

Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M.

## **“Unless the Lord Tarries . . .”: Fundamentalists Await the Second Coming**

The year 2000 will be either a boon or a bane to the tourist industry in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Officials are preparing for what they hope will be a flood of Christian pilgrims who will provide an important boost for the economy. At the same time, law enforcement agencies in the United States are sharing intelligence with their counterparts in the Holy Land—intelligence about several Christian cults that appear to be planning mass suicides or political provocations, and even terrorist acts in Jerusalem as the new millennium begins to push ahead the eschatological timetable for Jesus’ return. What is it about the turn of the millennium and the expectation of Christ’s imminent return that moves people to such irrational behavior? Where does such thinking originate?

### PREDICTING THE END

The story of the first Christians’ belief in the imminent end of the world is well known. Apparently both Jesus (Matt 24:34) and Paul (1 Thess 4:15) believed that they were living in the last days. Paul was so persuasive in convincing his converts about the imminent return of Jesus that some stopped their normal activities in view of the fast approaching end of this age. The apostle found it necessary to remind them that “those who do no work, should not eat” (2 Thess 3:10). Eventually, the apocalyptic strain in Christianity began to grow weaker until it was practically eliminated when Christianity became the religion of the Byzantine Empire. Christians were no longer outsiders in the empire; they were no longer a persecuted minority. They no longer were pessimistic about “this age.” Jewish apocalyptic texts like the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Book of Enoch*, abandoned by the rabbis but early studied, translated, and copied by Christians, became relegated to obscure corners of monastery libraries. Though they continued to feed the speculations of segments of the Christian population, they became increasingly irrelevant to the majority of Christian believers. Yes, there were the medieval sibylline tradition and the debates about the time of the Antichrist’s appearance, but apocalyptic’s day seemed to have passed.

Enthusiasm for the end of the age surfaced from time to time, but apocalyptic and millennial movements usually seemed to be on the fringes of Christianity. One reason for apocalyptic's place on Christianity's margins is its failure to deliver. It is impossible to keep expectations high indefinitely. Eventually the enthusiastic expectancy for the end of the age wears thin. Still, speculations about the coming of the Antichrist, the end of the world, the millennial reign of Christ have not gone away entirely. The nineteenth century seemed to spawn several movements that focused on determining the precise date for Christ's return and the end of the age. William Miller (1782–1849), a Baptist preacher from New England, captured the imagination of many people when he predicted the end of the world in 1843 on the basis of his interpretation of Dan 8:14. After 1843 came and went, he revised his prediction and claimed that the world would end on Yom Kippur (October 22) in 1844. The failure of this prediction has become known as "the Great Disappointment." Though Miller's followers may have been disappointed, the attraction of millennial expectations was too great simply to leave behind altogether. Some of Miller's followers became the nucleus of what became the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which has kept belief in Christ's "second coming" central to its beliefs.

#### OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS

At the beginning of this century American Protestant liberals described a new sort of millennium. They believed that the benefits of Christian civilization would soon transform the world through the elimination of ignorance, hunger, disease, and prejudice. Christian missionaries sent from the United States around the globe would not only lead people to Christ but would provide them with the scientific, technological, educational, cultural, medical resources and the democratic social, political, and economic institutions to create a new world. The triumph of Christian civilization would usher in the millennium: a glorious Christian age that was to last for one thousand years. Christ's coming at the end of this era would bring this world to its final destiny. If nothing else, this was an extraordinarily optimistic vision of the future. It called for Christians to become involved in the transformation of the world. The "golden age" would not come by some miraculous intervention, but through the efforts of human beings. "Postmillennialism" is the term coined to describe this vision of the future which had Christ coming after the millennium of Christian civilization ended.

Of course, more conservative American evangelicals were not so optimistic. They saw their country abandoning its "Christian" heritage. The great American universities, which began as schools to train ministers of the gospel, were now teaching evolution, which undermined the biblical doctrine of creation. Students preparing for the ministry were

being taught “higher criticism,” which denied the supernatural character of the Bible. Immigration from eastern and southern Europe was bringing many Catholics to this country. They were people who not only did not speak English and did not share in the Anglo-Saxon culture but, worst of all, they were adherents of a religion that was not really Christianity but “Romanism.” The country’s population was moving from the rural areas to the cities where these new immigrants were concentrated. The city with its saloons, gambling dens, and dance halls became synonymous with a non-Christian style of life.

The crowning argument against the liberals’ optimism about the future came with World War I. The science and technology that the liberals maintained would usher in a great Christian era were used by industrialists of supposedly Christian nations to create more efficient ways to kill people. The liberals urged America to enter the war in Europe “to make the world safe for democracy” while evangelical Christians chose pacifism as a way to protest the postmillennial view of the future. For most evangelicals, the world was not becoming a better place; it was heading toward total annihilation. They urged genuine Christians against spending their time, energy, and resources in trying to make this lost world into a Christian utopia. They should try to save lost souls before it is too late. Conservative evangelicals derided liberal Protestantism as “modernism” and considered it a departure from authentic biblical religion.

Evangelicals, like the liberals, believed that Christ was going to return to this world. However, Christ’s return would not be the crown on the liberals’ Christian civilization; rather, it would be to save the world in the last battle with the forces of evil as described in the book of Revelation. After defeating the Antichrist, Jesus would reign for one thousand years from Jerusalem. At the end of this period, there will be a final judgment. After this final judgment all who believe in Jesus will go with him to heaven while those who do not believe will be cast with Satan into the “lake of fire” for all eternity (Rev 20:13-15). Evangelicals, then, have a premillennial view of the future: Christ will return to this world before the one thousand years of peace can begin. This world is heading toward self-destruction—only Christ’s return can prevent it. No human effort can make this world a better place. On the contrary, human beings are pushing this world toward self-destruction.

#### THE DISPENSATIONS

What evangelicals were determined to avoid as they spoke and wrote about Christ’s return and the end of this age was the setting of dates. They were not going to fall into Miller’s trap. They also regarded the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who made several predictions about the end of the world, as distorting the Scriptures and the biblical doctrine of

Christ's return. The question that evangelicals faced was how to maintain a heightened state of expectancy without succumbing to the temptation to set dates. The solution to this problem came from John Nelson Darby (1800–82), the founder of a British evangelical church known as the Plymouth Brethren. He developed a scheme for interpreting all of history, which he called "dispensationalism."

Darby taught that God has related to human beings through a series of "dispensations" in which God tested people's obedience. Because people always failed these tests, God sent Jesus as an atonement for sin at the end of the dispensation of the law. Jesus' death for sinners inaugurated the present dispensation, that of grace. In this dispensation there is only one requirement for salvation: belief in the power of Christ's death to atone for one's sins. The final dispensation will be the millennium. This millennium will be preceded by the personal return of Christ to the world. All Christians who are alive at Christ's return will be raptured, that is, they will go up to meet Christ in the sky and be taken by him to a place of safety (1 Thess 4:17), while those remaining in this world will experience a Great Tribulation (Matt 24:15-25) during which Jews will have a final opportunity to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16) will be fought at the end of the Great Tribulation. Christ's victory at this battle will mean the establishment of his kingdom in Jerusalem. From there Christ will reign over the world for one thousand years (Rev 20:1-10).

Darby's dispensationalist scheme was popularized in two ways. First, Cyrus I. Scofield (1843–1921) studied with Darby in England and then composed notes for the King James Version of the Bible. The *Scofield Reference Bible* made its appearance in 1909 and remains the most popular Bible version among Christian fundamentalists. Second, popular evangelists like Dwight L. Moody promoted dispensationalism in their sermons. The beauty of the system is that it all but eliminates the temptation to set dates while maintaining a high degree of expectancy. While the Scriptures may describe the signs that will precede Christ's return and describe the events that will take place during the tribulation, they do not offer any signs that point to when the rapture will take place. Believers have to live as if Christ will return at any moment. This leads them to share the gospel with those who still do not believe so that they can experience the rapture and avoid remaining on earth during the Great Tribulation.

Liberal Protestants rejected this scheme and promoted their vision of a Christian civilization that will transform this world. Evangelicals believed that modernism kept the liberals from the work of evangelizing. The spread of the gospel and not liberal social schemes will bring people to acknowledge their sins and to accept the atoning power of Jesus Christ in their lives. Unless people accept Jesus, they will go to hell. The

beginning of this century witnessed a fierce struggle in some denominations between the liberals and evangelicals. The liberals always managed to maintain control of the denomination, driving the evangelicals to leave or go underground. This conflict gave rise to Protestant fundamentalism, a movement marked by a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible, premillennial dispensationalism, and militant opposition to modernism and the cultural change associated with it. Though the fundamentalists were not able to take control of any major Protestant denomination, they went about the task of bringing the gospel to the lost in view of the imminent return of Christ.

#### A NEW LOOK FOR FUNDAMENTALISM

In the last thirty years, however, evangelicalism and fundamentalism have not only gained new legitimacy but many adherents. Main-line Protestant churches have lost a significant number of members to evangelical, Pentecostal, and fundamentalist churches. In fact, the churches with a dispensationalist view of the future are the only Protestant churches that are growing. The liberal churches have been steadily losing members. Billy Graham changed the image that many Americans had of evangelical preachers. Similarly, the election of Jimmy Carter, a practicing evangelical, changed the image that many Americans had of evangelical Christians. The political support Ronald Reagan received from the religious right brought several evangelical and fundamentalist leaders to the very center of political power in the United States. Billy Graham, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan gave new legitimacy to evangelicalism and new currency to its message. A significant part of that message is fundamentalism's millennial views, which have been shaped by the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible.

In 1970, Hal Lindsey published a thin paperback entitled *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which set the premillennial dispensationalism of the *Scofield Reference Bible* into a contemporary idiom. Lindsey described the rapture, the Great Tribulation, and the Battle of Armageddon in some detail by relating these fundamentalist commonplaces to political events of the day. For example, he identified Revelation's beast with ten horns (12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12, 16-17) as the European Common Market, which had just accepted its tenth member. Lindsey saw this as one sign that the end of the age was imminent. He wrote that the world was going to end in a thermonuclear holocaust that he saw "plainly" described in Rev 8:6-12. By painting a terrifying portrait of the last days, Lindsey hoped to encourage his readers to escape these terrors by becoming Christians. Lindsey ends his book with a literary "altar call" in which he invites his readers to accept Christ as atonement for their sins. This would guarantee that they meet Christ in the rapture and so avoid experiencing the horrors of the Great Tribulation. The book was a phe-

nominal success, selling more than sixty million copies. Clearly, the book's readership was not limited to the evangelical and fundamentalist faithful. The only reason it did not make the New York Times best-seller list was the newspaper's policy against putting religious books on its list.

Lindsey did succumb to the one temptation that has always bedeviled Christian millennialists: he set a date. He asserted that the return of Christ and the rapture would take place during the State of Israel's fortieth year of existence. Israel just completed celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. The failure of Lindsey's prediction was merely a minor setback, which provided Lindsey with the opportunity to write another book, claiming that God simply gave people more time to accept Christ as their savior.

Lindsey's success combined with the advent of "Christian" television engendered a crowd of "biblical prophecy" teachers who, like Lindsey, combine Scofield's premillennial dispensationalism with current events to underscore the imminence of the end of this age. Teachers and preachers cut in the Lindsey mold have become a staple of religious broadcasting in the United States. Two of the slickest of these preachers are Pat Robertson and Jack Van Impe. Both assume the role of a news reporter and commentator on sets designed to look like those used by the major networks for their news shows. World crises become indicators of the imminent end of this age. Their shows blend what appears to be news reporting with editorial comment and biblical interpretation that is nothing but speculative commentary presented as having biblical warrant. The basic message of all these "end-time" preachers is the same: political events indicate that within a few years the dramatic events surrounding the return of Christ will bring this present age to a violent end. Listeners are urged to make contributions to the television ministry so that the message about the approaching end can get out to more people, leading them to accept Christ as their savior.

#### MILLENNIAL POLITICS

Though the demographics of their audiences are not clear, the influence of these "biblical prophecy" teachers is not limited to a few fundamentalist faithful. When James Watt, Ronald Reagan's nominee for the Secretary of the Interior, was being interviewed by a committee of the United States Senate for his confirmation, he stated that long-range land management plans were not necessary because "Jesus Christ is coming very soon." The Religious Right was opposed to the treaties between the Soviet Union and the United States that called for the dismantling of their nuclear arsenals. High profile fundamentalist preachers like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell did all they could to dissuade

the Reagan Administration from a policy of nuclear disarmament. Their motivation for doing so came from their premillennial dispensationalism. These ministers believed that the world was destined to destroy itself in the course of a final nuclear war, started by the Soviet Union and a coalition of Arab states, over Jerusalem as predicted in Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. Disarmament agreements, therefore, will put obstacles in the way of fulfilling God's will and are needlessly postponing the coming of Christ and the end of this age. Of course, because fundamentalists believe they will be raptured before the final war begins, they are certain that they will not suffer the horrors of the nuclear holocaust that is certain to come. The fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have caused these preachers to rework their end-of-the-age scenarios. The most convenient way to handle the problem is to assert that the end of the Soviet Union is just part of a communist plot to get the West to lower its defenses.

#### ISRAEL AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Another example of the political consequences of premillennial dispensationalism is the support that fundamentalists give to the State of Israel. More than any other contemporary event, the founding of the Jewish State in 1948 has been seen by fundamentalists as a sure sign that the end of this age cannot be far away. The result of this belief is an unlikely symbiosis between Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals principally from the United States and Jewish religious nationalists in Israel. Each group, for its own reasons, wants the State of Israel not only to continue in existence but to control all of the land that once belonged to the ancient Israelite kingdoms. In addition, both groups support the building of a Third Temple on the site where the first two temples stood. Of course, this site is now an Islamic holy place, the Haram es-Sharif ("the Noble Sanctuary"). Building the "Third Temple" there would require dismantling the two Muslim shrines that have stood on the site since the eighth century.

Both the Israeli religious nationalists and the Christian fundamentalists oppose any accommodation with the Palestinians. The motivation of the Israeli nationalists is obvious. That of the Christian fundamentalists flows from their premillennialist views. They believe that a war in the Middle East is inevitable. The Scriptures predict such a war, as the notes in the Scofield Bible on Ezekiel 38 allege. Any agreement with the Palestinians is merely postponing the inevitable. Christian fundamentalists have been the strongest supporters of the Israeli politicians who do not want the Oslo Peace Process to be successful. They have also supported the Jewish religious groups that are preparing for the resumption of Temple services. The building of the "Third Temple" is the keystone of the fundamentalist end-time scenario. Dur-

ing the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist will enter the temple and demand to be worshiped as divine. The demand will result in a great persecution of the Jews who have come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Without a temple, this scenario cannot be enacted and the end of this world will be put off.

To express their support for the State of Israel and for the Israeli religious nationalists who opposed the establishment of a Palestinian state, some high-profile fundamentalist ministers such as Jerry Falwell bring their followers on tours to Israel. These tours are quite different from the pilgrimages that most Christian groups make to the Holy Land. Fundamentalist groups visit few if any of the Christian shrines that commemorate events in Jesus' life. These shrines are relics from another dispensation. Fundamentalists are looking forward to the dispensation of the kingdom; they are not interested in the dispensation of the law during which Jesus ministered. Fundamentalist Christians on tour have no contact with the local Christian community. They think of their co-religionists in Israel as Arabs first and Christians second. Fundamentalists on tour groups are likely to visit army camps to hear generals speak about the state of Israel's preparedness and West Bank settlements to hear of the settlers' commitment to stay in the disputed territory. They hear more from Israeli politicians than from ministers of the gospel.

Evangelicals have a permanent base in Israel called the "International Christian Embassy." This "embassy" was set up in Jerusalem following the Arab oil embargo in the 1970s when countries that had embassies in Jerusalem relocated them to Tel Aviv. (The United States has always maintained its embassy in Tel Aviv.) One purpose of this Christian embassy is to show that evangelical Christians support the State of Israel and its declaration that Jerusalem is its "eternal" capital despite what governments might be forced to do. The Christian embassy serves as a resource for fundamentalist groups coming on tour to Israel. During the Jewish feast of Succot, it sponsors its "feast of Tabernacles" celebration that attracts thousands of fundamentalists and evangelicals from around the world to Israel. Israel's prime minister and other officials address their meetings and attend their receptions attesting to the gratitude the Israeli government has for the political support it receives from them.

#### POLITICAL STRATEGY

The stance that Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals have taken toward the Palestinian-Israeli dispute reflects their basic approach toward complex social, political, and economic issues. For fundamentalists, all these issues are religious since they all are manifestations of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, personalized as

a struggle between God and Satan. Fundamentalists will canonize one solution to contemporary problems as “biblical” or “Christian” because they are consonant with a premillennialist interpretation of reality. Contrary opinions are dismissed as “secular humanism.” Political lobbies that are part of the religious right in the United States have issued analyses of voting records of senators and representatives that evaluate their votes in terms of the “Christian” political agenda.

At first it may seem odd that fundamentalists, who have such a pessimistic view of the future of this world, would even have a political agenda. For a long time they did not. Until thirty years ago, many fundamentalists were strangers to the political process. They changed their attitude for a variety of reasons. They came to see that it is possible to influence the political process to put into place what is necessary for the return of Christ. In other words, fundamentalists not only believe that Christ will return but that they can, in a sense, hasten the day of Jesus’ return.

Fundamentalists, of course, look beyond the day of that return. Their vision of the future involves more than the catastrophe that must take place. While fundamentalists are pessimistic about this world, they are cosmic optimists. A favorite millennial slogan among fundamentalists is “I’ve read the end of the book [the Bible] and we win!” Fundamentalism holds out the promise of a new world beyond the catastrophe that awaits this one. It is a new world that will be the result of their evangelism, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and the return of Christ. This new world will have a new moral order. Gone forever will be the evils that plague society today. It will be a perfect world that will be re-created through the power of God revealed through Jesus Christ upon his return.

#### THE FUTURE OF MILLENNIALISM

Will fundamentalism be able to sustain its vision of the future? Will people still read the notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible* and be fascinated by its premillennialism and persuaded by its dispensationalism? Will the teachers of “biblical prophecy” still find curious pupils? Will another Lindsey be able to sell millions of books that describe the horrors that await the world as this age comes to an end, or will millennialism move to the periphery of Christianity once again?

In the immediate future, many Christians will allow their religious imagination to get the better of them as the beginning of the Third Christian millennium approaches. The turn of the millennium is an obvious time for millennial speculations to flourish, but these should diminish as we move beyond the year 2000. There is, of course, the inherent difficulty in maintaining millennial expectations over a long time. One cannot expect people indefinitely to respond to the cry,

“Jesus is coming very soon.” The early Christians learned this. While the belief in the Lord’s return was maintained, people simply could not live as though Jesus could return at any moment.

#### CHANGED POLITICAL SITUATION

The political realities of the post–Cold War world do not appear to be as amenable to fundamentalism’s view of the future as were the last fifty years. The Soviet Union is no more. Russia is not the nuclear threat that the Soviet Union once was. Its role in the Middle East has become almost negligible. Certainly, only the most inflexible fundamentalists see Russia as leading a grand coalition of nations against a restored nation of Israel.

Though it has not been easy, the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is moving ahead. This bodes well for peace in the Middle East and the establishment of normal relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Even now the Middle East is no longer a place of confrontation between East and West with thermonuclear devastation a distinct possibility. While there is a vigorous debate in Israel about how much land ought to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, all but the most ardent religious nationalists recognize the inevitability of a Palestinian state in territory now occupied by Israel. While the Israelis will insist on maintaining sovereignty over all of Jerusalem, the building of a Third Temple is a fantasy of only a small fringe element in the Jewish community. Even the ultra-orthodox Jews oppose such a project since they believe that only the Messiah can rebuild the temple.

The European Union, which has evolved from the Common Market, looks less like “the beast with ten horns” than an economic cooperative that wants to make it possible for the nations of Europe to compete effectively with the United States. Current events which were once the core of Lindsey’s apocalyptic fantasies seemed to have turned against the fundamentalists and their visions of the future. Still, interpreters of “biblical prophecy” have been working overtime to find Saddam Hussein, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the rise of Muslim fundamentalism, the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, and the Asian economic collapse as harbingers of the end of this age.

#### CHANGED SOCIAL LOCATION

Another problem in maintaining fundamentalist millennial expectations is that the world view of apocalyptic is most at home among people who see themselves as outsiders, who feel that they are not in control of their destiny, who believe that they belong to a misunderstood and sometimes persecuted minority. An apocalyptic world view gives meaning to their lives by relating them to a soon-to-come end

that will bring with it a reversal of fortunes. Circumstances have changed for fundamentalists and evangelicals in the United States. They are no longer on the periphery. They are in control of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant church in the country. The liberal, main-line churches are all losing members every year while fundamentalist and evangelical congregations are multiplying.

The religious right is a powerful political force that has made its presence felt on the national level and is now becoming dominant on the local level, controlling school boards and county and city governments. Fundamentalist groups like the Promise Keepers are able to turn out thousands of people for their rallies. Evangelicals and fundamentalists have learned how to use the broadcast media better than other religious groups to get their message out. It is hard to classify fundamentalists and evangelicals as outsiders in the United States today. It is also hard to think of fundamentalists as people who really expect the end of this age any time soon. They are too busy building universities, television and radio stations, and changing the shape of American politics.

#### RECLAIMING APOCALYPTIC

This loosening of fundamentalism's grip on the language, imagery, and ideology of apocalyptic may afford Roman Catholics and other mainline churches an opportunity to reclaim these. Certainly, biblical scholarship has prepared the way. Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature from antiquity has been the subject of intense study for more than twenty years. It is no longer the confusing and misunderstood body of literature that it once was. Now what remains is for pastoral theologians to examine the experience of believers today in light of the apocalyptic tradition in both Judaism and Christianity to see if this ancient way of looking at the world can shape the response of believers to the gospel today.

In *Tertio millennio adveniente*, Pope John Paul II chose not to commend biblical apocalyptic to Catholics preparing for the turn of the millennium. The biblical category that dominates his encyclical is that of the jubilee described in Leviticus 25. The pope focuses on the forgiveness of debts and the return of ancestral land that Leviticus describes as central to the celebration of the jubilee. He calls for lender nations to consider forgiving the debts of developing countries as an act particularly appropriate to the Christian celebration of the two-thousandth anniversary of the world's redemption by Jesus Christ. Here John Paul shows himself to have more in common with the postmillennialists who believed that human beings were responsible for creating a new world, a world where it is possible for all human beings to share in the bounty that God has given the earth.

Still, it is not only possible but important that Catholics reclaim apocalyptic, which they abandoned to the fundamentalists. An apocalyptic perspective can correct an overemphasis on the salvation of the individual. It sees salvation of individual persons against a wider cosmic backdrop. What will occur at the end of the age is nothing less than the complete transformation of the world. The gospel then becomes more than good news for the individual; it is for all of humanity and the world. Thus, apocalyptic underscores the wholeness of salvation. When Christ returns he will renew *all* things and take them up into God's purpose. Another positive value in apocalyptic is its emphasis on hope. Apocalyptic finds little comfort in human potential. If the world's future depended upon what people can do, there would be little reason for hope. What God can do and has promised to do is the basis of Christian hope. There is no doubt, no question, no uncertainty about the future. The ultimate shape of the future has been resolved in principle. What remains is the full revelation of God's victory over evil. This will come when Christ returns in glory.

The dissatisfaction of apocalyptic with this world is nothing else but the affirmation that there is little in the present structures of culture and society that can fully satisfy the human hunger for love, healing, and freedom. That is why resurrection is so central to apocalyptic thought. It is only when people reach the new form of human existence that resurrection makes possible that this hunger can be satisfied. Apocalyptic, then, does not express itself in the denial of this world's value; rather, it simply points out its relative value: this is not all there is. An apocalyptic world view interprets experience from the perspective of God's final movement into the world. It takes its stand in the future. It finds meaning in the new world to be created by God. Apocalyptic refuses to limit its vision to the possibilities of the present or by what human beings can accomplish.

While apocalyptic rejects this world in its present state, it does not abandon it. It calls believers to enter the world for the sake of its renewal and transformation. Three apocalyptic emphases shape believers' activity in this world: the triumph of God's justice, the reign of God on earth, and the new life of the resurrection. These do not yet exist. The shape of God's reign, the experience of resurrected life, and the coming of the new world of justice have yet to be revealed. But their outline is clear. Christian believers are convinced that the new world that apocalyptic expects is a world of life, love, justice, freedom, and peace. And we ought to give effective witness to our conviction.

#### CONCLUSION

Will fundamentalism's view of the future survive? In the short run, the "biblical prophecy" teachers will have to do some creative thinking

to integrate recent political events into their vision of an imminent return of Christ and the end of this age. Still, if history has taught any lessons it is that people are both horrified and fascinated by the prospect of the world's ending because of some great catastrophe. Eventually, some fundamentalist will repackage Scofield and Lindsey. This does not mean that Catholics ought to leave the field to the premillennialists. Apocalyptic is part of our biblical heritage. It offers believers hope for the future, a future whose shape has already been determined by the victory of Jesus over every evil power.

#### REFERENCES

- Harding, Susan. "Imaging the Last Days: The Politics of Apocalyptic Language." *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*. Ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, 57–78. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Hoppe, Leslie. "Premillennial Dispensationalism: Fundamentalism's Eschatological Scenario." *Chicago Studies* 34 (December 1995) 222–35.
- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Sandeen, Ernest. *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Weber, Timothy P. *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

---

*Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., is professor of Old Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union. In addition to his study and teaching of the Hebrew Bible, he lectures on the pastoral challenge that fundamentalism is for the Catholic Church.*