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REVIEWERS
CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGIES AND THEIR RELATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Janel M. Curry-Roper*
Central University of Iowa

Contemporary Protestant Christians hold differing views of the future that affect their attitudes toward the environment. Dispensationalism tends to use ecological deterioration as a gauge to predict Christ's return and the end of the present age. Postmillennialism teaches that the natural and human world will improve up to Christ's return and puts responsibility on Christians for that improvement. Amillennialism and Historic Premillennialism teach that the possibility of ecological and social improvement is limited in the present age though Christians are to attempt to heal the earth's wounds to show evidence of a future renewed earth. Key Worda: religion, futurology, Christianity, ecology, environment.

The study of the geography of religion has traditionally included such topics as the diffusion of religion and the study of concrete expressions of religious ideology on the landscape (Bjorklund 1964; Heatwole 1989). Questions of beliefs about the relationship between mankind and nature—inherently religious questions—have made up an additional area of inquiry within the subdiscipline (Glacken 1967; Tuan 1971a). Christianity's concern with defining mankind's relationship to nature is especially relevant to current environmental debates.

Christianity and the ideas which lay behind it is a religion and a philosophy of creation. It is preoccupied with the Creator, with the things he created and their relationships to him and among themselves (Glacken 1967, 168).

Scholars have much discussed the impact of Judeo-Christian beliefs on the natural environment (White 1967; Nash 1982). James Watt's rise to power as Secretary of the Interior in 1981 and the growing political power of fundamentalists in the United States have focused the debate on Christian views of the future. Critics claim that Christians who take the Bible at face value see stewardship as only temporary because they believe in the second coming of Christ and the end of this age (Steinhart 1981).

More distinctions need to be made in this area of Christian thought. Differing views of the future within the Christian community reflect differing views about the meaning of the earth apart from mankind. In attempting to make these distinctions and interpret their meaning I hope to challenge geographers to continue to approach the study of religion and geography at the belief level and to apply this approach to contemporary subcultures in our society. Understanding theological systems gives depth to the study of the concrete expressions of these systems on the landscape.

The study of belief systems should not be limited to those traditionally defined as religious systems. The same fundamental belief level underlies all segments of society. These beliefs can be described as religious because "they embrace hope for the future, faith in God or man, and love for self or others" (Goudzwaard 1979, xx).

Furthermore, while I look at Christian views of the future, or eschatologies, it must be understood that all individuals have eschatologies. In contrast to Lynn White's blame of the Judeo-Christian tradition, a group of scholars concerned about environmental degradation have pointed to Western Civilization's secular

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beliefs, particularly views of the future, as the source of our environmental problems. The underlying fundamental belief they blame for this destruction is faith in progress, especially expressed in technological advancement (Goudzwaard 1979; Griffioen 1987; Schuurman 1977, 1980). Egbert Schuurman, a specialist in the philosophy of technology at the Free University of Amsterdam, described this hope for the future as one in which mankind’s vision is not of a “new earth,” but of total happiness achieved by mankind’s own efforts with the aid of science, technology and economic powers. Christian eschatology has been replaced by an expectation of technological salvation (Schuurman 1977, 34). In the words of Oswald Spengler, “Technology is eternal and everlasting like God the Father; it redeems mankind like the Son, and it illuminates us like the Holy Spirit” (Schuurman 1977, 34).

I choose to look at several orthodox, or conservative, Christian belief systems. Though they differ from one another, they are similar in their appeal to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures to shed light on contemporary problems. They also share a belief in God’s creation of the universe, the fall of humans and nature from perfection with the sin of Adam and Eve, the restoration or redemption of mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the return of Christ. They believe these truths are the key to all understanding (Armstrong 1973; Harder 1971; Klotz 1984; VanDyke 1985).

If we Christians are guilty of bifurcating man and nature it is not because we have followed the Holy Scriptures so closely. . . . Only from a perspective as rich as the biblical one can either the glories or tragedies of ourselves and our planet be really understood. Only from this sort of stance can a genuinely radical attack on pollution be made (Harder 1971, 130-31).

These conservative Christians are distinct from liberals who view Scripture, and thus the future, quite differently. Kenneth Cauthan (1971, 314), from a liberal perspective, states that Scripture is authoritative only insofar as it gives us “clarifying images” that can be interpreted by reason. The church’s views of the future should then be mere visions to hold in front of society—a vision of “organic wholeness” and a vision of “planetary brotherhood at peace with nature and with God” (Cauthan 1971, 322-23, 328).

Another contemporary movement that reflects a similar use of Scripture is Creation-Centered Spirituality. One of the leaders of this movement is Catholic priest Matthew Fox. He rejects orthodox fall-redemption Christianity as anti-environmental. In its place he proposes a more “panentheistic” religion within Christianity (Fox 1984, 85). While these movements and belief systems are interesting in themselves, I put them aside for my purposes. They tend to draw on organic analogies of nature and mankind that, as Glacken (1967, 165) has pointed out, are not characteristic of traditional Judeo-Christian thought.

I attempt to analyze Christian views of the future in terms of their own inner consistency and the outworking of their belief systems. I regard this means of analysis as the only way to judge their environmental sensitivity. My purpose is not to explain all behavior of all individuals of each position. As Tuan (1971b) has pointed out, a gap exists between expressed attitude toward environment and actual practice. But I believe there is a general relationship, and its analysis must begin with a thorough understanding of environmental beliefs.

I have chosen to use a mix of popular and academic works in my analysis. I wanted to capture the popular expressions of the three major positions presented. But also, the positions varied in the richness of their writings on environment, requiring me to use different types of documentation.

In this paper I look at examples of three major contemporary views of the future held by conservative Protestants and the relationship of these views to environmental stewardship. Some simplification has been necessary as I have tried to draw out what seem to be the most pertinent
elements from eschatological doctrines rather than the finer distinctions. I have left almost untreated earlier historical stages or variations of these positions. They have been included in Santmire’s (1985) work. Another obvious reason is that the groundswell of literature on ecology and environment is a comparatively recent phenomenon. More explicit links of eschatological doctrine with environmental practice can be discerned only since the environmental movement surfaced, and only in connection with still-vital elements within eschatological traditions.

Every eschatology is but one component of a theological system, the other components of which may also have greater or lesser effects on cultural issues such as ecological concern. This complication of the task of analysis raises a challenge for added reflection and more refined methodologies, but it by no means totally undermines the thrust of this analysis. I believe that eschatology is the most ecologically decisive component of a theological system. It influences adherents’ actions and determines their views of mankind, their bodies, souls, and worldviews (Schwarz 1972, 27). To explore these worldviews scholars must, as Santmire (1985, 14) has said, “probe, as best we can, the complex and nuanced depth and breadth of lived human experience . . . tacit as well as articulated, . . . as that experience gives testimony about human identity in relationship to God and nature.”

The four most dominant current eschatological positions are dispensational premillennialism, postmillennialism, amillennialism, and historic premillennialism. But due to the similarity of their worldviews I will discuss amillennialism and historic premillennialism as one. Individuals who hold any of these three basic views believe that Christ will return in the future, resulting in the disappearance of sin and death, that in the meantime the natural world is in a sinful state along with mankind, and that relationships between creatures are distorted by this sin. W. D. Davies (1974, 155–56) described the issues that remain open to interpretation beyond these basic tenets of the faith:

If there was to be a “place” for salvation, where was that to be, in heaven or on earth after that earth had been scorched? Or again what was meant by the “new heaven”? Was the old earth to be undone and then remade out of a new substance? Or was the earth in its present material form to undergo a transformation? Or was the earth, without undergoing dissolution, to be purified? Or was “the new” to be wholly unrelated to the old?

Overview: Three Panoramas of the Future

Dispensational premillennialism holds that the history of redemption is divided into seven dispensations. It teaches that Jesus, when he came, offered the Jewish people a restored theocracy on earth. When they rejected him, this messianic kingdom was postponed and the dispensation of the church was parenthetically interposed. Certain signs are to precede the return of Christ, including the rapture of believers (their removal from the earth to heaven), the preaching of the gospel to all nations, a great apostasy, wars, famines, earthquakes, the appearance of the antichrist, and “the great tribulation.” Only then will Christ return and reign as King, fulfilling God’s plan for the Jews by establishing an earthly theocracy for a thousand years. During his reign the Jews will be converted to Christ and nature will share in the blessings by being abundantly productive. A rebellion will almost overcome the saints at the end of the thousand-year reign, followed by judgment and the establishment of the eternal states of heaven and hell (Clouse 1977, 7–8).

The dispensational premillennial hermeneutic interprets the New Testament and Christ through an ostensibly literal reading of the Old Testament. Hebrew prophecy is interpreted literalistically, implying a distinction between Israel and the Christian church with a separate destiny for each. The Old Testament pictures
the future of Israel as God’s people living in a theocratic kingdom in Palestine. Dispensationalism teaches that Christ offered such a kingdom to the Israel of his day (Hoyt 1977b, 84). This literal kingdom was suspended at Pentecost and will remain so until the return of Christ (Hoyt 1977b, 90). At that time Christ will set up his millennial kingdom in Palestine—thus the looking to the Middle East in anticipation of Christ’s return and the use of Old Testament prophecy to show signs of the coming (Hoyt 1977a, 41–46). On the other hand, believers in Christ during the present dispensation will go to heaven and have no further relation to the present earth.

In contrast, postmillennialism, amillennialism, and historic premillennialism use a hermeneutic that interprets the Old Testament in light of Christ’s life, teachings, death, and resurrection (Ladd 1977, 21). This hermeneutic is based on the premise that the New Testament authors themselves frequently interpreted the Old Testament prophecies in a way not suggested by the Old Testament context (Ladd 1977, 20). The New Testament applies Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament church and so identifies the church as the only legitimate heir of all that the old covenant promised to Israel—the church is now, in spirit, the real Israel (Provan 1987). The ethnically Jewish people and the place of Palestine have no special prophetic significance. The reign of Christ is not limited to a theocracy in Israel in the millennium, but rather, is a spiritual reign present now (Ladd 1977, 29–30). Since Old Testament prophecy is not interpreted literallyistically, it is not required to answer all questions about the future. Instead, prophecy is “to enable God’s people to live in the present in light of the future” (Ladd 1977, 39). Its purpose is not to predict, but to remind believers of their ultimate hope and destiny.

Postmillennialism holds that the kingdom of God is being extended through Christian teaching and preaching. This activity will cause the world to be Christianized and result in a long period of peace and prosperity called the millennium. That new age will not be essentially different from the present. It will emerge as an increasing proportion of the world’s inhabitants are converted and become obedient to Christianity, as evil is reduced, and as the church assumes greater importance. The millennium will close with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment (Clouse 1977, 8).

In contrast to dispensational premillennialism and postmillennialism—one maintaining the ascendency of evil in this age and the other the ascendency of good—amillennialism and historic premillennialism teach a simultaneous growth of both good and evil in the world that will culminate in the second coming of Christ. Judgment will follow. These positions hold that the kingdom of God is now present in the world through the work of the Holy Spirit but is yet incomplete. The future final universal reign of God on the earth will occur after Christ’s return, judgment, and the establishment of a new heaven and new earth (Clouse 1977, 9).

Dispensational Premillennialism

Those who tend to hold the dispensational premillennial position are often members of churches identifying themselves as fundamentalists (e.g., General Association of Regular Baptists), but also of more centrist evangelical denominations (e.g., Conservative Baptist Association). Of all the positions, this one is certainly the most strident and, according to political scientist Michael Barkum (1983, 259–60), represents a larger subculture than opponents supposed. With the advent of modern publishing techniques, the popular following has increased. Hal Lindsey, author of the most popular book illustrating this position, was named bestselling nonfiction author of the decade of the 1970s by the New York Times (Martin 1982, 31). His book, The Late Great Planet Earth, has sold over eighteen million copies (Lindsey 1989, 296). The most recent edition of The Scofield Reference Bible (Sco-
field 1967), the most influential source of this viewpoint, has sold well over two million copies (Martin 1982, 32).

Dispensationalism maintains that the present general direction of history is toward societal and ecological deterioration. The only hope for societal structures is the return of Christ. Such an event is essential given dispensationalism’s view of God’s power and the power of Satan at present. Currently God rules only in the individual hearts and minds of believers and can only bring salvation to the “soul.” God’s power over the broader society and its problems is thought to be properly manifest only in the form of a theocracy—whether during the era of the ancient Hebrew monarchies or in a future 1000-year reign of Christ (Chafer 1947; Darby n.d.; Peters 1972; Ryrie 1965, 172; Scofield 1917). Little can be done at present. Satan has the upper hand and humankind can only hope and pray for the end to come. This view of history and supposed lack of power reinforce a dualistic worldview in which the soul and those things “spiritual” belong to God while the remainder is “of the world” and not redeemable.

Dispensationalism expects the worst and almost welcomes it, because the worse things get, the sooner the rapture (removal of believers) may be expected. One of the more well-known personages of the last century who came under the influence of dispensationalism, Dwight L. Moody, thought that it was no use to attempt to work for this world. He declared it was a wreck bound to sink, and the only thing left to do was to save as many of the crew and passengers as possible (Lovelace 1979, 377).

The magazine Faith for the Family, a publication of Bob Jones University (an educational institution advocating the dispensational premillennial position), provides a particularly forceful exhibit of this worldview.

Christianize the World? Forget It!
Evangelize the world, Christian. That is your mission in the world.
Try to bring Christian values, morals, precepts, and standards upon a lost world and you’re wasting your time. The Bible has already told you the world will get worse, not better (II Timothy 3:19) (Christianize the World? Forget It! 1981, 33).

The tendency in dispensationalism, given that the world is getting irremediably worse and humans have no power over it, is to emphasize prophecy and the prediction of the end. Dispensationalism teaches that all kinds of prophecies must yet be fulfilled in a future great tribulation before Christ returns, and many others in the millennium that follows. The problem is to correlate symbols in the biblical text with current events in order to ascertain where we are along the line of historical development (Barkum 1983, 267).

Dispensationalism uses information on environmental pollution, concern over the environmental impact of nuclear weapons, and so on, to show how prophecy is being fulfilled, and thus it fosters no active, stewardly response—only idle waiting. Many examples of this outlook exist in popular literature. Chuck Smith (1980), in his book End Times, lists some signs of the times. The destruction of the ozone layer fulfills Revelation 16, which tells of the fourth vial poured out by the angel during the great tribulation when power is given to the sun to scorch men with fire—a description of the ultraviolet rays penetrating the atmosphere. He explains overpopulation as fulfilling another prophecy: “Jesus said that famines would be one of the signs of the end of the world.” DDT accumulating in the oceans fulfills yet another prophecy in Revelation where John saw a mountain “burning with fire fall into the sea, and the third part of the creatures living within the sea were destroyed.” Smith concludes that the only escape from these problems would be Jesus Christ snatching his followers out of this world (Smith 1980, 69–72, 84).

The literalistic hermeneutic of dispensationalism leads to the absence of a clear land ethic and, ironically, makes dispensationalists prey to secular ideologies. If the New Testament has nothing to say about things not explicitly mentioned,
then Christian faith and ethics are limited to personal piety. This restriction allows the balance of one’s activities to be left untouched by redemption (Van Leeuwen 1989, 4).

James Watt is a case in point. Environmentalists complained that Watt’s religious views caused him to see no future for the earth and thus led him to have no concern for the environment. The most notorious quote of Watt was taken out of context, however. When asked about preserving the land for future generations, he said “Absolutely ... I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns, whatever it is we have to manage with a skill to have resources needed for future generations” (Douglas 1981, 258). The latter part of the quote was often deleted, ironically causing the real problem of Watt’s views to be overlooked.

His restriction on the sphere of life affected by his faith meant that Watt had acted out of the secular ideologies of nationalism and economics. Nationalism was evident in his concern that the United States was not aggressive enough in developing resources and was dangerously dependent on foreign suppliers (Drew 1981, 119). His decisions, such as loosening of environmental protection regulations, reflected the exaltation of economic values based dominantly on the concept of the free market. He could see no value in a resource outside of its market value to large industries and its ability to bring continued economic growth according to select indicators (Douglas 1981, 170). Watt restricted his religious values to personal piety. Thus his problem was not dispensational beliefs per se, but the result of the literalistic interpretation of the Bible which necessarily accompanies it and leaves areas of life not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures untouched by the religious belief system.

Susan Bratton (1983, 232) noted the same exaltation of economics by Watt in her analysis of his writings. She pointed out, further, his lack of mention of sin as an ingredient in environmental degradation—an indication of the substitution of secular ideologies for sacred when it came to the articulation of a philosophy of natural resource use. The point here is not to criticize James Watt, but to point out tendencies of proponents of dispensational premillennialism to subordinate secular ideologies for biblical reasoning.

Such substitution can occasionally yield a more vigorous hybrid. One noteworthy instance is the work of the German dispensationalist, Erich Sauer. His book *The King of the Earth,* displays an exceptional appreciation for nature and a great store of scientific knowledge (Sauer 1981). Sauer shows an appreciation of nature that, for its scope, is seldom paralleled. However, his unique blend of “earthly” and eschatological doctrines is an unstable compound. The former was derived evidently from a German scientific education and wide personal learning. His dispensational scenario of the future, however, motivationally undermines the force of his appreciation for nature. Sauer illustrates the presence of those within dispensationalism who do speak out for good stewardship of resources (Manahan 1989; Roberts 1975). However, these writers continue to stress the belief that the earth is just the backdrop for human history and the Christian faith has only to do with human history. Within this view one can still be ecologically minded, but only with a call to be a “responsible steward” (Santomire 1985, 4). The emphasis is yet on human history, individual salvation, and “tracing ever more faithfully the steps of Christ” (Manahan 1989, 18), without an appreciation for the meaning of nature itself. Furthermore, dispensational premillennialism is not of itself a motivating force for action; rather it has to be purposefully set aside in order to justify ecologically responsible action (Roberts 1975, 131).

What, then, is the meaning of Christ’s return for the natural world in dispensationalism? The earth seems to have no place in the future—heaven is sought after, not earth. The earth is not a significant part of the redemption plan that began
with Christ's resurrection. No theology of the earth exists in contemporary dispensational premillennial thought. The earth is destroyed or perhaps inherited by Jews while Christians inherit heaven. Any reference to the New Earth is always very abstract, with an emphasis on the New Jerusalem but none on the nonhuman world (Sauer 1954, 19; Walvoord 1959, 333–34). Redemption is limited to mankind, who will live in the heavenly city, which expresses perfectly the essence of all "heavenly life" (Sauer 1954, 55). The earth is not seen as of interest to God for the home of mankind but as a temporary dwelling. In the words of a popular chorus, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through."

Postmillennialism

Present-day postmillennialism is found mainly among conservative Presbyterian Calvinists (e.g., Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Presbyterian Church in America). In stark contrast to dispensationalism, postmillennialism teaches that the kingdom of God will be extended in the present age, creating a new earth. A prominent postmillennialist declares, "There is no kingdom for us, if we are not in the kingdom now; there is no new creation we can look forward to in eternity, if we are outside the new creation now" (Rushdoony 1970, 17). The kingdom of God is perceived as on the rise against evil, and the direction of history is toward God gradually uprooting unbelievers from the land while moving Christians into a full inheritance of the earth (Chilton 1985, 53). Again, in contrast to dispensationalism, Christians are responsible for undoing the work of the fall of mankind and creating the new earth—possible since the resurrection of Christ brought about the first fruits of the new humanity (Rushdoony 1970, 215). Thus "... not by evading conflict, responsibility, and suffering, but by assuming it, do Christians and the Church gain their inheritance" (Rushdoony 1970, 17). Michael Gjalstra (1981, 160) goes so far as to say that survival is a matter of faith in God. If Christians do not survive the future crises of Western Civilization, something else will take dominion, and then Christians will have to begin once again the arduous task of building the kingdom.

This forward-looking stance comes from the belief that biblical prophecy is fulfilled almost totally in the present age. Furthermore, mankind has an important part to play in the fulfillment of those prophecies (Rushdoony 1982, 418). The question then becomes how redemption is extended to the natural world, assuming that the natural world changed as a result of the fall into sin, much as mankind did. Rousas Rushdoony, one contemporary postmillennialist who is gaining influence in the evangelical community (Frame 1989; Clapp 1987), deals directly with this question. David Chilton (1985), in his book Paradise Restored, presents similar views (Chilton 1985). Both Rushdoony and Chilton represent a movement called Reconstructivism. Christian reconstructionists came to the public's attention most recently in "God and Politics: On Earth as it is in Heaven," a Public Broadcasting Service series by Bill Moyers. Their existence and growing influence are also being recognized by the popular press (Shupe 1989, A14).

Rushdoony believes that the purpose of the Christian is to undo the work of the fall, including the fall of nature. This can be done by mankind's subjecting itself to what he somewhat gratuitously calls "biblical law," whereby humans can fulfill their calling to subdue the earth and restore nature to God's will (Rushdoony 1973, 728). By drawing upon Hebrew law, Rushdoony holds a view like that described by Kay (1988, 320), where any crime against God and society (lack of adherence to "biblical law"); is a crime against the nonhuman world. The views of contemporary postmillennialists are not to be confused with those of nineteenth century liberal postmillennialists who attributed such redemptive results to the presumed forces of social evolution and not to the supposed efficacy of legal obedi-
ence. Moreover, most orthodox postmillennialists have credited true preaching of the gospel with these expected results. Rushdoony believes in a relationship between human sin and natural events. If mankind is obedient, the earth will be fruitful. "As man moves out from under the curse into God's blessing, God will cause the very wilderness to change, so that springs and rivers will break out in the mountains and streams in the desert" (Rushdoony 1973, 312). All of this will occur in this age, according to Rushdoony, if we submit to Old Testament law. Thus, Rushdoony and other postmillennialists, like Chilton, seem to encourage a strong land ethic. Rushdoony demands careful development of the earth and reminds us that the earth is to be treated with respect because it is under the sovereignty of God (Rushdoony 1973, 805; 1982, 313). Certainly there is no otherworldliness here. Their land ethic, however, seems closely, if woodenly, strapped to Old Testament law as represented in the Hebrew Scriptures, which Kay points out has limited application in time and space (Kay 1988, 327). This limitation keeps these postmillennialists from a full and mature elaboration of a viable land ethic. Furthermore, they have uncritically accepted many aspects of present-day ideologies as part of their belief system, much like dispensationalists. Most notable is reconstructionist support of individualistic free-market capitalism, which becomes the overriding belief system that thoroughly conditions their land ethic.

The return of Christ takes on significance only for the hope it gives for the resurrection of the dead and for the final elimination of evil—evil that has been increasingly restrained up to that time. Christ's return has little meaning for the creation, which by then should have been virtually redeemed by the extension of the kingdom of God through obedience to biblical law.

All postmillennialists have tremendous hopes as to what can be accomplished in this age. Rushdoony puts those hopes in biblical law. As redeemed mankind obeys that law the kingdom of God will come progressively to earth. For all practical purposes Rushdoony seems to think mankind's habitual transgressions, rather than endemic mortality of constitution, totally account for the state of humanity and nature.

Amillennialism and Historic Premillennialism

Amillennialism and historic premillennialism have been the most productive of these three main traditions in writings about the environment and mankind's relationship to it (Granberg-Michaelson 1984; Reformed Theology and Creation's Integrity 1989; Schaeffer 1970; Wilkinson 1980). Several authors from these traditions point to their stands as important elements in this concern with the environment (Granberg-Michaelson 1984, 105–107; Redekop 1986, 395). Most members of mainline denominations who hold to orthodox Christianity also hold one of these two positions. It is an especially strong component of Reformed Calvinist (e.g., Christian Reformed Church in North America; Reformed Church in America) and Anabaptist (e.g., Mennonite) theologies.

I put both these positions together as one because they are very similar in their hermeneutic, view of prophecy, view of the kingdom of God, and thus expectations of the future (Ladd 1977, 27; Hoeckema 1977, 55). George Eldon Ladd (1959, 1964, 1968) discusses their main difference—the belief of historic premillennialists in an intermediate period of history between this present time, and the final new heaven and earth that emerges after final judgment by God. Both amillennialism and historic premillennialism hold that the old sinful world is still present, but that Christ inaugurated a new age. Both exist simultaneously and do battle at present. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, Satan can be beaten back—evidence of the power of God in this age—but he cannot be totally subdued until the return of Christ. This era can best be described as one in which the war escalates.
between the powers of light and darkness, and the battle lines are constantly changing. Under these conditions the return of Christ could come at any moment, with no sign or change in conditions as warnings, leaving no room for speculation. Christ's miracles showed evidence of the present new age that he inaugurated. They demonstrated the restoration that will be completed when he returns—a victory over evil assured because of Christ's resurrection overcoming death, the sign of the fall (Frey et al. 1983, 194, 107; Ridderbos 1973).

Amillennialism and historic premillennialism teach the presence of the kingdom of God now and the power to accomplish change in this present age. Work for change is motivated by hope in the future return of Christ. Hans Schwarz (1974, 335) states,

The incentive to strive for a better future is derived from our hope for a final realization of this future in the eschaton. This means that the goals of our ecological concern can be derived from the imitation of Jesus of Nazareth (restorer), while the incentive and the limitations for our involvement can only appropriately be derived from the expectation of Jesus Christ. The proper understanding of the interconnectedness between the imitation of Jesus and the expectation of Jesus Christ can lead us to an appropriate evaluation and to a proper attitude toward our present ecological crisis. It shows that we presently live in an apocalyptic age and that there is reason for hope and not for despair.

This hope is key to the land ethic, or any development of ethical positions, as expressed by those that hold these two positions (Schwarz 1972, 56; Zerbe 1989, 13). This faith in Christ's return motivates amillennialists and historic premillennialists to work towards healing in areas affected by the fall—healing of the divisions between person and person, mankind and nature, and among organisms within the natural realm (Schaeffer 1970, 66, 68). It is a call to exhibit rightly dominion—to be an example of substantial healing to the world (Schaeffer 1970, 81–82).

Oddi Hannes Steck (1978, 291–92) has called these actions proclamations "of the saving inclination of God toward everything he has created."

Nature is included in mankind's call to heal because of God's concern and power over all (Aay 1972, 13). As amillennialism and historic premillennialism point out, Christ had authority over the forces of nature; among other things he rebuked the wind and told it to be quiet (Mark 4:35–41), and he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). His kingdom knows no bounds (Ridderbos 1962; Schronenboer 1973, 71). Accordingly, acts of restoration and healing should extend to our whole created environment. Through these acts, amillenialism and historic premillennialism teach, humankind shows evidence of the future universal fulfillment of prophecy that can only be partially fulfilled in this age (Ridderbos 1962, 65–70, 115–21).

What is the meaning of the earth in amillennialism? In dispensationalism it has little meaning except symbolic or illustrative. In postmillennialism it virtually is the new earth. According to several amillennial authors, the Bible allows no separation between the spiritual and the material (Granberg-Michaelson 1981, 15). All is under the sovereignty of God and equal in its createdness (Schaeffer 1970, 47). All the creation waits on its Creator for what it needs. All the creation is in need of redemption and restoration (Burr 1989, 12; Steen 1983, 299). Nature has value outside of mankind because it is a creation of God—in that way no different from humans. "We should realize, and train people in our churches to realize, that on the side of creation and on the side of God's infinity and our finitude—we really are one with the tree!" (Schaeffer 1970, 54).

Though humanity and nature are equal in createdness, amillennialism and historic premillennialism teach that mankind is different from the rest of the creation in that mankind was made in God's own image and after his likeness. The "heart"—the biblical figure for the hidden center of the personality—allows fellowship with God; mankind became a Word-receiver, a listening being, and also an answering being (Steen 1983, 301).
Mankind was created with this uniqueness and given dominion over the rest of nature with the directive to make it fruitful and develop it. Thus nature is dependent on mankind and God (Schrotenboer 1973, 75). When mankind fell, death entered the natural order (Kuyper 1974, 3). Conversely, according to these eschatologies, nature looks expectantly for a day of redemption—not by mankind, but for redemption of mankind from the fall. The earth's own salvation will come through the salvation of mankind by Christ (Schrotenboer 1973, 76). This redemption of the creation will result in the transformation of those features of the natural order, like thorns and thistles, that came about through the fall into sin.

Reformed and Anabaptist amillennialism and historic premillennialism hold that this very earth will be redeemed. Whereas Lutheran amillennialism teaches total annihilation of this earth, after which will come a new earth, the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions hold that this earth and its systems will not be utterly annihilated, any more than the planet itself was obliterated by the flood in Noah's day (Künnehn 1965). Paul Erb, a Mennonite theologian, writes that nature was one with mankind in the fall, and so also in redemption; like mankind, the earth will be purified and revitalized (Erb 1955, 119).

Herman Dooyeweerd, a contemporary Dutch Christian philosopher of the Reformed amillennial camp, held that time and the physical earth were indissolubly linked. The earth could not exist without "earthly" time, nor time without creation (Steen 1983, 290). Thus if it is this very earth that is redeemed, then time continues on the new earth after judgment, and the cultural activity associated with the present continues also (Steen 1983, 287–88, 290). Christ, the center of the new age to come, moved to heaven with the ascension, though his influence is also with his people through the Holy Spirit on the earth. The center of the kingdom will move to this earth when Christ returns (Steen 1983, 295). This gives the present physical environment meaning as both the present and future home of mankind. The nature of things in this age in some sense determines the nature of things in the next (Van Leeuwen 1989, 10).

While waiting for the final universal kingdom to come, amillennialism and historic premillennialism teach that Christians are to carry out the central unity of the law—love and service to God and neighbor—in all their diverse tasks and responsibilities. This law extends to the natural environment which is dependent on mankind for its liberation and for their exhibiting such love and service on its behalf, thus giving evidence of the future universal reign of Christ and elimination of death. Such a faith, according to Australian theologian Robert Brinsmead (1984, 176), "reconciles us to our inseparable identity with the earth and all creatures great and small. It inspires us to regard the earth as something to be cared for and enjoyed. Like ourselves it is not yet what it ought to be. But with us it hastens to meet our common destiny when God at last says, 'Behold, I make all things new.'"

Conclusion

Individuals who hold any of the four views presented believe that the earth and mankind are in a fallen state characterized by death and distorted relationships within the natural order. Representatives of all four positions also believe that Christ will return in the future and the result will be a world without sin and death. They would concur with Lesslie Newbigin who said that "belief in eschatology without belief in a real End is like belief in religion without belief in God" (Erb 1955, 121–22). Beyond this point, differences emerge.

Dispensationalism teaches that the world is getting worse and uses environmental problems to predict its end. It holds that nothing can ever be done to reverse this downward direction of history, and in fact the acceleration of this trend is evidence that Christ's return is imminent. Since heaven, not the earth, is to be in-
herited by believers upon Christ’s return, the present natural world is of little theological consequence. W. D. Davies (1974, 121) would describe it as a theology that totally transcendentalizes land.

Postmillennialism as expressed in the writings of Rushdoony (1970, 1973, 1982) teaches that obedience to biblical law will restore fallen nature to its previous edenic state. It is up to Christians to realize the possibilities. History is seen as progressive, with this very earth as the present and future home of mankind.

Amillennialism and historic premillennialism maintain that there is, and will be, a battle between good and evil up to Christ’s return. Some restoration of the fallen natural world is possible during this time because of the presence of the Holy Spirit—the foretaste of the kingdom of God. Christians are called to work at this restoration in order to give evidence of the future universal restoration of this very earth that will take place when Christ returns. In this way earth retains its geographic dimension yet has transcendental connotations also (Davies 1974, 121).

This paper deals largely with the interface between ideology and biblical interpretation and with their effects on worldview. I attempt to give more analysis and depth to an area of discussion often characterized by stereotyping.

Most studies on the relationship between religion and environmental attitudes deal with vague notions like belief in God and church affiliation (Foster and Jeays 1981). Such studies are insufficient. Though I attempt to get beyond such vague notions in this study, I offer limited evidence of how these religious beliefs affect practice, an area where more research is needed. Paterson’s (1987) thoughtful study of the relationship between belief and action in a study of farming practices among the members of the Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta distinguishes among Christian belief systems and correlates these to farming practices. A similar study needs to be done with Christian eschatologies. At present I can only reflect on what actions seem to be associated with various worldviews. Individual exceptions may represent conflicts between worldview and action that are “embarrassing to observe for they expose our intellectual failure to make the connection, and perhaps also our hypocrisy; moreover, they cannot always be resolved” (Tuan 1971b).

**Literature Cited**


THE PROFESSIONAL GEOGRAPHER


JANET CURRY-ROPER is Assistant Professor of Geography at Central University of Iowa, Pella, IA. Her research interests include agriculture and natural resource policy.