyes. Even the elect are being deceived. Satan wishes men to be diverted from the great commission, that of seeing individuals of all nations following Him, being baptized and discipled for His kingdom. The more time spent on earthly pursuits, i.e. politics, studying vain subjects, social actions and filling our brains with more useless knowledge, the less time there will be to do His work He left for us to do.

I don't doubt that you have more knowledge than most men in the Western Hemisphere. You must be brilliant to have written the volumes and millions of words in your books. The crux is that with greater knowledge comes greater responsibility.

Sincerely,

• • • • •

He also included a poem, which by taking the first letter of each stanza, we get the following: OUR POLITICS ARE IN HEAVEN. It includes this stanza:

Each Christian who thus VOTES NOT, testifies
Exactly where his place of power lies.

He then assured me: "If preachers and teachers were subject to the Word of God as to the Christian's new heavenly relationship, as being no longer of this evil world, they would let the world take care of its own politics and cease reasoning about it."

I understand his point. Why bother to vote in a pluralist society if the church of Jesus Christ is doomed to defeat anyway? Voting would be pointless, except as a holding action. Our citizenship is in heaven, and **only** in heaven, he says. While the Bible teaches a doctrine of dual citizenship – heaven and earth, eternity and time – pietists reject this doctrine. Consistent pietists are like the Amish: they do not get involved in "gentile" politics.

His view of politics is the only view that is consistent with premillennialism. (It is also the only view that is consistent with amillennialism, as we shall see.) It rests explicitly on a specific view of the future of the gospel: the predestined impossibility of world transformation – including politics, but not limited to politics-through faithful **preaching** and honest, Christ-honoring living. It is the view promoted by Dave Hunt. Dave Hunt is consistent. So is his partner, Tommy Ice. (For a copy of the videotape of the great 1987 debate – Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt vs. Gary North and Gary DeMar – send a donation of \$50 to I. C. E.)

The inconsistent premillennialists who are political activists resent it when I say this, but I keep getting letters like this one. Until I see a book-long theological defense of political involvement from a premillennial standpoint, I shall keep on saying it. This premillennial pietist is consistent: Christians should direct their resources into missions, narrowly defined, that is, pietistically defined. What Kenneth Gentry calls *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (I.C.E., 1991) is ignored.

A Crucial Shift in **Dispensational** Rhetoric

What is significant is this: in the last fifteen years, the leaders of American fundamentalism have ceased to talk like Dave Hunt, a fact that Mr. Hunt has publicly deplored. They are no longer consistent regarding premillennialism and social activism. Not that they believe in biblical law, of course. But they do believe in conservative social and political action.

Paralleling this shift toward activism has been the quiet abandonment of dispensational theology. As of 1992, the only easily available book still defending the details of dispensationalism is a reprint of Charles Ryrie's 1965 book, *Dispensationalism Today*. It ought to be called, *Dispensationalism Yesterday*.

Dispensational eschatology is dying because fundamentalist activism and outrage at humanism are growing. Ghetto eschatology is no longer popular with Christians who are trying to move out of the psychological ghetto and into positions of influence. To put it bluntly, you don't run for President on a dispensational ticket. You run to win.

When Christians seek to make permanent, meaningful, Bible-based changes in the world outside the local Christian ghetto, they become **operational postmillennialists**. This is why there are so few Christians involved in social action who are willing to spell out the details of their officially held premillennial or amillennial views. They do not even try to explain in print how such views can be reconciled with activism. They have abandoned such views psychologically, except for those few who are willing to become kamikazes for Christ. As I have said for years, once a Protestant evangelical starts thinking "activism," he begins to shed his pessimillennial eschatology, whether pre-

mil or a-roil. It just sort of drops away, like a snake's skin.

What we theonomists are waiting for is a book called *The Premillennial Case for Full-Time Christian Social and Political Activism*. We are also waiting for *The Amillennial Case for Full-Time Christian Social and Political Activism*. We expect to wait a long, long time.

A Pamphlet from the Dutch-American Calvinist Ghetto

Let it not be said that I am unfairly singling out American fundamentalism's psychological ghetto. I target other pietist ghettos with equal enthusiasm.

One of the most consistent defenses of Christian ghetto psychology ever written was by Herrnan Hanko. On May 6, 1970, Dr. Hanko, senior theologian of the Protestant Reformed Church, delivered an address at the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church. It was reprinted as an uncopyrighted pamphlet: *The Christian's Social Calling and the Second Coming of Christ*. The Protestant Reformed Church is a tiny Dutch-American denomination that left the equally Dutch Christian Reformed Church in 1924.

As with all of his fellow PRC members, Dr. Hanko is a confirmed amillennialist. He knows who his enemies are on the question of social action, and who they aren't. Who they aren't are premillennial fundamentalists. Who they are are the postmillennialists. "In the first place," he writes, "many who strongly advocate christian social involvement almost always fall into the error of post-millennialism. That is the error of teaching that the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is realized here in this present world by a slow but steady process of social, economic and political evolution" (pp. 1-2).

He was correct in his identification of the postmillennial position as his enemy, though incorrect in his attribution of error to it. He was also correct about this: "In fact, it seems almost as if there is something inevitable about falling into the error of post-millennialism when speaking of the Christian's social calling" (p. 2). In other words, dedicated people prefer to believe that their efforts will succeed in **history**.

Is there legitimate earthly hope for the future of Christianity? No. "The apostle Peter," he said, "is at great pains to point out to us and the church of all ages that to live out of the principle of hope necessarily implies to walk in the midst of the world as a pilgrim and a stranger. In fact his letter is addressed to those in the midst of the world who are sojourners" (p. 2). This is a Dutch version of that old American folk song, "I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger, traveling through this world of woe." It is not "Christ shall have dominion!"

My question is this: Is today's Christian pilgrim **inevitably** a nomad until death? Abraham was a pilgrim, a stranger in a strange land. Did God give him a promise? Yes. Were his heirs to remain as pilgrims in Egypt? No. (Anyone who says "yes" needs to explain what Moses' ministry was all about. And Joshua's.)

Isn't a pilgrim a person on a journey toward a destination in history? Isn't a Christian's earthly journey based on ethics? Doesn't a faithful church serve as leaven for positive social transformation (Matt. 13:33)? If it doesn't, then Christians are forced to explain the economic growth of the last two centuries in terms of Satan's success in getting his followers to do everything his way. Are we really expected to believe that the world has achieved positive external blessings because of its adoption of either religiously neutral ideals (the explicit answer of all political pluralists: "democratic capitalism") or satanic ideals (the implicit answer of amillennial Dutchmen in 1970, and perhaps even today)?

In identifying the sources of theological deviation, Hanko did what Claude Rains did in Casablanca: he

"rounded up all the usual suspects," meaning residents of the Dutch ghetto. First, he attacked theological liberals, who "place all emphasis upon the social calling. . . ." No argument here from the theonomists. Then he attacked the Toronto-based followers of Herman Dooyeweerd: Dutch amillennialists who were pushing liberal policies of State intervention in the name of Abraham Kuyper's theology of sphere sovereignty and political pluralism. Members of this "cosmomic school" of Dutch Calvinism are hostile to Van Til and equally hostile to biblical law. Theonomists can hardly fault Hanks on his opposition to the antinomian Dooyeweerdians.

But Hanks did not criticize their antinomianism. Instead, he attacked them because of their supposed postmillennialism. They called for "the reformation of learning and, in turn, North American culture . . . as the Lord grants." To which Hanks replied: "if that isn't postmillennialism, then I don't know what postmillennialism is" (p. 7). Problem: off-ically speaking, they were, to a man (or noisy feminist), amillennialists. But Hanks had a valid point: when you start talking social action, you start thinking **postmillennialism**, unless you join "**Masochists** for Jesus." Why spend your life trying to recruit followers into a program of social action that is predestined by God to fail? Until they sank in an ocean of their own incoherent antinomian jargon in the late 1970s, these Dooyeweerdians had been operational postmillennialists. They were schizophrenic.

Then what is the true amillennialist's hope? Death or the second coming, whichever comes first. Hanks insisted that "in the context of sin, of a sinful world, of a world of depraved, totally depraved people, there is no solution to the world's problems. There cannot be" (p. 8). Therefore, "all the world's attempts to solve these problems are necessarily going to make these problems worse" (p. 8). This is amillennialism's interpretation of Luke 2:10: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

But what if lots of people should someday be saved by grace? Impossible, said Hanks, for "we know from Scripture that it is the Lord's purpose, in the midst of the history of this world, to save only a Remnant" (p. 9). This has all been predestined by God. He cited Isaiah's words regarding Israel, the era before the Incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of **Jesus Christ**, and then applied Isaiah's words to the Church. "The Church is always," Hanks said, "a hut in a cucumber patch, a besieged city" (p. 9). What a stirring view of God's Bride – dressed in her shining white robes out in the cucumber patch! In short, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been predestined by God to fail to overcome the historical effects of Adam's fall. The first Adam's cultural legacy in history triumphs over the second Adam's cultural legacy until Jesus returns in power and **glory**.

This is the heart, mind, and soul of ghetto eschatologies.

Finally, Hanks said that the only solution is the cross. "That is where all the social problems are resolved. . . ." But the cross can do nothing to heal the world at large, so "the solution of those problems is limited therefore, to those for whom Christ died" (p. 9). (Understandably, the theologians of the Protestant Reformed Church avoid discussing I Timothy 4:10: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." There can be no common healing in a world devoid of common grace, and they totally reject Calvin's doctrine of common grace – not just the 1924 Christian Reformed Church's view, which was flawed, but Calvin's.)

In the Church, he said, "those social problems do not exist; there is no problem of poverty in the Church. There

is an office of deacons to take care of the problem. There is no problem of juvenile delinquency" (p. 9). No problem of juvenile delinquency? This is the description of a northern Michigan farm community of no more than 3,500 people, 85% of them Dutch-American. In 1870.

Hanks did what all pietistic Christian social theorists do in principle: he redefined social as ecclesiastical, and then concluded that all social problems can be solved in the Church. Sure they can . . . if the tiny local church is prosperous because the society around it is prosperous. But what if the church is someday imprisoned in some variant of the Gulag archipelago? What if Islam conquers the world? What if the economy collapses – the humanistic, "totally depraved" economy? What will the local deacons do then to "solve" all social problems? Hanks, as with all amillennialists, had to presume that the world outside his ghetto will remain a productive place that is happy to leave the Church alone. Yet amillennial eschatology teaches otherwise.

Hanks then insisted that if you say that there are solutions "outside the Church," you also have to proclaim the universal atonement. "But then you are with the modernist of course" (p. 9). Got it? **Cultural optimism** = **modernism**. But this is true only if postmillennialism is false and common grace is a myth. That is to say, it isn't true. (I developed the Bible's view of common grace in my 1987 book, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress*. It did not persuade anyone in the Protestant Reformed Church. This does not surprise me. The fear of excommunication and shunning is a powerful fear in a ghetto.)

Then what is legitimate Christian social action? Only this, said Hanks: ". . . within the sphere of the Church and on the mission field, care for the poor, the administration of the sacraments" (p. 11). Care for the poor? That's it? That's it. That's all? That's all. Here is the conclusion of all pietistic social theory, in all its pathetic rags: **Christian society** as a skid row rescue mission. "In the world there is no solution. We must say that with courage. And it will take courage" (p. 14).

On the contrary, it takes zero courage. It takes only a permanent remnant mentality, a good economy in Michigan, and a willingness to forsake all social responsibility outside of the walls of the local ghetto congregation and the foreign mission field.

He made it clear: "Things will get worse and worse; that we know" (p. 15). Our only earthly hope is the second coming of Christ. Hanks then cheered our souls: Jesus is coming soon to bail us out before things get too bad! "There are signs, are there not? Signs which speak in eloquent language that the Lord is coming" (p. 15) This is **Second Coming fever**, a fever every bit as debilitating psychologically and institutionally as dispensationalism's Rapture fever. These two fevers have become epidemics inside Protestantism's eschatological ghettos.

Hanks vs. The "Heresy" of Cultural Optimism

Dr. Hanks waffled a bit in 1970. He did admit that the Church has at least some role in social action: helping the poor. He argued for a rescue-mission function for the Church. Over the next two decades, he continued to work out his practical theology, in order to make it fully consistent with his amillennial eschatology. He discovered that his practical theology has been altogether too practical in 1970. He took steps to correct this earlier commitment to traces of the social gospel. In the fall of 1991, Dr. Hanks delivered a speech to a Protestant Reformed congregation. His topic: **eschatology** and social action. This **uncopyrighted** tape is made available by the Protestant Reformed Church, 18511 South Park Avenue, South Holland, IL 80473.

Once again, he raised the specter of postmillennial optimism. He stated explicitly that postmillennialism is opposed to Reformed, Calvinistic theology. (Implicit argument: "Modern Dutch Calvinists reject postmillennialism; therefore, it cannot be Reformed.") Worse; postmillennial-based social action leads to cooperation between Calvinists and non-Calvinists. This Dr. Hanko rejects emphatically. It is clear that Dr. Hanko practices what I call safe sects. ("Safe Sects: Bottling Up Christ's Healing," *Christian Reconstruction* [Nov./Dec. 1990].) He writes:

Post-millennialism is antipathetic toward the Reformed faith because post-millennialism is spiritually dangerous. And it is spiritually dangerous in the first place because post-millennialism in its very nature destroys the antithesis. Those who are post-millennialists are ardent workers for the coming of the kingdom here in the world. And they are so eager for the coming of the kingdom here in the world that they are willing to unite with anyone to further their causes. And that stands to reason. In the cause of trying to get laws passed against abortion, they have no scruples about joining with Roman Catholics and the most ardent humanists. That is a destruction of the antitheses.

Their argument is, of course, and the argument makes worlds of sense in the light of a post-millennial kingdom: "Well, these people are going to be part of the kingdom of Christ too someday, so why not make use of them now? Why not embrace them now? Why not labor with them now in a common cause?" And because the post-millennialist in the pursuit of his goals can work with all sorts of people, people who are enemies of the Church of Christ, people who are enemies of the Reformed faith, people who belong to that Church which our confessions brand as false, people who belong to the denominations where the truth is no longer taught or preached, when the post-millennialist can join with them just because they happen to be against various evils which the post-millennialist also abhors, they are unequally yoked with unbelievers. They make common cause with the world; they bridge the yawning chasm of the antithesis.

The danger is that spiritually they lose their ability, their spiritual ability, to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven in the midst of the world. When the kingdom of anti-christ is established, it is going to be a beautiful kingdom from every conceivable human point of view. All the social ills of mankind will be solved in the kingdom of anti-christ. It will be the most wonderful kingdom the world has ever seen in which to live. The only thing you have to do is take the mark of the beast.

But if you are working for the kingdom of Christ here below, and if you are willing to cooperate with practically everybody in the world to pursue your goals. Then, when persecution comes, you are not going to be in any kind of spiritual position to endure it. When the kingdom of anti-christ dawns, you are going to fall in the very real danger of identifying the kingdom of anti-christ with the kingdom of Christ, and making your peace with the beast, thinking, as anti-christ himself claims, that his kingdom is the kingdom of Christ. It is serious business. We are not talking about doctrinal trifles. We are not talking about that which lies on the periphery of our faith. We are talking about fundamental principles of the Reformed faith.

If our view of the millennium is correct as I am convinced the Scriptures teach, we are pilgrims and strangers in this earth. We have here no abiding city. We seek a city which is above. We live in the hope of the coming of Christ. That finishes that part of my speech and so I'll give you an opportunity to make any comments about this or ask any questions about it which you would like to ask. . . .

Hanko identifies all cooperation between Christians and non-Christians as **unequal yoking**. This sectarian principle is basic to all ghetto theology. Anything – business, political action, entertainment, medicine, science – that involves the social division of labor between Christians and non-Christians is dismissed as "unequal yoking." In short, "Stay away from those Jewish brain surgeons; go to a good Calvinist general practitioner instead!" The concept of yoke in the New Testament is explicitly covenantal, and must involve the taking of a self-valedictory oath: no oath -no covenant. This never seems to occur to these self-professed covenant theologians. Abram's God-blessed military alliance with Mamre the Amorite (Gen. 14:13) apparently was "unequal yoking" in the view of Calvinist ghetto dwellers. This is Calvinism gone to seed, a denial of covenant theology. It is a denial of point four of the biblical covenant model: oath/sanctions. (See Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, institute for Christian Economics, 1992 edition, chapter 4.)

Notice that Hanko's amillennial argument is almost identical with the arguments set forth by premillennial, dispensational accountant Dave Hunt, whose attacks against post-millennialism also appeal to the postmillennialists' supposed compromise with a supposed coming kingdom of the antichrist. (See his book, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*) Like Hanko, Hunt believes that the futurist kingdom of the antichrist will be prosperous, marked by all the positive blessings promised by God to God's people (Deut. 28:1-14). Hunt wrote a whole book on this: *Peace Prosperity and the Coming Holocaust* (1983). (Hunt hates commas in book titles almost as much as he hates the antichrist.)

Hanko and Hunt both conclude that what Jesus could not accomplish in history – peace on earth – through the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the efforts of His people, God-hating covenant-breakers will establish. Hanko and Hunt agree: until Jesus returns physically to set up an earthly kingdom, the Church will fail to transform the world. Christ's kingdom will inevitably remain a tiny ghetto in the overwhelmingly successful kingdom of Satan in history. Hanko and Hunt agree: Satan does not need to be physically present on earth in order for his kingdom to conquer all things, but Jesus does need to be physically present in order for His kingdom to conquer all things. Hanko and Hunt have enormous confidence in Satan and his power to transform society into an outwardly wonderful place to live. They both insist that Jesus cannot pull this off representatively through His people; Satan can.

What does this say for their doctrine of Christ's ascension? What does this say for their doctrine of ethical cause and effect in history? Evil people prosper, while righteous people suffer. Yet Paul wrote of Jesus: "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:25-28). This vision of the future of Christ's Church is based on Psalm 110:

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth (Ps. 110:1-3).

Hanko and Hunt are pessimillennialists. Hanko is an

amillennialist. Ironically, he shares this view of eschatology with the Roman Catholics, whom he seems to dismiss as outside the faith. (Problem: Does his denomination require re-baptism of Roman Catholics, as it does with Mormons? If not, then a blanket condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church as apostate is invalid. If so, then a question has to be raised regarding the ancient heresy of Donatism.) Yet he criticizes postmillennialists for becoming involved in anti-abortion activism with Roman Catholics. Sharing their eschatology is the essence of orthodoxy, Dr. Hanko implies; sharing their concern with legalized murder is a form of cooperation with the antichrist.

This is what pessimillennialism does to its devotees: it turns their practical theology into silly putty, step by step, as they become ever more consistent theologically.

The Theology of "Principled Irrelevance"

Hanko recognizes the link between postmillennialism and social action. Rejecting the first, he is honest enough to reject the second. Many of his amillennial peers are not, just as many of Hunt's premillennial peers are not willing to take Hunt's Hanko-like position on the illegitimacy of social action. Both men understand the lure of operational **postmillennialism** in Christian social action. Both men understand that to be a pessimillennialist requires a person to become either a ghetto-dwelling pietist or a social action kamikaze for Christ. They take the first option: ghetto residency. We should applaud their consistency, and pray that none of their peers follow them into their theology of principled irrelevance. Hanko spelled out this theology in his 1991 lecture.

• * * * * *

The question is this: If post-millennialism is contrary to the reformed faith, what must be the attitude of the Reformed faith towards making this world as much as possible a world which lives in conformity with God's law? That is, ought we to strive to make this world a better place in which to live? Ought we regardless of our convictions, bend every effort to try to bring every institution of society under the rule of Christ, even if we know that we will not be successful, ought that not to be our goal?

To be specific, ought not the Christian to be busy in anti-abortion crusades? Ought not the Christian to fight houses of pornography and brothels? Ought not the Christian to try to get laws passed which close businesses on the Lord's Day. I think I am touching on a touchy subject here in Byrne, or Cutlerville is it? Ought the Christian to bend every effort to keep businesses closed on the Lord's Day? My answer to these questions is emphatically, no. [emphasis in lecture- G. N.]

The Christian is a pilgrim and a stranger in the earth. His calling is to seek the kingdom of God and God's righteousness as Jesus tells us in Matthew 5. What does that mean? That means that it is his calling in the world not just to let the world go to hell, not to stand on the sidelines and clap and applaud and whistle and cheer as the world rushes madly to her destruction. Not even to give the world a push in the behind to speed them on their way to their destruction. That's not the calling of the Church.

The Church's calling is to condemn wickedness as loudly and as passionately as she possibly can and wherever she finds it. She must do that in the name of Christ. When all the world says, this is the kingdom of anti-christ. The believer says this world belongs to Christ and someday all things shall be made new. When the wicked say we can sin as we please and God be damned, the Christian says God is in His heavens and God will judge wickedness and send the sinner to everlasting hell. In every way, on every occasion he must as loudly as can, con-

demn wickedness, that is part of his calling.

That is a far cry however, from having-a kind of a social calling. I do not believe that the Christian has a social calling. And now I am answering your question directly and forthrightly. I ask you from even a purely natural and earthly point of view, does it make any difference whether a drunk is taught to live a sober life, whether those who work in a brothel are taught to live monogamously in marriage? Does it make any difference whether the adulterer ceases his adultery if the result is that he goes to hell? Does it make any difference whether one goes to hell sober or whether one goes to hell with a whiskey bottle in his back pocket? Does it make any difference whether the world slides to hell on the skids of immorality and corruption or drunkenness or whether it slides to hell on the skids of sobriety and faithfulness to one's spouse? What difference does it make?

The calling of the Church is not social betterment. The world is interested in making socially better people. The Church is interested in saving sinners. The world is interested in painting the pump and the pump handle white while the well remains foul. The Church is interested in that work of grace which purifies the well. The world is interested in making this world a world in which all men can live at peace and where good things are done. The Church is interested in the gospel of the Kingdom and in the glory of God in bringing sinners to their knees in repentance and confession of sin.

The Church knows that Christ will come again. That the world will get worse, but that the victory will be ours in the day of His coming. To cooperate with the world in making this world a better place, is doubly wrong. That is a destruction of the antithesis. The Christian sits loose . . . sits loose to all the efforts that are made in society whether by the Church or by the ungodly to make this, this place a better world.

I think that we ought to say, as harsh as that may sound, we ought to say about those who advocate this position and summon us to join their ranks, what Jesus said to a would be disciple. "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the gospel of the kingdom." We must never forget this world is not our home, we are only passing through.

I challenge anyone, and I am doing that now, to show me one passage in Scripture where Jesus engaged in social betterment. Where the apostles preached efforts toward making this world a better place. Where anyone lays upon the Church or upon Christians the calling to work towards betterment in society. Our hopes are not in this world, they must never be. We are concerned with the salvation of the Church. The gathering of the elect because when the last elect is gathered, the last sinner is brought to repentance, Christ will come again. The victory will be ours forever and forever. That's my thesis. With that point I am going to close and you may have your say.

• * * * * *

Here it is: the Christian "sits loose to all the efforts that are made in society whether by the Church or by the ungodly to make this, this place a better world." It makes no difference whether we live next door to a mass murderer or a law-abiding non-Christian citizen, he says. They are both going to hell. It presumably makes no difference whether we live under the political leadership of Adolph Hitler or Helmut Kohl. They are both German pagans, after all. Hanko asks rhetorically: "Does it make any difference whether one goes to hell sober or whether one goes to hell with a whiskey bottle in his back pocket?" On the day that someone goes to hell, it no longer matters to me, but up until that day it surely matters to me, for example, if

he is drunk when driving. Hanko asks rhetorically: "Does it make any difference whether the adulterer ceases his adultery if the result is that he goes to hell?" Well, sir, it matters to me if he is committing adultery with my wife or my daughter. It also matters to me if he is an AIDS-infected bisexual, and he is committing adultery with my son. But, then again, I don't live in a nice, safe, ecclesiastical ghetto of cultural expatriates the way Dr. Hanko does (or thinks he does).

I hope you see the point. In the worldview of a committed pessimillennialist, history is irrelevant. The Church is culturally irrelevant to history, and history is irrelevant to the Church. When you live in an eschatological ghetto theologically, you are always tempted to create a fantasy world mentally. You begin to imagine that you live in a hermetically sealed-off world in which you and your fellow ghetto residents are isolated from the cultural world around you. Like the lunatic locked safely in a padded cell, it makes no difference to you if your neighbors in the next cell are adulterers or not, are drunks or not, are decent people or not. Just so long as someone outside your padded cell continues to pay someone to feed you, clothe you, house you, and heal your bodily pains, nothing outside your little world makes any difference. Obviously, nothing outside the Protestant Reformed Church makes any difference to Dr. Hanko. And he deeply resents the fact that those Christians, especially Reformed Christians, who are not dwellers in his Michigan ghetto keep telling other Christians that God has given them an assignment in history:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26-28).

He resents the fact that we take the Bible's words literally:

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).

For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

Hanko set forth this challenge: "I challenge anyone, and I am doing that now, to show me one passage in Scripture where Jesus engaged in social betterment." Feeding the multitudes? Not social betterment, in Hanko's view. Healing the sick? Not social betterment, in Hanko's view. Hanko challenged anyone to show him "where the apostles preached efforts toward making this world a better place." Jesus fed the multitudes and healed the sick. Then He told the apostles: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever (John 14:12-16).

Ah, yes: the commandments. The law of God. You

know: the Old Testament. When we turn to the Old Testament, we find lots and lots of examples of covenant-based social betterment. We find whole passages that promise social betterment in response to covenantal faithfulness, passages such as Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14. This means that Christians must preach God's **covenant lawsuit** to nations as well as individuals: a covenant lawsuit in history that includes both law and sanctions.

Problem: pessimillennialists deny the historical validity of God's sanctions in New Covenant history. They also have a tendency to deny the continuing validity God's Old Covenant case law applications of the Ten Commandments. They are, in short, **antinomians**. They reject the specific sanctions that God has always required His covenant people to preach to the lost. Pessimillennialists no longer believe that God raises up Jonahs to preach God's covenant lawsuit: a message warning of the coming destruction of any covenant-breaking society that persists in its evil ways. They no longer believe that God brings negative sanctions in history against covenant-breaking societies. On the contrary, they believe, as Hanko believes, that "When the kingdom of anti-christ is established, it is going to be a beautiful kingdom from every conceivable human point of view. All the social ills of mankind will be solved in the kingdom of anti-christ. It will be the most wonderful kingdom the world has ever seen in which to live."

The pessimillennialist, whether premillennial or amillennial, wants Christians to believe that God no longer backs up His own covenant with action. In fact, God supposedly has allowed Satan to impose the terms of his covenant: covenant-breakers get steadily richer and more powerful, while covenant-keepers are consigned by covenant-breakers to living in ghettos in between persecutions. The pessimillennialist is content with life in his ghetto because he believes that the only alternatives in history are life in the Gulag archipelago or literal execution.

The Amillennial Case for Abortion

The most consistent working out of the amillennial case against social involvement was presented in the conservative Lutheran tabloid, *Christian News* (Sept. 2, 1991). The debate centered around Operation Rescue. On pages 20 and 21, we see the pessimillennial alliance. First, the editor reprinted two pages of Dave Hunt's *C/B Bulletin* (Nov. 1989), in which Hunt attacked Operation Rescue specifically and "Christian activism" generally. Hunt insisted that "The Great Commission does not involve exerting a Christian influence upon society" (p. 21).

Next, there was an essay, "Millennial Lutherans Should Promote the Book of Concord" (p. 21). This was an attack on Christian Reconstruction's view of biblical law, as well as an attack on Hunt's Rapture theology. The author singled out *The Reduction of Christianity* (Dominion Press, 1988), by Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, as the offending book. The author was careful to side with Hunt's view of law: "... Hunt maintains the priority of the Church's task of preaching the gospel. He also promotes a proper understanding of the gospel as being the message of God's grace, forgiveness and new life in Christ."

Then there was a two-page article called, "Something More Important." This, in my view, represents the culmination of **antinomianism** and **pessimillennialism**. This said it all. The unsigned essay was an attack on Operation Rescue. It favorably cited a previously published essay - "a fine article" - by Lutheran pastor Roger Kovaciny (*Christian News*, May 18, 1989), in which Rev. Kovaciny argued the following fully consistent position: **It does no good for Christians to save the lives of unborn babies, since they will grow up and vote.** (And the critics of Christian Reconstruction argue that we place a "political spin" on

theology!) Rev. Kovaciny wrote of the pro-life movement:

And if abortions were prevented, what's going to happen to the babies who will be born? Will they be baptized? Will their mothers be brought to repentance, and join churches? Don't kid yourself. . . . Because even if they were effective – if the proliferers of this nation were successful in shutting down every abortion mill in the country – their victory is as temporary as the bombing of Pearl Harbor. By leaving the mothers convinced but not converted, and the babies born but not baptized, all the pro-life movement has done is double the number of the ungodly. In 18 years, those babies raised by pro-choice mothers, will start to become voters, and then pro-life activists will be outlawed, arrested, and maybe shipped off to Alaska.

You cannot make the ethical implications of amillennial eschatology any plainer than this. The **amillennial** view of God's covenant is deeply **antinomian**. A God without the willingness to impose corporate sanctions in history according to His law is a wimp, a loser, and so are all those who covenant with Him. The amillennial denies God's sanctions in New Covenant history, either positive or negative. He believes, **first**, that God will never send His Holy Spirit to transform the hearts of the ungodly on a widespread basis. This is the heart of **amillennial eschatology**. Therefore, concluded Kovaciny, the clever thing for the Christian

to do is to allow covenant-breakers" to slaughter their own unborn infants. Forget about God's law; what is important is future voter registration! The amillennialist believes, **second**, that God will never bring negative sanctions against a society (yes, including the ecclesiastical ghettos) that allows such a practice as abortion, for God does not bring corporate – i.e., social – judgment in history. If God were to bring social sanctions in history, this would make social action a Christian moral imperative. Let it never be!

Abortion on demand? No problem! After all, what difference does it make – applying Hanks's rhetorical flourish – whether a non-Christian mother aborts her child or not? Both mother and child are going to hell anyway! And then Kovaciny "upped the ante": it matters if the baby survives. Someday it will vote.

Conclusion

Eschatology matters. if you commit yourself to any version of pessimillennialism, you will spend your life in a psychological ghetto. If every Christian were to do this, the messianic State would expand without resistance until it threatened to swallow the church.

Those who live in ghettos are at the mercy of the messianic State. They are willing to render everything to Caesar while they wait for the return of Jesus. i'm not.