

JESUS IS COMING SOON: TOWARD REVISIONING PENTECOSTAL ESCHATOLOGY  
FOR A POSTMODERN MINISTRY AND MISSION

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Pentecostal Spirituality

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15 September 2016

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

### *Introduction*

To the causal 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. The purpose of this essay is to explore early Pentecostal eschatology, seek to understand its role in shaping the movement's spirituality and missional motivations by way of an historical-theological investigation. By tracing eschatological antecedents, examining the beliefs of four of its 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.

### *2. Exploring Early Pentecostal Eschatology*

#### *2.1 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>1</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>2</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>3</sup>

With postmillennialism as the dominate 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>4</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>5</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 to be “the

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), 415.

<sup>2</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

real developer of dispensational hermeneutics and theology”.<sup>6</sup> Popularized by Cyrus Ingerson Schofield (1843-1921) by the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909, fundamentalist dispensationalism taught the doctrine of the Rapture followed by a period of Tribulation prior to the premillennial coming of Christ.<sup>7</sup> Features of this eschatological scheme can be detected in the views of influential early “Pentecostal” leaders.

## 2.2 *Shaping Pentecostal Eschatology: The Views of Four “Pentecostal” Leaders*

### 2.2.1 *Martin Wells Knapp*

Martin Wells Knapp (1853-1911) 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>8</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

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<sup>6</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 112.

<sup>7</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 455.

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

was Knapp's connection between Pentecostal experience and the imminent return of Jesus, giving premillennialism an important place in Pentecostal doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

### *2.2.2 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. Like Knapp, Parham held that Spirit Baptism was important for avoiding the wrath of the end times and this belief added intensity to his teaching on the subject. He also insisted, like Knapp, that postmillennialism was unscriptural and counterproductive. The activity of the Holy Spirit signalled 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>10</sup>

### *2.2.3 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>11</sup> Richmann's examination of Seymour's published sermons reveals 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". It was this

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

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 13-15.

<sup>11</sup> Cecil M. Robeck Jr. *Azusa Street Mission & Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 33, 46-47.

group that 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>12</sup>

Finally, Spirit Baptism was of eschatological significance since it provided the empowerment needed for the church's missionary activity and signalled Christ's return.<sup>13</sup>

#### 2.2.4. D. Wesley Myland

D. Wesley Myland (1858-1943) “authored the work that many early Pentecostal would claim as one of the most articulate expressions of faith”.<sup>14</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 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>15</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.

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<sup>12</sup> William Seymour, “Receive Ye the Holy Ghost”, *Sermon Index.net*  
<http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=39712>

<sup>13</sup> Richmann, *Sanctification, Ecstasy, and War: The Development of American Pentecostal Eschatology*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

Myland's work was so influential that it became part of the mainstream eschatological view in the decades that followed.<sup>16</sup>

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

The eschatological views of the aforementioned leaders and their impact on Pentecostal spirituality can be easily detected in early Pentecostal newsletters. First, Walter Hollenweger notes that the titles of many early publications were in eschatological orientation such as “The Bridal Call”, “The Last Trump”, “The Midnight Cry”, “The End-Time Messenger”, and the “Bridegroom Messenger”.<sup>17</sup> Second, 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>18</sup> Third, 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>19</sup> Fourth, 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>20</sup> Fifth, 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>21</sup> and in the following excerpt from *Living Waters*:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 25-27.

<sup>17</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>18</sup> *The Apostolic Messenger*, Vol.1, No.1, (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. February/ March 1908), 5.

<sup>19</sup> *The Apostolic Faith*, Vol.1, No.1, (Los Angeles, Cal. September, 1906), 3.

<sup>20</sup> R.E. McAlister, *The Good Report*, No.1 (Ottawa, Canada. May 1911), 4.

<sup>21</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

“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>22</sup>

Sixth, because early Pentecostals understood this outpouring of the Spirit as a signal of the last worldwide revival before Jesus’ return<sup>23</sup>, and that Spirit Baptism prepared the believer for the Rapture as part of “the Bride”, it sparked an explosive global missionary movement. Azusa Street historian Cecil Robeck notes that within months of its beginning, numerous Pentecostal evangelists spread northward along the Pacific Coast, across the Mid-West, and into the Southern United States. By the end of 1906, missionaries were in Africa; by 1907 in Mexico, Canada, Europe, and Asia.<sup>24</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>25</sup>

### 3. Summary

At this point, I have provided ample evidence that the belief in an imminent premillennial second coming of Christ, coupled with the unique eschatological significance of their experience of Spirit Baptism in preparation for a rapture, shaped the heart and motivated the hands of early

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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>22</sup> Frank Small, ed. *Living Waters*, Vol. 1 No.1 (Winnipeg: Old Knox Church, 1918), 3.

<sup>23</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.”

<sup>24</sup> Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival & Mission*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *The Apostolic Faith*, Vol.1, No.1, 4.

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, signalling the imminent return of Christ, and setting them apart for their role in God's plan for the dispensation of the Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

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

Now well into the second 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, the adoption of fundamentalist dispensationalism by Pentecostals in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century appears to be highly problematic for classical Pentecostal spirituality which emphasizes charismatic phenomena as signs of Christ's imminent coming, and the basis for its mission.<sup>27</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. Secondly, Van Johnson, in an article titled "Jesus is Coming Soon", notes that those in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada are now

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<sup>26</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>27</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) 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) Makes a sharp distinction between the church and Israel, and 4) Adheres strictly to cessationism.<sup>27</sup> This leads to incompatibility with a Pentecostal ethos. If OT promises and prophecies apply only to Israel during the millennium, how can Pentecostals appeal to Joel 2 and continue to biblically validate their charismatic experiences, or frame their eschatological purpose as signs of last days and the soon coming of Christ?

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>28</sup> 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>29</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 successfully engage a post-Christendom, postmodern era.

#### *4. Revising Pentecostal Eschatology: The “Now/Not Yet” Kingdom of God*

Since fundamentalist eschatology abdicates social responsibility, viewing social action as useless in the light of Christ’s imminent return<sup>30</sup>, a revision of Pentecostal eschatology will be required. In the following, I will endorse Peter Althouse’s proposal to rethink Pentecostal eschatology as “proleptic anticipation”.<sup>31</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>32</sup>, and resonance with those developing a missional ecclesiology for a postmodern context. I will also draw from the New Testament concerning the Kingdom of God, and from voices such as Craig Van Gelder and Ronald Sider.

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<sup>28</sup> Van Johnson, “Jesus is Coming Soon”, Article 17, *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology*, 25-34.

<sup>29</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>30</sup> Murray W. Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective: Reformulating Pentecostal Eschatology” *Journal for Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993), 52.

<sup>31</sup> Althouse, “‘Left Behind’- Fact or Fiction”, 202.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

#### 4.1 *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>33</sup> For “to miss – or misunderstand this term is to miss Jesus altogether”.<sup>34</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 righteousness and justice”.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, 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>36</sup>; healing and exorcism meant Satan’s dominion *was breaking*<sup>37</sup>, and the time to plunder his house *was beginning*.<sup>38</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 the children of God 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>39</sup> to represent that present reign.

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

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<sup>33</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 51.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon D Fee, “The Kingdom of God and the Church’s Global Mission” in Murraray W. Dempster, Bryan D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen (eds.), *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1991), 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> Mark 2:19.

<sup>37</sup> Luke 11:20-21.

<sup>38</sup> Mark 3:27.

<sup>39</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.

#### 4.2.1 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>40</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 to abandon self-centered destructive behavior, and rejects oppression, injustice, tyranny, racism, and environmental destruction.<sup>41</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>42</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 design has been deeply affected and corrupted. This is what Sider understands as “embracing the fullness of God’s salvation”.<sup>43</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 against

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<sup>40</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 117

<sup>42</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 83.

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 right relationship with God and humanity as a whole.

Traditionally, Pentecostals have focused on saving souls either in preparation for the Rapture or for eventual death. 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 gunshy 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>44</sup> However, this trend is changing, especially among Pentecostals under 30 in North America.<sup>45</sup> Globally, African Pentecostalism also has responded to contemporary challenges by engaging politics, business, and social issues.<sup>46</sup> Further, social, political, and economic ills have been constructively addressed by Pentecostals in Latin America, South Korea, Africa, Australia, and South Africa.<sup>47</sup> It’s clear that global Pentecostalism has moved on from an apolitical and otherworldly posture by engaging social concerns and politics to ameliorate society.<sup>48</sup>

#### *4.2.2 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

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<sup>44</sup> Robert C. Crosby, “A New Kind of Pentecostal” *Christianity Today*, 2011 [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Cecil M. Robeck and Amos Yong eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 143.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 180-181. For example, standing against drug cartels, changing economic conditions of families, empowering women, and numerous social programs.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 183-189.

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 ostracizes, marginalizes, and robs human dignity.

#### *4.3 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. Kingdom eschatology on the other hand sees charismatic experiences as signs of the present Kingdom as Jesus indicated to the Pharisees when they charged Him 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.

##### *4.3.1 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>49</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

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<sup>49</sup> Bradley Truman Noel, *Pentecostalism and Postmodern Hermeneutics: Comparisons and Contemporary Impact*, (DTh Thesis: University of South Africa, 2008), 159.

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.

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

Finally, the church, as a new society representing the present and coming Kingdom of God, 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 the rule of Christ. Therefore, the church must *model* what it is like to love and worship God; 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; for postmoderns to witness true communion, unity, loving relationships, security, and hope - the church can provide a *foretaste* of the Kingdom. But 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.<sup>50</sup>

#### *5. Conclusion*

In summary, my exploration of Pentecostal eschatology has revealed that the beliefs, spirituality, and missionary impulse of early Pentecostals was 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

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<sup>50</sup> Wafik Wahba, *MISS 0782 Gospel Church and Culture: Lecture Notes Week 10 "Missional Church"*, 3.

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 the inaugurated Kingdom of God as proleptic anticipation, was found to offer a more biblically faithful holistic gospel and more compatible with both a Pentecostal ethos and with the postmodernism. By adopting and applying proleptic anticipation, the Pentecostal church is better positioned to serve its role to represent the Kingdom of God through both proclamation and social transformation, in anticipation of God's redemptive work of cosmic renewal.

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Wabah, Wafik. "Lecture Notes, Gospel Church and Culture" Tyndale Seminary 2015