Faith, Hope, Love, and the Eschaton

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.

John 14:23 (NRSV)

And he ... said unto them, “Occupy till I come.”

Luke 19:13(b) (AV)

From the earliest days of the Pentecostal Movement, the promise of the return of Christ has played a very significant role. The movement came into being in the midst of a complex confluence of several movements with eschatological overtones. Restorationism contributed greatly to Pentecostal self-understanding. Participants viewed themselves and the movement in which they participated as a harbinger of things to come. They were the “Latter Rain” Movement. Aimee Semple McPherson's famous sermon “Lost and Restored” epitomized the conviction of many early Pentecostals who viewed the Movement as a Holy Spirit restoration movement for the whole Church. Primitivism, too, played an important part in the lives of many restorationist Pentecostals. They searched the Book of Acts, and attempted to participate in the restoration of the Church by bringing their lives further into conformity to the life and teachings they understood to be revealed there.

Millenarianism played a role in this rich confluence of ideas as well. Indeed, from the time the idea arose that the United States had a “Manifest Destiny” millennial expectations within the country had reached a feverish pitch. Westward expansionism on the continent, military intervention abroad, and the rise of the country as an economic power gave way to a national optimism that tended to raise millennial expectations. Post-millennialism was in its heyday, even among many Wesleyan-Holiness people.

In the midst of the optimism and the Post-millennial expectations, many people in the Wesleyan-Holiness movement stopped singing “We've a Story to Tell to the Nations” with its chorus that spoke of the movement from darkness to dawning to noonday brightness, and began to sing “Work for the Night is Coming.” They were, it seemed, already in “Evening Light.” Optimism, after all, was not shared by everyone. Inherent in the millennial expectation was the pessimism or realism of those who, in spite of the rhetoric, did not see things improving. What they saw was increased alienation, estrangement, turmoil, even despair. Theirs was a view of life from the underside and many of them came to believe in a Pre-millennial return of Christ. Premillennialists were not convinced that the world was getting better. On the contrary, the Church
had always provided the last safe place in a world rapidly sliding to
destruction. Now it, too, was in a state of rapid deterioration. Higher
critical methodologies were making headway in the seminaries and the
pulpit, the social gospel was being adopted, the seeds of liberalism were
being sown, and it seemed that the very underpinnings of the conserva-
tive safety of Biblical literalism were being undermined. There was no
room for optimism without the hope of Divine intervention first. With
the return of Christ, peace, the end of alienation and despair, and the
beginning of the millennial kingdom would come.

As William J. Seymour noted in brief expository homily ("Rebecca:
Type of the Bride of Christ—Gen. 24," *The Apostolic Faith* [Los
Angeles, CA] 1.6 [Feb./Mar., 1907], 2.3–4), "Now we are living in the
eventide of this dispensation, when the Holy Spirit is leading us,
Christ's bride, to meet Him in the clouds." It was only after the bride of
Christ had been taken by the bridegroom that, "We shall be priests and
kings unto God, reigning with Him a thousand years." ("Behold the
Bridegroom Cometh!" *The Apostolic Faith* [Los Angeles, CA] 1.5
[Jan., 1907], 2.1–2). Pre-millennialism, and John Nelson Darby's dis-
persationalism, popularized and brought into a wide range of churches
at the turn of the century through Prophecy conferences and the notes in
C. I. Scofield's Reference Bible, had a strong effect upon early Pente-
costals. Pentecostal periodicals lavishly advertised the "Scofield" Bible
with its Dispensational features, simply because it provided the eschato-
logical scheme which they wanted to see proliferated. In spite of its
dismissal of modern day charisms such as speaking in tongues, it was
often used as the sole or primary text in Pentecostal Bible schools.

Charles Parham's heavy involvement in Zionism, another of the con-
fluents, contributed substantially to some restorationist expectations.
The return of the Jews to Palestine through the efforts of the inter-
national Zionist movement, he argued, stood for both the spiritual and
temporal welfare of the Jews. "May God hasten the day when this awful
prejudice between Jew and Gentile shall cease, when Messiah shall
reign and earth keep her jubilee a thousand years," he went on, with "the
sword a shear, the spear a pruning hook and nations shall have war no
more." ("Rev. Parham's Zionist Talk," *The Apostolic Faith* [Melrose,
KS] 1:5 and 6 (October–November, 1905), 9. Parham's commitment to
Zionism was shared by Aimee Semple McPherson in the 1920s and may
suggest why Pentecostals are among the leading proponents of Zionism
among the conservative churches of the United States even now. [Cf.
Ken Sidley, "For the Love of Zion," *Christianity Today* 36:3 (March 9,
1992), 47].

All of these confluent "isms," when taken together, add up to a sub-
stantial commitment by Pentecostals to a clear and convincing articula-
tion of a doctrine of the Second Coming. In most Pentecostal groups it
is a highly nuanced doctrine. In one sense it is a simple declaration that
Christ's return is imminent. In another sense it is very complex. It is