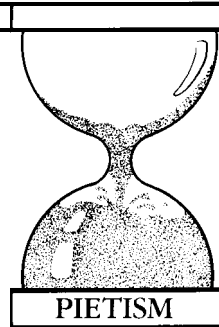


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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HOUSE OF SEVEN GARBLES

by Gary North

At last! After 15 years of Dallas Seminary's self-imposed strategic silence, one of its professors has gone into print with a critique of the Christian Reconstruction movement. H. Wayne House offers us *Dominion Theology, Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press). Guess what? He does **not** think Dominion Theology (which he equates with Christian Reconstruction, probably for the sake of increased book sales) is a blessing. The publisher was kind enough to send a review copy of the page proofs to us. (Since Gary DeMar had repeatedly requested a copy of this manuscript from the authors since February of 1988, in order to prepare for our public debate with co-author Tommy Ice and Dave Hunt in April, and had been refused each time, we are certainly grateful to the publisher. Both authors had instructed the publisher not to release the manuscript to us. They even told us they had. But at least we got the page proofs.)

Professor House has made at least seven key intellectual errors – garbled interpretations – but far more costly was his decision to allow Tommy Ice to become co-author. Mr. Ice is a self-proclaimed ex-Reconstructionist who was never invited into the movement to become the Reconstructionists' ambassador to the dispensational community. Perceiving himself as having been scorned (see his remarks on page 8 about my refusal to comment in detail in response to his 10-page, single-spaced, dot matrix printed letter of criticism that he sent to me without even separating the print-out pages), he has now rejected the Reconstructionist position. Like so many other enthusiasts in history who were formerly committed to a strong ideological position, and who later saw "the error of their ways," Mr. Ice now lashes out wildly and often incoherently at those who previously had "misled" him. Like the sobered-up drunk who had long been incapable of holding his liquor, and who then joins the temperance movement to spend the rest of his days preaching against the incomparable moral evil of beer, so is Mr. Ice.

Unfortunately for Professor House's academic reputation, he was unsuccessful in controlling Mr. Ice's more intemperate and outlandish statements. What Dr. House failed to perceive is that when an unknown author with no reputation persuades a better-known author with academic credentials to team up with him, the professional has lots to lose, while the amateur has everything to gain. House lost; Ice gained.

Several of the book's chapters are technical, detailed discussions of biblical law. They are pretty slow reading. They are at least judicious and deal directly with the text of the opponent. I have in mind Chapters 5-7 dealing with Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. These clearly are chapters written by Professor House. Other chapters rely heavily on footnotes to various Reconstructionist newslet-

ters rather than on extended theological discussions in Reconstructionist books, and are written in a style best described as neo-hysterical. These I believe were written by Tommy Ice. Nevertheless, both men are responsible for this book.

Their exegetical house of cards will begin to topple publicly in the spring of 1989, when Dr. House debates Greg Bahnsen at the Simon Greenleaf School of Law in Orange County, California. Dr. House declined the opportunity to debate Ray Sutton at this meeting, after Sutton accepted House's tactically unwise challenge to debate him. Sutton is an ex-dispensationalist and a Dallas Seminary graduate who knows every weak spot in House's system. Dr. Sutton outlined his **resurrected and now-universal New Covenant** line of attack in his private phone conversations with Professor House, who then apparently decided that debating Bahnsen is safer. Out of the frying pan and into the fire!

Changes at Dallas Seminary

This book really does give away whole departments of the dispensational store in its attempt to refute Reconstructionism, at a time when dispensationalism is already sitting on mostly empty shelves. Readers need to be aware of the historical setting of this book. Here is what they have not been told.

A quiet revolution has been going on at Dallas Seminary. Dallas has quietly abandoned "the true and ancient faith, as delivered by Lewis Sperry Chafer." The outline of the "new, improved" dispensational faith, as tentatively offered by Professor Craig Blaising in 1988, is as yet unclear in its details – deliberately unclear, in my judgment – but it appears to involve such things as blurring the distinction between the church and Israel. Michael Gilstrap has repeatedly tried to get clarifications from Dallas faculty members. He drives in and sits down to ask them what is going on, but he cannot get precise answers.

Obviously, **the holders of this reworked version of the faith are skating on thin career ice**. If they go too far, they will lose their jobs, and where do you go to teach seminary as a "not quite dispensationalist"? Yet they know that they can no longer defend the dispensational faith, even in its revised, 1967, "New Scofield Reference Bible" version. Dallas Seminary's theological position has become increasingly murky as its student body has grown to 1,700. What we do know is that Chafer's *Systematic Theology* is not simply out of print; it is out of commission.

Don Quixote Rides Again!

Into this scene ride Tommy Ice and his faithful, cautious, and somewhat hesitant assistant, Wayne House, like

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, with Ice seated shakily on the aging Rosinante of the Scofield Reference notes. These two chivalrous warriors have engaged in a series of fierce battles against a squad of stick men, mostly of their own creation, labeled "Rushdoony," "North," "Bahnsen," "Chilton," and "Jordan." And let me assure you, these stick men have been soundly defeated in 460 pages of poorly typeset and improperly proofread pages.

But one name is strangely absent: "Sutton." Not even his stick figure is allowed onto the battlefield by Ice and House. There is a reason for this. Even dressing up a stick man in Sutton's five-point covenant model is too risky, for to discuss this explicit covenant model points to **the threatening link between the Old Testament covenant order and the New Testament covenant order** – a link which, if true, would demolish dispensational theology. (And it is true.) Ice and House have seen this looming danger, and have judiciously avoided it as much as humanly possible. Out of a total of 798 footnotes in their book, there is a grand total of five references to Sutton's book on the covenant, *That You May Prosper* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

You can always spot the weak points in a man's presentation by locating the handful of inescapable topics that he nonetheless refuses to discuss. Professor House and Mr. Ice have identified the topic which they do not want to discuss: the five-point covenant model, which structures the first five books of the Bible, meaning the Pentateuch (see North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, 1987 edition, Introduction), the Ten Commandments (see North, *The Sinai Strategy*, Preface), the Book of Deuteronomy (see Sutton, *That You May Prosper*), the Book of Revelation, and much, much more.

There is not a single reference anywhere in their book that presents Sutton's five-point model. The five-point supposed Reconstructionist outline on page 17 has points two and five reversed, making it appear as though it is not quite Sutton's model. (Nice try guys, but I caught you!) There is one short paragraph on page 347 that mentions that I have said that Sutton's model is the crucial structuring device for Reconstructionist thought, but they do not even outline it for the benefit of their readers. They know that Chilton adopted this model to structure his commentary on Revelation, *The Days of Vengeance*, yet in chapter after chapter devoted to their attempted refutation of Chilton, this absolutely central fact is never even mentioned. They know that seven of the ten volumes in the Biblical Blueprint Series (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1986-87) adopt Sutton's five-point covenant model as their structure. Not a word of this is mentioned, either. You need not bother straining your eyes in search of any reference to Sutton's newsletter, *Covenant Renewal*. There are dozens of references to newsletters that I even forgot that I wrote, but nary a mention of the one newsletter that is the foundation of what we in the "Tyler camp" are doing. This silence is deafening.

There is another topic which they self-consciously refuse to discuss: **the work of the Holy Spirit in New Testament times as the empowering factor in Christians' being able to extend dominion through Christ**, who is seated majestically in the heavens at the right hand of God. They admit that we teach this (p. 50), but then they fail to respond. Over a hundred pages later, they devote one sentence to the topic, saying that the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to preach against sin (p. 152). Social sin? Another unmentionable! **In their view, there are no social sins except murder that can be confidently challenged in the name of God's permanent law.**

Tommy Ice admits in the book's opening paragraph that he was the pastor of David Schnitger when the latter

wrote the fascinating booklet, *Christian Reconstruction from a Pretribulational Perspective* (Oklahoma City: Southwest Radio Church, 1986), a document referred to continually in the Reconstructionist book that refutes Dave Hunt, *The Reduction of Christianity* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1988), by Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart. **Schnitger's booklet is a devastating criticism of traditional dispensationalism's systematically world-retreating outlook.** He freely admits that we Reconstructionists have been correct in pointing to dispensationalism's retreatism. But Ice and House systematically ignore this crucial dispensational document, almost as if Ice had not believed its thesis just two years ago. Schnitger's booklet gets flushed down the Dallas Seminary memory hole. "Schnitger? Who's Schnitger?" This is suspicious. It is also traditional. This is the Dallas Seminary approach to apologetics: **refutation by blackout.**

With these warnings in mind, let us survey some of the highlights of *Dominion Theology, Blessing or Curse?* Few Christian books of supposedly high academic caliber have ever been so garbled.

Garble #1: Sutton's Five-Point Covenant Model

The points are: 1) God's transcendence yet immanence (presence); 2) hierarchy/authority/representation; 3) ethics/law/dominion; 4) oath/sanctions (blessing and cursing); 5) succession/inheritance/continuity. Acronym: THEOS.

What our two authors fail to tell their readers is that **they are both staunch defenders of point one, the absolute predestination of God.** Their Arminian fundamentalist readers really ought to be informed about this. Silence is not golden at this point.

Then comes point two: **hierarchy.** They refuse to discuss how this works in the so-called Church Age. But they forthrightly tell us how it will work during the dispensational millennial age: "Premillennialist plead guilty to the desire to have a 'top-down' kingdom. We eagerly look forward to Jesus Christ's earthly reign" (p. 237). This is in response to my criticism: "The premillennialist has so little faith in the power of the Bible's perfect revelation, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to shape the thoughts of Christians, that Jesus must return and personally issue millions of orders per day telling everyone what to do, case by case, crisis by crisis." I had thought mine was a highly critical observation; they openly confirm the accuracy of my original accusation, and they rejoice in it.

In short, **they place traditional dispensationalism at the forefront of the judicial principle of benevolent totalitarianism.** They believe that Jesus prefers to work as Satan does – through a rigid, top-down bureaucracy – rather than through the bottom-up appeals court hierarchy of Exodus 18 and Matthew 18. They refuse even to mention the humanist world's existing system of bureaucratic, top-down hierarchy, but they forthrightly affirm Satan's bureaucratic vision as the true kingdom standard for the dispensational millennium.

Garble #2: Becoming a Perfect Bureaucrat

Tommy Ice ends his Preface with these words: "My blessed hope, however, continues to be that Christ will soon rapture his Bride, the church, and that we will return with him in victory to rule and exercise dominion with him for a thousand years upon the earth. Even so, come Lord Jesus!"

Ice knows very well that I upended his partner Dave Hunt on this very point during our April debate, because Hunt was completely ignorant of the fact that the traditional dispensational view of the "raptured saints" during the millennium is that they will **not** return to earth to reign with Jesus. J. Dwight Pentecost says, "Thus the millennial age

will be concerned only with men who have been saved but are living in their natural bodies." (Pentecost, *Bibliotheca Sacra* [Oct. 1960], p. 341.) John Walvoord writes in *The Rapture Question* (rev. ed.; 1979): "The Scriptures declare emphatically that life on earth in the Millennium relates to a people not translated and not resurrected, a people in their mortal bodies" (p. 86). Well, the Scriptures failed to declare this emphatically enough to register with Tommy Ice, who wants with all his heart to return in bureaucratic power with Jesus in his very own sin-free, death-free body and kick a little donkey!

As I said of Dave Hunt's view, which is identical to Ice's, "It sounds great, but I think he makes these things up as he goes along." So does Ice. These people rewrite a whole system of eschatology in order to appeal to uninformed laymen in their movement, and then they pretend that this is the original version. This is not what I would call honest dealing with one's overly trusting followers.

Garble #3: The Old Historical Shell Game

In their chapter, "IS Premillennialism a Heresy?" they attack David Chilton for the latter's accusation that premillennialism was first invented by Cerinthus, a second-century heretic. They acknowledge that nobody else in the Reconstructionist camp has sided with Chilton on this, and they quote me in saying that many of the early church fathers were premillennial. Chilton's gift is exegesis, not historiography, so I will not run to his defense at this point.

What is important to understand is that by spending a chapter defending the early church origins of premillennialism, the authors are playing a game that has been basic to Dallas Seminary's creaky defense of its faith: **dead silence regarding the 1830 origin of the pre-tribulation Rapture doctrine.** Post-trib dispensationalist Dave MacPherson has inflicted a deep wound on the pre-trib camp by showing that a teenage Scottish girl named Margaret Macdonald, a disciple of a mystic named Edward Irving, came up with this doctrine during a private "revelation from God." (McPherson, *The Unbelievable Pretrib Origin, The Great Cover-up, and The Great Rapture Hoax.*) The traditional Dallas Seminary-taught view has always been that John Nelson Darby discovered the doctrine in 1830. **In either case, traditional pre-tribulation dispensationalism cannot trace its origins back to anyone prior to 1830.**

If Mr. McPherson is categorically wrong, as Mr. Ice insisted that he is in a letter to me, then why hasn't Dallas Seminary's church history professor John Hannah presented the evidence? Why has he been silent about this for over a decade? Why hasn't any full-length historical refutation of MacPherson's thesis appeared from the traditional dispensational camp?

The two authors then attack postmillennialism because it was supposedly invented by unitarian Daniel Whitby, who was born in 1638, despite the overwhelming evidence that the New England Puritans of the 1630's were postmillennial, and that they brought the doctrine to North America from England. The authors know about Iain Murray's book, *The Puritan Hope* (Banner of Truth, 1971), in which the Puritan origins of postmillennialism are discussed. They know that as the editor of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I published an entire issue on "Puritanism and Progress" (Summer, 1979), in which the documentary evidence is presented. They simply ignore all this. They write: "Thus, the system called postmillennialism was born in the early 1700s as a hypothesis" (p. 209) **This is not scholarship; this is self-conscious propaganda and active deception of their unsuspecting and overly trusting readers.** This is a high school debating technique disguised

as scholarship. This is not the way that men with academic integrity are supposed to conduct public debate, let alone Christian academics. As I said earlier, Professor House has the most to lose; he had an academic reputation prior to this book.

When Mr. Ice launched this ancient "Whitby" attack in the rebuttal portion of our April 1988 debate, I reminded him that his system was invented in 1830, and that post-millennialism can trace its history at least back to 1630. (Actually, it goes back to John Calvin.) He did not respond to my rebuttal. How could he? But he drags out all the old arguments again, as if he had never attended the debate, as if he were deaf. He is deaf. Judicially deaf. **Hearing he will not hear.** (And let it be known: Professor House was also in attendance that evening.)

This shell game has been going on at Dallas for decades. "Keep your eye on the pre-trib, premillennial pea, my friends. See how it goes here, under this 1830 pretribulation Rapture shell. Now, with just a few deft shuffles . . . presto: we now find it under the historic premillennial shell of the early church! Thus, we can see that C. 1. Scofield was a defender of eschatological orthodoxy. Now, take this postmillennial pea. We place it under the **seventeenth-century Puritan shell.** A few deft shuffles presto: we now find it under Daniel Whitby's eighteenth-century unitarian shell. Thus, we can see that postmillennialism has very questionable ancestry!" Ice and House continue to push around these mostly empty shells. Bad habits picked up in one's youth are difficult to break.

Garble #4: An Inner Kingdom Only

Matthew 13 is filled with parables about God's kingdom in history. Several proclaim the church's **continuity in history**, also called the **leaven principle** (Matt. 13:33-34): the influence of the gospel continues to transform history without a break until the final judgment. These parables are the most difficult passages in the Bible for premillennialists. The authors cite Grace Seminary's Alva J. McClain, who referred to them as "these difficult parables" (p. 226). They are not difficult for postmillennialist! On the contrary, they are foundational.

To escape the Reconstructionists' accusation that dispensationalism is socially paralyzing, they say: "Dispensationalists agree that it is wrong to limit God to only the spiritual or inner realm. This is why we so strongly believe in a literal kingdom of Christ, which will encompass his rule over every area of life" (p. 247, note 65). They have now given the game away. **The external kingdom is supposedly exclusively millennial, i.e., future.** They say that insofar as we are speaking of the so-called Church Age – the here and now – God **has** limited His kingdom to the inner or spiritual realm. This is what author Dave Hunt says repeatedly in his *Seduction* books.

They then quote favorably Samuel J. Andrews, whose words, if taken literally (the "Dallas hermeneutic"), set forth the foundation for **the rule of the tyrannical Saints** – something the authors accuse us Reconstructionists of promoting. We have seen the results of this sort of premillennialism in the revolutionary "Christian" communist movements of the late Middle Ages (Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*) and the early modern era (Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*, ch. 2). This is what can happen when you combine apocalyptic premillennialism and a theological hostility to revealed biblical law:

It is as its Head that He rules over [the Church], not as its King; for this latter title is never used of this relation. Nor is His rule over His Church legal and external, like that of an earthly king. The relation between Him, the Head, and the Church, His Body, is a living

one, such as nowhere else exists, or can exist; His will is the law, not merely of its action, but of its life. He rules in the Church through the law of common life. (p. 235).

Spoken like a true Brother of the Free Spirit! Get out your shotguns and hide your wives and daughters: pre-millennialists are on the march again. Fortunately, this book tells dispensationalists not to march, but to stand dead still:

"God has told us to take up a defensive posture against the enemy stand and resist the sword is for a counterattack stand" [p. 156]. This book is a 460-page tract to **stand pat for Jesus**. It is a theological defense of John Milton's line, "They also serve who only stand and wait." Milton had an excuse, however. He was blind. Then again, now that I think about it.

Garble #5: Neither Biblical Law Nor Natural Law

The non-Reconstructionist Christian, we are told, "is not under the law as a rule of life; rather we are under the law of Christ" (p. 184). This they call Wisdom. Wisdom "does not legislate civil penalties" (p. 186). Civil penalties can be imposed in the name of Christ only during his top-down, international, bureaucratic reign (the millennium). Personal progressive sanctification also has nothing to do with God's law: "Christ has freed us from the law for salvation or sanctification" (p. 185). Therefore, "millennial standards await Christ's victorious return" (p. 148). Until then, we must stand pat for Jesus. No explicitly Christian civil sanctions!

There is only one alternative to biblical law: **natural law**. Yet the authors do not once mention this phrase. Both authors are followers of Calvinist philosopher Cornelius Van Til, both know that natural law is a Stoic pagan myth, and both reject former Dallas Seminary professor Norman Geisler's natural law neo-scholasticism. So, they just stay silent about alternatives. They hope that no one will raise the obvious question: **By what standard** does any Christian government – church, state, or family – execute lawful judgment in history? Just wait for Jesus, they reply. We must remain silent until then.

Garble #6: Dispensationalism's Social Relevance Today

Not wanting to seem retreatist and socially irrelevant, the authors hasten to assure the readers: "Our job is to be a faithful witness to those in the darkness of Plato's cave. We are to shine the light of God's word on current issues in order to remove the shroud of darkness cast over this world system by Satan" (p. 155). **How?** Their book denies biblical law. They do not mention natural law. **What Bible-revealed light can dispensationalism shine?**

I know: the same light that Dallas Seminary shined in 1973 after *Roe v. Wade* – a City of Dallas case – legalized abortion. Remember Dallas Seminary's response? "Hear no social evil, see no social evil, speak no social evil."

In a century and a half, there has not been a single published book on dispensational social theory written by a dispensationalist. I wonder why. (No, I really don't.) The dispensational movement gave up its one recent opportunity to say something relevant in the late 1960's. It remained silent, as always. Its heart had died by 1970.

Garble #7: Noah's Covenant is the Church's

Ray Sutton and the "Tyler" Reconstructionists argue

that it was with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that a **resurrected new covenant** was inaugurated. God's five-point covenant is now universal, the standard for the nations, because the church and the gospel are now **universal** (Matt. 21:43; 28:18-20). **But Professor House** does not want to deal with this possibility, for it conflicts with his foundational theological argument in this book: that the terms of Noah's covenant alone binds Gentiles, while the Mosaic law was only for ancient Israel. House equates Christ's law for the Church Age with Noah's covenant: "Since a law is given within the context of a covenant, the nations could not be given the Mosaic Law since they are under the Noahic covenant" (p. 130). **Are** is present tense. This is the book's key covenantal thesis. House wants us to believe this because **there was only one civil sanction, and only one civil law, in Noah's covenant**: execution for murder (Gen. 9:5). If his thesis is true, then everything else about civil government is up for grabs, The Christian would then have almost zero to say judicially about anything. **This in principle turns society over to humanists and other covenant-breakers,**

But it is worse than this. He writes: "The Noahic covenant is perpetual" (p. 127). This implies that **the Mosaic law will not even be adopted during the millennium**, contradicting all previous dispensational theologians. In his attack on Bahnsen's view of a universal Old Covenant law-order internationally, **House has scrapped traditional dispensationalism**. In short, Noah's covenant – devoid of all but one civil law and one sanction – is all that Christians have or will ever have to call society to account.

If you are wondering why dispensationalism is culturally irrelevant, search no farther. When you argue that Noah and the rainbow are more socially relevant than the resurrection of Christ, His giving of the Great Commission, the revealed law of God, and the empowering of Christians by the Holy Spirit, you will remain culturally irrelevant.

Conclusion

This book is 460 pages long. There are errors on at least 410 of these pages. (The rest are indexes and bibliography.) While there are many other garbles that I might consider, I can wait. There will be additional refutations to come. In fact, Gary DeMar's book, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction*, appeared three weeks before the Ice-House book did, and many of the authors' theological objections are answered in detail there. These answers will not satisfy the authors, but they will satisfy those who are tired of **garbled theology and hidden agendas – agendas promoting Christian social impotence**. Christians are tired of hearing theological defenses for the supposedly inevitable failure of Christians in the so-called Church Age. This weariness, and not our specific responses, is what has sealed the doom of dispensationalism.

The dispensational movement waited 15 years until Tommy Ice volunteered to carry its banner into battle against the dreaded Reconstructionists. Sancho did not help much in this task. Ice and House dropped this banner and have substituted a "new, improved" one. They have abandoned traditional dispensationalism in the name of dispensationalism's key conclusion: the continued social irrelevance of Christianity. I can safely say that the dispensational movement is now buried intellectually unless someone else picks up the original banner, tattered though it is, and at least stands with it.

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