

The Role of Media Effects in Popular Eschatology

Case Studies in 20th Century Mass Theology and Questions for 21st Century Theologies of Missions

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Preface

In the twentieth century we saw a significant popularization of eschatology. Apocalyptic ideas worked their way into numerous corners of theological writings, but didn't stop there. Several varieties of "popular eschatology" made their presence known and were operative in major organs of the multicultural fabric. Societies and movements in culture and subcultures led to outpourings that might be described as a kind of mass theology. It was divergent in many details, but often fit into broad categories driven by scenarios that share a common apocalyptic thrust or hope.

Coupled to this rise were widespread efforts in missions, some of which tapped this same font of eschatological ideation. The emerging mass theology of apocalypse became in many instances a cornerstone of missions work. It thus grew to be one of the leading identifying factors of the Christian church to the wider culture.

The engine of this growth was a collision of multiple media and fundamental shift in the use of media effects. The transformations of culture precipitated by mass media were vital to the popularization of formerly-obscure bodies of esoteric knowledge. Swift flowerings happened, quickly moving subcultural and previously-marginalized conceptual elements into centerpieces of movements. This occurred independent of any specific religious milieu, almost as frequently as within Christianity itself. As media altered the landscape of the culture, so did the self-conceptions of evangelizing organizations transform their approach and content. Alongside these developments, new analytical techniques and tools were built to probe media technology and the effects of media on the mass culture.

This study examines and attempts to put a name to the outgrowth of these mass eschatologies. Using the *Scofield Reference Bible* as a case study, and the tools of media analysis devel-

oped in the work of H. Marshall and Eric McLuhan, this thesis will interrogate the media roots of mass eschatology. We will use these tools to briefly draw comparisons between the form and content of mediated mass theology thereby presented, and the eschatological alternatives set forth by modern interpreters of the Lutheran tradition. In confronting questions about popular theology, and the role of media effects in shaping it and, by extension, the wider culture, we will ask if there are alternative missiological emphases which may be presented in the church, by whom, and how.

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Once a new technology comes into a social milieu, it cannot cease to permeate that milieu until every institution is saturated. —H. Marshall McLuhan

Over the past thirty years, more scholarship has been devoted to apocalypticism than in the previous three hundred.

—The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, 1998

*History is **ending**. I mean, we are to be the generation that witnesses the revelation of the purpose of the cosmos. History **is** the shock wave of the eschaton. History **is** the shock wave of eschatology, and what this means for those of us who will live through this transition into hyperspace, is that we will be privileged to see the greatest release of compressed change probably since the birth of the universe. The twentieth century is the **shudder** that announces the approaching cataracts of time over which our species and the destiny of this planet is about to be swept. If the truth can be told so as to be understood, it **will** be believed. —Terence McKenna*



A Mass Eschatology

The time right now is sixteen minutes past eight in the morning. In some places, it is always sixteen minutes past eight in the morning. In Hiroshima, somewhere around thirty-nine seconds into that minute of August 6, 1945, a nuclear flower bloomed, the first such explosion in anger against a live target. Likewise, it is always seven minutes to midnight in the dark analytic corridors of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scien-*

tists. We live in the post-atomic age, wrapped by the post-industrial warfare age, wrapped by other world-ending epochs.

Apocalyptic Imagination

In *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, University of Southern California essayist Stephen O'Leary takes stock of "apocalyptic themes in American popular culture in the decades preceeding the year 2000."¹ He catalogs the Heaven's Gate suicides and UFO phenomena; analyzes monster and atomic-war-themed films of the fifties and sixties; denotes the aforementioned *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*; recalls radio dramas such as *War of the Worlds* and *Flash Gordon*; remarks on the sixties as a "generational apocalypse;" and, passing briefly over Hal Lindsey, on the way to recall Reagan and the fall of the Berlin Wall. He concluded his essay "It is as yet too soon to discern which cultural artifacts will most effectively reflect and promote new understandings and interpretations of the ancient apocalyptic myths as we pass the millennial deadline."² And it came to pass in time that we recognize what O'Leary could only gesture toward: within the wrappers and deep layers of previous apocalyptic eras, now it is always going to be a "post-9/11 world."

Journalist Michelle Goldberg's 2006 book *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* paints vivid picture of the stakes of the rise of apocalyptic thinking. Examining the present political landscape, Goldberg's book borders on the sensational. But

¹ O'Leary, *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 392

² *Ibid*, 423

it is a telling review of the impacts of these movements in the stories she relates from around the U.S. She describes the fervor and urgency surrounding Judge Roy Moore's refusal to remove a two ton ten commandments monument from his courthouse. The Moore story is a touchstone in Goldberg's book, one which collects together the threads of anger and suspicion about judges, homeschooling, military service, the role of demons in sexuality and substance abuse, science, medicine, and more. Quoting journalist Matt Labash, Goldberg talks about how the controversy surrounding Moore frames him as a martyr, beset by a hateful culture and the agents of his defense, "The conflict's natural drama was compounded when the governor, Fob James, announced that he would deploy the National Guard, state troopers, and the Alabama and Auburn football teams to keep Moore's tablets on the wall."³ It's a singular scene to picture all those armed and uniformed men and boys, one to which this study will return as we continue. More important are the roots of conflict behind the governor's threat, and the key players.

We are witness to a movement near the peak of its rise, bearing multiple names: fundamentalism, Christian Reconstructionism, Christian conservatism, the Religious Right, dispensationalism, dominionism and Goldberg's suggested "Christian nationalism," interchanging it occasionally with the others, particularly dominionism or dispensationalism. Goldberg describes it thus:

³ Goldberg, 25

This is Christianity as a total ideology. (...) It's what drives a great many of the fights over religion, science, sex, and pluralism (...) It is a conscious refutation of Enlightenment rationalism⁴.

She traces the participants in these conflicts to a marriage and politicization of Christian reconstructionism with premillennial dispensationalism⁵. For this thesis, we will spend most of our time on dispensationalism as a key source of this cultural group.

There are 30 million Christian adherents who believe in the theological interpretations of dispensationalism. There are millions more influenced by its precepts and narrative principles. Overtly premillennial materials have flourished in the wider culture. Where did this come from?

The headwaters of dispensationalism

A widespread and vibrant subculture propelled by apocalyptic visions was present in Britain and America in the early 19th century. Categorized with the loose catchall of “millenarians,” American believers asserted exuberant conviction that the U.S. represented the apex of universal history.⁶ The variety and tone of millenarian movements prior to the 20th century makes a fascinating subject of study, one which we will simply gloss in this thesis, except to note the diversity of teachings that drove the various movements. There was little to unify them and each was characterized by nuances. Clusters of millennial teaching sprung up around assorted Protestant leaders from Jonathan Edwards to Samuel H. Cox, William Miller, and more. They also

⁴ Goldberg, 5-6

⁵ Goldberg, 38.

⁶ Sandeen, 44

found expression in religious movements made of whole cloth such as the Disciples of Christ, Shakers, and Latter-Day Saints.

These are mentioned to call attention to two facts: 1) The imprint of diverse and complex apocalyptic visions on American culture is not a 20th century invention. 2) While diversity exists in Christian and non-religious apocalyptic ideas, there has been a dominant unifying impetus carried through one particular 20th century version which does not have a precedent as a mass cultural movement. A line of teachings marks this distinguishable theme, traceable from the present back to two key figures: first came John Nelson Darby, and later, perfecting and promulgating Darby's work, Cyrus I. Scofield.

Called alternately dispensational premillennialism or premillennial dispensationalism or shortened to just dispensationalism, it presents a very complicated system of reading scripture. Dispensationalism divides the history of creation into six periods, or dispensations, each one thousand years in length, followed by a crucial seventh, the eternity after the second coming and judgment by Christ. The Christians who believe in it view scripture through the particular lens of

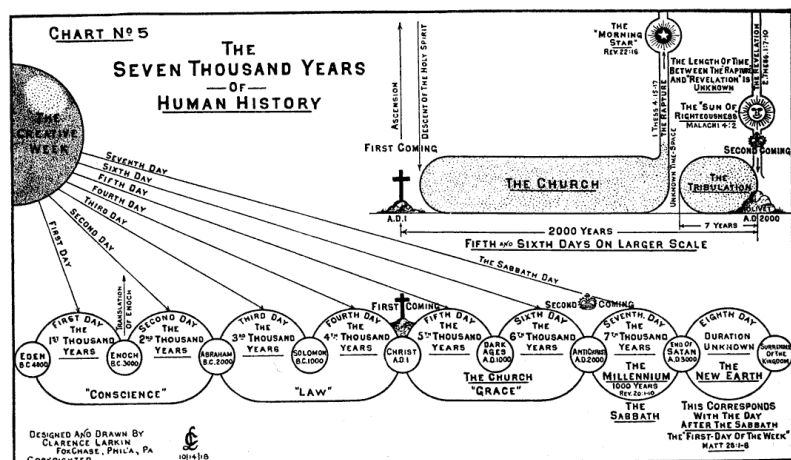


fig. 1 - "The Seven Thousand Years of Human History"
from *Dispensational Truth* by Clarence Larkin

prophetic imagination, that each dispensation corresponds to a biblically described epoch. Thus the dispensations move from the Creative Ages, The Age of Conscience, The Age of Law, The Church Age, The Kingdom Age and The Perfect Age.

Interstitially distributed amid these ages are significant events of judgment. The Creative Ages were ended by Eden and The Fall. The Age of Conscience was ended by The Flood. The Age of Law ended at The Crucifixion. The Church Age will be ending with the Second Coming.

Then comes The Kingdom Age ended by the judgment of the wicked before The Great White Throne and The Renovation of The Earth By Fire. All of these followed at last by The Perfect Age. Keep-

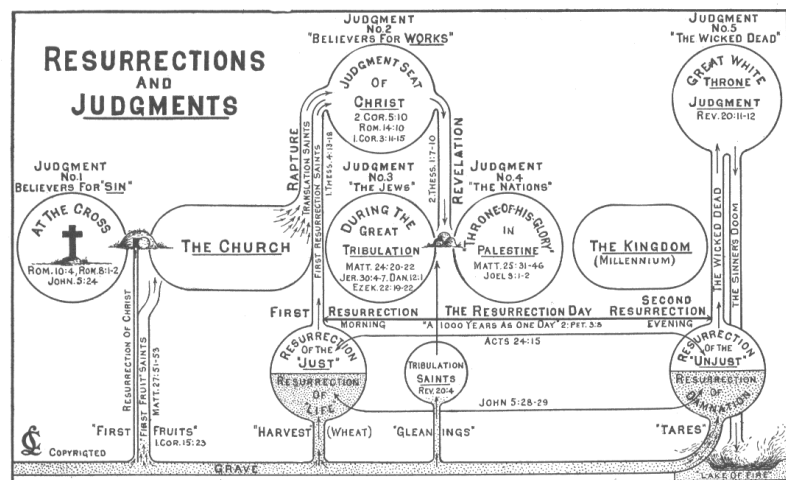


fig. 2 - "Resurrections and Judgments"
from Dispensational Truth by Clarence Larkin

ing track of these eras, and of the signs of their transitions, becomes the basic task of the dispensationalist enterprise. "Each dispensation is set off as a distinct period of time which has little or no organically historical relation to what preceeds or follows."⁷ This leads to a condition Sandeen describes as enabling the cohort to treat the world as "a series of epochs with different ground rules, while safely preserving their own age

⁷ Kraus, 62

from any reinterpretation.” The role of the Church is to exist in secret until it is summoned out of this age by its bridegroom, uninvolved in the processes of history.

The complexity of these Age frameworks, and their interrelationships with biblical prophecies increases with time. Dispensational interpretation is prolix, with a deep well of complex and specialized language and metaphors. Each line in scripture that is deemed prophetic points to interpretable real world events. Each epoch, and then within each epoch each moment of time, is distinctly compartmentalized and connected to specific chapter and verse references. The compartmentalization of all things is a vital characteristic of dispensationalist interpretation. This is noted in historian Clarence Bass’ text *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, along with an outline of the related common features:

a rigidly applied literalism in the interpretation of Scripture, a dichotomy between Israel and the church, a restricted view of the church, a Jewish concept of the kingdom, a postponement of the kingdom, a distinction between law and grace that creates a multiple basis for God's dealing with man, a compartmentalization of Scripture, a pre-tribulation rapture, its view of the purpose of the great tribulation, its view of the millennial reign of Christ, its view of the eternal state, its view of the apostate nature of Christendom ⁸

Keeping track of these principles while reading the bible might present one an onerous task, demanding of the reader a level of attention to detail and following of prophetic threads that borders on the paranoid. Yet this very process repeatedly occurs in the popular culture of the twentieth century. Educated and uneducated, profes-

⁸ Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, 18.

sional and amateur, American fundamentalist Christians of every stripe and experience grasp these readings of scripture and call them up with astonishing clarity and accuracy. Related texts such as the aforementioned *Late Great Planet Earth* and *Left Behind* are integrated by their readers into the mosaic with alacrity. Whether the occasion is one of instant recall of biblical prophecy at the reading of numerous current events, or the identification of fictional narratives with *both* current events *and* scriptural references, the student of dispensationalism rapidly and effortlessly bridges wholly manufactured hermeneutical worlds.

Dispensationalist belief remains vividly alive and culturally active. Dispensationalism presents a deep layer of interpretation and complication within or atop the already-significant and lengthy structures of Christian theology. It explicates in considerably fine-grained detail the shape and aims of biblical prophecy, the role of specific bible verses and the narrative structure to drive both far-reaching theological constructs and multi-volume fictional bestsellers.

The theological emphases of dispensationalism are pessimistic and contrarian, seeking to counter rationalism and disrupt modernism. In *Dispensationalism in America*, C. Norman Kraus explores how dispensationalism demands “a rigid theory of verbal and plenary inspiration, the absolute depravity of man and his helplessness to assist in his own salvation, and the sovereign transcendence of the triune God⁹.” Sovereignty directly underpins the dispensation concepts, as the discrete covenant periods with

⁹ Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America*, 61.

humanity are established by the kingship of God and close with his act of judgment. In the course of this covenant making, dispensationalism considers God's sole purpose to be to "gather out from among the Jews and Gentiles an 'elect bride,' the Church."¹⁰ The purpose of each dispensation is thus also to show to humanity our total depravity by contrast to God's sovereignty and grace. From the earliest days the movement has faced criticism that its tactics have no interest in acts of Christian charity, and reject and obstruct all notions of moral progress. Kraus describes the reaction of others in the church charging dispensationalism with "cutting the nerve of Christian activity."¹¹

Their normative hermeneutic is strict verbal inspiration for scripture, a conviction that "critics were actually infidels working on naturalistic assumptions, and that to accept any of their insights would amount to denying the unique, supernatural character of the Bible."¹² Furthermore all hints of "immanence and evolution undercut the orthodox doctrine of supernatural revelation."¹³

The dispensational enterprise further prides itself on being the product of humble beginnings, and comprehensible to untrained, independent non-scholars. There is also a high degree of suspicion among the agents of dispensationalism about the church. From the earliest systematic efforts of JN Darby, distrust of the Church as a

¹⁰ Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America*, 63.

¹¹ Kraus, 64.

¹² Kraus, 65.

¹³ Kraus, 67.

“ruin” has been closely knitted to the foundations of dispensationalism. Kraus uncovers for us some of Darby’s sense of contempt:

He also used the term “church” to apply to the existing organized church in some sense. However this ambiguity did not carry over into his practical program, which called for an essentially congregational fellowship of those who would withdraw from the existing organized church—either the Established Church of England or the dissenting bodies. When he claimed that the Church was apostate he clearly meant the organized church as he knew it; and his followers, who exerted a great influence in America, made a clear distinction between the Church, which is the true bride of Christ, and Christendom, which was their designation for organized Protestant and Catholic Christianity. It is this concept of the Church that dominates Darby’s eschatology. His outline of the dispensations adds little to the many schemes which were developed before and after his own¹⁴.

“Dispensationalist scholars who little historical self-awareness. This is evident in their facile identification of their own position with the millennialism of the early Church.”¹⁵

The movement’s most basic self-understanding stands on belief in an immanent judgment event dichotomously yoked to literal interpretation of scriptures totally independent and deliberately ignorant of historical context. The baseline attitude of dispensationalism is hostility to anything outside itself, hostility to the world, hostility to the aims of the global church which it perceives to actually be the opposite of itself, lost in the hands of the enemies of the reign of Christ.

Despite, or in part *because* of this blend of dichotomies and contradictions, there are tens of millions of adherents to the dispensational doctrines, and millions more who

¹⁴ Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America*, 27-28.

¹⁵ Kraus, 71.

accept as an underlying characteristic the frameworks of a true and secret Church, and the revelation of purpose in coming judgment. Preachers of dispensationalism from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham counted their services in the tens of thousands, their broadcast virtual congregations in the millions. *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the series of novels published under the *Left Behind* brand name, both with dozens of millions of copies sold, present immensely successful incursions of dispensationalist thinking into the popular culture.

This is an age of popular eschatology, when artifacts of apocalyptic imagination appear in secular and religious realms from the Jehovah's Witnesses to *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. When thoughts of the end of all things dangle amid the thousand delicate peace cranes of a Japanese schoolchild, and stretch into the very heart of geopolitical brinksmanship, what gathers adherents to these complicated, prickly systems of thought? What enables the rapid assimilation and integration of events into the assumed unfolding of prophecy? What kind of culture or subcultural setting resonates behaves this way? What properties of people and groups enable them to receive these messages and processes them into ever more intricate forms around these specific hermeneutic principles?

Traditional folklore consists of the arts of song and dance of agricultural and nomadic peoples. But an industrial world cannot produce the same folk forms as can a society in a state of harmonious equilibrium with the soil and the seasons. Yet much of the industrial world's entertainment and public expression is just as unconsciously expressive of its inner life.
—H. Marshall McLuhan

In His redemptive relation to man, Jehovah has seven compound names which reveal Him as meeting every need of man from his lost state to the end. (...) The name is interpreted by the context. —C.I. Scofield

2

Analytical ground

We shall attempt next to understand the ground in which the dispensationalist enterprise grows, to describe the cultural features, and their historical/mythological structure. Knowing these things about the culture, we will examine some of the interaction between culture and evangelism through the guidance of theologian Lamin Sanneh. Then we will return to examine a new application of the media and cultural analyses of theorist H. Marshall McLuhan. While not an entirely novel approach, the author acknowledges this has not had previous widespread application in the examination of theological texts or biblical criticism.

The Folkloric Structure of the Culture

We begin with a different approach to cultural analysis, retrieving ideas presented in communication theorist H. Marshall McLuhan's first book, *The Mechanical Bride*. Subtitled "The Folklore of Industrial Man," the book constructs a way of looking at the development of Anglo-American culture throughout the first half of the 20th century that serves surprisingly well yet today. This 1951 work explores its present and roots of the first 50 years and connects them by looking through a lens on the popular culture. He writes:

Traditional folklore consists of the arts of song and dance of agricultural and nomadic peoples. But an industrial world cannot produce the same folk forms as can a society in a state of harmonious equilibrium with the soil and the seasons. Yet much of the industrial world's entertainment and public expression is just as unconsciously expressive of its inner life. Our hit parade tunes and our jazz are quite as representative of our inner lives as any old ballad is of a past way of life. As such these popular expressions, even though produced by skillful technicians, are a valuable means of taking stock of our success or failure in developing a balanced existence.¹⁶

McLuhan had delineated several manifestations of the popular culture. In describing the linkage of art and science McLuhan points out the "abruptly overlayed...cubist or Picasso style" of facts and social patterns. He writes, "By this method the greatest possible detachment from our own immediate problems is achieved. The voice of reason is audible only to the detached observer" ¹⁷. It is this voice of reason and the thirst for it

¹⁶ McLuhan, *Mechanical Bride*, 114-5

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3

along with the stylistic considerations of finding ears for that voice that mark one of several traits of "Industrial Man."

Be individual like us!

By way of example, McLuhan describes what was then Time magazine's depiction of their readership: "very wide-awake people indeed. Their IQ's would stand well above the average"¹⁸. This mythically constructed reader is 'hard-boiled' and sharply attuned to reason. "They are in the know, they are not like other people" he writes, invoking a pointed irony. "They are an exclusive coterie of millions and millions of superior people"¹⁹. The use of a continued story technique keeps this union of readers in an orderly group; McLuhan used the terms "goose-steeping reader(s)" marching in "glittering parade to brassy music"²⁰.

This form of cultural lock-stepping played out across McLuhan's pages: book clubs, 'know-how', business executives and corporate success, 'plain talk', indexing, market research and etiquette all express the manifestation of a substantial and distinct culture. The media themselves conveyed the substance of what constitutes Industrial Man. For example, book clubs first "souse [the reader] with sex and violence but at all times protected them from the harsh contact of the critical intellect"²¹. Sensationalism

¹⁸ Ibid., 10

¹⁹ Ibid, 9

²⁰ Ibid, 10

²¹ Ibid., 23

and sadism went hand in hand with the effect being to "reduce the reading public to a common level of indiscriminating helplessness"²². This is directed at the public for whom reading these books becomes a means of overcoming "personal concerns about an inferiority complex and any fear about being the equal of others whose formal education is greater than your own"²³. This compares readily to the accumulation of specific and dense specialized knowledge about the corpus of prophetic scripture and its particular applicability to moments in time, wielded by unique and yet somehow countless numbers of self-directed persons.

How-to. . .be a monk and. . .operate heavy machinery

"Know-how," McLuhan writes, "is at once a technical and a moral sphere (...) It is a duty to be glamorous, cheerful efficient and, so far as possible to run the home like an automatic factory"²⁴. The idea McLuhan worked with here was that life at home is dull and the purchase of gadgetry amounts to a means of preserving love in the home. But these technological necessities are more than mere objects. How-to books and products become essential for both psychological and material advance. McLuhan saw this as a "mechanical strait jacket"²⁵. He cites Joseph Campbell's discussion of the advance of society coming through an act of ego annihilation:

²² Ibid. 26

²³ Ibid., 24

²⁴ Ibid., 32

²⁵ Ibid., 33

It is precisely the same annihilation of the human ego that we are witnessing today. Only, whereas men in those ages of terror got into animal strait jackets, we are unconsciously doing the same vis a vis the machine. And our ads and entertainment provide insight into the totem images we are daily contriving in order to express this process. But technology is an abstract tyrant that carries its ravages into deeper recesses of the psyche than did the sabertooth tiger or the grizzly bear. ²⁶

This abstraction plays itself out in our economic structure and industry. McLuhan notes that "The puritan both retained the scholastic method in theology and gave it expression in the precision and austerity of his secular existence. So that it is scarcely surprising that a great modern business is a secular adaptation of some of the most striking features of medieval scholastic culture" ²⁷. His point here is, "The know-how of the twelfth century was dedicated to an all-inclusive knowledge of human and divine ends. The secularization of this system has meant the adaptation of techniques not for knowledge but for use"²⁸. The drive to know-how expresses rational, systematized knowledge for the purpose of ego-less utilization: the mythic development of mass culture needs things that people can use, or for that matter, *people* to become like *things* which the spreading *culture* can use.

Get a piece of the Rock, citizen

Simplicity of the acting agent's reaction becomes a cultural norm here as well.

"The more complexly mechanical the job, the simpler the man becomes, and the more

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 33

²⁸ Ibid.

he has to rely on sheer automatism of response"²⁹. This is the ultimate expression of "executive ability." The idea here is to create "men of distinction" by using simple, readily available ideas in a "race for inequality" ³⁰. McLuhan points out an irony in this that "the more equality there is in the race for inequality, the more intense the race and the less the inequality which results from the consequent the rewards. That means less and less distinction for more and more men of distinction"³¹. The great executive therefore is a result of simplistic processes and automated response to problems and is marked with a bland distinctiveness relative to all the others just like him or her. This person emerges from a "pattern of individuality" ³² that establishes relative sameness—McLuhan used the example of growing need for individuals to have homes of particular size and plans for retirement security that are functionally the same ³³.

The point here is that success and distinction ultimately does not *distinguish* one from another. As manifestations of popular culture, getting a much needed "piece of the rock," or setting one's music free in a beautifully crafted digital music player, as the ads go, are simultaneously the marks of a distinguished person and yet one who shares the same features *as millions of other distinguished persons*. Indeed, the sharpest individual in *this* social order is one who responds to the siren of good planning quite like a

²⁹ McLuhan, *Mechanical Bride*, 37

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 38

³³ Ibid.

mechanism, the complexities of mapping a future success requiring machine-precision in choosing a benefit company or a storage device. Or a set of hermeneutical principles which automatically provide instant total knowledge of the nature of events as they happen; and their purpose in a wider prophetic process.

Tough guys eat words like you for lunch

Furthermore, the successful individual will be clearly marked by a penchant for "plain talk." McLuhan builds his argument here on the notion that a new paradigm of eloquence exists in ad agencies and their kin³⁴.

Whereas the older concept of eloquence linked it to public responsibility and ceremony and a unified program for enlisting the passions on the side of reason and virtue, the new school of eloquence is virtually demagogic in its headlong exploitation of words and emotions for the flattery of the consumer³⁵.

Classical education has been out-evolved it would seem, by the need for separation between word and wisdom. The "big man" requires less in terms of big words and more of "'how to put wings on your words' and how to present your ideas and 'make them stick'"³⁶. Language becomes another utilitarian tool for bettering self position and personal usefulness. By firing words in a way to make them stick, one cuts a swath of distinction.

³⁴ Ibid., 42

³⁵ Ibid., 42

³⁶ Ibid., 42

Where eloquence was once "power, wisdom and political prudence" learned in a "curiously unified and extensive program" it is now the province of "ad agencies" ³⁷. As the consumer found the use of words more necessary, speech transformed into the tool of advancement and another mark of "individuality."

Know your Nielsens! (or else)

More attention is given to the roots of these increasing trends in the culture. McLuhan cites *technique* as a child of certain progressions. Indexing provided means of opening the ideas of history for immediate use: "In the matter of insistence on the supremacy of technique at the expense of nutriment, the University of Chicago is the child of Harvard, as Harvard is the child of German know-how"³⁸. Education faces a "storm of triviality" for which it is ill equipped. Mechanistic response—the technique to deal with a dearth of information—is really a "reflection of the technological world in which [the educator] lives".³⁹

McLuhan probed this issue with "One hundred and two ideas a minute? It's only 1951"⁴⁰. Acknowledging this also demands that the reader consider the figure per minute is greater, in 2008 perhaps by a few factors of ten! In the McLuhan example, the index is of great books—useful for the plain talker who needs rough and ready

³⁷ Ibid., 42

³⁸ Ibid., 43

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 43

ideas to fuel his or her plain tongue. Now similar ideas and information are accessible in quantity greater than a billion human minds, and nearly as fast, with network collaboration tools facilitating the acceleration even further.

“Industrial society,” McLuhan noted, “must have exceptional awareness of its processes”⁴¹. He probed the issue in an earlier section of the book: “Want to know where you fit in so you can be outstanding? Do you feel a need to be distinctive and mass-produced?”⁴². By way of unpacking that query consider that return of information on our combined individual interactions with a changing world is ever mounting. Radical changes in social networks, interactive communities, webs within webs of nested media, opinion polls, Nielsen ratings—devices making “Galluputians” of us—transmit and feedback to us much the same way the book clubs and advertisements did at the dawn of the 1950s. At the turn of the last century also grew sprouts in the sectarian realm, a network of the broadsheet, the tract and leaflet printer, the study group, the bible school, the circuit rider.

“There’s no police like Holmes” — Joyce

Where does all this come from? There appears to be a lineage for this culture and its methods. McLuhan suggests one such parent in Rene Descartes:

Descartes, as much as any one person, can be said to have initiated the stress on mechanization and rationalism which fostered the era of Newto-

⁴¹ Ibid. 50

⁴² Ibid., 46

nian physics and the allied notions of a self-regulating market and social institutions. He was explicitly motivated by a passion for exactitude and universal consent. he expressed his disgust with the age-old disagreements of philosophers and suggested that universal agreement was only possible in mathematics. Therefore, he argued, let mathematical laws become the procedure and norm of truth (...) at the beginning of a whole era of mechanization there stands Descartes with his passionate wish for a universal mathematical unity in thought and society.⁴³

In that setting, the picture painted was of Sherlock Holmes, at once the grandchild of Cartesian rationalism, progenitor and brother of the popular culture. Here the Holmes figure operates in a kind of network, with roots among the likes of Darwin, Thomas Huxley and Kipling (MB, 107-8). McLuhan excerpted sections of Doyle and Huxley's works: "Holmes is described as follows: 'He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen'"⁴⁴. Huxley wrote

'That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in his youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work, that as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all the parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready like a steam engine to be turned to any kind of work...' ⁴⁵

Under McLuhan's eye, Sherlock Holmes stands in as the superman product of focused rationalism. Holmes is "noble savage utterly above society and commerce, with his unspoiled faculties (...) here is the complex image built up sentimentally by Rousseau, digested by Darwin and expressed by Doyle"⁴⁶. Holmes is at once the sci-

⁴³ Ibid., 50

⁴⁴ Ibid., 107

⁴⁵ Ibid., 108

⁴⁶ Ibid., 109

entific mind, the individual, the instant response mechanism, the utilitarian who recognizes little need for “high-brow” literature and philosophy, eschewing them instead for functional knowledge of sensational crime and the various tools of mayhem. In short he is the honing of the edge of individuality, utility and machinery which we have already discussed at length.

“A better instance of the network of the varied roots of popular culture would be hard to find” notes McLuhan⁴⁷. The heroism of Holmes is merely continuation of the notion of individuality for all—be an individual, like us (or our father, Sherlock).

Thus popular culture is expressed through a deeply rooted and growing mythology. It is a mythology built on the mechanistic response of individuals to rationalist, commerce-enabling, “individual-istic” popular culture. It bears its own philosophical and psychological stamp. Perhaps it exudes “psychic stench [rising] from its own splintered ego”⁴⁸.

Extensions of the self from the mythic process

Years after *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan took his analysis to greater depths with the 1964 landmark *Understanding Media*. The opening salvo is among his most famous and has relevance for this study (emphasis added):

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, **in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.** This is

⁴⁷ Ibid. 110

⁴⁸ Ibid., 108

merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.⁴⁹

Here we begin to understand how the mythic processes of culture creation and ad-making led toward the (in)famous concept of the “medium is the message.” A continuous story-line fabric is woven—but then exploded—across technology, mechanistic response, and instant retrieval and compilation of data culled from millions of speed-thinking fast-talkers. Instantly aware of what we are and where we fit in, we approach a gray machine state of consciousness, whilst our technological extensions become increasingly organic. We reflect the idea of the well-oiled engine mechanism telescoped within an electrically extended network of nervous systems. Computer networks become *webs*, human athletes become *scoring machines*; computer generated/altered objects and images *animate*, acting and moving organically and seamlessly across movie screens; commerce produces *CEOs* (an acronym bearing a droid-like connotation) with coldly calculating minds and steamroller business tactics; the know-how of punditry flashes into innumerable media and the audience/participants engage in correspondence, linking, tagging/taxonomy, feedback. We envision an increasingly *organic machine* operated by an increasingly *mechanistic people*, feeding itself on content which is functionally meaningless.

The point of this is that the digital and “pop” culture is a manifestation of these underlying processes. McLuhan wrote about it in 1951 using ads and the effects of

⁴⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 23

emerging opinion polls, which by now are unnoticeably a part of daily life. An ad for a movie can occur in no less than 15 media⁵⁰ with sufficiently high frequency to inject it constantly into practically the entire gestalt. This process of saturation occurs without particular notice, save as background noise that massages the subconscious. Polling is natural and knowledge of poll results is staple matter in television, radio, newspapers and so on. So the radical effects of imposed uniformity may not be as sharply distinguished as in 1951. But it does occur in the present—commerce still embraces the “bold look” as normative for business-suited executives.

Another example is the evolution of popular music. The relevance of the content of music—whether categorized as “alternative” or “independent” or “hip-hop” or “pop”—is practically meaningless. Alternative is no longer a concretely defined category—no longer is it an alternative to anything, no kind of reaction to another dominant paradigm. Similarly the rise of hip-hop, once obscure and frankly terrifying to white audiences now occurs routinely as the dominant creative form within wider popular music programming around the world. No, the transformation that occurred happened in the media communicating the music--the time-deferred freedom of the iPod and the peer-to-peer distribution of digital music seamlessly over great distances has become in fact a cultural drum beat that drenches hearers with the self-definitive sounds of their choice, a confluence of media and effects that drives listening public

⁵⁰ Consider. TV, movie theaters, newspapers, magazines, world wide web, buses, billboards and other signs, toy tie-ins, fast food tie-ins, cell phone ads and ringtones, traditional and satellite radio, packaging tie-ins, email and direct mail, even other ads include products that aren't the main focus of the ad in question!

into step via the media. The private-music-device culture and its clear object signifiers constitute a contemporary counterpart to McLuhan's example of book clubs and the "coterie of millions" of Time readers. He wrote about it again, furthering the work in 1964, while still naming potential consequences that are emerging as accurate as the present matches and exceeds past predictions of the future:

Perhaps the most obvious "closure" or psychic consequence of any new technology is just the demand for it. Nobody wants a motorcar till there are motorcars, and nobody is interested in TV until there are TV programs. The power of technology to create its own world of demand is not independent of technology being first an extension of our own bodies and senses. (...) The urge to continuous use is quite independent of the "content" (...) Electric technology is directly related to our central nervous systems, so it is ridiculous to talk of "what the public wants" played over its own nerves.⁵¹

The technologies of humanity extend us—clothing extends the skin, houses extend a communal skin over the family,⁵² the wheel extends and repeats the foot. Likewise media extend our *senses*—the telephone extends the ear and voice, the printed word extends the eye. These extensions alter the ratios of our internal perception to orient around the aspect of ourselves that is so extended.

The real power of media

Thus the phonetic alphabet and the printed word had power to drive the development of linear, mechanistic culture. The myth-making described earlier is the product of over two thousand years of type-driven linear extension of the eye over the other

⁵¹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 73

⁵² *Ibid.*, 117

senses. All technologies and media had the effect of fragmentation into the one or two senses or faculties that they extend. But electricity moves at the speed of light, past which nothing can be accelerated. So for McLuhan, the era of electricity represents maximum acceleration of this process of extension. Electrically connected information transmission, whether telegraph, telephone, radio, or television means an extension of humanity beyond skin or sense, to the extension of the central nervous system itself! “In this electric age we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information.”⁵³ Once these keys are understood, the possibility of rapid and total transformations of culture by technological extensions is assumed.

Media are containers of other media: as simply described as to say that speech is the container of thought, that words are the containers of metaphor,

symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness. By means of translation of immediate sense experience into vocal symbols the entire world can be evoked and retrieved at any instant.⁵⁴

The McLuhan approach treats media as agents of translation, “active metaphors” possessing the power to translate experience⁵⁵.

It is partly this recall and evocation that gives media its power. It is hardly the actual content! This is the theme McLuhan returns to throughout the work, and which is the key to understanding what we are studying in this thesis: in mediated experience,

⁵³ Ibid., 64

⁵⁴ Ibid., 64

⁵⁵ Ibid., 64

content has limited power, and what it does have is done in service to the media that carry it. Furthermore, the collision of media metaphors has a unique and shocking power:

The hybrid or the meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses⁵⁶

In his analysis, McLuhan describes the hybridization of media forms such as the meeting of oral and print/literate cultures as capable of unleashing energy and violence. He shows the introduction of “literacy as a typographic technology”⁵⁷ that unleashes “psychic transformation” of the inner person, to work with facility in segmented terms. This creates a culture of precision and industry, giving the individual an extra-familial private identity. It unleashed the subsequent freedom to “make one’s mark” in enterprise, industry, and commerce. The efforts at “Westernization” of previously oral cultures unleashes torrents of hybridized energy.

A missiological consideration

In *Encountering the West*, theologian Lamin Sanneh outlines a fascinating proposal of Christianity, posited as a subversive sect within culture. “Christianity dealt a mortal blow to the [Roman Empire] by introducing provincialism and fostering sub-

⁵⁶ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 63

⁵⁷ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 262

versive congregational particularism at the local level.”⁵⁸ “At any rate, [Edward Gibbon] made colorful assertions about Christianity as the enemy of enlightened progress, saying that culture in its noble rebirth would discard the religion as the butterfly the chrysalis”⁵⁹. And that this view was “gratuitously promoted by Christian scholars themselves, even though for them the focus is on the power of Christianity to succeed where others failed or were thought to be failing”⁶⁰. Drawing on Eric Dodds, Sanneh adds

For the people of the Empire it was a time of increasing insecurity and misery; for the Church it was a time of relative freedom from persecution, of steady numerical growth, and above all of swift intellectual advance’ The basic outline of Christianity under this negative thesis is that cultural opportunism enabled the new religion to profit from the crisis and misfortune... K.S. Latourette advances ‘Had Christianity been born in a vigorous young culture whose adherents were confident of its virtues it might have met a different fate.’⁶¹

But even Latourette notes that “Christianity had encountered a vigorous Neoplatonism which ‘had the endorsement of a much larger proportion of the upper classes than did the eventual victor.’”⁶²

Such an encounter seems to resonate with the state of Christian interaction to pop culture. Given what we have available to examine this present mediated culture, how can an electric culture relate to Christianity? The culture of popular apocalypse

⁵⁸ Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 125-6

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 126

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 126

⁶¹ Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 127

⁶² *Ibid.*, 128

here is more differentiated in that it represents post-Enlightenment industrialization of intellect and logic, intended to far exceed the efforts of the Hellenistic philosophers; while simultaneously undergoing electrification and consequent recuperation of mythic tribalism. One set of problems Christianity faces in meeting this culture is doctrinal and translatory. How does Christianity maintain the integrity of the word of God? What garb does the Gospel wear when it goes out courting in this culture?

Sanneh points out that the Christian-Hellenistic encounter led to challenge instead of opportunism⁶³. The author quotes W.E. Hocking:

Western religion has for over three centuries had the unique advantage of constant intercourse with a science and philosophical activity independent of itself, and yet relevant to its being. Largely throughout this free intercourse it has moved toward solving insights which, made part of its vital impulse, promise to give it curative impact on any modern society. And if Christianity...is distinctively western, its significance for world civilization is...discontinued.⁶⁴

In *Translating the Message*, Sanneh writes:

The problematic relation of Christianity to culture hinges on the necessity for the message to assume the specific terms of its context and the equal necessity for it to be opposed to the normative idealization that leads to particularism. Christianity is parallel to culture but it is not completely proportionate to it. The religion is not culture, but it is not other than culture.⁶⁵

These passages seem in tension. If Christianity is western in the sense of the Western-legacy-from-Hellenistic-philosophy, then its significance as such is lost to

⁶³ Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 128

⁶⁴ Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 128-9

⁶⁵ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 53

any culture different from itself. However, as in the second quotation, it seems clear that Christianity is not of necessity a western religion. To be more precise it would appear that it is a *translating* one.

“When we consider the transformation that took place in the world of Hellenism, we shall see that as Christianity penetrated into the culture it succeeded in establishing Hellenistic cultural paradigms into a condition of its own identity”⁶⁶. It would appear however that the two cultural partners outstripped each other in important matters. That is, the rationality of the Greeks outlasted Christianity through the agents of philosophy, the extension of the eye in the phonetic alphabet, and its perfection in the printing press. Meanwhile the discontinuities of Christianity took some other directions, and the two arrived in the Anglo-American world of the 20th century as estranged and feuding brothers, the shared advantages of lexicon notwithstanding. The energy of modernism met the a brotherhood feud on the order of Islam and Judaism—where the differences are significant enough to amount to distinct cultures. Sanneh goes on:

We need to explore in some detail the philosophical and religious basis of this transformation, and suggest how it contributed to the revitalization of the Hellenistic world while extending the range and influence of Christians’⁶⁷.

Rationalism survived the Greeks in Descartes and subsequent philosophers. A counter-rationalist mien survived early Christianity in today’s Protestants. Rational

⁶⁶ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 54

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 54

humanity is industrial humanity's parent and friend thanks to Descartes, and finds apotheosis in complete extension into electric space. This is then rapidly adapted to and adopted by the early cohort of dispensationalism.

After outlining Harnack's point about Christian universalistic attitudes, and refining it with the term "translatability," Sanneh states:

Such an attitude to cultural assimilation, conceding a little along the lines of tactical advance without deviating from the course of the main thrust, implies a principled commitment to contextual engagement. The outcome was contextual revitalization as a precondition of Christian advance.⁶⁸

In new contexts, the message lost "nothing of its original force and yet it acquired an enlarged capacity as it came to bear the image of the Christian proclamation. Christianity thus came to make better copy of the portraits of other cultures"⁶⁹. The comparative speed of Christian advance within a millennia-old culture appears less baffling in the wake of the above analyses about the invasion of media and the energy of cultural forms undergoing hybridization. Sanneh's approach dovetails with McLuhan's when it is noted "This suggests that the religion has a special affinity with multiple cultural forms, with the message interacting with 'coefficients of the most diverse nature.'"⁷⁰ The sense of finding "coefficients" (i.e., *multipliers*) makes immediate sense in the context of the rapid adaptation of Christianity. Even in the face of doctrinal problems that

⁶⁸ Sanneh, *TM*, 64-5

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 65

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 65

naturally arose within the invading meme itself as Sanneh points out: “In fact formal doctrine, as Irenaeus hints, is inclined to oppose the adaptive power of the environment against the rule of uniformity”⁷¹. Though there were doctrinal oppositions against translative work, they did not bear out against the facts of the case; namely that Christianity intended itself for adaptation, translation and contextuality.

Christianity sought indigenous coefficients, and, finding them, flourished by them so that both borrower and borrowed were transformed in a common direction. This stands in stark contrast to the view that Christianity profited from cultural decay and political confusion.⁷²

It seems that this has a 20th century American antecedent: Christianity operating in these modalities has made significant progress in the US in this century. While there are echoes of the earlier point by Dodd that Christianity would falter upon meeting a young strong culture—in this case the popular secular culture with its considerable sway—but this culture has ancient roots, and observers can hear some of its rattles. Whether presented in the rise of an avant garde and its reaction to popular culture, the increasing repetition of themes through mass media, and acceleration of networking and collaboration, the old industrial culture has encountered deep shocks.

We have two points of analysis with which to work. First is insight into our culture’s relationship to media, directing us to the hybridized media forms and their unfolding energy of “psychic transformation” of the inner person. We also recognize that into this industrial culture comes the translating, adaptive, coefficient-seeking church.

⁷¹ Ibid., 66

⁷² Sanneh, *TM*, 70

The electrification of culture unleashes energy, the commingling of cultures does the same. We find a case study of this in the electrification of both the peculiarities of Anglo-American myth-making and typographic technologies, applied to a printed bible.

The subject references lead the reader from the first clear mention of a great truth to the last. The first and last references (in parenthesis) are repeated each time, so that wherever a reader comes upon a subject he may recur to the first reference and follow the subject, or turn at once to the Summary at the last reference. --C.I. Scofield

At electric speed, all forms are pushed to the limits of their potential. --H. Marshall McLuhan

3

Case Study and Analysis

We will examine *The Scofield Reference Bible* as a specific media artifact essential to the promulgation of dispensationalism, and within the emerging mythic Anglo-American cultural setting already described. We will seek to explain the *Scofield Reference Bible* as a *techné* of dispensationalism, and the corresponding implications and applications of this designation.

Product of its (end)time

At the 20th century dawn of this culture of dislocation and psychic cutting of the nerves poured out the prophetic and disruptive works of the age: the novels of James Joyce (a particular focus of McLuhan's), poems such as Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Yeats' *The Second Coming*, Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* and the output of sur-

realists such as Max Ernst, the plays of Shaw and Tzara, the cinema of D.W. Griffith, even the philosophical inquiries of Buber or the earliest stirrings of Heidegger. Likewise comes *The Scofield Reference Bible*, as revolutionary an exemplar of human media artifacts as any groundbreaking avant-gardisms of the decades around the first world war.

Cyrus Scofield's edition of the bible "is perhaps the most influential single publication in millenarian and Fundamentalist historiography."⁷³ Each work this author explored while researching the growth of dispensationalism either referenced Scofield or his text directly.

In the *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Paul Boyer describes it as a landmark event in the promulgation of dispensationalist ideas which were preached by "nearly every major evangelist of these years."⁷⁴ The writer describes Scofield as a fixture on the conference circuit who, working with an editorial board of premillennialist scholars, produced "the full text of the King James Bible with Scofield's commentary printed at the bottom of each page" and Oxford estimates sales at ten million.⁷⁵

In David New's *Holy War* which, while focused on the the conflicts in the Middle East, gives significant credit to *The Scofield Reference Bible*:

First-century Christians had recognized the necessity of two institutions—the biblical canon and the church. Dispensationalist fundamental-

⁷³ Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 222.

⁷⁴ *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 155

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 156

ists believed the traditional church was in the hand of Satan. Hence they devised parallel institutions to function in the same way as the traditional Bible and church. The first of these institutions was the *Scofield Reference Bible*, the brainchild of Cyrus I Scofield. (...) The *Scofield Reference Bible* has been called “the most effective tool for the dissemination of dispensationalism in America”⁷⁶

New refers to Scofield’s numerous notes in the text as dispensationalist “eyeglasses” that made the dispensations and the connections between text references easy to find. He echoes suggestions made elsewhere that the notations are often granted the sense of authority given the text itself. Though he only mentions the fact in passing, he also pinpoints a key fact that “Readers often find it difficult to differentiate between dispensationalist doctrine and the words of Scripture.”⁷⁷ Boyer’s essay echoes this in the *Encyclopedia*: ““Well-thumbed Scofield Bibles occupied an honored place in the homes of vast numbers of evangelical Christians, many of whom had difficulty remembering precisely where they had acquired a particular idea: from the sacred text itself, or from Scofield’s notes, with their dispensational premillennialist message woven throughout.”⁷⁸

Look at pages from *The Scofield Reference Bible*. Every page is surrounded with marginal notes and references to other verses. The book describes how to use itself in the introductory pages

The subject references lead the reader from the first clear mention of a great truth to the last. The first and last references (in parenthesis) are repeated each time, so that wherever a reader comes upon a subject he

⁷⁶ New, *Holy War*, 19

⁷⁷ New, 19

⁷⁸ *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 156

may recur to the first reference and follow the subject, or turn at once to the Summary at the last reference.⁷⁹

The reference tools included in the text thread an interpretive connection through the text, through time, from end to end of the dispensationalist view of history.

Incidentally, McLuhan hints at the implications of this for scripture reading in *Understanding Media*

Myth is contraction or implosion of any process and the instant speed of electricity confers the mythic dimension on ordinary industrial and social action today. We *live* mythically but continue to think fragmentarily and on single planes. Scholars today are acutely aware of a discrepancy between their ways of treating the Old and New Testaments frequently say that while their treatment must be linear, the subject is not. The subject treats of the relations between God and man, and between God and the world, and of the relations between man and his neighbor—all these subsist together and act and react upon one another at the same time. The Hebrew and Eastern mode of thought tackles problem and resolution, at the outset of a discussion, in a way typical of oral societies in general. The entire message is then traced and retraced, again and again, on the rounds of a concentric spiral with seeming redundancy. One can stop anywhere after the first few sentences and have the full message, if one is prepared to “dig” it. (...) The new electric structuring and configuring of life more and more encounters the old lineal and fragmentary procedures and tools of analysis from the mechanical age. More and more we turn from the content of the messages to study total effect.⁸⁰

J.N. Darby’s early work on dispensationalism marks an interpretative advance, an underlying discovery of the scientific sort. Working from this basis, Cyrus Scofield invented an incredibly powerful text technology, one that invokes a confluence of old and new media forms, a prefigure of this century’s hypertexts, and a bellwether of theologies to come.

⁷⁹ Scofield, 2

⁸⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 39

HOW TO USE THE SUBJECT REFERENCES.

The subject references lead the reader from the first clear mention of a great truth to the last. The first and last references (in parenthesis) are repeated each time, so that wherever a reader comes upon a subject he may recur to the first reference and follow the subject, or turn at once to the Summary at the last reference.

ILLUSTRATION

(at Mark 1. 1.)

^b Gospel, vs. 1,
14, 15; Mk.
8: 35 (Gen.
12: 1-3; Rev.
14: 6.)

Here *Gospel* is the subject; vs. 1, 14, 15 show where it is at that particular place; Mk. 8. 35 is the next reference in the chain, and the references in parenthesis are the first and the last.

THE PENTATEUCH.

The five books ascribed to Moses have a peculiar place in the structure of the Bible, and an order which is undeniably the order of the experience of the people of God in all ages. Genesis is the book of origins—of the beginning of life, and of ruin through sin. Its first word, "In the beginning God," is in striking contrast with the end, "In a coffin in Egypt." Exodus is the book of redemption, the first word of a ruined race. Leviticus is the book of worship and communion, the proper exercise of the redeemed. Numbers speaks of the experiences of a pilgrim people, the redeemed passing through a hostile scene to a promised inheritance. Deuteronomy, retrospective and prospective, is a book of instruction for the redeemed about to enter that inheritance.

That Babylonian and Assyrian monuments contain records bearing a grotesque resemblance to the majestic account of the creation and of the Flood is true, as also that these antedate Moses. But this confirms rather than invalidates the inspiration of the Mosaic account. Some tradition of creation and the Flood would inevitably be handed down in the ancient cradle of the race. Such a tradition, following the order of all tradition, would take on grotesque and mythological features, and these abound in the Babylonian records. Of necessity, therefore, the first task of inspiration would be to supplant the often absurd and childish tradition with a revelation of the true history, and such a history we find in words of matchless grandeur, and in an order which, rightly understood, is absolutely scientific.

In the Pentateuch,^a therefore, we have a true and logical introduction to the entire Bible; and, in type, an epitome of the divine revelation.

^a Cf. Mt. 8. 4; 19. 8; Mk. 12. 26; Lk. 5. 14; 16. 29-31; John 3. 14; 5. 45, 46; 7. 19.

The abbreviation cf., used throughout the Bible signifies compare.

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES CALLED GENESIS.

1]

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It records not only the beginning of the heavens and the earth, and of plant animal, and human life, but also of all human institutions and relationships. Typically, it speaks of the new birth, the new creation, where all was chaos and ruin.

With Genesis begins also that progressive self-revelation of God which culminates in Christ. The three primary names of Deity, Elohim, Jehovah, and Adonai, occur in the five most important of the compound names, occur in Genesis, and in the ordered progression which could not be changed without confusion.

The problem of sin as affecting man's condition in the earth, and that in an Edenic covenant which condition human life and the divine redemption, four of the eight great fundamental covenants to which the other four, the Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants, are related chiefly as adding detail or development.

Genesis enters into the very structure of the New Testament, in which it is quoted above sixty times in seventeen places. In a profound sense, therefore, it is quoted comprehensively that revelation must begin here.

The inspiration of Genesis and its character as a divine revelation are authenticated by the testimony of history, and by the testimony of Christ (Mt. 19. 4-6; 24. 37-39; Mk. 10. 4-9; Lk. 11. 49-51; 17. 26-29; Jn. 1. 5; 7. 21-23; 8. 44, 46).

Genesis is in five chief divisions: I. Creation (1. 1-2, 23). II. The Fall & Eve (2. 1-3). III. The Diverse Seeds, Cain and Seth, to the Flood (4. 1-8, 24). IV. The Flood to Babel (6. 1-11, 9). V. From the call of Abram to the death of Joseph (11. 10-50, 26).

The events recorded in Genesis cover a period of 2,315 years (Usher).

CHAPTER 1.

The original creation.

IN the beginning ¹God created the heaven and the earth.

Earth made waste and empty by judgment (Jer. 4. 23-26).

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was

B.C. 4004.

² John 1.
¹ Deity (names of)
Gen. 24, 7.
Ex. 3. 14.
Mal. 3. 18.
³ Holy Spirit.
Gen. 6. 3.
Gen. 1. 2.
Mal. 2. 15.
Ps. 104. 30.

upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The new beginning—the day light diffused.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
4 And God saw the light, that it

¹ *Elohim* (sometimes *El* or *Elah*), English form "God," the first of the three primary names of Deity, is a uni-plural noun formed from *El*=strength, or the strong one, and *Ahah*, to swear, to bind oneself by an oath, so implying faithfulness. This uni-plurality implied in the name is directly asserted in Gen. 1. 26 (plurality), 27 (unity); see also Gen. 3. 22. Thus the Trinity is latent in Elohim, later in meaning primarily the Strong One it is fitly used in the first chapter of Genesis. Used in O. T. about 2500 times. See also Gen. 2. 4, note; 2. 7; 14. 18, note; 15. 2, note; 17. 1, note; 21. 33, note; 1 Sam. 1. 3, note.

² But three creative acts of God are recorded in this chapter: (1) the heavens and the earth, v. 1; (2) animal life, v. 21; and (3) human life, vs. 26, 27. The first creative act refers to the dateless past, and gives scope for all the geologic ages.

³ Jer. 4. 23-26, Isa. 24. 1 and 45. 18, clearly indicate that the earth had undergone a cataclysmic change as the result of a divine judgment. The face of the earth bears everywhere the marks of such a catastrophe. There are not wanting intimations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels. See Ezk. 28. 12-15 and Isa. 14. 9-14, which certainly go beyond the kings of Tyre and Babylon.

⁴ Neither here nor in verses 14-18 is an original creative act implied. A different word is used. The sense is, made to appear, made visible. The sun and moon were world is used. The sense is, made to appear, made visible. The sun and moon were

38

Scofield's *Finnegan's Wake*. It possesses unheard of power, not because it is a good or bad reading of the scriptures, but because it is a technological artifact loosing hybrid energy from the meeting of industrial text and electric mythic culture. It is a *techné*, one that came to light just as the culture was entering a transformative time, particularly ready to respond to it on an unconscious level. The content of the *SRB* pales in comparison to the translatory and directive power of the technique it represents.

Narcissus, our source for *narcosis*, is described as falling into mechanical love with his reflection, that the mirror was a technology that extended him, and it numbed his senses and perceptions, narcotically closing him off to the pleading of Echo⁸¹.

McLuhan used the Narcissus myth to draw an insightful comparison with surgical operations. When a medium or several media extend a faculty, the extension thereby causes same faculty to be *numbed*, and the remaining *whole system* is affected. The comparison is apt in exactly as much as a local anesthetic enables surgery on a part, while leaving the remaining whole of the organismic system to contend with the actual effects.

The new media and technologies by which we amplify and extend ourselves constitute huge collective surgery carried out on the social body with complete disregard for antiseptics. (...) in operating on society with a new technology, it is not the incised area that is most affected. The area of impact and incision is numb. It is the entire system that is changed. (...) Each new impact shifts the ratios among all the senses.⁸²

⁸¹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 51

⁸² McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 70

How should we analyze the dispensationalist approach to scripture as presented in the *SRB*? If it is understood as an extending medium, an artifact of consciousness, it has properties and effects which we can gauge, in its impact on the person or persons encountering it, and the subsequent impacts in its ambit of church and culture. If we've analyzed the media and cultural *ground* of dispensationalism we should be able to extract knowledge that tells us the ways it is actually capable of having effects and the nature of those effects.

The culmination of McLuhan's role in this thesis depends on the capstone work of his life, *Laws of Media*, completed with his son Eric. In it, the McLuhans present definitive tools for examining these effects. They write:

All of [humanity's] artefacts—whether language, or laws, or ideas and hypotheses, or tools, or clothing, or computers—are extensions of the physical human body or the mind. [We have] long been engaged in extending one or another of [our] sense organs in such a manner as to disturb all other senses and faculties. But having made these experiments, [we] have consistently omitted to follow them with observations.⁸³

The response to this omission is the four laws of media:

Our laws of media are intended to provide a ready means of identifying the properties of and actions exerted upon ourselves by our technologies and media and artefacts. They do not rest on any concept or theory, but are empirical, and form a practical means of perceiving the action and effects of ordinary human tools and services. They apply to all human artefacts, whether hardware or software, whether bulldozers or buttons, or poetic styles or philosophical systems. The four laws are framed as questions:

⁸³ McLuhan & McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 95

- What does the artefact enhance or intensify to make possible or accelerate? This can be asked concerning a wastebasket, a painting, a steamroller, or a zipper, as well as about a proposition in Euclid or a law of physics. It can be asked about any word or phrase in any language.
- If some aspect of a situation is enlarged or enhanced, simultaneously the old condition or unenhanced situation is displaced thereby. What is pushed aside or obsolesced by the new ‘organ’?
- What recurrence or retrieval of earlier actions and services is brought into play simultaneously by the new form? What older, previously obsolesced ground is brought back and inheres in the new form?
- When pushed to the limits of its potential (another complementary action), the new form will tend to reverse what had been its original characteristics. What is the reversal potential of the new form?

This tetrad of the effects of technologies and artefacts presents not a sequential process, but rather four simultaneous ones. All four aspects are inherent in each artefact from the start. The four aspects are complementary and require careful observation of the artefact in relation to its ground, rather than consideration in the abstract.⁸⁴

The McLuhans’ text included several examples, as simple as pointing out that “money speeds transactions and gives rise to uniform pricing systems, obsolescing haggle and barter and much of the human relation to commodities (...) The vacuum cleaner obsolesces the broom and the beater (...) Some forms are so evanescent they have their own built-in obsolescence. Nothing is as stale as yesterday’s newspaper—until it can be retrieved as valuable documentary evidence or nostalgic treat.”⁸⁵ They go on to more elaborate tetrads analyses presented below. By way of example the tetrad for the telephone (*fig. 2*) is presented be-

⁸⁴ Ibid., 98-99

⁸⁵ Ibid., 99-100

low, which reflects the same pattern of Enhances (top left) - Obsolesces (bottom right) - Retrieves (bottom left) - Reverses Into (top right) pattern, the bold-face type being the laws, and then glosses are added to the margins outside the bold.

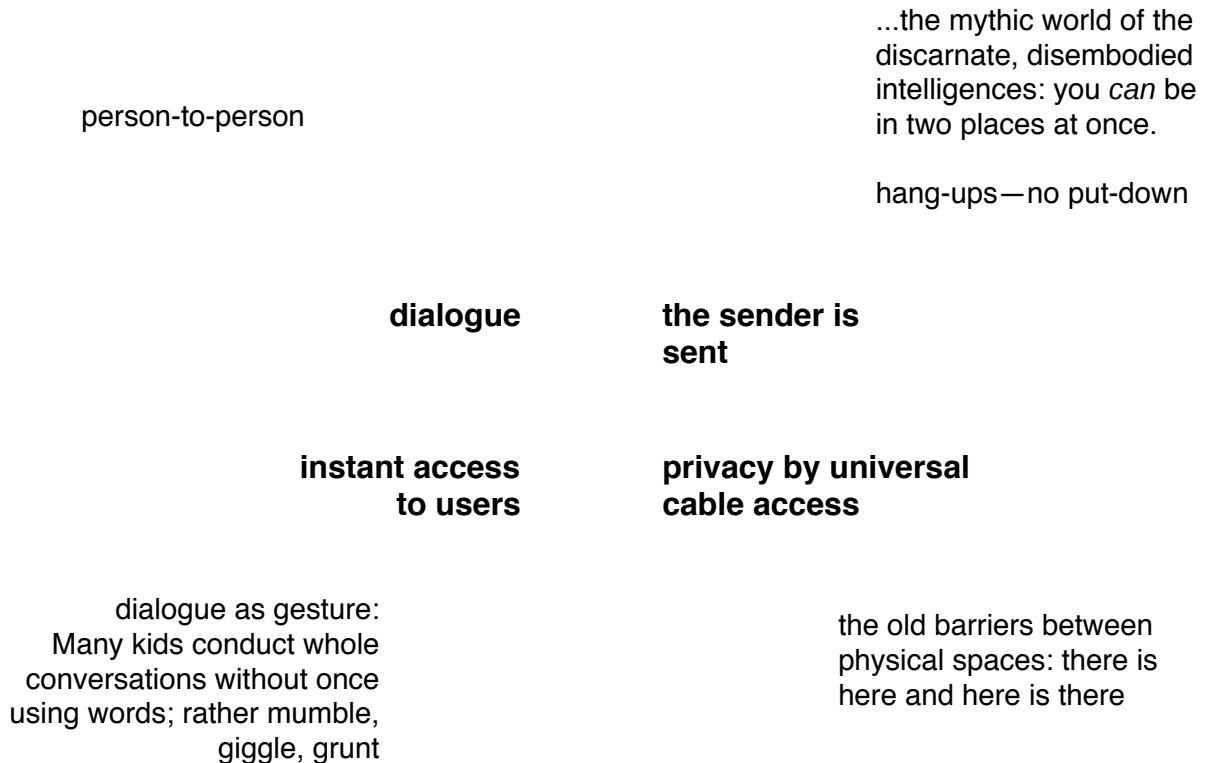


fig. 2 - tetrad of the telephone
from Laws of Media by Marshall and Eric McLuhan
The tetrad demonstrates the effect of a medium in all dimensions of impact at the same time, rather than linearly. The telephone enhances dialogue while obsolescing privacy, and retrieves ancient actions of gestural dialogue, while at electric speed (its inherent pace) flips into its own opposite, the user is transported to another extrasensory realm, apart from the immediacy of access.

Not content to simply describe this example, this thesis proposes to appropriate

the laws of media and the tetrad of media effects in order to examine the dispensationalist enterprise and its first *techne* of the post-industrial era, *The Scofield Reference Bible*.

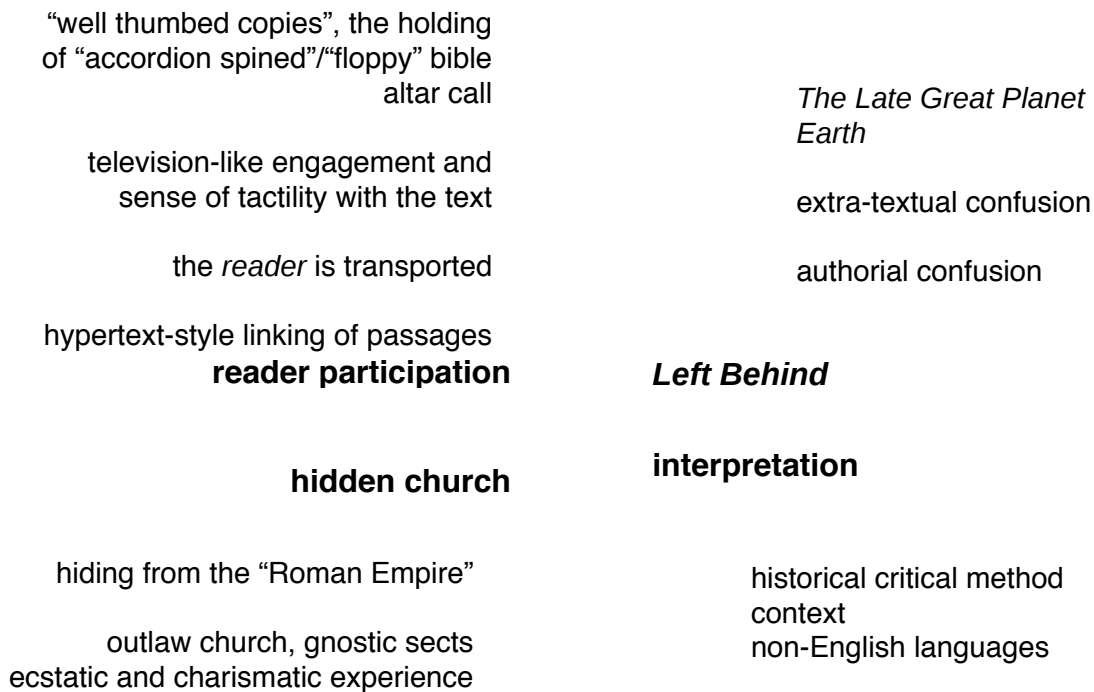


fig. 5 - tetrad of The Scofield Reference Bible

The commentaries of the *SRB* invite the reader to fill in blanks, create an electric environment quite unlike a standard linear text. As the telephone creates an extrasensory experience by simultaneous extension of ear and speech,⁸⁶ the *SRB* combines the mechanical word with an experience of connection between the

⁸⁶ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 233

fragments of text and external cultures, a experience of participation in depth. The *reader* is transported. A moment's thought on this should immediately connect one to the historical dependency of dispensationalism on the doctrine of "the rapture of the secret church." The attention to rapture set in motion this kind of reading of the text as surely as nocking an arrow to the bowstring. If the doctrines of the end of things demands a rapture then creates the demand for an invisible church; and likewise carrying the message of this invisible church creates the demand for a technical explication to connect the concept with the fragmenting mythic culture as it emerges into the 20th century. The *techné* of this process is a bible capable of giving its ten million readers greater tactility and experience in depth of participating in the text and its interpretation.

The outcome of this process is as surely a cultural transformation and the instantiation of a major Christian group. Below is a draft tetrad analysis of the dispensational approach (*fig. 4*) suggesting what it simultaneously enhances, retrieves, obsolesces, and flips into.

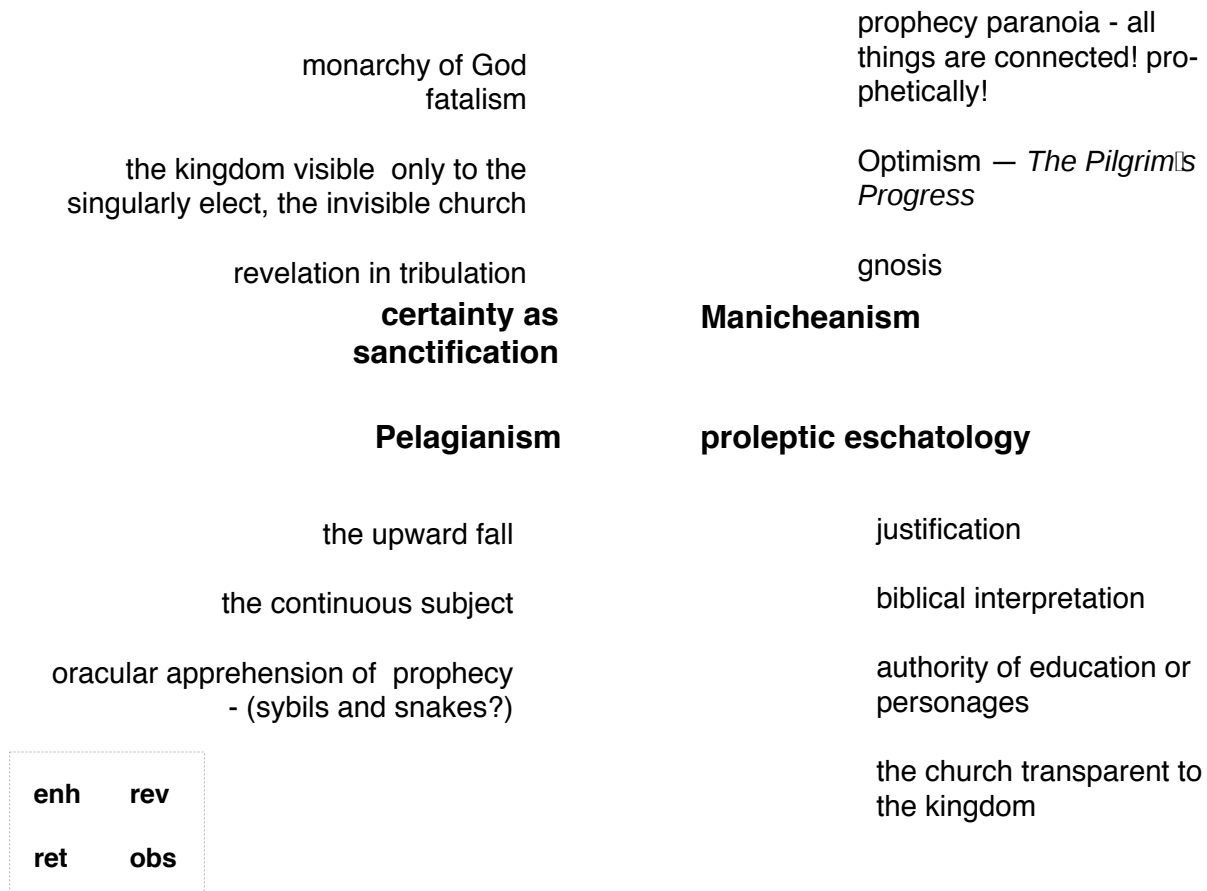


fig. 2 - tetrad of dispensationalism
*This rendering subject to change; it's possible that some of the glosses are better
suited as main ideas enhanced, reversed into, obsolesced, or retrieved.*

Dominionism as media-dependent outcome

Recall the events described earlier, of the effort to bolster support for judge Roy Moore. The participants in his dramatic stand, from governors to university football teams, stand where they do on the concern that they must mix church and state to combat “a lie introduced by Satan and fostered by the courts.”⁸⁷ The drama of Moore’s

⁸⁷ Goldberg, 28

struggle on behalf of a granite ten commandments monument is the result of the conviction that there must be Christian dominion over the U.S. If we are given in this to understand Christianity as a total ideology and self-conscious reaction to rationalism⁸⁸, this thesis' reading of cultural and media theories can shed some light. On the one hand we have interpreters of the *content* of the dominionist message, as analyzed by Goldberg and others. Observers are justifiably unnerved that Christian nationalism

claims supernatural sanction for its campaign of national renewal and speaks rapturously about vanquishing the millions of Americans who would stand in its way. (...) the ultimate goal of Christian nationalist leaders isn't fairness. It's dominion. The movement is built on a theology that asserts the Christian right to rule⁸⁹.

If you only treat the content as the start and end point that alone can be worrying. Instead Goldberg made numerous other observances, presented in quick succession here:

Like all ideologies, Christian nationalism tells a story. It's a tale about a godly country, blessed for its piety, that began to go wrong in the nineteenth century and sank to unimagined lows in the twentieth (7). Reconstructionist theory calls for a stealth strategy to Christianize politics and culture (...) The Christian Coalition specialized in...dispersed political warfare. While the Moral Majority had focused on direct mail and large rallies, the Christian Coalition trained activists and candidates on the local level (...) 'I want it to be invisible' Ralph Reed told the [newspapers]. 'I paint my face and travel at night. You don't know it's over until you're in a body bag. You don't know until election night' (14). (...) [The] answers were bound up with a restoration of public faith, as if through asserting Christianity, the anxieties and disappointments of American life would be replaced by transcendent certainties. They longed for a Christian community, not as a subculture, but as the culture (21). "Reach over and slap someone a high five and tell them it's gonna get better!" [Preacher Rod Parsley] said, and people happily complied. As the music

⁸⁸ Goldberg, 5-6

⁸⁹ Goldberg, 6-7

rose, Parsley enjoined the worshippers to dance harder. “You need to abandon yourself! Don’t let those aisles separate you!” At his words people started dancing in the aisles. Parsley called headache sufferers to the front of the auditorium. (...) “Don’t stop worshipping Him! Don’t become a spectator!”⁹⁰

This extended gloss just touches on the style of the dominionist program. Consider the alignment of myth making with dispersed local engagement. Consider the intrigue, the dressing up, the shifting ratios in the sensorium of participants, the tactility.

There is a perception, formed by the content of their messages, that the Christian Right in the U.S. opposes “the media.” However, in their functions, they have thoroughly adapted to the era of electric media, functionally producing a systematic theology out of accelerated-media techniques. They, better than any other political-religious movement, have taken to heart McLuhan’s analysis considering the effects of our extended senses. Christian nationalism has intuited a powerful dissonance between their content, which is strictly anti-modern, and the surrounding media that deliver it, which is shockingly advanced and has the greater portion of the effect. Dominionism’s rise from dispensationalism’s ground is an advanced hybrid media artifact of the post-McLuhan era. It is a socially transforming adaptation and translation of Christianity, taking as its coefficient media technology and political *power*.

⁹⁰ Goldberg, 51

For the Easter hope shines not only forwards into the unknown newness of the history which it opens up, but also backwards over the graveyards of history, and in there midst first on the grave of a crucified man who appeared in the prelude. —Jürgen Moltmann.

When the technology of a time is powerfully thrusting in one direction, wisdom may well call for a counter-vailing thrust. the implosion of electric energy in our century cannot be met by explosion or expansion, but it can be met by decentralism and the flexibility of multiple small centers. —H. Marshall McLuhan.

IN a global information environment, the old pattern of education in answer-finding is of no avail: one is surrounded by answers, millions of them, moving and mutating at electric speed. Survival and control will depend on the ability to probe and to question in the proper way and place. —McLuhan and McLuhan.

4

The End

These transformations, prompted by the explosion of this particular strain of evangelical Christianity which pretends to stand over and against culture spring up from the adaptability of those groups' message to the Anglo-American culture, itself in a state of implosion and translation from alphabetic figure to electric ground. How do the remainders of the church, and particularly the inheritors of the Lutheran theological tradition, address this drama of message and media? We will consider theological

questions and responses to the challenges of dispensationalism as operative cultural artifact. We will further seek to interrogate the possible role of media in this challenge.

These last days

Theologians — this author included — express a variety of reactions to the exercises of dispensationalist doctrine. Especially as applies to cultural influence, generally these run to surprise and occasional disorientation. The heterodox observer may decry that these groups preach a misleading gospel; that their dependence on human will and response, and the human role in making specific choices for salvation are of hidden bondage. The Lutheran observer of dispensationalist activity is bewildered at the efficacy of these complicated abrasive readings and demands. Contempt quickly girds the voice as an indictment of “decision theology” rolls off the tongue. This contempt breeds shock when millions are flocking to these readings, engaged completely in the drama of prophecy possibly playing out in this or that news event, or if not, then soon, surely soon. The question this prompts is whether or not these reactions reflect a way of thinking solely focused on *content*.

In the dispensational program, the *message of the medium* is that transformation is operative through the text transporting the *reader*, exchanging the figure/ground relationship and locating the reader as figure grounded in the invisible church. The mechanics communicating this meshed exquisitely with the prevailing culture of the early 1900’s. How does a doctrinally firm message come to a culture like the one I’ve de-

scribed in this paper? What do we do in a place and time where the media itself is a message, above, beyond or devoid of content?

Themes of freedom and bondage, and the participation of the subject with an invisible drama revealed by prophetic struggle against visible enemies. A text whose meaning is clear to the coterie (of millions) who have been called out of time and space to prepare for a coming tribulation. These stories hold sway because the cultural translation of the scripture as performed by dispensationalists is functionally more resonant with the tactile media expectations of the public who encounters them. Will other denominations bemoan the loss of purity and cheapening of the message? The traditional confrontation with these is to focus on those doctrinal impurities, the textual compromises and the role editing decisions play in objects like *The Scofield Reference Bible*. But as medium, the power it communicates to those encountering it is a participation in depth, an emotional investment in a greater force, one which opens to them the vision of the past as a total now. Dispensationalism approach and its provided media *techné* integrate the adherent completely with its hermeneutical framework.

If we are concerned the word is lost in compromise should we not remember our lessons from Sanneh? As he puts it, “it is important to emphasize that the attempts to suppress vernacular renewal merely succeeded in exciting it”⁹¹. The efforts of dispensationalism have born fruit because they alter the ratios of perception among the sense of the participants and render a translatory and thus transformative effect. “The

⁹¹ Sanneh, 79

church does not err in confidently appropriating the requisite cultural materials to express the gospel, and the triumph of the religion in the modern West attests to the success with which it can be done.”⁹²

The problem, therefore is that the anthropological answers to questions such as “what must I do to be saved?” and “what is the future of the world?” are dominant and the theological ones founder. Have not the denominations, Lutheranism among them, fallen behind in translating as effectively? Nor have we understood the role media effects play in communicating this message. What challenges to these approaches can we present? What alternatives do we lay claim to, and how do they operate relative to the analytic treatment already presented in this thesis?

The dispensations are a view of history divided into discrete and bounded covenants. The aim and purpose of prophecy is to be revealed only to the “properly indwelt,” yet these prophecies remain mechanically literal, the words oriented toward remote realms of the future. In view of these as possible effects of the dispensational enterprise, it is noteworthy that alternatives have not found extensive cultural coefficients, and have not offered a coherent translatory action.

Does this mean something should be manufactured, in order to respond somehow to the likes of *The Scofield Reference Bible* or *Left Behind*? To address a “cultural influence gap” with some kind of multimedia output? Write books of our own, make mov-

⁹² Sanneh, *TM*, 83

ies, web sites? That course seems half-baked, representing a kind of “tit for tat” approach that does not address the complexities of the matter. It further does disservice to a population this paper has already shown have endure mythic transformations in a state of mediated anesthetized Narcissus/narcosis. If we see the wisdom of Sanneh’s insight that the translation of the Gospel is at the heart of activating its power, are we not called to address the whole matter of translation? Of what is to be translated and the means? So this author seeks to present alternatives and ask further questions.

Let us return a moment to the tetrad earlier used to analyze dispensationalism’s effects. In the particular hypertextual theology of prophecy enhanced by dispensational hermeneutics, there is also the obsolescence of several theological themes. Among these we find the role and nature of interpretive authority, the place of justification, and the relationship of the church to the kingdom. Those themes have particular resonance for Lutheran theologians.

First let us confront the question of eschatology and elaborate on the concept of proleptic eschatology obsolesced by the dispensationalist program. If eschatology is understood as the doctrine(s) of “last things” it has a special bearing for this study. Concern for the “end times” is naturally front and center in the doctrines growing out of the vision of the hidden church, the secret rapture and the numerous judgments. The deduction of the dispensationalist eschatology from its hermeneutical approach is a straightforward matter. It was set on course as directly as the outcome of the pinned text was from the templates laid down by Darby and fulfilled by Scofield. The

end of time remains a matter of the future, and the purpose of the cosmos is to be revealed at its conclusion. This further accords with our modern views, a strong adherence to the categories of past, present, and future that presents time and the end of time as discrete linear concepts.

In media . . . *Rex*

On the other hand, in the twentieth century many theologians considered time and eschatology in a different ground, connecting the future through the experience of the present. Consider theologian Ted Peters, writing in *God—the World's Future*:

The link is the prolepsis that ties together two otherwise disjunctive understandings of the future, *futurum* and *adventum*. Our modern view presupposes *futurum*, the assumption that the future will be the result of causative forces coming from the past. (...) With the term *adventus*, in contrast, we think of the appearance of something absolutely new. (...) The future renewal of all things that the advent of time in the person of Jesus from Nazareth, the proleptic advent of the ultimate rule of God.

A third latin term for the future, *venturum*, is helpful here. (...) In its coming this future has an impact on us before its full advent. *Venturum* gives us the sense of prolepsis, the invasion of the present by the power of what is yet to come.⁹³

With Peters we have a solid summary of the twentieth century's theological apprehension of the concept of prolepsis. It echoes the work of Kasemann and then of Moltmann. For example, writing in *The Crucified God* twenty years prior Moltmann notes

Jesus' resurrection from the dead by God was never regarded as a private and isolated miracle for his authentication, but as the beginning of the general resurrection of the dead, i.e. as the beginning of the end of history *in the midst of history* (...) Thus the resurrection of Jesus stood in the

⁹³ Peters, 308-9

framework of a universal hope of eschatological belief, which was kindled in it.⁹⁴

The common thread is of the prolepsis and of the future *in media res*.⁹⁵ Here we have a possible opening to question the nature of our understanding of eschatology. These theologians ask what if we consider the eschaton on Christological grounds.

Now let us probe some of *how* that should take place. In theologian Gerhard Forde's work *Theology is for Proclamation*, Forde locates a place for this in descriptions of the role of the preacher: "The preacher must claim the audacious and unheard-of authority to say who is intended to actually speak for God. The answer to anticipate, is always you: 'You, now that you are in earshot.'"⁹⁶ The preacher presumes the role of elector in proclaiming salvation to all within hearing range. This level of presumption is a "present tense, here-and-now deed of God [which is] the answer to the problem of God"⁹⁷. The deed of election, the act of proclamation is an operative speaking, an action of the whole of the triune God.

Proclamation as present-tense Word of God spoken by a human being is possible only under the aegis of this divine self-repetition. Only so can the Word we proclaim today be the Word of God. One proclaims the only Son of the Father in the Spirit and so "does God" to the hearers.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Moltmann, 162 *emphasis added*

⁹⁵ used here as "into the middle of things"

⁹⁶ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 35

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 93

The proclamation of Jesus Christ not only *contains*, but is operative. It *performs* the interior of the heart of the triune God⁹⁹ upon and for the sake of the hearer. Forde's ultimate point leads to an eschatological construction as well, writing

All this is to say, of course, that the Word is an eschatological Word, a Word that puts an end to the old and ushers in the new. The doing of the text to the hearers is nothing other than putting an end to our affairs in the double sense already noted above, ending the old and giving an end (a *telos*) to our existence, our world. Proclamation is to be understood and prosecuted in this light. The sacraments sign, seal, and deliver this end in unmistakable fashion. They are the end of the old and the beginning of the new in the midst of our time.¹⁰⁰

Forde's depiction opens a direct connection between the existential person and the apocalyptic end of all things. His theological innovation does so not by relocating the subjective individual but relocating the revelation of the interior desire of God into the space/time reference Forde describes repeatedly as the "living present." This encounter, between preacher and hearer, also contains the Christ, the heart of the living God; as such, also kingdom and end of time, all delivered inside the living present.

This author contends that at least one matter of doctrinal purity along these lines shares a resonance with a culture driven by media-effect. In lectures in 1996, Luther Seminary Professor Paul Martinson described a threefold understanding of mission, that it "stands on three legs." The first is a leg of proclamation/communication issues. The second leg is interfaith issues. The third he described is the integrity of

⁹⁹ Proclamation not only contains—as a medium might *contain* content—but is operative of the incarnate word of the triune God, it performs—as a medium *performs* or leads to effects on the whole.

¹⁰⁰ Forde, 158.

community that bears witness. It is the notion of a church community that lives from faith for the world. The Christian, Luther says, is perfectly free lord of all subject to none; and perfectly dutiful servant of all subject to all. To be a lord of all is to declare the fact of redemption—to do the eschatological deed of God in proclamation. To be a dutiful servant is to declare that at once we are free and to bring the kingdom of heaven into the midst of the world. “Put on your neighbor as Christ put on us and for us, and so acts what we are.” We are free from compulsion by the gospel, and hence freely subject ourselves to our neighbors. For Luther it was the concept that “we become Christ for our neighbors.”

If we consider the threefold nature of missions through Martinson’s eyes should we not engage the present globalizing electric culture on two points: 1) as a separate culture with its own complete and self-validated structure, language, myths, ritual and patterns; 2) from the position of servanthood to our neighbors? Going out with human hands to proclaim an eschatological gospel in the living present, seek translatory motion from a position of resonance and service.

Mustn’t we, as Martinson put it, minister through placing on our selves the claims of our neighbors, knowing that through grace we participate in those claims in and through the life, death and resurrection of Christ? Could we consistently do this in the present and within the culture to which we are in mission, not outside of it? We become actors in the matter of translation, meeting the “individual” components of the popular, modern and postmodern culture as the “individual” of a perfectly free lord of

all/perfectly dutiful servant of all in the living present. The words spoken between Christian and citizen *are* plain talk, resonant with a mythically-structured culture, rendering broad themes in human brushstrokes; i.e. salvation comes not through abstraction but a concretely present Jesus who live and died. And clearly no culture has universal resonance with Christianity. Whether it is the African examples provided by Sanneh or the dissonance of machine culture in organic encounter of a dead-and-resurrected Christ. However, the points of entry provide a means for the two to become cultural coefficients, to react and grow from each other—perhaps adapting their own thinking in light of them.

Put in a radically abbreviated way, in Christ the media becomes the message. The deed of God which is the eschatological gospel of death and resurrection is done to our neighbors in the living present through servant-hood. If as McLuhan described, the content of media is other media, and correlated to this he demonstrated that light is the contentless medium, then the matter of the medium and the media that are content of other media, is of vital importance. When the content is treated as literal text and interpretation, that in its fixation likewise binds the subject to itself, does it live to itself?

What is the content of proclamation if not the living Word? The content of the media of preaching, sacrament and servant-hood are living Word. The content of living Word is the heart of the triune God, the living present creator, the final *immediate* Light

which illuminates and contains all else. Contained in the living present, done to the hearer. And not a moment too soon.

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