The future begins in the past and powerfully shapes the present. This is as true of civilizations as it is of religions and individuals. Despite a virtually unblemished record of failure in making predictions, we humans continue to forecast. Apparently we have no choice. Thinking about the future is in our genes.

In the days of the Roman Republic, learned Etruscan soothsayers ventured to forecast the future by close scrutiny of the liver and entrails of sacrificed animals. The Delphic Oracle, one of the best-known and most prolific forecasting businesses in history, provided a full millennium of unbroken pronouncement between 700 B.C. and A.D. 300, when it ceded the field to Christians.

Divinely revealed futures within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have served as the underpinning for invasions, occupations, wars, genocides, exterminations, expropriations, migrations, executions, suicides, racism, and ethnocentrism, as well as various kinds of bizarre but essentially harmless behavior. One recent survey chronicled several hundred predictions of the Messiah’s return and the end of time as we know it, beginning with Theudas’s announcement in A.D. 44 that he was the Messiah, and including Jerry Falwell’s 1999 pronouncement that the Antichrist was probably alive then and that the Lord would return within ten years (www.bible.ca/pre-date-setters.htm).

As Steven Schnaars reminded readers in a book published twenty years ago, religious prognosticators do not have a monopoly on failed predictions (Megamistakes: Forecasting and the Myth of Rapid Technological Change [Free Press, 1989]). A detailed analysis of thirty years of technology forecasts appearing in seven

Continued next page
of America’s most prestigious news publications showed that fully 85 percent of all predictions were dead wrong.

In Fortune Sellers: The Big Business of Buying and Selling Predictions (John Wiley & Sons, 1997), William Sherden took a hard look at the modern prophecy industry and at the soothsayers who make a handsome living out of human anxiety about the future. He estimated that North Americans spent $200 billion dollars annually for the forecasting services of meteorologists, economists, stock market gurus, demographers, technology assessors, and, of course, prophecy buffs. Of fourteen different genres of forecasting identified by Sherden, only two—one-day-ahead weather forecasting and predictions positing an aging population—have proven reliable.

As the essays in this issue remind us, our understanding of the future has a direct bearing on how Christians (and Muslims) have understood their mission in this world. Each part of the Christian Bible seems to have been written without any anticipation that it would one day be incorporated into the vast seamless garment typified by the “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth” chart on the cover of this issue. This compilation of disparate books and letters has never easily yielded to even the most ingenious attempts to systematize its contents and deduce our present location on the continuum of time and eternity.

And yet . . . we seemingly must try. In this issue Edward Rommen, an Orthodox priest, theologian, and missiologist, leads with an article that demonstrates Christian interpretation of biblical eschatology at its least speculative. David Shenk follows with an essay reminding us that Muslims, too, embrace a messianic hope that both informs their understanding of the here and now and guides them in and through it to the ultimate beyond. Susan Perlman, associate executive director of an organization dedicated to proclaiming to Jewish people the Good News that Jesus is their long-awaited Messiah, demonstrates how crucial to this enterprise is one’s particular understanding of biblical eschatology. Other authors in this issue evaluate the impact of premillennial eschatology on twentieth-century American evangelical mission theory and practice. First, Michael Pocock points out in his carefully crafted and highly instructive piece that it would be difficult indeed to overestimate the influence of premillennialism. Then Colin Chapman and Andrew Bush, whose own understanding of eschatology has been influenced by personal, prolonged immersion in the lives of Lebanese and Palestinian believers, follow with passionately written critiques of on-the-ground implications of Western armchair eschatologies for dispossessed, dislocated, and ravaged populations in that deeply troubled part of the world.

If there is one lesson to be learned from millennia of religiously inspired but misguided speculation about the future, it is that we should indulge the impulse to forecast only with deep humility and a great deal of caution. Christians who predict the future on the basis of insider religious knowledge should recall that prophecy has always been a risky undertaking—unless one is a false prophet! In the Hebrew and Christian record, official liars were generally popular with the masses and with the powers of their day, while authentic prophets got themselves into trouble by speaking unpleasant truths to anxious kings and smugly complacent nations.

The outcome of all authentically Christian hope is the pouring out of God’s love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), evidenced by the fruit of that Spirit and grounded in the here and now of love for God, neighbor, stranger, and enemy (1 John 3:3; Luke 6:35). Any other outcome is an evidence of hope manipulated, ill-conceived, or simply false.

—Jonathan J. Bonk
Every time Orthodox faithful celebrate the Divine Liturgy, they sing the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. In doing so, they confess that Christ is coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead, that his kingdom shall have no end, and that they look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. These brief statements capture the church’s teaching concerning the last things, and their creedal and ecclesial context serves two distinct functions. On the one hand, they represent the binding dogmatic conviction of the church and, as such, provide a foundation for theologically understanding the Scripture passages upon which they are based. While we cannot hope to fully understand the mysteries involved in the last things, we can and are encouraged (Matt. 24:32–33) to develop an adequate overview of the end times. On the other hand, the Creed acts as a weekly, if not daily, reminder of the living hope that is at the very heart of the Eucharistic community. This is a living, dynamic eschatology, a continual expression of our belief that Christ will indeed come again. In what follows, I would like to examine each of these functions by laying out the general scope of Orthodox eschatology and demonstrating the regular and enlivening place that this teaching has in the life of the church and the faithful.

Dogmatic Convictions

I begin by presenting a brief outline of the Orthodox understanding of the last things. As points of reference, I use the three statements of the Creed and focus on death, the second coming, and the kingdom.

Death. While every human being will die, death is not the end of individual existence but merely the separation of the soul from the body. The Scriptures speak of death in terms of the soul being freed from the body (2 Cor. 5:1–4; 2 Pet. 1:13–14), after which the immortal soul continues to live unto God (Matt. 22:32). Immediately following death the soul is subject to a particular judgment (Heb. 9:27) according to his or her deeds and then conveyed to a state of blessedness (Luke 23:43) or torment (Luke 16:22–23). These ideas are captured in the Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs on the Orthodox Faith: “We believe that the souls of the dead are in a state of blessedness or torment according to their deeds. After being separated from the body they immediately pass over to joy or into sorrow and grief; however, they do not feel either complete blessedness or complete torment. For complete blessedness or complete torment each one receives after the general resurrection, when the soul is reunited with the body in which it lived in virtue or vice.” According to the Eastern Church the soul can exist in only one of two states after the particular judgment; it thus rejects the Roman Catholic teaching of purgatory as a third state.

The second coming of Christ. Although the time of that “last day” is not and cannot be known (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7), Christ did point to certain historical events in which we can discern the signs of his approaching return. The Gospel will be preached in all the world (Matt. 24:14); there will be extraordinary manifestations of evil (Matt. 24:12; 2 Tim. 3:1–5); the kingdom of God will be opposed by a powerful adversary, the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3–11; Dan. 7:11); and two witnesses will appear and speak the truth against the Antichrist (Rev. 11:3–12).

These are just some of the signs that will alert us to the second coming. Of that event itself we can say with confidence that Christ is coming again, for it has been referred to by Christ himself (Matt. 16:27; 24; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 17:24; John 14:3), by the angels at the ascension (Acts 1:11), and by various apostles (Jude 14–15; 1 John 2:28; 1 Pet. 4:13; 1 Cor. 4:5). Moreover, it will come suddenly and visibly (Matt. 24:27), with power and glory (Matt. 24:30; 25:31; Mark 8:38), and in judgment of the world (Acts 17:31; Matt. 16:27).

In that great day of his coming there will also be a general resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:13–15). It will be a universal and simultaneous resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous (John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15). According to the Scriptures the resurrected bodies will be the same ones that belonged to their souls in this earthly life, but, at the same time, they will be transfigured, that is, become incorrupt and immortal, freed of all weakness and infirmity.

At this point some have interposed a literal thousand-year kingdom based on Revelation 20:4–8. Such chiliastic schemes were promoted in antiquity, primarily by heretics, are even found among a few Fathers of the church, including Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyon, and have many modern adherents. According to this approach there will be two judgments and two resurrections: one for the righteous, and one universal. The idea seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the term “first resurrection,” which actually refers to spiritual birth into new life through baptism (Eph. 2:5–6; 5:14; Col. 3:1). On this basis, the thousand-year reign must be understood as “the period of time from the very beginning of the kingdom of grace of the Church of Christ, and in particular of the triumphant church of heaven, until the end of the world.” The “second death” is the judgment of sinners at the last day. It will not touch those who have been part of the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6). “If it was at one time possible to express chiliastic ideas as private opinions, this was only until the Ecumenical Council expressed its judgement about this. But when the Second Ecumenical Council (381), in condemning all the errors of the heretic Apollinarius, condemned also his teaching of the thousand-year reign of Christ and introduced to the very symbol of faith the words concerning Christ: And His Kingdom will have no end—it became no longer permissible at all for an Orthodox Christian to hold these opinions.”

The day of the Lord will also lead to the transformation of the world. Having been negatively affected by human sinfulness, the whole of the created order suffers under the weight of corruption (Rom. 8:19–23). But, as St. Peter tells us, this world will be subjected to a fiery transformation that will lead to a new

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heaven and a new earth where the righteous shall dwell (2 Pet. 3:7–13)—not the destruction of it, but its complete renewal.

Finally, we are told that the day of the Lord will bring with it a universal judgment. This event is anticipated in so many Scriptures as to make it an absolute certainty (e.g., Matt. 16:27; 24:30; 25:31–46; Acts 17:31; Jude 14–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:6–10; Rev. 20:11–15). Taken together, these and other passages give us the following picture. This judgment will be universal, that is, extend to all the living and the dead, to the righteous and the unrighteous, and even the fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). It will be a public affair, in the presence of Christ with all his angels before the face of the whole world. It will be a fearful revelation of God’s justice (Rom. 2:5). And it will be final and definitive. Those so judged will be divided into two groups and rewarded accordingly. The righteous will go into eternal life in the presence of God. The unrighteous will be sent into eternal punishment, a place of fire and torment called Gehenna (Matt. 25:41, 46). The exact nature of this place is not known. John of Damascus writes that sinners will be “given over to everlasting fire, which will not be a material fire, such as we are accustomed to, but a fire such as God might know.” Others have speculated that it might be the deprivation of God’s love and glory, which would be a torment more cruel than Gehenna. In any case, these torments will be eternal and unending.

This, of course, seems to be at odds with the unfathomable mercy of God. Yet, compelled by the Scriptures, we have no right to minimize the eternality of this state by placing limits on it or by seeing the warnings as conditional, pedagogically motivated statements. At the same time, we know that God desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and we have no right to define the boundaries between God’s mercy and his justice. It is, I suppose, possible for God, in his mercy, to save everyone. But such an action would have to be balanced against the ability of human beings to reject that mercy and thereby the very means of salvation.

**The kingdom of glory.** When Christ has come and the world is renewed, the kingdom of God will be revealed in all its glory. This will mark an end to the time of the church and the beginning of the heavenly church (1 Cor. 15:24–26, 28). This will bring the mission of Christ to an end, and he will reign in a kingdom of glory that will have no end. This life of eternal blessedness is described in Revelation 21. There we read that everything will be immortal and holy. There we will complete our salvific journey and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), participants in that perfect life, knowing and seeing God as the angels do. And there will be no hunger, no thirsting, no tears, no suffering, no death. “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, . . . what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9, citing Isa. 64:4). This, then, is what we confess: Christ is coming again, he will judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

**A Living Hope**

From this brief survey it can be seen that Orthodox dogmatic convictions on the last things are, at least by Western standards, rather simple and straightforward. They have a different character, a different place in theology and the church. There are few details and very little speculation. There are no diagrams, no calculations. Eschatology is not reduced to futuristic, individualistic concerns. It is not merely a chapter at the end of theology that deals primarily with the fate of a person’s soul after death. Alexander Schmemann develops this point:

Properly understood, eschatology is not so much a separate “chapter” or “doctrine” (which, being distinct from all other Christian “doctrines,” can and ought to be treated “in itself”) as it is the essential dimension of the Christian faith and experience themselves, and therefore of Christian theology in its totality.

The Christian faith is essentially eschatological because the events from which it stems and which are its “object” as well as its “content”: the life, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the “institution” of the Church, are seen and experienced not only as the end and the fulfillment of the history of salvation, but also as the inauguration and the gift of a new life whose content is the Kingdom of God.13

For these reasons the whole of theology and the whole life of the church is permeated with eschatological hope and the life of Christ. Eschatology is not merely a set of doctrines, not primarily futuristic, and not exclusively individualistic; instead, it is the living and enlivening relationship to the person of Christ, which is the present confession of the whole Eucharistic community. It is not something that is much discussed, but rather something that is lived and experienced in almost every aspect of ecclesial being. This eschatological consciousness is expressed in, among other things, the church’s understanding of salvation, Eucharist, holiness, and mission.

**Salvation.** In Eastern Christian thought the idea of salvation is developed in the broad context defined by creation and deification, or theosis. That is, the process of sanctification whereby the individual becomes increasingly like God in character. The ultimate goal of humanity is to become so like God, communing so intimately, that it can be said that we partake in the very nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4). Unfortunately, humankind used that freedom of choice to turn away from God and reject the life-giving communion and the potential for deification. As a result, human nature was corrupted, which led to death. Although the image was not destroyed by sin, it was distorted, and that distortion has been expressed in a continuous misuse of the tainted free will. In order to save humanity, two things were necessary: a restoration of human nature and a healing of human will. These
needs were effectively addressed by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. In the incarnation the divine and the human natures were perfectly united. In the death of Christ our sins were assumed, and the fundamental consequence, death itself, was defeated. In the resurrection we have the actualization of the defeat of death and the healing of human nature. Salvation consists of a recapitulation appropriated by faith—that is, a restoration of human nature and a healing of human will, as well as a forgiveness of sin. Restored to the position Adam had before the fall, we have been given a second chance to accept God’s plan and move toward him through sanctification/deification. Salvation, then, is an ongoing relationship to Christ, not an instant, once-and-for-all, never-to-be-lost change of status, but rather the culmination of a lifelong struggle of faith that will be fully realized when Christ comes again to establish his glorious and eternal kingdom.

Christians thus understand themselves to be a community of those redeemed by the “eschatological saving event of Jesus Christ.” Because of his work, the kingdom of God has come near, has broken into our reality. The salvific awareness of the church is that we have been saved (Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:5, 8), are being saved (1 Cor. 1:18; Gal. 2:20), and will be saved (Phil. 1:6; Rom. 5:9). Life in Christ is at its very root eschatological, a living hope that has already dawned, an active anticipation of the fulfillment of the kingdom.

**Eucharist.** Every Sunday Orthodox faithful celebrate the Divine Liturgy. It is of eschatological significance that the service begins with the words “Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.” This reference to the kingdom is a reminder of what is about to happen. Ordinary time is being suspended, and we are being ushered into a foretaste of the heavenly kingdom, which has come near and is yet to be fulfilled. The liturgy is a bridge, and it takes place at the intersection of time and eternity. The very heart of the liturgy is the Eucharist, which we celebrate in anticipation of the second coming of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26). In communion there is a looking back, a remembering of the saving events of Easter. But there is also an active deliberate looking forward, an anticipation of the Lord’s return. All this is captured in a prayer that is said just after the words of institution: “Remembering this saving commandment and all those things which came to pass for us: the cross, the grave, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting down at the right hand, the second and glorious coming again, Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee on behalf of all and for all.” So the Eucharist connects both the past and the present with the future. It spans heaven and earth. Most important, it unites the redeemed with the real and actual presence of the Redeemer. By partaking of the bread and the wine, we are united with Christ, here and now.

Schmemann suggests that we look at the Eucharist in terms of an “eschatological symbolism” in which the symbol fulfills the reality it represents, the reality of the symbol fulfilled in the sacrament. “The essential particularity of the eschatological symbolism is the fact that in it the very distinction between sign and signified is simply ignored.” The whole point of the eschatological symbolism is that in it the sign and that which it signifies are one and the same thing. Thus we might say that the liturgy happened to us. The liturgical entrance is our—or rather, the church’s—entrance to heaven. We do not merely symbolize the presence of the angels; we do, however, join them in their unceasing glorification of God, just as the Eucharistic gifts, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, are the real body and blood of Christ, bringing together everything that Christ has done, is doing, and will do when he comes again.

**Holy Tuesday.** According to Whitby at the outset of Holy Tuesday, the Church’s liturgy is still “cultic,” a celebration of Christ’s “Amen.”

**The Eucharist connects both the past and the present with the future. It spans heaven and earth.**

**Mission.** Finally, all of this spills over into mission. Throughout its history the church has been actively involved in the sending of missionaries to spread the Gospel to those parts of the world not yet evangelized. This involvement is illustrated in the nearly unbroken chain of outreach, including the ninth-century mission to eastern Europe, the massive fourteenth-century effort to evangelize Siberia and central Asia, the very successful eighteenth-century mission to Alaska and the continental United States, and the current efforts of the North American missionary society, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center.

This mission of the church is grounded in Christ’s identification of his mission with that of the apostles (John 20:21) and the specific sending of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20). The record of the apostles’ missionary activity in the Acts of the Apostles and the whole life of St. Paul make it clear that they understood that the work of proclaiming the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:38) and reconciliation with God (Col. 1:21–22) had been committed to them (Luke 24:47–48). Their work was not an exception but the very core of the early church’s activity. It was, by definition, a sending and a witnessing community.

The early believers were motivated by an inner necessity to proclaim the Gospel to every nation. This necessity arises from the eschatological events of salvation. It was not a “strategic consideration to gain more members” but the result of a deeply held conviction that Christ himself was necessary for the life of the whole world and for its salvation (Acts 4:12). At the same time, this eschatological orientation is intensely personal. The proclamation of the Good News is an invitation to enter a relationship with the person of Christ. What we seek to mediate is communion with a personal being. Only within the framework of such a relationship can the words of the Gospel connote both reality and the knowledge of that reality. Our message, then, is not primarily information about some truth but is itself a reality—communion with a personal being.
Announcing, as it does, the coming kingdom of God, this mission of the church is to be universal, a message for all people (1 Tim. 4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9). It is to be above all narrow nationalisms and all exclusiveness (Col. 3:11). It must also be a permanent aspect of the church’s life, practiced until Christ returns. Mission is rooted in the eschatological events of salvation and is sustained by the living eschatological consciousness of the church.

These, then, are some of the aspects of the church that express its eschatological awareness. As you can see, the church insists on defining the relationship between these aspects and eschatology correctly. Eschatology is not an expression of mission, as if the mission of the church could somehow hasten the coming of Christ. It is not an expression of holiness, as if a particular brand of Christian behavior could define one’s view of the second coming. Eschatology is not an expression of the Eucharist, as if a certain Eucharistic practice could determine the nature of the coming kingdom. Nor is it an expression of one’s salvation, as if one’s particular view of soteriology could determine the concept of the judgment. Quite to the contrary, these things are themselves expressions of the eschatological consciousness of the church. We continually engage in mission because we know Christ will return. We strive for holiness because we have been called apart and are not of this world. We receive the Eucharist as a foretaste of the kingdom. We allow ourselves to be saved because we know judgment is coming for all.

In the Eastern Church eschatology is not simply a set of dogmatic assertions. It is a living, active hope that informs many aspects of the church’s life. It is confessed on a weekly or even daily basis. It is the brilliance of the Eucharistic celebration. It is a present reality that brings together the salvific events of Christ’s life and the glory of the kingdom that is to come.

Notes

3. This judgment is called particular in order to distinguish it from the general last judgment.
4. As cited in Pomazansky, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, p. 355.
5. The character and activity of the Antichrist has been graphically described by St. Cyril in his Catechetical Lectures (15), as cited by Pomazansky, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, p. 333.
6. There is some thought that this witness will cause Israel (at least a remnant) to believe in the Messiah and again become part of God’s ultimate plan of salvation. See Dennis Engleman, Ultimate Things: An Orthodox Perspective on the End Times (Ben Lomond, Calif.: Conciliar Press, 1995), pp. 194–97. The two witnesses are traditionally identified as Enoch and Elijah, who will endure their earthly death only during the reign of the Antichrist. See Zechariah 4.
7. A related error, that of a so-called rapture, is based on a misunderstanding of 1 Thess. 4:17. This view envisions the sudden removal of all true Christians sometime during the great tribulation. It is clear from Scripture, however, that even the elect will suffer during the tribulation and that, for their sakes, this time will be shortened (Matt. 24:21–22).
8. Pomazansky, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, pp. 343, 344.
11. Origen was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council for placing a limit on the eternal state.
19. This entrance refers to a point in the liturgy when the clergy and all the servers process with the gifts (bread and wine) and enter into the sanctuary.
21. For a brief summary of these historical trends, see Luke A. Veronis, Missionaries, Monks, and Martyrs (Minneapolis: Light & Life, 1994).
22. Unfortunately, much of this missionary activity was silenced during the last two centuries, while the Orthodox world was under the domination of Communism and Islam. With the demise of Communism and the coming of newfound freedoms, there are some signs that the church is in the process of rediscovering its mandate and relearning how to fulfill the Great Commission. One example of this renewed activity is the work of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (www.ocmc.org) in St. Augustine, Florida. OCMC is a joint effort of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) and currently recruits, trains, and sends missionaries to a number of countries.

Four Conferences to Comemorate Edinburgh 1910

Many conferences, colloquia, and celebrations are being planned for 2010, centennial of the historic 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. Organizers of four international gatherings met to coordinate details.


October 16–25, 2010—Cape Town. Organized by the Lausanne Movement and World Evangelical Alliance, Cape Town 2010 will provide 4,000 leaders from 200 countries a forum for exploring critical issues facing the church. Details: www.lausanne.org/cape-town-2010.

“For me, the professors’ missions experience has helped me better understand how I can use my passion to teach English as ministry, and further the Great Commission.”

Mark Herbst

('07, M.A. TESOL)

For the past 25 years, the School of Intercultural Studies has been all about the Great Commission. When Jesus said, “go and make disciples of all nations,” we believe he meant it. Now celebrating its silver anniversary, the newly renamed Clyde and Anna Belle Cook School is committed to continuing and strengthening its tradition of disciple-making — of equipping cross-cultural servants for missions and global impact through doctoral and master’s programs in missiology, intercultural studies, linguistics, education and anthropology.

Students like Mark Herbst come to the Cook School of Intercultural Studies with the ambition to impact the world for Christ. They leave with the tools to make it happen.
For two days in September 2006, at a conference in Tehran, I was immersed within Iranian Shi’ite Mahdist eschatology. About four thousand were present; five were Christian, with three of the Christians invited to make presentations. The conference was hosted by the Bright Future Institute of Qom, Iran. When I saw the invitation, one of the themes leaped off the page to me: “The Mahdism and Messianism Doctrine in Other Religions (Abrahamic).” I subsequently offered to present a paper entitled “Messianic Hope in Biblical Eschatology,” which the planners accepted.

Iranian Shi’ite Eschatology

Iranian Shi’ite eschatology is one of a variety of Muslim eschatologies. The literature is enormous and often confusing. In recent years the volume of Islamic apocalyptic and eschatological literature has increased dramatically, especially as a response to the emergence of the State of Israel. This development has similarities to a variety of Christian apocalyptic scenarios, also in regard to Israel and the end times, such as the Left Behind series. These eschatologies have the potential to form powerful movements that cannot be trivialized.

Iranian Mahdism is one such movement. At the conference we heard twenty-one sermons, all related to eschatology. The meeting was opened by a one-hour address by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on the political implications of Mahdism; it closed with a passionate presentation by Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi on the spiritual foundations for authentic Mahdism. He is respected as a spiritual counselor for leaders of the Iranian Revolution.

Shi’a background history. In order to understand the Iranian Islamic Revolution, it is essential to grasp the historical background for Iranian Mahdism. The Shi’a wing of the Muslim movement believes that the authentic leader (Imam) of the Muslim community (the Ummah) must be a descendant of the Prophet through his daughter, Fatima, and her husband, Ali. The Sunni wing, in contrast, opts for the discernment of the theological community (the ‘ulama) to determine the leader (the caliph). This tension tested the early Muslim movement, resulting eventually in violent conflict.

Ali eventually became the leader, but only after the death of the first three caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, and ‘Uthman. Conflicts ensued, and Ali was killed. When his son Husayn became caliph, he was treacherously assassinated near Karbala, now in Iraq. The Shi’a/Sunni divide was thus planted within the soul of the Ummah. In the ashes of Husayn’s treacherous death, however, the imamate prevailed, but only within the Shi’a wing of the Muslim movement. In due course several Shi’a movements emerged; the Iranian Ithna ‘ashari (twelve) is the largest.

Drawing from a variety of Shi’a Hadith (traditions), the Ithna ‘ashari believe that Muhammad prophesied that there would be only twelve imams. Then the Mahdi (savior) would come. In A.D. 869 (A.H. 255) the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn ‘Ali, was born. At the age of five, however, he disappeared. The Ithna ‘ashari believe that this Twelfth Imam is the Mahdi, whose mission is to extend peace, justice, and Islam to the ends of the earth before the final judgment. So for nearly twelve centuries the Mahdi, who is the vanished Muhammad ibn Hasan, is present through Occultation. The ayatollahs are leaders who are seeking perfection through becoming sensitive to the Occultation of the Mahdi. When the time is right, he will appear for the purpose of consummating his mission of preparing the world for the final judgment. The belief prevails that the Mahdi will appear with Jesus, who will defer to the Mahdi’s leadership, as they work together to establish universal Islamic righteousness and justice throughout the world.

Details of Mahdist eschatology. The sermons at the Mahdism conference were about developing a system and ethos that is fully accommodating to the commands of the Mahdi. He disappeared because there was a spirit of rebellion against the way of the Prophet and the commands of the Twelfth Imam. He left, yet his Occultation prevails. The leaders of the Iranian Revolution are committed to developing a political and religious system and an ethos that are in full harmony with the wishes of the Mahdi.

When the hidden Mahdi observes that Iranian society is approaching the perfection that he commands, he will return. He will command from a political position that will enable his decrees throughout Iran and the whole world to be carried out. The theologians believe that they have put in place just that kind of system, with the various ascending levels of political power, culminating in the Great Leader. As I understood it from the sermons, the Mahdi will occupy this highest position when he appears. In all of this emphasis on right political structures, the Iranian Revolution is emulating the political models developed by Muhammad when he assumed political and military power in Medina. Like Muhammad, Iranian Mahdist eschatology envisages the effective use of political and military power to bring about justice and universal peace in the concluding drama of history.

Mahdist eschatology and global culture. We learned that Western systems of democracy are in conflict with Islamic Mahdism. These Western systems must therefore be resisted, for political authority comes from God and his revealed laws as interpreted by the infallible Imam. The prophets reveal that God commands justice. The State of Israel is founded on injustice and therefore must be dismantled. The people of Israel are welcome to live and thrive within Middle East regions, but the unjust foundations of the State of Israel must be confronted and destroyed. There is evidence that the Iranian Revolution is approaching the perfection commanded by the Mahdi. The defeat of Israel by Hezbullah in the 2006 invasion of Lebanon has revealed that the favor of the Mahdi is upon Iran and its allies.

The coming of the Mahdi is drawing near. Faithful Muslims must therefore resist all semblances of the Antichrist. As Iran presses on toward increasing perfection, detractors such as the Antichrist might decide to attack Iran. That would not be a
calamity, because the blood of Iranian martyrs would be a powerful inducement for the Mahdi to return to save these faithful believers from destruction. Apocalyptic disaster would only be preparation for the coming of the Mahdi.

Jesus and the Mahdi. Jesus will come before the Mahdi, preparing the way for his coming. When the Mahdi appears, Jesus will defer to his leadership as they work together to extend universal peace throughout the world and prepare all humankind for the last trumpet call and the hour of the final judgment and the end of the world. The expected appearance of Jesus with the Mahdi was explicit. In the conference lobby a video loop proclaimed, “Do you know Jesus Christ is coming soon? The Mahdi right after that!”

The second coming of Christ is on the mind of President Ahmadinejad, who several months before the conference had written to President Bush, inviting dialogue on international issues based upon their common commitment to the message of the prophets. In his concluding paragraphs he refers to the second coming of Jesus and then asks, “Will we be given a role to play in the promised world, where justice will become universal and Jesus Christ [i.e., peace be upon him, a Muslim expression of respect] will be present? Will they [the prophets] even accept us?”

Messianic Eschatology

It was within this Mahdist milieu that I was invited to speak on messianic hope according to biblical eschatology. Other Christian colleagues delivered papers on Israel and dispensational theology, the Antichrist in the end times in Islam and Christianity, and themes in Christian eschatology of peace and justice. The following sections summarize my message.

The presence of the kingdom of God. The Messiah inaugurated his mission in his Nazareth hometown synagogue; he read from the prophet Isaiah concerning the mission of the Messiah: good news for the poor, freedom for the captives, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed, the year of the Lord’s favor. Then he announced that this presence of the kingdom of God was now fulfilled (Luke 4:16–21). Thereafter all that Jesus said and did demonstrated that he was indeed the presence of the kingdom of God.

The Messiah and the cross. At the height of Jesus’ popularity, people in Galilee tried by force to make him become their political ruler (John 6:14–15). They were fighting for freedom from the dominion of polytheistic Roman rulers. The Galileans believed that if Jesus became their leader, he would lead their guerrilla militia to victory and extend the kingdom of God throughout the earth.

Jesus rejected that invitation and instead set his face to travel south to Jerusalem. He confided to his disciples that in Jerusalem the authorities would arrest him, mock him, beat him, and crucify him (Matt. 20:19; Luke 18:31–34). And indeed in Jerusalem he was crucified between two thieves. Soldiers mocked. Jesus cried out in forgiveness. His open, wounded hands proclaimed forgiveness and the embrace of reconciliation. Three days later he arose from the dead. For the next forty days he appeared a number of times to his disciples. On at least one occasion he showed them the wounds of the nails in his hands and feet and the wound from the spear thrust in his side.

The mission of the church. Then Jesus declared, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21–22 NIV, used throughout).

Forty days after his resurrection Jesus sent his disciples on a hill in Galilee and commissioned them, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Later within this period, in Jerusalem, he ascended into heaven. As the astonished disciples were gazing into the heavens, two angels appeared and said to them, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). For the next ten days the disciples prayed together in an upper room in Jerusalem. Then on the Day of Pentecost, when Israel celebrated the firstfruits of the harvest, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. That event is the birthday of the church. With the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the disciples began witnessing to the Gospel of the kingdom, just as Jesus had commissioned them to do.

The kingdom of God and the eschaton. The church was born within the context of Jesus the Messiah promising to return again. In his life and teachings Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God. The church is called to carry forward the ministries of the kingdom of God initiated by Jesus. In all of this the church anticipates the final fulfillment of the kingdom of God, when Jesus returns. The church is an eschatological community pressing forward toward the day when the kingdom of God will be fulfilled on earth as in heaven.

Before his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus prophesied colossal troubles that will sweep the world before the end. He insisted, however, that these troubles are a sideshow; the most important sign that the end is drawing near is the church carrying forward the witness to the Gospel to all nations. He said, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). For this reason the faithful church proclaims the Gospel of the kingdom throughout the world, inviting people to repentance and commitment to Jesus. The church is a sign of the kingdom of God in ministries such as justice and peacemaking, schools, hospitals, agricultural development, cultural transformation in a
humanizing direction, encouraging human rights and freedom, and ministries of compassion.

The church often betrays this calling! No church is a perfect sign of the kingdom. The faithful church, however, is a community of joy that proclaims the grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation that is extended to all people in the suffering love of Jesus on the cross.

The second coming of the Messiah. The faithful church lives in expectation that Jesus the Messiah will return and bring to complete fulfillment the kingdom of God that he inaugurated. This is to say that the faithful church is a sign of the end. The apostle John describes the second coming of the Messiah thus: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him” (Rev. 1:7). When Jesus returns to earth in triumph, everyone will see the wounds of his crucifixion. The fulfillment of the kingdom of God at the second coming of Jesus is centered in the transforming power of the redemptive, suffering love revealed in his crucifixion and resurrection.

In his second coming the Messiah’s wrath will also be revealed. In his wrath the Messiah will slay the nations with the sword as he establishes the eternal kingdom. The sword he uses, however, comes from his mouth. He overcomes the unjust opponents of the kingdom of God with the sword of truth. This is the sword that penetrates the inner soul with convicting power. It is with the transforming sword of truth that the Messiah triumphs over his enemies (Rev. 19:11–21). In the final drama of history we read that the nations walk by the light of God and bring their treasures into the city of God (Rev. 21:24–26). What an amazing transformation that is—the nations that once opposed the kingdom of God are now bringing their treasures into the kingdom!

After the Messiah’s crucifixion, God raised him from the dead; likewise God will raise all humanity from the dead in that final day. The trumpet will sound! The dead will resurrect! (1 Cor. 15:51–52). At that time everyone will face the judgment of God. The Scriptures say, “I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books” (Rev. 20:12).

The Messiah warned that the final judgment is the great divide between those who embrace Jesus and the kingdom of God and those who reject that way. The Messiah likens to goats those who do not serve the poor, oppressed, hungry, thirsty, sick, naked, and imprisoned. These goats will receive just judgment. The sheep are those who visit the sick, care for the naked, comfort the prisoners, and provide food and water for the hungry and thirsty. They will be invited into the eternal kingdom that God has prepared (Matt. 25:31–46), and they will reign with the Messiah forever (Rev. 22:5).

The Bible refers to a new heaven and a new earth. That will be the final consummation of all things under the authority of Jesus the Messiah. At that time the redeemed earth and heaven will be united. In the grand conclusion of history, the Bible proclaims, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. . . . I am making everything new” (Rev. 21:3–5).

When I concluded my presentation, the chairperson said, “We did not know this about Jesus; we need to research Christian archives to explore these matters further!” In subsequent interviews with the media, they pressed me on the kind of political system Christians are putting in place to prepare for the second coming of Jesus. I insisted that no political systems can contain the kingdom of God; the church is a community of redeemed and forgiven sinners who meet in Jesus’ name and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a people of the kingdom of God within the various political systems. We are like salt, signs of the kingdom among the nations that will be fulfilled when Jesus comes again.

Apocalyptic Eschatology

Iranian political Mahdism is only one Islamic apocalyptic eschatology; there are others as well. For example, in 1881 Mohammad Ahmad in Sudan declared himself to be the Mahdi. His eschatological vision of extending Islamic peace throughout Sudan and the whole world was the theological grist for wars that devastated huge regions of Sudan and enormously challenged Anglo-Egyptian authority. In the last half century, especially in relation to the emergence of the State of Israel, there has been an enormous increase in both Muslim and Christian apocalyptic eschatology. The Temple Mount and Jerusalem are prominent in the apocalyptic literature for both communities, as well as for Jewish Zionism. All three communities are inspired by biblical apocalyptic literature, especially in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation; Muslims also refer to the Qur’an and the Hadith in developing their apocalyptic scenarios.

Jerusalem is prominent in the apocalyptic eschatology of Christian Zionism. The Antichrist dominates in the apocalyptic end time, and he is the desecrator of the Jewish temple. Therefore the Al-Aqsa Mosque must be removed from the Temple Mount, where the Third Temple must be built in preparation for the second coming of Christ. How else could the Antichrist desecrate the temple? An enormous army of the enemies of Israel will attack Jerusalem, led by Gog and Magog. That will be the trigger that will initiate the second coming of Christ, who will intervene dramatically, destroying the armies arrayed against Israel, cleansing the temple, and overthrowing the Antichrist. Jesus will appear on the Mount of Olives and inaugurate a thousand-year reign of peace that will extend throughout the world.

The Temple Mount and Jerusalem are also prominent within some expressions of Jewish Zionism. These Zionists anticipate that the Third Temple will be built upon the Temple Mount, which will be the prelude to the coming of the long-awaited Messiah.

Likewise, a widely held view among Muslims is that when Jesus returns, he will appear in Jerusalem. Some populist writings proclaim the Jews to be the Antichrist; after all, Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah (Christ). In these scenarios the Jewish occupation of Jerusalem is viewed as a core dimension of the Zionist Antichrist movement. In order for Jesus to return to earth, Muslims must free Jerusalem from dominion by non-Muslims, thereby creating a region of peace that is preparatory to the return of Christ.

The revenge-minded forces of Antichrist, however, will form a vast army that will slay Muslims throughout the earth. This heinous one-eyed monster with “Infidel” inscribed upon his forehead might appear at any time with his wily schemes to decimate the Ummah. Some scenarios have the Antichrist allied with Gog and Magog in a vicious global anti-Muslim alliance. Astounding natural upheavals will sweep the world; the sun will rise in the west! Faithful Muslims will flee to Jerusalem, which the Muslims have freed from the Antichrist forces. They will even come from Mecca and Medina, thereby uniting these three holy cities as the Muslim faithful worship together in Jerusalem.

Then the Mahdi will appear in Jerusalem to lead the prayers.
of the besieged Muslim remnant. And Jesus will return to earth leading a massive army of angelic warriors. He will slay the Antichrist and all his vast armies that are advancing on Jerusalem. As victor he will defer to the leadership of the Mahdi and pray in the great mosque in Jerusalem. He will break all crosses and kill all pigs, as well as destroy all synagogues and churches. For fifty years he will reign in Jerusalem, extending the rule of Islam throughout the earth. Then Jesus will die and be buried by Muhammad’s grave in Medina, awaiting the final resurrection of the dead.14

Given the key significance of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount in these end-time scenarios as viewed by Muslims, Christian Zionists, and Jewish Zionists, it is not surprising that the Mount has been a pernicious stumbling block to Palestinian-Jewish peace initiatives ever since the Jewish occupation of Jerusalem in 1967. However, although these Jerusalem-centric apocalyptic eschatologies enjoy enormous popularity, there are also powerful voices within the Christian and Muslim theological worlds that vigorously disagree. The renowned Al-Azhar University in Egypt condemns such apocalyptic eschatology,15 there are also Christian scholars who forthrightly object to the hermeneutical approach of Christian Zionists to passages such as Daniel 9:27 and Ezekiel 38 and 39.16

The Final Judgment

In all Islamic eschatology, the final judgment is the defining climax of history and the world. The Qur’an is replete with warnings about “that hour.” This is in harmony with the Islamic view of history. The parents of humanity, Adam and Eve, were created in paradise. When they took the forbidden fruit, God sent them to earth for a period of testing. The test is Islam, which is the curriculum providing instruction on right belief and conduct. Two angels are assigned to each person to record whether the person is submitting to the curriculum. Those who pass the test will be rewarded with paradise at the final judgment. Those who fail will be assigned to hell. So history is a parenthesis between being sent out of paradise and a return to paradise. History and the earth terminate at the final judgment, when the testing period is over.17

The role of Jesus in his second coming, as well as that of his associate, the Mahdi, is to prepare the world for the final judgment. Qur’anic references to the eschatological role of Jesus, however, are obscure. The Qur’an indicates that Jesus was taken to heaven without crucifixion and death, yet there is a reference to his death and resurrection (19:33). He is also a sign of the final judgment, when the testing of all but God will endure.18

The Qur’anic and Hadith scenarios of “that day” are complex, and the ‘ulama are not in consistent agreement. The main events of that day, however, seem to be the following: the first trumpet will sound, the mountains will be crushed to powder, and the sky will be rent apart. On that terrifying day, all humanity, all living things, the earth and universe—all will be obliterated. Only God will remain. He alone! Nothing else, for God alone is sovereign. It is a mystery how long this silence of obliteration of all but God will endure.18

Then at last there will be a second trumpet blast, and God will raise the dead of all ages so that all may meet their judgment. Eight angels will bring forth the judgment throne. Everyone will stand on a vast plain facing that throne in absolute terror. The books will be opened, and the records of good and wrong will be read, every day a page in each person’s book, one book recording the wrong deeds and another the good (69:13–37). Muhammad will be the first to be resurrected so that he can fulfill his role as intercessor for the Muslims. The judgment might go on for as long as 50,000 years. God will pass judgment and assign each person to hell or paradise. There are seven levels of hell and eight levels of paradise. Some scenarios have persons moving upward through the various levels as they are purged of evil through the fires of hell.19

And then when the judgment is finally complete, earth will be obliterated; its function as the arena for human testing will have been fulfilled.20

The Escaton!

It is obligatory for Muslims to repeat the Fatiha (the opening surah of the Qur’an) sixteen times daily with face to the ground. These recitations occur during the five daily prayer times. The Fatiha pleads for guidance so that all will be well on the day of judgment. That prayer is the soul of Qur’anic eschatology.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray that the kingdom of God might come on earth as it is in heaven. New Testament eschatology is based on confident anticipation of the fulfillment of that prayer.

Notes

1. David Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature (Syracuse: Univ. of Syracuse Press, 2005), pp. 1–12.
12. Ibid., pp. 104–5.
15. Cook, Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature, pp. 1–7.
19. Ibid., pp. 73, 83–97.
20. Wagner, Opening the Qur’an, p. 243.
Eschatology and Mission: A Jewish Missions Perspective

Susan Perlman

In a scene from Fiddler on the Roof, the Jews of the village of Anatevka have just been told they must leave or risk another pogrom. One of the citizens of the village asks the local rabbi, “Rabbi, we’ve been waiting for the Messiah all our lives. Wouldn’t this be a good time for him to come?” The rabbi responds, “We’ll have to wait for him someplace else.”

The Jewish Hope

The coming of the Messiah has been the greatest hope of the Jewish nation throughout the ages. The daily synagogue service expresses that hope in the following prayer: “Let the shoot of thy servant David sprout up quickly and raise up his horn with thy salvation, for all day long we hope for thy succor.”1 The great twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Maimonides included that hope in his Thirteen Articles of Faith: “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.”2

But what will the Messiah’s coming bring? The following poem from the Middle Ages reflects a sense of ambiguity toward the Messiah and future events.

Hurry, Messiah of God, why do you tarry?
Behold, they wait for you with flowing tears,
Their tears of blood are like mighty streams,
For you, O Prince, yearns every heart and tongue!

Awake, our Messiah, rise and shine, mount
A galloping horse, hitch up a royal carriage,
Woe, all my bones are broken and are scattered.

But should you ride an ass, my lord, here’s my advice:
Go back to sleep, our prince, and calm your heart,
Let the end wait and the vision be sealed.3

The poem conveys a poignant combination of longing and uncertainty. As early as the time of the Talmud, many rabbis had concluded that errors in messianic calculation could have such serious consequences that it would be better not to try to figure out when the Messiah would come: “Cursed be they who calculate the end, because they argue that since the end has arrived, and the Messiah has not come, he will never come” (Sanhedrin 97b).

The Jewish Missions Response

Our belief that Jesus is the Messiah removes the uncertainty that unbelieving Jews experience, and we have a different response to our own question of when he will return. Our uncertainty about the timing of future events is outweighed by the certainty of what he wants us to do in the interim.

Historically, Jewish missions in the United States and in Europe—while not attempting to set a date and time of Messiah’s return—saw his coming as a key motivator in their mission endeavor. An excellent record of this perspective appears in Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000, by University of North Carolina professor Yaakov Ariel. His chapter “Eschatology and Mission” features the work of German Methodist Arno Gaebelein: “In the 1890s, an unusual religious group convened on the Lower East Side of New York: immigrant Jews who had accepted the Christian faith yet continued to retain Jewish rites and customs. Established by Methodist missionaries, . . . [Gaebelein’s Hope of Israel mission] was one manifestation of a larger movement that came to evangelize the Jews of America at that time. It advocated a premillennialist messianic theology and emphasized the central role of the Jews in the divine program for the End Times. The messianic belief shaped the character of the missionary movement, its rhetoric, symbols, the publications it produced, and its appeals to supporters as well as to potential converts.” Parallels can be seen in European and British missionary movements, which included “German pietist societies aimed at converting the Jews, as well as British missions to the Jews, which were also evangelical and premillennialist in nature. Motivated by a biblical-messianic understanding of the Jewish people and their role in history, the movement to evangelize the Jews in Britain started at the beginning of the nineteenth century with much strength and enthusiasm.”4

Interest in Jewish evangelism steadily decreased throughout Europe in the following century, and by the end of World War II the American movement had become much more influential. Yet it too waned in the shadow of the Holocaust, and many major denominations lost interest in Jewish missions as liberal theology, universalism, and two-covenant theology became more and more prevalent. While the establishment of Israel in 1948 renewed the interest of many Christians, perhaps this past century’s greatest wave of Jews coming to faith in Jesus occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s as an outgrowth of the U.S. Jesus People movement. At that time, tens of thousands of Jews came to faith in Christ.

End Times Prophecy and Jewish Evangelism

Apart from the Bible, the most influential book in bringing Jews to Christ during the Jesus People movement (in which Jews for Jesus was born) was The Late Great Planet Earth, by Hal Lindsey.5 Jews for Jesus conducted a survey of new Jewish believers, and one of the questions was, “What one book other than the Bible influenced you to consider Christ?” Lindsey’s book was the overwhelming response.6

Regardless of how accurately one believes Lindsey’s book reflects biblical teaching, one need not look far for examples of Jewish people who came to Christ through reading it. Rich Nichol, messianic rabbi at Congregation Ruach Israel in Needham, Massachusetts, and a leader in the messianic congregational movement, recalls that era: “I was nineteen years old and I had read a book that changed everything for me. It was The Late Great Planet Earth by Hal Lindsey. . . . Lindsey thrilled me and my friends

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with his predictions of Israel’s soon-coming war with Russia.”7
Tuvya Zaretsky, a senior staff member with Jews for Jesus, has a similar memory of the book:

The book was given to me by the stepmother of a guy I grew up with and went to high school with. She had written in the front cover, “I’m giving this to you because I cherish you.” Now we’d never spoken about spiritual issues, so I was wondering why she gave me this book. It was some time in the summer of 1970. I didn’t want to read the thing. I can’t tell you what prompted me to want to pull the book out, but one evening I dug it out of the closet and started to read. And I read the whole book that night. The very next morning I got up to go to the campus where I was working, and there was a sign, a big banner over the cafeteria, that said, “Hal Lindsey, author of Late Great Planet Earth, speaking here tonight.” I’d been praying that God would show me who He is, and I really felt that this was the answer to my prayer. It was only days later that I prayed to receive Jesus.8

These are just two of many Jews who came to Christ who were greatly influenced by Lindsey’s book. Whether or not another popular book with a heavy eschatological premise has had or will have similar effects remains to be seen.

Diverse Views with a Common Theme

Those engaged in missionary work among the Jewish people today span the eschatological spectrum. They do not all hold to a dispensational premillennial position. They do, however, all hold to a belief in a future for the people of Israel. Fred Klett of the Presbyterian Church of America, a Gentile missionary among the Jewish people and a church planter, put it this way:

The Jewish people are an unreached people group who need the Good News proclaimed to them, regardless of one’s eschatological position. All New Covenant believers agree that our message will be vindicated at the last trumpet, and that is certainly an encouragement in the face of the misunderstanding and even hostility we experience in Jewish missions. One day every knee will bow, and, sadly, those who oppose us will wish they had believed our message. For those of us who hold to an eschatology that views Romans 9–11 as promising a future revival of ethnic Israel, there is good reason to be optimistic. The promise that we will see Jewish revival at some time in history, that we could possibly see it in our own time, and that, until then, there will always be a Jewish remnant provides real hope and encouragement that our labors in advancing Messiah’s kingdom among the Jewish people are not in vain.9

Steve Cohen, a Jewish believer in Jesus, is director of The Apple of His Eye, a Jewish ministry based in St. Louis that is affiliated with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Cohen comments: “While the issue for millennials is a matter of great debate, the biblical mandate for Jewish missions today for Lutherans is not based on fulfilling eschatological interests but simply in direct obedience to the Great Commission. And while some question the role of Israel in the light of the end of days, we in The Apple of His Eye see the slippery slope of universalism creeping in, which must be rejected, just as the so-called two-covenant theory needs to be rejected. The church has not replaced Israel; rather, God’s promises are being fulfilled that Israel is to be a light to the nations so that Gentiles might also hear the Gospel and respond in faith.”10

Such Lutheran sentiments are not restricted to such recent vintage. From a 1901 Lutheran Jewish missions conference—falling between the beginnings of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel—comes the following exhortation:

Let us not as Christians jealously contemplate his [the Jew’s] brilliant achievements, rather aid him: The end of all will be spiritual blessings, whatever the preliminary temporal agonies. Let us wax warm at the beautiful hopes of the late Zionist movement. Would to God Israel had its Palestine already! The rest of the earth has ample room for the Gentiles. As soon as we touch on the question of Israel, spiritualities and temporalities intermingle inextricably. It seems unavoidably. We can separate church and state. Israel not. Israel’s theocratic genius and inclination did not fit in the Graeco Roman era of history, nor finds a place in the present, half finished Germanic era which since about 1200 A.D. moves on toward its goal. Israel’s theocracy was, and we can hardly evade the thought that it will yet again, in a spiritual antitype, rise up. Israel is a people of the past and of the future.11

Richard L. Pratt, Jr., professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida, describes the Reformed perspective on eschatology and Jewish evangelism: “The Reformed tradition has typically affirmed a very important eschatological role for ethnic Israel. . . . Calvinists have strongly affirmed that the land promises to Israel will be fulfilled when redeemed Israel possesses the entire earth.” Pratt also notes that while amillennialism and postmillennialism do not make much out of the reestablishment of the State of Israel, they do see the new heavens and new earth “as the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes of a land.”12

Pratt cites Reformed writers such as Charles Hodge, who said, “The second great event, which, according to the common faith of the church, is to precede the second advent of Christ, is the national conversion of the Jews.”13 Pratt points out that this kind of conversion can come only through the preaching of the Gospel. He then puts forth two significant implications of Reformed eschatology in relation to mission to the Jewish people. One is that the promises of God are real and fulfilled through the work of the Messiah and that “every hope of the faithful remnant of [ethnic] Israel will come to complete fruition in the return of Messiah.” Second, “like Gentiles, Jews can experience the future glory of the kingdom of God only by receiving the gospel of Messiah now. As a result, Christians have an urgent responsibility to bring the gospel to Jewish communities.”14

It is significant that A. Boyd Luter, writing from a premillennial dispensational perspective, emphasizes a hopeful future for Israel and for the nations, including Arab nations. He writes of the fulfillment of Romans 11:26 in an end-time turning of Jewish people to Jesus, with a concomitant blessing of the nations. “In the overall biblical usage, ‘all the nations’ is picked up as the chord that is replayed over and over in the NT in the offering of the blessing/redemptive aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant to all who would believe in Jesus Christ. . . . So, not only is there a
past historic interconnectedness between Israel and the nations dating back to Noah’s family, well before the national aspects of the Abrahamic covenant; it is also the intention of the Lord’s redemptive plan that the Abrahamic blessing provide the basis for a present and future connection through faith . . . in Christ . . . It is a blessing that can, one by one, person by person, overcome even the tensions between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.”

Luter presents some questions for discussion, which include the following: “List blessings to the nations, especially the Arab peoples, that occurred because of the Abrahamic covenant.” Israel’s blessings, for Luter, come upon even those nations that count themselves as Israel’s enemies in the present time; Israel’s future includes those same nations as their people, as well as the Jewish people, turn to Christ.

It is also important to note that some proponents of dispensationalism distance themselves from “Christian Zionism,” which is sometimes thought to be identical to a premillennial dispensational framework. From the introduction to the book I have just quoted, one supporting a future for national and ethnic Israel, comes this critique: “The other extreme, the opposite of replacement theology, is Christian Zionism. The views of those who are a part of this movement could be summed up as ‘Israel, right or wrong!’ These Christians have made idols of the Jewish people and the state of Israel. Since God gave the land to the Jews and now the state of Israel is in existence, whatever the Jewish state does to those within its borders should go unquestioned, regardless of human rights concerns. Some within this camp have advocated a view called ‘two-covenant theology,’ believing that Jewish people are saved simply by being Jewish and being connected to the Abrahamic covenant, while Gentiles must be saved through faith in Christ.”

**Messianic Jews and Eschatology**

Most Jewish believers in Jesus, while not unified around one eschatological view, believe that the return of their people to the land of Israel is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. While they hold differing views on how the State of Israel should respond in the Middle East conflict, most see Israel’s survival as evidence of God’s providential purpose in preserving his people, bringing them back to the land and giving them renewed sovereignty. Whether they live in Israel or in the Diaspora, Jewish followers of Jesus are strongly attached to Israel and long for peace and security in the region. Those who do live in Israel serve in the army, put their children through the Israeli school system, and contribute as good citizens to the life of the country. Jewish believers around the world share the passion and the pain of Zion, and they pray for a solution.

Among some there is a “millennial fever” that does not always promote sympathy with the present suffering of Palestinians. Others are deeply compassionate and involved in the ministry of reconciliation. Many, while sympathetic to the Zionist position, are cautious in expressing political and prophetic views. For them, a healthy emphasis on evangelism and unity in the body of Messiah overrides political and prophetic opinion. A variety of prophetic expectations and political opinions may be found among Jewish believers. There is no unified view on how to interpret biblical prophecies, let alone how the biblical data mesh with contemporary events.

While the majority of Jewish believers in Israel would be unwilling to concede territory, there have been several initiatives at the local level for reconciliation with Arab Christians. Arab and Jewish pastors, young people, and women meet regularly to pray and share one another’s lives. Friendships that cross the political divide are powerful expressions of the reconciling love of the Messiah.

Too many Christians the world over find it easy to sympathize with one people group at the expense of the other. The best way to champion the cause of Jews or Arabs in Israel is to champion the cause of the Gospel among both, remembering that the land promised to Abraham is the home for both Jewish and Arab peoples.

**A Plan Forward**

The Jewish community today remains uncertain about the coming of Messiah, the future of Israel, and even whether there is a world to come, an afterlife. Yet we can observe and affirm the following principles:

- In a postmodern society where uncertainty rules the present and casts doubt on the future, proclaiming the blessed hope meets the unrealized longing of the human heart and offers an identity and the promise of a destiny.
- In a church that often ignores the importance of Jewish evangelism, proclaiming the blessed hope clarifies the position and calling of the Jewish people as having a special role in God’s plan.
- In a climate of moral degeneration and intellectual stagnation, proclaiming the blessed hope gives people a cause worth living for.
- In a period when mission methods may become tired and mundane, preaching the blessed hope allows a dramatic approach to proclamation, which enables us to use great attention-getting creativity.

There are not a great many people proclaiming the second coming of Christ to Jewish people today. Yet this was the preaching of the early church.

Bertrand Russell once said, “Extreme hopes are born of extreme misery.” We are in a time of economic depression and of extraordinary violence, injustice, and suffering. Would this not be a good time to point out that the coming of Jesus is a blessed hope? Even if we return to great economic prosperity, people will still suffer from spiritual emptiness, insecurity, and fear. Our world is scarier now than ever before for the person without that blessed hope.

Those of us who are missionaries to the Jewish people have been sent to tell our people a message that they think they have already heard and to raise an issue that they think they have already decided. Sadly, even those who are looking for Messiah are not looking for Jesus. Nevertheless, we are called to proclaim the Good News to the Jewish people—a task that can be difficult,
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*Paul H. De Neui, editor*

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This is the sixth volume in a series produced from the annual SEANET Missiological Forum held in Chiang Mai, Thailand. All authors included here write from many years of experience as Evangelical mission theologians, scholars, pastors and practitioners working within Asian urban Buddhist contexts. This book is divided into three sections with the first focused on foundational issues of ministry within the framework of Asian Buddhist cities. The second section includes four chapters addressing several contextual issues specific to peoples within Asian Buddhist cities. The final section includes three chapters on the topic of strategic means of evangelization found useful in specific Asian urban Buddhist contexts.
especially when we effectively communicate who Christ is and why he came, and our people still angrily reject the Gospel.

Much of postmodern thinking seems to imply that we can measure success by how happy people are with our approach. Unfortunately, many in churches see an angry response to the Gospel as a sign of failure, thinking that, to be effective, we need to avoid the unpleasantness of confrontation. But it is not an either/or outcome. It is not realistic to think that if we do evangelism right, those whom we evangelize are bound to be happy about it. And it is not realistic to surmise that all will respond the same way.

When we make Jesus an unavoidable issue, our people will have to decide whether he is the Messiah. And it hurts us as we see so many not wanting to hear. That pain is only intensified by the frustration that we feel because we have been taught to be polite, not to shout; to be reasonable, not to insist; and to make friends, not to proclaim. But the very approach that one person finds so offensive may be just what is needed by another. Frankly, if we are to be successful, we need to be prepared to shock our people into awareness. Polite discourse is not enough. We must shake off the ordinary and embrace the difficult thing if we want to reach Jews and others for Christ.

Most Jewish missions do not articulate a specific position on eschatology, and Jews for Jesus does not promote a particular eschatological view in our statement of faith but has room for a variety of convictions in this area. However, most in our field feel it is important to include in our message the fact that the Lord is returning—that the Messiah not only has come, but is coming again.

It would be exciting to have more details about our Messiah’s return, but much more important is the expectation, the longing, and the joy that hope brings to our hearts. The fact that the glorified, holy Messiah of God could step through the door of heaven at any moment must fill us with an unrelenting and impassioned hope. It is intended by God to be the most pressing, incessant motivation for holy living and aggressive ministry, and it is the greatest cure for lethargy and apathy.

I was part of a group that met in 2004 under the auspices of the Lausanne Committee in Pattaya, Thailand, to hammer out a document on Jewish evangelism. Among other things, we recognized that one of the challenges facing our work is in the area of eschatology. Our group’s comments on this subject provide a fitting conclusion to this article.

Evangelicals have different interpretations of Old and New Testament prophetic texts concerning the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Some are hesitant to speak about the fulfillment of specific prophecies with regard to the establishment of the present-day state of Israel. Others are not. Some await further fulfillment of prophecy in the spiritual restoration of ethnic Israel and the coming of the Messianic kingdom. Others do not apply these prophetic texts exclusively either to ethnic Israel or to the church. This view does not detract from the reality of the promises but is open to how they will be fulfilled, either to the church or to the Jewish people in their homeland.

Indeed, expectation of the imminent return of Christ should be a strong inspiration for the task of Jewish evangelism. He will return in glory and power to fulfill His purposes of judgement and salvation. Before that day, the gospel must first go out to all nations and to all Israel. This glorious future hope should guide all Christians in setting evangelism as their priority both now, and until the Lord returns in glory.

Notes
1. This prayer is the fifteenth of the Eighteen Benedictions, or Amidah, recited in the daily synagogue service. The Amidah can be found in various English translations.
5. Hal Lindsey, with C. C. Carlson, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).
8. Tuvya Zaretsky, personal communication with the author, August 8, 2003.
13. Ibid., p. 184, citing Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3:805. Fred Klett quotes the same passage from Hodge, along with others such as: “As the restoration of the Jews is not only a most desirable event, but one which God has determined to accomplish, Christians should keep it constantly in view even in their labors for the conversion of the Gentiles” (www.chaim.org/reformers.html).
17. For example, Jews for Jesus executive director David Brinkner articulated his eschatological views in the book Future Hope: A Jewish Christian Look at the End of the World (San Francisco: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 1999), published with this disclaimer: “Most views expressed in this book enjoy wide acceptance by followers of Jesus throughout the world. However, some of the subject matter enters areas where honest differences of opinion exist even among believers in Jesus. As to those details, this book expresses the views of the author and not necessarily those of the Jews for Jesus organization” (title page).
The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology on Evangelical Missionary Theory and Praxis from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present

Michael Pocock

Premillennial eschatology has deeply influenced the missiology and praxis of evangelicals, particularly from North America, from the nineteenth century to the present. The eschatological orientation of missionaries and their sending churches affects their view of the Christian life, the direction of their work, their hopes for the future, and their relationship to the culture of nonbelievers around them. The missionary impact of a particular eschatological orientation may have many positive effects, such as energizing workers and providing focus and hope for a victorious outcome of Great Commission activity. Individuals, denominations, and missionary agencies holding almost every form of millennial expectation have made valuable contributions to missionary theory and practice. There may also be unintended negative consequences of a particular outlook.

In his monumental work Transforming Mission, David Bosch fairly traces the historical development and impact on mission of three types of millennial expectations: amillennial, postmillennial, and premillennial.1 Greg Herrick and Darrell Bock explain those positions from inside the premillennial camp, as does David Hesselgrave in his Paradigms in Conflict.2 Bosch distinguishes the term “millennial” from simple identification with “eschatology” or “apocalypticism.” The last term refers to Shakers and Millerites and, I would add, to the best-selling but overly dramatic popularizations of what many understand to be standard representations of dispensational premillennialism, such as those depicted in Hal Lindsey’s Late Great Planet Earth and the fictional Left Behind series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.3

Premillennial thinking, “the vision of a golden age within history,” as Bosch puts it,4 has had a recurring emphasis in the history of the church and missions. It is a significant part of eschatology that more broadly includes the direction of time, the eternal state of individuals, the future status of this world’s kingdoms, and the full realization of God’s kingdom. The triumph of God’s kingdom through Christ and his Gospel over the principalities and powers of this world constitutes a large part of the biblical basis of the Christian movement. For Christians, it is the hope that energizes. The manner and timing of this triumph, whether through transformed individuals in the body of Christ or ultimately in a worldwide rule of Christ in history, has occupied the minds and hearts of Christians through the ages and has shaped their mission to the world. This article will not deal with millennial expectation through the ages. It is limited to the development of premillennial, primarily dispensational, eschatology and its impact on missions from the late nineteenth century to the present.

Premillennial Eschatology Defined

Premillennialists live in expectation of a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth, together with all those who have trusted in Christ through the ages or responded in faith to the all-sufficiency of God’s provision previous to the first advent of Christ (Rev. 20:1–10; Heb. 11:39–40). It will include believers from every people group (Rev. 5:8–9; 7:9–17). Many of these will have been saved during a previous period marked by great distress and tribulation. The millennium will be a period of perfect righteousness and equity. This golden age will be facilitated by a binding of Satan that limits, but apparently does not eliminate, the fateful possibilities of sinful human nature itself, even among the redeemed. At the close of this period, Satan is again released and draws a massive number of people who respond to his deception, oppose God, and war against his faithful people. But both Satan and his followers are overthrown and destroyed (Rev. 20:1–10).

The millennium is preceded by the coming of Christ to initiate this rule; hence “premillennial” refers to the fact that only Christ can initiate and rule over this golden age (Rev. 20:4–6; Matt. 24). The millennium will be characterized by the conditions described in Isaiah 11 and 60–62, in which Israel, joined by those of every other people and nation, will live in harmony and peace with one another and with God ruling through his Messiah.

Premillennialists understand the reestablishment of Israel in its land during the millennium to be part of the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:15–17; 15:18–21) and also with Israel. Abraham was to become a great nation that would be both the object and the vehicle of God’s blessing on all peoples. God reaffirmed this covenant several times to the patriarchs in Genesis and later to David, promising that his offspring would reign over Israel, even though they would do wrong and need severe discipline (2 Sam. 7:8–16). God’s loving kindness toward David’s heir would never end, and his throne would be established forever. Premillennialists also believe the conditions of restored Israel, following the exile predicted in Jeremiah 30–31, were never completely fulfilled by the nation’s historical return from captivity. Complete fulfillment awaits the yet-future millennial period.

Although it seems that the issue of the millennium would be at the heart of premillennial eschatology and therefore of its missionary outreach, in fact its adherents are more oriented on a daily basis to the responsibilities of Christ’s followers to live holy lives and to witness to the regenerating power of the Gospel while they wait for Christ’s return and work in the light of Christ’s command to disciple the nations (Matt. 24:1–51; 28:18–20). Premillennialists are, as the name suggests, more concerned about what they should be doing before the millennium than during that period. They understand from the words of Peter that human history, replete with so many evils and difficulties, continues primarily because of the patience of God. New Testament believers were already living in eschatological time—time that had a purpose and an end.5 Time itself was, and remains, a redemptive opportunity for Christians and humankind. As
outlined in 2 Peter 3:1–15, time has a both a missionary and a sanctificational purpose. Present time represents the patience of God allowing for the preaching of the Gospel.

Those who hold to a premillennial eschatology are not a monolithic block. They are generally distinguished as *historical premillennialists* versus *dispensational premillennialists*. The former consider an actual millennial, or substantial, earthly reign of Christ on earth to be the logical outcome of taking relevant Scripture in a normal fashion, following its “plain sense.” They utilize a grammatical, historical, and literary hermeneutic that, if applied consistently, rather than allegorically, results in no other conclusion than that there will be a millennium and that Christ’s coming must precede its initiation.6 Historical premillennialists do not claim to be dispensational in their view of Scripture teaching.

Dispensational premillennialists believe in a literal millennial reign of Christ on earth, holding that this rule represents the fullest manifestation of God’s kingdom in its earthly sphere, the final dispensation before the eternal state. History is the unfolding of

### Bible and prophecy conferences gave rise to the Bible institute movement, with its distinctly missionary emphasis.

several distinctive administrations, economies, or dispensations in which God sets up certain conditions in which human beings are tested in regard to their faithfulness to the provisions God has granted for relating to himself.7

Dispensationalism is really intended to have a ministerial, or helpful, effect in understanding the progress or stages of revelation, a task all biblical interpreters must face and that they have resolved in various ways. Some dispensationalists have communicated a sense that their system also has a magisterial function. This term implies that all Scripture must be made to fit their particular paradigm, which becomes a misapplication of the general tenor of the system. According to Charles Ryrie, neither dispensations (whether seven, five, or three) nor premillennialism itself is the sine qua non of dispensationalism, but rather the distinction between Israel and the church.8

More recently, *progressive dispensationalists* have emphasized that the purpose of God for these two peoples overlaps without extinguishing the existence of ethnic Israel. The reality is that only those, and all those, who share the faith of Abraham are the spiritually authentic people of God (Rom. 4:16–17; Gal. 3:6–9).9 Although all who believe in Jesus as Savior and Messiah, whether ethnically Jews or others, are one in Christ and part of the same body, Jews who have not accepted the Messiah are nevertheless related to the program of God. They are, so to speak, “God’s people on the shelf.” They have a definite future when they will be regathered in their land, come to recognition of their Messiah, and reign with him in his millennial rule on earth (Rom. 9–11, esp. 11:25–32).

In summary, the foremost conviction of premillennialists about the future is that Jesus is returning. A second conviction concerns “the millennial part of premillennial. This is the belief that after Jesus comes, he will establish and rule over a kingdom on the earth for a millennium, that is, for a thousand years.”10

### Premillennialism and Missionary Interest

Bosch notes that “from the beginning there was an intimate correlation between mission and millennial expectation.”11 He was referring to the manifestation of postmillennial hope found among the Puritans and in the First and Second Great Awakenings. Millennialism was very evident from the birth of modern Protestant missions with Englishman William Carey and the American Adoniram Judson in the early nineteenth century. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover the same concern for mission found in premillennial expectation born out of the ministry of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) at about the same time. Premillennialism represented a return to the millennialism of the early church and of post-Reformation thinkers. Darby’s whole objective was to return a departed church and mission to its earliest New Testament characteristics.

There had been versions of an epochal, or dispensational, approach to the revelational development of Scripture in Pierre Poiret (1646–1719), John Edwards (1639–1716),12 and Isaac Watts (1674–1748),13 but Darby, an erudite man, was more systematic and prolific in his writings. He produced over fifty works, including an entirely original translation of the whole Bible. He traveled widely in Europe and North America to popularize his views and began meetings of like-minded believers for Bible studies that eventually grew into the Plymouth Brethren movement. By 1921 the Brethren assemblies began their own missionary sending agency, Christian Missions in Many Lands.

Darby was an Anglican priest, but he became disaffected by what he viewed as a lack of authenticity and New Testament practice in Anglicanism. (Similar views led to the rise of the free churches in Europe and later the house church movement in China.) Darby’s influence spread rapidly, partly through his own itinerate ministry and partly because those in the movement, wherever they lived, considered themselves responsible and capable as a “priesthood of believers” to spread the Gospel and found fellowships of those who came to Christ. Darby’s emphasis on Bible study and literal interpretation became a mark of dispensational premillennialism.14 With their low profile and utilization of lay teacher-pastors, the Brethren assemblies were well suited to highly oppositional or antagonistic contexts.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, evangelicals became increasingly concerned about the decline of faith and the lack of understanding of the Word of God in mainline denominations. This concern prompted a number of movements emphasizing a literal biblical interpretation. What Darby contributed was not only an integrative system for understanding Scripture in its plain sense but also, through his biblical emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, a ground for confidence that ordinary laypeople could study the Bible, understand it for themselves through inductive Bible study, and engage in ministry without any authorization outside the local assembly.

Ministries in North America and Great Britain by D. L. Moody (1837–99) before and after the U.S. Civil War brought about major turning to Christ, as well as added interest and need for more thorough biblical grounding. Bible and prophecy conferences in the northern United States and Canada provided opportunities for understanding the Bible and constituted the more sedate northern version of the earlier camp meetings in the American south during the Second Great Awakening. These conferences and some of their prominent Bible teachers gave rise to the Bible institute movement, with its distinctly missionary emphasis, beginning in 1882.15

An ongoing series of Bible and prophecy conferences at
Niagara, New York, and later in Mount Hermon, Massachusetts, attracted the attention of many evangelicals from 1875 onward. \(^{16}\) Respected Bible teachers and pastors from various denominations—Baptist A. J. Gordon, Presbyterians A. T. Pierson and James H. Brookes, Methodist William Blackstone, Congregationalist D. L. Moody, Presbyterian and later founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance A. B. Simpson, as well as C. I. Scofield, another Congregationalist—spoke and interacted with one another at these conferences. Their emphasis on interpreting the Bible in its plain sense, along with clear attention to the person and writings of J. N. Darby and other British Brethren like George Müller, moved them toward a dispensational premillennial understanding of the unfolding of Scripture and the path into the future.

The Niagara conferences did not adopt Darby’s emphasis on separation from existing church bodies. Although Moody was probably the first to establish nondenominational and independent Bible churches, most participants continued in their denominations, united in loose fellowship through their interest in biblical studies and prophecy, missions, and social action. Dispensationalism has not been, as some have charged, a divisive movement. But because of a great need for trained workers for mission fields and because of the extensive preparation then required by established mission boards, together with a perceived lack of schools emphasizing biblical studies, Bible institutes sprang up, many founded by the conference speakers of the Niagara and Mount Hermon conferences.

There was no rigid understanding of a dispensational scheme until 1909, when Scofield, one of the prominent Bible teachers at the Niagara conferences, published his Scofield Reference Bible. \(^{17}\) He was assisted in its editing by a team of able scholars, colleagues of his in Bible teaching ministry. Interpretive notes and helps within the pages of this Bible eventually gave an almost canonical status to the particular dispensational framework it espoused. It unintentionally “locked in” the conceptual framework for dispensationalism and became the Bible of literally millions worldwide. It was revised by Scofield in 1917 and by others in 1967. Scofield was one of the founders of Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924.

Teachers at the Bible and prophetic conferences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not propound a monolithic dispensationalism, but rather saw themselves as working toward better understanding of the whole of biblical revelation. Dispensational premillennialism was advanced in the twentieth century through men like Lewis Sperry Chafer, Dwight Pentecost, John Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie, who could be considered the twentieth-century developers and popularizers of premillennial convictions on a global scale. But Dallas Theological Seminary, in which these men have labored, is only one, albeit a large, seminary among many other seminaries and hundreds of premillennial Bible institutes and colleges in North America founded to prepare Christian workers, pastors, and missionaries.

More recently, Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, part of a group advocating progressive dispensationalism, have emphasized the nature of premillennial dispensationalism as dynamic, rather than static. Whereas earlier dispensationalists held to a rigorous and eternal distinction between the church and Israel, progressives see considerably more continuity between the two, without eliminating a future role for ethnic Israel in a literal millennium along with believers from all nations. \(^{18}\)

Most dispensational premillennialists look favorably on the present existence of the State of Israel. They generally view the existence of Israel today as a remarkable act of God’s providence in preserving the Jews, but not necessarily representative of fulfilled prophecy or the beginning of the millennial kingdom. The return of Israel to Palestine as envisioned by premillennialists is preconditioned on the acceptance of the Messiah (Matt. 23:37–39; Zech. 12:10–14; Rev. 1:7). But the present State of Israel is necessary for the survival of the Jews in the light of repeated attempts in history to exterminate them, most notably in the Holocaust. \(^{19}\) Johannes Verkuyl, himself an amillennialist, identifies strongly with the legitimate need of the Jews for a land, as also for the Palestinian Arabs. He notes, “One must try to understand what it means to the Zionists to be able to return to Palestine after two thousand years of dispersion, and one must join them in rejoicing. But in my mind it is improper to assign a special theological significance to the land of Palestine and view the Jewish return as a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.” \(^{20}\)

Some premillennial Pentecostals, such as John Hagee and Benny Hinn, give unequivocal support for the State of Israel but err in failing to give consideration to the Arab Palestinian case and their equal need for a stable homeland. \(^{21}\) The triumphalistic and apocalyptic Christian Zionism of Hagee and Hal Lindsey is not appropriate. \(^{22}\) Every act of Israel is not justified, nor was it ever, even when their presence in the land was undisputedly legitimate. Christian Zionism as espoused by these men is an example of an unintended consequence of earlier premillennial thinking. In the case of Hagee, it has serious implications for missionary activity, not only because his unqualified support for Israel creates hostility to Christians among Arabs, but also because he believes there is no need for Jews to respond to Jesus as Messiah and Savior, thus creating what has been called a dual-covenant approach to salvation for Jews and Gentiles. \(^{23}\)

**Premillennialism in Missionary Practice**

Premillennialism in the late nineteenth century developed in the context of evangelical concern about rising secularism, the application of Darwinian evolutionary thought to biblical studies, and the general erosion of faith in many institutions of higher learning originally founded for the preparation of ministers. Dynamic, evangelical, yet academically unprepared ministers like D. L. Moody, as well as educated men like A. T. Pierson, were being well received by both the common people and university students such as those related to the YMCA. Although they flocked to Moody’s Northfield summer conferences, there were few places for them to study the Word of God in schools where the Bible was respected as fully authoritative. An interest thus arose in new ministerial and missionary training institutes.
Peters saw the Bible as an inherently missionary book from start to finish and believed that mission itself is based primarily in the character of God.

the generation that completed the Great Commission. They accomplished a great deal but failed in their great ambition. Almost a century later, in 1989, the watchword was restated as “a church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.” Students and mission agencies worldwide responded, resulting in the deployment of thousands and the engagement of many unreached people groups. Premillennialists alone were not the driving force of the AD2000 and Beyond movement (although Luis Bush, its leader, is a graduate of Dallas Seminary), but the emphasis on “closure” based on Jesus’ words “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.”

The Bible Institute Movement

In Equipping for Service, Larry McKinney’s account of the Bible college movement in North America, McKinney shows how the nineteenth-century revivals growing from the ministry of men like D. L. Moody and Reuben H. Torrey developed into Bible and prophetic study conferences like those of Niagara and Mount Hermon. Bible institutes were then established to meet the need for biblically trained evangelistic and missionary workers who had been motivated for service through the ministry of the conferences. The urgency to prepare and send workers grew from two convictions: Christ’s return was imminent (1 Cor. 15:51–52) and the Gospel would and should be preached to all nations before the end would come (Matt. 24:14).

A. B. Simpson formed the first Bible institute in 1882. First known as the Missionary Training Institute for Home and Foreign Missionaries and Evangelists, it later was named Nyack College, the premier mission training school of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The second was the Chicago Evangelistic Society, founded by Moody in 1886. In 1900, after Moody’s death, the school changed its name to Moody Bible Institute.

A. J. Gordon established the Boston Missionary Training School in 1889, later to become Gordon College and Divinity School. Still later, the divinity school merged with the Conwell School of Theology to become the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The proliferation of these institutes was mirrored in Canada with the founding of the Toronto Bible Training School in 1894 and the multiplication of institutes across Canada, more than 75 percent of them west of the Manitoba-Ontario border.

The movement grew rapidly, and by 1960 there were 248 Bible institutes identified in the United States and Canada. A survey that year reported that over 25,000 students were studying in these schools (though not all schools responded to the survey). Today, the Association for Biblical Higher Education reports 200 postsecondary Bible schools and colleges, with an aggregate of 35,000 students. From the beginnings of these schools, we see a definite commitment to missionary education and service. McKinney notes: “The missionary movement over the last one hundred years owes an inestimable debt to the Bible institute, now the Bible college movement.”

Citing S. A. Witmer in 1962, McKinney asserts that about 50 percent of missionaries from North America then in service had been trained in Bible colleges. J. Herbert Kane of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School put it at more than 75 percent. Ironically, Ralph Winter, while recognizing the large numbers of missionaries trained in Bible schools with their premillennial orientation, seems to denigrate their contribution because of their emphasis on evangelistic and church-establishment ministries, the very enterprises he has so brilliantly and effectively promoted for most of his life. Winter recently drew a contrast between the more kingdom-oriented civilizing ministries of college-educated missionaries before 1900, which he now approves, and the work of “agencies drawing on Bible institutes and other non-college people, primarily emphasizing a heaven-oriented, personal fulfillment gospel intended mainly to draw people into the Church.”

Many of the Bible institutes became Christian liberal arts colleges and universities. Major evangelical seminaries emerged from earlier premillennial beginnings in the Bible institute movement. Dallas Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, Ill.), the Seminary and School of Missions of Columbia International University (Columbia, S.C.), Biola University’s Talbot School of Theology (La Mirada, Calif.), Western Seminary (Portland, Ore.), Providence College and Seminary (Otterburne, Man.), and now many large Southern Baptist seminaries are all avowedly premillennial in eschatology. All of them have departments or complete schools of intercultural studies in missions. All of these have poured a constant stream of workers into the global missions movement. These workers, having been formed in the context of Bible colleges and seminaries, have duplicated these institutions as leadership training programs abroad. Fortunately, many have also seen that the institutional manner of training in North America is not necessarily the best for other contexts and have created wide-ranging extension training and church-based leadership training programs.

Premillennial Contributions to Missiology

It is impossible to outline in detail the contributions to missiology made by the faculties of hundreds of premillennial institutions. Here, as a sample, we look briefly at the life and mission focus of two outstanding men: George W. Peters (1907–89) and David J. Hesselgrave (b. 1924).

George Peters. The son of German Mennonite Brethren immigrants from Russia, George Peters grew up in Saskatchewan, Canada.
In the context of revival movements on the prairies of Canada in the early twentieth century, he also learned of premillennialism and of the progress of revelation through successive dispensations.35 His mind and heart turned to missions, which led to a Ph.D. from the Kennedy School of Missions at the Hartford Seminary Foundation, in Hartford, Connecticut. He later joined the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary, becoming one of the earliest professors of mission at a graduate school in North America.

We can summarize Peters’s contribution to missiology through his principal work, A Biblical Theology of Missions, published in 1972 and still in print. He also made extensive on-site studies of spiritual awakenings in Indonesia, beginning in 1965, and of the Saturation Evangelism movements in Latin America, which led to significant breakthroughs in evangelical growth, particularly in Central America, from the 1960s. He also published Theology of Church Growth in 1981.36

Peters was well acquainted with the works of leading spokesmen of mission connected with the Student Volunteer Movement: J. R. Mott, Robert Wilder, Robert Speer, and J. H. Oldham. He acknowledged his indebtedness to his more contemporary fellow missiologists Gerald Anderson, Max Warren, Stephen Neill, and Lesslie Newbigin, among others. He took no issue with the relative merits of their views but simply set forth a missionary theology based on Scripture as he saw it. His emphasis was not on dispensational premillennialism as a system, but it is evident that that was his orientation. He saw the Bible as an inherently missionary book from start to finish and believed that mission itself is based primarily in the character of God. Even without a direct command from Christ, mission flows from the heart of God and his Spirit as a missionary Spirit.37

George Peters captured the missionary intention of God to bless all peoples through his own people, beginning with Abraham. But Peters distinguished between what he termed the centripetal pattern of the Old Testament and the centrifugal pattern in the New.38 The general pattern of the Old Testament was that Israel should attract the nations, as evidenced by Solomon’s temple dedicatory prayer of 1 Kings 8:41–43 and Psalm 66:5: “Come and see what God has done!”

In the New Testament, the people of God are sent out in a more centrifugal pattern as in the Great Commission statements of Matthew 28:19–20, Mark 16:15, and Luke 24:46–49. Peters’s contribution to evangelical missiology lies primarily in his observation of a continuous thread of universality in God’s concern for the nations throughout the Old and New Testaments. There is no doubt that he understood mission as primarily evangelizing the lost, establishing the body of Christ, and creating a trained ministry. Like other missiologists, his view of the kingdom of God also influenced his sense of what should be done by missionaries. He saw the kingdom qualitatively in three senses: the rule of God in the hearts of men and women, in the church, and in the world. Though the kingdom is personal, “it has strong social implications through the ministry of the individual Christian and the general impact of the gospel upon the conscience of society. The presence of the gospel in this world constitutes judgment, modification and enrichment of the order of society. It is strongly social in its general impact, regulating all relationships according to the will and purpose of God.”39

David Hesselgrave. Following missionary service with the Evangelical Free Church in Japan, David Hesselgrave became professor of missions and evangelism at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1965. He founded its School of World Missions in 1965 and, in 1975, its doctor of missiology program, in consultation with George Peters and others.40 He has remained active in research, writing, and teaching since his retirement in 1991. During his tenure at Trinity, he gathered an outstanding faculty, including J. Herbert Kane, a key mission historian; Arthur Johnston, major architect of the first Lausanne Consultation in 1974; and Edward Rommen, who collaborated with Hesselgrave in the area of contextualization. To these were added Ted Ward, veteran leader in international education and the Theological Education by Extension movement; Lois McKinney, in leadership education; Ruth Tucker, mission biographer; Harold Netland, in comparative religions and pluralism; Paul Hiebert and Robert Priest, cultural anthropologists; and Craig Ott, mission theologian and experienced church planter in Germany and the United States. All these were premillennial if not also dispensational in their eschatology.

Hesselgrave, always an irenic leader, constantly brought missiologists from other schools and varieties of evangelical faith before his students at the masters and doctoral levels. His own expertise lay in communication and linguistics theory, but he was ever at the service of applied missiology, authoring works on contextualization, cross-cultural church planting, and counseling—a total of eleven major texts and countless journal articles. Donald McGavran urged him to establish an evangelical society of missiologists focusing on “Great Commission mission,” meaning the evangelization and discipleship of unreached peoples.41 This vision led to the foundation of the Evangelical Missiological Society in 1991, a society that would include reflective practitioners from mission agencies and churches, as well as professors of mission. He served as its first executive director and contributed the first of its annual volumes, Scripture and Strategy.42

Although Hesselgrave along with every tenured professor at Trinity is premillennial in his eschatology, neither he nor other professors of mission there have centered on eschatological matters. But he, and they all, work, write, and teach in the expectation of Christ’s return and the establishment of the millennial kingdom. Hesselgrave represents an aspect of premillennial thinking that remains a key to their influence: he has always emphasized and utilized Scripture as the basis for mission theory and practice. He has constantly called for faithfulness first to Scripture, even while integrating the insights of the social sciences with missiological reflection. For example, in regard to contextualization he says: “Missionary contextualization that is authentically and effectively Christian and evangelical does not begin with knowledge of linguistics, communications theory, and cultural anthropology. It begins with a commitment to an inerrant and authoritative Word of God in the autographs of the Old and New Testament Scripture. . . . Tools afforded by relevant sciences are necessary additions to enable us to understand Scripture and communicate it meaningfully and effectively across cultures, but apart from that commitment, using tools will not enhance understanding. In fact it may take away from the knowledge of the truth.”43

Although Hesselgrave has generally had emphases other than eschatology, in 1988 he dealt extensively with Jesus’ Olivet Discourse and its implications for mission, as he did also in 2005 in his chapter “Countdowns and Prophetic Alerts,” in his Paradigms in Conflict. After tracing the development of premillennialism in somewhat the same form as in the present article, he shows that premillennial expectation from the days of A. T. Pierson grew out of a strong emphasis on biblical exegesis. He also notes that “most of those who were so motivated have been operating from a premillennial perspective.”44

David Hesselgrave. Following missionary service with the Evangelical Free Church in Japan, David Hesselgrave became professor of missions and evangelism at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1965. He founded its School of World Missions in 1965 and,
The conclusions Hesselgrave draws from his consideration of how eschatology impacts missioniology are as follows:

First, we know that we are constantly to be on the alert, anticipating the return of Christ. . . . Preachers, teachers, missionaries, laymen and laity all should point to that coming and encourage one another to good works and godly living. An awakened and committed church is tremendously important, if not absolutely imperative to world evangelization. . . . Second, we know that the Great Commission will be completed and the world will be evangelized before Christ returns. . . . Third, obedience to the Great Commission will hasten the day when Christ will return and inaugurate his kingdom.45

Hesselgrave, in company with most other premillennialists, keeps the focus of mission on evangelism, discipleship, and church planting, which he regards as Great Commission activities. He resists the growing emphasis on holism, or “kingdom missions,” preferring instead “traditional prioritism.”46 He feared that evangelistic priorities were lost when the initial zeal of the SVM waned and the ecumenical movement developed. Though his fears were reasonable, nineteenth-century premillennialists, some of whom we have earlier cited, were in fact what we would call today holistic. Dale W. Johnson, in “Millennial Thinking and Its Implications for Social Reform: Premillennialism in Urban America, 1865–1925,”47 traces the social involvement of premillennialists A. J. Gordon, A. T. Pierson, William Bell Riley, John Roach Stratton, and Mark Alison Matthews. Johnson shows that social concern, at least in the early days of the premillennial movement, was not inimical to premillennial eschatology.

Societal Transformation and Premillennial Faith

Johnson and others have noted that there is an apparent incongruence between holistic ministry and what he terms the “pessimism” of premillennialists regarding the possibilities of social transformation in the present age. The imminent expectation of Christ’s return, coupled with the conviction that truly global shalom will be realized only in the future millennium, seems to imply that social work today is useless without individual transformation. Why should we engage in societal transformation when mission is essentially an emergency rescue operation, as nineteenth-century premillennialists were what we would call today holistic.48

Peters and others had maintained? But Johnson was able to show that early premillennialists were indeed concerned for improved labor conditions, schools, social legislation, and women’s suffrage. They acted “incongruously” because they were able to reconcile the tension between the urgency of the Great Commission and the evident compassion of the Christ they sought to emulate.49

Fredrik Franson was a Scandinavian immigrant who became an ardent evangelist in North America and Europe. Himself a premillennialist, he modeled his ministry after that of D. L. Moody and others in the premillennial movement of the late nineteenth century. He lived in daily expectation of the Lord’s return. While he clearly saw time as limited, his concern to finish the task Christ assigned to his apostles led him beyond evangelistic preaching alone to the foundation of fourteen distinct mission agencies in North America and Europe, all of which are in existence today. The largest was the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, founded in 1890, which became The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM). He also recruited the first two hundred workers for A. B. Simpson’s Christian and Missionary Alliance for work in China.49

Franson’s original emphasis on the need for individual conversion and “constant, conscious communion with Christ” remained the primary concern of this ministry, along with a focus on church establishment. Nevertheless, TEAM has founded or collaborated in eleven hospitals in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, spearheaded numerous community development and relief projects, and founded widespread educational and leadership-development ministries. In this regard it is not unusual as a premillennial-oriented mission.

Conclusion

The contribution of premillennial eschatology to missionary theory and practice has been to maintain urgency in the global proclamation of the Gospel, understanding that we always live in precarious times. The hallmarks of premillennial mission are Christocentricity, emphasis on personal transformation, the gathering of believers in local churches, and the formation of indigenous church leaders. These emphases all spring from a strong conviction that the Bible is the Word of God and, as such, should guide all missionary practice. The movement was birthed in Bible study and gave rise to a system of biblical and theological education that has prepared the majority of Western and many non-Western missionaries since the late nineteenth century. This emphasis, however, has not precluded action on behalf of the suffering, marginalized peoples of the world.

The model of Christ’s compassion and the multiplied apostolic injunctions to “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal. 6:10), “to look after orphans and widows” ( Jas. 1:27), and to “live . . . good lives among the pagans” (1 Pet. 2:12) have led to widespread social and educational developments pioneered by missionaries of all millennial orientations. Even secular authors such as Nicholas Kristoff in the New York Times have opined that medical services, general education, and dignity shown to women would be far less developed on the continent of Africa were it not for foreign missionary involvement: “I’m convinced that we should all celebrate the big evangelical push into Africa because the bottom line is that it will mean more orphanages, more schools, and above all, more clinics and hospitals. Particularly when AIDS is ravaging Africa, those church hospitals are lifesavers.”50

In a similar contemporary comment, Shen Dingping (Chinese Academy of Social Science) and Zhu Weifang (Beijing Foreign Studies University) have shown through a balanced study of the strengths and weaknesses of the Western missionary presence in China that “the evolution and reform of Chinese education would have been inconceivable without the contribution made by American missionaries.”51

Premillennialists look forward to that time when “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea,” a time when God will settle his people once again “in their own land” and “aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob” (Isa. 11:9; 14:1). God’s full promises to Abraham will be fulfilled through him, his Seed and his ethnic people, and all who share his faith. The full family of Abraham purchased from all nations will experience the blessing of God’s salvation and will serve him and reign with him on the earth (Rev. 5:9–10). To that end we labor in the expectation of his coming.
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Notes


3. Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, Left Behind series, 13 vols. (CarolStream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995–2007). See also Craig Blaising, “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, ed. Craig Blaising and Darryl Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 15. Colin Chapman, Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), pp. 254–57, has argued that Lindsey and LaHaye are solidly within the dispensational premillennial camp and that a significant danger of their views is that they see a literal earthly future millennium in which Israel is reconstituted in their land. Chapman’s point is that such an expectation is prejudicial to Arab-Israeli relations and to the very existence of the Christian Arab church in the Middle East. Though I reject the notion that Lindsey, LaHaye, John Hagee, or Benny Hinn are representative of either classic or progressive dispensationalism, these writers are indeed premillennial. They represent, however, an unbalanced approval of modern Israel that fails to emphasize the reality that God also has his people among the Arabs and that they, with believers from all nations, will one day live together under the Prince of Peace. Chapman admits there are differences within dispensational premillennialism, but his definition of Christian Zionism as any Zionism with a theological base puts all religious Zionists in the same camp, whether they would wish to be distinguished or not. A fuller discussion of this issue, which admittedly does have implications for mission among Middle Eastern peoples, is beyond the scope of this article.


8. Ibid., p. 45.


20. Ibid., p. 154.


22. Lindsey, Late Great Planet Earth.


29. Ibid., pp. 68–69, 184.


31. See www.abhe.org/aboutus.


33. Ibid.


37. Peters, Theology of Missions, pp. 10–11, 144.

38. Ibid., p. 21.

39. Ibid., p. 41.

40. Kasdorf and Müller, Bilanz und Plan, p. 28.


43. Hessgelave, Paradigms, p. 214.


45. Ibid., pp. 310–11.

46. Ibid., p. 121.


Since the late 1800s, premillennial theology has been enormously influential in providing motivation for thousands of participants in the missionary movement from the West. In this article I wish to raise several probing, even disquieting, questions about the inner logic and the historical pattern of influence of premillennial theology. I also briefly discuss an alternative theological approach that holds promise for undergirding mission outreach without falling into the many snares and traps that beset the path of dispensational premillennialism.

Though dispensational premillennialism at its extreme edge has displayed unwavering support for Christian Zionism, premillennial theology itself is not monolithic. We are greatly helped in understanding this position and its relation to missionary practice by an article by Michael Pocock entitled “The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology on Evangelical Missionary Theory and Praxis from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present,” printed in this issue. I appreciate Pocock’s clarity in identifying the essential features of premillennial eschatology, which he lists as insistence on literal interpretation of the Bible, understanding it “in its plain sense” (pp. 130, 131), belief in “a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth” (p. 129), “the distinction between Israel and the church” (p. 130), and a role for Israel/the Jewish people that includes a return to the land (p. 130).1

Pocock shows how premillennial eschatology became the dominant eschatology in the United States in the nineteenth century and played an extremely important role in motivating Christians for mission. The premillennial movement “has prepared the majority of Western and many non-Western missionaries since the late nineteenth century” (p. 134, also p. 132). In the nineteenth century this motivation included a strong commitment to holistic mission.

In addition to motivating Christians for mission, this eschatology with its associated hermeneutic played an important role in encouraging Christians to have confidence in the complete authority and inspiration of Scripture. At a time when liberalism was gaining strength in the mainline churches, it encouraged Christians to take Scripture at its face value and, among other things, to look for literal fulfillment of prophecy.

Pocock reminds us that in the nineteenth century there was a wide variety of different kinds of premillennial eschatology, and there were (and still are) significant differences between historical premillennialists and dispensationalist millennialists. Not all premillennialists were dispensationalists, and there was no rigid understanding of dispensations until the Scofield Reference Bible of 1909 popularized an understanding of seven dispensations that became widely accepted by evangelicals all over the world with “an almost canonical status” (p. 131). In recent years we have seen the development of progressive dispensationalism. It is therefore misleading to lump all premillennialists together and to assume that all can be associated with the more extreme expressions that have emerged in recent years.

Having acknowledged the importance of Pocock’s discussion, I move on to express major concerns about premillennial eschatology itself by asking a series of questions. The issues raised have very direct consequences for missional practice, especially in the Middle East. In developing this critique, I am acutely aware of the need to avoid suggesting guilt by association. It is all too easy to do this, for example, by suggesting that all premillennialists of the past and present have held basically the same views, or by suggesting that all premillennialists today are in some way associated and identified with the more extreme expressions that are so popular today. In what follows, therefore, I try to recognize the considerable differences among premillennialists, but at the same time I wish to point out the common ground that they all share and some of the consequences that seem to flow from their basic assumptions.

What Is the Starting Point of Premillennial Eschatology?

Having had to wrestle with these issues over many years in the Middle Eastern context, I would suggest that the starting point for premillennial eschatology can be summed up as follows: Although Jesus as the Messiah is the fulfillment of all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, the promises and prophecies about the land and about biblical Israel remain the same even after his coming and need to be interpreted literally. Because of the promise to Abraham, therefore, the Jewish people have a special, divine right to the land for all times. And even if the prophecies about a return to the land were fulfilled in a limited way in the return from the exile in Babylon in 538 B.C., they have been fulfilled once again in recent history in the return of Jews to the land since the 1880s. Some would go further and say that they have also been fulfilled in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the capture of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967. These events are signs pointing to the second coming of Christ and to his millennial rule.

What Are the Unintended Negative Consequences of Premillennial Eschatology?

Adoption of a premillennial eschatology gives rise to a number of unintended negative consequences.

Christians tend to feel instinctive sympathy for the Jewish people and instinctive support for Zionism and much less sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs. When ordinary Christians believe that Scripture clearly teaches that the Jews will return to their land before the second coming of Christ, and when they see this happening before their eyes, it is natural that they believe they are seeing the fulfillment of biblical promises and prophecies and feel that God must be on the side of the Jews. It is almost inevitable, therefore, that they cannot feel the same sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs.

The return of Jews to the land has turned out to involve much more violence than was ever anticipated. Most Christians in the nineteenth
century who had millennial expectations probably imagined that a return of Jews to the land would be as peaceful as the return of the Judean exiles after the Babylonian exile. When immigration into the land began to increase in the 1880s, the Jews in Palestine were only 5 percent of the population, the remaining 95 percent being Palestinian Arabs. The new Israeli historians, such as Benny Morris and Ilan Pappe, have documented the program of deliberate, planned, and systematic ethnic cleansing that took place before and after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, in which around 750,000 Palestinians (i.e., 85 percent of those living in areas that became the State of Israel) were forced to leave their homes and become refugees in order to ensure that as few Arabs as possible were left in the new Jewish state. If we look at all that has happened since 1880, it can hardly be denied that this recent return of Jews to the land has involved a great deal of violence and has had far more in common with Joshua’s conquest of the land than the peaceful return from exile under Ezra and Nehemiah.

Christians who have been most enthusiastic about the Zionist project have seldom raised questions about justice. If the vision of a restored nation in the land is what is predicted in Scripture, many Christians hardly believe it is necessary to study the history and politics of the conflict to understand the processes by which the vision has been accomplished. Moral and ethical questions are seldom raised, since all the attention is focused on the bigger divine plan that is being fulfilled.

Extreme versions of Christian Zionism have become very popular in the last thirty years. In his book On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend, Timothy Weber speaks of Israel as “the crown jewel of prophetic speculation, the key piece in the apocalyptic puzzle.”4 Christian Zionists have tended to support the State of Israel and its policies without question and have often put strong pressure on the U.S. government to support Israel’s occupation of the West Bank since 1967, to recognize exclusive Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, and to resist the peace process. The identification of the State of Israel with biblical Israel is sometimes unconscious but most often very deliberate, and Genesis 12:3 (“I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse”) has become one of the most foundational texts for Christian Zionists today. Some Christian Zionist teachers claim that between 30 and 70 million Christians in the United States are sympathetic to this way of thinking, and that they reach an audience of 100 million every week through radio and television.5

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**Rejoicing in Hope**  
*A Tribute to Kosuke Koyama*

Straight lines seemed to be an image of imperialism. I became aware that the love of God—hesed, agape—is more of a zigzag than a straight line. For the sake of others, love makes self-denying zigzags, displaying its power as it overcomes profound frustration.

—Kosuke Koyama

The earth-bound portion of Kosuke Koyama’s “zigzagging” life came to an end on March 25, 2009. “Ko,” as many knew him, died in Springfield, Massachusetts, at the age of seventy-nine. He had been battling esophageal cancer for several years, but the immediate cause of his death was pneumonia, according to his son, Mark, with whom Ko and his wife of fifty years, Lois, had recently been living.

Koyama was born in 1929 in Tokyo into a Christian family. His paternal grandfather had become a Christian around the turn of the century, and his father had followed him in Christian faith. Ko himself was baptized at age fifteen, in the midst of World War II. He often reflected through the years on the significance of this experience of being baptized into “the religion of the enemy.” The pastor who baptized him, Ko recalled, told him that God loved the Americans as well as the Japanese. That became the heart of his ecumenical theology.

Ko lived through the firebombing of Tokyo in March 1945, in which 88,000 inhabitants were killed by those same Americans. The experience was to significantly shape his understanding of history, the idolatry of power, and the suffering of God. Following the war, he enrolled in Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, graduating in 1952. He then moved to New Jersey, in the United States, to complete his B.D. at Drew Theological School in 1954 and his Ph.D. at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1959.

After graduating from Princeton with a dissertation on Luther’s interpretation of the Psalms, Koyama was sent by his home church, the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan), as a missionary to the Church of Christ in Thailand. Serving as a pastor in northern Thailand, he found himself in theological conversation not only with Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth, who had been his interlocutors at Princeton, but also with the farmers who now made up his congregation. The result was “water buffalo theology,” a term that would permanently enter the name of Koyama in the register of twentieth-century contextual theologies.

Ko wrote several works in Thai during this period, but it was the English publication of *Water Buffalo Theology*—a collection of meditations and academic presentations from 1960 to 1968 that was first circulated in 1970 by SPCK and later published by Orbis Books (1974 and 1999)—that gained him widespread recognition. Other books in English followed: *Fifty Meditations and Theology in Contact* (1975), *No Handle on the Cross* (1977), *Three-Mile-an-Hour God* (1978), and *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai* (1984). Koyama’s bibliography included numerous articles and reviews as well, in English, Thai, and Japanese. Through arresting images and a profound sense of irony, he sought to move beyond rabid triumphalism and crusading ideology to realize in a fresh way what it means to “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), which for Ko could only mean the crucified mind. His reflections were laced with...
Unquestioning support for Israel in recent years has created a major stumbling block for the Gospel. Many Christians engaged in mission among Muslims testify to the fact that Muslims are often unwilling even to open their minds to consider the claims of Christ because they cannot understand why so many Western Christians offer such blind support for Israel. Their protest can be summed up like this: “What kind of a God do you believe in, if questions about justice, human rights, and international law are completely irrelevant in God’s master-plan for history? How can you expect us even to listen to your Gospel when so much injustice is being done in the name of your God and your Christ and in so-called fulfillment of his will for the world?”

The two-covenant theology adopted by many Christian Zionists does away with the need for Jews to accept Jesus as Messiah. In this way of thinking there is no place for mission to the Jewish people, since salvation is available to them through the covenants made with Abraham and Moses.

Unquestioning support for Israel and all its policies and actions, when combined with a very negative view of other faiths, leads many Christians toward a demonization of Muslims and Islam. Many Christians perceive the Muslim world as set on destroying “the people of God” and as engaged in a war against the West. This demonization makes it virtually impossible to thoughtfully practice the loving, blessing, and praying for Muslims that Jesus commands (e.g., Luke 6:27–28).

What Happened to Postmillennialism?

The development of premillennialism needs to be traced alongside that of postmillennialism. This fuller historical perspective should remind us that most American Puritans in the seventeenth century were premillennialists. Postmillennialism then came to dominate American eschatology, partly if not largely through the influence of Jonathan Edwards in the 1730s and 1740s. As a result of this development, most American Christians in the eighteenth century and well on into the nineteenth century were postmillennialists. Not until the 1870s did premillennial dispensationalism begin to spread in the United States, initially through the influence of John Nelson Darby. By the turn of the century, premillennialism had become the dominant eschatology among evangelicals. The Civil War and the horrors of the First World War made it virtually impossible for thinking Christians to hold onto the optimistic worldview of postmillennialism. It simply could not be reconciled with contemporary history.

Koyama felt the pulse of resurgence of Christianity around the world at a time when others were skeptical about its future and even of the prospects of religion in general in the West. He brought a largeness of heart, mind, and soul to bear on urgent issues confronting world Christianity and the ecumenical movement as they were living through the decolonization of the latter twentieth century. At a time when many had no inkling regarding the importance of Christian voices outside the Western hemisphere, Koyama urged his listeners to take seriously the challenge of contextualization as it reshaped the Good News Christians had for the world. Christianity cannot be one-way traffic, he argued, but, aligned with the agenda of the crucified Christ, must follow him to the peripheries of history. He urged all who would listen to exemplify the virtues that were embodied by Jesus, becoming disciples who were also neighbors.

An African proverb states that “borrowed garments never fit a person well, they are usually either too tight or too loose; proper fitting is achieved when one wears one’s own clothing.” Koyama wore his theological garment very well, and it fitted him properly and snugly. We give glory to God for his life. We celebrate his intercultural, interconfessional, and interreligious theological contributions and imagination. And we look forward to talking with him again at the banquet table where he always taught that we would one day be seated.

—Dale T. Irvin and Akintunde E. Akinade

Dale T. Irvin is Professor of World Christianity and President of New York Theological Seminary.

Akintunde E. Akinade teaches world religions at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service in Qatar.
How Progressive Is “Progressive Dispensationalism”?

In his article cited above, Pocock states that progressive dispensationalists “have emphasized the nature of premillennial dispensationalism as dynamic, rather than static.” Furthermore, referring to the accepted distinction between Israel and the church, he says that progressive dispensationalists “see considerably more continuity between the two.” But if progressive dispensationalism insists on “a future role for ethnic Israel in a literal millennium along with believers from all nations” (p. 131), this suggests that these recent developments amount only to minor modifications that do not in any way challenge the main assumptions and outlines of the system as a whole.

Why Have Some Premillennialists Become Less Holistic in Their Mission and So Pessimistic About Changing the World?

In some cases premillennialists have looked pessimistically at the possibility of present-day social transformation and thus have tended to downplay any emphasis on holistic ministry. In Pocock’s words, “The imminent expectation of Christ’s return, coupled with the conviction that truly global shalom will be realized only in the future millennial kingdom, seems to imply that social work today is useless without individual transformation. Why should we engage in societal transformation when mission is essentially an emergency rescue operation?” (p. 134). Excessive emphasis among dispensationalists on events leading up to and following a literal Battle of Armageddon encourages Christians to believe that there is never going to be a human solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that it is therefore pointless—and perhaps even against the will of God—to work for a peaceful and just resolution. A peaceful solution, they would say, might actually delay the second coming!

How Strong Is the Biblical and Theological Critique of Premillennial Eschatology and Dispensationalism?

A great number of weighty biblical and theological considerations argue against customary premillennial and dispensational ways of handling Scripture.

Insistence on literal or literalistic interpretation that is limited to a “grammatical, historical, and literary hermeneutic” is hardly consistent with the way the New Testament writers interpret the Old Testament. It is understandable that, when many Christians felt that their confidence in Scripture was being undermined by developments in science and biblical criticism, they were attracted to a doctrinal system that seemed to give them total confidence in the reliability of Scripture. (It has been argued that this emphasis on literal interpretation was itself a somewhat rationalistic response to rationalism and liberalism.) But if this kind of literalism made sense in the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe and America, it makes much less sense in the Semitic worldview of the Scriptures, and it is hard to demonstrate that Jesus and the New Testament writers interpreted the Old Testament in such a consistently literal or literalistic way.

In Mark’s summary of the message of Jesus in Mark 1:15, Jesus claims that the time that the prophets looked forward to has come and that the kingly rule of God is about to begin. New Testament scholarship in the last hundred years has shown that the idea of the coming of the kingly rule of God is one of the overarching themes—if not the overarching theme—in the teaching of Jesus. The Gospel writers are constantly pointing out ways in which major themes in the Old Testament—including the covenant promises, major events in Israel’s history (e.g., the exodus and the return from exile), the visions of the prophets (e.g., about the Son of Man, the Suffering Servant, and the Davidic king), and institutions like the tabernacle, the temple, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system—have all been pointing to, and find their deepest fulfillment in, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The coming of the kingdom of God in and through Jesus is therefore seen as the real and substantial fulfillment of all the covenant promises and the visions of the prophets about the coming of the kingly rule of Yahweh. It is difficult to see how these ways of seeing the Old Testament Scriptures as being fulfilled in the coming of the kingdom of God through Jesus can all be described as “literal interpretation.”

One single example has special relevance in the light of the fact that dispensationalists frequently say that the prophecies of a return from exile cannot have had their complete fulfillment in the return in 538 B.C. and have therefore been fulfilled in the recent return of Jewish exiles to the land. The way Jesus quoted from passages in Isaiah that in their original context were speaking about the return from exile (e.g., Isa. 61:1–2, which Jesus quotes from in his Nazareth Manifesto in Luke 4:17–19, and Isa. 55:5–6, which is quoted in response to the question from John the Baptist’s disciples in Luke 7:22) suggests that Jesus was claiming that though the people were about to experience a new return from exile. If Jesus was claiming that through his life and ministry he was leading his people back from the state of exile in which they were living, can Christians today be required to believe that this great theme can and must be fulfilled once again in a very literal way in a physical return of Jews to the land in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

The thousand-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20:1–8 cannot be used as the main hermeneutical key for constructing an eschatology based on a literal reign of Christ on earth. First, Revelation 20:1–8 is the only passage in Scripture that speaks about “a thousand years” or millennium. Second, this passage must be interpreted in the context of the Book of Revelation, which is full of symbols that need to be interpreted. It is not meant to be seen as a video of future history. Third, there is nothing in the passage that relates “the millennium” to the second coming of Jesus. Fourth, nothing in the passage suggests that “the millennium” is on earth. The main focus in this passage is on the martyrs, not on the whole church.

The distinction between Israel and the church is a thoroughly unnatural way of reading the New Testament. Drawing a rigid distinction between the two has the effect of making the church little more than a parenthesis within God’s dealings with the Jewish people. I suggest that seeing the church as Israel—Israel renewed and restored in Jesus the Messiah—in the way that N. T. Wright, Christopher Wright, and other biblical scholars increasingly do today, is a far more convincing way of reading the New Testament. Seeing the church as Israel renewed and restored is also a decisive repudiation of anything resembling replacement theology or supersessionism (the view that the church has replaced or superseded biblical Israel). This way of understanding the
relationship between Israel and the church can be illustrated by several New Testament texts.

- When Jesus speaks of himself as the vine in John 15:1–11, he is using a symbol from Psalm 80:8–18 that refers to Israel.
- At the Last Supper when Jesus speaks of his disciples as sitting on thrones “judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” he sees them as the patriarchs of Israel (Luke 22:29–30).
- Ephesians 2 insists that Jesus the Messiah has broken down “the dividing wall, that is, the hostility,” between Jew and Gentile, creating “one new humanity in place of the two” (vv. 14–15). I fear that dispensationalism has the effect of erecting once again the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles.
- In Romans 9–11 Paul says that Gentiles who believe in Jesus are grafted into Israel, and he looks forward to the time when a larger number of Jews will come to faith in the Messiah. When he says that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26), Paul must be thinking of either the full number of Jewish people who believe in Jesus as Messiah (but not every single Jew) or of all Jewish believers together with Gentile believers who aregrafted into Israel. But this better future is tied up with the Messiah and is not in any way related to a restoration of Jewish people to the land.
- When Peter is addressing churches of Jewish and Gentile believers in Asia Minor, he applies to them titles that in the Old Testament are reserved only for Israel: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9).
- The two visions in Revelation 7 (the 144,000 of Israel who are sealed, and the multitude from every nation that cannot be numbered) can be seen as complementary visions describing the same reality in different ways, namely, the whole body of Christ throughout time, including both Jews and Gentiles.

Return to the land in the Old Testament is conditional on repentance.

In passages such as Deuteronomy 4:25–27, God says in effect to the children of Israel through Moses, “If you are obedient, you can live in the land. But if you are disobedient, I will throw you out of the land.” Leviticus 18:28 says that the land “will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.” The land does not belong to the children of Israel, but to God: “the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” (Lev. 25:23). Therefore, while the land has been given to them as a gift, they can continue to live in the land only if they are faithful to the covenant. Disobedience will lead to exile.

Deuteronomy 30 makes it clear, however, that if the people repent in their exile, God will bring them back to the land: “If you ... return to the Lord your God, ... even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back” (vv. 1–4). In later days, when the people were in exile, the prayers of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel demonstrate that there was genuine repentance on the part of at least some of the community. So when God brings the people back to the land after the Babylonian exile, he does so in response to genuine repentance and in accordance with the terms of Deuteronomy 30.

But how can we say that the same pattern has been repeated in the Zionist movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Restorationists and dispensationalists say that God has brought the Jews back to the land “in unbelief” and point out that many who have returned to the land in recent years have come to believe in Jesus as Messiah. Of course we rejoice that this embrace of Jesus as Messiah has been happening. But the fact that the condition of repentance taught in Deuteronomy 30 has not been fulfilled in this recent return makes it difficult to assert with confidence that the events of the last century must be seen as a further fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about a return to the land.?

Strong emphasis on the predictive element of prophecy means that there is little place for the kind of moral judgments that were such a significant part of the teaching of the prophets. Elijah, for example, predicted a drought. But he also condemned Ahab for stealing Naboth’s vineyard. We do not hear many Christian Zionists today making the same moral judgments about the hundreds if not thousands of vineyards that have been stolen by Jewish settlers from their Palestinian owners in the last hundred years.

Can One Be a Premillennialist but Not a Christian Zionist?

The answer to the question, “Can a Christian be a premillennialist and not be a Christian Zionist?” must clearly be: Yes, it is possible. In fact, a considerable number of premillennialists dissociate themselves strongly from Christian Zionism. Some are Arab Christians. We are, however, still left with the question whether Hal Lindsey and the Left Behind series can be explained as extreme examples, “overly dramatic popularizations,” and “an unintended consequence of earlier premillennial thinking.” Or could it be that while they may certainly be overly dramatic in their fictionalized version of dispensationalism, they are in fact working out this theology to its logical conclusion by describing in vivid detail the kind of scenarios that dispensationalist theologians and exegetes have described in much more sober and straightforward language?

When Christians start with the assumption that Scripture clearly teaches that there will be a significant restoration of Jews to the land and that the millennial reign of Christ is a literal reign from Jerusalem, it is hard for them not to support the Zionist vision. When they believe that the return of Jewish exiles to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile was a very partial and limited fulfillment of prophecies of national restoration that would be accompanied by spiritual renewal, they are likely to believe that any further and more extensive return will have to be every bit as literal and physical as the return in and after 538 B.C.

Some premillennialists, although they might recognize the creation of Israel in 1948 and the capture of the West Bank in 1967 as preparing the way for a fuller and greater fulfillment of prophecy, do not believe that these events in themselves should be seen as the fulfillment of prophecy. But is there any clear biblical principle that holds them back from drawing this conclusion? While they may be critical of the methods by which Jewish settlers achieved their vision of a purely Jewish state (from the first Aliyahs in the 1880s through to the ethnic cleansing of Arab areas in 1947–48 and on through the illegal confiscation of land on the West Bank since 1967), their theology encourages them to be totally supportive of the vision of a return to the land and the establishment of a Jewish homeland, if not a Jewish state. This amounts to what Timothy Weber describes as “condemning the methods but cheering the results.”

July 2009
An Alternative to Premillennial Eschatology

A number of serious questions have been raised both about the hermeneutical approach of premillennial eschatology and about its frequent close association with Christian Zionism. What other approaches to Scripture are available? As an alternative to premillennial eschatology, I wish to recommend what is often called covenant theology. The name is not ideal, but no satisfactory alternative that I know of has been suggested. This approach works from a thoroughly evangelical view of Scripture and suggests the following starting point for thinking about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

The promises given to Abraham and all the prophecies in the Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus. The Old Testament must therefore be read through the spectacles of the New Testament. Because Old Testament promises and prophecies—including those about the land and about biblical Israel—have been fulfilled in the coming of the kingdom in Jesus, the return of Jews to the land and the establishment of the State of Israel, while all taking place under the sovereignty of God, have no special theological significance. They are not to be seen as signs pointing forward to the second coming or to a literal millennial rule of Christ on earth, for all believers in Jesus inherit all the promises made to Abraham. All are together “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9; see further Gal. 3:26–29) and enjoy their spiritual inheritance, which is “kept in heaven” (1 Pet. 1:4; see also Heb. 4 and Heb. 12:18–24).

I add two further points. First, while many of the best-known evangelical leaders in Britain in the nineteenth century, such as Charles Simeon, Lord Shaftesbury, Robert Murray McCheyne, Andrew Bonar, Hudson Taylor, George Müller, and C. H. Spurgeon, held to one or another kind of premillennial eschatology, premillennialism has not been the dominant eschatology among evangelicals in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the proportion of evangelical Christians in Britain today who hold these views is very considerably lower than it is in the United States.

Second, Christopher Wright’s The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative is an excellent example of a biblical theology of mission that is neither premillennial nor postmillennial.12 I wholeheartedly commend this as a mission theology that is thoroughly contemporary, uses the very best of recent biblical scholarship, is thoroughly evangelical, categorically repudiates replacement theology, and is motivating many Christians to be involved in God’s mission to the world as it is today.

Conclusion

Despite all the problems evident in premillennial eschatology, I want to recognize, up front and without the slightest reservation, the simple fact that, from the latter part of the nineteenth century and through the whole of the twentieth century, it was the dominant eschatology undergirding the missionary movements that have originated from North America. At the same time, I would suggest that those who still hold to various forms of premillennial eschatology need to be encouraged to face up to the many serious but unintended consequences of this eschatology, particularly as they relate to developments in the Middle East. They should ask themselves whether these consequences can be explained as aberrations or extremes that bear no relationship to the basic premillennial doctrine, or whether they may in fact represent the logical and consistent, even if sometimes extreme, outworking of premillennialism as a doctrinal system.

It was one thing for Christians to embrace premillennial eschatology when the events they envisaged as armchair spectators seemed far off in the future and in a country thousands of miles away about which they knew very little. It is quite another thing for Christians to continue to hold this eschatology when these same events begin to unfold on their doorstep in the globalized world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, causing a great deal of suffering and injustice for the Palestinian inhabitants of the land and threatening the peace of the whole region and of the world. I do not see how the problem for premillenialists can be resolved by saying that the recent return of Jews to the land was predicted in Scripture and is part of God’s plan for them—and that they are not in any way to blame for the way the Palestinians responded to their return. If returning Jews had determined to integrate with Palestinian Arabs, remain a minority, and share power with them, history would have been very different. But the logic of the dominant Zionist vision, which has been consistently supported by premillennial eschatology, pointed to the need for a Jewish state in which Jews were a majority holding political power. Such a vision inevitably contained within itself the seeds of violence and injustice. The vision has turned horribly sour. Furthermore, I would hope that the seriousness of the negative consequences of premillennial eschatology would encourage Christians not to rely on books about the fulfillment of prophecy for their historical knowledge but to study the history of what has actually happened in the Middle East in the last 125 or so years, to reexamine the biblical foundations of their eschatology, and to consider alternative ways of interpreting Scripture in relation to this history.

I suggest, finally, that covenant theology offers an eschatology that makes much better sense of Scripture and at the same time makes much better sense of the central conflict of the Middle East, which is between Israel and the Palestinians. In discussion of this issue we are not dealing simply with a question about the history of mission or minor details of an eschatological system. What is at stake over this issue is nothing less than our understanding of God, our witness to the Gospel, and the credibility of the Christian church, especially in the Middle East, in relation to the Jewish people and the House of Islam. At this particular time in history the stakes are very high, and premillennial eschatology is not the only eschatology that can motivate Christians for mission today.

Notes

1. Page references in the text and the notes are to Pocock’s article.

14: Nabeel T. Jabbour, for example, an Arab-American Christian, devotes several chapters of an addendum to issues of this kind in his book The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross: Insights from an Arab Christian (Colorado Sprigs, Colo.: Nav Press, 2008); he sends...
Being called is different than being prepared. The apostle Paul was both. So when he unexpectedly found himself in chains, he was prepared to show love and compassion for his prison guards. And they listened to him.

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the addendum as an attachment to readers who request it. An American Christian woman with a premillennialist outlook who entered into a lengthy e-mail correspondence with a Middle Eastern Muslim man has said that her correspondent was at first unwilling even to think about the Christian faith because he was so shocked by the ideas of Christian Zionism. Only when, as a result of reading Jabbour’s book, she began to change her ideas about Israel and the interpretation of prophecy was he willing to think seriously about the claims of Christ.


9. In his article, Pocock recognizes there is a problem for premillennial eschatology at this point. He writes, “The return of Israel to Palestine as envisioned by premillennialists is preconditioned on the acceptance of the Messiah... But the present State of Israel is necessary for the survival of the Jews in the light of repeated attempts in history to exterminate them, most notably in the Holocaust” (p. 131). This concession amounts to recognition that the recent return of Jews to the land does not fulfill the condition of repentance and therefore must be explained or justified on humanitarian rather than on biblical grounds.
10. Ibid., pp. 129, 131.

The Implications of Christian Zionism for Mission

*Andrew F. Bush*

The region of Gaza in the Palestinian territories is home to 1.5 million Palestinians, making it one of the most densely populated communities in the world. It is fenced and heavily guarded, with Israel restricting travel into Israel, off the shores of Gaza in the Mediterranean, and at the Rafah border crossing into Egypt. It is a captive community. The former presence of the Israeli settlements, with their eight thousand settlers, made a difficult life virtually unbearable. Under the protection of Israeli armed forces, the settlers controlled 50 percent of the land, further squeezing the Palestinian communities into their packed towns and refugee camps. When the government of Israel made the decision that it was not feasible to expect that Israelis would ever constitute a majority community in the Gaza Strip, it began the process of relocating the Israeli settlers. In the months and weeks leading up to the final eviction of the most recalcitrant settlers, Christians from the United States and elsewhere moved into the settlements in Gaza, joining the settlers in protesting Israel’s policies. The suffering of the Palestinian Gazan residents caused by the presence of the settlements seemed not to be a consideration to these protestors.

These Christian supporters illustrate a commitment to Christian Zionism, a mission movement that believes in a literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of the land to the Jews, regardless of the implications for Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza. This article examines the implications of popular Christian Zionism for contemporary missions. I wish to show that in four respects it radically departs from the norm of contemporary mission theory and practice, namely, in (1) failing to view Palestinian Arabs as a distinct people group, thus ignoring the insights of cultural anthropology; (2) ignoring the role of context in its missionary efforts; (3) following militant liberation theology in espousing the use of force to accomplish the mission of God; and (4), espousing heightened eschatological expectations, creating a missional ethic that downplays, if not dismisses, Jesus’ ethic of love.

Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism

*Dispensationalism*, a theology formed in the nineteenth century by evangelical Protestants in England and the United States, emphasizes a literal interpretation of the Bible, including especially the prophecies concerning Israel. These prophecies are viewed as predicting the restoration of Jews to Palestine, which is regarded as a condition for the return of Jesus Christ. This restoration includes possession of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants, as well as the renewal of worship in a rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem. This new Jewish temple must replace the presently situated Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest place of worship in Islam. Following establishment of a false peace, the Antichrist will defile the temple and will instigate persecution of the Jews. Christ will then return to defeat the Antichrist and his forces at a final battle of Armageddon and establish his global millennial reign. National Israel will be glorified before the nations, which must come to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. Dispensationalism maintains that God has distinct purposes for Israel and for the church and that God’s prophetic purposes are fulfilled through Israel. Before the final horror of the Antichrist, the church will be “raptured,” or caught up into heaven.

In accordance with dispensationalism’s emphasis on the centrality to God’s purposes of a restored Israel and the assumption that modern Israel is the fulfillment of these biblical prophecies, dispensationalists are devoted to furthering the security of Israel and its claims to the land. This commitment is apparent as dispensationalists have formed numerous organizations in the United States and internationally to advance political support for Israel on the part of the U.S. government. At the same time, they have developed associations with Israeli political leadership and Zionist organizations.

For its part, *Christian Zionism* is a movement of premillennial, dispensational, fundamentalist evangelical Christians who adhere to and promote the beliefs and goals of political and religious Zionism. It is a nationalistic movement driven by heightened

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eschatological expectations. As a Christian movement, it does display a concern for the salvation of the Jewish people, even though evangelistic intentions must be tempered in order for alliances to be secured with Jewish activists and Israeli authorities. Christian Zionism is also characterized by its rejectionist position toward the Palestinian people, who are regarded as illegitimate usurpers of the land and whose claims to a sovereign state areviewed as having no merit. Although Christian Zionism adheres theologically to mainstream dispensationalism, it is distinct from it in melding theology with alliances to political movements that seek to advance the fulfillment of the dispensational prophetic scenario. Two such organizations are the International Christian Zionist Center in Jerusalem and the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ).9

While not all dispensationalists support the activism of Christian Zionism, the influence of the latter movement is widespread within the evangelical dispensational community. Its values are spread through popular televangelists and Bible teachers such as Pat Robertson and Kay Arthur, influential pastors, the Web sites of various ministries, and popular Christian literature such as Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* novels.10

**Christian Zionism as Mission**

Dispensational evangelicals have always been ardent supporters of global mission. Although postmillennial evangelicals in the nineteenth century argued that dispensationalism’s emphasis on the sudden, premillennial return of Christ to “rapture” his church from the world would effectively mitigate against missionary fervor, the opposite has been true. The mission motivation for dispensationalists is the salvation of as many people as possible before the nations are “left behind” to suffer under the Antichrist.11

Christian Zionism is emphatically to be seen as missional in intent. With the same zeal that dispensationally informed mission agencies exhibit throughout the world, it seeks the fulfillment of God’s purposes for a people group, Jews in Israel, and the establishment of the kingdom of God in a particular land. Christian Zionism strives to further the fulfillment of prophecy that will lead ultimately to the end of mission, when the nations are gathered to worship Christ in Jerusalem in the millennium.12

Christian Zionism has indeed made meaningful contributions to mission to the Jewish community in Israel. The Messianic Jewish movement has played a significant role in developing relevant forms of witness to Jewish communities.13 Christian Zionist ministries have also furthered such mission by addressing historic anti-Semitism in the church. Also, in their desire to support Israel, such ministries have delivered meaningful aid to needy families in Israel. It is, however, as mission that Christian Zionism requires critique, which I develop in terms of the four issues mentioned above in the introduction.

**Failure to View as a Distinct People Group**

Contemporary missiological thought and practice have been significantly informed by cultural anthropology, which has stressed the significance of the people group: “a significantly large group of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity . . . because of shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combination of these.”14 Taking this concept to heart, mission efforts have changed their focus from geographic regions to people groups. In order to quantify the task remaining in world evangelization, extensive research has been undertaken to number the remaining unreached people groups. Current results are available on the Web site of the Joshua Project, a ministry of the U.S. Center for World Mission.15

The strategy of reaching people groups is well understood throughout the evangelical mission community. Yet Christian Zionists often assert that there is no authentic people group known as Palestinians, that the Palestinians are merely Arabs without cultural distinction from other Arab communities in the Levant. For example, “the notion of a distinct ‘Palestinian people’ with a language, culture and religion of its own, is a creation of Yasser Arafat and nurtured by the surrounding Arab nations after their ignominious defeat in the 1967 war with Israel. The so-called ‘Palestinian people’ are, in reality, Arabs whose mother tongue is Arabic, whose religion is Islam, and whose culture is shared by most of the 22 surrounding Arab countries. There simply is no distinct Palestinian entity.”16

The historic presence of the Palestinian community in the land is also disputed. Despite the centuries-old association of Palestinian Arab society with the land, Christian Zionists maintain that the land was essentially empty when Jews began to immigrate to Palestine. Such an idea is borrowed from political Zionism, which sought to dismiss Palestinian national identity.17 Israeli historians Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal challenge such notions in their analysis of the Palestinian people.

One of the best known expressions of such a viewpoint [the denial of the Palestinians’ unique ethnicity and historicity] has been argued by Joan Peters’ *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine*, a heavily documented and, apparently, serious work of scholarship. Its basic argument is that most of Palestine’s Arab population was not indigenous. Rather, it consisted of migrants, attracted by opportunities offered by Jewish settlement, who came from separate streams and certainly did not (do not) constitute a people . . . . But as numerous sober historians have shown, Peters’ tendentiousness is not, in fact, supported by the historical record, being based on materials out of context and on distorted evidence. . . .

We asserted then, and reaffirm in this book, that the origins of a self-conscious, relatively unified Palestinian people pre-date Zionism.18

The recognition of the Palestinian Arabs as a unique people is also found within the evangelical mission community. The Joshua Project, for example, clearly identifies Palestinian Arabs as a distinct people group.19

Palestinian Muslims and Christians, for their part, are quite conscious of their particular history and culture. Identity as a Palestinian and not simply as an Arab is emphatically stated. Historically, there were about 1.3 million Palestinians in the land in 1948. Christian Palestinians, for example, trace the spiritual roots of their community to first-century Gentile Christians who lived in Palestine, and their pre-Christian heritage to the inhabitants of the land before the arrival of the ancient Israelites.20 The Palestinian architectural preservationist society (RIWAQ), based in Ram Allāh, seeks to preserve the rich architectural history of the Palestinian community.21

Ironically, despite Christian Zionism’s claims that there is no unique people group known as Palestinians, broad disparaging remarks are commonly made concerning the Palestinian people, especially collective references to them as terrorists, which implies a commonality of culture.22 The idea that there is something pathologically wrong with Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular has long been held in the evangelical community.23
The denial of cultural identity and the pejorative stereotyping of a people are not consistent with the efforts in contemporary missions to value each people group and its culture and to strive to protect its dignity.

**Igno**r**ing Present Context of Israel/Palestine**

To make universal truth relevant in a specific context, it is necessary to consider carefully that context. While Christian Zionism may adopt certain outward forms of Jewish piety and Israeli culture, its theological foundations have been laid and developed in evangelical communities in the West. In transplanting these convictions into Israel/Palestine, Christian Zionism has failed to listen sympathetically to the views of the people actually living in these societies.

The fruit of mission that is conceived without contextual reflection and then inflicted by foreign mission organizations on an indigenous people is well known.25 The best of intentions

**Noteworthy**

**Announcing**

The Theology and Religious Studies Section at York St. John University, York, U.K., in association with the UCLA Centre for Korean Studies, is holding the second *International Conference on Peace and Reconciliation*, July 7–10, 2009, at the University of California Los Angeles on the theme “Embracing the Displaced: Shaping Theories and Practices for a Sustainable Peace.” For more information, e-mail icpr@yorksj.ac.uk or go online to www.yorksj.ac.uk/icpr.

The joint annual meetings of the *Evangelical Missiological Society* and *CrossGlobal Link* (formerly International Foreign Mission Association) will be held September 17–19, 2009, in Orlando, Florida. Plenary speakers *Jerry Rankin*, president of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, and *Bill Taylor*, ambassador-at-large for the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission, will discuss “Ethics: Serving Jesus with Integrity.” *Marvin Newell* is executive director of CrossGlobal Link. *Enoch Wan*, professor of intercultural studies at Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon, and general editor of www.globalmissionology.org, is EMS president. Additional information is online at www.crossgloballink.org/annual.


The *Centre for Mission Studies at Union Biblical Seminary*, Pune, India, will hold an international conference January 13–15, 2010, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the historic Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference. Papers now being sought for the theme “Edinburgh 1910 Revisited” will update the nine themes of 1910 and “bring an India perspective to the global conversation,” according to *Frampton F. Fox* (ffox@eroam.net), who has additional information. The conference themes are Foundations for Mission, Christian Mission Among Other Faiths, Mission and Modernities, Mission and Power, Forms of Missionary Engagement, Theological Education and Formation, Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts, Mission and Unity—Ecclesiology and Mission, and Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship.

The Aarhus University Faculty of Theology and the Danish Centre for Contemporary Religion are organizing an international conference January 27–29, 2010, on the theme “Church and Mission in a Multireligious Third Millennium.” *Brian Stanley*, professor of world Christianity and director of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity, University of Edinburgh, an *IBMR* contributing editor, will open the conference with an address entitled “2010 and Beyond: Church and Mission in the Third Millennium.” *Stanley Hauerwas*, professor of theological ethics at Duke University Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina, will give the keynote address, and noted mission panelists will discuss ecclesiology and mission, as well as the future of missiology. Aarhus University professor *Viggo Mortensen* and other conference organizers are seeking brief proposals for papers, by October 15, 2009. For additional information, contact conference coordinator *Andreas Østerlund Nielsen* (cm3@teo.au.dk) or visit www.teo.au.dk/churchandmission.

With a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California has launched the *Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative* (PCRI). The initiative will provide up to $3.5 million in grant funding to support social science research on Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union. PCRI will award up to seven grants to regional centers and fifteen grants to individual scholars or small research teams. Letters of intent are due by August 1, 2009. Visit www.usc.edu/pcri to learn about the initiative and download the request for proposals.

The *London Missionary Society* collection of Chinese books at the National Library of Australia is now accessible online. The collection consists of 539 items and is mostly of printed books collected by LMS missionaries in China in the late Qing period. The Qing, or Manchu, dynasty was the last dynasty of China, ruling from 1644 to 1912. Go online to http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Search/Home?filter[pi]=pi%3Anla.gen*&lookfor=London+Missionary+Society&type=all.

The Global China Center, Charlottesville, Virginia, will facilitate publication of “Studies in Chinese Christianity,” a new book series in cooperation with Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon. The series will focus on history, biography, and culture-and-society issues important to the development of Chinese Christianity. Contact series editor *Carol Lee Hamrin* (clhamrin@globalchina.org) for additional information.

*Christians in the Middle East* is an international network of scholars working on issues related to Christians in the Middle East from the late eighteenth century to the contemporary era. An initiative of the University of Stirling in collaboration with the University of St. Andrews, both in Scotland, the network of more than two hundred members from around the world operates an e-mail network for the exchange of scholarly in-
do not suffice. For example, the goal of the ICEJ is to fulfill the prophetic command to comfort God’s people, Israel. Yet the political stance that this organization assumes—opposition to withdrawal of Israeli settlements from occupied Palestinian territory and to formation of a Palestinian state—endangers all Israelis by exacerbating the already extreme tensions.26

Western Christian Zionists might make more positive contributions if they would consider the nuanced positions of some Messianic Jewish leaders in Israel who have attempted to respond theologically to the fact of the Palestinian presence in the land. For example, Asher Intrater thoughtfully argues:

Jewish habitation of the land of Israel and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. Yes, God gave the land of Canaan to Jacob. Yes, God called Jacob (the Jews) to return to the land of Israel. But Jacob could not fulfill the prophecies of the restoration of the land of Israel without reconciling with his brother Esau (the Arabs).
The challenge of reconciliation with the Arabs forms a type of prerequisite for the Jews to fulfill their own destiny. Reconciliation will require both humility and courage. Jesus instructed His disciples that if there is a problem of reconciliation with a brother, one must first deal with the issue of reconciliation before he can enter into spiritual worship with God (Mt. 5:23, 18:15).27

Similarly, the Palestinian Christian community, weary of the imposition of Western theologies, of which Christian Zionism is the most recent, is in the midst of its own efforts to develop an authentic local theology. Mitri Raheb states: “Up to the present time churches in the Middle East have been engaged in either recalling the patristic theology or importing Western theology…. It is time to develop a Palestinian Christian theology which reflects our situation and deals with the problems of the Christian community today.”

The challenge before Christian Zionism is to consider the complexities of the context in Israel/Palestine. Could reflecting on this context assist a deeper reading of scriptural texts fundamental to dispensationalism and Christian Zionism? Perhaps such deeper reading would bring to light the prophets’ call for justice for the marginalized and the limits of nationalism in the economy of God.

**Willingness to Use Force for Mission Goals**

An early source of contextual theological reflection was liberation theology. Ironically, although Christian Zionism resists input from local sources that might modulate its position, it does share certain affinities with radical liberation theologies, which espouse violence to achieve liberation from oppression and to achieve the justice of God for a people. Concerning this approach, David Bosch notes that “revolutionary action is raised almost to the level of sacred liturgy, conflict becomes an all-embracing hermeneutical key, and the mobilization of hatred and demagogy an inescapable duty. At the same time it perpetuates the fixation on the ‘opponent’ as the implacable enemy and imputes the blame for every misery on others, while condoning everything the oppressed may choose to do in trying to rid themselves of the shackle of oppression.”22

These attitudes are reflected in Christian Zionism when it views Palestinians only as replaceable enemies. Christian Zionism’s advocacy of force to achieve what is viewed as God’s purposes is found in its support of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). For example, the International Christian Zionist Center has urged Christians to engage in the use of force to combat Palestinians:

Christian—You too can work in the I.D.F.!

As Israel is forced unwillingly towards a violent, history-making war with its Arab enemies, many Christians who care are wondering what they can do to stand by the Jewish state against its foes.

Some talk about praying, some talk about giving. Others talk about coming over to Israel and giving the Arab enemies what for!28

Liberation theology has been criticized for assuming that the “oppressed” are righteous and the “oppressors” evil. In such advertisements the possibility that Israel’s military might be abusive seems not to be recognized.31

The glorifying of force in Christian Zionism is significant. How does this relate to the past use of force in establishing Western hegemony and Christian mission in various parts of the world? The advocacy of militarism is a radical departure from the values of contemporary mission, which seeks to remove all remnants of colonialism from its theology and praxis.

**Downplaying the Love-Ethic of Jesus**

The eschaton is significant to mission. Christ associates mission with the signs of the end of the age (Matt. 24:14). Ultimately, the end of the age signals the end of mission. Premillennial dispensationalism is motivated by the urgency engendered by the expectation of Christ’s sudden, soon return. Those not raptured with the church at that time will be “left behind” to face a world racked by the great tribulation.

Christian Zionism combines this sense of urgency with the assumption that the founding of the State of Israel has initiated the final events that precede the return of the Lord.32 Christian Zionism, Timothy Weber has argued, is characterized by its ethos of participation in eschatological prophecy, seeking through its actions to ensure prophetic success and to speed the return of the Lord. John Hagee Ministries invites Christians to participate in its ministry “Exodus II,” which assists Jews to immigrate to Israel and thus “be a part of the fulfillment of prophecy.”73

It can be argued that heightened apocalyptic expectations tend to induce neglect of the ethical demands of this present age, and specifically the ethical dilemma related to Israel’s attempt to occupy the Palestinian territories.34 This might explain why Christian Zionists support ethnically dubious activities such as the Israeli settlement movement and radical organizations such as the Temple Mount Faithful, an Israeli group dedicated to the rebuilding of the Jewish temple at any cost.35 Just as the denial of Palestinian ethnic identity by Christian Zionists reflects attitudes

The expectation of the end of the age should strengthen the claims of Christ’s command to “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”

in religious and political Zionism, so the minimizing of ethical issues reflects the approach of Zionism, which has refused to consider the immorality of occupying a land that was home to another people.36 As Michael Prior notes, “There was little debate within political Zionism on the right of Jews to go to an already inhabited Palestine. Whereas one might expect to find debates centering on such concepts as natural right, historical right, moral right, or religious right, the discourse was content to stake a claim by virtue of a perceived ‘national’ need, with a presumption that a need constituted a right.”37

The expectation of the end of the age should strengthen the claims of the ethical teachings of Christ, particularly his radical command “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27). The apostle Paul is likewise clear: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. . . . And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:8, 11 NIV).
Implications for Mission

The immediate effect of the missional theology and praxis of Christian Zionism is felt in the Middle East by the Arab Christian community, which seeks to bring witness to its Muslim neighbors. I recently completed research on the relationship Palestinian Christian students have with Muslim students at Birzeit University in the Palestinian territories. My research revealed that the Christian students have close friendships with their Muslim classmates, but that these friendships and relationships are hindered by the perception of the Muslim community that Christians in the West hate Palestinians and are biased in support of Israel. Palestinian Christians become guilty by association. These perceptions hinder meaningful ministry by Palestinian Christians as voices of reconciliation among Palestinian Muslims. One Christian university student stated, “Unfortunately, they watch TV and see Christianity in the West and they think wrong things...I talk to them [Muslim friends] about my belief that we are not seeking the land, we are seeking our heaven, because our land is not from here...but they think that I am a Zionist or with them. But I say ‘No.’ The human being is our most valuable thing, the most fruitful thing in the land, and we do not need to kill to take the land.”

In refusing to view the Palestinians as a coherent people group, with their distinct values, concerns, and human rights, Christian Zionism—from the seminary down to the local church—dehumanizes the Palestinians. It represents an impulse opposite to that of Christ, who affirmed all humanity by the incarnational adoption of a specific culture. Jesus rebuked ethnic prejudice, which lowered people’s status to that of “dogs,” by such encounters as that with the Syrophoenician woman, in which he repudiated popular attitudes toward her ethnicity by answering her prayer (Mark 7:24–30).

In making no effort to look deeply at the actual context of the Palestinian territories, Christian Zionists deprive themselves of the chance to speak clearly to issues of injustice. They thus seem to turn their backs on Isaiah, Amos, and the other prophets who (along with their foretelling) urgently called for justice on the part of God’s people, not to mention Jesus, who roundly condemns the Pharisees because they “neglect justice and the love of God” (Luke 11:42).

In downplaying Jesus’ ethic of love to one’s neighbor including even one’s enemy, Christian Zionists seem to be preferring instead an ethic based on one’s treatment of national Israel. According to Genesis 12:1–3, good or evil is defined by the treatment rendered to Israel, that is, whether a given action is judged as being either a “blessing” or a “curse” to Israel. But to try to bless Israel at the expense of failing to follow the two greatest commandments (Mark 12:29–31) is to leave the way of Jesus, who emptied himself and assumed a posture of lowliness and humility, becoming a servant and enduring the cross. Mission that proceeds out of a position of strength or force is very different from mission that proceeds from a posture of humility. It inevitably affects the message of the Gospel and distorts ministry. Samuel Escobar writes about “imperial mission,” which depends on a source of influence other than the Gospel. He maintains that Western mission has historically sought to advance its agenda by alliance with militarism, commercialism, and Western business models. The challenge for Western mission today is to rid itself of its dependence on these vehicles of manipulation (i.e., force) and to fearlessly pursue the way of Jesus, both in Israel and in the Palestinian territories.

In the future, with the hindsight of many years, after the turbulence of the creation of the modern State of Israel has settled and after the church has moved on to other concerns, will Christian Zionism be seen to be another aberrant element in Western mission? It is time for more rigorous missiological and theological critique of this widely admired popular movement.

Notes

2. For a useful summary of dispensationalism, see Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 1162–64.
3. This view is popularly promoted by the dispensational classic by Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 56–57.
5. These organizations include National Unity Coalition for Israel (formerly Voices United for Israel), founded in 1990 and based in Kansas City, Missouri, which networks evangelical Christian and Jewish organizations together in support of Israel; the Jerusalem-based International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem, which was founded in 1980 to support Israel’s annexation of East Jerusalem (traditionally Palestinian Jerusalem) and which sponsors an annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem; and the International Christian Zionist Congresses. The ICEJ has offices in numerous countries. Its conferences in Israel draw large international followings. Bridges for Peace, founded in 1976, is another evangelical Christian organization that promotes the concerns of Israel internationally.
7. Earlier in the twentieth century “Christian Zionism” was the term used to describe Christian supporters, especially in Britain, of the foundation of the State of Israel. Only recently, however, has this term become more popular.
8. According to Basilea Schlink, “Anyone who disputes Israel’s right to the land of Canaan is actually opposing God and his holy covenant with the patriarchs. He is striving against sacred, inviolable words and promises of God, which he has sworn to keep” (Israel at the Heart...
of World Events: A Perspective on the Middle East Situation Written During the Gulf War [Darmstadt, Ger.: Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary, 1991], p. 22.


11. For example, the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination, whose ministers must yearly sign a statement of faith that embodies dispensational theology, has an aggressive mission program. It presently includes 2,700 North American missionaries who work with 330,000 national pastors in 214 nations. See http://agchurches.org/Content/Resources/2009%20AGWMCurrentFacts.pdf.


15. See www.joshuaproject.net.


22. For example, see Suad Amiry, Throne Village Architecture: Palestinian Rural Mansions in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (Râm Allâh: RIWAQ, 2004).

23. For example, Pat Robertson has stated, “I am telling you, ladies and gentlemen, this is suicide. If the United States . . . takes a role in ripping . . .” (Silent Night, Bright Night, pp. 164–65, first cited in Weber, On the Road to Armageddon, p. 250; for the John Hagee quotation, see www.jhm.org/ME2/Sites/dirdorm.asp?sid=1D57124D58B1463B8A2130A7BE58182C&tid=1&siteID=973F95B9970A4652A0B45F5CE33EF1C).


26. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem declares its goal to be to respond to “the need to comfort Zion according to the command of scripture found in Isaiah 40:1–2,” www.icej.org, “our mandate.” In fact, the majority of Israelis oppose settlements in the occupied territories and the military action that is needed to secure them.


28. For further discussion, see also Naim S. Ateek, “The Emergence of a Palestinian Christian Theology,” in Faith and the Intifada, ed. Ateek, Ellis, and Ruether, p. 60.


32. One dispensational ministry has established an “Armageddon Clock” to assess how much time is left in this age. See www.raptureready.com/armageddon2.html.

33. Ibid., p. 250; for the John Hagee quotation, see www.jhm.org/ME2/Sites/dirdorm.asp?sid=1D57124D58B1463B8A2130A7BE58182C&tid=1&siteID=973F95B9970A4652A0B45F5CE33EF1C.

34. Again it is important to acknowledge the Israelis who adamantly oppose this occupation, one of whom is Adi Ophir, “A Time of Occupation,” in The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and Dissent, ed. Roane Carey and Jonathan Shainin (New York: New Press, 2002), pp. 51–71.


36. For his discussion, see Transforming Mission, pp. 504–6.


38. Remarks of Western Christian leaders expressing biased support for Israel are invariably reported in the Arab media. The perception that Christians hate Palestinians is also furthered by such events as the annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration sponsored by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. This draws thousands of Christians from throughout the world who stage a march through the streets of Jerusalem carrying banners proclaiming their support for Israel.


“W”hat would you think of a man approaching you of gigantic stature, long beard, fierce eyes, a turban on his head, which if stretched out would make a blanket, long flowing robes, a large belt, in which were four or five pistols and a sword?” Cultural historian Timothy Marr begins his study of early American Protestant missionary perceptions of Islam with this excerpt from a letter sent by Turkey-based missionary Levi Parsons to his sister in 1820, a year after his arrival on the “field.” Parsons was one of two missionaries sent out by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to initiate a mission to Western Asian peoples in Palestine, the first such effort by an organized American Protestant mission body. Marr’s purpose is to illustrate how the mental universe of these early missionary pioneers was shaped by fearsome images of Muslims drawn from a well-established, widely accepted millennial narrative featuring a villainous Islam.

Marr makes a strong case. However, documentation from the early years of this pioneering missionary effort also reveals a weakening of the millennial narrative in the missionary imagination when missionaries took up residence overseas. When the fearsome Muslim became a neighbor with a name and face, the objectifying force of the millennial narrative became harder to uphold. Looking first to the background for this millennial narrative in the thought of Jonathan Edwards, I trace here the missionaries’ change of perception.

### Jonathan Edwards and the New Divinity

The idea for an American-based Protestant mission organization bringing together the energy and vision of those whom today we would identify as evangelicals emerged out of meetings held in Massachusetts in the early nineteenth century by a group of students first at Williams College, then at Andover Seminary. The students were inspired by the later development of Jonathan Edwards’s visionary theology, derisively described as the New Divinity. Most critical to their thinking was Edwards’s grand providential/millennial scheme, which proposed that “the mid-eighteenth-century revivals in Europe, England, Scotland, Wales, America, and elsewhere signaled the dawn of the millennium. According to Edwards, this new age would not come through cataclysmic means (as earlier interpreters had suggested), but through natural means, through the outpouring of God’s Spirit manifested in Christian teaching, preaching, and religious activity. . . . Christian activity was a precondition of the coming new age, for Christians who engaged in benevolent activities, social reform, and missionary outreach actually played a divinely ordained role in ushering in the kingdom of Christ. Edwards’s millennialism thus joined revivalism and missions in a providential scheme.”

Peppered throughout the documentation of the first ten years of the ABCFM are statements that give evidence of this influence, particularly when the board and its missionaries address the larger purpose of their mission. Consider the following entry from an address the ABCFM gave to “The Christian Public” in 1811: “In the great conflict between truth and error, what Christian will refuse to take an active part? Satan has long deceived the nations, and held in ignorance and idolatry much the greater part of the human race. When his empire is assailed, and his throne begins to crumble under him, what friend of the Redeemer will refuse to come to the help of the Lord . . . against the mighty? Ultimate victory is secure, as it is promised by Him who cannot lie, and in whose hands are the hearts of all men.”

It is noteworthy that all non-Christian faiths are condemned in this statement. Islam, though, has a particular role, as Edwards and others draw out the apocalyptic narrative in finer detail. In the course of discussing the role of millennial narratives in the early American Protestant missionary imagination, Richard Lee Rogers explains this point. The narratives identify “clearly defined threats to the American evangelical way of life. The powerful armies of Catholic Europe and the Ottoman Empire threatened the political stability of Europe, and the philosophy of the Enlightenment challenged the validity of the Christian faith. These conflicts were exaggerated in eschatological writings identifying these forces and their leaders with the Antichrist or one of the apocalyptic forces of destruction. At the same time, other groups less threatening to this way of life were not similarly highlighted: Hindus or Africans might be described as pagans or barbaric, but they were not regarded as threats and consequently were not vilified through their placement in apocalyptic scenarios.

### Edwards and Islam

Edwards’s characterization of Islam as having a unique, largely negative role to play in the millennial narrative is given its most detailed treatment in his posthumously published History of the Work of Redemption. This long historical treatise delineates Edwards’s prophetic interpretation of redemptive history within the framework of biblical history, postbiblical history, and future fulfillment. Islam figures in the third of the three historical epochs, which begins with the resurrection and leads to the glorious second coming of Christ.

Islam as a true monotheistic faith. Given common assumptions about Islam found among conservative Protestants in America today, one might assume that Edwards would locate Islamic error in the false revelation of a false god. But such is not the case. In fact, he begins his discourse on Islam with the acknowledgment that Muslims, like Jews and deists, drew their inspiration from the same revelatory source as Christians: “And hence it is that all that part of the world which now does own one only true God, Christians, Jews, Mahometans, and even Deists too, originally came by the knowledge of him. It is owing to this that they are not in general at this day left in heathenish darkness. They have

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**Making Friends with Locusts: Early ABCFM Missionary Perceptions of Muslims and Islam, 1818–50**

*John Hubers*

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it all, first of all, either immediately from the scriptures, or by tradition from their fathers, who had it first from the scriptures.” Islam’s error was not, in Edwards’s estimation, localized in the revelation it received but rather in what its early community of believers did with that revelation. “The Mahometans, who own but one true God, at first borrowed the notion from the scriptures: for the first Mahometans had been educated in the Christian religion, and apostatized from it” (p. 257).

Here is the classic case for Islam’s identification as a Christian heresy. The truth was received, then discarded, illustrating the adage Samuel Zwemer would quote much later about Islam: “The corruption of the best is the worst.” The context, however, shows this to be less a statement about Islam than a backhanded critique of rationalists, who were Edwards’s primary target as he develops his argument in the context of a larger discussion about sola Scriptura: “And this is evidential, that the scriptures were designed of God to be the proper means to bring the world to the knowledge of himself, rather than human reason, or any thing else” (p. 257).

Thomas Kidd’s observation about colonial Christian writers in general is borne out here: “no matter how ‘knowledgeable’ an author, his knowledge about Islam was located more in ‘internal apologetic concerns’ than it was in the Islamic world.”

Roman Catholicism’s evil twin sister. After establishing the heretical nature of Islam (“the corruption of the best”), Edwards proceeds to fit it into a historical/apocalyptic scheme where it serves as a kind of evil twin sister to the papacy, the other great “work of the devil.” “The two great works of the devil which he in this space of time wrought against the kingdom of Christ, are his creating his Antichristian and Mahometan kingdoms, which have been, and still are, two kingdoms, of great extent and strength, both together swallowing up the ancient Roman empire; the kingdom of Antichrist swallowing up the Western empire, and Satan’s Mahometan kingdom the Eastern empire” (p. 265).

The false prophet. At this point Edwards digresses into a descriptive analysis of Islam’s founder. It is apparent that he has done some research, even though that research probably did not reach much further than Humphrey Prideaux’s widely read polemical biography of Muhammad. Edwards’s dates are more or less correct as he notes that Muhammad was born in a.d. 570 and received his prophetic call at age forty. That, however, is where the factual treatment of Muhammad’s life ends and the polemic begins, for Edwards asserts that Muhammad “began to give forth that he was the great prophet of God, and began to teach his new invented religion, of which he was to be worshipped as the head next under God” (p. 268).

Muhammad’s next step, according to Edwards, was to publish “his Alcoran, which he pretended he received from the angel Gabriel,” as the vehicle of his false religion spread by devious means. In this effort Muhammad achieved a relative degree of success because he was “a subtle, crafty man” who was quite wealthy. This advantage, plus “promises of a sensual paradise,” helped him foist his falsehood on “very ignorant” people who were “greatly divided in their opinions of religious matters.” Once he had convinced enough of these ignorant people to embrace his deception, he set himself up as prince and “propagated his religion by the sword, and made it merits of paradise to fight for him” (pp. 268–69).

**Saracen locusts and Turkish horsemen.** After explaining the early success of Islam to his satisfaction, Edwards turns to apocalyptic imagery in order to describe the Islamic conquests, drawing particularly on the symbolism of Revelation 9. The Saracens “overran a great many countries belonging to the empire, and continued their conquests for a long time. These are supposed to be meant by the ‘locusts’ that we read of in 9th chapter of Revelation” (p. 269).

This chapter also provides Edwards with an apocalyptic appellation for the Turks who “became masters of the Eastern Empire” in a continuation of the Islamic conquest. These were the “horsemen” of Revelation 9, who treated those they conquered “with a great deal of barbarity and cruelty” (p. 269).

But they will vanish like smoke. Later in his narrative, in the more specifically prophetic section, Edwards returns to his earlier linkage of the Catholic and Islamic empires by declaring that in the latter days they will join forces to make one final attempt to destroy the true church. But they will fail, as will all other heretical movements Edwards perceived to be threatening the purity of the Gospel: “There will be an end to Socinianism, and Arianism, and Quakerism, and Arminianism; and Deism, which is now so bold and confident in infidelity. . . . The Kingdom of Antichrist shall be utterly overthrown. . . . That other great kingdom which Satan has set up in opposition to the Christian church, viz., his Mahometan kingdom, shall be utterly overthrown. . . . The false prophet shall be taken and destroyed. . . . This smoke, which has ascended out of the bottomless pit, shall be utterly scattered before the light of that glorious day, and the Mahometan empire shall fall at the sound of the great trumpet which shall then be blown” (pp. 311–12).

Edwards believed that the day when these things would happen was drawing near, the evidence being the wave of revivals sweeping through Europe and New England in the Great Awakening—harbingers, in Edwards’s mind, of the approaching millennium. It would take Edwards’s New Divinity disciples to translate this into a plan of missionary action. The young idealists of the New Divinity who founded the ABCFM believed themselves to be the vanguard of the new age, working with God to bring down the strongholds of Satan, not with Crusader swords but with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). God would surely do it. The kingdoms of Satan would fall. But it would require human effort as well.

**The Mission Begins**

The ABCFM became an organized mission agency in 1810. Not until 1818, however, did it commission its first missionaries to establish a presence in the Muslim-majority world. An inaugural address given at the first meeting of the ABCFM in 1818 sounded
the millennial theme that accompanied all who went out under the mission’s auspices. “Attuned to millennial strains, the prophetic lyré has cheered long ages of darkness, and waked the children of Zion, in successive generations, to hope, and prayer, and joyous anticipation. The hopes were not fallacious; the prayers have been heard on high; the anticipations are beginning to be realized with augmenting joy. God has arisen to have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yea, the set time is come. Her children are at length aroused to action; and as they advance, the opening and brightening prospects inspire them with fresh and increasing animation.”13

The first to be stirred to action for missionary service in the Muslim-majority world—in this case to Palestine, the center stage of millennial hopes—were Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons. Between 1818 and 1850 (the period of time covered in this study), sixty more pioneering spirits would follow in their wake, effectively establishing the first Protestant American mission presence in the Ottoman Empire.

The Players

The geographic territory covered by these missionaries is reflected in the names given to the various stations:

- Syria and Holy Land Mission (1821), operating primarily out of Jerusalem (1821) and Beirut (1823)
- Turkey Mission (1826), with missionaries in Smyrna [Izmir] (1826), Constantinople [Istanbul] (1831), Broosa [Bursa] (1834), Scio [Chios] (1834–37), and Trebizond [Trabzon] (1835)
- Persia-Nestorian Mission (1834), with a presence in Ooroomiah [Ortumyeh] (1834)
- Persia-Mohammedans Mission (1835–40), located in Tabreez (1838), which was occupied for only a brief time by one missionary.

Each location not only offered its own unique challenges but also confronted the missionaries with a similar set of issues related to the need to define their mission in the context of the larger matrix of Christian-Muslim relations.

The Early Years

It is not difficult to find evidence of the Edwardsian millennial categorization of Islam in the writings of the early missionaries. Fisk’s first correspondence is filled with themes that resonate with millennial hopes and dreads: “I love to think of the glory of Christ’s Kingdom, and of its progress from step to step, till it shall fill the earth. . . . It is not more certain, that the walls of Jericho fell before the ancient people of God, than it is, that the whole Mohammedan world will be subdued by the Gospel.”14

The fact that the stated purpose of the mission was to work with the “nominal” Christians of the indigenous churches as a means to the end of converting Muslims (and Jews)15 meant that Fisk and others interacted with Muslims only on an occasional basis, often in the context of negative encounters with Ottoman officialdom, which made it easier to cling, at least initially, to their millennial narrative. Fisk would speak of “the cross hearted Ottoman, sitting in sullen grandeur,” a designation that suggests a critical assessment of the religious “other” from a psychological and social distance.16 But there is also evidence of a developing humanizing strain to his observations. In a letter written to the corresponding secretary of the ABCFM in February of 1820, Fisk speaks of the Islamic law of apostasy as evidence that Islam’s cruelty but then makes a point of stressing that Muslims do not “induce others to embrace” their faith and generally treat Christian missionaries with respect: “As to any molestation from government, we feel almost as safe as we should in Boston. . . . We hear of no instance in which Turks have molested a Christian merely on account of his religion. There is reason to believe, that American missionaries will enjoy as much safety as merchants and other Christians who reside here and think of no danger.”17

Even more telling is Fisk’s chronicling of a dialogic encounter with a distinguished Muslim (an effendi) he identifies as “Jar Allah.” The fact that he records the name is significant, as it suggests that the religious “other” now has a name and face and personality. Even more significant is his detailed recounting of what Jar Allah says about Dajal (the Muslim Antichrist), without the kind of editorial comment one would expect from someone who sees Islam as a satanic religion, going so far in this case as to use the Muslim as a negative foil for date-setting chiliastic Christians. “As among Christians, some pretend to calculate the precise time when the millennium shall commence, so among Mussulmans, there are some who pretend to have ascertained when the Dajal will appear. Jar Allah more prudently says, it will be when God sees fit.”18

Further Developments

Growing admiration for the Muslim “other” both as neighbor and as a person of faith became a common theme in Missionary Herald entries after the deaths of Parsons (1822) and Fisk (1825). Particularly interesting is a journal entry dated 1835 by William M. Thomson of the Syria and Holy Land Mission, who gives an eyewitness description of Mohammad Ali, the “king” of Egypt, whom Thomson saw riding through the streets of Jaffa after Egyptian troops had put down a Bedu rebellion in the area: “There are not many parallel cases on record; and perhaps no man living, who, all things considered, has accomplished so much, and been so uniformly successful, as Mohammed Ali.”19

Notable here is that Thomson is praising Mohammed Ali not only as a Muslim but as a Muslim ruler, the very kind of ruler whose overthrow was seen to be an inevitable part of the Edwardsian apocalyptic scheme. The fact that Thomson follows this comment with praise for the kind treatment his family received from Muslim neighbors during the rebellion Muhammad Ali put down shows that what was a minor subtext of Fisk’s experience had become a more prominent motif of the mission sixteen years down the road: “Such was the behavior of the sheiks to our family in Jerusalem, during the worst time of the attack on the castle, that Mrs. Thomson, from what she had experienced from them, felt far safer in the country, than she had ever done before.”20

Praise for Muslim Spirituality

Clearly, we cannot suggest any fundamental alteration in the early ABCFM missionary perceptions of Islam. An anti-Islam millennial metanarrative remained an important conceptual framework for the missionaries throughout this early history. But hints and suggestions that this framework was being combined with a more humanized and humanizing perspective are also evident, becoming more prominent as time went on. Even more telling are indications of a growing appreciation for Muslim spirituality. Such words of praise can be found particularly in
later editions of the *Missionary Herald* during the period under consideration.

In 1835 Daniel Temple, one of the first ABCFM missionaries to serve with the mission in Turkey, shared with *Missionary Herald* readers a colorful account of a visit he made to a mosque in Smyrna just after the breaking of the fast on a Thursday night during Ramadan, which he describes as “the Mohammedan Lent.” What is most striking in this account is the element of genuine respect he holds for the solemnity of the occasion: “There was no response of the people to the voice of the Imams till near the close of the service, when they responded in a low undertone, hollow and solemn, all on their knees, raising their hands as high as their faces, and spreading them forth with their eyes lifted up to heaven, with an air of much humility and devotion. In this part of the service there was something solemn and touching to my feelings; indeed, the whole scene was an impressive one, partly, no doubt from its novelty, but still more so from the decorous and solemn air that breathed through it all.”

That too much should not be read into this is underscored by what immediately follows, which can be characterized as a more dialogic approach to Islam that would come into its own in the later part of the twentieth century.

### Notes

7. See, for example, a short Internet piece by Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, who says, “The Bible is very clear about this. There is only one true God and His name is Jehovah, not Allah” ([http://www.beliefnet.com/story/136/story_13644_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/136/story_13644_1.html)).
10. Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fally Displayed in the Life of Mahomet*, with a Discourse annexed, for the Vindicating of Christianity from this Charge; Offered to the Consideration of the Deists of the Present Age (London: William Rogers, 1698).
11. Edwards apparently knew that Muhammad came into wealth through his marriage to Khadijah.
12. “We invite them [those who would be called to mission in the Holy Land] not to the bloody achievements of maddened crusades, but to enterprises of glory; with the weapons which are mighty through God to the putting down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing which exalbeth itself against the knowledge of God” (*First Ten Annual Reports*, p. 317).
13. Ibid., pp. 230, 173.
16. In 1823 Fisk had a run-in with Ottoman officialdom in Beirut, where he was brought before an Ottoman judge who accused him of distributing illegal books. Ironically, the Muslim judge was prodded to confront Fisk by local Orthodox Christians, who were often more confrontational with the missionaries than with Muslims. After meeting Fisk and hearing his story, the judge apologized, hoping that Fisk was not offended. See Bond, *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk*, pp. 359–63.
17. *Missionary Herald* 16 (1820): 267. The *Herald*, the official magazine of the ABCFM, was my primary source of information for this article.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., pp. 220, 221.
22. Ibid, p. 221.
23. Another example is found in a letter written by a Dr. Wright, new to the field in 1842. He is even more expansive in praising Muslim piety, expressed in this case through his description of an Ashura procession in Ooroomiah, Persia: “Never did those affecting incidents in the history of the Jewish people, as related in the Scriptures, seem so full of reality, where it is said: ‘all the people lifted up their voices and wept.’ I question if it ever occurs in the West as in the East, that a whole congregation is convulsed with emotion, giving vent to their feelings in cries and tears.” But this affirmation is followed by reproof: “We long to see this benighted population mourning on account of their sins and turning away from them. They weep easily at the story of the wrongs of their imam, but have no tears to shed on account of their alienation from God” (*Missionary Herald* 38 [1842]: 42).
Writing a history of Christianity in India in a single volume, even a volume as large as this one, is a daunting task. Not only have there been a variety of Christianities in India, but Christianity in its diverse forms has also had very different histories in the various regions of India. The historian must therefore make many difficult, often seemingly arbitrary, choices about what to exclude, what to include, and what to highlight, and be very cautious in making generalizations. In addition, such a history demands a high level of competence in India’s national, as well as regional, histories and cultures. This book faces those challenges head-on with considerable success, and it is important to note how it does so.

Robert Eric Frykenberg has literally a lifelong connection with India and Christianity there which is both personal and professional, as professor (now emeritus) of history and South Asian studies at the University of Wisconsin. His approach to his subject is Indo-centric, and he uses his considerable knowledge of Indian history and society to focus upon Christianity as an indigenous Indian phenomenon. In fact, “the indigenous” is a major criterion he uses in determining what to include and what to exclude in his history (p. 461). His consistency in applying this criterion is one of the great virtues of the book.

This volume is part of the Oxford History of the Christian Church, edited by Owen Chadwick; as such, it is intended primarily for Western academic readers who may not know much about the Indian history of Christianity. To help them out, Frykenberg has provided three contextual chapters, as well as considerable “deep background” in most of the other chapters. In addition to translations in the text, he has included an extensive glossary of Indian terms. There are eight maps and thirteen photographs of churches.

After an introduction and two contextual chapters, the history begins with chapters, in a basically chronological order, on the Thomas Christians in Kerala, the Roman Catholics under the Portuguese Padroada, and the Evangelical/Protestant Tranquebar Mission. These extend up to about the end of the nineteenth century. They are followed by a contextual chapter on the British East India Company. Following chapters are arranged around specific caste or tribal communities, or categories of such communities, within Indian society among whom Christianity became indigenous during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition, one chapter is devoted to selected individual “trophies of grace” (defined on p. 380 as involving high birth and class, conversion by divine agency, and celebrated status because of their own accomplishments). The conclusion includes an epilogue devoted to some recent developments. Footnotes are not extensive, and the bibliography is arranged in chronological divisions for easy reference to major secondary works.

Three organizational features of this book deserve special attention here. One is the heavy emphasis upon the south, and upon Tamil Nadu in particular. This choice has its own historical justification. Christianity has a longer history in the south than elsewhere in India, being home to about 60 percent of India’s Christian population. An additional justification would be that the south is the region to which much of Frykenberg’s own research has been devoted. The rewards of this concentration become most obvious in chapter 10, “Indian Christians and ‘Hindu Raj,’” a truly outstanding chapter and the best in the book. It is quintessential Frykenberg, bringing his own particular Indo-centric approach to bear upon not just Christianity but also the East India Company, a subject he knows a great deal about. Of course, there is a trade-off between a strong regional concentration and a more well-rounded, balanced, and inevitably superficial coverage of the country as a whole; I think Frykenberg made the right choice.

The same can be said of his use of lengthy and detailed case studies, supplemented by much briefer descriptions of parallel cases. Thus in chapter 8, “Avarna Christians and Conversion Movements,” he concentrates heavily upon Tamilians in Tirunelveli and elsewhere but says much less about Telugus and even less about North Indians. In chapter 13, “Trophies of Grace,” he devotes twenty-eight pages to Pandita Ramabai and just over five pages to seven other “trophies.” In chapter 11, “Adivasi Movements in the North-East,” the Baptist Nagas get about five times the space that all the other movements he describes receive. The trade-off is between depth and balance. Frykenberg’s choice is conscious and deliberate.

The third organizational feature is that Frykenberg concentrates upon where, when, how, and why specific caste or tribal communities (or individuals) became Christian and yet remained indigenous. In other words, he focuses on each one’s foundation-laying period as Christians, He sees in each case Christianity connecting in a meaningful way with the community’s primal religion, which he defines, with Andrew Walls, in universal terms as an “elemental impulse within human experience that is anterior, in time, place, and status, to any superimposed religious impulses or subsequent religious institutions” (p. 10). For this connection to take place and significant conversions to occur within a community requires what Frykenberg calls an incubation period, during which Christianity must become an acknowledged part of the community’s sociocultural milieu. This is a highly suggestive metaphor, a healthy warning against the expectation of instant results, but Frykenberg’s own data indicate that incubation periods vary greatly in length and content from community to community.

A striking consequence of this concentration upon the early stages of a community’s Christian history, however, is that the entire twentieth century is almost entirely neglected, apart from carryovers from the nineteenth century and some backgrounding of recent developments in the epilogue. Frykenberg ignores the political struggles of the Christian communities he mentions, and of the Christian community as a whole, for a proper place within the emerging political order during Gandhi’s campaigns against British rule, during the constitution-making process, and since Independence. He likewise ignores the corresponding struggles within the churches against missionary and then elite (and male) dominance. I mention this point not only because I consider this to be an important chapter within any history of Christianity in India but also because it represents an important dimension of Frykenberg’s own emphasis upon the indigenous nature of Christianity in India. This has been a period when the very Indian-ness of Christians and Christianity has been severely challenged and yet revealed in...
fresh ways. It has also been the period in which Indian Christians have struggled to find ways to survive and to progress as Christians within the evolving Indian political order. This is the best single-volume history of Christianity in India written so far. It is both genuinely Indo-centric and genuinely ecumenical. Within its chapters are extensive illustrations of ways that Frykenberg’s distinctive way of being Indo-centric (there are others!) might be applied to regions and topics he did not cover. While written primarily for Westerners, it does provide Indian Christians with further evidence, in their current struggle with Hindutva propaganda, that Christianity is not a foreign religion.

—John C. B. Webster

John C. B. Webster, a retired Presbyterian missionary to India, has published extensively on Dalit Christian history.

**Worldview for Christian Witness.**


Charles Kraft has been writing and teaching on worldview for forty years at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, where he is senior professor of anthropology and intercultural communication. *Worldview for Christian Witness* is the culmination of his passion for understanding and advocating change in peoples’ worldviews, as well as a chronicle of his own worldview transformation to endorse spiritual power as a vital part of Christian faith. While discussing the structure of worldviews and how they shape people’s understanding and influence their choices, Kraft nevertheless insists that it is people who make choices and change, not worldview or culture that determines their actions. People are the actors; culture or worldview is the script.

Kraft defines worldview as “the totality of the culturally structured images and assumptions (including value and commitment or allegiance assumptions) in terms of which a people both perceive and respond to reality” (p. 12). He proposes a model of analysis that looks for themes, subthemes, paradigms, and subparadigms in people’s worldviews, and he illustrates his model with examples from Papua New Guinea, Nigeria, and the United States. The book summarizes much of the work that has been done on worldview by both missiologists and secular anthropologists, hence making this one of the most comprehensive (if sometimes tedious) treatments of the topic in print. Eight chapters describe in detail the characteristics of worldviews, including an excellent chapter on how to discover a people’s worldview, and the last third of the book focuses on how to introduce change into worldviews. It is here that Kraft’s passion emerges and his concern with spiritual power is emphasized.

An appendix on the history of the concept of worldview in anthropology and appendixes with examples of different worldviews, along with a comprehensive index, make this a very useful book for those wanting to know how to discover and understand their own worldview and the worldview of others, and then to introduce kingdom values into those worldviews.

—Darrell L. Whiteman

Darrell L. Whiteman is Vice President for Mission Education and Resident Missiologist at The Mission Society, Atlanta, Georgia.

**Introducing Asian American Theologies.**


This book is the first of its kind. While there are books on Asian America, most are from historical, sociological, political, or cultural perspectives. This is the first addressing Asian American theologies and is necessarily a concise overview. It takes as starting point the work done in the other disciplines and lays out what seems to be a coherent trend in the development of Christian theology among Asians in America.

In outlining the context within which
Asian American Christians theologize, the author gives a rather detailed account of the cultural, the historical, and especially the legal conditions that conditioned the various waves of Asians coming to America. This is not surprising, as the author, Malaysian-born Jonathan Tan, trained and worked as a lawyer in Singapore before migrating to the United States to pursue graduate studies in theology. He wrote his dissertation on Asian theology under the renowned Asian American theologian Peter Phan. Tan is married to a Vietnamese-American scholar and is presently teaching world religions at Xavier University in Cincinnati.

It is not surprising that, with his rich background, Tan is unusually sensitive to the diversity within Asian American theologies. His foundational thesis is that these theologies seek to “juxtapose the actual life realities and experiences of Asian Americans with the soteriological, prophetic, ethical, and transformative power of the Christian gospel” (p. 81). The book outlines the theologies of Asian American Christians over two distinct generations, with each generation confronting different issues, as well as across nation of origin and denominational lines. Asian Americans are betwixt and between, neither wholly Asian nor wholly American. Tan examines the notion of Asian Americans as “model minority” and then elaborates on the idea of “middle minority.” Race and culture are potent sources and symbols for Asian American theologies.

—Edmund Chia

Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East.


Ussama Makdisi, a leading scholar of nineteenth-century Ottoman history, offers in this book a breathtaking genealogy of the various discourses swirling around the death of a young Maronite convert to the Protestant faith, As’ad Shidyaq, around 1830 in what is today Lebanon. Treated as “insane” people were apt to be treated at that time, As’ad, despite multiple escapes, was kept in a Maronite monastery, “bled,” beaten repeatedly on the soles of his feet, and fastened to a wall with a chain around his neck, with little food or clothing. According to the Maronite patriarch who in vain had tried to force him to recant, he died of a fever.

On a first level, Makdisi unveils the tragedy as the clash of two irreconcilable narratives. Members of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) began work in Beirut and surrounding areas in 1820, buoyed by a millennialist view of biblical prophecy according to which the end was near and, despite satanic opposition, all false contenders like Catholicism and Islam were doomed to crumble before the advent of Christ’s kingdom—hence the phrase “artillery of heaven.” The Maronite Church, in contrast, after some battles with heretical elements, aggressively enforced its role as the Catholic bulwark of doctrinal and moral purity.

On another level, however, Makdisi follows Michel Foucault in unmasking the dimensions of power in discourse—in a tribute, certainly, to his uncle Edward Said. The ABCFM was clearly the heir of previous attempts to evangelize Native Americans, though by now, the missionary conscience

![What They Taught Us: How Maryknoll Missioners Were Evangelized by the Poor](image)

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was uneasy with the gradual decimation and dispossession of the Indian tribes. Yet millions of heathen now beckoned in and around the Holy Land, and so, riding on the coattails of surging American imperial might, missionaries aimed to refashion the world in a Protestant mold.

Other layers are skillfully peeled back in Makdisi’s “new history”: the class dimension behind the Ottoman millet system and its gradual unraveling as a result of Western pressure and Ottoman reforms after 1850; the evolution of missionary goals and philosophy as schools and hospitals begin to compensate for the missionaries’ dismal failure to see conversions; and finally, the unintended consequence of that educational mission in the person of Protestant convert, teacher, and encyclopedist Butrus al-Bustani, who, half a century after As‘ad’s death, penned a biography of As‘ad that radically subverts both the racial and national superiority of the American missionaries and the self-righteous conservatism of the Maronites with his discourse of “dialogue within and across cultures” (p. 212). Tellingly, the last chapter is entitled “The Vindication of As‘ad Shidyaq.”

—David L. Johnston

David L. Johnston spent sixteen years as a pastor and teacher in Algeria, Egypt, and the West Bank. He is currently an adjunct professor in Islamic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and St. Joseph’s University, both in Philadelphia.

The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died.


The streams of history and the deposits that compose the historical account are greatly shaped by the achievements and outlook of the victors. By 1500, with other major centers of Christianity absorbed within an expanding Islamic empire, western Europe emerged as the main heartland of the faith. Thereafter, Christianity became decidedly European, with its story and subsequent global expansion thoroughly dominated by European views, experiences, and initiatives. In short order, the unique histories and glorious accomplishments of the church in the previous heartlands of the faith (in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East) went into eclipse. As Philip Jenkins argues in this compelling study, “rediscovering the lost Christian worlds of Africa and Asia” (p. 4) can radically transform the historical and mental maps of Christianity filtered through the prism of Western perspectives or accounts. The enforced amnesia is as egregious as the rediscovery is exhilarating. Christianity was a global faith before it became a Western religion. Not only did these erstwhile Christian lands once constitute Christianity’s center of gravity, but they also represented experiences and expressions of the faith that were fundamentally different from those associated with western Europe. In addition to their phenomenal growth and remarkable endurance—in the Middle East many survived until the early twentieth century!—the churches of the East produced the earliest Christian kingdoms, functioned in a variety of languages (not including Latin), developed rich liturgies and powerful intellectual traditions, mounted impressive missionary efforts to distant lands, thrived in contexts of religious diversity, engaged in dialogue with other world religions, and successfully translated the faith into the fabric of life in non-European contexts.

But it is the catastrophic collapse of Christianity in these non-Western contexts that will fascinate most readers. Jenkins eschews neat theories. As he explains, the cessation of deeply rooted Christian communities in the Middle East, Asia, and much of Africa occurred through a protracted and convoluted process that involved crushing oppression by Muslim powers (interspersed with periods of religious coexistence), bloody massacres, population displacement, and geopolitical shifts. Where the church remained robust, as in Egypt and Ethiopia, extensive cultural adaptation that transcended class and tribal distinctions, an arguably less monolithic church structure, and natural

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geography were crucial factors. But even where Eastern Christianity was ostensibly exterminated, tangible and evocative remnants of its existence endure in the form of architectural styles and religious customs (like Ramadan) now deemed Islamic.

The massive de-Christianization of the faith in western Europe in recent decades adds to the poignancy and relevance of The Lost History of Christianity. Yet the fact that the book appears primarily aimed at a Western readership skews the focus somewhat. The subject matter raises profound questions and offers important lessons pertinent to the church everywhere. In the final analysis, this “rediscovery” is as much about the future as it is about the past. A full historical account reveals a faith that is inherently global because it is ultimately local and therefore never fully defined by any singular expression or historic center.

—Jehu J. Hanciles

Jehu J. Hanciles, a Sierra Leonian, is Associate Professor of Mission History and Globalization, Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, Pasadena, California.

American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire.


Heather Sharkey sets out to produce a “secular history” (p. 14) of Presbyterian mission in Egypt between 1854 and 1967 that “illuminates both the Egyptian and American dimensions of this historical exchange while attending to the changing landscapes of social attitudes and religious beliefs” (p. 16). In meeting this aim, she has added significantly to what can be known about Protestant mission history in the Middle East, the rapidly evolving character of Christian-Muslim relations since the nineteenth century, and the social, cultural, and political aspects of these encounters.

Sharkey pays close attention to a range of social forces and multiple overlapping contexts that affected the work of this missionary group, including the nineteenth-century evangelical culture of American Presbyterianism, British colonial activity in the Middle East, the rise of Egyptian nationalism in the twentieth century, and the postcolonial dilemma of Western missionaries in the region. She drills deeply into the holdings of the Presbyterian Historical Society, located in Philadelphia. Sharkey also draws extensively from several previously underutilized resources, most notably her own interviews with contemporary Egyptian Protestant leaders and retired missionaries, the archives of the American University in Cairo, and a host of Arabic-language materials. This latter feature in particular distinguishes Sharkey’s history from the otherwise informative study of American evangelical culture and Islam recently published by Thomas S. Kidd, American Christians and Islam (2009).

Sharkey’s focus on twentieth-century issues is especially welcome, since relatively few scholars have chosen to concentrate on this phase of Presbyterian mission history. A nuanced chapter entitled “The Mission of the American University in Cairo,” in which the career of its founding president, former United Presbyterian mission executive Charles R. Watson is featured, stands out. An extended discussion of Samuel Zwemer’s conversionist activities in Egypt clarifies the nature of the transition Watson’s educational initiative represented. In her

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treatment of decolonization (1945–67), Sharkey shows how successive Egyptian governments worked steadily to limit missionary independence. American backing for the newly established State of Israel further eroded the social legitimacy of American missionary efforts in the Middle East, while stoking the production of antimissional propaganda in Arabic. Throughout, Sharkey considers the “ambiguity of power” (p. 4) that surrounded the American Presbyterian Mission in Egypt. It is her contention that social proximity to British imperial power between 1882 and 1918 created a “colonial moment” for the mission which then slowly dissipated during the interwar years, before giving way to a situation of much greater vulnerability within a fully independent Muslim-majority nation. —Stanley H. Skreslet

Stanley H. Skreslet is F. S. Royster Professor of Christian Missions at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia.

Global Catholicism: Diversity and Change Since Vatican II.


Ian Linden, formerly director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations and now at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, sets out in this book to present a picture of global Catholicism as it has developed from the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) to the present. The first third of the book is devoted to describing the antimissional sentiment in the church during the first half of the twentieth century, the countervailing attempts of theologians to work toward a renewal of Catholicism, and the event of the council itself. There is nothing new to be found here; Linden relies on well-known resources. There are numerous small errors that a good fact-checker would have caught; they do not detract, however, from the general narrative.

The rest of the book is Linden at his best. There he chronicles events in Latin America, Africa, and Asia in the years since the council. A central theme running through is the Church of the Poor, first articulated by Pope John XXIII and picked up especially at the Medellín Conference in 1968. Linden looks at developments between church and state in the turbulent years of the national security state in Latin America and at the struggles for independence in Africa. Radical movements in the Philippines during the Marcos regime and the anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa are well presented. Themes of inculturation and dialogue with Islam conclude his survey. The book itself closes with Linden’s read on the issues facing a global church in the twenty-first century—some of them already long debated (secularization, celibacy for priests), others of more recent provenance (globalization, climate change).

All in all, a good survey of major issues in the Catholic Church over the past half century. The book is written in an accessible, even breezy style that reflects Linden’s long history as a thoughtful journalist.

—Robert Schreiter

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., is Vatican Council II Professor of Theology at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His books include The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local (Orbis Books, 1997).

Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile! Called in Christ to Be Reconciling and Healing Communities.


Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile! is the edited volume of proceedings of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Conference on World Mission and Evangelism held near Athens, Greece, May 9–16, 2005. The editor, Jacques Matthey, is director of the Unity, Mission, Evangelism, and Spirituality program of the WCC. In this volume he brings together documents issued by the WCC before the meeting, the plenary papers, and the presentations at the various synaxes. (The Greek word synaxis is a liturgical expression that refers to a “gathering of people” around a theme. It was adopted by the WCC as “the collective term for the variety of offerings given, such as workshops, study groups, panel discussions, introductions, video presentations” [p. 221].)

Ruth Bottoms, moderator of the conference, notes in her brief introduction that the collection of papers will serve as an aide-mémoire to participants and provide a snapshot for those who were absent on current thinking within the ecumenical movement (p. 9). The section “Spiritual Life” (pp. 129–40) will be particularly helpful in offering nonparticipants a sense of the very innovative manner in which the conference was organized. It has a brief report on the arrival of the cross made from wood of olive trees uprooted near Bethlehem during the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian crisis at the time, an event that truly symbolized “hope and reconciliation” (p. 130). This section also has the text of the message of the patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem, the conference hymn, and the sermon preached by WCC general secretary Sam Kobia at the “Sending Service” that took place on the Areopagus.

As one who participated in the event, I can verify that this volume constitutes a true account of the substance of the presentations and faithfully reflects the rich variety of activities inspired by the various Christian denominations, confessional bodies, and spiritualities as they came together in 2005 for this important conference.

—J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Vice President of Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana, teaches contemporary African Christianity, Pentecostal/charismatic theology, and new religious movements. He is an adjunct professor at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission, and Culture, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana.


Conversion from one religion to another has never been a purely religious process. It has always had sociocultural, even political, dimensions. It is not a one-way communication of the faith by the missionaries. The converted group has its own social goal, which it pursues in its own way, which the missionaries often do not understand. This gap may lead to many tensions and some disappointments, all of which this study illustrates with reference to the conversion of a particular group of people in the Punjab in the northwest of India. The period covered is eighty years for the Church Missionary Society (1850–1930) and forty-five (1885–1930) for the Belgian Capuchin Franciscans. While the author depends on historical records for the activity of the missionaries, he can only guess at the reactions of the Indians, who have left no written records.

Both groups of missionaries come with a background of work among the rural poor. They want both to convert and to uplift the poor Christian community from a socioeconomic point of view. While the Protestants are more urban centered, are helped by the colonial administration, and promote a local church, the Catholics seek to integrate their communities with the universal Roman church. The Indians become Christians not merely for economic gain (i.e., as “rice Christians”) but for overall social advancement. But they must negotiate this benefit in their living sociocultural contexts, without breaking away from them. While they profit from the educational, economic, and health projects of the missionaries, they remain the agents of their own social transformation. Thanks to a new irrigation project in the area, both groups establish a model village. But the experiments do not finally succeed. The division of the area between India and Pakistan in 1947 brings not only physical dislocation but also social upheaval. The Christians then assert their identity and seek social liberation.

The principal lesson of this excellent study is that converts are not just objects but subjects of their life-project in their actual sociocultural context. This conclusion is true not only in Punjab but everywhere else as well.

—Michael Amaladoss

Michael Amaladoss, S.J., is Director of the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions, Chennai, India. He is a past president of the International Association for Mission Studies.

When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World’s Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge.


“The last speakers of probably half of the world’s languages are alive today” (p. 3). So Harrison, a professor of linguistics at Swarthmore (Pa.) College, opens When Languages Die. Harrison specializes in...
Siberian Turkic languages, as well as languages around the globe with only a few speakers left. His main goal is to answer one of the major questions about language death: Since no human being dies when a language dies, what really is lost in language death that should cause us concern? Harrison provides a scientifically based response, as well as a human response. While presenting the scientific data, he does not lose sight of the human beings that suffer through the process of language death, even if some might feel that at times he borders on writing an adventure book.

As the last speakers of these languages lose their friends and communities, we suffer a loss of human knowledge, including the names and taxonomies of fauna and flora that are rich with generations of observation, ideas about time based on lunar and ecological cycles, and ideas about space relevant to survival and religious systems. A second loss is in the silencing of human cultures which are basically oral, with no writing system, with implications for creativity, writing, and literacy. These cultures also have a variety of numbering systems using different bases, embedded arithmetic functions, and ways of anchoring the system to the physical world. A third loss is in our understanding of human cognition, for abstract language structures in every tongue do not stand alone but are used in meaningful ways with social and cultural content, showing “weird and wonderful exceptions” (p. 211) to generalizations we might be tempted to make.

Those in Christian missions might well ask several questions. Ethically, since “language death typically begins with political and social discrimination” (p. 8), what role have missions played in such systemic discrimination, and how should they address it? Various professions are involved with these communities, but where are the theologians? Can we learn nothing from these cultures about thinking theologically? Do the literate cultures have it wrapped up? Strategically, what is our responsibility toward the millions who speak the smaller 3,500 languages, or the few thousand people who speak the 548 languages with fewer than 100 speakers and that are soon to disappear? —John R. Watters

John R. Watters, Chairman of the International Forum of Bible Agencies, was CEO of Wycliffe Bible Translators International, 2000–2007.

Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World.


The six chapters of this carefully nuanced exposé address myths of terrorism, religious violence, human rights, multiculturalism, science, and postcolonialism. Chapter 1 meticulously deconstructs the so-called war on terror. Ramachandra is appalled by the ignorance of Western university students and professors, an ignorance that the chapter on religious violence bears out. Contrary to popular notion, the worst violence of the twentieth century was committed not by religious groups but by atheistic regimes—the Soviet Union, Mao’s China, North Korea, and Nazi Germany (p. 76). Hundreds of millions were slaughtered, imprisoned, and impoverished in the name of the “modern secular religions of nationalism, fascism, globalizing capitalism, revolutionary Marxism, and state socialism” (p. 62).

The author discusses the modern concept of human rights, then proposes a more satisfactory grounding in the biblical understanding of humans as the...
image of God. Application is made to the “right of life” for all humans. “This right is threatened by policies and commercial practices that threaten whole communities with starvation and ecological degradation, as well as by public pressure to abort fetuses with congenital deformities and to kill men and women suffering from incurable diseases” (p. 105).

The chapter on myths of science is particularly revealing. Genetic engineering is the new humanism. The author counters that the answer to scientific determinism is a Christian theological anthropology. “The entire biblical narrative attests to God’s solidarity with and selection of the weak and ‘insignificant’ that they may be the vehicles of his redemptive love to the rest of his creation” (p. 207). A “theology of science” is a significant contribution of this chapter.

The concluding chapter on post-colonialism confronts aspects of Edward Said’s Orientalism. Ramachandra points out that Orientalism “led to the creation of Hinduism as a world religion” (p. 236) and fed into the “Indo-European myth of a pure Aryan race” that became the ideology of Nazi Germany’s National Socialism (p. 237). In Hindutva the fruit of Orientalism now buttresses violent persecution of Christians by religious extremists in India (p. 242).

—Roger E. Hedlund

Roger E. Hedlund is Director of the Dictionary of South Asian Christianity project at the Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies, Chennai, India.

Anglicanism and the British Empire, c. 1700–1850.


The swing in recent years toward the study of cultural history and its bearing on the expansion of empire or the dynamics of imperialism has found little place for religion. It has often seemed as if there was no significant corner, not simply for the history of missions (now, however, coming into its own as an important research field), but for religious conceptions of empire or ecclesiastical interests as a spur to colonization. For example, the Oxford History of the British Empire, volume 1 (1998), appeared to endorse this perspective as it found no niche for religion. More recently, however, the absurdity of separating religion and culture has been recognized, and their integration is under way, as Rowan Strong’s recent book usefully demonstrates.

Anglicanism and the British Empire is not a history of missions, of Anglican missionary societies, of the colonial development of the Church of England, or of the colonial encounter. Taking his lead from the foundation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1701 and the rich resource available in the regular publication of its annual sermons, Strong offers readers a history of the public views on empire of both metropolitan leaders of the Church of England and leading colonial Anglicans. He identifies an “old imperial paradigm” that accepted the close relationship of state and church and rested on state initiative and ecclesiastical concern with governance and security in the face of Nonconformity and Roman Catholicism. Elaborated in the early eighteenth century, it was long-lived, its echoes still sounding from pulpits in the 1850s.

These ecclesiastical ambitions were reinvigorated by their institutionalization in North America and India. Between

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1780 and 1830 newly founded bishoprics, notably in Quebec and Calcutta, asserted the principles of a traditional imperial discourse relatively untouched by Enlightenment values. Here Strong takes issue with the suggestion of historians such as C. A. Bayly that only then did a new imperial Anglicanism assert itself, embracing both High Anglicans and low-church Evangelicals as part of an imperial resurgence following in part the losses in America. For Strong's churchmen, continuity of principles and discourse, not discontinuity, was the reality: after a “long eighteenth century” an Anglican empire for an Anglican state seemed on the verge of realization.

Anglican hopes, however, were dashed by developments at home and in the colonies. With state recognition of a growing “denominational pluralism,” a “new Anglican imperial paradigm” began to accept that “the empire was now no longer likely to be an Anglican one” (p. 220). This paradigm was rooted in the practicalities of secular and ecclesiastical self-government, episcopal leadership, and “a fundamental episcopal identity”; it was given form first in the Colonial Bishoprics Fund set up in 1840–41 and then immediately in the colonial episcopate of Bishop Selwyn in New Zealand. Voluntarist principles were drawn upon to provide for a revivified imperial Anglicanism once the old paradigm failed its supporters.

This book will be of serious interest not only to historians of religion and empire but also to those engaged with current debates on culture and empire, globalization, and “the British world.”

—Andrew Porter

Andrew Porter is Rhodes Professor Emeritus of Imperial History at Kings College London.

In Search of the Via Media Between Christ and Marx: A Study of Bishop Ding Guangxun’s Contextual Theology.


This dissertation on Ding Guangxun (better known outside China as K. H. Ting) is an important study of the contextual theology of China’s most prominent theologian and Protestant leader. Jieren Li, a Chinese pastor working in Sweden, has brought many diverse elements of Ding’s theology together in a fresh way that will be of interest to all who are concerned with Chinese Christianity.

Li argues that the Anglican Lux Mundi tradition, Chinese culture, and ecumenical theology were the key sources of Ding’s early theology. However, Li exaggerates the extent to which Ding appropriated Lux Mundi. Similarly, Chinese culture was never an explicit aspect of Ding’s thought, unlike the more direct use of Chinese cultural ideas by T. C. Chao and others. Ding is not easily understood as a “Confucianized Christian.” Still, the implicit theological and cultural influences Li identifies have been ignored by many scholars.

The core of this study is the author’s exploration and evaluation of the defining features of Ding’s approach. For Li, the key components of Ding’s theology are God’s love, the ethical dimension of theology, the evolutionary process, the world moving toward consummation in Christ, and a postdenominational ecclesiology. He surveys the theological...
...and political implications of each theme and concludes that Ding is a contextual theologian who emphasizes “socio-political accommodation and cultural indigenization” (p. 399). It is a theology “from above” (which, I would add, is the case with most theology written by bishops) seeking a theological, cultural, and political via media between Christ and Marx. Li acknowledges Ding’s contributions but adds that Ding’s theology has limited appeal for the Chinese church in the future.

The author’s interpretation of contextual theology is synthetic and systematic, not historical and dialogical. As a result, he tends to make theological connections without direct or sufficient evidence. In contrast, Ding wrote unsystematically, for particular audiences in response to events, and not always with a theological purpose. As a church leader, his achievements and limitations were more than theological.

—Philip L. Wickeri

Philip L. Wickeri teaches at San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union. His most recent book is Reconstructing Christianity in China: K. H. Ting and the Chinese Church (Orbis Books, 2007).

Christian Theology in Asia.


As befits the diversity that is Asia, the essays in this volume reflect the pluralism in theological thought within the Asian continent. The book is in two parts. The essays in the first part amply demonstrate that theologies in Asia are necessarily shaped by the interaction between Christians and their specific sociopolitical, religious, and cultural contexts. David Thompson’s introductory chapter maps the terrain of theology in Asia. The influence of culture on theological construction is evident in the essays by Jacob Kavunkal and Israel Selvanayagam, who survey the various attempts by Catholic and Protestant theologians, respectively, to seek rapprochement between the Gospel and Hindu India. The same sensitivity to culture may be observed in Nozomu Miyahira’s overview of the appropriation of Japanese cultural elements in Japanese theology, and in Sebastian Kim’s assessment of Christianity in Korea. Political considerations also play an important shaping role, as seen in John Titaley’s description of the theological presence in Indonesia and in Choong Chee Pang’s analysis of the current state of theological scholarship in China.

Despite the different contexts in which the writers operate, they share common themes: Christianity and other religions (Thomas Thangaraj); postcolonial identity, hermeneutics, and biblical authority (Archie Lee); feminism (Namsoon Kang); the ecumenical movement (Wesley Ariarajah); openness to the supernatural in mission and evangelism (Hwa Yung); and poverty and theology from a subaltern perspective (Sathianathan Clarke).

By introducing a host of Asian theologians as well as providing summations of their theologies along with bibliographic references, the book makes an invaluable contribution to the growing body of literature on global Christianity.

—Mark L. Y. Chan

Mark L. Y. Chan is Lecturer in Theology, Trinity Theological College, Singapore.
Dissertation Notices

Albrecht, Michael Jerome.
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Andersen, T. David.
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Im, Chandler H.
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Wu, Kijin James.
“A Protestant Theological Inquiry into a Classical Confucian Idea of Offering Sacrifices to Ancestors (Ji Zu).”

Young Min Paik.
“Transforming the Myth of Oneness for Korean Christianity.”

Zscheile, Dwight John.
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