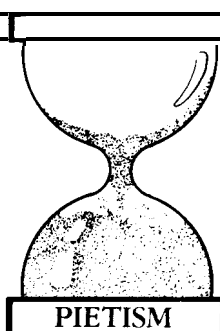


# Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



Vol. III, No. 11

©ICE, 1990

November, 1990

## "WHERE'S THE BEEF?"

by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.D.

As one interested in the promotion of God's truth, I enjoy reading various Christian writers. In fact, I even enjoy reading reviews of their books. When a book is published **it enters the market place of ideas. Unless there is** an aeon-spiracy of **silence**,<sup>1</sup> if a book has any merit at all it will be challenged in book review format by opponents seeking to expose its weaknesses.

As a writer, one of the things I find most helpful is to read a critical analysis of my work by a knowledgeable opponent. Obviously, writers appreciate letters of commendation. Yet, critical book reviews are the telling story. There, the mood shifts from cordial back-patting to concerned **face-slapping**, giving rise to a hearty "Thanks, I needed that."

### My Day Has Come, Or Has It?

When I learned that Dr. John F. Walvoord, Chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary (hereinafter: DTS), had "reviewed" Greg Bahnsen's and my, *House Divided: The Break-up of Dispensational Theology*, I was delighted. At DTS Walvoord served as president (1952-86), faculty member (50 years), and editor of its theological journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1952-85). He is also a widely published author.<sup>3</sup>

I was fearfully certain that I would get a challenging response in Walvoord's "review," which appeared in the July-September, 1990, issue of *Bibliotheca Sacra*. I was mistaken.

### "Blessed is he who reads" (Rev. 1 :3a)

Quite frankly, I do not believe Walvoord even read *House Divided*. I rather suspect that of the twenty chapters plus foreword, preface, and two appendices, he only read the "Publisher's Foreword" and my chapter entitled "The History of Theology on the Kingdom." My reasons for this suspicion are:

First, in the 400+ pages of the book we confront **dispensationalism** on two major fronts: ethics (Part 1) and **eschatology** (Part II). Both are major challenges against **dispensationalism**. Yet Walvoord has absolutely *nothing* to say in response to Bahnsen's presentation of theonomic ethics. Since the book focuses in on only two *major* issues,

1. As is sometimes the case, See: "Dealing with the Academic Black-out," a section in Gary North's "Publisher's Foreword to Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided: The Break-up of Dispensational Theology*, pp. xxxvii-xliv.

2. In one of the most unusual book reviews I have ever read, evangelist John R. Rice reviewed *his own book*. His title was: "Tremendous Remarkable! The Best Ever!" (*The Sword of the Lord*, October 19, 1973, p. 4). In his review of his own book, which was volume 2 of *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, he wrote: "I am amazed at this encyclopedia of scholarly answers to these Bible questions." This is *not* a review by an opponent!

3. At Grace Seminary I met Dr. Walvoord in 1974, when he came there to speak. He autographed my copy of his *Jesus Christ Our Lord* "John F. Walvoord, Rev. 22:20."

why is one *who/ly* overlooked – unless those chapters were not read?

Second, the single issue he confronts is in the field of **eschatology**. But twice he makes the **astounding** charge regarding our postmillennialism: "Contenders for postmillennialism never set up their own view in a solid way. After all, the issue is whether postmillennialism is taught in the Bible" (p. 370). "The book . . . never faces the central question of whether postmillennialism is valid biblically" (p. 372).

Is he kidding? I certainly did not expect Walvoord to be converted away from dispensationalism by my presentation, but how can he say the book "never faces the central question of whether postmillennialism is valid biblically"? I set aside five entire chapters (**chs.** 10-14), covering eighty-three pages, to the biblical exposition of postmillennialism! Those chapters deal with the "expectation," "nature," "presence," "mission," and "victory" of the kingdom from a postmillennial perspective. In those chapters I cite 791 separate Bible **references**.<sup>4</sup> And this does not count the two additional chapters on the related issues of the historical development of **eschatology** (ch. 15) and **preteristic** hermeneutics (ch. 16).

I challenge any Dallas Seminary student, who may read this newsletter, to get out *House Divided* and take a mere five minutes to read just the *summaries* at the end of the five chapters I just **cited**.<sup>5</sup> In those summaries you will find citations of 139 biblical references. Along with these citations you will discover summary arguments that at least *attempt* to face "the central question of whether postmillennialism is valid biblically." Then ask yourself: Was Walvoord's "review" honest and careful? Is obscurantism a teaching method used in **class**?<sup>6</sup> Will such "review" tactics blind *Bibliotheca Sacra* readers to what is going on in the theological world?

### "Pride Goeth Before . . . a Fall" (Prov. 16:18)

There was another aspect of the "review" that was rather disturbing. Walvoord writes: "According to Bahnsen and Gentry, their book has completely refuted House and Ice with devastating logic and arguments" (p. 370). Where do Bahnsen and Gentry state that? He does not tell us.

4. I painstakingly counted **every** separate biblical reference cited that involved a **different** Bible chapter (I did not count each verse referenced).

5. They may be found on pages 157-158, 173-174, 191, 210-211, 230-231.

6. According to Curtis Crenshaw, former DTS student, and co-author of *Dispensationalism, Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*, three major professors at DTS had their **distinct** ways of dealing with probing questions from students: Pentecost would get upset that he was **being questioned**; Walvoord would speak **condescendingly** to the student ("When you get as much experience in study as I have, you will understand"); Ryrie would give **thoughtful** and helpful **replies**.

The only thing I can figure is that **Walvoord** read Gary North's Foreword, where North states: "**Bahnsen** and Gentry . . . very politely and graciously **expose** the arguments of Houee and Ice as half-baked, carelessly researched, insupportable, and intellectually dishonest" (*House Divided*, p. xiii). In other words, **Bahnsen** and Gentry did not boast that they themselves had employed "devastating logic." Those words were from North. It is one thing for someone to claim another's arguments are "devastating"; it is quite another for one to boast of his own writing in that manner.

Dr. Ken **Talbot** of **Whitefield** Seminary told me that this "review" reminded him of an old lawyer's maxim: "If you can't pound the facts, pound the table."

### "Let Walvoord be true and every man a liar"

**Walvoord** states: "This reviewer has read few books with more errors of fact and half truths about the doctrines being considered" (p. 370) and "the method of attack is to dispute, run down, and misrepresent various authors classified as dispensational" (p. 370). But where are these errors, half truths, and misrepresentations? In short, where's the beef? Unfortunately, *there is not one reference to any page in House Divided that makes such a claim.* In fact, nowhere in the three page "review" is even one quotation drawn from *House Divided* nor is even one page from it referenced: **Walvoord's** charges are wholly unsubstantiated; the reader must simply take him at his word. **Walvoord** said it; I believe it; therefore it is true.

And what is ironic, **Bahnsen** and I were ourselves responding to "errors of fact and half truths" and misrepresentation! Yet when we make the charges of misrepresentation (**Chs.** 5, 17, 18, 19), we document our charges with specific source references.

What is more, **Walvoord** laments that "opponents of fundamentalism and premillennialism accused dispensationalists of being heretical, and said so often enough that people began to believe it" (p. 371). Yet his charges against *House Divided* are mere charges with no substantiation, thus differing little from things "said so often enough!" His analysis of the rise of non-premillennial eschatology is such that, in essence, he charges that the birth of non-premillennial thought had heretical origins: "the Alexandria School began an attack on normal and literal interpretation of the Bible and substituted an allegorical interpretation that subverted every biblical doctrine, not simply that of eschatology. All theologians . . . regard the Alexandria School as heretical; yet it caused the turning of the church from premillennial truth to what became amillennialism and later postmillennialism" (pp. 370-371 ).

### "You Have Neglected the Weightier Matters" (Matt. 23:23)

Except for his unsubstantiated charges regarding our alleged recklessness, **Walvoord** deals only with one sub-issue broached in the book: the historical development of eschatological understanding in the Church (*House Divided*, Ch. 15): "Though denied by **Bahnsen** and Gentry the Christian church was predominantly premillennial in the first century and most of the second century until A.D. 190" (p. 370). The vast bulk of his "review" seeks to correct my analysis of the history of eschatological development. This is odd for several reasons.

First, the significance of the historical development of eschatology is a secondary issue – even on **Walvoord's** own analysis! He writes of us that we "never" face "the central question of whether postmillennialism is valid biblically, which is the point at issue" (p. 372). Then why does he never speak to the biblical issue in his "review," since this is the "central question" and "point at issue" in the debate?

Second, in *House Divided* we had to defend ourselves from an alleged unwarranted reliance on historical argument. House and Ice write: "Most dominion theology adherents, when challenged to defend the second coming do not cite Scripture as the basis for their belief; rather they cite the voice of mother church!"<sup>7</sup> Now comes **Walvoord** who gives virtually his entire "review" over to the teaching of "mother church"! Darned if you do; darned if you don't!

Third, **Walvoord's** "review" sets up our historical argument as if it is just a matter of our mere assertion: "Though denied by **Bahnsen** and Gentry the Christian church was predominantly premillennial in the first century and most of the second century" (p. 370). The "review" reader will have no inkling of the documentation of our argument.

In *House Divided* I cite such premillennial church fathers as **Justin Martyr** and **Irenaeus** as to the existence of anti-premillennial thought in their day. I cite such modern scholars as **Berkhof**, **Kromminga**, **Stonehouse**, **Shedd**, and **Peiters**, who dispute the predominance of premillennialism then. I even cite dispensationalist scholar, **Alan Patrick Boyd**, in this regard. I name those ancient Christian writings that were not premillennial.<sup>8</sup> In other words, I attempt to prove my point by a thorough investigation. But the reader of the "review" would never suspect as much.

But what does **Walvoord** do in rebuttal? He merely asserts that those centuries were "predominantly premillennial" (p. 370). Then he attempts to undermine all non-premillennial thinking by attributing its source to heretical allegorism (p. 371).

### Conclusion

In the final analysis, what does it matter? The theologian who urges us to defend our views from the Bible writes in his concluding paragraph: "One wonders how the writers of this book can read the newspapers with their accounts of increased crime and a decaying church and come up with the idea that Christianity is triumphant in the world" (p. 372).<sup>9</sup> And given **Walvoord's** statement as to the dominance of premillennialism in our era,<sup>10</sup> it makes one wonder about cause and effect.

7. H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989), p. 269. For our rebuttal see: *House Divided*, pp. 307-308.

8. Such as: 1 Clement, 2 Clement, *The Didache*, the Ignatian epistles, Polycarp's Epistle, *On the Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Barnabas, Hermas, Diognetus, Fragments of Papias, and *Reliques of the Elders*.

9. The phraseology here is typical dispensationalist distortion: Postmillennialists do not say Christianity is present/y "triumphant in the world."

10. "In the 20th century there has been a tremendous increase in studies in eschatology, and in some ways this is the century in which eschatology has come to the fore. For the first time since the early centuries of the church, premillennialism became a major factor. ." (p. 371).