

The World Network of Religious Futurists



Global Visions

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Note

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Editorial

...and so to bed. With these famous words of Samuel Pepys, I take my leave of you. Editing Global Visions over the last few years has been at times exhilarating, frustrating, exhausting, great fun. It has never been dull. My successor is also my predecessor. Bill Heins edited this magazine from its inception until I took over at the end of 1994. I have no hesitation in returning the editorship into his hands.

In this issue, we have news on the World Network of Christian Futurists; the WNRF-sponsored Convocation of Wisdom Schools, as it moves into its third phase in London; and an update on the WNRF Think-tank. We have

articles from Paul Meyers and Richard Kirby, as well as our regular column from Jay Gary.

May you all be richly blessed, as you explore what the future holds.

Enjoy the Magazine.

Gordon Arthur

Are We Gonna Go, or Not?

by Paul Meyers

Thinking about the past is easy. We've been there. We've "done that". We can remedy the errors and change the current reality in light of past happenings. We can "do it over and over again".

Thinking about the future is difficult. We're not there. We don't know what it's like there. We cannot see the future. We cannot reach out and touch the future. Or can we?

Our calling as Futurist Visionaries is not to think (and feel) about the past or even the present for that matter. Our calling is to fix our eyes on a place in time yet unseen and untouched - by humanity, that is.

I call your attention to Exodus 15:1-21. (It is necessary to follow along with an open Bible.) This passage is more than a story of Praise to God after a Divine wind blew some water away to make a safe pathway to freedom. This is a song of Praise that I can hear being proclaimed from tomorrow! (vs. 11)

Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Notice the present verb tense)

Continuing, the Praise chorus echoes of great deeds done: vs. 12 - You stretched out your right hand and then swallowed [the Egyptians] (Notice the past verb tense) And further, notice the amount of verse dedicated to the past and present.

Now read on. Open your eyes to the amount of text space dedicated to Praising God for Future Deliverance!

Vs. 13-18: ...you will lead... you will guide... the nations will hear and tremble... anguish will grip... chiefs will be terrified... leaders will be seized... you will bring... you will plant... The Lord will reign forever and ever!

Has our work caused any nations to "hear and tremble" with what our Creator is gonna do? Maybe? Kind-of? Really? NOT YET!

Why? Because the WNRF has not yet passed by. Check out verse 16: By the power of your arm they [the nations] will be as still as stone until your people pass by... until the people you bought pass by

My friends, our inheritance awaits us just around the corner! It's a place with many names: Healed. Forgiven. Changed. New. Difficult. Exciting. Weird. Beautiful. (Fill in your words here) Are we gonna go or not? The text implies that the future becomes a reality when God's people pass

by. I trust that this is our time to begin the pilgrimage toward passing by the future! It's time to go! Where's the place we're going?

We don't know. Simply put, it's just beginning to be revealed. Yet we know something about this place. It's new. (Is. 43) It's a sanctuary of God's love. (Ex. 15:17) God is there. (Ex. 15:18) It may be dark, but you hold the light! (15.60:1-3)

The whole world is waiting for God's Futurists to pass by. Anyone can talk a good show. God's waiting for us to GO! (It's an action verb. See Matthew 28:19)

Are we gonna go, or not?

Rev. Paul C. Meyers
National Director - USA
WNRF

Theology of Mathematics

by Richard Kirby
Part One

(First presented at King's College, University of London on February 16th 1988)

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to Professor Gunton for the opportunity to present this paper. I am also grateful to the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, and to the members of the Department of Christian Doctrine and History, for their hospitality within Professor Gunton's Senior Seminar. My thanks to the participants in this seminar for their kind attention to the doctrines presented in this paper.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Parker Rossman for his companionship along the rather unfamiliar path of the systematic theology of computer science and artificial intelligence. Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin and Professor T. F. Torrance have helped me clarify my ideas about misology and theological science respectively, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge their prodigious advancement of these fields.

However, responsibility for the content of this paper remains solely mine.

I - Introduction: Purposes

I would like to begin by explaining my hopes in presenting and writing it. First of all, my hope is to present a survey, with some synthesizing principles, of a number of important new ideas and research fields in the Anglo-American world, especially at those points where theology and mathematics share common boundaries.

If we imagine the geography of ideas as similar to a world map, we can portray theology and mathematics as having a long, though irregular, common border: similar to (say) the Sino-Soviet border. At the present time (1988), it is the field of computer science which occupies the largest part of that common border. Computer science, and its companion discipline of information technology, has its own frontiers, in both theory (concept, idea) and practice. The notions of supercomputer and artificial intelligence, and more re-

motely, robotics science, occupy much of the high ground in the frontiers of mathematical computer science. In mentioning these concepts, it is not too early to make the important point that the contemplation of mathematical science is in part the study of prevalent mathematical ideas.

It is important to remind ourselves that mathematics, in addition to being (allegedly) an "exact science", is also a field of discussion and an intellectual world in which the free play of novel and experimental concepts takes place within what may be called Wittgensteinian "language-games". In other words, the advancement of mathematics occurs through the discussion of mathematical ideas and their attendant "paradigms" as well as through the actual deployment of mathematical instruments of thought in such fields as ballistics and astrophysics.

In presenting this survey, it will be my responsibility to draw together many strands of research and of mission, as well as to mention some recent viewpoints in mathematical and theological method. Some of the names which I mention will be well known to you; others less so. However, all the protagonists in the following story deserve to be considered leaders in the advancement of true religion in the field of mathematical science.

My second hope is to give some articulation to a new field of theological inquiry: the systematic theology of mathematical science. This is not offered as a primarily theoretical exercise, nor as a hope, but as

an attempt to provide a coherent paradigm, an intellectual canopy, for an already ongoing international programme of research, action, communication and technology.

Adopting the terminology of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, we could say that part of what is described here is a missionary encounter of the Gospel with a central element of our culture: the science of mathematics and all its resultant technologies. So my second hope, then, is to define and inaugurate, on behalf of my colleagues, a programme of action by the Church (for all missionary action is the action of the Church) in relation to the foundations and frontiers of mathematical science.

If one were to ask why such a programme is necessary, the answer would be, "Because of the crises in mathematics and its technologies" - crises to be documented below. This paper - this programme of action - is possible because of the juxtaposition in time of two phenomena; the collapse of certainty in the philosophy of mathematics and in advanced computer research; and the appearance of new instruments of theological research and collaboration. In reporting to you these two phenomena, I hope to show that the new theological instruments of mission and community entitle us to postulate and initiate the emergent field, the systematic theology of mathematical science.

Thirdly, and finally, my hope is to draw attention to some events at the boundaries of theology itself, and of its instrumentalities in the domain

of theological method. For example, we can discern the emergence of a "theological mathematics" to complement the "Theological Science" of which Professor T. F. Torrance has written (see Torrance, 1969).

II - Crises in Mathematics: Practice and Theory

A. Practice

To honour the principle of God's Incarnation in this world, I begin with mention of two news items from the frontiers of mathematical inquiry and the philosophy of mathematics. One is from the USA, one from the UK; one pertains to pure mathematics, the other to applied mathematics.

i) Applied mathematics.

First, the USA. A few weeks ago, Cray Supercomputers, Inc. suffered a debilitating loss in their research programme: Steve Chen, their director of research, resigned. The result, from the company's viewpoint, was near-catastrophic: the company shares fell on the stock market, and I believe that the entire Dow-Jones index fell as a result. Reasons for Mr. Chen's departure are not entirely clear, but one reason appears to be that the progress in supercomputer research had slowed down; it had encountered unexpected difficulties. At the high frontier of applied mathematics, a sudden loss of confidence had occurred.

ii) Pure mathematics.

Second, a little news item from the U.K. The Times, for February 8th, 1998, reports, "Baker's top maths adviser resigns", and continues: "The Government's plans for raising the standards of mathematics teaching in schools were thrown into disarray yesterday by the resignation of Professor Sigbert Prais, its most prominent supporter on the national curriculum working group... The 14 members of the group were appointed last July by Mr. Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education and Science. Their task was to redefine how mathematics should be taught in the light of the growing evidence that British schoolchildren of average and below average ability were falling behind their counterparts in West Germany and Japan".

Here we see in the more basic levels of education in principles of pure mathematics, some confusion concerning the desired "redefinition of how mathematics should be taught".

I would like to suggest that these two apparently isolated instances are part of a much more widespread malaise in the entire field of mathematics. According to one of its most eminent philosophers and historians - an apologist for mathematics - mathematics is in crisis: the philosophy of mathematics has come close to collapsing.

B. Theory

Morris Kline, the well-known historian of mathematics, has been emeritus Professor of Mathematics, and is as-

sociated with the Courant institute of Mathematical Sciences, within New York University.

In 1980, a fascinating treatise appeared under his authorship, published by Oxford University Press. Its title was simply MATHEMATICS; but it had a sub-title also: The Decline of Certainty. One reader of this work described it as a history of mathematics written as a tragedy.

In this work of history of mathematics, Professor Kline focuses on the modern period; more than two thirds of his study is dedicated to the examination of the modern history of mathematics, from Newton to Poincaré. Following a review of the origins of mathematical inquiry in ancient times, he records what he calls the “Mathematization of science”, and then goes on in successive sections to speak of what he terms “The First Debate”, “The Illogical Development”, “The New Crisis of Reason”, “Disasters”, and the “Isolation of Mathematics”. The penultimate chapter is termed, “Whither Mathematics?”

To a theologian this “strange, eventful history” reads rather oddly. Theology is not even mentioned in the index of the book, and Fr. Lonergan’s monumental study, “Insight”, is conspicuous by its absence. Such instruments of thought and inquiry as prayer, meditation and liturgy are also absent from overt consideration. Nevertheless, the theological aspect appears at the very end of the story of mathematics, in a very vivid way. For Professor Kline con-

cludes his dissertation by writing of mathematics:

“...though it is discomfiting to have to grant that its foundations are not secure, it is still the most precious jewel of the human mind and must be treasured and husbanded. It has been the van of reason and no doubt will continue to be even if new flaws are discovered by more searching scrutiny. Alfred North Whitehead once wrote ‘Let us grant that the pursuit of mathematics is a divine madness of the human spirit.’ Madness, perhaps, but surely divine.” (Kline, 1980; page 354)

III - A Theological Response to Contemporary Crises in Mathematics

Several elements in Professor Kline’s conclusion, taken collectively, constitute an invitation to theologians to begin a systematic encounter with the foundations and frontiers of mathematical inquiry, mathematical science, mathematical philosophy and philosophy of mathematics. These elements are, first, the alleged divinity in “the pursuit of mathematics”; second, the loss of security in the foundations of mathematics, and the sense which mathematicians have that they do not - to paraphrase Bertrand Russell - know where they are going, or why, or what they will do when they get there; and thirdly, the concept that mathematics is “the most precious jewel” of the human mind. This encounter with both the foundations and the frontiers of mathematical science is

beginning to be known as the theology of mathematics, with some similar phrases competing at present for the status of working title in an intensifying field of research and inquiry: theology of mathematical inquiry, theology of mathematical science, systematic theology of mathematical science, etc.

Whence the phrase “theology of mathematics”? It is a natural continuation of the line of terms which have grown up over the last hundred years in relation to science itself. Thus we speak of “philosophy of science” (Kuhn, 1962 etc.), “sociology of science”, “politics of science”, and even “psychology of science”. In the same way that we can now speak of “theology of science” (see Kirby, 1986), we can accordingly speak of “theology of mathematics” as an emerging field of research being undertaken by theologians, philosophers, scientists and mathematicians around the world. If we ask what kind of definition is employed in speaking of theology of science or mathematics, we could respond “a stipulative definition”. Therefore, the concept is a kind of “performative utterance” in J. L. Austin’s sense, but the definition can and should be progressively refined by its users.

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Announcing The World Network of Christian Futurists

by T. M. Johnson

The purpose of the WNCF is to promote dialogue, strategy, collaboration, scholarship, and clear thinking between Christians on the subject of the future. This collaboration has the following characteristics:

1. **WORLD.** Participation is international in nature. Men and women from all over the world can join in the dialogue via the Internet.

2. **NETWORK.** The nature of the collaboration is a network – “a group of interconnected or cooperating individuals.”

3. **CHRISTIAN.** Participants are Christians, defined as “one who believes in, or professes or confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, or is assumed to believe in Jesus Christ; an

adherent of Christianity.” (World Christian Encyclopedia). This presumes that participants will be drawn from the seven major ecclesiastical blocs (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, non-Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Marginal, and Independent), from more than 160 ecclesiastical traditions (Lutheran, Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, nondenominational, Jehovah Witnesses, etc.), and from 24,000 different denominations.

4. **FUTURISTS.** Futurists are “people who have a special interest in what may happen in the years ahead and think seriously about what lies beyond the short-term perspective...[they] are especially concerned about the impact on the future of what is done in the present.” (Ed Cornish, Encyclopedia of the Future). Christian futurists feel a responsibility to obey Christ in the present for a positive impact on the future.

Christian futurism can be surveyed from the following major categories.

1. **Theology.** Not all theology is future-oriented but works that are deliberately so include *“Theology for the third millennium”* by H. Küng (1988), *“Revisioning Evangelical theology”* by S. Grenz (1993), and *“The temples of tomorrow”* by R. Kirby and E. Brewer (1993). This would also include areas such as dialogue with other religions and interfaith activities.

2. **Ecclesiology.** This is the study of the church of the future. K. Rahner’s *“The shape of the church to come”* and W.

Buhlmann’s *“The church of the future”* examine issues directly related to the structure and life of the church in the future.

3. **Eschatology.** Perhaps the most prolific category ranging from popular works such as H. Lindsey’s *“Late great planet earth”* (1970) to scholarly treatments like A. Hoekema’s *“The Bible and the future”* (1979).

4. **Missiology.** A long history of forward-looking strategic planning includes *“The future of the Christian world mission”* by W. Danker and W. J. Kang (1971) and the more recent *“Redemptoris Missio”* by John Paul II (1991).

5. **Prophecy.** This might be considered a part of eschatology but much prophecy has little to do with the “end times” per se. Beginning with God’s revelation of the future in the Garden of Eden and continuing with recent prophetic announcements from Christian prophets such as R. Joyner and P. Cain, this category should probably be examined apart from eschatology.

6. **Inspiration.** Many Christians approach the future from the standpoint of worship and devotion. The content of J. Gary’s *“The star of 2000”* overlaps with some of the other categories but its basic orientation is inspirational.

These categories are specifically “Christian” but there are many other areas of human life and society that Christians directly address in relation to the future. These include:

7. **Science and technology.** Christians are making contri-

butions in a wide array of disciplines including cosmology (R. Peacock's *_A brief history of eternity_*. 1991), biology (J. Rifkin's *_Entropy_*.1986), computing (P. Rossman and R. Kirby's *_Christians and the world of computers_*. 1990), etc.

8. Issues. This would include general works such as T. Sine's *_Wild hope_* and books and articles focused on the environment, population, gender, sexuality, etc.

9. Society and culture. This includes E. Bellamy's *_Looking backwards 2000-1887_* (1887). The focus in recent times has been on the death of modernity and what is emerging in its place, usually called "postmodernity" for lack of a better term. Most of the literature, such as S. Grenz's *_A primer on post-modernism_* (1995), is descriptive rather than prescriptive, but has clear future-orientation. Sociologist R. Wuthnow's *_Christianity in the 21st century_* (1993) is also in this category.

10. Philosophy. Much of what is written on postmodernity is approached from the discipline of philosophy. D. Allen's *_Christian belief in a postmodern world_* (1989) is one example.

11. Science fiction. Christians have been writing science fiction since its inception. Orson Scott Card's future scenarios and Andrew M. Greeley's *_Sacred visions_* compilation of Catholic science fiction are two examples.

These 11 categories give a broad-based context for dialogue and collaboration in the

World Network of Christian Futurists. Any of these areas can be discussed on the forum. Please send me additional ideas if you have any.

The World Network of Christian Futurists - Rules of the Road

by Justin D. Long, Facilitator

This is the first entry into the Christian-Futurists archive. As such, I am taking this opportunity both to informally introduce this special interest group, and to explain the technical aspects of how the group works.

WNCF is a private, moderated conference for Christians who are interested in the future. The purpose, as the next entry will make clear, is to promote dialogue, strategy, collaboration, scholarship, and clear thinking between Christians on the subject of the future. WNCF is a sub-set of the larger World Network of Religious Futurists, organized out of Seattle, WA.

As the facilitator for this conference, my task is to insure the clean flow of mail, to subscribe interested Christians to the conference, to unsubscribe those who request it, to kick off those who are abusing the list, and most importantly to compile these entries.

The purpose of the entry will be of paramount importance to each of our participants. It is designed from the very start to eliminate "e-mail glut." Essentially, the conference works in this form:

1. Each participant e-mails their messages to the conference.

2. All e-mails are collected and compiled (without editing).

3. The "entries" will be posted roughly once per week.

I suggest that we begin with "submissions" on particular topics. Responses will be collected into a single "submission." I will be adjusting this format in the days to come to find the optimum balance.

If you have any suggestions or requests, feel free to simply hit the <REPLY> button. Your comments will +NOT+ be automatically echoed to the list, so you don't have to worry about cluttering the list up.

I encourage you to send this entry and/or the next to prospective individuals who may be interested in participating in this conference, as an official "invitation" to participate.

Blessings to all,

Justin Long

Bimillennial Bytes

by Jay Gary

"Scanning the millennium for religious futurists"

Tertium Millennium Magazine Available

The Vatican's Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 has just completed its first year of publication of its quarterly magazine, "Tertium Millennium." Each issue of the 126 page glossy color magazine features how the Roman Catholic Church is

preparing to celebrate the bimillennium through its various Jubilee Commissions. The first year of publication covered a number of issues of interest to religious futurists, including reflections on the Pope's Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986, as well as reports on ecumenical possibilities that 2000 will bring.

Everything2000: "All things millennial in one place"

Everything2000™ is a comprehensive web resource for all 2000 and new millennium enthusiasts. It is a commercial site that offers a balanced clearing house of millennium information representing diverse opinions, business interests, organizations, causes and events. Impressive debut this past December.

Will Faith Be Found Under the Millennium Dome?

It appears the Eiffel Tower in Paris will soon be upstaged as the most famous architectural symbol left from a world exposition. The new kid on the block will be London's Millennium Dome. Twice the size of the Georgia Dome, the Millennium Dome will have a circumference of one kilometer, housing a year-long Millennium Exhibition on time which plans to open December 31, 1999. According to Exhibition specs, the Dome's glass sides and translucent white fabric roof will dominate the London skyline by day and glow spectacularly at night.

But when some 10 million visitors pass through in 2000, will faith be found on the 130

acre site? This was the question which the moderators of the ecumenical Churches Together in England program asked The Millennium Commission this month.

Here is a list of 10 values excerpted from a larger paper on how faith relates to the English millennium celebrations and how religious values have "shaped our past, determined our calendar, and we believe, offer meaning for the next millennium."

1. Hope For the Future:

Let there be people and exhibits that look to the next thousand years and offer to make sense of it, rather than assuming we must give in to blind fate and circumstance.

2. Families and Relationships:

Let there be an affirmation and celebration of the strengths of living together in good times and bad, and recognition of how families provide the "best practice" for bringing up children - the adults of the next millennium.

3. Togetherness:

Let space be given to those who work for others less fortunate than themselves, or who engender a sense of solidarity within Britain and across the globe, and let diversity and difference (in Britain as well as outside it) be celebrated.

4. Encounter:

Let people be encouraged to take the risk of meeting and conversing with others during their Greenwich experience, rather than spending their time

isolated and cut off in their own private experience.

5. Creativity Matters:

Let there be artists and craft workers (of all kinds), for people to watch, talk to, try their hand...

6. Stories From People's Lives:

Let there be places for your own group (whether religious or otherwise) to tell their story, and to hear other people's views on life, the Universe, and everything.

7. Learning From the Past:

Let there be room for people to do their own audit on our nation's past, and their own past, to equip them to recognize failure take the chance to start again and be renewed for the future.

8. Change is Possible:

Let there be opportunity for people to see that the world needs to be changed, and that it can be changed, and to hear from those who work for justice and fair shares for all - everything from the nuts and bolts of alternative technology to the economics of world debt.

9. Belonging:

Let there be lived-out examples of communal efforts that make a difference, and opportunities for people to commit themselves to joining up, having a go, or just finding out more when they get home.

10. Spirituality:

Let there be space for people's capacity to feel wonder

and delight, to survive immense struggles, pain or tragedy, yet remain hopeful and trusting.

I look forward to seeing many of you this summer at the World Future Society conference July 17-19th, in San Francisco. I hear that WNRF has a great program lined up. Until then, let's keep working to see the next millennium become a Millennium of Faith.

Developments in the WNRF Think-Tank

by Richard Kirby

The "WNRF Think-Tank" Building

Here goes with my main policy/method statement for 1997. I will keep it fairly brief and ask for interim feedback.

We postulated many things last year as method, content and community. How to synthesize them? Here's my plan:

We are going to design and build together a cyber-building, as follows.

WNRF BUILDING: CODE NAME 'GLOBAL COMMONS'

1. On research topics (FIRST FLOOR):

A. Imagine that each month we will focus our think-tank debates on one of the great themes which we discussed, e.g. the arts, global projects and so on. So our discussions can be flexible but focused; and the results can be cumulative.

B. Further, each week, we will have a topic of the week. This will be flexible, and can respond on a 'consultancy' ba-

sis to current affairs: so we will have pure and applied research going on. There will also be a news and 'Situation' room for news of the world, urgent needs, and news of our own work. We will be available as a team of experts should the need arise: that is one thing a think-tank is.

C. In addition to these specific foci, we will have a subject-free chat room where anyone can speak of any ideas.

2. There will be a chaplain's room, within a temple, for prayer, 'cyber-medicine', and pastoralia.

3. There will also be a 'Basement' where we can keep talking about our identity and our methods

4. There will be a penthouse where we 'broadcast' to the world

5. There will be a Garden where we relax.

6. And there will be a Playhouse. In that rooftop Theater we present our fiction, drama and so on.

7. There will be a Treasury where we deposit, if we wish, symbolic 'wealth'; and develop our 'theology of business/finance/economics'.

8. There will be a Guest Room and Visitor's Book.

9. And a Students'/Apprentices' Room.

10. And a new members room.

How will it happen? I will literally and in cyberspace 'model' this building, the locale and site of our conversations. Add your 'rooms' please - write now and tell me what I omitted.

And there is the Land, the Site of the Building. Let us

plan its neighborhood. Let us name 'roads', streets and avenues for each of us: e.g. Wellesley Walk is a Wisdom Way: on it, you meet - what? How to construct spiritual experiences in cyberspace?

All I ask of each of us is that in due course we state which room we are in when we send our messages. Over the next few months I'll set this up on the Web - probably in association with one of the Universities where I teach. I'll try meanwhile to design an e-mail form to be used ad interim.

This plan allows us to have free and/or focused dialog/multilog: and to develop on all levels, as we proceed through the year.

I will announce the per-month topics for your consideration next week or so. (I and my team here will maintain all the databases.)

Thank you everybody

Richard

A response from Parker Rossman

An imaginative, visionary project like this falls by the wayside if too much is proposed at once. Include in the idea a schedule to do one "room" each year, 1,2,3,4,5,6. What is the order of priority? Of course plans and content for all "rooms" can be put in that room, in storage, until it is time to work on that one. And of course, you and others can work on one or another at any time when an idea comes or interest develops.

When visiting our youngest daughter at Christmas, she

took us on a tour of a “virtual city” on the World Wide Web, where many people are building houses, businesses, institutions. She and some of her friends in Cleveland are each designing and building a house. You can visit it during construction and talk to her if she is on-line at the time. When it is finished she can invite guests in for conversation, or have a party or meeting there. She can go to a recreation center to play golf or ski and talk to other people (who are on-line) who are golfing or skiing. (We watched her ski down a slope.)

Some who are experimenting in such virtual reality city building hope to use these places for education, action meetings, research on important topics. Here one can experiment with untried ideas to play out the consequences and examine alternatives. There are plans for war in such virtual communities, but are there for peace-building, peace-keeping, etc. I bet no one has yet started to build in that virtual city a religious institution -- temple, mosque, church or (although some ‘independent-type’ TV preacher will probably be the first to do so) study center for dialog among people of different faiths and opinions, a retreat center, much less the headquarters of a group like the WNRF. When preparing for my week at UNESCO last spring I visited UNESCO and the new electronic library in Paris, on the world wide web, reading documents, making appointments in advance, and saving myself at least two days when I actually got to Paris.

Now that I have been asked to write a couple of policy papers for the world bank I am been visiting the bank on the web to read papers, etc., in the same way. When I visit the Peace Research Institute in Sweden, I not only see the building but a map of how to find it, etc. Next, of course, there will be ways to visit such institutions in the kind of Virtual Reality community that my daughter is exploring.

Combine this with the technology at the Danish-built Synoptican (that may not be the right word) at Penn. State - an electronic conference center with wall-sized TV screens, so that attendees can talk with people in other countries as if they are in the same room. So in time you can create a “virtual reality conference center” on the web where all sorts of WNRF conferences can be held, so that people in various countries can attend without travel expense. This is the time for experimentation with how the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, etc., can function in this way.

An Invitation to the London session of the Convocation of Wisdom Schools

by Carol Parrish

Dear Friends,

It is with delight that we invite persons to join us in London, May 23-25, 1997 for the concluding session of the year-long Convocation of Wisdom Schools for the 21st Century sponsored by Sancta Sophia seminary and The

World Network of Religious Futurists.

Purposes:

* To convene interfaith and ecumenical wisdom traditions, to reflect together upon the future of the world in the light of spiritual heritage and potential of the human race.

* To chronicle the contributions of various schools and cultures to the emerging “Yoga of the World” - the religion of the future wherein respect and ecumenical appreciation for each tradition will be reflected.

* To invite participants to define their contributions to the spiritual councils of global governance in the new millennium.

Part I, in New Delhi inspired the 50 of us that gathered to reach out in new ways to the various denominations of Christianity and other world religions. There were beautiful demonstrations of how native Indian Christians have integrated yoga and Hindu culture with their approach to Christianity, making it natural to their own people. We also had an opportunity to hear from several women how, as women visitors, to adapt to the culture bridging the differences presented to us as Westerners.

The US group had many learning experiences as they then continued to travel to holy sites of various religions associated with the spiritual heritage of India. Varanasi, as a holy city was very important to us, as well as Vrindabahan and Mathura (birthplace of Lord Krishna) and Bodhgaya (birthplace and place of enlighten-

ment of Lord Buddha). We continued our journey in the Himalayas and visited Tibetan Monasteries in both Darjeeling and Sikkim. Returning home, all of us had been deeply touched by the sincerity and respect of each tradition for true spiritual pilgrims. We realize how much we have in common, rather than only the strangeness of differences.

A most touching experience, was to be received and blessed by Mother Teresa. She had been out of the hospital one-and-a-half-days when we attended mass with her at the motherhouse in Calcutta and afterwards had an audience. Later, in Gangtok, Sikkim, we had an opportunity to visit a Catholic Church maintained by her Sisters and their home for the mentally and physically handicapped, as well as the elderly, ill and dying.

Here we learned six Sisters are assigned to operate the center and care for 100 persons. Daily, four care for the charges, and two go out to beg for monies, supplies, and ask public officials, and those who have plenty, for whatever is most needed. The facilities were very simple, but spotless. These four daily cook, clean, nurture, assist with clothing etc., all the 100 in their care. On the day we were there, a funeral for a former charge had also taken place. We were inspired by the beauty of the Sister who spent time with us and she touched each of us in such a way as to cause us to look at our service to the Christ, and determine what more we could do.

Each spiritual journey we create has ways of blessings us as we go. We will next travel to Wales as pilgrims to learn from Rev. Geraint ap Iowerth, an Episcopal priest, who has recently visited the US offering workshops on Celtic Christianity. Most of us have little understanding of our early Christian heritage as it was practiced within the British Isles.

After the Convocation, we shall travel to the possible location of Avalon, to Marlborough, and to Glastonbury to see sacred sites associated with an emerging history about the Celtics, Druids and Christianity with many legends regarding this part of the world.

Part II of the Convocation held at Sparrow Hawk Village on the campus of Sancta Sophia seminary was truly ecumenical with participants from many wisdom traditions: North American Native Traditions, Central American Mayans, Nigerian Christianity, delegates from Israel with Judaism as their faith, a representative from India, plus Christians of a variety of denominations. Here each shared with their faith position the wisdom they affirm and how it envisions the enlightened disciple can contribute to the new world emerging as we enter our 21st Century.

Questions were presented to each participant and pondered in small groups. Opportunities for sharing were plenty and presenters made themselves available to visit, talk and share as requested. With Tahlequah, Oklahoma, being the home of the Cherokee Nation,

we also were privileged to have a presentation through the Heritage Center of history, art and beliefs of this native tribe. An elder of the western Cherokees spent an evening visiting with participants, while a grandmother of the eastern Cherokees conducted sacred ceremony.

We could sum this up by saying "a good time was had by all"... we were truly Interfaith and ecumenical and I know I speak for all prayerfully, if we can build a world as respectful of one another as this group was, we will have peace as we experience the 21st Century.

WNRF at WFS

We have received the following, mixed news, to the WNRF's proposals for the 1997 WFS Assembly.

The Religion and the Future special event, the Social Communications Technologies session by the Spadys, and James Spady's session on Charter Schools as a 30-minute individual presentation have been definitely accepted.

Richard Kirby's and Colin Lewis's session on Medicine and Morals (or related titles to be determined soon) have been placed on the brief waiting list for a session slot that should be confirmed shortly.

The Youth, Religion, and the Future session with Richard Kirby and Rashmi, and the Youthful Energies for the 21st Century session with Richard Kirby and Mary Anne Moorman have been rejected.