

The Next One Thousand Years Of Christianity

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Look around you. In any city, even an old one, all that is visible now was not visible a century ago. Old houses get new skins, inside and out. Buildings come and go. Even in the wilderness, individual trees, bushes, and grass thrive and die, while entire ecologies shift across the landscape in a matter of a thousand years. Meadows morph into woods, woods age into mature forests. No matter where you stand, what you see is change. Our short lives blind us to this constant inconstancy.

If we accept continual change in the past we must accept continual change in the future. More so because everywhere the rate of change is increasing. This new neck-snapping acceleration is driven primarily by new technologies. As long as change happened over the span of many generations there was no sense of the future as a destination. The “future” arrived only when change sped up until it was noticeable within an individual’s lifetime. When your world was different from your parents, then you had to talk about the future. A relentless avalanche of new technology means that we now live not in the present but in the future.

The Christian church has changed significantly over time. The church in the year 1000 AD would not have been very recognizable to an ordinary Christian today. Certainly a core set of beliefs and values would remain unchanged, but much about daily life, spiritual perspective, and church-wide activity would be alien. One measurable and significant example would be the church’s attitude toward Jews. One thousand years ago official church doctrine and widespread popular sentiment declared Jews an anathema and they were treated as subhuman and worse. The fact that today a major supporter of an all Jewish state are conservative Christians would have been a laughable joke in 1000 AD. Or even two hundred years ago.

In many other dimensions the church has shifted its course in the last 1,000 years. Ten centuries ago very few Christians were literate, so reading the Bible did not play a large role in everyday church life. Back then one’s denominational belief was almost 100% inherited from one’s parents. The geographically largest denomination was the Nestorian church, which has, for the most part, now disappeared. Sainthood had meaning, as did the concept of purgatory. Monasticism was considered a noble calling. Heretics were executed for public entertainment. There was no sense of an archeological or historical record of Biblical events. The raging religious controversies of the time were not about abortion and homosexuality, but whether the Spirit emanated from the Father and Son, or the Father alone, and whether indulgences (spiritual pardons from priests, often tied to donations) were legitimate.

Clearly a devout medieval Christian dropped into a mid-morning service at a progressive church today would not recognize his faith. The strong sensual music, the focus on Bible-reading, the unadorned architecture, the lack of ornate ritual, the conversational tone of the sermon – all would

be baffling at best. Getting into a discussion with our visitor would not ease him much either. A contemporary Christian's familiarity with the Scriptures, their sense of history, their great emphasis on the self, the heavily mediated context of their belief, and even the degree to which fundamental assumptions of their religion have been baked into the culture at large, would confuse the 10th century Christian, who lived in a world where only 18% of the people were fellow believers, even in Europe.

Given the extreme rate of change at work in our culture today it seems reasonable and responsible to expect tremendous change in the Christian church in the next 1000 years. Yet who in the church is preparing for this great shift? Where in the church is the needed longterm perspective? What is the scenario for the next 1,000 years of Christianity? As the wisdom in Proverbs 29:18 reminds us, "Without a vision the people perish."

Only 13 Generations

One thousand years may seem too distant and remote to even contemplate, particularly for busy folk who have trouble making next summer's vacation plans. Ten centuries so exceeds our own lifetime that we want to dismiss it as extraneous and unapproachable, and not worth thinking about. On the other hand, everyone understands a generation, and how values and consequences can flow over many generations. The Bible pays attention to generations. 1 Chronicles is full of generational perspectives. A typical generational roster like the following lists 13 familial generations of father to sons:

Eleazar was the father of Phinehas, Phinehas the father of Abishua, Abishua the father of Bukki, Bukki the father of Uzzi, Uzzi the father of Zerahiah, Zerahiah the father of Meraioth, Meraioth the father of Amariah, Amariah the father of Ahitub, Ahitub the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Ahimaaz, Ahimaaz the father of Azariah, Azariah the father of Johanan

If the average age of fatherhood is 25 years, then this span of 13 generations will reach more than three centuries. But there is another definition of generation besides father/son that might be helpful.

We might count a lifetime as a generation. A generation would go from birth to death, birth to death, and so on for a full 72 years on average. Imagine if we were trying to pass on a treasure and all that was necessary was that one person be alive – if even for a day – during the life of another to transmit it. As long as a person is born before the previous holder dies the generation chain remains unbroken.

I recently constructed such a personal generational chain back 1,000 years. I searched for a notable person who died shortly after I was born. A few minutes on Wikipedia turned up the explorer Sven Hedin. I then found a notable person who was born shortly before Hedin died. And then someone born before he died, and so on. With little effort I can arrange a chain of only 13 people that will reach back 1,000 years.

Me	1952
Sven Hedin, world explorer	1865
William Hooker, early botanist	1785
James Oglethorpe, founder of the state of Georgia	1696
Pope John the III of Poland	1629
Hieronymmous Praetorius, German composer	1560
Andrea Doria, Italian naval commander	1466
Donatello, Italian artist	1386
Peter IV of Aragon	1319
Duccio, Italian painter	1255
Tankei, Japanese sculptor	1173
Roger de Clare, Earl of Hertford	1116
Coloman of Hungary	1070
Robert 1, Duke of Burgundy	1011

None of the notable luminaries in this chain had actually met, so this unbroken circuit is purely conceptual. I was forced to use notable people who were unlikely to cross paths because we have so few historical birth records for ordinary folk. The further back you go, the fewer personal records of any sort, and the more difficult it becomes to make an optimal generation chain. The only people with recorded birth dates are the famous. However unnamed people in ordinary families could easily form a relational chain with the same span, with a great grandson arriving before the great grandfather dies. We could easily imagine the grandfather picking up the infant, and perhaps in some indirect way transmitting the wisdom of his grandfather to this next generation. We might further imagine a 70-year person standing with his arms outstretched in each direction – from the past of his birth to the future of his death – fingertips touching the previous generation and the following generation. With a chain of outstretched hands, each about 70 years long, we need only line up 13 people, fingertip to fingertip, to have them stretch their lives over 1,000 years.

This means that the next 1,000 years is only 13 generations away. Calculated this way it doesn't seem so distant, because this span of humans could fit around a dinner table. We could hold the list of 13 names, linking us and the year 3000 AD, in our head, much like the list of 13 generations just quoted from 1 Chronicles. In terms of lifetimes – which are steadily increasing due to medical progress – 10 centuries is just next door.

The Last 1,000 Years

As close as it is, the change we can expect in the next 13 generations will be far greater than the change experienced in the last 13 generations. Most of this change is driven by technology, just as it has been in the past. By far the greatest influence upon the Christian church in the last 1,000 years was the invention, dissemination, and perfection of printing technology. From this innovation flowed literacy, ubiquitous Bibles translated into the local vernacular, universities, historical research, and a culture centered around the book, among many other consequences. Printing transformed the church in many ways, not the least of which was the Protestant revolution. Knowledge was organized by printing technologies into encyclopedias, journals, and societies of experts. These technologies combined with a pursuit of truth and other values fostered by Christian faith to produce the way of thinking we call science, which slowly was refined in the last 400 years.

Until the Renaissance, China invented most of the innovations that found their way to Europe. In some cases China invented things 200 to 1,000 years before Europe re-discovered them. China pioneered breakthrough advances like steel, vaccines, suspension bridges, gunpowder, and of course printing and paper. The one invention China never discovered was the scientific method, which was created by the Christianized west, in part because of the sense of order and rational law which permeated the universe depicted in the Bible. Although it was not visible to either medieval monks or illiterate church goers in the year 1000 AD, science was embedded in the values of the Christian church. It took a few generations of technology to expose and release this force.

There are most likely other gifts embedded in the Christian perspective that have yet to be uncovered by new technology or Christian-based culture. The job of the present generation is to detect the signs of the next gifts and prepare the church to make the most of them. At the same time of course, these new technologies also bring challenges to the Christian church, as they have in the past.

Futurity

Where is the Christian church headed in the next 13 generations? It is impossible to predict the details of how 6 billion free-willed souls living on the planet at this moment, together with the ocean of ideas each of these 6 billion minds can generate, will interact with the extreme change offered by this century's technologies such as genetic engineering, quantum computing, and cognitive sciences. The specifics of the next 1,000 years is unfathomable.

But it is not necessary, nor desired, to predict in detail what the world, or Christianity, will be like in 10 centuries. Even if it were possible, it is not evident whether it would be useful. Imagine if you took a time travel trip back to a church in medieval England around the year 1000 AD. You appear at Mass one Sunday and have a chat with the priest afterwards. You could, of course, describe

exactly the milieu of the year 2000 AD (cars, internet, rock and roll, medicines, obesity) but what could you tell him about our daily lives that would be useful if he wanted to prepare his church or the church at large for the future? What you'd like are some tools for presenting new perspectives.

Three “Thinking Tools” For Aiming Christianity Into The Future:

Large-scale trends

In the year 1000 an awareness of how literacy would increase and become ubiquitous, and how nations and markets would rise in importance, are two examples of large-scale trajectories that, if accepted at that time, could have prepared the church for what was coming. In the 20th century you didn't need to know anything about IBM or Apple to understand what computers did to the culture; all you needed to know was that computers would be half as small, and twice as fast every year. We can look for similar trends at work today. In the long-term careers will become more and more specific, if not tailored for specific individuals. In real dollars the cost of food and other necessities has been dropping for centuries. All trends today point toward more leisure, more abundance of choices. We can't predict what company will win, or what specific technologies will triumph, but we can clearly see that the electronic network of cell phones, TVs, and computers will converge into one global web.

Scenarios

While we cannot predict what will happen in the far future we do know that whatever happens has to be possible and plausible. We can therefore eliminate the impossible from our forecasts, which leaves us only with the possible. The realm of all that is possible is still a very large pool of potential paths and might include such mysterious (but not physically impossible) inventions as flying cars and invisibility cloaks. The other key thing we know about the future is that whatever it is, every stage between today and then must also be possible and plausible. So the story of the next 1,000 years must make sense every step of the way, and any future where a discontinuous breach is required can be rejected. The result of these conditions is that we can imagine the future as a map of hundreds of possible narratives, each one a coherent story beginning today, each one as likely as the other, all bounded by an edge beyond which lies the impossible. The actual future will occupy a small point inside this boundary.

To construct useful scenarios then, we will map out the outer boundaries of plausibility (always remaining just inside the possible), knowing that the actual future will be less extreme than the four corners of extreme plausibility we stake out. So our task is to permit our minds to imagine various coherent stories of the future that are both distinct (pushed to the four corners of plausibility) and still possible. We can then begin to unroll those extreme corners back to today and see what kinds of events, forces, drivers would need to be operating now in order for those scenarios to play out over time. If every Islamic nation today converted to Christianity by 3000 AD, what kind of signs would we need to see now? Likewise, if the US was not a Christian nation in 3000 AD but China was, what trends would we likely detect now?

The problem with Christianity is that for the past 1,000 years it has permitted itself only one scenario of the future: the end of the world in our lifetime. In fact, make that 2,000 years. The first generations of Christians believed the future was short lived, and that it would end in their lifetimes. And the 25 lifetime-generations since then have also believed that the future was short and the world would end in their lifetime. Every generation has legitimately seen signs and wonders indicating an immediate end of the world. The scenario was plausible in every century. It might still happen today, in our lifetime.

The end of the world in our lifetime is a scenario that cannot be rejected. It is as plausible as it has ever been. But in order to fashion a Christianity ready for the next 1000 years, this generation of Christianity must begin to create alternative future scenarios in order to fill out the space of possibilities. By relying on a single scenario of the future for the last 2,000 years, in particular a single scenario that was constantly and decisively wrong, Christianity left the invention and control of the actual future to those outside the church. Relatively few scientists are Christians, and almost no futurists are. By retreating to this unwavering single wrong prediction Christianity has surrendered the future to non-believers.

In a fast-paced time when the future overruns the present every day, when the young spend more time inhabiting what is coming than what is happening, when every corporation and secular institution has a future strategy, the only large entity lacking alternatives for the future is the Christian church. It is still surrendering the future to science fiction authors, corporations, new agers, technologists, and all who understand that we make the future by inventing it. The most dangerous aspect of the single scenario the Christian church clings to is that it denies all other scenarios of the future, in effect denying that it has a future of any sort. Even one alternative scenario to the mono-scenario would break this confinement, and open up the future for Christianity.

Incremental forecasts

The story of the next 1,000 years of Christianity cannot usefully be written just by disclosing the ending – by revealing some picture of life in the year 3000. It has to be written in increments, starting with Act 1, advancing in stages, with the knowledge that the story has a long narrative arc that is played out in many scenes along the way. Our generation's job is not to write the ending, but to begin the story, and lay out some possible themes. The details in Act 2 and Act 3 will have to be completed by generations yet born.

Midway: 2040

We might begin Act I of Christianity's future a mere half generation away, in the year 2040. The year 2040 is a particularly interesting year because a number of disruptive global trends converge about then:

- In the year 2040 most of the world's baby boomers will have died. Baby boomers are a global phenomenon that have inflated the world's population in almost every country and dominated the culture wherever they lived. Their absence will leave open many jobs, but also will remove a huge market for consumables.
- In the year 2040 the world's population numbers will reach its peak (about 8 billion). Shortly after this, the total population on this planet will start to drop and drop and drop. There is no bottom limit and no discernable counter force to prevent this decline. Few countries will have a rising or even stable population. (The US is expected to be the lone exception, due to immigration.) Throughout history we have never seen rising living standards and falling population, so economic disruption of some sort seems likely.
- By the year 2040 the global decrease in population will be accompanied by a rising age wave as the average age of the living increases dramatically. An average age of 50 or even 60 may not be unusual for some areas. This wide-scale aging will burden medical services and overtax the young. But it will also make scarce young people very precious.
- By the year 2040, 80% of humans will live in cities. As recently as 100 years ago only 2% of earthlings lived in cities. This new urban majority means that many villages around the world will be abandoned, or designated as semi-living museums, and culture will be essentially totally urban.
- By the year 2040 China will overtake the US as the world's largest economy. It will have the largest educational system in the world, the most out-bound tourists, the most churches. It will very likely also become a cultural leader.
- By the year 2040 nearly 90% of all humans will be connected via phone and internet to all other humans. In theory anyone can send any other inhabitant on the earth an email or instant message. The web/internet/phone system will be one large machine.
- Extrapolating from current increases in computing power, a true artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to be possible by the year 2040. A workable AI would shift work patterns, immigration patterns, and would lead to theological and cultural disruptions. By some computer scientist's calculations once an AI has been made it would be recruited to invent smarter AIs, which would then make yet smarter AIs in an ever escalating race to extreme intelligence, forever changing the face of society.

The Future Of Christianity

What do these trends mean for Christianity? How will the church fit into this future? Since we can't know for sure, I offer six plausible scenarios, six thought experiments.

1. The center of Christianity will shift west

One hundred years ago there were almost no Christians in Korea. Now 50% of South Koreans identify themselves as Christians. A century ago the percent of Christians in China was unnoticeable. According to David Aikman, author of *Jesus in Beijing*, we can expect 30% of the

population of China to be Christian by 2040. Brother Bakht Singh, a missionary who planted thousands of churches in India, died in 2000. Over 600,000 people attended his funeral. No one in the west has ever heard of him.

On the other hand everyday in Europe an old church is decommissioned. Today African churches send more missionaries to the west than the west sends to Africa. The center of gravity for the global Christian church is shifting quickly.

From the time of Christ to the year 300 the center of Christianity moved from its epicenter in Jerusalem to Armenia, which is the oldest Christian country. By 500 AD the center of the faith had moved west to Greece and Rome. In the next 500 years the center of gravity of the church continued to move further west into Europe, where it became synonymous with culture and art. In the next 1,000 years the center of the Christian church moved even further west into North and South America. While the Pope remained in Europe, all the cultural action, innovation, change, and life in the church was focused in the Americas. By 2000 AD the USA in particular came to see itself as the headquarters of Christian belief, now removed half way around the world from its origins.

But the center of the church continues to move west. As the numbers above suggest, Asia and Africa are experiencing phenomenal rates of Christian church growth. Most of the new Christians in the world born in the next centuries will live in Asia and parts of Africa. The fastest growing churches seem to be in Asia (China and the Asian Tigers), and so the cultural center (newest ideas, most money, largest congregations) of the global body will tend to move west again. Given the speed of church growth in Korea and China, and extending that another 500 years, by the year 2500 the world might identify Christianity as primarily an Asian thing.

If the move west continues as it has for the last 2,000 years, Christianity's center of gravity may keep migrating westward. The new missionaries based in Asia will reach out to unbelievers in the birthplace of Christianity. Eventually the center of gravity leaves Asia and slowly returns to the Mid East. In the next 1000 years the epicenter of Christianity might complete its circumnavigation of the globe and arrive back where it began. As one Chinese missionary said, "We have the view that Chinese missionaries will be part of the mainstream on the highway back to Jerusalem."

These huge demographic swings already in motion suggest several things. One is that unless Christianity in the US becomes less parochial and more global, what happens in North American Christianity in the next 500 years may simply be the side-show. The main event will happen elsewhere around the globe.

2. The varieties of Christianity will continue to increase

From the very first century, Christian discipleship has emphasized personal experience and salvation and therefore a certain freedom of interpretation in belief. Thus the number of creeds, denominations, and varieties of faith have increased steadily from the first days of the church. By

1800 there were 500 self-identifying Christian denominations. In 2007 those who track such things list 40,000 active denominations.

At current rates of increase, there should be 260,000 denominations in the next century. Subtle distinctions, endless permutations and combinations of creeds are bound to increase in a world of abundant choices. When you can get 72 varieties of mustard in the supermarket, choice is accepted. There is no known counter force visible in our culture which would work against increased varieties in Christian approaches.

3. The margins of the Church grow fastest

Some of the fastest growing churches are those at the margins of Christian denominations. The Church of the Latter Day Saints, better known as the Mormon Church, is experiencing fantastic rates of population growth, primarily outside the US. If they continue at present speed, the total population of Mormons will exceed the population of Earth in a thousand years. The Amish and other denominations out of the mainstream are also rising faster than the general Christian population. Growth at the margins has been the rule all along anyway. The Methodists, Pentecostals, and the original Protestants themselves were all marginal churches that experienced rapid initial growth. We should expect the greatest growth in the future to occur from church groups that are either at the margin or outside of the mainstream. Some of these will be considered cults by insiders, heretics by the orthodox, or at best, worrisome experiments that need to be watched carefully.

4. The sphere of empathy continues to expand

Over time, societies have regulated who should be treated well. The family clan has always been inside the circle of our empathy; we treat our brother and sister as we'd treat ourselves. In some societies the circle of empathy was expanded to the tribe as a whole; everyone in the greater tribe was treated like a brother or sister. Jesus revolutionized the boundaries of our sphere of empathy. Under his teachings, we should think of any person – neighbor, stranger, even our enemy – as one of us, to be treated as we'd like ourselves to be treated. It took a long time but eventually Christianity recognized that "anyone" included slaves, and anyone of any race, color, ethnicity. Through the teachings of Jesus, our collective sphere of empathy kept expanding to include all humans of any form, including the imperfect, handicapped, crippled, terminally ill, and even unborn.

This trend is likely to continue. Currently our sphere of empathy is expanding to embrace all other living creatures. The animal rights movement and the environmental stewardship movements are part of this enlarging empathy. While we may not treat an owl like we would treat a brother, we might treat it the way we would if we were an owl. Identifying with the suffering and well-being of animals, both domestic and wild, is likely to get a Christian hearing in the coming centuries. Even the grass, which cannot be confused with our family, can be included in a wider definition of

“ourselves.” The natural world is seen to be our home, and our responsibility. It is ours. For this and other reasons, environmental, ecological, and natural issues will continue to grow in importance in Christian culture.

This enlargement probably won’t stop there. At some point in the next thousand years, perhaps even in the next hundred years, humans will invent some kind of artificial thinking machine. Whether that thinking machine has a conscience, consciousness, free will, or soul remains to be seen. What is certain is that no other event in the history of our culture will have such theological ramifications (except contact with an ET). The debate over what moral standing such a mind would have has already started before it has been invented. How will we know if an AI is conscious? If it is conscious, what does that mean to us as humans? Will we remain special as children of God? What about a soul? The only way these dilemmas will be satisfactorily resolved is if a robot one day stands up in some future church and proclaims, “I too am a child of God!” At that point will the Christian sphere of empathy expand to include them?

There are other puzzles. Forget about robots. What about reengineering the human body, or even human genes? The Christian church is manifestly unprepared for the theological challenges arising from re-making humanity. We already have low-level genetic screening. We have artificially conceived babies, a practice embraced by infertile Christian couples. There are hundreds of identified gene sequences – for dreadful, crippling diseases, as well as for controversial behavior such as alcoholism, addiction, and homosexuality – which many Christians would be happy to eliminate from the genes of their children if they could. And there may be other genes – like the supposed “God gene” which benefits belief – that they would like to add to their lineage. Imagine the temptation for trans-human engineering if there was a prayer gene! Our current understanding of genes and actual human life is rudimentary and probably wrong in many details, but the desire to deliberately mold ourselves and our children will remain a large factor in Christian circles, and so the move towards a transhumanism is likely. But despite the near arrival of these technologies, there is little spiritual guidance for such practices.

5. The spiritual dimension of technology

At the central core of Christianity is the question of the relation between man and God. As Christianity has developed it has begun to question the relation between man, nature and God. What does God think of nature, what should humans think of nature in relation to God? This second order relationship will be one of the primary concerns of the church in the coming decades. But there is a third order relationship only now beginning to emerge, which is: what is the relationship of technology, nature, man and God? What does God think of technology? Is it good, evil, or neutral? If some technology can be evil, then can some technology be holy?

We swim in a sea of ever changing communications technology. We are immersed in a flood of voice, data, text, images, sounds, music, signals, icons, symbols, idols, and intangible entities that seem almost other worldly. Scientists in our research labs come out muttering strange things about quantum effects in matter that seem at first glance to be magical – time travel, black holes,

curved space – findings that turn our ordinary understanding of the world upside down. And tomorrow there will be more of it, and even more the day after. If God is absent in this technological world, modern Christianity will have a hard time.

Of all the challenges one can imagine Christianity facing in the next 1000 years, at least 95% of them will be driven by new technologies. Current hot topics such as contraception, abortion, stem cell therapies, the mainstreaming of pornography are all issues forced by new technologies. These challenges are tame compared to the ones coming.

Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter, SMS – these are solutions, and these are problems. The next generations of Christians will talk this language as easy as we speak English. It took several centuries for Christianity to embrace capitalism and markets, to interpret them in terms of freedom of worship and work, when on the face of it, communism seems more Christ-like. The long-term trend is more technology in the Christian culture; what is missing, and what may take several generations to supply, is an understanding of the spiritual meaning of technology.

6. Relationships with other beliefs

Christianity will have difficulty balancing its deep intolerance of other beliefs and its world-changing tolerance for freedom of belief. Pluralism is in large-scale ascendance around the globe. Intolerance is one of the few qualities not tolerated by civil society. This rising plurality will test Christian allegiance to an eternal truth. Ubiquitous information on the always-on internet, and a direct line to any of the 6 billion souls on earth, make a marketplace of contrasting, if not conflicting, opinions and testimonies. Questioning authority is no longer the rebel's role. It's mainstream. There hasn't been a Hollywood action movie in three decades where the hero did not question authority.

Everything in the future of media tilts it toward questioning and doubt. If Christianity is to swim in this emerging culture and yet keep its certainty of salvation, it has to develop a cultural practice of positive questioning, of active holy doubt, and a clear articulation of what is eternal and what is in flux. This is likely to be constructed not by theologians, but by the members of the world-wide church in a distributed social media context. The wiki-church.

Chief among the other beliefs to be dealt with is Islam. Islam is rising through population growth, rather than converts. In Europe a dying Christian community is being replaced by a growing Islamic community. It is easy to imagine a scenario where Europe becomes Eurabia – mostly Muslim, and only marginally Christian. In other parts of the world Islam has turned radical and militant because of tyrannical politics in the Mid-East nations, and consequential miserable economies, some heavily distorted by oil, which have bankrupted the current generation of youth. Would Islam continue to be militant if these social ills were healed? We don't know. The millions of non-militant moderate Muslim communities of the world, however, suggest an alternative scenario worth considering. On many social issues moderate Islam and conservative Christianity agree.

They are both people of the book. They both honor many of the same prophets. They agree on many religious issues like prayer, sexuality, sin, and family. It is not impossible to imagine Muslims and Christians becoming allies in the inevitable culture wars of the future. It is no more impossible than imagining Christian and Jews would be allies a thousand years ago. One hundred years from now a conservative Christian-Islam alliance might be a serious global political force.

Here And Now

Of course nothing like this may happen, or maybe something even more unimaginable will happen. The point of scenarios is to explore the present. We consider the future in order to design institutions that will do well and good over many generations. To do that we have to have a firm grasp of what is happening now. Sometimes it takes an exercise of extrapolating to a thousand years from now to see what is happening tomorrow. Only by extending a trend can we see if it might endure, or survive in the face of other trends, or if it might provoke an awareness of a trend we could not see before.

The world may end tomorrow in the Rapture. We should be prepared. But the world may not end for another 1000 years. Are we prepared for that? A lot can happen in 1000 years. The web arose and took over our culture in only 15 years! How many of the unmade inventions promised by science fiction will be real in only one century? Yet we can reach into that distant unknown future of 1000 years with only 13 generations.

The bounty of change we reap from science and technology has its roundabout roots in the Christian perspective. Unlike any other ancient book, the Bible aimed our attention from the past into a novel and non-cyclic future. Christianity invented the “Future” with its linear sense of history running from the alpha to the omega, from genesis to the end. A plain reading of the Bible makes it clear that believers should prepare for what comes, and not just in heaven. If you need to reduce it to a bumper sticker try this: The future is what happens until the Rapture comes.

If anyone takes a generational concern for the future of mankind, it should be Christians. If not the followers of Jesus, then who will contemplate that place we are headed? It is written in Joel 1:3: “Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.” The future always begins right now.