

## **Dr. Bahnsen Addresses the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting**

*By Dr. Greg Bahnsen*

On November 21 and 22, in Kansas City, Dr. Bahnsen had the opportunity to address over 600 Bible teachers and scholars who attended the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. This year's topic was the Kingdom of God.

Dr. Bahnsen was invited to participate on a panel to discuss the ways in which Christ's redemptive kingdom is manifested between the first and second advents. He represented the postmillennial position. There were also spokesmen for dispensationalism, charismatic theology, and amillennialism.

Many attendees expressed appreciation for Dr. Bahnsen's challenging position and congenial spirit. Even one of the lecturers the next morning openly complimented Dr. Bahnsen's presentation and admitted he would now need to rethink his eschatological position.

It became evident from the panel discussion (as well as many lectures at the convention) that dispensationalism is undergoing a major reconstruction in our day. The panelist who appeared with Dr. Bahnsen openly agreed to "inaugurated eschatology" -- the view that Christ established His kingdom at the first advent -- which is contrary to historic dispensational distinctives.

The dispensationalist professor said he would have to disagree with Dr. Bahnsen, however. According to the dispensationalist, the manifestation of the kingdom in this age is solely internal and spiritual. The outward and socio-political manifestation of the kingdom awaits the return of Christ to establish an earthly millennium. Dr. Bahnsen responded that this internal/external distinction is arbitrary and not found in the Bible. At the ETS convention Dr. Bahnsen also presented a paper on the visible success of the kingdom between the advents. The lecture was very well attended and received. A professor in a presbyterian seminary complimented the content and style of the presentation, saying that "it is lectures like this" which will lead the Reformed world back into a postmillennial outlook, if anything is going to do so.

Tapes of the panel discussion (\$9), as well as of Dr. Bahnsen's full lecture on postmillennialism (\$6), are available from Covenant Tape Ministry, 24198 Ash Court, Auburn, CA 95603. You will enjoy them both and find them beneficial.

Excerpt from the Lecture

There is enough misunderstanding of evangelical, Bible-believing postmillennialism abroad today that it would be worthwhile to make note of the kind of constitutive doctrinal convictions which have been set forth by its representatives.

1. Evangelical postmillennialists champion the inspiration, infallibility, and sole doctrinal authority of the Bible.

2. Evangelical postmillennialists believe that fallen man is totally unable to do any saving good, cannot atone for his sins, and can become a member of the kingdom of God only through the redemptive work of the Savior and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

3. Evangelical postmillennialists teach the glorious, personal return of Jesus Christ at the end of history to judge the world.

4. Evangelical postmillennialists insist that at his first advent Jesus, the Son of God, came as the Messianic or Mediatorial King and established His saving kingdom among men on earth. Citing Philippians 2, Acts 2, Ephesians 1, Hebrews 1 and a host of other Biblical texts, William Symington wrote these words in his study, *Messiah the Prince, or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ*: "Christ's appointment [to the kingly office] was still farther intimated by his actual investiture with regal power at and after his resurrection.... Christ's appointment gives him a rightful claim to the implicit and conscientious obedience of every moral creature.... This appointment affords ample security for the overthrow of all Christ's enemies, and the ultimate establishment of his kingdom in the world." David Brown could hardly be clearer: "Christ's proper kingdom is already in being; commencing formally on His ascension to the right hand of God, and continuing unchanged, both in character and form, till the final judgment."

5. Evangelical postmillennialists are painfully aware that those who belong to Christ -- the church -- are appointed to suffering in this world, and will inevitably undergo persecution and affliction, in following their Savior and King. Listen again to Symington: "The members of the church have many enemies. The devil, the world, and the flesh, are in league against them. They wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickednesses in high places. They are required to assume the character, equipments, and attitude of soldiers.... Satan, the chief and leader of these enemies, exasperated at his overthrow, makes a desperate effort to regain his lost dominion over them; and, although he cannot succeed, he does much to annoy such as have been rescued from his grasp."

Charles Hodge commented upon 2 Corinthians 4 that Paul there "compares himself to a combatant, first hardly pressed, then hemmed in, then pursued, then actually cast down. This was not an occasional experience, but his life was like that of Christ, an uninterrupted succession of indignities and suffering.... We constantly illustrate in our person the sufferings of Christ. We are treated as he was treated; neglected, defamed, despised, maltreated...."

6. Evangelical postmillennialists believe that the gospel is to be preached to all nations by the church prior to the second advent of Christ, eventually bringing worldwide conversion, and that this is the church's calling from God. Charles Hodge taught: "The first great event which is to precede the second coming of Christ, is the universal proclamation of the Gospel.... The conversion of the Gentile world is the work assigned the Church under the present dispensation." B. B. Warfield argued that "precisely what the risen Lord, who has been made head over all things for his church, is doing through these years that stretch between his first and second comings, is conquering the world to himself; and the world is to be nothing less than a converted world.... All conflict, then, will be over, the conquest of the world will be complete, before Jesus returns to earth."

7. Evangelical postmillennialism maintains that the victorious advance of Christ's kingdom in the world will take place in terms of the present, peaceful and Spiritual power of the gospel, rather than through a radically different principle of operation, namely Christ's physical presence on earth using violence to subdue opposition. A. A. Hodge put it this way: "The Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, clearly reveal that the gospel is to exercise an influence over all branches of the human family, immeasurably more extensive and more thoroughly transforming than any it has ever realized in time past. This end is to be gradually attained through the spiritual presence of Christ in the ordinary dispensation of Providence, and ministrations of the church." Charles Hodge insisted that "There is no intimation in the New Testament that the work of converting the world is to be effected by any other means than those now in use.... It is to dishonour the Gospel, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to suppose that they are inadequate to the accomplishment of this work."

8. Evangelical postmillennialism believes that with the power of the Holy Spirit working through the church's preaching of the gospel, in gradual stages of growth, the preponderance of men and nations will submit to Christ at some time in the future. B. B. Warfield drew this generalization: "the nature of the whole dispensation in which we are living, and which stretches from the First to the Second Advent, [is] a period of advancing conquest on the part of Christ.... The prophecy [of Romans 11] promises the universal Christianization of the world." Elsewhere he wrote: If you wish, as you lift your eyes to the far horizon of the future, to see looming on the edge of time the glory of a saved world, you can find warrant for so great a vision only in the high principles that it is God and God alone who saves men, that all their salvation is from him, and that in his own good time and way he will bring the world in its entirety to the feet of him whom he has not hesitated to present to our adoring love not merely as Savior of our souls, but as the Savior of the world.... The redemption of the world is similarly a process. It, too, has stages; it, too, advances only gradually to its completion...."

9. Evangelical postmillennialists do not hold that each and every individual on earth will someday be saved, but that at some future time the vast majority will; in Christ's wheat field there will always be found some tares, up until the final harvest in judgment. Charles Hodge taught that "it is not to be inferred from this [Biblical promise of Gentile and Jewish conversion] that either all the heathen or all the Jews are to become true Christians. In many cases the conversion may be merely nominal. There will probably enough remain unchanged in heart to be the germ of that persecuting power which shall bring about those days of tribulation which the Bible seems to teach are to immediately precede the coming of the Lord."

10. Evangelical postmillennialism teaches that there will be a final apostasy or falling away just prior to the return of Christ in judgment on the world. Interpreting Revelation 20, A. A. Hodge wrote: "Christ has in reserve for his church a period of universal expansion and of pre-eminent spiritual prosperity, when the spirit and character of the "noble army of martyrs" shall be reproduced again in the great body of God's people in an unprecedented triumph of their cause, and in the overthrow of that of their enemies, receive judgment over their foes and reign in the earth; while the party of Satan, "the rest of the dead," shall not flourish again until the thousand years be ended, when it shall prevail again for a little season." Charles Hodge held that "The great truth set forth in these prophesies is, that there was future... a great apostasy in the Church; that this apostasy would be Anti-christian (or Antichrist), ally itself with the world and become a great persecuting power... [which will] be overtaken with a final destruction when the Lord comes."