

# **The *Decline And Fall* of the Second Millennium—Final Chapter or New Beginning for Christianity?**

*Alexander Robertson Lecture, 1998*

Mary Grey

## **Introduction: Choosing Disneyland instead of Promised Land?**

I begin by putting the question to you: is it not true that Disneyland has become not only our Euro-N. American playground but a metaphor for contemporary culture? That is, without any sense of criticising culture's need for leisure and—maybe theologians need more play and less books—nor to ignore the efforts made by Euro Disneyland to become environmentally politically respectable—but to see such glittering theme parks as one symptom of a cult of the superficial, a selling short of humanity in terms of our dreams and our hopes for the future. Harvey Cox began to hint at this so many years ago, in his book *Seduction of the Spirit*,<sup>1</sup> when he warned us that Disneyland has no tomorrow, no future to offer: it offers only brighter, more technologically sophisticated and more luxurious versions of today. And now, when confronted with the most extravagant theme park of all, the Millennium Dome, the existence and contents of which are, to put it mildly, contentious, is it not timely to reflect on the meaning of this cultural artefact in terms of its highly ambiguous promise in the context of the end of a century and the end of a millennium?

My argument in this lecture is that the characteristics of this waning millennium offer parallels with the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and the onset of the Dark Ages. (You probably remember Alasdair MacIntyre's call for a new St Benedict in this, the new Dark Ages of Europe).<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, that even the part which Christianity played in this decline and fall presents uneasy parallels for the Church today; but, just as the beginning of the second millennium could be thought of as a prophetic moment of the Spirit, a *kairos* for Christianity, that there are dynamic and prophetic currents at the edges of our own contemporary

culture which hold promise of the recovery of the dream of Promised Land, of New Creation, but embodied in culture and not in Utopias of un-earthly, post-material existence.

But my first task is to justify the use of this expression "the decline and fall of the second millennium" at this time of semi-euphoria with New Labour and Blair's brave new world. (Although I know it does not seem so brave in Scotland!)

### **1. A millennium in decline.**

To use the expression *Decline and Fall* as a description of our Promethean culture, whose chosen self-image is one of un-stoppable progress, achievement, and global technological sophistication, may seem indefensible. Let me explain. As you know, the expression is that of Edward Gibbon, who wrote his six-volume *History of the Roman Empire* at the end of the 18th century, on the eve of the French Revolution and just before the Napoleonic wars would change the face of Europe decisively. It is not so immediately obvious—even from his own autobiography where he describes in detail the process of writing the work—that Gibbon held the Roman Empire in such low esteem. But elsewhere he declares: 'The history of empires is that of the misery of humankind'.<sup>3</sup> His opinion of the Roman empire is clear in a letter to his father:

I am convinced that there never existed such a nation and I hope for the happiness of mankind that there never will be again.<sup>4</sup>

Why was there such hostility to Rome from a scholar who spent his life reading and re-reading the classical texts of Cicero and Virgil? Can it be explained purely as disgust at the moral corruption of the Emperor? John Robertson, in a recent book on *Gibbon and Empire* refuses the explanation of moral outrage:

the suggestion that the sceptical, ironic Gibbon was primarily a moralist is less than persuasive ...<sup>5</sup>

and sees his hostility against the background of Gibbon's life as the decline of two empires the Roman and the British. Behind Gibbon's critique of Rome is the critique of empire as *universal monarchy*, a concept Gibbon traced back to the English King Charles I. He saw that it was this concept of universal monarchy that helped Christian Europe to meet the challenge of the so-called "infidel" through conquest and crusade. So his problem was as much the Empire's survival as its decay.<sup>6</sup> It is against this background that we can understand Gibbon's critique

both of the Roman empire and of Christianity's part in it.

But let us move now to a more contemporary figure, contemporary, that is, to the decline and fall of Rome. Augustine of Hippo, Bishop of Carthage (d.430), sat writing far into the small hours of the morning as the barbarians were literally storming the city gates, and the so-called civilised world collapsed around him. Far more than for Gibbon, safe in his study, did the decline and fall present a threat for Augustine's life and ministry. Augustine's solution was to deny all validity to Rome as a real *polis*, because the authentic city was to be focused around the idea of justice. Rome had given up on justice, so the real city was the *Civitas Dei*, the unity of all peoples around Christ through the virtue of *caritas*, love. From Augustine's sublimation of apocalypse to a heavenly eschatological fulfilment—he even solves the problem of whether women can be in heaven *as women*, by imagining a kind of heavenly hysterectomy, by which all that is most distinctively female will acquire a more glorious purpose! —we have inherited our revulsion to the idea that the heavenly city can be embodied here on this earth, that greater justice can be worked out in history, as well as allowing an ecclesial triumphalism to take over: this triumphalism, having expelled all elements of paganism, says American feminist Catherine Keller, was then

prepared to project the shadow of its “evil” onto any obtrusive “others”,—eventually to liquidate not just pagan but Jew, certainly Muslim, and eventually countless women, (the latter as witches).<sup>7</sup>

Thus, from both Gibbon's reading of the decline of Rome from his own mistrust of universal monarchy and the role of Christianity within it, (mutually reinforcing), and Augustine's attempt to work out the role of the Christian in a corrupted state, we inherit a deeply pessimistic view of what Christianity can achieve in terms of justice embodied in history.

And this matters very much at this juncture. It is not merely that the gloom and doom reading of this century will tell us that we have had two World Wars—at the first of which the famous lamps went out over Europe!—and the second of which culminated in the holocaust Shoah, an event of such unspeakable evil that it was assumed it would never re-occur: yet we have witnessed ethnic cleansing as a phenomenon of the war in the former Yugoslavia, whose tragic rumbles are still with us: after which Europe and America have allowed the centre of the war scene to be removed to the Two Thirds world, mostly controlling its involvement through the arms trade and through sending in troops when its interests were threatened—as in the Gulf War. It is more that there is a sense that our culture has reached its nadir, its lowest level, as an

Eastern European theologian wrote to me.<sup>8</sup> It is a *nekrophilic* culture, the word which Mary Daly coined—a culture in love with death, not life, as the criss-crossing forms of violence—sexual, domestic, economic, military and racial, compete with addiction to drugs, money and power to describe our age.

True, we have seen the Prague Spring, the fall of communism, the end of apartheid and the coming of some form of democracy to the Philippines and some of the Latin American countries: I do not underestimate the importance of these. But the vicious cycles of poverty ensuing on the globalisation of the market, and the acceptance of global capitalism as not admitting of alternatives, contribute to this sense of decline and fall of our age. The tragic irony now is that we are even proposing to export our problems to the galaxies—with a Hilton complex on Mars! It seems like the “bread and circuses” of the Roman empire, Disney land and Domes writ large as cultural symbols, are simply camouflaging the fact we have lost the heart and soul of our cultural and spiritual identities. If “I spend, therefore I am”, consumerism as the yardstick of identity, if our society exists as a global supermarket, St Tesco’s, Holy Sainsbury replacing our Cathedrals, then the lamps are only re-kindled for those who can spend. *So to be a person is to be a consumer: to be a super-person is to spend a lot, or to let it be known that you are “worth a lot”.*

## **2. What response has Christianity made to this situation?**

The tragedy of Christianity within this drama is that it has difficulty in doing anything but reading culture naively: the tendency is either to be against it, (relying on a reading of Scripture telling us to be *in the world but not of it*), or to be coopted by culture and cultural change and to renege on the call to be transformer of culture. Is this because we have lost a vision about what transforming culture now means in this changed world of secularisation, of post-Christianity for many people, and a multicultural society to which we react defensively? No longer do we export Christianity to colonial territory, (broadly the situation until the beginning of this century); since the end of the cold war we no longer have a clear enemy to oppose, and now we lack a language to confront global capitalism with anything but the kind of critique with which I began in response to “Disneyland”.

Even the liberation theologies appear to have lost their way—if ever they did acquire a place in the sun in a European context—a question to which I will return. So, on the one hand we have the managerial Church; the Church equipped with websites and spin doctors; aware of the crowds of young people leaving, Churches are quick to pick up on

evangelising techniques which draw in the crowds—for a time—but slow to ask what kinds of communication respond in depth to this fast-changing context. The other response is to counter post-modern confusions with a clinging to the supposed certainties of modernism, reasserting these so-called universal truths with unflinching severity, without tolerance of ambiguity, and with a nostalgia for the culture of the seamless robe, which has never existed—as Augustine knew only too well. Theology itself, in response to Higher Education funding cuts, and its increasing marginal situation, adjusts itself to the cyber-age, to the need for individualistic choices of modules in an entrepreneurial culture, offering mix and match degrees, a veritable smorgasbord of spiritualities which give a superficial impression of engaging with multiculturalism and seldom responding to the challenge to engage seriously with culture or to attempt a counter-cultural response. To do so frequently means job-loss within the academy or silencing within the Churches.

But instead of acquiescing in this language of decline and fall, the end of the road—or final Chapter—for Christianity, falling into what has been called by another US feminist theologian, "the cultured despair of the middle classes"<sup>9</sup>, I invite you to regard this as *kairos*, as a chance for a new beginning. Not, as Charles Dickens said at the beginning of his novel,<sup>10</sup> *A Tale of Two Cities*, against the background of the French Revolution, as "the best of times, the worst of times", but as *kairos*, as the right time. To do this, I first call upon two traditions within Christianity: the first is the conviction that the beginning of a new millennium signals a new awakening of the Spirit, a time of prophecy, prophetic movements, and an awareness of the Spirit moving in history.

In the winter of 1190–91—to give an example from the beginning of this millennium—Richard the Lionheart, the Crusader, the self-styled apocalyptic warrior, about to attack the Muslim leader Saladin in Jerusalem, whom he identified as anti-Christ, the infidel, thus justifying his slaughtering adventures as the apocalyptic victory in history—and this remained the official line of Christendom in Europe—visited the monk of Messina, Joachim of Fiore, asking him to foretell victory. It is not so much what Joachim said—namely that Saladin was the sixth dragon, there was one more to come, thus the final victory was put off: it was more that Joachim explained to him a whole vision of the fulfilment of God's plan in history. He gave us something to hope for in history.<sup>11</sup> Catherine Keller writes:

What he does with time is crucial: against Augustine, he again positions the millennium as a symbolic time in history, and binds it to the Spirit, that untoward agency of ferment.<sup>12</sup>

There is a kind of revolutionary Trinitarianism given us, in which the third age is one of liberty, of contemplation, of love, of friends, and of children. And we know that the effective working out of this in history evoked new Franciscan movements, and movements of the free spirit in which women, too, acquired new voices. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), was also speaking of the Spirit, of divine Sophia, a century earlier, and of the end of the world in different terms from Augustine:

it will be brought forth openly with gentle words just as the words of this book are — in the seventh day of quietness.<sup>13</sup>

A new dawn for the spirit breaking into history—or awareness of what is already there needs augmenting by a second strand. This is the accumulative memory of suffering throughout history. The book of Revelation (6.9–10) refers to this as the subaltern presence of souls who cry out, “How long, O Lord, how long?” Liberation theologians speak of the dangerous memory of suffering, of crucified memory. Ignacio Ellacuria—the murdered Jesuit—and his colleague, Rodolfo Cardenal, speak of the crucified peoples of El Salvador. Bishop Gerardi of Guatemala was assassinated a few weeks ago, for his intensive support for Human Rights in Guatemala. The document he had been preparing was called “The historic memory of the people”. The Korean *minjung* people speak of *han*, the *han*-afflicted spirits of the people. All diverse ways of expressing that hunger for justice, and end to suffering of victimised people through history. But not only that. Crucified memory acts as an ethical critique of the present in the name of the gospel message, of the Paschal mystery of entry into risen life. The bearers of crucified memory are the consistent witnesses to the core of Easter faith. And if we ask, where in Europe does crucified memory act in ethical judgement of the present—there are no lack of examples. Muslims slaughtered by Richard the Lionheart, in the apocalyptic fundamentalism of the crusades, consistent discrimination and pogroms against the Jewish people culminating in the Shoah: and the numerous ways in which Europe has refused to recognise anyone outside its narrow definition of personhood—and until recently that would mean women. There are a lot of people under the altar, thirsting for justice!

### **3. What, now, constitutes transformation theology?**

I see the way forward in terms of the creativity and prophetic qualities of the liberation theologies, or broadly speaking, transformation theologies. But first we have to ask, what is it which prevents them from transforming culture?

Any transformation theology today must contextualise itself within the three horns of a postmodern trilemma, outlined by the American theologian, Mark Kline Taylor:—resist oppression, respond to tradition, and engage with pluralism.<sup>14</sup> By transformation theology I mean Latin American, African and Asian liberation theologies, and the sub-groupings within them for example, Dalit Theology within India; Black theology; Gay and Lesbian theology; the indigenous theologies of Australia, New Zealand, N. America; the many sub-divisions within Feminist Theology, womanist theology, *mujerista* and Latina theology, ecological theology, theologies of disability and so on. All of these have very different historical starting points and foci, and we should resist attempts to bring them under one category. Their very diversity and distinctiveness is an important point in the struggle. But there is a certain sense in which they are now perceived to have run out of steam—or that their *raison d'être* is no longer so appropriate. This is my real concern here.

Now it is true that mainstream patterns of thinking, well-trodden ways of doing theology, long-accepted patterns of faith never did accept liberation theology. I have used the image of the changeling for Feminist Theology.<sup>15</sup> Tolerate its presence in the Academy—and eventually it will go away. Like the changeling, whom the devil substituted for the real baby, it is not authentic—but in the long run it will disappear and we can revert to normal. (Although Rebecca West wrote: “Love the changeling enough, it becomes a real child!”)<sup>16</sup> Ecological theology is similarly barely tolerated—it makes too many demands on life-style: what we wear, eat, patterns of transport, water consumption, the way we treat animals and so on—all of these raise issues which disturb what the Academy has always been taken for granted.

The second point is that Liberation Theology depended for its biblical inspiration on the Exodus paradigm: the departure from slavery, or from all forms of alienated relationship as this became in other expressions. Whereas this was an inspiring paradigm in the context of apartheid, in the struggle against oppressive governments in Latin America, we are now in a changed context. For example, Rosemary Ruether, in her theology of Women Church, speaks of it as an Exodus Church, in the sense of Exodus from alienated or wrong relationship—in the sense of the subordinate position of women within Christianity. But the New Testament scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza objected: women, she said, are not quitters, but have a tremendous loyalty to Church. So, she proposed a definition of Women Church as “discipleship of equals”.<sup>17</sup> Again, after the defeat of the Sandinistas in

the Nicaraguan revolution, a re-thinking goes on as to the effectiveness of the original theological paradigm. Could the symbol of Babylon, or being in captivity to the Beast of global capitalism, or neo-American forms of colonialism be more appropriate than the Exodus symbol? How does Exodus symbolism help Europe and America relate to Arabs in modern-day Egypt, to refugees and asylum seekers, where the crucial factor is the right to stay and not the freedom to go? Do Liberation Theologies now need a different text and symbolism? I have already mentioned Babylon as text, and the situation of being in apocalypse, even “enacting apocalypse,” as our text (Catherine Keller)—perhaps in the context of *the decline and fall of a millennium* my own hunch is that in this completely new situation of postmodern complexity no single text or symbol will be adequate. We live not in one culture but in an overlapping space of many cultures. Our supermarkets offer produce from the global market. When I was in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, a new restaurant from a different country opened every week. The diverse ethnic mix in the schools of many cities in Great Britain means not only challenges to the curriculum, but that we need to relate to many communities with cherished memories, traditions and cultures. In the words of a feminist poet: do we even have the “Dream of a common language?”—or *the common language for the dream?*<sup>18</sup>

So, not one text or symbol, but *a new configuration of several texts and symbols*—and the possibility of intercommunication within and across them is called for. Ecclesiastes, for example, expresses disillusionment with the vanity of the age and human endeavour; Isaiah provides the resources for the re-contextualisation of Prophetic texts for a new situation—for example, the way Isaiah 61 and Luke 4.18 are the inspiration for the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel the debts of the Two Thirds World.

For women, the re-reading of the texts of Judaism and Christianity is nurtured by this dream of a common language, in the sense of a language where women are included, our diverse experiences, memories, sufferings, our subaltern presence is acknowledged. Often nurtured by—not the excluding word of Scripture—but other secular texts, we are then enabled to return to Scripture, with a diversity of reading strategies to reclaim the women rendered invisible, to chase after the lost stories in the gaps, cracks, allusions of the text, and to denounce the oppressive interpretations of many texts, again inspired by Adrienne Rich's words:

My heart is touched by all I cannot save.  
So much has been destroyed.  
I have to cast my lot in with those, who



Age after age, perversely  
With no extraordinary power  
Re-constitute the world.<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, all of this points to the urgency for the transformation theologies to engage in a more complex cultural analysis. There is a need to move out of a simplistic victim/oppressor polarity, to map the shifts in understanding of good and evil, the huge ambiguities in the global culture, the limits of toleration of otherness. Solidarity has always been the rallying call of Liberation theology: but new forms of solidarity and partnership need to be created as response to a changed global situation. Thus the movement *Kairos Europa* calls for new coalitions and groups to form, calling Europe through a conversion from past imperialism to new just partnerships for the future.<sup>20</sup> Without losing the ethics and poetics of resistance, is the distinctive mark of the Liberation Theologies, the task of identifying new forms of collaboration? So Robert Schreiter proposes a future for Liberation Theology *in the space between resistance and reconstruction*.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. Feminist Theology as a transformation theology**

In my final section I want to show how Feminist theology functions as a transformation theology, responding to this, *the Decline and Fall of the second millennium*, but with a freshness of response, which offers promise to the tired, apathetic forms of Christianity, showing that the Holy Spirit/Holy Wisdom is active in our world, finding the cracks in the cultural maelstrom in which to bring forth healing and transformed life. I hope at the same time to show that this involves a response to the postmodern context outline above—resist oppression, respond to tradition and engage with pluralism. In fact, what Feminist Theology attempts is the overthrow of *kyriarchy*, (the dominating rule of the Lord), in the name of just and right relation. Is this not a direct link both with Gibbon's anxiety about the Roman empire and the subsequent European tradition of domination, especially since 1492 and the construction of the capitalist empire?

When speaking about Feminist theology, what is now meant is a **family of theologies** with a range of positions. From the sixties' rhetoric of the global solidarity of sisterhood, "Till all women are free no woman is free", came the realisation that this masked a crypto-universalism, which claimed to include all women in the analysis of Euro-American scholars, or, specifically white feminist theologians. This might have meant that the liberation slogans of "hearing the voice of the voiceless, the marginalise" and so on, were but empty words. But out of the pain

of all this arose *Womanist* theology, the theology of women of colour in the US, Latina theology, (women of Latin American), *mujerista* theology (theology of Hispanic women), the contextual theologies of the women theologians of EATWOT, (Ecumenical Assoc. of Third World Theologians), Jewish, Islamic and Hindu women of faith, Lesbian theology, post-Christian theology, goddess-based spirituality, ecofeminist theology—and many more. My chosen focus here is on Christian feminism, and in particular, Christian Feminist Liberation theology: but I emphasise that one of the strengths of Feminist theology, is that already there are links, dialogues and partnership between different groups and a possibility of a creative learning from each other.

It follows from this that the first strand of Feminist Liberation theology has been the *movement from connection to difference*. Much of the initial visionary language used metaphors of connectedness, espoused hopes of mutuality, right relation, methods of empathy, ethics of connection, a spirituality of compassion. While not wanting to lose the basic rightness of this direction—it formed the hallmark of my own theology—the postmodern concern for particularity and diversity showed it needed to be balanced by a respect for difference.

The strength of Womanist theology has taught us white European women that an assumption that sexism as the fundamental oppression masked the depths of the racism of Europe and America Womanist theologian Toinette Eugene tells the story of visiting Paris as a tourist. All day she has enjoyed the delights of Europe's past—Notre Dame, the Louvre, and a bistro in Montmartre. Night fell and she tried to take a taxi home. She was black—and she was totally ignored. There was to be no homecoming for her—as long as she remained in admiration of Europe's culture. there was a place for her. As soon she made a demand—there was no place.<sup>22</sup> The tensions between black-white dialogue are painful and real and demand new forms of solidarity. I do not pretend the problems are solved—but they are being grappled with. Another tension is between east and west. The networking with Third World women has been longer and more effectively established than that with the so-called liberated countries of E. Europe. We have been slow to understand the severity of the forms of poverty and other restrictions in which E. European women live. Through the European Christian Ecumenical Forum of women, and the European Women's College, alliances with women in the Churches are being slowly created. The rape of the Bosnian women—and in particular the Muslim—women was a decisive moment in this development. The realisation of the position of Muslim women in the former Yugoslavia and the connivance of Christian women in some of their suffering, the connection between

war, militarism, and rape, has been a decisive moment for building new solidarity within communities of faith—and far beyond them.

All this has taught the criss-crossing of many forms of suffering that affect women's lives. The oldest form of oppression—and one that makes the greatest challenge to Christian theology—is of course the whole area surrounding women's sexuality. From the demonising of Eve for sin, the Pauline text which declares the “women shall be saved by bearing children”, (1 Tim2.14-16), to the whole control of female sexuality in the tradition, right up to the essentialising view of motherhood in the papal document, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, there are a range of issues continuing to increase women's misery. There is probably no more sensitive area in Feminist Liberation Theology, including as it does the racism of white women acquiescing—albeit passively—in racist stereotyping of the sexuality of women of colour.

On the one hand the *analysis* is painstaking as to the suffering of Third World mothers through multiple pregnancies over which they have no choice, male violence and total economic dependence. You need no reminder as to the increase in child prostitution—all of this was part of the analysis with which I began: “We have reached the lowest point of our culture”. Recently Vatican representatives have managed to control the outcome in major international meetings concerned with sexuality—as happened in Beijing and in Cairo—and it is difficult to see how there can be a breakthrough in tackling the way the prohibition on contraception worsens the poverty of poor mothers—but also in the very understanding of sexuality itself. What feminist theological analysis offers is the emphasis on mutuality, respect, tenderness, an understanding of sexuality in the wider context of friendship, and most of all, within a context of justice. As Elizabeth Stuart makes clear in her book on lesbian theology, *Just Good Friends*, friendship offers the best model for sexual relationships, be they heterosexual or gay, and certainly friendship has a solid biblical basis in the discipleship of Jesus—“I have not called you servants but friends”.<sup>23</sup> What feminist liberation **communities** offer is the commitment to the healing of suffering and mutilated bodies, within the consciousness that healing women is healing earth.

Hence the focus on faith community as liberating space—with an openness to the overlapping discourses that must engage each other—inter-denominational, inter-faith, ecofeminist, peace groups, as well as with secular groups which are seeking a Variety of spiritualities and ways in which the sacred is embodied and experienced today. “Liberating space” makes possible a *poetics* of resistance, a quality of listening, *severe listening*, Adrienne Rich calls it, of hearing into speech,

as the famous phrase goes, and a freedom—the freedom of the children of God—to develop to mould and develop traditional symbols into creative and healing forms. I believe that we make these connections in the name of the whole of *ecclesia*, in obedience to a revelation of the abundant generosity of God's love.

But it is not only the move from making connections to respecting difference? the struggle with the interweaving of oppressions and the creating of liberation communities of solidarity which are the ingredients of a new beginning: it is also the already living out of a new sense of self, which offers a way forward from the individualist, consumerist self with which I began. The spiritual search of women has frequently begun with a sense of no-being, nothingness. The development of strong sense of self moves through a process of awareness to a new naming, (Carol Christ, Mary Daly), to either a re-appropriation of a faith community through a constructive analysis, or a reaching out to a new one. But this is achieved through new understanding of self and other. The other remains distinct, but is part of an enlarged, wider living out of self, relational and ecological, and in the west, we have much to learn from Asian and African understandings of self in community, and the precious quality of hospitality which they inspire. Wendy Farley, in her book *Eros for the Other*, wrote:

The plurality and ambiguity of our world call us to a vigilant renunciation of totality, of possession, of presence. But the face of the other, the beauty and vulnerability of nature, calls us to responsibility. If only we could forgo pornographies of truth and find the courage to subsist in this tension, to embrace the securities and delights of a ceaseless desire for truth.<sup>24</sup>

My hope is that the visionary quality of Feminist Theology witnesses to a new awakening of the Spirit. A few weeks ago, in Durham, we celebrated the end of the decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in a weekend entitled “Forward to the Promised community” —although it was recognised that our work had barely begun. At Gmünden in Austria, two years ago one thousand women held a Synod, where new hopes and dreams of different, liberating faith communities—including Muslim Jewish, and women from newly liberated countries who had been cut off from the roots of faith, were expressed. *It is about reclaiming and transforming the heart, soul and imaginations of culture.* So that our dreams are actually what God dreams for our planet. It is about the healing of brokenheartedness, our own and the sorrow of God—and the healing of the earth. And believing in the words of Scripture— “And we saw his glory”—not for an

imagined future, but embodied in our lives: and in fact, the dream is very simple:

Bread. A clean sky. Active peace. A woman's voice singing somewhere, melody drifting like smoke from the cook fires. The army disbanded, the harvest abundant. The wound healed, the child wanted, the prisoner freed, the body's integrity honoured, the lover returned. The labour equal, fair and valued. Delight in the challenge for consensus to solve problems. No hand raised in any gesture but greeting. Secure interiors—of heart, home, land—so firm as to make secure borders irrelevant at last. And everywhere<sup>25</sup>, laughter, care, dancing, contentment. A humble, earthly paradise in the *now*.

Could this be the transforming yeast, that the Holy Spirit, Holy Wisdom is already kneading into our culture? New Hope? New Beginning? Yes, but ancient dream, ancient prayer:—that God's kingdom may come in this, a “kairos” moment for a new millennium.

- 1 Harvey Cox, *Seduction of the Spirit*, ( New York: Random House: 1976).
- 2 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, ( London: Duckworth, 1981), pp. 144-5.
- 3 E. Gibbon, "Essai sur l'étude de la littérature", in *Miscellaneous Works*, Vol iv, p. 15.
- 4 Letter to Edward Gibbon, Rome, 9th October? 1764, in *Letters*, Vol I, p. 184.
- 5 John Robertson, "Gibbon's Roman Empire as a universal monarchy: the Decline and Fall of the imperial idea in early modern Europe", in *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, eds., McKitterick and Quinault, (Cambridge: CUP 1997), p.245.
- 6 Robertson, *op cit.*, p 265
- 7 Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now—and then: a Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, (Boston: Beacon, 1996), pp 102-3
- 8 Jana Opocenska, and Mary Grey, "East meets West: a dialogue" in *Jahrbuch of the European Society of Women in Theological Research*, Vol 1, pp. 78-79 (Mainz: Grünewald, Kok: Kampen, 1991).
- 9 Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk?* (Augsburg: Fortress, 1992)
- 10 Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, (London: Chapman and Hall, The Biographical Edition XV )
- 11 Here, I am grateful to Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse now and then*, *op cit.*, pp. 106-109.
- 12 Keller, *ibid.* p. 108
- 13 Hildegard, *Scivias*, (Paulist Press? 1990), tr. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop,p.351,
- 14 Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: a Cultural-Political Theology of N. American Praxis*, (Marshall, Orbis, 1991
- 15 See M.Grey, “Feminist Theology: Late Arrival or Changeling in the Academy?” in *Louvain Studies* 18, (1993), pp.318–332.

- 16 Rebecca West, *Cousin Rosamund*, (London: Virago).
- 17 See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*,
- 18 Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language*, Poems, (New York: W&W. Norton, 1978).
- 19 Adrienne Rich, Natural Resources, in *The Dream of a Common Language*, op cit., p.67.
- 20 See *Kairos UK*, Grassroots, 15–17 Chapel St, Luton.
- 21 Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Local and the Global*, (Maryknoll, Orbis: 1977), p.111.
- 22 See Toinette Eugene, in *The Globalisation of Theological Education*,
- 23 Elisabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends?* ( London: Cassell, 1995 ).
- 24 Wendy Farley, *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in. a Pluralistic world*, (Pennsylvania Press, 1996) .p. 200.
- 25 "A Woman's Creed" cited in Beijing Preparatory documents. and quoted in Catherine Keller ,op cit., 268. Actually it was composed by Robin Morgan with a group of Third World women sponsored by a women's Environment and Development organisation.

## **“A Woman is not Without Honour...” The Prophetic Voice of Christa Wolf’s ‘Cassandra’<sup>1</sup>**

Antonia Lacey

This woman whose voices drive her into exile.

(Exile, exile.)...

This woman/ the heart of the matter.  
Heart of the law/ heart of the prophets. <sup>2</sup>

Prophets and poets make difficult stable companions and they share the ability to unsettle or subvert the norms of their societies. Because of this they are often silenced or killed. They both, in different ways, offer to the individual or community a two way ‘glass’ in which the individual or community then has to face the truth about themselves. One side of this glass acts as a mirror from which is reflected the breaking of communities; the injustice, the impoverishment, the godlessness, from which our laws and systems normally shield us. The other side of the glass is the window, through which, creative and energising, the