

?Some Ethical Implications of Pentecostal Eschatology?

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by
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On May 16, 2001, I was hours away from leaving for Brazil to participate in the international Pentecostal dialogue with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), when I received a series of frantic calls from my sister. Late in the afternoon, Deborah received flowers at her office from her husband, Mikey Jones. They missed one another at the office, but cried about the flowers over the phone. We did not know it for three or four hours, but about one hour later, the axle broke on his SUV which rolled two or three times side ways then two times long ways. He was expelled from the vehicle and taken to Vanderbilt University Hospital where he was on life-support for 10 days. During that time, I cried as hard as my body can cry. All his family?including his 16 year old-son and 20 year old daughter?were in his hospital room when his heart beat for the last time.

Not many years back, my wife Sondra did a children?s musical at the General Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy based on John Bunyan?s *Pilgrim?s Progress*. With approximately 13,000 people in attendance, Sondra said that she could not have done it without help from Mikey. Toward the end of the musical ?Enchanted Journey,? we see two pilgrims who can finally approach the Celestial City. To their horror, they discover that before them is a river that is deep and wide and there is no bridge.

The tremendous impact of Mikey?s submersion into that deep river led to a revisiting of some of the ethical implications of pentecostal eschatology. What I found sounded akin to euthanasia. The paper will focus on parts of a pentecostal eschatology and close with some suggestions about various ethical implications.

The Place of Eschatology

Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach by Thomas N. Finger¹ proposed eschatology as an integrative motif. A defense for opening a new gate came by a challenge from Jürgen Moltmann. This opening volume draws attention to eschatology, but then he directs his attention to revelation and closes with the work of Christ.

The eschatological orientation of the NT message motivates Finger to begin his theology with last things. But with only a partial reversal, most find the order a disadvantage. A more substantive complaint is that he may not use eschatology as the integrative motif of his theology. Contrast this to classical Protestant theology that follows a trinitarian outline that begins and ends with God. Traditionally, God's work through Christ and the Holy Spirit is illuminated by the nature of God and the predicament of humanity.

When it comes to those matters that have been central to North American member churches of the Pentecostal World Conference, I wish to say that many of the eschatological questions seem ill-advised. G.C. Berkouwer's *Return of Christ* essentially characterizes my view on matters of the millennium, the role of Israel, and the antichrist. Berkouwer argues, rightly in my estimation, that there are no biblical signs that allow us to work out some kind of historical chronology, but there is the perpetual battle of good and evil and we should always be watchful and remember that Christ is victor. Pentecostal creeds, periodicals, books and tracts that differ with this view have spawned denominations that, nevertheless, adopt my views in practice.

It is distracting that some in our tradition fight over particular eschatological schemes?chronology, millennium fever, etc.?at the expense of fundamentals of the faith. Also disappointing is that many of them allow their behavior to be determined by aberrant eschatological schemes. We should always live a holy life because we are Christians, not because we fear the world as we know it will end soon. More honor is due those whose

personal eschaton resulted from persecution than lives thrown away calculating morbid details of a global scheme while self-absorbed in Western materialism.

Resurrected Body

The central themes of OT eschatology—the advent of God, God's judgment of the nations, and establishment of the final kingdom of righteousness—are themes which concern the nation of Israel and ultimately humankind as a whole. But what of the individual? It is difficult for the Christian to understand the little place which is given in the Hebrew Bible to individual salvation both as a present reality, but especially as a future hope. The emphasis is on the solidarity of the larger unit of the household, the tribe, the nation, and the race.

Yet the Israelites did not suppose that the individual became extinct at death; from earliest times they entertained a belief in a shadowy existence in Sheol. The etymology of the word *Sheol* is difficult. It probably derives from the same root as the words for the "hollow" of the hand, or a "hollow" place in the land. Sheol is a sort of subterranean region, or pit, where the dead subsist in a shadowy and attenuated form; it is but a feeble reflection of life on earth. Though under heaven's dominion, God has withdrawn God's spirit from the denizens of that forgotten land so that they lack energy and the vital spirit of life, being consigned to a flaccid and vacuous existence as shades.

The abode of the dead is called "silence" (Ps 94:17); "the land of forgetfulness" (Ps 88:12); the dead know nothing (Eccl 9:5). Death levels all people to a common fate; it brings them to a state where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. The most threatening aspect of death for the righteous is the fear that they will be cut off from God.

Unlike the NT, the OT teaches that both the righteous and the wicked go to Sheol, and the factor of reward and retribution is not a paramount consideration. Yet it would be too much to say that the same fate awaits the righteous as the wicked. The latter, in contrast to the former, perish under the bane of divine displeasure. It may not be too much to say that the hope of the righteous is for a deliverance from Sheol.

As time went on, this hope of deliverance becomes more articulate and there is even the suggestion of a resurrection of the body. Finally, in Dan 12:2, for the first time, the resurrection of the wicked, as well as the righteous, is affirmed.

For centuries the Roman Catholic Church taught against cremation. The early centuries saw Christians following the Semitic custom of burying the dead, both in contrast to the Roman practice of cremation and in opposition to the contempt shown Christians by their persecutors in their occasional cremating of the bodies of martyrs and scattering their ashes.²

It has been thought that the viewing of the body of a beloved deceased is an advantageous opportunity beneficial to the mental well-being of the survivors by forcing the reality of the moment upon their minds and emotions.

The Revised Code of Canon Law adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in November, 1983, states in Canon 1176, par. 3, that "the Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed; it does not, however, forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching."

In terms of an intermediate state, Anabaptists and Socinians prompted the idea of "soul sleeping". This has been revived in modern times by various groups of Millennial Dawnists and Adventists and is even suggested by such a scholar as Oscar Cullmann.

In the scriptures there are references—which can be construed as metaphorical—that talk about the dead being asleep: Dan 12:2, Matt 9:24, John 11:1, 1 Cor 11:30, 15:51, 1 Thess 4:14. Whereas Luther was attracted to the idea of the soul sleep, Calvin wrote against it.³ Paul's pithy statement, to be "absent from the body" (2 Cor 5:8) is understood by soul-sleep advocates to reflect an immediacy of sequence in the consciousness of the individual only. When a Christian closes his/her eyes in death, the next moment, so far as he/she is concerned, he/she will be with the Lord, though countless millennia may have intervened.

However, since "today" for the thief on the cross was his death day, and since the early Christians recalled these words of Jesus in the full knowledge of this fact, it seems they must have related "today" to the

paramount concern of the man which was deliverance from death; otherwise "today" becomes superfluous, for the day on which Jesus spoke these words was self-evident. In like manner, it seems impossible to suppose that Stephen's final prayer (Acts 7:59) refers to some indefinite future, when his spirit would be awakened out of the sleep of death.

When a person dies, there is the separation of the immaterial from its material part. At the time of death the material or physical part continues to exist, although it is in the process of decay. For the Christian, the body is metaphorically described as being asleep awaiting the coming of the Lord. The immaterial part, at least for the believer, departs immediately to be with the Lord.⁴

The traditional teaching among Protestants has been that the dead survive as conscious selves, though without the body, until the day of resurrection. Some think a disembodied spirit is Hellenistic so hasten to place the resurrection immediately upon death.

Taking the established Protestant position, Oden⁵ sees the believers as alive and conscious (Matt 22:32, Lk 16:11, 1 Thess 5:10) enjoying a state of rest and blessedness (Rev 6:9-11). This happens immediately after death, Oden says looking at Luke 16:22 and Rev 14:13.

Since a person is both immaterial and material, it is thought by some that between death and the resurrection there is an intermediate body. This concept can be inferred from a passage like the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31).

Mounce writes:

To each of the martyrs was given a white robe. Some writers understand this as a reference to spiritual or glorified bodies which are given to the martyrs ahead of time as a token of special honor. It is thought to have developed from God's clothing himself with garments of lights. Apocalyptists spoke of the resurrection bodies of the righteous as "garments of glory" (1 Enoch 62:16; 2 Enoch 22:8), which were 'stored up on high in the seventh heaven' (Asc Isa 4:16). Paul's reference to 'a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven's which will clothe the believer at death (2 Cor 5:1ff) is thought to be analogous.

In the book of Revelation, however, white robes are symbols of blessedness and purity. The redeemed throng before the throne in 7:11 are arrayed in white robes. They have come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb (7:13f).⁶

An intermediate body evokes questions like: If it is a glorious body, then what is the need of a final resurrection? If it is not, what is the advantage over our present mortal existence?

The resurrection will not be a resurrection of the "flesh" (as the Apostle's Creed says), which contradicts 1 Cor 14:40 that "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom. In 1 Cor 15:35-49 Paul describes the resurrected body. It is contrasted with the pre-resurrected body, which is set forth as a "soulish body" or a material body which is governed by the soul. Rather we shall receive a "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44), a paradoxical expression to teach us that in the life which is to come, our mode of existence shall be neither wholly similar nor wholly dissimilar to our present mode of existence. Jesus' tomb was empty.

The Christian hope is not escape from the body, but deliverance from this mortal body of flesh and blood, that we may be clothed in a glorious body like unto that of our Lord Jesus Christ. It should be made clear that resurrection does not mean the reassemblage of the atoms of in the same molecular pattern which prevailed in the body laid in the grave. In the Middle Ages, an indestructible "bone of immortality" was postulated as the nexus. Even later when Descartes was looking for the location of the soul, he postulated the pineal gland as it had no known function at that time.

Paul admits that he is showing us a "mystery" (1 Cor 15:51). With what kind of body do they come" (1 Cor 15:35); Paul uses the apt figure of a germinating seed to illustrate continuity with a difference. Yet this is only a picture drawn from the natural order. Certainly the resurrected body was matter that could be observed because Paul demonstrated Christ's resurrection by the many people who had seen Christ in his resurrection body (1 Cor 15:5-8).

Although the resurrected body of Christ did have some similarities to the pre-resurrected body in that he breathed (John 20:22), ate (Luke 24:42f), and was recognizable (John 20:27-29), it also was different because he was not always immediately recognizable (Luke 24:16-31; John 20:14; 21:4); he could walk through doors or walls (John 20:19, 26; Luke 24:36) and rapidly traverse great distances (Matt 28:7-10).

Purgatory

The Roman Catholic teaching on purgatory is a direct contradiction to the typical Protestant idea of passive existence in the intermediate state. It is also related to the conviction of most Protestants that one's eternal destiny is irrevocably decided at the moment of death?in obvious contrast to something like reincarnation.

Whereas the Roman Catholic church affirms that upon death those, like the saints, who are ready for the beatific vision enter into the rest of the blessed and the incorrigibly wicked, the reprobates into the torments of hell, it also teaches the doctrine of Purgatory. The suffering of Purgatory is not penal but purgative. All those dying in a state of grace, yet tainted with the stain of sin, must undergo this catharsis.

Origen [early third century] is the first to speak of the "salutary troubles" which the souls "in prison" endure, not as a retribution, but as a benefaction. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage?heavily influenced by Tertullian and was charismatic himself in some respects?was unambiguous about the heavenly destiny of heroic martyrs. He was equally clear on the definitive character of hell. His problem had to do with the fate of the well-intended Christians who had weakened under persecution. His pastoral problem was whether such basically good people were to be consigned to hell forever.⁷

The idea of a process of purification not only in this life but in the next as well seemed welcome to Cyprian. So the central plank of what eventually became the doctrine of purgatory was formulated already by the middle of the third century. Augustine extends the purifying trials of death beyond this life and Gregory the Great interprets being saved "yet so as by fire" (1 Cor 3:15) as a description of the pains of purgatory.

A more developed doctrine blossomed during the Middle Ages, particularly starting in the 12th century.⁸ The official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is contained in the Decree of the Council of Florence (AD 1429) that souls in the intermediate state "are purged after death by purgatorial or cathartic pains."

Clark Pinnock, a Baptist turned Charismatic, when reacting to an article on purgatory by a Roman Catholic scholar says:

I cannot deny that most believers end their earthly lives imperfectly sanctified and far from complete. I cannot deny the wisdom in possibly given them an opportunity to close that gap and grow to maturity after death. After all, most evangelicals accept the position that babies dying in infancy end up in heaven. If so, do they live in heaven as babies or as grown persons? If we think they will be grown persons, where do we suppose that they grow to maturity?⁹

Evangelicals would not think of purgatory as a place of punishment or atonement because of our view of the work of Christ, but we can think of it as an opportunity for maturation and growth.¹⁰

At the 1992 edition of American Academy of Religion in San Francisco, Pinnock probed the possibility of post-mortem conversion thus shifting from the position in the above quotation.

Isa 5:14 which says that Sheol is a place of interaction and recognition and the story of Lazarus cautions one against being too dogmatic regarding the nature of the intermediate state. Other sympathizers with purgatory

include George MacDonald, J.B. Phillips, William Barclay, and C.S. Lewis. Bavinck says, "Gradation of punishment will be in accordance to the knowledge of God's will and law."¹[1](#)

At the August 23-27, 2000 ICCOWE conference in Prague, Hilarion Alfeyev, from the Department for External Church Relations at the Moscow Patriarchate, defended the Orthodox Church's position that the fate of a person after death can be changed through the prayers of the Church.¹² During the discussion that followed, Alfeyev was surprised to learn that J.H. King, pioneer leader for the Pentecostal Holiness Church, had advocated post-mortem spiritual growth.¹³[3](#)

Hell

First, some specifics. Hell is a common translation of the Greek "Gehenna," from the Hebrew, ge-hinnom, the valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem where children were sacrificed in the fire to Molech (2 Chron 28:3, 33:6) and later served as a garbage dump. There are various problems such as reconciling the description as this being a place of darkness (Mt 25:30, 2 Pt 2:17) with statements that it is a place of fire (Mt 5:22; 13:30-50). This is only a problem for literalists.

Some have thought that the wicked are annihilated. Such punishment is "eternal" in that those who are annihilated never get over it. Such proponents have to make sense of "eternal" fire (Matt 18:8, 25:41), "eternal" punishment (Matt 25:46), "eternal" destruction (2 Thess 1:9), "eternal" judgment (Mark 3:29).

The lead article for the October 23, 2000 edition of *Christianity Today* was an open discussion on hell between annihilationists, conditionalists and traditionalists. Given the influence of the National Association of Evangelicals and this magazine in particular on North American pentecostal ecclesiarchs, a subterranean shift may be underway. The same might be true of the impact of a related discussion at the Evangelical Group of the American Academy of Religion on professors at pentecostal seminaries in the USA.

When Pinnock published his position on this subject in *Christianity Today* in 1987, Adrian Rogers, then president of the Southern Baptist Convention, used this as proof that Pinnock was getting liberal. The same reception awaited John Stott after publically endorsing this teaching.

Classical Pentecostals may have to reckon with the reality that Pinnock's emergence from the cocoon of narrow fundamentalism was not unrelated to his charismatic experience of speaking in tongues. Further, a position not unlike that which follows is taken by Thomas Finger¹⁴[4](#) who was once rumored to be a charismatic. Both of them attribute the problem of eternal conscious torment to the erroneous idea of the immortality of the soul—a Hellenistic intrusion into the gospel.

Pinnock's 1992 contribution to the familiar format of InterVarsity Press in *Four Views of Hell*¹⁵[5](#) which covers literal, metaphorical, purgatorial, and conditional starts with his unabashed commitment to hell as an "unquestioned reality." Reminding Evangelicals that most of them have abandoned ancient doctrines like double predestination, infant baptism, and only one view of the millennium, he says there should be room to debate the nature of hell. Especially so since the eternal punishment of hell has often been portrayed as bringing delight to those in heaven who observe the miseries.

Pinnock says that it is not a denial of the reality of hell to interpret its nature as destruction rather than endless torture. He says this view avoids portraying God as being a vindictive and sadistic punisher. Hell becomes the possibility that human beings may choose in their freedom. As he says, "How can God predestine the free response of love?" So again the question of how to understand election enters the fray. It shows that Pinnock is not a universalist.

Also spurning universalism, Finger puts it this way:

Those outside Christ will not be suddenly condemned by an alien, hitherto absent God ... Instead the true character of Reality will be lit up ... Even within those who have never heard of Christ, their conscience will 'bear witness ... ' (Rom 2:15-16) ...¹⁶[6](#)

Finger certainly finds this more satisfying than the idea of universal salvation which he thinks Evangelicals are taking up de facto. He finds everlasting torment in Tertullian, annihilation in the *Didache*, and universalism in

Origen.

We are reminded that some of the most graphic pictures of the anguish of hell come from the Apocrypha. Then there are ridiculous stories like how are those without teeth going to gnash their teeth to which a recension of a Gospel text quotes Jesus as saying "teeth will be provided."

Passages looking towards annihilation include: Psalm 37; Malachi 4:1f; Matt 10:28; Matt 3:10, 12; Matt 5:30; 2 Thess 1:9; Gal 6:8; 1 Cor 3:17; Phil 1:28; Rom 1:32; Rom 6:23; Phil 3:19; 2 Peter 3:7; 2 Peter 2:1,3,6; Heb 10:39; Jude 7; Rev 20:14f.

Pinnock is clearly impatient with the idea that this position challenges the authority of scripture since scripture is his recourse. He turns the tables saying that tradition?especially the hellenized immortal soul?has determined the "traditional" view of everlasting conscious torment. Pinnock does not flatly rule out that God could give immortality to the wicked for everlasting torment, but asks why God would do so. He finds the idea of sin against an infinite God as insufficient grounds to warrant infinite punishment.

Now to a review by Pinnock of passages used by traditionalists. Mark 9:48 when interpreted in light of Isaiah 66:24 where fire and worms are destroying dead bodies does not require eternal torment of conscious persons. Pinnock finds Matt 25:46 wanting because of the lack of definition regarding conscious punishment that is eternal. Annihilation has eternal consequences, but the person is not eternally conscious. The parable in Luke 16:23f refers to Hades?the intermediate state between death and resurrection?not to gehenna?the final end of the wicked.

Pinnock sees Rev 14:9-11 as the strongest text. He goes on to say that while the smoke goes up forever, the text does not say the wicked are tormented forever. Finger stresses that eternal torment is aimed at the devil, the beast, and the false prophet.¹⁷ The text says the wicked have no relief from their suffering as long as the suffering lasts. Before oblivion, there may be a period of suffering, but not unendingly according to both Pinnock and Finger.

Pinnock reacts to the idea of annihilationists softening the gospel message?by taking away a terror stick used by Dante, Jonathan Edwards, et. al.?by saying that although this makes hell less of a torture chamber, it does not lessen its extreme seriousness. To pass into oblivion and nonbeing while others enter into bliss is a terrifying possibility of misusing our freedom by losing God and destroying ourselves. It does mean they do not go to heaven.

For his part, J. Rodman Williams¹⁸ distances himself from the idea of annihilation. Williams finds support in the lexicon by Thayer and the claim that this position has never had "creedal or confessional status" in the church. Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield lower the population of hell by means of a postmillennial eschatology and the automatic salvation of babies who die in infancy.

Classical Pentecostals have an oral tradition that infants, apparently regardless of water baptism or ?dedication?, end up in heaven.¹⁹ Naturally this idea has been extended to fetuses, especially those who were aborted. Now are they going to say that the fetus or infants must be from Christian parents or at least a Christian mother? If not, does this say something about proxy faith among pentecostals? It at least illustrates the pentecostal preoccupation with actual sins rather than ?original sin.?

Although no major Roman Catholic theologian advocates annihilation?nor Orthodox²⁰ I would imagine?Charles Parham taught annihilation. This teaching is more often associated with the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. All of this puts Pinnock in the heretical category for many North American Evangelicals especially when coupled with his probing of the concept of post-mortem conversion.

Yet how different ultimately is Oden's position when Oden says that common grace will save the likes of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? In fact "pious Jews of every generation who remain faithful to the covenant (Rom 11). Gentiles who have not heard of God coming will be judged equitably according to the light given them (Rom 12:6-16)."²¹

There is insufficient scriptural-ecumenical authority for the debatable assertion that those who have not had a fair chance to hear the gospel are consigned peremptorily and immediately to eternal punishment, for all who miss the joy

of heaven will have had plausible opportunity to have chosen a better life, yet willfully refused it.²²

The posturing of pentecostal Zionists continues to make this kind of thing an ongoing debate in pentecostal ranks.

Pinnock makes a great deal of this idea that no one goes to hell except those who chose it. Like Finger, this does not mean only those who have heard the name of Jesus.

Along with biblical passages that promote the wideness of God's mercy, one has to consider the eschatological implications of Amos 9:7 brought to my attention by an article on Asian theology:²³

"Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the LORD. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?"

Amos challenges the conventional wisdom of the privileged class that had monopolized God and drastically reinterprets the Exodus tradition. Here the Ethiopians, the Philistines and Arameans have each in their own history experienced God's saving act.

This is the flipside where earlier Amos so clearly utilizes geography in the two opening chapters to put a noose around his audience: 1:3 Damascus, 1:6 Gaza, 1:9 Tyre, 1:11 Edom, 1:13 Ammonites, 2:1 Moab, 2:4 Judah, 2:6 Israel. If Israel is unique--"You alone have I known" (Amos 3:2)"she will not be spared judgment.

Universalists, by contrast, suppose that finally all people will be restored to God's fellowship, for God's very nature is love. But retributive justice is by no means incompatible with love. There are some striking statements in the NT on the universal scope and efficacy of Christ's atoning work. The context, however, seems to place faith and obedience to Christ as requisite for saving benefits of his work.

There is no warrant for understanding such universal statements of scripture as promising the salvation of those who willfully rejected the claims of Christ and die in unbelief. To be sure, the redeemed host will number people from all nations. But this is not to say every individual.

But, it is commonly objected, granted that God is not only loving but holy, it would be an intolerable miscarriage of justice that a person, who has sinned threescore years and ten, should suffer the consequences everlastingly.

Oden supporting eternal consequences quotes Augustine and others saying that rape and murder may take minutes, but the consequences go well beyond that. Does this imply that God's purpose has failed? No, but it shows the difference between God's antecedent will to save all and the consequence will of God to deal justly with the ramifications of free human choices.²⁴

It must be remembered that hell is not a place of passive suffering (as in some of Dante's visions), but rather a state of active rebellion. "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven," said Milton's Satan. And by the lives they have lived, the wicked have said, "Better to serve Satan than God" even if it be in hell.

Eternal punishment means that the character which one chooses in this life is irrevocably confirmed in the life to come. Can they then justly complain of hell which is just that?life without God forever? This is not to imply that those in hell will be happy with their lot. They neither will be happy in hell nor aspire to heaven. Hell, in other words, is frustration, the reality beyond the myth of Prometheus and the rolling stone.

Leading thinkers of the western world, from Plato to Kant, have regarded penal retribution as a necessary part of a moral universe. In the West from the time of Jeremy Bentham, people have increasingly stressed the remedial function of punishment. But if correction is the only function of punishment, then hell is impossible; for hell, in its essence, is not remedial.

The doctrine is that those who sin against God without repentance, shall experience God's wrath without remedy. Eternal consequences which of itself does not demand continuous punishment to infinity.

Heaven

Theologians have called this happy life "heaven" because scripture uses the term "heaven" to describe the abode of God (Deut 26:15); and to dwell with God is human's highest beatitude (Ps 73:25). Heaven is where God is; and the final hope of God's people is to dwell with Godself, to be their God and they God's own people, in unbroken fellowship forever (Rev 21:3). This is the "kingdom of God" consummated.

In the NT there is the teaching that the natural order will be delivered and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:31). In Matthew 19:28, Jesus refers to the "regeneration" (palingenesis, "new world" RSV) when the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne. And Peter, preaching in the portico of Solomon in the temple, speaks of the "restitution" (apokatastasis) of all things at the time Christ shall return (Acts 3:21). It is preoccupation with the bliss of the creature rather than the glory of the Creator, which has led to the oft-repeated charge that the Christian heaven is a boring place.

What about a transition period, a manifestation of the kingdom more glorious than what we now see, yet not what shall finally be? Millennialists tend to construe OT prophetic visions of a future glorious age in this world as referring to the Millennial kingdom, making the passages which speak of a radically new order to refer to the final state, that kingdom of glory when "God shall be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

Postmillennialists conceive the future golden age on earth largely in spiritual terms. The gospel of the kingdom will gradually permeate society till people and nations shall own Christ as Lord and peace shall prevail in all the earth. So far as the natural order of things is concerned, the Millennial age is really coterminous with the present.

Premillennialists have no such sanguine hope for the future mission of the church in human society. Given many of the OT prophecies which speak of a coming glorious kingdom, a more literal reading than Postmillennialists would do, they believe that Christ will return to this world, bind Satan so that the Evil One(s) can deceive the nations no more, and reign in a glorified Jerusalem with the resurrected saints for a 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-6).

At the close of this period, Satan shall be loosed to gather the nations to war for the last time. But both the Evil One(s) and they shall be overwhelmed. Then they who had no part in the "first resurrection" (Rev 20:5) shall be raised to judgment and condemnation. Some see corroboration in the structure of 1 Cor 15:25-28.

In contrast to the diversity of positions embraced by Pentecostals around the world,²⁵ subscription to premillennialism was one of the most prominent doctrinal belief for most early North American Pentecostals after initial-evidence Spirit baptism, which was itself intricately wrapped up in their eschatological ideology. Pentecostal premillennialism taught that the world was getting progressively worse rather than better and that the second coming would precede the millennium during which Jesus and the saints would rule the earth. It would be difficult to overemphasize how central a role the expectation that Jesus would return at any moment played for early Pentecostals; the theme dominated their periodicals, sermons, testimonies, and theological tracts. Through the *Apostolic Faith*, Seymour constantly disseminated premillennialist doctrine. The first issue of his paper announced the return of the apostolic Pentecost to Azusa, rejoicing that the fight against "sin and Satan" was almost over and the time when the holy and meek would rule the earth in the millennium was at hand. The Azusa group also made an explicit connection between the date when they began speaking in tongues and the almost simultaneous earthquake that devastated San Francisco, interpreting both to signify that the end of times was near.²⁶

The Pentecostal people of North Carolina did not have to be convinced that the latter rain signaled the imminent millennium. Premillennialism had been one of Crumpler's central doctrines from the earliest days of the state's holiness movement. In 1902, Mrs. J. C. Kinaman wrote to the *Holiness Advocate* that she was "watching and waiting for His coming," and Mrs. Emma Lent contributed a poem entitled "The Master is Coming." Crumpler responded to these and other offerings that "the postmillennialists teach that the world is growing better all the time, and not the premillennialists. . . . The *Advocate* is a premillennialist, of course."²⁷

G.F. Taylor's 1907/8 theological tract was heavily concerned with the relationship between tongues and the second coming, which he explicitly linked by calling speaking in tongues the "unceasing call for the coming of the Bridegroom." Additionally, the very name Cashwell chose for his paper directly connoted both the return of Christ and the paper's conscious role as its forerunner. According to the Biblical parable in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the bridegroom who will return to his bride, the church, at the final marriage supper that will usher in the millennium.²⁸

Not surprisingly, Cashwell fully embodied the state of expectancy in which early Pentecostals lived. In a letter to Azusa, he rejoiced that "He is coming soon, and the bride must be dressed and ready. . . . Heaven seems nearer every day. I hear the music. I see the city. Glory be to God." Cashwell also reported that an angel had told a fellow Pentecostal whom he considered trustworthy that "it will not be long." In the inaugural issue of his paper, Cashwell announced that his goal was for God to announce on the day of judgment that the *Bridegroom's Messenger* had warned the world to be prepared for Christ's return. The periodical stressed the imminence of Christ's return in almost every issue, and the people who wrote in with testimonies shared these sentiments.²⁹

The Pentecostal Holiness Church believed not only that Christ's return was at hand but also that their own actions could push the date even closer. Because they believed that God was waiting for the gospel to be spread more extensively throughout the world before initiating the second coming, Pentecostals placed heavy emphasis on missions both at home and abroad. In 1909, with a sense of urgency undoubtedly exacerbated by God's three-year delay since Azusa, Cashwell wrote: "There is no time to lose. . . . This is the last call. . . . For our sakes, He will shorten the time of the coming of Jesus. . . . The quicker we complete this [spreading the gospel], the more will be saved and the sooner Jesus will come." In his theological discourse, Taylor asserted that God had bestowed the gift of tongues in order that Pentecostals might quickly spread the gospel throughout the world.³⁰

The premillennial view has an ancient pedigree, being found in the thought of some of the church fathers (and mothers?). This was mostly Ante-Nicene and was quickly challenged. It has had no place in the official theology of Roman Catholicism, nor appreciable influence in the mainstream of Protestant thought. Some credit this fact to the influence of Augustine.

It has been argued that dispensational pretribulational premillennialism was triggered by the exposure of J.N. Darby to a charismatic named Margaret MacDonald whose name is usually associated with Edward Irving. David MacPherson was so convinced of this that he entitled his book *The Incredible Cover-Up*.³¹

Eusebius disliked premillennial thought. Because of this he belittled the intelligence of Papias. This may help account for Eusebius' opposition to the Montanists. Certainly premillennialism was not the only view accepted by Christian thinkers through the years.

Dale Moody³² argues that Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) gave impetus to the rise of postmillennialism. It was picked up by the likes of John Wesley who believed the pope was the Antichrist. Many conservatives in the 19th century were postmillennial. It is found in many popular commentaries like those by Adam Clarke and perhaps Finney. Some Presbyterians who took this position referred to the papacy as the Great Harlot and looked to a future implementation of Calvin's "theocratic kingdom."³³

Often those who disavow the various forms of pre- and post- millennial thought are classed as amillennial. This can be a misnomer. Oden suggests the more inviting term realized millennialism.³⁴ This position takes issue with the idea that there is a future literal, earthly-historical millennium. They object to taking the Apocalypse? a prophetic book full of abstruse visions, as well as allegorical and quasi-enigmatical forms of speech? to be the filter for other texts. Analogia fidei reads the obscure in light of the clear, not the reverse and how can such a literal interpretation come from a book full of so much symbolism?

When dealing with millennialism, Hans Schwarz³⁵ treats the tripodic scheme of Joachim of Fiore. He compares Joachim to Montanus on this score then talks about the implementation of the scheme by the Franciscan Spirituals of the 13th and 14th centuries. He says since this was the Era of the Spirit that Spirituals saw no need for sacraments, preaching, a clerical hierarchy, and pronounced Emperor Frederick II as the Antichrist. Naturally they were persecuted by church and state.

Schwarz also mentions Thomas Müntzer who refers to Joachim. He concludes by saying that millennial thought is now mostly found among sects like Jehovah's Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventists, and fundamentalists. Interestingly, tongues-speech, prophecy and healing were all associated with the extended circle around the Spirituals and Müntzer (Zwickau prophets).

J. Rodman Williams³⁶ takes a position that has often been called amillennial. He dislikes this word but clearly will not accept any form of premillennial or postmillennial thought. The idea of an interim kingdom for Christ he says is not found in the scriptures, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, nor the Westminster Confession.

Richard Lovelace, an evangelical charismatic, is amillennial. He argues that most great missionary movements were inspired by amillennial leaders, largely influenced by Augustine. Augustine believed that 1,000 years reign mentioned three times in Rev 20 could be understood either literally or symbolically. The Reformers, as well, were amillennial. A premillennialist responded by arguing that amillennialism has tended to go hand-in-hand with state churches and spiritual lethargy.³⁷

It is a widely held consensus that the postmillennial evangelicals of the 19th century were more socially responsible than the dispensationalists of the 20th century who are characterized as rejoicing when things turn bad.³⁸ Generally this group has more to say about the millennium than the final state.

Dispensationalists are premillennials who have divided among themselves based on whether one is pre-, post- or mid-trib. So naturally they can distance themselves from those who are not pre-millennial forgetting that the range of positions usually presuppose a common allegiance to Jesus Christ as the Lord of history.³⁹

Cosmic Transformation

In a 1990 issue of *Transformation*,⁴⁰ an account is given of a conference where Peter Kuzmic said that Moltmann and others deserve attention for their work on the relation of eschatology to ethics. Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* gave eschatology a centrality in christology. He also wanted to emphasize that the promises of God to humanity do not refer to some ethereal realm into which the soul may now blissfully escape at death, but to the historical future of humankind. God intends that promises for the future bear fruit in world-transforming activity in the present. This does not mean that Moltmann is a rosy optimistic.

A few have tried to argue that the future state will be that of disembodiment, but that wholeness now in the present kingdom can bring wholeness to mind, body, society and environment. But this has not been a common position. Something like this is argued by Rodman Williams.⁴¹

Peter Kuzmic has argued that affirming continuity "implies that all of our present work for a better world is of eternal significance." Similar arguments have come from Miroslav Volf in *Work in the Spirit* and *Transformation* [1990] and Murray Dempster in his 1991 Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) presidential address. Then we are reminded of the arguments against cremation since it was said to affect the resurrection of the mind. Now one asks can the new earth come from the ashes of a planet destroyed by nuclear cremation?

So part of the debate concerns sorting out any differences between passages that refer to futuristic renewal or complete renovation. Rodman Williams sides with renovation. Miroslav Volf postures for eschatological transformation instead of annihilation of humans or creation.⁴² The biblical testimony to the earthly locale of the kingdom of God speaks indirectly in favor of the belief in the eschatological transformation of the world rather than its annihilation. Gundry argues that Revelation promises eternal life on the new earth, not ethereal life in the new heaven.

This corresponds not only to the earthly hopes of the Hebrew prophets, but most significantly to the Christian teaching of the resurrection of the body. Theologically it makes little sense to postulate a non-earthly eschatological existence while believing in the resurrection of the body.

Moltmann seems willing to concede that one can have a "this worldly" hope and expect that it will come about through the act of new creation ex nihilo. But more typical is the position of conservatives attached to the administration of the American President Ronald Reagan which reasoned that we should hurry and use up our natural resources for the benefit of human beings before they are burnt up in a decade or so in a cosmic cataclysm.

One can postulate a logical connection between eschatological annihilation and social improvement, but are they theologically compatible? Miroslav Volf says no. Theologically there would be a tension between affirming the goodness of creation and at the same time expect its eschatological destruction. And there are NT statements explicitly supporting the idea of an eschatological transformation of the creation, as Moltmann goes on to prove and F.F. Bruce concurs. To Volf the important issue is that humans not only have a body but are a body.

The traditional picture changes⁴³ radically with the assumption that the world will end not in apocalyptic destruction but in eschatological transformation. Then the results of the cumulative work of human beings have

intrinsic value and gain ultimate significance, for they are related to the eschatological new creation, not only indirectly through the faith and service they enable or sanctification they further, but also directly: the noble products of human ingenuity, "whatever is beautiful, true and good in human cultures," will be cleansed from impurity, perfected, and transfigured to become part of God's new creation. They will form the "building materials" from which (after they are transfigured) "the glorified world" will be made.

Consider the human body. When I look on pictures of me as a child, I say I am that person. That is not, however, literally true. My cells have died and reproduced and so in a molecular sense there has been a transformation. In my case, more grey hair cells of the few hair cells left, more fatty cells, etc.

To whatever extent this is true, might it not be something of a parallel to the planet? Volf's position over against a huge atomic bomb that explodes the planet is a form of continuity that does not play down the transformation of the Almighty God.

A brief review of the 1991 SPS presidential address by Murray Dempster will prove helpful.⁴⁴ Dempster starts with the sect/church/mysticism typology found in Ernst Troeltsch's *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Here sect-type expressions of the church have such an intense eschatological expectation that the church mission focuses virtually singularly on evangelizing unbelievers. The resulting social quietism reinforced a conviction within the corporate mentality of sectarian believers that they were faithfully loving with eternal?not temporal?values in view.

Notice part of the final statement produced by members of the dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and some pentecostals:

Pentecostals focus more on individuals than on structures, viewing persons as individuals. When a person is in need, Pentecostals will often attend to the immediate need without always analyzing the systemic issues that might give rise to the situation. As they probe more deeply, they uncover systemic issues that produce or aggravate the pastoral issue being addressed. Some Pentecostals, then, confront systemic issues out of strong pastoral concerns about an individual or a group of people. While Pentecostals have frequently been stereotypically portrayed as passive and ?other worldly,? programs of personal renewal at grassroots levels have had far-reaching implications for social transformation.⁴⁵

During the dialogue with WARC, I argued that when recounting the record of social activity by Pentecostals one should not forget social location and that Pentecostals did not realize observers would look on them differently had they publicized their social awareness.⁴⁶ As director of the IPHC Archives, I have found numerous records of social care that have not been cited in any work on this subject.

Yet among Classical Pentecostals, however, it is still hardly rare to hear that the church not worry about being an agent of social change because of the imminent return. The Kingdom of God is portrayed as an idealized state of future ahistorical bliss. Add to this the despair of working with structural change and preoccupation for individual rehabilitation. The latter which should not be dismissed by any account.

Dempster goes on to argue that the eschatological continuity between the "already" and "not yet" kingdom implies that the apocalyptic act at the end of this age will not be one of total annihilation of the world but one of total transformation of the world.

This transformed world of God's future reign ... has historical continuity and theological homogeneity with the reign of God that was present in the person and ministry of Jesus and which continues to this day in human history by the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷

Dempster then affirms the notion of Miroslav Volf that eschatological continuity "guarantees that noble human efforts will not be wasted." Or as Dempster himself put it:

... the second coming of Jesus Christ as an apocalyptic act at the end of this age?when interpreted within a Pentecostal/kingdom framework?can inspire hope in today's church that God's redemptive reign will find consummation in a new creation. Such a hope places God's stamp of significance on the massive human effort and sacrificial expenditures of resources that go into supporting programs of Christian social service and action. Such a hope is buoyed up by the conviction that God will preserve, transform and incorporate the church's kingdom-signifying deeds into the new creation when Jesus returns to bring the reign of God to its promised fulfillment. 'Maranatha,' the Lord cometh, therefore, should fuel the fires of the church's social concern with the same intensity that this hopeful expectation has historically brought to the task of evangelism.⁴⁸

Concluding Reflections

When I began to observe more closely a particular practice of some PWC type Pentecostals in North America, I found what seemed to be a link between their eschatology and sympathy for shades of euthanasia. This should not be overemphasized because in the USA, one must clearly express wishes about the end of life or our law requires numerous means by which to keep a person ?alive.? On the other hand, the strong conviction of the ?life-to-come? and expected soon reunion obviously informs practical decisions made by pentecostal families.

The evidence that I offer is largely anecdotal. However, those in view include an IPHC General Superintendent, the spouse of the Church of God (Cleveland) General Overseer, and the last surviving daughter of M.A. Tomlinson, long term General Overseer of the Church of God of Prophecy.

I found that in contrast to the early years of opposing medical intervention, that hospice care was taken for granted. Those who did oppose medical aid were not looking for healing, but were trying to assure the outcome of a hasty end. Some were so incensed at the intervention of technology mandated by the government that they used a living will to increase the speed of their exit. Uniformly, families were unwilling to continue ?life-support? (meaning ventilator and food) for cases without a medical remedy. Cremation is not forbidden.

The influence of the early days remains evident. North American pioneers not only taught an imminent return of Christ, but that Spirit baptism gave one an assurance that one was truly saved and ready for the rapture. Parham?s eschatological tie to Spirit baptism is well known. ?One-way-ticket? missionaries went around the world armed with permanent xenolalia. G.F. Taylor argued that only those with Spirit baptism would be in the Bride rather than among the guests at the marriage supper of the lamb. Thus, even today, there can be speaking in tongues at funeral.⁴⁹

Will Classical Pentecostals of this millennium be drawn to ethical solutions made famous by the Netherlands? That chapter has yet to be written.

1 Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Nashville: Nelson, 1985) 367pp. Reviews by Stanley J. Grenz in *CT* (Sept 5, 1986) 31 and Donald Bloesch in *TSF Bulletin* (May-June 1987) 16f.

2 The following is taken from the State and Policies on Cremation in the Province of Miami by the Catholic Bishops of Florida, October, 1986 as reproduced in *The St. Augustine Catholic* 1:4 (March/April 1992) 12.

3 Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit, Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992) 396f.

4 "Biblical View of the Body," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 165.

5 Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 392f.

- 6 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 159f.
- 7 How would Cyprian respond to the ordeal of Christian teenagers forced today by militants to marry Muslims?
- 8 Zachary J. Hayes, "The Purgatorial View," *Four Views of Hell*, edited by William Crockett (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 97-99.
- 9 Pinnock's response to "The Purgatorial View" as espoused by Zachary Hayes in *Four Views of Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 129.
- 10 Ibid., p. 130.
- 11 Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 [1956]) 565-66.
- 12 Hilarion Alfeyev, "Christ the Conqueror of Hell," International Charismatic Consultation on World Evangelization, August 23-27, 2002 in Prague. Although the paper held out the possibility of salvation for those of other religions, less clear was the fate of pentecostals in Russia.
- 13 See chapter titled "The Pentecostal-Holiness Theology of Joseph Hillery King" in forthcoming volume about Pentecostal theology by Douglas Jacobsen.
- 14 Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1985) 1:158-161.
- 15 Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View," *Four Views of Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 135ff.
- 16 Finger, *Christian Theology* 1:159.
- 17 Finger, *Christian Theology* 1:160.
- 18 J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: The Church, the Kingdom and Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3:472.
- 19 Harold D. Hunter, "Reflections by a Pentecostalist on Aspects of BEM," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29:3/4 (Summer/Fall 1992). Wojciech Gajewski and Krzysztof Waszeniuk, "A Historical and Theological Analysis of the Pentecostal Church of Poland," JEPTA XX (2000), 42, report the rejection of paedobaptism while affirming infant salvation.
- 20 There are, it would seem, Orthodox scholars who follow the Origenistic position and thus hold out for the ultimate redemption of the whole universe. This was evident in the paper by Hilarion Alfeyev titled "Christ the Conqueror of Hell" delivered at the International Charismatic Consultation on World Evangelization conference held August 23-27, 2002 in Prague.
- 21 Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 452.
- 22 Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 454.
- 23 Archie C.C. Lee, "Prophetic and Sapiential Hermeneutics in Asian Ways of Doing Theology," *Doing Christian Theology in Asian Ways*, ed. by Alan J. Torrance, Salvador T. Martinez, and Yeow Choo Lak, ATESEA Occasional Papers (ATESEA: Singapore, 1993) 4.
- 24 Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 456.
- 25 Wojciech Gajewski and Krzysztof Wawrzyniuk, "A Historical and Theological Analysis of the Pentecostal Church of Poland," mention (p. 45) that some advocate amillennialism.
- 26 *Apostolic Faith* (Sept 1906) 1, 3; *Apostolic Faith* (Oct 1906) 2. Seymour also claimed that God had shown him the earthquake one year before it occurred as a sign to prepare for the second coming.
- 27 *Holiness Advocate* 2:8 (Jan 1, 1902) 1; *Holiness Advocate* 2:19 (Jan 15, 1902) 1; *Holiness Advocate* (July 1, 1903) 4.
- 28 Taylor, *Spirit and the Bride*, 96, 127-130. For Taylor's explication of the parable of the bridegroom, see pp. 112-118.
- 29 *Apostolic Faith* (April 1907) 4; *Bridegroom's Messenger* (Oct 1, 1907) 1. Taylor said he did not know of any prophecy yet to be fulfilled.
- 30 *Bridegroom's Messenger* (March 1, 1909) 2; Taylor, *Spirit and the Bride*, 50-51.
- 31 See Moody, *The Word of Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 550, 555.

32 Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 553.

33 Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 554.

34 Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 421.

35 Hans Schwarz in *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 2:507-510.

36 Williams, *Renewal Theology*, volume 3, chapter 13.

37 Leslie R. Keylock, "How Does the Church's view of Millennialism Affect Missions?" *CT*, (1980s?) p. 94f. The conference was at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

38 See even "Our Future Hope: Eschatology and its Role in the Church," *CT* (2-6-87) 5.

39 Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Agreement is Not Required," *CT* (2-6-87) 13.

40 Stephen Williams, "The Partition of Love and Hope: Eschatology and Social Responsibility," *Transformation* (July/Sept 1990) 24.

41 Williams, *Renewal Theology* 3:400f.

42 Mirsolav Volf, "On Loving with Hope: Eschatology and Social Responsibility," *Transformation* (July/Sept 1990) 28.

43 Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 91.

44 Murray Dempster, "Christian Social Ethics in Pentecostal Perspective," *Decades of Expectancy: 1891-1900, 1991-2000*, ed. by Bill Faupel (Lakeland, FL: SPS, 1991). Also see Murray W. Dempster, "Social concern in the context of Jesus' kingdom, mission and ministry," *Transformation* 16:2 (1999) 43-53.

45 "Word and Spirit, Church and World," The Final Report of the International Dialogue between Representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders: 1996-2000, *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal Charismatic Research* #8 (September 2000) paragraph # 62.

46 Writing from Oakland, California in 1946, Max A.X. Clark, "The Pentecostal Movement: Forty Years of Power, Probation and Progress," *The Pentecostal Journal*, p. 17, counts the second cause for the success of the Pentecostal Movement "is that it also ministers to the physical and temporary needs, such as feeding the hungry and clothing the poor, visiting the shut-ins and those in prison ...?"

47 Dempster, "Christian Social Ethics," p. 35.

48 Dempster, "Christian Social Ethics," p. 38.

49 Consult the opening chapter on Parham in the upcoming book by Douglas Jacobsen and D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).