

The World to Come : The Millenarian Tradition in Christianity
 Its Origins and Transmission

by

John Corbett

"Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed."

I Corinthians 15,50-52 (Auth. King James Version)

The coming of the Kingdom of God is the central concern of Christianity; everyone can share some of the feeling which inspires these words of Paul's. It is by no means so easy for scholars to come to terms with the millenarian tradition in Christianity - something surprising, perhaps, given the effort which has been expended over the last few decades in the 'pursuit of the millenium', whether it is the Christian millenium of the Middle Ages or the millenium sought by the 'cargo cults' of Melanesia. What follows is an attempt to indicate some shortcomings of the modern scholarship on the millenarian tradition in Christianity and to suggest, in the briefest fashion, some new approaches to the study of this phenomenon. I speak as a Classicist with an interest in social history who has dabbled in biblical studies and semitic philology and made some brief excursions into the Middle Ages. My concern, however, is more with the study of the Christian millenium as a phenomenon in and of itself than with the methodology or traditional content of any of the disciplines which may prove useful to me in this study.

I am focusing my attention in this paper on symbolic systems of belief, the conflicts within and between such belief systems and their development. Unfashionable as it may be to acknowledge in this materialistic age, I prefer to assign logical priority in my study to the ideological dimension of the societies which I shall consider (following in this the lead of a certain school of social anthropologists in particular). I do not dismiss or disregard the more overt and obvious phenomena which have been the traditional subjects of study for humanists - the social, political, economic, even technological areas so beloved of historians. I have come

to believe that a primary characteristic of the more advanced or evolved societies, to which I shall be referring, in the ancient Mediterranean and medieval Europe (if not, indeed, of all societies, including those still at a 'tribal' level) is the "search for meaning". Perhaps in a stable and prehistorical tribal society the meaning of life is a given but certainly in the societies which I have studied, in the evolved city states of classical antiquity perhaps, but certainly in the Hellenistic, Roman and Christian world states or empires, the search for meaning has become a primary - perhaps the primary - obsession in my experience. Now millenarian activity is especially associated with the restoration of "meaning" or "wholeness" to life (what else does "redemption" or "salvation" imply?)¹; this being so, I believe that much more of the spiritual activity of the societies which I am studying (the Greco-Roman world and Christendom) has a millenial character than the customary definitions of the millenarian tradition in Christianity would allow. Definitions are arbitrary; in this instance I prefer to follow the lead of the social anthropologists who have made a special study of millenarian activities.

I

Man, Nature, History and God

"Never surely did more terrible calamities of the Roman People, or evidence more conclusive, prove that the gods take no thought for our happiness, but only for our punishment." Tacitus Histories I, 3, 9-11

(Church & Brodrigg)

A survey of the human conflicts and natural disasters of his time wrings from Tacitus this cri de coeur, one of the few occasions on which a Roman, abandoning his customary icy reserve, revealed his anxious concern about the meaning of life for all to see. It is à propos for our purpose, a striking example of the universal human search for meaning; for here we clearly see man scrutinizing nature and history to determine the will of god. This anxious concern may be most acute in times of disaster - but it cannot be stilled by success; it is a search for meaning, not simply for power. Nevertheless, their success was taken by

the Romans, as success often is, as a confirmation of the correctness of the way they interpreted reality - as a confirmation of their belief system. But failure or defeat poses problems too; either we have not understood the will of god and we must change our interpretive system or we have not conformed to the will of god and we must change our conduct. Consciously we prefer to change our conduct and preserve intact the beliefs which give meaning to our lives; but unconsciously, as the social scientists have shown, our belief system often changes too - but without our conscious awareness and much more slowly. However, changes in our belief system often make it more complex, heightening our anxiety and requiring more and more extreme adjustments of our conduct²; these adjustments increasingly unbalance our relationship to our environment (in the case of early Christianity, as we know, they tended to lead to a rejection of the created or material world). Perhaps in such circumstances men are faced with radical alternatives; either to become increasingly dependent on an interpretive system which is the province of experts alone, or else to accept a radical simplification of their beliefs (the experience of the Zealots in the war against Rome would be an example of this latter situation). In this case, perhaps the structure of a society also becomes more simple; in the former case, with increasing elaboration of the belief system, a society of necessity becomes more complex.

For the Christian, history is measured by the spread of Christian ideology (or belief in Christ), its successful diffusion constituting the proof of its correctness. At the end of history, whether soon or late, stands the Kingdom of God (there is evidence that the early missionary effort in Ireland was partially motivated by this desire for the millennial kingdom - which could only come when all the world had been converted). There are barriers to the attainment of the Kingdom; among Christians there is uncertainty concerning right belief; is orthodoxy confirmed by the spirit or the law or by a combination of these (Montanism opted for the spirit, as charismatic Christianity in general does, Gnosticism and the dualist heresies for law, i.e. for theology; normative Christianity presumably lies between these extremes). Outside the Christian community there are

difficulties as well - especially in the propagation of right belief (with these difficulties are associated forcible conversion, religious wars, and perhaps even the burning of witches). And then there is the 'Jewish Problem', the profound Christian ambiguity towards Judaism as authenticator of Christianity and obstacle to the attainment of the millennial kingdom (perhaps Christian anti-semitism is associated with this symbolic conflict: alternatives offer, the conversion of the Jews of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem"). All these barriers to the attainment of the kingdom are Christian problems; as Professor Fackenheim has noted³, the "commanding voice of Auschwitz" simply restates in our time the terminal problem of Christianity; can God's Kingdom be achieved by force? We should note, at this point, that while all these problems in the Christian world have a social, political or even economic dimension, they are emphatically not social, political or economic problems; conflict where it exists is symbolic conflict, that is conflict of competing belief or value systems. But this was nothing new in the Christian world.

The central element of Jewish belief is the idea of "God's progressive self-revelation to his people through history". The parting of the Red Sea, Moses' experience on Mt. Sinai give us a clue to the unique significance of the covenant: it is a universal, freely assumed moral law. From an anthropological perspective Judaism represents one extension of the reciprocal tribal society; God himself increasingly fills the role of "tribal king" and man does not "obey" man. For the Romans, as we have seen, the auspices and the pax deorum are central concerns; the favour of the gods is confirmed by success, that is the attainment of military, political and social power over others; in other words the attainment of a favourable pax deorum confirmed for the Romans the correctness of the observations which they had made, through their various systems of divination, regarding the will of the gods; but the success which they achieved, having so tangible a material correlative, was precarious in the extreme and its threatened loss bred increasing anxiety (so Tacitus interprets disaster as punishment). Again, from the point of view of

an anthropologist, the Roman Empire, the logical consequence of the Roman value system, represents an extension of the reciprocal tribe by analogy; the "city state" of Rome is more or less artificially reproduced throughout the Empire; Rome herself becomes, as it were, the "tribal king", in a community of lesser city states; her clientes, the subject states, are the tangible measure of her dignitas/auctoritas, but their "respect" is in most cases commanded, won by violence, not freely given. The "federation" which the Roman world should have been (by her own value system!), which it was in name and once had been in part, this "federation" was replaced by a redistributive bureaucracy based on military and economic might.

From this point of view we can examine the millenarian response to Rome in the Jewish environment for many Jews it was impossible for the "Kingdom of God" to co-exist with the Roman Empire without conflict (even though the existence of the Roman Empire was almost universally viewed by Jews, as we would expect, as a manifestation of divine providence). This conflict had its origins and conclusion in the period of the Second Commonwealth (ca. 170 B.C. - 70 A.D.); this same milieu is the cradle of Jewish apocalyptic and millenarianism, as it is of the Christian gospel with its view of the "world to come".⁴

As we shall see, millennial movements and beliefs have been much studied by modern anthropologists (principally as conflicts of belief systems), and with considerable profit. No one seems to have applied this methodology to our own Christian experience - at least not with any great degree of success. In his book New Heaven, New Earth, Kenelm Burridge argues that millennial activity is most common and most acute when opposing groups share the same or similar value systems (and not, as we humanists might expect, where their value systems are quite different) or where different sub-groups within the same culture and value system do not have equal control over the workings of that system or equal access to its benefits (spiritual benefits, that is!). These ideas are so striking and suggestive that they deserve to be tested against our own millennial tradition. Christian studies and anthropology will perhaps both benefit from the dialogue. In any case we westerners

should have the courage to test and examine our own tradition of millenarian experience as we have that of others. I believe that many features of religious life in the pre-Christian or non-Christian Roman Empire, as well as in early Christianity and the Christian Middle Ages, can be better understood when examined in this way.⁵

II

The Pursuit of the Millenium

Any consideration of millenarian activity in the Middle Ages must begin with Norman Cohn's Pursuit of the Millenium. Its argument is so well-known as not to require recapitulation here in detail; nor will it be necessary for my purposes to give a detailed exposition of some of the important shortcomings in Cohn's methodology. I shall content myself with some brief allusion to R. Lerner's delightful book on the Heresy of the Free Spirit; this masterpiece of historical method and expository style has demonstrated some fundamental weaknesses in Cohn's presentation of the "Free Spirit" heresy (and incidentally indicated some much more serious inaccuracies in other recent work on religious dissent in the Middle Ages). Norman Cohn has advanced a thesis which attempts to relate millenarian discontent to the social, economic and political conditions of life in north west Europe from early Christian times to Cromwell's England, and even if we must reject much of this thesis, nevertheless Cohn has challenged us, as Robert Lerner has emphasized, to look at aspects of European history that we have all neglected and to devise a methodology adequate to the study of these fascinating but most complex phenomena.

The "Free Spirit Question" is a good place to begin any consideration of Cohn. His argument in his two chapters on that subject (Chaps. 8 & 9) is very typical of Cohn's general method, and its historical weaknesses have been amply demonstrated by Lerner. In brief, Cohn asserts that there was a more or less unitary and homogeneous "Free Spirit Movement" by the Fourteenth Century, spreading over Europe from Picardy to Bohemia, from Cologne to Silesia. The links between various groups were often tenuous. But these people did keep in touch with one another;

and the Free Spirit (note the capital letters) was at all times clearly recognized as a quasi-religion with a single basic corpus of doctrine which was handed down from generation to generation.⁶ True, Cohn has anticipated the objections (frequently made) that the movement never "existed at all outside the polemics of ecclesiastics."⁷ He feels that he has overcome these "doubts" by using "all the sources available" - something which other scholars have never done, he believes. Professor Lerner has dealt adequately with this assertion; the apparent unity of the movement owes more to the structure of the orthodox reaction than it does to the beliefs of the individual free spirits; in fact there probably was no movement as such at all. And a closer and more extensive investigation of the sources only reinforces this sceptical position. This criticism is solidly based; when dealing with something as subtle and elusive as popular beliefs, it is very easy to support any view by a selective reading of the evidence. In other words, given enough material we can easily manufacture a movement or a much modern biblical theology). But it seems to me that there are more serious objections to be raised against Cohn's method because he tends to resolve millennial activity into two components: (i) a reaction to a political and social environment (which provides the "content" of the movement) and (ii) a millennial tradition (which merely defines its "form").

In his discussion of the "sociology of the Free Spirit" Cohn's characteristic method is quite obvious: this movement of the voluntary poor finds its prime audience "amongst all the disoriented and anxious elements in urban society"⁸; so far so good; with these people, as people "from the less privileged strata of the intelligentsia"⁹, we might expect a spiritual discontent to give rise to a spiritual reaction. This promising line of enquiry is soon abandoned. Women, as we all know, were especially associated with the phenomenon of the "Free Spirit"; they are identified by Cohn as a focus of discontent. But notice the shift of emphasis; these "unmarried women and widows in the upper strata of urban society" had "less compelling reasons to feel disoriented and frustrated"¹⁰; "the number of women far exceeded the number of possible husbands," and, especially among the prosperous "medieval society offered (women) no recognized role

save marriage"¹¹. Now there is a certain truth to all these statements (even if many of them are unprovable), but this approach comes perilously close to explaining a spiritual desire in terms of a social discontent - that is, it seems to "explain away" a search for meaning which is essentially spiritual. If Marguerite Porete had enjoyed a happy marriage, she would never have felt the need to be "annihilated in the love of the Creator"¹²! In the last line of this discussion Cohn goes so far as to assert, "The Millenium of the Free Spirit had become an invisible empire held together by the emotional bonds - which of course were often erotic bonds - between men and women"¹³. Their love of God was really love of man! Here we are dealing with something much more dangerous than the manufacturing of movements from misunderstood evidence. We are dealing with a whole "neo-Marxist" materialistic framework of interpretation which insists upon "reducing" spiritual phenomena to material terms (among its many other faults thus perpetuating the false dualism of spiritual and material categories so beloved of western man).

We need not pursue this criticism of Cohn at greater length. Those who remain unconvinced of the dangers of this method should look carefully at Cohn's chapter on the "Messianism of the Disoriented Poor."¹⁴ Here quite clearly we are dealing with a scholarly approach that tends to resolve millennial activity into (i) a reaction to a political and social environment and (ii) a millennial tradition. "The areas in which the age-old prophecies about the Last Days took on a new revolutionary meaning and a new, explosive force were the areas which were becoming seriously over-populated and were involved in a process of rapid economic and social change"¹⁵. This seems to suggest, whether Cohn intends it or not, that the "content" of the millenarian activity was the reaction to the social, political and economic environment, whereas "only" the form of the activity was associated with the millennial tradition. No one would deny that here spiritual and material categories of experience (if we must use this dangerous terminology) are inextricably intertwined. Cohn is certainly himself aware of both dimensions. He deserves great credit for trying to understand these phenomena, and incidentally

It should be noted, with no prejudice to Lerner, that when we have demonstrated that there never was a "Free Spirit Movement" as such, we still have not gone very far in understanding why Marguerite Porete was burned at the stake (this inadequacy is a shortcoming of much traditional history).

Yes, Cohn deserves great credit for making the attempt, but what purpose do such explanations really serve? If we explain one category of experience in terms of another, we have not really understood anything, and we have introduced the danger of an "infinite regress". The environment speaks for itself on this approach, but how do we "explain" the existence of a millennial tradition. It was obviously something inherited from the past, and Cohn appropriately gives us a survey of the traditions of "Apocalyptic Prophecy" and "Religious Dissent"¹⁶. But how were those traditions formed? At some point environment and belief must come together as we trace the tradition back into the past. In this case I believe they do - in Jewish life of the Second Commonwealth (or Second Temple period ca. 170 B.C. - 70 A.D.) the form and content of millenarian experience cannot be artificially resolved. And this may strike some of us as wholly appropriate, for the distinction between environment and belief, material and spiritual, will already have been recognized as a false one, doubly dangerous because in our modern world it always ends by reducing the spiritual to a function of the material. We must replace this artificial dichotomy with a different, much more holistic approach. And here, the methodologies of traditional history, however indispensable, will not be sufficient. Fortunately there are other approaches to hand.

But before we examine some of these other approaches let us glance briefly at the world of the eastern Mediterranean in the period of the Second Jewish Commonwealth. We shall achieve an understanding of Christian millenarianism in this context or not at all.¹⁷ The givens are obvious: the historical circumstances of Jewish life. To begin with, there is of course the Jewish tradition regarding God's covenant with his chosen people; then the prophetic tradition and after the exile and the end of prophesy, the work of the Pharisees and their offspring, the Rabbinic fathers.

But always there is, too, that burgeoning growth of popular belief so redolent to its students of the whole spirit of the age, but now represented by the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts, Philo and a few others, and if Professor Goodenough is to be believed, the remains of a rich iconography. Then there are the political facts of life, Alexander, Ptolemy, Seleucus, the repression of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the rebellion of the Maccabees, the Hasmonaean monarchy, the Herods and always here the ambiguous relationship with Rome, the early treaties, Pompey the Great in the 60's B.C. and finally the great revolt repressed by Vespasian (to leave aside, for now, Bar kochba). Through this all, of course, there runs the scarlet thread of Messianism and millenarian thought from Daniel through the apocryphal apocalypses and the scroll of the War from the Dead Sea to the "little apocaplyse" in the synoptic gospels and the Revelation of St. John; or again from the Maccabees and the Essenes (whoever they may be) to Jesus, Paul and the Zealots (without placing these all in the same category). What are we to make of this? Our pursuit of the Millenium has come to an end; the origin of the tradition dissolves with Daniel.¹⁸ Perhaps we westerners, who have become so adept at analyzing "cargo cults", have never really understood our own millenarian tradition at all. Either none of this is associated with millenial activity - or it all is. I can see no middle ground.

By strict definition, at least in the historical and theological worlds, my net has been spread much too widely. On this view, well described by Cohn, "Christian millenarianism was simply one variant of Christian eschatology."¹⁹ "It referred to the belief held by some Christians, on the authority of the Book of Revelation (XX 4-6) that after his Second Coming Christ would establish a messianic kingdom on earth and would reign over it for a thousand years before the Last Judgement"²⁰ and so on although as Cohn also points out this belief was always interpreted even by the early Christians in a very liberal and creative sense; and down to modern times a truly dizzying variety of changes has been rung, with every conceivable permutation and variation of the basic concepts. Nonetheless, the idea of the Christian Millenium is still reasonably limited and manageable when defined in this way. This definition certainly does not require us to include within the category of

millenarian activity all Christian belief and action (to say nothing of much of the belief of classical antiquity which is likewise excluded from consideration). There is, however, another use of the term "millenarianism" and another definition of millenarian activity. The term is used conveniently (and with some considerable justification, I would say) by anthropologists, sociologists (and some historians) as a "convenient label for a particular brand of salvationism," as Cohn puts it, going on to define millenarian sects or movements as those which "always picture salvation as collective . . . terrestrial . . . imminent . . . total . . . (and) miraculous".²¹

There is little to quarrel with here; and however disquieting we may feel this appropriation of terminology to be, I think that we shall have to admit that the social scientists are one step ahead of us in their recognition that the idea of the specific Christian millenium is associated in a profound and meaningful way with the general human experience of salvation or redemption. It is in this larger context that the Christian experience should be set, and it is this association alone which social scientists are indicating by their appropriation and use of our term. I, for one, think that the social scientists here have significant and moving insights to offer us, and I shall now attempt to report to you some of those insights, especially as they affect our understanding of millenarian activity.

III

'New Heaven, New Earth' : Structural Anthropology and the Millenium

Perhaps one of the major shortcomings of the traditional methodology of history is what I choose to call the "intentional fallacy" - the assumption that men are always conscious of every aspect of their world, internal or external (or at least of every important aspect!), that they form intentions on the basis of this consciousness, and that their actions are always related to their (conscious) intentions.²² True quantitative or statistical history and content analysis seem to have overcome this weakness somewhat, the former by drastically expanding the field of enquiry, the

latter by its much more systematic methodology. While both these newer methodologies have their considerable advantages, they have their shortcomings too. The models which they produce are relatively unsophisticated - with the quantitative method the historical model becomes much more detailed in its content, while content analysis ensures greater accuracy of our model of reality as far as it goes. It seems to me, however, that for the study of belief systems, especially complex or elusive ones, structural anthropology offers the scholar certain tools of an incalculable value with which to supplement his more normal historical and philological methodologies.²³

Its main virtues can be stated quite simply - structural analysis begins by assuming the unity of man's social experience; rational and irrational, material and intellectual activities, art and technology. All are examined with a view to understanding the basic underlying structure of social experience and bringing it more and more from the realm of unconsciousness to the conscious world. The salvational or redemptive experience emanating from the core of man's spiritual being with profound public consequences for the individual and the society in which the experience unfolds, and the millenarian activities which, as we shall see, this redemptive experience involves, are obvious subjects for structural analysis. Of course, a whole sub-species of anthropological literature has grown up around these subjects, but the millenarian activities which form the favourite subject of examination for anthropologists are usually contemporary or almost so, and usually found in the more "tribal" societies of Oceania (the Pacific), Africa or Brazil.

There is no reason why the same techniques cannot be applied to the historical societies of the ancient Mediterranean or of Medieval Europe. And there is one further pressing reason for us to adopt the technique of structural analysis - that technique assigns a very high value to the study of language and linguistic structure (as the underlying and ultimate structure of human experience), and as it happens, most of our evidence for millenarian activities in the Christian world comes to us in the form of texts. What could be more obvious and more challenging? Perhaps a detailed study of the language in which such a key concept as "the world

to come" was embodied can give us some new insights into the meaning of the Christian millenium, but let us first look at some more recent millenial movements and consider the conclusions of the scholars who have classified and interpreted them.

The altogether admirable study of millenarian activities by Kenelm Burridge is an especially useful guide for relative beginners through the maze of modern scholarship on the subject. The study was originally presented as a series of lectures which aims to provide "a general conspectus of the problems involved in the study of millenarian movements"²⁴, but, more than this, Burridge has "sought to incorporate appreciation and criticism within a specific approach and synthesis" with a view to widening "the perspectives offered by millenarian movements." In his Introduction he briefly alludes to the methodological question which we have already considered, emphasizing that the historical reconstruction of "what actually happens or happened" in these movements is the pointe de depart. He stresses, however, that the major concern of the social scientist "to show abiding logical principle in social relations"²⁵ causes the study of millenarian activities to assume "a prime importance" for such activities no doubt constitute a particular challenge to our general understanding of human society.

Burridge opens his discussion with an important - and I think very significant - general statement on "religion and redemption". However, curious it may seem, social scientists are rightly concerned with the "redemptive process", he argues. Religious activity he defines as referring to

"The redemptive process indicated by the activities, moral rules, and assumptions about power which, pertinent to the moral order and taken on faith, not only enable a people to perceive the truth of things, but guarantee that they are indeed perceiving the truth of things."²⁶

But Burridge goes beyond this. "Not only are religions concerned with the truth about power, but . . . a concern with the truth about power is a religious activity."²⁷ On this definition, of course, the Torah with its regulation of the (power) relationships among people is a manifestation of religious activity, but perhaps less obviously to us, the obsessive Roman concern with the exercise of power also belongs to the same order of experience. Burridge

makes this quite clear in the summary of his opening remarks. On the assumption that redemption or the redemptive process, the freeing of man from the many obligations which bind him in his human state, is a common human need, Burrige suggests that "millenarian movements involve the adoption of new assumptions, a new redemptive process, a new politico-economic framework, a new mode of measuring the man, a new integrity, a new community: in short a new man"²⁸. But if millenarian movements involve the radical restructuring of the redemptive processes in a society, what are the social and human circumstances, the human situations which seem to require such extreme adjustments? As it happens they are many and varied and of the numerous examples which Burrige considers I have chosen several which seem particularly appropriate for the present study.

The first situation is one which involves not a single millenarian movement but a whole range of millenarian activity unfolding in cultural milieus which are similar but not analogous. The general environment is the Pacific, Oceania or, specifically, Polynesia and Melanesia, in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. His discussion of this material occupies a large part of his book (Chaps. 3-6), but the conclusions to which he comes - and which are especially important for our purposes - arise from a comparison of movements (in Polynesia and Melanesia) which appear similar superficially while being in essence very different. I shall summarize briefly and refer you to Burrige's book for detailed discussion and documentation.

As I understand it, most of these movements can be loosely described as "cargo cults" (although the term is more properly used of the Melanesian examples alone - see New Heaven, p.48 for this term and its application in Melanesia). The name is derived from the "cargo" or trade goods which the white men brought to Oceania. Although these material goods are at the centre of the conflict between natives and white westerners, and though they are obviously desirable and desired in themselves, their principal significance, as we shall see, arises from their symbolic value in the context of a conflict of belief systems. It is obvious that the advent of the white man with his goods, his technology, his power over man and nature was extremely

disruptive to the societies in Oceania or elsewhere which suffered his impact. If we followed the historical approach used by Cohn in his discussion of the Free Spirit and other such movements in the Middle Ages, we might say that in Oceania the social and even spiritual disruption of native society had an economic and political cause.

While it is true that these movements in Oceania had an economic dimension, it is probably false to assume that they could have been ended by greater generosity on the part of the whites, by "giving natives work" or by any economic and social policy apart from the eradication of native culture; certainly the spread of Christianity by no means prevented disruption and discontent, but that disruption took different forms in different environments. In Polynesia movements such as the Siovili or "Joe Gimlet" cult²⁹ certainly had the purpose of opening to the Samoans access to the wonderful goods of the Europeans - a hymn sung by Siovili's followers proclaims this with its refrain of "Necklaces, O Necklaces". And a necklace is a peculiarly appropriate object of wishful prayer for the people of Samoa. In this cult and others like it, Burrige insists, "the significance of the economic components is defined by their relation to prestige and integrity, not simply by virtue of their scarcity or becoming scarcer"³⁰. "Herein lay the value and significance of European goods: they could be exchanged", and to this day even (but not uniquely) tins of fish are important to Samoans not for consumption principally but as a means of exchange.³¹

So far so good. Even where it appears to be most concerned with material goods, this Polynesian cult conceived of the millennial kingdom as introducing the Samoans to the status system of the Europeans. The conflict between the followers of Joe Gimlet and the whites was largely a symbolic one. But Joe Gimlet and his followers were never very extreme - this movement and others like it in Polynesia were pretty tame affairs that tended simply to fade away and even at their height were none too dramatic. In fact, as Burrige notes, "Polynesia and Australia account for very few millenarian movements"³². The reason for this is not far to seek. "Polynesians had highly sophisticated hierarchical political systems and religious organizations and ideas, and

Australians had rudimentary political systems but developed and complex religious notions". In short, to anticipate a general conclusion, Polynesians (and Australian natives) had tenaciously held traditional value systems that were very unlike the European ones. Quite other was the situation in Melanesia.

Time does not allow me to give you examples from the Melanesian context; suffice it to say that Melanesia is the home of the "cargo cult" par excellence. It is here, notes Burrige, "that we find not only the large bulk of Oceanic examples, but also the most bizarre"³³. A particularly good example is the cult of Mambu who appeared as prophetic leader of his movement in 1937 in the Madang district of New Guinea. This movement and others like it are known for their collections of myths (both "bizarre and esoteric"; so Burrige, New Heaven p.63) and no less for the extreme action which they counseled. Mambu's followers were to strip off and bury their old (native) clothes, undergo a ritual of baptism and engage (we are told) in promiscuous sexual intercourse before donning European clothes and entering on a new life which incidentally involved a policy of systematic non-co-operation with missionaries and civil administrators. This ritual reminds us of the Christian rites which probably influenced its form, but such rituals are probably common to most extreme millenarian movements (think of the charges made against the free spirits and their admitted practices). Similarly the Mambu myths, however exotic and bizarre, are "formulations with the same kind of doctrinal force in relation to basic assumptions as, for example, the Book of Revelations, or St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians," as Burrige notes.³⁴

More to the point, and returning to the general conclusions which Burrige draws for this study, we may observe, that, in contrast to their Polynesian brothers, the Melanesians, so Burrige notes,³⁵ with their mainly democratic and egalitarian political systems tended to be prudish, obsessional, suspicious and much given to wrestling with their consciences. Notoriously hard-headed and pragmatic, addicted to business and trading, the rather piecemeal and opportunist religious ideas of the Melanesians may be set against the more solidly founded and systematic spiritual life of Australians and Polynesians." The general conclusion fairly leaps

off the page at us - these Melanesians who reacted so severely to the arrival of the white man and his value systems were in fact much more like the white westerners than were their Polynesian brothers. These Melanesians, "notoriously hard-headed businessmen and pragmatists, were those who were most susceptible to millenarian activities"³⁶. Of especial importance in this context were the "competing prestige systems (i.e. of whites and Melanesians) characterized by a common involvement in the self-same assumptions together with a relatively privileged access to the rewards and benefits of the assumptions on the one hand, and a relatively under-privileged access on the other"³⁷. The opposition was less pointed, as in Polynesia, when it involved a conflict between two different measures of man (the qualitative and the quantitative, ibid. p.48). The conclusion which will be of use to us emerges quite clearly. We can expect more acute conflict between competing value systems when they are similar, less acute when they are dissimilar. Very superficially, and I am only suggesting this as an hypothesis when we observe the very acute and painful conflict of value systems which took place between Jews and Greco-Romans under the Maccabees or during the Jewish revolt which left its legacy in Daniel, the apocrypha and the tradition of Jewish messianism in popular Judaism after Bar Kochba, or again when we observe the similar painful conflict recorded in the Christian milieu, especially but by no means exclusively in the Book of Revelations, perhaps we should attempt to compare Roman and Jewish (or Judaio-Christian) world views with the intent of determining the extent to which they overlap or are similar. As I have already suggested at the beginning of this paper, I believe that there is a considerable similarity. Both Jews and Romans believed that the divine manifested itself pre-eminently through history, a casual assertion which it would take a lifetime to document! But this is the direction in which Burridge's theoretical conclusions direct us. And perhaps such an approach would explain some aspects (especially the spiritual or ideological) of the conflict between Romans and Jews which the customary social, political, economic or even cultural categories of the historians leave relatively untouched.³⁸ These insights from Burridge's work, however much light they may ultimately throw on the origins of Christianity in the millenarian activity of the

ancient world, scarcely help us to understand the development of smaller scale internal millenarian movements within Medieval Christendom, movements of the sort which Cohn examines. But Burridge has other examples and another model to offer which perhaps does contribute to our understanding of medieval millenarianism; to this other model we must now briefly turn.

In this case Burridge is concerned to demonstrate how millenarian activity can occur in other contexts than the "colonial" situations which we have been considering. This case "enables us to appreciate . . . how a conflict . . . need not be outer-directed but may be inner-directed"³⁹. We must go back to an early stage in the religious development of India and examine the origins of the sect known as the Jains. In the traditional Indian value system society, at least in its upper levels, was composed of two castes, the Brahman and the Kshatriya, respectively the "sacerdotal academics" and the "political bosses" as Burridge describes them.⁴⁰ Both groups shared the same spiritual ideal, the attainment of a state in which the soul was released from the "bondage of finite life" and was absorbed "into the absolute all-being"⁴¹ but "as a matter of axiom, only Brahmans had access to this release." Only they could live the life of grace which would allow them to attain it, while the others, the Kshatriya, were distracted "by the cares of the world" as we would put it. At some early point (6th-5th centuries B.C.?) this situation became unsatisfactory. Even before Mahavira, the Jain reformer, appeared, other prophets had preceded him, for the most part from the Kshatriya, who had "rejected the main tenets of the Brahmanical scheme," while some opted for materialism or fatalism⁴². At this point society in Northern India, quite apart from these theological troubles, was undergoing a series of economic adjustments. A new mercantile class was emerging which, while using the "managerial techniques" of the Kshatriya, would not in fact hold political office. It was precisely this situation which saw the rise of Jainism.

The Jains were to be a composite class borrowing much from their ancestors the Kshatriya, although they were not warriors or "political bosses". More important, perhaps, for our purposes, and this marks their theological break with orthodox Hinduism, they believed "that given an adherence to certain observances,

moksha (i.e. "release") was available to all and not just to Brahmins"⁴³. In our terms they were to be "in the world but not of it", and in fact the sect is known as paradoxical. Originating among warriors, the Jains were non-violent; aristocrats by origin, they became merchants; although unworldly on principle, they have always been extremely wealthy as a group. We can consider the foundation of this sect as a kind of millenarian activity; but we are quite clearly dealing with a conflict - not now between two value systems, however similar or dissimilar, but within a single value system - and it is a conflict over the access to benefits. We should note in this case that they are first and foremost spiritual benefits. I believe that we have here a paradigm by which we may better understand the evolution of sub-sects within Christianity such as the free spirits.

Many of the free spirits, we are told, were from the "middle class", whatever that may mean (at least they were not by any means all impoverished). Whether or not they were women (but perhaps especially if they were), they seem to have felt excluded from full participation in the spiritual life of the church. No suitable orders were open to them (and especially not to the women). Men and women both may have been educated above the ordinary level, although they certainly were not trained in any formal sense in theology. In any case it is quite clear that all these beguines and beghards really wanted was to live a life of Christ-like poverty in some form of community modelled on the convents of the religious - they aspired to be and often were, in fact, lay or "third orders". Churchmen who observed their spirituality were content to allow them to live as they chose, and most "free spirits" seem to have been quite orthodox. Other clerics saw them as threatening the monopoly which the church maintained over ecclesiastical organization (or more significantly over spiritual benefits, "grace"). Here again this is not the time or place to undertake a detailed investigation of the applicability of the "Jain Model" to an analysis of the social and spiritual situation which gave rise to the "Free Spirit Movement", but I think that the appropriateness of this model is quite apparent, superficially at least.

An "explanation" of the "Free Spirit Movement" along these lines would seem to me to have the great merit of putting spiritual concerns at the heart of what was, after all, a spiritual movement, while allowing ample scope for all the social and political questions which are associated with the origins of this phenomenon. But since I have committed myself so far to unsubstantiated hypotheses and irresponsible suggestions, I would go further and suggest that we have here in the theoretical framework provided by Burrige's analysis of the Jain sect as the product of a special and highly sophisticated type of millenarian activity, an analytical approach which may allow us a much more profound understanding of the context of ideological conflict and development which gave rise to a whole host of historical phenomena analogous to the "Free Spirit Movement". There are, of course, the other movements which Cohn considers, early medieval messiahs, peasant crusaders, taborites, and the like. But perhaps it would be worthwhile to apply the "Jain Model" to an analysis of the development of the mendicant orders on the one hand and the protestant reformation on the other, both social phenomena associated with access to the fullest spiritual benefits of Christian belief and both associated in one way or another with the "democratization" of that access. As with the Jains, so with St. Francis and perhaps even the protestant reformers, the question at issue originally at least was not so much one of dogma - although in both cases it had dogmatic implications - but one of how most effectively the new class of educated and powerful bourgeois were to participate more fully and more directly in the life of the church.

These anthropological studies of millenarian activities obviously have much to teach us about our own millennial tradition. One part of my purpose in this paper will have been accomplished if I have been able to suggest some lines of enquiry, in part perhaps rather new, which might lead to a greater understanding of the tradition of Christian millenarianism. But there is one way in which the Christian tradition differs from the cases which we have been considering. Millenarian thought in the Christian (and Jewish) context is thousands of years old. The myths in which the Christian tradition expresses many of its essential millennial conceptions are themselves very diverse in origin,

drawing on many different cultural traditions in antiquity. Then they have been handed down from culture to culture over the generations, and in the process of development and transmission the myth stock of the millennial tradition has been translated from language to language. It is understandable that many of the most important concepts associated with the Christian Millenium will have undergone distortion or development as they passed from language to language. The "Kingdom of God" is one such concept - the phrase can obviously acquire different connotations in different cultures. In that case probably the denotation remains rather clear.

I believe that the situation is quite otherwise with the concept of the "World to Come", a subtle, elusive and very sophisticated idea which undergoes marked development from one culture to another. I intend to examine quite briefly the history of this concept in Hebrew and Greek, suggesting some further lines of enquiry into the linguistic history of the phrase. But as I do that I shall have another ulterior purpose to fulfill - as I have already indicated, one of the shortcomings of traditional historical enquiry seems to be that it is often not sufficiently sensitive to the role which language plays in human life and thought. Here structural anthropology to some extent shows us another way of investigating the fundamental structures of any belief system. Modern linguistics follows that up, providing us with a methodology sufficiently sophisticated and reliable that it allows us to analyse the vast stock of linguistic conceptions which surround a complex phenomenon like early Christianity without our making the mistake of simply reading our own preconceptions into the data at hand.

IV

The "World to Come"; New Perspectives on Language and Culture in the Millennial Context.

I think that I need make no apology for emphasizing the importance of language and an awareness of language (in the fullest sense) in our study of the Christian millenarian tradition and of the related belief structures (or "myths", following the terminology of Buddige). It is self-evident that Christian beliefs are intimately involved with the written word - that is an inheritance, of course, from the Jewish context with its unique concern for

"the Book". The Jewish case introduces a salutary reminder - the written word may be all important but it is not all since it is accompanied by an oral or "popular" interpretation which, standing in dynamic tension with the written word, complements it and contributes to the whole tradition. So it is among Christians - the tradition is expressed in hagiography, oral and written, in popular prayer and liturgy, exegesis and theology as well as in the scriptures. The gospels are indispensable but they are not the whole tradition. As we might expect, this being so, philology has always played an important part in Christian scholarship. And, reasonably enough, it is to philology that we must turn for a better understanding of many aspects of the Christian millenium, among them not least the "World to Come".

But there is much more to "biblical language" than this. As I have already indicated, structural anthropologists have assigned a central place to linguistics in the structural analysis of society.⁴⁴ Not only is linguistics the most scientific of the social sciences, it is indispensable as a methodological base for the others (so Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology pp.31-32). It has proven invaluable to anthropological fieldwork, true enough, but the development of structural analysis in linguistics ("structural linguistics") makes it much more than a tool for fieldwork. Structural linguistics will certainly play the same renovating role with respect to the social sciences that nuclear physics, for example, has played for the physical sciences⁴⁵. According to Troubetzkoy the significance of the structural method is found in its four basic operations: briefly it shifts study from conscious linguistic phenomena to unconscious infrastructures; it deals not with terms as individual entities but with the relations between them; it introduces in Levi-Strauss' terms the concept of system, that is, demonstrable system; and it aims at discovering general laws. A great claim perhaps, but one which appears not without foundation even to this amateur. We shall soon examine some of the more specialized scholarship which applies these insights and others of the same sort to biblical and early Christian studies.

If we are to apply to the Christian millenarian tradition some of the techniques of analysis, some of the insights which Burridge has reported and developed in the study of more modern

millenarian activities, we must be prepared to do "fieldwork" at first hand. All the early Christian (and the medieval "free spirits" for that matter) are no longer available to us in person, but fortunately they have left us a body of texts which incorporate considerable historical details of their experience, and, more importantly, scriptures, whether canonical or otherwise, from which we can reconstruct their belief system (or "myth system") in general terms and often in very considerable detail. Modern structural and linguistic anthropology encourages us in this study by showing us where to look and suggesting to us how the myth systems expressed in the Christian texts may reveal some of the basic and largely unconscious infrastructure of the Christian belief system. Here traditional philology - the methodology on which we have been raised in the Humanities - comes into its own. It alone, but, even more than this, our old friend philology, often dry as dust and without much significance when it becomes an end in itself and not simply a means, will be rejuvenated in the course of this study if we are successful in bringing our age-old tradition into a fruitful dialogue with some of these methodologies.

Linguistic analysis, as applied to biblical and Christian studies especially, is very complex. The best that I can do is to give you an overview of some of the significant recent work - and exciting it is indeed - while referring you for further edification and delight to the work of the scholars whom I shall mention. I believe that this technical excursus will not be without its utility if it is put into the form of a simple Forschungsberichte. It requires no genius to recognize that language and culture are closely intertwined. In Canada especially we should be aware that the essence of the French or English world view, whatever that may be, is in some special way associated with the French or English language. But stated in such a simple "popular" form ideas like these are perhaps more dangerous than useful. Many modern biblical scholars, beginning perhaps with a modernized version of the belief that Hebrew was pre-eminently the "language of God", have pushed this popular attitude to language and culture to the brink of absurdity if not over it. "The retention of the reduced vowel in Hebrew," we are told, "is 'parallel' to the shadowy continuance of the soul

after death and to the maintenance of the dead man's name through the levirate marriage". As we shall see, much of the work of James Barr, a scholar, the significance of whose work it would be difficult to exaggerate, has been directed to refuting just this sort of popular heresy in the field of biblical studies.⁴⁶

However perilous it may be to speculate about the relationship between language and culture, it is necessary for us to do so and linguists especially have developed a whole literature on the language-culture question. Perhaps the most important formulation of this question in modern times is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It is simply one striking formulation of the principle of "linguistic relativity", associated with the impressive, if erratic scholarship of two American linguists, Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir. But for anyone interested in the modern literature on the subject, the work of these two is a logical place to begin. Whorf described his "new principle of relativity" in the following terms:

"(This principle) holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated."⁴⁷

It is impossible for us to discuss and evaluate, however briefly, modern theoretical conceptions of the relationship between a culture and the language in which it is expressed; suffice it to say that the question has a long history in biblical studies, that it is a question which is very vulnerable to muddled thinking, and that whatever our views may be of the general relationship between language and culture, they will profoundly affect our study of the Christian belief system.⁴⁸ Let me now just indicate some other linguistic dimensions of the study of the Christian belief system, its origin and development.

Whatever we may conceive to be the unique qualities of one culture or another and however unique we may consider one or another language to be in its expression of a world-view, reasonable men, I think, can agree on a simple operating assumption: comparable idea structures or systems of belief will not be expressed in exactly equivalent terms in different languages. Any language is at least theoretically capable of expressing any idea, but the more complex the idea structure or belief system the

more likely it is to suffer serious distortion as it moves from one language to another. For instance the idea of a "hammer" can easily be conveyed in almost any language, in all probability; probably too any language can devise an adequate translation of "helicopter"; but an abstract idea such as the "dialectic of history" is another matter altogether. Perhaps few native speakers really understand such terms in their own language - how much more difficult to translate them! Yet I am afraid that the latter situation prevails with a concept such as the "World to Come". In fact we must admit that many of the concepts associated with the Christian belief system are quite untranslatable (in a relative sense, of course). Yet what is more obvious than the fact of their having been translated! Here we are confronted with "the problem of cultural transmission across language barriers". At the level of general semantics, meanings of words for the same "things" in different languages rarely coincide completely. From the point of view of structural analysis, complex ideas, to say nothing of systems of belief are structures which can be translated only with great difficulty when someone sits down to do so intentionally; at the level of popular belief especially, the elements of the complex structure which are closest to the native structures of the recipient language/culture group are the ones which will be most emphasized in the course of transmission across a language barrier. Not to say that they will be totally misapprehended, but some distortion will result. This, I think, is obvious. Ever since Jerome set out to render the Hebrew Bible more accurately into Latin, Christian scholars have been aware of this problem. In fact, it was an awareness which they had inherited from their Jewish predecessors. Since the translation of the Tanak into Greek for the first time in the Septuagint, Jews had sought more accurate renderings of the substance of the original, and not in Greek alone but even in the different dialects of Aramaic. In any case, we are heirs to a scriptural tradition which began with Hebrew and Aramaic, then passed through Greek and Latin (and even Syriac) on its way to the languages of modern Europe. We can ask, without any prejudice, in regard to this scriptural tradition (to say nothing of the larger belief system of which it is only the most formal part) - what has come down to us across the frontiers

between linguistic and conceptual worlds quite clearly, what in more distorted form? I had hoped to be able, at this point, to follow some millenarian concepts right down the language chain and I have assembled some of the evidence with which to do so. The task is one of literally staggering proportions, and although I intend eventually to trace down at least some key ideas (such as the "World to Come") all along this line of cultural transmission, for the present I must be content to present to you, however, briefly and inadequately, a survey of some of the very impressive modern scholarship dealing with the ancient biblical languages and particularly with the transmission of Hebrew and/or Aramaic ideas to the Greek-speaking world.

There has been a veritable spate of such work in recent years, but, to my mind at least, much the best of it has been produced in the post-war period by a small group of British scholars. A place of honour should go to Matthew Black whose book, An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts (of which the first edition appeared in 1946; the much revised third edition of 1967 was reprinted in 1971), not only surveys all previous modern work on the subject (Part I, The Approach), but also presents a systematic discussion of Syntax, Grammar and Vocabulary (in Part II) and Semitic Poetic Form (Part III). No one could read such a book without vastly extending his awareness of the extent to which Aramaic underlies the New Testament tradition and deepening his understanding of the effects of the Aramaic original.

Somewhat different in emphasis is the work of James Barr. His Semantics of Biblical Language (Oxford 1961, reprinted 1962, 1967, 1969) deals with some of the larger questions of great methodological importance which we have already mentioned" "Whether there is a relation between the religious structures found to exist within one particular linguistic group and the linguistic structure of the language of that group; and further . . . whether and how the transference of religious structures and thoughts to another linguistic group is affected by the change of linguistic structure involved in the use of a new language." ⁴⁹ After a survey of work on the contrast between Greek and Hebrew thought, Barr undertakes a general discussion of linguistic/semantic methodology as

applied to the area of biblical studies. Here already he is particularly concerned to combat the "unsystematic and haphazard nature" of modern attempts to relate theology to biblical language, and he points out the failure of many modern scholars to examine the Greek and Hebrew languages as a whole and to relate their special theories to a general semantic method or to general linguistics.⁵⁰ What results from this methodological failure, he alleges, is a widespread preference for a neo-Humboldtian idealism strangely compounded with a spurious "ethno-psychology"⁵¹ which assumes on the basis of a general acquaintance with Hebrew and Greek that there are special characteristics associated with each language (found even in the grammar of the language) which distinctively belong to the "Hebrew" or "Greek" "mind", and then proceeds to impose these assumptions on the evidence.

The bulk of Barr's Semantics consists of a detailed exposition of the dangers of this naive pseudo-science. He gives numerous illustrations of the dangers and even absurdities to which this approach can lead.⁵² By way of a general and more common illustration of the defects of this method Barr gives, as an English example faced by church-goers quite regularly in sermons, the "popular" etymology of "holy" as equivalent to "whole" or "healthy". It is not enough for the preacher to abuse his congregation with the etymology, he proceeds to exhortations to conduct which are as misleading as his science is faulty; a humorous example but the fallacies implicit here also make their appearance in more learned circles.⁵³ Barr's bête noir, however, is Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testaments (Stuttgart 1933-) and his book concludes with a very critical examination of "Some Principles of Kittel's Theological Dictionary". Not to mince words, Barr seems to believe that many modern biblical theologians, such as the authors of the articles in the Theologisches Wörterbuch (but by no means only them) have manufactured new systems or structures of belief which owe more to their own preconceptions than they do to early Christianity, by a random and methodless raiding of a grab-bag of disparate fragments of belief. This is a grave charge and probably one with much substance, although Barr's righteous indignation may have carried him rather far in his criticism, as David Hill would have it.

Hill's book on Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings : Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms (Cambridge 1967) Hill has reproved some of Barr's excesses (see especially pp.1-14) and defended the methodology of the Theologisches Wörterbuch, emphasizing the importance of the etymology and background of crucial word/concepts such as "lutron" and its cognates. But I for one believe that Hill has not really disposed of the substance of Barr's criticisms (he does, in fact, admit the merit of many of them, e.g. ibid. p.1). For anyone who aspires to understand the structure of a complex belief system and to trace subtle shifts of emphasis or distortions arising when one language (or even dialect) attempts to absorb concepts from another, these methodological objections which Barr has raised are all-important. In his other book, Biblical Words for Time (SCM Press, 1962) Barr focuses the criticisms which he has developed on the modern scholarship which purports to expound the various biblical concepts of time. In this connection he has particular criticisms to make of the interpretations which have been applied to the Hebrew word "olam" and the Greek word aion. These modern interpretations (of Oscar Cullmann and others) and Barr's criticisms of them especially concern me, as these are the two words used to denote the "world" (in the phrase the "World to Come") in Hebrew and Greek respectively, and I wish to close this already over-long presentation by sharing with you some ideas on the development of the concept of the "World to Come" - a crucial concept in Christian millenarianism.

As I have already indicated the procedures which Barr criticizes in detail in Biblical Words for Time are specific examples of the tendency of scholars to build "a structure from the lexical stock of the biblical languages, . . . (on) the assumption that the shape of this structure reflects or sets forth the outlines of biblical thinking about the subject"⁵⁴ - a process which Barr has elsewhere described as the "hypostatization" of biblical concepts⁵⁵. In the case of the time concept the structure has been built "from two or three words which are fairly close in meaning or which commonly relate to the same subject or theme"⁵⁶. For Oscar Cullmann the two significant words are kairos and aion.⁵⁷ It is worth noting here that, from the point of view of the biblical theologians, "the New Testament belongs . . . entirely or almost

entirely to the solid block of Hebrew thought, and thus the whole Bible stands in monolithic solidarity against Greek thought" (as described by Barr, Biblical Words pp. 11-12).

This view, at least when stated so baldly, is patently ridiculous. However much of the Greek of the New Testament, or of the Septuagint before it, was infused with Hebrew "content", it was intelligible to Greek speakers - and was to that extent at least non-Hebrew. This is an important point, for Cullmann believes that the observations which he makes about the meaning of aion are observations about a Hebrew concept. For Cullmann the word aion denotes a duration or extent of time, limited or unlimited (this is probably fairly accurate, as far as it goes; see Barr, ibid. p.47; aion never in fact means a point of time) in contradistinction to kairos which denotes a point of time (see Barr Biblical Words p.47f. for this summary). Together these terms serve in the New Testament to characterize "that time which is filled out by the salvation history"⁵⁸ - in other words the whole "New Testament view of time". The weaknesses of Cullmann's theory are disguised by two procedures which Barr excoriates: (i) the concept method and (ii) the use of transliterated Greek words in place of translation (for this and what follows see ibid., pp.50-63). This leads to a procrustean treatment of a language's lexical stock - the "concept" not the lexical stock is important; but the "concept" is the result of "hypostatization of linguistic phenomena" (so Barr, ibid., p.58 & n.1 with reference). This hypostatization leads to the second fallacious procedure - the substitution of a transliterated Greek word for a translation. Having invented a "concept", Cullmann must give it a distinctive name, a transliteration from the Greek. The use of kairos or aion in this way makes no sense in Greek or English. This is all really incidental to our purpose but it shows us why we must treat with the utmost suspicion the work of the biblical theologians. For Barr is certainly correct in dismissing Cullmann's interpretation of aion.

Briefly, Cullmann argued that aion means (i) unending time forward or backward, i.e. eternity, (ii) the limited period of time between creation and the eschatological drama, (iii) periods of time limited in one direction but not in the other viz. (a) ek

tou aionos, where aion refers to the period before the creation and (b) the aion mellon, the period which "extends beyond the end of the present aeon".⁵⁹ This is, of course, nonsense. As Barr notes, usages (ii) (this aion) and (iii,b) (the aion or "world to come") depend on the late Hebrew use of olam and the Greek aion (more properly the order should be reversed, as we shall see), and the rest is just an arbitrary classification of the conventional usage of some phrases common in biblical Hebrew (and subsequently Greek as well). It is unnecessary to continue with Barr's criticism of Cullmann and his ilk. It would be more enjoyable and profitable for us to discuss Barr's insights into "Hebrew Words for Time and Eternity"⁶⁰ (ibid.) and "Vocabulary Stocks for Time and their Translation"⁶¹ to say nothing of his general theological and methodological conclusions; but time does not allow it and my present interest is somewhat different - not in time but in the "World to Come"!

Barr himself gave the clue as to where to find sounder opinions on the background of the Hebrew word/concept olam, used in the Hebrew expression for the "World to Come" (ha olam ha ba). Not only did the classic Hebrew grammar of Gesenius-Kautsch correctly understand the usage of olam in most of its forms, but an excellent modern study on the very subject of "Das Wort 'olam im Alten Testament"⁶², as Barr himself noted⁶³ said everything that needs to be said about the meaning and significance of the word - on the sound basis of a complete study of some 440 instances of this work in one form or another in the Old Testament. The conclusions of that study can be stated in general terms quite simply which for us, with our interest in the "World to Come", however, merely sharpens the problem. In almost all cases in the Old Testament olam can be "adequately represented . . . by 'remotest time'" (so Barr, summarizing Jenni; Biblical Words p.68). It is most commonly used in the descriptive phrases me olam ("from or since the earliest time") and le olam ("to the farthest time, forever") or in construct phrases such as berit olam ("the eternal covenant") where it has a simple adjectival force. The plural form olamim which occurs rather frequently in these phrases is simply an intensive plural of emphasis and not an extensive plural of number.

Most important, however, is Jenni's negative conclusion.⁶⁴ "With the exception of certain uncertainties of detail it can be concluded that in the Jewish literature of the pre-Christian period, the new meanings 'aeon' and 'world' occur at the most very rarely, but in any case are not common." But in this meaning, expressed in Greek by aion, the word we translate in the phrase the "World to Come", olam refers to the messianic or millenarian kingdom, known henceforth quite as well to the Jewish tradition as ha olam ha ba. And this precisely is the problem - olam is an important word in the Tanak, but only in descriptive phrases, never really as a substantive in its own right, simply a word widely used in speech and prayer as equivalent to our word "eternal". In the Septuagint it was very regularly translated by the Greek word aion. Now aion in descriptive phrases could easily convey the meaning "to or from the remotest time" and it was probably so understood by the readers of the Septuagint, by the Jews at least. In the New Testament aion quite as clearly is used to mean "world", whether ho aion ho toutos, this world of grief and sin or ho aion ho mellon, the coming world of truth and righteousness, in short the "Kingdom of God" whether here on earth or in some other dimension of reality. But here is the final problem - aion has acquired this special meaning (an age, a world age, one of many world ages, this world and the world to come) sometime around the time of Christ (say between ca.100 B.C. and 100 A.D. at the latest); this new meaning is so overwhelmingly present that it swamps the rather colourless Hebrew olam, which from now on refers (not only in normal everyday Hebrew and Aramaic, but even by reflex in the Tanak) not to the remotest time or even to an indefinite period of time, but to this world (ha olam ha zeh) and the better one to come (ha olam ha ba),

The puzzle remains. We cannot explain, as Cullmann does, the development of this concept by reference to special Christian concepts of time which were in some ways always mysteriously present in Hebrew. But if we follow the more sober and reliable methodology of Barr and others, we have no obvious easy explanation of the origin of this crucial millennial concept, the "World to Come". And here, I think, the kind of enquiry into millenarian activities on which

I reported in the first part of my paper shows us the way to a more satisfactory understanding. That approach also makes sense of the only other information which we can bring to bear on this new meaning of olam/aion - the overwhelming and increasingly widespread association of aion with the aeons of the ancient Gnostic dualism, with its rejection of "this world" as evil. The anthropologists might suggest that this new idea of a millennial kingdom, a better "World to Come" (expressed in the widespread belief in a succession of aeons and thus not confined to Christians alone) arose as a result of a conflict between similar value systems in which some group(s) felt excluded from the benefits open to the dominant group. There had to be a better "world to come" because this present one, the Roman empire, caused many of its inhabitants (people who were committed to value systems which seemed to have been defeated) a profound despair. The spread of the doctrine of aeons, of that ancient Gnostic dualism to which I have already referred, testifies to exactly that situation. Some time around the time of Christ men, in the partially Hellenized eastern Mediterranean, began to feel a great Weltschmerz, a sense of alienation, anomie or rootlessness in the world in which they lived (and, of course, all late ancient religion, especially Gnostic dualism, but other areas of religious and spiritual life as well, was imbued with this profound pessimism - it scarcely requires documentation).⁶⁵

From the anthropological point of view the situation is quite clear. The dominance of one value system in the Roman empire and the defeat of other rival systems of belief caused widespread despair (a despair which eventually infected the dominant culture as well!) and produced by way of reaction a general belief in a better "world to come". Of course, only followers of Christ knew that the new world had been proclaimed at his resurrection. Ask me why they felt the need of a new world, ask me why they suffered from such despair, and I will respond by asking you what is the meaning of Christ in History? I do not know for sure; but despair I do know, Weltschmerz ancient and modern. I intend to look more closely into that despair because there, if anywhere, is to be found the meaning of the "World to Come".

FOOTNOTES

1. The use of the term "redemption" by social scientists in the context of a study of millenarian activity is defended in very strong fashion by Burrige (New Heaven pp.4-8 esp.p.6); I shall return to this as well at a later point.
2. I believe that this is perhaps the case in both Jewish and Roman systems. Noth's amphictyonic theory suggests that the Yahwist idea acquired a strength proportionate to the early success of the Jewish amphictyony gathered in the worship of Yahweh. When the tribes of Israel came into conflict with the empires of the east and no longer simply with the near neighbours who were their approximate equals in strength, the Yahwist conception was threatened; it was in this context that the prophetic spirit as we know it found utterance.

As for the Romans, their anxious concern to maintain the pax deorum, it has often been suggested, led to an increasing elaboration of cult (with the introduction of new rituals and deities) and especially of the augural rites which were uniquely concerned to determine the will of the gods (this latter point is much more difficult to demonstrate). The validity of their whole belief system was confirmed by the Roman success in arms; but anxiety increased nonetheless; they now had more to lose. See R.T. Scott Religion and Philosophy in the Histories of Tacitus. Cf. Burrige, New Heaven, New Earth, p.76, for a comment on the role which millenarian movements play in the development of a society "from the more simple to the more complex".

3. E.L. Fackenheim God's Presence in History : Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections (New York Univ. Press 1970). Fackenheim uses this phrase as the title of his third chapter. It is true, and appropriate, that Prof. Fackenheim addresses his book especially to Jews; his especial concern is with Jewish survival. But his book has no less importance for Christian readers, for Christians too must ask: " at Auschwitz

9. Ibid. p. 159.
10. Ibid. p. 160.
11. Ibid.
12. R. Lerner, op. cit. p. 1, for the phrase attributed to Marguerite Porete.
13. N. Cohn, op. cit. p. 162.
14. Ibid., Chap. 3, pp. 53-70. Note especially, in addition to the passage quoted below, the consistent emphasis, throughout the first subsection of this chapter ("The Impact of Rapid Social Change"), on the crucial role played by social and economic factors in triggering millennial activity; first we are told that the "agricultural society of the early Middle Ages . . . (was) relatively unreceptive to the militant eschatology of the unprivileged" largely because of the communal nature of the peasant village and the support which peasant life received from custom. "So long as that network (of social relationships) remained intact peasants enjoyed not only a certain material security but also - which is even more relevant - a certain sense of security" etc. There is probably more truth in this; but note what follows. This situation begins to change with the increase in population and commerce from the 11th century onwards (paraphrased); in the newly enlarged cities "the spectacle of a wealth undreamt of in earlier centuries provoked a bitter sense of frustration" "disorientation" followed amongst journeymen and casual laborers. This disorientation and other similar disruptions "acted on these people with peculiar sharpness and called forth reactions of peculiar violence." And note the next sentence. "And one way in which they attempted to deal with their common plight was to form a salvationist group under a messianic leader". Even allowing for theories of "relative deprivation" this approaches outright misrepresentation!
15. Ibid. p.53.
16. Ibid. Chaps. 1 & 2.
17. This context is the locus of other important millenarian activities apart from the Christian. Jewish Messianism, above all, harks back to this period; it is now quite clear that Bar

did the grave win the victory after all, or, worse than the grave, did the devil himself win." (ibid. p.75).

4. Of course, at the beginning of the Second Commonwealth the conflict for the Jews was not with Rome (which was, in fact, at this time a benevolent "friend"), but with the Hellenistic Kingdoms, particularly that of the Seleucids. But shortly after the time of the Maccabees the Romans took their place as the ultimate "successor state" of the Seleucids; and, in any case, the essential conflict here is that between tribal city states and a dominant imperial system; the imperial system, which I have described as Roman, was earlier found in the Hellenistic world, from which the Romans acquired it in one way or another (i.e. partly directly, through adoption and imitation of administrative and military technology, and in part indirectly through reaction to the challenge of the Hellenistic powers, especially Pyrrhus, Carthage, Macedon and Syria). For the whole climate of repression and resistance in the Hellenistic east, see the excellent book of Samuel K. Eddy, The King is Dead; Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism 334-31 B.C. (Univ. of Nebraska Press 1961).
5. This is perhaps a not altogether untimely undertaking in view current Christian self-examination - especially in Latin America and the "Third World"; cf. G. Gutierrez A Theology of Liberation; History, Politics and Salvation (Eng. ed. New York 1973); and for our purposes especially pp. 220-232 "The Political Dimension of the Gospel", pp. 232-238 "Faith, Utopia and Political Action".
6. N. Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (Ed. 2, Oxford Univ. Press 1970) p.172.
7. Ibid. p. 149; cf. for what follows R. Lerner The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages (Univ. of California Press 1972)
8. N. Cohn op.cit. p.157.

Kochba and his followers represent only the tip of an iceberg. And the defeat of the "Son of the Star" (or "of the Lie", as you will have it) by no means put an end to the messianic expectation in Judaism - overt but elusive in the popular tradition which later produced the Kabbalah, partly obscured but always disturbingly present in the "Rabbinic tradition". See G. Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York, 1971) esp. pp. 1-36. But I suggest that there are many more social movements which have a millenarian component in this part of the Greco-Roman world than most of us would expect, e.g. slave revolts (Sicily and Asia Minor), mystery religions and early Christian heresies, to name only a few.

18. See Scholem, op. cit., esp. pp. 6-7; it is a puzzling and, as yet, unexplained phenomenon to him why the message of the prophets, "knowledge which could hardly be proclaimed with sufficient loudness and publicity" should have become "secret" in the apocalypses, attributed pseudonymously to "the heroes of biblical antiquity" and conveyed only "to the select or initiated". I believe that all this would be much less puzzling if we could see it in the context of millenarian activities the world over.
19. N. Cohn, op. cit. p. 15 Introduction.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Of course, these assumptions arise from the characteristic pragmatic approach to history and its primary concern with the explicit as Levi-Strauss puts it (see below); they are necessary qualities for a science which aspires to demonstrate more than suggest. "History" is perhaps not to be criticized for the shortcomings implicit in its methodology; historians, however, can be criticized for confusing their particular discipline with the subject of study and their methodology with reality itself. A phenomenological approach seems more useful in some circumstances.

23. For the relationship between history and anthropology see C. Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology Chap.1 pp.1-27 esp. p.24:

"It would be inaccurate, therefore, to say that on the road toward the understanding of man, which goes from the study of conscious content to that of unconscious forms, the historian and the anthropologist travel in opposite directions. On the contrary they both go the same way. The fact that their journey together appears to each of them in a different light - to the historian transition from the explicit to the implicit; to the anthropologist transition from the particular to the universal - does not in the least alter the identical character of their fundamental approach. They have undertaken the same journey on the same road in the same direction; only their orientation is different. The anthropologist goes forward, seeking to attain, through the conscious, of which he is always aware more and more of the unconscious; whereas the historian advances, so to speak, backward, keeping his eyes fixed on concrete and specific activities from which he withdraws only to consider them from a more complete and richer perspective. A true, two-faced Janus, it is the solidarity of the two disciplines that makes it possible to keep the whole road in sight."

24. K. Burridge, New Heaven, New Earth (Oxford Blackwell 1969) Preface p.vii.
25. Ibid. Introduction p.2.
26. Ibid. pp. 6-7
27. Ibid. p.7.
28. Ibid. p.13.
29. Ibid. pp. 22ff.
30. Ibid. p.25
31. Ibid. p.26
32. Ibid. p.40.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid. p.63.
35. Ibid. p.40.
36. Ibid. p.48.
37. Ibid.
38. If we make an exception of the conflict between the Seleucides under Antiochus IV and the Jews in the time of the Maccabees, perhaps we can suggest the Greek culture, the Greek value system, generally provoked less hostile reaction among Jews,

and, generally speaking, potentially could have, and indeed did have, a greater influence on Judaism than did the Roman value system precisely because the Greek view of man, time, history, god etc., was so very different from the Jewish. Not to deny that there was conflict between Greeks and Jews (Alexandria gives us more examples than we need), but the nature of the conflict (following Burridge's suggestion) between different "measures of man" meant that it was ultimately much less acute and thus more fruitful in the long run. How many Jews ever learned Latin or thoroughly Romanized themselves (and remained Jews)? The available evidence suggests that very few indeed did, compared to the vast number of Diaspora Jews (or even Jews in Palestine) who adopted Greek as their lingua franca. See H.J. Leon on the Jewish community in Rome for evidence of this crucial cultural dimension; H.J. Leon The Jews of Ancient Rome (Philadelphia JP5 1960).

39. Burridge op. cit. p.95.

40. Ibid. p.87.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid. p.90.

43. Ibid. p.93.

44. In his collection of studies on the subject of structural anthropology, Levi-Strauss assigns a whole section of four chapters to language and kinship; this subject is given pride of place in his book, and the book as a whole serves well as a general introduction to structural anthropology and to structural analysis in linguistics and anthropology in particular, useful not least because it guides the novice reader easily through the maze of the prolific scholarly literature; see C. Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology (Eng.ed. Penguin 1968).

45. Ibid. p. 33.

46. The quotation is from J. Barr, Semantics of Biblical Language (Oxford University Press 1961) p.45. n.1, paraphrasing A.R. McAllister in Interpretation 14 (1960) pp. 421-32, esp. p.421. - For another view of this subject, with restrained criticism of Barr's position, see D. Hill Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings:

Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms (Society for New Testament Studies; Monograph Series No. 5 Cambridge 1967), esp. pp. 1-14.

47. This brief statement of the "new principle" I owe to S. Chase, author of the Foreword to Language, Thought and Reality; Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf (MIT Press 1956) p.v; he appears to be quoting Whorf but gives no reference; for an interesting and readable summary of the work of Whorf with some discussion of his significance and of his relationship to Sapir see the Introduction to the same collection (written by J.B. Carroll). Be it noted that Whorf had a considerable interest in Hebrew (associated with his interest in religion); see Carroll Introduction pp.7f and passim; cf. J. Barr Semantics p.77.

On the Sapir-Whorf hypotheses in general the following may also be consulted with profit:

- E. Sapir Culture, Language and Personality ed. D.G. Mandelbaum (Univ. of California Press 1949)
- B.L. Whorf Four Articles on Metalinguistics (Washington 1952)
- H. Hoijer (ed.) Language in Culture: Conference on the Interrelations of Language and Other Aspects of Culture (Univ. of Chicago Press 1954) esp.pp. 47-81 F. Fearing "An Examination of the Conceptions of B. Whorf", 92-105, H. Hoijer, "The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis"
- P. Henle (ed.) Language, Thought and Culture (Univ. of Michigan Press 1958).
48. For a discussion of the problems associated with semantics and the relationship of those problems to "biblical theology", it is now necessary first of all to consult James Barr The Semantics of Biblical Language (Oxford 1961) esp. Chaps. 1-3; 8-10. But see also the judicious discussion of Barr's views in D. Hill Greek Words (Cambridge 1967) esp. pp. 1-14 with its defence of Humboldtian idealism (esp. pp. 10f.) and the methodology of the TWNT (pp. 12.f; cf. Preface) and criticism of Barr's approach by implication as "mechanistic" and "positivistic".
49. Barr op.cit. p.1.

50. Ibid. p.21.
51. Ibid. p.22.n.2.
52. For one such illustration see above n.46 and the text there.
53. Barr op.cit. pp.111-114.
54. Barr Biblical Words for Time (SCM Press 1962) p.16.
55. Ibid. p. 58 & n.1.
56. Ibid. p.17.
57. See O. Cullmann Christus und die Zeit Zooliken, Switzerland 1946, translated as Christ and Time London SCM Press rev.ed. 1962.
58. Barr Biblical Words for Time p.47.
59. Ibid. p.73
60. Op.cit. Chap. IV.
61. Ibid. Chap. V.
62. E. Jenni Zeitschrift für die Alt Testamentliche Wissenschaft pp. 197-248; 65 (1953) pp. 1-35.
63. Barr Biblical Words for Time p.65 & n.4. cf. pp.66, 69,
64. Jenni op.cit. p.34.
65. Those who are inclined to doubt the existence of this ancient and late ancient despair (that is,I assume, those who have not made a study of this period of antiquity) might with profit look at the following books (to name only two distinguished ones which come to mind):
H. Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Eng. Ed. Bonston 1958) and
E.R. Dodds, Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety (Cambridge University Press 1965).