

THE BLUE BANNER

Volume 6, Issue 1

January/March 1997

Dominion and Eschatology: A Review of Dr. Kenneth Gentry's *He Shall Have Dominion*

A few years ago I had the opportunity to meet and speak with Dr. Ken Gentry. We discussed many things, he took me to lunch, and I told him that I did not really understand much of the eschatological zeal on the part of modern postmillennialists. It seemed to me that to make such an explicit eschatology a central part of one's belief is without credal warrant. Dr. Gentry's response to my doubt was to present me with a copy of his book *He Shall Have Dominion* [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992. 585 + xliii pp. \$19.95 plus \$4.00 p&h].

I am familiar with Dr. Gentry's work on the Book of Revelation. While I agree that the book was most likely written prior to AD 70, I disagree with his praeterism. I hold to the same view of Revelation as held by the Reformers Vitranga and Paraeus. My audio tapes (ten 90 minute tapes) on the book of Revelation are available from Blue Banner Ministeries - c/o First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, 8210 Schrade Road, Rowlett, TX 75088. [See Page 7 of this newsletter.]

The following review certainly is written from one who holds a slightly different eschatological perspective from that of Dr. Gentry. However, the bulk of the review has as its purpose not a point by point refutation of Dr. Gentry's system — I will leave that for the more theologically astute. Rather, the purpose of the review is to take issue with the dismissive manner in which Dr. Gentry (and other modern postmillennialists) treats opposing viewpoints. Dr. Gentry, on page 17 of his book, lumps together amillennialism, premillennialism, and dispensationalism under a category he calls "eschatological pessimism." He then makes three statements about this category which are, in my opinion, the height of triumphalism. Each statement is quoted below then followed by my comments on it.

(1.) "As systems of gospel proclamation each [other system] teaches the gospel of Christ will not exercise any major influence in the world before Christ's return."

If true this would, indeed, be a strong indictment against any system of gospel proclamation other than the one Dr. Gentry proposes. However, it is true only insofar as Dr. Gentry defines "any major influence." The Apostle claimed that the sweet savor of the gospel has a profound influence on everyone who hears it, but that the influence it has is not the same on everyone. He stated, "Now thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

It should be noted that Paul claimed God *always* caused him to *triumph* in Christ. But it should be further noted that sometimes the triumph consisted in being cast out of the synagogue; sometimes it consisted in being stoned and left for dead; sometimes it consisted in being

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 Review of Gentry's *He Shall Have Dominion*

6 First Ever Blue Banner Conference

7 Revelation Tapes

8 About FPCR

Blue Banner Subscription Information

Order Form

shipwrecked; sometimes it consisted in imprisonment; finally it consisted in his martyrdom. Paul, it may be concluded, had a definition of the word “triumph” that did not include success as the world measures success.

Paul went on in the Corinthian passage to tell us what he regarded as the major influence the gospel proclamation has. “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (vv. 15-16)

It is one thing to claim that those Gentry and others characterize as “pessimistic” claim that the gospel will not exercise any major influence. That is a false claim. It is an altogether different accusation to maintain that other Christian scholars and pastors believe that the influence the gospel will have is different from the influence Gentry hopes for it. Such a claim would be accurate, but might not marshal quite the emotional impact that the claim he makes is able to muster.

The gospel proclamation certainly has a salutary effect upon the elect of God. But to the reprobate Paul insisted that the gospel was the means, not of their salvation but of their hardening. It is one thing to claim that those Gentry and others characterize as “pessimistic” claim that the gospel will not exercise *any* major influence. That is a false claim. It is an altogether different accusation to maintain that other Christian scholars and pastors believe that the influence the gospel will have is different from the influence Gentry hopes for it. Such a claim would be accurate, but might not marshal quite the emotional impact that the claim he makes is able to muster.

Scripture does, in the opinion of this reviewer, speak of an age of gospel proclamation to the entire world. We are now, and have been for over 1900 years, living in the age of world-wide gospel proclamation. Further, the “gospel victory theme” of Scripture is a twofold victory in which Christ, by means of his gospel and Spirit, subdues the elect to himself and hardens the reprobate for final judgment. To use the analogy of the parable of the wheat and tares, God is allowing both the wheat (the children of the kingdom) and the tares (the

children of the evil one) to “grow together until the harvest.”

Whether the gospel is successful at having a “major influence” depends upon what influence one expects the gospel to have. If one expects the gospel to be carried to every nation and kindred and tribe and tongue, then the gospel is now and has been for some time altogether successful. If one expects the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation for the elect of every generation then it is now and always has been a success. If one expects the gospel to sanctify the elect so that they die more and more to sin and live more and more to righteousness, then the gospel is successful.

However, the impact that the gospel has on the social institutions of a culture may not be precisely what the postmillennialist would hope for. Mr. Gentry and others seem to set forth an “either/or” scheme of Christian cultural involvement that places Christians on the horns of a false dilemma. Gentry presents what he terms “eschatological pessimism” as being culturally ineffectual, while the “optimistic” outlook of the postmillennialist will capture the day for Christ’s kingdom. Such a choice is both simplistic and false.

Christians are to carry their faith to every area of life — this is certainly true. Christians, according to their various places and stations of life, are to fulfill their offices as believer-priests of the most High God. But they must not think that the only reason or even the primary reason for doing so is the prospect of a dominion over others in their fields. The people of God should be driven (or rather led) in this area, not by the prospect of success in human terms, but by the duty laid upon them as bondservants of Christ.

(2) “As systems of historical understanding each holds that the Bible teaches that there are prophetically determined, irresistible trends downward toward chaos in the outworking and development of history.”

This statement is simply inaccurate. It has the sound of triumph, but it mischaracterizes opposing views. It may stir some folks to greater zeal, but the accusation is without foundation. Gentry here uses such terms as “downward” and “chaos” in a way that fits neither dictionary nor opposite view. First, for him to use such a term as “downward” begs the question.

If there are more humans born in Adam than are born again in Christ, one may view that as “downward” but it is a strange use of the term. Why strange? It is strange because God is saving a remnant out of mankind and that should not be regarded as a trend downward. For those who are being saved it is most certainly *not* a trend downward. However, for those who are perishing, life is unquestionably a pitward or hellward trend. This life is, for the reprobate, a time of hardening and of living under the impending judgment of God. If Dr. Gentry cares to characterize this basic division in mankind as a “downward” trend, then it is his characterization. We must remember that according to the parable we live in a “field” that consists of both wheat and tares to the end of time. There is no *a priori* reason for us to suppose that the wheat will “crowd out” the tares before the harvest at the end of time.

Gentry’s other term, “chaos,” is both inaccurate and inflammatory — in fact it is oxymoronic. This reviewer cannot understand how something could be “prophetically determined” and “chaotic.” I have read enough of Dr. Gentry’s material to know that he believes that God’s decree is determinative of whatsoever comes to pass. As the *Larger Catechism* phrases it, “God’s decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will, whereby, from all eternity, he hath, for his own glory, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men” (LC 12).

We must notice here that events which are future to us, no less than those events which are past to us, are “unchangeably foreordained.” This may not be precisely what Dr. Gentry means by “prophetically determined,” but it should be. If it is the case that all the events of time (“whatsoever comes to pass in time”) are determined unchangeably by God’s decree, and if it is the case that prophecy speaks truly regarding God’s decree, then it follows that whatever is “prophetically determined” has actually been decreed by the eternal and sovereign King of the universe.

So, the questions which should be asked, are what chaos is and whether opposing systems of eschatology teach that God has decreed whatever “chaos” turns out to mean. Apart from the obsolete usage¹ as “abyss,” the

term signifies, “a state of things in which chance is supreme; a state of utter confusion.” While the terms “downward” and “abyss” do seem to be linked, it would be misleading for Dr. Gentry to expect his readers to understand “chaos” in reference to an obsolete usage.

Do opposing systems of eschatology teach that God has decreed a state of things in which chance is supreme or that he has decreed a state of utter confusion? Of course not. Whether one speaks of the decree of God or of “prophetic determination,” it is clear that he is not speaking of a state of things in which either chance or confusion is supreme. What, then, could Dr. Gentry intend by his choice of words? It would seem that he simply disagrees with what the opposing schemes of eschatology teach will take place in accordance with God’s decrees.

In spite of Dr. Gentry’s claim that he does not take his opponents’ statements out of their proper context,¹ he very clearly does so with respect to David J. Engelsma on page 23.

In spite of Dr. Gentry’s claim that he does not take his opponents’ statements out of their proper context,² he very clearly does so with respect to David J. Engelsma on page 23. In reference to a future utopian period, Engelsma characterized such hopes as mere pipe dreams. In terms of the decree of God for the future Engelsma pointed out that our hope does not lie in a golden age of progress, but in the coming of Christ. Engelsma’s statement was simply an outworking of Paul’s teaching in Titus 2:11-15. Gentry, however, claimed, “This dramatic overstatement reduces all Christian hope to one event: the Second Advent. It effectively undermines the missionary and evangelistic hope of bringing others to Christ — as well as other such hopes — in that ‘*all* other hopes are delusions.’”³

One would hope that such statements are merely the result of misunderstanding. However, it is such a widespread misunderstanding among modern postmillennialists that it seems to be born of a prejudice against any view of eschatology but their own. The same Professor David J. Engelsma stated elsewhere, “Jesus Christ has dominion. Jesus Christ has dominion in the world in history. Jesus Christ has dominion now. Not

¹ Obsolete is defined as “having no evidence of standard use since 1755.”

² *He Shall Have Dominion*, p.19.

³ *ibid.*, p.23.

only does Jesus Christ now have dominion over all creatures, including His enemies, by His power, but also He now has dominion in His church by His Spirit and Word. . . . The victory of Christ in history is the faith, confession, battle against sin, warfare against the world, obedience to the law, repentance, and endurance to the end of every elect, redeemed, and regenerated child of God.”⁴

Christos Nikon (Christ the Overcomer) claimed on the night of his betrayal, just as he began that tortuous ascent to the cross, that he had overcome the world. He emphatically did not say, “In the world ye shall have great success and your tribulations shall be few.” He said quite the opposite in fact. “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Following these words of encouragement (that we should not measure dominion or overcoming in worldly terms), Christ prayed, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world They are not of the world O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee,” etc. (John 17:9, 14, 16, 25).

As a system of historical understanding, it is both inaccurate and unfair of Dr. Gentry to characterize the opposing view of eschatology as holding that the Bible teaches a downward trend toward chaos in the development of history. What the opposing view of eschatology teaches is simply that our victories are not dependent upon the circumstances of history and are not measured by the events of time.

As a system of historical understanding, it is both inaccurate and unfair of Dr. Gentry to characterize the opposing view of eschatology as holding that the Bible teaches a downward trend toward chaos in the development of history. What the opposing view of eschatology teaches is simply that our victories are not dependent upon the circumstances of history and are not measured by the events of time. The historical understanding of this reviewer is the same as the historical understanding of John’s angel. “These shall

⁴ “The Victory of Christ in History,” in *Standard Bearer*, 73:6, (December 15, 1996) pp. 126-127.

make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14). The issue is not one of optimism versus pessimism or of victory versus defeat. The issue is one of faithfulness. We are called *to be* faithful. We may live in a day of great gospel prosperity or in a day of relative apostasy. No matter, we are called to be faithful. “And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Revelation 12:11).

(3) “As systems for the promotion of Christian discipleship, each dissuades the church from anticipating and laboring for wide-scale success in influencing the world for Christ during this age.”

Dr. Gentry here makes a very broad, and in this reviewer’s opinion, vague generalization. First, Christian discipleship is not and should not be measured by how much “success” one has “in influencing the world for Christ during this age.” The Scriptures, and especially the New Testament Scriptures, lead us to believe that there is a great gulf fixed between the church and the world. Discipleship insists, not merely upon influencing the world, but upon turning the world upside down (or right side up from God’s perspective).

Christian discipleship should not be measured by the extent of influence upon the world, but by the extent of faithfulness of the disciple. In the eleventh chapter of Revelation, John was given a measuring reed and instructed how to measure. John was to measure “the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein,” (Revelation 11:1b). The measure of God’s people is not in terms of external successes and influence over the world, but in their relationship to God’s house and its worship.

Those who are found in God’s temple — at the altar of his choosing — are measured *in*. Now, as in Christ’s own day, God is not seeking a people to influence the world, but a people to worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Thus the people John is commanded to measure in Revelation 11:1 are not those who have great influence upon society, or whose success can be measured in terms the world understands or to which the world even responds well. Rather, those

included in John's measure are those who worship in God's temple, at his altar.

Even before we can get the words "but all of life is worship" to our lips, John has answered our doubts. In the next verse, the angel told him, "But the court which is without the temple leave out and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot." Now, the very act of measuring some things and people *in* must involve measuring other things and people *out* or the task is a useless and meaningless exercise. If the worship spoken of in verse one were "all of life," then by that very definition *nothing* could be measured as outside the temple of God.

The power of the witnesses of Revelation eleven is not a power to influence the world, but rather a power to cry out judgment against the world.

"These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will" (Revelation 11:6).

The power of the witnessing church is to influence the world for Christ the same way Elijah influenced Ahab for Christ. God's judgment upon Israel at the hand of the prophet was for the heavens to be shut for three and one half years (1,260 days) so that Israel received no rain. Elijah was not a merchant of influence but a messenger of judgment. The power of the testifying church, the worshipping church, the measured church, is to influence the world for Christ the same way Moses influenced Egypt. Moses was not interested in rebuilding Egyptian society — he was determined to see God's people leave Egypt.

So what manner of "success" might the witnesses of Revelation eleven expect? "And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them." Apparently these witnesses were unaware of the triumphalist theology that insists upon measuring success in terms of "influencing the world for Christ during this age."

There is a sense in which the world and the false professors within the city of God overcame his true witnesses. Yet we must not lose sight of the *true victory* of God's people: "And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Revelation 12:11). It is not "influence" by which God measures success, but by the faithfulness of his worshippers.

Faithfulness does not guarantee "failure," of course, any more than it guarantees success. There may be reformation and revival in the future of God's people. But the key thing for us to remember is that any true revival will accompany true reformation.

Faithfulness does not guarantee "failure," of course, any more than it guarantees success. There may be

ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

This Review of Ken Gentry's *He Shall Have Dominion* is also on the FPCR/Blue Banner World Wide Web site at <http://www.fpcr.org/bluebanner>

Other Reviews posted there to date include:

ANDREW CLARKSON'S *PLAIN REASONS FOR PRESBYTERIANS DISSENTING FROM THE REVOLUTION CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.*

GORDON CLARK'S *LORD GOD OF TRUTH AND AUGUSTINE'S CONCERNING THE TEACHER.*

KEN HANKO'S *PSALMS FOR CONGREGATIONAL SINGING*

JOHN MACARTHUR'S *RECKLESS FAITH*

MICHAEL G. WAGNER'S *A PRESBYTERIAN POLITICAL MANIFESTO: PRESBYTERIANISM AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT*

ALSO LOOK FOR MOST OF THE ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THE BLUE BANNER OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS ON OUR WEB SITE, AS WELL AS A FULL LIST OF SERMON TAPES, VIDEOS AND BOOKS AND TRACTS AVAILABLE.

Those who trample holy things underfoot — the Gentiles — are measured *out*; but that did not make God's witnesses ineffectual. God gave power to his witnesses in verse three to prophesy. But significantly they prophesied clothed in sackcloth. Sackcloth was the clothing worn by those in mourning — either for death or for repentance from sin. The church is not pictured in the eleventh of Revelation in the triumphalist terms of Gentry and others. Rather it is pictured as a church that testifies in mourning to a world that hates its message.

reformation and revival in the future of God's people. But the key thing for us to remember is that any true revival will accompany true reformation. If there are large numbers in store for the true people of God then it will be because large numbers of people have attached themselves to the appointed worship of the true God: "measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." Finally, at the end of time, the number of the redeemed of Christ will be "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," (Revelation 7:9).

Meanwhile, whether the number of God's people be large or small in a given generation, they are called to faithfulness. Just as in Paul's day, one may sow and another water but God alone gives the increase. In the fifteenth of First Corinthians Paul wrote to the

Corinthian saints not about the hope of influencing Corinthian society, but the hope of the resurrection. At the resurrection day at the end of time the church will be able to say, "thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

It is in light of the resurrection at the last day that Paul encouraged the Corinthians and us to remain faithful, work for the Lord, and count all our labor for him as successful whether or not it "influences the world."

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that you labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).•

First Ever Blue Banner Conference Featuring Rev. Professor Dr. Francis Nigel Lee

Preacher, Theologian, Lawyer, Educator, Historian, Philosopher and Author, Dr. Lee has produced some 290 publications, including many books and a multitude of lengthy unpublished manuscripts. In addition to an honorary LL.D., he has twenty earned degrees, including nine earned doctorates awarded for dissertations in law, literature, philosophy and theology. His works include a 3000 page dissertation on the roots of English Common Law.

Monday
6:30
Why Kings Must Kiss the Son **Bacon**
7:30
God's Law or Chaos **Lee**

Tuesday
6:30
Have Protestants Outgrown the Bible? **Bacon**
7:30
The Lord's Prayer **Lee**

Wednesday
6:30
Importance of John's Revelation for Today **Bacon**
7:30
Identity of Antichrist **Lee**

Registration Form
First Ever
Blue Banner Conference
May 26-28
1997
Dallas, Texas
Hosted by
First Presbyterian Church
Rowlett, Texas

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please enclose \$10.00 registration fee. Make check payable to and send Registration form to:

First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett
8210 Schrade Road
Rowlett, TX 75088
(800) 484-9377 code 3727 (FPCR)

Blue Banner Video

Male Headship and Head Coverings in Worship

A Discourse Analysis of 1 Corinthians 11.

By Richard Bacon

There is a bible commentary called *The Women's Bible Commentary* (so called because women are welcome to make comments in it) that refers to the passage of the Apostle Paul's first letter to Corinth, as those "chaotic verses." The comment then goes on to say "while this is certainly Pauline, nevertheless Paul's arguments are "inarticulate, incomprehensible and inconsistent." Richard Bacon, in this 2 hour video series, examines the whole 1 Corinthians 11 passage carefully using a discourse analysis approach. Summing up his introduction he says: "I am not going to suggest to you that this is an easy passage, nevertheless at the end of this study together I want you to decide for yourselves whether Paul was "inarticulate, incomprehensible and inconsistent" or whether in fact he was not quite articulate, comprehensible and consistent. 1 Corinthians 11 articulates *quite well* the mind of Christ regarding the position of women and men in the public assembly."

One 2 hour video tape. \$10.95 (includes \$3.00 for shipping and handling). See order form on page 8.

Blue Banner Audio

Lectures and Sermons on Revelation

In the past 150 years Christians have become fascinated with what they think is the message of the book of Revelation. Some have gone so far as to see "black helicopters" in the book, while others have maintained that the 144,000 are the members of a cult of Arians. In reaction to such speculations, some men today have set forth a strict praeteristic view of the book which limits it to the first century and the destruction of the Jewish temple under the Romans. According to Bacon, both the futurist and the praeterist views of the book have their source in Jesuit defenses of the papacy.

For the first time in a generation, these tapes by pastor Bacon offer a sane historical interpretation of the book of Revelation. In fifteen hours of lectures and sermons, Bacon sets forth the view of Revelation that sees it as a symbolic account of the war between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15ff). The lectures consist of chapter by chapter explanations of the book of Revelation from chapter one to chapter nineteen and chapter twenty-two. The sermons consist of five sermons on chapters twenty and twenty-one.

The view set forth by Bacon is that of the reformers Vitringa and Paraeus. Bacon demonstrates that far from considering the beast(s) of the book as belonging either to the distant past or the distant future, Christians today are called upon to war against not only the beasts, but the dragon who manipulates them as well as the harlot Babylon. In his summary of the book, Bacon calls upon Christians to take their places in the golden city, holy Jerusalem. Set of Ten 90 minute tapes. \$24.95 (includes \$4.00 shipping and handling). See order form on page 8. •

The First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett

<http://www.fpcr.org>

First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett is a member church in the Reformation Presbyterian Church (RPC). The subordinate standards of the RPC are the "whole doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms as approved by Acts of General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland in 1647 and 1648 respectively." The Worship of the RPC is that authorized in the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God, and all elements of worship are limited to those described in Westminster Confession chapter 21. Officers of the RPC subscribe fully and strictly to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

The Blue Banner is published by The First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas (RPC) and is supported by gifts. The cost to produce and mail a subscription is about \$15.00 per year. If you are able, please consider giving a gift of \$30.00 to support your subscription and one other. All material in this issue Copyright © 1996 by *The Blue Banner*, a ministry of First Presbyterian Church Rowlett, unless otherwise noted.
FPCR Session: Pastor Richard Bacon. Elder David

Seekamp. *The Blue Banner* Editor: Christopher Coldwell

The Blue Banner P O Box 141084 Dallas, TX 75214
800-484-9377 ext. 3727 Email: pastor@fpcr.org
WEB SITE <http://www.fpcr.org/>

ORDER FORM

THE BLUE BANNER • P O BOX 141084
DALLAS, TX 75214

Item	Qty	Price Each	Total
Revelation tapes		\$24.95	
Head Coverings tape		\$11.95	

Canadian orders must send checks in U.S. Funds drawn on a U.S. bank, otherwise bank charges will be billed to purchaser. Canadian Money Orders in U.S. Dollars are also accepted.

The Blue Banner

A Publication of First Presbyterian Church Rowlett
P O Box 141084
Dallas, TX 75214
Return Postage Guaranteed

• *Review of Gentry's He Shall Have Dominion*
First Ever Blue Banner Conference featuring Dr.
Francis Nigel Lee. May 26-28th.