

IMAGING THE FUTURE: NEW VISIONS AND NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

by *Kenneth Cauthen*

Abstract. History may be pregnant with a new paradigm centering around the organic features of systems in four areas: the global-ecological, the national-social, the organizational-institutional, and the individual-psychological. Key terms are holistic, synergy, harmony, interdependence, and synthesis. A transition is occurring in each of these realms that has great potential for human fulfillment, if the shift can be successfully managed. Movements in theology can be similarly illuminated by this analysis at three points: the global conversation between liberation and establishment theologies, the renewed discussion among Christian theologians regarding other world religions, and the current influence of process theology.

With what is history pregnant? The presuppositions surrounding this question define the arena within which this paper is written. They also define a way to deal with the future both in terms of conceptuality and responsibility. Pregnancy is a particularly apt symbol for the present task. To elucidate this will require a brief introduction to some underlying operating assumptions. Three in particular are useful for interpreting the patterns by which historical movements and potentials come into being. The first is relativity: All historical phenomena are particular; they reflect the total cultural context in which they appear. The second is dynamism: Things change; what is humanly created can be humanly changed and, in the modern world at least, frequently is. The third is the gestalt dimension: Each epoch tends to have a kind of unity or wholeness. In each culturally relative period certain configurations of conditions give rise to ideas, values, and institutions that have a systemic or gestalt quality. We can speak here also of the emergence of a paradigm that is characteristic of a given era. A paradigm is a picture of

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how the world works and of how it ought to work. It contains both conceptual and normative dimensions.

To summarize, we can say that now and then *kairotic* moments appear—those ripe and right times when with the appropriate human response a certain configuration of potentials for human progress and fulfillment can be actualized. It is within this context that the question arises as to what *kairos* may now be on the horizon. Or to stay with the preferred metaphor of the hour, is history pregnant with anything? If so, what? This paper announces that conception has indeed taken place. Indeed, the author even is prepared in a fit of eschatological abandon to describe the features the new child might have if the pregnancy can be sustained and the birth successfully accomplished! More precisely and modestly, the paper will suggest some of the structural elements or skeleton of the emerging age rather than the details or the fleshy outer appearance. It is with its form rather than the details of the content that is of interest immediately. Granted, the whole enterprise is risky. There may be no pregnancy, or the child anticipated may not be growing in the womb. Rather some unsuspected, though we may hope not unwelcome, infant may surprise us all. Lest the metaphor be overworked, let us proceed in somewhat abstract if more conventional fashion to develop the thesis.

Any extended remarks on methodology must be foregone. If you ask how the things proposed are known, the reply is that it involves a combination of empirical evidence, intuition, and imagination. At best that might add up to an adequate epistemology. At worst it means guesswork. Obviously we cannot know the future in the way that we have knowledge of the past. The past is fact and is thus the object of intellect. The future exists only as possibility and hence as the object of imagination and will. This article proposes an experiment in thought for heuristic purposes. If the proposed thesis is not true, it may at least be interesting and provocative. In that sense it may provide an occasion for learning.

Let us proceed, then, to an outline of the vision of reality which is a potential on the horizon and which we should help to actualize in fact. The focus is on the ideological rather than on the institutional character of the paradigm. Attention is directed to ideas and values, to the conceptual and evaluative dimensions of this potential reality, and to its mind rather than to its body.

This emerging vision will be examined with respect to four areas of life that constitute the context in which we live. Then brief comments will be made about the theological enterprise and the implications of the new paradigm for its work. With respect to the world we inhabit, attention is called to the global, the national, the organizational, and the

individual levels of contemporary life. What strikes one recently is that the (or an) emerging paradigm appropriate for each of these four areas has similar features. From a wide variety of disciplines there are evidences of a common intuition about the meaning of what is happening. Not everybody is in agreement. A tendency, a direction, can be noted. History is pregnant with a comprehensive way of perceiving, conceiving, and believing which we are beckoned to help give birth. The new vision exists as a possibility arising out of the actualities of the present, but it lures us forward to actualize it in thought, feeling, and action. The evidences of this evolving world view are appearing in the natural sciences, the social sciences, psychology, and in philosophy. It is beginning to be articulated by physiologists, biologists, economists, ecologists, planners, systems analysts, anthropologists, political scientists, futurists, and visionaries. My grasp of this vision is partial, fragmentary, and vague. It is possible to overstate reality, its significance, and its future. It is easy to mistake a ripple in one's own mind for the wave of the future.

The new vision centers in an intuitive perception of systems or organized unities. Key words are holistic, unitary, synergy, harmony, cooperation, and synthesis. It speaks of energy flow, of interdependent networks, of dynamic connectedness, of opposites rather than opposites, of organic processes capable of creative transformation. It sees nature and biological structures as providing both the foundations and limits of human possibilities. The focus is on total systems thought of as dynamically interacting, mutually sustaining parts which work together to support the functions and goals of the whole unit. Reality is viewed as a complex organization of interdependent systems. Its key insight is the interconnectedness of things. Contemporary science tends to see nature at its fundamental levels as made up of dynamic, organic systems, of organisms with life-like characteristics. Nature is constituted by patterns of energy that act like living systems in which parts and wholes mutually influence each other. The materialistic, deterministic, mechanistic, atomistic physics of previous centuries is gone. Certain features of dynamic-organic systems described in contemporary scientific models of the world can be found at every level of reality from the subatomic to the global-ecological level. Human individuals are best seen as members of one another, having a genuine autonomy but organically related to the total natural, social, and ultimate environments in which they live and have their being.

THE GLOBAL LEVEL

With this sketchy outline of the paradigm, let us look at each of the four areas. First of all, consider the transition that is taking place at the

global level. The consensus among futurists is that the human race is in the midst of a transition of major importance. We would have to go back 5,000 to 10,000 years to find a transition of equal importance for the total life of humanity. A planetary society is emerging. We are experiencing the birth pangs of a global order, a worldwide network of interacting, interdependent human thought and action covering the whole spherical skin of the earth. This network is held together by global processes of communication, commerce, and cultural exchange. This development is taking place while we are approaching the biological limits of the earth. The question is whether we can provide the necessary goods and services that an expanding population will require without either polluting ourselves to death in the process or without prematurely exhausting certain nonrenewable resources before we have found substitutes or learned to recycle. Meanwhile, science and technology are putting unprecedented powers in our hands either to bless the world or to curse it. Somehow we have to move through this ecological transition without permitting nuclear war or breakdowns in the social order. At the same time, we must try to overcome the gap between the rich nations and the poor nations. Put in a thumbnail sketch, that is the picture. Wide agreement can be found that the future will take us to a new phase of human history, to a truly global society that has passed through a major transition of exponential growth to a leveling off period and plateau.

With this sketch of the transformation of the world order in mind, consider how an old paradigm needs to be replaced by a new one. Our political and economic institutions have been based on the assumption of an open situation in which unlimited expansion could take place. The economies of capitalist and socialist nations have operated on a linear basis. Materials are taken from the ground, manufactured into products in a factory, and delivered to consumers who use them and throw the garbage away. The old car, or whatever, is left on the junk heap. The sequence is from the ground through the factory to the consumer and on to the junk yard as though there was always more in the earth to get. The aim is to expand this whole process as much as possible. Resources are regarded as unlimited, and pollution is not seen as a problem.

The new paradigm suggests not a linear pattern but a circular one. Frugality is the rule in using nonrenewable resources. Pollution must be reduced or eliminated. Used goods must be recycled where possible. Population must be kept within manageable limits. We are now talking in limited, systemic, circular, self-contained terms.

Nations have sought to maximize their own interests, each nation regarding the world as a commons to exploit at will. The growth of gross national product (GNP) has been the goal of each nation. This

image, again, is linear, stressing expansion directed toward unlimited growth. Humanity is seen as a master of nature whose growing technological skills can solve problems. The new paradigm suggests a world society of interdependent nations moving toward a converging destiny and living within the biological limits set by the earth's resources. War in its modern potential must be abandoned as a way to settle disputes, lest the earth be engulfed in nuclear destruction. Spaceship Earth is a symbol of this new reality and possibility—a finite, vulnerable, self-contained system that must guide itself in the light of goals that are both realistic and that stress the survival and the fulfillment of the whole human race. Organic, unitary, holistic images prevail to form a new vision stressing the interdependence of parts in a finite system.

Notice also the new awareness of the interdependence of the technological and biological dimensions of human activity. We cannot indefinitely pollute the environment with our industrial processes and live. Technology has to take into consideration biological limits. We cannot do just anything and get by. The unity of biology and technology is one of those interdependences in organic relationships that is impressing itself upon us.

Involved here also is the interdependence of physics, ecology, and economics. No longer can they be regarded as separate sciences dealing with disparate aspects of reality. The second law of thermodynamics is now being taken seriously by some economists. Heat loss, springing from production of goods, produces entropy, which in the long run could spell disaster. Moreover, economics presupposes air, land, water, and natural resources in a habitable world that preserves the delicate balance of nature. Everything is connected to everything else on Spaceship Earth, nations with each other, humanity with nature. The image of Spaceship Earth itself combines a natural, biological element—"earth"—with a human, technological element—"spaceship." Spaceship Earth is a very powerful symbol if you think about the very words it combines. Earth—the given, natural, round, self-contained body on which we live—is regarded as a spaceship, which is a product of human ingenuity. Human will attempts to modify, to change, and to direct nature. In the past we talked about mastering nature. In the future we are likely to speak of cooperating with nature. We are becoming aware of the unity of the biological and the technological, summarized in the symbol of Spaceship Earth.

THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Let us turn now to the second level of analysis, to the nation. Here again a transformation is taking place that is taking us into a new era that is

structurally and ideologically different from the past. Among many that might be chosen, reference will be made to the work of two people—George Cabot Lodge and Daniel Bell. In a recent book Lodge refers to “the new American ideology” (Lodge 1975). His thesis is that the ideology (his word for paradigm) that has dominated American thinking since the eighteenth century is breaking down. It is being replaced by another configuration of ideas that takes into account the structural changes that are taking place in society. Each ideology is made up of five key ideas.

The old ideology. The five key ideas of the old ideology are individualism, property rights, competition, the limited state, and scientific specialization. First, the individual is the basic unit. Society is the sum total of individuals and arises by a social contract. Equality refers to equal liberty and the equal right of all to enter freely into contracts with others. Fulfillment achieved by individual effort is a basic dogma. Second, the best guarantee of individual rights is the ownership of property. This provides a bulwark against government tyranny and against the encroachment of others. Third, through competition, each seeks his/her own private good by individual effort. When individuals freely and fairly compete the “invisible hand” (Adam Smith’s term) will guarantee the wealth of the nation. The mechanism of the market will insure economic efficiency and provide a just allocation of goods and services based on individual merit. Fourth, the limited state should do only what individuals cannot do for themselves. Its main functions are to provide for the common defense, protect individual and property rights, and guarantee the freedom of contract against force and fraud. And fifth, in scientific specialization, attention is paid to the parts as analyzed into their ultimate constituents. The whole is the sum total of the parts.

The new ideology. The five key ideas of the new ideology are communitarianism, rights of membership, community need taking precedence over individual preference, the state as planner, and holism. First, society is an organic whole made up of groups and subgroups. Community is a reality in itself and more than the sum of its parts. Society is an interdependent system constituted by individuals and groups. Fulfillment of the individual comes by meaningful participation in a community to which one contributes and from which one gains benefits. Second, membership in the community conveys rights and justifies claims upon the total resources of the community. The number of socially conferred rights increases—the right to a job, to a minimum wage, to health care, to security in old age. The number of

groups claiming protection grows—blacks, women, the elderly, the handicapped, homosexuals, atheists. When a person goes to work for General Motors, he or she immediately becomes a member of two giant bureaucracies—the labor union and the corporation. Contracts are negotiated for individual shareholders and workers by representatives. Ownership of property as a source of rights and protection decreases, while benefits or losses associated with group participation increases. Third, in the community need taking precedence over individual preference, the mechanisms of the marketplace leave some social needs unmet, requiring political action to achieve them. Car manufacturers sold cars until recently by stressing style, luxury, size, and power. The community, prompted by Ralph Nader and others, decided that safe, nonpolluting cars are essential whether consumer preference expressed in the marketplace produces this result or not. Hence, political measures were taken to force manufacturers to produce safer and now more efficient cars. In an antitrust suit the government recently tried to force International Telephone and Telegraph to divest itself of the Hartford Fire Insurance Company. The corporation lawyers argued that the United States needed ITT to be big and strong in order to compete with other countries and to assist in achieving a favorable balance of payments in a world trade. Community need thus takes priority over the principle of maximizing competition. Fourth, since the time of Franklin Roosevelt the state has taken an increasingly important role in regulating the economy and guaranteeing the social welfare of citizens. Increasingly the federal government sets goals and orders priorities. Energy policy based on long-range assessments of needs and resources is a particularly contemporary example of the role of the state as planner. Fifth, nature tends to be made up of systems. Reality is organic. Everything is connected to everything else. Hence, knowledge must take into account the wholes or organized unities as well as the parts.

The connections between what Lodge calls the new ideology and the paradigm previously outlined are obvious. The interdependence of individual and society, the stress upon the reality of community, the stress on holism in the pursuit of truth about realities that hang together in interconnected systems all point to a new way of perceiving, believing, and valuing that stands in contrast to a previous era and ideology.

The analysis is confirmed by Bell in his description of the emerging postindustrial society (Bell 1973). The modern liberal state was based on the ideas of Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and John Locke. In their view individuals were the focus of the freedom and reward system. Individuals were to be set free to pursue their interests and

enjoy the fruits of their labor achieved through the market mechanism of the economy and through democratic political practices. A new moral basis is now being sought, geared not to the realization of individual ends but to the group and communal needs.

In this emerging setting the value of equality takes on a different meaning. The old ideology generated the demand for equality of opportunity so that all could compete fairly for the rewards provided through individual efforts. The new ideology generates a demand that equality of opportunity be supplemented by equality of result. The reasoning is that in an interdependent society viewed as an organic system, all people have a claim on the sum total of available natural and human resources. Hence, inequalities produced by the unpredictable tides of fate, fortune, accident, and luck as well as by entrenched advantages of the privileged suggest that outcomes as well as opportunities be taken into account. Bell maintains that the central value question of postindustrial society will be equality of opportunity versus equality of result.

The Bakke case recently before the Supreme Court illustrates the issue well. Mr. Bakke argued that he was denied admission to medical school because blacks were given preference. If individuals are to be considered as such apart from the total social and historical context in which they live, then his charge of reverse discrimination has merit. If individuals are seen as members of groups organically related to the history and structure of the total society, then an argument for preferential treatment for previously excluded groups can be supported. The old ideology and the new ideology are in conflict here. Underneath the details of legal argument and beyond the fine points of law are more fundamental differences between one paradigm and another, involving a whole configuration of ideas.

We are witnessing at the moment a reaction against the new ideology. Whether the Reagan administration represents a momentary halt or a deep-going reversal of trends towards the new ideology remains to be seen. My best guess is that it is one of those pauses in a long-term trend that will in time reassert itself. At the least the present ascendancy of Reaganomics and its associated political individualism illustrates the fact that history does not always move in a smooth continuous flow toward a new gestalt. Rather we are likely to see slips and starts, momentary reversals, and a complicated process of advance and retreat. The "Moral Majority" is a partner in this reaction against many of the trends described here. It is an attempt to reassert an older economic, political, social, and moral ethos in the face of what it regards as threatening cultural forces.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Shifting very quickly to the third area, how does this organic/holistic vision speak to the questions of organizations and institutions? One of the characteristics of our time is that the work of the world is increasingly carried on in large organizations—hospitals, corporations, schools, factories, government, labor unions among others. They produce our goods and our services; they order, direct, and tend to monopolize our lives. We are more and more conscious of the importance of organizational ethics. In the future we need to seek not only what is efficient but what is also fulfilling and enjoyable. The controlling feature of the past and present is bureaucracy. By bureaucracy, of course, is meant the division of labor organized on a hierarchy and command basis. A pyramid is created in which authority runs from the top down. Bureaucracy is based on functional rationality directed by the goal of efficiency. Now that is a lot of abstraction which adds up to all the rules, regulations, red tape, and paperwork we confront everywhere. Each group, each individual, does a specialized task. The attempt is to reduce everything to routine for the sake of getting the most results for the least effort and expense.

TABLE 1
SHIFTING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VALUES

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- from considerations of quantity (more) to consideration of quality (better).
 - from the concept of independence toward the concept of interdependence (of nations, institutions, individuals, all natural species).
 - from mastery over nature toward living in harmony with it.
 - from competition toward cooperation.
 - from the primacy of technical efficiency toward considerations of social justice and equity.
 - from the dictates of organizational convenience toward the aspirations of self-development in an organization's members.
 - from authoritarianism and dogmatism toward participation.
 - from uniformity and centralization toward diversity and pluralism.
 - from the concept of work as hard, unavoidable and as duty toward work as purpose and self-fulfillment and a recognition of leisure as a valid activity in its own right.
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(From: Wilson 1975, 145-46)

The new image employs a democratic-cybernetic model. The cybernetic dimension suggests self-regulating processes which make it

possible to adjust an organization to changing conditions or to move towards a better level of quantitative and qualitative functioning. The democratic idea implies that participation of those involved will be maximized. Efficiency may be compromised in the interest of qualitative considerations. The enhancement of human life will take precedence over functional rationality. Ian Wilson put together a listing of value changes which he thinks are actually going on in our society (see table 1). It involves the shift from one side of a polarity to the other side. They point in the direction that this article has been suggesting, particularly the last four or five at the bottom.

Justice in this new image would be that kind of healthy functioning suggested by the term dynamic-organic wholeness. Organic wholeness is an ideal situation in which each part of a social system mutually sustains the others in a way that promotes the basic goals of the whole system and meets the essential needs of each individual. In other words, justice is to society what health is to the body. Here is an organic, biological model for looking at justice. Justice is healthy functioning. Justice is the form that is required in an organization to achieve goals that sustain life and promote healthy vitality.

THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

With regard to the individual, there is a growing recognition that a person is a bio-spiritual unity. Science is discovering a basis for mystical and ecstatic experience in the physiological structures of the nervous system (Katz 1975; d'Aquili 1975). The creation of religious visions and the urge to worship and participate in ritual is as natural as hunger and engaging in reproductive behavior. We are made biologically for ecstasy and joy as well as for food and sex. The biological structures of our bodies tell us so, as well as the thirst of our spirits. All this points to the unity and wholeness of selfhood. The biological and the spiritual go hand in hand. At the basic survival level that simply means that we have to have food, clean air, and pure water to live at all. These are biological necessities. But, beyond that, the capacity for the heights of ecstatic experience and joy in unity with each other and God is also built into our brains and our guts.

Moreover, scientists are now discovering that while the self is a bio-spiritual unity, our psychic functioning is of two complementary types. These two ways of operating are associated with the right and left hemispheres of the brain and may involve the operation of masculine and feminine principles as well. Put briefly, the left hemisphere operates in analytical, linear, sequential fashion. Time is the primary reference. The right hemisphere functions in holistic, integrative, simultaneous, and intuitive ways. Space is the basic category.

To put it in oversimplified terms, we have been dominated by the left hemisphere in the modern world. We need to shift the balance toward the right side. Recent centuries with their emphasis on linear growth, progress, forward-moving history, individualism, a dominating, aggressive approach to nature, analytical, mechanistic modes of thought associated with scientific and technological thinking, a desacralizing rationalism, and so on, all reflect a one-sided dominance of the left hemisphere and of masculine principles.

The new image requires a shift toward holistic, organic, unitary functioning which preserves the ecstatic and mystical dimensions of consciousness as well as the rational and ethical. It will see life in a proper unity with nature and will develop a communal, ecological ethic in which the feminine principle will be given equal weight with the masculine. Self-actualization and the maximizing of spiritual capacities and the inner consciousness will take their places alongside the search for material satisfaction competitively achieved and a devotion to external projects. In the words of James Ashbrook, "in-touch awareness" and "intentional consciousness" need to be held in a creative tension and balance (Ashbrook 1975).

THEOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS

To move toward a conclusion, let us look briefly at the theological enterprise in the light of this emerging paradigm. The first point to be made is that this enterprise at the world level is taking on interdependent features, the result in part of the interplay of globalization and indigenization. A generation ago most creative theology was being done by white males in Europe and the United States and imported around the world. Today Asian, African, and Latin American theologians are contributing to the course of study in European and North American seminaries. In the United States, blacks and women are providing both fresh perspectives and balance to the work of white males.

Third World theologies of liberation in particular represent a viewpoint from the underside of history and for the sake of the poor and the oppressed. Liberation thinkers focus on the cry of the wretched for freedom and dignity, for bread and justice. In all its forms liberation theology begins with an experience of oppression and interprets the Gospel as a word and deed of release from bondage into the liberty promised to the children of God. Liberation becomes the key and the clue to every doctrine of the faith. All concepts are interpreted in its light. Theology itself is typically defined as critical reflection on praxis, that is, on action or practice. Theology is "the second step" (Gutiérrez 1973, 11). The first step is engagement in liberating action. Only those

who participate in the struggle to free those in bondage can aspire to think and speak and write authentically of the liberating Gospel. What G. W. F. Hegel said about philosophy is descriptive of theology, namely, that it begins at sundown, after the day's work is over, as a reflection upon engagement and as a prelude to the renewal of the battle. Theology is seen as contextual and situational. It focuses on the predicament and hope of a particular group of people in a given situation in a specific time and place. Hence, there are many agendas among liberation theologians. For Latin Americans the focus is on class and the domination of the ruling elites over the impoverished masses, as Karl Marx teaches. For black theologians the emphasis is on race as the source of oppression. For feminists the primary concern is sexism and the control of men over women. These competing agendas are the source of debate as well as creative tension. Liberation theology is holistic. It interprets salvation as liberation from economic, political, and psychic oppression in quite secular terms as well as freedom from sin, guilt, anxiety, and death. It is suspicious of spiritualizing tendencies which ignore material and social misery. Social justice on earth here and now is a manifestation of the Kingdom which is yet to come fully.

Finally, feminist theology especially maintains that experience is the crucible of theology. Theological reflection arises out of the experience of the sacred in a given situation. For feminine liberationists this means that theology must not only be experiential but experimental. It is adventurous, exploratory. Established values are under suspicion since they are under the domination of a patriarchal paradigm that denigrates women to a position of inferior status and worth. The whole theological agenda with its associated principles and values must be reexamined and the future left open with respect to such matters as the nature of God, human sexuality, sexual roles, and male-dominated language of theology and worship, the dualisms of spirit and body, God and nature, and so on. This questioning of the beliefs and values of patriarchal religion raises a serious dilemma for feminists. Can the Christian tradition be reformed by an appeal to its deepest and most fundamental norms, or is it so rotten to the core with patriarchal assumptions as to be unredeemable? Mary Daly is one of those who has taken the latter position and simply walked out of the church and away from Christianity. Letty Russell, Rosemary Ruether, Phyllis Trible, and others believe that the search for a usable past can be conducted within the bounds of Biblical authority and Christian tradition, though not without thoroughly exorcizing the patriarchal demons which have dominated theology (Ruether 1983).

Liberation theologians generally see their basic task as fundamentally different from those who see the conversation with Christianity

and the modern world as the primary focus of theology. For example, Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Catholic theologian from Peru, distinguishes liberation theology from what he calls progressivist theology. The latter asks, How can we believe in God in a world come of age? It attempts to make the Gospel credible to unbelievers. Liberation theology asks, How are we to tell people who are scarcely human that God is love and that God's love makes us one family? "Liberation theology categorizes people not as believers or unbelievers but as oppressed or oppressors" (Torres and Fabella 1978, 241). Gutiérrez goes on to say that both traditional and modern theology in Latin America is allied with the ruling classes. Liberation theology has its locus in "the common people seeking to be agents of their own history and expressing their faith in the poor Christ through their efforts for liberation" (Torres and Fabella 1978, 242).

In summary, authentic liberation theology is done in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. It challenges injustice in the name of a liberating God. It calls upon the oppressed to become the subjects of their own release from bondage by taking appropriate action to overcome their oppressors. In extreme cases when peaceful resistance has failed, violence may be required. As a last resort in the worst situations violence is generally approved as a legitimate liberating strategy.

While the contrast should not be overdone, liberation theologies are stressing practice that leads to theory from the perspective of the aspirations of the poor and oppressed, while many prevailing theologies have stressed theory that leads to practice as seen from the point of view of established classes. Liberation theologies see the world as divided between the oppressors and the oppressed and are concerned to see the Gospel as relevant to the practical task of setting the captives free. Much establishment theology sees the world as divided between unbelievers and believers and has sought to make the Gospel credible to the modern mind. All theologies are concerned with truth and practice, but these relative distinctions are not unreal. The whole truth requires many perspectives, all of which can contribute to and receive from the ecumenical church thought of as one body. The future presents an opportunity for global theology to be done in more systemic, holistic, and even cybernetic (that is, self-correcting) fashion.

The second point relates to an emerging stage in the conversation between Christianity and other religions. Not only does the theological enterprise confront secular criticism of its deepest tenets, it also finds itself in a world of religious plurality in which other ancient faiths also make their claims of truth and offer their own paths of salvation. This is no new issue, but it becomes more acute as each passing decade moves us toward greater interpenetration of cultures and a growing sense of global interdependence. Over the centuries particularistic and exclu-

sive tendencies within Christianity have been in tension with universalistic and inclusive impulses in dealing with other religions. In the parable told by Jesus of the Good Samaritan the adherent of a rejected religion showed love to the wounded traveler, while the practitioners of the accepted faith went by on the other side. In the early centuries some theologians viewed Jesus as the manifestation of the universal Logos, the principle of truth that is present in all religions and cultures. However, it is no doubt true that the majority of theologians have interpreted Christianity in absolute terms as the final and ultimate truth by which all other faiths may be judged.

In recent decades we have become increasingly aware of the challenge of other world religions. One has only to say the word "Ayotollah" to call to attention the ways in which we have been shocked into an awareness of the power and vitality of a resurgent Islam. Buddhism intrudes upon our consciousness in more gentle but no less significant ways. In connection with the latter, two factors are of particular importance in the current scene. One is that a growing number of people in the West have turned East looking to the Oriental religions for insight and practical help. The number of course offerings in world religions in colleges has increased dramatically over the last decade or so. But beyond that many have incorporated the beliefs and practices of the Eastern religions, especially Buddhism, into their own search for truth and fulfillment. Mantras, meditation, yoga, and many other manifestations of Eastern piety are no longer oddities practiced by an eccentric few but a strong current involving significant numbers. The second factor is that an increasing number of Christian theologians are giving close attention especially to Buddhism. The reasons for this interest appear to be twofold. One is to gain a deeper understanding of their own faith by contrast with a challenging alternative. The other and more important reason theologically would appear to be a genuine openness to dialogue which seeks for the deepest possible basis not simply for discussion but of possible reconciliation and mutual transformation. It is this aspect of the current situation which needs brief attention.

It should be noted that many of the older and absolutist notions of Christianity are still held today. In fact, views all across the spectrum can be found in recent thinkers. At one polar extreme may be mentioned the views of many orthodox Christians who simply take the Christian revelation as the truth and hold that other alternatives are false. Sophisticated versions of the view that only in God's self-initiated self-disclosure in Christ can true and authentic faith be found are developed by Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer. The other extreme is represented by Arnold Toynbee who calls for a synthesis of world

religions. However, the most exciting work in these areas is found between these extremes. Many would be comfortable with the idea popular in nineteenth-century liberalism that Christianity represents the highest point to which religion has evolved and moreover is absolute and final. Other religions may be found at varying points down the scale embodying much that is true and wholesome. But even this is not the point at which the deepest thought is being exercised today. This still smacks of religious imperialism.

Today in many quarters an attempt is being made to remain loyal to Christianity and yet accept other world faiths, especially Buddhism, on an equal basis as partner in dialogue in the quest for deeper truth. While running the risk of oversimplification, let me suggest that the dominant notes in the most creative work being done in this area are indicated by the terms dialectical engagement, complementarity, and pluralism. The first term implies that if Christian norms are used to judge other religions, then in a turnabout Christianity must subject itself to an equally searching judgment by Buddhist standards. Complementarity refers to a pattern in which one truth is seen as completing and being completed by another. An analogy might be the complementarity of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Eastern and Western religions are seen not as opposites but as apposites. They have a mutual fittingness in which one requires the other for its completion. Pluralism recognizes that the Infinite Other may be experienced in many different, culturally relative ways. The future is likely to produce an unpredictable degree of convergence in thought and practice in a context of mutual respect.

In a previous generation Paul Tillich established a polarity of logical types which allowed him to view the dialectical relationship between Christianity and Buddhism. All religions arise out of the experience of the holy in some person, event, or thing. But this primordial encounter takes two directions: the mystical and the ethical. The former is the pattern taken by Indian-born religions, while the latter is the way of Israel. Likewise, the aim of existence takes a dialectical form in the two religions: "in Christianity the telos of *everyone* and everything united in the Kingdom of God; in Buddhism the telos of *everything* and everyone fulfilled in Nirvana" (Tillich 1963, 64).

On the current scene Peter Berger follows a similar pattern of ideal types. He contrasts two forms of religious experience. In the first the divine is confronted as a personal revealer and redeemer. This is characteristic of the religions of Western Asia—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the second the divine is experienced as the deepest ground of interior consciousness. This is characteristic of Eastern Asia religions—Hinduism and Buddhism. God confronted without and

beyond the self or ultimacy experienced at the depths of mystical consciousness—these are the two poles. Berger asks whether it is possible that both may be valid and whether each experience might be a prelude or a stepping stone toward the complementary way of experiencing ultimacy (Berger 1979).

A different option can be found in the thought of John Cobb, Jr. Here the fullness of religious truth is seen, not as lying in the past in one of the many historic traditions nor in a complementary joining of dialectical opposites in the present but as still to be discovered in the future. This possibility views the world religions as stages along the way to some final and ultimate wholeness of truth which may differ markedly from any historic tradition in its present stage of development. The way forward toward this goal is through a process of creative mutual transformation whereby now separate traditions may contribute something toward a full and final truth which may be different from anything we presently know. Cobb is a process theologian who believes that the convergence of Buddhism and Christianity toward a higher and more comprehensive truth can be especially fruitful if the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead is used as a guide. The Whiteheadian vision denies the truth of substance philosophies and provides a view of the self and the world in event-processive terms which may be congenial with Buddhist conceptions (Cobb 1982). Both Berger and Cobb are making use of patterns of thought which illustrate the dynamic, creative, organic, holistic motifs of the new paradigm.

Finally, the views of John Hick may be brought within this general orientation. Under the influence of William Cantwell Smith he urges a Copernican revolution whereby Christianity and/or Jesus are no longer in the center of the religious universe; instead God is in the center. Within this framework the world religions may be seen as different but valid human responses to one Transcendent Reality with different perceptions of the divine reflecting a variety of cultural and historical factors. He urges us to move toward a global theology in the context of a world ecumenism in which the historic religions will view each other—just as cooperating Christian denominations in Britain now see each other—as representing different but overlapping perspectives on one transcending Truth and Reality. Hick does not anticipate one world religion with an agreed-upon theology but accepts religious pluralism on a global scale, although it would not be unreasonable to expect some convergence on common themes amidst continuing differences of belief and practice (Hick 1973).

A final point regarding contemporary theology has to do with the growing influence of process theology, based on the metaphysical vision of Whitehead. Its key insight is that reality consists of organic societies of value-seeking events ordered and lured into creative ad-

vance by an all-inclusive Persuasive Purpose. The cosmos is a social process in which these life events are organically connected to everything else, especially to those organisms nearest in time and space. The world is a complex hierarchy of interrelated societies and series of occasions of value-seeking experiences. At the base of all things is God, who is the source of both order and novelty. Just this tantalizing hint regarding process theology is enough to suggest that its basic themes are representative of the new paradigm that is emerging across the whole spectrum of human thought. This congeniality helps to account for its increasing popularity among present-day theologians. This author himself espouses a version of this outlook—a fact that will provide a clue to many of the convictions set forth in this paper.

With what is history pregnant? A new vision of reality, it is suggested, has been conceived that has relevance for understanding many levels of existence from the subatomic level of nature to the global level of planetary ecology. Moreover, it has implications for personal and social values and for the understanding and achievement of justice. The actual world is, of course, much more complex, diverse, contradictory, confusing, and ambiguous than the neat, structured picture drawn here. Countertrends and contrary potentials are also present in abundance. Nevertheless, what has been described here is also real as ideal possibilities and to some extent as an emerging fact. These ideal possibilities in particular need to be lifted up as goals and norms for responsible human action in our generation. Moreover, there is an image that fits the conceptuality that has been elaborated. If the proper question is, with what is history pregnant, and if the answer is that history is pregnant with an ideal possibility along the lines suggested, then the image that most appropriately defines our responsibility is that we are to be midwives of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is real both as fact and as possibility. It comes and is coming as always as threat of judgment, promise of new life, and as demand for repentance for sin and obedience to the emerging vision. We cannot produce the reality of the Kingdom. The pregnancy is real apart from us. But we can assist in the birth of the new possibility as midwives of the Kingdom.

To conclude, it may be helpful to focus on some ambiguities in the paper with regard to both method and content. Doing so will also call attention to fundamental questions about the interpretation of the actual course of history and the role of images of the future in shaping the future. Initially it was said that the methodology of the paper involved a combination of empirical evidence, intuition, and imagination. But to what extent does the paper rely on specific evidence regarding actual trends in society that are converging to produce a new paradigm? And to what extent is the new orientation a vision of future possibilities that the author thinks should become dominant? These

questions are further heightened by the claim that history is actually pregnant with this new vision and by the proposal of the image of midwives of the Kingdom as a clue to human responsibility to help bring the new age into fuller realization. In the nature of the case, hard, quantifiable analysis is out of the question, at least in this paper. Hence, the thesis about the factual trends is a combination of impression and intuition based on my own reading and experience. That the main outlines of the new vision in various forms and contexts is appearing in some or many places is beyond doubt. In this sense, the new paradigm is a real potential ingredient in the actual world, not simply an imaginatively created ideal possibility. Conception has taken place, but the embryo may be aborted. More precisely, the favored paradigm may not become dominant or even pervasive. Obviously, many different futures exist as real potentials. The actual future will doubtless be as complex, multidimensional, and made up of contrasting realities as the present is. A certain looseness and imprecision inevitably attaches to any analysis of this kind. Metaphors are notoriously imprecise and are misleading when treated as literal truths.

The evaluation of the new paradigm is clearer. It is asserted that the vision elaborated (itself complex and multiform) is desirable whether or not it is ever dominant. The appeal is that those who agree with this assessment should see themselves as midwives of this vision. It can only be asserted and not demonstrated that visions of an ideal future can be powerful and effective in shaping the actual future when enough of the right people are grasped by them.

In Christian terms, the Kingdom of God is both a hope for the future and a present though partial reality. It is thus a perfect ideal not yet realized which defines a task to be done in the light of the coming new age. It would be idolatrous and arrogant to suggest that the vision so tantalizingly hinted at here is identical with the hope and mission of that absolute utopia. What is proposed is that some among us see it as the way of responsibility that we must follow. Surely we are not totally misreading the signs of the times, although we need to be corrected by other interpretations of trends that are real and by other visions of what ought to be. No ideal future projected by human beings is free from dangers, flaws, and unexpected weaknesses. If the analysis presented here is faulty either or both in terms of fact or ideal, then perhaps it may at least provoke better discernment about the best that can be in the future in the light of what is real and growing today.

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