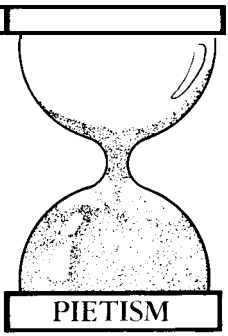


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO "THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S"? (PART TWO)

A Review of Dave Hunt's, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*

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Last month we began by surveying several of Dave Hunt's argumentative flaws regarding Christian Reconstructionism. We then focused on his doctrine of imminence. Now we will consider some of his views on the relation of the Christian to culture.

Sounding the Alarm

Hunt is quite disturbed with the Reconstructionist desire for Christianity to exercise cultural influence in the affairs of the world. In fact, the entire thesis of his book is one of alarm in this regard. He even traces the fall of Rome to "the sudden Christianization of the civilized world of the day under Constantine and his successors" (p. 7, cp. pp. 41, 111, 123)!²

This is a remarkable statement. On Hunt's view, God favored and blessed Rome as long as she persecuted Christians, but as soon as she favored them, God judged her! I rather suspect that Rome's collapse was due to (1) the judgment of God upon political imperialism, with prophetic reference to Rome (as per Daniel 2). I further believe that (2) the fall of Rome was *delayed* until His Church could spread throughout the empire and gain an adequate footing in it, so that it would be able to endure the collapse of Roman order and be available to the disoriented society that remained.

Hunt extols the Anabaptist movement as one that held a "fervent expectation of the return of Christ" — despite their being "far from perfect" in that "some denied the Trinity and were involved in polygamy" (p. 183). With the hatchet job he does on John Calvin and Calvinism, I would like to know if he is really aware of the numerous severe problems within the wider anabaptist movement.

So Heavenly Minded. . .

He seems so enamored with the Darbyite doctrine of an imminent rapture³ (which he confuses with an ancient expectation of the Second Advent itself) that he almost seems to be ready to praise any group that expected their

own generation to be the last! Almost. I am sure he does not praise other last day groups of the era of Darby (the 1800s), such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Seventh Day Adventists (who began by awaiting Christ's sure return in 1843 and then again in 1844), etc.

. . . No Earthly Good

What is it that disturbs Hunt about Reconstructionism? Is it doctrinal heresy regarding the fundamentals of the faith? No, for he recognizes Reconstructionists to be evangelicals (p. 232). Rather, he is troubled that we want our Christianity to impact our culture, that is, we want to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

In this regard, Hunt laments: "there is a large and growing number of Christians today for whom long-range earthly ambitions have all but obscured the traditional hope of heaven — ambitions which they believe to be not carnal but biblical and very spiritual. They have become convinced that the Great Commission calls for a reconstruction of society that will result in a 'Christianized' world. Since they believe that this reconstruction could take a long time, even thousands of years, it makes no sense not to lay up treasure upon this earth" (p. 41).

Of course, he does not show that Reconstructionists actually have "obscured the traditional hope of heaven" (which is the *future* destiny for all Christians, when our life on earth is done) by being concerned with our mortal lives (which is the *present* duty for all Christians, while our life on earth remains). Why is it wrong that we presently are concerned to "expose the works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11)? And to "cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)? And to attempt to live up to our high calling as the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14)?

We firmly believe that God created the material earth for man to dwell in, while in his mortal life (Gen. 1:26-28; Psa. 8; 115:16; Isa. 45:12, 18). Why should Christians diminish mortal life in the material earth?

We are persuaded that the entire "earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," which is a theme that runs throughout Scripture (Exe. 9:29; 19:5; Deut. 10:14; 1 Sam. 2:8; 1 Chron. 19:11; Job 41:11; Psa. 24:1; 50:12; 89:11; 1 Cor. 10:26, 28). Why should we leave it to the rule of and domination by the ungodly?

We are convinced that Christ is the head of *all* things (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:18; 2:10; Heb. 2:8; Rev. 1:5). Why should His pre-eminence be restricted?

Consequently, we are committed to serving Him in *all*

1. It *must* be noticed that we speak of the cultural (including political) influence of *Christianity*, not of the institutional Church. We believe in the separation of the institutions of Church and State, but not in the separation of Christians and governmental influence. Dispensational critiques of Reconstructionist thought frequently obscure this distinction.

2. Hunt contradictorily asserts that "during its first three centuries the church never entertained the idea of 'reconstructing society'" (p. 206), while earlier he spoke of Origen's hope that the gospel would gradually triumph over the world (p. 112)!

3. In light of the sheer noisiness of 1 Thess. 4:16 (shout, voice of the archangel, trumpet of God), the following dispensational view is amazing: "For example, the rapture as expressed in 1 Thessalonians 4 seems to be a *private event* involving the church only, and *unseen and unknown to the world*" (p. 303). This is pure Darbyism.

of life with our *entire* being (Mark 12:30-33; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 3:17, 23; 2 Tim. 2:21; Tit. 3: 1; 1 Pet. 1:15; 4:11; 1 John 2:6), on the basis of His will revealed in Scripture (John 17:17; Rem. 12:1,2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Is this an alarming error?

"Seeing, They Do Not See"

Hunt radically distorts and corrupts the postmillennial vision: "The growing acceptance of the teaching that a Christian elite has" a mandate to set up the kingdom without Christ's personal presence is genuine cause for concern" (p. 43).

What does he mean by "a Christian elite"? (Concerned Christians who run for office and are elected? Dedicated Christians who establish Christian schools?) What does he mean we have "a mandate to set up the kingdom"? (Christ established it while on earth [see next month's newsletter]. We are ambassadors of our king, 2 Cor. 5:20). What does he mean we labor without "Christ's personal presence"? (Does he denigrate the spiritual presence of Christ now? Is not Christ personally present with us [Matt. 18:20; 28:20; Rem. 8:9-11; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:27; 3:16; Heb. 13:5]?⁴

Due to his imminency doctrine, Hunt is adamantly opposed to *any* plans for long-range Christian operation in the world:⁵ "That Christ's promise to take His own to heaven has no significant place in [Christian Reconstructionists'] future plans is quite clear. Yet no support for Christians adopting such earthly mindedness can be found in Scripture" (p. 44).

"Where There Is No Vision"

But what "future plans" should we make for Christ's taking us to heaven, other than being saved by grace and walking in good works, which He has ordained (Eph. 2:8-10), and telling others so to do? Lamentably, Dave Hunt's pietism discourages the Christian's making future plans to promote God's glory in all of life by encouraging an *avoiding* of both righteous influence in culture and any long-range plans to be successful at it.

Of course, this is the practical effect of his gloom-and-doom view of the predestined future: "Scripture repeatedly predicts apostasy for the last days, an increase in ungodliness, and God's judgment upon the earth rather than a takeover by a triumphant church" (p. 45). Consequently, there will be *no* time on earth when Christians will be in the majority (p. 49). We are to be "less than conquerors" and "undercomers", if we are biblical realists. Anti-faith in Antichrist prevails. We are but grasshoppers against the opposition (Num. 13:33).

How can dispensationalists, such as Dave Hunt, deny with a straight face that they are historical pessimists? Con-

sider the logical answers to the following questions: Is contemporary society *irrevocably* doomed? Yes. Is the Christian's present hope to be the *end* of contemporary history and our present labor? Yes. Is there anything that prayer and righteous endeavor can do in the hope of exercising a successful influence on current immorality? No. Will Christianity "disciple all nations"? No.

Hunt's possible answers to such questions may further be indicated in the following. He writes that the rapture "thus ends, in a way that death does not, all human stake in continuing earthly developments, such as the lives of one's children left behind, the growth or dispersion of one's accumulated fortune, the protection of one's personal reputation, the success of whatever earthly causes one has espoused, and all other seemingly legitimate interests which bind us to this present world. . . The rapture, however, undercuts all of these; and to whatever extent these pseudoconsolations are weakened, our postmortem hope becomes purified of its earthly elements" (p. 60).

Of these "earthly elements" I fear that Hunt confuses use, with *abuse*. Consider his denigration of certain "earthly elements" of life: Of our *children*, the Bible teaches that children are "an heritage of the Lord" (Psa. 127:3) and that we must provide for them (1 Tim. 5:8). Of the dispersion of our *fortune* (wealth), Scripture commands leaving an inheritance behind for our children (Prov. 13:22; 19:14; 2 Cor. 12:14). Of our *reputation*, the Bible teaches that a good name is better than gold (Prov. 22:1; Eccl. 7:1). Regarding our *earthly labors*, the Bible encourages them for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17). Clearly the rapture hope is detrimental to these, by Hunt's own admission! Rapture is anti-cultural and anti-biblical.

Let's Not Lose Our Heads!

One alleged biblical illustration of the misdirection involved in political reform offered by Hunt is remarkable: "John the Baptist rebuked Herod Antipas for taking his half-brother Philip's wife. . . Could it be that John, who was imprisoned and later beheaded by Herod because of this reproof, may have needlessly cut his ministry to Israel short by aiming his remarks **at the wrong target?**" (p. 82) Frankly, I prefer Zacharias' and Jesus' high praise for John over Hunt's suspicions of his recklessness (Luke 1:67-79; Matt. 11:7-15).

But what are we to make of his later statements? "While Scripture does not specifically encourage it, there is also no prohibition in the Bible against appropriate social action in the interests of godliness" (p. 208). "Christians ought to stand against such evils as homosexuality, abortion, pornography, and the abuse of drugs, and do all they can to limit godless influence in society" (p. 216). On what basis should this be done, since the Bible has no answers?⁶ Is it not prophesied that apostasy and ungodliness *must* reign? Is this not directing our energy toward the *wrong targets*? Do we **want to die early deaths, like John the Baptist?**

4. I wonder if his Arminianism leads Hunt to conclude that if is *he* himself who leads people to Christ, rather than the Holy Spirit working through him (cf. John 3:8; Acts 16:14; Phil. 2:13)?

5. Interestingly, in the 1970s *The Presbyterian Journal* reported that, due to his sizeable book royalties, Hal Lindsey was forced to put his money into long term real estate investments. It is a good thing, too, for almost two decades have transpired for the man who felt "we should be living like people who don't expect to be around much longer. "

6. "When all is said and done, however, even Colson - in spite of an excellent discussion of the issues is short on real answers. And so he should be if he is to be true to the Word of God in dealing with difficult issues upon which it makes no definitive pronouncements" (p. 86).