

When Theology, Missiology and Futurology Clash

by Frank Kaleb Jansen

Theologians say: “Teach the nations!” Missiologists proclaim: “We must finish the job!” Futurists predict: “The end is near!” What has a beginning must have an end. The creation will one day wear out, the heavens shall pass away, the elements shall melt, the oceans shall be no more. There shall be a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. The tabernacle of God shall be with man and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people. (Rev. 21:3)

The Bible presents both the beginning and the end of time. It also presents *He who is* the Alpha and Omega—the first and the last, the beginning and the end. This of course does not mean that Jesus *has* a beginning nor an end since He is from eternity to eternity.

Christians of every age have asked the same question as the disciples did: “Tell us, when shall these things be?” When theologians, prophets and missiologists evaluate the time-line of the Church, Matthew 24 is probably the most quoted and referred to passage in the Bible. Echoes from great preachers like A.B. Simpson have sounded through our century: “Let us bring back the King,” meaning that through the completion of world evangelization we can “hasten the day of the Lord”.

We are rapidly approaching the third millennium, and many are those who wish the task of world evangelization could be completed *so that Jesus can return*. “Closure” has become a buzzword among missiologists. In many parts of the world there are great expectations regarding the advent of the year of the Lord AD 2000.

Dedicated Christians have

always looked forward to and loved “His appearance,” and rightfully so. Most of the revivals in the last 150 years have each had eschatology as a major focus, if not as their main theme. Many organizations and whole denominations believe that this time is the end and that the advent of Christ’s return is imminent. In the past some have neglected their education or addressing the ills of society due to a sense of urgency to evangelize. Some have even borrowed huge amounts of money and mortgaged their homes to invest in evangelization for the purpose of *bringing back the King*.

However a good question to ask, even if it appears to be a bit heretical! How biblical or theologically true is this? Are we interpreting Jesus’s words in the Olive Discourse correctly or are we trying to make God’s plan fit our own thinking?

When I did the mission atlas “Target EARTH” (1989), Matt. 24 was my outline for the book. Therefore, the 24th chapter of Matthew is probably the chapter I personally have dealt with more than anything else in the whole of Scripture. The topics and statistics were meant for Christians to watch and even to quantify and to qualify “the signs of the times”. In the closing words of the book I wrote... “there is a lingering whisper in my ear, a music that fills my mind: Yes I am coming soon. Amen, come Lord Jesus, come!

I still watch these signs, and can tell you about the increasing magnitude and frequency of earthquakes, floods and disasters, (16 major ones in the 1960’s, 29 in the 1970’s, 70 in 1980’s, a number that tends towards more than doubling in the 1990’s). California

alone will suffer more disasters than the whole world did in the 1960’s. (A disaster is defined by the UN as an event that has killed at least 10 people or affected at least 100.)

More than one million were killed by cyclones in the last 25 years, and almost half a million by floods. The waves of the North Atlantic have increased an average of 25% since the 1950’s. Hunger and pestilence are rampant. HIV/AIDS is expected to reach 40 million infected people by AD 2000 and its estimated cost worldwide is 500,000,000,000 (US dollars) per year. In addition, 1.3 million have died from drought.

People against people

In spite of talks of “peace and no danger” and the “end of the cold war”, there is increased rise in nationalism racism, and more ethnic strife than ever before. The iron clad hand of communism has been replaced by lawlessness and “mafia-ism”. International organized crime and drug traffic add to more suffering. Chernobyl is not a disaster of the past! The covered up reactor is heating up again, and we can only hope and pray that scientists find a permanent solution before the next blow out “dwarfs the first one” Divorce, family strife, babies killed in their mothers’ wombs, euthanasia, etc. are signs of the global disintegration of societies, communities and families.

The heavens are being rolled back like a scroll. Man has polluted the atmosphere, the ozone layer is being depleted. The people of Australia and New Zealand have had to cover up because the life giving sun has become an enemy causing skin cancer. I keep

statistics on all these “signs” and on many more others. I, (like Peter, Paul and the first Christians) feel that I can await the rapture any time, day or night. I have dedicated my life to see *every* people adopted and reached, provided information and encouraged the worldwide body of believers to proclaim the gospel where it is still not heard., I believe that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall one day cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.

However, some of us as evangelical Christians have a tendency to focus on the dark side of developments. As if to say: The worse it gets—the better, because this is what the Bible tells us will be the sign of His return. In our cultural near-sightedness we tend to forget that these dramas have always pulsed throughout history and affected parts of our globe that we did not even know about until years later.

In order to be a timely spokesman for the Lord, I need to report the good news, as well as the bad.

The Good News

* Never before has there been revival and Church growth like in our time.

* Never before has the Church been globally present in every nation,

* Never before has the Church been as multiracial as today.

* Never before has the Word of God been available for 93-95% of mankind.

* Never before have so many nations had their own freedom as today. The number of UN nations has grown from 50 to 184, primarily an increase in democracies where people have a better prospect for self-determination than ever before.

* Never before has the world been safer from the threat of a nuclear holocaust.

* Never before has life expectancy risen so high, or infant mortality so low; increased educational attainment and

improved nutrition are happening at unprecedented pace,— three times faster in the developing countries of today than it once happened in the developed world.

* Never before has so much humanity enjoyed better physical conditions than today. In 1960, 70% of humanity resided in dismal human conditions: only 32% suffer such conditions in the 1990's.

* Never before has the global domestic product (GDP) increased from \$3 trillion to \$22 trillion –7 times— while the world population has barely doubled. The per capita income has increased three times.

* Never before has most of the world had immediate access to more communications i.e., telephone, television and fax.

* Never before has modern travel been able to bring us to almost any spot on earth in shorter time than it took Charles Lindberg to cross the Atlantic (33 hours).

* Never before has technological ingenuity, medical breakthroughs, and space exploration been as astronomical, doubling our knowledge every 3 years.

* Never before has global military spending been as low; dramatically low even after years of increased spending.

* Never before have three quarters of the world's population lived under relatively pluralistic and democratic societies.

The challenge of Matt 24:14

With this as a backdrop, I boldly share some thoughts with you that even might challenge the Greek scholars among missiologists and futurists. To get the full understanding of Matt. 24:14 we have to understand the Greek words used as well as see their context. An interlinear, romanized translation, looks like this:

kai keruchthesetai — **and shall be proclaimed**, tuto te evangelion — **this gospel**, tes basileias — **of the kingdom**, en hole te oikumene— **in whole the inhabited world**, eis martyron— **as testimony**, pasin tois ethnesin— **for all peoples**, kai tote eksei— **and then shall come**, to telos — **the end**.

* The “proclaiming” action has a form—*kerusso*. *Keruxis* is a herald, a spokesman with authority from the king. The messenger is not the important focus— his message is. His right and duty is to proclaim it loudly and publicly. *Kerusso* is not a teaching or a discussion of the truth. It is a proclamation and a statement of the fact. “This has happened!”.

*“...of this gospel...”—*evangelion*
This word for the contemporary Greek speaker was the technical term for good news about a victory from the battlefield i.e., VICTORY IS WON! It could also be good political news or personal news. Only a true *kyrios*—an emperor or lord could order a herald to proclaim such news. So we can say that Jesus' time was full of gospels. It was therefore a bold challenge to the existing order for Him to commission the proclamation ..of this gospel

*“...tes basileias...”—the kingdom
This gospel of the kingdom is more than the proclamation of salvation, grace and mercy for sinners. The Kingdom is the main theme of Jesus' teachings and runs like a scarlet tread through the entire New Testament, reaching its completion in the book of Revelation. *Basileia* is the domain of the *Basilev*—the legitimate king—as compared and contrasted to the domain of a *Tyrannos*—a ruler who has grabbed the power by force or cunning. Jesus proclaims that the King is here, and he demonstrates for the demonic powers as well as to men, the King's authority, “*but if I will by the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.*” (Luke 11:20)

The gospel that Paul proclaimed to the Gentiles to make them obedient in word and deed “*through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.*” Is the same power that Jesus had when he said “*ALL power is given unto me in heaven and IN EARTH.*” That and nothing less, is the gospel from the King of Kings, the rightful ruler on earth and in the heavens about his Kingdom, and we believers are commissioned to proclaim it.

*“... *eis martyria*...”—as a testimony. The word is from the legal language, although in church history it gave name to the costliest of testimonies, the martyr—to stand firm on the truth until death. The *martyria* is a first hand personal witness about what really has happened. It is not a scholarly observation or a piece of art about Jesus, how good and beautiful that may be. Only those born into the Kingdom “*through water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5) can truly testify about the Kingdom and what they have received. Only they are equipped to testify first hand about what has happened.

*“... *en hole te oikumene*...”—in the whole (inhabited) world. The interesting word here is *oikumene* that comes from *oikos*=house or home. I believe Jesus is actually saying that this gospel of the Kingdom shall be proclaimed to EVERY HOME. The bureaucrats in the former USSR knew that they had 469,254 homes in their land. I used to have a map that filled the whole wall in my office where every village in the Soviet Union was plotted. Matt.24:14 is not Jesus’ visionary plan, nor is he suggesting the idea and need of evangelizing—he is stating the fact as the true prophet—IT SHALL BE proclaimed. “It ought to be done, it can be done, and it will be done!” as D. L. Moody said.

* “... *pasin tois ethnosin*...”—all the peoples before the throne in heaven. The concept of peoples becomes the slogan for the people group movement. The rallying cry for the AD 2000 Movement is A Church for Every people, and, The Gospel for Every Person. They truly have God’s perspective, because

The end... refers to an era of fulfillment after the gospel of the kingdom has been proclaimed in power for all peoples in every habitat. The point will come when nations have not only heard the good news, but they have been disciplined—taught to obey Jesus’ every command.

He seeks every soul and His Son died for every person. Salvation is provided for anyone and everyone that will receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. Our Lord is not happy with a few Christians, 2% or 20%, in every people group. He himself became the true *martyria* for all mankind so that none should perish. The children of Abraham in heaven shall be as numerous as the stars in heaven or the sand on the sea shore, a multitude greater than any one can count; redeemed from all peoples of the earth.

When this gospel is proclaimed as a testimony, *hole te oikumene*, and *pasin tois ethnosin*, then the end will come—*tote eksei te telos!* The key word here of course is *telos*-end. But what is the precise meaning of “the end” here in this passage?

The disciples had just asked Jesus (v.3) “...and what shall be the signs of your coming, and the end of the world?” Here the Greek word is not *telos*, but *sun-teleta*. In verse 13 Jesus talks about *he that shall endure unto the end*

(*telos*), shall be saved. “End” seems to have a different meanings in these contexts. The disciples wanted to know about “the end of the world.”

The phrase “day of the Lord” is another description used in both Old and New Testaments. Peter writes dramatically about that in his letters, referring to the prophet Joel and to Jesus’ prophecy in (Matt. 24:27-29 and 25:30-32) or “*Dies Irae*”—the day of wrath—as Catholics sing about in the Latin mass. “*But of that day and hour knoweth no man.*” Jesus says in Matt. 24: 36 “*No, not the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the father only.*” Apparently that day was hidden from him and was so incomprehensible that the translator of the old King James authorized version even omitted the original Greek words of the manuscript “*ude ho hylos*”—neither the Son.

Jesus consequently refuses to satisfy the disciples curiosity. *It is not for you to know* as He had said in Acts 1:7. I thank God for the wisdom, not to reveal to the disciples, what we now know, that the end they were asking about was more than 1900 years away! But He reminded them, and so to us: “Watch, stay awake, be ready at any time.” This has been and will always be His message to the Church, because “*I come in the hour you think not!*”

Allow me to suggest that the “*telos*” Jesus is talking about in verse 13 is not the end of the world (as the end of time), but rather has a different meaning. He could not have meant only those few who happened to live, and endure, when the end of the world comes, would be saved.

So, what is the most likely meaning of “end” in Matt. 24:14? Originally *telos* meant a “turning point” or the “high point” from the root *tel*—turn around. Progressively it got the meaning of goal

completion or the end. In classic Greek it is used to describe reaching the full development, as in to be an adult, no longer being a child or a youth. It also has the meaning of closure, for instance death. Primarily in Greek philosophy the word stands for completion, to be complete, to reach a goal, often meaning the same as the word *agathos*—good, excellent.

The New Testament has a whole group of words related to *telos* (used 41 times) like *teleiotes* (2 times), *teleiosis* (2 times), *teleiotes* (1 time), *telejoo* (24 times), *telesforse* (1 time), *teleo* (26 times), *teleios* (20 times). The meanings center around the concept: To reach a goal, to make complete, to fulfill, to close or to finish something. When Paul writes that Christ is the *telos* of the law (Rom. 10:4), he does not want to say that the law is terminated, rather that the law has come to an end because Christ is the fulfillment of the law. (Not one hyphen of law shall perish.)

I Tim 1:5 says “*Now the end (telos) of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart....*” The end of the age has this dual meaning—the age of fulfill-

ment, reaching the intended purpose for this era, as well as the closing of this age.

It seems that Jesus is not talking about the end or the point in time when time is no more. Neither is he talking about the day of judgment, the “day of the Lord,” nor is he talking about the rapture or His return in glory in this verse. Those things are addressed later on in the Olivet Discourse.

Rather the end is something coming, not a point in time. It refers to an era of fulfillment after the gospel of the kingdom has been proclaimed in power for all peoples in every habitat. The point will come when nations have not only heard the good news, but they have been discipled—taught to obey Jesus’ every command.

The end therefore does not happen as a sudden moment of history when the last people group is “reached”. It rather begins when the light comes to those who are in darkness, when they are set free from Satan’s power. In some sense the day Jesus received me in his kingdom was the end (*telos*) of my life as a sinner, and the coming of the era

of fulfillment of God’s intended purpose for my life—the great turning point in my life. So it is in some degree the same for each people group, tribe, nation, language and people.

I know many of my readers may now react because to change the understanding of “*the end*” to make it mean *the beginning* is fairly radical. But we need to remember that neither my understanding, or for that matter anyone’s understanding of eschatology will change God’s plans in the least. The point is this: we have a theology that make us ready any time and any day. That a missiology that make us press on to proclaim Jesus where he is not known—gives us hope purpose and comfort rather than fear and despair for the future.

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What Can Agencies Expect from the Clearinghouse in 1995?

Since its inception in November of 1989, the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse (AAPC) has made substantial progress toward its goal of linking mission agencies with churches wishing to adopt unreached peoples. The AAPC is now in a position to more directly help mission agencies benefit from our efforts. We have accomplished the following:

- * Documented the most detailed and up-to-date assessment of how far we have come in taking the Gospel to every people. The first “list” entitled, *A Church For Every People* was published in 1993. A second publication, in two volumes, published in 1994 entitled *An Inquiry into the Progress of World Evangelization Toward Anno Domini 2000*, lists all peoples of the world.

- * Compiled a database of the world’s unreached peoples, which includes all those which have been “selected” by mission agencies.

- * Compiled a database of churches adopting unreached peoples.

- * Compiled more than 1,500 people profiles. We also house and maintain peoples files developed by MARC in

the 1970’s and 80’s.

- * Developed an integrative database system. (Read article: *Computerized Integrative Unreached Peoples Information System* for more in-depth information.)

- * Developed generic AAP resources such as prayer profiles, full-color prayer cards, and AAP commitment certificates for churches and individuals.

- * Enlisted approximately 90 mission agencies to participate in the Clearinghouse.

- * Global Network. The Clearinghouse is developing similar organizations in the major regions of the world. Currently, there are Clearinghouses in Korea, India, Norway, and South Africa. Others projected for development are Latin America, Sweden, Australia, Nigeria, New Zealand, North Africa, Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

In the last 24 months the Clearinghouse has handled more than 1,300 generic AAP inquiries from individuals and churches and almost 1,000 people specific inquiries. The Clearinghouse is near completion of providing an information and response system that will allow information flow to participating agencies and churches.