

Pentecostals' fatal eschatology of destruction: Implications for a viable eco-theology¹

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Abstract

Since its inception, Pentecostals have expected the imminent return of Christ. They viewed their movement as the restoration and revival of the early church to introduce Christ's second coming, ensuring their eschatological fervour to hasten Christ's return by taking the gospel to all people. In accepting classical dispensational eschatology, they became so heavenly-minded and focused on reaching the un-evangelised that they showed little concern for preserving the earth. Several Pentecostal scholars, of whom four are discussed, revisited traditional eschatology and suggested an eco-theology. It is concluded that Pentecostals urgently need to redesign their eschatology with an alternative eschatological future that focuses on transforming the present world because the awaited new world is born from the present world. Christians are called to establish a renewed earth filled with God's presence because the world's end is not its termination. A Pentecostal eco-theology is kingdom-oriented, socially minded, pneumatologically consistent, ecologically inclusive, and sustainable.

Keywords

Dispensationalism, rapture, premillennialism, care of the earth

1. Introduction

Pentecostal eschatology preaches and teaches that the end of the world and space-time as we know it is near, making it unreasonable, and unnecessary to care for the earth.² They found classical dispensational eschatology favourable for their expectation of Christ's return imminently. It is a

1 This article was delivered as a paper at the SPTSA Conference in January 2024 at Unisa.

2 Du Plessis, *Return of Christ*, 102.

philosophy of history and a hermeneutical system that identifies with an apocalyptic identity heralding the last revival before the return of Christ.³ They justified their movement as a new move of the Spirit to restore the early church in the last days that precede the second coming. Their eschatology is linked with the apocalyptic philosophy of history that finds the meaning of history beyond history; human life's true fulfilment is only in a transcendent future beyond death and the earth.⁴

Classical dispensationalists situate their experiences theologically in the context of premillennial expectations and identify themselves as an apocalyptic revival movement rather than a church.⁵ The principal features of their eschatological paradigm are: Israel is the apostate nation but will be restored; inter-related social, political, religious and moral disorders characterise society, reflected in humanity's despair at the present situation; their only hope is found over the bridge of calamity, judgment, wrath and purification; a faithful remnant will play a saving role and the millennium will be the ultimate righter of wrongs. This fatalistic system represents the flowering of apocalypticism, found also in some of the early church's eschatological expectations.⁶

Dispensationalism's system of dispensations accepts that each successive dispensation failed through human disobedience and divine judgment. Therefore, it is replaced by a new dispensation operating according to different principles. Premillennialism is the belief that the world will worsen until Christ returns to set up a visible, thousand-year reign of peace.

A central principle in the system is the total separation between Israel and the church. They have separate destinies, Israel an earthly destination and the church a heavenly destiny. Premillennialists also view the church's task before the second coming of Christ as the proclamation of the gospel of the free grace of God and not the gospel of the kingdom of God.⁷ They

3 Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 139–140.

4 Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, 61; Chan and Miller, "Apocalyptic Eschatology: Lutheran-Pentecostal Reflections on the End," 343.

5 Dodrill, "From Second Blessing," 158.

6 Walsh, "Eschatology and the Fortunes of Early British Pentecostalism," 32.

7 In contrast, Grant (*Jesus*, 11) calls correctly the New Testament "virtually a commentary on this one single concept," the kingdom of God (or its equivalent, the

distinguish between the gospel of the kingdom, which is limited to Israel, and the gospel of grace, which is valid for the church. The church's task is to assemble all the elect from the heathen nations. At the end of the dispensation, Christ will appear, and his coming will lead to the mass conversion of Jews, introducing their time of salvation.⁸ It was this separation of destinies that necessitated the “rapture of the church,” as Israel's destiny can only unfold on earth after the removal of the church.

Some dispensationalists even divide the Jewish nation into Jacob-Jews and Esau-Jews. For instance, Lemmer du Plessis argues that in God's eternal counsel, God decided to divide the Jews into these two groups, represented by Jacob and Esau, referring to the elect and the hardened, the remnant and the non-elect.⁹ The Esau-Jews represented those Jews who rejected Jesus and his ministry because God hardened their hearts. The root of the olive tree in Romans 11:11–12 is the Jacob-Jews who can also be saved through the cross of Christ (Rom 11:15, 23), although they were and are hardened not to respond to the preaching of Jesus for a specific period and a specific reason. During all these dispensations, God's sovereignty is revealed not in terms of ultimate power but of unfathomable love, especially for Israel.

As stated, Pentecostals view their movement as the Spirit reviving the church shortly before the second coming to restore the church of the first century and prepare it for the termination of life on earth.¹⁰ Their expectation that the last of the last days have appeared and the world will end is a challenge because it implies that any care of creation becomes useless. The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost inaugurated the “last days”, but the “last of the last days” coincided with the Azusa Street Revival that introduced Pentecostalism, currently a fast-growing movement.¹¹

kingdom of heaven). The concept appears thirty-seven times in the Gospel of Matthew and thirty-two times in Luke. Dispensationalists have to ignore the preponderance of such evidence in the New Testament.

8 Flesher, “The Historical Development of Premillennial Dispensationalism,” 41.

9 Du Plessis, *Return of Christ*, 120–121.

10 Archer and Hamilton, “Anabaptism-Pietism and Pentecostalism,” 189.

11 Williams, “Greening,” 223.

If these are the last of the last days, Pentecostals reason, “Why oil the wheels of a car that’s about to drive over a cliff? We’re going to heaven; let the earth go to hell.” That it is still the case is evidenced by a survey that I completed at the end of 2023 of 124 sermons broadcast during 2022 and 2023 on the Internet by 47 African classical Pentecostal preachers. I found 16 sermons among them referring to aspects of eschatology. And without exception, these preachers expected the imminent end of the world with the return of Christ, warning that the last of the last days have already arrived when the opportunity to repent will cease. None of the sermons referred to a “new earth” or considered any concern with the current state of environmental pollution and global climate change that threatens the extinction of life. Instead, they expect life and nature to be destroyed while believers end up in heaven.

Instead, I argue for a Pentecostal eschatology that sees the eschatological future portrayed by the New Testament in terms of the transformation and not the destruction of the present world.¹² The new world will not fall like a bomb onto the present world; it will be born from it. The new world believers expect will be a renewed earth, not a new creation. The present world may be nearing its end, but its *telos* define its “goal” and not its “termination”. A shift in thought has become vital to allow Pentecostals to take responsibility as citizens of the new kingdom (or divine reign) already present in the world by caring now for what will become the basis of the expected new earth. The divine reign realises every time a believer conforms to God’s will, as Jesus’ model prayer demonstrates.¹³

In contrast, dispensationalism, with its seven dispensations, argues, *inter alia*, that Israel and the church are two distinct peoples of God that correspond to two distinct divine plans.¹⁴ On the one hand, the Christian church is a parenthesis that began at Pentecost and will end at the Rapture.¹⁵ On the other hand, while God has temporarily suspended the divine plan for Israel with the incarnation of Christ, at the rapture, God’s plan for

12 Althouse, “Pentecostal Eco-Transformation,” 123.

13 Fee, “Kingdom of God,” 17.

14 Bertone, “Seven Dispensations,” 94.

15 Hocken, “Liturgy and Eschatology in a Pentecostal-Charismatic Ecumenism,” 7.

Israel will finally and fully be realised.¹⁶ The rapture will introduce the end of the world and the realisation of heaven, God's home, as the new home of Christian believers. The separation between Israel and the church supplied the theological rationale for the sequence of events articulated in dispensational eschatology.¹⁷ The argument about the relationship between Israel and the church is vital and needs further attention, but there is no room in the present article for its full development. The early church already identified Israel with the church, probably in reaction to the Jews' rejection of Christ as the Messiah. The church was viewed as the spiritual Israel, and promises to Israel were applied to Christians. This eventually became the viewpoint of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy as well as large parts of Protestantism.¹⁸

By adopting fundamentalist dispensationalism, Pentecostalism develops an escapism mentality instead of taking responsibility for and assisting in preventing some of the injustices that humanity is committing to the earth. Their theology has become truncated because it unwittingly promotes the church's withdrawal from social involvement, and they regard all social concerns as a possible sidetrack of the church from its priority of evangelical mission that focuses on the saving of the individual sinner's soul.¹⁹

I will argue that concerns to establish the divine reign here and now need to take precedence over any other ideological concerns, including the sentiment for the nation of Israel found among present-day fundamentalist believers, comprising most Pentecostals, and demonstrated currently in their uncritical support for Israel in the conflict with Palestinians. It implies that we should regard the realisation of the divine reign not as postponed to the second coming but as already present in the completion process. The kingdom has come and is coming. Only then will Pentecostals acknowledge their co-responsibility in realising elements of the cosmic transformation in their eschatology in an ethically responsive and responsible eschatology. It has become critical to develop a sustainable eschatology informed by eco-theology. Various Pentecostal scholars have already addressed this

16 Coulter, "Pentecostal Visions," 84.

17 Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 198.

18 Hattingh, 'n Alternatief vir die Premillennialistiese Standpunt in die AGS van SA, 22.

19 Dempster, "Eschatology, Spirit Baptism, and Inclusiveness," 156.

task, and I now turn to some of their conclusions to inform our discussion before making some conclusions.

2. Diverse views on a sustainable Pentecostal eschatology

(a) Peter Althouse

Peter Althouse presents a revised Pentecostal eschatology as a theological justification for his concern over social justice and environmental issues.²⁰ He acknowledges the challenge of continuity and discontinuity that underlies the premillennial sentiment found among many Pentecostals that builds on the eventual annihilation of this world, negating any motivation for caring for God’s creation in the here and now.²¹ He argues that the Spirit is God’s presence and action to transform creation into the eschatological new creation, and God has appointed the citizens of the new divine reign to share in the care of creation based on its eventual renewal and continuity. This is a viable alternative to participating in not caring about the human contribution to the destruction of creation that characterises fundamentalist dispensational eschatology.

When we read the future in terms of the past, he says, the resurrection body becomes an analogy of how to think about the future in general.²² When Jesus appeared after his resurrection, his disciples recognised and did not recognise him. He was like a human being among other human beings, carrying the scars of his suffering. But he was also strange, appearing and disappearing in mysterious ways. When Paul saw Jesus, he was revealed in a great light from heaven. The experience of meeting with the resurrected Jesus happened on the boundaries of human experience, as mysterious pointers to the future of God we expect when our body of humiliation will be conformed to the body of Christ’s glory. We do not use the language of fantasy or speculation about an unknown future but extrapolate the lines of our experience to unknown territory to qualify the promise of the new body through which we will navigate the new world. We extrapolate the lines of their experience to unknown territory to qualify the promise of

20 Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days*, 109.

21 Althouse, “Pentecostal Eco-Transformation,” 123.

22 See Althouse, “Pentecostal Eschatology in Context,” 205–231.

the new body through which we will be able to navigate the new world. In the words of 1 John 3:2, we know now that we are God’s children, although we do not know what we will be when Jesus comes back, except that we will be like him when we see him as he is. Louis Berkhof says that Jesus stands surety for our identity, which is enough for us.²³ Our end will be our ultimate goal, our telos. And we do not need more information about the future than to know that we will bear the image of the last Adam, the second man (1 Cor 15:42–49).

Althouse argues that early Pentecostalism’s concept of the “latter rain” also comes in handy because it suggests a covenantal theology in which the diverse prophetic traditions of Israel were continued into the apostolic period through the event of Pentecost.²⁴ The implication is that the promise to Israel is the promise of God to the church in the eschatological age, which extends from the time of the incarnation to the second coming. Now, our apocalyptic urgency is in the service of our work as Christ’s ambassadors in anticipating the new divine reign, whereby creation is being transformed into a new creation.²⁵ Because of the character of the divine reign as proleptic anticipation, active participation is expected of believers in the work of the divine reign that breaks into the existing world as a God-ordained act (serving the theme of discontinuity found in traditional Pentecostal eschatology and combining continuity and discontinuity between the old and the new creation).²⁶ The charismata serve as foretastes of the new creation.²⁷ Speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing serve as moments of the interpenetration of the new creation into our present reality and enforce our hope for the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the world.

23 Berkhof, *Gegronde Verwachting*, 38.

24 Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days*, 18.

25 Althouse, *Left Behind*, 206.

26 See especially his foundation of proleptic anticipation in the theology of Miroslav Volf, Murray Dempster, and Frank Macchia (Althouse, *Left Behind*, 202–206).

27 Althouse, *Left Behind*, 206.

(b) Frank Macchia

Frank Macchia is another scholar who moved beyond fundamentalist premillennial and dispensational tendencies, shifting the rubric of the divine reign of God to social transformation. He discusses the work of the Blumhardts in terms of the otherworldly classical Pentecostal apocalyptic eschatology and brings it into relation with the Blumhardts' suggestion that the rubric of the kingdom of God should move from divine healing to social transformation.²⁸ He argues that its otherworldliness undercuts the very logic of Pentecostal logic. That God wants to heal people, he argues, shows God's involvement in individual lives. It is not only located in the ultimate future but visibly realised in the context of human relationships and environments.²⁹ He writes that we share the present life with God through the divine eschatological gift of the Spirit, who renews everything. The eschatological goal of the outpouring of the Spirit is the divine inhabitation of creation, symbolised in the vision of the new Jerusalem coming down to the new earth, to establish God's presence and reign in all creation.³⁰ Pentecost will be finally fulfilled when Christ fills the universe with his presence through his Spirit, and God's home is among mortals that will comprise the new world.

The important Pentecostal insight that God wants to bodily heal people shows God's involvement in individual lives and demonstrates that salvation is not just located in the ultimate future but visibly realised in the historical context of human relationships and environments.³¹ It proves that there is a contradiction between a belief in divine healing on the level of individual eschatology and an apocalyptic eschatology with its corporate dimension.

Another insight of Macchia is that eschatology should not only be rooted in the kingdom of God concerned with social liberation but should also be thoroughly pneumatological, implying that the present life is shared with God through God's eschatological gift to human beings, the Spirit.

28 Macchia, "Jesus is Victor."

29 Macchia, *Spirituality*.

30 Macchia, "Jesus is Victor," 381.

31 Macchia, *Spirituality*, 162.

Eschatology involves all creation because the Spirit is involved in the reach of life toward the renewal of all things.³² The eschatological goal of the outpouring of the Spirit is the divine inhabitation of creation, symbolised in the vision of the new Jerusalem coming down to the new earth, to establish God's presence and reign in all creation. Macchia refers to 1 Corinthians 15:28, which explains that God will put all things in subjection to Christ. And when all things are subjected to Christ, then Christ will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all. Pentecost is fulfilled when Christ fills the whole universe with his presence, through his Spirit. Then, the home of God will be among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be God's people, and God will be with them (Rev 21:3).

I submit that a responsible eschatology accommodating our hermeneutical sentiments needs to be divine reign-oriented (kingdom-oriented), socially minded, pneumatologically consistent and ecologically inclusive.³³ For that reason, believers should fight whatever oppresses or destroys creation. When they pray in tongues, their groaning too deep for words should become an act of yearning for deliverance for the suffering and hurting creation. Their prayer for social renewal should lead to political and social actions, the only logically required outcome of a viable eco-theology.

The implication is clear: the “new” will not imply annihilation but rather transformation. The kingdom serves as a dynamic within history through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is repeated throughout history and directed towards the divine indwelling in all of creation so that all things may correspond to Christ's image.³⁴

Andrew Williams correctly opines that Macchia's proposition for an alternative Pentecostal eschatology exists in the context of pneumatology and embraces spiritual and social dimensions that critique the escapist tendencies of classical Pentecostal theology while at the same time conserving Pentecostal distinctive.³⁵ He is correct. Macchia leaves room

32 Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 41.

33 See also Macchia, “Justification through New Creation,” 216.

34 Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 97.

35 Williams, “Greening,” 214–215.

for the dimensions of “already” and “not yet” regarding the realisation of God’s kingdom, bringing eschatological concerns to the forefront.

(c) Larry McQueen

Another scholar, Larry McQueen, describes a narrative eschatology from a Pentecostal perspective centred on Revelation 21–22 and Pentecostalism’s traditional fivefold full gospel.³⁶ He emphasises the eschatological renewal of all things that answers the longing described in Romans 8:21–22: the whole creation, he says, is groaning in labour pains, summoning believers to see themselves as God’s participants in renewing the cosmos. Jesus, as saviour, implies present proleptic participation in the new creation, and it challenges individualistic notions of salvation. Jesus, as a sanctifier, implies that believers do not, as a priority, seek to go to heaven but rather live on earth in a way that reflects divine holiness. We, the church, serve as an outpost of the divine reign on earth in anticipation of God’s dwelling place descending from heaven to envelop creation. Jesus, as Spirit-baptiser, implies our commitment to a holistic mission that promotes the development of just social and ecological structures because we are prudent stewards of the resources God has given us. Jesus as healer implies our participation in the healing and transformation of creation; it is only the present form of this world that is passing away (1 Cor 7:31) and not the world itself. And Jesus, as the coming king, affirms that the return of Christ will bring with it the fullness of holistic redemption for the entire created order.

Pentecostals involved in ecological issues will find that it intersects and overlaps with other justice issues, such as poverty and inequality.³⁷ In Africa, the poor choose Pentecostalism because it represents a tradition that traditionally champions the cause of the marginalised.³⁸ It is submitted that to realise this goal, Pentecostals need to hear clear preaching and teaching about an eco-theology that addresses the environmental degradation that consistently accompanies and aggravates poverty, partly because of colonialist powers that abused African countries and their mineral

36 McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 2.

37 Waddell, “Apocalyptic Sustainability,” 110.

38 McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 257.

resources, a practice continued by many African governments without caring for the people or environment.

(d) Andy Williams

The last scholar that is discussed is Andrew Williams who argues for the viability and necessity of eco-eschatology.³⁹ Kingdom work, he writes, is more than the proclamation of the gospel focused on the saving of souls or the demonstration of the power of the gospel to save; it includes natural efforts to renew God's creation by means of believers participating in the establishment of the divine reign on earth. The anthropocentric limitation of dispensational eschatology should be replaced with a universal view of the final redemption that awaits all creation.

In other words, creation shares in the soteriological destiny of humanity. The Spirit is the initiator but also the director and developer of creation on the way to its final consummation,⁴⁰ and creation is the theatre of the Spirit's activity and presence, while the Spirit is the very source of life and creation.⁴¹ What is said about the redemptive functions of the Spirit is valid for the Spirit's creative functions as well. Romans 8:19 demonstrates the close affinity between the two that the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the children of God. Creation shares in the soteriological destiny of humanity. The Spirit is not only the initiator before the creation but also with creation, as its director and developer. The Spirit seeks to recapitulate all things in the Spirit (Eph 1:10), awaiting the final consummation.⁴²

The outpouring of the Spirit was a sign of the latter rain outpouring of the Spirit in preparation for the imminent second coming.⁴³ This awareness created an apocalyptic fervour that the world should be reached with the good news. What is needed now is reclaiming early Pentecostalism's eschatological fervour, but this time by adding care for God's creation. The popular Pentecostal vision of the world destroyed along with evil powers should urgently be changed into a vision of the care of creation in the

39 Williams, "Greening," 220–227.

40 See also Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 281.

41 Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 281.

42 Williams, "Greening," 223.

43 Williams, "Greening," 224.

light of global warming and climate change, which threatens to terminate humanity's existence. The interpretation of the Latter Rain motif should shift to include the church's work in waiting for the second coming by taking care of the divinely instituted creation.

The Latter Rain motif provides the primary organisational structure for the Pentecostal tradition.⁴⁴ It is derived from Deuteronomy 1:10–15, Job 19:29, Proverbs 16:15, Jeremiah 3:3, Hosea 6:3, Joel 2:23; Zechariah 10:1 and James 5:7, allowing Pentecostal people to relate to and interpret the Old and New Testament according to a promise-fulfilment strategy and allowing them to extend the promise into their present community, thus enabling the modern Pentecostal community to continue participation in the past promises.⁴⁵ “The early rain came at Pentecost, and immediately the seed which Jesus and his disciples had sown sprung up. This early rain continued for more than a hundred years, during which time the church was inundated with mighty floods of salvation. But when the church became popular and was formed into a great hierarchy, the long drought began, interspersed with local showers of gracious revival now and then through the middle ages (sic).”⁴⁶ “... the latter rain has been withheld until now. It seems to have had its starting point in the year 1906.”⁴⁷ Scriptures alluding to the early and later rain are used as types of the Holy Spirit, and the showers of rain in the land of Canaan become a type of the operations of grace.⁴⁸ George Taylor explains that God fashioned Palestine to be the model land of all lands to contain the products of all zones and climates, “to be a miniature world in itself,” and God arranged the coming and going of its rain clouds on a spiritual pattern, to “adumbrate the movements of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁹ “Canaan” receives early rain in the spring, before the seed is planted, followed by a dry spell of several weeks, allowing bright weather

44 Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 19–34.

45 Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 137. Berkhof (*Gegronde Verwachting*, 13) explains that “promise,” *pro-missio*, is invested with the meaning of a promise but also of being sent forward with a mission. The human being is underway, faith is hope, and the church is an exodus congregation.

46 Taylor, “Spirit and the Bride,” 90–91.

47 Taylor, “Spirit and the Bride,” 92.

48 Taylor, “Spirit and the Bride,” 90.

49 Taylor, “Spirit and the Bride,” 90.

for the cultivation of the crops, and then the latter rain follows to ensure a good harvest. The rainy season in an average year extends from October to April, with the former rain occurring in October and November and the latter rain falling during March and April.⁵⁰ The motif of the Latter Rain was interpreted by the Pentecostal people as a stable conceptual framework of God's involvement within human history and provided the framework in which they constructed their worldview.⁵¹

The Spirit's work is present, renewing all of creation, including human beings. God's mission has always been to bring health, vitality, and prosperity to all. For that reason, Pentecostals should pray for the physically and spiritually ill but also for the healing of creation, using the same theological logic.⁵² The Spirit will lead Pentecostals to discern what they need to do to realise their prayers, changing their lives into the answer to their prayers for saving the created order from the results of human abuse of nature. In partnering with the Spirit in praying for God to heal the damaged ozone layer, the Spirit will teach and guide them to be good stewards of limited available resources, to resist consumerism, to live simply and strive for greening the planet, to embrace the Sabbath rest for themselves and their kin, to reduce plastic waste by using reusable alternatives and to shop for environmentally friendly designs, to name a few examples. Such actions are not primarily or exclusively motivated by an eschatologically sensitised awareness, but they are pneumatologically and eschatologically motivated. They result from an eco-theology of responsibility for the "already" of the divine reign. While secular people preserve nature because it is their present home, Christians understand the world as both our present and future home, making its preservation much more vital. The world is already God's abiding place, and we should allow the sense of the world as God's presence and the future to influence how we live in the present. Our robust eco-eschatology in a pneumatological perspective should lead us towards a green praxis, into the future of God.⁵³

50 Comfort and Elwell, "Palestine," 984.

51 Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 32–36.

52 Swoboda, "Posterity or Prosperity?" 410.

53 Williams, "Greening," 227.

3. Synthesis

In conclusion, traditional Pentecostal dispensational eschatology expects the end of the world, implying that we need not care about or care for the earth. It is submitted that Pentecostals should urgently redesign their eschatology to include an eschatological future linked closely to the transformation of the present world, which is partly their responsibility as well because the awaited new world is born from the present world. Christians are not going to heaven; they are already busy establishing a renewed earth filled with God's presence. The world as we know it may be nearing its end, but its end is its goal, the meaning of the Greek *telos*, and not its termination. When Pentecostals keep this in mind, they realise that it is their responsibility as citizens of the new divine reign to care for the present world, the basis for the expected new world. In other words, we should recognise that we are partly responsible for realising certain elements of the cosmic transformation. Our eco-theology accommodates a kingdom-oriented, socially minded, pneumatologically consistent and ecologically inclusive sustainable eschatology. We fight anything that oppresses or destroys our lifeblood, God's creation, by praying and then participating in saving the world. We accept responsibility for transforming this beautiful, scarred, suffering earth.

Pentecostals should ask the uncomfortable but vitally necessary question of whether the time has not come to distance themselves from their earlier conviction of Christ's imminent second coming taking Christians to heaven⁵⁴ because such expectations are related to an outdated, irrelevant apocalyptic worldview that can no longer be accepted, given the time

54 Macchia, "The Time is Near!" 162.

between Jesus' incarnation and prediction of the imminency of his return.⁵⁵ Eschatological issues can no longer be ignored.⁵⁶

It is acknowledged that it is a difficult issue. The hermeneutical necessity of stepping into the world of an ancient text with (possibly) an unknown social context from a significantly different contemporary context remains a complex exercise. Should the concept of the second coming be de-literalised and viewed as a metaphor? Perhaps, in reflecting on the questions, some other voices in the canon should be listened to as well, such as 2 Peter 3:8–10's injunction to keep in mind that God's patience differs from that of human beings: with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. In other words, our eschatological expectations should be subjected to God's timetable. The author affirms that God is not slow about the promise of the second coming; it is rather a sign of God's patience to allow time for repentance. At the same time, it should be remembered that nobody knows when the day will be; it will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night. Another such voice is found in Philippians 1:21–24 where the apostle affirms that Christians are both world-affirming and world-denying; Paul states of himself that when he lives in the flesh, that means fruitful labour, and when he dies, he is with the Lord.

55 Mark 13:30–31; Matthew 24:34–5; Luke 21:32–33 repeat words ascribed to Jesus, "Amen, amen, I tell you the truth: this generation will not pass away until all these things occur. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." "Generation" can refer to several aspects: i.e. to "race," assuring that the Jewish race will survive, ii. implying "this type of generation", referring to wicked humanity that will be redeemed or iii. "the generation that sees the signs of the end", implying that the events before Christ's return will happen in rapid succession. However, iv. a last option is that the "things happening" refer to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple that occurred in 70 CE.

56 In several commentaries on the book of Revelation by Pentecostal scholars, the commentators did not hold dispensationalist views: Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary*; Newton, *The Revelation Worldview*; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*.

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