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REVELATION, FORESIGHT, AND FORTITUDE: HOW AWARENESS OF THE FUTURE AFFECTED THE EARLY CHURCH AND HOW THEIR PAST MIGHT INFLUENCE OUR FUTURE

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John's Revelation to the Christian churches of Asia provided a powerful apocalyptic message, helping early Christians to struggle through Roman oppression and emerge beyond the shadow of Second Temple Judaism. Ideological texture analysis from socio-rhetorical criticism deciphers the revelatory model at work in John's message, while a discussion of present-day foresight models establishes a contemporary corollary for comparative purposes. Where John's model was based on prophetic, apocalyptic imagery, contemporary foresight models involve a systemic process of envisioning plausible futures that can help to build resiliency into planning processes. Both models have contemporary value. Radical change and incredible complexity have increased the need for hope in the future and for strategic foresight to deal with extraordinary levels of uncertainty. Nevertheless, foresight without Biblical wisdom can lead to selfish utilization of the earth's finite resources. Revelation and eschatology can help to ensure that foresight motives and applications are consistent with God's intent. Ultimately, it is the combination of foresight applications and Biblical wisdom that will lead to a future that is, as Ted Peters related, both "human and divine."¹

¹ Ted Peters, *Futures: Human and Divine* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1978).

I. INTRODUCTION

The early Christian Church struggled under extreme circumstances.² Living under the shadow of the Roman Empire and Second Temple Judaism, the Early Church was strongly influenced and threatened by the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious aspects of that era.³ The New Testament provides many examples of persecution, turmoil, and how the Early Church responded. However, to gain an appreciation for how an awareness of the future helped the Church to emerge from these challenges, the book of Revelation provides insight through the apocalyptic revelation given by John to the seven churches of Asia.⁴ By studying these messages and using ideological texture analysis from socio-rhetorical criticism,⁵ a model of Christian foresight emerges.

John's revelation included acknowledgement,⁶ correction,⁷ and encouragement⁸ in the face of fear, enmity, and shame. In the midst of these trials, John called them to experience friendship, confidence, and intimacy with their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.⁹ The combination of apocalyptic imagery, powerful language, recurring themes, and church specific instructions that shined a spotlight on each of the seven churches must have created a very strong emotional response.¹⁰ Foresight into the future played a crucial role in this process.

This essay reveals the foresight model at work in the churches of Asia by establishing a social, cultural, and historical backdrop for John's apocalypse. It then focuses on the church of Laodicea to demonstrate the framework of the foresight model and how it may have influenced the Early Church. Although the model is specific to the first-century church, it has the potential to inform and encourage contemporary Christian foresight applications. To that end, the essay describes contemporary foresight models and then compares them with John's, analyzing the differences and providing implications for Christians who are developing present-day, Christian foresight models.

II. REVELATION

The book of Revelation opens with, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show his servants what must soon take place; He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the

² Acts and Rv. All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

³ Richard A. Horsley and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (New York: Grossett/Putnam, 1997).

⁴ Rv 2:1-3:22.

⁵ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1996).

⁶ Referring to identification of both the positive and negative attributes of each of the churches.

⁷ Suggestions for improvement and returning to good standing.

⁸ Hope for the future.

⁹ David A. deSilva, "The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Oracles to the Seven Churches," *New Testament Studies* 54, no. 1 (2008): 90-114.

¹⁰ Ibid.

testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”¹¹ John, the writer of the book of Revelation, then immediately encouraged his readers by telling them that those who would read, hear, and keep the words of the prophecy would be blessed, but he also set the level of urgency by telling them, “The time is near.”¹² These comments most likely referred to the impending collapse of the second temple, prophesied by Jesus,¹³ and the problems associated with political accommodation to the Roman Empire.¹⁴

John’s Message to the Seven Churches

John’s greeting to the seven churches offered grace and peace as he lifted up Jesus Christ as the eternal ruler of the earth who was to be praised and revered.¹⁵ Through apocalyptic imagery and by quoting Christ, John grabbed his reader’s attention, established the authority of Christ in his message to the seven churches, and established himself as the messenger who was to deliver the message.¹⁶ John shared the spectacular images he saw and Christ’s response when John fell at His feet in awe of what he had seen.¹⁷ John then proceeded to share the messages Christ had for each of the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.¹⁸

Each message to the seven churches was unique to the specific church being addressed; however, similar themes ran throughout the discourse. This provided explicit instructions for each church while providing a comprehensive framework for all of them. To gain an appreciation for this revelatory model, this essay focuses primarily on the last of the messages, which was addressed to the church of Laodicea.¹⁹

John’s Message to Laodicea

The church of Laodicea was “neither cold nor hot,”²⁰ which was clearly not acceptable.²¹ Although the church at Laodicea perceived itself to be rich, Christ saw it as “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”²² He therefore counseled them to acquire “gold refined by fire”²³ to become *spiritually* rich, “white robes”²⁴ to cover their

¹¹ Rv 1:1-2.

¹² Rv 1:3.

¹³ Lk 21:6.

¹⁴ David Cashmore, “Laodicea and the Seven Churches,” *Stimulus* 12, no. 2 (2004): 16.

¹⁵ Rv 1:4-6.

¹⁶ Rv 1:7-20.

¹⁷ Rv 1:17-20.

¹⁸ Rv 2:1-3:22.

¹⁹ Rv 3:14-22.

²⁰ Rv 3:15.

²¹ Rv 3:16.

²² Rv 3:17.

²³ Rv 3:18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

shame, and “salve”²⁵ for their eyes that they might see the truth. Christ reproved them out of love, and told them that they needed to repent.²⁶ He then stated:

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with Me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with Me on My throne, just as I Myself conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.²⁷

Writing in the voice of Christ, John acknowledged their downfall, offered correction, and encouraged them. However, more was at work here than initially meets the eye. To gain a better understanding of this message to Laodicea, it is imperative that it be looked at in the historical, social, cultural, and ideological perspective of the time in which it was given.

III. SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The first-century church was operating under the pressures of the Roman Empire, which established the “dominant culture”²⁸ throughout that region of the world.²⁹ Second Temple Judaism, which established a subculture,³⁰ created additional complications for the fledgling Christians who were looking for a new future. The Christian “counter-culture”³¹ was trying to establish a better society, not by violence or legislative action, but by seeking alternatives in Christ who provided new hope and a constructive image of how people and society should behave. Apostle Paul, John’s predecessor to the area, had impressed upon the Early Church that grace—not law—should be their primary concern.³² Not all Jewish laws and traditions were appropriate for gentile Christians. Furthermore, the Roman Empire was tearing away at the economic, social, cultural, and spiritual fabric of both the Jews and the Christians.³³

Christians in the Early Church were seeking transformed relationships, reflecting their desire to find appropriate means and improved approaches to coping with the evils of their day.³⁴ The Early Church had a reformed approach to social structures, seeing the world as corrupt.³⁵ Their rejection of the Roman Empire would, however, come at a great price. The Jews had already come under the scrutiny of Roman repression,³⁶ and Christians had to live under the additional weight of Second Temple Judaism. Where much of society was looking to salvation from Rome or strict adherence to Jewish laws and traditions, Christians were looking for salvation through Jesus Christ and a new reality to arise through divine intervention.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rv 3:19.

²⁷ Rv 3: 20-22.

²⁸ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 86.

²⁹ Horsley and Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom*.

³⁰ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 86.

³¹ Ibid., 87.

³² Acts; Horsley and Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom*.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 73.

³⁵ Acts 2:38-40.

³⁶ Horsley and Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom*.

In addition to providing consideration for the historical, social, cultural, and ideological context of the time period, the message to Laodicea should also be viewed within the context of the entire message of Revelation, especially as it related to the first chapter and the messages for the other churches. The first chapter of Revelation acknowledged that John was their brother who was also enduring persecution.³⁷ This acknowledgement in conjunction with Christ's promises to those who were to become "conquerors" suggests that the churches were being prepared for making choices "between worshiping the beast of Rome, or the one true God"³⁸ and that they would need courage to persevere through even greater persecution.³⁹ Promises of wonderful blessing were to await those who would overcome, and judgment awaited those who would not repent or hold fast to what they had in Christ.⁴⁰

It is most likely that these messages would have been read together in combination to each of the churches, providing local instruction, correction, and encouragement at the same time each congregation could learn about the Church comprehensively. For that reason, it is helpful to acknowledge the similarities and the differences between the messages to each church.

Each of the seven messages was addressed "to the angel of the church,"⁴¹ provided a description of Christ, and indicated Christ's awareness of their activities. The messages consisted of some combination of encouragement, rebuke, blessing, judgment, or approval. They ended with closing remarks making promises to those who would be conquerors, but spoke to everyone:⁴² everyone who had ears was to "listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."⁴³

IV. ANALYSIS

The members of the church of Laodicea had a relationship with John (the writer of Revelation), with the other Christian churches in the surrounding area, with Christ (the head of the church as Lord and Savior), and with God through Christ. They also had social relationships with their communities, which were under the influence of Rome and Second Temple Judaism. These relationships were often at odds with each other, creating confusion and questioning the allegiance of the church to Jesus Christ.

John's revelation, placed in the context of belief in the imminent return of Christ and either his blessings or judgment, would have served to clarify the church's existing state, its responsibilities, and the future outcomes of their present actions. This foresight would have encouraged them to hold on to those aspects of Christianity where they were strong, to make corrections where they were in error, and to have courage in the face of even greater opposition.

³⁷ Rv 1:9.

³⁸ David Cashmore. "Laodicea and the Seven Churches," 16.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Rv 2:1-3:22.

⁴¹ Rv 2:1 -3:22.

⁴² Cashmore, "Laodicea and the Seven Churches."

⁴³ Rv 2:1 -3:22.

John's writings to the seven churches seem most appropriate for the social and political environment at the time of their writing. They also seem consistent with Jesus' view of the future and the revolution He ignited during His ministry.⁴⁴ According to Gary, Jesus viewed the future *creatively* in contrast to the *conventional* or *counter* futures of that day.⁴⁵

As Horsely and Silberman observed, revolutionary response to Roman order was predicated on the harsh political, economic, social, and technological changes thrust upon the Jews as radical change swept the land.⁴⁶ Remaking Galilee, according to these authors, was about the impact of Rome on this fringe community that failed to realize Rome's promises of "prosperity and hope."⁴⁷ They further asserted that Jesus sparked a different kind of revolution: a revolution of hope and confidence through community instead of violence and bloodshed—a spiritual revolution to restore a covenantal system that placed God above all, called for preservation of Israel's legacy, and viewed all people as one family under God.

This "social transformation"⁴⁸ provided freedom and independence from Roman tyranny, as Jesus' disciples dispatched more than a spiritual revolution; they also promoted "a community-oriented political-religious program of renewal."⁴⁹ In contrast to other views on eschatology,⁵⁰ these perspectives focused on generational concerns, not a distant future with surrealistic apocalyptic implications. As a result, they would have evoked strong emotions in the readers and hearers of the messages, which would have helped them to recognize the destructive powers at work in the Roman Empire's attempt to establish a world religion. In association with John's apocalyptic revelation, the early Christian churches were gaining the fortitude they needed to emerge from the shadow of Second Temple Judaism and Roman tyranny.

V. CONTEMPORARY FORESIGHT MODELS

Foresight—in contemporary terms—implies an ability to construct views of the future that incorporate multiple, plausible, and insightful alternatives.⁵¹ The goal of foresight is to provide better, more informed decision making.⁵² It can mitigate uncertainty and help decision makers "move forward with [greater] clarity, creativity, and confidence."⁵³ According to Andy Hines, the process involves framing, scanning,

⁴⁴ Jay Gary, "The Future According to Jesus: A Galilean Model of Foresight," *Futures* 40, no. 7 (September 2008): 630-642.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Jesus rejected both the official, Roman, collaborative, *conventional* (top down) view and the Jewish, nationalistic, dissenting, *counter* (bottom-up) view—providing an alternative that would break the cycle of oppression and rebellion.

⁴⁶ Horsley and Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁰ Ted Peters, *Futures*; Anthony Hoekema, "Recent Trends in Eschatology," in *The Bible and the Future*, 288-316 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁵¹ Andy Hines, "Strategic Foresight: The State of the Art," *Futurist* 40, no. 5 (September–October 2006): 18-21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

forecasting, visioning, planning, and acting. Scenario planning also plays a role; however, Lindgren and Bandhold⁵⁴ noted that forecasting (projection) and visioning (establishing a desired future) are different from scenario planning.

Ralston and Wilson⁵⁵ provided an in-depth process for scenario planning, which facilitates the process of “developing strategies in uncertain times.”⁵⁶ Scenarios provide stories of “what can conceivably happen”⁵⁷ in contrast to expectations and desired outcomes. This distinction makes scenarios more effective at revealing risks and the potential impact of previously unanticipated events. Scenarios also establish a mechanism to identify and plan for the potential vagaries of the future. Furthermore, they provide planners with opportunities “to engage in ‘rehearsals of the future’”⁵⁸ while there is still enough time to adjust. In this way, scenario planning provides a link between futurology and strategy.⁵⁹

As instability and uncertainty intensify, the number of assumptions in planning processes increase,⁶⁰ which amplifies the need for strategic foresight and scenario planning. This is particularly true for circumstances such as crisis management, opportunity management, and risk management.⁶¹ However, because “strategic foresight is based on the principle of planning from the future back to the present,”⁶² it is atypical, requires new approaches, and demands different ways of thinking.

Strategic foresight is a process that learns from the past, uses the present to determine critical issues for the future, and then visualizes the future in multiple ways to positively influence the present and the future.⁶³ It also provides a proving ground for strategies. Testing strategies, according to Heijden,⁶⁴ involves running planning ideas through multiple futures to see how they hold up to a range of possibilities. This process helps to identify internal strengths and weaknesses in the context of a variety of external opportunities and threats. But being prepared for the future requires much more. It requires a different world view than those that dominate current thinking.⁶⁵ Beyond the technological, economic, and political consequences are social and moral

⁵⁴ Mats Lindgren and Hans Bandhold, “Scenario Planning: An Introductory Overview,” in *Scenario Planning: The Link Between Future and Strategy*, 21-46 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁵⁵ Bill Ralston and Ian Wilson, *The Scenario Planning Handbook: Developing Strategies in Uncertain Times* (Mason, OH: South-Western Educational, 2006).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, cover page.

⁵⁷ Lindgren and Bandhold, “Scenario Planning,” 21.

⁵⁸ Ralston and Wilson, *The Scenario Planning Handbook*, 25.

⁵⁹ Lindgren and Bandhold, “Scenario Planning,” 26.

⁶⁰ James Dewar, *Assumption-Based Planning: A Tool for Reducing Avoidable Surprises* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶¹ Nick Marsh, Mike McAllum, and Dominique Purcell, “Why Strategic Foresight?” (a briefing paper, Christian Futures Network, 2002).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶³ Hines, “Strategic Foresight”; Richard Slaughter, “Futures Concepts,” *Futures* 25, no. 3 (April 1993): 289-314; Hugh Courtney, Jane Kirkland, and Patrick Viguierie, “Strategy Under Uncertainty,” *Harvard Business Review* 75, no. 6 (November–December 1997): 67-79.; Marsh et al., “Why Strategic Foresight.”

⁶⁴ Kees Van der Heijden, “Option Planning,” in *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*, 273-284 (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2005).

⁶⁵ Slaughter, “Futures Concepts.”

consequences that must not be ignored if we are to have a brighter future for everyone.⁶⁶

“Decisions have long-term consequences,”⁶⁷ and our worldviews affect our attitudes towards the choices we make and the alternatives we choose. The dominance of instrumental rationality, which has encouraged unlimited growth in infrastructure, “cannot supply useful insights about ethics, meanings, or purposes.”⁶⁸ Western cultures and an industrialized worldview—through reductionism, desacralization of nature, and cultural editing—have trampled the transcendent goals of meaningful life.⁶⁹ Unless we can learn to “dance with systems”⁷⁰ and “dragons”⁷¹ with a worldview that is focused on sustainability, respect for our planet, and respect for all of its inhabitants, foresight could lead to further concentration of wealth, power, and corruption. Clearly, this is not what God intended.⁷²

VI. COMPARISON OF FORESIGHT MODELS

John’s vision of the future was born out of prophetic, apocalyptic revelation and the images he saw on the island of Patmos. His revelation for the seven churches of Asia was unlike anything experienced in present times. It provided a dramatic reflection of the churches’ conditions and an image of the future that awaited those that would overcome the problems they faced. This foreknowledge encouraged the seven churches of Asia to make adjustments, or course corrections, to get back onto an acceptable path; a path that would lead them to conquer the ills of their day and to prosper in God’s kingdom. It gave them courage in the face of the world’s oppression and uncertainty.

Futurology and present day foresight applications deal with what the world is becoming and the challenges faced by extreme changes in the modern world. However, as reflected in the previous section, contemporary foresight models don’t presume prophetic foreknowledge. They frame key issues, scan the environment for important trends, and envision possible outcomes as part of a comprehensive strategic foresight process that facilitates planning and informed action.⁷³ This is essential for dealing with radical change, globalization, and the complexity of economic, political, technological, ecological, and social systems. Contemporary foresight models involve a human process⁷⁴ that facilitates decision making under extreme uncertainty.⁷⁵ Nonetheless,

⁶⁶ Ibid.; “Global Challenges for Humanity,” The Millennium Project, <http://www.millennium-project.org/millennium/challenges.html> (accessed May 24, 2010).

⁶⁷ Slaughter, “Futures Concepts,” 290.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 300.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Donella Meadows, “Dancing with Systems,” Sustainability Institute, <http://www.sustainer.org/pubs/Dancing.html> (accessed May 24, 2010).

⁷¹ James Canton, *The Extreme Future: The Top Trends that will Reshape the World for the Next 5, 10, and 20 Years* (New York: Dutton, 2006), 301-329.

⁷² The Holy Bible.

⁷³ Hines, “Strategic Foresight.”

⁷⁴ Jay Gary, “The Future of Faith FAQ,” Christian Futures Network, <http://www.christianfutures.com/faq.shtml> (accessed July 11, 2010). Dr. Gary points out that not all futurology is secular.

⁷⁵ Courtney et al., “Strategy Under Uncertainty”; Canton, *The Extreme Future*.

there are moral components and consequences to the social, technological, economic, environmental, and political choices being made.⁷⁶

Similar to the time of Christ, contemporary people and governments influence the future by their daily actions. Just as the Roman Empire and the early Christian Church altered the lives of people and their future, actions that are taken today will have both a current and a future impact. What should not be forgotten is that the goal of the Roman Empire was radically different than the vision of the early Christian Church. This is no trivial matter, as today's foresight applications have the potential to facilitate very different kinds of outcomes. The search for prosperity and hope for the future can lead people to take very different approaches, depending upon their values and the cultural lens they use to view the future.

When futurists "project visions of the kind of utopia they desire in place of oblivion . . . they sound a good deal like those who project the Christian vision of the Kingdom of God."⁷⁷ Nevertheless, for contemporary foresight applications to be in accordance with God's will and purpose, they must consider the moral and spiritual implications of their outcomes. This can only happen when preferred futures are in conformity with God's eternal principles and the desired outcomes identified in the Bible. A secular, humanistic approach that focuses on selfish motives is destined to fall short of an approach that integrates Biblical wisdom and principles.⁷⁸ For this reason, it makes sense to employ the best of both.

Futurology and foresight applications can help to make better sense out of the world. Revelation and eschatology can help people to stay on track as they plan for the future, shaping it in the image that God has given and allowing for Christ to have a transformational impact throughout time.⁷⁹ Both the accuracy of strategic foresight applications and the outcomes of their resultant strategies will remain uncertain. What can be certain is the hope that can be placed in God when those applications remain in conformity with His ultimate design.

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The world is very different today than it was in the time of John. As a result, foresight models are much different than they were then. Nevertheless, the revelatory model in John's apocalypse can do much to inform present-day foresight applications. For example, John's dramatic image of the future had a powerful influence that created a sense of urgency. An extreme vision of the future can be a powerful motivator, but it needs to be shared in a context that is applicable and understandable—both locally and globally.

Readers of John's Revelation were provoked and encouraged to abide in the will of God, caring for one another and living in obedience. Present-day foresight models can also have a powerful influence through the development of dramatic images of the

⁷⁶ Ted Peters, *Futures*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Jay Gary, "The Future According to Jesus: A Galilean Model of Foresight," *Futures* 40, no. 7 (September 2008): 630-642.

future; however, the moral concerns for remaining in God's will and protecting His creation should not be overlooked.

Under the Roman Empire, the Jews and the Christians had limited options. Today, particularly in the United States, there is far more freedom. It is extremely important that people exercise their rights to that freedom in a way that is pleasing to God, honoring the stewardship responsibilities that all Christians have to the Creator and His creation.

Although a case might be made that foresight and eschatology have little to do with each other, they do share common ground. For example, according to Ted Peters,⁸⁰ "the future is an intrinsically moral concern,"⁸¹ and "future consciousness itself is an intensely religious phenomenon,"⁸² tying together the desperate streams of futurology and eschatology. This would be hard to accept if not for application of the "hermeneutic of culture,"⁸³ which broadens religion to include the ultimate concerns of a culture even when they are secularly based.

If "futures is the science that seeks to understand the future and provide the tools whereby humans can obtain greater control over their own destiny,"⁸⁴ then like eschatology, which comes at the present from a different direction,⁸⁵ it still concerns itself with the future outcome of the human race. If we accept that futurology helps us to become, and eschatology helps us to appreciate the coming of God's final kingdom, there is ample territory for the streams to overlap. As Slaughter⁸⁶ noted, worldviews and attitudes play a significant role in decisions made about the future. Sustainability—referring to both ecological and eternal sustainability—cannot be reached without an ultimate concern for the human race. Futurology presents many different futures; however, without values and eschatology, the "ultimate concerns" for the human race will not be met.⁸⁷ It is here where the past, the present, and the future merge.

The past is history, and the future is uncertain; however, getting caught up with complacency or fear can undermine both the present and the future.⁸⁸ What people can do is learn from the past, and, with hope for the future, use today to plan for a better tomorrow. Both futurology and eschatology can help.

Respect for the planet and its inhabitants demands better understanding of not only what has been done, but what will be done. Here, futurology can provide foresight to leverage opportunities, while avoiding destructive tendencies. However, futurology, mingled with grounded and hopeful eschatology, provides a platform for truly constructive action in our present age.⁸⁹ Today we can help shape the future, but an ever-present assurance of God's love can encourage us to live in harmony as

⁸⁰ Peters, *Futures*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

⁸⁶ Slaughter, "Futures Concepts."

⁸⁷ Peters, *Futures*; Slaughter, "Futures Concepts."

⁸⁸ Peters, *Futures*. As Peters points out, lack of hope can cause people to discount the future and focus only on the present, which can lead to selfish, destructive behaviors.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

responsible stewards, applying what we have learned from the past, and looking forward to our future in Christ Jesus.⁹⁰

By framing the present with eschatology that is grounded in the past,⁹¹ ever present,⁹² and looks to the certain hope of God through Jesus Christ in the future, we can have greater assurance of living according to God's will.⁹³ Eschatology provides an image of our ultimate future as God intends it to be.⁹⁴ Christ (born in the past), through "The Word," provides proof of God's divinity, connecting the past and the future to the present: in Christ's example we see God's future kingdom.⁹⁵ Futurology identifies future risks resulting from our present actions;⁹⁶ however, as Peters noted, people must make decisions: will we "revel for a few short decades in one last gluttonous technological fling . . . or invoke a new sense of ecological thrift"⁹⁷ and commitment to our descendant's wellbeing. The present value of these streams merging reflects hope for a *sure* future,⁹⁸ judgment for present ills,⁹⁹ better understanding of consequences,¹⁰⁰ encouragement to change,¹⁰¹ and directions on how to do so.¹⁰² Separated, these streams could leave Christians without present insight into the damage they might

⁹⁰ Hoekema, "Recent Trends in Eschatology." As Hoekema notes, "The kingdom of God is both present and future. Biblical eschatology, in other words, if it is to be complete, must deal with both present realities and future hopes" (p. 316).

⁹¹ Gary, "The Future According to Jesus"; Horsley and Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom.*"

⁹² Hoekema, "Recent Trends in Eschatology." Hoekema revealed that Christ's arrival—in one sense—ushered in the kingdom of God, which made it present for those in the time of Christ and a past historical event for us. However, through Christ's saving grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God lives in all those who have been redeemed, with a corresponding obligation to live sanctified lives. Peters, *Futures*. As Peters noted, God's future kingdom was made present in Christ: "He is tomorrow's bread given us today" (p. 52). "God's eschatological future became present and . . . the hopes of humanity for a new and better world have received divine confirmation" (p. 63). "In Christ God has promised vindication to those who seek to make his future kingdom a present reality. Hope based on this promise gives us the power to live resurrected lives now" (p. 66).

⁹³ Hoekema, "Recent Trends in Eschatology." Hoekema traversed the chasms between realized eschatology, present obligation, and future eschatology in a way that places us in the overlap between Christ's arrival and the coming of God's kingdom. While we can debate whether the kingdom of God is a divine gift that is yet to come or a realized eschatology obtained through Christ's arrival, acceptance of Christ places a present obligation on those who are redeemed to honor God by reflecting the kingdom of God right here and right now, regardless of what is in store for the future.

⁹⁴ Peters, *Futures*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* Peters used Scriptures to reveal the combined evidence of eye witness accounts to the empty tomb and personal encounters after Christ's resurrection. For Jesus, the Easter resurrection was the arrival, or preactualization, of the future reality of God's kingdom. For us, according to Peters, it was the promise "of the eschatological future itself" (p. 54).

⁹⁶ Slaughter, "Futures Concepts."

⁹⁷ Peters, *Futures*, 177.

⁹⁸ Based on God's divine promise for restoration, resurrection, and a heavenly kingdom.

⁹⁹ Acknowledging that we live in a sick and sinful world.

¹⁰⁰ Through the tools of futurology, which predict the future ills of threatening trends, and through recognition that sin creates separation from God.

¹⁰¹ Recognizing that our current, Western values have the potential to destroy our planet, that we can make changes to improve things in the near term, and that we may hope for God's kingdom, which—in its fullness—is yet to come.

¹⁰² Futurology, eschatology, and the foresight to combine them with Biblical wisdom and godly character can steer us in the right direction and give us hope for a better future—near term and ultimately.

cause,¹⁰³ or futurists without the moral values to steer future efforts in accordance with the will of God.¹⁰⁴ Christians are *presently* responsible for a *future* that—in the *interim* between now and the coming of God’s ultimate kingdom—is consistent with his absolute will. Using “the tools of *futurum*. . . eschatology commits us to *adventus* . . . [and] a future that is both human and divine.”¹⁰⁵

About the Author

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¹⁰³ Referring to the social and ecological ramifications of not caring appropriately for our planet or its inhabitants.

¹⁰⁴ Without moral values, futurology can be used for selfish motives.

¹⁰⁵ Peters, *Futures*. Peters states, “Christian eschatology . . . commits us to endeavor within the provisional matrix of present human affairs to plan with the tools of *futurum*.” It also commits us to “the absolute future that continually reminds us of the preliminary character of present efforts compared to the radical transformation to be brought about by God’s Power” (p. 180).