

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 23

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

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Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
Theological Commission

Volume 23 • Number 4 • October 1999

Evangelical Review of Theology

ISSN: 0144-8153

Vol. 23 No. 4 October 1999

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Manuscripts, reports and communications

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Editorial

We will soon experience the historic change from the 1900s to the 2000s. Whatever may be said about the precise timing of the new millennium, we are able to mark a significant milestone—two thousand years of the Christian era, and use this event to reflect on our journey so far, and to prepare for the future.

It is ironic that the short cuts and amazing lack of foresight in the computer industry, which have resulted in the infamous ‘millennium bug’ threatening business and other activity around the world, have focused so much attention on a particular date, even where the Christian calendar is not the standard. It is even more scandalous that this problem has been the catalyst for so much fear and uncertainty, often generated artificially to serve vested interests.

Given the complexity of the evolution of the Christian calendar, it may be arbitrary to select one date rather than another for celebration, but the approach of the ‘year of our Lord’ (AD) 2000 has served a useful purpose in motivating the church for mission, worship and renewal.

But more important than dates on a calendar, the Christian faith itself is intimately bound up with the ongoing story of God’s creative, providential and redemptive work. Therefore, instead of being paralyzed by sensationalism about the new millennium, or being confused by unwarranted apocalyptic speculation, Christians have every reason to be interested in the future. They can look confidently to the further unveiling of God’s purposes as ‘Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ leads us on.

The opening article in this issue by historian Richard V. Pierard gives an informative overview of the millennial interests throughout the long pilgrimage of the church. (Also reviewed is a book on the same subject to which he is a major contributor.) Papers by Professor John Macquarrie and James Veitch survey developments in mainstream theology and the church during this century and consider prospects for the future. Missiologist Stephen T. Hoke examines prominent trends in the global church and their consequences for mission, particularly the paradigm shifts needed in training church leaders for the new era.

Narrowing the focus to one of many church initiatives for the year 2000, Leonardo de Chirico provides an illuminating study of the biblical concept of Jubilee. Finally, Brian Edgar turns to the ‘brave new world’ of bio-technology and develops theological understandings of the person and of time in the light of remarkable developments in the scientific understanding and potential manipulation of the process of human aging.

David Parker, Editor.

The Coming of the New Millennium: A Study in Evangelical Misunderstanding

Richard V. Pierard

Keywords: Millennialism, calendar, prophecy, apocalypticism, history, Sabbath, adventists

Millennial madness is sweeping the face of the earth. ‘TEOTWAWKI’ —it’s the end of the world as we know it, so the prophets of the end times are telling us. Particularly in North America, forecasts of doom and despair fill the airwaves as Christian radio and television preachers work overtime to warn people of the wrath of God about to be poured out on our hapless planet. Best-selling books and videos, both Christian and secular, and Hollywood movies herald the impending catastrophe. In fact, several evangelical authors have become millionaires by publishing sensationalist accounts of what they claim lies ahead.¹

Public attention is riveted on the anticipated Y2K computer meltdown, and survivalists are urging people to stockpile food, water, generators, money (gold), and weapons in preparation for the imminent collapse of technological civilization. Advertisements crowd the pages of religious magazines and commercials spew forth from Christian radio offering all sorts of Y2K survival gear and provisions that will enable simple believers to prepare adequately for what lies ahead. The ‘Chicken Littles’ of the Y2K cataclysm laugh all the way to the bank with the profits they are gaining from the sale of lurid books and unneeded merchandise to anxious Christians.

What really is nothing more than an artificial calendar change—from 1999 to 2000 in the western or Christian calendar—has been transformed by media hype into an apocalyptic event of unprecedented proportions. It is easy to dismiss this millennial madness as simply another contemporary fad. However, thoughtful Christians have every reason to be concerned about what is happening. The untrammelled apocalypticism of our times is exercising a perverse influence on the interpretation of eschatology or ‘the last things’ and subverting the real meaning of this teaching for the church. Although the return of Christ has been the ‘blessed hope’ ([Tit. 2:13](#)) for believers in all places and times, the unfortunate linkage of the Second Coming with the millennial fever of our day is causing many to question its validity and relevance for their lives.

THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF THE YEAR 2000

The transition to a new millennium has caught the fancy of many because it seems to have capped a thousand years of material progress that resulted in the spread of Christianity throughout the entire world and the development of a global society. Although people now are placing such great emphasis on the specific year 2000, it is well to remember that throughout most of Christian history the concept of time was viewed differently from the way it is now. The date of an event was of far less importance than its theological significance. The writing of history and precision of dating took on importance first at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation when papal tradition was under attack. The papacy attempted to bolster its image by stressing an unbroken line of continuity in papal succession beginning with the Apostle Peter.

Nevertheless, historians still tended to stress the ongoing work of divine providence more than actual objective events. Only in the nineteenth century did people come to recognize the fundamental significance of historical perspective. When they became conscious of the reality and inevitability of change, they saw a need to trace its progress.

¹ 1. One of the most egregious examples of this are the ‘Left Behind’ novels, co-authored by political activist and evangelist Tim LaHaye and veteran writer Jerry Jenkins, that focus on the lives of people left behind on earth after the ‘rapture’ of the church. This is the idea that prior to the Second Coming, Christ will take all believers to heaven to be with him. Tyndale House, Wheaton, Illinois, has already published four titles (*Left Behind*, *Tribulation Force*, *Nicolae*, and *Soul Harvest*) in what is projected to be a seven-volume series, and the three million copies sold to date have made it one of the most successful Christian fiction sequences in history.

The reconstruction of the past required the ready availability of historical data, thus resulting in the collection and publication of medieval documents and the search for new information about classical antiquity through archaeology.

At the same time, most of the world's peoples continued to use calendars of their own for religious and ceremonial reasons.² Many of these exist, but probably the most noteworthy are the Hebrew, Islamic, and Chinese calendars. The Hebrew or Jewish calendar is a lunar-solar one that is based on the phases of the moon. In ancient times each month began when the moon's slim crescent was visible in the evening twilight, and the festival of the new moon was celebrated with solemnity. Nowadays the calculation of months and years is done with astronomical regularity. The civil year begins at the autumnal equinox (Rosh Hashanah) and the religious year at the vernal equinox. The civil year consists of twelve lunar months—Tishri, Cheshvan, Kislev, Tebet, Shebat, Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Ab, and Elul—which are alternately twenty-nine and thirty days in length. To prevent this lunar calendar from deviating too far from the solar cycle, a thirteen month, Veadar (second Adar), is added seven times during each nineteen year cycle. The weeks, however, run in a continuous seven-day cycle, with the Sabbath, which begins at sundown Friday, ending the week.

The numbering of years begins with the creation (*anno mundi* or A.M.—'in the year of the world'), which Jews believe occurred 3,760 years before the birth of Christ. This means that the year 2000 in the western calendar will be A.M. 5760/5761 in the Hebrew one. The Jewish calendar is used today in Israel for all civil and religious purposes, and by Jews everywhere for religious purposes. Some Jews utilize the Christian calendar but replace the terms B.C. and A.D. with B.C.E. (before the common era) and C.E. (common era), a practice which in recent years has gained some acceptance in secular and liberal Christian circles.

The Islamic calendar is a purely lunar one. The year 1 began on the day and year (sunset, July 16, 622, as reckoned by the Christian calendar) when the Prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina. Known as the Hijra or Hegira, this is the defining event in Muslim history. Each year, which is labelled A.H. (*anno Hegirae*), has twelve lunar months, which alternate between thirty and twenty-nine days, thus making it 354 days in length. Because the Qur'an specifies that a year has only twelve months, there is no thirteenth month. This means that the months move backward through all the seasons and complete a full cycle every 32½ years. The year 2000 in the Islamic calendar is A.H. 1420/1421. A new month does not begin until the new moon has been sighted and the announcement made by some prominent figure in the Muslim community. The days run from sunset to sunset, and Friday, the day of worship ('day of gathering'), marks the beginning of the new week. Some of the more westernized Muslim countries use the Christian calendar alongside the Islamic one.

The Chinese calendar is quite regular and is based on the motion of the sun, moon, and planets. Its use can be traced back to 2953 BC, the mythical founding of the empire. It developed two systems of numbering, both of which covered a sixty-year cycle. One linked the twelve animals of the zodiac (rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig) with ten celestial signs of the Chinese constellations. The other used the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water). The date of the Chinese New Year

² 2. There is an extensive literature on the question of calendars. Sources used to construct the following discussion include David Ewing Duncan, *Calendar: Humanity's Epic Struggle to Determine a True and Accurate Year* (New York: Avon Books, 1998); L. E. Doggett, 'Calendars', in *Explanatory Supplement to the Astronomical Almanac*, ed. P. Kenneth Seidelmann (Mill Valley, Calif.: University Science Books, 1992); Anthony F. Aveni, *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); and Frank Parise, ed., *The Book of Calendars* (New York: Facts on File, 1982).

varies within a thirty-day period from mid-January to mid-February. The New Year in 2000 will fall on February 4 and mark the beginning of the Year of the Dragon.

A variety of other calendars are in use in other countries, such as the Coptic calendar in Ethiopia, the Saka calendar in India, and various Buddhist ones in Southeast Asia. One thing is clear. The date 2000, which is so meaningful to us in the West, is an arbitrary milestone and of little importance to people in many parts of the world.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

The Christian or western calendar has its roots in the Roman world. The earliest Roman calendar was based on observation of the phases of the moon along with the solar cycle. However, by the late Republic the lunar calendar had deviated almost eighty days from the normal solar calendar. Thus, in 46 BC, Julius Caesar, with the aid of a Greek astronomer, developed a new calendar that was based completely on the movements of the sun without reference to the moon. The so-called Julian Calendar defined a year of $365\frac{1}{4}$ days, with an extra day added every four years as February 29. The new year now would begin on January 1 instead of March 1 as was the situation before, a fact which can be seen in the names of the months from September to December (seventh to tenth month), and the years were grouped and counted by the reigns of the consuls. Some modifications were made in the length of the months to make them fit into the yearly cycle, and two of them were subsequently named after Julius and the first emperor, Augustus.³

The Christian church readily adopted the Julian calendar, but over the passage of time the practice of numbering the years from reigns of consuls or emperors became increasingly unsatisfactory. Around AD 525 a Roman monk named Dionysius Exiguus, while in the process of developing a table for setting the date of Easter, came up with the idea of a Christian era beginning with the nativity of Jesus. This would be the year AD 1 (*anno Domini*—in the year of our Lord). The concept of zero was unknown at the time and thus was not used in Roman numerals. The practice of numbering backwards (BC—before Christ) apparently was not introduced until the seventeenth century.

More recently, scholars discovered that Dionysius had erred in his calculations. Jesus must have been born around five or six years 'BC', since Herod the Great died in 4 BC. He was the one who ordered the 'slaughter of the innocents' in a desperate attempt to eliminate the potential rival king whom the Magi had come from the east to find.

Actually, at least 200 years passed before Christians began using the new dating system with any regularity. Historians credit the English monk and scholar Bede (c. 673–735) with institutionalizing the practice, but in some parts of Europe several hundred years passed before it was accepted.

After a few centuries people began to notice a significant discrepancy between the actual solar time and the Christian calendar. The reason for this was that the solar year is slightly shorter than Julius Caesar had calculated, namely, 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 46 seconds. Although various individuals called for calendar reform, it was not until the late sixteenth century that Pope Gregory XIII took action. He sought the help of an astronomer to correct the calendar and in 1582 announced his famous reform. It involved dropping the leap year in every century year (those ending in 00) except the ones divisible by four (like 1600 and 2000), and advancing the calendar ten days to catch up with solar time. This reduced the discrepancy from 11 minutes and 14 seconds per year to 26

³ 3. See Agnes Kirsopp Michels, *The Calendar of the Roman Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

seconds per year, and 3000 years will pass before it is a full day off. On the night of October 4, 1582 people in Italy went to bed as usual, but they awoke the next morning to find that it was now October 15—eleven days later!⁴

The new Gregorian calendar was quickly accepted by Catholic countries, gradually over the next two centuries by Protestant ones, and only in the twentieth century by those where Eastern Orthodoxy prevailed. By then, the calendar in Russia and other Orthodox lands was thirteen days behind that in the West. This is now the standard civil calendar used throughout the world.

Because there was no year 0, the first Christian millennium started with the year 1. The world went from 1 BC right into AD 1. Although that means the third millennium technically begins in 2001, there are no signs that people will be deterred from celebrating its beginning in the year 2000. After all, MCMXCIX will become MM with the tick of a clock.

END OF THE CENTURY, END OF THE MILLENNIUM

While the word *millennium* carries with it significant religious and historical baggage, the term century is a modern notion in measuring time that differs from the season, reign, or era.⁵ In fact, the last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed such a great outpouring of literary and artistic material in Europe that contemporaries gave the period a name — *fin de siècle* (French for ‘end of the century’)—to acknowledge its influence in time. Intellectuals looked upon the last years of their century as an era of cultural decadence and despair, an age of anxiety. European bourgeois or middle-class society seemed to have lost its way. Unable to influence political developments in an age of mass society and faced with the mounting crises of imperialistic expansion in Europe and overseas, industrial growth and economic depression, and the worsening armaments race, intellectuals and artists retreated into aesthetic or psychological pursuits. The most radical among them welcomed the imminent collapse of a ‘botched civilization’, as poet Ezra Pound put it.

The prophets of the new age about to dawn were Nietzsche, Darwin, and Freud. It was a world of chaos. Neither God nor human reason counted. Impersonal forces determined human existence, both within the psyche and society at large. Christianity was a ‘slave morality’ that softened the resolve of humankind to deal with the demands of the age. Survival of the fittest was the law not only of the jungle but also of the realm of business and the competition among the nations and races for mastery of the world. The easy optimism of the Victorian Era and the Gilded Age was fading. An age of accelerating growth and change lay ahead, but many feared it would be one of conflict— between labour and capital, rich and poor, and the nations themselves.

Perhaps the ennui of the late nineteenth century was connected to the expectations that the age created. Never before had history come under such scrutiny. The modern era was not living up to the hopes of its prophets nor its participants. Such expectations were not a problem in previous centuries because people looked at time differently. In fact, the first instance we have of a new century being celebrated in the Christian calendar was the

⁴ 4. This is described in detail in G. V. Coyne, et. al., eds., *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar: Proceedings of the Vatican Conference to Commemorate Its 400th Anniversary, 1582–1982* (Vatican City: Pontificia Academia Scientiarum, Specola Vaticana, 1983); and Peter Archer, *The Christian Calendar and the Gregorian Reform* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1941).

⁵ 5. Asa Briggs and Daniel Snowman, *Fins de Siècle: How Centuries End 1400–2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 1.

Jubilee of 1300, proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII. The celebration was facilitated by invention of the mechanical, weight-driven clock in the previous century that was used in the monasteries to determine the times for worship and prayer during each day. As a result of the clock's influence, a 'time consciousness' gradually developed that simply was not known before.⁶ Subsequent popes declared Jubilees in each century year. Known as a 'Holy Year', the faithful who made a pilgrimage to Rome during this time received a generous indulgence (reduction of the amount of time one would have to spend in purgatory before he or she went to heaven) for visiting various churches. Also a special 'Holy Door' in St. Peter's Basilica was opened for pilgrims to pass through, and after the conclusion of the year it was sealed once again.

By the 1600s centuries were taking on a identity of their own. They had their own personalities and life courses (beginning, first half, middle, second half, end) and names, such as the Reformation Century or Century of Louis the Great (Louis XIV of France). Until this time, birthdays were not recorded with any particular precision except for rulers and very important people, and they were usually not observed. However, the increasing use of exact calendar dates in business affairs and private life and the recording of births, marriages, and deaths in church registers caused people to become more aware of their birth dates and ages. Nevertheless, the century years were not occasions for major observances until the end of the eighteenth century. Then the French Revolution, the rise of Napoleon, and prophetic speculation made people much more conscious of the year 1800–1801, and considerable attention was paid to the passing of the old century and advent of the new—in both Christian and secular circles.

Thus, when the nineteenth century arrived, it had a distinctive identity, and even magazines and journals took its name, something which had not occurred in the previous century. The most prestigious of the many periodicals that did so was *The Nineteenth Century*, founded in London in 1877. At midnight on December 31, 1900 it was renamed *The Nineteenth Century and After*.

As the twentieth century neared, people were quite aware of the new era coming and keenly anticipated it. From this time forward, consciousness of the coming of the next century was an integral part of western thinking about time and dates. Moreover, as the years passed, people increasingly discussed the prospects which the next millennium might hold for humanity and society. At the same time, it was a period of intense and even anxious eschatological speculation as many eagerly looked for the return of Christ at the end of this millennial century.

THE MYTH OF THE TERRORS OF THE YEAR 1000

Some have argued that the century preceding the arrival of the second millennium of the Christian era also was marked by a time of anxiety. As the year 1000 approached, many in Europe were gripped by what one contemporary writer labelled as 'terrors'. The primary source for this characterization of the times was the monk Radulphus (or Raoul) Graber, whose *Five Books of Histories* chronicled events during the period 900–1044. Born around 985 in Burgundy, he entered a monastery at the age of twelve and lived into the 1040s. He was quite well-read but not a skilful writer, and he must have had problems with interpersonal relations as he was forced to spend his life travelling from abbey to abbey without finding a permanent home. However, historians have vigorously debated just how true this characterization was, and the most recent commentators maintain that

⁶ 6. Ibid., p. 3.

rumours of tenth-century apprehension did not circulate in Europe until the sixteenth century.⁷

While the millennial speculation which had characterized the early church receded after the time of Augustine, it did not die out. After all, Augustine in his *City of God* suggested that the thousand-year period since the birth of Jesus was the millennium mentioned in [Revelation 20](#), and thus 1000 or 1033 (the anniversary of the death of Christ) could be seen as a time for expecting the Antichrist and the Last Judgment.

In the tenth century this resulted in a groundswell of speculation that the world was drawing to a close. Various monastic writers predicted the imminent coming of the Antichrist and the end of the world, and this led to heightened tensions and fears as the year 1000 approached. Both in the years immediately preceding and following that fateful date, various signs such as a comet, meteors, and famines were seen as indications of the approaching apocalypse.

However, the documentary record is unclear as to how widespread the alleged 'terrors of the year 1000' actually were. Papal statements between 970 and 1000 and the principal monastic documents (annals as well as biographies) make no mention of such a happening. One writer, Thietmar of Merseburg, referred to 1000 not as year of horror but as the comforting anniversary of Christ's birth: 'When the thousandth year since the salvific birth of the Immaculate Virgin had come, a radiant dawn rose over the world.'⁸ Another problem was the imprecision of dating. At least one important monastic writer at the time maintained the AD calculation currently in use was twenty-one years off. Most modern-day scholars agree that the 'terrors' of 1000 have been overstated and that anxieties about the end of the world prevailed throughout the eleventh century. What should have been the decisive year turned out to be just one more year in a lengthy period of fear and anxiety.⁹

APOCALYPTIC AND MILLENARIAN SPECULATION

While the extent of apocalyptic speculation a thousand years ago is debatable, there is no question that it is widely prevalent today. Not only do we have the secular apocalypticism like that found among adherents to New Age, Third Wave, and catastrophe theories, but it is also prevalent among such pseudo-Christians cults as the Branch Davidians and Christian Identity movement. Much more remarkable is the hold it has in conservative evangelical circles. The strong fascination with eschatological matters and the events surrounding the return of Christ has led to all sorts of rash speculation about the future and bitter polemics about events that have not yet even come to pass.

An important element in eschatological thinking is the messianic kingdom, commonly referred to as the 'millennial' kingdom because of the six references in [Revelation 20:1-10](#) to the thousand-year reign of Christ. As the end of the second millennium of the Christian era neared, theorizing on this matter increased at an exponential rate. According to the writer of Revelation, the kingdom is established immediately after the victorious return of Christ, the event dramatically described in chapter [19](#). The narrator relates in chapter [20](#) that an angel came down from heaven holding the key to the 'bottomless pit' (the Abyss) and a large chain. The angel seized the dragon or serpent that is called the devil or Satan, bound him and threw him into the pit, and shut and sealed it, so that he

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Henri Focillon, *The Year 1000* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969), p. 60.

⁹ James Reston, Jr., *The Last Apocalypse: Europe at the Year 1000 A.D.* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

could not deceive the nations. Those who had given their lives because of their witness to Jesus and for the Word of God and who had not worshipped the Beast (Antichrist) and had not received its mark, were resurrected and reigned with Christ for a thousand years on thrones set up for that purpose. By sharing in this 'first resurrection', they were 'blessed and holy' and would never again be subject to death (the 'second death'). Instead they would be priests of God and of Christ and reign with him for a thousand years. When the thousand years came to an end, Satan escaped and tried to deceive the nations again, but he and his minions were destroyed and thrown into the 'lake of fire and brimstone' where they would suffer eternal torment. Then God created a new heaven and earth, and those who were Christ's entered into the New Jerusalem to enjoy the eternal state of happiness and bliss.

Although these statements seem clear enough, throughout the history of the church they have been interpreted in different ways. The *premillennialists* hold that Jesus will personally and physically return to earth and immediately establish the millennial kingdom. The reign will be inaugurated in a cataclysmic way and Jesus will personally exercise control over all the earth and its inhabitants. The Second Coming will be preceded by a series of dramatic signs—wars, famines, and earthquakes, the preaching of the gospel to all nations, a great spiritual apostasy culminating in the appearance of the Antichrist, and an intense persecution of the church. Just when all seems to be lost, Christ gloriously descends from the sky, smites his foes and places Satan under lock and key, and takes charge of the world which is rightfully his. This ushers in a period of peace and righteousness under his firm but benevolent direction.

Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals. The world will eventually be Christianized, a golden age of spiritual prosperity brought in, and then the return of Christ will occur. The kingdom will not be essentially different from our own time, as far as the basic facts of existence are concerned. The present age gradually merges into the millennial age as an increasing proportion of the world's inhabitants turn to the Christian faith. Even now Christians function as the outward and visible manifestation of the kingdom of God, and over the course of time they will produce a transformed political and social order whose values are those of Christ.

Not only will Christ's reign over the earth be the result of forces now active in the world, but also it will last an indefinitely long period of time, perhaps much longer than a literal thousand years, the symbolic number in [Revelation 20](#). The millennium's length will be difficult to determine because it has no clear point of beginning. The kingdom will arrive by degrees, not instantaneously. Eventually the era of peace and harmony will conclude with the personal and visible return of Christ, just as the Scripture had foretold. This will be followed by the resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous and the last judgment. All will be judged and consigned to one of two permanent states—eternal punishment or eternal happiness.

Adherents of the third position, *amillennialism*, believe there will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. The second coming of Christ will be a dramatic, visible occurrence that will be followed immediately by a general resurrection of all the dead, both believers and unbelievers. Meanwhile, the Lord Jesus will instantaneously transform and glorify the living believers. Then the last judgment will take place, and all men and women will be consigned to their eternal rewards.

Amillennialists regard the first coming of Christ as the more important event. When the Son of God came to earth, he died on the cross as the atonement for our sins and rose triumphantly from the grave. In the process, he overcame sin, the Devil, and death itself,

and his victory decided the ultimate issues of history. The kingdom of God is both present and future, and in fact during his earthly ministry Jesus taught that the kingdom was already present. Christians embrace the present by following Jesus and the future by expecting his return. The bridge between the present and future is faith in Christ. What we do today anticipates what will occur in the future.

The variation on premillennialism that claims the support of a large segment of British and North American evangelicals is *dispensationalism*. This view actually originated in the early nineteenth century, especially as a result of the teachings of John Nelson Darby and the 'Plymouth' Brethren, and was spread through interdenominational Bible and prophecy conferences and the famous *Scofield Reference Bible*. It holds that God has dealt with people in various ways during the course of history, and each of these is called a 'dispensation'. We are currently living in the period of grace or the church age; the final dispensation will be that of the kingdom.

Dispensationalism places great emphasis on the separate existence of Israel and its restoration at the time of Christ's return. In an event called the rapture of the church, Christ will come in the air prior to his second advent. He will resurrect all the dead believers and take up the living ones, and they will join him in heaven. At this point the Holy Spirit's restraining hand is removed from the world, and all hell literally breaks loose on earth in what is known as the Great Tribulation. The Antichrist will establish his totalitarian rule, vigorously persecute those who come to Christ during the period, and attempt to destroy Israel (who have returned to their homeland in unbelief) at the climactic Battle of Armageddon. Then, just in the nick of time, Christ comes down from the sky accompanied by the raptured believers and the armies of heaven, crushes his foes in the greatest bloodbath of all times, and sets up the millennial kingdom with its seat in Jerusalem.

MILLENNIALISM AND DATE-SETTING

These positions are familiar and require no further exposition. The early church fathers were largely premillennial in their eschatology,¹⁰ but a shift to amillennialism had set in by the time of Augustine. Although there were dissenting voices in the medieval church advocating a form of popular millennialism, such as Joachim of Fiore, the Spiritual Franciscans, and the Taborite faction of the Hussites, Augustinian amillennialism held sway in both Catholic and Protestant circles until the seventeenth century. Then a revival of premillennialism in the Protestant world occurred and along with it the appearance of postmillennialism, especially in works of Jonathan Edwards. Before long, some of these writers began to fall prey to the temptation to identify the Antichrist and set a date for the coming of Christ and the end of the world.

L. R. Froom, in his massive compilation *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, identifies a wide variety of seventeenth and eighteenth century date-setters. According to which particular author one read, the end of the 1,260 day tribulation period and the return of Christ would be 1694 (Johann Heinrich Alsted), 1697 (Thomas Beverly), 1714 (Pierre Jurieu), 1762, (Richard Clarke), 1798 (Edward King and Richard Valpy), 1830 (J. A. Bengel), 1847 (J. P. Petri), or 1866 (Joseph Lathrop, John Gill, and Samuel Hopkins). And these are only selected examples; Froom cites numerous others.¹¹ Moreover, like their

¹⁰ 10. D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), p. 76.

¹¹ 11. LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1948), charts on II, pp. 786–87; III, pp. 252–53.

predecessors in the preceding two centuries, preachers in nineteenth-century America often made rash statements about the imminent return of Christ. For example, the renowned evangelist Charles Finney told a gathering in New York City in March 1835 that if the church would do all her duty, the millennium might come in the United States in three years.¹² But the most noteworthy of all the date-setters were the Adventists.¹³

The principal twentieth-century survivals of this millennial tradition are the *Seventh-day Adventists* and Jehovah's Witnesses. The story of William Miller, a self-educated Baptist preacher in New York State who predicted from the 2,300 days mentioned in [Daniel 8:14](#) and the seventy weeks in [Daniel 9:24–27](#) that Christ would return on October 22, 1844, is so well-known as not to require recounting. After the disaster of the 'Great Disappointment', as this event was labelled in Adventist circles, Hiram Edson claimed that he had a vision of Jesus the High Priest on that date moving from one place to another in heaven in order to carry out a new stage of his work in cleansing the heavenly sanctuary. This would be the task of making the atonement which would at last blot out the sins of the believers; the cleansing from sin would be accomplished by Christ's own blood. Ellen White and a band of followers picked up on this, added the idea of honouring the Sabbath, and promoted the view that Jesus was continuing his efficacious task in the sanctuary in heaven while they were to be busy spreading his gospel on the earth. Their message included warning the world of the coming judgment and calling individuals to repentance and righteous living, which included keeping God's commandments.

Charles Taze Russell, a men's clothing merchant in Pennsylvania, was won over to the Adventist beliefs about the divine inspiration of the Bible and the last days. This included the idea that the world would soon be consumed by fire and only Adventists would survive this judgment. Within a short time, he began setting dates for the second advent and calculated that Christ would return, first in 1873 or 1874 and then 1878. When this failed, Russell announced that Christ had made a spiritual return to the 'upper air' and said he would set up the millennial kingdom in 1914. Before then would be a forty-year time of preparation which would herald the 'day' of the millennium, a period he called the 'millennial dawn'.

Russell linked biblical prophecies to events in his own day in a complex and creative fashion by locating the beginning of Christ's invisible presence in 1874 and the onset of the 'harvest', a forty-year process of winning believers to Christ. In 1881 the fall of Babylon the Great occurred (the end of false religious influence over the church), and the end of the general call to join the special flock of 144,000 saints, mentioned in [Revelation 7:1–8](#) and [14:1](#), who would reign with him during the millennium. The rest of humanity would be resurrected during the thousand years, allowed to learn God's will, and given the opportunity to accept God's teachings. Those who did would pass through the final Battle of Armageddon and live on the new earth, a restored Garden of Eden.

Although Christ did not appear in 1914, Russell's successor, Joseph F. Rutherford, readjusted the eschatology, developed a new organizational structure, and provided it with more practical methods for propagating the faith. He argued that Christ actually was enthroned and the kingdom had begun, but in heaven. After a transitional period the full millennial reign would begin on earth. His faithful people were to continue witnessing and

¹² 12. Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revival* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 306.

¹³ 13. Of the vast literature on Adventism, the most helpful are Edwin Gaustad, ed., *The Rise of Adventism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, Ida.: Pacific Press, 1993); and Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

bringing as many people to a knowledge of God as possible. Renamed the *Jehovah's Witnesses* in 1931, the movement grew rapidly, set new dates for Christ's return, and continued redefining its worldview as time passed.¹⁴

The Jehovah's Witnesses may have been the most forthright in making statements about the immediate future, but as millennial trends shifted in the early twentieth century, some evangelical preachers went out a long way out on the limb of their own prophetic speculation. Revival preachers increasingly espoused pretribulational premillennialism, as it proved to be a powerful evangelistic weapon. They equated being left behind at the Rapture and having to go through the horrors of the Great Tribulation with dying without Christ and going to hell.

MODERN EVENTS

Many who observed the 'signs of the times' began to make rash predictions about the meaning of contemporary happenings. They said World War I was the precursor to the revival of the Roman Empire and the return of Israel; the end of the 'time of the Gentiles' was at hand, and events were rushing toward the climax of history. The formation of the League of Nations was one more step toward the realization of the new Rome and the appearance of the last dictator, the Antichrist. Some preachers, such as Leonard Sale-Harrison, even identified him with Mussolini.¹⁵

World War II and its effects added fuel to the fires of apocalyptic speculation, as three major developments helped feed the date-setting frenzy. The first was the development of atomic weapons with incomprehensible destructive power together with delivery systems that left no place on earth safe from the threat of thermonuclear annihilation. The second was the creation of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948 and the successful defence of its territory in wars with its neighbours during the ensuing decades. The third was the emergence of the Cold War, the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Particularly in evangelical circles it was portrayed as an ideological struggle—capitalism versus communism, democracy versus dictatorship, freedom versus slavery—rather than a geo-political conflict for hegemony in the areas of the world that the two protagonists regarded as their spheres of interest. These themes pervaded the prophetic and apocalyptic literature that rolled off the evangelical presses.

Perhaps the most dramatic works have been produced by Hal Lindsey, whose scenarios for the future are a creative mixture of dispensational premillennialism and apocalyptic speculation informed by modern technology. His *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), with forty million copies in print, and the dozen or more books and videos recycling the ideas first set forth here, have made him the best-selling prophecy writer of all time. He put together the prophetic jigsaw puzzle of end times events—the creation of the state of Israel in 1948; its recovery of the ancient capital city of Jerusalem in 1967; the rise of Russia as a powerful nation and enemy of Israel; the Arab confederation arrayed against Israel; the rise of a great military power in East Asia that can field untold millions of soldiers; the movement toward European integration; the revival of the dark occultic practices of ancient Babylon; the increase of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pollution;

¹⁴ 14. Useful treatments of the Jehovah's Witnesses include M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); and Melvin D. Curry, *Jehovah's Witnesses* (New York: Garland Books, 1992).

¹⁵ 15. Leonard Sale-Harrison, *The Resurrection of the Old Roman Empire* (London: Pickering Inglis, 1939), p. 96.

the apostasy of Christian churches from historic Christianity; the move toward one-world religion and government, and the decline of the United States as a world power.

Other pieces of the puzzle yet to fall into place are the rapture of the church, the seven-year tribulation period following this, and the visible return of Christ. Drawing upon Jesus' statement in [Matthew 24:34](#) (RSV), 'this generation shall not pass away until all these things have taken place', he asserts that a biblical 'generation' is forty years and concludes that 'all these things' could take place within forty years after the founding of Israel.¹⁶ On that basis he predicted the return of Christ in 1988, with the Rapture occurring seven years earlier. Like all other date-setters before him, he had to do some swift back pedalling when Jesus did not show up as expected.

Lindsey is very much in the tradition of evangelical preachers who could not resist the temptation to make specific predictions from the apocalyptic Scriptural passages. The historical record of failure is there for all to see, yet these individuals really believe that they have received some new understanding of Scripture from God that permits them to speak with precision about the future. Since an unsophisticated reading public eagerly snatches up books containing such predictions and some televangelists and publishers alike see an opportunity to get a leg up on the competition, all too much of this sort of naive speculation continues to take place.

Edgar Whisenant created a major prophetic stir with his *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*¹⁷ in which he argued from a complicated use of numerology that Christ would come for his church at Rosh Hashanah in that year. The sensational seer sold some two million books, but then when the Rapture failed to occur, he reconfigured his data in *The Final Shout, Rapture 1989 Report* (same publisher) which moved the event back a year. Since then he seems to have dropped out of sight. Soon afterwards, radio preacher Harold Camping, a Reformed amillennialist, came into the prophetic spotlight with *1994?*¹⁸ which boldly predicted the world would end on September 6, 1994. When that missed the mark, he tried again with other dates, always pleading prophetic miscalculation. Like Whisenant, he used sophisticated a system of dating and biblical numerology, but to no avail.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of communism sent the preachers scurrying for a new conspiracy in which to fit their preconceived prophetic notions, and they found it in the 'New World Order'. The idea of a 'new order' is as old as America itself and is enshrined in the Great Seal of the United States, found on the back side of the one dollar bill, but the new world order as a replacement for the failed communist world conspiracy is of more recent origin. An excellent example of this is televangelist Pat Robertson's best-seller *The New World Order*, which best can be described as post-communist eschatology.

He argues that men of goodwill like Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush unknowingly and unwittingly carried out the mission and mouthed the phrases 'of a tightly knit cabal whose goal is nothing less than a new order for the human race under the domination of Lucifer and his followers'.¹⁹ Then in a long, rambling account of two hundred years of conspiracy, Robertson shows how 'monopoly bankers' (many of whom were Jews) controlled the course of history. Along the way he plugs in the Illuminati (a

¹⁶ 16. Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p. 54.

¹⁷ 17. (Nashville: World Bible Society, 1988).

¹⁸ 18. (New York: Vantage Press, 1992).

¹⁹ 19. Pat Robertson, *The New World Order* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), p. 37.

secret society founded in 1776), Freemasons, Karl Marx, the U.S. Federal Reserve System and money barons in Europe, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the Council on Foreign Relations, United Nations, the nuclear arms race, New Age religions, and computer technology.

He maintains a 'one-world government' is about to be established that will control the lives of all people, and then a 'demonized madman' will seize power in this worldwide, homogenized political system. He will employ currently existing technology to turn the entire world into a giant prison, thereby becoming what communism had been, and the horrors of the rule of the Beast as portrayed in Revelation will come to pass.²⁰

Other eschatological fads competed for evangelical attention as the century neared its end. Canadian evangelist Grant R. Jeffrey made a big splash with several books and videos that used computer technology to uncover revelations allegedly encoded in the Hebrew text of Scripture.²¹ Others, arguing from [2 Peter 3:8](#), 'With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day', claim that the world has existed for six thousand years and that the seventh thousand will be the millennial kingdom, the Sabbath day of rest. Thus Jesus will come in 2000 and they expect to be reigning with him. Some have even booked trips to Jerusalem so they will be there to greet him.

As mentioned above, the so-called Y2K computer glitch has created considerable excitement, particularly among the evangelical survivalists, and such enterprising evangelical writers as Michael S. Hyatt and Shaunti Christine Feldhahn have turned a handsome profit alerting people to the dangers ahead.²² In fact, religious right fear-mongers have exploited the computer problem for political as well as economic gain.²³

WHAT SIGNIFICANCE DOES THE MILLENNIAL IDEA HAVE FOR US?

In some respects the extremism of this madness overshadows the more holistic vision of the Christian faith that is inherent in the millennial vision. The biblical teaching of eschatology, involving a belief in history as directed toward the restoration of Israel, the kingdom of God, and the new earth, gives purpose to the great Christian doctrines of creation, the fall of humanity, the incarnation of Christ, and the mission of the church. There is a purpose behind the great events of the last days, toward which God is moving history, that makes them meaningful at the present time. We rejoice because we have hope that beyond the present age we shall be with Christ, and nothing shall ever separate us from him again.

We know that the agents of Satan and fleshly humans have opposed the gospel in all ages, but God's sure hand of judgment falls on these evildoers. A redemptive history seems to be finding fulfilment in the events of our times, but yet the final peace predicted in Revelation may not come as soon as we expect. We live in a dynamic age and must realize that despite all the upheaval and confusion in life, God is working out his purpose. There is a permanent, enduring dimension to life under God's control that will never pass away.

²⁰ 20. Ibid., pp. 215–16, 220, 253–55.

²¹ 21. *The Signature of God* (1996), *The Handwriting of God* (1997), *The Mysterious Bible Codes* (1998), all published by his own firm, Frontier Research Publications, Toronto.

²² 22. Michael S. Hyatt, *The Millennium Bug* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1998), and *Y2K: The Day the World Shut Down* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998); Shaunti Christine Feldhahn, *Y2K: The Millennium Bug, A Balanced Christian Response* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1998).

²³ 23. Rob Boston, '2000: Apocalypse Now?' *Church & State* 52 (March 1999), pp. 56–60.

When the apocalyptic writers of the Bible proclaimed the kingdom's coming, they spoke of its nearness in time. Jesus had the same message of immediacy, but he also emphasized its urgency. The kingdom was not merely a future phenomenon but a dynamic force in the here and now. Thus Christians are called to struggle now for kingdom issues—social and economic justice, world peace, racial and ethnic equality, and stewardship of the environment. We pursue these goals with a certainty born of the conviction that the Christian hope leads somewhere—to the triumph of God. As people who have heard God's loving invitation to share in his victory, we long for the day when the shout will resound throughout the heavens and earth: 'Praise God! For the Lord, almighty is king!' It is this assurance that gives the millennial hope such power.

We look forward to a time when peace and justice will embrace, prevailing on earth as in heaven. The millennial vision reminds believers that no matter how discouraging the situation is today, kingdom glory waits us in the future. One day assuredly believers will rule the world with Christ. All that is broken will be repaired, and the entire earth and its population will be renewed. However, in the meantime we are to continue working faithfully at the tasks to which God has called us. As we enter the new millennium, let us continue to proclaim the good news and perform good works as we confidently await the Lord's promised and sure return.

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Ebb and Flow of Hope: Christian Theology at the End of the Second Millennium

John Macquarrie

Keywords: Liberalism, revelation, existential, mythology, transcendentalism, anthropology, hope, immanence, church

The earliest endeavours in Christian theology are found in the New Testament, and since then it has developed and diversified in innumerable ways, yet has consciously sought to maintain continuity with its origins. The world of the New Testament was, of course, conceived in ways very different from the world as we conceive it almost two thousand years later. Theology cannot and indeed has not stood still through that long period, but has responded to social and cultural changes and particularly to intellectual changes, in philosophy, the sciences, the understanding of history. When the New Testament was composed, people were still thinking in prescientific and even

mythological terms. Theology in our time, therefore, cannot be merely a repetition of the New Testament themes. A very different conceptuality and language are needed. But in spite of all the changes and vicissitudes of twenty centuries, there are some constants of human nature that have remained recognizable through all the transitions. We can still recognize our affinity with the men and women of the New Testament, and acknowledge that many of their problems, hopes and values are close to our own. I do not say they are unchanged, for they may possibly have assumed new forms. But they are not just foreign to us, and indeed they can still attract and inspire some of the most influential people of modern times, such as Gandhi, Tolstoy, Mother Theresa and countless others. But even those who believe that there are great spiritual treasures enshrined in the New Testament acknowledge that much difficult and demanding work of interpretation needs to be done if these treasures are to be made available to generations whose cultural and intellectual environment is so different from that of the ancient world. This interpretative work is the task of theology, and it has to be done again and again as the centuries move on and new situations arise. Sometimes radical rethinking and reinterpretation are demanded, and this has been especially true in modern times; sometimes there are periods of relative stability, such as the Middle Ages in Europe; sometimes there is need for a return to the sources, an attempt to recapture the original creative vision, lest we become engulfed in a meaningless interpretation of interpretations of interpretations!

So what is the present state of the question? In order to understand where we are today, I think we must look also at the immediate past, as far back, let us say, as the beginning of the twentieth century. The story of theology which unfolds itself during these hundred years may, I think, be entitled 'The Ebb and Flow of Hope'.

The early years of the century were simply a continuation of the century that had gone before. The western world was (on the surface at least) at peace and enjoying prosperity. The prevailing philosophies were, in the main, optimistic, science was steadily advancing, industry was expanding. Perhaps theology was too much concerned to adapt itself to this 'brave new world' and too little mindful of some of the sterner teachings of the New Testament, but it did reflect the general upbeat tone of secular society. The great historian and scholar, Adolf Harnack (1850–1930), represents the spirit of his time in his book *What Is Christianity?* For the modern mind, he believed, Christianity must be reduced to its simple essence. This means cutting away all the dogmas and theological accretions that have grown up over the centuries. He believed that Christianity is primarily a practical affair, directed, like the preaching of Jesus himself, to the realization of the kingdom of God. The fatherhood of God, the infinite worth of the human soul, the ethical idea of the kingdom—these are the essentials, but they have been obscured by a mass of dubious doctrines. Other liberal optimistic theologies flourished at the beginning of the century, some of them drawing inspiration from the philosophy of Hegel who was still influential, especially in the English-speaking countries. Later, others drew on the philosophy of Whitehead, whose world-view was based on an interpretation of nature in the light of modern physics. Theologies based on evolutionary theory provide another version of the optimism of those days, and one such theology, that of Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), was still flourishing in mid century.

But most of these liberal progressive theologies were abandoned by about 1920. The reason for this is obvious, for the Great War (1914–18) had shattered the complacent belief in progress that had for so long held sway in the West. The war itself with all its horrors and tremendous slaughter, followed by bloody revolutions in some countries, by economic depression and mass unemployment in other countries, including the United States, induced a sombre mood that had not been known in the West for a long time. Now, when theologians turned to the New Testament, they became aware of other themes that

had been ignored by the liberals: the presence of sin in human nature, the finitude of man amid the vastness of the cosmos, human powerlessness in the face of vast impersonal forces at work even in society itself. The most important theological figure to emerge in the post-war world was Karl Barth (1886–1968), one of the greatest Protestant theologians since the Reformation. Like the Reformers, Barth went back to the New Testament to seek the authentic vision of Christianity, as he believed. His first major writing was a commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans. For the people of that time (just after the end of the Great War) this was a new kind of commentary. The commentaries of the time had been mostly taken up with purely academic questions—questions of syntax and semantics, questions of textual criticism, questions of historical scholarship concerning date, authorship, the influences coming from Hellenistic society, and so on. Barth did not ignore such questions, but his main interest was in the theological content of the text and what it might have to say to the western nations in the post-war confusion. In fact, Barth did not hesitate to lay part of the blame for the war and the suffering it had produced, on the theologians of Harnack's generation who, he believed, had paid no attention to some vital themes in the biblical message because they had been blinded by the brilliant achievements in material progress made by the nineteenth century. As Barth read the Bible, its teachings were in flat contradiction to the human values that had been so eagerly pursued in the previous century. The Bible does not contain a confirmation and endorsement of the type of human culture that collapsed in 1918, but is rather a judgment against it. The Bible contains a revelation of a humanity that is both finite and sinful, and of a God who is transcendent yet merciful.

The contrast between this new understanding of Christian theology and the one which Harnack had used may be illustrated from an exchange of letters between Harnack and Barth in 1923. Harnack maintained that 'the task of theology is one with the tasks of science in general'. By this he meant that theology has to treat Christianity as a historical phenomenon and to deal with the tasks mentioned earlier—problems of language, text, historical background and the like. Barth, in his reply, held that the task of theology 'is one with the task of preaching; it consists in taking up and passing on the word of Christ'.¹ Here Barth is introducing, shall we say, a more existential or personal note into the idea of theology, which he understands not as a disinterested or 'value-free' study of some objective phenomenon that we may call 'Christianity', but in trying to understand it as a word addressed to the human race in its actual life-situation.

Looking back to the Harnack-Barth debate from a much later date in the twentieth century, I think we might agree that both of these scholars were guilty of exaggeration. Harnack exaggerated the importance of the strictly scientific approach. This approach can indeed supply a great deal of information about Christianity. Even though there are great difficulties in the way of obtaining a detailed and accurate account of events that happened nearly two thousand years ago, the patient labours of many scholars have amassed a very considerable amount of trustworthy information concerning the life of Jesus, the beginnings of the church, the composition of the New Testament, and the spread of Christianity. This factual information does not, indeed, bring us to the heart of Christianity itself, yet it serves as a kind of control, filtering out the legends and mythology that invariably attach themselves to a religion, and enabling us to get a clear sight of the original phenomenon, so far as that is possible after so long a period of time. But however much material is accumulated and however carefully it is sifted, there remains a gap that cannot be bridged by more information. Something different is needed before the authentic message of Christianity can be heard. This was the point that Barth grasped, but

¹ 1. Karl Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Evangelischer Verlag, 1957), pp. 10ff.

unfortunately he too exaggerated the importance of his insight, and he tended, certainly in the earlier part of his career, to set aside the labours of critical scholarship as if they were of very secondary value. This kind of exaggeration, found in the early Barth, tends to discredit the whole theological enterprise as a serious study.

What then was of value in Barth's protest against the old liberal or scientific theology? Actually, the point at issue had been put very clearly by Kierkegaard in the middle of the nineteenth century. He argued that no amount of historical information would bring one nearer to understanding the meaning of Christianity, but only 'the consciousness of sin'.² But this is not an additional piece of information. It is indeed something that can be known, but such knowledge is of a different order from the knowledge of objective facts. It is awareness of the human condition, an awareness that arises through one's participation in that condition. Barth was misleading in saying that theology is closer to preaching than to science, for this could be misunderstood to suggest that theology is indistinguishable from mythology or from ideology. But given that Barth's choice of words was unfortunate, his essential point was correct. Theology cannot be value-free. It is doubtful if any study affecting the nature and destiny of human beings could be 'value-free', and certainly theology does touch very closely on these human questions. If theology is the intellectual interpretation of religion, then it must take into account the fact that the human person is not a purely intellectual being but encompasses also feeling and willing and whatever else is essential to a truly personal mode of existence. If religion is concerned with the enhancement of human life, what is traditionally called 'salvation', then it makes a lot of sense to say that theology, as the interpretation of religion, needs for its understanding not so much factual information about historical realities as rather that first-hand acquaintance with sin, for sin is the sense of falling short, and this in turn awakens the quest for that enhancement or fuller existence, promised by the religions. Of course, as I have already said, any developed theology will embrace both the kind of knowledge championed by Harnack and the existential awareness that seemed so important to Barth and to Kierkegaard before him.

In what I have just been saying, I have confined myself to the teaching of the early Barth and to only some aspects of that teaching. To fill this out, one would have to speak also of his doctrine of revelation, his distinction between revelation which comes from God and religion which (in his view) is the human quest for God and therefore the reverse of revelation. We cannot expand to take in all these other topics, but I think I have drawn attention to a decisive moment in the development of twentieth-century theology in highlighting the disagreement between Harnack and Barth as the moment when there is a turning away from liberal humanistic theology based on historical scholarship to a new style in which historical knowledge should not be despised but which stresses even more an intimate existential grasp on the part of the student of theology.

In the early part of the century, Barth was the leading light in a quite widespread revolt against the older liberal theology. Perhaps some of the theologians who belonged to this movement succeeded better than Barth had done in injecting the rediscovered existential dimension into theology without abandoning or, at least, putting in question the value of the academic historical approach. Among these theologians may be mentioned Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). He was, by common consent, the greatest New Testament scholar of the twentieth century, but, as one who had lived through World War II and had an excellent record resisting the attempts of Hitler to subjugate the German Church to the Nazi ideology, he was also keenly interested in the affairs of the contemporary world and spent most of his energies in an attempt to show how the message of the New Testament

² S. Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity* (Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 71.

is still a message for men and women in the world today. Equally with Barth, he had turned against the liberal theology of Harnack and others like him, though he retained a great respect for Harnack's historical researches. Also, like Barth, Bultmann stressed the existential interpretation of the Christian message, but whereas Barth had been influenced by Kierkegaard, Bultmann's enthusiasm for existentialism was derived from Heidegger, who had been his colleague for several years after the Great War.

Bultmann's early work was directed mainly to the critical analysis of the New Testament. His work was reminiscent of that of Strauss almost a century earlier. Though they used different methods, both of these scholars raised serious questions about the reliability of the New Testament, especially the Gospel records of the career of Jesus. In particular, they both argued that the narrative had been strongly influenced by mythologies current in the first century. In Bultmann's view, men and women who have been educated in the twentieth century and have imbibed something of the scientific understanding of the world simply cannot accept the strange phenomena reported in the New Testament—miracles, voices from heaven, diseases caused by demons, and other ideas of the first century. But (and here we see some common ground with Barth) he believed that this mythological language is a kind of framework, the only one available in the Jewish-Hellenistic culture in which the New Testament was written, and within this framework may be discovered the essential message of the New Testament, if only we can find the key to interpret it. The first step toward a right interpretation is to ask the right question. The question is not, 'What happened?' but 'what does this mean for my existence?' That is because a religious document, such as the New Testament, is concerned, as we have said, with the enhancement of life, with setting before the reader a new possibility of existence. A religious document is not primarily a history book, though of course it may contain some history. This method of existential interpretation devised by Bultmann was called 'demythologizing', though perhaps this designation was too negative, for while the method eliminated the mythological strand in the New Testament narratives, it could also be applied in an affirmative way. For instance, ethical commands were understood existentially as demands made directly on the hearer or reader of the word, not just as general principles of conduct. The effect of Bultmann's hermeneutic was to stress that Christianity is in the first instance a way of life and only secondarily a doctrine. For instance, he taught that to believe in the cross of Christ is not primarily to believe that this event actually happened in the year 33 or thereabouts or to believe in a doctrine of atonement, but 'to make Christ's cross one's own'.³

Some critics claimed that Bultmann had subjectivized religion and abandoned any objective reference either to history or even to God. It is true that for him the narratives are primarily expressions of possibilities of human existence and that God is understood not as a 'substantial being' but as an event, when the human being is confronted with an ultimate demand. It is also true that in the aftermath of Barth and Bultmann, there was an attempt, especially in the United States, to devise a form of Christianity that would demythologize even the concept of God. Bultmann himself would not go to such lengths. He always opposed the objectification of religious beliefs, not because he denied that they referred to realities, but because such objectification obscures their more immediate significance as guides to human conduct.

In any case, the third part of the century, say from about 1965 onward, brought in a new phase of theology. Whereas the liberalism of the Harnack years had been optimistic, while the existentialism of such men as Barth and Bultmann had been more conscious of the sin and finitude of human life, this third phase was ushered in with a reaction in which

³ 3. R. Bultmann, in *Kerygma and Myth* (SPCK, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 42.

hope for the future and a new stress on the fundamental goodness of the human being began to assert themselves. The major event which led to this reorientation of theology was the Second Vatican Council, held at Rome in the years 1962–65. It is difficult to say why this Council took place when it did. It may have been due largely to the vision of one man, Pope John XXIII, for it is difficult to see how the public events of that time could have brought about a new wave of hope.

In any case, Pope John summoned his Council, and it brought a surge of new life not only to the Roman Catholic Church but to the Protestant churches of Europe and America as well. The philosophy which dominated the thinking of the Council was called 'transcendental Thomism'. For many centuries Thomism, the system of philosophy constructed by Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages, had been dominant in the Roman Catholic Church. Even at the beginning of this century, it was a philosophy of static entities, and much of its argumentation seemed to consist in ever finer definitions and distinctions. But in the present century, it has come alive again, perhaps demonstrating its claim to be the 'perennial philosophy'. This is due to the attempt by some Thomists to come to terms with modern European philosophy, especially the ideas of Kant, then later with evolutionary philosophies and with existentialism.

The Catholic theologian who had perhaps the greatest influence on the thinking of Vatican II was Karl Rahner (1904–84). He had embraced some ideas from the new 'transcendental Thomism', and had also been a student of Heidegger. Fundamental to Rahner's thinking is his anthropology or doctrine of man. Whereas the existentialists had stressed human finitude, Rahner saw the human being as a finite centre which reaches out toward the Infinite. The essence of man is spirit, and spirit is to be understood not as some thing or substance but as the capacity for going out. (In traditional Christian language, the Holy Spirit 'goes out' or 'proceeds' from God into the world.) A human being, therefore, is not a static entity with a fixed nature, but is a 'transcending' being, that is to say, is always passing across into new phases of existence.⁴ This is not a doctrine of automatic progress, like the doctrine widely held in the nineteenth century and tragically proved wrong since then. It is not the doctrine of a brash optimism, that everything will come right in the end, but rather a doctrine of hope, and we must remember that hope is vulnerable. The end or goal of human transcendence is God. Since Rahner had a strongly mystical element in his make-up, he often speaks of God as the Nameless (which perhaps reminds us of the Tao of Chinese philosophy), but as a Christian theologian he also believed that the human spirit, with its capacity for transcendence toward the Infinite, is our best clue on the finite level to the meaning of God, and he believed also that the human spirit is seen at its most transcendent in the self-giving life and death of Jesus Christ.

Just about the same time as these developments were taking place in Roman Catholic thought, a parallel development had begun among Protestants. The leading figure in this was Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926). His book *Theology of Hope* appeared in 1964. He severely criticized the theologians of the previous generation. Barth, he claimed, was in error in making revelation rather than promise the basis for his theology; Bultmann was wrong in thinking that eschatology is merely a mythological framework for the Christian message whereas it belongs to the essence. He was particularly critical of Bultmann, and believed that resurrection is not a mythological idea but a reality, though some of the things he says in this connection make one wonder whether he is not guilty of a measure of re-mythologizing. Part of the philosophical conceptuality of Moltmann's theology is derived from the neo-Marxist philosopher, Ernst Bloch, whose book *Principle of Hope* expounded a worldview in which not only the human race but even inanimate nature is

⁴ 4. Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (Sheed & Ward, 1957), p. 220.

claimed to be in a process of 'transcendence' toward an as yet unidentified goal. But no more than Rahner can Moltmann be blamed for teaching a bland optimism. He followed up his book on hope with a second called *The Crucified God*, in which he makes it clear that hope is not fulfilled automatically but demands effort and suffering from human beings and even from God.

So much then for what I have called the 'ebb and flow' of hope as we find it expounded by some of the leading theologians of the century. The story opens with the inheritance from the nineteenth century of an unbounded optimism, though events were soon to show that it had no solid foundations. Then the pessimism of the years following World War I and extending beyond World War II brought a more chilling mood, culminating in the episode of the 'death of God' among some American theologians. The final third of the century has seen a revival of hope, but it is a chastened hope, quite different from the uncritical optimism of the early decades.

But to complete our survey, it will be useful now to look at some of the principal doctrines of Christian theology, and consider how they have changed, not only in the major theologians already discussed, but across the whole theological spectrum. The doctrines to be briefly examined are those of God, Christ, the church and the nature of the human being.

In Christian theology, although God has usually been regarded as both transcendent and immanent, that is to say, as both beyond the world and yet within it, the emphasis was usually placed on his transcendence. He was beyond or above the world, a *deus ex machina* who might from time to time intervene in the world's affairs. Since the time of the Enlightenment, the world has been increasingly regarded as a self-regulating mechanism, and it has also been thought that the interventionist role assigned to God was, to say the least, somewhat undignified. Already in the nineteenth century, God was being more and more understood in terms of immanence, sometimes coming near to a pantheism. The reaction against the nineteenth century by Barth and his collaborators included a new emphasis on the transcendence of God. This was especially the case with Barth, who in his early writings wrote of God's acting 'vertically from above'.⁵ In 1963 there was something of a crisis when an English bishop, John Robinson (1919–83) published his short but celebrated book *Honest to God*. This called for a rethinking of the concept of God, and this rethinking has in fact taken place in the later part of the century. It has moved, not in the direction of pantheism, but towards a combination of transcendence and immanence in a more complex concept. This is sometimes called 'pantheism'—a word which means literally 'everything in God', but is also understood as 'God in everything', a kind of mutual indwelling. Some such idea seems to be already implicit in the Christian idea of God as Trinity—God over us (Father), God with us (Son), God in us (Spirit). Some such understanding of God is to be found in many contemporary theologians, such as Moltmann, discussed above.

On the question of the person of Jesus Christ, the traditional theology has again tried to hold a balance between Christ's consubstantiality with God and his consubstantiality with the human race. But although it has always been deemed a heresy to deny the true humanity of Jesus Christ, this has often been virtually ignored. But once more we can see in this doctrine the same profile as in the doctrine of God. The nineteenth century made much of the quest for the 'historical Jesus', that is to say, for the human Jesus of Nazareth before he became swallowed up in the theological construction of the God-man. So it is a very human Christ that we meet in Harnack. In Barth, on the other hand, we seem in some places to strike against what is virtually a monophysitism, that is to say, the doctrine that

⁵ 5. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (OUP, 1933), p. 102.

Christ had only one nature, a divine nature into which the human nature has been absorbed. But again, in the more recent theology, the humanity of Jesus Christ is being uncompromisingly reasserted. This is clearly the case with the Catholic theologian Rahner, and the same is true of a great many other theologians of our time.

There has likewise been a considerable modification in the conception of the church. Especially since Vatican II, what are called 'triumphalist' ideas of the church are increasingly disavowed. Though it is a mistake to associate the church too closely with the expansionist aims of European colonialism, there is little doubt that sometimes Christian missions were in fact contaminated by the imperial idea. However, this does not seem to be supported by the New Testament, where one of Christ's parables suggests that the kingdom of God (and so the church as a stage on the way) is like a little leaven which works in the whole lump of dough, leavening the lump but not itself claiming to be the lump. This has led to the idea of the church as a representative body, aiming indeed to make its contribution and to render its service to the whole, but not aiming to dominate the whole. Perhaps the most obvious symptom of this new attitude is to be found in the change that has taken place in the church's relations to other religions. Here again Vatican II has played a significant part through its 'Declaration on the Church's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions'. The Council declared that the church should recognize whatever is good and true in the non-Christian traditions, though once again the precedent for this goes back to the early days of theology, and can be found in such pioneering Christian writers as Justin and Origen. Protestants are moving in the same direction, and already a vigorous dialogue is in progress among the various world religions.

Finally, there is the question about human nature. Is man by nature good or bad, or perhaps a mixture? Following the Enlightenment and through the nineteenth century, especially after the influence of evolutionary theory made itself felt, belief in an inherent human goodness and an inevitable human progress gained ground, and was reflected in such a theology as Harnack's. But the wars and upheavals of the twentieth century put this optimistic belief in question. As we have seen, Barth and his colleagues in Europe spoke once more of man's limitations and of his sinfulness, while even in the burgeoning United States of America, Reinhold Niebuhr ventured to revive the doctrine of original sin. But once again, from about 1965 onward, a different voice was heard. When Paul Ricoeur declared, 'However radical evil may be, it cannot be as primordial as goodness',⁶ he was only reminding us of the teaching of the Bible, in the creation stories of Genesis. Certainly he was not returning to the naïve optimism of the Enlightenment and its aftermath, but trying to achieve that proper balance or dialectic which is truer to the authentic tradition. He goes on to say: 'Sin does not define what it is to be a man; beyond his being a sinner there is his being created. Sin may be older than sins, but innocence is still older.'⁷ Karl Rahner has frankly acknowledged that in his theology, sin and evil have not been given a prominent place. It is because it has achieved this more nuanced understanding of the nature of the human being that modern theology can claim that it is in his very humanity that Christ manifests (so far as this is possible) the image of the invisible God.

Such then is one man's impression of the present state of Christian theology in the West, as it has emerged after a tumultuous and even chaotic century. I think it is still alive and well.

⁶ 6. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Harper & Row, 1967), p. 156.

⁷ 7. *Ibid*, p. 251.

This lecture by Professor John Macquarrie, Lady Margaret Professor of Theology in the University of Oxford from 1970 to 1986, was originally given at Beijing University in October 1995, and was published in *Expository Times* Vol 107 (1995–96) pp. 205–210. It is reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Christianity Facing a Third Era and a Third Millennium

James Veitch

Keywords: Armageddon, crisis, renewal, Charismatic, change, church, technology, revolution, orthodoxy

INTRODUCTION

We had been waiting a long time for the death of the church, steeling ourselves against its crash, watching from the pulpit the greying of the pews, projecting from the weekly attendance figures and offerings, the breathing space salvaged from the bulldozer's blade. We gather statistics and our computer uses them to shape a graph tracing for us the decline and fall of a dream. 'Eighteenth century philosophers had a very simple explanation for the gradual weakening of belief; religious zeal they said, was bound to die down as enlightenment and freedom spread. It is tiresome that the facts do not fit this theory at all.'¹

The decline Tocqueville saw in the 1830s, pales in comparison to the decline in church attendance and membership plotted today on computers in church offices, in many different countries in the Western world. While the facts he was referring to may not fit the theory explaining the decline he had in mind, there is by now information at hand which will help us understand what is happening to the Christianity with which we are so familiar in the Western world.

'Sunday morning in the sanctuaries of Christendom is as other-worldly as ever, from prelude to invocation, to anthems, hymns, prayers, to benediction, to sevenfold amens, to the dress of the clergy, to the shape of the building and its furniture—it is straight out of the middle ages or even earlier. In spite of the choir's latest hairstyles, the minister's quotations from contemporary literature, and the organists' dissonant crashes, all of which exhibit an overlay of modernity.'² But in spite of all this and the death threat, Christianity survives and in some places is doing quite well. But there is a puzzle: while less and less people attend church, not only adults but also children and teenagers, traditional forms of Christianity seem to blossom—with accents on unchangeable ancient beliefs, non-negotiable moral norms and excitable enthusiasms.

¹ 1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 364.

² 2. Mary Jean Irion, *From the Ashes of Christianity* (adapted).

'Conservation' Christianity takes many forms and expressions but its commitment to audaciously proclaiming its Good News (an ancient story) as if this had happened today, and as if the end of history was scheduled for noon next Friday, is gradually taking centre-stage in church life. Other forms and expressions of Christianity pale at the strength and commitment of those who report that they are driven by daily experiences of the presence of the risen Christ. While one part of the church—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox—slowly ebbs away, there is another part which thrives on its eloquence, is certain of a social blueprint, and is spreading its influence at key political junctions.

THE YEAR 2000

The 1990s may well be an incredible decade for the Christian and religious world. 'The time is at hand' so to speak, when attention shifts to the year 2000, and the Christian imagination fuelled by pictures of the end of history, seeks to drive new revivals. The millennium change has a fascination for Christians whose eschatology is shaped and moulded by the visions of the Book of Revelation. The turbulent times forecast by John of Patmos, surround us, giving birth to ever-increasing ripples of certainty. Just as the book of Daniel in the Hebrew Bible helped focus the attention of the historical Jesus on an apocalyptic vision of the end of time, so the word pictures of the book of Revelation appear to drive Christians living in the latter part of the twentieth century to renew their solidarity with the end of time vision of Jesus and the early church. 'In turbulent times ...' writes one major researcher, 'in times of great change people will head for two extremes: fundamentalism and personal spiritual experience.'³

The fundamentalist offers a return to clear-cut values based on non-negotiable religious principles, whereas the new age movement offers a living, feeling, experience of spirituality,⁴ and the opportunity to put a person in touch with their inner selves. The religious growth is at both ends of the spectrum, and into this spread of religious advocacies comes the 'megamagnetic' power of the year 2000. As if mesmerised by the power of this date churches throughout the world have launched a decade of evangelism.

To ensure effective evangelism, some churches have begun study programmes to probe the beliefs people say they hold and to devise ways of moving them into the church and putting their bottoms on to pews. Before the year 2000 dawns, Christianity will strive to capture the attention of people, in case 'Jesus returns again'. The church will not die, God is not dead at least in this decade. 'Science will not master all our problems'⁵—the expected revival of the 1990s is, Harvey Cox notes, 'a global phenomenon which has to do with the unravelling of modernity'.⁶

A WORLD IN CRISIS

There are others apart from Christians using the year 2000 as an 'Armageddon'. For, as Christians turn their enthusiasm to capturing souls for the kingdom before the end, others have turned to this world in an effort to avoid major disasters which put the life of the

³ 3. James Naisbitt, *Megatrends 2000*, p. 256.

⁴ 4. Ibid.

⁵ 5. Harvey Cox, *Publishers' Weekly*, 7 October 1988, p. 96.

⁶ 6. Ibid.

world at risk. And well they should!⁷ The atmosphere clouded by our combustible refuse is changing the contours of the antarctic ice cap, raising the level of the planet's oceans and threatening to submerge inhabited Pacific Atolls.⁸ A small rise will force back shorelines in New Zealand and Australia and, according to a map of the United Kingdom for the year 2050, will turn the English University City of Cambridge into a seaside resort. Global warming through the greenhouse effect poses a major environmental threat. Over the next 40 years temperatures could rise to a mean 3 degrees centigrade above normal, the poles may well become 7 degrees centigrade warmer, and as this occurs it will be impacted throughout the world on shorelines and low lying areas, reshaping the inhabited land of our planet. A second problem relates to the depletion of the ozone layer which will increasingly let in the harmful rays of the sun and gradually force humans inside from the beach, seeking shelter in summer as well as winter.

Our cities are cluttered with colossal wastage, much of it unable to be recycled. We rip down forests around the world to facilitate our lust for paper, and often the cost of recycled paper means that only the committed will choose to buy the more expensive product.

It is a well known statistic, but worth repeating here: the people of developed nations who represent less than a third of the world's population consume three-quarters of available food resources—leaving two-thirds to live off one-quarter! The United States, which represents 6% of the world's population, consumes 33% of the world's energy and minerals.

There are more than forty unresolved violent conflicts of one type or another at present being waged. War is endemic in parts of Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle East. Since 1990, in the wake of new political alignments, conflict has flared in a number of countries in Eastern Europe. For decades, some would say centuries, Northern Ireland has been in a constant state of conflict.

We exploit and pollute nature, the air we breathe, the land we use, and the water around us, and we exploit each other. It is possible that in one decade the world's population, now at five billion could nearly double, the increase coming from the Third World. Within a very short period of time, an overpopulated planet could be seriously at risk. We humans need the resources of the planet in order to survive; the earth does not need human life in order to live. Often it appears that this piece of information is not considered by those in power.

In the Pacific, far away from seats of power, out of sight and out of mind, and with total and cynical disregard for the protests of Pacific people, France continues an underground nuclear testing programme. Not just one atoll but two are now used. We are told it is safe but Pacific people watch and wait, suspecting that nuclear explosions, whether above or under the ground, can never finally be labelled safe. Every woman wearing a bikini immortalises above-ground nuclear testing which blew Bikini, a Micronesian island, apart in the late forties and fifties. If it is so safe to use the Pacific to experiment on nuclear weapons why not explode them underground in France!

The burning of toxic substances used in chemical warfare and the disposal of deadly nerve gases on Johnson Island, 1,100 kilometres south of Hawaii in spite of protests, is another example of what happens in the waters of the Pacific which cover a third of the globe.

⁷ 7. Norman Myers (ed.), *The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management*, 1985—provides an excellent review of the problems and what is being done about these matters.

⁸ 8. Tuvalu is the island community under threat. The 7,000 inhabitants may have to eventually relocate elsewhere in the Pacific.

The Pacific is the last part of the planet to be exploited for its natural resources. That exploitation has begun on an immense scale. Drift-net fishing, a method used by Asian fishermen in the Pacific, acts as a wall of death for all sea life in its path and some of the walls, according to Greenpeace surveillance, stretch for 50 to 60 kilometres, scooping up the entire future livelihood and staple diet of Pacific peoples.

True, Pacific protests at the United Nations have been particularly successful and a ban on such fishing methods is spreading, but such worldwide threats to sea resources will continue in some form or another.

It is seldom now the church that highlights such matters and which protests. It is more likely to be Greenpeace and one of its allies. Together with their allies in politics, the Greenies sound a secular prophetic note: we humans are killing our planet and placing its future at risk in a way which no other generation has done.

The children of our time are amongst the most endangered species of the universe:

If present trends continue more than one hundred million youngsters will die, most of them unnecessarily of illness or malnutrition, or both, during the 1990s. Every day over forty thousand children under five die of preventable causes; twenty-three million children under the age of five are, at this moment, severely malnourished! Add another one hundred and fifty million to that figure for children who are only malnourished. More than thirty million children live in the streets of our world cities. More than one hundred million of school age, 60% who are girls, will never attend school.⁹

Of course there is hope, as world-wide agencies work to reduce the damage, but when the figures for displacements caused by civil wars, drought, famine and acute poverty are added, too many children die across our world.

If all the present trends continue, the world up to the year 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, far less stable ecologically, and far more vulnerable to disruption. Serious stresses involving population resources and environment are clearly visible ahead. Despite material output the world and its people will be poorer in many ways then, than they are today.¹⁰

It is little wonder that Christianity expressing itself through the church struggles to maintain its influence and its credibility. It's not that we do not have the capacity to care, and the political influence to challenge and change ideas, policies and structures, which need to be changed. It appears that we have lost our nerve to change both the church and the world we believe is God's creation. We have lost the biblical vision of a planet nurtured and cared for, so that future generations can live on it with peace and understanding and the interdependence that seeks to eradicate the poverty and oppression—the ills which destroy the lives and hopes of so many today.

Alongside a plan on the part of Christians drawn to the magnetic power of the year 2000 to evangelize the people of our planet, and to 'present Jesus with His two thousandth birthday present', according to American Southern Baptists, there is this keenness and commitment on the part of the secular conservationists and their allies, to change the way we live on this planet to ensure a future by the year 2000, for all. But with each step forward, time keeps running out. The challenges facing the world are enormous, the threats to life have grown to such an extent that they not only threaten to overcome our best efforts to initiate and bring about change, but they threaten the hopefulness we must bring to any effort to successfully initiate change.

⁹ 9. *Time* magazine, No. 40, 10 October 1990, pp. 41–43, quotations slightly adapted.

¹⁰ 10. 'The Global 2000 Report to the President', 1982.

THE CHURCH FACES ITS OWN CRISIS

This decade may have been set aside as the Decade of Evangelism, and the Decade of Hope for the global village, but unless Christianity renews its inner Spirit, and recovers a vision of the world, the church faces an uncertain future.

The decade of the 'sixties was high on rhetoric and new ideas. The 'seventies saw a retreat from change; the 'eighties saw an increasingly introspective church anxious about its future, and its influence on public thinking gradually disengaged from its public role. Since the 'sixties the church has encountered competitors and has increasingly been unable to cope with the challenges these competitors represent. There has been a parting of the ways as the church has stepped back from its interest and involvement in public matters and social affairs.

In spite of vigorous aid programmes, and a verbal commitment to social justice and the integrity of creation, international Christian bodies and national leaderships have not managed to motivate and mobilize concerns and commitments at the local church level. When it comes to initiating change or promoting peace, we become divided in our parishes. A-religious groups and movements have been able to develop more successful programmes for action on human rights and social justice (Amnesty International), as well as conservation (The Green Movement). The church is left with its gospel, its religious message and the formidable task of challenging and convincing people that this is a coherent, credible, humanly authentic world view, which is relevant to the plight of our world—that it is in fact the truth about God, our world, and us humans.

But unless I am mistaken, we are not doing too well on this level—in spite of evangelistic campaigns and the world-wide renewal associated with the charismatic movement. As if to force the issue with ourselves we have initiated a Decade of Evangelism to stem the tide, and set the year 2000 as a watershed by which time we hope to realize the vision of a world 'won over and dedicated to Christ'. The trouble is that with all this idealism we are in danger of over-estimating the *relevance* of our gospel to the people of today's world.

The issues facing the Christian community are much more serious and cut deeper into the heart of Christian belief than either the Decade of Evangelism or the Charismatic Movement will resolve. For the first time in our history since the formative period of origins (30–325 AD) we are faced with competitors who continually undermine our world-view and spike its relevance. We have to face the painful reality that what Christians believe as the truth, is but one possibility amongst many, and what we articulate as the gospel is not easily understood in today's world.

THE THIRD ERA: THREE CRUCIAL OBSERVATIONS¹¹

In the Western world (and it is extending to other parts of the world at a different pace) we are experiencing the massive changes at all levels of our psyche and life which are associated with a change in *era*. This is not a generational or decade change but a major shift of earthquake proportions which is bringing down institutions, destroying patterns of life long valued and cherished, and throwing up the ugliness of violence at all levels—not only where Western political and financial interests are being threatened and

¹¹ 11. For sources on a new era see Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (1973/1979) and *The Third Wave* (1981); John Hick, *The Second Christianity* (1983); John Hick, (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977); John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Response to the Transcendent* (1989); J.A.T. Robinson, 'Religion in the Third Wave', in James Veitch (ed.), *Faith in an Age of Turmoil* (1990), pp. 3–14; H. Küng and D. Tracy, *Paradigm Change in Theology* (1990).

challenged in other parts of the world, but within our own societies where the structures we have put in place, which have oppressed and disadvantaged many, and have served the interests of an educated social, economic and political elite, are now being critically challenged and threatened.

The second observation is as follows: institutionally the Church belongs to the structures which are most under threat in this early period of the era change. In spite of the Reformation and more recent attempts at reform, the Church is an early medieval institution which has survived largely because of its foresight in being ready and able to sanction and absorb political developments, statecraft and nationhood. But as our Western political institutions began to waver in the earthquakes so does the Church. In the past the Church has survived by playing the role of political broker: sanctioning and approving wars (this in spite of uneven and stormy relationships with governments) giving divine sanction to our Western way of life as the life for all humankind, serving as the unifying force within societies, and often being a party to stifling opposition.

All this is coming to an end. The state lays down the parameters for religious freedom and the Church is obliged to operate within such parameters. Its power and influence has been domesticated by the political apparatus it continues to bless and seeks to serve. Its own fate is tied to the fate of the political institutions by which it is controlled and to which it has become subservient. The Church is a first era institution, reformed constantly by tinkering with the institutional forms during the second era—to avoid its demise—but now in danger of falling with the institutions of the second era.

The third observation is this: all the principal beliefs in Christianity were formed by the seven ecumenical councils which met between Nicaea I in 325 and Nicaea II in 787. These beliefs were formulated and moulded by the debates which took place in the cultural and political ethos of that first era. Theologians of the time considered they had reached a consensus on primary matters of belief (often at the expense of destroying and silencing any opposition). So their decisions became the mind of the Church. What they did was to draw up the ideas which they thought were in the minds of the New Testament writers and express these in the language and thought forms, understandable to their peers and to, they hoped, non-Christians in their world. They formulated these doctrines with the mission of the church in view. The mind of the New Testament writers was in effect *re-created* by the theologians, bishops and clergy of the ecumenical councils. They did for their time what we should do for ours; but their way of thinking is not ours.

INDICATORS OF AN ERA CHANGE

There are a number of indicators which document major steps in the era shift. The first is the explosion by the United States Air Force of the atomic bomb, first over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, and then three days later over Nagasaki. The war with Japan came to an abrupt conclusion. The reasons for the use of this bomb were widely debated at the time by scientists as well as politicians, but it was used on military advice, in spite of the Japanese attempt through diplomatic channels to bring about a cessation of war. On the day the bomb exploded, however, the world entered a new phase in its history. Whenever we now go to war it is always with the threat of events moving beyond control and a nuclear conflict erupting, destroying not only parts of our natural world but also leaving deep scars on the psyche of both victor and vanquished. Although conventional weapons have been developed and have nearly the same capacity as their nuclear counterparts, it is the use of nuclear weapons which carries the greater threat to the continued existence of human life.

We will never rid ourselves, however, of nuclear technology, nuclear waste, the weapons and the memory of how these are made. We shall have to find ways of disposing of the waste and become increasingly sophisticated in the way we treat nuclear energy, if people are to survive on this planet.

6 August 1945 is a date firmly engraved in the psyche of our world history; it is the day humanity came of age in the Garden of Eden, and began to eat the fruit of the orchard. There can be no going back, for this date marks the shift from the second to the third era.

We can document other signs of the shift. The technology which helped produce the nuclear age promoted the creation of the 'information society'.¹² By 1956, in the midst of an accelerated period of prosperity and productivity in America, a symbolic milestone was reached which 'heralded the end of the era: for the first time white collar managerial and clerical workers outnumbered blue collar workers.' 'For the first time in history most Americans worked with information rather than with the production of goods.'¹³ The next year that information society was globalized with the launch of the Sputnik satellite. The years 1956 and 1957 ended the industrial age and the second era, and created for us what Daniel Bell has called 'the post-industrial society'. The turning point in 1956 and 1957 in America impacted on the world in subsequent years creating a global village on the one hand, and on the other beginnings of colossal unemployment, consequential upheaval and the disintegration of social patterns. Employment is a commodity of industrial society, but the sophisticated computer technology of the information society needs less hands to make it work: information society needs less people to drive it. Unemployment will grow in this transition, causing enormous misery, frustration and anger until the state is prepared to recognize this and rearrange the distribution of wealth.

It is important to be reminded of the powerful impact one of the major symbols of this new era makes upon us. Television has transformed what we think, the values we have, and the hopes we strive to realize. It is not just entertainment, it is information. The visual picture is more influential in the shaping of our ideas and attitudes than the printed word. Governments realize this and use the television network to influence and mould public opinion. Television is already dominating domestic life, and the technology exists to allow it to dominate our lives further; early next century the TV wrist watch is expected to appear at commercially viable prices!

Along with energy and technology the silicone chip revolution and the information society with its satellite networks, there are the scientific discoveries which have changed our knowledge and understanding of our place as humans in the universe and in the cosmos.

THE THREE ERAS: THE RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS

The first era was dominated by the Ptolemaic understanding of the earth as the centre of the universe and by Aristotelian physics and cosmology. Christian thought was fitted into this (pre-scientific) world. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a spectacular scientific revolution which ushered in the second era. The condemnation in 1633 by the Vatican, of Galileo's re-mapping of the universe, marked the beginning of this era. Although the subsequent second era picture of the universe as a giant machine created by God was never entirely satisfactory to theologian and scientist alike, it gripped the popular imagination. The Bible and theological ideals could be easily adapted to fit

¹² 12. Naisbitt, op. cit., p. 11.

¹³ 13. Naisbitt.

into this model. But the revolution continued with a succession of investigators and thinkers and the map of reality was subject to yet more changes. It was not only in the world of ideas that changes were rampant, the French revolution showed what enormous power the people possessed, when they sought their freedom. The church allied with the political establishment was swept aside in that avalanche.

The scientific revolution of this century, from Einstein to Stephen Hawking, shows every indication of a radical re-mapping of the cosmos. We have come to live in a vastly different sort of world from all our predecessors and for the first time we are becoming aware that we are standing alone in a new world and must re-create patterns of meaning and new structures and institutions to support and service our needs and further our vision of the world we wish to build.

This far into the third era there are few signs that people are uninterested in religion whereas there are strong indications of disaffection with church-going and traditional Christianity. It appears there is a strong positive interest in spirituality as people search for meaning and quality in human life and for ways in which the full potential of their humanity can be realized and evil overcome with good. Sadly this is being sought outside the church in specialized social groups which serve as support for individuals and families, enable people to care for each other, and express their interest as well as their compassion and support for others. It is also being expressed in leisure pursuits which enforce a kinship with nature.

While the church is less attended, the search for a viable and meaningful way of life continues. It is especially the people born since the mid-1940s who have increasingly sought their spiritual fulfilment outside the church—and their children appear less likely than any before to attend church. I believe this is because they are moulded by the world of the third era and from where they stand they do not see value in the church or traditional Christianity. It is not a third era institution that talks about the meaning of life in the context of the world which is slowly being replaced; it is a first era institution which insists that its first era theology and thinking about Jesus is ‘good news’ for third era people.

THE PROBLEMS

Christianity and all the world religions originated and developed beliefs, rituals and structures in the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian era and these were canonized into orthodoxy. The second era saw paradigm shifts as Christian thinkers sought to keep in touch with the developing scientific knowledge of the world and create a better understanding as humans.

But the map of the third era which confronts us is very different from anything else that has gone before and this is our major problem. Our immediate response has been to hold firm to orthodox Ptolemaic beliefs modified over the centuries and to *re-state* and *rethink* these in the language of our contemporaries. But this re-stating and re-thinking is too little, it may be too late, and for many it is totally irrelevant.

The credibility gap is continuing to widen between the world-view enshrined in and perpetuated by the Sunday service (and the building in which it is held) and the world in which we live at other times. We preach as ‘Good News’ religious ideas, convictions and ways of life which have very few connections with the third era in which we all live. A first era faith in a third era world seldom connect, hence the decline in church membership and attendance and the decline in the influence in the position of the church in western society.

To rationalize what has happened the fashionable term secularization is often used. Secularization, we are told, 'is the process in which religious consciousness, activities, and institutions lose social significance (and) ... religion becomes marginal to the operations of the social system (as) the essential functions for the operations of society (pass) ... out of the control of agencies devoted to the supernatural'.¹⁴ Put in another way, with the risk of over-simplification, secularization is a concept used since early in the eighteenth century to describe a world-view which increasingly developed during the second era, replacing the religious world view of the first. The phenomenon it points to simply means people found they could live well and meaningfully without reference to a transcendent God 'out there' as well as the church as the institution bearing witness to this God.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

First, the Church with its wide networks continuing to exist throughout society, its different ways of expressing Christian belief and its variety of worship styles is responsible for the care of people caught up in the era transition. On one level it needs to continue its work ministering to people who understand their lives and their religion in terms of first era beliefs. Many cannot change and prefer to blot the third era out of their minds; the only real world they know is the religious world of the hymn-book and the Bible. They were introduced to this world at some point in their lives and made commitments which have been crucial to their lives so they need to be cared for in terms of first era theology and pastoral care.

Secondly, the Church, especially if it is open about its understanding of what is happening to itself in the early decades of the third era, can give positive support and encouragement to people whose lives are caught up in the enormous changes, and who need the affirmation to work through these changes to develop new forms of being religious and reach new levels of belief. Such people should not be given a diet of first era theology and spirituality but helped to create new and relevant theological directions.

Thirdly, the Church because it has experience of where God's presence has been experienced in different situations and in different ways in the past, knows that it now needs fresh intellectual grounding for religious belief which can be spelt out in third era language and thought forms, and which can interact with and critique the emergent values and ideologies of the third era. All aspects of our theological training tell us that we can break out of our present situation. We know we do not need to be defensive when ideas are no longer useful, our images no longer inform people's imagination, and the theological language we use is not communicating 'Good News'—then it is time to discard the things that prevent us from taking a new and fresh impact on the minds of our contemporaries. But this means two things: recreating the Christian mind and re-founding the Christian community. Only time will tell if either or both are outside our ability in this final decade of the twentieth century. But we do need new wine skins for new wine.¹⁵

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¹⁴ 14. Bryan Wilson, 'Secularisation' in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), Vol. 13. p. 160.

¹⁵ 15. The first of the Reid Lectures at Westminster College, Cambridge given on 1 March 1991 under the general title Re-creating a Christian Mind: The church faces a third millennium in its history.

Paradigm Shifts and Trends in Missions Training—A Call to Servant-Teaching, a Ministry of Humility

Stephen T. Hoke

Keywords: Missiology, training, cross-cultural, contextualisation, urbanisation, pluralism, globalisation, dialogue, church planting, synergism, andragogy, mentoring, technology

'For every trend there is a counter-trend.'¹ In response to lightning change in our global society, serious questions have been raised as to whether theological and missiological education are ailing. There is widespread recognition that missionary training can no longer remain the same. But the cure must go deeper than a facelift. Bryant L. Myers, director of MARC, Monrovia, California, has said: 'The most important and enduring challenge to missiological education in the 21st century is the need to recompose and reform itself so it makes sense and supports missions in a pluralistic, multicultural, post-modern world in which the gospel is nowhere at home.'²

Just as the cry of the exploding national churches in the 60s and 70s became 'We need help training leaders,' so the critical concern with the rapidly exploding Two-Thirds-World (T-T-W) missions movement today is equipping leaders for the church and missions to reap the harvest from among the nations.

In response to one or a set of problems in education, the workplace, the church, and in missions, several trends are emerging, which arrange themselves at several levels: First, a set of global contextual issues which impact how we do missions; second, a cluster of new developments in areas of specialty which impact how each stakeholder fulfils their responsibility; and third, recent innovations in the field of training itself.

GLOBAL CONTEXTUAL ISSUES/TRENDS

1. Continuing Rapid Urbanization

As the world becomes more urban, the emphasis on preparing missionaries to live and minister in urban settings grows. Internships in urban centres throughout North America provide nearly ideal preparation for incarnational living among the rest of the world's

¹ 1. Edith Weiner, Plenary address given at 1998 International Conference, San Francisco, June 1, 1998., American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), Alexandria, VA.

² 2. Bryant L. Myers. 'Missiological Education Through De-Centralized Partnerships', an address at Missiological Education for the 21st Century, Fuller School of World Mission, Pasadena, Nov. 1992.

urban poor. According to Roger Greenway, missiology professor at Calvin Seminary (Grand Rapids, MI), 'The world of the 21st century will be urban, and so must our mission.'³

Phil Elkins, director of the Los Angeles-Missionary Internship (LA- MI), notes, 'Los Angeles, now called the capital of the Third World, offers an unparalleled environment of preparation.'⁴ InnerCHANGE, a Christian order among the poor in several U.S. cities, offers three-month, one-year and two-year 'Cross-Walk' apprenticeship experiences among ethnic communities. One team which spent more than four years learning the language and culture to ministry among Cambodian refugees in Santa Ana, California, recently transplanted to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to engage in incarnational holistic ministry among the poor.

2. Increasing Religious Pluralism

The spreading Christian church increasingly encounters the people and cultures of other religions. From the prevalence of postmodernism in the West, to the dominance of Animism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam in the rest of the world, Christians are finding themselves living in a thoroughly pluralistic world. Thus, the environment for the task will not be any easier; competition will more than likely be high. In *The Gagging of God*, D. A. Carson states: 'For any number of reasons, many Christians similarly feel they can participate in this little corner or that, but that in the face of the extraordinary complexities cast up by the new pluralisms they find it difficult to articulate a more comprehensive vision.'⁵

Effective missionaries must be able to function with ease in a world culture of diversity. Darrell Whiteman, professor of anthropology at Asbury Seminary (Wilmore, KY), suggests developing a 'missionary anthropology' with an urban flavour, which would equip missionaries to understand the cities around them and detect the social networks in which they find themselves. In studying world religions, Whiteman challenges missionaries to be sure they are conversant with the dominant major world religion in which they will live, and to study it from a phenomenological perspective rather than the traditional comparative religion approach.⁶

3. Shift in Dominance from West to Two-Thirds World

The shift in the dominance from western missionaries to the coexistence and cooperation (i.e. partnership) between missionaries from the West and the Two-Third World (T-T-W) is a welcome change that has been a long time in coming. David Tae Woong Lee, director of the Global Mission Training Centre in Seoul, Korea, notes that this development brings both good news and bad news. 'It is good news in that there are greater possibilities for an earlier closure to the Global Task. Real and active cross-fertilization is now possible to become truly global in our missionary work. Interdependent partnerships can be pursued with a real servant spirit. But it is bad news as well. Complacency could set into the

³ 3. Roger Greenway, 'World Urbanization and Missiological Education', an address at Missiological Education for the 21st Century, Fuller School of World Mission, Pasadena, Nov. 1992.

⁴ 4. For information on LA-Missionary Internship contact: Dr. Phil Elkins, 3800 Canon Blvd., Altadena, CA 98001. (626) 797-7903. Email: philelkins@aol.com

⁵ 5. D. A. Carson. *The Gagging of God*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), p. 405.

⁶ 6. Darrell Whiteman, 'The Role of the Behavioral Sciences in Missiological Education', an address at Missiological Education for the 21st Century, Fuller School of World Mission, Pasadena, Nov. 1992.

Western church, or a new form of imperialism could arise, with the West continuing to dominate and impose strategy and structuring.’⁷

Mission training must not only alert younger missionaries to the sea-change trend into which they will be stepping, but also equip them to work on teams composed of international Christians from several nations, as well as be able to take direction and counsel from leaders and co-workers from other countries. Servant leadership will be an essential quality and ministry skill to develop.

4. Changing Role of the North American Missionary

‘The major factor in our training of North Americans ought to be to examine and implement strategies that will turn us northerners into those that mobilize, equip and support those from the Two-Thirds World.’ ‘Generally I think T-T-W missionaries are better equipped to take the gospel to the rest of the T-T-W’, says Bob Moffitt, director of Harvest International, Tempe, Arizona.

As national churches around the world mature, the roles played by missionaries from North America must change. North Americans must be equipped as behind-the-scenes trainers, coaches, encouragers and support personnel. These higher-level leadership skills are not the skills of novices. They must be taught in a very specialized manner by competent mentors who have gained their skills through years of experience, group participation and shared leadership.

5. A Changing Missiology

Critics of North American missiology during the last thirty years would point to its strategic bias, with a supposed preoccupation with the social sciences, particularly that of cultural anthropology and theories of communication.⁸ The subsequent number of dissonant voices expressing their dissatisfaction with this direction in missiology have exerted pressure toward reshaping the direction of the discipline. Some of the more conspicuous trends include the following:

a) Attempts to capture a more global perspective. The evangelical community, following somewhat behind the ecumenical churches, has become more aware of the presence and dynamic of the churches in the T-T-W. A new wave of books from Africa, Asia and Latin America have been written with this ‘globalization’ effect in mind.

b) Increasing emphasis on a more holistic approach to ministry. As mission agencies focus on unreached peoples, the old dichotomy between evangelism and social concern/action (relief and development) becomes artificial. Issues of poverty, hunger, disease and displacement cannot be addressed on a purely spiritual level. Theological and missions training must highlight the interlocking causes of poverty, oppression and hopelessness. Mission into the 21st century must embrace both evangelism and social responsibility in fresh and spiritually powerful ways. This means evangelists and church planters must understand how their work fits in with digging wells and distributing food. Simultaneously, relief and development workers must search for how their work can become a bridge to longer-term, relational evangelism that results in vibrant, indigenous churches.

The need for holistic approaches will challenge churches and schools to work more closely with Christian relief and development agencies to design more useful, accessible

⁷ 7. David Tae Woong Lee, ‘Global Vision and Major Missiological Trends: A Perspective.’ World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission, April 20, 1997.

⁸ 8. *ibid.*, p. 2.

learning experiences and training in holistic ministry. At a minimum, new missionaries must be conversant with biblical holism, the integration of evangelism and social concern/ action, and be able to explain how their specialty relates to the broader picture of spiritual and physical hunger.

c) *Continued integration with other disciplines.* Historians have perhaps been foremost in integrating mission with the other disciplines. There have been attempts in such areas as counselling and church planting, and more recently there have been demands for a greater integration of missiology with theology and Scripture (versus the social sciences). The desire is not to blur the parameters of missiology, but rather to loose it from what some perceive to be an inordinate dependency upon the social sciences.⁹

d) *Heightened interest in the way to work with other religions.* Interest in other religions in the ecumenical community began as early as the International Missionary Conference held in Jerusalem in 1928. By 1971 'dialogue' had become their common practice for accomplishing mission. For evangelicals, following more cautiously, it is only in the last decades that heightened interest in other religions has developed, and that an appropriate role for 'dialogue' with other religions has been carved out.

e) *The emergence of a Two-Thirds World missiology.* Following the rise of the T-T-W church in the 60s and 70s, evangelicalism has joyously championed the rapid rise of the T-T-W mission movements in the 80s and 90s. Two-thirds of evangelicals now reside in the T-T-W, and the majority of cross-cultural missionaries are now said to come from the T-T-W. One can predict that missiology will not only be influenced by the theologizing of the T-T-W churches, but also be shaped by the T-T-W spirituality in particular.¹⁰

6. A Changing Strategy of Mission

Not only has the bulk of the writing and research in mission strategy been done by North Americans, for the last decade mission strategy has been dominated by the movement which anticipates closure at the end of this century. Notwithstanding the critiques concerning the current direction global missions strategy is taking us, the following positive dynamics can be cited:

a) Despite the passing of Donald McGavran, his influence is still seen in the dominant theory of priority upon '*harvest areas*'. In the 90s there has been significant effort among North American churches and agencies to redeploy missionaries from unresponsive fields to the rapidly opening harvest fields of Eastern Europe and the CIS. Actual redeployment of labourers from resistant fields to harvest fields has been much more difficult than anticipated.

b) *A shift from harvest field to hard fields.* The 90s have also given rise to a growing awareness of the critical importance of focusing greater prayer and personnel in the difficult fields of the 10/40 Window which takes in the majority of the unreached Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim worlds. This is a helpful corrective for the West which has approximately 90% of its missionary force in areas of the world considered to be largely reached or evangelized. For North American missions to relocate 20–40% of their missionary force to the unreached people groups appears to be a commendable idea.¹¹

For some of the T-T-W sending bases, this strategy has taken greater effect than in the West. Korea, for example, has deployed approximately 45% of her missionaries in the 'unreached' areas. India dispatches more than 90% of her missionaries to the 10/40

⁹ 9. *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ 10. *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹ 11. *ibid.*, p. 4.

Window (although all of India itself lies within that Window and thus all Indians working in other regions of India are included in this number).

c) *A shift from mission fields to sending bases.* In 1965, OMF challenged their Asian colleagues to join them in sending missionaries into the rest of Asia. The C&MA was ahead of OMF in this regard, and both of them are still ahead of most of the international mission community. Today it is no surprise, and a testament to the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit around the world, that the T-T-W sends out thousands of missionaries who serve beyond their national borders. Missionaries are now being sent out from countries that formerly only received them, as widespread as Nigeria, Ghana, Japan, Taiwan, Brazil and Colombia. By AD2000 Korea expects to have sent out as many as 5,000 to 7,500 missionaries.

d) *A shift from planting single churches to launching church planting movements.* The singular approach of one missionary planting one church per term has been dominant practice for the last 45 years. Since the rise of the Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN) movement in the Philippines and Latin America in the 70s, however, national church leaders and missionaries around the world have been challenged to think more systemically and strategically as to how waves of multiple churches can be planted. Critical to the DAWN movement strategy is the availability of apostolic leaders gifted to plant and multiply multiple cells groups within a people group. Beyond spiritual gifting, the training of apostolic leaders should include spiritual growth dynamics, cell group multiplication, and systems thinking.

7. Global Partnerships

There is increasing dialogue between churches, mission agencies and seminaries in the western world and their counterparts in the non-western world regarding missions training.¹² There is a new willingness to forge working partnerships for improving working strategy among unreached people groups, as well as forming cooperative working relationships for missions training. Unlike the old model in which all theological education was westernized, recent efforts involve a full partnership—one where a radical shift of ownership has taken place and missionary training consists of both mutual learning and interdependence. In 1998, The Next Step Partnership for Missions Training was launched in North America, and at this time includes over 100 member churches, agencies and training institutions and organizations. The primary concern is cooperative planning, curriculum design, resource sharing, and improved delivery systems for the most effective missions training possible.¹³

Partnership demands an attitude of servanthood and teachability. William Taylor, chairman of World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission, points out the critical lesson that must be learned: 'Listen before entering a partnership and be willing to learn from mistakes and try again. Church-to-church partnerships have real potential, but they must be entered into with wisdom, humility and a teachable spirit.'¹⁴ Tite Tienou, a Burkinabe and professor of theology and missiology, Alliance Theological Seminary

¹² 12. Robert Ferris (Ed), *Establishing Ministry Training* (Pasadena: WEF-Missions Commission/William Carey, 1995).

¹³ 13. For information on The NEXT STEP Partnership in Mission Training contact: Next Step, 6190 Balboa St., Port St. John, FL 32927-8838. (407) 639-1181, Fax 639-1181. Email: nextrain@aol.com Web: www.nextstep.com

¹⁴ 14. William Taylor (Ed), *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions* (Pasadena: WEF-Missions Commission/William Carey, 1994), p. 241.

(Nyack, NY) adds: 'The Western church must redefine its missiological terminology as it works in partnership with those in the "Third World".'¹⁵

CHURCH TREND

8. The Emergence of the 'synergistic' Paradigm Church in North America

Missions specialist Bruce Camp has described the emergence of 'synergistic' churches that assume a greater responsibility for equipping their members in cross-cultural ministry.¹⁶ While previous models of 'supporting' and 'sending' churches understood their roles mainly in terms of identifying missionary prospects, providing financial support, and sending missionaries out from North America, 'synergistic' churches ask, 'What is our congregation's role in obeying the Great Commission?'

In answering this question, these churches focus on what they can do well, often team up with other churches and organizations to achieve a greater effectiveness in missions. While some question the actual number of 'synergistic' churches, there is no doubt as to the increased desire on the part of larger churches in almost every denomination to become 'players' in the world mission arena. No longer content to stand on the sidelines, these churches are assuming greater responsibility in the selection, training and sending process. Some churches, in fact, operate as their own sending agencies, directed by their mission pastor and staff.

Along with this desire for increased participation, is a whole new sense of accountability and stewardship. Churches, like businesses, want to see a significant 'return on investment' (ROI), and want to be able to pinpoint the value-added component of any individual's or mission's involvement.

Critical to this trend is the rediscovery of missionary training as preparation *in* ministry rather than preparation *for* ministry. In the past, formal education for missions too often neglected the importance of experience, or 'praxis.' Regent College's Paul Stevens contends that understanding theological and missionary training as education *in* ministry will produce an integrated cycle of praxis, instructions and reflection.

In the past, the strength and vitality of some parachurch ministries has sometimes weakened the input of churches into missions. Many agencies are now tackling this issue head-on by declining volunteers who have not been involved in and mentored by a local church. As this trend gains momentum, local churches will be restored to their rightful place in the missionary training process.

AGENCY TRENDS

9. Flexibility in Accepting Candidates

Mission agencies are becoming more pragmatic about whom they will accept. Many are showing more and more interest in the actual competencies of their candidates than in their formal credentials or degrees. The key question asked is, 'Can they do the ministry they will be assigned to do?'

¹⁵ 15. Tite Tienou, 'The Training of Missiologists for an African Context', an address at Missiological Education for the 21st Century, Fuller School of World Mission, Pasadena, Nov. 1992.

¹⁶ 16. Bruce K. Camp, 'Major Paradigm Shifts in World Evangelization', *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol 11:3 (July/Aug, 1994), pp. 133-138.

This may prove beneficial to missionary candidates in several ways. First, less formal theological education is demanded before the first mission term. Second, more practical, mentored, on-the-job training is provided. Third, a move toward intensive one- or two-year formal study after a first-term exposure to missions on the field helps people make wiser decisions about long-term ministry.¹⁷ Fourth, the emphasis on team ministry (sharing skills and strengths on the field) has increased.

10. Character-Based Training

Mission agencies, in sync with the parallel trend in workplace and business training, have recognized character as the prior essential in effective leader training. Robert Greenleaf's 1977 classic *Servant Leadership* helped spark a redefinition of leadership away from power toward serving. Christian professor J. Robert Clinton of Fuller's School of World Mission fuelled the flames with his 1988 book, *The Making of a Leader*, which called for connecting with God's purpose for your life by becoming intentional in your spiritual-character formation. The dictum 'Ministry flows out of being' captures the essence of this character-based approach to leader training for Christian leaders. Stephen Covey's first book, *Seven Habits of the Highly Effective Leader* (1989), launched a tidal wave of business writing on leadership development. The initial surge has been kept in motion by the subsequent publication of Covey's *Principle-Centered Leadership* (1992) and *First Things First* (1994), and has propelled trainers worldwide into the areas of spirituality as a vital component of effectiveness.¹⁸

Christian and secular leaders alike have come to recognize that who a person is—their character, their values, the integrity between what they say and what they do, is of utmost importance in the exercise of any human endeavour. This recognition of the 'priority of interiority' has led organizational and church leaders to the realization that personal renewal must precede any corporate or community renewal. While agencies are devoting more time in early pre-field training to issues of the heart, mission agencies and schools alike are looking to local churches as vital partners in the initial stages of character formation in the lives of prospective missionaries. Churches are once again being consulted as to the role they can play in helping candidates develop basic Christian disciplines, under the tutelage of mature senior saints. Without more intentional assistance from sending churches and educational institutions in the area of character formation, agencies know they are unable to adequately prepare candidates for intense spiritual warfare.

Veteran missionary and Columbia Biblical Seminary professor Robert Ferris's (Ed.) book *Establishing Ministry Training* (1995) issued a challenge to the four stakeholders in missions training—sending churches, mission agencies, training institutions, and receiving churches—to a new partnership to redesign missionary training. The author called for a balanced approach to planning missionary training that keeps character

¹⁷ 17. For more information, contact: CBI Mission Associates Programme, P.O. Box 5, Wheaton IL 60189. (630) 665-1200. Web: cbi@aol.com

¹⁸ 18. Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977). J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: NAV Press, 1988). Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. (New York: Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 1989). Stephen R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992). Stephen R. Covey, *First Things First* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

qualities, ministry competencies and knowledge goals in proper relationship to the end in mind—equipping effective field missionaries.¹⁹

Ferris comments, 'Giftedness is something which comes from the Holy Spirit, and is not an issue of training, to be sure. But ministry skills are trainable. The close linkage between character and training, furthermore, should not be overlooked. Character, unlike giftedness, is NOT a gift; it too is trainable. We don't develop Christian character by running courses and seminars on 'Christian character' ('Love 101', 'Patience 430', 'Mercy 202', etc.), however. Christian character is the product when a willing heart responds in obedience to the clear and systematic teaching of God's Word under the Holy Spirit's influence. Seminaries do that pretty well . . .'²⁰

11. Customized Life-Long Training

Several critical developments in the area of international adult education have convinced agencies of the necessity of improving the quality of their in-house training if they are truly serious about sending out missionaries to be 'world changers'. The following are five of the most salient developments:

a) *Life-Long Continuous Learning—The Fifth Discipline*: MIT professor Peter Senge identified the simple principle that 'organizations work the way they work, ultimately because of how we think and how we interact ... only by changing how we interact can shared visions, shared understandings, and new capacities for coordinated action be established'.²¹ But learning that changes mental models is immensely challenging and occurs only over the long haul within a community of learners. The 'fifth discipline' in the business world is an organization's ability to create an environment in which people can create, new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured and where people are continually learning together; i.e. to become a 'learning organization'. The obvious implication challenges churches, agencies and schools to become true learning organizations that foster the growth and development of their members.

Many mission agencies have accepted this challenge and are designing pre-field and ministry internships that are highly experiential, non-formal and hands-on in nature. This practical mission training is also understood as 'life-long learning'. It reflects the growing realization that no matter how thorough the initial preparation for cross-cultural ministry is, the constantly changing global context and the exponential increase in knowledge and information demand not just 'continuing (periodic) education', but learning that is continuous and that lasts a life-time.

From the initial preparation for field assignments to continuing (and continuous) education on the field, agencies are beginning to craft programmes for their people which are comprehensive and individualized. They are comprehensive in that they take into account the initial ramp-up training, life-long learning over a career, as well as care related to personal, family and children's schooling issues. For example, Church Resource Ministries (CRM) requires all staff (both spouses) to file an annual Personal Development Plan with their supervisor, outlining key learning objectives in the area of spiritual and ministry growth. Learning can be informal, non-formal through intentional learning experiences, workshops and seminars, and formal—including a graduate degree

¹⁹ 19. Robert W. Ferris (Ed). *Establishing Ministry Training: a manual for programme developers*, (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1995), pp. 3, 8.

²⁰ 20. *ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹ 21. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1990), p. xiv.

programme. Supervisors meet with staff monthly, and at least twice a year check on each individual's progress toward their goals. Each member of staff then completes a year-end Ministry Development Profile evaluating their ministry effectiveness against key ministry indicators such as discipling, ministry coaching, training, and churches planted. To facilitate this continuous learning, all staff are encouraged and expected to find peer and upward mentors outside of the organization for accountability and advising.²²

This heightened awareness of the care and nurture of missionaries over their career has led agencies to look outside for additional assistance. Mental health professionals often assist in the screening and selection process, as well as helping with re-entry transitions, mid-career assessments, and role changes, and other short- or long-term counselling needs.

b) Training for Impact: Secular corporations that have poured countless millions of dollars into staff training efforts over the last several decades have made an alarming discovery—not all training results in the changed behaviour desired. Trends in management training, such as management by objectives, total quality management, computer assisted instruction, and multi-media learning, have not produced the anticipated results. Industry is concerned with impact on business, return on investment (ROI), profit. This has led in the early 90s to the movement (retreat) from training by objectives to training to performance outcomes (impact). The question is no longer, What did we teach them? but, Can they perform in the desired way when they've completed training? What is the impact of the training? So, too, ministry training whether for church or mission, must be concerned with effectiveness, with fruit, with impact; not just patient, persistent faithfulness. One biblical value cannot supplant the other.

c) Change Dynamic Focus: Schools of business management are highlighting the importance of leaders not only understanding but being able to lead and influence the organizational change process. MBA programmes are moving away from merely theoretical discussion of case studies toward more action research in the 'change dynamics' of actual organizations in the midst of change and the re-engineering process.

Practical missionary training must be redesigned with an intra-cultural or cross-cultural change dynamic in mind, not just an inter-cultural communication process. Churches and agencies sending missionaries must re-visualize the missionary leader in the role of a change agent or facilitator of the change process. The missionary can no longer be seen primarily as a trader, but must be sent as a storyteller and facilitator, able to work amidst numerous groups and between multiple cultures.

In response to this demand for comprehensive, yet customized missionary training, many agencies are joining forces to co-sponsor pre-field orientations, church-planting seminars, and other strategic training focused on impact. InterDev (Seattle, WA) has spearheaded the design of strategic evangelism and church planting partnerships (see #7 Global Partnerships above) that bring together various mission specialties working in the same geographical region of the world. Their 'Partnership Training Course' trains facilitators to lead operational, field-based partnerships between churches and agencies for the purpose of more effective penetration of an unreached area.²³ Since 1995 they have witnessed the emergence of over 50 such partnerships around the world, and are

²² 22. For information on CRM's personalized learning plan, contact: Church Resource Ministries (CRM), 1240 N. Lakeview Ave., Anaheim, CA 92807. (714) 779-0370, fax 779-0189 Email: djones@crmnet.org Web: www.crmnet.org

²³ 23. For information on InterDev, contact: P.O. Box 3883, Seattle, WA 98124. (425) 775-8330; Fax 775-8326 Web: www.interdev.com

conducting ongoing research to measure impact and effectiveness of those strategic partnerships in reaching targeted unreached peoples.

d) Experiential and Interactive Learning: Adult education since Malcolm Knowles has moved away from the theoretical and impersonal toward training that is experiential and relational. The Old Pedagogy encouraged students to come and stay so that experts could teach them the skills they would need and how to apply them. The New Andragogy provides the skills available in real time and coaches learners to seize the teachable moment. The Old Pedagogy was guided by clear purpose and process outcomes, which were easily consumed and easily applied. Even better training was logistically well supported, held in a great location, with great food and extra activities. The New Andragogy also wants to be effective and efficient, but is more results-driven and results verified where learning is tested by whether a person can actually produce the desired behaviour on the job. More than mere skills training, effective training is also 'Be-ing training,' in which the learner's capacity to see, think, feel and act are enhanced, learners are helped to learn what is needed 'just in time,' the training is often delivered by a peer, and the project is structured on-the-job.

Another benefit of the trend toward customized mission training is a change in the way mission agencies view and value training experiences. 'I believe we will move to a greater acceptance of non-formal training. Issues of proven ministry skills, character and giftedness will become the criteria for acceptance. Seminary training, while important for some missionaries in some roles, will take a back seat to these three items', says Sam Metcalf, president of Church Resource Ministries.

e) Contextualized Approaches— The best methodology is not one learned in a classroom and exported to a faraway mission setting, but a contextualized approach that takes seriously the biblical text, the cultural context, and the local community. Missionary training for the future will highlight the continuing importance of the contextualization process, and equip cross-cultural workers to engage in what Eugene Petersen calls 'contemplative exegesis'.²⁴ Several agencies and schools are currently engaged in intensive reflection and discussion of more radical contextualization approaches in areas such as developing Christian 'wats' as discipleship centres in Buddhist countries, and genuinely Christian outreach among Native Americans, Muslims, and Animists.

Mission agencies are taking an increasingly active role in developing and delivering their own programmes rather than depending on schools or churches to deliver their missionaries' and leaders' education. What is also new is the extent to which agencies can now draw from a rapidly expanding array of distance learning courses and modules being developed by schools, churches and other agencies. There is an increasing willingness to use learning modules that have proved effective for other agencies in their near-networks.

12. Focus on Leader Development

There has been in the last ten years a proliferation of corporate training universities and independent centres for creative leadership training. Organizations recognize their need for expert help, and they are willing to pay as much as is needed to get the help they need. Typical one-week programmes run from \$1,500 to \$10,000 for executive level leader training. Similarly, in recent years churches, schools and agencies have refocused training

²⁴ Eugene Petersen, *Working the Angles. The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987).

efforts on developing leaders. Leadership Network²⁵, Leadership Catalyst²⁶, and ReFocusing Leader Networks²⁷ are but three of the fastest growing learning networks for church leaders. In 1997, the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association (IFMA) launched *LeaderLINK*, a joint effort by member missions to develop an intentional leader development track for their own missionaries and agency leaders.²⁸

Larger agencies such as the International Missionary Board (IMB) of the SBC, OMF and CBI have jumped into the lead with comprehensive in-house leader training programmes. The IMB, for example, launched the International Centre for Excellence in Leadership (ICEL) in 1997 to provide assessment for leadership, leader development opportunities and leader resources that equip their personnel to begin and nurture church planting movements around the world.²⁹ Since the early 80s, Christian graduate schools and seminaries such as the Fuller School of World Mission have created rather extensive concentrations in leader development at both the masters and doctoral levels for church and missions leaders.

SCHOOL TRENDS

13. Design of More Creative and Flexible Formal Educational Programmes

Increased costs, a declining student population and the changing face of missions have forced many schools to become more creative and flexible with their programmes and delivery systems. The most obvious trend is 'distance learning,' (DL) or delivering off-campus extension courses in a variety of modes. As more students study at home, at work, at church or on the field, technological innovations will push the availability of multi-media training farther from the campus. Schools like Columbia, Fuller, Gordon-Conwell, Moody, Trinity and Wheaton have thousands of students enrolled in a variety of extension centres and through extended courses taken for credit by cassette tape, video tape, or downloaded from the Internet.

Professor of Christian Education at Gordon-Conwell, David Kletzing suggests that the 'new found importance of distance learning will be driven by at least the four following developments: the increasing dependence of institutions upon tuition dollars generated by DL, the need to plan and evaluate DL within the context of the seminary's mission statement, the systematic integration of distance courses and faculty within the main

²⁵ 25. For information on Leadership Network, contact: Leadership Network, 1-800-765-5323, (214) 969-5950. fax 969-9392. Web: www.leadnet.org

²⁶ 26. For information on Leadership Catalyst, contact: Leadership Catalyst, 5060 North 19th Ave. #317, Phoenix, AZ 85015. (602) 249-7000. 1-800.249-0700. Web: www.leadershipcatalyst.org

²⁷ 27. For information on ReFocusing Leaders Networks, contact: Church Resource Ministries (CRM), 1240 N. Lakeview Ave., Anaheim, CA 92807. (714) 779-0370, Fax 779-0189. Email: llarson@crmnet.org Web: www.crmnet.org

²⁸ 28. LeaderLink is a cooperative leader development institute specifically for missions administered by the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association (IFMA), culminating with an intensive five-day training institute each year. For information contact: IFMA, P.O. Box 398, Wheaton, IL 60189-0398. (630) 682-9270; 682-9278-Fax. Email: ifma@aol.com

²⁹ 29. For information on the IMB/SBC's International Centre for Excellence in Leadership, contact: Dr. Ben Sells, ICEL, 16492 MLC Lane, Rockville, VA 23146. (804) 219-1816, Fax 219-1850. Email: susan.welch@imb.org

curriculum, and the identification of distance students as valuable resources to the school.’³⁰

Another innovation is the creation of degree completion programmes for missionary training of adults available on campus or via distance learning. William Carey International University administrator Ben Sells reports on the growing number of potential ‘adult’ missionary candidates who have made a missions decision at some point in their life but lack one often-required credential for appointment by mission agencies—a college degree or a year of Bible and Missions. He describes them this way: ‘Unlike recent high school or college graduates these adults just can’t pack the car and drive away to college. They have jobs. They have families. Does it make sense to give up income and take on student debt, leave their future source of prayer and financial support, and divorce themselves from established ministry in their home church?’³¹

Sells observes: ‘The market is moving distance education from the margins to the mainstream. Technology is moving higher education from being delivered at a place to being placeless. And accessible education means learning opportunities that are moving from being regulated by the institutions to be captured by the learner “just-in-time”.’

This degree completion model for missionary training at seminaries is a welcome trend. Fuller Theological Seminary, for instance, provides a way for mature Christians over the age of 32 who may have only two years of college but have at least seven years of proven missions experience to enter the seminary’s master’s programme in mission. Schools such as Biola University and Azusa Pacific University have similar programmes available for those interested in Missions.³²

The Institute of International Studies at the U.S. Center for World Mission presently offers the ‘World Christian Foundations’ (WCF) curriculum that allows adults to complete their degree at their own speed. Wycliffe Bible Translators is piloting the opportunity for people to do language surveys without a college degree if they can finish the degree on the field. In cooperation with two regionally accredited Christian colleges, the WCF provides 48 semester hours of upper division undergraduate credit. Students must have two years of earned credit and meet the other admission requirements of the respective college. The curriculum is divided into four modules of 12 semester units each. Students in the WCF programme must meet weekly with a locally qualified mentor. The student can pursue studies within a time frame that takes into account work and home commitments. But the mentoring relationship moves the studies beyond the level of correspondence work. The WCF curriculum also carries masters level credit.³³

Missionary training curriculum is facing radical change in the United States in the next five years. Distance education programmes will proliferate, allowing more and more students to study at home, at work, at church, or on the mission field. Each generation of technological innovations will push the availability of multi-media training further from

³⁰ 30. David P. Kletzing, ‘New Directions for Seminary-Based Distance Learning’, *Journal of Adult Training*, (Fall 1996), Vol. IX, No.1. pp. 8–16.

³¹ 31. Ben Sells, ‘The Breakthrough for On-Field Mission Training’, *Mission Frontiers Bulletin*, (Sep–Dec 1998).

³² 32. For information contact: BIOLA University, 13800 Biola Ave., La Mirada, CA 90639, (562) 903–6000. Web: www.biola.edu Azusa Pacific University, 901 E. Alost Ave., Azusa, CA 91702 (626) 969–3434. Web: www.apu.edu

³³ 33. For information on the World Christian Foundations course, contact: William Carey International University, 1605 Elizabeth St., Pasadena, CA 91104–2127 818–398-2184, fax 818 298–2185, E-mail: ben.sells@wciu.edu

campus. Developments in communication theory and missionary anthropology will continue to suggest improved practices for building bridges of love with unreached peoples. Continued missions research and strategic breakthroughs among resistant peoples will force seminaries to innovate to stay on the cutting edge.

14. Increased Technology

Many schools have been quick to implement a wider and more innovative utilization of technology to facilitate the training process. Just as ease of long-distance travel facilitates the movement of faculty and learning resources to where the learners are, so the ease of long-distance communication via telegram, telex, fax, email and the Internet now link the furthest offices in micro-seconds. The mis-communication in past decades caused by distance and prohibitive costs are now minimized as long-distance rates plummet around the world. E-mail facilitates constant communication, contact and interaction between North American leadership and missionaries in the field.

Christian colleges and seminaries are aggressively developing a full-range of distance learning self-study modular courses. The Association of Christian Continuing Education Schools and Seminaries (ACCESS) is exploring a number of cooperative projects, including the joint publication of a catalogue of all distance learning Bible and Missions courses.³⁴ Courses on the Internet will soon replace the extension courses using notebooks, cassettes, or traditional textbooks. Conference calling and workshopping will soon become common-place in agencies, and churches will expand their use of email for communication, accountability, and caring. Billy Graham's global satellite evangelistic training and campaign in early 1995 is only a preview of the power the electronic media promises for more effective missionary training.

Some would see the claim of greater effectiveness through distance learning as an oxymoron, but the two are not mutually exclusive. Increased use of technology does not have to mean less relational or less interactive adult learning. Church planting author Robert Logan comments on the move toward Web-based training: 'The research on distance learning indicates that if you initiate the on-line learning experience with a face-to-face bonding experience (such as workshop, retreat, or orientation), you greatly multiply the impact and learning of a web-based course.' Logan, who teaches church planting at Fuller School of World Mission is the creator of CoachNet, a personalised coaching system for church planters over the Internet. 'On-line follow-up and interactivity can multiply the learning effectiveness three to ten-fold after an initial training experience,' Logan adds. 'Providing participants a relationship with a Coach, focusing on key issues in a systematic way, and interacting in detail on problems, people and personal issues are just three components of an effective web-based learning experience. On-line interactivity also allows for community building, discussion and feedback, and greatly facilitates very pointed and specific coaching from one or more peer coaches.'³⁵

Kletzing also underscores the positive way in which distance learning can address a broadening of student's needs more specifically. 'In the future we will see a wider variety of courses offered in distance learning than ever before, and we will see greater diversity in teaching strategies and delivery systems. The technology makes this possible, and new understanding of individual differences provides direction. As Christians we would that

³⁴ 34. For more information on Association of Christian College for Extension Studies (ACCESS) of Wheaton Ill., USA, see www.accessweb.org

³⁵ 35. Robert L. Logan (personal conversation, December 12, 1998). For more information on CoachNet, contact: Email: jbuller@CoachNet.org Web: www.CoachNet.org

people would come with different traits, gifts, and talents which are part of who God made them to be. The flexibility which technology and distance learning offers gives seminary educators an unprecedented opportunity to communicate in ways that respect individual learning styles and other personal variables.’³⁶

15. Innovative Two-Thirds World Missionary Training Centres and Programmes

Throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, young mission agencies are multiplying at an exponential rate. Following this trend, from the Global Missionary Training Center in Seoul, Korea, to the Nigerian Evangelical Missionary Institute in Jos, Two-Thirds World training programmes to equip the exploding numbers of missionaries from former ‘receiving nations’ are multiplying rapidly with many taking their place at the leading edge of training innovation.

Over 44 of 107 centres training missionary candidates are in the Two Thirds World. Their focus is to provide training appropriate for the needs of non-Western missionaries. As innovative new practical models and approaches are found, they will be exported back to North America, in the same way that TEE (Theological Education by Extension) started in the field in the 60s and was transplanted back to the United States a decade later. Their emphasis on learning in community with people from several differing cultures, applying spiritual disciplines, and practical courses in specific contexts may be instructive to North American programmes. Illustrative of this practical dimension is the EIC centre in Eldoret, Kenya, where missionaries will be sent to live among nomadic tribes whose life-style and livelihood revolves around their cattle, or the Global Mission Bible College in Fiji, where the art of mending fishing nets has opened doors in the evangelization of Pacific Island people.³⁷

CONCLUSION: THE CALL TO DOXOLOGICAL TEACHING AND TRAINING

The responses of theologians and Christian educators to such a widespread description of sweeping changes across the educational horizon are varied. Some will retreat in disgust and affirm the traditions of the saints once delivered. Some will recoil in fear that the sacred essentials are being desecrated. Some will attempt to defend the status quo. Some will tentatively attempt to engage with the issues and adapt them to their setting. Some will critically examine the trends and begin slowly to develop appropriate responses. Others have already decided that theological and missiological education was never really what they wanted to do anyway.

L. Grant McClung, associate professor of mission and church growth, Church of God School of Theology (Cleveland, TN), calls for involvement of the heart as well as the head: ‘The missing ingredient in missiological training in the Western church is passion. Our missiologists might as well be CEOs of multinational corporations. We have been depending too much on social sciences, management by objectives, and marketing techniques ... Where is Jesus in all this?’³⁸

³⁶ 36. David P. Kletzing, ‘New Directions for Seminary-Based Distance Learning’, *Journal of Adult Training*, (Fall 1996), Vol. IX, No.1., pp. 10.

³⁷ 37. Hartley, David, *Preparing to Serve: Training for Cross-Cultural Mission* (Pasadena: WEF/William Carey, 1995).

³⁸ 38. L. Grant McClung, ‘Pentecostal/Charismatic Perspectives on Missiological Education,’ an address at Missiological Education for the 21st Century, Fuller School of World Mission, Pasadena, Nov. 1992.

What is needed from Christian educators is a response that is biblically responsible and reflective. I propose a response of 'doxological teaching' or training. 'Teaching,' suggests Jerry Root of Wheaton College, 'is coming shoulder-to-shoulder with a person, looking out at a reality and describing it in such a way that captures their imagination and desire to do something about it.' Doxological teaching, then, is recognizing or discovering that 'God is here! God is in this place!' and then designing learning experiences which open the learners' eyes to see how big and glorious God is. In global crisis and change, in sorrow and in joy, God is at work in our world completing the 'Big Picture' of his kingdom. God is in this place. There is hope. People Groups are becoming worshippers!

To this end, cultural changes, technological innovations, and instructional developments can be made allies in moving missions into the 21st century. But the missions educator that is needed must own more than cable TV, the latest computer, and most recent book on leadership training. We need teachers who themselves have been caught by the Lord of the universe, who can see clearly God's sovereign hand moving in the affairs of the world, and who burn with a passion to raise up other worshippers who long to tell 'the story of His glory' among the nations! They alone will be suited to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with missionary candidates from countless nations and help them detect the glorious movement of what God is doing in our day!

'For the earth will be filled with the kingdom of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'

[Habukkuk 2:14](#)

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The Biblical Jubilee

Leonardo De Chirico

Keywords: Jubilee, land, wealth, property, poverty, Sabbath, justice, covenant, prophecy, Messiah, servant, community

INTRODUCTION

'Jubilee' is a word we hear more and more with each passing day. All over the world extraordinary efforts are being made over this event associated with the fateful date of 2000. Millions of people, lay and religious alike, are getting ready to make a form of 'pilgrimage'. Many voices are raised urging us to not make this millennial event merely a grand media event or a commercial jamboree of global proportions, and the sentiments

of these calls are worthy. The problem that remains, however, is the lack of direction. Many know that the word 'Jubilee' comes from somewhere in the Bible, yet they would not be able to describe this 'Jubilee' that the biblical writers spoke about.

In Italy, the Roman Catholic church has assumed a leading role in promoting the 'Jubilee'. The Pope has worked tirelessly for this, and has initiated a very ambitious project. But can we speak of the 'Jubilee' without defining it? With this aim of deepening our understanding, our starting point must be where the 'Jubilee' idea was born: The Bible.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE IN THE BIBLE

A. the Institution of the Year of Jubilee

In order to understand how the 'Jubilee' is presented in the Bible, we need to start from a long passage taken from [Leviticus 25](#) vv.8-55. This third book of the Pentateuch contains a collection of laws that confirm and clarify the terms of the covenant that God had established with the people of Israel after having freed them from slavery in Egypt. In it, the types and modes of sacrifice that Israel must offer as an integral part of their worship of the Lord are prescribed. The principal emphasis of Leviticus concerns the holiness of Israel as a chosen people, having been liberated and set apart for the service of God, who has amongst his attributes that of being Holy ([11:44-45](#); [19:2](#)). In this context, the festivals and celebrations that Israel must keep are presented. Amongst these is the Jubilee which is described in [Leviticus 25](#).

A) Derivation

The similarity to the Latin verb *jubilare* (from which comes the English 'jubilation') must not deceive us concerning the derivation of the term Jubilee. Jubilee is a word that comes from the Hebrew word *yôbêl* that occurs 27 times in the Old Testament. The meaning of *yôbêl* is 'ram's horn',¹ the instrument that was used to gather the assembly, to sound the battle against the enemy's forces or to mark a sacred moment for the people of Israel. By extension, the 50 yearly event introduced by the sound of the ram's horn is called in the Bible, the year of *yôbêl*, the year of Jubilee. On the other hand, the Hebrew verb *ybl* (to make restitution, send away)² evokes the idea, linked to the Jubilee, of the restitution of property or of people. The word, therefore, can indicate both the musical instrument that announces the Jubilee and the principal actions that characterize it. Finally, there is another possibility for the derivation of this Hebrew term, which is not an alternative but complements the preceding ones. Given the theological weight of the institution of the Jubilee—which we will detail later—the word itself can be an expression of faith in YHWH, the God of Israel. In this sense, YHWH (*Yô-*) is recognized as *bahal* (*-bêl*), Lord, that is, as the one true Lord, thus *yôbêl*, Jubilee.

B) The Specific Characteristics

In [Leviticus 25](#), there are three fundamental provisions, around which turn all the legislation concerning the Year of Jubilee. These three important elements are developed and extended by examples, but, taken by themselves, are the essence of the Jubilee legislation.

¹ 1. Cf. [Ex. 19:13](#) and [Josh. 6:4-6, 8, 13](#).

² 2. Cf. [Isa. 23:7](#) and [Job 21:30](#).

Firstly, comes the order to leave the land fallow, which is to let the land *rest* ([25:11–12](#), [19–22](#)). In the Jubilee Year, the normal activities linked to cultivating the land must be suspended completely. The fields must not be sowed, the produce must not be gathered, the vines must not be tended (11). A whole year of complete rest must be observed, both for the land under cultivation and for the labourers. In order to eat, the crops stored from previous years must be relied upon (12), or, better, from the year before the Jubilee, given that God promised such a blessing upon the harvest of that season as to make it sufficient for the following three years ([21–22](#)). The Year of Jubilee is to all effects a sabbath year, a year in which all labour ceases and which is consecrated for the resting of the earth and of man.

The second key provision of the Jubilee concerns the *redemption* of property (land or houses) on behalf of the original owners who, for various reasons, had lost them during the previous fifty years ([25:13–18](#), [23–24](#)). On the Jubilee, the land must be returned to those to whom it originally belonged—that is, to the original ordered division of plots of land amongst each Israelite nuclear family after the conquest of the land of Canaan by the people of Israel. If the ups and downs of life had brought about a series of transfers of land, the Jubilee was the occasion to return things to their initial allocation. Selling was never an absolute transfer of property (23) because, due to the Jubilee, lands sold later returned to their vendor. But this was not all. The Jubilee also influences the determination of the selling price. It was established that the price was calculated according to the time remaining until the next Year of Jubilee ([15–16](#)). Thus the further from the Jubilee the higher the price, and vice versa. Naturally, nothing stopped a seller of a field from buying it back before the automatic redemption which came through the Jubilee. In that case, however, the usual commercial terms applied ([25–28](#)), although fairness was still expected ([14](#), [17a](#)). The exception to the rule of the Jubilee redemption concerned houses situated in walled cities. These could not be redeemed in the Year of Jubilee and could revert back to the owner only if they were repurchased within a year of their sale ([29–31](#)). As for the priestly tribe, the Levites, they were especially protected in that they had the permanent right to redeem their property ([32–34](#)).

Lastly, the Jubilee laws commanded the *liberation* of Hebrews from their servitude ([25:35–55](#)). With this command, a remedy is given if an Israelite had been forced to ‘sell himself’ after being unable to repay his debts. In this case of servitude due to insolvency, on the Jubilee the servant and his children were returned to his clan ([39–41](#)). In any case, the relationship between the master and his servants was not to be one of domination ([43](#), [53](#)). The people from the surrounding tribes or foreigners who lived amongst the Israelites could, however, be acquired as slaves ([44–46](#)), but this could never apply to the Israelites themselves ([42b](#), [46b](#)). If a foreigner acquired Israelite slaves, these could be redeemed by his family by an amount directly proportional to the number of years before the next Jubilee ([47–54](#)). As well as restoring the servants to their dignity as human beings, this section from [Leviticus 25](#) underlines the requirement, often repeated in the law of Moses, not to take advantage of people in difficulty nor to expect interest on loans nor to practise usury, but instead to help the neighbour who is in need ([35–37](#)).

C) The Socio-Economic Context

The Jubilee laws set out in [Leviticus 25](#) cover the people of Israel at a particular point in their history and relate to a particular social reality. Thus, we should not think that the provisions of the Jubilee can be uprooted from their specific context. Bearing this in mind, it must be remembered that the social structure of pre-monarchical Israel was founded essentially on a system of clearly-established family descent, firstly to a tribe, then in turn to a clan based on the father’s line and finally to a nuclear family. Every Hebrew found in

these last two the social groups which provided reference points for his life. This explains why the conquered land of Canaan was divided amongst the various clans.³ The clans, in particular, had the task of preserving the well-being of the families, whose source of wealth came from their allocation of the land.

Despite these ideals, the maintenance of the original division of land was jeopardised by a series of factors that favoured the creation of large estates on the one hand, and the breaking of the fundamental link between the allocated land and the families to whom it had been given, on the other. This deprivation of land threatened the survival of the family itself, and would have destroyed the social fabric. The growth of servitude would also have had a disruptive impact on the whole social system. These effects would not have been merely economic, but fundamental for the lives of the people. In fact, the person, the family and the land are linked and interdependent, so that having an impact on one of them meant affecting all three. In the prescriptions of the Mosaic law, 'a person cannot survive without belonging to a family and without a land to cultivate; a family cannot be guaranteed without possessing a property and without respect for each of its members; the dignity of the land passes through the way in which it is cared for and cultivated by families and individuals'.⁴

The year of Jubilee therefore operates as a counterbalance so as to prevent the concentration of property in the hands of a few clans to the detriment of the smallest and weakest families and also to return servants to liberty. In this way, the clans and the families should have been safeguarded through the periodic return of their property and the cessation every fifty years of their servitude. The properties would also have thus conserved the link that united them to the families to whom they had been originally assigned.

D) The Theological Background

Chapter [25](#) of Leviticus is a legal text which follows a clear theological framework over and above the social and economic prescriptions that it contains. The Jubilee is prompted, justified and legitimized theologically in the sense that reference to the God of Israel runs right through its institution, its necessity and its meaning. The Jubilee finds its rightful place in a theological setting which must be clearly understood, else it will be misinterpreted. With this in mind, it is interesting to observe that each section of [Leviticus 25](#) concludes with an exhortation to the people to remember that God is the Lord ([17, 38, 55](#)) and that the Jubilee laws in question are founded completely on his lordship. Before the inescapable presence of this God, they were called to live a life developing the fear of God, showing respect and obedience before him ([17, 36, 43](#)). In more detail, there are four big references that give sense and theological weight to the Jubilee.

First of all, the Jubilee evokes the *creation* of God and the *providence* of God. It has already been seen how the Year of Jubilee was established on a calculation based on sabbatical years. Every seven cycles of sabbath years, a Jubilee year must be celebrated (8). In its turn, the Sabbath Year ([25:1-7](#)) had been instituted to commemorate the ceasing of God's creative activity on the seventh day.⁵ Just as God had rested on the seventh day, so the people of Israel had to suspend their ordinary activities, not only every

³ Cf. [Num. 26:52-56](#) and Josh. chaps. [13-21](#).

⁴ A. Pitta, *L'anno della liberazione. Il giubileo e le sue istanze bibliche*, (Cinisello Balsamo (Mi): Edizioni San Paolo 1998), p. 45.

⁵ Cf. [Ezek. 20:8-11](#) and [31:13-17](#). In [Deut. 5:15](#), the sabbath is related to the liberation from the bondage of Egypt.

seventh day but every seventh year. The resting of God at the end of the work of creation acted therefore as a model to guide the rhythm of life for the people. Based on this, in the biblical legislation, both a day of rest at the end of a cycle of six days of work and a year of rest at the end of a cycle of six years of work was established. The Jubilee is celebrated also to honour this creation ordinance. If it were fully respected, God would bind himself to provide the means of sustenance which are still necessary when productive activity has stopped. In this sense, the requirements for the Year of Jubilee were underwritten by the promise of the provision of God (20–21). God is the One who created the world but he is also he who controls the cycles of nature, bringing forth their produce. The Jubilee makes clear that those who honour God will not fail to be abundantly repaid, as not only the beginning of the world but also its continuing natural processes depend upon him.

Secondly, the Jubilee is set forth in relation to the *covenant* established between God and his people on the day after their liberation from Egypt. This key, formative event in the history and the identity of the children of Israel acted as a reference for every aspect of life (38:55). God is not only the universal Lord who has created everything, but also he who liberated his people from Egypt and the God of the Covenant of Mount Sinai; in short, 'your God' (17, 38, 55). In terms of the Jubilee, the provision by which the servants receive back their original liberty is based on the act by which God took Israel out of slavery and gave them the gift of serving him, the only true God. The freeing of servants is possible and indeed necessary because of this previous liberation.

In addition, the reference to the covenant is an appeal to the duties that the people took on when they made this treaty with God. Because they are bound to him in covenant, the people of God could no longer live independently of his will, either in the life of religious worship or in the socio-economic sphere. The Jubilee is an integral part of the arrangements that enforce the covenant established on Mount Sinai.

But there is more. Beyond just pointing to the creation of God, his providence and bringing to mind the covenant between God and his people, the Jubilee is also an assertion of the *right* of God to rule over his creation and his people. The Jubilee laws are legitimate because of the divine prerogative over all reality. This is not the claim of some political or religious authority over land or people. No, God reserves for himself the right to have at his complete disposal the earth and its inhabitants, in that he, as creator of the world and Lord of the Covenant with Israel, has an original and absolute right over all people and all things. Thus, the plots of land can be redeemed as 'the land is mine' (23). The property rights acquired in the fifty years preceding the Jubilee are therefore relative to those of the Lord, who can manage the earth as he likes. God is therefore the planner-owner-creator of the world while men are 'aliens and tenants' (23) in respect to the land that they cultivate and manage. Because of this, one cannot do as one pleases with God's creation.

In addition, the people who through various circumstances lived in servitude can regain their liberty as 'they are my servants' (42, 55). The state of being a servant of God, common to all human beings, makes one free with respect to all other men. Nobody must be the servant of another because we are all servants of God.

The Jubilee is therefore a concrete expression of the right of God to intervene in the affairs of men to bring honour to the order of creation and to correct the distortions upsetting the lives of his people. This prerogative of God is not an illegitimate interference nor an unwarranted meddling in the human sphere of action. Instead, the Jubilee is an integral, justified and incontestable assertion of the fact that God is creator, provider and Lord of the world.

Finally, the Jubilee is linked to the *atonement* of the sins of the people of God. Here also, the theological dimension of thinking about the Jubilee is illuminating in that it sheds

light on the necessity of dealing with sin. To underline this connection, the blast of the ram's horn that signals the start of the year of Jubilee is also sounded during the 'Day of Atonement' (9) and the arrangements for the Day of Jubilee come into force from that special day in the Hebrew calendar.

According to [Leviticus 16](#), the 'Day of Atonement' was an event that occurred every year in which the High Priest offered atoning sacrifices for the sanctuary, for the priests themselves and for the whole nation. The coincidence of this day with the day of Jubilee encourages reflection. The fact that it starts on the 'Day of Atonement' means that it started with an invitation to contrition for sins and with the asking of forgiveness from each other whereas it is clear that the social processes that produced the inequality on which the Jubilee intervenes have a cause largely linked to the exploitation of the poor by the rich. This is the fruit of mankind rebelling against God. The ultimate cause of the injustice is found here. Sin is a force, as real as it is perverse, that has irreparably corrupted every area of life.

The Jubilee is not merely a legislation with idealistic social aims inspired by some egalitarian ideology; instead, it is a necessity that is prompted by an awareness of the state of sin in which all exist and of the consequent need of atonement. According to the true spirit of the Jubilee, it is important not merely to correct the perverse effects of past developments, but above all, to confront the central issue for man, which is that of being a sinner before God. The need for atonement precedes and accompanies the needs of social justice.

E) Summary

Reading [Leviticus 25](#) is a fascinating exercise that cannot but stir both novice and expert Bible students. There are a number of reasons for such a reaction.

First of all is the *radicalism* of the Jubilee. The ordinances that are found in [Leviticus 25](#) have huge ramifications. The restitution of land to the original owner, the freeing of servants, the rebuilding of families are very drastic measures, that, if applied literally, would radically change the social fabric of a people. The Jubilee does not pursue a strategy of marginal corrections or of minimal adjustments to the social-economic system. On the contrary, it is a comprehensive reform project that breaks the existing order so as to create a substantially new one, or at least one that is very different. The Jubilee acts on the structures of society, even if this society continues to be exposed to the dynamic processes that will, over time, recreate inequality. The Jubilee covers all social relations with a view to reordering them on bases formed from an original definitive model of social justice.

In addition to this, the cyclicity of the Jubilee is striking. It is not simply provisions for a once-off change, inspired by a utopian egalitarianism or by a populist dictator. The Jubilee is instead a set of precepts that, at least in the intentions of the Book of Leviticus, must be applied every fifty years. The Jubilee regulations are based on an awareness of the need to act periodically upon the social structures of a society and on property-based relationships and to uphold the downtrodden. Behind the Jubilee lies the conviction that, left to itself, a social grouping manifests unacceptable inequalities and grave injustices. The sin introduced into the world by the fall of Adam and Eve has also structural ramifications that disrupt the social life of man. The Jubilee is an occasion every fifty years to start again, to rebalance the disparities of income in society that were produced by the social dynamics of the fifty previous years.

Thirdly comes the surprising *spirituality* of the Jubilee. In [Leviticus 25](#) is found not only a programme of social reform, that is both radical and cyclical, but a real demonstration of the faith of Israel through these same reforming provisions. The

underlying theme of the Jubilee is the recognition of the lordship of God the creator, provider and saviour, to whom one's very existence is owed and who is worthy of all honour. The institution of the Jubilee takes us back to a holistic vision of life, in which God is God and the lives of men depend on their relationships with him. From this viewpoint, the arrangements of the Jubilee are expressions of an authentic spirituality. In [Leviticus 25](#), the confession of faith in the God of Israel and the measures taken to restore equality combine to form something of extraordinary theological worth and of remarkable social impact. The biblical Jubilee highlights a true conception of the world which manifests itself in concrete arrangements, but which is nurtured by all the richness of the reality of who God is and what he does.

B. The Prophetic Promise of the Jubilee

The biblical Jubilee is not found solely in [Leviticus 25](#). On the contrary, this is merely the starting point, being the foundation and introduction to all that the rest of the Bible has to say concerning it. In fact, the Jubilee theme is evoked many times in the story of salvation, from the pre-monarchical period to that of the prophets, from the life of Jesus to the early church. The images surrounding the Jubilee act as a rich reference point in understanding the complete sweep of biblical revelation.

A) Jubilee and Prophecy

Despite the institution of the Jubilee stated in [Leviticus 25](#), there is no evidence in the Scriptures that the Jubilee arrangements were ever fully put into practice, or their fifty year cycle followed. That legislation did not translate into full practice, even if there were single episodes inspired by a Jubilee sentiment.⁶ In the story of the people of Israel, even after the period of the conquest of the land of Canaan, the problem of poverty continued to afflict society, ancestral property rights were denied and the dignity of people continued to be ignored. No political or religious authority was able to guarantee or command the implementation of the Jubilee regulations, neither were the mere prescriptions of the Jubilee a sufficient deterrent against social injustices or the oppression of the poor.

This systematic contravention of the ideals of the Jubilee, however, did not lead to a fatalistic sense of resignation to the existing order of human wickedness. These contraventions instead provided the inspiration for the preaching of several prophets who, observing with sadness the social inequalities present amongst the people, did not fail to call forcefully for heartfelt repentance and for full respect for the obligations of the covenant with God.⁷ Indeed, the high social concern of the message of the prophets which was inspired by the Jubilee, does not exhaust the ways in which these same prophets interpreted and expounded the *yôbêl*, the year of freedom foreseen in the book of Leviticus. With this in mind, it is worth referring to a passage from the prophet Isaiah ([61:1-3](#)) which brought an extraordinary development to the meaning of the Jubilee.

The prophecy in question is part of the 'servant songs' that are scattered throughout the book of Isaiah from chapter [42](#).⁸ In these poetic sections, the prophet speaks of how the Messiah was to come to fulfil the plan of God for his people, in his capacity as 'servant' of the Lord. In this 'song' in particular, the servant announces his being chosen by God for

⁶ 6. Cf. [Num. 36:4](#); [Neh. 5:1-13](#); [Jer. 34:8-22](#).

⁷ 7. Cf. [Isa. 3:14-15](#); [10:1-2](#); [Amos 2:6](#); [4:1](#); [8:4-6](#); [Mic. 2:1-2](#); [3:1-4](#).

⁸ 8. Cf. [Isa. 42:1](#); [49:1](#); [50:4](#).

a task, gives the reason for his mission and also the beneficiaries of his work. The points of contact with the Jubilee cannot fail to be observed, being so clearly discernible.

B) The Mission of the 'servant'

The 'servant's' action concerns the announcement of 'freedom for the captives', a message that corresponds to the expression used in [Leviticus 25:10](#) regarding the proclamation of amnesty for the servants. In addition, if the Jubilee was aimed at those who were impoverished (25:35.39), the servant looks to those who are 'afflicted'.⁹ Also the 'humble' (*-anawim*) to whom the 'servant' turns, are identified in the book of Isaiah with the wretched, the poor—in short, those who are being exploited by the rich.¹⁰ The mission of the 'servant' is also to bind up the 'broken hearted', the same expression of contrition called for in the 'Day of Atonement' that preceded the start of the Jubilee.

Yet there is more; as we have seen before, the Jubilee was the year of the restitution of property, of liberation for slaves, of respect for creation ordinances and of keeping the requirements of the covenant. In parallel, the 'servant' announces 'the year of the Lord's favour' that is also the 'day of vengeance of our God'. Throughout the text of Isaiah, God proclaims a year of extraordinary favour in which he himself guarantees the fact that justice will be done for those to whom it had until that time been denied. The year of amnesty of the Jubilee becomes the year of God's favour.

Between the Jubilee and this 'servant song' there exists therefore a parallelism that makes us think of how the preordained work of the Messiah can be seen as the proclamation of a great Jubilee in which God intervenes to reestablish justice. The Jubilee becomes an eschatological reference tool for understanding the actions of the 'servant'. God, in the person of the 'servant', will put his Jubilee into effect. However, there is a great difference. If in the intention of The Book of Leviticus, the Jubilee should be repeated cyclically, the year of favour prophesied by Isaiah is instead announced as a unique intervention, decisive and definitive on the part of God.

In the prophetic vision, the Jubilee is not solely a pre-monarchical law to be referred to when denouncing grave religious hypocrisy and crushing social injustice. In the prophecies relative to the Messiah, the mission of the 'servant' is framed as a great Jubilee event in which God intervenes through his 'anointed one' to reclaim those who were under varying yokes of oppression. Being unable to rely upon the prescribed implementation of the law, these people will have God himself to restore their personal and social dignity.

C. The Messianic Fulfilment of the Jubilee

In the New Testament we do not find direct quotes or explicit references to the Jubilee, as presented in [Leviticus 25](#). But this is not to say that it is completely absent or that it had been relegated to something only of historical interest to the people of God.

A) The Jubilee of the Messiah

In the New Testament the theme of the Jubilee came via the realization of the Messianic prophecies announced by Isaiah and fulfilled through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah sent by God and 'servant' of the Almighty. It is not by chance that the text of

⁹ 9. In the LXX, the 'poor' of [Lev 25:25.35](#) (*penētai*) corresponds to those 'who mourn' in [Isa. 61:2](#) (*penthontas*)

¹⁰ 10. Cf. also [Isa. 3:14-15](#); [10:2](#); [14:30](#); [24:6](#); [25:3](#); [29:19](#); [41:17](#); [58:7](#).

[Isaiah 61:1–3](#) is quoted extensively by Jesus on the occasion of his visit to Nazareth ([Luke 4:16–30](#)).

The episode reported by the evangelist Luke refers to the beginnings of the ministry of Jesus in the land of Galilee. On this occasion he was in Nazareth, the city ‘where he had been brought up’. The reading of the Scriptures in the midst of the synagogue service offered him the opportunity to declare the meaning of his coming in the light of the prophecies of Isaiah. The affirmations of Jesus thus set forth his manifesto. That which Isaiah had written concerning the ‘servant’, Jesus attributed to himself and to his work. In Jesus and with Jesus that prophecy ‘was fulfilled’. The expectations regarding the coming of the Messiah in his guise as ‘servant’ were realized with the presence of Jesus at Nazareth. It was thus clear that if the prophetic announcement concerning the Messiah had had as its paradigm of reference the promise of a great Jubilee from God, the fulfilment of that promise in the person of Jesus was the crucial moment in the realization of the plan of God. The history of salvation was taken to completion: the Jubilee prefigured in the Mosaic legislation and prophesied in the preaching of the prophets found in the coming of the Messiah the decisive point in its fulfilment.

It is clearly possible to extend the strong parallelism noted between [Leviticus 25](#) and [Isaiah 61](#) to the text of Luke quoted above, not least because the Gospel text quotes almost verbatim the text of Isaiah. In particular, we can observe that the passage read by the Lord Jesus indicates that he was sent to evangelize ‘the poor’ (*.anawim*), who, as already demonstrated, are amongst the beneficiaries of the provisions of the Jubilee. With reference to [Isaiah 61](#), in Jesus’ reading there is also the insertion of a clearer specification of the mission of Jesus which brings it closer to that of the Jubilee. In fact, bringing liberty to the oppressed (18)¹¹ is a fundamental part of the Jubilee which is also an essential part of the missionary work of Jesus.

[Luke 4](#) allows us to go a step further in defining the beneficiaries of the Jubilee. Now the Jubilee of Jesus Christ is no longer reserved solely for the children of Israel, as had been the case in the Old Testament. With the incarnation of the Son of God the beneficiaries of divine favour are all people and all nations, the whole of humanity. The Gospel of Luke records the hostility of his fellow villagers following Jesus’ stating that the horizons of God are not limited to territorial boundaries or to the people of Israel but extend much further. The reference to the widow of Sidon (26) and to Naaman the Syrian (27) proved the reality that the plan of God knew no limitations, despite the nationalistic convictions of the Hebrews of the time. The text leads us to think (although explicitly stated elsewhere only in Luke,¹² and above all in the Acts of the Apostles¹³) that the benefits from the Jubilee of the Lord Jesus have a universal application, belonging to all men of whichever race, tribe or language, despite the complaints of the villagers.

Whereas the Jubilee of Leviticus maintained a distinction of treatment between Hebrew ‘servants’ and foreign ‘slaves’, the Jubilee announced and fulfilled by Jesus completely eliminated it. Thanks to him, men and women from every race, could be liberated from their conditions of servitude. All could regain their dignity that had been taken away through sin, and justice could be reestablished, a justice which had been compromised with the fall of the human race. With the incarnation of the Son of God, the Jubilee could no longer remain the exclusive prerogative of the Hebrews, given that his

¹¹ 11. ‘Setting the oppressed free’ is not part of [Isaiah 61](#) but is a quotation from [Isaiah 58:6](#).

¹² 12. E.g. [Lk. 2:32](#).

¹³ 13. [Acts 1:8](#); [9:15](#); [11:17–18](#).

work was meant for the whole world. Hence 'all nations' were the aim of the mission entrusted to his disciples ([Mt. 28:19](#)).

B) The Interpretation of the Work of Jesus Christ in the Light of the Jubilee

The Jubilee is therefore an interpretive key to what Christ came to achieve on the earth. His message, his miracles, his death and his resurrection are all ways that establish the Jubilee.

His *teaching* made known the truth about a God who has the power to liberate. Knowing the message of Jesus means knowing him who is True ([1 John 5:20](#)) whilst remaining in his word makes us truly free ([John 8:31-32](#)). The cry for liberty associated with the Jubilee finds in the declaration of the 'good news' of Jesus the only possibility of its being satisfied. To be free, the first thing that a person is called to do is to hear the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

His *miracles* prove the reality of a divine power, a power far above the limitations of men, the cycles of nature or the dynamic processes of history; it can resolve situations which are, humanly-speaking, impossible, 'doing good' to people ([Acts 10:38](#)). In the same spirit of the Jubilee, the poor are called blessed ([Luke 6:20](#)), the oppressed are returned to liberty ([Mk. 9:17-27](#)), the hungry are satisfied ([Mk. 6:34-44](#)). Thanks to him, the beneficiaries of the Jubilee will no longer stay crushed because Jesus, with his powerful works, has demonstrated his power to change any situation, even the most intractable and entrenched. The miracles of Christ, especially his healings, are extraordinary anticipations of the blessings that the Jubilee of the Son of God will one day make concrete.

The *sacrifice* of Jesus on the cross demonstrates the fact that Jesus wanted to confront the central issue of the problem: the sin of mankind. He did not limit himself to denouncing the abuses of power by the rich against the poor, nor did he want simply to express his solidarity with the poor. His death testified to the reality that at the root of the human wickedness which produces such inequality there is humanity's rebellion against God, the breaking of the covenant and the offence to God's honour by humanity. The Jubilee laws also were framed in the knowledge that sin was the source of all the disruptions in life and so the start of the Year of Jubilee was preceded by the repentance of the Day of Atonement. Thus, even for the Jubilee in the Book of Leviticus, sin could never be confronted and resolved in a complete way by legal decrees or by social programmes, despite their importance.

With his sacrifice, Jesus has finished the only task necessary and sufficient to overthrow sin. At the cross, he voluntarily took the place of man, paid for him and substituted himself for him. In contrast to those prescribed by the law of Moses, the sacrifice of Christ was once and for all and unrepeatable. The sacrifices that were offered in the Day of Atonement were surpassed by the sacrifice of Christ, offered 'once and for all' ([Heb. 9:1-12, 24, 28](#)). The Jubilee of Jesus Christ solved the root of the problem for which the Jubilee in Leviticus offered a partial, temporary remedy.

The *resurrection* of Jesus also assumes a deep significance in the light of the Jubilee. Rising from the dead, the Lord Jesus proclaimed his victory over sin. His Jubilee is not mere high-sounding theory. Although the Jubilee in the Book of Leviticus had encountered very strong resistance when any attempt was made to enforce it, in time it had become part of the Hebrew system of justice, but it had lost most of its power. Instead, what Jesus had promised with the announcement of his great Jubilee, he could maintain because he had defeated sin and overcome death. That which Jesus obtained with his sacrifice he is able to put into practice because he rose on the third day. Given that Jesus is living, he is the judge of the living and the dead ([Acts 17:31](#)) and he will avenge those who have

suffered ([Rom. 12:19](#)). Justice can finally be re-established because the legislator is also the enforcer of the Jubilee.

Through the reference to the Jubilee it is therefore possible to understand important aspects of the work of Jesus on behalf of mankind in that the ideals of the Year of Jubilee find in Christ their true and full expression. More precisely, it can be said that the *rest* foreseen in the Jubilee for the land or for the labourers has been freely given by Jesus Christ. He offers his rest to those who are weary and burdened ([Mt. 11:28-29](#)); the salvation that Jesus has made possible through his work is the real 'sabbath-rest of God' ([Heb. 4:1-11](#)).

The *redemption* of lost properties is guaranteed by Jesus Christ who makes those who believe in him partakers of his incalculable riches ([Eph. 1:7, 18; 3:8, 16](#)) and who declares the believers heirs of his glorious reign ([James 2:5](#)). The value of this glorious inheritance will far exceed that which has been lost. Jesus is the one who 'though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)). The *freedom* of the slaves associated with the Jubilee is put into practice by Christ who, more than freeing his sons from the slavery of sin ([Gal 5:1](#)), will also free the whole of creation from the structural sins that afflict them ([Rom. 8:21](#)). Those who have lost their dignity can be honoured with the title of 'son of God' ([1 John 3:1](#)).

In summary, the Year of Jubilee prescribed by [Leviticus 25](#), the year of the Lord's favour heralded in [Isaiah 61:2](#) is fulfilled 'today' with the coming of the Messiah. Christ proclaimed the advent of the 'Year of the Lord's Favour' (19). He himself is the realization and fulfilment and the putting into practice of the Jubilee.

D. The Jubilee in the Early Church

The coming of Jesus Christ represented the key moment for the understanding of the Jubilee according to the Scriptures and for the putting into effect of the Jubilee provisions on behalf of the people of God. After the ascension of Jesus to the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early church became the ambassador of the 'Year of the Lord's favour' that the Son of God had inaugurated and of the proof of his work of salvation for those who would believe in him. In order to conform the extension of the benefits of the Jubilee of the Messiah to all, the mission of the church had to extend to the 'ends of the earth' ([Acts 1:8](#)). The believers took on the task of witnessing given by the Lord, preaching the 'good news' of Jesus. In this way the church became the publiciser of the coming of the Jubilee that Christ had brought about through the proclamation of his liberating words, through his atoning death and by his resurrection, all proving his divine power.

In addition to this, God wanted to accompany their words by accomplishing miracles through them, that were, like those of Jesus, visible demonstrations that gave a foretaste of the fullness of the Jubilee of Christ. In all this, the church gave testimony about the Jubilee of its Lord. However, the preaching of the gospel or the miraculous works were not the only ways in which the reality of the Jubilee was lived and shared within the first group of disciples.

A) The Sharing of Wealth

One of the most characteristic aspects of the first Christian church at Jerusalem was certainly the way in which it organized and lived out the communal life. The sharing out of wealth, described in [Acts 4:32-35](#), was an example of this. The picture is clear enough: those who, in the grace of God were added to the original band of disciples of Christ chose to have everything in common, selling their property and pouring the proceeds into a common fund managed by the apostles. In passing, it should be noted that the 'lands and

houses' mentioned (34) were the same things covered by the arrangements in the Jubilee of [Leviticus 25](#).

However, in this decision there was no element of pressure upon the new believers, much less any hint of coercion by anyone. Instead, it was a spontaneous initiative on their part which had not been imposed as a condition of entry into the Christian community or as an integral part of following the 'way'. Its voluntary nature was clearly shown by the words of Peter to Ananias concerning the absence of compulsion in the selling of his field ([Acts 5:4](#)).

The decision to share goods in common was a response above all to the wide poverty in the city of Jerusalem and to provide for more than just the spiritual needs of the followers of Jesus Christ. By doing so, the Christian church took care of the physical conditions of its members and sought to overcome the situation by organizing a communitarian life such that all had something 'as each had need'.

The sharing of wealth was the means that allowed them to overcome the poverty of those without property. Thanks to putting resources together and their consequent redistribution according to the needs of each person, there were no 'needy persons' in the church (*endeês*). Nobody could claim to be in a desperate and irredeemable state of need. The legislation concerning the sabbatical year ([Deut. 15:4](#)) set out the objective of alleviating the conditions of the 'needy' (LXX: *endeês*) and, as we have already seen, the Jubilee law defended the needs of the 'poor' ([Lev. 25:25, 35, 39](#)). Now in the primitive Christian community, an attempt was made to put into practice this sensitivity to the poor which runs through the whole biblical revelation: in the community of Christian disciples, the needy were no longer only objects of written directives but finally saw their needs satisfied.

B) The Jubilee Community

The motivation that made possible this type of church life was faith in Christ: the sharing of faith made possible the sharing of goods. Thus this common faith was the starting point for meeting the needs of the community of believers. In this sense it can be said that in the early church 'alongside the need of following Christ', there is the ecclesial need for solidarity.¹⁴

The distinctions between the church and the world are nowhere clearer than in those between the values of the church and those of the world. If society encourages the selfish accumulation of property, the church encourages the sharing of property. If society produces violent conflicts amongst men, the church leads to communion between believers. If society generates great differences in access to resources, the church ensures that all have 'as they had need'. If society itself undermines human dignity, the church defends and safeguards it. In all this, the spirit of Jubilee clearly pervades the model of the common life which the early church followed.

The alleviation of poverty and the restoration of the self-respect of people are objectives which link the Jubilee laws to the practice of the Jerusalem church. In the preaching of the gospel, in the miracles done by God through the disciples, in the sharing of wealth between the believers, the church could be recognized as the true *Jubilee community* that announces, demonstrates and experiences the Jubilee of the Lord.

More can be said about the model of community life that is found in the first chapters of Acts. It is not just a phenomenon to be described in sociological terms, but it contains principles that must be borne in mind for the life of every church. The early church proves

¹⁴ 14. A. Pitta, *L'anno della liberazione. Il giubileo e le sue istanze bibliche*, (Cinisello Balsamo (Mi): Edizioni San Paolo 1998), pp. 114–115.

the possibility of the aims of the Jubilee finding their application in the life of the Christian community. A true spirituality prompted by the Jubilee must have some application in the socio-economic context in which it is born. Its example justifies, encourages and directs us to consider and bring about the actions and initiatives that echo the Jubilee arrangements and extend its spirit throughout the varying circumstances in which we are called to live.

It is not a question of mechanically transplanting the specific communitarian experience of Jerusalem, as if such a 'community' were the ideal or norm for every church. Instead we are to find ways and means in the life of every church which give concrete expression to the fact that this is a community that was born and which exists thanks to the Jubilee of the Lord. The church in every place and in every time must be able to call itself a Jubilee community, regardless of the failures of its efforts or the weakness of its grasp of the problems. The sense of Jubilee must always surround those people who are liberated and redeemed by grace and who are moved to testify to the world that the Jubilee of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled. Where Christ is present, there we find the Jubilee; where the church is, there we find a Jubilee community.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE TODAY

So, in the light of all this, what should the Jubilee mean for us today? The biblical Jubilee sets out something extraordinary. It is not a utopia or simply an ideal, but a glorious reality for those who believe in him who has accomplished it for them. Jesus Christ gives his rest, providing full redemption and freedom for those who trust in him. The benefits of the Jubilee are bestowed upon the disciples of the master. The sin that blights existence and that disfigures creation can be defeated because Jesus died and rose again. His Jubilee transforms everything, restores dignity, satisfies the thirst for justice, reforms ways of thinking and acting, changes the heart and creates a community of people who share their wealth. His Jubilee is an opportunity for starting again for those who have taken the wrong road, gives a new start for those who are at a standstill, gives a new life for those who have lost it. The 'today' of the Lord's Jubilee is also the 'today' of the call of God for heartfelt conversion: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion' ([Heb. 3:7, 13, 15](#)). This 'today' of God is not yet finished; there is still time to believe in him. The 'Year of the Lord's favour' is not over yet; his Jubilee is still in operation. What better occasion to honour the biblical Jubilee than to convert from one's idols to the living and true God?

With the coming of the year AD 2000, millions of people will be involved in celebrations and festivities that are hard to reconcile with the Jubilee. Many religious-sounding words will be uttered, many religious activities will be encouraged. Nevertheless, the God of the Jubilee will be absent, the ideals of the Jubilee will be compromised, the call of the Jubilee will be drowned out by the sensationalism of the media and the excitement of the crowd. A true Jubilee, however, is where there is conversion to God. 'Today' can be the day of your Jubilee.

Believers in Christ are the only people that can accomplish Jubilee acts that reflect the biblical Jubilee in its completeness. The Jubilee community is composed of those who have benefited from the Lord's Jubilee and is the only one that can fully honour it, announcing it with conviction and practising it with courage. In fact, only those who have experienced the Jubilee can work it out worthily and faithfully through life's difficulties. The preparation and the bringing about of Jubilee acts could be a precious opportunity to work together as believers in the same city with a view to a joint Christian witness. In short,

acts inspired by the Jubilee cannot be announced and brought about except by the Jubilee community.

What does the Jubilee mean today? Perhaps we can summarize like this: it is to live *believing* in the Lord of the Jubilee, to live *acting* in the spirit of the Jubilee and to *live* with a Jubilee perspective.

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A New Immortality?

Brian Edgar

Keywords: Immortality, theoanthropology, biotechnology, telomere, aging, DNA, causality, genetics, personality, process, time

One of the theological challenges of the twentieth century has been to respond to those issues relating to the *creation* of human life. Whether theology has adequately met the challenge or not, birth control and enhancement techniques must rank as one of the major social developments of the century. The contraceptive pill and abortion have had an enormous impact on social structures, family relations, female and male roles, sexual attitudes, work patterns and global economics. Birth enhancement techniques, including the various reproductive technologies, in vitro fertilisation, genetic engineering, cloning, genetic screening and gene therapy are set to have a similar impact. All of these developments require a theological understanding of the nature of the person and of the way in which humanity reflects the image of God both individually and socially and it is probable that the twenty first century will not see any easing of the imperative to describe the nature of the human person in theological terms. In fact, it is more likely that an even more intense scrutiny of theoanthropology¹ (the theology of the human person) will be needed due to developments concerning the *extension* and then the *ending* of human life. This will come about because of the probability that we are soon to be presented with the prospect of medical technology, known as telomere therapy, which will enable human life to be extended by hundreds of years and perhaps indefinitely. This paper will focus on the theological implications for the understanding of immortality in the context of this possible development in the third millennium.

¹ 1. Theoanthropology is simply a conflation of 'theological anthropology'. It is a convenient way of referring to the theological understanding of humanity which avoids the non-inclusiveness of 'doctrine of man' and the absence of convenient nouns and adjectives relating to the 'doctrine of humanity'. It is, of course, possible to use 'anthropology' and 'anthropological' but these refer to the study of humanity in the widest possible sense and when used without qualification are usually taken to refer to what is more properly called 'cultural anthropology'.

TELOMERE THERAPY²

It is a serious possibility that telomere therapy will be available for extending the life span between 2005 and 2015.³ The technology involved goes beyond attempting to establish optimum standards of good health in order to achieve greater longevity, and well beyond attempts to eliminate individual diseases. Telomere therapy is aimed at investigating and manipulating the most fundamental aging mechanisms of the human body so that there can be an almost unlimited extension of human life. One of the simplest ways for anyone to gauge the social significance of such a discovery is to ask happily married people what they think it would be like to be married 'till death us do part' if both partners are going to live four hundred years. There are enough significant implications for career and work patterns, global population, marriage and family structures and social relationships to guarantee a large-scale social transformation.

The various component organs of the body have different cells which function in a variety of ways according to the needs of the particular organ and they reproduce themselves at different rates. The life of the whole organism is longer than that of any of the individual cells of the body but the life span of the organism as a whole is restricted if the various organs are not able to reproduce cells. Until the early 1960s it was generally assumed that cells could, theoretically, perpetually reproduce themselves and that the failure of cells to do so was simply the result of an accumulation of degenerating conditions. In 1961 Leonard Hayflick and Paul Moorhead demonstrated the falsity of this and showed that even under optimal conditions cells would reproduce only a finite number of times.⁴ Each cell type has its own reproductive limit, now known as the Hayflick limit. Some cells however, do not seem to have this limitation. The very problem with cancer cells is that they reproduce indefinitely, to the point where the sheer number of cells overwhelms the normal functioning of the host. If the processes which control this can be discovered and manipulated might it not be possible to find a way to cause cancer cells to reach a reproductive limit and also to persuade normal bodily cells to reproduce indefinitely and thus extend the lifespan of the organism as a whole?

Telomeres are structures found at the ends of eukaryotic linear chromosomes and consist of thousands of tandem repeats of the DNA sequence TTAGGG. These terminal repeats are highly conserved among all vertebrates. Every time a cell divides the chromosome is duplicated and its telomeres get shorter. In 1986 Howard Cooke of the Medical Research Council in Edinburgh noticed that telomeres in reproductive cells were longer than those in shorter lived somatic cells such as those found in skin and muscle. Most normal somatic cells have Hayflick limits which are comparable but some cells, including the reproductive cells, need to divide more than would normally be the case. Cooke speculated that the somatic cells might not be able to make an enzyme to repair their telomeres and that this would account for their reaching their Hayflick limit after less replications than reproductive cells. And it seems that he is right—it is likely that the telomeres are the molecular clock that triggers replicative senescence. Once a threshold number of TTAGGG repeats is reached cells become unable to divide. Some cells, however, produce an enzyme called telomerase which rebuilds and maintains the telomeres and thus extends their replicative life. Telomerase has now been found in a number of classes

² 2. Acknowledgment is made of the assistance of Edmund Sim of the University of Queensland who read the paper and made valuable suggestions regarding some of the scientific details.

³ 3. M. Fossel, *Reversing Human Aging* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1996), p. 222.

⁴ 4. L. Hayflick and P.S. Moorhead, *Experimental Cell Research*, 25, pp. 585–621.

of normal cells (including, stem cells, gonadal germ cells, skin fibroblast cells) and all of them are cells with a high turnover rate or which are in a continuously replicating pool of differentiating cells. It seems that an extended replicative life is made possible by the presence of telomerase. It is also significant that the level of telomerase in these cells is still significantly less than that found in cancer cells which are virtually 'immortal'.⁵

In 1998 several studies were conducted in which human cells were cloned. Some were telomerase negative and they exhibited telomere shortening and normal cell senescence. In one study those cells which were telomerase positive exhibited both elongated telomeres and delayed senescence, exceeding their normal life span by at least 20 doublings, thus indicating that perhaps telomere loss is the intrinsic timing mechanism in human cells. To be able to treat human cells with telomerase in this way is thus a significant step forward not only in the search for significantly extended life span but also, more immediately, in the treatment of certain aging problems including atrophy of the skin, muscular degeneration, atherosclerosis.⁶ Down's syndrome and failed bone marrow transplants could also benefit from telomerase treatment⁷ and it may be an answer for those with Hutchinson-Gilford syndrome⁸ who have an average life-span of 12.7 years (and, significantly, skin fibroblasts with telomere lengths characteristic of cells from far older patients.⁹)

The role of the telomeres in this is only one part of a broader theory. Human aging is controlled by gene expression and operates through free radical damage to the cell. Senescent cells have altered function (through gene expression changes such as altered patterns of collagen production) and increased damage (as a result of poorer control of free radical metabolism). Such senescent cells introduce dysfunction at the cell and organ levels of operation. Altogether, the process is a complex picture of senescent gene expression regulated by telomeres and the telomeres are only one part of the picture. They are, though, the part of the process which has had the focus. Fossel says that 'shortly after the year 2000 telomere therapy will be available for treating cancer and telomere therapy will be available for extending your life span between 2005 and 2015'.¹⁰

This is not to say that even the greatest success with telomere therapy would eliminate death. Even if this scenario turns out to be right people will still be able to wear out and die and no one will be immune from other diseases and accidents. Perhaps talking in terms of an indefinite lifespan is more accurate as it leaves open the question of the ultimate human life expectancy.

Even though in relatively recent times there have been significant changes to mortality rates it seems that over the past forty thousand years at least there has not been any significant change in potential life span. The fact that no Neanderthal skeletal remains have been discovered which give any indication of a life span of more than thirty or forty years simply indicates that this was the maximum possible given the very significant

⁵ 5. W. Wright, M. Piatszek, M. Rainey, W. Byrd, J. Shay, *Developmental Genetics* 18, pp. 173-179.

⁶ 6. A. Bodnar et al, 'Extension of Life-span by Introduction of Telomerase into Normal Human Cells', *Science*, (January 16 1998), pp. 349ff.

⁷ 7. L. DeFrancesco, 'Looking into longevity with telomere detection kits', *The Scientist*, Vol. 12:7 (March 30 1998).

⁸ 8. Juvenile progeria—an aging disorder.

⁹ 9. M. Fossel, Senescent Gene expression, telomeres and aging, <http://faculty.ucr.edu/~browley/telomere.htm>.

¹⁰ 10. Fossel, *Reversing Human Aging*, p. 222.

environmental dangers that were faced. Even two to three thousand years ago, environmental conditions meant that the average life expectancy was low, but evidence from ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek and other cultures point to a reasonably consistent picture in which the maximum human life span in optimum conditions is 70 to 100 years.

¹¹

Nor is the general constancy of the maximum human life span negated by great changes to mortality rates in the twentieth century. In this century in western society there has been an increase in average life span of around 25 years. For example, in Australia in the 1990s the average life expectancy was around 80.5 years for females and around 74.5 years for males instead of about 48 and 51 years respectively at the turn of the century. But this average increase is obviously achieved by keeping people alive longer, especially by reducing infant mortality, rather than by extending the maximum possible life span which has not significantly changed. To illustrate this one may ask how much longer a person can expect to live, assuming a person avoids disease and accident and survives to 65. In the USA in 1900 it was a further 11.5 years (male) or 12.2 years (female). Today it is only three to five years more than that. In short, medical science has had significant success in increasing the average life expectancy but so far has managed only a modest improvement in the normal maximum lifespan.

COMPETING THEORIES OF AGING

Is this likely to change? Or is telomere therapy one more scientific theory which has suffered from over optimism? Steven Austad¹² puts the case against telomere therapy as the overall solution to human aging. While telomere research is extremely important Austad thinks that the study of the growth of cells since Hayflick has been mistaken to the extent that it assumes that it is a study of aging as such. Austad argues that cell research is very relevant to aging but is not aging itself. He distinguishes between *mechanisms* and causes and argues that senescent gene expression, even if controlled by the telomeres, is a mechanistic theory of how a certain part of the aging process takes place rather than a causal theory of why humans age. Austad reviews the three present causal theories of aging: the 'good-of-the-species' theory; the 'rate of living' theory and the 'evolutionary

¹¹ 11. In Ancient Egypt it was not considered completely inappropriate to aspire to live 110 years and the reign of 67 years of Ramses II points to a death at around 90 years of age. Plato and Sophocles were considered old when they died at about 80 and 90 and of course there is the biblical 'three score years and ten'. (Bromley, *The Psychology of Human Aging*, 37; S. Austad, *Why we age: what science is discovering about the body's journey through life* [New York: John Wiley, 1997] 37.) Nor does the evidence of [Genesis 5](#) run counter to this general picture. Prior to the eighteenth century the long lives attributed to Adam, Seth, Methuselah and others were generally accepted as real descriptions of life span. However, the combined effect of biblical criticism and biological evolution led to them being more generally reckoned to be artificially exaggerated lifespans. It is important to note that large figures such as these are not only a Hebraic phenomenon but are consistent with certain Sumerian king lists of about 2000 BC. R.K. Harrison sees the apparent lifespans of Genesis as the result of some combination of an enhanced reckoning by the family and a mathematical manipulation by an archivist with the intention of honouring significant people—in accord with a broader ancient near eastern tradition which also influenced the form of the Sumerian king list material. (R.K. Harrison, 'From Adam to Noah: a reconsideration of the antediluvian patriarchs' ages', in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* [37:2](#), [June 1994], pp. 161–168.) Other interpreters find somewhat different versions of this answer but whatever the nature of the precise solution, it would seem that these figures are best taken as cultural phenomenon rather than as biological data.

¹² 12. S. Austad, *Why we age: what science is discovering about the body's journey through life* (New York: John Wiley, 1997)

aging theory'. Each will attribute to telomere therapy a different role and status in the aging process.

The 'good-of-the-species' understanding of cellular behaviour argues that evolutionary theory requires that any process as ubiquitous as aging must benefit the population as a whole apart from any benefit to the individual entity or its immediate offspring. Therefore cellular senescence should not be equated with human aging per se but rather should be seen as a normal part of bodily development by which the body avoids its own destruction through unlimited cell reproduction. Without a limitation on cell reproduction it would not be possible for the body to survive. The Hayflick Limit is therefore a part of the normal growth and development of the body, a necessary protective device against cancer and an important mechanism in the cell processes of the body. It is neither a pathological disorder nor an overall causal explanation of aging. If this interpretation is correct then the search goes on for a broader causal understanding of the aging process.

Austad rejects this theory however, arguing that it emerges from a misunderstanding of evolutionary theory when it requires a benefit to the population as a whole. Most traits or processes which are beneficial to an individual or their immediate offspring will also be beneficial to the species as a whole, but not all. For example, a propensity to reproduce more offspring can certainly be beneficial to the individual entity and immediate offspring but it may not be beneficial to the species as a whole if, say, food supplies are limited. Where there is a conflict will the interests of the individual or that of the species prevail? There is an analogy with the reproduction of cancer cells where there is a conflict between reproduction of the cancer cells—reproduction is certainly advantageous for the cells and their 'offspring' but it is not advantageous for the host organism or the overall population of cells which constitute the organ. Just as the individual cancer cell wins out at the expense of the whole, so too must we say the same about aging. That is to say, that we should not assume, along with the 'good-of-the-species' theory, that aging is a process which is necessarily beneficial to the species as a whole. The implications of this for understanding the aging process and the telomere theory of replicative control are that these processes need not be presumed to be best understood as a theory or cause of aging of the organism as a whole but need be seen only as having their purpose in the basic requirements for the proper development of the individual entity alone.

Austad discusses two other possible causal explanations of aging—the 'rate of living' or metabolism theory in which the rate of energy use is seen as causing aging via the collateral damage of biomechanical processes through the production of toxic by-products or by oxygen free radicals (oxidants). However, he declares it to be a theory which is now 'as dead as the proverbial doornail'.¹³ Like cell senescence these process may play a part in the aging mechanism but the scientific evidence for elongated life span based upon, for example, antioxidant vitamins is not convincing, despite popular support. In the search for a causal theory one would be better to revert to the investigation of telomerase or to move to a broader 'evolutionary aging theory'. Austad prefers the latter.

He notes that a reduced vulnerability to environmental accidents leads to slower aging. This is seen experimentally in research with certain insect and animal populations and is consistent with the general trend for larger animals to live longer—because they are less susceptible to external threats. In the context of reduced danger the imperative to move through the life cycle rapidly is diminished. The theory is a general one and the processes by which it is implemented can include a variety of mechanisms, including cellular behaviour. The point Austad makes is that discovering a mechanism is not the

¹³ 13. Austad, *Why we age*, p. 93.

same as discovering an overall theory and telomerase therapy is, in principle, not going to provide the answers that some people expect.

'TOP DOWN' VERSUS 'BOTTOM UP'

How does the theologian or other lay-scientist assess the value of these competing views? In terms developed by Arthur Peacocke the conflict is between 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches to explaining causes.¹⁴ Generally, scientific explanations are tightly locked into the concept of causality and any detection of a causal sequence of the kind that event 'x' causes event 'y' is frequently taken to be a sufficient explanation of the process and sometimes also a predictor of event 'z'. The final value of such inductive reasoning has been the subject of philosophical debate (concerning the extent to which a sequence of events can be logically predictive) and it ultimately requires some intelligible explanation in terms of underlying relationships. Yet despite the problems which exist with the fundamental uncertainty of complex systems, the overall effectiveness of simple induction cannot be denied. Methodologically, scientific reductionism, whereby complex situations are broken down into simple units for analysis has been responsible for scientific progress to the point where 'bottom up' causality has frequently been perceived as the *only* form of causation. Telomere theory as an explanation of aging is a form of 'bottom up' causation.

'Top down' causation on the other hand refers to the influence of the state of the system as a whole on the behaviour of its components so that changes occur to the components of a system because of their incorporation in the system.¹⁵ Recognition of 'top down' causation is important, not least because science is typically reductionist and never fails to look for 'bottom up' causation whereas recognition of 'top down' is less frequent. Properly understood, the processes of causation have a dual character—an 'up and down' interaction. Peacocke identifies four levels which are able to interact in terms of causation.¹⁶ The first level is that of the *physical world* of matter and energy existing in space-time. The physical sciences typically focus on this level. The second level is that of *living organisms* of cells and bodies and so forth which is the interest of the biological sciences. Level 3 concerns the *behaviour of living organisms* and is attended to by the behavioural sciences including psychology. Finally, the fourth level is the domain of *human culture* including art, economics, literature and science. These levels interact and it is quite appropriate, for example, for the level 1 physical sciences to indicate to level 2 researchers those systems of causation which influence events in the realm of level 2. But it is also right to reflect on the influence of the system as a whole and to seek downward influences as well. Indeed Peacocke argues that "top down" causation has increasing significance in those kind of complex systems that are living'.¹⁷

The recognition of the role of such 'top down' causation in no way detracts from that of 'bottom up' theories. The two are able to exist harmoniously. In the present case cellular theory is intrinsically a 'bottom up' mechanistic explanation which need not be in competition with 'top down' causal theories. If a conflict does occur then one or other or both theories must be modified. But it is not impossible for such conflicts to be more

¹⁴ 14. A. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), esp. pp. 44–45.

¹⁵ 15. Peacocke, *Theology*, pp. 53–54.

¹⁶ 16. Peacocke, *Theology*, pp. 213–144.

¹⁷ 17. Peacocke, *Theology*, p. 55.

apparent than real. Conflict is expressed in the present case when Fossel sees the limitation on the reproduction of cells according to the Hayflick Limit as problematic and the fundamental reason for aging. Cellular senescence is pathological and degenerative. He interprets this as a problem to be overcome in the search for longevity.

From a different point of view Austad sees the Hayflick limit and the behaviour of cells with limited life as being a necessary and normal part of life which enables normal bodily development. He sees Fossel's pathological interpretation of this cellular behaviour as misleading and argues that cellular behaviour is mechanistic rather than causal in that it might explain *how* aging takes place but not *why*. He prefers an explanation at a higher level. This is not to say that he repudiates the value or even the findings of telomere research but he does have a different assessment of the primary purpose of the Hayflick limit (which is not so much to do with aging as it is to do with a necessary defence against cancer); he also has a different view of the overall cause of aging.

Our assessment of this situation and its various interpretations needs to include the following observations. Both are agreed that serious progress can be made in the next 20–50 years (at the most) concerning the aging processes and the possibility of significantly extending the human lifespan. There is agreement that the examination of cellular behaviour is very relevant and will play a part in understanding the process. The reductionist, 'bottom up' approaches tend to be more optimistic, but ultimately those who require a 'top down' approach will have to be satisfied—an holistic explanation will be needed in order to fully comprehend the situation. With regard to the debate concerning the role of telomeres in cell behaviour, there is no fundamental reason why the process of cellular senescence cannot be *both* normal and developmental as well as ultimately pathological and degenerative.

Finally, we note that reductionist 'bottom up' approaches have been enormously successful and it would be unwise to rule out some of the possibilities envisaged by some of its advocates. Nor is it simply wishful thinking to put a time scale on the likely developments. It is true that many revolutionary scientific discoveries have been quite unpredictable not only as to the timing of their discovery but also as to the very idea. For instance no one said, 'I think that today I'll invent a machine which will allow us to look through a person's skin and muscle so that we can see their bones and other internal organs.' Such an idea would rightly have been considered extremely improbable but it came about, quite unpredictably, as the by-product of research of a different nature. At other times though, the progress of scientific discovery is much more predictable—though never certain—as science moves along generally predictable lines once fundamental principles have been established. Telomere therapy may be one such development and even if it is not the final answer, it will still constitute a major step forward in understanding the mechanisms of the aging process and the focus of research will simply move on to another area with the advantage of a greater understanding of cellular aging processes.

IMMORTALITY: CONFLICT, INTEGRATION AND DIALOGUE

If a 21st century theology of the person is likely to focus on the *ending or non-ending nature* of human life, then the theology of death and immortality will need to be re-examined. Given the propensity of human nature to repeat itself, it is likely that the exploration of these new issues will follow a pattern similar to that of earlier science-faith interactions which have frequently been characterized in terms of 'conflict', 'dialogue' and

'integration'.¹⁸ It would be tempting to hope that there will be no such conflict when the general discussion about increased life-spans comes to the fore and, no doubt, many will easily assume that the two 'immortalities'— extended temporal life and the eschatological 'life everlasting' of the Apostles' Creed need not be played off against each other in any way. Nonetheless a conflict is likely, not only because there have been similar confrontations, but also because a debate over immortality would in fact simply be a repetition of a conflict extending back to the earliest days of modern medicine.

Hans Küng observes that it was no coincidence that it was after a surge of materialism that Antoine de Concordat, in a mood of medical optimism, described in his *Outline of an Historical Presentation of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1794) the ultimate goal of modern medicine as being the abolition, or at least the considerable postponement, of death. This was an expression of the agenda which medical science has pursued vigorously ever since. In the context of a reductionist scientific world-view, everything can be explained by physical and chemical processes; when it comes to the threat of death, medical science provides an alternate form of salvation and as a consequence 'atheism went hand in hand with the Utopia of an earthly immortality'.¹⁹ However, de Concordat's vision has not been fully realized because, despite the incredible success of modern medicine, in the absence of any final solution to the problems of sickness and death, it is difficult for a scientifically reductionist point of view to persuade everyone that religious faith in the resurrection is superfluous. But the closer science comes to understanding human aging the more tempting—though not necessarily the more valid—that proposition becomes and the greater is the possibility of confusion concerning the meaning of 'immortality'. It is used in a number of different ways and some clarification is needed.

The first immortality might best be called *genetic immortality* and it is found in writings such as those of Richard Dawkins who proposed that the aspect of human behaviour normally referred to as altruism was, in fact, the outcome of a genetic selfishness aimed at maximising the chance of an entity's own genetic material surviving into the future. The aim is genetic immortality. Despite the metaphorically personal terminology frequently used of the genes, in which deliberate intention is attributed to them, this form of immortality does not include personal survival of any kind. It is simply the continuous replication of the genetic code.

The second form of immortality is *cellular immortality* which is the process whereby a population of cells is able to keep reproducing indefinitely. In no situation can individual cells be immortal. It is only certain cell populations as a whole which can be 'immortal', that is, exist indefinitely by replication. It is therefore properly a 'corporate' or 'cell population' immortality.²⁰

At the third level there is *organismal immortality* which refers to the possibility of certain more complex organs having an indefinite life. This is predicated on the possibility of cellular or cell population immortality and is distinguished from it only by the fact that it refers to a more complex, functioning, interactive bodily organ or set of organs such as an animal or human person which is able to survive indefinitely because of the continual replication of various types of cells. The indefinitely replicating organism (or person) is

¹⁸ 18. E.g., as in I. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (London: SCM, 1990), pp. 3–31.

¹⁹ 19. H. Küng, *Eternal Life?* (London: Collins, 1984), pp. 7–8.

²⁰ 20. As discussed earlier it was Hayflick who first showed that 'cell populations could be classified into two distinct categories characterized chiefly by whether they were mortal or immortal.' L. Hayflick, 'Mortality and Immortality at the Cellular Level: A Review' in *Biochemistry* Vol. 62 No 11 (1997).

still subject to illness, disease, accident and is a form of life which still has a guarantee of death.

In all cases the 'immortality' is temporal, relative, indefinite and corporate in nature. It is *temporal* in that any continued existence takes place in time. It is *relative* in the sense that immortality is not intrinsic to the entity in question and is dependent on suitable conditions including the absence of fatal accidents and so forth. The potential life span is therefore *indefinite* rather than infinite. Finally it is *corporate* in the sense that while the whole may be immortal the constituent parts are not, although they may be indefinitely replicated.

Of course, it is also necessary to include a fourth definition which is more theological than scientific in nature. It is that immortality which is primarily defined in terms of a qualitative relationship with God in Jesus Christ ([In. 17:3](#)). It is not an intrinsic quality of human life but a gracious gift of God, a sharing in the divine nature ([2 Pet. 1:4](#)). Now a definition expressed in biblical and theological terms such as these suggests that there is no necessary connection with any of the previous definitions of immortality. Therefore there can be no conflict if they are referring to different kinds of events. Indeed, treating theological immortality as something of a completely different order might be as useful as the recognition of the different orders of causation can be in eliminating the forced choice in the creation debate: Darwin *or* God. But it is not that simple; the problem that emerges is that any genuine dialogue can be expected not only to point to differences but also to look for similarities, especially methodological parallels in what are otherwise different areas. There is no doubt that the interpretation of the fourth level of 'theological immortality' is influenced by the way that the first three levels of 'scientific immortality' are understood as temporal, relative, indefinite and corporate. The temporal and corporate dimensions are of particular importance.

PARALLELS IN SCIENTIFIC AND THEOLOGICAL IMMORTALITIES

(a) *Temporality*. All three of the definitions noted above assume an understanding of immortality which is temporal. In contrast to this, classic theology understands immortality as a-temporal. But there have been philosophical problems with the concept of a-temporality. Karl Barth objects to 'the Babylonian captivity of an abstract opposite to the concept of time'.²¹ Clark Pinnock objects to its apparent determinism.²² J.W. Cooper rejects the notion of timeless eternity; as part of his defence of anthropological dualism and the concept of the intermediate state, he argues that on death the person does not move out of spatio-temporal conditions²³ J.R. Lucas claims that the temporality of God is essential because 'to deny that God is temporal is to deny that he is personal in any sense

²¹ 21. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/I, ed. G.W. Bromily and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), p. 611.

²² 22. For example, as Clark Pinnock has said, 'We are not impressed when classical theism tells us that God takes in the whole of history in a single glance, because what that means to us is that history is meaningless. If the day after tomorrow is as fixed in God's timeless present as the day before yesterday, then there is no meaning to our freedom and power to shape what will be in the future.' 'Between Classical and Process Theism' in R. Nash (ed), *On Process Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 309–328.

²³ 23. J.W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 210.

in which we can understand personality'.²⁴ The consequence of this is that, while an identification of the theological concept of immortality with the temporal 'immortality' of scientific endeavour is not automatic, at least one of the one of the previously essential differences has been minimized.

(b) *Personality*. It was also noted that scientific versions of immortality are fundamentally corporate in nature. It is cell populations, genetic codes and whole entities rather than constituent parts which are described as being 'immortal'. The focus is upon the continuation of the species or the population as a whole rather than any individual constituent. This stands in contrast to the classic picture of immortality which is essentially personal in nature. However, objections have been raised concerning the personal nature of immortality. It is argued that the general emphasis in eschatology has been too individualistic and anthropocentric and thus too subjective and selfish.²⁵ This common, anthropocentric approach, it is said, has distorted the construction of what ought to be a more directly theological framework built on the foundation of God. Thus, there is in process theology a stress on 'objective' forms of immortality. By this, it is meant that the symbols of 'resurrection' and 'immortality' are ways of saying that all experiences and all relationships which have been known and realized have been received by God into the divine life. The manner in which this history is conserved and guaranteed is not so important as the fact that their preservation illustrates the tremendous significance given to them.

Whitehead held to a neutral stance so that subjective immortality was neither definitely affirmed nor denied, even though it is obvious that Whitehead's own tendency was to deny the possibility of it. Others are quite clear that there is definitely no subjective immortality at all. It is, as Hartshorne says, an idea which is an invention²⁶ and as Ogden says, 'The only immortality or resurrection that is essential to Christian hope is not our own subjective survival of death, but our objective immortality or resurrection in God, our being finally accepted and judged by his love, and thus imperishably united with all creation into his own unending life.'²⁷

From these two examples we can see that as science begins to consider seriously the possibility of an indefinite life span, the tendency is to describe this 'immortality' in temporal and corporate terms. It is no coincidence that at broadly the same time some theological definitions of immortality have shifted away from classic a-temporal and personal notions of immortality to a view which is more likely to lead to a fundamental agreement. There is likely to be a significant minimization of difference between scientific

²⁴ 24. J.R. Lucas, 'The Temporality of God' in R.J. Russell, N. Murphy, C.J. Isham (eds) *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, (Vatican Observatory and Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1993), p. 235.

²⁵ 25. 'Another factor which has tended to make talk about the "after-life" less than appealing may be found in the feeling that too much of that talk about it is highly self-centred—a matter of "glory for me" ... men and women nowadays are uncomfortable with any position which would be so totally individualistic. ... the presentation of the Christian gospel as purely individual "salvation" appears to be outrageous.' Norman Pittenger, *After Death: Life in God* (London: S.C.M., 1980), p. 13.

²⁶ 26. See Charles Hartshorne, 'Time, Death and Everlasting Life' in John Hick (ed.), *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970), pp. 357–369; *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press) pp. 36–37; 'Response to Debate' in T.L. Miethe (ed.), *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 137–142.

²⁷ 27. Schubert M. Ogden, 'The Meaning of Christian Hope', in H.J. Cargas and B. Lee (eds) *Religious Experience and Process Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1976), pp. 206.

and theological understandings where there is a commitment to the view that 'God is subject to the same principles which govern all reality', as in process theology.²⁸

DEFINING IMMORTALITY THEOLOGICALLY

In this situation how are we to be more precise in the definition of the fourth, more theological, level of immortality? There are at least three possible interpretations, each of which relates the theological to the scientific to a different degree. The first possibility is to understand immortality as *personal and qualitative immortality* and therefore defined in terms of the survival of transformed, resurrected persons in an a-temporal context. This 'classic' understanding of immortality is unlikely to be equated or even loosely related to the 'immortality' of medical science.

The second possibility is that of immortality as *personal and quantitative*. This involves persons in an infinitely extended temporal lifespan. It is the quantitative extension of the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual life of a person. This view is held by those such as Cooper who says, 'eschatological time is historical time'.²⁹ This form of immortality which comes about as a result of the eschatological action of God through the resurrection of Christ does not have to be identified with the indefinitely extended lifespan sought by medical science but an identification or partial identification is less problematic than for the first definition and can occur.

The final option is *corporate and quantitative immortality* in which immortality is not a quality attributable to persons. People constitute a temporal event in the life of an organic whole and exist beyond death only as part of the history of the infinitely but temporally existing whole known as God. Once again, this immortality, found in various forms of process theology, is not necessarily to be identified with the immortality sought by medical science but some form of connection is probably inevitable, given the search for a thorough going integration of the religious and scientific levels of immortality.

In evaluating the merits of these three broad interpretations of immortality the critical questions revolve around the extent to which *temporality* and *personality* are essential constituents of immortality. So it is to these two issues that we now turn.

TEMPORALITY AND IMMORTALITY

The 'classic' Christian conviction is that immortality is a presence with Christ which is more than extended duration and so it can be described only as timelessness. This belief is protected by being tied very closely to the principal attributes of God. The notion of timelessness emerges from a belief in the immutability of God and, in turn, it provides a defence of divine omnipotence.

Timelessness emerges from the immutability of God because, as Aquinas says, 'the idea of eternity follows immutability, as the idea of time follows movement. ... as God is supremely immutable, it supremely belongs to him to be eternal.' Divine eternity arises out of divine immutability because 'in a thing bereft of movement, which is always the same, there is no before and after'. In this, classic western Christian theism has followed Boethius' definition of eternity as the 'simultaneous possession of endless life'. This divine 'timelessness' enables God to avoid being subject to the changing events of the world and

²⁸ 28. Hartshorne, 'Time, Death and Everlasting Life', p. 362.

²⁹ 29. J.W. Cooper, *Body, Soul*, p. 210.

by his simultaneous knowledge of all things, and by not being subject to time, God's omnipotence in his relationships with the world is preserved.

This understanding of time and eternity has been popular but it has not won universal theological approval because the linking of immutability with eternity in the classic tradition meant that God became a static entity. Hence the reservations of those such as Pinnock, Cooper, Lucas, Barth, Whitehead, Ogden and Hartshorne. In particular, A.N. Whitehead and process theology generally have specifically aimed to eliminate that 'vicious separation of the flux from the permanence' of classic theology which produced a changing world but an entirely static God with whom it seemed impossible to have any real relationship.

Scientifically, it has also been found wanting. In the modern era the classic Boethian-Anselmian-Thomistic tradition of eternity has been interpreted by reference to the Newtonian method of science. Newton identified space and time with the omnipresence and eternity of God which, together, constitute the infinite container of all creaturely existence. Space and time are thus considered absolutely, in themselves without relation to anything external. As attributes of an immutable God they are absolute and unchanging and they embrace all things within the universe and as such they are the ultimate reference system. However, it has been necessary to move forward beyond the classic notions of time and eternity. The theories of Newton have been superseded by those of Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg and others. The *receptacle* concept of time and space was replaced by the *relational* theory of time and space so that instead of understanding time as a line or boundary it was understood as a succession of states of personal activity. Time is never given independently of a given situation. The theory of relativity has reminded us of this: that there is no absolute time. Just as there is no space without an object, so too there is no moment without an action and no person without a relation. Time is the form and shape of our actions. We now have to talk of time *for whom*. Once it was believed that there was a spatial centre to the universe and that all directions could be defined by reference to it. Now it is understood that position is defined in relation to the observer. In fact, there is no fixed position, only relations between bodies. Similarly time is dependent on the observer.

Any contemporary view of immortality has to work with these changes to the understanding of time. The fundamental conviction of the classic view that immortality is more than extended duration need not be altered, but the description of this in terms of timelessness is soon shown to be less than helpful. What is required is an immortality which is defined neither in terms of time nor in terms of the opposition to time, but as an immortality which is trans-temporality—beyond temporality and yet embracing it. Such a relationship of temporality and eternity can be clarified by analogy with the relationship which exists in classic theism between the omnipresence (immensity) and the spirituality (a-spatiality) of God.

The notion of omnipresence asserts that there is no place in the universe where God is not. This attribute is actually *defended* (rather than negated) by the assertion that God is a 'spiritual' being, which is to say that there is a real sense in which God is, in fact, spaceless or in *no* space. If God were to be in space in the same way as other forms of reality then there is no 'space' for anything else. In other words, the assertion that God is in space and in every space *requires* as a corollary the statement that there is a sense in which God is in 'no space'. In a similar way, the assertion that God is in *every* time requires the assertion that God is, in a sense, in *no* time *in the same way that other things are*. This is an eternity of God which is not threatening to the 'timefulness' of God any more than the 'spirituality' of God threatens his omnipresence. In this way it is possible to come to the idea of eternity as *timelessness* by stressing the *temporality* of God.

This stands in opposition to the classic method of deducing the timelessness of God, which is by working from his immutability. What has happened in classic theism is that God's eternity has been primarily described in terms of the negative quality of timelessness *without sufficient recognition of his temporality*. But the method of reaching eternity via time does not run into the problem of relating time and eternity, as the classic method does, because it is clear from the start that *time and eternity are, asymmetrically, each the ground of the other*. We come to an understanding of eternity as supra-temporality (rather than a-temporality) not by denying involvement in time, but by stressing it. Eternity is understood positively, with its primary meaning being more than simply the absence of time. It is the positive description of God's time which is not external to God but included in his duration.

Given this, it is possible to see a direction forward. Earlier in our discussion, immortality was understood as *either* essentially temporal or as essentially a-temporal. Now we can see that, as far as God is concerned, the possession of temporality is not limiting, provided that time is not understood in an absolute, singular or non-relational manner. The temporality of the world is derived from the eternity of God which is, partially at least, understood as a relational multi-temporality. This understanding of eternity may exhibit a form of 'simultaneity' in that God is related to all times, but this does not imply 'temporal' simultaneity because time is not absolute, time is not the medium of association. Different events cannot be said to be 'simultaneous' *to each other* even though each one of them is present to God and all events are simultaneous *in him*: 'He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' In this way it is possible to affirm an immortality which goes beyond those purely quantitative notions of immortality put forward as alternatives to what has been described as the classic view. However, the classic view must recognize the role that temporality plays in divine eternity in that the point of connection between eternity and time, between God and humanity, is found in the mystery of the incarnation. Here is one who is temporal and eternal, and time and eternity are united in each person as the person is united in Christ, as the image of God in the person is fulfilled.

PERSONALITY AND IMMORTALITY

The question of (a-)temporality is closely connected to that of personality. J.R. Lucas claims that the temporality of God is essential because 'to deny that God is temporal is to deny that he is personal in any sense in which we can understand personality'.³⁰ In a contrary move process theology uses a temporal understanding of immortality to *deny*³¹ the possibility of personal immortality.³² According to Hartshorne 'my everlastingness is neither more nor less than my entire earthly career as a contribution to the divine life'.³³ Eternity is not continued personal existence—it is purely God's enjoyment of our past life. This, says Hartshorne, does not mean that there is no immortality or that at death people

³⁰ 30. J.R. Lucas, 'The Temporality of God', pp. 235.

³¹ 31. Or, at best, leave open the question of subjective immortality.

³² 32. It is important to recognize that some process theologians do affirm subjective immortality, such as John Cobb and David Griffin. However, subjective immortality is not a necessary development of process principles and has to be based on other material, as Whitehead recognized.

³³ 33. Hartshorne, 'Response', p. 137.

become unreal. 'Once an individual is there to refer to, he continues to be there even after death, as object of reference, as a life which really has been lived.'³⁴

There are obvious parallels with the relative, temporal, indefinite and corporate immortality of scientific speculation. In cellular immortality individual cells are not immortal but do participate in the ongoing life of the whole cell population and in organismal immortality, complex organisms survive indefinitely because of the continual replication of various types of cells. In a similar manner, process immortality is corporate in that the individual human person does not survive but does contribute to the continuing immortality of the whole God/cosmos. The person is no longer present as the subject of a life but only as 'an object of reference' in the experiences of many people.³⁵ God's continuing experience or memory of me is *my* immortality. But it is so only in the sense that it is an experience for God which is based on an experience involving me, although not in the sense that I am the subject of the experience.

For some people this is immediately problematic and the view is immediately repudiated as it constitutes the end of personal existence. Unfortunately, however disconcerting this thought may be, it is a possibility which cannot be ruled out simply because it is an unpleasant thought. It is possible however, to claim that it is a view presented using somewhat misleading terminology. If my personal immortality ('my everlastingness' according to Hartshorne,³⁶ or 'our objective immortality' according to Ogden³⁷) consists in God's remembrance of me in a manner analogous to any person's remembrance of me³⁸ then I may protest that another person's memory is not normally seen as part of *my* reality and the same must apply with respect to God's remembrance of me. It is therefore misleading to suggest that God's remembrance of me can be spoken of as my immortality.

However, a linguistic correction such as this does not indicate that the proposition is essentially wrong. Consistency with biblical data is more of a problem though. The process view of immortality involves the conviction that there is no personal activity in immortal life. There will be no addition to the experiences of the person; death is understood as the affixing of the quantum of the reality of a life;³⁹ resurrection is simply the synthesizing of one's life in God. While Hartshorne claims that this view is superior to the traditional alternatives,⁴⁰ he certainly has difficulties establishing this by comparison with the biblical data concerning death and resurrection life.

³⁴ 34. Hartshorne, 'Time, Death and Everlasting Life', p. 359.

³⁵ 35. The 'retained actuality' of a person is that which was part of his or her 'thoughts, feelings, decisions, perceptions' (Hartshorne, 'Time, Death and Everlasting Life', 361). In this context it is impossible to forget Woody Allen's comment, 'I don't want to live forever by having my art remembered, I want to live forever by not dying.'

³⁶ 36. Hartshorne, 'Response', p. 139.

³⁷ 37. Ogden, 'Christian Hope', p. 206.

³⁸ 38. For Hartshorne the only difference between a human remembrance of me and the divine remembrance is that no human person can perfectly remember me. 'In short, our adequate immortality can only be God's omniscience of us' (Hartshorne, 'Time, Death and Everlasting Life', p. 362). God alone really knows us and can recall us and only in him can we have what might be called immortality.

³⁹ 39. Hartshorne, 'Time, Death and Everlasting Life', p. 364.

⁴⁰ 40. He argues that this view is preferable because it transcends the present form of self-identity as human beings which is 'at best, an extremely partial preservation of the actual quality of life' (Hartshorne, 'Beyond Enlightened Self-Interest', p. 309).

(a) *Death*. In process thought death takes the individual person into a *total losing* of self, a losing of personal identity and the absorption of the total history of the person into the life of God for God's gain and benefit. The scriptural material indicates though, that the *ultimate* resolution of the transitoriness of life is not death *per se*, it is the final *gaining* of self in the next life through resurrection and transformation as the consummation of a life which is 'lost' in the present in the service of God in Christ. 'For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it' ([Matt. 16:25](#)). This is a finding of life, a gain which is to the benefit of the person as well as to God.

(b) *Resurrection*. Ironically, the process notion of eternal life is more like the biblical notion of death involving, as it does, a completely static, de-personalised and unchanging 'existence'. In contrast, the biblical picture, symbolic though it may be, is of a continued, dynamic, developed life lived in relationship with God ([Titus 1:2](#); [1 Pet. 5:10](#); [Rev. 3:20-5:14](#); [21-22](#)).

Beyond linguistic clarity and biblical consistency a third approach is to question the rationality of the fundamental rationale behind the process approach to immortality. David Pailin, in discussing the claim that the Whiteheadian position is wrong because it does not involve the survival of the self, puts very simply the process belief that most modern expressions of immortality are hopelessly individualistic. 'The strength of this objection to objective immortality depends upon the credibility of holding that our individual lives are so important that their continuation is a requirement of rationality and meaningfulness of reality.'⁴¹ Pailin therefore dismisses the objection on the basis that while it may be hurtful to our pride, there is in fact no absolute necessity for us to survive at all and that to assume so is to exaggerate our own importance. 'Our aim in life must be to enhance our contribution as much as we are able and our satisfaction lies in knowing that nothing we achieve will ever be lost. All will become part of the concrete reality of God.'⁴² However unpalatable this may seem, the possibility must be faced. Ogden expresses the issue theologically by saying that the expectation of personal survival is nothing other than an idolatrous hope. He argues that historically such an individualistic view of immortality is the superimposition of a Gnostic hope on to a Jewish apocalypticism, and what is produced is 'nothing specifically Christian'.⁴³ In a similar vein Hartshorne says, 'my contention that wanting to be immortal in the specified sense is a form of wanting to be God'.⁴⁴ Such a claim could not be more serious. Is a belief in a personal after-life a form of idolatry? Is it appropriate to set oneself up as an 'object' or 'end'?

There is no doubt that biblical teaching is consistently opposed to self-centredness and it is opposed to those who seek to arrange their lives in a way that is focused on themselves. Positively, it stresses the need to direct life towards God's glory. What Hartshorne has overlooked is that, while any self-centred thought or action is idolatrous, a belief in immortality is not necessarily self-centred. It is not idolatrous if it arises from a belief that personal survival is a gracious act of God (a gift rather than a necessary action) arising out of his love (not the result of inexorable logic or self-love) and revealed as a possibility in which the person of faith can hope (not as a demonstrable fact).

⁴¹ 41. David A. Pailin, *Groundwork of Philosophy of Religion* (London: Epworth, 1986), p. 196.

⁴² 42. Pailin, p. 197.

⁴³ 43. Ogden, 'Christian Hope', pp. 203-209.

⁴⁴ 44. Hartshorne, 'Response', p. 138.

If God says that the individual will be part of, and participant in, the eschatological future then it is not a 'setting up of oneself' but the reception of the gracious promise of God and the evidence for this lies in the incarnation, ministry, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus and the ensuing tradition of the church. The fact, manner and effect of the incarnation is understood to teach, not only the existence of God but, above all else, his extraordinary love for the world. This demonstrates the value he attributes to the world and the particular esteem in which he holds people. This love is not the natural or inevitable result of some inherent value or of inexorable logic, it is purely a matter of grace. A belief in personal survival need not be idolatrous. Stressing, as process theology does, that the symbols of future life have a primary reference to the glory of God, does not require the elimination of continuing personal involvement in that life.

CONCLUSION: GOD AND IMMORTALITY

The indefinite and relative immortality which can be achieved by continuous replication of cells and which has no final solution for death is not the infinite immortality which is a final presence with Christ and not simply a continued presence in this world. This participation in the divine nature ([2 Pet. 1:4](#)) is an immortality which is not in conflict with the temporal, relative, impersonal, indefinite immortality of scientific expectation. But nor is it completely unrelated. It is an immortality which cannot be defined in temporal terms as it extends beyond temporality but nor is it a radical a-temporality as it does not exclude all elements of temporality. Rather it is the fulfilment of temporality. It is a transformation of this life rather than a rejection of it, a taking up of temporality into eternity. As such it is a genuinely personal immortality rather than the continuation of any genetic code or population. It is personal life emerging out of God's graciousness rather than from any fundamental anthropocentricity or genetic or personal selfishness.

There is nothing in a genuine theology of immortality which conflicts with the relative 'immortality' which is a radically extended life-span. Nor is there anything in this theology of life in Christ which makes a scientific search for this relative 'immortality' wrong. For God a thousand years is as a day ([Ps. 90:4](#)) and a life lived for two thousand years is one which can be lived in honour of God as much as one lived for three score and ten years or a life lived for only twenty minutes. A life lived for seventy years is a life lived 25,000 times longer than a life lived only for a day. Yet both can have their own completeness in God. If people were to be able to live a mere fifty times longer than at present and survive for 5000 years would that detract from the immortality of grace which is an eternity with Christ? I think not. Given the huge amount of time involved in God's work of creation prior to the presence of any human being it is hard to imagine him being concerned about a few thousand years! There is nothing in this scientific hope of extended life which causes concern to a genuinely theological understanding of immortality. The two 'immortalities' can live in dialogue rather than in conflict. This is not to say, however, that there are no problems at all with the search for an end to aging, simply that if there are problems they will emerge elsewhere. Extended life span is not a threat to God's immortality but it may well be a threat to significant aspects of human life and social relationships but these will have to be dealt with elsewhere.

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Book and Journal Information

Expository Times, published by T. & T. Clark Ltd., 59 George St, Edinburgh, EH2 2LQ Scotland. [Ph 0131-225 4703](tel:0131-2254703) Fax 0131-220 4260 www.tandtclark.co.uk Annual subscription for individuals (12 issues) £14.95 (UK), \$29.95 (USA) £17.25 (most other countries)

Evangelical Missions Quarterly, PO Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60189. www.wheaton.edu/bgc/emis A subscription form describing the scope and nature of our publications is available upon request.

Asia Journal of Theology, published by The Association for Theological Education in SE c/- BTESSC PO Box 4635 Miller's Road Bangalore 560 046 India.

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Book Reviews

CONSULTING THE FAITHFUL: WHAT CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUALS CAN LEARN FROM POPULAR RELIGION

by Richard J. Mouw

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), Pb 84 pages ISBN 0-8028-0738-0

Reviewed by David Parker

In this short essay, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, offers a perspective on popular evangelicalism that differs sharply from the strident criticisms

that are often heard. He suggests that practitioners of 'high theology', who are apt to make sophisticated analyses of the statements and practices of preachers, megachurch pastors and prominent lay people and find them seriously wanting, should adopt a 'hermeneutic of charity'. Following this process, Mouw argues, they would 'take a positive look at things we might otherwise reject without carefully considering their merit'.

Mouw freely admits that many aspects of modern evangelicalism might be described as in 'bad taste' or constitute 'tacky' theology; other features represent an initial understanding which will mature in time or represent profound truths deliberately couched in popular terms in order to communicate with the public. But his 'hermeneutic of charity' suggests that theologians should look for the helpful and valid insights contained within these phenomena when evaluating them, rather than concentrating on their weaknesses under the control of a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'.

He points out that experience proves there is profound wisdom in the church as a whole, even if it is not always expressed in the precise technical terms of 'high theology'. Furthermore, he invokes Paul Hiebert's theory of the 'excluded middle' to show that the sometimes limited or questionable statements of 'low theology' are couched in practical terms that serve well enough to communicate and develop the faith at a popular level. Provided adequate safeguards are in place, people continue to grow in their understanding, and where such statements are seen in the larger context of Christian truth, he argues, they have an important function and, as such, should not be ignored or treated with contempt by academic theologians.

Mouw thus challenges the views of several prominent contemporary evangelicals, referring explicitly to David F. Wells and Os Guinness who have spoken strongly about the negative effects of the church's wholesale adoption of the managerial and therapeutic revolutions. He takes some risks when referring positively to popular practices, such as magic and prayers to Mary and the saints, or when relating popular religious expression to the creation of humans in the divine image. But overall, his warnings about the patronising dismissal of the 'sense of the faithful' are well worth consideration. Even more importantly, his claim that 'theologians need help from lay people' should be also be taken seriously:

What I am insisting is that theological reflection must utilize the insights of the entire Christian community; rather than send the laity off to do their own theology, it is important to draw them into a larger process of theological formulation. Professional theologians who regularly ignore— even worse, disdain—the spiritual and theological impulses of popular religion are missing out on an important theological resource. Insofar as popular Christianity is the arena in which ordinary Christians are exercising a discerning practical wisdom, a fully adequate theology will attend very closely to their insights.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM MANUAL: A ONCE AND FUTURE GUIDE

by Robert G. Clouse, Robert N. Hosack and Richard V. Pierard

Michigan: Baker Books, 1999 (A Bridgepoint Book) ISBN 0-8010-5848-1 Pb., 222pp
illus, indices

Reviewed by David Parker

According to Mark Noll, this 'book is as timely as it is expert'. Presented with attractive page design, and many intriguing illustrations, charts, and side-bars, this manual is intended to provide a popular audience with historical, biblical and cultural information which will help them cope with the uncertainty and fears associated with the advent of the new millennium. Two of the authors, R.G. Clouse and R.V. Pierard are well known and

widely published historians from Indiana State University, and the third, R.N. Hosack, is an editor with the publishers and a free lance writer.

The opening chapter deals with general issues of prophecy, calendars, the end of the first millennium and contemporary apocalyptic cults and catastrophe movements. The traditional approaches of Christian eschatology to the Millennium (pre-, post-, and a-millennialism with a major section on dispensationalism) form the content of the second chapter, but Chapter 3 provides an interesting survey of how the church from its original beginnings viewed the end times, and especially the idea of a millennium. Setting of dates for the end of the world or for the millennium itself has been popular in many periods of the church, despite the teaching of the New Testament to discourage the practice. So Chapter 4 gives many examples, covering Jewish mysticism, the Millerites, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and some more mainstream evangelicals.

Millennial thinking is not confined to evangelical Christians or even to religious people, as Chapter 5 indicates. Civil millennialism has been a prominent feature of United States culture, while Nazism and Marxism are strongly oriented in this direction as well. This chapter also discusses non-western examples of the phenomena such as Joseph Booth of Malawi, Rastafarianism of Jamaica, Shining Path of Peru, some Islamic movements and Melanesian cargo cults. It also includes a section on the millennial speculations about the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism, Nostradamus, Pyramid Numerology and a final section to bring it up date on Michael Drosnin's 1997 book, *The Bible Code*.

The concluding chapter deals with the meaning of the Millennium, pointing out how central eschatology is to the Christian faith, but warning against excesses of various kinds and unintended side-effects of millenarian interests. The book ends with a well balanced call for purposeful living and, in view of the socially-negative tendency of much millennialism, an emphasis on justice, peace and equality as Christians live out the Bible's apocalyptic message.

This is a well resourced book, imaginatively presented, tackling some of the most important issues at the turn of the millennium. Seeking to discuss both the traditional idea of a 'golden millennial age' and the turn of the Christian calendar to the Third Millennium, it provides essential biblical and historical background to understand the issues and trends. In the process it unmasks some myths (including fears about the Y2K computer problem, mysteries about the calculation of the Christian calendar, and the idea that there was popular panic at the turn of the first millennium) and sets other material in a wider and therefore more helpful perspective. It does not underestimate the importance of eschatological issues related to the millennium or minimize their vital relevance to Christian discipleship and witness.

As might be expected from the authors, there is a heavy emphasis on historical content and background. Accordingly, there is little theological evaluation of the standard millennial schemes; no explanation of why millennial hopes have proved so attractive and so prone to distortion; and no fresh insights to integrate millennial thinking with Christian life and faith and thus provide a dynamic spiritual force to guide us through the present period.

The book is sharply oriented to the North American context where apocalyptic elements are often found in more extreme and more influential forms than elsewhere. Nevertheless, as Ronald Sider states (on the jacket), it is 'a reliable guide' and as such it is 'just the book to give to that sincere friend terrified by all the apocalyptic predictions of cosmic collapse in the year 2000'.

CONSTRUCTIVE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH

edited by William R. Barr
ISBN: 0802841430 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997 Pb, pp 553

Reviewed by Erich Geldbach

It is the intention of the book 'to give a more inclusive account of the contributions Christians from various parts of the world are making to theological understanding in our time'. This global quest, so the editor tells the reader, will form an essential part of the future work in theology. He rightly contends that the different contextualizations of the Christian faith will require a cross-cultural conversation. In this global dialog across cultural, ethnic and other traditions the participants must develop ways to communicate their different insights 'with integrity' to their own constituencies, but likewise to people in other contexts (p. xi). The book is a very helpful tool to communicate to the reader some current theological reflections and thoughts within the worldwide church.

The list of contributors which the editor apparently selected reveals that the Euro-American domination of modern theology is swiftly disappearing. It may be especially difficult for German theologians, who seem to think that they are still the hub of the theological world, to realize that only one of them is represented in this volume. Of course, one can argue that the selection reveals the bias of the editor, but this can be said of any selection of such a broad dimension. The fact is that the church is a worldwide community and that the centre of gravity within Christianity has shifted. There is, therefore, the need for different contexts to express themselves. No one context is 'closer to' the gospel or represents a more 'universal' meaning than a different context. The gospel itself, because of its 'historicity', requires its 'inculturation' into different contexts, and when the contextual understandings of the gospel enter into a global dialog with each other, we may get a glimpse of what it means that the gospel is 'universal' and not provincial.

The book is divided into six parts: part I deals with 'constructing theology from diverse perspectives', part II is concerned with 'enlarging our understanding of God', part III is devoted to 'humanity within the fabric of creation', part IV is dedicated to the discussion about 'the significance of Jesus Christ', part V is assigned to the topic 'the church and the Christian life' and, finally, part VI raises the issue of 'Christian hope'. All parts begin with an introduction to the issue and end with 'some further contributions to the discussion'. Both the introductions, which actually give summaries of the various contributions in each particular section, and the 'further contributions' are helpful.

It is quite appropriate to begin with basic hermeneutical issues before entering into various topics of Christian theology. In fact, the hermeneutical question should have been more stressed than is done in the book. The editor was careful, however, not only to choose essays that convey theological concepts, but also stories or poems. Other forms of expressions of religious experiences cannot be communicated in a book, but require other means. In this connection it may be said that the wisdom tradition in the Bible has so far not been adequately dealt with and made use of in our ecumenical quest for 'unity in diversity'. The editor calls to the reader's attention that minority cultures within a dominant culture or whole segments of the population like women were often forgotten. Their approaches are very different from 'traditional' God-talk.

How do we escape a postmodern relativism when we are confronted with all the different concepts, ideas, statements, experiences? The first point is that the conversation takes place within the worldwide church. The second point is that in the 'round-table discussion'—a metaphor that the editor favours—no one view is 'better' or 'more important' or carries 'more weight' than another: all need to be brought up and only then can a valid judgement be made which again must be seen as something which happens within the church. The third point is that all views which are presented have 'relative'

meaning, i.e. stand in relation to one another. This is different from the postmodern 'anything goes' concept as the aim is a better and clearer understanding of the Christian faith in its encounter with the economic and social realities of our time in the various contexts. As this will always be an unfinished business, there is no need to be afraid of 'relativism'. The encounter with those of different persuasion or experience than our own will turn out to be a challenge to our own traditional ways and an experience that will enrich us even if we differ.

The editor William Barr, professor of theology at Lexington Theological Seminary in Kentucky (USA), must be thanked for providing a cross-cultural conversation in one challenging volume. The contributors are from around the world, both men and women, lay and clergy, from various theological backgrounds ('schools') as well as from different denominations. The variety of viewpoints is a reflection of a truly 'ecumenical'—worldwide—theology.

MISSIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: GETTING YOUR CHURCH INTO THE GAME

by Tom Telford with Lois Shaw

ISBN: 0877885788 Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1998 Pb, 171pp pb.

Reviewed by Tom Seller in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* Vol 34:4 (Oct 1998)
Used by permission of EMQ, PO Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60189.

It has been said that good preaching is 'truth through personality.' The same could be said of good teaching and good writing. Tom Telford is a personality, a character, a refreshing breeze in the North American missionary movement. His book *Missions in the 21st Century* is living testimony to this. This book began as a master's thesis in which Lois Shaw wanted to document Telford's 'remarkable life and contribution to the current missions scene.' But it was too rich to leave it as such, and so it has been written in a very popular style ideal for the laity and missions professionals alike. It is especially valuable to help the new mission committee member get up to speed quickly on sound current missions thinking.

Telford's book is a wealth of wisdom on such topics as avoiding local church missions errors, recruitment, missionary training programmes, missions conferences, missionary care, mistakes mission agencies make, partnering, biblical foundations, and contemporary models of missions-minded local churches.

Tom writes in the entertaining style of a baseball umpire (which he was). But he also writes from the perspective of a seasoned missions committee chairperson and missions consultant and mobilizer who has observed and interacted with hundreds of churches for many years.

One of the book's strengths, and at the same time one of the weaknesses, is that Tom, umpire-like, 'calls em as he sees 'em.' It is a strength because, in his winsome way, he says some very tough things to churches, agencies, and missionaries which we all need to hear. It's a weakness because at times he overgeneralizes or makes judgment calls which tempt readers to argue with the umpire.

His 'Hall of Fame' chapter on churches with 'top-notch' missions programmes is both helpful and controversial, as was his listing of the top ten missions churches several years ago. It is helpful because models can be inspiring and insightful. It is controversial because so many excellent programmes are left out. Serving a church which happens to be in the 'Hall of Fame' is a bit humbling, given all the weaknesses I'm aware of as an insider. But all in all, *Missions in the 21st Century* is a great book for getting your church into the game.