

Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"

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THINGS THAT WENT

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I recently finished a major writing project entitled *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (1. C. E., 1992). This project took over a year to complete and was 585 pages long in double-spaced manuscript form. Originally I had thought it would be finished by Thanksgiving, 1991. But it ended up taking until the end of February, 1992. I was fortunate in that I was a postmillennialist, for at least I knew I had time on my hands. Plus, I did not have to sit out on a mountain eagerly watching and waiting. Yet, even though you enjoy researching and writing a project, you still long for its completion. Working on a publication project is fun; finishing the project is even more fun.

Then Along Comes DeMar

But then I have this nosey friend, Gary DeMar, who had just finished publishing his own book, *Last Days Madness*, on the Olivet Discourse. Just a few days prior to his annoying phone call, I had just quit getting up at 5:30 AM every morning to work on my *He Shall Have Dominion* book. I was satisfied that all was well. I said to my soul, "Soul, you have many bytes of data laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, 'drink, and be merry' (Luke 12:19). Now I could commit 'a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep' (Prov. 6:10). But DeMar had to set off an alarm by pointing out an apparent error he found in what I had been writing in *Dispensationalism in Transition*. He cometh to me saying, "Thou fool! This day your manuscript will be required of you: then whose will those things be which you have word-processed?" (Luke 12:20). His alarm, were it true, threatened to begin awaking me every morning at 5:30 AM again! If I was as mistaken as it seemed, I would have to make corrections in my book manuscript, for some of the material in the newsletter had been reworked for the book!

DeMar saw some things in my "Dispensational Dyslexia"¹ article that interested him, so he thought he would look up a few references I had made from J. Dwight Pentecost's *Things to Come*. He was surprised when my citation of Pentecost was *not even similar* to what he read in his copy of Pentecost's book. In fact, the argument that he read in Pentecost's book was the *exact opposite* of what I had claimed in my newsletter!

When DeMar called and asked, "What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:12). I marvelled greatly and answered and said, "I am not drunk as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day" (Acts 2:15).² So we double-checked the

reference over the phone, and 10 and behold, we *both were right!* I read him the paragraphs in my copy of Pentecost's *Things to Come* (a 1974 printing) and he read me the same sections *and* on the same pages in his copy of *Things to Come* (a 1987 printing). They were diametrically opposed!

Then we checked the back of the title pages in our copies of *Things to Come* to see if the two books were different *editions*. But alas! they were apparently the same edition. There was no note of any editing changes (although DeMar's copy was a later *printing* than my own).

Pentecost, Not the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Readers of *Dispensationalism in Transition* may remember my complaint that dispensationalists are prone constantly to reprint books even when they need some radical editing and updating. I have long thought that Pentecost's *Things to Come* (1958) was a prime candidate for updating, since it was continually being reprinted (100,000 copies in print) and was still accepted as a dispensational standard (most Christian bookstores still distribute it).

In that work he makes such radical errors as claiming Warfield was an amillennialist (pp. 387ff). This is despite Warfield's strongly held postmillennialism.³ He blatantly claimed postmillennialism had "no defenders or advocates in the present chiliastic discussions within the theological world" (p. 387). This is despite the fact that one year before the publication of his Pentecost's work Boettner published *The Millennium* (1957) and four years before it Campbell published *Israel and the New Covenant* (1954). In addition, when he sets out to critique covenant theology, he gets his definition, not from covenant theologians, but from anti-covenantal dispensationalist L. S. Chafer (p. 65)! When he analyzes postmillennialism, he provides a definition — provided by dispensationalist Walvoord (pp. 385-386)!

Although I had long lamented the anachronistic argument provided by his outmoded book, I simply assumed that he was not going to edit it. Sales were good. Why bother? There is an old saying: If its not broken too awfully bad, nobody's going to get seriously hurt, and you probably will not be found out any way, why fix it? A good

1. *Dispensationalism in Transition*, October, 1990.

2. I very much eschew drinking to excess, even though I am convinced the Bible allows drinking in moderation. See my: *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Baker: 1986). If interested, order from me for \$5.50 (including postage): 46 Main St., Conestee, SC 29636.

3. See: Warfield, "Jesus Christ the Propitiation for the Whole World" (1921) in *SSW-I*, pp. 167-177. "Antichrist" (1921) *ibid.*, 348-355. "The Impotent Widow and the Alleged Failure of Faith" (1913) in *SSW-II* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), pp. 698-711. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, Samuel E. Craig, ed., (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), "Are There Few That Be Saved?" (1915), pp. 334-350; "The Prophecies of St. Paul" (1886), pp. 463-502; "God's Immeasurable Love" (n.d.), pp. 505-522. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 663ff. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," *Princeton Theological Review* (October, 1904).

salesman accentuates the positive (*Things to Come* is a good doorstop, weighing about three pounds); why mention the negative (his research is second hand, was outdated when printed, and often patently erroneous)? But there is now more here than meets the eye.

Pentecost *has*, in fact, edited his book. DeMar stumbled on some major editorial changes tucked away on pages 146-149 (and perhaps elsewhere, for all we know). And it is strange that such fundamental changes could be made without some editorial notation. By definition an "edition" is "the total number of copies of a book, newspaper, etc. printed from the same *plates*, type, etc."⁴ When a book is updated or revised it is supposed to be marked as a different edition. If nothing else, this is a scholarly courtesy for later researchers.

But this was not done in *Things to Come*. The unwary reader would never know there had been another edition. There is a clearly marked *New Scofield Reference Bible* to replace the *Scofield Reference Bible*. That is easy enough to detect. But there is no notice of a *Things to Come* first edition and a *Things to Come* second edition. There is no new title *Things That Went*, indicating Pentecost changed views. For several years I have checked copies of his book while visiting Christian bookstores, just to see if it had been updated. Never finding a "second edition" notice, I thought it had not.

Now that I have used up over half of my newsletter space, I will get to the point (you can tell I am a preacher). I want to compare the radical changes made on a fundamentally important point for comparing dispensationalism and postmillennialism. Notice the differences introduced by Pentecost without any editorial indication or footnote notation (I do not have the first printing; apparently the 1958 first printing is the same as the 1974 eleventh printing):

The Mustard Seed Parable: 1974 Printing

"As the age progresses several facts are to be observed. (1) The age is characterized by an abnormal external growth. That which was to be an herb has become a tree – it has developed into a monstrosity. (2) This monstrosity has become the resting place for birds. In the first parable the birds represented that which was antagonistic to the program of God and consistency would demand that they be so interpreted here. The parable teaches that the enlarged sphere of profession has become inwardly corrupt. That is the characterization of this age" (p. 147).

The Mustard Seed Parable: 1987 Printing

"In Jewish idiom a mustard seed was used to weight what was considered the smallest measurable amount. Thus the insignificant beginning of the new form of the kingdom is being stressed. This part of the parable stresses the great growth of the kingdom when once it is introduced. The kingdom will grow from an insignificant beginning to great proportions. . Here the mustard reveals that the kingdom in its new form will have an insignificant beginning, but will grow to great size and multitudes will benefit from it" (pp. 147-148).

The Leaven Parable: 1974 Printing

"The progress of the age is marked, according to this

parable, (1) by the ministry of the woman. This evidently refers to the work of a false religious system (Rev. 2:20; 17: 1-8). . . (2) The age is marked by the introduction of the leaven. This figure is used in Scripture to portray that which is evil in character (Ex. 12:15; Lev. 2:11; 6:17; 10:12; Matt. 16:6; Mark 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6,8; Gal. 5:9). . There is a different emphasis in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. The mustard seed refers to the perversion of God's purpose in this age, while the leaven refers to a corruption of the divine agency, the Word, through which this purpose is realized" (pp. 147-148).

The Leaven Parable: 1987 Printing

"When leaven is used in Scripture it frequently connotes evil. Its use in the sacrifices that represent the perfection of the person and work of Christ (Lev. 2:1-3) shows it is not always so used. Here the emphasis is not on leaven itself as though to emphasize its character, but rather on the fact that the leaven has been hidden in meal, thus stressing the way leaven works when once introduced into the meal. . This is intended to stress the way the new form of the kingdom will develop. The power in the kingdom will not be external but internal. By its internal working it will effect an external transformation. . . . [T]his new kingdom will flourish, not by military might, but by a new principle – the power within" (p. 148).

What's a Researcher to Do?

These are fundamental changes that raise fundamental questions. *Hermeneutically*: Does leaven always represent evil? Or does leaven *frequently* represent evil. What becomes of "consistency demands" (p. 147, 1974 printing)? *Exegetically*: Does the leaven parable speak of an evil influence in Christendom? Or does the leaven parable speak of a beneficent internal influence? *Eschatologically*: Will Christianity become a monstrous anomaly as history progresses? Or will Christianity grow by a gracious influence – in history?

Pentecost's later book, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), is something of a condensation and popularization of his doctoral dissertation, *Things to Come*. To know the mind of Pentecost today, one would do well to bypass the earlier, partially edited, totally hidden editorial work in favor of the newer one. Perhaps I can do some more research in tracing out the development in Pentecost's thought and the hidden changes in his *Things to Come*.

Some day you may be arguing for postmillennialism and employing the Mustard Seed and Leaven Parables. You may (probably will!) hear an objection on the basis of an early Pentecost-like view of the Parables. If so, just whip out the newer model Pentecost. You can quickly dispatch the faulty notion that "leaven" always represents evil by citing a genuine DTS prophet.

Somehow dispensationalists do not understand the *reductio ad absurdum* involved in pointing out the error of the principle "once an evil symbol always an evil symbol. " That *reductio* would be: Since a lion is symbolic of Satan in 1 Peter 5:8 it must be symbolic of Satan in Revelation 5:5. Clearly such is not the case. Unquestionably, then, the early Pentecost-like argument regarding leaven is fatally flawed as an argument against postmillennialism.

4. Webster's New Twentieth Century Unabridged Dictionary (2d ed: New York: Prentice Hall, 1979), p. 576