

# JESUS IS COMING SOON: Toward Revisioning Pentecostal Eschatology for Postmodern Ministry and Mission



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**ABSTRACT:** *Pentecostal spirituality cannot be rightly understood without properly placing eschatology at the center of its message and the true focus of the movement. The proposed essay will seek to explore early Pentecostal eschatology, seek to understand its role in shaping the movement's spirituality and missional motivations by way of a historical-theological investigation. By tracing eschatological antecedents, examining the beliefs of its early leaders, and consulting early newsletters and secondary scholarly sources, this writer will then explore early Pentecostal eschatology and the implications of those eschatological beliefs. I will then propose a re-visioning of Pentecostal eschatology that may be more compatible with the ethos of Pentecostalism in missionally engaging a postmodern Western context and attempt to flesh out implications and applications for ministry and mission for today's church. The research will conclude that early Pentecostal eschatology, influenced by premillennialism and the Latter Rain Covenant, fuelled fervent global missionary efforts. The adoption of fundamentalist dispensationalism occurring in the mid 20th century produced an escapism mentality rather than one of responsibility to society. However, that system presented a truncated gospel, incompatibility with Pentecostal theology, and is unsuitable for mission in a postmodern context. The proposal to embrace an eschatology of the inaugurated Kingdom of God as proleptic anticipation, was found to offer a more biblically faithful holistic gospel, compatibility with both a Pentecostal ethos, and with postmodern culture.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Pentecostal Theology, Eschatology, Dispensationalism, Kingdom of God, Postmodernism*

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## **Part I: Antecedents, Leaders, and Letters: Exploring Early Pentecostal Eschatology, Spirituality, and Mission**

To the casual observer, Pentecostal spirituality appears obsessed with speaking in tongues or other charismatic phenomena. While these operations of the Holy Spirit have been given a place of primacy within the movement and much scholarly ink has been spilled defending and articulating its distinct pneumatology, Pentecostal spirituality cannot be rightly understood without properly placing eschatology at the center of its message and the true focus of the movement. This essay aims to explore early Pentecostal eschatology and seek to understand its role in shaping the movement's spirituality and missional motivations by way of a historical-theological investigation. By tracing eschatological antecedents, examining the beliefs of early leaders, and consulting early newsletters

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and secondary scholarly sources, this writer will then explore early Pentecostal eschatology and the implications of those eschatological beliefs. I will then propose a re-visioning of Pentecostal eschatology that may be more compatible with the ethos of Pentecostalism in missionally engaging a postmodern Western context and attempt to flesh out implications and applications for ministry and mission in today's church.

### **The Antecedents of Early Pentecostal Eschatology: Postmillennial Currents and the Rise of Premillennialism**

The late Walter Hollenweger notes that the Pentecostal movement emerged "in an atmosphere of fervent expectation of the second coming of Jesus."<sup>2</sup> That expectation, however, was not created in a vacuum. Significant historical and theological factors created the fertile soil for such an eschatological expectation. Vinson Synan notes that the French Revolution of the 1780's sparked apocalyptic images akin to the Book of Revelation and created a renewed interest in biblical prophecy.<sup>3</sup> Donald Dayton asserts that millennialist currents ran through American revivalism, citing as an example the Great Awakenings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Jonathan Edward's contribution to the expectancy of a literal millennium. Postmillennial in outlook, Edward's views would influence millennial thinking for the next century.<sup>4</sup>

With postmillennialism as the dominant current in the new optimistic America, Methodism and its focus on "perfectionist soteriology" under John Wesley would find soil for his optimistic social vision.<sup>5</sup> Significant for the development of Pentecostal eschatology was the doctrine of John Fletcher. His doctrine of dispensations divided history into three periods: the dispensations of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It was the dispensation of the Spirit that promised Christ's second coming. His scheme is significant since it served as a bridge for dispensationalism<sup>6</sup> and resonates with Pentecostalism.

Though dispensational schemes can be found in the writings of William Cave (1633-1713) and Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) is considered "the real developer of dispensational hermeneutics and theology."<sup>7</sup> Darby argued that salvation history is divided into seven periods or dispensations and taught a unique *two-phase return* view that harmonized Christ's imminent return.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the church age (the age of grace), God would take up his church in a 'secret rapture,' the Tribulation would follow, and the unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament would unfold to Israel.<sup>9</sup> His eschatology also provided a cosmic, geo-political end-times scheme. An unfortunate feature of this end-times scheme was that it reinforced the doctrine of cessationism. Darby's eschatological scheme influenced George Duffield, William Trotter, William Blackstone, Charles. H. Mackintosh,<sup>10</sup> James Brookes, G. Campbell Morgan, Harry Ironside, A.C Gaebelein, and C.I Scofield. With the publication of Scofield's Reference Bible in 1909, fundamental dispensationalism

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), 415.

<sup>3</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>8</sup> L. Thomas Holdcroft, *Eschatology: A Futurist View* (Abbotsford: CeeTeC Publishing, 2001), 59.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Althouse, "Left Behind," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13.2 (2005), 196.

<sup>10</sup> L.Thomas Holdcroft, *Eschatology: A Futurist View*, 59-60.

became widely adopted and reinforced in fundamentalist circles through churches and Bible institutes.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Relationship Between Dispensationalism and Pentecostals: Early Adaptations**

David Kentie notes that “Pentecostals did not fully embrace an ardent dispensationalism,”<sup>12</sup> but rather it was, according to Donald Dayton, “one of the several nineteenth-century sources of modern Pentecostal thought.”<sup>13</sup> It is asserted that Classical/Fundamental Dispensationalism replaced the Latter Rain motif as the dominant eschatological vision within Pentecostalism.<sup>14</sup> Christopher J. Richmann, and Douglas Jacobson provide historical research that indicates that a current of premillennial dispensationalism ran strongly among early Pentecostal pioneers with what I call a “Pentecostal twist!”

### **Martin Wells Knapp**

Martin Wells Knapp (1953-1911) provides us with an intersection of Holiness and Pentecostal thought. His publication, “*Lighting Bolts from Pentecostal Skies*,” in 1898 utilized Pentecostal terminology to speak of judgment, punishment, and the purification of the church.<sup>15</sup> Knapp believed that the church was more holy and evangelistic when expecting Christ's imminent return, whereas postmillennialism pushed His return too far into the distant future and made room for humanity's spiritual and moral progress. Knapp adapted Darby's model of historical dispensations and asserted that the Pentecostal Period began with Acts 2 and ended with the rapture. Significant for Pentecostal eschatology was his assertion that only those who experienced Pentecostal baptism, which he understood as sanctification, would be raptured and escape the tribulation. He also believed that premillennialism was the better eschatological option since it was 1) in harmony with Scripture, 2) provided an incentive for holiness, 3) promoted watchfulness, 4) was a warning to others, and 5) rejected human optimism. Significant was Knapp's connection between Pentecostal experience and the imminent return of Jesus, giving premillennialism an important place in Pentecostal doctrine.<sup>16</sup>

### **Charles Fox Parham**

Though Charles Parham (1873-1929) has been commonly noted for his doctrine that glossolalia is the initial evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, one cannot overlook his influence on early Pentecostal eschatology. Parham's theology was greatly concerned with the grand narrative of history, and he believed that he was living at the cusp of the most significant turning in all time. The age of grace was about to end, and Christ's appearing was soon. Prior to His coming, a great worldwide revival and Spirit Baptism with tongues were preparation for that global campaign. But Spirit Baptism was not only for the foreign missionary effort. Like Knapp, Parham held that Spirit Baptism was important for avoiding the wrath of the end times, as only those who were sealed through the Baptism in the Holy Spirit would become part of either “the Redemption,” “the Bride,” or the “Man-Child,”<sup>17</sup> and this belief added intensity to his teaching on the subject. He also insisted, like Knapp, that postmillennialism was unscriptural and counterproductive. Thus, the activity of the

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<sup>11</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study in the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 111-115.

<sup>12</sup> David Kentie, *Kingdom-Now*, (MTS Thesis: Tyndale Seminary, 2015), 54.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987), 145.

<sup>14</sup> See Althouse, “*Left Behind*,” 190.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher J. Richmann, *Sanctification, Ecstasy, and War: The Development of American Pentecostal Eschatology, 1898-1950* (MA Thesis: Luther Seminary, 2009), 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 35-37; 43

Holy Spirit signaled the last days, promised escape from tribulation, and the sign of tongues not only was a sign of the sealing of the believer for escape but was a tool for the evangelization of the world.<sup>18</sup>

### **William J. Seymour**

Both Knapp and Parham significantly influenced William Seymour (1870-1922) as he attended Knapp's school in Cincinnati, Ohio and Parham's school in Topeka, Kansas.<sup>19</sup> Richmann's examination of Seymour's published sermons reveal some of Seymour's eschatological convictions. For Seymour, Christ's return was soon and imminent, and one's expectancy of His return served as a gauge of spirituality. Like Knapp and Parham, he believed that Spirit Baptism admitted those who experienced it into the "Bride of Christ." This group would escape God's wrath and partake of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Those not Spirit Baptized would endure the tribulation likely to face martyrdom. Seymour preached:

Dearly beloved, the only people that will meet our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and go with Him into the marriage supper of the Lamb, are the wise virgins—not only saved and sanctified, with pure and clean hearts but having the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The others we find will not be prepared. They have some oil in their lamps but they have not the double portion of His Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Spirit Baptism was of eschatological significance since it provided the empowerment needed for the church's missionary activity and signaled Christ's return.<sup>21</sup>

### **William Durham**

An early Pentecostal leader known for the "Finished Work" doctrine later adopted by the Assemblies of God and Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, echoes the "Pentecostal twist" or adaptation of dispensational views. Like Seymour and Parham, Durham believed that Spirit Baptism prepared believers for the rapture. An excerpt from *The Pentecostal Testimony* out of Chicago in 1910 sums it up well:

*A portion of the cold formal church will have enough life to be saved but will pass through the tribulation. The third class is those who are yielding themselves wholly to God and are sealed unto the day of redemption. These are living the overcoming life and will constitute the reigning force in the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. They are the pre-tribulation rapture saints who will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*<sup>22</sup>

Douglas Jacobson also notes that Durham believed that "the baptism of the Holy Spirit placed God's seal on the believer; it put a lock on the believer's heart that prevented any future fall from grace, thereby rendering salvation permanent."<sup>23</sup>

### **D. Wesley Myland**

D. Wesley Myland (1858-1943) authored the work that many early Pentecostals would claim as one of the most articulate expressions of faith.<sup>24</sup> Myland's work "*The Latter Rain Covenant*," published in 1910, implied a dispensational view of history and taught that the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was the *former rain* and the outpouring of the Spirit experienced at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 13-15.

<sup>19</sup> Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. *Azusa Street Mission & Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 33, 46-47.

<sup>20</sup> William Seymour, "Receive Ye the Holy Ghost," *Sermon Index.net*  
<http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=39712>

<sup>21</sup> Richmann, *Sanctification, Ecstasy, and War: The Development of American Pentecostal Eschatology*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> William Durham, *Pentecostal Testimony* Vol.1, No.5 (Chicago, Ill. July 1, 1910), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 158.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 23.

was the *latter rain*. Myland derived his latter rain covenantal eschatology from Deuteronomy 11:10-21 and applied the OT passage prophetically to God's actions in the grand scheme of history, believing that "just as the physical latter rain prepares the final crops for harvest, the spiritual latter rain ripens the spiritual crop."<sup>25</sup> Like his predecessors, he too ascribed eschatological significance to Spirit Baptism, believing that those who received the experience became members of the Bride of Christ, who would escape tribulation through the Rapture. Myland's work was so influential that it became part of the mainstream eschatological view in the decades that followed.<sup>26</sup>

### Applying Pentecostal Eschatology: Eschatological Themes in Early Newsletters

The aforementioned leaders' eschatological views and their impact on Pentecostal spirituality can be easily detected in early Pentecostal newsletters. Walter Hollenweger notes that the titles of many early publications were in an eschatological orientation such as "The Bridal Call," "The Last Trump," "The Midnight Cry," "The End-Time Messenger," and the "Bridegroom Messenger."<sup>27</sup> Concerning the premillennial orientation of the movement, in a section titled "Jesus is Coming Soon," the *Apostolic Messenger* states, "It seems clear from many Scriptures that Jesus will come again *before* the millennium..."<sup>28</sup> Regarding holiness, the first edition of the *Apostolic Faith* reports that those affected by the revival made restitution, reconciled relationships, forsook alcohol and crime, and left behind sexual immorality.<sup>29</sup> The soon return of Jesus served to provide both hope for the righteous and a warning to the wicked: "Jesus is coming soon. Hear it, cities, and prepare to burn; hear it, ye sinners, and prepare to die; hear it, ye righteous, and prepare to rise."<sup>30</sup> The belief that Spirit Baptism created the remnant called "the Bride of Christ" provided the strident motivation to seek the experience. This is encapsulated well in Volume 1, Number 1 of the *Apostolic Messenger*<sup>31</sup> and in the following excerpt from *Living Waters*:

The prophetic Scriptures and the signs of the times all tell us that Jesus is Coming Soon...We believe that God is preparing His people as quickly as possible to meet the Soon Coming Bridegroom. We must all have oil in our vessels with our Lamps to gain admittance to the Marriage, Matt 25. Every student of the Word knows that "oil" in the Scriptures is symbolic of the Spirit, and if it means anything at all, it means the fullness of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost.<sup>32</sup>

Because early Pentecostals understood this outpouring of the Spirit as a signal of the last worldwide revival before Jesus' return,<sup>33</sup> Spirit Baptism prepared the believer for the Rapture as part of "the Bride," which sparked an explosive global missionary movement. Azusa Street historian Cecil Robeck notes that numerous Pentecostal evangelists spread northward along the Pacific Coast across the Mid-West and into the Southern United States within months of its beginning. By the end of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 25-27.

<sup>27</sup> Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 415. The digital archives at [www.pentecostalarchives.org](http://www.pentecostalarchives.org) contain such titles as "The Bridal Call Foursquare," the "Bridal Call Crusader Foursquare" and the "Latter Rain Evangel," further illustrating the eschatological orientation of the early Pentecostal movement.

<sup>28</sup> *The Apostolic Messenger*, Vol.1, No.1, (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. February/ March 1908), 5.

<sup>29</sup> *The Apostolic Faith*, Vol.1, No.1, (Los Angeles, Cal. September, 1906), 3.

<sup>30</sup> R.E. McAlister, *The Good Report*, No.1 (Ottawa, Canada. May 1911), 4.

<sup>31</sup> "Jesus is Coming Soon," *The Apostolic Messenger*, Vol.1, No.1, (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. February/ March 1908), 5. Thos Smart writes, "There is a marriage coming, and there is a bride prepared, but all who are expecting will not be the bride nor be admitted to the supper. Some will be foolish and neglect to provide oil in their vessels with their lamps".

<sup>32</sup> Frank Small, ed. *Living Waters*, Vol. 1 No.1 (Winnipeg: Old Knox Church, 1918), 3.

<sup>33</sup> *The Apostolic Faith*, Vol.1, No.1, 1, 4. On page 4, we find: "This is a worldwide revival, the last Pentecostal revival to bring our Jesus. The church is taking her last march to meet her beloved."

1906, missionaries were in Africa; by 1907, in Mexico, Canada, Europe, and Asia.<sup>34</sup> Lastly, the newsletters clearly demonstrate that early Pentecostals viewed the restoration of Spirit Baptism and their role in reaching a last-days harvest through the lens of Latter Rain Covenant eschatology. For example, the last page of the first edition of the *Apostolic Faith* quotes Joel 2:23 and adds, “He gave the former rain moderately at Pentecost, and He is going to send upon us in these last days the former and *latter rain*. There are greater things to be done in these last days of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>35</sup>

### Summary

With a doctrine of an imminent coming of the Lord in a secret rapture, such convictions created a sense of urgency and provided a means to give Spirit Baptism a greater value as they interpreted it as “oil” in the lamps of wise virgins and as a “seal of redemption” promising an escape from Tribulation and a seat at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. But this eschatological motif also was a powerful missiological catalyst. The soon return of Christ shaped the heart and motivated the hands of early Pentecostals. It fuelled their motivation to win and warn others before He came on the clouds of glory to snatch away His bride. Significance was given to Latter Rain Covenant eschatology, which framed their experience, spirituality, and missionary spirit, provided the empowerment and impetus for the evangelization of the world, signaling the imminent return of Christ, and setting them apart for their role in God's plan for the dispensation of the Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

## Part II: Where No One Has Gone Before: Revising Pentecostal Eschatology for Ministry and Mission a Postmodern Context

Now into the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, much has changed since Pentecostalism appeared on the scene at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, Pentecostal's adoption of fundamentalist dispensationalism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century appears to be highly problematic for classical Pentecostal spirituality, emphasizing charismatic phenomena as signs of Christ's imminent coming and the basis for its mission.<sup>37</sup> Instead of possessing a self-understanding of having the unique role in reaping a Latter Rain harvest, the influence of fundamentalist eschatology fostered a posture of *escapism* from a world headed toward destruction rather than a posture of *responsibility* to the world as Spirit-empowered witnesses of Jesus and His inaugurated and soon coming consummated Kingdom. On this point, Peter Althouse writes,

The pre-millenarianism of fundamentalism, with its doctrine of a secret Rapture, is opposite to the pre-millenarianism of the early church. Early church apocalypticism included eschatological

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<sup>34</sup> Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival & Mission*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *The Apostolic Faith*, Vol.1, No.1, 4.

<sup>36</sup> On the significance of the Latter Rain Covenant and its shaping of the PAOC, see David K. Porter, *Shaping the Missionary Identity of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada: Spirit Baptism and the Latter Rain Covenant in the writings of R.E. McAlister and George A. Chambers* (Th.M. Thesis: Wycliffe College, University of Toronto).

<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Peter Althouse, “‘Left Behind’ - Fact or Fiction: Ecumenical Dilemmas of the Fundamentalist Millenarian Tensions within Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13.2 (2005), Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, 145, and Gerald T. Sheppard, “Pentecostals and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: The Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship,” *Pneuma* 2.2 (1984). This adopted eschatological framework is highly problematic for Pentecostals to maintain due to 1) strict biblical literalism, 2) exclusion of OT and NT that are relevant to Pentecostals, 3) a sharp distinction between the church and Israel, and 4) adheres strictly to cessationism. This leads to incompatibility with a Pentecostal ethos. Suppose OT promises and prophecies apply only to Israel during the millennium. How can Pentecostals appeal to Joel 2 and continue to validate their charismatic experiences biblically, or frame their eschatological purpose as signs of last days and the soon coming of Christ?

hope that resisted the powers of sin and oppression, but fundamentalist apocalypticism embodies a spiritual escape from the world. Passive withdrawal in the hope of a secret Rapture abdicates our responsibilities to protest against the powers of sin and oppression in all their personal, social and cosmic dimensions.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, Van Johnson, in an article titled, "Jesus is Coming Soon," notes that those in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada are now enjoying the benefits of upward mobility and have gained a legitimate status within wider Evangelicalism. This has shifted the previous disenfranchisement and marginalization of the movement, resulting in a loss of eschatological interest.<sup>39</sup> The third is the transition from modernity to postmodernity - Christendom to post-Christendom, which has resulted in North America becoming a challenging and resistant mission field.<sup>40</sup> What is urgently required for the present religious terrain is a revision of Pentecostal eschatology that is biblically faithful, true to the Pentecostal ethos, and can adequately shape ecclesial praxis to engage a post-Christendom, postmodern era successfully.

### **Revising Pentecostal Eschatology: The "Now/Not Yet" Kingdom of God**

If Althouse is right that fundamentalist eschatology abdicates social responsibility and creates a view that social action and transformation are useless in the light of Christ's imminent return,<sup>41</sup> a revision of Pentecostal eschatology will be required if the Pentecostal Church can successfully engage the postmodern mission field called North America. In the following, I will endorse Althouse's proposal to rethink Pentecostal eschatology as "proleptic anticipation."<sup>42</sup> This means that the Pentecostal church, while living in the "now," is to represent the "not yet" Kingdom of God as if the future already exists. This means participation for the Kingdom, compatibility for Pentecostal theology,<sup>43</sup> and resonance with those developing a missional ecclesiology for a postmodern context.

### **The In-Breaking of the Kingdom of God: The Eschatology of Jesus**

The Kingdom of God was central to the thought and actions of the writers of the synoptic gospels. The phrase appears 122 times - 92 times on the lips of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> For "to miss or misunderstand this term is to miss Jesus altogether."<sup>45</sup> Gordon D. Fee explains that the Kingdom of God is an *eschatological* term, a reality that points to the day when the end would come, and God would establish his rule over the created order. The Jewish eschatological expectation was that when Messiah came, the old age would pass, and the new age would dawn, "ushering in an age of

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Althouse, "Left Behind," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13.2 (2005), 191.

<sup>39</sup> Van Johnson, "Jesus is Coming Soon," Article 17, *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology*, 25-34.

<sup>40</sup> See Darrell L. Guder (ed), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Murray W. Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective: Reformulating Pentecostal Eschatology" *Journal for Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993), 52.

<sup>42</sup> Althouse, "'Left Behind' - Fact or Fiction," 202.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

<sup>44</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 51.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon D Fee, "The Kingdom of God and the Church's Global Mission" in Murray W. Dempster, Bryan D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen (eds.), *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1991), 8.

righteousness and justice”<sup>46</sup> which includes “the destruction of the present evils and the realization of a completely new set of values.”<sup>47</sup>

In contrast to Christianity,<sup>48</sup> Jesus taught that the Kingdom was “now” but “not yet”; it is both *present* and future. In His person, the Kingdom of God was *among them*. Offering forgiveness of sins to outcasts meant that the great banquet of the future *had begun*,<sup>49</sup> healing and exorcism meant Satan’s dominion *was breaking*,<sup>50</sup> and the time to plunder his house *was beginning*.<sup>51</sup> This redemptive reign of God also created a new dividing line in humanity. No longer was the division between Jew and Gentile but between God’s children and the children of the evil one. Those who became the children of God formed a new society commissioned by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill their vocation<sup>52</sup> to represent that present reign.

### **Kingdom Now: Proleptic Anticipation and its Implications and Applications for Ministry and Mission to Postmoderns**

#### ***Implications for Social Transformation***

The gospel that is preached in many Pentecostal churches today tends to focus on individualistic salvation. Ronald Sider points out, “for the individualistic evangelical, the gospel is about the justification and regeneration of individuals rather than the dawning messianic kingdom where all areas of life are being redeemed in Jesus’ new community of believers.”<sup>53</sup> Sider, in his book *Good News and Good Works*, argues that the gospel of the inaugurated Kingdom of God was more than just good news of the forgiveness of personal sins, but that the scope of salvation includes all of creation. For Sider, biblical conversion transforms persons, families, and nations. It restores humanity’s broken relationship with God, frees us from the guilt and shame of sin, empowers us to abandon self-centered destructive behavior, and rejects oppression, injustice, tyranny, racism, and environmental destruction.<sup>54</sup> God’s ultimate goal, in the words of Craig Van Gelder, is to bring “...back to right relationship all that was lost. God was re-establishing creation design.”<sup>55</sup> For Van Gelder, creation design included God’s covenantal relationship with humans and the world, *human responsibility* to govern as stewards, relationship with God and one another, the ability to *create a society* that reflects God’s image, marriage and family as building blocks of that society, and the capacity to create culture. In a fallen world marred by sin, all of creation’s design has been deeply affected and corrupted. This is what Sider understands as “embracing the fullness of God’s salvation.”<sup>56</sup> If God is concerned about all of creation with the ultimate plan to reconcile all things to Himself as proven by Revelation 21-22, the good news of the Kingdom of God extends beyond personal salvation. If this is the case, Christians must respond by engaging in social action, working

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>47</sup> William Raccah, [“Early Jewish Eschatology.”](#) in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World without End*, ed. Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Mark 2:19.

<sup>50</sup> Luke 11:20-21.

<sup>51</sup> Mark 3:27.

<sup>52</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke: Trajectories from the Old Testament to Luke-Acts, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 93.

<sup>53</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 117

<sup>55</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 95.

<sup>56</sup> Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 83.



against oppression, injustices, tyranny, racism, and care for the environment as agents of the Kingdom of God, without neglecting the call to reconcile the lost to a right relationship with God and humanity as a whole.

Traditionally, Pentecostals have focused on saving souls either in preparation for the Rapture or eventual death.<sup>57</sup> It has largely ignored the power resident in an eschatology that understands the Kingdom of God as *presently* breaking into our lived experience with the power for both individual *and* social transformation. On that historical trend, Robert C. Crosby notes, “for many years, North American Pentecostals were gun-shy about using terms like ‘social concern’ and ‘social justice’...many worried that a social justice emphasis would undermine the message of salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>58</sup> However, this trend is changing, especially among Pentecostals under 30 in North America.<sup>59</sup> Globally, African Pentecostalism also has responded to contemporary challenges by engaging politics, business, and social issues.<sup>60</sup> Further, social, political, and economic ills have been constructively addressed by Pentecostals in Latin America, South Korea, Africa, Australia, and South Africa.<sup>61</sup> It is clear that global Pentecostalism has moved on from an apolitical and otherworldly posture by engaging social concerns and politics to ameliorate society.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Application for Pentecostal Ministry to Postmoderns***

A revision of eschatology grounded in proleptic anticipation of the Kingdom of God will resonate well with postmoderns. Jesus, in challenging the status quo, sought to transform social conditions of the socially marginalized in His day by His concern for the poor, the weak, the disabled, and the ostracized. With these precedents in view, the church must strive for social transformation by working to change political, social, and economic structures that divide families, ethnic or linguistic groups, and even religious groups. The church can model the Kingdom through genuine compassion by working against injustices that ostracize, marginalize, and rob human dignity.

### ***Implications for Pentecostal Pneumatology***

As mentioned previously, a revision of Pentecostal eschatology in line with the “now/not yet” Kingdom of God is more compatible with Pentecostalism’s distinct pneumatology and doctrine of Spirit Baptism. Fundamentalist dispensationalism gated off Pentecostal experiences by relegating OT prophecies exclusively to Israel and propagating the doctrine of cessationism. On the other hand, Kingdom eschatology sees charismatic experiences as signs of the present Kingdom as he indicated to the Pharisees when they charged Jesus with blasphemy. The power of the Spirit demonstrated in healing, exorcisms, resurrections, prophecy, and tongues are all signs that the Kingdom of God has dawned, and, therefore, these charismatic phenomena should be expected as normative for Pentecostal ministry.

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<sup>57</sup> See Murray W. Dempster, “Eschatology, Spirit Baptism and Inclusiveness” in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World without End*, ed. Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 157. Dempster writes, “Pentecostal historian Dwight J. Wilson ... made the... insightful observation that the premillennial dispensational eschatology of early Pentecostalism also unwittingly promoted a withdrawal of the church from social involvement, because such social concern might sidetrack the church from its priority of evangelistic mission.

<sup>58</sup> Robert C. Crosby, “A New Kind of Pentecostal” *Christianity Today* (2011)  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/august/newkindpentecostal.html>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Cecil M. Robeck and Amos Yong eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2014),143.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 180-181. For example, standing against drug cartels, changing families' economic conditions, empowering women, and numerous social programs.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 183-189.

### ***Application of Pentecostal Pneumatology for Postmoderns***

Bradley T. Noel claims, "The newest generation [Generation X] having found themselves on the grand stage of history are significantly more open to, and more consciously searching for, the supernatural than any generation in several centuries."<sup>63</sup> This places Pentecostalism and its emphasis on Spirit Baptism for supernatural empowerment for mission and the charismata for ecclesial edification in a good position to reach and minister to postmoderns. Therefore, this revision of Pentecostal eschatology finds practical ministry value in a postmodern context where youth and young adults are, for the most part, absent in many Pentecostal congregations in North America.

### ***Proleptic Anticipation, the Pentecostal Church, and Postmodern Witness***

Finally, as a new society representing the present and coming Kingdom of God, the church is to be a *sign, foretaste, and instrument* of that Kingdom. The church needs to see itself as a *living example* of what life looks like when under Christ's rule. Therefore, the church must *model* what it is like to love and worship God. The church must love, forgive, and be reconciled to each other, and work toward reconciliation in the world. In this way, the church can be an attractive counter-cultural alternative for postmoderns. Experiencing fragmentation, disorientation, the pain of broken relationships, uncertainty, and despair, the church can provide a *foretaste* of the Kingdom for postmoderns through witnessing true communion, unity, loving relationships, security, and hope. However, this also means allowing postmoderns the opportunity to test the authenticity of the alternative through belonging and thereby establishing trust which can lead to reconciliation with Christ. This means that churches must guard the unity of the Spirit so that such an environment can exist for postmoderns to explore.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, my exploration of Pentecostal eschatology has revealed that the beliefs, spirituality, and missionary impulse of early Pentecostals were the direct result of their premillennial views, in particular, the Latter Rain covenant. The adoption of fundamentalist dispensationalism in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and holding influence through the Scofield Reference Bible into the 1970's, produced an escapism mentality rather than one of responsibility to society. However, that system presented a truncated gospel, incompatibility with Pentecostal theology, and is unsuitable for mission in a postmodern context. The proposal to embrace an eschatology of God's inaugurated Kingdom as proleptic anticipation was found to offer a more biblically faithful holistic gospel, and compatibility with both the ethos of Pentecostalism and postmodernism. By adopting and applying proleptic anticipation, the Pentecostal church is better positioned to serve its role to represent the Kingdom of God through proclamation, the charismata and social transformation, in anticipation of God's redemptive work of cosmic renewal.

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<sup>63</sup> Bradley Truman Noel, *Pentecostalism and Postmodern Hermeneutics: Comparisons and Contemporary Impact*, (DTh Thesis: University of South Africa, 2008), 159.

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