

GlobalShift: *The New History Vectors*

By
Thom Wolf

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
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Most people live their lives within a period or era of history. Only some live in a turning-point of history. We are among those few.

Our time is such a time, a point of turning, a change of times, a season of crossover, a globalshift of history. When historians of the future write of these times, they will note that we were the generation that lived in a globalshift, a time of turning that shaped all that follows for a significant period of planetary history.

Those of us who are followers of Jesus are not surprised at this. We are not surprised because it is a providential view of history that integrates all our thinking. Thus we expect coherent sections of history, and shifts in the strategic centers of history. Gordon Graham, professor of philosophy, Leeds University, notes that there are basically five possible ways to see history: history as progress, decline, collapse, recurrence, and providence.

Graham re-examines the strengths of viewing the planet's story from a providential view of history. "In particular, I shall argue," Graham says, "that the originating conception of sacred history, the perception of providential purpose, has more strengths than is now generally accepted."¹

To get your bearings on what the Spirit of God is doing today, consider these three history vectors: *historystream* and *historyshift*, and *historyservants*.

¹ Gordon Graham, *The Shape of the Past: A Philosophical Approach to History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997, 9, 1-13. See also Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999.

To compare interpretations of history and the Judeo-Christian view of global history, see Thom Wolf, *Community Development: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Riverside: California Baptist University 2005, 12-15 and 53-65; Michael Bauman and Martin I. Klauber (editors), *Historians of the Christian Tradition: Their Methodologies and Their Influence on Western Thought*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman 2000; and E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography: 500 BC to AD 2000*. New Delhi: Orient Longman 2004.

HistoryStream: the 3,000 years arc of history

Crane Brinton, professor of history, Harvard University was spot on when he noted that history, for the last 3,000 years, has moved westward in a huge global arc. To assist you to keep your mind on the course of history, Brinton suggests focusing on “the concept of a specific region or nation as a leader, a centre, a focal point of historic change in our own western civilization at a given period. Periclean Athens, the Rome of the Caesars, and Victorian Britain are classic examples.”

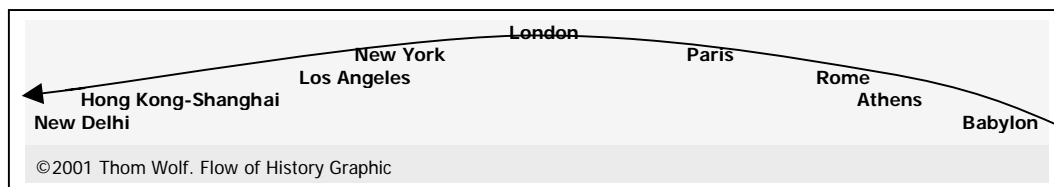
He then makes an almost incredibly simple statement that I find enormously compact, insight-intensive, and historically irrefutable: “Very broadly speaking, these centers of leadership have since 3000 B.C. swung westward and northward in a huge arc, from Egypt and Mesopotamia to Greece, Rome, western and central Europe, the United States.” Continue Brinton’s proposal, and today you can say “a huge arc, from Egypt and Mesopotamia to Greece, Rome, western and central Europe, the United States, East Asia, and South Asia.”²

From Ur, Memphis, and Babylon, to Athens, and on to Rome, history was launched from the quiver of the ancient world.

The middle ages would see history continue its arc to Rome, to Paris, and eventually across the channel to London, the historical finalist in the times of modern colonialism.

Not stopping, it seems history almost insisted on crossing the Atlantic Ocean to New York. Then, after some 200 years, the port of Los Angeles would exceed the tonnage of the port of New York.

And history continues, in a seemingly mysterious—almost eerie—journey westward, just as Brinton noticed. So that now, global attention turns to the Hong Kong-Shanghai-Beijing nexus of trade and politics as all stand transfixed, watching the 3,000 years arc-of-history wing its geo-political trajectory.



If the Atlantic has been the ocean that dominated the last 500 years, the Pacific will be the ocean that introduces the next 500 years.

Recently I was in Seattle USA when the topic was raised about what drives history. Several options were discussed: economics, politics, demographics, epidemics, technology. Also in the mix was the question: does secular history drive spiritual history, does spiritual history drive secular history, or some combinations of those?

In that discussion, most were unable to commit on the drivers of history.

Let me propose a minority position. I think an overlooked perspective is that of an obscure 1st century thinker. He represents a powerfully brilliant, but largely excluded voice in the current intellectual dialogue: Jesus, the Galilean.³

² Crane Brinton, John B. Christopher, Robert Lee Wolff, and Robin B. Winks, *A History of Civilization: Prehistory to the Present*. 9th edition. Engle Cliffs: Prentice Hall 1995, vii.

³ For a summary of the earliest framing by Christian intellectuals, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press 2003, especially Jesus, “The Turning Point of History” 21-33, and “The Light of the Gentiles” 34-45.

Jesus' proposal was bold, blunt, and elegantly beautiful. He said: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the End will come."⁴

As I said: bold, blunt, even elegantly beautiful as an intellectual construct. When delivered, it was perhaps considered overstated by some. But in the light of some two millennium, it has not yet, interestingly enough, been overturned. And—surprising to many—it appears to be remarkably on track.⁵

Thus my minority proposal: *show me where the good news of Jesus has not gone and I will show you where history is about to go.*

The underground church of China is a reality acknowledged and discussed at the highest levels of the Chinese government.⁶

Historically, evangelical Christianity ("evangel" or "gospel" version of Christianity) has demonstrated the repeated ability to create a progress-prone culture. Thus, whether it is Lawrence Harrison of Harvard, Parkin of Oxford, or Dipankar Gupta of Nehru University, this sociological phenomenon is a well-known fact of common currency.⁷

Alan Richardson, professor of Christian Theology, University of Nottingham, UK, asks for a source—the "creative thinker" or "the genius" behind the worldview that burst onto history's stage—for "such brilliant reconstructions as this uniquely original" interpretation of history, Richardson opines, are not created by amorphous collective communities. Instead, he insists that there "must have been some profoundly original mind which started the whole development on its course." And unless you are willing to posit some anonymous person whose name and whose memory has perished (an *argumentum ex silentio*), he concludes, there "remains only one other possibility: the mind behind the NT reinterpretation of the OT theology of redemption was that of Jesus himself." *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*. London: SCM Press 1958, 20-23. I agree.

See similar thoughts by visiting fellow in ancient history, Macquarie University, Paul Barnett (*Jesus and the Logic of History*. Cambridge UK: Eerdmans 1997) and Oxford University research scholar David Wenham (*Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* Cambridge UK: Eerdmans 1994 and *Paul and Jesus: The True Story*. Cambridge UK: Eerdmans 2002).

On the sociological impact of such a brilliant intellectual and spiritual reframing, see the University of Washington's professor of sociology and comparative religion, Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996, 191-215.

⁴ *Gospel of Matthew* 24.14.

⁵ For a widely and well-received historical assessment and global projection, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003; and David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson (editors), *World Christianity Encyclopaedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001.

⁶ Among many reports see, for example, how civil rights activists are becoming Christians and finding support for their causes in the Bible, <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/13879416/site/newsweek/>; and the documentation of rapid growth in evangelical Christianity in northeast Anhui province over the past few decades, with some solid statistics by Wu Haitao in *Zongjiang [Religion]* 4 (2000), a publication of the Religious Institute of Nanjing University, <http://www.us.oumf.org/content.asp?id=42831>; and the government's concern over the spreading celebration of Christmas, "Christmas Increasingly Popular in China, Despite Government Restrictions" (December 25, 2005, AFP); and Charles Hutzler, "Mixing Religion and Noodles Lands Ms. Su in Hot Water" (June 2, 2005, *The Wall Street Journal*).

⁷ Lawrence E. Harrison, *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind: The Latin American Case*. New York: Madison 2000; Frank Parkin, *Max Weber*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood 1982; Dipankar Gupta, *Ethics Incorporated: Top Priority and Bottom Line*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India 2004.

For an introduction to the debate over Weber's thesis on the historical connections between capitalism and the Protestant ethic, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings*. Edited, translated and with an Introduction by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells. London: Penguin Books 2002; Stanislav Andreski, *Max Weber's Insights and Errors*. London:

And it is not to be overlooked that many—myself included—consider the transformation of Latin America into an emergent Pentecostal Protestant continent may well be the historical harbinger to fill in history with Jesus’ words in reference to the Muslim world.⁸

Few would have ventured to write of the future as did Philip Schaff, the Princeton historian, of the 1880s and 1890s. Schaff, working from a Judeo-Christian worldview, suggested that the next great cultural and spiritual encounter would be the transforming encounter of gospel Christianity with the Muslim regions of the world.

So, from the minority proposal viewpoint, the possibilities are striking: show me where the gospel has not gone, and I will show you where history will go. Add to this the interactive element of a providential view of history and the potential for both insight and research is quite exciting.

For example, the earliest Christian expression of providential history is personalist, interactive, and providentially emergent, not impersonal, static and predestinarian determinism.⁹

On the other hand, secular and postmodern historians agree on at least one point, a contrary point: there is no discernible pattern to history.¹⁰ In the court of contemporary secular consensus, then, Jesus remains a minority voice.

But a voice he has. His position may currently be dismissed by many, uncomfortable for some, even embarrassing to others. But his position over the historical long-haul remains unrevoked: *wherever his kingdom news has not gone, history will go*. And so far, Jesus seems to have gotten it right. Thus, there appears to be a kind of tantalising convergence in world history that many are beginning to find hard to dismiss.¹¹

Routledge & Kegan Paul 1984; and Stephen Turner (editor), *The Cambridge Companion to Weber*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

My thinking can be traced in “Progress-Prone/Progress-Resistant Cultures: A Comparison”, a lecture at Baylor University, Spring Semester 2006; “Three Challenges for Buddhism of the 21st Century”, a paper read at the First International Buddhist Conference 9 April 2005; and Piero Gheddo with Thom Wolf, “The Judeo-Christian Worldview: A Note on the Source of Progress-Prone Cultures.” Chiang Mai, Thailand: University Institute 2001. See also “The Empty Chair: Democracy in the Middle East.” New Delhi: University Institute 2004; with Talmiz Ahmad, *Reform in the Arab World: External Influences and Regional Debates*. New Delhi: Indian Research Press 2005; and Robert Pinkney, *Democracy in the Third World*. New Delhi: Viva 2004.

⁸ See Charles Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity*. Pasadena: William Carey Library 2005; Richard D. Love, “Discipling all Muslim Peoples in the Twenty-First Century” *International Journal of Foreign Missions* Volume 14: 4 (December 01, 2000), 5-12; and Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003.

⁹ Smit, M C. “The Divine Mystery in History” *Free University Quarterly* 5 (1958) 2:120-145; Christopher Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History*. New York: ISI Books 2001; Robert E. Speer, *The Finality of Jesus Christ*. The Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary 1932-33. New York: Fleming Revell 1933; Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 1997; Thom Wolf, “History Belongs to the Intercessors” *Social Change*. San Francisco: Kim School of Intercultural Studies 2001; and E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography: 500 BC to AD 2000*. New Delhi: Orient Longman 2004.

¹⁰ From Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*. London: G Bell and Sons 1950; to Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984.

¹¹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003; and see the older works of philosophical history that deal with the providential view of history: Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History*. London: SPCK 1966; and Jacques Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History*. New York: Scribner’s 1957.

And now, in the midst of the westward-flowing historystream there has come a major historyshift.

HistoryShift: a turning point of history

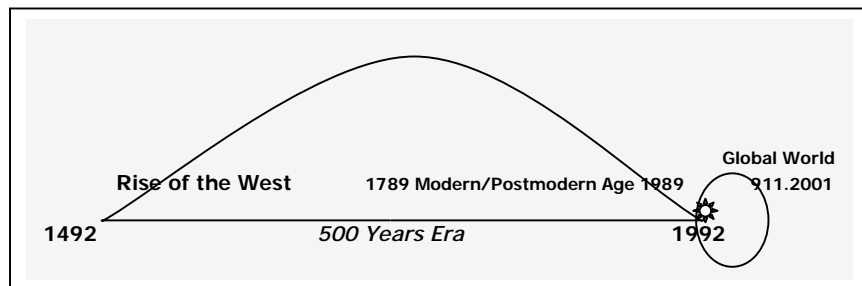
Most people live their lives within a period of history. Only certain generations live at the turning points of history.¹² This generation is part of turning point of history.

Let me explain. Three pictures can help us see the HistoryShift we are in the midst of.

Frame one: 1492—1992

The 500 year era. The rise of the West.¹³

When Columbus sailed the ocean blue he did not just sail on a ship. He sailed with a needle, as it were. And the threads of history in the needle of



Columbus were the cords of commerce, conquest, colonialization, communication, and Christianization.¹⁴

¹² History turning points, for example, by general consensus, include the 6th Century Axial Revolt and the life/death/resurrection of Jesus; and, to a lesser extent, but significantly, the Protestant Reformation and the 1789 Revolution (American Constitution, French Revolution). On the Axial Period see Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1951; S. Eisenstadt (editor), *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*. SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press 1986; and Ninian Smart, *The World Religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

For the turning point caused by Jesus, Paul Barrett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2001; Gordon Graham, *The Shape of the Past: A Philosophical Approach to History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997; and W. D. Davies, *An Invitation to the New Testament*. Sheffield: JSOT Press 1993; as well as Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press 2003.

The global significance of the Protestant Reformation's hinge factor can be seen in varied discussions of Rodney Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2001; *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003; Herbert N. Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1977; and J. M. Roberts, *The Penguin History of Europe*. London: Penguin Books 1996, 231-271; William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988.

¹³ See William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2000; J. R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History*. New York: Norton 2003; and the companion volume to a BBC series, J. M. Roberts, *The Triumph of the West*. London: British Broadcasting Company 1985 (Phoenix, 2001).

¹⁴ Theodore H. Von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987; Thom Wolf, Baccalaureate Address, California Baptist University 1990. Thom Wolf, Baccalaureate Address, Grand Canyon University 1990; and Gerhard Lenski, Patrick Nolan and Jean Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*. 9th edition. London: McGraw-Hill 2004.

From then to today, the patches of the cultural quilt of the earth have been stitched together into an increasingly seamless garment.

The rags of separate and isolated worlds will not return. The future will continue to unfurl a world of common and intertwined destiny.

The culture world of the future may well be a quilt of many colours, but one common quilt it will be. And that is because of the rise of the West in the 500-years era that has just concluded.

Frame two: 1789—1989

Within the 500-years era of 1492-1992 stands the two hundred year period of high modernity. Seldom has history sliced such a precise piece of the calendar pie.

From the peasants' storming of the Bastille 14 July 1789 in France to the students' protest of Tianamen Square 4 June 1989 in China, the modern age reigned.¹⁵

Everywhere, secular man was confident, supremely confident, that heaven would be forged on earth by applying reason to the techniques of science to solve the issues of society as history inevitably produces ever-upward progress.¹⁶

Communism, that bastard child of the French whore of the Paris revolution,¹⁷ trampled the 20th century bloody, gang-raped the minds of whole nations in look-alike gulags, and coughed up the phlegm of tyrannical banality everywhere it spread.¹⁸

On the 4th of June 1989, that rogue worldview received a headshot in Tianamen Square. Brain-dead, Communism staggered around the world until its lifeless body slumped exhausted over the Berlin Wall, 11.9 1989.

The hands of history scooped up the corpse of Communism and carried it across the steppes of Russia to lay it in state in the August coup of 1991.¹⁹ With that, another volume in the encyclopaedia of history was shoved across the table.

From the viewpoint of the stages of history, future historians will no doubt record that the 20th century ended on the 4th of June, 1989. If that is so, when did the 21st century begin?

¹⁵ Zhang Liang (compiler), Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link (editors). *The Tianamen Papers*. Washington DC: Public Affairs 2002; Jack Casserly, *The Triumph at Tianamen Square*. New York: ASJA Press 2005; Robert Skidelsky, *The World After Communism: A Polemic for our Times*. New York: Papermac Macmillan 1995; George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003; and David Martin, *Forbidden Revolutions: Pentecostalism in Latin America, Catholicism in Eastern Europe*. London: SPCK 1996.

¹⁶ John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1998.

¹⁷ Lyford P. Edwards. *The Natural History of Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago [1927] 1970.

¹⁸ Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale Note Bene Yale University Press 1999; Stephane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panne, Adrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartoock, and Jean-Louis Margolin. *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, and Repression*. Boston: Harvard University Press 1999; Judith Shapiro. *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.

¹⁹ D. Armstrong and E. Goldstein. *The End of the Cold War*. London: Frank Cass 1990.

The 21st century was not birthed by the turning of the clock January 1, 2000. The 21st century was birthed by the collapse of the towers September 11, 2001. The 21st century began on 9.11, 2001.

Frame three: 9.11.2001

On 9.11 2001, the 21st century was birthed. The midwives? Inflight-passengers, used as knives, to stab to death early morning workers.

Buddhist doctrines compelled the kamikaze pilots who dove into the battleships of World War II.²⁰ Muslim teachings guided the jihadist pilots who flew into the Twin Towers of New York City.²¹

And so it was. The 20th century ended in the blood of protesting students in Beijing June 4, 1989. The 21st century opened with the blood of working people in New York September 11, 2001.

Seven years before Harvard University historian Samuel P. Huntington had explained the nature of the coming new world order: it would a clash of civilizations.²² By that, Huntington meant that the 21st century would be most deeply, a clash of ideas. For Huntington was clear: *beneath every major civilization is a major world religion.*²³

Thus, the driver of the 21st century, according to Huntington, will be neither economics nor politics, but will be culture—or more precisely, cultural values and spiritual roots. I agree. And that is why one other point needs to be made.

HistoryServants: from the ordained to the ordinary

Almost half a century ago Robert Greenleaf began to speak in business circles about ‘servant leadership’. I want to speak about leaders who are ‘historyservants’. As I have said, most people live their lives embedded *within a period* of history. Few live their lives *at a turning point* of history. This generation, however, is a turning point generation.

The *historystream* (the westward flow) and the *historyshift* (the turning point) have created the new environment (for *historyservants*).

20 See the discussion of Hagakure Bushido (Book of the Samurai Codes) and the expression of such thinking in the “flying samurai of World War II”, the Japanese kamikaze fighters: Nobukaze <http://www.geocities.com/nobukaze23/index.html> and <http://www.geocities.com/ominobu/kamikaze.htm>; Frank Smitha, “Japan, Buddhism and Military Aristocracies” 2000 <http://www.fsmitha.com/index.html>; Rikihei Inoguchi, Tadashi Nakajima, with Roger Pineau, *The Divine Wind: Japan’s Kamikaze Force in World War II*. Washington DC: Naval Institute Press 1994; and Albert Axell and Hideaki Kase, *Kamikaze: Japan’s Suicide Gods*. New York: Longman 2002.

21 See Terry McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers: The 9/11 Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It*. New York: HarperCollins 2005; and Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House 2006; and for historical perspective, see Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press 2006.

22 Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* Volume 72 Number 3 Summer 1993 22-49; and “The West Unique, Not Universal” *Foreign Affairs* Volume 75 Number 6 Nov/Dec 1996 28-46.

23 See *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Touchstone 1996 42-47; and Thom Wolf, “Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* Vol. 1 No. 1 Spring (2006), 55-70.

The history *shift* from modern/postmodern world to the global world, has buried one period of history and birthed another.

The history *shift* is from the *ordained*, to the *ordinary*. Consider this by illustration: the time of modern missions—1790s-1990s—from William Carey to Mother Teresa, was the period of the ordained. That is, the basic mode of delivery for the good news was the ordained. That period of history—the period of the ordained—is over.

The characteristic of the age of the *ordained* was: a person who felt called to dedicate their life to God and his purposes in the world would *abandon* their past and *enter* full-time religious work, *the ministry of the ordained*.

That time period of history has terminated. A turning point has occurred. We are already into and more deeply entering into a new period of history: the era of the *ordinary*.

In other words: if someone today wants to love God and serve humanity, that person must not *abandon* their past, but *embrace* their past.

That is, at entry-point of the 21st century, there is a reconnect to the entry-point of the 1st century: “Each person should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him...although if you can gain” a better situation, take it. (I Corinthians 7.17-24) This was the unusual view of the world that turned the 1st century A.D. upside down.

In other words, those 1st century historyservants saw their career as the context of their character development. They recognized their life station for what it can be—the matrix for life investment and a contribution to humanity. It was a life-situation base for a pro-active, entrepreneurial attitude, rooted in the mindset demonstrated by Jesus. And that Jesus those early followers knew as the One alive by his resurrection and with them for active encouragement to do right and help others.

In the mode of the ordinary, their work place was not some vampire against their vocation, but the vehicle of their vocation. Their workspace was their worshipspace, the place where they prayed to God and helped those around them. For those of the 1st century, their market place was their ministry place. They did not wait for an ordained person to show up. In their thinking, they themselves were the ordinary person God has raised up to be his hands of blessing to those around them.

Thus, all those in the 1st century who saw themselves as God’s people, in all the life domains—technological, political, economic, social, educational, cultural—engaged in doing good deeds and sowing good seeds, creating good will and sharing good news. It was the generation French intellectual Alain Peyrefitte says was a burst of spiritual and social transformation, unparalleled on the stage of world history.²⁴

And that is what the 21st has become: the place for the ordinary person—the technician, the political leader, the business person, the social activist, the teacher, the artist—to be the providential vector point for making this all to often forlorn and fractured planet, a more spiritually-flourishing and friend-engendering place: historyservants, in the westward flow of the providential historystream, at this awesome turning point of generational historyshift. ■

Thom Wolf, D.Lit., Ph.D. studies (Andrew University), is International Director of UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, New Delhi India. With offices also in Chiang Mai Thailand and Prague Czech Republic, UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE is an Asia-based learning group with clients throughout South and East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

²⁴ Alain Peyrefitte, *The Trouble with France*. New York: New York University Press 1985.