



Pentecostals and Premillennialist Dispensationalism

An Unhappy Marriage

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Abstract

Early Pentecostals believed their experience of Spirit baptism represented the latter rain of prophecy that introduced Christ's return. Therefore, their goal was to preach the Pentecostal gospel to all, expecting their success to hasten Christ's return. They read the Bible through the lens of their charismatic experiences and left room for the Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures to explain its meaning. The next generations adopted a fundamentalist hermeneutical angle and included premillennialist dispensationalism to understand biblical prophecies. The doctrines of rapture, premillennialism, and a distinction between Israel and the church imply that the church belongs to the 'parenthetical age', indicating a delay in the prophetic timeline when Jews rejected Jesus. It took the emphasis away from the urgent need to evangelise the world, focusing on explaining the biblical 'last events' and setting timetables. It is argued that Pentecostals' dispensationalism betrayed their unique ethos, values, and hermeneutical angle.

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Keywords

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1 Introduction

The nineteenth century saw developments in the fields of geology and biology that challenged the ‘Christian’ worldview that determined most Western people’s thinking. Christians traditionally based their views of the universe’s origins and evolution primarily on their literal interpretation of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Many responded to the challenge by asserting the reliability of the Bible’s portrayal of creation. Others responded by accepting the evolving scientific worldview; from their ranks, biblical criticism developed that emphasised human contributions to biblical texts. Literary and historical studies of the biblical text illustrated that the Bible was not the result of *theopneustos* or infallible oracles containing divine self-revelation. Many conservative Christians feared that such a view would undermine the Bible’s status as authoritative and normative.

Christian apologists responded to this assertion in various other ways.¹ The first way was to reconcile the new developments in scientific knowledge with the traditional structure of theology in different imaginative ways. For instance, they reconciled evolution with the Genesis account by stating that the days correspond to long periods, based on 2 Pet. 3,8’s statement that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. Another way was to accept the scientific findings and discard the views of biblical inerrancy, redefining biblical inspiration in alternative ways. This view became known as liberalism and implied a thorough suspicion of dogmatic theology and the normativity of biblical authority because historical criticism illustrated the diversity of contradictory theological opinions and perspectives contained in the Bible. For instance, liberal theology distinguished between the Jesus of history and the Christ of the early church’s teaching and doctrine, redefining Jesus as a prophet in the traditional Hebrew style whose life and teaching illustrated brotherly love, the dignity of all people and justice. Jesus was not born from a virgin, sinless or rose from the dead. ‘Sin’ refers to

1 E.J. Tinsley, ‘Introduction to the Series’, in E.J. Tinsley (ed.), *Karl Barth: Selections from Twentieth-Century Theologians Edited with an Introduction and Notes* (London: Epworth, 1973), pp. 11–36 (18).

human imperfection and ignorance; 'salvation' is acquired by education and enlightenment, supporting the idea of evolutionary progressivism.² Although the Bible remained a principal source for theological endeavours, it discarded literalism, typology, and allegory as efficient means to interpret it. Human individual and corporate experience also became a source for theological endeavours and a source of belief and meaning along with nature.³ It defined experience in Friedrich Schleiermacher's terms as the essence of religious sentiment consisting of the feeling of absolute dependence, demonstrated by Christ's example of 'God-consciousness'.⁴

However, Pentecostals continued to read the Bible as literally as possible. They adopted a fundamentalist hermeneutic that emphasised the integrity of certain fundamentals of the faith as unnegotiable, such as biblical verbal inerrancy, Jesus' divinity, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and physical resurrection and return.⁵ It initially originated as a critique of modernism and liberalism, demonstrated in the historical-critical study of the Bible that was perceived as endangering the church's survival.⁶ Historical-critical exegesis was based on the modernist notion of a split between subject and object; to discover the text's 'objective' meaning, it should be rid of 'all' subjective influences and distortions by the interpreter (subject) by viewing the text as object and the interpreter as subject.⁷ In contrast, fundamentalists view the Bible literally as God's inerrant word or divine self-revelation, inspired by the divine Spirit. They believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and the literal inerrancy of the scriptural record that affirms the tenets of the Christian confessions of the immediate post-Reformation era.⁸ The Bible's infallibility extends to all historical remarks and 'scientific' explanations.⁹ Every word in the Bible carries the same weight as divinely infallible and inerrant words. Erasmus' *Textus Receptus*, the *Novum Instrumentum Omne* (1516), is the final

2 Tinsley, 'Introduction to the Series', p. 20.

3 Holly Reed, 'Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834)' (2004), Retrieved from: https://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/mwt_themes_470_schleiermacher.htm (13 August 2022).

4 Wessel Bentley, 'Schleiermacher: God-Consciousness and Religious Identity', *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 75.4 (2019), a5439.

5 Jens S. Krüger, 'Religious Fundamentalism: Aspects of a Comparative Framework of Understanding', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27.3 (2006), pp. 886–908 (887).

6 Daniel Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; New Testament Series; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 7.

7 Jacqueline Grey, *Three's a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), p. 42.

8 Grey, *Three's a Crowd*, p. 147.

9 James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1980), pp. 66–68.

authority to determine the biblical text. All newer translations represent corruptions of the 'original' Spirit-inspired text.¹⁰ Hence, most Pentecostals in English-speaking Africa use the King James Version of 1611, initially sponsored by King James VI and based on the *Textus Receptus*.

2 Developments in Pentecostal Hermeneutics

However, such Bible-reading practices were not the order of the day among early Pentecostals. Their hermeneutical views developed in at least three clearly distinguishable stages, as analysed by Kenneth Archer:¹¹ an early pre-critical period, from its origin until the 1940s; a modern period, from the 1940s to the 1980s; and the contemporary period, from the 1980s to the present.

2.1 *Pre-Critical Period*

Early Pentecostal hermeneutics used reading methods and interpretive procedures inherited from their predecessors, the holiness traditions. Their pre-critical, canonical and text-centred approach was populist and biblicist.¹² They straightforwardly read the Bible as they thought any typical reader or listener would understand it. They inductively focused on the literary context and interpreted single words before understanding the verse in the larger literary context. Deductively they then developed a biblical doctrine that compared all texts related to the theme, harmonising them into a cohesive synthesis.

Their common sense, uninformed, and unarticulated hermeneutic utilised their charismatic experiences as their preunderstanding (*Vorverständnis*) in interpreting the text. They aspired to press 'behind creedal language and philosophical categories to the thought-world of the biblical texts, particularly its Hebraic background'.¹³ This way of thinking accommodated the characteristic Pentecostal spirituality, piety, praxis, and modes of thought, emphasising the importance of continuing charismatic encounters. They also

10 The argument is based on the presupposition that a ground text of the Bible exists, something that has never been discovered and is unlikely, given the fragility of papyrus rolls on which the texts were written.

11 Kenneth J. Archer, 'Hermeneutics', in Adam Stewart (ed.), *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), pp. 108–116 (111–15).

12 Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2009), pp. 92–93.

13 David K. Bernard, 'Oneness Theology: Restoring the Apostolic Faith', in Wolfgang Vondey (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (Routledge Handbooks in Theology; Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2020), pp. 195–205 (198).

read the Bible with the clear expectation of experiencing what the biblical authors witnessed in their encounters with God. They expected that they would share similar miracles as the early church. Lastly, they defined their mission like the early church, to carry the message of the good news to the ends of the earth, and the same urgency characterised their attempts.

Early Pentecostalism reasoned that theologians' endeavours were one of the main reasons for the main-line churches' 'dead' condition. It viewed historical criticism as a denial of the Bible's divine authority and normativity;¹⁴ in their perception, that was the reason why the church displaced the power of the Spirit and the divine presence with a reliance on intellectual and rational abilities underlying speculative thinking and theories that paralysed the believers with scepticism.¹⁵

Pentecostals' gospel consisted of four Christological emphases: Christ as saviour, Spirit baptiser, healer and soon coming king¹⁶ and (for those with holiness sentiments) sanctifier.¹⁷ It formed the doctrinal grid that oriented pentecostal beliefs and living and doctrinal hypotheses that explained Scripture as related to spiritual experiences.¹⁸ The eschatological theme received the most prominence and dominated the movement at first. Their expectation of the imminent return of Christ formed the motivation for their missionary zeal and identified themselves as the 'latter rain' outpouring of the Spirit in the 'last days' that preceded the second coming of Christ (Joel 2.23, 28-32). They interpreted the restoration of speaking in tongues and other charismatic gifts as the announcement of the final, glorious harvest of souls before the imminent coming of the Lord.¹⁹

14 Chris B. Ansberry and Chris M. Hays (eds.), *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (London: SPCK, 2013), p. 205.

15 Marius Nel, *An African Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Distinctive Contribution to Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), p. 52.

16 William W. Menzies, 'The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology: An Essay on Hermeneutics', in Paul Elbert (ed.), *Essays on Apostolic Themes* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), p. 14.

17 Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland, OH: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, 2010), pp. 35-53.

18 Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 137.

19 Peter Althouse, "'Left Behind' – Fact or Fiction: Ecumenical Dilemmas of the Fundamentalist Millennial Tensions within Pentecostalism', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 13.2 (2005), pp. 187-207 (194). They reasoned that the latter rain (Deut 1.10-15; Job 19.29; Prov. 16.15; Jer. 3.3; Hos. 6.3; Joel 2.23; Zech. 10.1; Jas 5.7) followed on the early rain that came on the day of Pentecost, followed by a drought of many centuries before Azusa Street introduced the 'Latter Rain' (G.F. Taylor, 'The Spirit and the Bride: A Scriptural Presentation of the Operations, Manifestation, Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit in His Relationship to the Bride with Special Reference to the "Latter Rain" revival', [1907]

2.2 *Modern Hermeneutic*

In contrast, many 'modern' classical Pentecostals since the 1940s have uncritically become the theological heirs of orthodox conservative Western Christianity, uncomfortably combining their continuationist stance with the hermeneutics of conservative Evangelicalism.²⁰ They vied for acceptance by Evangelicals to escape their sectarian status. Eventually, they aligned their doctrinal and hermeneutical perspectives with these conservative views. The price they paid was that they also accepted the Evangelicals' fundamentalist-literalist hermeneutics with its literalism and inerrancy of Scripture²¹ alongside the other fundamental aspects cherished by fundamentalists, among which is dispensationalism, an eschatological view that was accepted widely only during the First World War, a view advocated since 1875.²² Dispensationalism distinguishes between the church and Israel, interprets all texts in the Old Testament literally and sees God's purpose in history as for the sake of the divine glory.

Pentecostals also shared with the Evangelicals a strong anti-intellectualism²³ demonstrated in their animosity towards historical-critical studies, which persists in a modified form to the present day in their revivalist emphases on divine encounter, Spirit-related happenings and the like.²⁴ They also accepted conservative Evangelicals' preferred historical-grammatical methodology, focusing on the world behind the text.²⁵ They aimed to arrive objectively at

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- pp. 90–91. http://pctii.org/arc/taylor_bk.html [accessed 21 July 2022]). The motif of the latter rain was interpreted in dispensationalist terms (D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], pp. 32–36). In the premillennial framework, the 'latter rain' signifies and signals the last hour of the great harvest before the tribulation, when the Spirit empowers believers to witness, as found in its eschatological-missionary impetus (Wonsuk Ma, 'Pentecostal Eschatology: What Happened When the Wave Hit the West End of the Ocean,' *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12.1 [2009], pp. 95–112 [98]).
- 20 Matthew K. Thompson, 'Eschatology as Soteriology: The Cosmic Full Gospel', in Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (eds.), *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), pp. 189–204 (189); Nel, *An African Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, pp. 48–51. Classical Pentecostals are distinguished from charismatics who have pentecostalized some mainline churches since the 1960s and independent neo-Pentecostal groups that formed since the 1990s.
- 21 Vinson Synan, 'Fundamentalism', in G.P. Duffield and N.M. Van Cleave (eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 324–27.
- 22 Harlyn G. Purdy, *A Distinct Twenty-First Century Pentecostal Hermeneutic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), p. 56.
- 23 Grey, *Three's a Crowd*, p. 38.
- 24 Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), p. 31.
- 25 Allan H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 114.

the author's intended meaning (accepting the possibility of doing so) that would allow them to apply it to the current situation.²⁶ However, they differed from the fundamentalists (and dispensationalists) in one critical aspect: they were not cessationists. Still, they accepted the *charismata* as valid for the contemporary church practice,²⁷ implying that wonders and signs will also continue in their day.

Hence, their engagement with Evangelical and fundamentalist hermeneutics was in dire tension with their roots²⁸ and conflicted with what was previously commonly and traditionally practised in Pentecostal preaching and piety.²⁹

2.3 *Contemporary Period*

Since the 1990s, Pentecostal scholarship has defined an articulated hermeneutic that embraces post-critical and postmodern approaches, reader-response approaches and advocacy hermeneutics to analyse the text.³⁰ Like early Pentecostals, they allow their charismatic experiences to influence their interpretation of the text; they acknowledge the Holy Spirit's influence on the process; they focus on the final form of the text; and they expect that they would experience what biblical believers did, while using Luke-Acts as directional in Pentecostal theology and the fourfold or fivefold Full Gospel as scopus.³¹ The way Pentecostals read the Bible implies a tension between the working of the Spirit and academic training and endeavours³² that some may interpret as anti-intellectualist.

26 W.B. Tolar, 2002. 'The Grammatical-Historical Method', in Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy (eds.), *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2nd edn, 2002), pp. 21–38 (21–37).

27 Peter Althouse, 'Pentecostal Eco-Transformation: Possibilities for a Pentecostal Ecotheology in Light of Moltmann's Green Theology', in A.J. Swoboda (ed.), *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology, and the Groans of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), p. 43 (pp. 41–57).

28 Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition*, p. 29.

29 L. William Oliverio, 'Introduction: Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical Tradition', in Kenneth J. Archer and L. William Oliverio (eds.), *Constructive Pneumatological Hermeneutics in Pentecostal Christianity* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1–12 (3).

30 Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), p. 132.

31 Archer, 'Hermeneutics', p. 115.

32 Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), p. 118.

3 Development of Dispensationalism

The origins of the Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the twentieth century were closely linked with the Holiness movement, a revival movement following shortly after the American Civil War (1861–1865) on the Wesley's Methodism. An integral part of the revival was the Higher Life or Keswick movement under the leadership of William Boardman (his book, *The Higher Christian Life* of 1858, provided the initial impetus), T.C. Upham, and Asa Mahan. It promoted two distinct experiences, the 'new birth' as a result of conversion and the 'fullness of the Spirit', the progressive or crisis experience of sanctification. They utilised the 'baptism with the Spirit' concept to indicate this 'second blessing' of sanctification necessary for mission service.³³ The Keswick movement utilised Darby's dispensationalism. He expected that a sweeping revival would usher in the return of Christ,³⁴ requiring believers to move on from their initial conversion to experience a second blessing or touch of entire sanctification, designated as fulfilment with the Spirit. It would qualify Christians to live a more holy life that could eventually culminate in a sinless life, preparing them for the imminent coming of the Lord, introduced by the expected rapture.³⁵

An important theme in Christian eschatology is the millennium, referring to the thousand-year reign of Christ, found in six references in Revelation 20 that expects Christ's second coming to occur after the 'Millennium', a Golden Age in which Christian ethics will prosper.³⁶ This is supposed to be the first phase of the new creation.³⁷ As a result, four millennial approaches developed, postmillennialism, premillennialism, amillennialism, and dispensationalism. Amillennialists expect *no* millennium, *postmillennialists* believe Christ returns *after* the millennium and *premillennialists* believe Christ returns *before* the millennium.

Although eschatology figured prominently in early Pentecostals' teaching, it is ambiguous whether they mostly accepted the doctrine of a secret pre-tribulation rapture;³⁸ most black Pentecostals did not develop any nuanced

33 Allan H. Anderson, 'Keswick Movement,' in A. Stewart, (ed.), *Handbook of Pentecostal Spirituality* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), pp. 128–130 (128).

34 Ma, 'Pentecostal Eschatology', p. 97.

35 Paul G. Chappell, 'The Birth of the Divine Healing Movement in America,' in Pieter G.R. de Villiers (ed.), *Healing in the Name of God* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1986), pp. 60–77 (64).

36 G.P. Duffield and N.M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: Foursquare, 1983), p. 553.

37 Eckhard J. Schnabel, 'The Viability of Premillennialism and the Text of Revelation', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64.4 (2021), pp. 785–796 (787).

38 P.C. Nelson, *Bible Doctrines* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1948).

eschatology.³⁹ Although premillennialism is often seen as a dispensational way of understanding Revelation 20, and while many premillennialists are dispensationalists, there is nothing about premillennialism in itself that demands dispensationalism. In fact, in early Church history, more than a thousand years before the development of dispensational theology, there was a group called the Chiliasts (from the Greek word for ‘thousand years’), which held to a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. Most Pentecostals were historic premillennialists, a different view from dispensational premillennialism. They were Chiliasts (Greek for ‘thousand years’), holding to a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20.

Historical and dispensational premillennialism represent two different views on the end times and the return of Jesus Christ. Historic premillennialism holds that Jesus will return before the millennial reign, followed by a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, a view many early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Papias, Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Hippolytus held. It is the oldest form of premillennialism. When Christianity became the official religion of Rome in the fourth century, many things began to change, including the acceptance of historic premillennialism. Amillennialism soon became the prevailing doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

On the other hand, dispensational premillennialism is more recent. It reads the Bible literally, particularly the book of Revelation, concluding that a tribulation period will follow after Christ’s return. Historic premillennialism differs from dispensational premillennialism in various respects. Although both views propagate the premillennial return of Jesus Christ, they interpret the end times events and the role of Israel in God’s plan differently. Historic premillennialism teaches that the Old Testament prophesied the existence of the Christian church and the present age of grace; dispensationalism teaches that Old Testament prophets hardly, if ever, refer to the church, and the Old Testament does not refer to the present age. A parenthesis was introduced when the Jews rejected the kingdom. Historic premillennialism teaches that the millennium will follow Christ’s advent and has little or no interest in classifying other historical epochs or dispensations. Dispensationalism sees the present church age as the sixth dispensation, followed by the millennial age after the rapture. Historic premillennialism is post-tribulational, while dispensational premillennialism is pretribulational.

39 Christopher J. Richmann, ‘Sanctification, Ecstasy, and War: The Development of American Pentecostal Eschatology, 1898–1950’ (MA Thesis, Luther Seminary, St Paul, MN, 2009), p. 44.

The premillennial view of the end times is thus advanced in two different ways. Historic premillennialism views the millennium as the period of history in which God reverts to fulfilling his Old Testament promises made to ethnic Israel when the current parenthetical church age ends. Hence, in the millennium, the state of Jewish will reign over all the world and establish a renewed Jewish temple and priesthood in Jerusalem. During this time, the Christians will have eternal, glorified bodies and reign spiritually, in contrast to the Jews who will own the world physically and live and die at high ages, as people did throughout the history of the world. When the millennium ends, and God has fulfilled the promises given to ethnic Israel, Christ will return, judge all rebellious elements and usher in the eternal state in a new heaven and new earth. In contrast, historic premillennialism does not have a dichotomy existing between the church and the elected people, ethnic Israel. It anticipated Christ's visible reign on earth before introducing the eternal state.

For early Pentecostals, the millennium was not a fulfilment of promises to the Jews but a time when faithful Christians who suffered now would reign with Christ and help judge the world.⁴⁰ They expected an imminent return that would be hastened by effectively evangelising people around the globe. Early Pentecostal eschatology was not merely a modification of classical dispensationalism.⁴¹

However, as explained, following generations of Pentecostals were captured by dispensationalism; by the 1950s, it probably represented the predominant eschatological conviction that had shifted from the imminence of the Lord's return to the pretribulation rapture to define its eschatology. Today most classical Pentecostals hold to the futurist premillennial view that the return of Christ would introduce the tribulation and the millennial reign of Christ.

Popular premillenarian views occurred during the First World War I in Christian circles because of the turmoil and the uncertainty it produced. By 1920, premillennialist revivalism swept many churches within mainstream Evangelicalism.⁴² In time, a prominent part of fundamentalist thinking became 'dispensationalist'; popular revivalists used the threat of 'the rapture'

40 Larry McQueen, 'Early Pentecostal Eschatology in the Light of *The Apostolic Faith*, 1906–1908', in Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (eds.), *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), pp. 139–153 (152–153).

41 McQueen, 'Early Pentecostal Eschatology', pp. 139–153.

42 Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 162.

to emphasise the division between sheep and goats, with goats destined for hell. Much of modern Pentecostalism is dispensational in its eschatology.⁴³

Dispensationalism attempted to make sense of the history of salvation according to a system of systematisation used as a preunderstanding to interpret the different events.⁴⁴ The premise was that God was revealing salvation in other periods or dispensations in different ways in a progressive and developing practice. A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose.⁴⁵ The divine goal remained the same, to save people, whether the Israelites or the heathen, given their total human depravity and inability to save themselves.⁴⁶ What differed was the terms of obedience and how God worked with different people segments. It rests on a literalist interpretation of Scripture, especially prophecy, including the thousand-year earthly reign of Christ mentioned in Rev. 20.2-6.⁴⁷

Essential 'dispensationalism' originated in the English-born John Nelson Darby's (1800–1882) prophetic studies of the 1830s, based on a 'pre-tribulation rapture'⁴⁸ and a strict separation between the church and Israel.⁴⁹ Darby (1800–1882) got his dispensational hermeneutics and theology from the tradition of William Cave (1633–1713), Pierre Poiset (1646–1719) and John

43 Amos Yong, 'Unveiling Interpretation After Pentecost: Revelation, Pentecostal Reading, and Christian Hermeneutics of Scripture', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11.1 (2017), pp. 139–155 (142).

44 James D. Hernando, 'Dispensationalism', in James D. Hernando (ed.), *Dictionary of Hermeneutics: A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods, and Expressions* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2012), pp. 158–160 (158). Arnold D. Ehlert (*A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1965]) compiled a useful comprehensive history of dispensationalism, beginning with the Christian era until the middle of the twentieth century.

45 Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1965), p. 29.

46 Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grace Bible College, 1971), p. 5.

47 Hernando, 'Dispensationalism', p. 158.

48 Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, pp. 17–24, 30–32.

49 Gerald T. Sheppard, 'Pentecostals and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: The Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship', *Pneuma* 6.1 (1984), pp. 5–33. Dispensationalism was not technically a distinctive feature of the religious world. Both Darwin and Marx referred to schemata that divided history into distinct periods. Marx used his schema to indoctrinate followers into understanding where humanity had been and where it is going. 'Catastrophists' also believed the layers of flora and fauna of geological discovery revealed successive geological epochs ended by a catastrophe and the arrival of a new age (George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], p. 65).

Fletcher (1729–1785).⁵⁰ As a member of the Plymouth Brethren, he called his premillennialism ‘dispensationalism’ to denote his division of history into eras. There were seven dispensations: of innocence, beginning with the creation and ending with the fall into the sin of the first human beings; conscience that ended with the Noahic flood; human government that ended with Babel; promise that ended with the captivity of Israel; the Law that ended with the death of Christ; and the current dispensation of grace that will end with the tribulation that will usher in the final return of Christ.⁵¹

C.I. Scofield’s⁵² influential *Scofield Reference Bible* defines a dispensation as a time during which humans are tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God unique to that period or dispensation, implying a unique deposit of divine revelation applicable to that period. Walvoord⁵³ adds that ‘dispensation’ relates to a distinctly given stewardship based upon a specific rule of life revealed in the progressive unfolding of divine truth in the Scriptures. The dispensations are distinguished by spiritual crises in the history of God’s people.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Hal Lindsay, and Clarence followed the tradition. For instance, Chafer argues that the Old Testament prophets could not foresee the Christian church, and their promises were ‘earthly’, consisting of the Law in contrast to the entirely ‘heavenly’ character of the church of grace.⁵⁴ Israel and the church are distinct groups, each having a divine plan. When God finishes the divine program with the church, it will be the turn of Israel. In other words, the Christian church is not the spiritual or new Israel,⁵⁵ and Jesus’ teaching about a kingdom is not about the church but literally applies to a Jewish dispensation.⁵⁶ The church belongs to the ‘parenthetical age’, implying a delay in the prophetic timeline when Jews rejected Jesus.

Premillennialist movements in the past disappeared after predicting Jesus’ return without result. Instead, Darby’s new view of the church and the end of history interpreted history as a ‘progressive revelation.’ There was nothing especially radical about dividing history into periods. What separated Darby’s

50 Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), p. 112.

51 www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/pastorsandpreachers/john-nelson-darby.html (accessed on 20 July 2022).

52 C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, rev. edn, 1917), p. 3.

53 John F. Walvoord, ‘Dispensational Premillennialism’, *Christianity Today* 15 (Sep 1958), p. 11.

54 Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1944), IV, pp. 1–10.

55 C.I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1896), p. 12.

56 Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 97.

dispensationalism was his novel method of biblical interpretation, which consisted of several elements: a strict literalism, the absolute separation of Israel and the church into two distinct peoples of God, and the separation of the rapture (the ‘catching away’ of the church) from Christ’s second coming.⁵⁷ Its hermeneutic is fundamentalist; fundamentalism finds one of its important roots in the millenarian tradition.⁵⁸

4 Pentecostals and Dispensationalism

Pentecostals used dispensationalism to identify themselves in apocalyptic terms that expected the last revival before the return of Christ.⁵⁹ They applied the same elements to the biblical text as dispensationalists, of literalist reading, belief in the separation of Israel and the church and the rapture. Although they are linked with dispensationalism, Coulter⁶⁰ nevertheless argues that their relationship has always been uneasy and strained. The dispensational system, with its rigidly compartmentalised and predetermined blueprint of history, was inimical to the vibrant spirituality and participatory scriptural approach of Pentecostalism in Thompson’s view.⁶¹

The dispensationalist paradigm saw the millennium as the ultimate righter of wrongs.⁶² Each successive dispensation fails through human disobedience, resulting in divine judgment and the establishment of a new dispensation that operates according to different principles. The systems of principles in each dispensation refer to how God governed human beings during this period⁶³ while the world was getting worse, ending in Christ’s return to set up a visible millennium of peace.

Myer Pearlman (1893–1943) also influenced Pentecostals, especially in his discussion of the relation of Israel to the church and the events surrounding

57 M.A.L. Hattingh, ‘n Alternatief vir die Premillennialistiese Standpunt in die AGS van SA’ (MA dissertation, North-West University, 2018), p. 22.

58 Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition*, p. 121.

59 Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, pp. 139–40.

60 Dale M. Coulter, ‘Pentecostal Visions of the End: Eschatology, Ecclesiology and the Fascination of the “Left Behind” Series’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14.1 (2005), pp. 81–98 (82).

61 Thompson, ‘Eschatology as Soteriology’, p. 189.

62 Tim Walsh, ‘Eschatology and the Fortunes of Early British Pentecostalism’, *Theology* 63.871 (Jan/Feb 2010), pp. 31–43 (32).

63 Baker, *A Dispensational Theology*, p. 1.

the return of Christ.⁶⁴ He emphasises three vital elements of dispensationalism from a Pentecostal perspective: the rapture, Israel and premillennialism.

4.1 *Rapture*

The placement of the rapture concerning the other events is one of the main differences between historic premillennialism and premillennial dispensationalism. Teaching a secret, pre-tribulational rapture ('catching away') of the church that can happen at any moment is dispensationalism's most controversial and distinctive doctrine. Premillennialists believed the rapture would occur at the end of the tribulation when Christ returns. In contrast, dispensationalists separated the rapture (Christ coming *for* his saints) from the second coming (Christ coming *with* his saints). The church is the heavenly people of God. Once they have been raptured, the Antichrist will rise before Christ and his saints will break through the clouds and destroy him and his followers in battle. Then the nations of the world will be judged and Satan will be thrown into a bottomless pit. This ends Daniel's seventieth week and now the victorious Messiah will restore the throne of David, establishing the millennial kingdom followed by the last judgment and a new heaven and earth. The seven dispensations then over, time shall be no more.

Rapture believers use three texts that 'literally prove' that the doctrine of the rapture is biblical: 1 Thess. 1.9-10; 4.17; 1 Cor. 1.7; 15.51 and Lk. 21.28. Nelson⁶⁵ argues that believers' hope includes that the rapture is near and may take place at any moment. The 'imminence' clearly indicates a pre-tribulation rapture; he asserts that his interpretation represents the 'plain' meaning of the texts clearly to any unbiased reader.

In defending the pre-tribulation rapture, Pearlman⁶⁶ also refers to Mt. 24.36, 42, 50; 25.6, 19 and 2 Cor. 5.10 that, in his opinion, shows that there is a long interval between the rapture and subsequent return of Christ, accepting implicitly that Matthew 24-25 refers to the occurrence of the rapture. Not everyone agrees. For instance, Pentecost⁶⁷ writes that Matthew 24 refers to the situation of the Jews during the tribulation. Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9.27) occurs after the parenthetical church age ends with the rapture. The mystery of the church only occurred after Jews rejected Jesus, according to Mt. 11.20-24.⁶⁸

64 Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1937), p. xii.

65 Nelson, *Bible Doctrines*, p. 172.

66 Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*, p. 390.

67 Dwight D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham, 1958), pp. 202-204.

68 Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, p. 1011 (n. 1-2).

The church will be saved from the tribulation because God will take them away during the rapture (Rev. 3.10; 12.5). The rapture introduces a new dispensation for Israel, discussed in a separate section. However, the rest of the world, representing the unfaithful and apostate, will be judged and punished.⁶⁹

4.2 *Premillennialism*

Nineteenth-century postmillennialism asserted the church would gradually bring about a Christian millennium where Christ would rule, after which Christ would return as King,⁷⁰ in contrast to medieval amillennialism, which viewed the millennium merely as a symbol of the church age. As a result, most Pentecostals are futurist premillennialists, expecting the major fulfilment of biblical prophecies to lie in the imminent future, in contrast to historicist premillennialism, which views the fulfilment of prophecies within the historical church age.⁷¹ Premillennial dispensationalism influenced Pentecostals' theology and political attitudes, leading to elaborate and fanciful interpretations of future and current world events.⁷²

Premillennialist Pentecostals taught the church would be secretly raptured to heaven, introducing a seven-year period of tribulation in which the Antichrist would rule. At the end of the great tribulation, Christ will return, accompanied by raptured Christians, to defeat the Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon. Satan would then be banished. After that, Christ would rule for a thousand years over the earth (millennium). Finally, at the end of the millennium, Satan would be released and defeated when Christ finally returned to judge everyone. Premillennialism was so widespread and influential in forming pentecostal thought that it can be characterised as an essential element of pentecostal spirituality.⁷³

4.3 *Israel*

Dispensational eschatology's separation between Israel and the church supplied the theological rationale for interpreting the sequence of events leading to the second coming.⁷⁴ Premillennialist dispensationalism is based on

69 Ralph M. Riggs, *Dispensational Studies* (Book 2; Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1948), pp. 2, 30.

70 Hans Schwartz, *Eschatology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 99.

71 Damian Thomas, *Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 9.

72 Thomas, *Waiting for Antichrist*.

73 Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 1993), pp. 222–23.

74 Coulter, 'Pentecostal Visions of the End', p. 84.

a Judaist paradigm that requires a specific perspective on Israel and its destiny, constructed by reading passages from the Old Testament in the light of one passage in the New Testament (Rev. 20.4-6) and literally without considering the widely different contexts. Jesus's message was primarily about the kingdom of the Messiah, is interpreted as a national kingdom of Israel that would realise, at the end of time,⁷⁵ required by strictly maintaining a distinction between Israel and the church as two distinct peoples of God for which distinct plans exist. The dispensation of the church is parenthetical to God's two periods of dealing with Israel.⁷⁶ The church originated at Pentecost and will terminate at the rapture introducing God's plan for Israel.

The principal distinguishing factor is that Israel exists as a national entity while the church has an international character.⁷⁷ Israel has an earthly destination, and the church has a heavenly destiny. The church is tasked to proclaim the gospel of free divine grace before the second coming and not the gospel of the kingdom of God.⁷⁸ The gospel of the kingdom was limited to Israel, and the gospel of grace to the church. The church must assemble the heathen elect before Christ appears at the end of the dispensation that will introduce Jews' mass conversion.⁷⁹ Because of their separate destinies, the 'rapture of the church' became necessary to accommodate Israel's destiny after the removal of the church. It also seems that the way of salvation differs between the nations and Israel. The church consists of people who put their trust in Christ for righteousness. At the same time, the universalist conception of the guaranteed salvation of all of Israel seems to require another means of acquiring righteousness before God.⁸⁰

Premillennialist Pentecostals experienced the development of Zionism in the same period as the early outpouring of the Spirit and interpreted both

75 F.P. Möller, *Words of Light and Life: The Great End Time Events* (Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1998), VII, p. 64.

76 Peter D. Hocken, 'Liturgy and Eschatology in a Pentecostal-Charismatic Ecumenism', Paper Presented at the 41st Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies (2012), pp. 1–11 (7). www.stucom.nl/document/0366uk.pdf (accessed 20 July 2022).

77 Riggs, *Dispensational Studies*, p. 39.

78 Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* (London: Rigel, 1977), p. 11.

79 Leann S. Flesher, 'The Historical Development of Premillennial Dispensationalism', *Review and Expositor* 106 (2009), pp. 35–45 (41).

80 Johan A. Heyns, *Die Chiliasme van die Duisendjarige Ryk [The Chiliasm of the Millennium]* (Kaapstad: N.G. Kerk-uitgewers, 1963), p. 61.

events as signs of the latter rain.⁸¹ They interpreted the First World War (1914–1918) with the freeing of the holy land from the Turks and the return of the Jews to the promised land (1948) as the fulfilment of prophecy and deduced that the rapture would happen within one generation of the resettlement of Jews (as Mt. 24.34–35 explains).⁸² Later they interpreted the capture of the old city of Jerusalem after the Six-Day War in 1967 as the end of the ‘time of the Gentiles’ (Lk. 21.24), seen as a direct fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Rumours were also rampant that the Jerusalem temple was about to be rebuilt on the site of the Muslim Mosque and that Jews were preparing for the restoration of Mosaic sacrifices.

Some dispensationalists divided the Jewish nation into Jacob-Jews and Esau-Jews; the divine eternal counsel required this division.⁸³ Jacob and Esau represent the elect remnant and the hardened non-elect, respectively. Esau-Jews rejected Jesus and his ministry because God hardened their hearts. They are the root of the olive tree in Rom. 11.11–12 and will not respond to the preaching of Jesus for a specific period and a particular reason.

To describe the fate of Israel, Du Plessis⁸⁴ refers to Jer. 23.5–8; 31.8 and Ezekiel 36.24–27, 37, which ‘guarantees’ the return of Israel from the Diaspora to the holy land. Then God will deal with Israel as God’s covenant people after the church era had passed with the rapture.⁸⁵ God will then pour the divine Spirit on Israel, and they will settle in their own land. God will join the two parts of the torn kingdom of Israel, Jacob and Judah, into one nation with one king and establish the divine sanctuary among them. These predictions did not realise

81 The government of Israel deliberately cultivated premillennialists support to swing public opinion in their favour and Pentecostal support for Israel increased with the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the attack on Iraq in 1981, and the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. They assumed that God who chose and blessed Israel would bless those who support Israel. During the 1980s, premillennialist Pentecostals in the USA joined right-wing fundamentalists in political support of Israel and supported lobbyists to move the USA embassy to Jerusalem. On 6 December 2017, President Donald Trump, who relied on the support of these Christian groups, announced the USA’s recognition of Jerusalem as the state of Israel’s capital and relocated the embassy on 14 May 2018 from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a move that delighted Israel and (quite rightly) infuriated the Palestinians (www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-israel-diplomacy-jerusalem-explai/why-is-the-u-s-moving-its-embassy-to-jerusalem-idUSKBN1I81N [accessed 20 July 2022]).

82 D.J. Wilson, ‘Eschatology, Pentecostal Perspectives on ~’, in S.M. Burgess and G.B. McGee (eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1988), pp. 264–68 (265).

83 Lemmer Du Plessis, *The Return of Christ: A Perspective on the Eternal Counsel of God* (Pretoria: Aktua, 2004), pp. 120–21.

84 Du Plessis, *The Return of Christ*, p. 321.

85 Du Plessis, *The Return of Christ*, p. 272.

when the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, implying that its realisation would only be in Christ's messianic millennial kingdom. The first part of the prophecy was fulfilled in 1948 when Jews returned to Palestine. However, they represent only 38% of the total Jewish population. The rest of the prophecy will only be fulfilled when God establishes the kingdom during the millennium.⁸⁶ Israel is the 'crown jewels of God' as God's elect people. However, when they strayed from God's precepts, the nations treated them as scapegoats. Their fortune will undoubtedly change; only when the laws of nature controlling the movements of the sun and stars change would the descendants of Israel cease to be a nation before God (Jer. 31.35-37).

As a result and rule, Pentecostals do not decry the Jews' treatment of Arab refugees. On the contrary, they distrust the Arabs as Islamic people because they reject their religion and are indifferent to the fate of native displaced Palestinians, including Christian Palestinians.⁸⁷ Instead, they supported Israel's attempts to restore ancient boundaries, including the area east of the Jordan.

5 Critique of Fundamentalist Dispensationalism

It is submitted that Pentecostals need to reconsider their eschatology to affirm their theological stance of continuationism. Larry McQueen agrees and investigates early American classical Pentecostalism's eschatology that was consistent with its dynamic spirituality, arguing that dispensationalism is incompatible with Pentecostalism's continuationism, denying dispensationalism's cessationism.⁸⁸ Healing, exorcisms, prophecy, and *glossolalia* are signs of the kingdom of God that demonstrate the power of the Spirit that are normative for pentecostal ministry.

In redeveloping an eschatology consistent with the internal heartbeat of the movement, it should be shaped by the fivefold full gospel.⁸⁹ Pentecostals need to reject dispensationalism and its emphasis on the imminence of the second coming. In the past, it repeatedly led to setting dates for the second

86 Du Plessis, *The Return of Christ*, p. 322.

87 Glenn Balfour, 'Pentecostal Eschatology Revisited', *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 2 (2011), pp. 127–140 (131).

88 Larry R. McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology: Discerning the Way* (Blandford Forum, Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2012), p. 2.

89 McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 2. See Andrew R Williams, 'Greening the Apocalypse: A Pentecostal Eco-Eschatological Exploration', *PentecoStudies* 634 (2018), pp. 1–20.

coming at the hand of contemporary events that did not realise, embarrassing the movement constantly.

In analysing the literature of early Wesleyan Holiness and Finished Work Pentecostals, McQueen attempts such a reformulation of eschatology.⁹⁰ He shows how each element of the fivefold gospel might be seen when viewed from the perspective of Jesus as the coming King.⁹¹ His Christocentric and eschatologically based redemptive vision for the cosmos leaves no room for anthropocentrism. It explains in what way believers live in the established kingdom, at the same time anticipating its final realisation. While waiting for its completion, signs such as healing and deliverance testify to the inbreaking of the kingdom of God and serve as foretastes of the new creation.⁹²

A second danger that dispensationalism held was that it led Pentecostals to believe that Christ would not return until all people had been reached with the gospel. As a result, their sole interest was the effective proclamation of the gospel to hasten the second coming; they largely ignored social issues such as racism, same-sex orientation, and gender discrimination.

Additionally, since the earth would be destroyed in the cataclysm provided by their apocalyptic eschatology, they did not believe in or promoted an inherently good earth, and it disqualified them from participating in attempts to preserve the planet in the face of contemporary challenges of global warming. Instead of introducing the kingdom of God, escapism based on speculations about the imminent end of the world contributed to the destruction of the world that is the basis of the new creation.⁹³ Pentecostals argued that what God would annihilate must either be so bad that it is impossible to redeem it or so insignificant that it is not worth being redeemed.⁹⁴ In the process, they wrote off the earth with their pessimistic futurist eschatology, fostering disengagement with society in an 'other-worldly' preference. It deprived them as Spirit-empowered witnesses from becoming involved in social and political issues. Instead of living as an alternative community to a consumer-driven society, they formed a holy huddle that did not influence their environment.⁹⁵

90 McQueen, 'Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology', p. 200.

91 McQueen, 'Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology', p. 219.

92 McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, p. 256.

93 Althouse, 'Left Behind', p. 191.

94 Miroslav Volf, 'Living With Hope: Eschatology and Social Responsibility', *Transformation* 7:3 (1990), pp. 28–31 (30).

95 Murray W. Dempster, 'Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective: Reformulating Pentecostal Eschatology', *Journal for Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993), pp. 51–64 (52); Stephen H. Williams, 'Jesus is Coming Soon: Toward Revisioning Pentecostal Eschatology for a Postmodern Ministry and Mission', *Pentecostal Spirituality* (2016),

Their escapism was contradicted by their belief in the literal resurrection of the body; it is impossible to believe in the apocalyptic destruction of the earth while affirming the goodness of creation and the resurrection of the human body.⁹⁶ Moreover, their emphasis on divine healing, not only as an outflow of the atonement (Isa. 53.4-6) but also as a partial realisation of the reign of God in the here and now, also underlines the materiality of their concept of salvation.⁹⁷

The incorporation of the salvation of all of Israel after the age of the church implies that chiliasm and dispensationalism awarded the historical person of Jesus and his suffering and death a temporary and transient value; true salvation will only occur with and during Christ's second coming.⁹⁸

The last result of Pentecostal eschatology was the lack of ecumenical awareness and engagement with other Christian churches, including charismatic and renewal groups and neo-Pentecostal independent churches. At one stage, it was popular among Pentecostals to designate the World Council of Churches as well as national and regional councils of churches, as the apostate church, the whore of Babylon and the Antichrist (2 Tim. 3.1, 5).⁹⁹ When the Pentecostal movement first engaged in ecumenical talks with the Roman Catholic Church, the first initiators (like the South African, David du Plessis) were ostracised and excommunicated from the movement.¹⁰⁰ Eventually, parts of the movement saw the benefits of such talks and engaged with other established denominations in ecumenical talks as well.

Fundamentalist dispensationalism is also cessationist because it accepts that revelation is confined to each age and that the revelation given in any age has no significance for other dispensations. It views the occurrence of the *charismata* as belonging to the inter-dispensational age between the revelation in Christ and the church age.¹⁰¹ Cessationism serves as an organising principle within dispensationalism. Prosser¹⁰² calls it 'supremely ironic' that Pentecostals

pp. 1–18 (9). <http://mpseminary.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Jesus-is-Coming-Soon-S.Williams-2017.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2022).

96 Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 267.

97 Miroslav Volf, 'Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26.3 (1989), pp. 447–67 (457).

98 Heyns, *Die Chiliasme van die Duisendjarige Ryk*, p. 62.

99 Wilson, 'Eschatology, Pentecostal Perspectives on ~', p. 267.

100 Bob Slosser, *A Man Called Mr. Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977).

101 Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, p. 55.

102 Peter A. Prosser, *Dispensationalist Eschatology and its Influence on American and British Religious Movements* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1999), p. 275.

adopted a theological system that denied their foundational experience of Spirit baptism; he argues that their keen interest in eschatology and lack of theological expertise saw a comprehensible and systematic approach to dispensationalism.

A fundamentalist understanding of Scripture is not integral to the pentecostal heritage.¹⁰³ Instead of grounding the authority of Scripture on the bedrock of inerrancy, early Pentecostals found it in their charismatic encounters with God.¹⁰⁴ Scripture was their norm for faith and practice. Still, they repeatedly observed how God utilised Scripture interactively.¹⁰⁵ Traditionally, Pentecostals viewed the Bible as inspired and preserved by the Spirit to inspire, illuminate, teach and transform contemporary believers. The Bible only becomes the word of God when the Spirit enlivens (aspirates) its words. The Spirit's authority comes before the Bible's authority.

The risk is that it might (and did) lead to subjectivist practices,¹⁰⁶ mistaking one's insights for the voice of the Spirit.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, to overcome this danger, the Bible must remain the norm of all revelation and be a boundary around possible subjective meanings and applications. Pentecostals must keep on emphasising that the Spirit will never speak in the present in ways that contradict what the Spirit has revealed in the Bible.

Although the New Testament church might have been premillennialist, it differed in important ways from fundamentalist premillennialist dispensationalism. Their apocalypticism actively resisted the powers of oppression, even from a position of powerlessness, while fundamentalist apocalypticism embodied a spiritual escape from the world. New Testament authors utilised the metaphors of the rapture, tribulation, Antichrist, battle of Armageddon, and millennium to protest totalitarian systems and their dominant ideologies. On the contrary, dispensationalists await the rapture by withdrawing from the world, abdicating their responsibility, and limiting sin to their personal lives, ignoring the disastrous effects of sin and oppression on the social and cosmic dimensions.¹⁰⁸

103 Paul W. Lewis, 'Reflections of a Hundred Years of Pentecostal Theology,' *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* (2016), pp. 1–25 (8). [Online]. www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj12/lewis.html#_ftn1 (21 July 2022).

104 Scott A. Ellington, 'Pentecostals and the Authority of Scriptures,' *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4.9 (1996), pp. 16–38 (17).

105 Ellington, 'Pentecostals and the Authority of Scriptures,' p. 21.

106 Purdy, *A Distinct Twenty-First Century Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, pp. xiii.

107 Purdy, *A Distinct Twenty-First Century Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, p. 105.

108 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), p. 15.

It is submitted that Pentecostal eschatology should again become faithful to the Bible and their ethos. At present, Pentecostalism, in its diversity, oscillates historically between the extremes of fundamentalist dispensationalism preferred by the poor and marginalised with its annihilationist tendencies and a realised eschatology preferred by the middle class and upwardly mobile, found in the postmillennialism of the Kingdom Now movement and the hyper-faith doctrine proposed by Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and others.¹⁰⁹ The alternatives to premillennialist dispensationalism are inaugurated eschatology, which understands the kingdom of God to be both already present and not yet fully consummated, and realised eschatology, which views the kingdom being fully present in both the words and deeds of Jesus and his followers.

It is argued that Pentecostal eschatology should instead be based on amillennialism and proleptic eschatology that views the kingdom as already and not yet. In this perspective, Christians pray and work for the divine reign to be introduced by doing God's will; the prayer for kingdom participation implies a present and future transformation. It means the church is concerned with saving souls and bringing wholeness to broken people and society through the Spirit's work.

Anthony Hoekema defines amillennialism as the interpretation of the millennium as the era between the first and second coming of Christ. During this period, Satan is bound and subjected to Christ's victory on the cross. However, God's kingdom is already established provisionally, awaiting its final realisation after Christ's return.¹¹⁰

In other words, believers are presently living in the millennial kingdom characterised by simultaneously experiencing victory and suffering. The concept of 'one thousand' serves as a metaphor for Satan being bound and unable to prevent the gospel's spread. However, it does not imply that Satan does not persecute believers. At the end of the period, before Christ's return, he will attempt to deceive the nations and persecute believers ferociously before the bodily return of Christ will terminate believers' suffering. Now believers who died will be raised and join those who came back with Christ for the final judgment and the introduction of eternal life.

Vital in amillennialism is the kingdom's establishment in the world waiting to be realised fully only with the introduction of the new world. As stated,

109 Robby Waddell, 'Apocalyptic Sustainability: The Future of Pentecostal Ecology', in Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (eds.), *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), pp. 95–110 (100).

110 Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 173. Hoekema mentions that due to this potential confusion, some amillennialists prefer the term realised millennialism, as it more accurately describes the amillennialist position.

believers experiencing the inaugurated kingdom still endure tribulation amid the victory of their evangelisation attempts. Only when they join the consummate kingdom will their suffering end, and they will experience eternal rest.

Amillennialists view Jesus Christ and his church during this present age as fulfilling the Old Testament's promises to Israel, David, and Abraham; they foresee no future fulfilment. They view Revelation 20 and the events described in Revelation 19 as occurring simultaneously rather than following each other in chronological succession.

This does not imply that Pentecostals should discard apocalyptic eschatology, given its motivation to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. However, they should know that the term 'apocalypse' does not refer to 'end times' or 'cosmic dissolution' but rather to 'unveiling' or 'revelation'. Apocalyptic texts discern the spiritual significance of the present rather than predict the future. Defining apocalypse correctly plays an integral role in an inaugurated eschatology.

6 Synthesis

Early Pentecostals' mission and theology flowed from their premillennial views of Christ's imminent return and their experience of Spirit baptism that empowered them to preach the gospel. 'Eschatological urgency is at the heart of understanding the missionary fervour of early Pentecostalism'.¹¹¹ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the latter rain, introducing the imminent return of Christ and necessitating the church to carry the gospel into the world. Their expectation of the second coming served as an icon of pentecostal theology that permeated their reading of the Bible and practices, in Vondey's terms.¹¹² Apocalyptic eschatology was not the last chapter in their textbook but can be found in all the chapters.

However, in adopting dispensationalism's rigidly compartmentalised and predetermined blueprint of history inimical to their vibrant spirituality and participatory scriptural approach, Pentecostals escaped from rather than care for their society and its injustices. As a result, they renounced their foundational experiences of Spirit baptism and continuationist expectation

¹¹¹ Velli-Matti Kärkkäinen, 'Missiology: Pentecostal and Charismatic', in S.M. Burgess (ed), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 877–85 (881).

¹¹² Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 131.

of ongoing charismatic experiences. Now they viewed any social concern as a possible side-track from the priority of saving individual souls. By reading the New Testament metaphors of the rapture, tribulation, Antichrist, battle of Armageddon, and millennium literally, Pentecostals escaped the world's challenges without addressing the suffering due to ungodly powers.

The delay of the *parousia* should encourage Pentecostals to reconsider their eschatology as both a motivation for mission and a corresponding reinterpretation of the church's role. They should distance themselves from the conviction that Christ's second coming and the dawning of a new world are at hand by de-literalising it and viewing it as a metaphor. And they should subject their eschatological expectations to God's timetable (2 Pet. 3.8-10).

Pentecostal eschatology should be (re)formulated in terms of the kingdom of God as proleptic anticipation of the new earth. It will change the church's proclamation and involvement in society. The time of the eschatological establishment of the kingdom and the restoration of Israel has already come in the King who the divine Spirit represents within and through the church. As people of the Spirit, Pentecostals should be sensitive to what the Spirit is doing in the sphere of their involvement. They should bring messianic hope back to the centre of church life and its missionary discourse. Where there is no operative eschatology, there is no ultimate hope. Eschatology has to be revived in church life to make the church again missional and future-driven, establishing an eschatological church that is forward-looking and forward-moving.