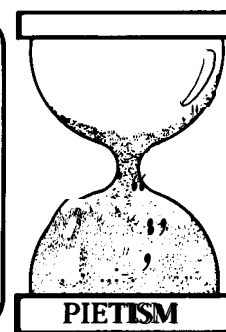


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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DISPENSATIONAL METHODOLOGY IS CONTAGIOUS: Part II

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

We turn our attention for the second time to millennialist Herman Hanko's critical review of my *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*. His review is found in *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* (November, 1993) on pages 33-37. Due to frustrations beyond my control, I will have to make my response three newsletters long, rather than two, as originally stated.

As I indicated in our previous newsletter, this may seem unusual in light of the purpose of this newsletter to expose dispensational errors. But there is a method in my madness: Hanko's methodology and conclusions in analyzing and rebutting my book are remarkably similar to Walvoord's critique of my *House Divided: The Break-up of Dispensational Theology*.¹ Both are superficial and anti-contextual. Besides, this newsletter is not merely a *genera/* expose of dispensationalism, but, more specifically, a *postmillennial* critique of dispensationalism. Hence our defense of postmillennialism. Now, let's get to work!

The Great Commission

Hanko (p. 35): "Especially the great commission refers to the post-*roil* kingdom here on earth because the text speaks of the Christianization of every area of life" (261). But where is the proof of such an assertion?

This seems to be a rhetorical question, the effectiveness of which demands an audience which has not and will not read *He Shall Have Dominion*. At least Walvoord only dealt with one chapter of *House Divided* (ch. 15). So if we complain to Walvoord that he read only one chapter for his review, he could respond: "So? That's all I reviewed!" But due to his wide-ranging references to and citations of particular pages, Hanko leaves the appearance of having thoroughly analyzed and presented the argument.

Is Hanko sincerely asking the question, "Where is the proof of such an assertion?" If so, I can give him a quick response: "It is on the remainder of the page that you got the quotation from. And on the two that follow it. And, while you are at it, go ahead and read the preceding page, as well. You will find it helpful."

Contextually, in those pages I expressly note that the text commands us to disciple "all nations" regarding "a//things" Christ taught us. I also point out that His teaching was for all of life. Exegetically, I mention the distributive function of "all" in "a// authority." I note that this most definitely speaks of all authority in every area of life, not just in the church and home. Hence, it involves political authority, as well. Theologically, I bring in other verses in supplementation of this Christianization process of all of life (e.g., Matt. 12:36; Luke 3:11-12; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Col. 3:17). And, of course, the whole point of the 600 page book *He Shall Have*

Dominion is to argue the point of the universal proportions of the conquest of the Gospel.

Hanko's review makes it appear that I simply said in one sentence "The Great Commission speaks of the Christianization of every area of life" and then moved on without comment. When in fact, I deal with the Great Commission on pages 260-263?

The Heavenly Jerusalem

Hanko (p. 35): *Even the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2-5) is referred to this earthly kingdom on which the post-mills pin their hope* (363).

This is all that he says about this matter! The PRTJ reader, while thumbing through the journal looking for more articles on the free offer of the gospel and common grace, would be greatly misled if he thought I merely stated the position and then moved on. If he stopped and read this review, he would think that I gave no argumentation whatsoever for applying the Revelation 21 passage to the earthly kingdom. Neither would he realize that I see it as having its fountain in Heaven (as does the Church) and its consummate perfection in the New Earth (as does the Church).

But I point out something quite important in HSHD on the very page mentioned by Hanko: In the chapter immediately following (and concluding!) the New Jerusalem revelation, John says in Revelation 22:6: "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which *must shortly* take place." In Revelation 22:10 he says again: "And he said to me, 'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.'" And John is not the only writer to refer to the present influence of the New Jerusalem, see also: Galatians 4:26-31 and Hebrews 12:22-24. Thus, John speaks of the New Creation as flowing from Heaven in the first century. In fact, I provide an entire chapter (ch. 17) outlining the flow and argument of Revelation, so the reader might understand where I am coming from.

The Kingdom of God

Hanko (p. 35): *Without any attempt to explain their meaning, Gentry also claims that Luke 17:20..., John 18:36-37..., Matthew 27:11, Mark 15:2, Luke 23:3..., in no way deny an earthly kingdom. This is hard to believe; a man who claims to base his view on Scripture refuses to explain these texts.* (HSHD, 218)

Hanko is correct on this point: In the preface of the book I mentioned very clearly that I was going to do a study of postmillennialism, but that I absolutely refuse to explain these passages. I indicated that no one knew where I lived and, therefore, they could not coerce me into explaining these

passages. *Not!*

Really now Did I "refuse" to explain these passages? Admittedly, I did not give in-depth exposition to these passages. But Hanks's charge is that "without *any* attempt to explain their meaning, Gentry claims that [these passages] in no way deny an earthly kingdom." Two problems arise in his critical evaluation.

In the first place, my point in the very context that he mentions is to prove the *spiritual* nature of the kingdom over against the carnal, political kingdom of dispensationalism! I do not claim these passages "in no way deny an earthly kingdom." My point was of the spiritual *presence* of the kingdom in Christ's ministry. A point I would think Hanks himself would affirm. The very essence of the kingdom is spiritual, rather than political.

Secondly, as indicated above, I did make an (abbreviated) attempt to "explain their meaning." The context of my argument, again, was of the spiritual nature and the very presence of the kingdom, which these verses support.

In the very next paragraph after listing these verses (to which Hanks refers) I write: "Although He defines His kingdom as something other-worldly, rather than essentially political (as was Caesar's kingdom), He nevertheless indicates His kingdom is present: He speaks of 'my kingdom' (v. 36a). He claims to have His own 'servants' (even though they do not fight with sword to defend Him, v. 36b). He clearly states 'I am king' (v. 37a). And, as we might expect, given our previous study of Mark 1:14-15, He states that it was for that very purpose He was born into the world (v. 37b)!"

In a footnote I direct the reader to pages 225-227, where I cite these passages again, indicating they teach a *spiritual* rather than a *political* kingdom as in dispensationalism.

Just two paragraphs before this offensive "refusal" I deal with Luke 17:20-21 (*HSHD* 21 7). And in each of these cases I argue for the spiritual essence of the kingdom, much like Hanks would argue! My point at this juncture in *HSHD* is to show the kingdom has been established and is present during Christ's ministry, being essentially spiritual (though the spiritual kingdom has a transformational impact on human life and society).

Persecution

Hanks (p. 35): *To talk about persecution is "pessimistic" (457), and, according to Gentry, the Scriptures never speak of tribulation as the lot of God's people in the world (338ff.).*

This statement is horribly anti-contextual and absolutely erroneous. Do I really argue that "the Scriptures never speak of tribulation as the lot of God's people in the world"? He makes it sound as if I believe that Christians will *never* suffer tribulation in the world! The statement to which he refers on my page 457 is: "Many argue that it is the Church's ordained lot to suffer through the entirety of history only receiving its glory beyond the present era. That being the case, there is no room for a long era of righteousness, peace, and prosperity." I then quote Hendriksen who states the gospel age "will finally result in the complete destruction of the church as a mighty and influential organization of the spread of the Gospel." If that is not pessimistic, I do not know what is!

My position is that the church does, in fact, suffer persecution in history – it has for a long time! On page 493 I comment regarding 2 Timothy 3: 1: "And though it is true

that perilous "times" (*chairoi*) shall come, this does not demand a pessimistic position. The Greek term here indicates 'seasons.' It is the logical error of quantification to read this reference to (some) "seasons" of perilous times as if it said *all* times in the future will be perilous Postmillennialists are well aware of the 'seasons' of perilous times that beset the church under the Roman Empire and at other times."

How can this be construed to mean I deny Scripture ever allows for persecution to be the lot of Christians? I resolutely deny, however, that this is the *sum total* of the Christian lot in history. I argue that these perilous times will give way to glorious victory by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The pessimism that I assert, and which Hanks does not understand, is that which claims Christians can expect *only* persecution in time.

Social Gospel

Hanks (p. 36): *The sad part of all this is that Gentry makes it very clear that post-rol really means gospocial. The very idea of post-rol that the kingdom of Christ shall be realized in this world by a 'total transformation of culture' requires that the institutions of society shall be Christianized and brought under the rule of Christ. If this is not social gospocialism, I do not know what it is.*

Of course, here in his last sentence he admits he does not know what "social gospocialism" is. So, I suppose there is no point in criticizing his deficiency of understanding.

But for others who are able to exercise critical discernment, it must be pointed out that "socialgospocialism" is liberal religiosity attempting to make man better by changing the environment through legislation. What I argue for as a post-millennialist, is that God will change the environment as more and more men are converted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the efficacious work of the Spirit as they are sanctified through the Word (John 17:1 7). It is ridiculous to think that if the Gospel were to win the hearts and lives of billions of people (as I argue it will) there would be no biblical warrant — for these billions to make any impact on their culture. That is absurd! And that is why I charge Hanks with "Cultural Antinomianism" (Appendix A).

Question: Who wrote the following, Dave Hunt, Hal Lindsey, or Herman Hanks? "The post-rol theologians are preoccupied with this world." Answer: All three! (See p. 36 of Hanks's article. And I am sure you know the Hunt and Lindsey references.) As with Hunt, Hanks asks the question (in essence): "Whatever Happened to Heaven?" With Gary North, I answer: "Heaven is for dead people!" Praise God for our eternal glory, but let us not forget, while living here upon the earth: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

Join us next month for the conclusion to the thrilling saga illustrating that, indeed, dispensational methodology is contagious.

¹ See: Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Where's the Beef?", *Dispensationalism in Transition*, 3:11 (Nov., 1990).

² For a forty-five minute lecture on the Great Commission, entitled "The Four Ails of the Great Commission," send \$5.00 to me at: 46 Main St., Conestee, SC 29636. I also have available a seventeen tape set course (thirty-five hours of instruction) on postmillennialism, for \$68.00. It is my Christ College lectures and is suitable for individual or group study.