

Dispensationalism and Orthodox Eschatology

Daniel Artur Branco

INTRODUCTION

The present article aims to investigate the orthodox view of eschatology and to present the error of dispensationalism in both the historical and biblical sense. The first section will be to study the historic origin of dispensationalism. The second section will be to investigate the aspect of dispensationalism in the twenty-first century. The third section will explain the Lutheran condemnation of chiliasm. The fourth and last section will make a biblical evaluation of the dispensational doctrine.

1- Origin of the Dispensationalist Doctrine

Contrary to what is claimed by dispensationalists nowadays, dispensationalism didn't begin in the primitive church. In fact, there are not only few fathers in the early church that espoused speculations concerning a future millennial kingdom. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyon, Lactantius and Melito of Sardis are examples of fathers called "Chiliasts". However, the early fathers: 1) didn't believe in a secret rapture; 2) didn't teach that all non-essential speculation concerning determined issues were apostolic and universal doctrine. For example, one of the most ancient fathers, Ignatius of Antioch, taught that the bishops had the authority over the church and, by logic, the speculations couldn't be dogmatic without the universal consensus of the bishops; 3) despite the fact that other fathers didn't teach the same high episcopal ecclesiology of Ignatius of Antioch, at least the notion of dogma as universal doctrine was taught, that is, non-universal doctrines weren't dogmatic; 4) Origen is a famous example of the rejection of chiliasm in the early church; 5) the anathema to "Origen-ism" by the Fifth Ecumenical Council wasn't an anathema to Origen's rejection of chiliasm (to the contrary, the early condemnation of chiliasm was supported by the councils); 6) Eusebius of Caesarea did condemn as heretical the millenarianism of Bishop Nepos and didn't make a difference

between a false millenarianism and a “possible” true millenarianism; but in this case he condemned millennialism itself, to support Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria against Nepos (the heretical Apollinaris of Laodicea and the gnostic Cerinthus both supported millennialism as well); 7) The Apostolic Creed teaches only one return of Christ in the end of times; 8) the primitive church came from Judaism to gentile people (all the apostles were Jewish) and it was natural that some Jewish notions remained in the imagery of some of the first Christians; 9) and maybe the most important point: millennialism was common even to the fathers that made confused speculations about the millennial belief that Jesus was already reigning in the church by the sacraments (the belief of the bodily presence of Christ in the eucharist was a clear idea that in the universal church Jesus was reigning over the world). These points are sufficient to show that it was impossible for the early church, as the universal Church, to be dispensationalist.

There are those who state: “the early church wasn’t dispensationalist, but believed in the historical or non-dispensational premillennialism”. Nevertheless “non - dispensational premillennialism” is an oxymoron. It’s logically impossible to talk about premillennialism without talking about Jesus' millennial kingdom in Israel. For if Jesus will literally reign in a sacred country and sit on a sacred throne, it’s necessary to admit that this country and this throne is a gentile country and a gentile throne. This heretical position fails because it gives to a gentile nation the status of a chosen people or a chosen nation like Israel in the Old Testament (certainly evangelicals reject this notion and even oppose the Roman Catholic title Eternal City, given to the city of Rome, and reject Universal See, given to “the See of Peter”), or that Israel will be this country and David's throne will be this throne. Thus, the “historical premillennialism”, although it claimed to be more speculative, opened to debate the formal and systematic doctrine of dispensationalism prior to the beginning of dispensationalist doctrine. It (“historic premillennialism”) is still linked to dispensationalism by many aspects like logical implications, essence of doctrine and non-systematic and informal teaching of the same fundamental postulates of this doctrine.

Non-dispensational premillennialism doesn't exist. It's possible to exist only as an informal and non-systematic teaching (as a forerunner) of essentially the same dispensational doctrine that in the future got a formal system. Therefore, all kinds of premillennialism were absent from the universal dogma of the early church. The Council of Constantinople condemned the heresies of Apollinaris, who was a Chiliast as well, and supported the addition of the phrase "His kingdom shall have no end", which teaches an only and eternal kingdom of Christ in the Nicene Creed, also called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Likewise the Council of Ephesus, which occurred after the death of Saint Augustine, condemned Chiliasm as an error and an illusion. These councils expressed the real doctrine of the universal and apostolic church concerning eschatology because, first of all, the confusion and doubts of some fathers about the millennium were not doctrines. Also it is possible to say that even they believed that Jesus was already reigning in the church by the sacraments. On the other hand, the early church always condemned chiliasm, premillennialism, or dispensationalism as doctrines, as was shown in the cases of Nepos, Apollinaris and Cerinthus.

The official rejection of the heresy of a millennium didn't avoid different people in history who taught millennialism. Joachim de Fiore, in the twelfth century, taught the existence of different dispensations to mankind: the age of the Father, age of the Son and age of the Holy Spirit. To him, the thirteenth century, precisely the year of 1260, would be the end of the age of the Son and the beginning of the Age of the Holy Spirit. His disciples were called Joachimites. During the reformation period until the eighteenth century, some enthusiasts, Anabaptists, Puritans and Pietists taught chiliastic doctrines. But the Magisterial Reformation, that is, Lutherans and the Calvinist denominations, like the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, rejected this heresy. However, in the nineteenth century, millennialism and dispensationalism were recreated in the churches. Perhaps this century is the modern origin of dispensationalism. Before it, this doctrine was taught by a minority. From it, it found success in the evangelical circles. John Nelson Darby, a member of the Plymouth Brethren, is considered the father of

modern dispensationalism¹. His doctrine has influenced many famous dispensationalist authors over the years, like the scholar C. I. Scofield² and the writer Tim LaHaye. Other authors, like the scholar Charles Ryrie³, adopted a modified view of Darbyian and Scofieldian dispensationalism. Today many Baptists called themselves pre-millennials or dispensationalists⁴.

Pentecostalism became so popular that modern evangelicalism has many times considered this synonymous, and generally has adopted a Zionist and dispensationalist eschatology as well. Normally, even when the Pentecostals do not have a systematic view of dispensationalism, the popular imagination of their members is affected by dispensational thoughts and the belief in the rapture. The success of dispensationalism in the media, principally through cinema, theater and music helped to popularize the belief in the rapture and to make this doctrine influential like never before⁵.

¹ “Now the mystery which belongs to us is not merely that we should have the sure mercies of David by virtue of His resurrection. This will be made sure to the Jews (Acts 13:32-34), in the day when He shall see them, even the believing remnant, and He shall sit upon the throne of David His father, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever, all nations serving Him, and the nation and kingdom which will not serve Jerusalem shall perish, yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted”. See Darby’s article published in <http://www.cpjasper.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Day-8-Progressive-Dispensationalism.pdf>

² “In the fullness of time John the Baptist, and then Christ came preaching ‘the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ ‘But His own received Him not.’ Israel would not have her King ‘meek and lowly’ (Zech ix:9; Matt xxi: 1-15), and so, when His rejection by the bulk of the nation became manifest, the Kingdom was postponed, and Christ announced the mystery, the Church”. See SCOFIELD, C. I. *Addresses on Prophecy*. The Gospel Hour, Greenville.

³ “Because the King was rejected, the Messianic, Davidic Kingdom was (from a human viewpoint) postponed. Though He never ceases to be King and, of course, is King today, He does not rule as King. This awaits His second coming. Then the Davidic Kingdom will be realized (Matt 25; 31; Rev 19. 15;20)”. See RYRIE, Charles. *Basic Theology*. Victor, Wheaton, 1986.

⁴ Chafer was a pastor of Congregational church: The Church will be removed and Israel advanced to a position above all the nations of the earth with Jehovah’s Law written in their hearts and the Spirit poured out on all flesh”. See “Chafer’s article published in http://bartimaeus.us/pub_dom/dispensationalism.html”.

⁵ Maybe the confessional Lutheran champion Francis Pieper would be considered an antichristian for them: “This pernicious effect [of the Judaizing Christianity] is intensified if this dream of

2- Aspects of Dispensationalism in the Twenty-first Century

Today many dispensationalists prefer to call themselves Progressive Dispensationalists. This issue has caused misunderstandings among theological circles, but some adepts of the PD, state that the criticism of dispensationalism cannot be linked with their doctrine. They assert that there exist considerable differences between them and the traditional dispensationalists; and, it is necessary firstly to make a meticulous study of their doctrine and only after that, to start to criticize them. This point is only partially correct. It is correct when it asserts that there exist differences among different dispensational schools and that it is unjust to make exactly the same criticisms, point by point, to all of them. But is incorrect when they try to relativize the fact that these differences are not essential, or substantial differences, and that even the PD falls into the same substantial error of millennialism and dispensationalism.

.What are the substantial or essential beliefs of dispensationalism? There are different possibilities in answer to this question. Some scholars summarize this doctrine in more points than other scholars. This article has no intention of being exhaustive, but to offer a succinct answer. Some points need to be enumerated: dispensationalists believe: 1) that the Christian Church (with her sacraments) is not the same as Israel in the Old Testament; 2) that futurist OT prophecies are not completely fulfilled by the Christian Church; 3) that David's throne must be occupied by Jesus in Israel; 4) that the Jews are still the chosen people; 5) that the sacraments are not means of grace by which

a future "time of the Jews" is made attractive to them by promises of Jewish nationalism, a return to, and possession of, the land of their forefathers, and a rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, with re-establishment of its elaborate worship. One of the many deplorable consequences of the World War is the promise of the Allies to give Palestine to the Jews as their national home. Instead of repenting of their sins and believing in the Messiah who has come, the Orthodox Jews dream of a return to Palestine and the rebuilding of the Temple with its worship (Zionism), and the Reform Jews envision a spiritual domination of the world by Jewish intellectual superiority and erudition" See PIEPER, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics - Vol. III*, Concordia Publishing House-CPH, St Louis-Mo, 1953, p. 534

the Incarnate Christ comes to believers both in the Old and New Testaments; 6) that eternal election can subsist even when it rejects Christ; 7) that in the end, prior to the millennium, the Jews as a nation will believe in Christ; 8) that Jesus will reign over Israel in the Millennium. 9) that believers must recognize that Palestine is a land given by God to Israel and that it is strictly necessary for the Jews to occupy that land in the millennium; 10) that political support to Israel in the final years that precede the millennium is required of believers. Although, different groups have different insights, these ten points are common to various types of dispensationalists.

Eminent scholars of the PD, like Saucy⁶, Blaising, Ice and Bock, have tried to approximate PD to Calvinistic pactual (i.e. covenantal) theology⁷. They admit that there exist discontinuities between the OT and NT⁸: that faith is necessary to salvation in both

⁶“The Christian cannot accept this total negative understanding with respect to the fulfillment of the promises. Jesus has come as the Christ in fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures. This is the consistent apostolic witness. But some Christian interpreters are also willing to acknowledge that while some of the OT prophecies are fulfilled in Christ, there remain many that are yet unfulfilled. With specific reference to Israel LaSor says: There are countless prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Israel and the land of promise which have not been fulfilled in the Christian church, and, in my opinion, can never be fulfilled in the church. They can be fulfilled only in Israel.²⁴ The Church has frequently seen herself as the "new Israel" fulfilling Israel's promises through the realization of the new covenant. But the question must be asked as to whether we have experienced the full reality of this covenant and its implication for salvation as prophesied for Israel. See SAUCY, Robert. *A rationale for the future of Israel*. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, Chicago, 1985, p. 440

⁷“That Israel was to be a channel in the service of God in some way to bring this to the nations is also clear. Whether this Israel refers to the nation or the Church remains in dispute.” See SAUCY, Robert. *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids-MI, 1993, p. 441.

⁸“The Scriptures frequently reveal different applications of similar language without implying a change in identity. The fact that the same phrase about God's son being called out of Egypt applies to both Israel and Christ does not make these objects identical (cf. Hos 11:1 and Mt 2:15)”. See BLAISING, Craig; and BOCK, Darrel. *Progressive Dispensationalism*. Bridgepoint Books, Grand Rapids-MI, 2000, p. 206.

testaments; that some OT prophecies (against the traditional dispensationalists who believe it must be only applied to Israel) can be applied to the Christian church as well; and, that in some sense Jesus is seated on David's throne through the Christian Church, too. However, none of these changes⁹ in the dispensationalist thought¹⁰ changes the core of the issue¹¹. For example, when they admit the existence of discontinuities between the OT and NT and that recognition imposes on them the necessity to be clear regarding the coming of Jesus to millennial Israel and to a literal Davidic throne, the faith in the Incarnate Christ as visible evidence of eternal election and political Zionism, they appeal to the indefiniteness of PD and many times say that these themes still need to be debated.

⁹ “It is hard to define exactly what PD is for a number of reasons. First, it is still in the development stage. Second, it is easier to say what they don’t believe and how they are different than older dispensationalists, than what they actually believe since it appears that some of their thought is tentative”. See ICE, Thomas. *What is Progressive Dispansationalism?* Article published in <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Ice-WhatIsProgressiveDis.pdf>.

¹⁰ “Darrell Bock lists three types of dispensationalism: 1. Scofieldian Dispensationalism - This was popularized by C.I. Scofield who was influenced by the teachings of those within the Brethren movement in England in the early nineteenth century. Scofield's teachings influenced others such as Lewis Sperry Chafer who founded Evangelical Theological College which became Dallas Theological Seminary. 2. Revised Dispensationalism - This brand came about in the middle of the 1900's and was popularized by men such as Alva McClain, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie and Dwight Pentecost. This revised form was to clarify positions held by those of the Scofield era and resulted in the publication of the New Scofield Bible in 1967. Bock contends that revised dispensationalism saw more continuity between the church and Israel and the promises of God to Israel are associated more closely with the church. He said, "no longer is there a great distinction in the work of God for two peoples as in the Scofieldian Dispensationalism." 3. Progressive Dispensationalism - This newer form sees more continuity between Israel and the church in God's plan. Bock and Blaising stated: "the older idea that the church was a parenthetical break between God's Jewish work in the Old Testament and God's Jewish work in the future is being replaced by the assertion that the church, although different, has much in common with Israel." Blaising talks about four stages: “1) Niagara premillennialism, 2) Scofieldism, 3) essentialist dispensationalism of Charles Ryrie, and 4) progressive dispensationalism or postessentialist dispensationalism”. See Article *A brief sketch of Progressive Dispensationalism* published in http://www.faithbaptistwestfield.com/images/biblical_studies/topical_studies/dispensational/progressivedispens.pdf.

¹¹ “A Jew who becomes a Christian today does not lose his or her relationship to Israel’s future promises”. See BLAISING, Craig; and BOCK, Darrel. *Progressive Dispensationalism*. Bridgepoint Books, Grand Rapids-MI, 2000, p. 50.

But these things are essential differences between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalist. If PD scholars don't have clear answers to these issues, the alleged changes in dispensational thought, created by them, are nothing more than speculation, logical paradox and confusion. If PD says that faith is necessary to salvation, but the Jewish people can remain the chosen people, even while rejecting the Incarnate Christ, this "faith" is only an abstract faith and not the faith in the concrete Incarnate Logos. If PD says that is necessary for Jesus to come to Israel and to the Davidic-Jewish throne, so that the core of the OT futuristic prophecies are only truly fulfilled in Israel, then the promises weren't truly made to the Christian Church. Despite new insights, all of these things show that today the essence of dispensationalism remains much the same as in the nineteenth century (or even much the same as the early heresies in Christian history).

3. Lutheran Condemnation of Chiliasm

Despite the fact that Luther believed that the world could to end fifty years after the reformation period, his doctrine rejected millennialism. The Work *Jews and Their Lies* has been used to prove that Luther was an anti-Semite. In fact, he was hard on them. However, Luther didn't believe in the ethnic inferiority of the Jewish people. He first wanted to convert the Jewish people to reformation. It was only after his personal experience with the Jewish rejection of Christ and with the blasphemous terms used by them against Christianity that Luther turned against them. This issue is only part of the personal history of Luther and not part of his doctrine. His doctrine condemns the legalistic spirit of Judaism and the Judaizing elements in Christianity. To Luther, Christianity is a religion of grace and Judaism a religion of Law. The Law is part of Christianity but cannot be confused with the Gospel. To Luther, if someone doesn't make the correct distinction between Gospel and Law, he cannot teach true justification by faith alone and cannot be called a Christian. This same teaching concerning Gospel, Law, Justification by Faith Alone, the rejection of Judaism and the Judaizing spirit in Christianity are in the Lutheran Confessions. Like Luther, the Lutheran Confessions

condemned all forms of chiliasm (it can include the postmillennialist view that talks about the Golden Age of the Christian Church on Earth, using millennialist notions).

The Augsburg Confession states that chiliast ideas are “Jewish opinions”¹². This statement has important implications. First of all, that dispensationalism is linked with syncretism. Secondly, that it confuses Law and Gospel. Thirdly, it affects the correct knowledge of justification by faith. Indeed, the Lutheran Confessions, when they say that chiliasm is “Jewish” and not Christian, are saying that chiliasm, as long as it is Chilliast, is not completely Christian, but a “Judaizing Christianity”. Also they are saying that if a Christian who must live by the Gospel and not by Judaism, which is a religion of law, wants to return to a Judaizing notion of faith, he is denying the Gospel and returning to Law. Moreover, it is necessary to Christian Judaizing elements, that justification is no longer by faith alone. This is according to all the teachings of the Lutheran Church and if the entire Lutheran theology is studied it becomes even clearer. In fact, dispensationalism is not only an eschatological opinion, but a syncretic and Judaizing worldview, that includes justification¹³ in the abstract without the incarnated Jesus¹⁴; election¹⁵ even after

¹²“They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed”. See Augsburg Confession, Article XVI.

¹³“In the tenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when faith is required as a condition of justification and salvation, as if a person were righteous in the sight of God and saved, not only by faith, but also on account of his faith, for the sake of his faith, and in view of his faith.”. See Walther's Fourteenth theses concerning Law and Gospel published in <http://lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/walther/LG/theses.html>.

¹⁴ “Jesus” is the New Testament version of the Old Testament “Joshua” or “Isaiah.” Yet the names in the Bible always have much more meaning behind them. Open your bulletin and look at those squiggly lines next to the Christmas Meditation. Those are the Hebrew letters for Jesus. Those letters mean “YHWH saves” – “the Lord saves.” Jesus literally does what His name means – YHWH saves. Immanuel, Prince of Peace, Branch, Word, King, Lamb and Shepherd – each of these names attempts to capture the un-capturable – the grandeur of God. They try to encapsulate the essence of the Son of God. We have grown to know and love these names. But they all fall a bit short. Hearing these names, as familiar as they are, is somewhat like hearing a grade school band trying to play Handel’s Messiah. They just can’t get it all in. No names do God justice”. See Sermon published in <http://www.epiphany-wels.org/sermons/2014/12/26/the-name-of-jesus>

¹⁵[we cannot to] begin to consider [the election or predestination] [...] apart from the actual salvific act of Christ at the cross”. See Mathew Block article why Lutheran predestination isn’t

the rejection of Jesus¹⁶; the mixing between Gospel and Law by Zionistic political militancy – also the likening of the political enemies of the Jews, such as the Iranians and Iraqis, to biblical Babylonians; refusal of the sacraments as the real Means of Grace; denying the Gospel by belief in the necessity of the reintroduction of ritual and political elements of the Law in the Millennium; and the furthering of the defense of the tenets of the supremacist doctrine of race (in this case, the Jewish race) even after the work of Christ on Earth.

4. Biblical Rejection of Dispensationalism

To many evangelicals the word “supersessionism” or the term “replacement theology” sounds like heresy due to the years of use by dispensationalist scholars of the supposed New Testament references in support of the idea of the continuation of the mosaic covenant side by side with the Christian Church. Among the most used biblical verses by dispensationalists to defend their position are OT verses concerning Israel that they interpret literally. The NT verses are: Acts 1:6-7, Gal. 2:7-9, 1 Cor. 15: 51-52, 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and chapter 11 of Romans and chapter 20 of Revelation. But none of these biblical references supports the dispensationalist or millennialist doctrine. The misinterpretation of these verses happens because many modern interpreters generally

Calvinist predestination published in <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2013/10/why-lutheran-predestination-isnt-calvinist-predestination>

¹⁶ The eternal election of God, however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto; and upon this [divine predestination] our salvation is so founded that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, Mt. 16:18, as it is written John 10:28: Neither shall any man pluck My Sheep, out of My Hand. And again, Acts 13:48 : And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed. See *Formula of Concord concerning election in Christ*. See : <https://bookofconcord.org/sd-sd-election.php>.

ignore the mystical nature of the Christian faith. This is the same problem of the misrepresentation of the OT prophetic hermeneutics by dualism: literalism versus symbolism. For example, when the people of Israel receive prophecies directly by God in the OT, it is natural to think of the application of these prophecies literally. It's not wrong. However, the nature of Christian revelation is that there is a distinction between the revealed God and *Deus Absconditus*, that is, in the metaphysical sphere God is impartial, but in the revealed sphere God shows Himself in a language of sincere relationship with mankind.

These two “sides” of God are part of Christian theology and there are different aspects of these “sides”, whereas God’s substantiality is the same. Therefore, despite the fact that God metaphysically cannot change, in Revelation divine prophecies can be redirected by human sin. If “prophecy” is understood (by late sense) correctly as the prediction of the future, there are considerable examples of these cases in the OT. In Genesis 9:9 God says to Noah: *“And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you”*. After that, God approved Noah's speech against his son Ham: *“And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant”* (Gen. 9:25-26). In the second book of Kings God says through the prophet Isaiah that King Hezekiah is going to die soon: *“In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live”* (2 Kings 2:1). After that, God answered the appeal of the king and said: *“I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake”* (2 Kings 20:5-6).

In the calling of Abraham in Genesis 17 terms like *מְאוֹן גֹּיִם* and *מְאֹד בְּמֵאֹד* denote the grandiosity of temporal blessings over Abraham's seeds, but in the future God used the prophet Jeremiah to talk about His letter of divorce to Israel and of the small

remnant. This same message was given to the prophet Ezekiel: *“Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.”*(Ezekiel 17:22-24). In all of these cases God’s prophecy didn’t fail; but, for the sinner of men, it readapted to new contexts. It’s by the same spirit that the apostle Paul talks about God’s prophecy and God’s sovereignty to both Jewish and Gentile audiences. God sovereignly used the Jewish people for the future salvation of Gentiles and at the same time God was sincere with Israel, but the Jews denied God. It was then that God’s promises were readapted into a new context, that is, into the Gentile context. Luke shows this in Acts 1:6-7, where it is said: *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power”*. Here Jesus doesn’t endorse the idea of a Jewish kingdom, but the idea that the mystical church, that shared his body, is truly the kingdom of Israel and the city of the church is the mystical Jerusalem (not the temporal Jerusalem).

In context, God’s promises are mystically applied to Christianity. In Galatians 2:7-9 it was not taught that there exists two churches, a Jewish and a Gentile church, but different customs. Until the present day the Ethiopian Church has the custom of circumcising its members. It’s different from making circumcision a duty to believers. Paul says that going back to the law is disconnecting from Christ. Likewise neither 1 Cor. 15: 51-52 nor 1 Thess. 4:15-17 teaches a rapture, but the coming of Christ in the air to the judgment of all mankind, the dead and the living. In this return, *“so shall we ever be with the Lord”*(1 Thess. 4:17). In Romans 11 Paul says: *“For if the firstfruit {be} holy, the*

lump {is} also {holy}: and if the root {be} holy, so {are} the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; {among them: or, for them} Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, the branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, {take heed} lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in {his} goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural {branches}, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Romans 11:16-24). The terms "olive tree" to Israel and "branches" to Gentiles and the strong language of Paul concerning the relationship of the Jewish nation and God, may seem a dispensational teaching, but it is a false notion. The eleventh chapter of Romans was written after Paul teaches that now the Gentile believers have the same rights that Jewish believers have.

But how was it possible that God said in the past that the Jews were the only chosen people in the Earth? To explain it, Paul talks about God's sovereignty in history and uses an uncommon language to OT authors: God used the OT events to lead up to the advent of Christ and the salvation of the Gentiles. However, this idea could lead the reader to think that God was not sincere with the Jewish people in the OT and, that after the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, they are still intrinsically part of God's plan. First Paul used God's sovereignty over history, to bring salvation to the gentiles. Now Paul uses the revelational language used by God with Jews to show that God did not lie to them and that their Jewish past was essential to universal salvation. In this sense Jews are the olive tree, that is, in a historical sense (for their past as condition to universal salvation). Jews can to be saved now and in the future too, Paul states. But this future salvation is not

more of the same way, as it was in the OT, but under the NT era, inside the Christian church. In another words, in the historical sense, the Jews are the olive tree and the Christian church is the branch, but in a metaphysical sense or in a "God's sovereignty" sense, the Christian church is the olive tree and the Jews are the branches. And it is "God's-sovereignty-over-history" language that is the central language in the NT. Besides that, it is not correct to understand the apostle Paul's doctrine by reading some words taken out of context. For example, if someone reads too quickly the analogy between Adam and Christ in Romans 5 he can then think that Paul is teaching universal salvation. Also, Paul talked about Israel in the OT as a chosen people and Gentiles in the NT as adopted people (Romans 8:15). But in Romans 9:4 Paul uses the same term writing to the Jews -adoption (υιοθεσιας)-that he uses writing to the Gentiles. The language of Paul in Galatians and Corinthians has been used by some Gnostics after their misunderstanding of Paul's opposition between flesh and spirit (σάρξ and πνεῦμα) and the concept of a "spiritual body". Thus, to correctly understand the apostle Paul, it is necessary for a proper understanding to have more than phrases taken out of context, but to have the entire teaching of the apostle.

Paul was not a philosopher but an apostle and pastor. All these following passages show it: *"In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).*

"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" (Heb 13:10)

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, {and} not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. (Heb.10:1)

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath {days}: {in meat...: or, for eating and drinking} {respect: or, part} Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body {is} of Christ" (Col 2:16,17).

“But if the ministration of death, written {and} engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which {glory} was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?” (2 Co 3:7,8).

Forasmuch, when the apostle Paul says that all Israel will be saved in Romans 11 he is not talking about Israel as a political state, neither Israel as an ethnic group, because the concepts of “the State of Israel” and “Israel as an ethnic group” depend on the preservation of the belief in mosaic law as necessary to the State and the idea of Israel as the only chosen ethnic group by God in the Earth. Jews are part of “Israel” only when they throw away all of their legalistic and ethnocentric worldviews and enter into the Christian Church by the Gospel. While in the OT the ethnical and statist Israel was used by God, the Jews were considered the chosen people, and Gentiles needed to go away from their nations, traditions and laws, now the Christian Church, which substantially has Jesus Christ as her head, is considered by God as the "chosen race and true Israel" and the Jews must go away from their concepts of state, ethnicity and view of the law. Thus, “all Israel will be saved”. In conclusion, Romans 11 a) doesn't teach that in the future there will be a statist-national or ethnic conversion of the Jews and b) it doesn't teach that in the future the Jews will return to “their land”. c) It's not necessary for salvation that Christians support the State of Israel nor to be against nations that are “enemies” of Israel, like Lebanon, Iran etc. This issue is only a subjective thing and must be solved through adiaphoric opinions. d) Dispensationalist, millennialist or Zionist doctrines aren't taught in the biblical passages analyzed above. They mix Law and Gospel and must be rejected.

Lastly, Revelation 20 teaches the mystical triumph of Jesus in “Israel”, that is, in the community of all believers, including Gentiles and Jews, not in the State of Israel or in ethnic Judaism (similar language to “Israel”, “Jerusalem” and “Temple” is used in Rev. 11:1-13). The time of this kingdom (εἶδος) is not measured by the calendar, like the OT- without this concept of “time” any Christian generation can talk as if Antichrist is present and talk about the triumph of Christ too. The relationship between

Jesus and His church is not only metaphorical. Jesus is actually reigning. Rather, this substantial relationship is like a type of “Israelization” of the Gentiles, while now the Jews live like the OT Gentiles. Until the end of the world all Christians, non-Jews and Jews, will be reunited but even in Christian history there exist Jewish Christians. It’s not a problem that the majority of the Christians be “Gentile”, for they are “Israelized” by Christ. The Jewish Christ is now the “Christ of the Gentiles”. For them the mystical Jerusalem, Temple and Davidic Throne are real, not only symbols in the church. The “First Resurrection”, η αναστασις η πρωτη (Rev 20:6-7), is the mystical resurrection of the believers, the glory of the church era - that is bigger than in the OT (because after Christ's death the Devil doesn't dominate the Gentile nations) - and the union of the triumphant and militant believers in all parts of the world.

Figures of people in heaven presented in other parts of Revelation are not about raptured Christians, but figures of the triumphant church in heaven and the church martyrs. Rather, Revelation is a symbolic book. The symbolic figures point to real things, like the dragon (12:7), souls (or spirits of the elders) “dressed” (Rev.4:4), a prostitute (Rev. 17:1), grasshoppers (Rev 9: 3,7) etc. The Christian Church's triumph with Christ is not a triumph in a temporal sense, but in a mystical sense. Therefore, it is possible that Christians suffer many persecutions and it is possible for the existence of a Christian Empire in history. The NT doesn't teach an absolute pessimism neither an absolute optimism. There will be suffering and growing in this era. In the end, Jesus will visibly return to render judgment (Rev 22).

CONCLUSION

This article sought to present the orthodox view of eschatology and the bad consequences of the doctrine of dispensationalism to all Christian theology. It showed what is the historical and the scriptural doctrine of the last things and it denounced

dispensationalism as an historical heresy, a biblical heresy and a syncretic cult. With these things, the aim was to be useful for orthodox exegesis of the Bible and for knowledge of Christian orthodoxy in history.

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