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Chapter Two

TIME: THE CULTURAL ACCOUNT

Western man is progressively putting more and more emphasis on the material things of life. This is a sad repudiation of our Christian heritage which is pre-eminently spiritual in its ethos. We have sent missionaries to other people with the intent of converting them to a more spiritual way of life: but it often became apparent that these same people to whom we sent our missionaries actually took a more spiritual view of life than we do ourselves. We assumed that the basis of this spiritual emphasis was in their case mere superstition, and undoubtedly this assessment has frequently been correct. Nevertheless, while we found them poor in this world's goods, they often turned out to be oddly well-to-do in the non-material aspects of their culture: and in spite of their poverty they usually found meaning in life where we seem to have lost it.

World Views contrasted

Now, anthropologists have observed that many cultures of non-Western tradition do not bifurcate their world into two kingdoms: the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural, the secular and the sacred. Western man tends to make a clear distinction in which the material world is taken to be the real world and the spiritual world is taken to be a fantasy, a creation of our ignorance. Primitive cultures, and many of the high cultures of ancient times, on the whole took a very different view of things. They saw the spirit world as everywhere interpenetrating the material world and, in fact, regulating it. It was for this reason that, in the case of an accident, they customarily asked not "How did it happen?" but "Who did it?" Events were not analyzed intellectually: they were experienced as personal confrontations. They felt themselves to be citizens of what to them was a kind of 'commonwealth' of animated beings. Many of them still feel this way. If what one reads is true, the Hopi pre-eminently view their relationship to the world as such. What we call the animated *forces* of nature (with a small *n*), to them are

the animated *wills* of Nature (with a capital *N*). Such people have always been humbler in the presence of elemental forces, less brash in their attitude towards the world around them, more aware of the comparative impotence of man when his behaviour is contrasted with that of animals. The relationship between man and his world was not, or is not, a *me/it* relationship (as it is with us) but a *me/thou* relationship.

As an illustration: in Egypt where annual records of the levels of the Nile river were kept from earliest times, the Pharaoh made gifts to the Nile every year at about the time it was due to rise. When they cast their sacrifices into the river, they also threw in a document stating, in the form of a contract, the Nile's obligations. The important thing was always to be in tune with Nature rather than on top of it.

The individual felt part and parcel of the universe, in sympathy with it, able and willing to deal with it on a person-to-person basis. In this personal relatedness he had no difficulty in seeing himself as surviving beyond the grave. Nature survives the apparent death of winter by spring, why should man not survive burial by resurrection? It was only when the animate Wills of Nature were turned into inanimate forces, and when the *characters* of these wills were reduced to mere *characteristics* of things, that man followed suit and found himself reduced to a mere thing among things. The responding soul was turned into a reacting *thing*, nothing but physics and chemistry.

Whereas native people animate Nature and so relate to it on a personal basis, our de-animation of nature destroyed this sense of relationship and left man feeling orphaned in a hostile universe. This sense of alienation has led Western man to seek the recovery of relatedness by reducing himself to the same inanimate status, thereby becoming a mere cog in an impersonal machine, but at least part and parcel of it all once again.

We have, in short, robbed ourselves of any spiritual significance. We have become bundles of electrochemical reactions instead of vital, conscious, animated souls capable of active communion with God and his world. Where other cultures have maintained their sense of fraternity with their living world of trees, stones, rivers, mountains, sun and moon and stars, and mother earth, we have come to treat these things as material objects and then sought relatedness with them by reducing *ourselves* to the status of objects. It may be that either way is unrealistic, but man in these other cultures has probably done less harm to the dignity of his own being.

Time-conscious vs event-conscious

Now, these two rather different philosophies of life have produced what might be called an unexpected spin-off which has not been given sufficient thought. The more deeply embedded we become in the world of *things*, the more profoundly conscious we tend to become of *time*. One cannot have a pervasive concern with the

three dimensions of space without being equally locked into the fourth dimension of time. It is not an accident that Western man has expended so much energy perfecting clocks that parcel out time in smaller and smaller fragments upon which he places a more and more precise economic value. We have thus come to quantify almost the whole of life. Never in human history was man so conscious of the importance of material possessions and of the necessity of preserving *physical* life, while paying less and less attention to its spiritual values. And never in human history was man so concerned to keep a precise record of the passing of time.

Other cultures had clocks and, like the Chinese, they gave much attention to improving their accuracy in many ingenious ways. But they were not intended to be read as marking fragments of time (seconds or minutes) for the individual but only for the co-ordination of events involving groups of people. And ninety-nine percent of the people felt no need to possess such devices nor sought to regulate their lives by them except on occasions of community effort. The ordinary man had a highly flexible sense of the flow of time, this flexibility depending entirely on the importance of the task engaged in. When there was no task that had to be done, there was no counting of time, *and no sense of wasting it either*. Time lost did not mean for them *things* lost, money lost, progress lost — in short, some of *life* lost as though life was parcelled out and ended with death when time ran out.

There is a real bond between things and time, because things occupy space, and space and time are inextricably bound together. And those whose philosophy is materialistic are accordingly far more time conscious. This applies not merely to certain individuals within a culture, but to the whole culture itself. When the ethos of a culture is materialistic, that culture is also likely to be strongly time-conscious. Many cultures throughout history which, unlike ourselves, have attached far less importance to things, have also attached far less importance to time. This is true of all primitive cultures. Such cultures do not even think of themselves as living in time at all: they actually live in eternity.

People who are absorbed in the material world are absorbed in a temporal world: those who hold *things* lightly hold *time* lightly. Those who are unwilling to share their things find it difficult to share their time. Time is money: which is another way of saying time is things.

Societies which bury all the treasures and material possessions of the dead with the deceased are in fact much closer in spirit to the child of God whose citizenship is in heaven and who lives in eternity, for such cultures are far less bound to the things of this world and do not find it difficult to relinquish them. During the early settling of the New World, many White men discovered that the graves of native people frequently contained valuables such as gold and silver, and they became chronic grave robbers. American Indians were often reluctant to move to new territories (sometimes even to better ones) because they could not bear the

thought of the desecration of their burial grounds which they quickly found out was likely to happen as soon as the White man moved in.

It might be supposed that such people buried precious metals with their dead simply because they were not so "precious" in their sight. There was a reasonable abundance of gold and silver and it cost them little or nothing to collect it. But we know now that later on when such precious metals became more scarce, they still buried items which were not as accessible — for instance, perfectly good sewing machines were buried with dead women. Such items were of considerable practical importance once they formed part of their culture and they could not be easily replaced. Yet they did not hang on to them. They buried them, as they had buried precious metals. Sometimes a perfectly good hunting knife of hardened steel obtained from a White man would be buried with the dead owner, and one must conclude that the economics of such "waste" were overridden even when they were irreplaceable.

There is much evidence from studies made by anthropologists during the last century that primitive people do not hold the physical world to have the same paramount importance in their lives as we do. As a consequence they do not mark time as we do either, and perhaps even more significantly they have not treasured physical survival as we have.

Man straddles both worlds — the physical and the spiritual — even in his fallen state. The physical world is not merely a world of three dimensional space occupied by things, but a world also marked by a sense of time. The spiritual world is inevitably, from this side of the grave, a projection of our space-time world — only we somehow conceive of its space as being qualitatively different rather than quantitatively different, and its time as being something which might appropriately be called *eternal* rather than merely extensive.

The Old Testament strongly reflects an awareness of the spiritual nature of this world. The Hebrew poets did this in the Psalms, calling upon all nature to worship the Creator in a spiritual way, inviting the mountains to skip like little children with sudden joy (Psalm 114:4)¹⁵ and the floods to clap their hands (Psalm 98:8).¹⁶ We think of this as fantasy.

Primitive people would not. They see a constant interaction between the visible and the invisible, between nature and supernature, between time and eternity, between the animate and the inanimate. These two worlds do not form two kingdoms but one, and the more important world in certain respects is the supernatural — more important because it is more difficult to control and therefore

¹⁵ "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs." Psalm 114:4.

¹⁶ "Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together." Psalm 98:8.

less predictable, and more important because it is constant while this world is always changing.

Living, as such people do, in daily awareness of this non-material world, they normally have a different time sense. The idea of cutting up time into segments of equal length and with more and more precise and diminutive divisions seems to them pointless. To get a native to use a watch in order to keep an appointment more accurately, or to report for work on a regular time basis, seems to him unreasonable. He is not clock conscious but event conscious: and for him 'event' usually means 'community event', *shared* event, and therefore corporate experience. To own a watch is fine as a prestige symbol, but to be in bondage to it is a form of slavery no sensible man should allow. The idea of an alarm clock that wakes a man while his soul is still wandering abroad in his dreams is the height of folly. The rudely awakened individual will be in danger of walking around for the rest of the day without any soul until sleep overtakes him again and his soul can finally catch up. All day he is a kind of half-there person.

Concept of time reflected in grammar

Non-Western man's sense of time is thus apt to be very different, and it is in fact nearer to the truth perhaps. We know now (since Einstein) that time does not have a fixed flow rate either in the personally experienced sense or even in the absolute clock-bound sense. Natives have 'known' this for years. For us it is a very recent re-discovery, based upon the strictest and most rational interpretation of scientific laws which are now being experimentally verified in remarkable ways. It is apparent that time does not flow as a steady current. Our clocks keep time with our time, not our time with our clocks. Native people have for centuries made time coincide with events, not events with time. The clock is set by their activities, not their activities by the clock.

Because events do not happen in time but time is determined by events, there is a real sense in which future time is simply non-existent since future events have not yet happened. Western man is very future conscious. We live in the future — for this evening, for to-morrow, for the weekend, for when we grow up, for when we get old, for the time when our children will take over from us, for when we are gone. Non-Western man has tended to live *now*, in the present: indeed, so indifferent to the future is he apt to be that we characterize him as improvident. We ourselves take out all kinds of policies to cover future eventualities — sickness insurance, unemployment insurance, annuities of all kinds for old age and life insurance for after death. The future which may never happen eclipses the present, and we think this is proper and normal. Other cultures have even refused to speak of the future unless they are so certain about what will happen that it can be spoken of as actually happening now.

The Hebrew language of the Old Testament has no future tense in its verbal system like Latin or French. In Latin "I love" is *amo*; "I shall love" is its future tense: *amabo*. French has its future tense: English manages it by using the compound form, "I will. . ." or "I shall. . ." and so on. But like the languages of many primitive people, the future is not specifically expressed in Hebrew. If one wishes to say "I shall kill," one uses a verbal form which really means "I *am* killing." The Hebrew people were quite aware of this and consciously made certain modifications in the rules when speaking of the activities of God. Man's intentions for the future are precarious and he cannot strictly speak of what he is going to do in the future, so in that sense he does not need a future tense. God, on the other hand, can speak with absolute certainty of the future — with such assurance, in fact, that the future is a *fait accompli*. Thus God's declared intentions for the future are often expressed in Hebrew not in the present tense but in the *past* tense. When God speaks of what He will do in the future, man can refer to it as already done. When man speaks of what he intends in the future he has to put it in the present tense, as though to say this is his present intention. Many non-Western people do just this, and it becomes highly disconcerting to the Westerner who assumes that the speaker is looking at time as he does himself. A good illustration of the confusion which such ways of thinking can create is given by Edward Mack who related the following incident:¹⁷

A desert traveller went with a missionary friend to visit one of the 10,000 mud villages in the Valley of the Nile. The night was not a restful one in a native home. The next morning the traveller wished to return as soon as possible to the boat on the Nile. The missionary however, knowing the demands of courtesy, insisted that they must not go until after breakfast but expressed the hope that breakfast might be expedited. "Oh," said the host, "breakfast is just ready." One hour and a half after that time by the traveller's watch, a match was struck to kindle the fire to cook the breakfast. And sometime later still, a cow was driven into the court of the house to be milked to provide the milk to cook the rice to make the breakfast. Was the host untruthful? Not at all; he did not reckon by time, but by events. He had no way of determining the passage of time. When he said, "Breakfast is just ready," he meant it was the next thing in the household economy, that they would do nothing else until that thing was done,

¹⁷ Mack, Edward, "Chronology in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol.1, 1831, p.644.

and that everything done was to that end. That is to say, he reckoned only by events.

Views of relationship of time and event

It may be thought that this attitude towards the passage of time is evidence of a primitive mentality which we have long since outgrown. But this is not really so. The Greeks themselves never seem to have entirely abandoned the view that there are really only two ways of viewing events. An event is either finished — or in process¹⁸. They saw all action as being either *imperfect* (by which they meant not yet complete but currently in effect) or *perfect* (that is, complete and finished). In short, there were only two tenses, though they embroidered them in different ways. Similarly, the Hopi gardener who intends to hoe his garden sometime in the future is already hoeing it, and he will tell you he is hoeing it — not that he *will be* hoeing it in the future. He does not see the future as having any strict reality. Such people do not really think of the past as an expanse of time as though it still had a real existence like a length of tape wound on the reel to the left while the future is a similar length already having a reality which is merely waiting to be unreeled from the right. They are aware only that NOW has real existence and that even IT is only a boundary, not a segment.

Augustine shared this view. He questioned whether it is possible to talk meaningfully of a period of a hundred years, for example. He asked, "Is a hundred years a *long* time? It is a good question! Is it a long time? Who can ever answer it, since a hundred years never exists . . ." Thus Augustine said:¹⁹

First of all, see whether there can *be* a hundred present years. If the first of those years is going on, it is present but ninety-nine are still in the future and so they do not exist. But if the second year is going on, one is already gone, another is present, and the rest are in the future. And this is so no matter which of the intervening years of this century we take to be the present one. For that reason there cannot be a hundred present years.

But Augustine carried his argument one step further. He said:

¹⁸ See a reflection of this in H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual of Greek New Testament*, New York, Macmillan, 1955, p.179, fn.

¹⁹ See Vernon J. Bourke, *The Essential Augustine*, New American Library, New York, Mentor Books, 1964, p.230.

Now, see whether even the one year that is going on to be itself present. If the first month in it is going on the rest are future; if the second is, then the first is now past and the rest do not yet exist. Therefore, one year which is now going on is not present as a whole and, if it is not present as a whole, then the year is not present. . . .

Yet neither is the month which is now going on present, but only one day.

And so he continued his argument with relentless logic down to the hour and the minute, in each of which only the immediate moment has any reality. "That alone is what we may call the present and this too flies over from the future into the past so quickly that it does not extend over the slightest instant. For if it has any extension, it is again divided into past and future. But the present has no length at all." It is obvious therefore that we cannot speak of past time or future time as having any reality. The tape, of which we spoke above, which we assume is unwinding through the vortex of our consciousness, is not doing anything of the kind — unless we equate *time* with events, or more strictly with the *succession* of events. It does not stand apart as a thing in which events happen, but is rather created by the events themselves so that if nothing happened there would be no time. It is important to get this concept clearly in mind.

Augustine was wise enough to observe that creation was not *in* time like a bleep which is written on a tape that is already unwinding, nor a single exposure on a film which is already running through the camera. Creation was *with* time, or better still, time was created when the Universe was created²⁰. Time is something which does not exist in its own right. It is not one of the "givens" of reality. This was known to Augustine and to others as well in those ancient times²¹. It is only recently that it has been re-discovered. Einstein put it this way:²²

If you don't take my words too seriously, I would
say this: If we assume that all matter were to disappear

²⁰ Augustine: *De Civitate Dei*, XI.6.

²¹ For example, Philo Judaeus (20 B.C. — 39 A.D.), "On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses" (*De Opificio Mundi*) in The Loeb Classical Library, *Philo*, translated by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A., Harvard University Press, 1971, vol. 1, sect. 7, p.21.

²² Einstein: quoted by Philipp Frank, *Einstein, His Life and Times*, New York, Knopf, 1947, chap. 8, sect. 5, p.178.

from the world, then, before relativity, one believed that space and time would continue existing in an empty world. But according to the Theory of Relativity, if matter (and its motion) disappeared, there would no longer be any space *or time* [my emphasis].

The Hopi Indians viewed the matter in precisely the same way. They did not see how it was possible to speak of ten days! One can have ten men at one time, but never ten days at one time. And so they considered the phrase inept and didn't use it²³. They might say, "after the tenth day. . . ." but they would not speak of a period of ten days. The past has gone, the future is not yet: only NOW has reality. To many Indians even the past is still *present*, time does not flow by at all. To this extent they live in the always-now. The Hopi, like many other cultures which have not grown up within the traditions of the Western world, were far more conscious of their oneness with nature and were far less absorbed with things or with time. They are nearer to Luther's concept of eternity as a reality which is *totum simul*, a phrase which is perhaps best represented in English by the words "the whole thing at once."²⁴ Eternity is a unique kind of now-ness that persists. The past is not past: the past is present still.

Dakota Indians have this kind of time perspective. The world in which they live is entirely a present one. They would agree with Augustine when he said,²⁵

What is now plain and clear is that neither future nor past things are in existence and that it is not correct to say there are three periods of time: past, present, and future. Perhaps it would be proper to say there are three periods of time: the *present* of things past, the *present* of things present, and the *present* of things future.

In short, only the present has any reality. A few years ago a full-blooded Dakota Indian girl with a Ph.D. wrote to a friend and said, "You see, we Indians live

²³ Whorf, Benjamin L., *Language, Thought and Reality*, New York, Wiley, 1956, p.140.

²⁴ Torrance, Thomas F., *Space, Time and Incarnation*, Oxford (Eng.), Oxford University Press, 1969, p.34. See also F. H. Brabant, *Time and Eternity in Christian Thought*, London, Longmans Green, 1937, p.37; E.M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, St. Louis, Concordia, 1972, Selection 1642 - 44.

²⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk.XI.xx.26.

in eternity.”²⁶ She explained that the Dakota Indian was not striving to get somewhere in this world, or the next; he was already there.

Relationship of time, events, and space

What is said of time is thought about space also. The Australian aborigines have no difficulty at certain times of the year in believing they can be in two different places at once, an idea that to us seems clearly impossible. Two branches of a family with a shared totem will ceremonially eat this totem animal once a year to re-unite themselves with their ancestral roots. Though the two branches may be hundreds of miles apart and have each captured a specimen of their totem animal and slaughtered it, they will both believe they have captured and eaten the very same animal, not simply the same species of animal, but the same particular animal. There is no contradiction to this in their mind. Both they and the animal can be in two different places at the same time. It reminds one of the statement made by the Lord (John 3:13²⁷) in which He speaks of Himself as actually being "in heaven," though also on earth. And in keeping with this elimination of distinction between the two worlds, the same Lord could speak of Himself as existing at this very moment "before Abraham *was*" (John 8:58).²⁸ It is impossible by our logic to reconcile such conceptions of space and time but this is only because we are culturally bound to a view which is only partially correct.

The native sense of space is not like that of an enormous box with the top and bottom missing and the sides knocked out, within which discrete things are separately positioned apart from one another: and their sense of time is not that of a river flowing by, a river which is in existence before it reaches us and continues on after it has passed us. The native creates both his own space and his own time by his own experience. Evans-Pritchard, who for many years studied and lived with a Nilotic black people called the Nuer, had to develop a different time sense in order to enter into their way of thinking. They do not keep time with their clocks, their clocks keep time with them. As he put it:²⁹

²⁶ Miss Deloria to R. Clyde McCone, "Evolutionary Time: A Moral Issue" in *A Symposium on Creation*, Henry Morris *et al.*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1968, p.144.

²⁷ "No man has yet ascended up into heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven". John 3:13.

²⁸"Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." John 8:58.

²⁹ Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *Social Anthropology*, London, Cohen & West, 1951, p.103.

The daily tasks of the kraal are the points of reference for each day, and for longer periods than a day the points are the phases of other recurrent activity such as weeding or the seasonal movement of men and their herds. The passage of time is the succession of activities and their relations to one another. All sorts of interesting conclusions follow.

Time has not the same value at one season of the year that it has at another. Since the Nuer have, properly speaking, no abstract of time reckoning they do not think of time as something actual which passes, which can be wasted, can be saved, and so forth; and they do not have to co-ordinate their activities with an abstract passage of time, because their point of reference is the activities themselves.

Thus, in a certain month one makes the first fishing dams and forms the first cattle camps, and since one is doing these things it must be that month or thereabouts. *One does not make fishing dams because it is November; it is November because one is making fishing dams.* [Emphasis mine].

Intervals between events are not reckoned as short or long passages of intervening time. What intervals of time there are, are "measured" by the importance of the events that bracket the interval. And as for an event itself, if it is very important it takes up a lot of time regardless of what the clock may happen to say. Even the order in which events are remembered and reported will be the order of their importance, not necessarily the order of their historical sequence.

View of time reflected in social codes

A culture's particular sense of time can have some remarkable repercussions on their methods of handling social problems. If the past is of no consequence for the present, a crime or a misdemeanor done long ago has no present significance from a legal standpoint. It no longer counts. Suppose in a South African gold mine a native employee is late and is docked so much "time" as a penalty. If the penalty is not imposed at once, it will strike him as a gross injustice to penalize him at the end of the week. It requires a basic re-orientation of time sense for such an employee, freshly introduced into a clock conscious world, to accept a delayed penalty as just.

It is not without parallel in our own culture, as C. S. Lewis commented:³⁰

We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. I have heard others, and I have heard myself, recounting cruelties and falsehoods committed in boyhood as if they were no concern of the present speakers, and even with laughter. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of the sin. The guilt is not washed out by time but by repentance and the blood of Christ.

How much time must elapse until an event which has moral implications becomes an event without moral implications? Can guilt be cancelled at all by the mere passage of time?

Admittedly as an accommodation to the fact that we are time bound because we are space bound, it seems that the mere passage of time must be allowed to have some bearing in the matter; and so we have the *Statute of Limitations* as a necessary accommodation. Our time is limited and will run out so that, as we have less and less of it remaining to us in this life, it becomes in a sense increasingly worth more and more to us. Experience shows that to delay the penalty unduly may impose an unfair hardship because what at the time might have been a just imposition becomes, as our time begins to run out, less and less just, simply because what time remains to us becomes increasingly more valuable. It is a kind of progressive inflation.

Thus a man earning a high salary could be reasonably expected to pay a penalty that at the time represented ten percent of his current income. But if the same penalty is imposed upon him ten years later when he has retired and his current income is not a quarter of what it then was, the burden of the same penalty becomes unbearable. It is commonly agreed as unjust to impose a penalty after many years have elapsed which change the circumstances. It is true that the same delay in some cases may place the guilty party in a much better position to pay so that the penalty is *reduced* in its effect. However, the prime object of the system is really intended to protect the injured party, but limitations are imposed in an effort to balance injustice to *either* party. As Paton and Derham have noted:³¹ "It is unsettling to allow no time limit to legal claims. . . . The small percentage of cases in which there may be injustice is outweighed by the legal interests in establishing security."

Such considerations are relevant only while we remain within the present space-time framework. In terms of the justice of God in the light of eternity in which

³⁰ Lewis, C. S., *The Problem of Pain*, New York, Macmillan, 1962, p.61.

³¹ Paton, G. W. and David P. Derham, *A Textbook of Jurisprudence*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972, p.502.

the present does not recede into the past, such limitations surely do not apply. Here the time factor becomes irrelevant, for guilt is *present* not past. In so far as heaven belongs to a timeless order of things, time lapse is not going to be relevant in determining the measure of guilt or of innocence.

The Christian: two worlds — two times

When a man becomes a child of God he is placed in a position of living in two different worlds. He cannot yet escape the world of time and space, and in his horizontal man-to-man relationships he must accept the consequences of the framework within which his social life is lived. But in so far as he has been translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son and has become a citizen of eternity, to this extent in his man-to-God vertical relationships he lives within a different framework. There is a sense in which his life becomes timeless, the new man ceases to grow old even though hopefully he may mature. There is a sense in which he lives in heaven even though he does not altogether escape the bonds of the material world. The community of the saints is a society of people who share together this dual sense of time, and it is important that we should not isolate ourselves from this new society, for membership here is everlasting: we are only passing *through* this world. The Lord prayed for us, not that we might be taken out of it but kept while we are in it (John 17:15).³²

Is there only a subjective sense of time?

In summary it can be said that any culture which places a major emphasis on the accumulation of things will tend to be pre-occupied with the value of time. It will cut up time, parcel it out, reify it as quantifiable, give it a measurable existence in its own right which it probably does not in fact possess. Our culture has done this pre-eminently. Many other cultures do it scarcely at all.

Thus we have to recognize that a different culture with a different ethos may have a different perception of time. We also need to recognize that as Christians our sense of time has been modified, because Christian culture is different in its ethos and thus also in its perception of time.

But quite apart from "cultural" influences, we also have to recognize that it is not merely a modified sense of the passage of time (which is subjective) that has to be taken into account. It is now known that time itself does not flow past us at a constant rate even when viewed objectively. It is as though the tape that is running through the recorder from the future into the past can actually run more slowly or

³² "I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil. . . ." John 17:15.

more quickly under certain circumstances and perhaps even stop running altogether!
This is not a subjective deceleration or acceleration, but an objective phenomenon,
a phenomenon that is (as we shall see) quantitatively measurable.

The implications of such a possibility are tremendous.

➡ PROCEED

