

## ***Zeitgeist* and the New Millennium: Comparing the Turn of the Century to the Turn of the Previous Century**

Stanley Gundry, in a seminal article published twenty-three years ago in JETS,<sup>1</sup> challenged evangelicals to consider the historical conditioning of the expression of their eschatological views. In particular, he was bothered by a correspondence that too frequently appeared throughout the history of the church.

But I am intrigued by another phenomenon related to this matter of causes and effects as it relates to the history of eschatology. It might be more appropriate to say I am troubled. Time and again there seems to be a connection between eschatology and the Church's perception of itself in its historical conditions. In other words, in many cases eschatologies appear to have been sociologically conditioned. This suggests that factors other than purely exegetical and theological considerations have been more influential in the history of eschatology than we would care to admit.<sup>2</sup>

Gundry's concerns had been anticipated by Jürgen Moltmann who echoes the same sentiment. In responding to the 'prophetic' and 'economic' theology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he noted that "its real appeal lies not so much in the enlightened explanation of the divine saving plan of history, but rather in taking the testimonies of scripture, which point historically towards each other and also beyond themselves, and using them to turn history into a 'system of hope' by which to answer the question of the future . . ."<sup>3</sup> While he affirms a good side to this endeavor, his analysis determined that

Its mistake, however, is to be seen in the fact that it sought to discover the eschatological progressiveness of salvation history not from the cross and resurrection, but from other 'signs of the times' – from an apocalyptic view of the corruption of the Church and the decay of the world, or from an optimistic view of the progress of culture and knowledge – so that revelation became a predicate of history, and 'history' was turned deistically into a substitute for God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley N. Gundry, *Hermeneutics or Zeigeist as the Determining Factor in the History of Eschatologies?* Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 20 (March 1977): 45-55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 50. See also Darrel R. Reid, "Luther, Müntzer and the Last Day: Eschatological Hope, Apocalyptic Expectations" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (January 1995): 53-74, for a specific case study in this area.

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965): 71.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Such analyses could be multiplied many times over. As we start a new century and move into a new millennium, perhaps evangelicals need once again to remind themselves of the potential hazards of developing eschatologies from the starting point of current events.<sup>5</sup>

Gundry's presentation in sounding the alert is not unbalanced. For example, he tells the reader:

Please remember that I am aware that I have not told the whole story of factors influencing shifts in eschatology. Nor am I saying that eschatologies have always been sociologically conditioned. Nor do I believe that they are of necessity sociologically conditioned. And I recognize that in some instances which I have cited it is difficult to distinguish between cause and effect. In fact, in some cases there may be no cause-effect relationship at all. I would also insist that millennial views of all varieties within orthodox Christianity usually spring fundamentally from a conviction of God's sovereignty and grace. In other words, millennial views, however conceived, are not merely Christianized versions of secular ideas of progress or decline.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, analyses of these kinds are essentially complicated. What makes it particularly difficult in tagging a person's view as culturally driven is the fact that interpretation of history and culture has its subjective dimension to the same or greater extent than interpretation of a written text such as the Bible.<sup>7</sup> So what follows is a brief presentation of some of the complicating factors which are involved. They will be illustrated using a limited set of historical examples from the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The **first factor** that needs to be considered is the **personal nature of many presentations and conclusions about eschatology**. A clear example with respect to personal eschatological conclusions can be seen from the late 1800s and early 1900s in the theology and ministry of Arno C. Gaebelein. The Methodist Gaebelein began his ministry as a postmillennialist but later converted to a premillennial position in eschatology and became an associate editor of the Scofield Reference Bible. What

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<sup>5</sup> This warning is the thrust of Brent Sandy's article "Did Daniel See Mussolini? The Limits of Reading Current Events into Biblical Prophecy" *Christianity Today* 37 (Fall 1993): 34-36. I believe such warnings are needed periodically in the church because of the general accuracy of Gundry's assessment.

<sup>6</sup> Gundry, 54.

<sup>7</sup> This writer's view of the possibility of knowledge of history is close to Ronald Nash's view of soft objectivity (*Christian Faith & Historical Understanding* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984], 77-92). See also Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 19-42.

caused him to change his mind about eschatology? In his autobiography, Gaebelien highlights two sources for the change . One is his reading of a book by Émile Guers entitled *The Future of Israel* and the second is his experience as a missionary to mostly Orthodox Jewish immigrants in New York City. Although he read the book before the Orthodox Jews came into his experience, it appears that he only took Guers' view of Bible prophecy seriously after many contacts and debates with the sons of Israel.

This initial attempt to bring the Gospel to the Jews led me deeper into the Old Testament Scriptures. I began to study prophecy. Up to this time I had followed in the interpretation of Old Testament the so-called "spiritualization method." Israel, that method teaches, is no longer the Israel of old, but it means the Church now. For the natural Israel no hope of a future restoration is left. All their glorious and unfulfilled promises find now their fulfillment in the Church of Jesus Christ. But as I came in closer touch with this remarkable people, those who are still orthodox, I soon had to face their never-dying hope. As I began to read their Machsorim, their rituals and prayers, I found the expressions of hope and longing for Messiah's coming. Do they not say each time Pesach is celebrated, commemorating their supernatural deliverance out of Egypt's slavery, "This year here, next year in Jerusalem"? Many an old, long-bearded, orthodox Hebrew assured me that the Messiah, the Son of David, the Bethlehemite, will surely come to claim David's throne. In the beginning it sounded foreign to me, but as I turned to the Bible I soon discovered the real hope of Israel and the truth of the promised return of our Lord, and the earthly glories connected with that future event were brought through the Spirit of God to my heart. Then the study of the Bible became my most fascinating occupation, and as I continued in my search, I knew that the Lord wanted me to turn aside from the regular ministry and devote myself to work among God's ancient people.<sup>8</sup>

The time period for Gaebelien's outreach ministry to Jews was the 1890s. His missionary example demonstrates that, regardless of the cultural tendencies (which still tended to postmillennialism in his day), seemingly momentous experiences of a personal nature can influence one's own eschatology.

An example from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (and into the present century) with a different twist would be the *Left Behind Series* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. This best-selling series of fictional works makes no predictions and uses no specific current or cultural events to frame the theology and chronology of the presentation.<sup>9</sup> It is LaHaye's testimony that the idea for doing the novels had been in his mind for several years and

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<sup>8</sup> Arno C. Gaebelien, *Half a Century: The Autobiography of a Servant* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1930), 20-21. See also Michael D. Stallard, "The Theological Method of Arno C. Gaebelien" (Dallas, TX: Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992), 23-25.

<sup>9</sup> The novels are, of course, set in a specific timeframe, namely the kind of world we experience at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. That is, it is not a nineteenth century series.

that his desire was to spread his particular pre-tribulational, premillennial understanding of the end times to the common mass of people who would never read theology books. In the same vein, he started the Pre-Trib Research Center and the Pre-Trib Study Group almost a decade ago to spread his views, views which he felt were being maligned and rejected with increasing fervency.<sup>10</sup> The result of all of these endeavors including the novels has been at least a modest resurgence in interest in the pre-tribulational, premillennial Second Coming of Christ.

While it might be possible to micro-analyze any historical trends that have fed Tim LaHaye's convictions, it might be best simply to view his efforts in the same way that *The Fundamentals* of the early twentieth century can be viewed. Sometimes current religious trends go counter to one's theological convictions and he simply tries to do something about it. Thus, the current phenomena of fictional literature highlighting a certain eschatological position, rather than being driven specifically by some social or religious trend that serves to produce the eschatology, actually is spurred on (in LaHaye's case) by theological trends counter to its own.<sup>11</sup> Such a state of affairs highlights a personal motivation for the expression of one's eschatology in certain forums.

A **second factor** that complicates an understanding of possible cultural derivation of eschatologies is that **different theological viewpoints use the same so-called "apocalyptic" cultural event or ongoing trend but in a different way for divergent ends.** In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the impact of various trends can be traced with respect to the fortunes of premillennialism versus those of postmillennialism. Kyle summarizes the generally accepted flow of events:

Changing conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also tarnished postmillennialism. Postmillennialism rests on the premise that the world will get better and better. The Civil War, the decline of evangelicalism, the influx of Catholicism, and the outbreak of World War I cast a shadow across this optimistic outlook. In the eyes of many, the situation was getting worse and worse. Under these circumstances postmillennialism became less believable.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Tim LaHaye discussed these issues at a session of the Pre-Trib Study Group held in Dallas, Texas in December 1999 which this writer attended.

<sup>11</sup> In a way similar to LaHaye, Lorraine Boettner defends classical postmillennialism during the 1950s when the view was anything but popular among evangelicals (*The Millennium*, Philadelphia : Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1957).

The pessimistic outline of American history beginning with the Civil War and culminating in the conflagration of World War I no doubt bolstered the historical expectations of premillennialists and may have gained them some converts.

Such an understanding could be contrasted with an earlier state of affairs which seemed to support postmillennialism.

In the early nineteenth century many American postmillennialists believed the defeat of the Satanic forces to be imminent. With the Papal and Islamic powers in an apparent state of decline, the more literal-minded concluded that the twelve hundred and sixty days (years) of the reign of anti-Christ (Revelation 11) would end around the 1860s. In any case American evangelical postmillennialists saw signs of the approach of the millennial age not only in the success of revivals and missions, but also in general cultural progress.<sup>13</sup>

However, postmillennial historical expectations, in spite of a growing disenchantment with the position after the Civil War, were still strongly stated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>14</sup> As history turned into the twentieth century, many postmillennialists were still filled with confidence and optimism.

The Protestant hope for world conquest for Christ and civilization was to be realized primarily by voluntary means, by the spirit, commitment, and sacrifice of those who believed it would soon be realized, with God's help. But when civilization was threatened, then the Protestant forces could include war in their crusading pattern—it happened in 1898, and on a much larger scale it happened in 1917-18. . . .

Lyman Abbott spoke for a majority of American Christians in calling the war a “twentieth century crusade” . . .

Beyond the storm of war, however, spiritual leaders discerned the rainbow of a Christian peace; in the midst of war the signs of the coming of the kingdom could be glimpsed by the eye of faith.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Kyle, *The Last Days are Here Again: A History of the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 102. See also Kyle's earlier work *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 95-106. Also helpful are Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 68-83,

<sup>13</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 49.

<sup>14</sup> Unlike Marsden's description which mentions secular progress, Augustus Strong is probably a typical evangelical postmillennialist at the turn of the century who emphasizes the success of missions and growth of the Church and not the elements of general cultural progress (*Systematic Theology* [Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1907], 1008-1015).

<sup>15</sup> Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 151-52.

Remember that World War I was President Wilson's war to end all wars. Consequently, both postmillennialists and premillennialists could examine the march of history from the Civil War and come up with two entirely different conclusions.

Why do the two interpretive camps give a different interpretation of the historical situation leading up to and through to the conclusion of World War I? McGinn's comments may reveal one particular area to consider (although there are many).

The growing strength of premillennialism in the twentieth century has been aided by a series of events that seemed to confirm that the great parenthesis of the dispensation of the Gentiles was about to end and the biblical prophecies about Israel and the endtime were soon to be fulfilled . . . All they [premillennialists] lacked was some connection with political realities. This began to change with World War I and the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which encouraged Zionist hopes for the establishment of a Jewish state.<sup>16</sup>

McGinn views this focus on the Jewish state (remember the earlier statements about Gaebelein) as the preoccupation or fixation that drives dispensational premillennialism's understanding of the historical events.

From the start, dispensationalist apocalypticism had been obsessed with the place of the Jews in the endtime . . . Apocalyptic traditions, based on a different logic from standard views of history, have always been more attentive to events that fit their picture of divine meaning rather than those that secular history might consider more important. Hence, for the premillennialists the most significant event connected with World War I was not the epic struggle that cost millions of lives or the collapse of the Russian Empire and the Bolshevik Revolution, but rather the 1917 declaration by Lord Balfour.<sup>17</sup>

What is the significance of this fixation on the nation of Israel by dispensational premillennialists? Its pertinence lies in the fact that it shows an opposite tendency to the socially conditioned eschatologies that Gundry was concerned about. This fixation was not caused by the historical events. Rather a particular view of eschatology, dispensational premillennialism with its literal understanding of Old Testament promises to the nation of Israel, created a kind of *historical expectation* on the part of the adherent. Consequently, at least in some cases, one's view of the Bible determined one's interpretation of history, not the other way around. This could also be said of

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<sup>16</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco, CA : HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 255. It should be noted that McGinn does not appear to be a dispensationalist.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 255-56.

postmillennial interpretations as well. A divergent view of eschatology led to differing historical expectations.

A more event-oriented example comes from the Y2K paranoia that the evangelical world experienced recently. Some popular dispensational premillennialists such as Jack Van Impe, Grant Jeffries, Chuck Missler, and others correlated biblical prophecies of the end times with the pending cultural disaster due to the Y2K computer glitch. Technically speaking, such dispensationalists abandoned the normal futurist leaning of dispensationalism for a kind of historicist application with respect to the setup for the end-time scenario. While one could wonder about the possible motivation behind the coupling of this particular current event with prophetic outlines, these premillennialists were clear in their position. For example, Van Impe stated in his *2000 Time Bomb* video that “the so-called ‘millennium bug’ could scramble the electronic minds of computers worldwide in the year 2000 . . . and the universal panic inspired could be the catalyst for the rise of the Antichrist, the mark of the beast ‘666’ system for buying and selling, and the advent of the great tribulation.”<sup>18</sup> Such thinking by premillennialists was roundly criticized by many evangelicals including dispensational premillennialists.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Y2K paranoia was also spread by some postmillennialists. Christian Reconstructionist Gary North provided a voluminous web site dedicated to spreading the word about the coming Y2K disaster. However, he was not interested in any set up for the rapture of the Church and the tribulation period. One critic observed that “through his Web site he can help to fan the flames of Y2K panic to create social disorder so the social systems of the world crash. It's out of the ashes of those systems that he thinks the kingdom will rise.”<sup>20</sup> Much earlier than Y2K North taught that the debt

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<sup>18</sup> See also Dave Hunt, *Y2K: A Reasoned Response to Mass Hysteria* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 166, for mention of Van Impe.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Dave Hunt as a premillennialist was joined by many others who debated against Y2K extremists among premillennialists at the Pre-Trib Study Group in Dallas, Texas in December 1998. This writer, as a premillennialist, spent much effort in 1999 speaking within his confessional constituency against the Y2K paranoia.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick Clarkson, *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* (Common Courage, 1997) cited in <http://www.wired.com/news/news/culture/story/17193.html> from April 3,

crisis would eventually lead to utter financial collapse of the Western world. He commented that “the reconstruction is more likely to emerge from the rubble.”<sup>21</sup> He means, of course, Christian Reconstruction with its postmillennial version of the coming kingdom of Christ. His approach to this rings of a kind of apocalyptic zeal when he reportedly confessed, “So, of course I want to see y2k bring down the system, all over the world. I have hoped for this all of my adult life.”<sup>22</sup>

The comparison of bizarre premillennial and postmillennial uses of the historical event of Y2K shows that widely differing eschatologies are capable of utilizing the same cultural occurrence for divergent purposes. A potentially apocalyptic kind of event (Y2K) was interpreted as fitting into either a pre-tribulational, premillennial set up for the coming great tribulation or a destroyed culture upon which the Church could have an easier time of exerting dominion and ushering in the kingdom.<sup>23</sup>

A **third factor** that complicates an understanding of possible cultural derivation of eschatologies is that **sometimes the proponents of various viewpoints are highly selective concerning which cultural circumstances are to be correlated with the theology of the position.** The discussion above concerning McGinn’s observation has already shown that there was a difference between the premillennial focus on the Jews during World War I and the secular focus on the war itself. Moorhead notes that “the idea of the kingdom of God became a powerful motif among moderate to liberal Protestants between 1880s and the 1920s. At one level, the notion continued the faith of pre-Civil War postmillennialists who likewise had believed that Christ’s progressive

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2000. For a premillennial response to North, see Tommy Ice, “Scary Gary and Y2K” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 4 (August 1999): 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Gary North, *Honest Money: The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1986), 141.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in <http://www.borderlands.com/Y2k.htm>, April 3, 2000. It was reported originally in an email message from Gary North to Steve Davis posted on <http://www.erols.com/steve451/doom.htm> on August 30, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Lest amillennial readers of this article might think their view free of examples of this kind of participation in such eschatologically oriented misconceptions, one only needs to remember Harold Camping’s famous prediction of the Lord’s return in 1994. Camping’s amillennial position is documented in *The Fig Tree* (reprint ed., Oakland, CA: Family Stations, Inc., 1983) and through his Family Radio ministry.

spiritual conquest of the world would win secular as well as sacred trophies.”<sup>24</sup>

Secularization of the postmillennial vision of the future and its association with liberalism are sometimes credited with a role in its demise among conservative evangelicals at that time. However, a postmillennialist of any stripe could still point to any number of events and conditions that gave hope that progress was being made as the world marched toward the kingdom with the Church leading the way. Not counting the success of the spread of the gospel in general, one such catalog of secondary evidences of hope that the kingdom was being brought to fruition, listed the accomplishments of the Christian faith in this way:

Wherever Christianity has taken hold, it promoted industrious habits, restrained gambling, elevated the status of women and children, abolished cannibalism, introduced modern medicine, brought relief from famine, established orphan asylums, promoted sanitation, developed industrial training, produced better government, wrought technological advance, and produced a more prosperous standard of living.<sup>25</sup>

Handy cites a rather remarkable statement by W. H. P. Faunce with respect to World War I along the same line: “When the prisoners in every belligerent land, sitting behind barbed wire fences or surrounded by stockades and guards, are writing tens of thousands of letters to praise the work done by the Y.M.C.A. and done in the name of Christ, here is going on before our eyes a visible preparation for the Christianization of the world.”<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand are the premillennialists who, since the Civil War, had pointed to the liquor problem, the rise of higher criticism and liberalism, the decline of evangelicalism with the corollary increase in Catholic immigration into America, and the rise of war as harbingers of a different way for the kingdom to come. In written works of two decades after World War I, Gaebelein sums up the attitude of many premillennialists that prevailed throughout his lifetime including those years at the turn of the twentieth century:

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<sup>24</sup> James H. Moorhead, “Engineering the Millennium: Kingdom Building in American Protestantism, 1880-1920” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, supplement no. 3 (1994): 105.

<sup>25</sup> Moorhead, “Engineering the Millennium,” 112.

<sup>26</sup> W. H. P. Faunce, *The New Horizon of State and Church* (New York, 1918), 39 cited in Handy, *A Christian America*, 152.

Morally the world sinks lower and lower. Christendom is turning more and more away from the supernatural, the foundation of the true Christianity, turning from the spiritual to the material, giving up the message of power for social improvements . . . The faith as revealed in God's infallible Book is abandoned; apostasy is seen everywhere. World conversion, the world accepting Christianity? *What mockery!*<sup>27</sup>

For Gaebelein, the postmillennialist had nothing to point to in history to bolster his claim. The world Gaebelein looked around and viewed was one where shameful Western Christianity had “been a curse to heathen nations.”<sup>28</sup> This illustrates to some degree the second point that we mentioned earlier—that the same world could be interpreted differently due to divergent expectations. However, it goes beyond that to show that the actual goings on in history provided ample ammunition to either the premillennialist or the postmillennialist for finding “proof” at some level satisfactory for the veracity of his eschatological view.

## Conclusion

This paper has noted briefly, using examples from the turn of the last two centuries, that it is sometimes difficult to assert that various eschatologies are culturally driven to an inordinate degree. Three factors which complicate such a negative assessment are 1) personal convictions and experiences sometimes play a stronger role than broad cultural attitudes, 2) the same historical event can be made to fit into multiple eschatologies, and 3) various eschatologies are sometimes selective in the use of history to support the viewpoint. As Gundry had hinted, there are too many counter examples to make an airtight assessment that certain eschatologies are culturally driven. During a time of strength for the postmillennial position in culture and long before the rise of modern Zionism, John Nelson Darby in the early nineteenth century was presenting his dispensational premillennialism. On the heels of the Jewish Holocaust in World War II, Loraine Boettner was a voice, albeit a lonely one, supporting classical postmillennialism. There have always been those who will stick to their convictions regardless of

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<sup>27</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Hope of the Ages* (New York: Publication Office “Our Hope,” 1938), 170-71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

contemporary trends and events, pessimistic or optimistic, with respect to historical circumstances.

In light of such complicating factors, some general suggestions for dealing with the issue of eschatology and present culture are in order. **First, to address Gundry's concern, evangelicals should use balanced language.** We should speak of eschatologies as *culturally enhanced* rather than *culturally driven* or *sociologically determined*. Gundry himself wisely stops short of using the stronger wording, speaking in terms of eschatologies being unduly influenced by sociological conditions. While there are no doubt cases where individuals do indeed come to a conclusion about eschatology based upon current events or are excessively swayed by the happenings of their day (Gundry cites several possible examples), eschatologies within the church should be viewed as primarily being grounded in certain hermeneutical commitments that drive the use of the Bible.<sup>29</sup>

A corollary of this point would be that **the relationship between eschatological viewpoints and history is a reciprocal one.** This points partly back to an earlier observation. One's interpretation of the Bible conditions one's anticipation of what is to be found in historical developments. If one has a postmillennial eschatology, he will look for elements in the record of present history that support an optimistic reading of the times. If one has a dispensational premillennial view of the kingdom of God, one will most likely search for events and trends in present history which portray the downward trend of human affairs. However, the finding of such supporting facts in the historical record then reinforces or enhances the particular eschatological position that is held. This may strengthen the attractiveness of the viewpoint within the cultural context even though the reason for the attractiveness is not the basis of the viewpoint itself. In other words, evangelicals should avoid getting into shouting matches about current events. All evangelicals can take hope in current events, but any particular interpretation of current events should never be made formally in theological assertions within ministry contexts.

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 79-95.

A third suggestion in light of this brief study is that **evangelicals need to commit themselves to a more holistic study of history**. In a postmodern day when the very enterprise of historical study seems to have lost its way, we need to be honest about all historical factors. The fact of the matter is that any age is a mixed bag in terms of the specifics, if not in the major sentiments of culture. We must be cognizant of both the events that generate optimism and those that generate pessimism. In the end, both should be interpreted through the grid of biblical theology.

Finally, **evangelicals should never make current events the starting point for eschatology**. Those who give the appearance that this is exactly what they are doing should stop and think about the larger picture. In a post-Christian world that is hostile to evangelical Christianity, evangelicals need less overstatement for which to apologize. Our in-house discussions should primarily be focused on exegesis and biblical theology and not newspaper exegesis. This need is what makes articles like Gundry's necessary from time to time.

However, it should not be surprising that historical events have captured the imaginations of evangelicals of varying eschatologies. After all, it is history itself where the working out of God's kingdom plan can be observed and where any eschatology will ultimately be verified. The coming of the Lord Himself will probably turn out to be the only consensus builder in eschatology for evangelicals. Until that time, evangelicals must take Gundry's concern seriously while recognizing that numerous factors come into play as the evangelical committed to biblical truth interacts with history including that of his own time. While the factors mentioned in this paper may help to diminish the concern or keep it balanced, this writer (who holds the correct view of premillennialism!) cannot help but wonder how much Augustine's fifth century amillennialism was influenced by the fact that his world atlas did not show the nation of Israel and what the answer to that question might mean for our day.