

A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism

(Part XII)

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The Victory of Christ in History

Jesus Christ is victor.

He is victor already now. He is victor in this world.

We do not see this yet. But we believe it as the clear testimony of the Bible.

In His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, He has become the Lord. He sits now at God's right hand. He wields the power of providence, upholding and governing all things (Eph. 1:19-23; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 5).

Jesus Christ is victor as Mediator of the covenant and Head of the church. By His atoning death and bodily resurrection, He has conquered sin, Satan, death, and the ungodly world and has become the sovereign, almighty, life-giving Lord on behalf of His church.

He is victor, not only personally on high in heaven but also as He is present in His church down here in the world by His Spirit and Word.

His gospel goes out into all the world with conquering power (Rev. 6:1,2).

His church on earth is a victorious institution. She is indestructible. She cannot be defeated by her foes. "I will build my church," said the Christ, the Son of the living God, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

She accomplishes her ecclesiastical calling and labor with unique, awesome power, and without fail. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

The church of Christ has been victorious in history, as regards her mature, New Testament form, since the day of Pentecost.

Not only is the church victorious but also each member of the church is victorious by the indwelling, empowering Christ. Here and now. Indeed, he is not merely a conqueror. He

is more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37). His many enemies are made in the end to work his good. The assurance of this is the strength and zeal of the Christian life.

Jesus Christ is victor in history.

His body and its members share in this victory.

This is what the church is celebrating when she confesses, "Jesus Christ our Lord."

The victory of Jesus Christ in history is the main concern of postmillennialism, especially the Christian Reconstructionist form of postmillennialism. Its dream of the future conversion of a majority of mankind, the "Christianizing" of the world, the dominion over the nations by the church, and a "golden age of peace and prosperity", before the return of Christ, represents the victory of Christ in history. Postmillennialism is optimistic about the future of history. It is an "eschatology of victory."

Amillennialism's sober forecast of increasing lawlessness, great apostasy, and persecution of the church by Antichrist is judged to be a denial of the victory of King Jesus in history. Reformed amillennialism is scorned as defeatist and pessimistic.

Christian Reconstructionist postmillennialist Greg L. Bahnsen saw the victory of Jesus in history as the main issue between postmillennialism and amillennialism:

What is really at stake is the question of the *future prospects on earth* for the *already established* kingdom. Shall it, prior to Christ's return, bring all nations under its sway, thereby generating a period of spiritual blessing, international peace, and visible prosperity? Shall the church, which has been promised the continual presence of Him who has been given all power in heaven and earth, be successful in making disciples of all nations as He commanded? On this basic and substantive issue — one which succeeds in separating out the three millennial schools — it becomes apparent that the *essential distinctive* of postmillennialism is its scripturally derived, sure expectation of gospel prosperity for the church during the *present age*.

. . . In short, postmillennialism is set apart from the other two schools of thought by its essential *optimism* for the kingdom in the *present age*. This confident attitude in the power of Christ's kingdom, the power of its gospel, the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the progress of the great commission, sets postmillennialism apart from the essential pessimism of amillennialism and premillennialism.... In the final analysis, what is characteristic of postmillennialism is not a uniform answer to any one particular exegetical question but rather a commitment to the gospel as the power of God which, in the agency of the Holy Spirit, shall convert the vast majority of the world to Christ and bring widespread obedience to His kingdom rule ("The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on the Millennium* 3, no. 2, Winter, 1976-77, pp.66-68; the emphasis is Bahnsen's).

Gary North sprinkles the charge that Reformed amillennialism is “defeatist” liberally throughout his writings. He misses few opportunities to jeer at Reformed amillennialists as “pessimillennialists.” The amillennial doctrine of the last things, says North, makes “God ... a loser in history (*Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1988, p.167). This is a damning indictment of a doctrine.

Nor is it only the Christian Reconstructionists who present the controversy between amillennialism and postmillennialism as centering on the victory of Christ in history. The Presbyterian J. Marcellus Kik did the same. The coming “glorious age of the church upon earth” in which “all nations (become) Christian and (live) in peace,” he called “the triumph of Christianity throughout the earth.” He accused amillennialists of being “pessimists and defeatists”:

To say that the defeat of Satan will only come through a cataclysmic act at the second coming of Christ is ridiculous in the light of these passages. To think that the church must grow weaker and weaker and the kingdom of Satan stronger and stronger is to deny that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil; it is to dishonor Christ; it is to disbelieve His Word. We do not glorify God nor His prophetic word by being pessimists and defeatists. With sufficient faith in Christ we could crush Satan under our feet shortly. Or else these passages have no significance to the church of Christ (*An Eschatology of Victory*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971, pp. 4, 19, 20).

The dubious honor, however, of the fiercest, and most wicked, attack on amillennialism belongs to the father of Christian Reconstructionism, Rousas J. Rushdoony. Lumping amillennialism with premillennialism (and we will see about this in a forthcoming article), Rushdoony has dared to write:

Amillennialism ... (is) in retreat from the world and blasphemously surrender(s) it to the devil. By its very premise that the world will only get worse ... it cuts the nerve of Christian action.... If we hold that the world can only get worse ... what impetus is left for applying the word of God to the problems of this world? The result is an inevitable one: amillennial believers who profess faith in the whole word of God ... are also the most impotent segment of American society, with the least impact on American life. To turn the world-conquering word of the sovereign, omnipotent, and triune God into a symbol of impotence is not a mark of faith. It is blasphemy (“Postmillennialism versus Impotent Religion,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, pp. 126, 127).

According to Rushdoony and his disciples, amillennialism denies the victory of Christ in history. Thus, it makes God and His Word impotent. To make God impotent is blasphemous. Amillennialism, therefore, is blasphemy.

In light of these savage assaults upon amillennialism and us amillennialists, it is surprising that some postmillennialists have objected to my tempered criticism of Christian Reconstructionism. I have been restrained.

In light of this constant barrage of violent condemnation of amillennialism from within the Presbyterian and Reformed community, it is nothing less than astounding that there is no spirited defense of amillennialism in those circles in which the Christian Reconstructionists move.

In light of postmillennialism's own sharp, radical distinguishing of itself from amillennialism in terms of nothing less than the victory or defeat of Christ in history, it is incomprehensible that some who do speak out, weakly, in favor of amillennialism still attempt to align amillennialism with postmillennialism as two acceptable eschatologies in the Reformed churches.

Reformed amillennialism repudiates postmillennialism's "victory of Jesus Christ in history," root and branch. That is, the **kind** of victory desired and dreamed by postmillennialism, we renounce.

But Reformed amillennialism takes a back seat to no one, including the most fervent Christian Reconstructionist, in believing, confessing, preaching, teaching, and defending the victory of Jesus Christ in history.

Christ has dominion.

Now.

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