



# Dispensationalism in Transition



Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"

SCOFIELDISM

PIETISM

VI  
Vol. VII, No. 11

©Kenneth L. Gentry, 1993

November, 1993

## A CURE FOR RAPTURE FEVER: EDUCATION

### Introduction

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

Gary North has produced a new work: *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism is Paralyzed* (1993). This interesting work functions somewhat as a counter-part to Gary DeMar's *Last Days Madness: The Folly of Trying to Predict When Christ Will Return* (1991) and as a rather vigorous update of Dwight Wilson's *Armageddon Now!: The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel Since 1917 [1977]* (1991). North's new book is more-or-less a popular demonstration of the cultural ramifications of millennialism that are treated academically in his important work *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990).

In this new 250 page work, North drives home the danger of the imminency doctrine in dispensationalism. It is a doctrine that has given rise to a favorite dispensational past-time: date-setting. Consequently, imminent expectations are tempting dispensationalists "above that which they are able." And as such, imminency is a position that leads dispensationalism into embarrassing situations. North argues that such is embarrassing dispensationalism to death. Even some dispensational theologians admit this problem.

For instance, Robert F. Lightner writes: "Sometimes individuals who embrace a particular view of end-time events embarrass others who hold the same view and they even put the view in poor light by their radical and extreme viewpoints. This has happened through the years and continues to go on among those who believe Christ will return literally. I refer particularly to date setting for Christ's return."<sup>1</sup> Then after mentioning the Edgar C. Whisenant debacle he laments the rise of various pre-millennial cults: Seventh-day Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God. He does not mention another premillennial last days cult: the Mormons.

More interestingly, Lightner does mention Hal Lindsey, pop theologian extraordinaire. He mentions Lindsey immediately after his lamentation above and following upon his reference to those last days cults: "Hal Lindsey, who rather recently popularized the pretribulational view, predicted Christ would return about forty years after the May 14, 1948 establishment of the nation Israel. See his *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and his more recent: *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* in which he asserts that this present generation is the one that will witness the return of Christ" (Ibid., 172).

In *Rapture Fever*, North studies the paralyzing effect of the imminency doctrine upon Christian endeavor, as well as the embarrassing consequences of failed expectations. Societal paralysis results in the reduction of Christian cultural influence. I have long associated dispensationalism's rise to dominance in the 1900s with the decline of Christian influ-

ence in the mid-1900s. North shows how this is so in chapters entitled: "Endless Unfulfilled Prophecies Produce Paralysis," "Fear of Man Produces Paralysis," "Pessimism Produces Paralysis," "Dispensationalism Removes Earthly Hope," etc.

### Dispensational Redivivus

A few years ago I suggested that dispensationalism would fade out by the year 2000, as Israel's re-birth to nationhood faded into the distant past and as more of their prophetic speculations failed. Now I am worried it is transmuting into Dispensationalism Redivivus. The gullibility of the American Christian is incredible. Let me give two reasons for my fears:

First, I was interviewed for two hours on WMCA radio in New York City in August.<sup>2</sup> The interview was on the topic of my book, *The Beast of Revelation*. Unfortunately, I am shielded from daily dispensational fears since I no longer dwell among dispensationalists. In a way, I was not ready for the naivete of some whose positions are set in concrete.

I was accused of anti-semitism because of my views of the relationship of Israel and the Church. That is, that the Church superseded Israel as the larger, more inclusive, New Covenant era people of God and which is, therefore, the fruit of ancient Israel. Of course, I am used to that from Tommy Ice. But the tenacity of those who are not theologically inclined and who have swallowed dispensationalism hook, line, and sinker was wholly incredible.

I also met with shock and disbelief when I informed one caller that I believe that Daniel's Seventy Weeks have been fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> He insisted that the Seventy Weeks referred to 490 years (a week = seven years), to which I agreed. But when I told him he could not simply insert a 2000 year gap after the 489th week/year and before the 490th week/year, he was flabbergasted. "You do not take the Bible literally," he complained. There was simply no way I could bring him to the point of seeing that he was reading an entire, pre-fabricated system into the text of Daniel 9. He could not see that the measuring rod of 490 years would be wholly destroyed if that 490 year time frame were stretched out over 2500 years! He was lost to the world of reason and exegesis!

Second, now that Yassar Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization have struck a political deal with Israel (September, 1993), I fear I will have to give dispensationalism another ten years or so. Is this the false peace that is to characterize the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation, which peace will be broken to the detriment of the Jews? Is this the quiet before the storm which will wipe out two-thirds of the Jewish people (on dispensationalism's analysis)?

When you look at Arafat's picture in the paper with that houndstooth headwrap, while you have one eye closed, and you are peering from a certain angle after *one too* many glasses of wine, and with the sun shining just right, and with his head cocked slightly starboard, you can catch a glimpse of what might conceivably appear to reflect the possible shape of ten horns (Rev. 17)! And I happen to know from good sources that he has ten toes (Dan. 2)! And who would deny that he looks like a Beast (Rev. 13)? And what of that name that speaks of a false peace? Yassar; he obviously is a "yes-man" working to get his will done! And his name is made up of two words with six letters each – just wait until we learn his middle name (notice "middle" has six letters)!

In other words, dispensationalism is alive as far as popular audience goes, even if not all that well among its academic institutions. Gary North shows how various dispensational institutions are closing shop or having financial troubles due to low enrollment. He did not know that my alma mater, Tennessee Temple College, had declined from almost 3000 students (when I was there in the early 1970s) to a student body of about 600 now. Apparently, dispensational institutions are being raptured out of the world one at a time!

#### Christ College to the Rescue

As I wander through the wastelands known as Christian bookstores . . . . As I consider the implications of North's and DeMar's analyses . . . . As I endure the illogic of well-meaning Christian radio talk show callers, I wonder how we can re-orient Christians to think biblically. This is a gargantuan task.

The problem in Russia is an analogous problem. The people there have lived so long with the "safety net" of communism that they cannot adapt easily to the new-found freedom and a free-market economy. Likewise is it with the average American evangelical: Without the Rapture soon and a Temple to worship in, what will we do?

I believe the answer lies in promoting a thoroughly biblical education. We need a whole new generation of Christians who are not so blinded by "dispensational truths" that they can no longer think properly. This is where Christ College comes in.

I am on the Board of Trustees and am Professor of Bible at Christ College in Greenville, South Carolina. Christ College, founded in 1989, is committed to framing in a biblical worldview - a worldview that excludes dispensationalism and includes an optimistic eschatology. Three of its distinctive (published in its catalog) include the following (which I quote):

**"Biblical Worldview.** We are committed to teaching a comprehensive biblical world and life view as derived from scriptural Reformed doctrine. We believe that the Bible is authoritative in all to which it speaks and that it speaks (explicitly or by good and necessary inference) to all things - including, philosophy, government, economics, literature, and all else. Thus, the Bible is the foundation of all knowledge. The Bible provides the framework by which all issues

are analyzed, evaluated, and understood. 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)."

**"Gospel Optimism.** We believe that Christianity can change a culture the better, as obedient believers applying the truths of the Word of God to all they do. We believe in the ultimate success of the Gospel of God's sovereign grace in our world and we believe that this truth can and should make a difference now – in philosophy, politics, and culture. The gates of hell shall not stand before the advance of Christ's kingdom. 'And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (Matthew 16:18)."

**"Theistic Ethics.** We hold a very high view of God's biblical 'Moral' Law, as contained in both the Old and New Testaments and where not altered by the advent of Christ Jesus the King according to New Testament revelation. The entire Bible is our standard for familial, ecclesiastical, and socio-political relationships. 'Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law' (Romans 3:31)."

Teaching courses at Christ College presently are: Dr. Greg Bahnsen (philosophy and apologetics), Dr. Kevin Clauson (government and economics), Dr. Roger Schultz (history), Dr. Jerry Crick (theology), Dr. Carl Curtis (English), Mr. Michael Mang (Greek), and myself (Bible). We now have thirteen full-time students (from Hawaii, Michigan, Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, and South Carolina) and several auditors. We are anticipating adding about five more students in January and increasing our student body by 50% next year (based on pre-enrollment assurances).

Write for information to: Christ College, P.O. Box 9084, — Greenville, SC 29604. If you can provide financial support to the promotion of Christ College, such would be greatly appreciated and would allow us to expand our program. Although we are financially stable, we are not in a position for growth without further assistance of God's people. We are now preparing to purchase some computers for our computer courses. Perhaps you would like to designate a gift to that project,

If we can train up a generation of Christians who knew not Scofield, perhaps we could re-orient Christian thinking in an optimistic direction. But we cannot make bricks without straw.

<sup>1</sup>R.P. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 171.

<sup>2</sup>For a copy of the WMCA interview, send \$5.00 to address in footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup>For a copy of an extensive analysis of Daniel 9:24-27 (much more thorough than in my *He Shall Have Dominion*), send \$3.00 to me at 46 Main St., Conestee, SC 29636.