

reNEWS

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Living on a Millennial Boundary

by Earl F. Palmer

In the autumn of 1939, C. S. Lewis gave a speech at Oxford University to students and faculty that he titled "Learning in Wartime." It could have been titled "Thoughts about the Possibility of the End of the World."

Everyone in the Oxford University Church of St. Mary the Virgin at that evening service was deeply worried about the very survival of western civilization in the face of a brutal invasion of Poland by the Nazi regime that had plunged the world into war. Students wondered what they should do about their education; some even speculated that history was nearing its boundary with eternity, and therefore they had questions about the viability of their present life as students of Latin or history or medicine. Would there be time to finish their courses? Lewis squarely faced, as a Christian, their questions about the future. These are some of his words he said that evening:

You would be surprised if you knew how soon one begins to feel the shortness of the tether: of how many things, even in middle life, we have to say "No time for that," "Too late now," and "Not for me." But Nature herself forbids you to share that experience. A more Christian attitude, which can be attained at any age, is that of leaving futurity in God's hands. We may as well, for God will certainly retain it whether we leave it to Him or not. Never, in peace or war, commit your virtue or your happiness to the future. Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment "as to the Lord." It is only our daily bread that we are encouraged to ask for. The present is the only time in which any duty can be done or any grace received.

Lewis learned this view of history from Jesus Christ and St. Paul. Our Lord had warned his disciples not to speculate about the timing of the boundary either of our own lives or of history itself. When we think it

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Fear Not

Living on a Millennial Boundary

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over, we realize that our Lord's exhortation is wise and realistic advice in our favor. "Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour" (Matthew 24: 42,44).

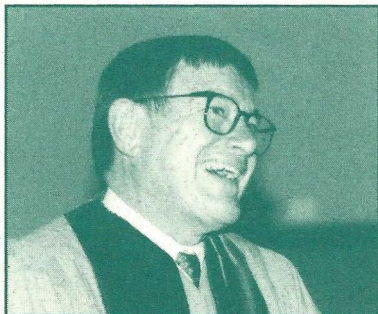
The discipleship teaching throughout the New Testament is clear: We are to live in obedience to the Gospel as present-tense Christians, wide awake and carrying on the ministry that God has given us to do, leaving the time-frame boundaries in his hands. We are not to worry about shortness-of-time issues nor about the time it takes to invest the gifts of God's love and faithfulness in the lives of people here and now. There is time, since time is on our side because we work and live within the hours, days, weeks, and years that belong to the Lord of time.

Therefore Christians are the ones who are able to relax and live without the desperate panic that crowds in on the human spirit when time is reduced to a theoretical chart. Time becomes the real lord of our lives it always terrorizes us. This is true when it is framed in our mind by either a religious scheme that we decide to trust or a secular scheme that we just accept because everyone else does. In both instances these time dogmas become a poor substitute for the living relationship with Jesus Christ the Lord.

I believe St. Paul has this in mind when he encourages his friends at Philippi to put their weight down upon the solid faithfulness of Jesus Christ: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4: 4-7).

When our year ends and another year begins, whether it is the boundary of a century or a millennium, we who trust in the Lord of Time should live on and through that boundary in the same way as on any other boundary, in daily gratitude and in daily responsibility as a disciple of Jesus Christ. As St. Augustine put it, "O God who art ever at work and ever at rest, may we be ever at work and ever at rest." Because of Christ

we are not a people of timetables or charts or predictions, but we are a people of relationships with God and with each other. We leave the future in God's hands. We might as well, because the future is in God's hands whether we leave it there or not. *✠*



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The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.

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