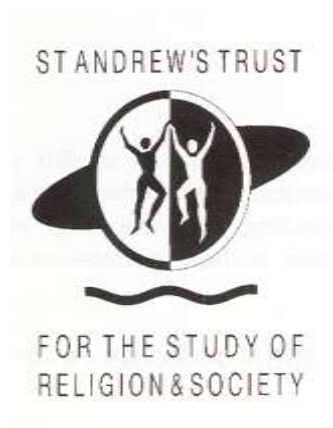


# PARADISE ON EARTH

LLOYD GEERING



Published by St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society  
PO Box 5203, Wellington

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Series Editor: Ian Harris  
Cover Design: Becky Bliss  
Typesetting: Anne White

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**ISBN 0-9583645-5-9**

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## FOREWORD

Since the beginning of recorded history, human beings have been captivated by the myth of paradise. It touches something deep in us: our origins, our aspirations, our fears, our need to determine our destiny. In ways we never fully comprehend, we are driven by a need to know where we are going, to progress upwards, always evolving into a state better than before.

It is this search for paradise that Professor Lloyd Geering explores in this series of lectures given at St Andrew's during September 2000. He argues that the "buoyant expectancy" of the past has been replaced by a growing dis-ease with a paradise that has remained elusive. Nevertheless, along the way the human family has learned a great deal about paradise. It is of this world, not another. It will require a collective human effort. It will always be ahead of us. While we cannot go back to the past, clearly the past can help us to envisage a future for all.

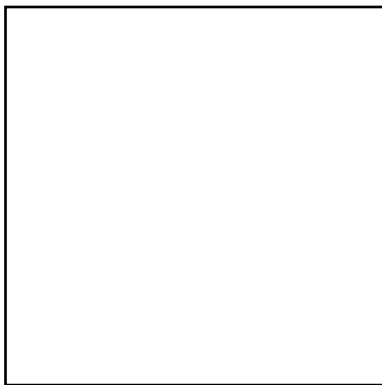
Professor Geering begins by exploring the ways in which the quest for a better world became part of our historical past. He suggests that every time the vision seemed to be within reach, it has eluded us. He then turns his attention to what kind of paradise we think we want, and examines factors such as globalisation and technological innovation, which are rapidly shaping the future for us. He then sketches how we might "reach the world we hope for". Finally, he identifies the obstacles that stand before us in our attempt to build a better and more equitable world society.

It is a considerable undertaking that Professor Geering sets before us but, as always, he undertakes it with wisdom, insight and an amazing breath of knowledge. We all know that the future has its own inner logic and will break in upon us in one way or another. What Professor Geering helps us see is that we can help to make the future better for the generations to come if we can free ourselves from the wasteful ways of the past, and from the rigidity of thinking and being that has so often been in the way. The future, he argues, will demand flexibility, empathy, goodwill - "mutual cooperation for the common good". The challenge to all of us is to learn how to think and live anew so that a "new planetary civilisation" can emerge.

**Dr James Stuart**  
Chairperson

St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society

## 1: The Elusive Land of Promise



**I**N 1984, at a time when there was an air of expectancy in the country, I delivered a course of lectures entitled *Envisioning New Zealand's Future*. It was shortly after the Economic Summit Conference. We had come to the end of the Muldoon era and were looking into the future with very positive hope. I explored the need to prioritise our values and clarify our goals if we

were going to achieve any worthwhile ends.

Since that time New Zealand, both in the economy and in society generally, has experienced a great deal of restructuring. The degree to which we have achieved our goals, however, is debatable. There is no longer the sense of buoyant expectancy we had then. What we were hoping for has proved to be more elusive than we thought. Now that we have entered a new century - and a new millennium to boot - it is a suitable time to look again at where we want to go, both as a nation and as part of the wider world.

Even since 1984 the global scene has changed considerably. We are much more aware of the process of globalisation than we were then. We are being forced to acknowledge our interdependence with the rest of the world. We can no longer ignore environmental and ecological issues. The Cold War is over, for the time being at least; yet there are many pockets of deep unrest and local violence around the world.

What sort of better world can we now expect or would we like to see? We shall address these questions particularly in the second chapter. In the third we shall explore how to go about trying to reach the world we hope for, and in the fourth we shall examine the obstacles in the way. First, however, we shall be looking into the past to get a better understanding of how we got here.

The most basic question to begin with is actually this: Why should we even bother thinking about a world better than this one? Why are we not satisfied with what we have? The very fact that we are so often yearning for a better world points to something deeply embedded in the culture which has shaped us. We owe it in part to the Bible, which has provided so much of the content of western culture in the last two millennia. The quest for a better world is a theme that runs through the Bible from beginning to end, even though that future world came to be envisioned in a wide variety of forms.

### **Abraham and the Promised Land**

It started with the story of Abraham, who was later to become, for Jew, Christian and Muslim, the very model of a person who walked forward into the future with faith. All that we know of Abraham has come down to us in the form of a legendary saga. Even that was shaped by later generations, who used it express their own aspirations. It is not the historicity of these ancient legends but their symbolic meaning that is important for us.

Abraham is portrayed as a voluntary migrant setting off on a journey in answer to a divine call. He heard a voice which said: "Go from your country, away from you family and neighbours, to the land that I will show you."

Very much later an unknown New Testament writer added to the saga by saying that Abraham was "looking for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God". But the earlier Hebrew people simply referred to the destination as a land. Abraham was making his way to "the land of promise". The hope of reaching a land promised by God not only initiated the Judeo-Christian cultural path, but has sustained it for nearly 4000 years.

The Abraham legend does reflect historical facts. Early in the second millennium before Christ various nomadic pastoral tribes migrated from Aramaea in Northern Mesopotamia to settle permanently among the more highly cultured city-states of Canaan.

It is worth examining the patriarchal legends which that migration gave rise to. First, they describe life as a journey. This has long been a useful way for us individuals to understand the nature of our personal life. But the metaphor is just as true of the human species as a whole. Only in the past 150 years have we been able to appreciate that fact: it is only since then that we have become aware of the long evolution of life on this planet.

An important part of that story is not only the biological evolution of the human species but also, subsequently, the evolution of human culture. By culture I mean the mode of thought and style of living which make us human. For some two million years humankind has been engaged in a cultural journey, and still is. It is a journey in which we are not at all clear where we are going. We are like Abraham, of whom the New Testament said "he went out, not knowing where he was to go".

### **An urge to go somewhere**

We humans as a species do not know where we are heading on this planet – or even whether we are going anywhere. Yet from time to time we experience an inner urge that we ought to go somewhere. This manifested itself in the European motivation to explore the world and colonise it. It is reflected in the widespread desire in the scientific world to be continually making progress. It was shown in the passion to put a man on the moon. It is felt by individuals in the urge to climb the highest mountain, or simply set off on what they call their OE. It is reflected in a term dear to all economists – the achievement of economic growth. We are told we should be always improving our material standard of living. Deeply embedded in the culture that shapes us is this urge to go somewhere.

It was not always so. For most of the two million years of human cultural evolution, so far as we can tell from scanty evidence, our far distant forebears were chiefly intent on preserving the way of

life they had inherited from their ancestors. They looked back to the mythical time of origins as the golden age; since that time any change they usually judged to be for the worse. We, too, often show a bit of that nostalgia for better times in the past, even though we have a tendency to look at the past through rose-coloured spectacles.

But from around the time of Abraham, human culture began to change. Starting with a few pioneering souls at first, humans began to look ahead and picture another kind of world better than the one they knew. It was this shift of attention from the past to the future which, among other things, led to the Axial Period in the first millennium BCE – the period which gave rise to the so-called “world religions”. The term “Axial Period” was used to describe how human culture seemed to make a giant shift on its axis. For the first time humans were no longer content simply to preserve the status quo, but chose to take the initiative in changing things for the better. They began to develop the notion that human society was also on a journey. This is one of the symbolic and permanent meanings of the Abraham saga.

### **A pivotal change**

Our widespread concern with history – the human story – came to birth in this period. Previously time had been experienced as a matter of going round in circles – days, months, years, generations – in which one kept returning to where one had started. From the Axial Period onwards time came to be seen as a line stretching out into the unknown future. You never pass the same point twice. Each moment is unique. Each generation can build on the products of the past. Culture can be accumulative and progressive. Now there are goals to be reached. As the Bible tells it, all this began with Abraham.

The second aspect of the Abraham legend which remains very relevant is that Abraham was looking for a land to possess. This element of the legend also reflected a fact – the cultural change that was taking place quite generally in the ancient world. The cultural event that is described symbolically in the story of one man was spread over several millennia. This was the change from the



migratory life of food-gatherer, hunter and pastoralist to the settled life of the agriculturist, a change that involved settling down in permanent residence. The agriculturists needed to possess and protect the land on which they depended for food.

This cultural transition is reflected also in the ancient myth of Cain and Abel, where there is hostility between Cain the agriculturist and Abel the pastoralist. In the end it was the agriculturist who won, but at a cost. This myth was shaped by memories from the patriarchal period of the clash between the incoming Hebrew tribes and the indigenous Canaanites.

The transition to an agricultural way of life made land possession a necessity. Yet this cultural transition is quite recent relative to the total period of human habitation of this planet. Before that, the earth was one vast common, owned by nobody. There were no humanly created boundaries and people were free to wander wherever they chose.

Since the time of the agricultural revolution, that has no longer been wholly the case. This is why, when the population of a society suddenly expanded, it felt obliged to go out and take possession of more land, if necessary by conquest. This is why, even in more recent times, the European nations went out and colonised the world. As European population expanded during and after the Industrial Revolution, nations found it desirable to export their surplus population. In the 20th century the expansionist designs of Japan, Italy and Germany led to major wars.

Today land possession has become a more urgent issue than ever, and will become the source of increasing tension and dispute during this century. It is sadly ironic that the Israelis and the Palestinians are today both vying with each other to possess the very same piece of land over which the Canaanites and the Hebrews fought 3000 years ago. And Israelis still claim it is theirs by divine right, since it is the land promised by God to Abraham long ago.

### **The urban revolution**

There is still a third aspect of the agricultural revolution which remains relevant. It not only brought about a population increase,

but it led to the building of walled cities for self-protection. Life in the city led in turn to a diversification of skills other than agriculture. Urban life had some great advantages, but there was a price to pay. It was the loss of the complete freedom experienced by the pastoralist – a freedom jealously preserved by the Middle East Bedouin to this day.

The biblical myth of Cain itself connects this loss of freedom with the advent of urban life, though in a rather quaint way. Cain the agriculturalist had to bear the mark of a murderer because he had killed the life of the pastoralist, as symbolised in Abel; so he went off and built a city.

When humankind lived the life of the hunter and food-gatherer, and even the life of the pastoralist, people were the passive recipients of the fruits of the earth. When humankind developed the life of the agriculturalist, people became active developers of the earth. By their skills they increased the fruits of the earth. Then, as humankind developed an urban existence, people began to live not only from the fruits of the earth, but also from the products of their own cultural activities. To a degree they began to be separated from the forces of nature. All these changes followed after land possession became important.

This possession of the land of divine promise has remained an article of faith in Judaism ever since. It has sustained Jews through many centuries of being forcefully exiled from the land and of being shamelessly persecuted by the Gentiles, even to the point of genocide in the Nazi Holocaust. The symbolic words “next year Jerusalem”, spoken at the celebration of every annual Passover, kept alive the hope of their ultimate return to the land of promise some time in the future.

As the long history of the people of Israel makes clear, it is not sufficient merely to possess the land. Equally important is the kind of society in which people live on the land. Further basic components of a desirable world are social order and harmony. The very entry of the ancient Hebrews to the land of Canaan, both under the patriarchs and under Joshua, led initially to a period of social upheaval bordering on chaos. The Bible describes it simply as a time when “everybody did what was right in his own eyes”. That is a euphemistic way of referring to anarchy.

The ancient Israelites overcame anarchy by establishing a kingdom. The one period when the institution of monarchy was relatively successful for the Israelites was the short period of 40 years under King David. So much was this the case that the kingdom of David came to be regarded as a golden age which, once lost, all later generations wished to be restored. Yet for centuries their hopes for this future eluded them.

### **Jesus' kingdom**

At the time of Christian origins the restoration of the kingdom of David was still a paramount concern for many Jews. Even the disciples are reported to have asked Jesus: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

It is widely acknowledged today that the chief message of Jesus was certainly about a kingdom - but a very different kingdom from that of the past. After all, the human rulers of the Davidic kingdom, including even David himself, had proved far from ideal. Some of them, like his son Solomon, had shown themselves to be eastern despots. Jesus called the kingdom he talked about "the kingdom of God"; and much of his teaching, particularly in his parables, was intended to describe what such a kingdom would be like. Since God was conceived as the source of all justice, love and righteousness, then any domain ruled by God would be one in which those virtues prevailed, shaping people's relationships and the general life of the community.

It is now becoming doubtful if the first Christians ever adequately understood the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom. They expected God to establish this kingdom by some cataclysmic event, and went out proclaiming its imminent arrival. Although that expectation is clearly evident in the New Testament, many scholars today question whether that was ever taught by Jesus. In any case, that original expectation was never fulfilled; it was the failure of that kingdom suddenly to arrive that led, during the second, third and fourth centuries, to the mental formation of quite a different world to come.

## **A spiritual alternative**

Eventually Christians lost all hope of ever seeing a better world in the here and now. They transferred their hopes to a more spiritual world beyond this physical world of space and time. This transition took place over some four centuries, and occurred unconsciously more than consciously. Some of it went back to ideas already taking root in pre-Christian Judaism.

In Maccabaeen times, 150 years before the Christian era, even the Jewish hopes of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom were being sorely tested, particularly when their young men were being killed in their prime in defence of the faith of their fathers. Jews began to entertain the hope of a great Last Judgment, when God would justify the righteous and punish the wicked. To make this possible God would need to resurrect the dead to hear the final sentence and receive their just reward. This is all clearly stated in the Book of Daniel: "And many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

We now know that many of these ideas which were taking root in the Jewish thought of the time emanated from the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. They were particularly dominant among the Pharisees - one linguistic theory is that the term "Pharisees" started as a nickname for those Jews who adopted Persian or Farsi ideas.

One of many elements in Jewish thought which reflects this Persian influence is the word *paradise*. It was the Persian name for a garden park with trees and flowers, something for which Iran (or Persia) is famous to this day. When the Jews translated their Bible into Greek some 200 years before the Christian era, they borrowed this word "paradise" to translate the "garden" in which Adam and Eve were placed.

By the time of the Jewish philosopher Philo (a contemporary of Jesus), many Jews had come to refer to the Garden of Eden simply as Paradise. Not only was this usage carried on by the Christians but, as their ideas about a new world beyond the grave began to develop, they increasingly referred to the new life of bliss to which the righteous would be sent as "paradise". This usage is reflected

very succinctly in the great classics of John Milton, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

The original Christian hope, as we have seen, was for the transformation of the world of here and now into the kingdom of God. The words of the Lord's Prayer make it clear: "May your kingdom come. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven." But though the prayer remained, all talk of the kingdom of God on earth became muted in the course of time. The kingdom of God came to be associated exclusively with God's dwelling-place in the sky.

This transition was aided, incidentally, by a linguistic accident. You may have noticed that whereas the Gospels of Mark and Luke speak frequently of the kingdom of God, the Gospel of Matthew refers nearly always to "the kingdom of heaven". This is because Matthew's Gospel was intended for readers with a strongly Jewish background. The fourth commandment forbids Jews to take the name of God in vain, so to be on the safe side they avoided using the word God altogether. They replaced it with a synonym. Heaven, the dwelling-place of God, was such a synonym. The kingdom of heaven was simply another way of referring to the kingdom of God. In time, however, it had the effect of causing Christians to associate the kingdom of God with heaven rather than the earth. Even St John's Gospel refers only twice to the kingdom of God. By the time of the creeds it found no mention at all.

### **Hopes transferred to heaven**

In what became the classical form of Christianity, all the earlier hopes of a better world to come were thus transferred from this earth to the heaven above. Devout human imagination eventually created an elaborate mental picture of this spiritual world to be reached after death; it was divided into paradise, purgatory and hell.

Only with the Renaissance did the focal point of attention begin to return to the earth. In the 16th century there began, step by step, the deconstruction of this spiritual world that had been constructed by ancient Christian imagination. The Reformers abolished purgatory in one fell swoop. By the 19th century theologians were

raising moral objections to the concept of hell as a place of eternal punishment. During the 20th century the reality of heaven began to lose conviction, so much so that in 1999 even Pope John Paul II declared that “heaven is not a place but a state of mind”.

For much more than 1000 years, Christian hopes of a better world were fastened firmly on an unseen world above. It was to this that the spires of the great mediaeval cathedrals pointed.

But eventually this world also proved to be elusive. From Galileo onwards our whole understanding of this world of space and time began to change and to expand even beyond the limits of our imagination. It completely engulfed the heavenly spaces.

It is fascinating that during the very time when the superstructure of the heavenly world was being dismantled, Christians began to sing hymns about building the kingdom of God here on earth. William Blake, strange visionary and theological conservative though he was, expressed it in his famous *Jerusalem* in the early 19th century. Note the words:

*I will not cease from mental fight . . .  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.*

Those words would have seemed heretical in the High Middle Ages. These modern Christians were learning again to speak of the kingdom of God coming here on earth. Later Charles Kingsley wrote a hymn which ends:

*And hasten, Lord, that perfect day  
When pain and death shall cease,  
And thy just rule shall fill the earth  
With health, and light, and peace.*

*When ever blue the sky shall gleam,  
And ever green the sod:  
And man's rude work deface no more  
The Paradise of God.*

Christians were rediscovering that this earth could be the paradise they sought. But, whereas the first Christians fully expected God to establish his kingdom by some cataclysmic event, the Christians of the 19th and early 20th centuries knew they had to build it themselves. That is why they began to sing such hymns as:

*Rise up, O men of God!  
His kingdom tarries long;  
Bring in the day of brotherhood,  
And end the night of wrong.*

### **Christian and other socialisms**

This is why a Christian Socialist movement arose about 1840, led by such people as Charles Kingsley and the theologian F.D. Maurice. The seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885), even though he was a deeply committed evangelical Christian who expected the imminent return of Christ, nevertheless became one of the most effective social and industrial reformers in 19th-century England.

In 1891 Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, which was considered to be extremely progressive. It enunciated the Roman Catholic position on social justice, especially in relation to the problems created by the Industrial Revolution. While critical of socialism, it showed deep concern for the condition of the working classes.

The western world entered the 20th century with considerable expectations that this world could be turned into an earthly paradise. Christians thought it would come by the spread of Christianity over the whole globe. Even the British Labour Party had its roots in the Methodist Church. From the early Christian socialists through to the liberation theologians of South America, the more liberal modern Christians have been working for the new world here on earth, and believe that it will come only if humans take the initiative.

But because so much attention was now being focused on the earth rather than on heaven, the Christian West was becoming secularised. (The word *secular* simply means "having to do with this world of space and time".) Besides Christian visionaries like Blake

and Maurice, there were now secular visionaries intent on building a new world. Robert Owen and Karl Marx became so critical of the church for continuing to defend the spiritual superstructure that they felt the church was a stumbling block that prevented the coming of the new world order here on earth. They dismissed the churches as offering only “pie in the sky when you die”.

Then came World War I, a bloody struggle fought by the very nations which had been Christian for the longest time. It was a great blow to Christian expectations. Liberal Protestantism has never wholly recovered from this. Yet the western world generally, still motivated by its Christian past, tried to interpret the disaster of World War I as “the war to end all wars”. It proceeded in 1919 to found the League of Nations for the express purpose of preventing all war in the future. In the late 1920s and early 1930s there was a widespread wave of pacifism among Christians and secularists alike.

All these efforts largely came to nothing. The new warless world did not eventuate. The League failed because of the refusal of member nations to put international interests before national interests. It was powerless in the face of German, Italian and Japanese expansionism.

In the meantime social reform began to develop at the national level in the western world. Most drastic was the Russian Revolution, by which Lenin tried to implement Marx’s vision of the classless society. Elsewhere there was considerable social change, though less dramatic, resulting in pensions for the aged, free medical care for all, and the dole for the unemployed. These moves came to fruition in various social security systems, commonly known now as the welfare state. Michael Savage, in introducing New Zealand’s social security policies, referred to them as “applied Christianity”.

For many people it seemed that the earthly paradise was at last coming within reach. It did not mean that the kingdom of God had fully arrived. Certainly there was much about the new secular world that seemed consistent with the Christian teaching about the kingdom of God.

Yet too many things seemed to be going badly wrong – the Great Depression, World War II, the Nazi Holocaust, the Cold War and



the threat of an all-out nuclear war. Humans, both Christian and secular, had been working hard to try to build paradise on earth, but despite some success, the setbacks were massive.

### **Rising tempo of cultural change**

We have seen how the ancient biblical myths and legends reflected in symbolic ways the drastic cultural changes taking place in human existence both before and during the Axial Period. In the past 300 years there has been a parallel transition. We have moved from agriculturalism to industrialisation, with the consequent explosion in global population. There has been a sudden increase in urbanisation. Only 200 years ago less than three per cent of the world's population lived in cities of 20,000 or more; today more than half of humanity is living an urban existence. We humans are increasingly becoming divorced not only from our rural roots, but also from our kinship with the forces of nature. As we have moved into the modern global world the same changes which marked the first transition have suddenly become magnified and cultural change has increased in tempo.

From Abraham up until today our forebears have been looking for a better world. This they have successively referred to as the Promised Land, the kingdom of David, a kingdom ruled by God, a paradise in heaven, a paradise on earth, a classless society, a warless world, the welfare state. Sometimes the vision ahead seemed almost within reach, but each time the vision has faded.

Each time paradise has eluded us there may have been a feeling of failure. Yet as we look back over this long cultural journey we can also see that, in cultural as well as material terms, we have come a long way. None of us really wants to go back even to the 19th century, let alone to the distant past.

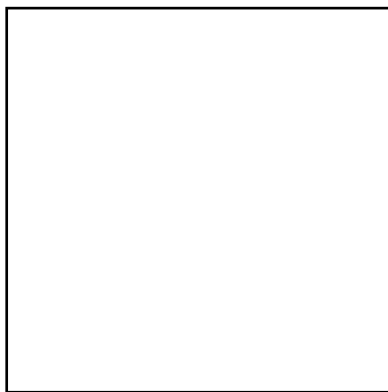
We have learned certain things about paradise in the course of our cultural journey. We now know that the only paradise we can hope for will be in this world of space and time. If we are to reach it, it will be by human effort and not by appeal to any supernatural forces.

Further, it will come only by our collective efforts as a community, as a species. We must surrender any hopes of a

paradise to come which are primarily for our own personal benefit. For us as for Moses, paradise will always be ahead of us: others are likely to benefit much more from our efforts to reach it than we ourselves do, and this will test our virtue to the limit.

As we stand at the beginning of this new millennium, amid the pressures of rapid cultural change, globalisation and dramatic technological progress, what sort of “brave new world” can we now envisage as the paradise to come? We shall explore that in the next chapter.

## 2: Viewing Paradise from Afar



**I**F you go to Jordan, and drive west from the city of Amman, you come to the edge of the Jordan Valley. It is part of the great rift in the earth's surface which stretches from Turkey to Tanzania. Some 4000 feet below is the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth. Because of what took place there more than 3000 years ago, the Jordan Valley has become a symbol

of what divides us from the paradise we are trying to reach.

The ancient Israelites had to cross the Jordan River to reach the Promised Land, which they described as a land "flowing with milk and honey". Later in Christian belief Jerusalem became a symbol of the heavenly city, and "crossing the Jordan" became a metaphor for the death by which one entered the paradise of heaven. Christina Rossetti wrote in her hymn:

*Sooner or later: yet at last  
The Jordan must be past.*

Equally symbolic, along with Jerusalem and the Jordan River, is the little mound on the Jordanian side of the valley known as Mt Nebo. In the biblical tradition this marks the last point reached by Moses in his 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. From Mt Nebo Moses is said to have looked out over the Jordan

Valley to view from afar the goal to which he had led his people, but which he himself was destined never to reach.

I have been to Mt Nebo half a dozen times. In summer the distant view is usually obscured by haze and in winter it can be hidden in mist. If one is fortunate, however, one can actually discern from Mt Nebo the towers of Jerusalem some 30 miles away, and at night one can see its lights.

The legend of Moses on Mt Nebo has long become symbolic of where we humans stand with regard to the future world we are hoping for. Only very dimly can we perceive its outlines, as through a haze. Even more importantly, like Moses we shall not reach it ourselves. Yet we continue to hope for it and to strive for it. This is partly on account of our children, our grandchildren and the generations of our descendants as yet unborn. This hope has become deeply ingrained in us by the culture we have inherited.

To reach Mt Nebo Moses had made a long, wearisome and troublesome journey through the wilderness. Yet no doubt he thought it had all been worth it, as he now viewed the Promised Land from afar. The Judeo-Christian cultural journey has taken nearly 4000 years. During that time our forebears, as we have seen, thought several times they were on the verge of reaching the paradise of their dreams. Yet on each occasion it proved elusive.

### **Science fiction, futurology**

As we stand on our symbolic Mt Nebo in this year 2000, what do we think we can see? During the 20th century there were many attempts to look into the future. The earliest occurred in the science fiction that developed at the end of the previous century. Rapid advances in technology seemed to be opening so many new doors that the sky was the limit. So during the 20th century science fiction flourished and is now found in every bookstore and library. In part, of course, it is just a form of pleasurable entertainment. Yet it is more than that. Like the apocalyptic writings of New Testament times, it not only stretches the human imagination but also, like those writings, it usually inspires great confidence in the future. Only occasionally, as with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, does it raise a cautionary note.

Whereas in ancient times the apocalyptic writers expected God to usher in the new world, the first science fiction authors replaced God with science. Readers were encouraged to believe that this new tool of science, which human ingenuity has devised, has put into human hands such power that it will solve and overcome all future problems. Some of the best examples of science fiction, such as H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and *War of the Worlds* (1898), became classics. This genre continued into cinema and video with such popular epics as *Star Wars*.

In the second half of the 20th century the attempt to look into the future took a more serious form and became such an important new enterprise that it earned a title of its own: futurology. With the aid of statistics and computer modelling, futurology has become an essential part of social and economic planning. Yet the attempt to forecast the shape of the future remains fraught with difficulty, simply because future trends remain dependent on a host of chance events and countless billions of personal choices.

This is why futurologists make such widely diverse forecasts about the human future. It is particularly noticeable that predictions made on the basis of science and technology tend to be optimistic, while those made on the basis of history and the study of human nature tend to be pessimistic. In the 1960s C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* drew our attention to the unfortunate divorce that was occurring between the cultures of science and the arts; nowhere does this show up more clearly than in the way they look into the future.

### **The vision of Teilhard de Chardin**

Let us look at a serious futurologist who preceded this divorce. The great visionary Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) was equally committed both to science and to the religious faith on which western culture is based. He is mostly known for the unique way in which he unfolded the story of our past, as he did in *The Phenomenon of Man*, but he also wrote quite a lot about the future. His creative imagination projected into the far distant future the long-standing trends which he observed in both our biological and cultural evolution.

Teilhard's writings are neither theology nor science, as we know these enterprises. Together they form a total vision of the human past and future. This vision needs to be looked at critically. Some of what he wrote is already dated. Yet elements of his vision have proved full of insight. For example, most of us became aware of the phenomenon of globalisation only in the past two decades, yet Teilhard was talking about it more than 60 years ago. He usually called it planetisation but sometimes he referred to it as the "hominisation of the planet" and sometimes as "complete socialisation". "No evolutionary future awaits human beings," he said, "except in association with all other human beings." Note that last phrase.

Teilhard had been led to this by his study of evolution, both biological and cultural. Teilhard maintained that evolution proceeds by what he called the Law of Complexity-Consciousness. In simple terms this means that, as the basic energy or stuff of the universe organises itself into ever more complex patterns, it manifests an increasingly higher level of consciousness. For example, if we trace the process backwards, we can concede that humans have a higher level of consciousness than the other vertebrates; the vertebrates have a higher level of consciousness than insects; insects have a higher level of consciousness than the amoeba.

### **Evolution of cultures**

Then Teilhard observed that evolution kept producing new species by diversifying. This applies to the evolution of culture just as it does to species. It is the reason why the human species has diverged into many races and cultures over some two million years. But because of the finiteness of planet earth, there would come a time, he said, when humans would completely envelope the globe, and then human divergence would give way to convergence. Teilhard sometimes uses quaint terms to express his thoughts. To describe human convergence he said the human race would fold back upon itself.

To help us understand what the result of this folding back would be, he then linked the phenomenon of convergence with his Law of

Complexity-Consciousness. He saw it resulting in the formation of a new and even more complex entity - a new level of human society. He called it a supersociety: it would experience an even higher level of consciousness, a kind of corporate consciousness that we could call global consciousness.

"Humans are now discovering," said Teilhard, "that they are nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself." These words, incidentally, originated with the scientist Julian Huxley, and were eagerly adopted by Teilhard. Teilhard believed that our emerging collective consciousness constitutes something like the mind of God in the making. "The consciousness of us is evolution looking at itself and reflecting upon itself."

We should further note that Teilhard discerned two great thresholds of change in the evolutionary process. The first was the transition from non-life to life; the second was the coming into being of what he called the *noosphere*. This is the presence within the human species of self-conscious, self-critical thought. It was the advent of the noosphere, rather than anything physical, that has brought about the great gulf between the human species and all the other higher animals. The noosphere constitutes not only a thin envelope of human consciousness around the globe but it produces language, culture, knowledge, science and religion. These products of the noosphere serve to stimulate even further the level of human consciousness, perhaps to reach a level higher than we have as yet experienced.

People other than Teilhard have hinted at something similar. They point out that it needs some 10 billion atoms to form a megamolecule. It needs some 10 billion megamolecules to form a living cell. It needs some 10 billion cells to form an organism, such as the human being. The projection of this into the future suggests that it may take about 10 billion people to form the supersociety.

The global population quadrupled to six billion during the 20th century and will probably become 10 billion within a few decades. This recent and sudden population explosion has understandably alarmed us. Yet it is not impossible that it may be the forerunner of the next stage in the evolutionary process.

## **Towards a supersociety**

That is exactly what Teilhard predicted as the human species folds in upon itself to develop an ever more complex, interdependent and ultimately unified society. We human individuals shall not ourselves become more highly evolved, but we shall become wise enough voluntarily to become parts of a higher social entity, just as the living cells in our body constitute a more complex living whole than themselves. The ever-increasing products of the noosphere, such as knowledge, science and religion, will enable the human species to evolve into a global super-society. We shall become, Teilhard said, “a harmonised collectivity of consciousnesses equivalent to a sort of super-consciousness”.

All this sounds so much like the product of wild imagination that the Jewish anthropologist Raphael Patai seemed perfectly justified in his judgment that “Teilhard embarks on a mythical-eschatological fantasy voyage that easily dwarfs every previous vision of the ultimate end of humanity”.

Yet 60 years later, as we observe the rapid expansion of population, the spread of general education, the modern knowledge explosion, genetic modification, the intensification of communication media, the advent of the internet and all the other aspects of current globalisation, Teilhard’s vision of a supersociety with its own superconsciousness does not seem quite so outlandish as it did when he sketched it.

Teilhard firmly believed that the 20th century marked the dividing line between human divergence and convergence. It was the threshold of change to the next state of planetary evolution. “Everything suggests that at the present time we are entering a peculiarly critical phase of super-humanisation.”

We should note his term “critical”. Even Teilhard was careful to guard against any easy optimism. He certainly insisted that when one looks back over the whole process, one sees evidence of what he called a “cosmic drift” towards greater complexity, and this has been accompanied at higher levels by increased consciousness. Yet he fully conceded that there was a great element of chance in the way life has evolved, and there is no guarantee that it will evolve further. He noted there have been many blind roads, as witnessed to by the end



of the dinosaurs after dominating the earth for 200 million years. That is why he used the word “critical” with regard to our time.

### **At a crossroads**

The belief that we have reached a critical phase in human history and possibly in human culture has been the subject of a number of books during the past decade. Here are a few: *The End of History and the Last Man*, by Francis Fukuyama, 1993; *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-first Century*, by Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1993; *Pandaemonium*, by Daniel Moynihan, 1993; *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, by Samuel Huntington, 1996; *The End of Science*, by John Horgan 1996; *One World, Ready or Not*, by William Greider, 1997; *Visions*, by Michio Kaku, 1998. All of these maintain that the human race has reached a crossroads where critical decisions have to be made. Some are hopeful about the future and some are pessimistic.

Michio Kaku, a theoretical physicist in New York, has written several best-selling books on science and hosts a weekly hour-long science programme syndicated through the United States. He contends that science has just reached the end of its epic phase – the age of discovery – and has now entered a new and dynamic era – the age of mastery.

This has occurred because of three scientific revolutions in the 20th century. The quantum revolution unlocked the secrets of the atom. The DNA revolution unravelled the molecules of life. And the electronic computer has revolutionised the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge.

Kaku believes that, whereas in the past the various sciences tended to proceed in independence of one another, this 21st century will be typified by the cross-fertilisation of these three revolutions. This signals the birthpangs of a new era in which we humans make the transition from being “passive observers of nature to being active choreographers of nature”. That would parallel the transition which took place at the agricultural revolution, when humans changed from being the passive recipients of the fruits of the earth to become the active developers of food production, gaining mastery over the growth of vegetation.

Kaku believes that “by the close of the 21st century, the sheer power of the three scientific revolutions will force the nations of the earth to cooperate on a scale never seen before in history”. If so, it would mark the arrival of Teilhard’s supersociety. Kaku refers to it as a planetary civilisation. But he also warns that though the progress of science has the potential to lead the human race to a planetary civilisation, there always lurks in the background “the possibility of a nuclear war, the outbreak of a deadly pandemic, or the collapse of the environment”.

### **Cracks in the global economy**

Others are far less confident about a favourable future being opened up by science. To Kaku’s list of possible disasters which would seriously jeopardise the realisation of a planetary civilisation they add the collapse of the global economy. Just as we are becoming only too aware that all our efforts to promote education and provide health facilities are dependent on the buoyancy of the economy, so science also will advance only if we can pay for it. Some areas of scientific research can now proceed only if they have access to billions of dollars.

Some suggest that the international monetary system of global capitalism may suffer the same sudden collapse as state socialism did in Russia and its satellite countries. In 1998 international financier George Soros startled some people with his book *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*. He argued that we are already in the early stages of a global bear market, which will lead to a global recession, a worldwide depression, and the disintegration of the capitalist system. Some economists and commentators are warning that it is no longer a case of “if” the global economy crashes, but “when”.

In *One World, Ready or Not*, William Greider examines the nature and prognosis of global capitalism. While conceding there is much to be said in its favour, particularly if it undergoes some necessary reforms, he observes that the utopian expectations which many intelligent people have with regard to the marketplace mean that they have come to worship market principles as if they were a spiritual code that will resolve all the larger social and moral issues also, so long as no one interferes with its authority. “In this modern

secular age," he said, "many who think of themselves as rational and urbane put their faith in this idea of the self-regulating market as piously as others put their trust in God."

In other words, there is not all that much difference between modern capitalists and the ancient apocalypticists. They just happen to worship different gods. Greider prophesies that the capitalist God will fail and that the global system will "probably experience a series of terrible events - wrenching calamities that are economic or social or environmental in nature - before common sense can prevail".

A similar view was expressed by the historian Warren Wagar as far back as 1971 in his book *Building the City of Man*. He too refers to the calamities we shall probably soon face, naming them as war, mass poverty, dehumanisation, nihilism and ecocide (by which he means the destruction of the planetary house we live in). He ascribes these coming calamities to the accelerating material progress of western civilisation, which is making everything happen too fast, too soon.

"Who can deny," he said, "that social conflict has steadily deepened, that every traditional culture has entered a period of rapid internal disintegration, that social institutions and class structures are crumbling, that the planet is simultaneously flying to pieces and shrinking into a sphere of fantastic density?" These revolutionary changes, not only in technology but also in the life of the mind and of the spirit, are bringing human civilisation to the critical point where it must soon burst.

Interesting confirmation of his reference to the speed of change unexpectedly came some 18 years later when he turned his attention to writing a book of historical fiction, *A Short History of the Future*. It is a somewhat light-hearted attempt to describe the period 1990 to 2100 from the viewpoint of someone living in 2200. The very year 1989 in which his book was published saw the fall of the Berlin wall with the consequent collapse of Russian communism. This revolution, along with the Gulf War, which Wagar had placed in the 21st century, arrived decades ahead of schedule, and he had to rewrite some chapters for the second edition.

Thus among today's futurologists there are wildly different expectations of where the world is heading, from enthusiastic

optimism to deep pessimism. The one thing the prophets have in common is that the world will not stay the same but is going to change ever faster, for better or for worse.

This may possibly be good news for those who are suffering – the hungry, the dispossessed. Perhaps there is a paradise on earth yet to come. That is what some prophets would have us believe – prophets who put their faith in science, in the global economy, in human wisdom, or in a combination of these.

On the other hand, the affluent people in the world, who are finding life very comfortable at the moment, may soon find that this is the only paradise they will ever experience, and that even this will be relatively short-lived. That is what the prophets of doom would have us believe.

Who are we to believe, the prophets of doom or the optimists? We have to make that decision for ourselves.

### **A paradise to aspire to**

Fortunately, no one can accurately look into the future, even though that does not stop us from trying. So let us now turn to the question: What would we **like** to be able to see from our Mt Nebo? What sort of world do we **want** in the future? What kind of goal would we regard as paradise on earth?

But who are the “we” we are talking about? The whole six billion human beings here on earth at the moment? The people of New Zealand? Or can we do no more than offer a personal view? The way we answer the question about a future paradise is surely going to vary, not only from nation to nation, from race to race, from culture to culture, but even from person to person. Every answer will reflect a particular standpoint. There are no neutral answers. Even the way the question is phrased betrays a cultural standpoint, as the use of the word paradise makes clear.

With that caveat, we can nevertheless acknowledge that in the past century or so we humans have begun to recognise our common humanity. Already we have expressed our mutual duties to one another in a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Are there some aspects of a desirable future world, therefore, which will

be reasonably common for most people just by virtue of the humanity we share? Let us see what they may be.

First, the paradise we seek will provide the bare necessities of life for all human beings: clean air, clean water and adequate food. To many that may appear little indeed. Yet there are many millions of people who lack these very things. While the underfed millions lack adequate food, even the more affluent already find the air in their cities polluted. In some countries the increased use of water is outstripping the natural supply.

In paradise air, water and the fruits of the earth will be freely available for all, not only for those who can pay for them. They will constitute a common-wealth to be shared by all according to their need, and irrespective of their personal wealth or their moral condition.

This common-wealth, incidentally, is about all that was referred to in the biblical description of the original paradise. "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden ... and out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed into it out of Eden to water the garden."

Or as Jesus later observed: "Your father in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

Today, by contrast, the fruits and other resources of the earth are very unequally shared. It has been claimed that the most affluent countries make up 25 per cent of the world's population but control 75 per cent of the world's resources. No future world could be described as paradise unless the earth's resources are reasonably shared.

During World War II H.G. Wells helped to draw up the Sankey Declaration of the Rights of Man which said: "Every man is a joint inheritor of all the natural resources and of the powers, inventions and possibilities accumulated by our forerunners. He is entitled, within the measure of these resources, to the nourishment and medical care needed to realise his full possibilities of physical and mental development from birth to death."

## Secure in the land

Secondly, the paradise we desire will provide security of land tenure for all human beings. No more would there be any fear of enemy invasion, of being thrown out of one's home or of being dispossessed of one's land. As we have seen, from Abraham onwards, and because of the agricultural revolution, land possession has become increasingly important. This has led, however, to forceful dispossession by violent conquest, by imperialistic colonisation, or more recently by economic imperialism.

The invasions and land-grabbing of the past have bequeathed to us a situation in which the territory of the earth is very unequally shared. In the paradise to come there will be a more equitable distribution of land. That is where most modern social revolutions usually start. The just distribution of land worldwide could involve us in revolution on a global scale. We may need to treat land as a form of common-wealth, just like air and water.

A straw in the wind is the current news (September 2000) about the dispute between Israeli and Palestinian over possession of the holy city of Jerusalem. The suggestion has been made that both sides should jointly declare that this city belongs to God. This of course is an ancient view frequently expressed in the Bible: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

Thirdly, in paradise there will be clothing and housing for all. Here the particular needs vary considerably from one locality to another, simply because of climatic conditions. But all need to be shown equal consideration.

Fourthly, there needs to be equality of opportunity for education and health needs. In 1963 Pope John XXIII said it all in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* :

Every man has the right to life, to bodily integrity and to the means which are necessary and suitable for the proper development of life. These are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and, finally, the necessary social services. Therefore a human being also has the right to security in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment,

or in any case in which he is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of his own.

### **Sharing, justice, peace**

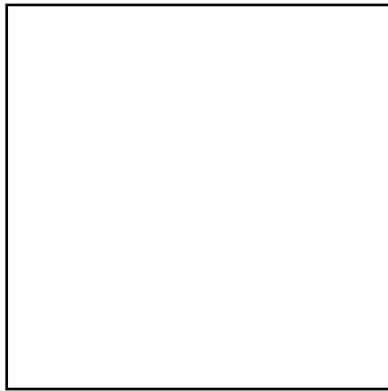
The equitable sharing of the basic necessities for life does not imply that paradise will be marked by a dull uniformity. On the contrary, paradise will be all the richer if it allows for human diversity of temperament, motivation, likes and dislikes. Paradise can still reward the industrious and penalise the irresponsible. But there can be no paradise where people go hungry, poorly clad or homeless through no fault of their own.

Thus a paradise to which we could all give our assent would be a global society where the necessities of life can be shared by all, where justice reigns, and where personal violence and war have been banished for ever. Such a harmonious and peaceful society would be knit together by strong personal bonds of mutual love and loyalty.

But is such a paradise anything more than a pious hope - a utopia that exists nowhere and, in view of human nature, never will?

Whether there ever will be a paradise on earth now depends on us humans as never before in the history of this planet. Teilhard de Chardin once wrote to a friend: "The whole future of the earth seems to me to depend on the awakening of our faith in the future." If that faith is awakened, and we do have the motivation and energy to make this vision of paradise a reality, how do we go about it? What road should we take?

### 3: The Road to Paradise



**W**E would all like the road to paradise to be reasonably smooth, marked by encouraging milestones on the way to show us what progress we are making. A sober examination of our present state of affairs, however, does not promise such a bright prospect. In the next chapter we shall look more particularly at the obstacles to be

overcome. In this one we shall look at the nature of the path itself.

If there is to be any future paradise on earth it will involve all people. Unlike the heavenly paradise of mediaeval times, it will not be just for the righteous, the wise, or the privileged. We have to abandon our individualism and walk the road together. Whether we reach the goal depends not on the decisions of a few, but on the combined wills of the whole six billion of us. In view of our present diversity, to say nothing of continuing outbreaks of animosity and violence, it is clear that the road to any future paradise on earth is going to pass through much difficult terrain.

The first problem is that we humans do not at the moment share any agreed picture of what our paradise should be like. Not all are motivated to build it anyway, while those who are, often want to set off in widely different directions. Secondly, as Warren Wagar points out in *Building the City of Man*, "our solutions [for reaching a better world] have been piecemeal, provisional, parochial,



uncoordinated and unsubstantial. They are too often conceived on a national scale, although the real problems are all planetary". This applies particularly to ecological concerns, where there is great reluctance to place global imperatives before national and local ones.

Further, the initial steps on the road to an earthly paradise may not be all that inviting. The road may lead us through a period of disorder and even chaos, and for that reason we shall be reluctant to take it, if we have any choice.

When the ancient Israelites set out for the Promised Land, for example, they found themselves enduring the hardships of the wilderness and they cried out to Moses to take them back to the fleshpots of Egypt. Even after they finally entered the Promised Land in the time of Joshua, they found it was far from the paradise they hoped for. They spent some 200 years in considerable anarchy before David brought law and order through the establishment of his kingdom.

That may be taken as symbolic of what will precede the coming of any global paradise on earth. It was exemplified in a small way by our most recent New Zealand history. When Roger Douglas introduced his programme for the major restructuring of the New Zealand economy, he warned that there would be a period of initial pain before we entered into the paradise he saw on the other side. Many people are now asking whether the pain of redundancy, the loss of economic security and the general bewilderment which New Zealand society experienced over the past 15 years were really worth while. Are we nearer to a New Zealand paradise or further away?

Yet what we suffered there may be quite minor compared with what we have yet to encounter, both nationally and globally, if we are to reach any future global paradise.

Thus we need to adjust ourselves to the probability that the road to a global paradise is going to be very rough. Even if it comes by a process of natural evolution it will demand a great deal of effort, commitment and personal sacrifice. If it can only come by a more revolutionary method, as seems more likely, the suffering we pass through before the goal is reached will be a great deal more intense.

## Limiting our freedoms

Let us first look at a possible evolutionary path. We tend to think of a future paradise as a time that will bring us greater freedom, such as more leisure. In fact, in order to enjoy whatever benefits it brings we may have to accept an increasing number of restrictions on our present freedom. In an era in which we have been glorying in a lot of new freedom, we shall not take kindly to that.

Let me explain by observing what took place at the ancient agricultural revolution. To put it simplistically, in order to enjoy an increased and more regular food supply, the agriculturalist had to surrender the freedom to rove about at will. This freedom, which had been enjoyed by the food-gatherer and pastoralist, is still highly prized by the Bedouin. There are even remnants of it left in New Zealand, as I found out years ago in my country parish in inland Otago. Those who worked on sheep stations, either as owners or as shepherds, showed a certain disdain towards the cow-cockies and the "dirt farmers", as they called the agriculturalists. Those on the sheep stations believed they enjoyed a much freer lifestyle than those who were tied to the strict daily routines of the farm.

In a similar way, the Industrial Revolution also brought a certain loss of freedom in order to provide a higher standard of living, including a greater diversity of materials and foodstuffs. It entailed the introduction of rigid working hours, wage control, the monotony of repetitive activity and, most serious of all, the possibility of unemployment. In a completely rural economy there had always been useful employment for everybody, partly because they were living so close to the source of their basic food. The Industrial Revolution removed many people one step further away from the forces of nature, and made them wholly dependent on one another for sustenance.

The Industrial Revolution also rapidly increased urbanisation. We now live cheek by jowl in cities. In the more densely populated areas people live in concrete jungles. Is this our idea of paradise? Rural life had always been much freer, so much so that for summer holidays, the urbanite is glad to escape for a few short weeks back into the open countryside.

In both the agricultural and industrial revolutions, therefore, our forebears experienced some loss of freedom and seemed to be further removed from the original garden of nature, whether or not it was conceived as paradise. Yet after each revolution we have gradually become adjusted to the new conditions and thought the change worthwhile. Nevertheless it has left some people feeling a certain degree of nostalgia for what they have lost. The rural person still prefers the freedom and restful peace of the countryside, and the warm personal relationships which bind a rural community together. City people, on the other hand, rejoice in the greater diversity of cultural pursuits which city life provides for them. They sometimes regard their country cousins as unsophisticated hayseeds.

This process of moving from an earlier type of freedom to more restricted lifestyles will intensify in the future. It will be part of the personal sacrifices which have to be made in return for the benefits of a richer global civilisation. Indeed, in spite of our distaste for restrictions it is remarkable how many we have already come to accept during the 20th century.

In the early 1920s, for example, my father drove our family car without ever having driving lessons or being required to have a licence. For decades to come one could park the car freely on the roadside. Restrictions multiplied during the course of the century. First, the vehicle had to be licensed. Then the driver had to be licensed, being required to pass an ever more exacting driving test. Then the car had to have a warrant of fitness. Then we had to wear seat belts. Then we had to pay parking fees, and now we are rightly forbidden to drink and drive. On the whole we do not object too much to the loss of freedom, and for this reason: the increase in the number and variety of restrictions in one area has the effect of safeguarding our freedoms in others.

This process is symbolic of the increasing restrictions we shall be subject to on the road to a future paradise. The restrictions will gradually become more severe. At the introduction of each we shall complain and resist. Here in New Zealand, for example, we have already surrendered the right to defend ourselves with our own firearms, but in the United States it is still a hotly disputed issue.

In the global civilisation of the future we shall find it necessary to impose upon ourselves more and more restrictions. There will also be increasing restrictions on world travel and immigration. Travel for tourism, yes! Travel for permanent migration, no! We shall be less and less free to do just what we want to with the land we believe we own. Land ownership as we now know it may have to be surrendered and replaced by leasing rights which will come up for regular review. This would constitute monitored stewardship rather than ownership.

In the global civilisation of the future the whole earth – air, sea and land – may once again become the common wealth of the human species as a whole, to be used communally by all but with no exclusively personal rights for anyone. Further, the earth will no longer be regarded as the exclusive preserve of the human species only. It has to be shared with the large variety of other species of life.

At the introduction of each restriction there will be strong resistance, and this will slow and delay, perhaps indefinitely, our journey on the road to paradise – that is, if we ever manage to make it all the way to paradise by the process of natural evolution. Our reluctance to make the personal sacrifices necessary for a coming paradise makes it all the more likely that we shall have to face some major global catastrophes. These may have to occur before we humans become sufficiently motivated to be shocked out of our complacency and small-mindedness to build the new kind of civilisation which is now called for.

### **Signs of the times**

As with the pains of childbirth, the birth of the global civilisation will be preceded by some apocalyptic events. Many of these I have already outlined in a chapter entitled “Scenarios of the Future” in my book *The World to Come*. Some readers have found that chapter depressing. I am not surprised. Yet in describing them, I had no intention of scaremongering, for that is a practice I deplore. I would much have preferred to be able to herald the imminent arrival of a rosy future. But, along with those whose ideas have most influenced me, I have simply been trying to interpret the signs of

the times. That, incidentally, is something which Jesus of Nazareth is said to have rebuked his critics for not doing.

To read the signs of the times we have to look beyond our own personal concerns and even beyond the latest public crisis. Parochialism prevents us from seeing the wood for the trees. It encourages us to shut our eyes to the distant scene and treat each immediate crisis as an isolated problem which can be solved by local politics or by the application of an economic theory. In recent decades, for example, we have been taken up with inflation, the oil shocks, Rogernomics, the Gulf War, the falling dollar, increasing gaps between rich and poor and so on. But what of the whole picture, to which each of these relates?

### **Toffler's shocks and promise**

Let us try to step back and put the crises in a global context. That is what Alvin Toffler did when he wrote his runaway best-seller, *Future Shock*, in 1970. This was before the first oil shock and the uncontrolled inflation which followed. The book had already gone through 15 printings when I bought my copy in 1972. It was widely read, not so much because it provided a lot of constructive answers about the future, but because he correctly read the signs of the times and interpreted a widespread mood.

His book helped people understand why they were feeling so unsettled without being able to put their finger on the cause. They were suffering the shock of cultural change. It was accelerating so fast that people began to feel they were living in a society out of control. The 1960s had witnessed the student revolts. People had begun talking about the generation gap. Social institutions of long standing, such as marriage, were being ignored. The British social scientist Sir Geoffrey Vickers had said: "The rate of change increases at an accelerating speed, without a corresponding acceleration in the rate at which further responses can be made, and this brings us nearer the threshold beyond which control is lost."

Toffler did not try to provide a strategy to control change and give it direction. His basic purpose was rather to diagnose the situation, on the grounds that proper diagnosis precedes the cure. Today's many changes, he suggested, may appear at first to be

quite independent phenomena – the break-up of the nuclear family, the global energy crisis, the spread of cults, the rise of separatist movements, the change in methods of communication, and the rapidly expanding influence of the mass media. Toffler saw them as all connected. A cultural revolution of global proportions, affecting everything and everybody, had already begun.

In a later book Toffler compared this accumulation of changes with two earlier revolutionary changes in the history of human culture. I have referred to them several times already. First there was the agricultural revolution, which led to the Axial Period. Then, from some 300 years ago, came the Industrial Revolution. Toffler speaks of these as the First Wave and the Second Wave. He notes that though it took several thousand years to work through the consequences of the agricultural revolution, only three centuries after the beginning of the Industrial Revolution we find ourselves entering a further cultural revolution, this time on a global scale. This he called the Third Wave.

This later book, *The Third Wave* (1980), which appears to have been not nearly so widely read, did attempt to engender hope for the road ahead. Toffler continued this more positive note, in co-operation with his wife Heidi, in a third book, *War and Anti-war, Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. There they said: “We are witnessing the sudden eruption of a new civilisation on the planet, carrying with it a knowledge-intensive way of creating wealth that is trisecting and transforming the entire global system today.”

This new planetary civilisation could be the global paradise we are looking for. In other words, we may already be on the road to paradise without knowing it or even having had to make any choice in the matter. Yet we must not rejoice too soon. Toffler was under no illusions about the real dangers to be faced before we reach the new civilisation. These he referred to as “nuclear annihilation, ecological disaster, racial fanaticism, regional violence and economic debacle”.

### **Seizing the moment**

If we are “witnessing the sudden eruption of a new civilisation on the planet”, then it is because, in evolutionary terms, its time has

come. In saying that, I am reminded of the Greek word *kairos* which, as biblical scholars came to discover, has a very special meaning. It refers to the decisive moment of change. The evangelist placed it on the lips of Jesus in a well-known verse which can be translated something like this: "The decisive moment has arrived. The kingdom of God is close to hand. That's the good news. But to enter it, you have to change your way of thinking." (Changing one's way of thinking is what is really meant by the Greek word *metanoia*, which has been too narrowly translated as "repentance".) If the phenomenon of globalisation means that the *kairos* or decisive moment for forming the new world civilisation has arrived, we must change our traditional ways of thinking, seize the time now, or we may lose it for ever. That is the significance of speaking of the era we have entered as one of world crisis.

Further, if we do not seize the *kairos* in this 21st century and lay the cultural foundations of the new civilisation, then human civilisation of all kinds may come to an end.

That, of course, sounds an over-dramatic way of stating the crisis, though no more dramatic than that used by the first Christians. They heralded, as they thought, the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God amid cataclysmic earthquakes and wars. In fact, without knowing it, their activities were laying the foundations of a Christian civilisation which was to last for 2000 years.

What further signs should we expect to indicate that we are now on the road to the new planetary civilisation? Sixty years ago Teilhard de Chardin said: "We stand at a critical point in the evolution of mankind. We hold the earth's future in our hands. The road to be followed is clearly revealed by the teaching of all the past. We can go forward only by uniting, for this is the law of life."

### **The path of unity**

The road to the new world civilisation, if we are to reach it at all, will involve the uniting of the whole human race. As we contemplate the present diversity of nations and cultures, giving rise to innumerable trouble spots around the world, we might well think that to be an impossible task. Yet if there is ever to be a

paradise on earth, this is the only way to reach it; the alternative road could well lead to the extinction of the human species.

The good news is that the process of globalisation is already challenging us to proceed with the unification of the human race, whether we are ready for it or not. But this will entail the construction or evolution of a number of basic structures for which we are as yet ill-prepared. They will be strongly resisted, as I have indicated, because they will each be regarded as depriving us of freedom and other values which we have enjoyed in the past. They are:

- The formation of a global economy;
- The establishment of a global democracy;
- The evolution of a global culture;
- The spread of a global faith.

Let us look at each of these in turn.

### **A global economy**

The evolution of a global economy has already begun. Globalisation is forcing a global economy upon us whether we like it or not. The peoples of the world are becoming increasingly interdependent economically for the practice of the consumer lifestyle to which we are rapidly becoming adjusted. Because the global economy was the first clear manifestation of the globalising process which has been creeping upon us for four centuries, there has been a tendency to confine the term "globalisation" to the ideology now promoting the growth of the global economy.

But the coming of the global economy is not going to be an easy ride. Certainly the planetary civilisation must have a global economy. But it is not sufficient simply to remove tariffs, promote free trade, open up a supposed level playing-field, and expect the self-adjusting mechanisms of the free market to do the rest. What is too often overlooked is that far from opening up some pristine level playing-field which has been lying hidden, the current globalising efforts of business magnates and politicians is rather opening up the whole world (especially the small and disadvantaged nations) to the greedy exploitation of the international corporations. The effect



of this is simply to make the poor countries poorer and the rich countries still richer.

Global market forces left to themselves are not the least bit interested in the welfare of humankind. The belief that they are is a false myth which stems from Adam Smith. His reference to the “invisible hand” represents the last trace of the Christian doctrine of divine providence, which he had not quite managed to let go. We should have tumbled to the error of his myth earlier, particularly on realising that having written the great textbook expounding the wonders of free trade, he ended his career as the controller of customs.

If the global economy is to be an instrument for unifying the human race and leading us on the road to paradise, it must be subject to human direction and control. But this will not necessarily be applied nationally, as it was hitherto, but from a world centre. That brings us to the need for some central world authority operating within the global economy, as part of the process of the unification of humankind.

### **A global democracy**

That requires the establishment of a global democracy. We need to find some global structure to unify the instruments of power, such as we currently have at national level in the government, the police, the judiciary, and the military. There must be one central point of final authority, responsible to humanity, using the democratic processes.

We have already taken the first tentative steps towards such global unification in order to promote and preserve international security. Two world wars in the 20th century made us realise that we need an international body. The United Nations Organisation, established after World War II to replace the failed League of Nations, has already lasted much longer and achieved more than its predecessor. We have also set up an International Court of Justice which, among other things, can put on trial the enemies of humanity, such as war criminals.

These world bodies have the potential to be the organs of a world state, but they lack ultimate authority. The reason for this is

the refusal of the major nation-states to surrender any more of their sovereignty. This has been so from the foundation, when the big five retained for themselves the power of veto in the Security Council. The road to a world civilisation and paradise on earth lies through the formation of a world democratic state.

This body will be responsible, first of all, for world peace. It would control the only legitimate armed forces in the world. They would consist of, say, 100,000 professional troops, drawn from all regions and ready to fly at short notice to any part of the world. Apart from them the national police forces would be sufficient to enforce law and order.

Warren Wagar, in his 1971 book, sketched an outline of this future world state as he saw it, which he described as unitary, democratic, socialist and liberal. He assumed that by the time of its formation we might have a world population of 12 billion. It would be governed by a world assembly of 800 members, and a world council of 25 people chosen by the world assembly. They would have responsibility not only for world peace, but also for the control of world health, the management of air quality, the distribution of water, and all other ecological issues, which can never be confined to national boundaries. In this respect, the way has already been pioneered by the World Health Organisation, as one of the more successful activities of the UN.

Because we humans are still committed to national states we jealously guard our national sovereignty and regard the idea of a world state as carrying the threat of a world dictatorship. There is little doubt a world state could easily turn into a dictatorship, human nature being what it is. That is why its establishment and stability would be dependent on the necessary democratic safeguards. These in turn would depend on the human race reaching a state of democratic maturity. To nurture this we need the evolution of some kind of global culture.

### **A global culture**

Every society is held together by its culture – that is, a cohesive pattern of ideas, values and practices which all share. A world society would be no exception. For any future planetary civilisation

to evolve, it must possess its own recognisably distinctive common culture. This would not necessarily obliterate the past cultures but it would relativise them to the status of sub-cultures. Global culture would incorporate all the human values we share by virtue of our common humanity.

In New Zealand and elsewhere we have been learning the dangers of cultural chauvinism, by which we used to take for granted that our own culture was clearly the highest and truest form of human culture. The process of globalisation is already hastening the decay of the traditional cultures, and has made it impossible to prevent the traditional cultures from interpenetrating one another.

We have been coming to accept cultural pluralism and to use such terms as “bicultural” and “multicultural”. This is the first step towards the evolution of planetary human culture, but cultural pluralism in itself does not go far enough. The sense of ultimate authority which used to make us feel completely confident about our own culture, and which we have lost in cultural pluralism, must be rediscovered in something larger. It is this sense of ultimate authority which provides human motivation. We shall find it again in the global culture which will evolve in response to all those things which threaten the future of the human race. The global culture, drawing from all the best that humans have achieved in their past cultures, will also rediscover the experience of faith, which will enable them to go forward into the future.

### **A global faith**

What could a global faith be? The spirituality of the future cannot yet be adequately described. It will not be based on any one race or ethnic tradition, as religion was in the pre-Axial age; it must arise from and involve the whole human race. It will not come from some supernatural source, as Axial religions were believed to do. It will need to be naturalistic and humanistic in origin and form.

As I have said in the last chapter of *The World to Come*, the raw material of the spirituality of the coming global culture will consist of a growing awareness of the human predicament, an appreciation of humanity's dependence on the earth, and a willingness to act

jointly in response. Certainly it will draw much value from past cultures, and particularly from the Judeo-Christian culture, simply because that is what brought the modern global world into being. As yet, however, this global faith is only in its embryonic stage.

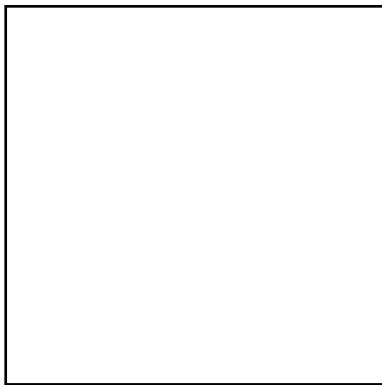
### **No time to lose**

I have attempted to sketch the road that could lead us to a future paradise on earth. Whether the road will be marked by a slow yet painful evolution, or whether it will lead us through unthinkable catastrophes, we do not know.

What we can venture to say is that the longer we delay the natural growth of a global economy, the establishment of a world state, and the evolution of a global culture, the more likely we shall be to unintentionally increase the chances of one or more global catastrophes.

So what are the chief obstacles which are currently holding us back on the road? To those we finally turn.

## 4: The Obstacles on the Way



**O**BSTACLES on the way to what? Let me briefly summarise what we have been discussing in the earlier chapters. What would be a planetary civilisation worthy of the title “paradise on earth”? Teilhard de Chardin, as we saw, envisaged it as so integrated that it could be regarded as some form of social organism.

Warren Wagar recognised its organic nature when he said: “Our goal must be a new organic world civilisation, a new sociocultural, economic and political environment for the species homo sapiens, with a new organic relationship to the larger environment of earth and cosmos.” He further described it as a world society, unified and enlivened by a global culture of values, institutions, philosophies, sciences, arts, and technology. It would be a global commonwealth with its own superstructure of political and economic institutions.

Why can we not set about building such a world society? Indeed all through the 20th century there were many far-seeing people advocating the promotion of such a society – people like Julian Huxley, Arnold Toynbee, W.E. Hocking in the West, and Baha’u’llah, Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan in the East. Why have their efforts not been more successful? What are the obstacles preventing us from reaching this future paradise on earth?

## Lessons from Adam and Eve

At the beginning of the Bible there is a well-known story which describes a parallel, if not identical, problem. It tells how and why humans were cast out from an original paradise. At face value this biblical myth is the history of human origins, and until less than 200 years ago it was commonly taken to be just that. We now know pretty conclusively that, regarded as ancient history, it is false. That fact has led most moderns to ignore it.

But even from the time this myth was first told, it possessed a deeper level of meaning. It expressed some of the wisdom that the ancients were already learning about themselves. This myth described in symbolic terms something extremely important about the human race. It is a parable about the human condition.

The word Adam, after all, should never have been translated as a proper name, as if it referred to one person. The Hebrew language always uses other words when it wishes to speak of an individual man or woman. The word Adam is simply the Hebrew term for humankind, and it even has the definite article attached to it to make that clear. The story of Adam is the story of human existence. It describes our human plight as the ancients had come to understand it.

Just as there never was an historical Adam and Eve, so there never was an original Garden of Eden in the past, which has now been lost. The permanent truth about the story of Eden does not lie in a mythical past but in the earth's potential. The story of the idyllic life in the Garden is a simple description of what human existence on this planet can yet become.

Moreover, the reason given in the story for the mythical exile from the Garden also explains why we are finding it difficult to reach it now. When we ask what is preventing us from forming a global civilisation here on earth, the story gives us the answer. It is not because there are superhuman principalities and powers holding us back. It is because, to use words familiar to many, "we have left undone things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done". It is as simple as that. As the mythical Adam and Eve ate from the Garden the fruit which they should not have eaten, so we exploit the earth. We

wastefully squander its resources. We fight each other over them. We carelessly kill other forms of life. These are a few of the modern equivalents of eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden.

Why should we not use the world's resources as we are doing? What we do with them makes life more pleasurable and exciting. They are there to be used. They are going to waste until our human knowledge and technology puts them to some positive use. That is just what Eve thought as she looked at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Its fruit was good for food. It was a delight to the eyes. It was desirable to be made wise.

What good reason could there be for placing a ban on fruit so obviously good? And then it came to her. In the myth, of course, it was a secret whispered by the wily serpent. The prohibition had been decreed by someone who had an ulterior motive. It was to keep humans in subjection by their ignorance and prevent them from becoming like gods. Those who ate of this tree would receive divine wisdom.

### **Destructive force of hubris**

And why should humans not share the divine wisdom, we may all ask along with Eve. Attempting to do what only the gods could do is what the ancient Greeks called *hubris*. The biblical myths show what is wrong with hubris. Hubris leads on to human megalomania and the macho attitude of brute domination. It leads to acts of human violence, murder and rape. It led Cain to kill his brother Abel. Finally it led humanity to become deeply divided into diverse languages and warring races. Because of hubris, human history has become the record of man's inhumanity to man in violent conquest, wholesale slaughter, mass rape and genocide. So there is no place for hubris in paradise. Of necessity, then, the myth described how it entailed expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Further, as the myth makes clear, hubris blinds us to what we have done and prevents us from acknowledging our own responsibility. It leads us to put the blame on others. So Adam put the blame on Eve and Eve passed the blame over to the serpent. We are still doing it. If we ask why we are not more successful in building a peaceful, harmonious world we quickly find scapegoats.

It is all due to the socialists, or to the capitalists (depending on where we stand). It is due to the foreigners, to the black people or to the whites (as the case may be), to the dole-bludgers, to the arrogant rich, to the multinationals, and so it goes on.

When we cannot find other humans to blame then, like Eve, we blame non-human forces. In olden times they were called “principalities and powers”. In modern times we call them market forces, or just bad luck. In many of these cases, of course, there is a certain amount of truth in the charge being laid. We shall refer to some of them later. But these specific objects of blame are only the manifestation of something which is much deeper and which is universal to the human condition. It is the potential in all of us for displaying hubris. When it comes to the question of building a better world, we humans are our own worst enemies.

Hubris displays itself in a variety of ways. It prevents us from developing the necessary collective will to build a global civilisation. The earth is a very big place and there are a great many of us scattered over it. We prefer to be big fish in little ponds. We feel secure in our own more limited world and fear we would become faceless nonentities in a global world. So we are happy to give our full attention to the protection of our own little world and brush aside or ignore all this talk of a global civilisation.

### **Good and bad in self-assertiveness**

Over many millennia we humans have developed a certain amount of homely wisdom and practical know-how about how to live within our own little world. We would like to keep it that way. Unfortunately, the globalising process is breaking into our comfortable little worlds whether we like it or not. All of a sudden, in evolutionary time, we find ourselves being challenged to become global citizens. The *kairos* of the world civilisation has arrived, and it finds us very parochial. We have to change our ways of thinking. We are not ready for it. We have to think globally, and we have so far learned only how to think locally.

If there is any truth in my suggestion that parochialism and small-mindedness have something to do with our human potential for hubris, then it will be useful to look more carefully at the nature



of hubris. There was nothing illogical about Eve's reasoning in the biblical myth. Behind hubris there is something even more basic, which I shall call self-assertiveness. Today's personal counsellors are rediscovering its importance. It is very like what the German philosopher Schopenhauer, trying to discern the dynamic character of reality, called "will". It is something basic to the nature of the universe itself. Self-assertiveness manifested itself at the very beginning in the "big bang". It manifested itself in originating life on this planet.

There is something very assertive about the life process. We observe it dramatically in the wonderful way in which the spring bulb pushes its new growth through the surface of the ground to reach out to the sun. We see it in the capacity of the human body to grow fresh skin to heal a wound. We see it in the capacity of the human body to bounce back into health after illness. We see it in the way a little child asserts itself against the will of its superiors. It is much prized in the business world today, where it is referred to in terms of free enterprise and entrepreneurial skills. Life everywhere manifests self-assertiveness, and it is something to rejoice in.

But what happens when self-assertiveness keeps on going without limit? The human organism has built into it a mechanism which tells it to stop growing on reaching a mature size. The blood cells keep reproducing themselves only until the required limit is reached. But what if this self-assertiveness in the body does not stop? Then we have a cancerous growth. When the self-assertiveness within the living cell accepts no limit we have hubris. It is a recipe for disaster and death.

Parents rejoice in the natural self-assertiveness of their growing children. It shows commendable spirit, vitality and a burgeoning personality. "Little Mary is now showing such a will of her own," parents delightedly say. Yet we all know that clear limits need to be established for the expression of that self-assertiveness for the child's own good, to say nothing of the parents' peace of mind. This is normally done in the family setting, and later in the larger social context.

We cannot become human individuals except within a social context. The extended family, which later became the tribe, was the original social context for the evolution of the human condition.

The tribe provided the necessary security and nurture for the growth of the individual. But the tribe also set the desirable limits to the natural self-assertiveness of the individual. It set a tapu on the no-go areas. If those limits were not adhered to, the individual had to be brought into line by force or, in extreme cases, eliminated from the tribe by expulsion or execution. This was the way in which the natural self-assertiveness was prevented from developing into hubris within the tribal context, where it would have destroyed the tribe in the same way as cancer destroys the body.

### **Tribalism has had its day**

After the agricultural revolution tribal society took the form of village life. Villages in turn developed into cities, nations and civilisations. Much of the original tribalism remained in the later forms simply because it has been essential to human survival – at least until the present. The strength of tribalism lies in the personal bonds of mutual loyalty which hold the tribe together, give it an identity, endow it with strength and courage to overcome threats, and enable it to survive from generation to generation. The tribal formation has been able to set adequate limits to the self-assertiveness of the individual.

But there is a negative side to tribalism. The natural self-assertiveness which has set limits within the tribe is free to be redirected towards those outside of the tribe. Tribalism permits and sometimes even fosters xenophobia. In tribalism the self-assertiveness of the individual is transformed into corporate assertiveness, leading to the struggle for power and domination. Because there is no external force to limit tribal assertiveness it turns into corporate hubris, where tribes can be quite merciless and inhuman to one another.

We have an interesting but sad example of such intertribal conflict among the Maori up until the time of European arrival. The traditional fear of it, and the need to take cautionary measures to counter it, are still clearly reflected in the cultural customs on the marae for greeting visitors. Non-violent remnants of Maori tribalism remain to this day. In Eurasia, by contrast, the equivalent of the Maori tribe had developed into the larger social unit of the

nation. But the same negative aspects of tribalism continued and resulted in international conflict and imperialistic domination. Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin became personal embodiments of corporate hubris.

In 1840 European nationalism encountered Maori tribalism and entered into the Treaty of Waitangi. Because of the justifiable disquiet today as to whether the Treaty has been adequately honoured, it has been easy to overlook one reason why the Europeans became so dominant. Maori tribalism prevented the Maori from uniting to become a Maori nation. Maori tribes were even found on opposite sides of the Maori-European conflict in the land wars. As someone has pointed out, it was in part a civil war. Maori tribalism proved to be an unequal match for European nationalism.

### **Nation states a liability**

I draw attention to this phenomenon from our own history not to take sides with either body in the past, but rather to show how it is a parable for our time. Just as tribalism became a liability for the Maori in their encounter with the European type of nation state, so on the global scene the nation state is now becoming a liability at a time when we must build a planetary civilisation. Tribalism was an asset for human societies before globalisation, but its persistence now constitutes a threat to the future of the race, preventing the evolution of one global society. The entity of the nation state claiming, and jealously preserving, its own absolute sovereignty now endangers the human future. Absolute national sovereignty leads to national hubris. The distinctive strengths of tribalism need to be transferred to the whole human race; tribalism needs to be transformed into globalism.

In some respects the nation state is a modern phenomenon so far as Europe is concerned. It came about as a result of the disintegration of Christendom during the past four centuries. As Christian conviction lost its power to unite Europeans into one international society, Europeans reverted to an ethnic form of tribalism. This resurgence of ethnic tribalism still continues in

Yugoslavia and in the various independence movements espoused by ethnic minorities around the world.

Yet that needs to be balanced by the good news that blind commitment to one's nation is coming to be questioned. During the 20th century for example, there was a big change from the bigoted jingoism which marked the early decades up until and during World War I, where there was a widespread attitude of "my country right or wrong". Today it is more common to acknowledge that "patriotism is not enough", to use the words of Nurse Edith Cavell. There are limits to patriotism. Allegiance to one's nation must be accompanied by self-criticism. There are wider global and ecological concerns which must be taken into account.

### **Arrogance of civilisations**

As well as in the nation state, we need to observe that tribalism can operate in whole civilisations. From the Axial Period onwards, Christianity and Islam each made attempts to overcome ethnic tribalism by incorporating all of humankind into a multi-ethnic society of a religious kind. For Christians this manifested itself as Christendom. Muhammad succeeded in overcoming the continual intertribal strife among his fellow Arabs by incorporating them into the Umma Muslima. On his death this newly formed Islamic world swept out of Arabia intent on spreading over the known world.

Both Christendom and the Islamic world were quite impressive at their best. But because they reached their geographical limits before becoming wholly global, they tended to assume the character of a religious tribe. As Samuel Huntington has said, "civilisations are the ultimate human tribes and the clash of civilisations is tribal conflict on a global scale".

In some respects it may be said that civilisations are the last form of tribalism before the unification of humankind into a planetary civilisation. If that is so, it is only to be expected that the great civilisations, such as Christendom and the Islamic world, should undergo internal disintegration and change before that happens. That is what has been occurring since the advent of the modern world. The negative side of that disintegration is that it opened the way for a resurgence of more primitive tribalism.

This has happened particularly in Christendom. The modern world began with the disintegration of Christian Europe. The one great church which had held the ethnic groups of Europe in the unity of Christendom itself fragmented into denominations. These assumed a new form of tribalism – religious tribalism. Thus Christian tribes emerged at much the same time as nation states did. In England the Christian tribe and the nation state were virtually one and the same. It was the Anglican Church.

### **Fundamentalist tribalism**

The most serious features of religious tribalism have appeared in the recent rise of fundamentalism. Although the name arose in a Christian setting and referred to those committed to the defence of what were called the Christian fundamentals, the word is used today to refer to a much wider phenomenon.

What all fundamentalists have in common is not one specific set of beliefs but an attitude of mind. It is the conviction that they have in their possession a knowledge of absolute truth, of which they have become the divinely ordained guardians. This conviction then gives them a feeling of extreme confidence and of inner power in relation to all who differ from them. They become crusaders, bent on spreading the Truth as they see it. Fundamentalism readily leads to fanaticism, for at the heart of it is a distrust of human reasoning. Fundamentalists are not open to calm and rational dialogue, for their minds are already firmly made up. They cannot be told anything and often refuse to listen. Here is hubris at its most blatant.

Fundamentalism, in its various manifestations, is a force that can no longer be ignored, for it constitutes one of the most serious obstacles to the evolution of a harmonious global society, both within national societies and between national societies. The fundamentalist cast of mind is the polar opposite of that required for the planetary civilisation. This is no doubt the reason why they are often hostile to the very idea of a world society, just as they have been opposed to the ecumenical movement.

Global society calls for flexibility of thought and practice, for empathy with those who differ, for compromise in a spirit of good

will. It requires mutual co-operation for the common good. Fundamentalism, by contrast, is socially divisive, calling for absolute and even blind loyalty to a holy book or a set of fixed principles. Fundamentalists insist on remaining loyal to the fundamentals, even if this leads to their own death or the death of others. Indeed, Muslim fundamentalists sometimes see martyrdom as the fast road to eternal bliss. This is why fanaticism soon leads to terrorism and suicide bombings. Fundamentalism is an intense form of religious tribalism, and has become the enemy of humankind. It is one of the obstacles in the way of forming a unified planetary civilisation, which must be able to draw freely from all the cultures of the past.

While the mainline churches usually hold themselves aloof from fundamentalism, they are now in the process of being drawn into the fundamentalist mindset. This is reflected in the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century they were forward-looking; at the end of the century they had become backward-looking. Because all the great cultures and civilisations of the past are now in a state of erosion, church authorities are strongly tempted to focus their attention on these signs of growing disorder, blame this phenomenon on the decline of the past cultures, and then try to restore the past. Any attempt to restore the past may serve only to exacerbate the situation, for there can never be any turning back of the clock. With rare exceptions, today's ecclesiastical leaders lack the vision, foresight and wisdom of the Christian pioneers of the past. That is why they find themselves being sidelined. It has been left to secular thinkers to be the pioneers and heralds of the new civilisation.

### **Rise of global consciousness**

If there is any good news to be proclaimed regarding our hope for the realisation of paradise on earth, it is mainly to be found in individuals and groups outside of the traditional religious communities and political authorities. They are not tied to any one nationality, race or religious persuasion. They are above tribalism, and find their chief loyalty to be to the earth and to all of its forms of life.

The almost spontaneous rise of the conservation movement and of green consciousness in the past two decades is an encouraging sign. These are alerting us to our dependence on the natural forces of the earth. They are being instrumental in the spread of what we may call green consciousness or global consciousness. There can be no future paradise in which we do not come to terms with the limits set by the natural forces of the earth. To ignore nature is the most serious form of hubris.

The spread of global consciousness is being aided, incidentally, by our new technology in the mass media and the internet – the very technology which is speeding up the globalising process. But will this new form of human consciousness spread around the globe in time? That is what we do not know, and time is not on our side. The time for creating a planetary civilisation, which is at the same time ecologically responsible, is now. Thirty years have already passed since Warren Wagar wrote: “Failure to institute world ecological planning and a system of world redistribution and rationing of vital raw materials will lead infallibly to the end of all civilised life on earth, through war, famine, disease, and the total eclipse of every economic system more advanced than the neolithic.”

In the light of what we have covered in this booklet regarding the hope of paradise on earth, what are the prospects that humankind will ever see it? There is no place for any easy optimism. Even if it does ever arrive, it may well be, as we have seen, that events of an apocalyptic order are unavoidable on the road to achieving it. By whatever route it comes, if it does come, it will involve a new form of human consciousness – global consciousness. This entails a radical change in the way we think: our present potential for hubris must be replaced by the ability voluntarily to set our own limits to the self-assertiveness we share with the universe. To live is to be self-assertive, but self-assertiveness without limits is the hubris which brings death.

### **Nietzsche’s “master morality”**

Something like this was being said more than a century ago, and at a time when the western world was self-confidently making

rapid progress. It came from that much misunderstood prophet Friedrich Nietzsche, who once complained he was born 200 years ahead of his time. Beneath the apparent prosperity of his time Nietzsche saw the crumbling of the whole fabric of the traditional cultures. He believed that humankind was entering on an entirely new era, one which required "the revaluation of all values".

In the new age, Nietzsche said, we shall have to abandon the "eternal values" of the past. They induced what he called a "slave morality": instead of making people morally responsible, they stunted moral growth, smothered self-assertiveness, and crushed the freedom of the human spirit. The revaluation of all values would introduce what he called "the master morality".

It is a grave travesty of Nietzsche's intentions to interpret this as the morality of mastering it over others, like the Nazi stormtroopers of Hitler's master race. It was in fact the opposite. It is the morality of mastering oneself, of voluntarily limiting one's assertiveness to what is appropriate to the circumstances. That is how one becomes the creator of values. Instead of becoming the slave of other people's values, one has become the master of one's own moral condition. The attainment of the master morality makes much greater demands on us than the traditional moralities have ever done. There must emerge a new type of human, whom Nietzsche called the *Urbmensch* (or overman). He is the one who has overcome the animal nature in himself, who has ordered the chaos of his warring passions, and who has set limits to his assertiveness not out of weakness, but from strength.

Nietzsche chose to express this teaching through the mouth of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra. Not only did that ancient prophet pioneer a path which greatly influenced the cultural traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but he spoke the language which gave us the word paradise.

Because the modern globalising world came out of the West, and one of its cultural roots can be traced to Iran, there is thus a thin thread linking us still to the ancient Zarathustra. There was a man, if ever there was one, who was keenly aware of the moral struggle which takes place in the human heart. He further believed this struggle was the key to the nature of the universe and to the human future.



There is no room for any easy optimism about a future planetary civilisation. It will be a great struggle in which it will be all too easy to give up in despair. Yet the cultural tradition which brought the modern world into being also includes this encouraging hope that the new future will be realised, and against all the odds. This hope associated with the concept of paradise may be the very thing we need to motivate us to continue in the struggle to create the new planetary civilisation. The coming of paradise on earth may yet be the last great manifestation of that self-assertiveness which permeates the universe and gives us life.



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### Don Cupitt

*Rethinking Religion*

### Neville Glasgow's interviews with Don Cupitt, John Spong and Lloyd Geering

*Frontiers of Faith*

### Also Available

*Tomorrow's God* (Lloyd Geering, Bridget Williams Books)  
*World of Relation* (Lloyd Geering, Victoria University Press)  
*The Double Cross* (Paul Oestreicher, Darton, Longman and Todd)