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JF*

## APPENDIX A

### POSTMILLENNIALISM: AN IMPERATIVE OF MORAL GOVERNMENT

Nothing is more important than that the church should have just and comprehensive views of the covenant dealings of God with his people. It cannot be too distinctly understood that the Adamic covenant, or covenant of works, is still binding as a rule of duty, but is not the condition of salvation.

-- Charles G. Finney\*

The Sacred Scriptures frequently compare moral conversion and the Christian life to that of the birth and growth of one's physical body. They also liken the Word of God to the food used as nourishment for our spiritual growth. Different levels of Christian instruction are noted in the Bible, which I choose to identify here.

The first level of Christian instruction has to do with the question of personal salvation, which precedes and consummates in the "new birth". In Scripture, this message is sometimes referred to as the "Water of life", offering pardon for sin and the deliverance from its power. This Gospel or Salvation message involves a sound presentation of God in His character, His government, and His act of atonement. A number of scriptural references confirm this perception (Isa. 12:3; Jn. 3:5; 5:3; 1 Cor. 10:3,4; Eph. 5:26; Phil. 2:16; Rev. 21:6; 22:1,17).

The second level of Christian instruction is outlined in Hebrews 6:1 and 2, and is referred to as "the first principles of the doctrine of Christ" (in the previous chapter as the "milk" of the Word). This level of instruction is an interim stage where the spiritual infant is indoctrinated with the truths that led to his conversion, and where he is taught the conditions of citizenship in God's Kingdom. The "milk" or Kingdom message is designed to establish the new believer in the life of sanctification and prepare him for a life-long relationship with God.

It is good to note that Moral Government theologians, such as Rev. Gordon Olson and Dr. Harry Conn, have had no equal in articulating a theology expounding these doctrines. It is a pity that the Christian churches have not availed themselves of their insights. Instead of pressing on to maturity, the Body of Christ suffers from abundant teachers confused on almost every doctrine meant for infants and children. Seminaries reserve for upper-classmen studies described in Hebrews as "milk"-- soteriology, pneumatology, eschatology, church ordinances, and so on.

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\*THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT, Charles G. Finney, (compiled by Timothy L. Smith), Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1980 page 200.

Although the Moral Government movement stands as a towering example of what salvation preachers and kingdom preachers should be, I believe it has lacked the fortitude to resurrect the "Dominion message" that was embraced by American theologians, as a rule, from the Puritans to Charles Finney and his colleagues at Oberlin College.

In Hebrews 5:13 and 14, we find the "meat" of the Word defined as the teaching on righteousness and morals, that is, Christian ethics. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 describe the purpose of Scripture (especially the Old Testament) to be fulfilled in our instruction unto "good works". The "Dominion message", therefore, describes our cultural and vocational activity to restore the earth to God's Kingdom. As the Kingdom people begin to externalize the righteousness that is in their hearts, strongholds are brought down and kingdoms subdued. This is precisely what the Cultural Mandate calls for and the Great Commission reiterates (Genesis 1:26-31; Matthew 28:18-20).

It has been unfortunate that Moral Government theologians have not been able to press-on to this level of Christian instruction. Although Harry Conn has bewailed the neglect, a systematic plan of action still remains to be formulated. Instead, we have left it to Reformed theologians, such as R. J. Rushdoony and Francis Schaeffer, to articulate the Christian's view of society and government. In Rushdoony, at least, we see the continuation of Old School theology typical of Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy. Such men were fruitful Covenant theologians and dominion preachers. But what has become of the New School theologians?

If we are going to advance to the "meat of the Word", the Dominion message, we must be prepared to embrace two doctrines that were common to not only Old School theologians, such as Bellamy and Hopkins, but also New School theologians, such as N. W. Taylor and C. G. Finney.

The first doctrine was the belief that the Old Testament (except as amended by the New Testament) was still binding upon mankind, and that it exists as a plan for dominion (Matt. 5:13-18). This doctrine of theonomy was championed for centuries by Covenant theologians, among them being Finney (quoted at the beginning of this article). Today, we must be prepared to advocate a reconstruction of society upon Biblical Law. A failure to do so will leave our Dominion message antinomian and rationalistic.

The second doctrine was postmillennialism. New England theologians of the 18th and 19th centuries taught an eschatology of victory through godly dominion. Their sermons on the Atonement, revivals and reforms were all shaped upon the anvil of postmillennialism. Without it, they would not have had the faith to accomplish the gigantic tasks they achieved, at home and abroad.

I realize the difficulty there is for those of us who are former dispensationalists. Premillennialism is so comforting and difficult to give-up. But it is also an eschatology of victory through escape, which runs against what the promises of God assure and Covenant theology asserts. Without laboring long on proving or disproving eschatologic models, I will note three major, Biblical teachings that confirm postmillennialism.

First, the Scriptures explicitly reveal God's intention that Christ will not return until the Church has completed its mission on Earth (Matt. 24:14). Early American theologians made the Church the center of God's prophetic timetable. When the Church completed its work of evangelism and discipling the nations, then the end would come. Dispensationalists make the Jews the center of God's prophetic timetable. Premillennialists, like dispensationalists, see an apocalyptic and arbitrary end to human history. Postmillennialists are soteriological; they see God redeeming human history.

Second, the calling of the Church involves more than testifying to the world. The Church is called to disciple the nations, bringing them under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. Success in such a commission can only mean one thing by definition: the ushering in of the Millennium.

The important thing to remember about the Millennium is that the only explicit passage describing the period is in Revelation 20, and that in strong metaphor. The Millennium is not described as a period of utopian perfection. That does not occur until the New Heaven and the New Earth. To define it properly, the Millennium is that time in human history when God is able to do for mankind what He could have and would have done for ancient Israel, except now on a global scale. "And in thee (Abraham) shall all families of the earth be blessed."

Third, the Atonement of Jesus Christ proved to be the undoing of Satan's kingdom. It made the Promises of God the law of the New Order, and obtained the ministry of the Holy Spirit to secure the triumph of God's purpose in human history. This grand act of deliverance by the Second Adam has empowered the Church with the authority to drive Satan and his wicked cohorts out of the earth, just as the angels drove them out of heaven in Revelation 12. Promises found in the Gospels are typical (Matt. 16:18,19; Mark 3:27; Luke 10:19).

In summary, permit me to say that Moral Government theologians of this century have taught well the Kingdom message-- that is, they have described the true character of one within the Kingdom; but they have not called for the Kingdom people to exercise godly dominion in the earth. We have not yet resolved the dilemma of choosing between two opposing principles: victory through godly dominion secured by the promises of God, or victory through escape brought by the rapture.

I believe in the rapture, but not that it is the source of the Church's victory. Christ's Atonement is the source of the Church's victory experienced now and consummated by the rapture. "For the last enemy . . . is death."

It is clear to my mind that a new frontier in theology and Christian living was opened by Charles Finney and men like him. The covenants of God with His people have only been briefly studied by the Church; the blessings of the Atonement scarcely have been considered. It is a challenge that lies before us all to renew the course which such godly men so bravely began.

I fear that we are approaching a point of losing our nerve; and I warn, that if the Moral Government movement is unwilling to meet those conditions necessary for advancement, that a false pietism will overtake us; and in the face of increasing opposition, a sort of romantic desire to retreat to the monastery will occur. As Finney has said,

. . . In my apprehension, this is the very reason why the millennium has not already come: because the church (is) waiting for the effect to precede the cause. The millennium will be the fulfillment of these promises. Before they can be fulfilled they must be believed and pleaded. But the church seems to be waiting for the millennium first to come, and then they will lay hold of the promises. How long shall the church thus act? How long shall the promises that are conditioned in their very nature upon our faith remain a dead letter in the Bible because the church is waiting for their fulfillment before they are believed.\*

May we well consider Brother Finney's solemn rebuke for our lack of faith and devotion.

#### *Addendum (Feb. 1989)*

The Adamic Covenant Finney makes reference to, at the beginning of this essay, is also known by theologians as the "Creation Ordinance" (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15-17). Reconstructionists also call it the "Cultural Mandate" or the "Dominion Covenant." Finney taught its abiding validity, and also, that the particulars of the Mosaic Law (except for ceremonial + dietary regulations) are still binding, being a part of the Adamic "covenant of works".

\*Ibid., page 172