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INERRANCY, HERMENEUTICS AND ESCHATOLOGY

A Report of the 2007 Midwinter Ministerial Conference

Introduction

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On January 24-26, 2007 over 400 pastors and church leaders of the EFCA met at Faith Missionary Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, to consider the topic "Inerrancy, Eschatology and Hermeneutics."

Why This Theme?

In our discussions of the Draft Revisions of our Statement of Faith that the EFCA Board of Directors had submitted for consideration and discussion in 2005, one of the most frequently asked questions was How would the deletion of premillennialism affect our biblical hermeneutic? This conference was designed to address that question.

With the decision in 1977 to broaden the meaning of "imminency" in our Statement of Faith to include the pre-, mid-, and post-tribulation positions within premillennialism, various approaches have developed within the Free Church to important questions like the place of the nation of Israel in the purposes of God and how that impacts our understanding of the Old Testament as a whole. One

of the central purposes of this conference was to help people understand these diverse views within premillennialism and the hermeneutical principles that undergird those positions. Only through comparison and contrast could we make an accurate comparison with a non-premillennial view (in this case, amillennialism) to consider what the implications would be for this recommended revision in our Statement of Faith.

Our Speakers

Four speakers were invited to represent four eschatological positions. Our first two speakers were professors from Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Elliot Johnson, Senior Professor of Bible Exposition, addressed the hermeneutics of Dispensationalism. He was joined by Dr. Darrell Bock, Research Professor of New Testament Studies and Professor of Spiritual Development and Culture, who expounded the hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism. These lecturers were joined by two professors from Wheaton College. Dr. Douglas Moo, Blanchard Professor of New Testament, elucidated the hermeneutics of Historic Premillennialism. Finally, Dr. Greg Beale, Kenneth Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies

and Professor of New Testament, delivered the message on the hermeneutics of Amillennialism.

An important historical piece in this eschatological discussion is the role Dr. Moo played while teaching at TEDS. During his early days, he was one of the presenters who addressed the question of the tribulation during the 1981 Mid-Winter Ministerial. He taught and defended the historic premillennial, post-tribulation position along with the hermeneutical principles undergirding the position. This premillennial, post-tribulation position was affirmed in 1977 by the Committee on Ministerial Standing, and Moo, with this position, was granted tenure by the Conference in 1985.

Summaries

In what follows you will read summaries of the four presentations written by EFCA Ministerial members. Our summarizers do not interact or assess strengths or weaknesses of the various positions. We attempted to reflect as accurately and objectively as possible the words of the presenters as they addressed the topic assigned to them. In a final, concluding piece, our *Ministerial Forum* editor will capture the highlights of our Question and Answer time with the speakers. ■

THE HERMENEUTICS OF TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONALISM

Dr. Elliot E. Johnson
Summary by Paul Schliep
*Director of Administration and
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Elliot Johnson began his presentation by identifying the hermeneutic of Dispensational theology as the "plain sense reading" of the Scriptures. He referred to this as a literal hermeneutic. This literal hermeneutic provides for the successful, contextual interpretation of the textual details in the exegesis and exposition of any text.

The doctrinal statement of Dallas Theological Seminary states: "We believe that dispensations are stewardships in which God administers his purpose on earth through man under varying responsibilities."

Johnson supported this unifying hermeneutic of God's administration and purpose by pointing to Genesis 1, showing that God's historical purpose was to create mankind in his image, thus making possible a relationship between God and mankind. Mankind was given a delegated rulership over creation. At the Fall of mankind, that rulership was usurped by the enemy, the Serpent. The first announcement of Good News was in the context of God's declaration that he would re-establish his rule over mankind.

Each of God's successive administrations moved toward God's historic purpose of fulfilling the original creation purpose. In other words, God speaks and acts throughout history to re-establish his rule over man who is in conflict with evil and then, as man is ruled by God in salvation from evil, God will eventually reign through man over the fallen creation.

The Dispensational hermeneutic views Revelation 20 as the moment at which the rule of man that was established in creation, which is the rule of man that was lost in the Fall, is going to be restored in history. The rebellion of evil which God permitted does

not overcome the plan that was introduced at creation. The dispensations have nothing to do with ways of salvation. Salvation is tied to the restoring of God's purpose. Being saved by grace through faith as a gift was true of Adam, it is true today and it will be true into the future.

Dispensationalism's Four Stages

Johnson contended that there are four stages, or dispensations, that cover Genesis 4 through Revelation. These four stages each involve a new revelation related to the establishment of God's rule.

The first stage is the Dispensation of Promise, recorded in Genesis 12-50. The new revelation is that Abraham is going to be blessed by God. This blessing was to be used by God to bless others. Under the patriarchs, sinful as they were, the rule continued. Under Joseph's rule, one of Abraham's descendants, the nations are blessed and his brothers are saved.

The second stage is the Dispensation of Law, recorded in Exodus through the Gospels. The question in this stage is, "How does the contingency of the law add to the unconditional promises?"

Johnson's contention is that under the Torah the unconditional promises and the contingency of the Law are kept separate, running as it were, on parallel tracks. The Law does not replace Promise because Promise continues to bless. The Law does not change Promise because it simply adds the contingency that God expects obedience if you are going to be a blessing to others. In the coming of Jesus, these parallel lines come together. He lives according to Promise, under the Law. Jesus, according to Matthew 5,

lives in complete obedience to the Law. According to Rom. 10:4, Jesus is the end of the Law, both as the goal to which the Law was directed and as the termination of the Law because He has met the demands of the Law.

The third stage is the Dispensation of the Gospel. This stage is recorded in Acts and the Epistles and centers around what Jesus' rule is today. Johnson believes that the primary question for an interpreter is, "Is the meaning of the Hebrew Bible altered when interpreted as a Christian Old Testament?" Traditional Dispensationalism would answer "no." The basis for this answer is found in answering three questions: "After the first advent, what revelation has already been fulfilled?", "What revelation has not yet been fulfilled?" and "What is the new revelation?" The answer to the first, according to Traditional Dispensational hermeneutic, is that the part of revelation related to the Gospel has been fulfilled. It was anticipated in the Hebrew Bible and fulfilled in Jesus. The answer to the second is that the promises to Israel have not yet been completely fulfilled. The answer to the third points to the "mysteries" related to the Kingdom. According to Traditional Dispensationalism's hermeneutic, Christ's reign is currently over his own, the church. There is coming a time when he will also rule over his enemies.

The fourth stage is the Dispensation of the Kingdom, recorded in the Book of Revelation. The enmity between Satan and Christ has yet to be resolved. The glory of the Messiah, prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, has yet to see its fullest completion. The earthly rule of Messiah has yet to be established. In Revelation 20, the Traditional Dispensationalist sees the fulfillment of both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants in the reign of Christ with Israel and the Church. Israel comes into this rule as the promised people, the church

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a consistent interpretive procedure requires that someday Israel possess the land fully and Messiah reign on earth.

comes in as heirs and fellow heirs with Christ. For Johnson, in this understanding of Revelation 20, God fulfills his creation purpose and thus exposes the fullest display of God's glory.

In summary, the Traditional Dispensational hermeneutic seeks, as J.I.

Packer put it, "a consistent interpretive procedure yielding a consistent understanding of Scripture." In the case of the promises given to Israel regarding the possession of a land and the rule of Messiah, a consistent interpretive procedure requires that someday Israel possess the land fully and

Messiah reign on earth. A consistent interpretive procedure requires that in Christ's death the new covenant promised to Israel be ratified, the benefits become available to all and the inauguration of the complete fulfillment with the covenant partner Israel take place in the future. ■

THE HERMENEUTICS OF PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

Dr. Darrell L. Bock
Summary by Paul B. Phair
Pastor, Oakwood Community Church
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Some people misunderstand the term *Progressive Dispensationalism* to mean that those who hold this system of theology believe they have made an advancement in enlightenment from the original and unrefined view of traditional Dispensationalism. However, this is not what the originators of this term intended to convey. Instead, by means of this label they desire to express the Scriptural principle that God successively builds and expands upon his revelation of truths and redemptive rule from one dispensation to another. In each dispensation, God sets up what he will implement subsequently. Each dispensation progresses to the next until God achieves the fulfillment of his ultimate purposes.

Traditional Dispensationalists usually emphasize the distinctions or discontinuity from one dispensation to the next; Progressive Dispensationalists, while identifying the changes and distinctions, underscore what they see as God's *continuity* of development from one dispensation to the next.

A key to understanding God's redemptive program is to grasp his covenant promises. Each covenant is linked together in one unified, yet progressively expanding plan. Unlike traditional Dispensationalism, Progressive Dispensationalists see that all the covenants of promise are initially, but not fully, realized in the church. However, in the millennium, and then in the eternal new heavens and earth, God will fulfill these

promises completely. Furthermore, the church is not a parenthesis in God's program, but it represents continuity with the OT messianic program.

Progressive Dispensations

In his notes, with numerous Scriptural citations and more detail, Bock set forth the following:

The Abrahamic Covenant, which includes a promise of a people and a land.

The Davidic Covenant and its development in the Psalms and prophets. These promises include an eternal line of kings that have descended from David that will climax with The King who will

rule both Israel and the world in an earthly, yet exalted, glorious realm.

The Promise of the New Covenant that involves an internal, intimate, and transformed relationship of God with his people. This involves forgiveness of sins and the empowerment of his indwelling Spirit so that God's law can now be operative within his people. This is not a renewed covenant; rather it is something totally new. God explicitly made this covenant to Israel/Judah and while God has broadened his covenant to include others, we cannot eliminate from the promise those to whom God originally gave it.

The Inauguration of the New Covenant in the Messianic Dispensation. The NT reveals that Jesus, in partial fulfillment of the Davidic

Covenant, has ushered in his kingdom in the here and now. However, its fullness is yet to come in the next, coming dispensation.

Complementary Hermeneutics

Bock labeled the interpretative approach Progressive Dispensationalists use as "complementary hermeneutics" between the Old and New Testaments. On the same themes that the OT Scripture address-

God successively builds and expands upon his revelation of truths and redemptive rule from one dispensation to another.

es, NT revelations complement (complete, or fill out) what God has already declared in the OT. God may develop and expand upon his earlier revela-

tions, and there may be additional elements that God adds (such as the inclusion of Gentiles). However, it is vitally important that we realize in God's doing that, he does not negate what he had already given to us in his original, more fundamental declarations. In NT revelations, God may refract back on God's promises in the OT, and he may do so in a manner that helps us to see the fullness of their scope, but God does not redefine what he originally promised.

Bock asked, "If God is faithful to his promises, then can he fail to redeem a disobedient, national-ethnic Israel?" "What's at stake here," he contends, "is God's faithfulness to fulfill the promises he makes related to the nation of Israel. Will he do what he says he will do?"

Revelation 20

Obviously, a key text regarding the millennium is Revelation 20. The often-repeated claim throughout the decades that Bock often hears and reads is that we should not build our view

of eschatology on the only text of Scripture in which the millennium is clearly set forth. In response, Bock maintains that all Revelation 20 essentially offers to us that is new is the time frame, the length of this era. What Revelation 20 describes is an intermediate, earthly kingdom that the OT promised again and again and again! This glorious kingdom on earth that Revelation 20 describes is not new; it is an era of promise that runs throughout all the Hebrew Scripture! Furthermore, Romans 11 is a very significant passage that essen-

God does not redefine what he originally promised.

tially states that if God can marvelously include Gentiles into his redemptive plans, is it too hard for God to return ethnic Israel back to him through the Messiah?

Some object that the NT in general, and here in Revelation 20 specifically, does not often or clearly mention “the land” for Israel. However, there is an easy explanation for this. Israel was already in the land when God was giving new revelations in the NT. The land is assumed in the backdrop. Furthermore, when Jesus’ authority expands to the entire earth, the promise of the land is then relativized—but that does not mean that God failed to fulfill this promise.

Bock acknowledges that Revelation is an exceptionally difficult book to interpret. Nearly all scholars recognize that it uses symbolic language, at least to some degree. What is abundantly clear however is that God is disclosing the program that God will one day deliver and with that God discloses the concept of a calen-

dar. It is quite clear that what God presents to us is a description of an intermediate kingdom on earth followed by a new heaven and earth. God’s calendar offers more. It is not a generic reference to some general period, but it is a reference to some specific periods of time. When Scripture discloses that this intermediate kingdom will be 1000 years, and this is specified six times in such a short span of verses, then clearly there is a description of a 1000-year reign in some sort of intermediate kingdom before the final, complete consummation of God’s plan is realized. God’s plan is a two-step plan, not just a one-step plan. God brings about a millennial kingdom on earth, followed by the eternal new heavens and earth.

In conclusion, Bock observed from Acts 3:18-21, “Heaven holds Jesus until he comes back when the rest of God’s program will be fulfilled, just as the prophets said. The question is, ‘what do the prophets say?’ The answer is found by just reading the prophets of the Old Testament and their expectation of an intermediate, earthly kingdom.” ■

The Ministerial Forum of the Evangelical Free Church Ministerial Association

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THE HERMENEUTICS OF HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM

Dr. Douglas J. Moo
Summary by Matt Mitchell
Pastor, Lanse EFC, Lanse, PA

According to Doug Moo, historic premillennialism is, at heart, “a view that takes a certain interpretation of Revelation 20 but does not necessarily buy into some of the broader hermeneutical implications of other millennial eschatological systems.”

The Pattern of Fulfillment

To understand the hermeneutics of historic premillennialism, Moo argued that we need to understand the pattern of fulfillment, how the OT relates to the New, so that the Bible is read as a single book.

Historically, there has been a tension in interpretation between the “natural sense” (the text in its histori-

cal setting) and the “canonical sense” (the text in its final literary setting). Both are vital. We must do our work on the natural sense because “A text can’t mean what it never meant”

Historically, there has been a tension in interpretation between the “natural sense” (the text in its historical setting) and the “canonical sense” (the text in its final literary setting). Both are vital.

(Gordon Fee), but we must also make sense of it as a part of the whole.

When we do, we recognize that there is a pattern running from the

Old Testament to the New that involves both continuity (promise/fulfillment) and discontinuity (mystery/revelation). Moo argued for *sensus plenior* as a key to understanding this pattern. He defined *sensus plenior* as the apostolic hermeneutic for understanding the “fuller meaning” of the OT—an organic development from the OT meaning, rooted in Christocentrism and an universalizing impulse, resulting in a *deepening* of meaning, an *extension* of meaning, and (stated carefully) a *transforming* of meaning usually based on the OT itself.

The Pattern Illustrated: Paul's “Universalizing” Hermeneutic of Romans

Moo illustrated this pattern with specific texts from the book of Romans, starting with Rom. 1:16-17. He argued that one of Paul's key purposes in Romans was to explain the prevalence of Gentiles in Messiah's people (“everyone who believes”) in light of OT Scripture (“to the Jew first”). Paul did this, in part, by developing the “righteousness of God” language from the OT (see Isa. 46:8-13 [vindication/righteousness for Israel], Isa. 51:4-8 [vindication/righteousness for Gentiles, too], and Hab. 2:4 [where Paul *legitimately deepens* all of Habakkuk's key words: “righteous,” “faith,” and “live”]).

This “Universalizing” in Romans affects Paul's understanding in three important areas:

1. The People of God. Jew and Gentile alike are now together God's people by faith. “It's not race, but grace” (N.T. Wright). Abraham is seen to be the “father of many nations” (Rom. 4:17; cf. Gen. 17:4-7) not just the circumcised (Rom. 4:11-12). Hosea promised that God will call those who are not his people “my people” (Rom. 9:24-25). In its natural sense, this referred to covenant-breaking Jews, but in the original context (Hos. 1:8-11) this promise came with

sweeping “sand on the seashore” language hinting at a deeper meaning in light of the bigger story. “It's like when you read a good novel. It might not be until you get to chapter 25 that you really see what was going on back in chapter 2.”

there is a pattern running from the Old Testament to the New that involves both continuity (promise/fulfillment) and discontinuity (mystery/revelation).

Dr. Moo believes that there is “evidence that Paul is reading God's promises to Israel as promises that can find fulfillment in the Gentiles of his day because ultimately these texts are talking about the ‘people of God’ and not just Israel in a national or ethnic sense.”

2. The Law. God's people of the New Covenant era are no longer under the OT Law (a point of discontinuity; see Rom. 6:14, 7:4, and 10:4: “Christ is the culmination of the Law”).

3. The Land. In Rom. 4:13 (“heir of the world”) Paul deliberately universalizes the land promises of Genesis. The land is not just “Christofied” or spiritualized, but cosmically expanded to include the whole world in a New Heavens and New Earth.

The general pattern, therefore, is one in which OT teaching and prophecy is “fulfilled” in Christ and his new covenant people. This “fulfillment” concept renders any “residual” application to Israel as a nation unlikely (a strong point of disagreement with Dispensationalism). And the application of OT language about Israel to the church respects the ultimate intention of the original texts.

“And Yet...” The Future of Israel

This understanding of the pattern of fulfillment is theologically neat and tidy. Moo, however, thinks that the whole OT picture is also a bit “messier than that.” He recognizes a few key texts that teach a future for ethnic Israel, especially Rom. 11:26

which finds its background in Isaiah 59. This future for Israel is that, through faith in Jesus Christ, a significant number of individual Jews will join the one people of God (the “Olive Tree” of 11:17-24). There is considerable overlap between Israel and the church but not a complete overlap.

“And Yet...” Premillennialism and Its Consequences

In Moo's view, Rev. 20:1-6 teaches that the millennium is “an indeterminate period of time after Christ's return in glory, bounded by the resurrection of believers and the general resurrection, during which time Satan is bound and saints reign with Christ.” This is based upon the “come to life” language (pointing to two separate resurrections) and the language about Satan being “bound” and not deceiving the nations (a significant step away from what has been said previously about Satan in Revelation).

Moo is a premillennialist—the millennium is going to follow Christ's return. He is, however, a “Revelation 20 Premillennialist.” He thinks that this is “the only NT text that suggests this idea of an intermediate kingdom, an intermediate fulfillment between Christ's return and the New Heaven

Dr. Moo draws no larger hermeneutical implications from Revelation 20. If his view were to change, he wouldn't have to change the way he interprets Scripture.

and the New Earth.” If it wasn't for Revelation 20, he wouldn't be a premillennialist. He also believes it is a difficult text to interpret with other legitimate possible readings.

Therefore, Dr. Moo draws no larger hermeneutical implications from Revelation 20. If his view were to change, he wouldn't have to change the way he interprets Scripture. This makes his hermeneutical approach closer to many amillennialists than to Dispensational premillennialists and is “messier” than he might like, but “for me, that's part of standing under Scripture sometimes, a willingness to acknowledge that kind of messiness, the tensions that do exist, as we try to be faithful to Scripture.” ■

THE HERMENEUTICS OF AMILLENNIALISM

Dr. Gregory Beale
Summary by Tom Macy
Pastor, Faith Missionary Church,
Indianapolis, IN

Inaugurated Millennialism" or "Already and Not Yet" Millennialism is the term preferred by Dr.

Beale in his presentation and defense of the amillennial view, primarily because, he assured us, "I believe in a millennium. I believe it is a literal millennium... not just spiritual."

Beale introduced his view with this brief description:

I believe that the millennium of Revelation 20 started when Christ rose from the dead and it will conclude right at the end of history, after which there will be this little period that Satan is let loose and seeks to exterminate the church, and he'll be done in. Then I believe there is destruction of the heavens and earth, the judgment and the new heavens and earth. The millennium is going on now.

The Biblical Pattern

Foundational to Beale's treatment of the Book of Revelation is the pattern that "All Scripture is working toward the reestablishment of the new creational kingdom." He finds this in Genesis 1-3 in the cycle of chaos, creation, the first Adam, followed by sin and judgment. This cycle occurs repeatedly in biblical history through Noah, the Exodus, and national Israel, all leading to the suffering and ultimate victory of Christ. Revelation 21, then, is presented as the "Ending of History as Consummative Eschatology." This recurring pattern in the OT revelation illustrates Beale's recapitulation view (see below) for understanding the flow of the Book of Revelation. Beale objects

to premillennialism's "temporary kingdom." He believes the Bible speaks rather of an "irreversible kingdom."

Beale argues for the symbolic nature of the Apocalypse and rejects premillennial claims to literalism by appealing to the opening "programmatic statement" in Rev. 1:1 that "the things which must shortly take place" were "communicated" (*esemanen*) through God's angel to

John. Beale understands the verb *semaino* to mean "to communicate by symbols." Thus he says, "I take Rev. 1:1 literally that the book is going to be figurative."

Recapitulation as an Interpretive Key

A major interpretive construct that distinguishes Beale's amillennial understanding is the rejection of the linear chronological view of Revelation in favor of the recapitulation view. The linear chronological view assumes that the order of the visions in the book is the order of the chronology of the future. In the recapitulation view the book follows only the order in which the visions were given, and it does not intend to present a chronological account of the fulfillment of those events. Each of these views take a variety of forms with different scholars, but Beale generally adopts M. G. Kline's structure of Revelation in which chapters 1-3, "The Church Imperfect in the World," and chapters 21, 22, "The Church Perfect in Glory," form a parenthesis around five synchronous parallel sections from Rev. 4:1—21:8. Each section recapitulates the same material offering "five snapshots of the same things" from differ-

"I take Rev. 1:1 literally that the book is going to be figurative."

ent perspectives. Several examples are set forth to support this recapitulation, such as the great earthquake out of the sixth seal (6:12), repeated in the last of the bowls (16:18); the moving of islands and mountains (6:14), repeated in 16:20 and similar to 20:11; and the "little time" (12:12b) and the "short time" (20:3) of Satan's rebellion. Beale believes each vision is going back to the same events, picking up and developing them further from a slightly different perspective but with enough similarity to bind them together.

Several other examples of parallelism are seen in Revelation that further support the recapitulation view--the trumpets and bowls based on the plagues of Exodus, and the "uncanny resemblance of Ezekiel and Revelation in order." Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel all give precedence for this recapitulation as they show cycles of exile and restoration. In Daniel, five parallel apocalyptic sections are "snapshots of the same general thing." Additional support is noted in the chiasmic structure of Revelation 17-22, giving evidence of events happening concurrently.

The Millennium of Revelation 20

The pivotal passage in the millennial debate is Revelation 20 and the understanding of the "thousand years." Beale's position is that "the millennium is inaugurated during the church age as God limits Satan's deceptive powers and as deceased Christians are vindicated by reigning in heaven. The millennium is concluded by a resurgence of Satan's deceptive assault against the church and the final judgment."

Beale sees numerous parallels between Revelation 12 and 20 including the resurrection and the establishment of Christ's kingdom. The binding of Satan in 20:2,3 does not mean that Satan is reduced to "zero influence" but is another expression of the declaration of Jesus that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against the

church; that is, Satan is bound from destroying the church.

In regard to the resurrection of 20:4, Beale argues that outside of Rev. 20:4-6, the Bible teaches "only one physical resurrection." He believes that resurrection life starts at regeneration and that there is a "staggered literal fulfillment." The first resurrection (20:4b) is spiritual and the second resurrection (20:5) physical. Thus, premillennial belief in two physical resurrections is unlikely and "unattested elsewhere." Support for 20:4 being a spiritual resurrection is seen in parallels to "rest" in 6:9 and 14:13. He takes "came to life" as referring "to an escalated resurrection experience with the Lord in heaven that will be consummated

with a physical resurrection."

In response to the objection that Beale inappropriately mixes the physical and spiritual resurrection, he appeals to Paul's interchangeable use of terms for both in 1 Corinthians 15. Beale also argues that parallels in Ezekiel 37, Jn. 5:24-29, and Rom. 6:4-13 support a spiritual resurrection in Rev. 20:4. He appeals to the symbolism of Revelation 20 that this is "not to be understood literally but viewed as symbolically portrayed and communicated."

Beale sees more evidence for the recapitulation view in regard to the war of 20:8, believing that it is the same war as 19:19 and 16:14. "Just as Ezekiel 39 is a recapitulation of Ezekiel 38, so the same with Revela-

tion 20 and Revelation 19. John just does what Ezekiel did."

Common Ground

Seeking common ground, Beale affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture and expressed his belief in the salvation of ethnic Israel at the end time, though just a remnant. His presentation time expired before he was able to develop his views of Romans 11 and "the true Israel," though he argues that "all Israel" in Rom. 11:26 refers to the salvation of the remnant of the Jewish sector of the church gathered in throughout the church age and that "the Israel of God" in Gal. 6:16 refers to the entire church as the "true Israel" and that this concept can be found elsewhere in the NT. ■

CONCLUDING SESSION: Discussion and Clarification

Summary by Bill Kynes
Pastor, Cornerstone EFC,
Annandale, VA

In the final session with the four speakers, each was given fifteen minutes to respond to what had been presented by the others, after which they all responded to questions. This session served to clarify some of the similarities and differences in their various positions.

Elliot Johnson, Darrell Bock and Doug Moo, as premillennialists, all represented positions that are currently accepted and well represented in the Free Church, but it was clear that the only hermeneutical principles that they all shared were also shared by the amillennialist Greg Beale. All affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture; all insisted upon careful attention to the exegesis of the Biblical text; and all insisted on the importance of a canonical meaning as a factor in interpretation. Interestingly, they also agreed in finding no prophetic significance in the return of

the Jews to the land of Palestine in the current state of Israel.

In overall approach, however, it was evident that Moo and Beale had the most in common. This resulted from their emphasis on the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ as expounded in the New Testament as the interpretive key to the whole Bible. In contrast, the Dispensationalists Johnson and Bock tended to give greater emphasis to the Old Testament. This was significant hermeneutically in that Moo and Beale were more likely to see a deeper and fuller sense of the Old Testament in the light of the New (the so-called *sensus plenior*).

Johnson agreed that our basic hermeneutic of OT texts must find its connection with NT writers, but he was more insistent that the meaning found in the OT by the OT writers themselves must be determinative. He described himself as probably "the most rigid" of the four in this regard. In his view the meaning of the text must be stable, regardless of what later revelation appears.

Moo disagreed, contending that we would not know what the OT meant without the new revelation in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Spirit. In the NT we see a pattern of unexpected deepening, expansion and elaboration of what we have in the OT text. This reflects Paul's theme of a mystery now revealed in the gospel. Consequently, Moo (and Beale) could see OT promises to Israel taking on new meaning in the light of the coming of Christ. They argued that this was an organic development of meaning, inherent from the beginning, like a flower from a seed. Only in the light of the gospel can it now be understood, though the OT itself often hints of this development. (The speakers each discussed Peter's understanding in Acts 2 of David's words in Ps. 16:9-11 in the light of their hermeneutical principles.)

Moo, in agreement with Beale, pointed to texts like Ezek. 36; Jer. 31:31-34, Hos. 2:23, which were originally applied to Israel but in the NT were applied to the church. In their view the language about physical Israel can be said to be fulfilled in Christ, in the church and in the New

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Heavens and the New Earth.

Bock, as a Progressive Dispensationalist, agreed that some of this sort of fulfillment does, in fact, take place and that Moo and Beale are making legitimate hermeneutical moves. In the "universalizing of the promise" which is rooted in the Abrahamic covenant we see the scope of what God really intended all along. However, he contended that the NT assumes and builds upon rather than negates what was promised to ethnic Israel. Thus, for example, though nothing is explicitly said about the fulfillment of the promises of the land for the people of Israel in the NT, those promises are assumed. The NT expands but does not fundamentally transform those promises. Much is added but nothing is lost.

Moo countered that something is lost as we move from the Old to the New. The bulk of the Mosaic law, for example, is lost, as we don't worship on Saturday *and* Sunday, nor do we perform sacrifices. A real transformation takes place. The universalizing of the land promise means that the land of Palestine has been taken up into something larger—the inheritance is

now the whole earth.

Johnson and Bock affirmed a future for the Jewish people in the saving purposes of God, to which Moo and Beale agreed. But for them, it is not as *national Israel* but as a part of the church. Further, this future role of ethnic Israel plays no significant role in their interpretation of the prophetic passages of the OT.

In fact, Moo and Beale agreed on almost everything except the interpretation of Rev. 20, though both held that most if not all the numbers of Revelation, typical of apocalyptic literature, function in a symbolic way, and that the 1000 years represents a period of indeterminate length. Bock acknowledged that such a view of the 1000 years was conceivable to him also.

What would be at stake if the EFCA were to drop premillennialism in its Statement of Faith? In Moo's view, the EFCA SOF as it stands reflects a certain interpretation of Rev. 20 and not much more than that. Dropping it would have no effect hermeneutically, since his hermeneutical principles are nearly identical to that of Beale. Bock was concerned

that dropping premillennialism might diminish the physicality of God's redemptive work. For a Dispensationalist like Johnson this physical dimension is realized in the millennial kingdom. In his view it is in the millennium that the earth is restored from its fallen condition to what God had originally proposed.

Moo and Beale fully agreed with this physical dimension to redemption, but they affirm it through the resurrection of the body and the restoration of creation in the New Heaven and the New Earth. This, Moo argued, is the substance of the hope in the NT, not the coming of the millennial kingdom. Beale did not believe that the amillennial view in any way detracted from a sense of expectancy with regard to the coming of Christ and would be no different than the post-tribulational premillennial view.

Those who attended the conference were very appreciative of the four speakers who interacted with grace while demonstrating a passion for biblical faithfulness. They provided a godly model for constructive theological discussion. ■

POSTSCRIPT: This is the third major discussion the EFCA Ministerial Association has had on eschatology. On January 12-14, 1981, the Mid-Winter Institute addressed the theme of "Preparing for the Church's Finest Hour," and the opening session focused on "Tribulation: Pre, Mid or Post." Paul Feinberg, Gleason Archer and Doug Moo, all TEDS professors, presented a defense of the respec-

tive positions. *The Evangelical Beacon* 54/10 (February 15, 1981), p. 14, notes that there were "360 Free Church pastors" present, which "was an Institute attendance record."

A conference on "The Premillennial Return of Christ" was held in January, 2000. Historical, biblical and distinctively EFCA aspects of the theme were considered. For a report of this conference see *The Ministerial Forum*, Vol. 11.1 (Spring, 2000). ■

I'VE BEEN THINKING...

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We seldom use the adjective "healthy" to describe a pastor's theology. The preferred term is "biblical" or "evangelical" or the less precise "solid". A pastor's leadership is described using "style" words (unifier, persuader, perfecter, director) and sometimes the less precise "strong". Healthy may be an imprecise word to describe a pastor's personhood. But I find it useful to summarize pastoral care issues.

It's essential that a pastor be a "healthy" person if our goal is healthy pastors becoming healthy leaders who serve on healthy teams contributing to the multiplication of healthy churches among all people. Effective ministry begins with being a healthy person. What helps a pastor be healthy? Four phrases summarize my thoughts.

Be Connected: Pastors who isolate themselves from others in life or ministry are vulnerable. A healthy pastor establishes deep friends and partnerships in ministry.

Keep Growing: Pastors who limit

themselves to what they have already learned will eventually become stagnant. A healthy pastor sees life-long learning as the norm.

Take a Break: Pastors who ignore the basic work/rest cycles instituted by God for the good of His creation will become exhausted. A healthy pastor observes a day off, personal retreats and restorative Sabbaticals.

Address It Now: Pastors who delay identifying areas of weakness are likely to experience difficulty later. Healthy pastors trust someone trustworthy to help them change. ■