African Pentecostalism and Eschatological Expectations
African Pentecostalism and Eschatological Expectations:

He is Coming Back Again!

By
Marius Nel
# Table of Contents

Foreword ........................................................................................................................................ vii  
Research Justification, Aim and Objections ............................................................................. x  
By Way of Introduction ........................................................................................................... xv  
Motivation of Study  
  Introduction......................................................................................................................... xv  
  Central theoretical argument and hypothesis ................................................................ xxii  
  Methodology ........................................................................................................................ xxiii  
  Concept clarification ............................................................................................................. xxv  

Chapter One ............................................................................................................................. 1  
Early Pentecostal Eschatology  
  Antecedents of early pentecostal eschatology ................................................................. 1  
  Development of early pentecostal eschatology ................................................................. 17  
  The shape of early pentecostal eschatology .................................................................... 41  
  Early pentecostal hermeneutics ....................................................................................... 52  

Chapter Two ........................................................................................................................... 65  
Acceptance of a Biblicist-Fundamentalist Hermeneutics and its Influence on Pentecostal Eschatology  
  Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 65  
  Pentecostal hermeneutics ................................................................................................. 78  
  African pentecostal hermeneutics ..................................................................................... 80  
  Critique of biblicist pentecostal eschatology ................................................................. 93  

Chapter Three ......................................................................................................................... 104  
A New Pentecostal Hermeneutics and Eschatology for a Postmodern Church  
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 104  
  New pentecostal hermeneutics ......................................................................................... 112
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Four</th>
<th>The Influence of a New Pentecostal Hermeneutics on Eschatology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>A new vision of the end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Five</th>
<th>More Questions about a Postmodern Pentecostal Hermeneutics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalist dispensationalism</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apocalyptic texts</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imminent futurist eschatology</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premillennialism</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapture</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangers of traditional pentecostal eschatology</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of God</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Six</th>
<th>Conclusions and Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literal and literalistic interpretation</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal talk about God</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostals and God</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles for reading the Bible</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context for eschatological convictions</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel and the church</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction or transformation of the world?</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bibliography</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T.S Eliot illustrates people’s discomfort in their understanding of time in saying:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Time present and time past} \\
\text{Are both perhaps present in time future} \\
\text{And time future contained in time past.} \\
\text{If all time is eternally present} \\
\text{All time is unredeemable.}
\end{align*}
\]

The mention of the concepts of “perhaps” and “if” in the poem is striking. Wisdom (phronesis) in our attempt to understand eschatology is after all much needed. This book, based on thorough research, already helps to fill a particular gap. Reflection on eschatology is therefore at the same time crucial in one’s life but it requires sobriety from faith communities, and this book enables readers to understand this matter. It also creates insight of understanding the continent we are living on, namely Africa. Marius Nel’s book, with the notable title of “He is coming back again”, touches this central motif of Christians’ thinking about time and their unique expectation of the future. This book is making a prominent contribution, not only to Christians from the Pentecostal tradition but also to other people from other paradigms, in realising that the revisiting of convictions about the past and the way it will influence modern thought patterns are important. In his book Marius Nel argues that the beliefs, spirituality and urgent missionary impulse of early Pentecostals were the direct result of their premillennial views. The premillennial belief in the imminent return of Christ coupled with the experience of Spirit baptism for empowerment of believers to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all people, should also be taken into account in discussing a topic like eschatology viewed from a Pentecostal viewpoint. This book has challenged me to look at my own stereotypes about eschatological thinking because I am aware that I am also from Africa with the expectation of “He is coming again”.

I feel privileged to write this foreword for one of the books of a gifted scholar. At the start of the project, Prof. Nel wondered whether this book could add value to the academic environment and faith communities. However, after reading this book, I am convinced that this research is
broadening people’s horizons, especially of readers interested in the hermeneutical approach in understanding a problematic praxis. This book enables me to understand that concepts like, *inter alia*, eschatological urgency, outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the responsibility towards mission in the world are interwoven within a Pentecostal interpretation of eschatology. Prof. Marius Nel makes a statement, namely “…many Christians have become disillusioned with any eschatological expectations…” That urges me to reflect deeper on the essence of this statement. One of the benefits, among others, of this book is that the coming of the Lord is not a proverbial pie in the sky and an escapist attitude should therefore be avoided.

The ability of a seasoned scholar reflecting critically on his paradigm is evident in this book and further contributes to the scientific quality of this research. One of the diamonds in this book, with a multi-faceted character, is contracted in the following formulation, namely “…eschatology within the study of systematic theology becomes an irrelevant appendix at the end, bearing no relation to the main theological themes”. The danger of becoming oversensitive to daily challenges at the expense of a vivid expectation of the coming of the Lord can indeed deprive believers from the relatedness of eschatology to all aspects of life and of a theology of profound hope. I agree with Nel that the urgent theological task of the church is indeed to bring back messianic hope to the centre of church activities and its missionary discourse. In this book, the researcher is challenging faith communities in saying that new vocabulary is needed in reflection on eschatology in order to avoid literalistic interpretations. Therefore, I found Nel’s emphasis on the influence of God’s presence on the present and our expectation of the future in what we are doing very helpful.

I want to congratulate a valued colleague on this research. I think that there is a need, even in a broader ecumenical environment, to take note of this research. The utilisation of references from an extensive academic environment provides clear proof of the academic quality of this book. The book certainly succeeds in providing an answer to the research question posted right at the beginning. As readers of this book we are in Marius Nel’s debt for helping us to keep a responsible hermeneutical outlook on one of the core activities of being a Christian, namely to expect. Our eschatological vision has to deal with the reality that the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed coming back again.
Ferdi Kruger
Research Director, Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society
North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.
Most of the academic literature in the field of pentecostal studies is from American or British-European origin while African Pentecostalism presents unique and relevant challenges on a continent where Pentecostalism is growing so rapidly that it is changing the face of Christianity, leading researchers to speak of an African Pentecostal Reformation.¹ In Africa, many Pentecostals read the Bible in a fundamentalist and biblicist manner, affecting their eschatological expectations. This book was written by a theological scholar from Africa, focusing on Africa’s need for revisiting its eschatology due to disconfirmation or disillusionment that expectant Christians experience when the return of Christ did not occur as predicted, based on a well-grounded pentecostal hermeneutics that can provide Pentecostals with the necessary equipment and motivation to contribute to important and needed social change, specifically in terms of ethical challenges.² Most Pentecostals read the Bible to a certain extent in a literalist

² J. Ayodejy Adewuja (“Constructing an African Pentecostal Eschatology: Which Way?”, in Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End, ed. Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell, 361-374 [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010], 361) is correct when he warns that Africa is a continent of over fifty countries, each governed on its own, and many people groups or tribes, each with its own traditional beliefs and practices, marked by diversity. However, he adds that there is a commonness that runs throughout the continent that allows comments made on the basis of the common aspects, although it should always be kept in mind that this does not imply that there are no exceptions. In the same sense, African Pentecostalism is not monolithic; such an assumption is flawed and simplistic. Nevertheless, there are common areas to all Pentecostals which enable one to speak of a distinct African Pentecostal spirituality that is part of its common eschatological (apocalyptic) worldview. The presence and activities of the Holy Spirit in and through the community of believers is one of the core aspects of African Pentecostal spirituality.
fashion and formulate the expectation of the imminent return of Christ in premillenialist terms. This is especially true in Africa.³

The purpose of this book is to describe the development of pentecostal eschatology, beginning with the early Pentecostals accepting the premillenialist perspective of their predecessors, the Holiness and revivalist traditions. By the middle of the twentieth century, pentecostal hermeneutics mostly conformed to the biblicist traditions of their new partners, the Evangelicals, in their bid to be accepted and to forsake their status as sects.⁴ Dispensational premillennialism had taken root in the fertile ground of Evangelicalism, and influenced pentecostal eschatology along with millennialist sentiments. Millennialism uses a literal interpretation of Scripture to understand the end of the world in apocalyptic terms as a historical event in time and space.⁵

I contend that the new pentecostal hermeneutic defined during the past decades that shows affinities with the way early Pentecostals had read the Bible suggests that non-literal passages in the Bible should be read in a non-literal way, including several symbols employed in the New Testament to assist in the description of the strange and unknown eschatological new world precipitated by the early church. Pentecostal

---
³ A capital letter is used when reference is made to Pentecostal people or the movement as such, while a lowercase letter is used to refer to pentecostal hermeneutics or theology.
⁴ “Evangelicalism” is a contested term and can be (and is) used to describe a number of constituencies in a myriad of contexts. Timothy P. Weber’s (“Fundamentalism Twice Removed: The Emergence and Shape of Progressive Evangelicalism”, in New Dimensions in American Religious History: Essays in Honor of Martin E. Marty, ed. Jay P. Dolan and James P. Wind [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993], 264-265) proposal seems sensible, that within evangelicalism three significant groups be identified as forming the broad charismatic tradition. A first category is the Protestant Reformers and the general ethos that they cultivated in regards to sin, divine initiative, personal religious experience, the primacy of Scripture, and so on. In Weber’s terms, this refers to classical evangelicalism. A second category is pietistic evangelicalism, which describes the evangelical awakenings and revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and includes Anabaptism, Puritanism, Methodism, and others. A last category is fundamentalist evangelicalism, known for its rejection of liberal, critical and evolutionary thinking and its strong defence of a few Christian “fundamentals” in opposition to various modernisms.
hermeneutics does not limit itself only to what the Bible states about eschatology. Taking their cue from the early church in its decision (described in Acts 15) whether non-Jewish Christians should maintain all the six hundred and thirteen regulations contained in the *Torah* ascribed to Moses, Pentecostals begin with the present situation in which the Holy Spirit reveals God’s will; they read the Bible from their experience with the Spirit. There is no hermeneutic unless and until the divine *Hermēneutēs* (the Holy Spirit) mediates an understanding.⁶ Their hermeneutical lens in interpreting the Bible is their present encounter and history with God, allowing them *inter alia* to acknowledge women as anointed and gifted pastors and ministers, even though (some passages in) the New Testament explicitly prohibits the practice, and to follow a pacifist course in the world even though the Hebrew Bible repeatedly depicts YHWH of the Armies (*YHWH Tsevaot*) as a violent God, demanding God’s people to act violently toward their enemies and execute the ban (*ḥerem*).

In this contribution, a descriptive eschatology is developed along historical lines for classical Pentecostalism in general, and African Pentecostalism specifically.⁷ Early Pentecostalism’s latter rain eschatology is described in terms of its hermeneutic before the changes are described that occurred when Pentecostalism closed an alliance with different Evangelical partners, leading to adaptations in their eschatological stance defined by dispensational premillennialism, at the potential cost of rejecting the continuation of the gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*). Dispensationalism differs from this essential teaching of Pentecostalism because it is undergirded by a cessation doctrine that argues that the spectacular charismatic gifts ceased at the end of the apostolic age. Cessationists commonly rely on 1 Corinthians 13:8 as their scriptural basis,⁸ without noting the explanation in 1 Corinthians 13:9-12 of in what sense the gifts cease.

---

⁷ Although diversity in the African worldviews and African Pentecostalism is recognised, it is also argued that there are enough elements in common that it is possible to define “African worldview” and “African Pentecostalism” in a way that allows for a useful term in discussing the significance of Africa and its religious sentiments.
⁸ “Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.” For all quotations from the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is used.
are temporary.\(^9\) Pentecostals argued that these manifestations of the Spirit were especially relevant for the church up until the time of the final consummation. Knowing and prophesying are “in part” compared to a future time when “the complete” comes and what is “in part” will disappear. When this time of completion comes, the gifts of prophecy, knowledge and tongues, and the other charismatic gifts will disappear. Paul did not have the post-apostolic age, the completion of the canon or the maturity of the church in mind as the time when the charismatic gifts would cease.\(^{10}\) Dispensational premillennialist Pentecostals’ view of a rapture that would end the church age led to a passive withdrawal from the world and society, replacing the original vision of hope in pentecostal eschatology. In the third place, the new pentecostal hermeneutics that developed since the 1970s and 1980s is described, before the implications of this hermeneutic are applied in a prescriptive manner in terms of eschatology in the last chapter, in order to assist African Pentecostals to rethink their eschatological convictions.

The problem of eschatology is the problem of navigating the tension between the present and the future, or more accurately, the tension between the already and the not yet of the coming kingdom of God that has also come. It is argued that the eschatological tension between the present age and the future age to come that is relegated to the near future by classical Pentecostals should rather be held in tension in a proleptic eschatology, providing meaning to the concepts of hope and despair among Christian believers and involving Pentecostal churches in the African challenge of unceasing poverty and inequality and the desperate hopelessness that accompanies it.

The study is aimed at Christian believers and pastors, as well as other Pentecostal leaders, and its aim is to reflect on an African eschatological perspective accepted widely on the continent, with the purpose to empower them to think consistently through an eschatology where the

\(^{9}\) For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; \(^{10}\) but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. \(^{11}\) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. \(^{12}\) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

\(^{10}\) As argued in John A. Bertone, “Seven Dispensations or Two-Age View of History: A Pauline Perspective”, in Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End, ed. Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 83.
second coming of Christ did not realise after more than a century in pentecostal terms, and twenty centuries in Christian terms. What is needed, in my opinion, is that the church should empower believers with relevant information about eschatology in terms of a useful hermeneutical angle of incidence that accommodates a viable pentecostal hermeneutics. These skills will allow them to ask the questions from a different angle and with a different attitude, established in relation to the revelation of God’s plan for humankind that includes more than personal salvation but also involves taking responsibility for social justice and the ecological preservation of the planet.

The book is also aimed at scholars across theological sub-disciplines and scholars in human sciences, especially those theological scholars interested in the intersections between theology, pentecostal hermeneutics and African cultural or social themes as well as anthropologists and sociologists. Christian believers without theological training will also benefit from the investigation into the vital issue of eschatological convictions and expectations. It is written from the science of hermeneutics, especially from an African perspective, as well as a comparative survey of literary studies on the issue. It addresses themes and provides insights that are also relevant for specialist leaders and professionals in this field. It contains some auto-ethnographical reflections as well as a comparative survey of literature from Pentecostal scholars as well as scholars of other traditions. Resources are used judiciously and viewpoints of authors are represented as fairly as possible. No part of the book was plagiarised from another publication or published elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF) for providing funding for this study. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the view of the NRF.
BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION:
MOTIVATION OF STUDY

Introduction

“He’s coming back again. He went away but not to stay. He’s coming back again!” is the song Pentecostals have been singing for more than a century. They pray in the words of an indigenous African song, “O Lord Jesus, how long, how long before we call out with thanks, Christ is coming again! Hallelujah! Amen.” This study is motivated by the question, how do African Pentecostals respond to the fact that the Lord's coming did not happen as they have been expecting fervently for many decades? Did they keep on believing in the imminence of the second coming or did they lose interest? How do they read the Bible to sustain their ongoing eschatological beliefs? Is that the best and most effective way to read the Bible? These are the questions that are being asked in this publication.

Eschatology is concerned with the culmination of divine activity in the last days ending in the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Bible’s use of symbolic language in describing eschatological elements—of death, judgment, heaven and hell, reward and punishment—led to many different viewpoints of what eschatological expectations should be. Underlying any eschatology defined in terms of biblical data is a philosophy of history that is not simply focused on the end but encapsulates all of human history. Eschatology is also not only concerned with the fate of the individual believer but includes social and cosmic elements. It is concerned with the interpretation of history as meaningful, purposeful and ethical. Most religions view history as moving cyclically throughout eternity rather than in linear time that culminates in a specific goal, holding that history is endlessly repetitive, directionless and devoid of end or purpose. Judaism and Christianity are

---

By Way of Introduction: Motivation of Study

unique in their conception of history in that they expect a purposeful end, a *telos*, in the coming of the messianic kingdom to replace the brokenness that resulted from human frailty. Christians confess that the meaning of history is revealed in Scripture and contained in a theology of history; the meaning will finally be revealed in its end and its valuation of creation as good and meaningful.

For Jews the meaning of history centres upon the covenants with Noah, Abraham and Moses, and the Law (*Torah*) given at Sinai gives meaning to history. Observance of the *Torah* perfects humanity and society, but it cannot be completed without the consummation of history and the realisation of the kingdom of God, and only then will the *Torah* disappear.13 The central symbol of Jewish eschatology is the messiah and his establishment of the messianic kingdom of God that envisions the destruction of the present evils and all the enemies of Israel (or the Jews), and the realisation of a completely new set of values, implying that eschatology is set on a thoroughly ethical purpose.14

The ethical teachings and moral responses of Jesus identify the behavioural expressions, which demonstrate what life looks like when people respond to God’s eschatological reign in concrete situations, in Murray Dempster’s words.15 In other words, the ethical teachings of Jesus are designed to create a people (the church as the visible body of Christ on earth) who provide a visible witness in the present age of what the future will look like. They follow Jesus who proclaimed that the reversal in the order of life to redressed past injustices creates a sense of solidarity with

14 Any idea of the messiah’s death as an atonement or ransom for sins of people was unknown to the rabbis. They saw the messiah as poor, humble and despised, a human being and not a god and kept hidden away on account of Israel’s sins, to be manifested in future. While hidden away, the messiah suffers for Israel’s sake. When the messiah appears, in God’s own time, he will introduce the end of time and the establishment of God’s kingdom. The messiah will then serve as the perfect type of ruler who will sanctify and establish the rule of God’s law for all people, and Israel will rule with him over the peoples of the earth who will all be subjected to his authority (Raccah, “Early Jewish Eschatology”, 34-35). The messianic expectation remains since the first century B.C.E. and remains until today a vital and living thing for believing Jews.
the socially marginalised, and promotes a spirit of generosity in calculating what is due to those in need.\footnote{Dempster, “Eschatology”, 174.}

Christian eschatology can in general terms be defined in a threefold manner, as inaugurated eschatology, which understands the kingdom of God to be both already present and not yet fully consummated, realised eschatology, which sees the kingdom being fully present whether in the words and deeds of Jesus or in the contemporary words and deeds of the followers of Jesus, and futurist or apocalyptic eschatology that provides for God’s final judgment of all people, the annihilation of the known world and the ushering in of the new world. Classical Pentecostalism is characterised by diversity and its eschatological convictions oscillate historically between the extremes of apocalyptic eschatology, influenced by fundamentalist dispensationalism and a realised eschatology.

Glenn Balfour explains different groups’ eschatological convictions in terms of the “Continual Harmonic Reinforcement” theory first formulated by Wayne Meeks\footnote{Wayne A. Meeks, “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism”, \textit{Journal of Biblical Literature} 91, no. 1 (1972): 44-72.} that states that a continuity exists between experience and theology.\footnote{Glenn Balfour, “Pentecostal Eschatology Revisited”, \textit{Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association} 2 (2011): 134.} The theory asserts that poor, socially and economically disadvantaged groups tend towards a “next life” preference. An imminently futurist, premillennial position is invariably taken by all Christian groups that are disadvantaged, persecuted (whether by the state or society), ostracised or poor. This was the case with the underground church in China, black churches under American slavery, the early Pentecostal movement among the marginalised and impoverished, and present-day European Pentecostals. On the other hand, affluent, socially and economically advantaged Christian groups tend towards a “this life” preference in their eschatological deliberations.

This was presumably also the case in the early church, with the earliest disciples being marginalised and at times experiencing discrimination and persecution from Jewish and Roman authorities, and choosing a futurist eschatology characterised by the expectation of an imminent return of Christ. Their socio-economic situation explains Acts 2:44-45’s description of the early Jerusalem church as a fellowship of believers who had all things in common. The text states that those with possessions and goods
sold it, probably because of their expectation of the imminent end of the world, and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. After all, their Messiah started his ministry with the words, the time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15), conveying the apocalyptic image that the current age they now lived in was controlled by evil forces, but its allotted time was nearly finished.19 The church of the fourth century C.E., however, found itself in a position where state and church fused under the reign of Constantine, as demonstrated in the decisions of the Council of Nicaea (324 C.E.), a fusion that enhanced the position of the church from persecuted to ruling party and influenced its eschatology. Now the church was no longer necessarily longing for a future reign of Christ which would take power from human empires and put it into the hands of Christ, and the church. Rather, the church associated its own “reign” on earth with the reign of Christ. It had become the manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth, as illustrated by its prelates and rulers in the form of bishops and archbishops with their royal clothing and paraphernalia. A realised eschatology fitted the new social and historical setting of the church that did not find itself at odds with earthly powers but ruled with and even over those powers. According to the Continual Harmonic Replacement theory, Christians’ experience and their doctrinal emphasis (including their eschatology) have a powerful and reciprocal influence on each other. Their newly formulated realised or inaugurated eschatology, defined by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.), the theologian par excellence of the fusion between state and church, was also related to replacement theology that states that the Christian church is the new Israel or the spiritual Israel. The promises made to Israel that were not fulfilled were reinterpreted in terms of the church.

The ultimate bankruptcy of the cooperation between church and state and the radicalisation of replacement theology and realised eschatology is perhaps demonstrated the best in the various crusades from 1095 to 1291 C.E. that were intended to restore Christian control of the holy land and led to the violent death of thousands of innocent Jews, Eastern Christians (contributing significantly to the demise of the Byzantine Empire that existed from 395 to 1204 C.E.) and Muslims.20 The amillennial, triumphalist “kingdom-now” eschatology remained the dominant eschatological position of mainstream established churches.

20 Balfour, “Pentecostal Eschatology Revisited”, 133.
Pentecostals were at first ostracised and persecuted for their practices by the mainstream churches and they returned to an eschatological position that reflected the same position that represented the church of the first three centuries C.E. The charismatic renewal found in some of the established churches since the 1960s and 1970s never experienced the church persecution that characterised the early Pentecostals and they also never accepted the predominantly futurist eschatology of their Pentecostal nephews but maintained the inaugurated eschatology of the churches in which the renewal took place.21

People observing the classical Pentecostal movement in the diversity of its practices and ministries and fluid and diverse constellation of claims, experiences, ethos and norms may be excused if they associate it with speaking in tongues and other charismatic phenomena, like divine healing, prophecy and even exorcism.22 It is true that these operations ascribed to the Holy Spirit have a primary place within the movement and today the movement’s distinct contribution to pneumatology is appreciated by many other traditions and their theologians. However, pentecostal spirituality and practice can only be rightly understood when one understands that eschatology is the true focus of the movement and the centre of its message,23 the heartbeat and hermeneutical key for understanding early Pentecostalism.24 Early Pentecostals expected the Lord to be coming back again within a matter of weeks or at most some years, a belief that

21 The real difference between the classical Pentecostals and the charismatics in my opinion is not in the acceptance or rejection of speaking in tongues as the initial sign of Spirit baptism but in their eschatological convictions.
By Way of Introduction: Motivation of Study

Informed their hermeneutics. The primary message among early Pentecostals was, “Jesus is coming soon!” Obviously their expectation was not fulfilled and the question is being asked, how did they react to their disillusionment when the second coming of Christ did not realise?

Pentecostals justified their origins and existence in terms of being a restorationist movement driven by a primitive impulse, the determination to return to the first, original and fundamental things that represented the early church. They viewed themselves as a work of the Spirit who intended to establish the church of the last days in conformity with the early church. The early church (or at least a part of it) also expected the imminent second coming of Christ, as can be seen in the earliest writings of the New Testament, such as 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 that warns Christians not to become victims of their eschatological expectations: They should not be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed by the announcement that the day of the Lord is already here because that day would only come when the lawless one has been revealed. The expectation was based on words ascribed by the early church and the authors of the Gospels to Jesus, that “this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place”, and supported by Jesus’ words that heaven and

---

28 The early church is defined here as pre-Christendom or Christianity, while the church from the fourth century can be designated as Christendom.
29 See the imaginative explanation of a premillennialist author for the statements of Jesus that some of his disciples would see the (presumably second) coming of the Messiah, as in Matthew 16:27-28. Lemmer du Plessis (*The Return of Christ: A Perspective on the Eternal Counsel of God* [Pretoria: Aktua, 2004], 141) states that the reason Jesus said in his prophecy that some of the disciples would live until he comes, must be understood from the Old Testament perspective which knew nothing of the church era wedged in between the two advents. “Here Jesus spoke from the viewpoint of an Old Testament prophet and therefore presented the two comings as one complex advent. From the perspective of the Old Testament the kingdom would come at the arrival of the Messiah. Therefore, they would not have died before its establishment”. It seems that the author implies that there are more things that Jesus did not know anything about than only the date of the second coming! A better explanation (among several others) is offered by J. Edward Dallas (“Matthew 16:28: The Promise of Not Tasting Spiritual Death Before the
earth will pass away, but his words will not pass away (Matt 24:34-35; Mark 30:30-31; Luke 21:32-33). Another example is the reference by the author of 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 to the tribulation, that it will produce God’s glory because God is in control. The experience of suffering and persecution comes before the glory; it is suffering in and for Christ that leads one along the kingdom path. Suffering and glory, tribulation and kingdom belong inseparably to one another. Without the hope of glory, suffering would be unfathomable to endure.

In this study, I propose to describe the way eschatology influenced early Pentecostalism and its hermeneutics, spirituality and missional motivations in order to answer the question how it processed its disappointment and disillusionment with the non-appearance of Christ on the clouds (Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27). Next, an important development in the movement is being scrutinised, the movement’s drive...

---

Parousia, Trinity Journal 30NS (2009): 81-95) who explains that the reference to those “standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” refers to those who answered the call to true discipleship and risk their physical lives by taking up their crosses and following Jesus; they will not taste spiritual death before getting to see and take part in the parousia, an interpretation that dates back to Ambrose (339-397 C.E.).

The expectations of the early church eventually led to the creeds which state: “I believe in ... The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen” (Apostles Creed); “I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ ... He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end ... I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen” (Nicene Creed); “[Christ] rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, is seated on the right hand of the Father, whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming, all men shall rise with their bodies and give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire” (Athanasian Creed).

It is acknowledged that no one eschatological position is intrinsic to Pentecostalism and that it is true to a certain extent that no single “pentecostal eschatology” exists, as Balfour (“Pentecostal Eschatology Revisited”, 128) argues. However, it is also true that a certain set of eschatological positions have developed within the classical pentecostal framework, allowing one to speak of pentecostal eschatological distinctives, as argued and described by David W. Faupel (The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought. [JPTSup. 10, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,1996]).
since the 1930s and 1940s to obtain the approval and acceptance of society, government and established churches and the justification of its existence as a separate tradition. As a part of the price Pentecostals paid for being accepted in some Evangelical circles, it changed their hermeneutics; in many cases they accepted the historical-grammatical method of exegesis and it influenced their eschatology incisively. The grammatical-historical method of interpretation advocates a literal reading of the text, and when applied to what it views as predictive prophecies, and when reading it literally, it supports dispensationalism. These changes are investigated in order to show how it influenced the way the movement set up its spirituality and missional involvement and responded to the traditional expectation of the imminent \textit{parousia}. A further significant development is found since the 1970s when more and more Pentecostals qualified at theological institutions, leading to a new foundation of their theology and hermeneutics. Again it influenced the movement’s eschatology. The question is asked again, how did the new hermeneutical angle influence the way Pentecostals think about eschatology and imminence?

Lastly I ask the question how a new pentecostal hermeneutics can be used imaginatively and creatively to revisit its eschatology in a way that is compatible with early Pentecostalism and its eschatological beliefs while being compatible with the ethos of Pentecostalism.

\textbf{Central theoretical argument and hypothesis}

The problem statement is that the primary eschatological expectations of the African Pentecostal movement of an imminent second coming have been disappointed for more than a century. Early Pentecostals justified the origins of the new movement by viewing the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2 as the former rain and the outpouring of the Spirit at the beginning

\begin{enumerate}
\item Bertone, “Seven Dispensations”, 62.
\item See the view of Michael Grant (\textit{Jesus} [London, Rigel, 1977], 23) shared by others (in e.g. the Jesus Seminar) that there is no reliable evidence that Jesus ever believed that it would be himself who would come again. These references in the Gospel to his second coming are posthumous and inauthentic. Jesus’ eschatological discourses in Mark 13 (and parallels) contain many utterances that “clearly” do not go back to his own time. The viewpoint is rejected by pentecostal scholars, and in this publication as well.
\end{enumerate}
of the twentieth century as the latter rain, noting Peter’s alteration of Joel’s “afterwards” to “in the last days” in Acts 2:17, a biblical phrase that applied especially to the period of Israel’s promised restoration.\(^36\) In their quest for acceptance by society, Pentecostals aligned their hermeneutics with a part of Evangelical sentiments, and the new theological perspectives led to a revision of its eschatological expectations. A new pentecostal hermeneutics developed since Pentecostals’ exposure to and participation in theological scholarship opened the way to reformulate their eschatology, as some Pentecostal scholars attempted. The implications of the disappointment of eschatological expectations in the postmodern church are investigated in terms of the historical developments of these expectations during the past 110 years.

**Methodology\(^37\)**

The study consists of various elements. In the first place, the way eschatology influenced early Pentecostalism and its hermeneutics is investigated to show how it shaped the movement’s spirituality and missional motivations. This is done by way of a comparative literary analysis of the publications and sermons of the first thirty years of the movement’s existence with reference to four prominent figures in early Pentecostalism, Martin Wells Knapp, Charles F. Parham, William J. Seymour and D. Wesley Myland, as well as the reflections of later historians and Pentecostal theologians about these years.

Next I look at the significant changes brought about by the move to align with (some) Evangelicals and the acceptance of a hermeneutics in line with their requirements. Again the changes are documented at the hand of contemporary publications by individuals and Pentecostal denominations while present-day theological reflection about it is also consulted.

\(^36\) Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 51. The metaphors are derived from Deuteronomy 11:10-23, a passage determined by the Deuteronomist theology that states that if Israel would diligently observe YHWH’s commandments, YHWH would bless them with rain in its season, the early rain and the later rain, ensuring good harvests and prosperity.

\(^37\) “Method” comes from the Greek met-hodos, meaning “entrance”. It refers to the question in methodology: in which way do we gain entrance to the closed world of specific knowledge, and in this context, which is the way of entrance into the world of the future?
When the movement changed the way it looked at and interpreted the Bible, it led to incisive changes in its eschatology. Many (perhaps even the majority of) members and pastors of the Pentecostal movement still use this hermeneutical angle in their spirituality. Their emphasis on the immediacy of the text at the cost of the historical and social context and the possibility of multiple meanings points to the growing gap between Pentecostal academics and Pentecostals in general, including Pentecostal pastors. Although a new pentecostal hermeneutic has been in the making since the 1970s and 1980s, developed by several theologians, the traditional distrust of academia and theology by Pentecostals and their widespread anti-intellectualism led to its rejection. The anti-educational and anti-academic stance of classical Pentecostalism has sometimes left Pentecostals’ biblical interpretation and exegesis pre-critical and uninformed. At the same time, the biblical genre most open to misuse is probably biblical apocalyptic literature, found especially in the books of Daniel and Revelation, and it is these books that Pentecostals primarily consult when they deliberate about eschatology, defining their futurist eschatology from them. At times they demonstrate an uninformed, literalist, pre-critical interpretation of biblical apocalyptic literature, used to defend and promote many differing eschatological positions and schemas that change all the time since historical events linked to biblical “prophecies” change with time. By applying a historical-literal understanding to apocalyptic writings, much like the Qumran community’s Peshar interpretation of scripture, Pentecostals have claimed that the apocalyptic texts contain a specific message for their day and are applicable to their situation and events in their world, in contrast to the preterist interpretations of apocalyptic writings by most other mainstream denominations and traditions.

In a next part a new pentecostal hermeneutics is being discussed at the hand of the abundant publications in journals and books by prominent Pentecostal theologians before its influence and implications on the movement’s eschatology are described.

Lastly I ask the question what the implications of this eschatology are in the light of the reality that the second coming of Christ did not happen as imminently as Pentecostals expected it. In what way can its hermeneutics help Pentecostals in their exposition of eschatology, formulating a view of the future that holds hope for believers as well as their world?

38 Purdy, Distinct 18.
39 Balfour, “Pentecostal Eschatology Revisited”, 135.
Concept clarification

Pentecostal movement – Pentecostals: Pentecostalism mainly started in the United States, but by now it is the strongest in the Third World, where more than 75 percent of non-white indigenous denominations are constituted by persons who bear all the phenomenological marks of Pentecostalism. In 1997 Pentecostals-charismatics made up approximately 27 percent of the world’s Christian population and David Barrett projects this will rise to approximately 44 percent by 2025. The movement consists of three (or four) waves, viz. classical (or denominational) Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement within traditional mainline churches that originated in the sixties and seventies of the previous century, and the neo-Pentecostal movement of independent groups (with perhaps a fourth wave in the neo-prophet movement that can to a certain extent be distinguished from neo-Pentecostalism). As a whole, the movement constitutes twenty-one percent of organised global Christianity. This publication is concerned only with the first wave, with classical Pentecostalism. It is acknowledged that classical Pentecostalism represents a wide diversity of beliefs and practices; however, there are certain distinctives that bind the movement together, of which the most important is its “Full Gospel” message. “The ‘full gospel’, with baptism in the Spirit as a subsequent experience to regeneration, is the heart of a common theological identity for Pentecostalism.”

Early Pentecostalism: A distinction is made between early Pentecostals and their successors in hermeneutical terms. Early Pentecostals read the Bible through the hermeneutical lens of their experience with the Holy

---

Spirit. Since the 1930s and 1940s, an Evangelical hermeneutics was adopted by a second generation of Pentecostals, leading to distinctive changes in their eschatology as a result of their fundamentalist and biblicist way of interpreting the Bible. The changes in eschatology were due to its new hermeneutical stance but also in accordance with the fancy for the extraordinary and perturbing. Since the 1970s and 1980s, when more Pentecostal pastors graduated from universities and seminaries and a pentecostal scholarship evolved, a new hermeneutics was developed that showed affinities with the way early Pentecostals read the Bible. The threefold development—of early Pentecostalism, fundamentalist Pentecostalism and a new pentecostal hermeneutic—will be utilised although it is acknowledged that it is dealing with generalised knowledge about the movement, ignoring some differing trends. Pentecostal practice can be described with more certainty since their practices agree over boundaries and in any case, their practices are much more important to them than their doctrines. The characteristic signs of a Pentecostal church include passionate anointed preaching, fervent communal prayer, expressive and lively worship, manifestations of the charismatic gifts, special prayer for healing of the sick and broken hearted, encouragement

---

45 While one proposal is that pentecostal hermeneutics should be established in continuity with early Pentecostals’ practice of reading the Bible, others argue that it is impossible to trace a continuous, unbroken line back to the Pentecostal outpouring in Acts 2 and the early Pentecostal movement. One such proponent from Africa is Harlyn Purdy (Distinct, 5). While some Pentecostals argue that Pentecostals practice hermeneutics as Evangelicals (such as Gordon Fee), others hold that a distinct pentecostal hermeneutics exists and should be developed (such as Howard M. Ervin). In this publication, it is accepted that there is limited continuity between a new pentecostal hermeneutics developed since the 1970s and early Pentecostals’ practices of reading the Bible and that it is possible and necessary to develop a distinct pentecostal hermeneutics apart from but not divorced from other traditions. It is in the tradition of Ervin who argues for a distinct pentecostal hermeneutic on the basis of his understanding of the role of the Spirit in the interpretive process.
46 Walter J. Hollenweger was of the opinion that divine healing is more universally characteristic of Pentecostalism than the practice of speaking in tongues (in Donald W. Dayton, “The Problematic of Pentecostal Theology”, *Torch Trinity Journal* 9, no. 1 (2006): 10).
of women in pastoral leadership and active evangelism in the community resulting in daughter churches being established.47

African Pentecostalism: It is necessary to distinguish between Pentecostalism in Africa and African Pentecostalism because although both movements share the doctrinal distinctives of Pentecostalism each has separate emphases. Many indigenous African Christians rejected Christianity presented by Western missionaries who accompanied the colonialist forces. One of the reasons for the rejection was that the missionaries’ religion did not have pneumatic elements and was not “biblical” enough.48 Historic mission Christians were perceived as neglecting or diluting biblical teachings to suit their liberal lifestyles and their indifference to such truths as the experiences of Spirit baptism, the practice of the charismata, the reality of evil spirits and the practice of deliverance or exorcism. The missionaries’ religion did not attract all Africans because it did not solve their daily existential challenges. In African Pentecostalism, the Bible speaks to everyday, real-world issues of poverty and debt, famine and displacedness, racial and gender oppression, and state brutality and persecution.

Pentecostalism was established in Africa by several missionaries and one still finds many churches and denominations established by these missionaries.49 In most cases they kept in touch with Western Pentecostalism, especially the churches in the USA. One can refer to these denominations as Pentecostal churches in Africa. However, at the same time Pentecostal churches originated within the context of African Independent or Indigenous Churches, as a reaction to Western Christianity and a deliberate rejection of some of the beliefs and practices of the mission churches.50 These churches with their indigenous leadership

49 Cecil M Robeck, The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 266 finds that the largest number of the first-time missionaries who went out in 1906 from the Azusa Street Mission went to Africa.
represent a turn to the Bible, from which they identified their own teachings and practices. The fact that missionaries and Western churches translated the Bible into the vernacular languages of Africa contributed to this process; these translations were a metaphor for forms of enculturation.51 These churches are usually referred to as Spirit churches or Aladura churches and emphasise the glossolalia and a Spirit-filled life along with charismatic worship practices. However, their different emphases of many doctrines and practices require that these churches be distinguished from the first group of Pentecostal denominations. Cephas Omenyo provides a useful typology of African Pentecostalism that takes into account historical and theological categories, making sense of the diversity of Pentecostal denominations, independent groups and movements within Africa:52 the Africa Initiated (Instituted, Independent, Indigenous) Churches (AICs) are the oldest type, established at the turn of the twentieth century by African prophets and considered to be the first stream of African Pentecostals; the classical Pentecostal movements, some of which had roots in the one-eyed black African-American preacher William Seymour’s Azusa Street revival; trans-denominational fellowships such as the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International (FGBMFI), Women Aglow Fellowship International, and others;53 charismatic renewal groups in the mainline churches; the independent neo-Pentecostal churches and ministries which started as a result of local initiatives, and neo-prophetism, which is an amalgamation of forms of ministries of the AICs and neo-Pentecostal churches. Africa is a diverse continent with more than three thousand ethnicities and distinct languages. In thinking about eschatology from a pentecostal perspective, the African pentecostal hermeneutical angle will be used.54 Because of the growth of Pentecostalism in the Majority World in comparison with the

51 However, this was not only a blessing since most first translations of the Bible into African vernaculars were strongly shaped by missionary forms of colonialism and Christianity that represented Western ideological prejudices and “civilisation” (Gerald O. West, “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation”; in The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube [Leiden: Brill, 2000], 29, 46).
Western world, it is being insisted here that any pentecostal hermeneutic must engage and take into consideration the African context.\textsuperscript{55} At least seventy-five percent of the twenty-first century Pentecostal world is in the Majority World.\textsuperscript{56}

**Full Gospel:** The Pentecostal movement understood the Full Gospel as the restoration of the New Testament presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a presentation that in Pentecostals’ view had become twisted by most other churches. The theological motifs of Jesus as saviour, sanctifier, Spirit baptiser, healer and coming king created a dynamic Christocentric spirituality of hope and healing, representing the theological DNA that formed a new theological tradition called Pentecostalism.\textsuperscript{57} Donald Dayton demonstrates that Pentecostalism was deeply rooted in the more radical wing of the American Wesleyan Holiness movement of the late nineteenth century but creatively reconfigured the motifs of Jesus as saviour, sanctifier, healer and soon coming king by adding the newly recovered biblical doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of speaking in tongues.\textsuperscript{58} Prior to 1910, all Pentecostal groups embraced the fivefold gospel. However, William H. Durham rejected the Wesleyan

\textsuperscript{55} The five largest churches in the world are Pentecostal and are located in the Majority World, not the West (Purdy, *Distinct*, 19). According to David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson (“Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2004”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, no.1 (January 2004): 24-25), there were 1,227 million Christians in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania in 2004, 62% of the world’s Christians, while those of the two northern continents (including Russia) constituted only 38%, dramatic evidence of how rapidly the Western share of world Christianity has decreased in the twentieth century. If present trends continue, by 2025 69% of the world’s Christians will live in the south, with only 31% in the north (Barrett and Johnson (“Annual Statistical Table”, 25). Adewuja (“Constructing”, 364) makes the important remark that pentecostal spirituality flourished in Africa at a time of socio-economic disintegration and political instability that mark the political and economic development of parts of the African continent at times. Africa is ravaged by internecine wars and continues to be economically, politically and even religiously exploited. It also continues to be devastated by famines, natural calamities and catastrophes and human induced ecological disasters. Its history is that of oppression, suppression, aggression, war, revenge and counter-revenge, homicide and genocide, in the description of Adewuja (“Constructing”, 373).

\textsuperscript{56} Purdy, *Distinct*, 89.


Holiness view of sanctification as a second work of grace. He argued that sanctification was positional and conditional and based it upon what he called the Finished Work of Christ on Calvary, leading to a fourfold gospel although holiness remained a significant emphasis. The lynchpin that held the full gospel together was Spirit baptism. If Spirit baptism as a subsequent experience to justification and regeneration drops out, then Pentecostalism would lose its distinctiveness. The primary metaphor for Spirit baptism is the notion of power, personified in the Holy Spirit and manifested in the charismata given to the church at Pentecost. The eschatological practices among Pentecostals are the result of the community-forming power of the Spirit and the empowerment for witness, leading to their eschato-missiological focus. The full gospel is what distinguishes Pentecostalism from other theological traditions.

Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics refers to the theoretical reflection on the processes of comprehending in general, of communicating the message of a text to a specific audience and of textual interpretation or methods of exegesis. Hermeneutics is not only a discipline in its own right but also an aspect of all intellectual endeavours. Initially, the term refers to the principles of interpretation, either the art or the science of interpretation. Hermeneutics is needed (and used, whether consciously or not) when one reads the Bible because it is a divine as well as a human book. Because human language by its very nature is largely equivocal or capable of being understood in more than one way, it is critical that the potential for misinterpretation be recognised and averted as far as humanly possible. Pentecostals accepted that only the Spirit of God knows the things of God (1 Cor 2:11) and only someone who has the anointing of the Spirit can expect to acquire a truly satisfactory understanding of the Bible. In 1 John 2:26-27, believers are encouraged to distinguish the truth for themselves because they have the anointing of the Holy Spirit that rests on them. They should take care that no one leads them astray but should submit

---

60 Archer, “Full Gospel”, 90.