

End Times

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This is a very complicated subject, and American Christian opinions on this are strong and varied. It is not my desire to get into this in detail on this web site, but if someone is interested, he can contact me personally (see Contact Us on the left side of your screen). Only a few comments can be made here.

First, it is a sad commentary on American Christianity that we can sell 50 million copies (and counting) of an end time series about the so-called antichrist, but we cannot sell 10 thousand copies of a book about Christ. What is wrong with this picture?

Second, it is also disheartening that some Christians identify the Christian faith with some particular view of end times, not with the ancient creeds that all branches of Christendom have embraced. In other words, some Christians think that if one is not pre-tribulational and pre-millennial that he/she is not a Christian at all, or at best, a second class Christian. We don't know what is important anymore. (See Beliefs on the left side of your screen to see what is important.)

Third, what most don't know is that the end times frenzy that so dominates **some** Christian circles in the USA is **unique** to the USA. If one goes outside our borders, much of these things do not exist. Moreover, if one moves back in time from the early 1900s, such views are non-existent in all branches of Christianity. Thus we are faced with a serious problem: these views do not exist in 80% of today's Christian circles, and they do not exist in 100% of yesterday's Christian circles. Could something allegedly so important miss the best theological minds for 2,000 years? Yet, we are not out to get anyone if they hold such views, and we would ask the same respect.

Fourth, it is ironic that what so many Christians in the USA think is the settled teaching of the Bible on antichrist, the rapture, and the millennium is actually changing in their own circles, but they are not aware of it. There are three views of dispensationalism that have been popularized by Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), the mecca of these end time views, and from which I graduated, though I do not now share those views. The original view was maintained by C. I. Scofield in his study Bible and Lewis Sperry Chafer in his *Systematic Theology*, both of whom were instrumental in founding Dallas Theological Seminary, where I attended. Scofield and Chafer represent **classic** dispensationalism, which clearly taught that Old Testament saints were saved by their own works. Then when I was at this seminary, dispensationalism was in its second stage with such leaders as John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Charles Ryrie, under whom I studied and the latter now has his own study Bible. Let me add that I have the deepest respect and affection for these three scholars and learned much good from them. But they promoted **moderate** dispensationalism. Now there is a third view called **progressive** dispensationalism (their term) in which the literal method of interpreting the Bible is **adamantly** denied, maintaining that Christ is

now ruling on David's throne (to some extent), that the Church partakes of blessings of Israel to some extent, and so forth.

Indeed, I asked one of the long time professors at DTS in the recent past about the current pre-tribulation view at DTS. I stated that there is no passage in the Bible that actually teaches it clearly (to which he agreed) but that it was an inference based on the consistent distinction between Israel and the Church as two separate peoples of God (to which he also agreed). But if this third view of dispensationalism was denying such a distinction, what would happen to pre-tribulationism? He stated that once the old van guard died, it would not be a point of doctrine anymore at DTS! But few people have kept up with the writings of these scholars, who are godly men, and are taking dispensationalism in a new direction. It will take at least two or three generations for these newer (and I would argue better) views to filter down from the seminary to the pulpit to the pew.

Moreover, it is the popular writers who often carry the day. What many do not know is that while I was a student at DTS, one popular writer was invited to the 50th anniversary of the seminary in 1974. His interpretations of the Bible were so arbitrary, with helicopters in the book of Revelation and other such things, that the professors and administration said they would never have him back again. As far as I know, he has never been back. Though he was a graduate of DTS (not with a degree but with a certificate), the professors thought that his popular brand of dispensationalism was just too far off base. It is the popular writers—not the dispensational scholars—who have given Christianity such a bad name with their date settings and unusual views of end times. They have popularized such things to the point that many cannot separate the essence of Christianity from such tangential views.

Some may claim that these popularizes do not date set, but such is really not true. I've personally heard one popular writer in the past say that the Jews got their land back in 1948, that a generation is 40 years in Scripture, thus the Lord should return in 1988. Sometimes he masks his comments with statements like, "Well, this may not be the end, **but** it looks very interesting." And what do most hear? "This is the end." And who remembers the unstable soul who published millions of copies of the book *88 Reasons for the Rapture in 1988*, and then when he was wrong *89 Reasons for the Rapture in 1989?* The secular media cannot separate the dispensational scholars from the myth makers, and condemn all Christians. But dispensational scholar John Walvoord stated in chapel when I was in seminary that we should not think that this is **necessarily** the prophesied return of the Jews to their land in 1948, for we just do not know. He went on to caution that they may be removed only to come back again later. But the media hear all these predictions from the popularizes and wrongly conclude that all Christians hold the same views. There is real harm done to the cause of Christ with such teaching when one thinks he knows who the antichrist is or when Christ will return. (And He will return!)

Of course, the whole Church for 2,000 years has not agreed that there are two separate peoples of God, Israel and the Church, but one people of God, Is-

rael that became the Church, and has not agreed that the land of Palestine is theirs, but that such was a type of the whole world. The Church has not been Marcion—the ancient teacher who taught that the two testaments had nothing to do with one another—but has rejected and condemned him. The Church has not taught that Christ has two brides, Israel and then the Church, but one bride, the people of God; the Lord is not a bigamist. To put this another way, the Abrahamic covenant promised at least four things: (1) the blessing of forgiveness of sins in covenant with God, (2) land, (3) seed, and (4) sacrifice. All of these were fulfilled in Christ: His blood is our forgiveness of sins in the new covenant, Christ was His seed and now we also are Abraham's seed by faith in Christ (Gal 3:29), there was the tabernacle and then the temple for sacrifices but now we have the once for all sacrifice of Christ (Heb 9-10), who is our temple (John 2:13-22) and we—the Church—are now the temple (Eph 2:11-12, 19-22), and the land promise is also now the whole world (Matt 5:5; 28:18-20; Rom 4:13; 1 Cor 15:22-26, etc). In other words, it was promised to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all nations (plural), not just to one nation, Israel. The Gentiles were thus prophesied to come into the covenant. In each case we have continuity (something that is the same) and escalation (something that is greater in fulfillment than the type). The blessing of forgiveness is now ours **in Christ**; the world that originally was given to man in the garden, promised to Abraham only as Palestine, is once again the world; the seed is not just one nation but now all nations; and the sacrifices of the Old Testament are now once for all by the blood of Christ. This is the heart and soul of the Gospel.

Whether one agrees with my statements in the preceding paragraph or not is not the point. I just wanted to express what the Church has held. My only plea here is for balance, not to identify a particular end time view with the faith, but to realize what the faith is: the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation (see Incarnation under Beliefs on the left side of your screen), forgiveness of sins by Christ alone and by faith alone, and so on. These are the important matters, and given the state of our society, we need to be preaching Christ, not antichrist. It is time that we Christians unite around the basics against the world and stop fighting among ourselves about matters that do not make up the essence of the faith. We at St. Francis and in the Reformed Episcopal Church will give the right hand of fellowship to anyone who can accept the basic truths of Christianity, regardless of what his/her end time perception may be. We would ask for the same charitableness.

Here is our motto: In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, love.