

**Zeitschrift:** Theologische Zeitschrift  
**Herausgeber:** Theologische Fakultät der Universität Basel  
**Band:** 27 (1971)  
**Heft:** 5

**Artikel:** Eschatology or Futurology? : On the Interdependence Between Christian Eschatology and Secular Progress  
**Autor:** Schwarz, Hans  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-878654>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 02.04.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# Eschatology or Futurology?

## On the Interdependence Between Christian Eschatology and Secular Progress

Despite all other important issues, twentieth century theology so far is largely determined by the quest for eschatology. Already in 1906 Albert Schweitzer claimed in “The Quest for the Historical Jesus from Reimarus to Wrede”:

There is, on the one hand, the eschatological solution which at one stroke raises the Marcan account as it stands, with all its disconnectedness and inconsistencies, into genuine history; and there is on the other hand, the literary solution, which regards the incongruous dogmatic element as interpolated by the earliest Evangelist into the tradition and therefore strikes out the Messianic claim altogether from the historical Life of Jesus. *Tertium non datur.*<sup>1</sup>

Though Schweitzer himself took a clear stand for a total eschatological understanding of Jesus, he had no concern for eschatology, neither theological nor philosophical. His main intention was to destroy “eschatologism” which he considered illusory and misleading, in order to penetrate to the heroic figure of Jesus. And he concluded his investigation in asserting that Jesus tried in vain to change the course of history and to bring to a stop the wheel of history<sup>2</sup>, the symbol of the eternal recurrence of the same.

The quest for eschatology occurred again in the neo-reformation theology of Barth and Bultmann. Contrary to Albert Schweitzer they considered eschatology no longer as something that had to be stripped away from Jesus and his message to discover still relevant parts of the New Testament. In the second edition of his commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans (1921), Karl Barth admitted his indebtedness to Franz Overbeck who had convinced him that “all Christian theology, from the Patristic Age onward, is unchristian and satanic, for it draws Christianity into the sphere of civilization and culture, and thereby denies the essential eschato-

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus. A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, transl. by W. Montgomery (1966), p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> Schweitzer (n. 1), p. 370f.

logical character of the Christian religion".<sup>3</sup> Christianity, that is not totally and exclusively eschatological, has absolutely nothing to do with Christ. For Bultmann "*the message of Jesus is an eschatological gospel*"<sup>4</sup> and the "decisive Either-Or dominates the preaching of Jesus".<sup>5</sup> In Barth's case the term eschatology served to indicate the infinite qualitative difference between God and the world. It is evident that this dialectical approach found it difficult to assert in a theologically meaningful way the bearing of eschatology on the future. Bultmann, on the other hand, tied eschatology almost exclusively to the new self-understanding of man. Already in 1933 Bultmann claimed: "If you want to talk about God, you evidently have to talk about yourself."<sup>6</sup> However, man is neither a solitary being who is only concerned about his self, nor does he solely depend on the eternal now. Man lives in and interacts with an environment, and together with his environment leaves the past, stays in the present, and approaches the future.

A generation after Barth and Bultmann, the historical dimension was finally included in eschatology by Wolfhart Pannenberg who pointed to God's acts in history. "According to the Biblical witnesses God's self-disclosure did not occur directly in the way of a theophany, but indirectly in God's acts in history"<sup>7</sup>, states the first of his seven theses in "Revelation as History" (1961). Revelation is not limited to a special "Heilsgeschichte"; it is progressive and can only be understood from the end of the revelatory history. Again the history of Jesus is endowed with eschatological significance, because in the course of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ all final events occurred proleptically. The Christ event as the proleptic anticipation of the end of history enables us to interpret the totality of all other history. This theology of history takes man's environment and his future into consideration and is a valu-

<sup>3</sup> K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, transl. from the 6th ed. by E. C. Hoskyns (1933), p. 3 n. 2, in his preface to the second edition.

<sup>4</sup> R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, transl. by Louise P. Smith and Erminie H. Latero (1934), p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Bultmann (n. 4), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> R. Bultmann, *Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden?: Glauben und Verstehen*, I (1961), p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> W. Pannenberg, *Dogmatische Thesen zur Lehre von der Offenbarung: Offenbarung als Geschichte*, ed. by W. Pannenberg (1961), p. 91 (own translation).

able supplement to Bultmann's theology of existence. But is the task of eschatology already accomplished when it incorporates the steadily receding horizons of history into the Christ event?

Jürgen Moltmann points out that the dynamic factor is missing in Pannenberg's approach and Moltmann feels that it is not sufficient for a theologian to give a different *interpretation* to the world, to history and to human nature, but to *transform* them in the expectation of a divine transformation.<sup>8</sup> Moltmann's own approach offers a corrective to Pannenberg's concept of eschatology in directing our attention to the Judaeo-Christian religion as a religion of promise. God always reveals himself in such a way that He points to His faithfulness in history. Knowledge of God means recognizing God, because revelation means that God stands in historical faithfulness to His promises. The reality of the promises lies in the trustworthiness of the one who gives them. Consequently, the understanding of the promises connects personal and historical categories of reality. However, the question arises how promises are connected with eschatology. Moltmann proposes to regard those promises and expectations as eschatological that are directed towards a historic future in the sense of an ultimate horizon. A horizon is already envisioned in the common concept of promise in the sense that it is the limit of expectation that recedes and invites for future exploration. Where the historically limited and perspective horizon reaches in the *eschaton* the *proton* of the whole creation, there we can talk about eschatology, because there is nothing beyond *that* of which we could think.<sup>9</sup> Moltmann does not want to confine eschatology to the so-called last things that will happen in the end, as was the case in traditional theology, but for him it is also the cause and the drive towards this end.<sup>10</sup> Yet he never mentions the so-called last things and is predominantly occupied with the drive towards this end, or to state it more bluntly, he is mostly concerned with the immediate future. With this concern about the future he coincides with the feeling of many people.

The secular book market is almost swamped with book titles such as "Brave New World", "1984", "Man and His Future", "The

---

<sup>8</sup> J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope. On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (1967), p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Moltmann (n. 8), p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> Moltmann (n. 8), p. 16.

Second Genesis” and renowned scholars advocate that professorships for futurology and planning for the future should be established. There are some encouraging signs that theology, at least as far as it is influenced by men such as Pannenberg, Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz and Richard Shaull, is rediscovering the dimension of the future too. But by the same token eschatology, or the doctrine of the last things, i.e. of a Christ-centered and God-provided final transformation and a new creation of man and of his environment, seems to be old-fashioned and finally discarded. In the eyes of the public and in the eyes of many theologians, man should take the shaping of the future in his own hands and not wait for a divine intervention which solves his problems and provides a final goal of history. Christians, too, should be concerned with the immediate future and not with obscure metaphysical speculations about the future destiny of the world. They have to get involved in the urgent issues of modern life and modern society. If the Christian faith has any value at all, it must consist mainly of an ethical attitude that transforms the unjust and cold structures of modern life. So why bother with any last things if there is so much to do in the immediate future? But can this alternative between Christian eschatology and secular planning for the future be justified?

### 1.

Our everyday life reflects very clearly the emphasis on the immediate future and a *disinterest* in the *final end* of history. We try to do everything to forget the last things in our everyday life. Even if we are still exposed to them in the traditional teachings of our church, they do not appeal to us any longer.

Our attempt to forget the last things is shown best in our attitude towards death. Prospects such as the threat of a global, push-button war, frequent gun fights in our metropolitan areas and an inescapable death toll in daily traffic makes us accept a sudden death as a by-product of progress. The term “traffic victim” makes us believe that death on the road is not the fault of a careless driver or of a careless pedestrian, but the result of our modern traffic conditions. We are used to these daily death reports, and unless a whole busload of people is killed in one accident it hardly makes the front page

of the newspapers. Sudden death is an undesirable but inescapable by-product of modern living, and is hardly understood as leading up to the last things.

Even when death hits us personally, for instance when one of our loved ones dies, our feelings are only slightly different. We are embarrassed with this occasion and a little helpless. But soon we regain our composure and try our best to belittle and forget death.

Evelyn Waugh's "Death in Hollywood" gives a shockingly vivid description of our attempts to do away with the embarrassing fact that everyone has to die.<sup>11</sup> First, we try to counteract the basic law of nature that everything in our world is doomed to decay. Cosmetologists are employed to restore the life-likeness of the corpse, because we do not want to admit that death has interfered with our man-made environment. Of course, the body must be prepared against the hideous results of natural decay. When the Egyptians mummified their dead kings and queens, they did so because they believed they were deities and would be reincarnated. Modern funeral practices however, attempt a deification and immortalization of man. Secondly, we do not want to admit in our vocabulary that someone died. Death is an impolite word.

Undertaker has been supplanted by "funeral director" or "mortician". Even the classified section of the telephone directory gives recognition to this; in its pages you will find "Undertakers - see Funeral Directors". Coffins are "caskets", hearses are "coaches", or "professional cars"; flowers are "floral tributes"; corpses are "loved ones", but mortuary etiquette dictates that a specific corpse be referred to by name only - as "Mr. Jones"; cremated ashes are "remains". Euphemisms such as "slumber room", "reposing room", and calcination - the "*kindlier* heat" abound in the funeral business.<sup>12</sup>

We also call the cemeteries "memorial gardens" where "perpetual care" is administered and a cemetery salesman refers to himself as a "memorial counselor" who wants to sell "pre-need memorial estates" or, in the good old vocabulary, a grave for future occupancy.<sup>13</sup> Finally, we have also done away with a special mourning color. In most other countries, whether pagan or Christian, the immediate relatives of the dead dress in a special morning color, mostly white or black, for a certain period of time. With this, affection to the dead is indicated and other people are encouraged to shield the mourners from the ensuing hardship. Often the morning colors are at the same time

---

<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Death in Hollywood: Life* (Sept., 1947), pp. 74-84. See also Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (1963), pp. 148-160, in her vivid description of Forest Lawn Memorial Park of Southern California.

<sup>12</sup> Mitford (n. 11), p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Mitford (n. 11), p. 32.

colors of joy, to express that the dead man has reached his destiny and is now in union with his god(s). However, in America we do not want to pay so much attention to death, and we try to overcome as quickly as possible these unpleasant interruptions of our daily life. Modern funeral business lends a helping hand to this attitude. The undertaker has discovered his role as "grief-therapist" in which he becomes the stage manager to "create an appropriate atmosphere and to move the funeral party through a drama in which social relationships are stressed and an emotional catharsis or release is provided through ceremony".<sup>14</sup> For instance the harsh realities of the grave tend to be softened by the skills of the undertaker and the cemetery personnel.<sup>15</sup> Graves are lined with artificial grass to cover the upturned earth, canopies are raised in inclement weather, and the coffin in most cases is not lowered until the bereaved have departed.

During the Middle Ages life was centered much more around death. The allegorical concept of the Dance of Death expressed the all-conquering power of death and influenced the thinking of many generations. Its impact can be seen in most countries of Western Europe in poetry, music and visual arts which depicted and dramatized processions of the living and the dead. Through the encounter with the Black Death in the mid-14th century it gained momentum and was soon popularized by the belief of the nocturnal dances of the dead as part of their purgatory punishment. Paintings of that time show us people of all ways of life dancing to the tune of death. This motive with half-decayed dead corpses was used by the church to lead people to repentance. The quest of Martin Luther: "How do I get a gracious God?" is certainly not unrelated to the theme of the Dance of Death and to other related topics such as the *dies irae* (day of wrath), *memento mori* (a reminder of death) and the *ars moriendi* (art of dying). Though Luther discovered that the Judgement Day need not be conceived as a day of wrath (*dies irae*), but a day of joy, he did not take it less seriously. In reading the letters of his later years one gets the impression that his life outlook is more determined by longing for death than by craving for life.<sup>16</sup>

Though we are now much more aware of the sudden possibility of death in knowing that a heart attack can terminate our life in

---

<sup>14</sup> Mitford (n. 11), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> R. W. Habenstein & W. M. Lamers, *Funeral Customs the World over* (1960), p. 748.

<sup>16</sup> P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (1966), pp. 409ff.

the blink of an eye, and in being constantly threatened with an "all-out" atomic war, our life outlook is neither in a positive nor in a negative way determined by death. We do not want to admit that death is the final incalculable end of our life. This became evident in the enthusiastic response to the first heart transplants. The possibility of removing the death barrier seemed to emerge and man was again hoping for eternal life here on earth. Medical doctors are already doing their best to prolong life and they rather "pull the plug" too late than too soon. Many people sacrifice the pleasures of gourmet cooking and try through dietary asceticism to escape from threatening heart attacks, while politicians appropriate billions of dollars to an ABM system to save us from the fate of an atomic war. Evangelistic preachers such as Billy Graham get immense applause when they proclaim:

That's the way a Christian should live his life, in constant anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ! If we could live every day as though it might be the very last one before the final judgment what a difference it would make here on earth!

But we don't like to think that way! We don't like to think that our carefully made plans, our long range schemes may be interrupted by the trumpets of God! We are so engrossed in our own little activities that we can't bear the thought of having anything spoil them! Too many people would rather say, 'Oh well, the end of the world hasn't come yet, so why think about it - it's probably a thousand years away!'<sup>17</sup>

But who really cares about such a message? Does it ever penetrate beneath our skin? Hardly, because the style of our life is so different from the time of Jesus or even from that of the Middle Ages.

We sing from our hymnals, "Refresh thy people on their toilsome way, lead us from night to never-ending day"<sup>18</sup>, but leaving the church service, we live a life full of interest and excitement. Life is no longer a vale of toil and tears. Emotional upsets are cured through psychiatric treatment, through pills, or in a less expensive way through our pastor. Life is thrilling and exciting and we are too busy to be concerned about any last things. While people of

---

<sup>17</sup> B. Graham, *Peace with God* (1968), p. 229.

<sup>18</sup> Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America, Hymn 521, stanza 4.



past generations had to hope for a life beyond, because life here was short and filled with drudgery, for the majority of us there is no such need. The claim of Karl Marx that "religion is only the illusory sun around which man circles unless he circles around himself" and that "it is the *task of history* to establish the *truth of this world* after the *otherworldliness of truth* has disappeared" is already a historical fact for us when applied to eschatology.<sup>19</sup> We have almost succeeded in forgetting the last things and instead concentrate on life here on earth.

The last things are no longer appealing. The picturesque language with which the Bible describes eternal life and heaven seems boring for us. The prospect of golden streets, gates of pearls and celestial choirs do not mean much in an affluent society. They would be interesting museum pieces or something you could visit while touring Disneyland, but to live there would be a different matter. Our present life is in constant opposition to any life beyond. While the life beyond should be devoted to eternal worship and service of God, we find enjoyment in busy streets and even good church members hardly find time for their daily devotions. We read in the New Testament that in heaven there will be no male nor female, while our life here is centered around sex, and we are "out" if we are not informed about the latest sex techniques. In heaven, we are told, we will mostly sing hymns and adore God, while here it is one of the most frustrating jobs to recruit new choir members. Above that, Sunday School attendance is declining and atheism is increasing all over the world. We could continue to list the characteristics of our attitude here on earth which are mostly opposite to those which are expected from us in heaven.

We can only conclude that our life here on earth is in no way determined by God's eternity. While access to life beyond death depends on God's grace, access to life here on earth depends on our own success; and while forgiveness of sins is the essential prerequisite of heavenly bliss, earthly blessing is determined by our own efficiency. Man has become mature, he has taken the future in his own hands and does not rely any longer upon vague promises of a life hereafter.

---

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, *Frühe Schriften*, ed. by Hans-Joachim Lieber and Peter Furth, 1 (1962), p. 489.

## 2.

(a) The amazing fact, however, remains that modern life, with its *confidence* in man and in his ability to determine the *future*, is a result of the *Judaeo-Christian* environment out of which it originated. Secular progress presupposes a linear concept of time, a time arrow that has a definite starting point and a definite goal. This linear understanding of time originated in the *Judaeo-Christian* religion.

All other world views and religions are confined to a cyclical understanding of time.<sup>20</sup> For instance, in the Canaanite religion of the neighbors of Israel the two seasonal gods Baal and Mot determined the religious life of the people.<sup>21</sup> In the beginning of summer the people lament the death of Baal and the triumph of the death god Mot, because in the summer drought all vegetation dried out and perished through the merciless rays of the sun and through the glowing winds of the desert. Half a year later the people rejoiced and celebrated the death of Mot and the "resurrection" of the fertility god Baal when the winter rain drenched the dry ground and promised a good crop. Such a seasonal rhythm between "life and death" does not provide much incentive for any long range planning, because man feels himself subjected to the power of nature. The Indian religions of Buddhism and Hinduism provide even less stimulus to engage in any planning for the future. They advocate as one of the main goals of this life to negate all craving for life, and thus to break out of the fatal *samsara* of birth, death, and reincarnation. Any interest in the future and any appreciation of the life here on earth would contradict the dominant cyclical understanding of time.

One might argue that the Greeks are an exception, because they reached a very high cultural level without a linear concept of time. There certainly is some truth in this argument. But when we penetrate through the cultural facade, we realize very quickly that the Greek view of life was utterly pessimistic. During the classical period of Greek history the gods of Homer looked like deified men and were themselves subject to the destiny of the world.<sup>22</sup> In later Hellenism the mystery religions indicate an unfulfilled

---

<sup>20</sup> K. Löwith, *Meaning in History* (1957), p. 19, expresses this very well when he says: "It seems as if the two great conceptions of antiquity and Christianity, cyclic motion and eschatological direction, have exhausted the basic approaches to the understanding of history. Even most recent attempts at an interpretation of history are nothing else but variations of these two principles or a mixture of both of them."

<sup>21</sup> H.-J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel. A Cultic History of the Old Testament* (1966), pp. 38ff.

<sup>22</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Religionen der Menschheit in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (1959), pp. 464f.

yearning for immortality in which the Christian hope of resurrection of the dead easily found open ears. Friedrich Nietzsche in his "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greek" advocated the basic understanding of time as "an eternal recurrence of the same". The British historian Arnold Toynbee who was largely influenced by Greek philosophy wanted to understand all history as a rhythmic pattern of challenge and response.<sup>23</sup> One civilization emerges, attains its height, and provokes another civilization to originate. The latter conflicts with the former, gains strength while fighting the other, and finally prevails until a third emerges. Like the waves of the sea crashing against the shore and receding, one civilization after the other is doomed to death without any evident progress.

Why is the Judaeo-Christian religion so different that it can provide the ground for the modern emphasis on this world and on the concern for the future? The reason for this can be found in two basic convictions: The belief in *one God*, and the identifying of this one God as the *creator* and redeemer of everything that is. Often the people of Israel were attracted to the polytheism of their neighbors, but their religious leaders always brought them back to Yahweh, the only God. Though Yahweh was in a special sense regarded as the divine head of the Hebrew community, this theocracy tended to be universalistic.<sup>24</sup> Especially under the influence of the prophetic movement, that is, from about the middle of the eighth century onward, the Israelites conceived Yahweh more and more as the divine head of all mankind, while the neighboring nations still worshiped their respective particularistic gods. How decisive this monotheistic and universalistic view of God is, can be shown by comparing the Judaeo-Christian religion with Zoroastrianism. Both conceive history as a forward movement, but the evident dualism between the two main gods Ormuzd and Ahriman prevented Zoroastrianism from pursuing the idea of progress.<sup>25</sup> The Judaeo-Christian belief in historic progression is largely due to the understanding of history as "*Heilsgeschichte*". The God of Israel is not

<sup>23</sup> A. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (1953), pp. 14f. However, he concedes the possibility that our present civilization may survive because this cyclic movement is no inescapable fate and leaves room for the freedom of choice to give history "some new and unprecedented turn" (pp. 38f.).

<sup>24</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1967), p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> M. Ginsberg, *Essays in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, 3. *Evolution and Progress* (1961), p. 6. It seems strange that Ginsberg does not point to this evident difference between the two religions but only shows the similarity in their understanding of history as a "forward movement".

God of the past but of the future. This was already indicated in the Old Testament covenant concept and is even more emphasized through the apocalyptic periodization of history in the intertestamental period.

Greco-Roman thinking was past-oriented and mainly interested in the eternal laws beyond and above history out of which the historical events flowed in eternal occurrence and recurrence.<sup>26</sup> Thus the Greeks were not concerned about the Lord of history, but about the regularity and steadiness of the cosmos which they first perceived in the movements of the heavenly bodies.<sup>27</sup> In the Judaeo-Christian religion God was conceived as the agent of history, who works in and with history. Though the God of Israel undoubtedly was first understood as the redeemer of Israel, the consequent development of the universalistic view of God led to the understanding of God as the creator of everything that is. However, one should realize that the gradual development of the belief in Yahweh as the creator of the world did not replace any other creation stories that were prevalent within the Israelite community. As soon as the concept of creation emerged, the Israelites assumed Yahweh as the creator. It is vital for the Judaeo-Christian faith that the understanding of Yahweh as creator did not develop as a separate belief system parallel to the notion of Yahweh as the redeemer. The belief in God the creator was conceived in a strictly soteriological way<sup>28</sup> to assert that the God who will provide the redemption of the world *did* also create it. Yahweh provided the origin of the world, he is active in the world, and he will provide the redemption of the world. This latter part came to its fulfilment in the Christian faith when the history of Jesus of Nazareth was understood as the redemptive act of God. Thus history had a definite beginning (its creation), a definite course (the present acts of God), and a definite goal (redemption in and through Christ). History had a goal worth living for, and the present gained its well-deserved recognition too, because it was the arena in which man had to prove himself to be eligible for that final goal.

---

<sup>26</sup> Collingwood (n. 24), pp. 42f., rightly speaks of a "substantialism" which is incompatible with a due recognition of history.

<sup>27</sup> Löwith (n. 20), pp. 4f.

<sup>28</sup> G. von Rad, *Das theologische Problem des alttestamentlichen Schöpfungsglaubens: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (1961), p. 142.

There was no emphasis on man though. It was clearly understood that man could never reach the final goal without the saving grace of God. This emphasis on the grace of God is already expressed in the covenant concept. According to Jewish thinking a covenant is always offered by a stronger power (Yahweh) to a weaker power (the Israelite community). When the Christian church saw itself in continuance with the Old Testament community the church found it impossible to accept the prevailing humanistic anthropology of the Greco-Roman world. In the Greco-Roman world history was conceived as a history of man's deeds, man's purposes, man's successes and failures. "The gods have no plan of their own for the development of human affairs; they only grant success or decree failure for the plans of men."<sup>29</sup> Christianity, however, rejected such optimistic idea of human nature. The inability to achieve ends clearly conceived in advance was no longer understood as accidental but as a permanent element in human nature<sup>30</sup>, arising out of the condition of man as a fallen creature. Especially Augustine with his concept of mankind as a *massa perditionis* (corrupt entity) influenced the thinking of the Western world for at least a thousand years.<sup>31</sup> But at the same time this did not indicate a rejection of man. Admittedly, the historical process is not the working-out of man's purposes, but of God's, because it is basically "Heilsgeschichte". Man does not control the goal of history but God. However, God's purpose is not a purpose for himself, but it is a purpose for man and it is embodied in human life and through the activity of human wills. God predetermines the final goal and he determines from time to time the object which man desires. But each human being is a historically important and responsible agent. He knows what he wants and pursues it, though he does not know why he wants it. Thus man receives his dignity and importance as the vehicle of God's redemptive purpose. All hope is founded and centered in God and not in the belief in progress or in man himself. The acting and active God who provided the beginning, who controls the present and who will provide the future is the decisive center of all Christian and Jewish hope. Even now Christian churches still emphasize the unworthiness of man. However, sometimes this

---

<sup>29</sup> Collingwood (n. 24), p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> Collingwood (n. 24), p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> J. Baillie, *The Belief in Progress* (1951), pp. 20ff.

is done more out of tradition than out of conviction, and it is questionable whether the hope in an active and gracious God still determines the life-orientation of most church members.

(b) Throughout the Middle Ages God-confidence prevailed over self-confidence. The pope ranked higher than the emperor and everything was done to the glory of God and through God's grace. *Gradually*, however, man became *more confident in himself*.

One of the first documents in which self-confidence prevailed over God-confidence is René Descartes' "Discours de la Méthode" (1637). It is probably not just coincidence that this treatise was written during the devastating and bewildering time of the Thirty Years' War.<sup>32</sup> Descartes introduced radical doubt into philosophy and into Western thought and thus can rightly be called the father of modern philosophy. He stated that it is possible to doubt everything.<sup>33</sup> But still the "I" is there even in the midst of all doubt. *Someone* has to doubt. Otherwise there could be nothing. Consequently, the "I" of the solitary man became the foundation of all reality. Though Descartes still needed God to guarantee for him the reality of the world outside him, the decisive point was made: Man is the center of everything, it is more reliable to trust in him than anything or anyone else.

One hundred fifty years later Immanuel Kant went a decisive step further in his essay "Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1783) in saying:

Enlightenment is the emancipation of man from his self-inflicted immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use your intellect without the guidance of someone else. This immaturity is self-inflicted if its cause is not found in the defect of the intellect, but in the decision and courage to use your intellect without the guidance of someone else. *Sapere aude!* Have courage, to use your own intellect! Is the watchword of the enlightenment.<sup>34</sup>

Kant is advocating here the freedom of man in political and religious matters and the dominance of man's own intellect and

---

<sup>32</sup> Descartes himself refers to the wartime in which his Discourse was written. Cf. *Discourse on Method: Philosophical Writings*, selected and translated by N. K. Smith (1958), p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. for the following Descartes (n. 32), pp. 118-123.

<sup>34</sup> I. Kant, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. by W. Weischedel, 9 (1968), p. 53 (own translation).

his own reason. Man should no longer be dependent on someone or something else; and Kant calls such dependence immaturity. Man is now able to determine his own destiny. This optimistic attitude prevailed throughout the enlightenment era.

Gottfried Ephraim Lessing in "The Education of the Human Race" (1780) draws an important analogy between education and revelation. Education is revelation made to the individual, while revelation is an education which has come and still continues to come to the whole human race. However, education never gives man anything which he might not have derived from "within himself", but merely gives it to him more quickly and easily. With the same token revelation gives to the race nothing which human reason, left to itself, might not also have attained; although it has given, and significantly continues to give, the most important of these things more quickly.<sup>35</sup> This would mean that according to Lessing the goal of human progress is no longer found beyond man, but in man himself. But Lessing did not yet realize that the re-discovery of "innate ideas" as the goal of progress must necessarily exclude true progress in the sense of any creative novelty. However, the optimistic trust in the newly established self-confidence continued.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in the 19th century made mankind even more optimistic, because the door seemed to be open for new and unprecedented human progress. If man had evolved so high above the animal world, he could evolve much higher. While Kant emphasized the autonomy of man, that man should have enough self-confidence to determine his own views, here the next step was taken that man is actually able to evolve beyond his present state. Herbert Spencer shaped the outlook in the second half of the 19th century unlike any other writer by converting the theory of evolution into "an instrument of unbridled optimism".<sup>36</sup> Development for him is a cosmic principle that pertains especially to man. The universal development has to be made fruitful for man to drive him to further progress. Nothing can be excluded from this progress, no knowledge, no value systems, and no feelings. Man is in control of his future; he can determine his own progress and he need not rely any longer on an active God.

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. H. E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment* (1966), pp. 151f.

<sup>36</sup> Baillie (n. 31), p. 144f.

Along with the change from God-confidence to self-confidence another important shift emerged which contributed to the belief in *man-made progress*, the secularization of the Kingdom of God. The root for this shift lies in the Calvinistic theory of double predestination. Man is predestined by birth either to be received into heaven after his life here on earth or to be condemned to eternal damnation. Of course, he wants to find out as early as possible what his destiny is. In popular understanding the fact of election could be seen in earthly success. Thus Calvinists worked tirelessly in an ascetic manner to prove to themselves and to others that they were on the right side. The results of this work, of course, could not be enjoyed but had to be added to the constant increase of the employed capital. Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch rightly called Calvinism the forerunner of modern capitalism.<sup>37</sup>

Surprisingly, pietism played a similar role with its radical orientation towards the other world. This other worldliness, by necessity, led pietists to responsible use of the time here on earth. Time was not to be spent in worldly joy and amusement but in self-crucifying work. The father who presided over hours of devotions is at the same time the ancestor of many industrial endeavors. In the 19th century the centers of the pietistic movement in Germany, Rhine-land-Westphalia and Württemberg, became the centers of industrial development. The religious convictions of the ancestors led to a splendid industrial success of the grandchildren, most of whom have long ago discarded the religious premises of their forefathers. In America the development was similar, partly in direct connection with the immigration of German pietists. One of the biggest American steel companies, the Bethlehem Steel Company in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was begun by a blacksmith who had immigrated from Herrnhut, Germany, at the beginning of the 18th century.<sup>38</sup> He settled in Bethlehem, a Herrnhut missionary settlement in the forests of Pennsylvania, and started a small blacksmith shop there.

---

<sup>37</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress* (1958), pp. 131ff. Whereas Max Weber sees at this point close affinity between Calvinism and Judaism, Troeltsch rejects this idea, since the Calvinistic use of Jewish ethical teaching cannot sufficiently explain the phenomenon of modern capitalism.

<sup>38</sup> E. Benz, *Evolution and Christian Hope. Man's Concept of the Future, from the Early Church Fathers to Teilhard de Chardin* (1968), p. 130, quotes this striking example.



Quality and industriousness helped to develop his workshop into a large company. Though the name Bethlehem still points to the pietistic and pacifist origin of the company, it has turned into a huge armament enterprise without regard to its religious premise.

In his book "The Kingdom of God in America" (1937) H. Richard Niebuhr pointed to an important factor that caused this loss of the religious premise. He claimed that the spiritualistic and Calvinistic groups finally favored a man-made heaven. The belief in man as a good creature, virtuous enough to acquire heaven, and the radical transformation of life on earth undermined in the long run the expectation of heavenly bliss. Life on earth became attractive enough to cause them to forget life in heaven, especially when they felt man was able to bring about the kingdom on earth.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.

*Hope* is as *necessary* for human life as oxygen. When man has no hope, he has no incentive to live and he might as well die. Even the rate of mental illness is higher in periods of economic and social depression than in periods of economic growth.

But apart from Christian faith, hope is futile and deceptive. Man must be turned into a cog-wheel of progress in order to keep progress progressing. Mechanization and automation in a modern army or in our huge corporations give us some taste of how inhuman and demanding progress can be. It can be quite totalitarian and does not bring about just earthly blessings, because it emerges as a new god whom man must worship and who demands his life. Man has abandoned God-confidence to gain self-confidence. However, this can only be a transitory state, because human imperfection demands man's surrender to other and even more "dehumanizing" forces. Emil Brunner is right when he calls the belief in progress and the hope for a better future an "illegitimate child of Christianity".<sup>40</sup> The loss of a goal causes an even more severe threat to the modern belief in progress and to the interest in the immediate future. To what end are we progressing? Is there anything worthwhile we

---

<sup>39</sup> Cf. H. R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (1959), pp. 150ff.

<sup>40</sup> E. Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (1954), p. 25.

hope for except the thrilling movement of progress? As long as God provides the goal as the end of history and beyond history, progress has a definite goal. This goal determined the destiny of our life but cannot be reached within our own life. Once this God-provided destiny is denied, the goal must be found within time. However, it can never be reached, because then there would be nothing left to hope for. Thus it has to recede within the farther and farther progressing horizons of history, and the speed of its recession must be at least equivalent to the speed of our own progress. The idea of never-ending progress is already indicated in Lessing's remark that, if God offered him a choice between the possession of truth and the quest of it, he would unhesitatingly prefer the latter.<sup>41</sup> Kant went along similar lines in interpreting life immortal as endless advance towards a perfection that can never actually be attained. That a huge segment of our younger generation, the so-called "hippies", are no longer interested in these fruits of progress should make us wonder. It should also make us wonder that a rapidly increasing number of young people try to escape from the reality of this progress-determined world in resorting to drugs, because they feel that we have created a world of standards without meaning and of goals without ultimate direction. Though man is a transitory being he receives his own identity not from transitoriness and steady change, even if this process allures him to an ever better future, but from something beyond change and transitoriness. Even humanists readily admit this when they refer to the infinite, and this means unchangeable, value of a human being. But what are we doing? Are we trying to catch our own shadow which the idea of progress is projecting in front of us? It might even be that we shall some day discover that there is no ultimate hope for us as long as we try to provide it for ourselves, because it is constantly superseded by our own technological achievements.

At this point *Christian eschatology* becomes *relevant again*.

Firstly, it shows us where the modern idea of progress alienated itself from its Christian foundation. Though maintaining a linear view of history, it deprived history from its God-promised goal. Consequently, the progressiveness of history became an end in itself with man being raised from the position of a God-alienated

---

<sup>41</sup> Baillie (n. 31), p. 182.

and God-endowed actor in history to the position of a deified agent of history. But how can one assert a linear progressiveness of history and at the same time deny the origin and the goal of this progressiveness?<sup>42</sup> Our present dilemma with the environmental exploitation, human depravation and threatening meaninglessness of life seems to indicate that mankind is unable to achieve self-redemption which the pursuit of steady progress demands.

At this point Christian eschatology provides secondly a hope and a promise which we are unable to attain. Eschatology is neither obsolete, nor can it be replaced by any secular or religiously colored idea of progress. But it endows our life and even the idea of progress with new meaning. Secular endeavors for progress and a socio-ethical transformation of the world have to be related and must be based on Christian eschatology. On the basis of the Christ event they can be understood as proleptic anticipation of the God-promised eschaton which at the same time is their incentive, their directive, and their judgement. Secular endeavors for progress and a socio-ethical transformation of the world are legitimate and necessary, they are preliminary and inadequate, and they yearn for their final completion through God's redemptive power. But apart from Christian eschatology, they not only miss God, but man too. Instead of leading to freedom and new humanity, they lead to new slavery and potential self-destruction. This is the reason why eschatology is so crucial in our time.

*Hans Schwarz, Columbus, Ohio*

---

<sup>42</sup> Löwith (n. 20), pp. 205ff., observes that modern trust in the continuity of history is irreconcilable with a linear view of history and is actually much closer to the classic theory of a cyclic movement. Thus the modern view of history is an eclectic and inconsistent combination of the Greco-Roman and the Judaeo-Christian views of history.