

Sunday, February 26, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 59 American Millenarianism, 1860-1878: Assessing the Impact of Dispensational Theology

### Introduction

- In 1897, Dr. James H. Brookes stated that the Plymouth Brethren were, “a people who are on the whole the soundest in faith, and most intelligent in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (quoted in Kraus, 47)
- According to Ironside, C.H. Spurgeon and A.J. Gordon “gladly acknowledge in their respective periodicals, that there are thousands of ministers in various ‘systems’ throughout Europe and America who, without the least sympathy with the peculiar ‘church views’ of the ‘Brethren,’ gratefully recognize their indebtedness to them for a better understanding and a fuller preaching of the Word of God.” (quoted in Kraus, 47)
- W.G. Turner in his biography on JND states the following regarding D.L. Moody’s views on the brethren, “Mr. Moody ever confessed his indebtedness to the writings of the Brethren for much help in the understanding of the Word, but it was C. H. Mackintosh and Charles Stanley who had the greatest influence.” (Turner, 22)
- When one considers the high regard that leading men in the millenarian movement (James H. Brookes, A.J. Gordon, D. L. Moody) of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had for the Brethren and their writings, their impact cannot be underestimated. The purpose of this lesson is to begin tracing their impact.

### Mainstream Millenarian Trends

- The American millenarian movement passed through a second period of development between 1845-1878. A resurgence of historicism was followed by an emerging interest in futurism. It was during this time period that Darbyite dispensationalism began to impact the mainstream of American millenarian thought. (Sandeen, 90)
- “The first sign of millenarian vitality after the failure of the second advent on 22 October 1844 was the founding of the *Theological and Literary Journal* in 1848 by David Nevins Lord.” (Sandeen, 90)
- “Lord’s journal upheld a standard historicist position, though Lord was critical of almost every historicist commentator so far discussed in this book. Lord initiated his publication in an effort, he told his readers, to introduce some order into the interpretation of prophecy which he described as “wrenched by a thousand experimenters on the wheel of conjecture.” (Sandeen, 91)
- “The *Christian Intelligencer*, the weekly newspaper of the Dutch Reformed church, was never intended to serve as an organ of the millenarian movement; but during the 1860s millenarianism became a cause of contention within the denomination and the *Intelligencer* became the arena of combat.” (Sandeen, 91)
- “Twenty-eight articles appeared during 1864 and January 1865, in which Gordon (W.R.) and Demarest (John Terhune) attempted to show that their millenarian position was supported both by scripture and by the early church fathers. . . Their millenarianism

reflected the standard historicist stance without any hint of Darbyite influence.” (Sandeen, 92-93)

- “The controversy (in the *Christian Intelligencer*) serves as an example of the manner in which the millenarian cause in the United States grew within the denominations and also helps to illustrate the degree to which millenarian interest and activity had increased during the 1850s and 1860s in contrast to the nadir reached with the disappointment of Miller’s followers in 1844.” (Sandeen, 93)

### **Dispensationalism Goes Mainstream**

- Concerning the prolific writing ministry of the Brethren, C. Norman Kraus author of *Dispensationalism in America*, writes:
  - “Along with the oral teaching of the Plymouth Brethren went the written word. Books, pamphlets, magazines, and a torrent of tracts spread their doctrines in Canada and the United States. They set up publishing houses of their own. Besides these, Fleming H. Revell advertised many of their books with warm endorsement. In 1886 Brookes wrote in *The Truth* ‘Their books and tracts were largely circulated, bringing interest in the study of the Bible, and spreading like a wave of blessing through the church of England and other religious bodies.’” (Kraus, 47-48)
- “Writers in some Protestant journals warned readers of the dangers of dispensationalism, but Darby’s views found an outlet in the premillennialist *Prophetic Times*, edited by the Lutheran Joseph Seiss. Its leading contributors were denominationally diverse (Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Moravian, and Baptist) and advocated for historicist and futurist positions. Without mentioning its origin among the Plymouth Brethren, which would have put most readers off, some writers promoted the pretribulation rapture,” (Blomberg and Chung, 11)
- “Beginning in 1863 the American millenarian cause found new focus and scope of expression within the pages of the *Prophetic Times*, a monthly periodical which remains the best source of information about the development of millenarianism in this period. . . On the title page of the first number the *Prophetic Times* was described as “A New Serial devoted to the exposition and inculcation of the doctrine of the speedy coming and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, and related subjects.” (Sandeen, 94)
- In the first issue of the *Prophetic Times* the editors published their creed: “We believe,” they stated:
  1. That we are living in the last periods of the present dispensation.
  2. That Christ will soon reappear upon earth, to avenge His elect, and fulfill His covenant to them.
  3. That the expectation of a Millennium of universal righteousness and peace before the return of the Saviour, is an unchristian delusion.

4. That the Church will remain under the cross until Christ comes; and that the present dispensation is only preparatory to another.
  5. That the personal return of the Lord Jesus is the great hope of the Church, to which, and not to the triumph of present institutions, we are to look for the fulfillment of the great promises of the world's ultimate blessedness.
  6. That when Christ comes, it will not be to depopulate, annihilate, or destroy the earth, but to renovate it by judicial administrations, as to bless it with a new and heavenly rule.
  7. That the saints shall rise first, and together with such of the living as shall be accounted worthy of such honor, be received up in the glorified state, to share with Christ in his subsequent dealings with our world, and its inhabitants.
  8. That Christ is to reign in glorious empire over all the earth, sending forth His law from Jerusalem; an earnest of the glory of which was furnished on the Mount of Transfiguration.
  9. That great judgments are pending over Christendom, and that all present systems in Church and State shall be revolutionized by them, if not quite destroyed.
  10. That in the new order of things to come, the house of Israel, or Jewish race, shall again occupy their own land, and hold the first place among the nations, under their proper King, the Son of David, forever.
  11. That the earth, and the heavens enveloping it, are to be renovated by Him who is to have the dominion; and that the heavens and earth which are now, shall be made into new heavens and earth, as the natural man by regeneration is made into the new man.
  12. The only those who are properly awake to these truths, and watchful, and waiting, and looking for the Lord's speedy return, and prepare accordingly, shall escape the dreadful tribulations which are to mark the last years of this dispensation, or secure the high and peculiar honors in reservation for the wise and faithful. (quoted in Sandeen, 95-96)
- Whether or not the *Prophetic Times* is going to support the historicist or futurist position is not explicitly stated. However, there is hint that the editors will advocate for the secret, any-moment rapture of the church, the critical element in Darby's eschatology. Article 9 is not explicit but it does sound like something JND would have said. The lack of clarity regarding their support of secret rapture doctrine seems to have confused the readership of the *Prophetic Times*. In 1866 a reader wrote the magazine stating that he could find no difficulty with "your excellent monthly but this one point, the silent stealing away of the

- righteous at the end of this dispensation.” The editor then proceeded to explain and defend the Darbyite doctrine of the secret coming; (Sandeen, 97-99)
- “We thus find nothing in the reference of our correspondent to interpose the slightest difficulty to this doctrine of a coming of Christ to steal way his saints form their graves and from their companions. . . Harmony throughout is what we seek and harmony throughout really exists, but upon no theory except that which presents Christ as coming first invisibly for His saints, before He is openly revealed with His saints in the destruction of Antichrist and his hosts.” (quoted in Sandeen, 99)
  - “This was not a passing fad in exegesis on the part of the editors, and many other articles supporting this doctrine and its implications appear in subsequent issues—especially in 1871 under the initials of Reverend E.E. Reinke. . . and in 1875 in an article with J.A. Seiss’s byline. Furthermore, a long series devoted to “Israel and the Church” appeared in 1869 in which Darby’s distinctive definitions informed the whole discussion.” (Sandeen, 99)
  - While no source is offered save scripture only for these writings and there is no specific discussion of JND’s or other Brethren writings it is difficult to not see the influence of dispensational theology on the millenarian mainstream in the *Prophetic Times*.
  - “Another journal, James Inglis’s *Waymarks in the Wilderness*, took an unapologetic pro-Darby stance. The journal’s readership was a fraction of that of the *Prophetic Times*, but many of the people associated with Inglis’s journal were influential in starting the Bible conference movement, which spread dispensationalism far and wide.” (Blomberg and Chung, 11-12)
  - “James Inglis edited the periodical *Waymarks in the Wilderness*, 1864-1872, the year of his death. His friend Charles Campbell edited *The Scripture Testimony*, 1863, and speaks of having received books and tracts from England which:
    - With unusual Scripturalness, power and unction set forth the gospel of the grace of God, the coming and glory of His Kingdom, and the calling and hope of the Church of Christ.” (Huebner, 16)
  - Charles Campbell’s periodical (*The Scripture Testimony*) carried articles by C.H. Mackintosh as well as other Brethren writers. Campbell goes on to speak of enlarging the distribution of these writings:
    - “With this small beginning the Lord was pleased to grant his blessing. Soon both the demand and supply was increased.” (quoted in Huebner, 16)
  - The first issue of *Waymarks in the Wilderness* contains an essay titled, “The Expectation of the Church,” which contains the following significant citations:
    - “Before the visions of judgment in the apocalypse, he assures the Church, “I will keep you from the hour of temptation that is coming upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” Accordingly, in the vision of judgment, the Church is seen, not on the earth, but under the symbol of twenty-four Elders

seated around the throne, until under the symbol, she is seen as the armies of heaven following Him who goes forth on the white horse to complete his victory.”

- “We look for our gathering together unto him, when those who sleep in Jesus shall arise, and we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and there is not a single predicted event standing between us and the fulfillment of that hope.”
- “The duration of this present dispensation is nowhere indicated in prophecy. In fact, prophetic times are reckoned in relation to the history of Israel. . . No outward sign will precede the deliverance of the waiting church.” (Inglis, 16-17)
- “Is it too much to say that through Charles Campbell and James Inglis truths that were being taught by ‘brethren,’ which really were brought out through J.N. Darby, were being disseminated in the U.S.A? James Inglis also edited another magazine from 1864-1872, namely, *The Witness*. In this magazine ‘brethren’ writers were quoted and their books advertised for sale. Of special interest is that in the May 1867 is included an advertisement for the five volumes of the *Synopsis* by J.N. Darby.” (Huebner, 16)
- In 1872 the following disclaimer was published in *Waymarks in the Wilderness* which shows where the pretribulation rapture doctrine was learned.
  - “Only in justice to our contributors on the one hand and the Plymouth Brethren on the other, it is proper to say that no one connected with that sect ever wrote a line for its pages. Our contributors are chiefly ‘pastors of our Reformed churches,’ most of them well known, though they do not claim consideration on ecclesiastical grounds. So far from being “the doctrinal representative of the ‘Plymouth Brethren,’ while we greatly own our indebtedness to them under God for the testimony they have borne to our standing Christ and the hope of our calling, we have been constrained to testify against nearly everything in their theology which distinguishes them from the other men of God named in the review which occasions this statement.” (quoted in Huebner, 16-17)
- “This defense clarifies a great deal. Inglis, and the millenarians he represented, were well acquainted with the works of Darby and the others connected with the Plymouth Brethren. But they rejected their distinct beliefs, presumably the sectarian and separatist elements of Darby’s teachings which would have required Americans to sever their denominational associations had they been convinced by him. Inglis, in other words, was testifying to the truth of Darby’s continual lament that the Americans took what they wanted from his theological bag but refused to forsake their positions within the denominations. What the Americans appreciated in Darbyism is equally clear—his doctrine of grace (“our standing in Christ”) and his doctrine of the secret rapture (“the hope of our calling”).” (Sandeen, 101)
- Ernest B. Gordon, the son of A.J. Gordon, a prominent leader in the Niagara Bible Conference, recorded the following words from his father in his biography:
  - “It gathered itself a strong body of scholars, most from the pulpits of the Church of England, who began to pour out biblical literature in floods—exposition and

textural criticism, lexicons, and dictionaries for aiding in the study of the Bible, synopses of Scripture, tract leaflets, etc. The Christian world has been fairly inundated with these issues, and it may be doubted if any body of Christians ever sent forth such a mass and such a variety of biblical literature in the same length of time.

If we were to describe in a word the theological complexion of these writings, we should say that there we have high Calvinism, preaching free grace with a fullness and plainness never surpassed; practicing believers' baptism, and writing treatises on its symbolism rarely equaled for deep spiritual insight . . . holding with primitive apostolic fervor to the personal, literal, and ever-imminent coming of Christ as the hope of the church. It is our opinion that the best writings of this body have furnished the text-books of the modern evangelistic movement, and largely determined its type of doctrine and preaching. Let us specify briefly.

There is C.H. Mackintosh's "Notes on Genesis," "Exodus," etc., a work for which Mr. Spurgeon has expressed his high admiration, and which has had an immense circulation. We know of hardly any modern treatise which is so full of the meat and marrow of the gospel as this, and which sets forth so clearly the fundamental doctrine of atonement and justification. . . Of less popular works, we might mention Darby's "Synopsis of the Bible, the expositions of Kelly, Newton, Tregelles, Soltau, Pridham, and Jukes. These books especially the first three, have constituted the chief theological treasury of many of our evangelists. We can say for ourselves that, from the first time our eyes fell upon these treasures, we have nowhere else seen the gospel so luminously presented—the gospel of the grace of God, disencumbered of legalism and mysticism and tradition.

Such, we believe, after much thought and careful investigation and frequent conversation with those best qualified to judge, is the real spring of the present evangelistic movement. It demands a fearlessness and candor to concede it, but we believe that the truth requires us to confess that we owe a great debt, both in literature and in life, to the leaders of this ultra-Protestant movement. And we are glad to believe that the light which it has thrown out by its immense biblical study and research has been appropriated by many of the best preachers and evangelists in our Protestant churches." (Gordon, 86-88)

- C. Norman Kraus suggests that Charles Henry (C.H.) Mackintosh was not a precise theologian, and that his writings lack systematic development but rather are commentaries on Scripture which he entitled *Notes*. (Kraus, 49)
- W. Blair Neatby, author of *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, states the following regarding the place of Mackintosh's writings,
  - "Mr. Mackintosh had been a schoolmaster, but he subsequently devoted himself exclusively to the ministry. **He had very marked popular gifts, both as a speaker and a writer, and became by means of his *Notes on the Pentateuch* the principal interpreter between Darbyism and the Church at large.** Unfortunately, he was an interpreter and nothing more. His thought was loose and unsystematic." (Neatby, 128)

- Mackintosh's *Notes* on the Pentateuch were extremely popular and sold in enormous quantity, especially in the United States. His *Papers on the Lord's Coming* have been in print until the present. (Kraus, 49)
- "In *Papers on the Lord's Coming* one finds an insistence upon literalism. . . The major emphases of contemporary dispensationalism are all to be found in his writings. . . The Church is conceived as a clearly distinct entity existing from Pentecost to the rapture of the saints. He says that there are shadows and types in the Old Testament which can now be recognized as foregleaming of the Church, but absolutely nothing explicit is prophesied of the Church's existence or destiny. In fact, this "mystery" was not revealed even by Christ while still on earth. The "gospel of the kingdom" and the "glorious gospel of the grace of God" as preached by Paul are not to be confused . . . On the schematic side he teaches the pretribulation secret rapture of the Church—that is, the true Church. The professing church, or Christendom, will be under the judgment of God during the tribulation and will be destroyed. While he does not give a dispensational scheme in his *Papers*, he presupposes Darby's general outline." (Kraus, 50)
- Please note that we will have much more to say about Mackintosh's teaching on the mystery in a future lesson.
- "The second edition of William Trotter's *Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects*, which became popular in the United States, was written sometime during the American Civil War. The first edition was published anonymously in England some ten years earlier. In the 1886 edition of Blackstone's *Jesus is Coming*, Revell advertises thus: "Trotter's *Plain Papers* have long been considered among the very best, if not the best popular presentation of Prophetic Truth in print either in England or America." (Kraus, 51)
- One finds the same elements in Trotter that were evident in Mackintosh, but Trotter is more systematic in his development, and writes more at length. Concerning dispensational differences he says:
  - "And has it never occurred to you, dear Christian readers, that in the gradual unfolding of God's purposes, dispensations have run, are running, and have yet to run their course, so widely different in their character, that what is simple obedience and for the glory of God in one dispensation, may be entirely foreign to the character of another?" (Trotter, 397)
- "Trotter contrasts the Church and Israel in several ways. Israel's blessing is temporal, and will finally be fulfilled in an earthly millennial Kingdom. The Church is never promised temporal blessings. She is a heavenly creation, and in this world will have only persecution and trial. Her blessings are spiritual. The sword of judgment given to Israel in the previous dispensation has been taken from the Church. It will be returned to Israel in the millennium. (Kraus, 52)
- The church's blessings according to Trotter were not,
  - "conditional on obedience,\* as was that of Israel in the land; but blessing in Christ, to which we are introduced, consequent on His accomplishment of all that the Father gave him to do. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. 1: 3.) *Who hath blessed us!* And with ALL spiritual blessings! And in Christ! How complete! How certain! How inalienable! . . . Further: the blessings of the Church are *spiritual* blessings in *heavenly* places — not *temporal* blessings, as Israel's were. It was promised that they, if obedient, should be blessed in their basket and in their store, in the fruit of their body, the fruit of their cattle, and the fruit of the ground. It was with temporal blessings that they were to be blessed. And even in millennial times, when they will enjoy spiritual blessings also, the possession of every temporal comfort is a prominent feature in their predicted condition. "And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord." (Ezek. 34: 27.) There are no such promises as these to the Church. Existing, as it does, by virtue of union with a risen and exalted Saviour, its blessings are spiritual. Redemption, forgiveness, acceptance, adoption, knowledge of God's mind and will, co-heirship with Christ, the earnest of the Spirit; these, and such as these, are the blessings with which the Church is blessed. And it is *in heavenly places* too." (Trotter, 109)

- "Trotter had a clearly defined doctrine of the postponement of the kingdom. He did not, however, suggest that there was a time in Christ's ministry when He withdrew His offer of the Kingdom to the Jews, as Scofield later taught. He said that the Kingdom was offered to the Jews by the apostles after Jesus' death and resurrection, and that they would have been nationally forgiven if they had accepted it on the Day of Pentecost." (Kraus, 53)
  - "The doctrine of the New Testament is not the substitution of another kind of kingdom for that of which the Old Testament could not fail to awaken expectations, *but the postponement of the expected kingdom* because of Israel's unpreparedness to receive it; and the existence meanwhile of an anomalous state of things, expressed by the phrase "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Christ was presented as king to Israel — "Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass," — but Israel rejected Him" (Trotter, 539)

### **Conclusion**

- There can be little doubt that by 1875/1878 when the Prophetic Conferences began their yearly meetings that dispensational theology had greatly impacted the main stream of American millenarian thought.
- Sandeen offers the following assessment of JND's/Brethren influence on American millenarianism, "although not willing to admit their affiliation with his denominational views, Americans raided Darby's treasuries and carried off his teachings as their own." (Sandeen, 102)



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