

Putting Transformation in Context

by Tim King , Oct 30, 2000



In response to millennial madness and God-at-War theology various followers of Christ have begun to recover a constructive millennialism. Here is a 30-point executive summary of the Transmillennial® conversation that Tim King presented in November 2000 to scholars gathered at Boston University's Center for Millennial Studies.

1. JEWISH APOCALYPTICISM:

The Jesus movement and early church expected the kingdom of God to come in their generation. In this regard, Jesus fit into a larger matrix of Jewish restoration theology, vying with other apocalyptic sects to shape the future of Israel.

2. MILLENNIAL DISAPPOINTMENT:

Nearly one hundred years ago, Albert Schweitzer gave currency to the expression "the delay of the parousia." He saw this millennial disappointment as beginning with Jesus. He felt the "non-occurrence of the Parousia" described the inner development of Christianity down to the present day, marked by the "abandonment of eschatology

3. REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY:

The "de-eschatologizing of religion" also came through "realized eschatology" or identifying the final or redeemed state with various institutions, whether the state, the liturgy, religious orders or a "progressive" ideology or historical age.

4. CREEDAL ESCHATOLOGY:

The ecumenical councils of the first millennium and the confessional creeds of the second, did not focus on the "doctrine of last things" nearly to the degree that they examined christology or soteriology. As a result, wide ranges of millennial orientations emerged within orthodoxy.

5. CONSTRUCTIVE MILLENNIALISM:

Like a pendulum, Christianity has swayed between the poles of apocalyptic and realized eschatology. Both "roosters" and "owls" have shaped their own brands of millennialism. Those crowing the imminent dawn of the Redemptive Day have fixated on the catastrophic. Those resisting End-Time arousal have emphasized the values religion offers toward building a constructive future.

6. CATASTROPHIC MILLENNIALISM:

By the time the Modernist-Fundamentalist divide was complete, Christian millennialism had differentiated itself into the "Big Three," namely Premillennialism, Amillennialism and Postmillennialism. Although distinct in dogma, these schools agree that the return of Christ is yet future. Each has a latent tendency to slide toward "catastrophic millennialism," particularly when society is overtaken by historical or cultural pessimism.

7. TRANSMILLENNIALISM™ :

Over the past thirty years, a fourth expression of Christian millennialism has been in the making. In the summer of 1999, its advocates coined the term Transmillennialism™ to refer to this emerging brand of realized eschatology. Transmillennial, Transmillennialists and Transmillennialism are trademarks of the Council on Transmillennialism.

8. MAX KING:

Although there have been historical precedents of fulfilled prophecy throughout history, Transmillennialism™ traces its origins to 1971, when Max King published *The Spirit of Prophecy*. Emerging from the Churches of Christ, it spread to the Reformed Presbyterian world in the late '80s and is now crossing a multitude of confessional lines, among both high and low churches

9. MILLENNIUM:

Rather than see Jesus as predicting the "End of Time," Max King proposed that Jesus foresaw the "End-Time" as a 40-year millennial reign stretching from the Cross to the Fall of Jerusalem. King theorized that the Gospels, Epistles and Book of Revelation spoke to the climax of the Kingdom in C.E. 70 as the restoration of Israel in Christ, preceded by the Tribulation, capped by the Parousia, last Judgment and spiritual resurrection of the dead

10. HISTORICAL ESCHATOLOGY:

In 1987, King released *The Cross and the Parousia of Christ* -- a 784-page exposition of how the early church's "Covenant Eschatology" could best be understood as Jewish apocalypticism -- historicized and fulfilled, rather than eschatological existentialism as Rudolf Bultmann had proposed. He distinguished Covenant Eschatology from theories such as C.H. Dodd's "realized eschatology" at the Cross, Cullman's "mid-point" in redemptive history and Dispensationalism's postponement hermeneutic.

11. SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM:

Parallel with King's proposed shift in biblical theology, other scholars have sought to illuminate the social and political context of the Second Temple period. The Transmillennial® view draws upon the work of these historical Jesus scholars, who seek to understand Jesus in his original cultural setting.

12. NEO-SCHWEITZERIAN:

N.T. Wright, the canon theologian of Westminster Abbey, has offered an adaptation of Schweitzer's view of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet. Instead of Jesus predicting the "end of the world," Jesus envisioned the end of the religious world as Jews knew it. Wright's book, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 1996, 741 pp.) presents a contextual and historical framework in which Jesus could envision his death and the destruction of Jerusalem as the basis for the re-constitution of Israel.

13. THIRD QUEST:

Wright's work is giving definition to a "Third Quest for the Historical Jesus," along with George B. Caird, E.P. Sanders, Maurice Casey and R. David Kaylor. These scholars use the historical-critical method to place the Jesus movement in a pre-C.E. 70 Galilean context. What emerges is a Jesus who is both apocalyptic prophet and social reformer operating within the mainstream of Jewish prophetic tradition. This apocalyptic orientation viewed the Torah, Territory and Temple in a different light, soon to be fulfilled, destroyed and spiritually reconstituted.

14. PAUL THE APOSTLE:

Transmillennialism™ seeks to correlate the quest for the historical Jesus with the quest for the early kerygma. It finds lines of continuity between Jesus' and Paul' view of the End of the Age. Rather than see Paul inventing a traditional "Second Coming" in a post-Easter period, Paul is considered to be intuitively focused, as was Jesus, on the approaching Jewish apocalypse of C.E. 70. Both Jesus and Paul focused on this singular and climatic "Day of the Lord."

15. REVELATION:

Drawing on works such as Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.'s *Before Jerusalem Fell* (American Vision, 1998), Transmillennialists make a literary, historical-critical case that the Book of Revelation was written before C.E. 70. Revelation is seen as amplifying Jesus' Olivet Discourse and Paul's Thessalonian letters. When Revelation depicts the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, this is considered a description of the imminent consummation of the New Covenant.

16. REDEMPTIVE HISTORY:

In seeking to place Christian apocalypticism back into its original Jewish context, Transmillennialists view the story of the Bible as fulfilled. The "end of history" has come, if by history one means redemptive history. This climax of Israel's redemptive history is seen as having brought forth an unending age of universal history, full of New Covenant promise.

17. CONTINUITY, DISCONTINUITY:

As the Great Revolt of CE 66-73 began, Jewish Christians followed Jesus' prophetic advice to flee Jerusalem. Following the Roman war they settled on the Mount of Olives. This Jerusalem "above" was considered the new "Mount Zion," the new "House of God," where according to Eusebius, "The law of the New Covenant began and from thence went forth and shone upon all" (Eccl. Hist.,I,4). After the failure of the second Revolt of CE 135, a growing Hellenized gospel outside of Palestine, combined with Roman persecution, led the church fathers to assume the final battle with evil yet remained.

18. DUALISM:

Despite the redemptive consummation in CE 70, the Patristic fathers continued to read Rome into the book of Revelation and felt they lived in "this evil age." After the fall of Rome, St. Augustine drew upon Neo-Platonism to affirm this eschatological dualism with the City of God and the City of Man being parallel states. This set the stage for Western civilization largely to hollow-out the New Covenant and embrace an entire range of dualisms, including time-eternity, heaven-earth, or mind-body.

19. GOD-AT-WAR:

As they say, "Jesus preached the Kingdom and we got Christianity." Rather than a "kingdoms-in-consummation" paradigm, the West embraced a "kingdoms-in-conflict" paradigm, believing a Final Battle was yet future. This addiction to "redemptive violence" is retrogressive and Manichean. The West has not entered its promised rest. Transmillennialism™ counters the prevailing tendency among End-Timers toward "spiritual warfare" with a "spiritual banquet" paradigm. It also rejects the triumphalism of Christian reconstructionism; preferring to see history more tenuously as "the present moment filled with potential," rather than an inevitable march toward perfection

20. COUNCIL:

In June 2000, some forty leaders, representing authors, congregations and ministries came together in Ohio for four days to launch the Council on Transmillennialism™. The Council is an emerging network of ministries committed to the transformation of the church and society based upon fulfilled Bible prophecy. The Council aims to mainstream the Transmillennial® view in the 21st century through a variety of means, much like the Premillennialists did in the 1800s through their Bible colleges, revivals and study bible.

21. INTERNATIONAL:

Today Transmillennialism™ is an international conversation and is considered to be the fastest growing field of Christian millennialism. Although its scholarship is in the English language, it is attracting a wide following among people from all sectors of church and society. While its proponents do not teach at leading divinity schools, they have published research in theological journals for more than a decade. They belong to academic associations such as the Society of Biblical Literature and The American Academy of Religion. The Council estimates its network exposes a quarter of a million people a year to fulfilled prophecy, with a core following of 30,000 people among various confessions

22. POST-MODERN:

Just as Evangelicalism differentiated itself from Fundamentalism in the mid-20th century, so Transmillennialism™ has differentiated itself from preterism, a literal expression of fulfilled Bible prophecy in the Reformed world, that developed since 1994. Through narrative theology, Transmillennialism™ aims to transcend the Modernist-Fundamentalist debate and the tendency to appeal to Enlightenment based-philosophical "foundationalism."

23. WORLD-VIEW:

The Council's quest is to encourage the development of a post-modern Christian worldview, based on narrative theology, religious humanism and authentic religious futurism. This trilogy draws on theology, history and futures, or namely, the schools of covenant eschatology, historical analysis and societal futures. The aim of Transmillennialism™ is to help the church "Recover Humanity's Hope." What was restored in Christ, lost in history, can be recovered through a theology of humility.

24. FOUNDING MINISTRY:

The lead ministry of the Council on Transmillennialism™ is *Presence*. Organized in 1997 on the basis of Max King's writings and seminars, *Presence* publishes a lifestyle magazine, hosts an annual 4-day national conference, provides leadership training for area ministry and leads study tours to Jerusalem. Its president, Tim King, along with three full-time volunteers and a project associate, leads *Presence*.

25. JERUSALEM:

Given the importance that Jerusalem plays to three living religions and both to the Jewish and Arab world, *Presence* is active in a dialogue with the leadership of Arab Christian and Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel and the West Bank. Its aim in this is to temper End-Time demonization and scapegoating and provide through covenant eschatology an impetus for mutual understanding and reconciliation, particularly in respect to a "theology of the Land." For a PMI position paper on Jerusalem, see <http://www.presence.tv/cms/jerusalemreport.php>

26. SOCIAL PARADIGM:

As an integral "constructive millennialism," Transmillennialism™ aims to undergird "images of the future" and "governing metaphors" which can be carriers of social change and transformation. The current "sustainability" paradigm or "millennial myth" of the West is seen as a three legged stool: Economy, Ecology and Eschatology, with Eschatology being that pool of cultures, images, values and meta-narratives upon which society draws meaning.

27. OPENNESS:

Transmillennialism™ embraces the "openness of God" and the "open society." Eschatology is not realized in the state, church or ideology, but in the human person and their context. The healing of the planet and the human spirit is embraced through a "new creation" faith that trusts God to make all things new. "missio Dei" is seen as encompassing all generations, all peoples, all cultures, all sciences and all technologies. As in math or physics, a centered-set paradigm for conversion, rather than a boundary-set is envisioned.

28. FUTURES:

While impossible to clearly predict the future, Transmillennialism™ affirms human potential to shape the future. The future is viewed as plural, i.e. futures. Within a "cone of plausibility" many futures can emerge from the present. Each future or scenario can be examined, critiqued and shaped. In addition to learning from cultural history, societal futures are embraced. By teaching "future fluency" Transmillennialism™ aims to empower people to be creators, rather than reactors, in their personal and vocational lives. It draws upon the futures study movement as expressed by the World Future Society .

29. FORESIGHT:

For too long millennial madness has kept society bound to short-term vision by relying on the rudder of tradition or "hindsight." This worked fine until change became the only constant. In response to change, strategic "foresight" can be cultivated by society's institutions. This is based on forward-looking vision, creativity and internal "insight." Hindsight, foresight and insight ought to be building blocks of a new "constructive millennialism" for the third millennium.

Transmillennialism™ supports efforts of religions to use social sciences to understand change and shape it.

30. MILLENNIAL STUDIES:

Transmillennialism™ considers Millennial Studies to be a valuable discipline and self-corrective pursuit. It supports the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University (<http://www.mille.org>) in raising society's collective intelligence to "turn Swords into Ploughshares." The Transmillennial™ movement welcomes scholarly attention, critique and participation to create a better constructive millennialism. Scholars are welcome to request interviews or review copies of publications. Contact Timothy R. King at:

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Transmillennialism™ -- the belief that the millennial reign of Christ brought about the change, or transformation of the ages, from the Old to the New Covenant in A.D. 70. Also known as covenant eschatology, or a preterist view of Scripture.

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