

An Eschatology of Hope:

A View of Life after Death and the Last Days after the Reformation

by David Norris

Tucked away in the last section of most systematic theology textbooks is the obligatory section on eschatology, where questions about life after death and the end of the world are considered.¹ While during the last two centuries at least some theologians have made certain kinds of eschatological themes more central to their theological presentation, typically, conservative evangelical scholars do just enough work in the area to establish their orthodoxy.

For example, Henry Clarence Theissen's *Lectures in Systematic Theology* has been a twentieth century classic among those with a conservative theological bent.² While a fifth of the four hundred page volume is dedicated to matters of eschatology, only a few pages actually deal with subjects of the expected state upon death, the questions related to the immortality of the soul, and the specifics of the resurrection. Of greater concern is "end-time" matters; fixing a schema and time frame for things related to the coming of Christ and the eschaton.

The task of this paper is to historically examine the theological perspectives of the afterlife beginning with the time of the reformers. We will focus on the most distinctive Reformation eschatological reinterpretation of the afterlife, the doing away with

¹ In early Protestant Reformation theologies, a discussion of eschatology might occur as an appendage to some other topic, but the effect was the same; to offer a discussion deemed secondary to more central issues of theology. On this, see James P. Martin, *The Last Judgment in Protestant Theology from Orthodoxy to Ritschl*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William P. Eerdmans, 1963), 6-7.

² Henry Clarence Theissen's *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, (1949) 1979).

purgatory. In order to understand such a change, we must first revisit the Catholic understanding against which reformers positioned themselves as well as the eschatological impulses that propelled Reformation eschatologies and their inheritors. We will then offer a brief scriptural survey of the eschatological positions on the afterlife with which we resonate as Pentecostals, and finally, we will synthesize what we have discussed.

Two questions are uppermost in our survey. The first relates to whether or not the view of the afterlife which we as Pentecostals have inherited in whole or in part from the trajectory of the reformers is in some way flawed. Second, we need to determine whether a Pentecostal telling of eschatology is somehow out of balance. That is, given that so much energy among Pentecostals in eschatology relates to questions about End Times, could it be that we are giving the focus on the afterlife a short shrift? This paper will argue that theological understanding of the afterlife as inherited from the reformers is sound. Further we will offer historical reasons as to why we should not quickly abandon our perspectives in eschatology. While in many ways Pentecostalism had a unique origin connected to the expectation of the coming of Christ,³ we will suggest that such a view is in some sense a “Reformation inheritance,” arguing that the same sort of eschatological impulses which were causal to advent of Modern Pentecostalism also shaped the Reformation eschatological thinking and was a catalyst for change.

³ This is the major thesis of D. William. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel. The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

The Advent of Purgatory in Catholicism⁴

With the fourth century marriage of the Catholic Church to the power of Rome, theologians ultimately revisited the place of the church in the world. The most important voice of that time was Augustine. Whereas his received teaching was that Revelation chapter 20 describes a future millennial hope where the church would some day rule on this earth, Augustine reinterpreted the text, arguing that the passage actually refers to his present day church which was even then reigning on the earth. While such a realized eschatology empowered both Rome⁵ and the leaders of the church such as Augustine to be self-authorized to determine the meaning of the text,⁶ it did not solve all issues of interpretation for Augustine related to Revelation 20.

Augustine grappled with what to do with both the “thousand year period” and with the cosmic judgment connected with the rest of Revelation chapter 20. The end of the chapter 20 indicates “God and Magog” will cause a terrible conflict ending in cosmic judgment, all of which will commence when the reign of the church comes to end.

Augustine’s interpretive solution was that thousand years consisted of “either what remains of the sixth day which consists of a thousand years, or all the years which are to elapse til the end of the world.”⁷ In the end, Augustine suggested that the reign of the church would indeed end at some point, and then, as the narrative of Revelation 20

⁴ My presumption is that Nick Cohen’s symposium paper will deal with purgatory in considerable detail, so we leave that to him. It is important to note, though, that the view of purgatory was not static. From the presentation of Pope Gregory to the merchandising of purgatory through the indulgences, there was considerable development. On p. 150, Bengt Häggglund, in *History of Theology*, translated by Gene J. Lund, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), notes that Gregory drew from popular piety and was motivated to find ways whereby eternal punishment could be mitigated. Yet, as Häggglund rightly notes, the introduction of the notion of purgatory was significant toward making a certain kind of theological turn, one which laid the foundation for medieval theology.

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, “Response 3: An Evangelical Response,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, Craig A Blaising & Darrell L. Bock, eds., (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1992), 361-62.

⁶ Philip Schaff, *Church History*, vol. 2 of vols. 1-8, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1954), 619.

⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.7.

indicated, there will come a time when Satan would be loosed for three years and six months and he would wreak havoc on the world.⁸ Further, Augustine interpreted Gog and Magog mentioned in Revelation 20 as the enemies of the church who would come against it;⁹ most importantly for this paper, Augustine allowed for a literal Antichrist who would bring terror upon the world. Ultimately for Augustine, the return of Christ would be accompanied by fire that rained down from God.¹⁰

It is interesting that in this one short interpretive piece, Augustine's eschatology gave a foundation for the Catholic church government to rule, authorized them to interpret the Bible as it pleased them, gave a foundation upon which Pope Gregory to codify the notion of purgatory, and most importantly for this paper, Augustine unwittingly made certain that people would live in fear of future judgments portended by cosmic destruction and the rise of the Antichrist. Given the limitations of space, it would not do to trace all the various permutations and expectations that evolved on the foundation laid by Augustine. Further writings such as the Sibylline Oracles, II Esdras, and Joachim of Flore and miscellaneous prophetic utterances all played a part in the various medieval expectations of the Last Days. From the end of the eleventh century onward, apocalyptic movements were increasingly motivated by the biblical apocalypticism of John as well as the Sibylline oracles.¹¹

The figure of the Antichrist remained current in the speculation of the world of the Middle Ages. As Norman Cohn notes, the description of the Antichrist drawn from

⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.8.

⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.11. Augustine takes Gog to mean "roof" and Magog to mean "from a roof"; allegorically they refer to the collective nations which will rise against the saints.

¹⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.12.

¹¹ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961, 1970), 53.

Revelation was portrayed not merely as an enthroned tyrant but “as a demon or dragon flying in the air surrounded by lesser demons or trying to fly aloft to prove himself God and being hurled to his death by God.”¹² Roland Bainton notes of the time of Luther, “The best sellers of the period were not on *How to See Rome*, but on *How to Avoid Hell*.”¹³ It was this expectation that caused events of the medieval times which portended danger to be viewed as definite signs of approaching disaster and the end of the world—and it is Augustine’s foundational claim that we might arguably assess to be the cause of a thousand years of fear.

A medieval view of the Last Days had surprising applications, often influencing behaviors of individuals and groups. This expectation increased in the centuries immediately prior to and after the Reformation. David MacCulloch writes,

Without that pervasive expectation of an imminent, dramatic change, few might have listened to Luther’s challenge to the Church. Without it, Savonarola could not have seized Florence, thousands would not have trekked to Münster to set up a new Jerusalem, Franciscans might not have toiled to convert the Indios in the Americas, Friedrich V might not have traveled to Prague, Transylvanian princes would not have found a sense of crusading mission, Oliver Cromwell might not have readmitted the Jews to England.”¹⁴

Reformation Responses to Purgatory

It was the Catholic view of the afterlife itself that was instrumental in Luther’s 95 theses being nailed to the Wittenberg church door. In this single act, a trajectory was set that would not only critique the excesses of those who were merchandising purgatory but would focus the spotlight on the notion of purgatory itself. While the Catholic view of the afterlife was that evil people were sent directly to hell, good people were sent for some

¹² Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 34.

¹³ Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 26.

¹⁴ David MacCulloch, *The Reformation. A History*, (New York: Penguin Group), 551.

period of time to purgatory until sufficient punishment took place that would keep them from being condemned in judgment. Although the Church had no official pronouncement as to how long purgatory would be related to specific sins, they did claim the ability to shorten the time in purgatory. As has been often noted, “On All Saint Day, Christians viewing the relics accumulated by Frederick the Wise in Luther's town of Wittenberg and paying the necessary indulgences could reduce their purgatory stay by 1,902,202 years and 270 days.”¹⁵

In the heat of his fight with the Catholic Church, Luther turned apocalyptic in tone, branding the pope as the Antichrist and the Catholic Church as Babylon.¹⁶ Nor were such accusations by Martin Luther unique or limited. In Luther's 1522 Bible, the Book of Revelation was the only one illustrated, and these illustrations demonized both the pope and the Catholic Church in graphic terms. Such illustrations did much propel speculation among the populace related to the Last Days.¹⁷

It was not Luther alone who saw God working in special ways. In 1532, Lutheran Joachim Camerarius wrote a book detailing the natural phenomena called a “wonder book,” arguing that it was the Last Days. This was only one of many which were

¹⁵ <http://theory.stanford.edu/~oldham/church/calling/Martin.html>. Accessed Oct. 13, 2010.

¹⁶ Although Luther had made the identification of the Antichrist with Papacy as early 1518, it was two years later when he realized that the whole Roman Church was corrupt that he became more certain. See Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 42. While Luther codified this assertion, there is a long list of others had made such an accusation before him: Bernard of Clairvaux, Lorenza Valla, Marsiglio of Padua, Petrarch, Savonarola, Joachim of Flora, and Baptist of Mantua, all gave “the world sometime to understand that the bishop of Rome himself (by your leave) is very antichrist.” On this, see Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 32, citing *Apology of the Church of England*, p. 75.

¹⁷ Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4. Dürher's illustration became the prototype for this and subsequent illustrations of Revelation. Between 1498 and 1650, 750 different editions and commentaries of Revelation were published, many published for a very reasonable price. In many cases, the only book illustrated was that of Revelation.

published. Nor could Calvin keep from using similar language. Calvin's *Institutes*, in a true Reformation critique, takes the reference to the Antichrist in II Thessalonians to be related to the Roman Pontiff.¹⁸ And while neither Calvin nor Beza from the Reformed wing of the Reformation promoted the notion of the end times, the successor of Beza, Simon Boulart saw signs of the times in nature and clearly deemed it be the Last Days.¹⁹

Consider that when apocalyptic thought becomes unleashed, there is a tremendous potential for dynamic change in perspective. When the dust of the Reformation cleared, there was no small break in thinking with regard to purgatory. Luther moved from critiquing it to denying it. Indeed, in trying to distance himself from the suffering of purgatory, Luther went so far so to proclaim that when a person died, that person slept until the last resurrection. Again, responding to the excesses of the teaching on purgatory, Luther branded the doctrine of the immortality of the soul as one of the monstrous fiction of the popes. Further, the Luther doubted the beginnings of Purgatory, bemoaning that it or Gregory, being in the night-time deceived by a vision" had originated the teaching.²⁰

Whereas Luther's eschatology was more "strongly governed by the resurrection of the dead in the sense of the renewal of the whole man",²¹ the Reformed Church, following Calvin, believed in an intermediate state after death where the saved were ushered in the presence of Christ. Made official by the Westminster Confession of Faith,

¹⁸ James P. Martin, *The Last Judgment in Protestant Theology from Orthodoxy to Ritschl*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William P. Eerdmans, 1963), 7, note 13. Martin argues that based on the clear reading of Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin thought it was the last times. See Calvin's *Institutes*, IV.7.25. Further, he cites F. Turretin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 503. This is not the same as saying that Calvin does any more with this. But certainly other reformers pick up on this theme.

¹⁹ Cunningham and Grell, *Four Horsemen*, 24; citing Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 87-94.

²⁰ Martin Luther, *Of Purgatory*, http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEWluther_c19.htm. Accessed Oct. 19, 2010.

²¹ Martin, *The Last Judgment*, 17.

the Reformed Branch of Protestantism asserted that someone who dies is immediately introduced to the blessings of heaven.²²

Like Luther, Calvin took a strong stance against purgatory. Calvin insisted that purgatory could logically have no role in cleansing from sin as this was done by the work of Christ. He writes, “what remains but to hold that purgatory is mere blasphemy, horrid blasphemy against Christ? I say nothing of the sacrilege by which it is daily defended, the offenses which it begets in religion, and the other innumerable evils which we see teeming forth from that fountain of impiety.”²³

Calvin could write, “If heaven is our homeland, what else is the earth but our place of exile? If departure from the world is entry into life, what else is the world but a sepulcher?”²⁴ While the Catholics reaffirmed their opposition to the Reformers’ position on purgatory at the Council of Trent,²⁵ Reformation doctrines were confirmed through various means. The Presbyterian Confession of Faith (1647) declared that “the bodies of men after death return to death, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal substance, immediately return to God who made them... The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness are received into the highest

²² Martin, 16; c.f. The Westminster Confession, chapter 32.

²³ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, book III.v.6.

²⁴ David E. Holwerda, “Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin’s Eschatological Vision,” in *Vol. 9, Calvin’s Theology, Theology Proper, Eschatology*, ed. Richard C. Gamble, (New York and London: Garland Publishing Company, 1992), 130-159, 134; citing Calvin’s *Institutes*, III.ix.4.

²⁵ The *Catholic Encyclopedia* reports the affirmation at the Council of Trent (Sess. XXV): “Whereas the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has from the Sacred Scriptures and the ancient tradition of the Fathers taught in Councils and very recently in this Ecumenical synod (Sess. VI, cap. XXX; Sess. XXII cap. ii, iii) that there is a purgatory, and that the souls therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar; the Holy Synod enjoins on the Bishops that they diligently endeavor to have the sound doctrine of the Fathers in Councils regarding purgatory everywhere taught and preached, held and believed by the faithful.”

<http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=9745>, accessed Oct. 13, 2010.

heavens where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.”²⁶

The Church of England did not abandon the Catholic position on purgatory with the same sort of acrimony as did either Lutherans or the Reformed Church. In fact, one could read a prayer for the dead still offered in the 1549 English Prayer Book. The prayer offered petition was mild, imploring that those who had died “may ever dwell in the region of light, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the place where there is no weeping, sorrow or heaviness....”²⁷ Over time the English Prayer Book was tweaked further by Queen Elizabeth I, as conservatives continued to contend that the English Prayer Book did not move far enough from Rome.²⁸

Theologically, Pentecostals are much indebted to a particular Anglican priest who sprang out of the Church of England named John Wesley. Like Calvin before him, Wesley believed in an intermediate state after death, calling it “Abraham’ Bosom.”²⁹ Interestingly, Wesley made the curious claim that in Abraham’s Bosom, also called Paradise, saints would “continue to grow in holiness there.”³⁰ Catholics sometimes find in this an echo of purgatory, but such a claim seems to be reaching. In any case, what came to be official Methodist teaching allows for the intermediate state while not addressing the notion of a continued progression of holiness.

As we have begun to discuss, while the engine of the Reformation may have been sparked in large part by the by the merchandising of purgatory, it was the evolving expectation of the Last Days that fueled change as well. Let us synthesize and build on

²⁶ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Paradise Misaid*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.

²⁷ Russell, *Paradise Misaid*, 20.

²⁸ Bainton, *Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 202.

²⁹ http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/parables/sn-lk16_19-31.htm. Accessed Oct. 13, 2010.

³⁰ Ted Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials* (Nashville: Abingdon 1999), 82.

what we have argued thus far. Let us consider three steps in an epistemological progression as it relates to the turn in a Reformation eschatological confession.

First, in the century prior to the Reformation, cosmic events, natural calamities, and enemies from the East all worked together to convince every day populace in Western Christianity that it was indeed the Last Days. Numerous scholars have demonstrated how the Black Death in 1348, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the advance of the Turks, crises in social structures, in the economies, self proclaimed prophetic and messianic voices all coalesced in heightened expectancy of the End.

Second, in this dynamic time of crises, Reformers began to reframe the Antichrist so that the Antichrist was not merely a theoretical and expectant figure but was present already. For Luther and subsequent Reformers, the pope was the Antichrist and that the Catholic Church was Babylon.

It was just because there was such sense that in the fifteenth century prophetic pronouncements of the end were so influential. For example, one such prophetic voice was that of Girolamo Savonarola. Savonarola was a priest who in 1495 believed that renovation of the church would occur, that there would be a scourge throughout Italy, and that these things would happen soon.³¹ Although not emphasized by historians, Christopher Columbus clearly saw his discoveries in an apocalyptic light, “helping to fulfill God’s plan for the world, making it possible to convert all the earth’s people to Christianity before the Second Coming.”³²

³¹ Cunningham and Grell, *Four Horsemen*, 247; citing Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendium Revelationum*, Ulme, 1496; English version trans. Bernard McGinn, ed. and translator, *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Savonarola*, (New York, 1979), 192-175.

³² Cunningham and Grell, 77. citing, B. McGinn, *Visions of the End. Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1979), 284-5; see also Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 29.

This led to the third element, one of hope. If the enemy could be identified, then that enemy was in some way more manageable. Further, the ones naming this said enemy actually might contribute to ultimate victory over him. It was just such apocalyptic stirring that in many ways propelled people to be receptive the Luther's voice. While Luther himself was not given to personally speculate about the Last Days in writing, there is a considerable body of evidence that demonstrates just how eschatologically motivated Lutheranism really was. Further, it was not so much the official eschatology of the reformers with regard to the Last Days as the attending view of the populace with reference to the end that gave momentum to a disposition toward change. Lutherans never officially endorsed such a popularized view of the Last Days. Nor did Calvin have anything positive to say about those who, though, in the same camp, were much taken with speculation regarding the End Times. Nonetheless, both the Reformed and Lutheran wings of Protestantism were propelled by popular belief.

There is a point that should not be missed in this change. Prior to the Reformation, the only expected end which people had was either facing individual judgment in purgatory or experiencing cataclysmic judgment at the hands of the Antichrist. As James Martin has noted, the Reformation made a turn in this anticipation of judgment. Luther consistently "called attention to the joy of the Last Day, and wished that it might soon come, and this was expressed also by [Lutheran theologian Johann]

Gerhard.”³³ Further, Calvin’s belief in “Divine righteousness and justice” caused him to respect rather than fear divine judgment.³⁴

While religious sentiment is never universal, it is not too much to argue that the religious fervor of the Reformation was different “in kind” than most who contemplated the Last Days in the Middle Ages. The fear of cosmic judgment was certainly ameliorated by the heroes of the Reformation. Further, purgatory was now gone for those in the Reformation ranks. And it is this change in thinking regarding those who were in the Church that allowed for a resurgence of hope.

Biblical Anthropology: A Key to Assessing Life after Death

At this point, it is important to assess the doctrine of life after death, not merely from the historical perspective of which reformers came to believe. We need to ask whether or not they got it right or whether, say, they were merely reacting to the historic errors of the Catholic Church. The good news is one of method. If the Reformation claimed anything at all, it claimed that whatever one believed ought to be based, not merely on tradition or the whims of the Church, but on the truth of the Scripture itself.

There are, of course, different ways to read passages related to the afterlife. While the Old Testament would offer a stronger basis for Luther’s view which affirmed the resurrection, although denying the immortality of the soul, the New Testament favors another view. A generation after Luther, Calvin rightly came to conclude that the New

³³ James P. Martin, *Last Judgment*, 6-7; citing Lennart Pinomaa, *Der Zorn Gott in der Theologie Luthers* (Annales Acad. Scient. Fennicae BXXI, I, 1938), 125; Hanns Lilje, *Luthers Geshchichtsanschauung* (Fürche-Studien 2, 1932), 132; John Gerhard, *Loci Theologica*, 20 vols., ed. J. R. Cotta, (Tübingen, 1762-1779), Vol. XIX, 137.

³⁴ Martin, *Last Judgment*, 6-8; Calvin, *Institutes*, III.12.

Testament is clear that Scripture teaches death as a segue for individuals to be ushered into the presence of the Lord.³⁵

Hermeneutically, the Old and New Testament ought not to be pitted against each other. Jesus and the apostles is that they were Jewish and though Jesus could nuance earlier teaching, their foundation was the Old Testament. As Matthew Johnson has argued in his 2009 UGST symposium paper, even the Old Testament is not limited to a physical body or a kind of monism absent a resurrection.³⁶ Johnson, relying heavily on Ron Cooper's significant work,³⁷ argues for a "holistic dualism" a view that posits that although humanity should be viewed as a functional unity in its totality, this does not necessarily imply that if the whole is broken up, all the parts disintegrate into chaos or nothingness. It affirms phenomenological, existential and functional unity, but does not conceptually entail monism or personal extinction at death.³⁸

The very words of Jesus affirm the existence of those who are departed. In rebuking the Sadducees, Jesus affirmed the existence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by utilizing God's identification with them at the burning bush and noting in Matthew 22:32 that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The New Testament hardly stops there. Certainly there are numbers of Pauline passages confirm that n dies, they are immediately in the presence of the Lord.³⁹

³⁵ See, for instance, Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1953), 668.

³⁶ Matthew Johnson, "Paul's Anthropology," A paper delivered at the 2009 UGST Symposium, Florissant, MO, Oct. 29, 2009, 6-8. On this, Johnson cites John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, (Chicago: Regnery, 1952), 8.

³⁷ John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

³⁸ Cooper, 46. See also Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 208

³⁹ II Corinthians 5:1-8 is typically utilized as a proof for this. In Philippians 1:21-4;

There are, of course, a number of New Testament passages which refer to death as “sleep.”⁴⁰ Still, the weight of the New Testament texts demonstrating cognizance when a person even after a person has died⁴¹ and therefore death should be understood as metaphorical and with reference to the death of the body. Still, while the weight of New Testament texts teach the understanding that people are “with the Lord” who die, Scripture offers a relatively few text that even consider the question.

Millard Erickson posits two reasons for the relatively few Scriptures which address the question of an “intermediate state.” First, he would suggest that the expectation of the New Testament writers was that Jesus would return relatively soon.⁴² The other reason is that “whatever its length, the intermediate state is merely temporary and, accordingly, did not concern the early believers as much as did the final states of heaven and hell.”⁴³ Erickson challenges that if human nature is entirely unitary—that is, if nothing survives death—what will be the basis of identity? Or as Erickson puts it, “If the soul, the whole person, becomes extinct, what will come to life in the resurrection?”⁴⁴

While the view of life after death is not universal among Apostolics, the majority would resonate with the approach of Erickson. Analogous to the eschatological positions that rose after the Reformers, so the formation of Apostolic beliefs related to life after

⁴⁰ For example, Jesus referred to both Lazarus in John 11 and Jairus’ daughter as sleeping (Mark 5:39). Paul could as well refer to those who were dead as sleeping (I Cor. 15:51, etc.).

⁴¹ In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus relates the narrative of Lazarus and the rich man where both Lazarus and the rich man are cognizant after death. It is difficult to disallow the passage as a parable and therefore metaphorical. Firstly, Jesus names Lazarus, something that is not done in any other parable, suggesting that He had a particular referent in mind. Secondly, even if the passage were a parable, Jesus never told parables about things to which there is no reality. Jesus did not speak of “Martians,” say, or “people levitating.” He only spoke of things which exist in reality.

⁴² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), 1175; citing C. Harris, “State of the Dead, (Christian),” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, (New York: Scribner, 1965), vol. 10, 837.

⁴³ Erickson, 837; citing Loraine Boettner, “The Intermediate State,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 291.

⁴⁴ Erickson, 1178.

death were part and parcel of broader eschatological issues at the inception of the Pentecostal Movement.

The Last Days: A Pentecostal Eschatology of Hope

When the question is asked why so much of Pentecostal eschatology is given to speculation about the Last Days and comparatively little focus is given to the state of those who die, one must address such a question historically. While after the Reformation, speculation regarding the Last Days waned among Calvinists and Lutherans, this was not the case in Great Britain. After an extensive argument that includes a broad representation of various sources within the English Reformation, As Christianson points out, “An apocalyptic view of the Reformation represented a consensus view among English protestants, not one confined to ‘proto-Puritans’ or some other imaginary minority group.”⁴⁵

Among others, King James delved into prophecy, as did Isaac Newton as he delved into the mystery of the number of the Antichrist. John Napier did as well, who “not only invented logarithms but extended his professional interest to the number of the beast.”⁴⁶ He along with Thomas Brightman both developed a schema that incorporated ideas that reflected a more pure millennialism of the early church.⁴⁷

While it is true that marginalized groups settled the new world in an effort to bring in the Kingdom of God on earth, this eschatological inheritance was not merely the work of a splinter group; it was the application of a broader sentiment with one

⁴⁵ Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon*, 36.

⁴⁶ Christianson, 97.

⁴⁷ Christianson, 97-102.

application that some were marginalized settled in America to see eschatological God's Kingdom built on this continent.

The expectation of what would bring about Christ's return differed considerably. For example, Roger Williams and John Cotton shared Oliver Cromwell's belief⁴⁸ that the immanent arrival of the Last Days "must be heralded by the conversion of the Jews." In tandem with this, "any conversion of new Gentile peoples would form a later stage of God's plan."⁴⁹ Thus, an eschatological hope was woven throughout every effort at evangelization of the world. While many Puritans looked for the soon return of Christ,⁵⁰ average church attendees had little more than a murky belief about prophecy.

Largely, those Protestants who settled the American shores believed in a kind of Augustinian sense that the true Church was the Kingdom of God with one added eschatological element. They believed that as the Church progressed, as it successfully evangelized the world, this accomplishment would usher in the coming of Christ. Some refer to this view as "postmillennial" expectation of the return of Christ. Not everyone held such a view, and even those who believed such a view sometimes lived it out more consistently than at other times.

Pentecostal Eschatological Hope

Given the constraint of space, let us move ahead to the latter part of the nineteenth century. A number of factors propelled those who were the forebears of the Pentecostal Movement to move from a postmillennial expectation of the return of Jesus to a kind of

⁴⁸ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 527-8. This was motivation for Jews to be welcomed into England so that prophetic fulfillment of their conversion to Christianity might take place.

⁴⁹ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 140.

⁵⁰ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956), 217-39.

premillennial and dispensational expectation of the return of Christ. When Pentecostalism began in the twentieth century, they were largely dependent on these groups.

The groups from whom Pentecostals would emerge developed an intense eschatological expectation of Christ's imminent return during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Thus, their eschatological concern was far more related to being a part of the Bride of Christ and the return of Jesus than about questions relating to the state of those who died. It is from this eschatological inheritance that Pentecostal/Apostolic eschatological teaching is framed.

Given that Pentecostals are diverse, it should be no surprise to find a variety of positions related to the state of a person after death. While there are those who espouse "soul sleep" in the Pentecostal Movement, such is a minority view; the larger body of Pentecostal and Apostolic teaching on this subject would hold to view more consonant with that of Calvin or of Wesley (as well as classical dispensationalists)—that there is an intermediate state of the dead as well as a final resurrection.

The earliest Pentecostals were given to evangelism, motivated by the need to call people into the Bride of Christ. Concomitant with such a call was the insistence that one needed to be baptized with the Holy Ghost to be a part of the Bride of Christ.⁵¹

Apostolics included baptism in Jesus' name as an essential matter in being part of the

⁵¹ See D. William Faupel, 26. Faupel cites several sources and notes, "We learn that the Bride enjoys the Pentecostal baptism which of necessity brings her to a place of yieldedness and suffering not realized by the great majority of believers." Faupel acknowledges A. G. Ward, *Soul Food for Hungry Hearts* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1925), 16-17. See also F. L. Crawford, "Preparing for Himself a Bride," *The Apostolic Faith* (Portland) 18 (January, 1909), 2; and E. A. Sexton, "The Bride of Christ", *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 3 (1 May, 1910), 1.

Bride of Christ.⁵² Given the eschatological inheritance, it seems logical that less speculation would be offered with regard to the specifics of the afterlife.

That said, one should avoid any sort of critique that a Pentecostal expectation of the coming of Christ is, because of its apocalyptic nature, often unduly pessimistic. That is, because Pentecostals have traditionally railed against the evils of the day, looked for signs of the time, and have hoped for Christ's soon return, some take this to be otherworldly to be of real value. Yet, since the Reformation, revivals have always railed against the evils of the time, hoped for redemption, and in some sense have brought heaven near eschatologically.

There is more than one way to "bring heaven near." While a medieval world view made considerable room for the working of angels, demons, God, and Satan, I would argue that because their expected end was not heaven but judgment; consequently, this turned them toward an eschatology based on fear. By contrast, while Pentecostals could point to signs of the time as indicative of the Lord's soon return, this did not cause them to cower and quake but to believe that redemption was nigh. Such a difference made practical difference in peoples' lives. With few exceptions, medieval fear of the Last Days did not motivate people to love God more, to take actions that would make a difference, to break out of the familiar. By contrast, Pentecostals were empowered to start orphanages, become missionaries, and leave their familiar places to share good news; in short, to live their lives fully and totally dedicated to God's work and purpose.

⁵² As Robin Johnston accurately notes, "When the dust cleared sometime around 1915, the New Birth message was attached to the "New Issue" of Jesus' name baptism and the oneness of God." See his "Transitional Hermeneutics in Oneness Pentecostalism," in *2001 Urshan Graduate School of Theology Symposium*, Hazelwood, MO.

Some have suggested that Pentecostal emphasis on eschatology, because it is so driven by questions related to the Last Days, has had too little interest in the question of life after death. Such a criticism is simplistic. Early Pentecostal hymnals are replete with songs about heaven, the hope of seeing Jesus, and eternity. The hope of heaven is more corporate and relational than ontologically specific.

Conclusion

Let us first of all consider what we have not said before we work to synthesize what has been claimed. We have offered an uneven survey of options after the Reformation with regard to life after death. We have not tracked the various challenges of the Enlightenment nor the various permutations of belief in the seventeen and eighteen hundreds. Moreover, we have purposely passed over the assessment of liberal Protestants and Neo-orthodox who vie for a monistic perspective of the individual.

What we have attempted to do is to keep in mind a Oneness Pentecostal audience, speaking questions that seem to be most relevant. First, we have sought to show how that a Pentecostal emphasis on Last Days is not an aberration but a Reformation inheritance. Second, we have sought to show that the focus on heaven since the Reformation is neither irresponsible nor impractical. Rather, in contrast to a medieval focus based on fear, the reality of heaven promotes godly living and lives lived to the fullest. Third, we have argued that one should not assess that the meager speculation of the ontological nature of life after death among Pentecostals is deficient. Rather, following our Reformation inheritance and our continued focus on the coming of Christ, the most

important questions are in reality how we are to live our lives with reference to heaven in view.

What cannot be forgotten is that Pentecostal eschatology offers solutions and specific direction. Although acknowledging that there is systemic evil and that Christians may well face significant difficulties, such a pronouncement is always made by sharing the good news of a real future because of the work of Jesus Christ as well as an opportunity to live a more abundant life on this earth. In summary, rather than being unmindful of our responsibilities in the world or encouraging Christians to escape-minded based on fear, the reality of heaven, the hope of Christ's coming, and the assurance of His Spirit while we await His return suggests that we have been faithful to the tenor of the biblical proclamation; and in that faithful presentation, we call people to an eschatology of hope.