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resurrection of the dead, the unbelievers will be destroyed by God, so that they cease to exist.

Most evangelicals, in line with the tradition of the Early Church, of the Medieval Church, of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Churches and the Churches of the Reformation, opt for the first possibility as the only scriptural view.¹⁰ Universalism, which was advocated in the Early Church by Origen, in the 16th century by the Socinians and in the 19th century by quite a few liberal theologians, but also by F. D. Maurice, and in our century is quite common among Liberal and Roman Catholic theologians¹¹, has never been a real option for evangelicals. In recent years, however, we see that the third option is gaining ground among evangelicals. It is defended by such evangelical stalwarts as John Wenham¹² and John Stott.¹³

I would like to end this short and incomplete survey of evangelical theology with a twofold conclusion.

1. It is definitely possible to speak of an evangelical theology, at least as far as the main tenets of the Christian faith are concerned.

2. There are still many areas where evangelicals disagree. In other words, there is still much to be done by evangelical theologians. They have to study hard and should make the results of their study available in scholarly publications. I for one would be inclined to give special attention to the doctrine of Scripture and to hermeneutics. The different hermeneutical conceptions used within the Evangelical Movement are the main cause of the theological differences we have noted in this paper.

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Christian Faith in the New Millennium

Eshetu Abate

In this brief article, Dr Eshetu Abate, an evangelical Lutheran theologian from Ethiopia, focuses on two essentials for the Christian Faith in the new millennium—continuity in the Apostolic Faith and concern for others, especially the poor. In the context of the suffering of churches across Africa today, this simple but clear statement speaks to the heart of evangelical mission now and in the future.

Editor

¹⁰ Cf. for instance, Leon Morris, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (1984), pp. 369–70.

¹¹ Cf. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973) and *ibid.*, *God has Many Faces* (1980), and Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions* (1985). See also: John Hick and Paul Knitter ed., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (1987).

¹² John Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil*, (1985), pp. 27ff.

¹³ John Stott, in David L. Edwards/John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, (1988), pp. 312ff.

At the end of the present millennium we find peoples of the world with their different cultures opening up to each other. Peoples and cultures of the world are not so remote from each other as they used to be in the first century or even in the last century. Modern communication systems bring people from every corner of the world to individual homes even if the people themselves have not got a chance to travel. As it has been often said we live more and more in a 'Global Village'. Even if the term village may sound a bit exaggerated we can feel that there is something unifying or identifying the peoples of the earth with each other as if they belonged to one nation.

On the other hand, in spite of all that brings the people of the earth closer to each other, their unique cultural and social heritage still remains. This makes wondering at and learning from each other an enjoyable possibility. The new millennium into which we are entering is at the threshold of these phenomena. What kind of Christian Faith do we then expect to live and confess in this new millennium? As far as I am concerned the Christian Faith in the new millennium should demonstrate the following two major things: Continuity in the Apostolic Faith and Concern for each other, especially the poor.

I CONTINUITY IN THE APOSTOLIC FAITH

For us the year 2000 may represent too long a period of time. We feel that the world has a very long history and that we have progressed very far. Midnight on the last day of December 1999 will be not only the start of a new year but also of a new millennium. So people are waiting for the day with much expectation and with a sense of great accomplishment and progress. If seen from the biblical perspective however, the period leading up to year 2000 cannot be considered very long. 'With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day' ([2 Pet. 3:8](#)). We may be just finishing our second day and entering our third day from the perspective of the Lord. This demonstrates the fact that we have to follow just the same faith as that of the apostles and their disciples without exaggerating our remoteness or distance of time from them.

The Apostolic Faith Exists Regardless of Place and Time

One of the marks of true followers of Jesus Christ is continuity in his teaching and that of the apostles. 'He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me' ([Mt. 10:40](#)). The apostle Paul praises the young Timothy for the knowledge of his teaching, way of life, purpose, faith and patience etc. and admonishes Timothy to continue in what he has learned ([2 Tim. 3:10-17](#)). The first believers who gave themselves to the Lord after hearing the message preached by St. Peter devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer ([Acts 2:41-42](#)). It is the same faith that we who are living at the threshold of the new millennium are following, committed to and intend to carry on.

It is very important for us to ascertain whether the faith we hold, which we preach in our churches and teach in our theological schools and Faculty has continuity with the apostolic faith or not. The true Christian church has one faith, one Lord and one baptism ([Eph. 4: 5.](#)) The content of that faith does not change with time or place.

The famous Church Father, Irenaeus, once wrote the following about the permanence of the Apostolic Faith in his work entitled *Against Heresies*: 'The Church though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith . . .' Then, after describing the content of the faith in words very similar to the Apostles' Creed he continues, 'As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these

points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. . . . Nor will any one of the rulers in the churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master); nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on tradition. For the faith being ever one and the same, neither does one who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, make any addition to it, nor does one, who can say but little, diminish it. (Iren'us, *Against Heresies*, [1:10](#)).

If we really believe in the communion of saints, as we usually confess, we cannot but have the same faith as the early church. The content of the faith was handed on by the Lord to his first disciples and by the disciples to their followers. Christians of the first millennium handed on the same faith to those of the second millennium. We who are now living at the end of the second millennium have to carry over the same faith and hand it on to the generations of the third millennium. Christianity is not created anew in every generation or century. Rather it is newly experienced by each generation. The fish has been there in the sea for thousands of years. But each time we eat, we experience its taste and nourishment. It is similar with Christianity.

The Apostolic Faith May Be Contextualized But Cannot Be Modified or Changed

In recent years there has been a good understanding of the need to respect cultures and people groups. As a result genuine attempts have been made to share the message of Jesus Christ without imposing one's culture upon the recipients. On the other hand, some have gone to the point of modifying or changing the very content and message of the faith in order to speak to contemporary culture. It is very important to note here that there is no culture in the past, present or future to which Christianity will not be relevant. In fact, though the forms and expressions may change from place to place or from time to time, the situation, needs and predicaments of human beings are the same throughout the centuries and will remain the same until one gets an answer by faith in Jesus Christ. In my own judgment, there is no substantial difference, even between the so-called modern and scientific world, and the world of the first century, when it comes to the essential questions of human destiny. The difference I see between the two worlds is only that of 'mechanical advantage'.

Christianity deals with the question of relationships—a right relationship with God and man. There is an innermost yearning for this right relationship in everybody, whether a scientist in his laboratory or an illiterate farmer in a remote bush. I heard once of the death of two doctors in a renowned research laboratory. When the news of their death was revealed it was told that the one killed the other and then himself due to a quarrel they had. Thus we see that love, forgiveness, joy and peace are needed for every human being and every place in the world, regardless of one's background, such as country, education, occupation or culture. No sophistication of the modern world, the digital system, computerization or automation of any kind can help human beings in the area of relationships. The only one who can help is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who has opened the way to a right relationship with God and fellow human beings with his death on the cross that heralded love, forgiveness and reconciliation. I once also saw a rich man living in a big house with a lot of material wealth in it. However he was alone and lonely. I later on came to realize that he no longer lives with his wife because of the poor relationship they had. I said in my heart, 'It is much better for a person to live with his wife (a person) in love, forgiveness and patience than to live alone in a big stone house with all material

wealth in it.' A right personal relationship both with God and one's fellow man is a key to understanding what Christianity is all about. As I understand it, this right relationship does not conflict in any way with scientific progress or advancement. As air, food and water are needed for every human being, regardless of his background, so also true love, forgiveness and fellowship are needed for all. They are found by faith in him who is 'The Truth, The Way and the Life'. It is this faith that we need as we enter into the new millennium.

The Apostolic Faith Accepts the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Authority of His Word

The apostle Paul writes about Jesus Christ, 'And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy' ([Col. 1:18](#)). Accepting the lordship and supremacy of Jesus Christ is demonstrated by obedience to him and his Word. He who does not accept his Word cannot accept him. There is no dichotomy between his Word and himself. I have heard a number of comments from church members that some churches preach politics from the pulpit, leaving aside the Word of God. If that is true, those churches have forgotten their calling and mission. A church that does not have a message from the Word of God to its audience is like a gun without a bullet. It is important to remember at this point what the reformer Luther said about the two marks of a true church, namely the right preaching and teaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the Sacraments. Whatever may be said to elucidate the message, Jesus Christ and his Word should have full authority in our churches. Our acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of his Word should be demonstrated in both our churches and daily life. The modern church, if she wants to keep her identity with the Apostolic Church, needs to live in the same faith and preach and teach the same faith.

The Apostolic Faith is Mission Oriented

The church all over the world is the result of mission. To learn this we need simply to go back and read our history. The first missionary was our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent from his Father. Ever since his first coming, mission has been going on. We may explain mission with different words and understand it in many ways. But for me, mission is the very breath of the church. It is her confession, telling who she is, what she believes and why she believes it. In short, it is telling what Christ has meant for her and what he promises to do for those who believe him. This kind of mission cannot be limited to a certain designated locality. It starts first with one's life, then family and friends, neighbours and one's town and country. It involves one's total existence and way of life. It is impossible to evangelize others without first being ourselves evangelized. He who does not know, and has never experienced the blessings of Jesus Christ in his own life and church cannot offer to others a genuine invitation to share in the blessing. It will be sheer hypocrisy to do that.

Inspired individuals and groups have done a great deal to give testimony to their faith in unreached areas all over the world. But in some of the countries which were seed beds of missionaries the very faith of the church is under attack. People have turned their eyes to material enticements and worldly pleasures, forgetting that whatever is material is temporary. Only the name 'Christian' is left as a historical relic and tradition without any demonstration of the essential substance of Christianity, which is living faith in Jesus Christ. In view of this the traditional and customary thinking of doing mission in certain designated areas, such as Africa, Asia and Latin America is painful to me. At this stage in history, I am quite convinced that mission and the proclamation of the saving power of

Jesus Christ are needed everywhere with almost equal urgency. With the apostle Paul we should be able to say 'I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. . . .' Everyone who believes in the message of the gospel will be saved. So mission should be done everywhere, among all nations ([Mt 28:19-20](#)).

II CONCERN FOR EACH OTHER, ESPECIALLY THE POOR

One of the marks of true disciples of Jesus Christ is love. Love cannot be love if it is not translated into action. The apostle John writes, 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity in him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth' ([1 John 3:17-18](#)). Love requires interaction. It cannot take place in seclusion or isolation. The present seclusion and individualism seen in some cultures should be carefully weighed on the basis of this concept of love. We have heard and read a number of times of people dying in their apartments and their bodies being found after a number of weeks. It is very sad to learn that nobody ever visited them regularly. The church should be the foremost example of the love of Jesus Christ both within her members and in the community among whom she exists and whom she serves. Jesus Christ sought the lost; the downcast and the marginalized. So should his church on earth. It is expected from the body of Christ, the church, to reflect him who is love. He gave not only his possessions, honour, etc. but his very life in love.

Conclusion: We expect and hope for the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The present world around us is full of evil. When we see the countries in the world arena, materially affluent nations seem to be selfish, greedy and protective of their own advantages. On the other hand materially poorer nations seem to be torn with discord, war and envy. What then is the hope for our world in the years to come and particularly in the new millennium? If all the nations of the world were to be led by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who was born from the virgin Mary, crucified, died and was buried under Pontius Pilate and rose on the third day from death, the world would be a peaceful place. There would be no discord, war, envy, selfishness, greed and protectionism. Thus, the only solution for our world is in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and his total reign. The church, his body, is expected to share in the reign of Jesus her Lord. In the meantime however she has to live in the world without being of the world and sharing its evil deeds. We, then, enter into the new millennium expecting the coming of our Lord who will give peace to his world and creation. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

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Jesus Christ—Lord of the Market Place