

Dispensationalism...

Not so much a movement as an expression in hermeneutics, dispensationalism became a dominant theme in evangelical theology in all the major church bodies of the period..I don't mean all teachers accepted it...I mean it was a force in all points. It owed a good bit to Darby's church in ruins concept and the idea that this was the Laodicean age but the actual concept is far older than that...historians will remember that Irenaeus suggested a four dispensation Biblical hermeneutic...although the older practical roots are probably in the theologies of Cocceius (1669) and perhaps Zanchius. The former promoted the Calvinistic credo of Scripture interpreting Scripture and is a fundamental figure in Covenant theology. Today these views are seen as far apart but in historic perspective they are quite close and probably come out of the same jar...theological enemies of both will quickly point that out today. But as the older churches cooled and became non-biblical in affirmation, the teaching of dispensationalism tended to rally the common parishioner into the right dividing of the Bible...if the professors could not do it, perhaps the people could! This bibliocentric emphasis made the movement a haven for the orthodox and a large number of the missions and schools begun in this period had the mandate of dispensational interpretation behind them. The move was generally missions minded although not a church move...that is, it is a parachurch theological system, not a denominational development. Premillennialism is a key to the system and it became the common property of the evangelical Bible conferences and publication systems. As with other theologies, it is not a uniform expression and individual teachers offer distinct emphases in their thrusts. But it has been a major theological voice in the last century and although it appears to be changing course or waning somewhat today, it is still a viable force in church work. Church history does not offer a value judgment on this and other moves, it merely reports what it was and only history and time will give the proper assessment of its merit or lack thereof.