

A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism

(Part XIII)

[Prof. David J. Engelsma](#)

The Victory of Christ in History

(Concluded)

The gross error of postmillennialism is that it misconceives the victory of Christ in history as carnal rather than spiritual. Gary North is wrong when he says, “It’s not a question of ‘dominion vs. no dominion’; it’s a question of whose dominion” (*Unconditional Surrender*, ICE, 1988, p. 317).

It is emphatically not a question of “whose dominion.”

Jesus Christ has dominion.

Jesus Christ has dominion in the world in history

Jesus Christ has dominion now.

Not 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 question is not, “Whose dominion?”

But the question is, “What kind of dominion?”

Specifically, the question is, “*Carnal* dominion or *spiritual* dominion?”

Carnal dominion is earthly victory. It is victory according to the thinking of man. It consists of numbers — the conversion of a majority of humans; of physical force — a Christian police force and army; of control of culture — godly television, radio, and newspapers; of deliverance from worldly cares and natural miseries — the virtual eradication of poverty, sickness, and war; and of material prosperity — jobs, money, houses, and long life.

This is the dominion of Christ that is proclaimed by postmillennialism, especially by Christian Reconstructionism. This is supposed to be the victory of Christ in history, the flourishing of the Messianic kingdom.

It is a carnal dominion.

The victory heralded by Reformed amillennialism is spiritual. It is real victory. It is real victory here and now. But it is victory according to the thinking of God. It is contrary to human standards of victory. It makes all natural human thinking about victory, including that of Christian Reconstructionism, foolishness. No eye can see this victory, just as no eye can see the kingdom that is established by this victory (John 3:3). The victory and kingdom of Christ can only be known by faith.

The true victory of Christ in history is His saving of the elect church from sin. It is His empowering that church to confess His name. It is His preservation of the church in holiness of life unto life eternal. To this saving of the church belongs Christ's institution of true churches that preach the gospel purely, administer the sacraments properly, and exercise Christian discipline rightly.

The conquering Christ gathers the elect church out of all nations and institutes true churches in all nations. Thus, the nations are saved and disciplined, as Christ commanded in Matthew 28:19. In the salvation and obedience of the elect among them, the nations are saved and disciplined, regardless of the numbers, whether many or few. The postmillennial notion that the salvation of a nation requires the conversion of a majority of the population is unbiblical. Just as the elect remnant in Israel was the real nation of Israel, even though they were the small minority (Rom. 9:6), so also the elect Chinese are the real China, the elect Dutch are the real Netherlands, and the elect English are the real England. If the victory of Christ is a matter of sheer numbers, Christ is the loser in history, since He saves fewer humans than perished in Adam, as even the most optimistic postmillennialist must admit.

Christ's victory in history is the gathering of the church out of the nations. This gathering includes that the church is faithful to her calling to confess Jesus Christ. He Himself said that building the church is His work in history (Matt. 16:18, 19). The church is His glorious and indestructible kingdom, the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 72, as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches in Lord's Day 48 when it explains the petition, "Thy kingdom come," as meaning, "Preserve and increase thy church."

Since the church is made up of her elect members, the dominion of Christ is also His reign in the heart and life of each of His chosen people. The Heidelberg Catechism begins its explanation of the victorious kingdom of Christ here: "Rule us so by thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee." 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.

The victory of Christ is progressive. The perfection of it, as regards the church, the individual elect, and the creation, will be realized by Christ Himself personally at His coming. The perfection of His victory is not to be within history, but as the end of history (I Cor. 15:22-28; Rev. 21; Rom. 8:18-23). There is good reason for this. It must be

demonstrated, so that none can doubt or gainsay, that *Christ, Christ personally*, is Savior and Lord to the glory of God.

The King accomplishes this victory by the gospel (Mark 16:15; II Cor. 10:3-5).

To mock this spiritual victory of Christ is unbelief.

To be dissatisfied with it is ingratitude.

To underestimate its awesome power and wondrous glory is folly.

To be oblivious to it because one has his heart set on a carnal victory and earthly kingdom of the Messiah is “Jewish dreams.”

Only the spiritual nature of the victory of Christ in history harmonizes with the teaching of the Bible that the church in the world is a church that is always reproached and persecuted - a church “under the cross” (Matt. 24:9, 10, 21-31; John 15:18-16:4; John 16:33; II Thess., 1:4-10; II Tim. 3; I Pet. 4:12-14).

Only the spiritual character of Christ’s victory in each elect believer explains the fact that the man or woman who, according to Romans 8:37, is conqueror in history, indeed, “more than conqueror,” is at the same time, and all the while, “killed all the day long ... accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (v.36).

At the same time, victorious and persecuted! Christian Reconstruction cannot understand this, does not know what to make of this. Only the spiritual mind, the mind of Christ, understands this. The natural mind supposes that the victorious party *does* the persecuting.

Blinded by its assumption that the victory of Christ in history is carnal, postmillennialism stumbles into other, glaring errors. For one thing, a Loraine Boettner can cheerily announce that the world is getting better right along. Chapter 7 of his *The Millennium* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958) is entitled, “The World is Growing Better.” This, in a century that has witnessed the horrors of Nazi Germany; the atrocities of Stalin’s Soviet Union; the slaughters of Mao’s China; the killings of Pol Pot’s Cambodia; the cruelties of the Africans at the present time; and the butcheries of their own offspring by the United States.

This, in a century that has seen the “Christian” West sink into the depths of approving homosexuality.

For another thing, the dream of earthly victory arouses the desire to bring it about, quickly. This demands numbers and political power. Since Calvinists are few, and Christian Reconstructionists still fewer, the Christian Reconstructionists make alliances with the more numerous charismatics in order to realize the dominion of Messiah (see Bruce Barron, *Heaven on Earth? The Social & Political Agendas of Dominion Theology*,

Zondervan, 1992 and Michael G. Moriarty, "The Dominion Pursuit: Will the Church Christianize the World?" in *The New Charismatics*, Zondervan, 1992). The dream of an earthly kingdom of Christ always produces strange bedfellows.

Worst of all, postmillennialism, in fact, charges Christ with being a weak and defeated King in history. At least, up to the present time. For as yet His kingdom has not been victorious in history, as postmillennialism counts victory. For almost 2,000 years Christ has failed to "Christianize" the world. So far, He has been a "loser." In addition, the leading postmillennialists attribute the failure of Christ to achieve victory to the weakness and faithlessness of His church. The Commander has poor troops. J. Marcellus Kik has written:

Unfortunately the Church of today does not realize the power that Christ has given her. Christ has placed in her hands the chain by which she can bind Satan. She can restrain his influence over the nations. But today the Church bemoans the fact that evil is becoming stronger and stronger. She bemoans the fact that the world is coming more and more under the control of the Devil. Whose fault is that? It is the Church. She has the chain and does not have the faith to bind Satan even more firmly. Satan is bound and the Church knows it not! Satan can be bound more firmly and the Church does it not! (*An Eschatology of Victory*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971, p.196)

Gary North agrees: "The only thing that is holding up the victory of God's home guard is the home guard's lack of confidence, lack of training, and lack of tactics" (*Unconditional Surrender*, p. 366).

This is a reflection on Jesus Christ. For, as North declares, Jesus is the "Supreme Allied Commander" (p.365). If only He had better troops, that is, a stronger church! But why doesn't He? Has He been unable now for 2,000 years to create men and women who are strong and faithful enough to do His will and bring about His earthly kingdom?

O, the weak Jesus Christ of Christian Reconstructionism!

The Jesus who depends upon men and who is evidently unable to make His men dependable is a defeated Jesus.

North admits this: "*Christ is waiting for His church to surround Satan's last outpost. Christ is waiting for the work of the leaven to replace Satan's leaven in the dough of creation*" (*Unconditional Surrender*, p.332; the emphasis is North's).

What is the difference between a Jesus who is helplessly waiting for men to get busy finally to bring about His kingdom and the Jesus of Arminianism who is helplessly waiting for men to let Him reign in their hearts?

Neither of them is the Jesus Christ of Reformed amillennialism.

Our Jesus is Lord.

He conquered in His cross and resurrection.

He has been conquering in the gospel from Pentecost to this moment.

His Messianic kingdom has come in its prophesied power, peace, riches, and glory. Worldwide!

Faithful, zealous, energetic “troops,” made willing in this the day of His power, serve Him, doing all that He commands them to do, although not perfectly. These are the living members of the true, Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the world.

Jesus is victor.

Really.

A spiritual victor.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [Reformed Perspectives Magazine Forum](#).

Subscribe to Reformed Perspectives Magazine

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [Reformed Perspectives Magazine](#), please select this [link](#).