

Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"

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THE ICEMAN COMETH! MORONISM REIGNETH!

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

In my last newsletter I began considering the absurd charge that **Reconstructionist** theology is intrinsically and systemically anti-Semitic. In that article I was responding to a study in Tommy Ice's newsletter *Biblical Perspectives* (5:1; Jan-Feb, 1992). His piece was entitled: "Hal Lindsey, Dominion Theology, and Anti-Semitism." I now continue this foray into the Twilight Zone of dispensational thought.

I am well aware that new-school dispensational theologians are offering radical emendations to dispensational theology. And I understand, therefore, that Ice's system is basically fossilized (his name obviously demonstrates he is from the Ice Age). Nevertheless, the man-in-the-pew moves slowly through fossil museums. John Q. Christianpublic has as his anthem: "O Dem Bones!" He seems to avoid paradigm shifts by gnawing on the fossilized bones of simplistic, out-dated dispensational presentations. Consequently, there are undoubtedly a number of gullible Christians out there who take this Lindsey-Ice conspiratorial charge of anti-Semitism seriously.

The Charge of the Light-weight Brigade

The stated purpose of the January-February, 1992, edition of Ice's newsletter is given in his first paragraph (in this section all parenthetical page references refer to the edition of his newsletter cited above): "I want to state why I believe that Hal [Lindsey] is correct" about his anti-Semitism charge (p. 1).

Thinking – and I use the term loosely – he has proved his point, he closes his six page article with these words: "I hope that you have come to realize that Hal Lindsey's claims in *The Road to Holocaust* are not something that should be apologized or repented for, nor are they false accusations, and neither should 'the book [be] pulled from the market,' as suggested by Gary DeMar" (p. 6).

As indicated in our last issue, Ice and Lindsey's basic "problem" with Reconstruction thought is that it has no *special place* for the exaltation of *national-political* Israel in a millennial era. Worse still, Reconstruction theology follows the pattern of most non-premillennial, evangelical theologies in interpreting the flow of redemptive history *supersedes* *sierra/y*. That is, we believe that in the unfolding of the plan of God in history, *the Christian Church is the very fruition of the redemptive purpose of God*. As such, the multi-racial, international Church of Jesus Christ *supersedes* racial, national Israel as the focus of the kingdom of God.¹ Indeed, we believe that the Church becomes "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), the "seed of Abraham" (Gal. 3:29), "the circumcision" (Phil. 3:3), the "temple of God" (Eph. 2:19-22), and so forth. We believe that Jew and Gentile are eternally merged into a "new man" in the Church

of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:12-18). What God hath joined together let no man put asunder!

Consider Ice's complaint: "**Reconstructionists** advocate the replacement of Old Testament Israel with the church, often called the 'New Israel.' They believe that Israel does not have a future different from any other nation" (p. 1). In summarizing a charge by Lindsey, Ice writes: "What is the basis upon which Lindsey makes such claims [of philosophical anti-Semitism]? His basis is that historically replacement theology (the church replaces the Jews as the new or true Israel, and Israel has no future as a distinct nation within God's plan) has been the theological foundation upon which anti-Semitism has been built within the confines of Christianity. Therefore, Lindsey has seen in the 1980s² a revival of replacement of theology (the historic cause of anti-Semitism) spearheaded by **Dominionist** leadership. His concern is that for the first time in our *lifetime*,³ there is a decline of those who believe in the Pretrib Rapture and a future for national Israel, often known as **Dispensationalism**, and a dramatic shift towards replacement theology" (p. 2). All I can say is, "Yay!" (Tommy does occasionally bring me great joy, when he speaks of the decline of dispensationalism.)

In my last issue I mentioned in passing that his ill-founded plaint against supersessionistic, theology and his laying at the feet of **Reconstructionists** the scurrilous charge of anti-Semitism was a two-edged sword. The "logic" he uses can be and, indeed, has been used to discredit Christianity and the Bible, as well as our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Let us see the dangers of his **bull-in-a-china-shop** theology. Due to space limitations I will only deal with the discrediting of the Christian faith that is inherent in the anti-supersessionism of the **Iceman**. And I will do this illustratively.

Slicing and Dicing Christianity

Ice apparently does not realize that the *idea of supersessionism is fundamental to the Christian faith itself*. The basic idea of supersessionism is that *Christianity has superseded Judaism as the true faith*. Supersessionism – which is despised by liberals, as well as by Ice – shamelessly endorses the words of Christ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

Ultimately, supersessionism is orthodox Christianity proclaiming that "neither is there salvation in any other: for

1. And since the Church is international, it includes racial Israel, as well.

2. Lindsey also saw in the 1980s a countdown to Armageddon that did not come to pass! Hal Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam, 1980). This ridiculous book is still on bookstore shelves! See what I mean by John Q. Christianpublic's fossilized bone-gnawing?

3. Ice wisely limits the diminished influence of **pre-rapture, Zionistic** theology to his and Lindsey's own *lifetime*. This **aberrational** theology arose only a century before Lindsey was **born**. He wisely avoided speaking as if this were the historic **position** of the church.

there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). **Supersession** theology is exclusivistic in arguing: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Supersessionism arrogantly proclaims that "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Let me illustrate how this is so from a recent spate of letters and articles to the *Biblical Archaeology Review* magazine.

Illustrating the Error

A Roman Catholic article entitled "The Church's Teaching on Supersessionism" undermines the Protestant view of the necessity of converting from Judaism to **Christianity**⁴: "For Catholics, the era in which it was possible to espouse any theory that the Christian Church has 'superseded' or 'replaced' the Jewish people as God's Chosen People in the history of salvation ended definitively on October 28, 1965. On that day the world's Catholic bishops, together with the bishop of Rome, Pope Paul VI, signed the declaration, *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time), of the Second Vatican Council." He laments ancient contempt for "Judaism" because it "was posited on the erroneous notion that God had 'repudiated' the Jews because of their so-called failure to accept Jesus as the Christ"! *Is this not what Ice is saying in essence?*

Fisher continues: "The destruction of the Temple and the Diaspora are not to be utilized polemically as a proof of divine punishment from Jewish 'failure' to 'recognize' Jesus. Rather, the Jewish 'no' is properly understood as a 'yes' to God's continuing call to them. Jewish refusal to **convert** to Christianity is not to be understood as anything less than a faithful witness to God."

Of a Pope John Paul II statement, Fisher comments: "Clearly, such language . . . indicates how far Church [i.e., Roman Catholic] teaching on the official level has come from anything resembling supersessionism or the old 'replacement' theologies of the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. No Catholics who wish to consider themselves in conformity with the **Magisterium** of the Church can espouse or countenance such views today." *Nor may dispensationalists!*

C. Nicky **Blackford**, a United Methodist pastor, wrote: "It always saddens me to read of Christians and ministerial colleagues whose theology has not advanced beyond the Middle Ages. **Nicola Greci**, . . . wrote in the March/April 1991 issue that the Jews must accept the Christian covenant to be accepted by God. It seems important for me to say that such a god is not the God that most of us worship. . . . I have no doubt that my Jewish friends have a vital relationship with the God **I serve**."⁵ **Blackford despises supersessionism, as does Ice.**

Bruce A. Broerton, United Methodist pastor, also recoils at Christian exclusivist in supersessionist theology: "Our denomination has long fostered a relationship of respect and cooperation with our Jewish brothers and sis-

ters. Such bigoted intolerance and arrogance as Mr. **Grenci** displayed in his letter would indicate to me that he is seriously at odds with the United Methodist Church. . . I can only feel very sad for him and pray that someday he will grow in his ability to tolerate and accept others different from himself" (*Ibid.*).

Kathleen Marble responded with disgust: "What kind of 'pastor' would spew out such hateful bigotry against the Jewish people and the way they worship God? I am not Jewish, but I was brought up to respect all manner of worship, be it Catholic, Protestant, Charismatic, Jewish etc. We all believe in God, whether we call him Allah, Jehovah or just plain God" (*ibid.*). *Is dispensational-like anti-supersessionism leading to the Antichrist's One-World Church?!*

Defending the Truth

Lewis Entze, *defended* supersessionism: "It seems that the thing currently in vogue in intellectual circles is the seeking and finding of anti-Semitism. It seems the uprooting of anti-Semitism has such priority that, if need be, basic Christian doctrine can be jettisoned. If Pastor **Grenci's** is your worst anti-Semitic letter, you are blessed indeed. The letter stated that God's cleansing is 'given in the Christ.' That is basic Christian doctrine. . . I am *not* anti-Semitic. I feel that anti-Semitism is extremely detestable, second only to denying Jesus Christ as the *only* Savior" (*ibid.*).

Another defender of **Grenci's** supersessionism was George E. Mohun: "Pastor **Grenci** goes on to say that Judaism rejects Christ as the Messiah. That is neither anti-Semitic nor a gratuitous insult. It is a statement of fact. The difficulty with such words as 'anti-Semitic' and 'racism' is that they lack clear definition while implying an imputing immoral motives and behavior. As such, they make the perfect meat-ax" (p. 16). My sentiments exactly!

Lawrence M. Downs defends John **Strugnell's** basic alleged anti-Semitic sentiments: "John **Strugnell's** great crime, it seems, is in being bold enough to say today what the apostle Paul said 2,000 years ago and what orthodox Christianity has always believed. I quote Mr. **Strugnell**: 'The correct answer of Jews to Christianity is to become Christian.'

I realize that such statements are not popular, diplomatic or acceptable to your editorial philosophy, but if that is bigotry, anti-Semitic and contemptible, then all of us who still subscribes to classic Christianity are guilty also" (*Ibid.*).

Robert T. Tuten followed suit: "You are in error to suggest that supersessionism. . . equals anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism do exist in the world, but they are not defined by supersessionism" (p. 19). Rev. **Robert F. Cerar** wrote: "You assume that supersessionism is anti-Semitism. I have never heard such a thing before. Really, your continued ranting verges on paranoia. Anti-Semitism is hatred. " Kenneth M. Sears: "To believe that God would supersede the old covenant with a new one is to be no more anti-Semitic than the prophet Jeremiah. . . (Jeremiah 31 :31). Evidently God intended his new covenant with **Israel** to displace the old. Real anti-Semitism is not a matter of these theological concepts; anti-Semitism is a matter of murderous hatred" (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

Supersessionism is orthodox Christianity. The anti-supersessionism of Ice and Lindsey is more compatible with official Roman Catholic dogma and liberalism than with evangelical sentiments.

4. Eugene J. Fisher, "The Church's Teaching on Supersessionism," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 17:2 (March-April, 1991) 58. Fisher is Director of the secretariat for Catholic-Jewish **Relations** of the National Conference of Catholic **Bishops**. This is a one-page article, so all citations from it are from page 58.

5. In "Queries and Comments," *Biblical Archaeology of Review*, 17:4 (July-August, 1991) 14. All the following quotations and page references are from this issue of BAR.