

## **Materiality or Materialism?: Revising Pentecostal Eschatology, Renewing the Earth, and Saving the Planet from the Prosperity Gospel**

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### **Introduction**

We find ourselves living at the threshold of environmental crisis. While some suggest that claims of climate change are simply political tribalism at play, the scientific consensus is overwhelming.<sup>1</sup> What is also clear is that human beings are responsible for much of this crisis and that if the human species does not alter its course then the consequences—be they near or far—will be disastrous for future life on the planet.<sup>2</sup> At the same time as the global community grapples with the growing realisation (or denial) of the climate crisis, it is pentecostalism that has emerged as one of the fastest growing religious movements in the world.<sup>3</sup> Thus, pentecostals find themselves at the forefront of global religion just as the looming climate crisis has itself become most evident. Given this reality, it is vital that pentecostals engage in the critical and constructive theological work needed to become active participants in one of the more pressing issues of our time. In particular, the eschatological vision of pentecostals—often a central theme of pentecostal movements—requires significant evaluation and renovation.

In this article I will argue that the premillennial eschatology of pentecostals—and dispensationalism in particular—has contributed to a deficient approach to ecological issues of concern, as well as being out of step with the intuitions of pentecostal spirituality itself. In view of this, I will propose three features of a reformulated pentecostal eschatology that can contribute to a pentecostal response to issues related to climate change; a materialist pneumatology, pentecostal renewal as personal and cosmic, and a prophetic millenarianism.

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<sup>1</sup> Dana Nuccitelli explores the scientific consensus relating to the evidence for climate change in Nuccitelli, Dana. "How We Know the Earth is Warming and Humans Are Responsible." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 76, no. 3 (2020): 140–44. For a discussion on how acceptance or denial of the scientific evidence for climate change can be shaped by political and ideological commitments, see Thomas Dietz, "Political Events and Public Views on Climate Change," *Climatic Change* 161 (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Nuccitelli, "How We Know the Earth is Warming and Humans Are Responsible," 3, 141.

<sup>3</sup> Bonjour Bay, "The Current Tendencies of the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement and the Growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 2 (2004), 255.

### 1. The deficiencies of pentecostal premillennialism

Pentecostalism is a diverse global movement with polycentric origins; defining the movement(s) is a challenging task.<sup>4</sup> Despite this dilemma we can still speak of the “family resemblances” found within the variety of pentecostals as a helpful means of understanding what lies at the heart of pentecostal spirituality and identity.<sup>5</sup> One such “family resemblance” is premillennial eschatology, with its consequent impact on pentecostal approaches to issues of social, political and environmental concern.<sup>6</sup>

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, revivalist and experientialist forms of Christianity were spreading across the world, often connected through networks of literature, travelling evangelists and missionary movements.<sup>7</sup> A predominant feature of this revivalist spirituality was heightened eschatological fervour. We see this, for example, in the emergence of North American pentecostalism, where Stephen Land and William Faupel (among others) have argued that it was a particular eschatological vision that shaped much of early pentecostal thinking.<sup>8</sup> The experience of Spirit baptism, the expression of the spiritual gifts, and the growing prevalence of pentecostal encounters with the Spirit were all understood in the context that Christ was the “soon-coming-King.”<sup>9</sup> This was a “latter rain” outpouring of the Spirit, meant to awaken the church and usher souls into the kingdom before Christ returns to take up rulership in his millennial reign on the earth.<sup>10</sup> As Land states, “Pentecostalism’s reason for existence was the carrying out of a last-days, global, missionary mandate by those who were Christ-like witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> This urgent premillennial eschatology was not only a feature of North American pentecostalism, but also of the various forms of pentecostalism emerging around the world in the early 20th century, and it was this eschatological imperative that added impetus to the remarkable uptake of evangelistic and missionary work by pentecostals in the 20th century.<sup>12</sup>

In time, the premillennial eschatology of pentecostals also came to be associated with the dispensational premillennialism first made popular in the work of John Nelson Darby through

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Wilkinson, *The Spirit Said Go: Pentecostal Immigrants in Canada* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Anderson, “Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions,” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson, et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Frost, *The Spirit, Indigenous Peoples and Social Change: Māori and a Pentecostal Theology of Social Engagement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Wilkinson, *The Spirit Said Go*, 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> See D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). and Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Frost, *The Spirit, Indigenous Peoples and Social Change*, 37.

<sup>10</sup> Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 30-33.

<sup>11</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 49; Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Gary B. McGee, “‘The Lord’s Pentecostal Missionary Movement’: The Restorationist Impulse of a Modern Mission Movement,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8, no. 1 (2005), 53.

the Scofield Reference Bible.<sup>13</sup> Dispensationalists claim that the approaching “end times” will involve (in various permutations) a mysterious rapture of Christians from the earth, the rise of the Anti-Christ, the restoring of Israel, and the final battle between the forces of God and the forces of the Devil. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century this set of beliefs was adopted by Fundamentalists and Classical Pentecostals, along with many of those in what came to be known within the term “Evangelicalism.” In this eschatological framework, not only is the end of the world coming, it is coming soon and bringing destruction with it. While this form of eschatology may seem like a curious oddity of particular streams of Christian faith, the implications are far-reaching. Interpreting apocalyptic scriptural texts as predictive of current geo-political events along with a belief that the world is approaching a climactic and cataclysmic battle both have real world consequences.

Of course, not all premillennial pentecostals are constantly obsessed with prophecies about the end of the world. For some, it is instead an eschatology that holds explanatory power for the present, helping adherents to make sense of the world as it is and their experiences of it. For others, it is simply one minor component of a much wider system of belief.<sup>14</sup> Yet even in these cases, an underlying conviction that the world will ultimately be destroyed as a part of God’s plan—whether in the near or distant future—has ethical and ecological consequences. As Amos Yong notes, this has resulted in a movement with “... historical and political attitudes and positions that are theologically problematic.”<sup>15</sup> Among other things, pentecostals are often characterised as otherworldly, cultivating an escapist spirituality and prioritising the saving of immaterial human souls over issues of wider social, political and environmental concern in the here-and-now.<sup>16</sup> As I have argued elsewhere,

...this is not to say that pentecostals who hold to a dispensational eschatological framework do not engage in issues of social concern, but rather to point out the dissonance between the two. When Classical Pentecostals do embrace social engagement (which they do) it is often despite their eschatology rather than because of it.<sup>17</sup>

In particular, this has deep-seated ramifications for pentecostal eco-theologies. The imminent return of Christ, along with the ultimate destination of the earth in a cosmic rubbish fire clearly defuses any need to address long-term issues of environmental degradation,

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<sup>13</sup> Dale M. Coulter, “Pentecostal Visions of the End: Eschatology, Ecclesiology and the Fascination of the Left Behind Series,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 1 (2005), 83-84.

<sup>14</sup> Damian Thompson, *Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7-10.

<sup>15</sup> Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 325; Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 325.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Russell Spittler names “otherworldliness” as one of the five implicit values of pentecostalism. Russell Paul Spittler, “Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M Burgess, Gary B McGee, and Patrick H Alexander (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 805.

<sup>17</sup> Frost, *The Spirit, Indigenous Peoples and Social Change*, 42.

ecological concern and climate change.<sup>18</sup> These issues will be resolved, in the pentecostal premillennial mind, not by human participation in efforts to care for creation itself, but by Christ's triumphant (and apocalyptic) return and the ultimate destruction of this earth.

One response to this might be to emphasise creation care on its own terms. In other words, rather than seeing this issue as one that relates to the future trajectory of the planet (and the human race along with it), we are better to focus on the loving of God's good creation in the present, simply because it is good and because that is what God has asked of us. For example, Van Johnson suggests that,

Premillennial eschatology is not the root of the problem, nor is a different type of eschatology, which views this planet as our eternal home, its necessary solution. Rather, concern about how we treat the earth and all God's creatures on it is mandatory because of the creation narrative, which includes the divine command to reflect God's image by ruling, not destroying, the earth.<sup>19</sup>

This could encourage pentecostal approaches to creation care without needing to revise the entire eschatological framework or engage in politically contentious debates. However, all theology functions, and even with an emphasis on creation care as a good in and of itself, the ultimate claim that this world is headed for annihilation upon the soon-coming return of Christ will always encumber efforts to prioritise creation care over other, seemingly more eternal, matters. As Jeffrey S. Lamp notes, "If the destiny of the created order is ultimately annihilation at the end of the age, there is greatly reduced impetus in the minds of many caring for creation in the present, particularly if this involves sacrifice of any kind."<sup>20</sup>

While at a grass roots level various forms of urgent (and often dispensational) premillennialism remain popular, scholars of pentecostalism have been calling for a revision to this framework for some time.<sup>21</sup> This call for change stems from concerns of a biblical and ethical nature, as well the claim that dispensationalist premillennialism is not congruent with the eschatology of early pentecostals nor with the intuitions of pentecostal spirituality.<sup>22</sup> Criticisms of the alliance between pentecostalism and dispensationalism can be seen in the work of Gerald Sheppard, and picked up and expanded on more recently by theologians such

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<sup>18</sup> Robby Waddell, "A Green Apocalypse: Comparing Secular and Religious Eschatological Visions of Earth," in *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology and the Groans of Creation*, ed. A.J. Swoboda (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 136.

<sup>19</sup> Van Johnson, "Eschatology and Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 23, no. 1 (2020), 103.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey S. Lamp, "New Heavens and New Earth: Early Pentecostal Soteriology as a Foundation for Creation Care in the Present," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 36 (2014), 69.

<sup>21</sup> Larry McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology* (Dorchester: Deo Publishing, 2012), 2.

<sup>22</sup> See McQueen, *Toward a Pentecostal Eschatology*, for an analysis of the variety of eschatological frameworks in early pentecostalism.

as Amos Yong, Dale Coulter and Peter Althouse.<sup>23</sup> Rather than dispensationalism being ubiquitous in early pentecostalism, it is more helpfully understood as a later development in the movement as it sought to build respectability (and alliances) with Fundamentalist Evangelicals.<sup>24</sup> This development occurred despite the contradictory manner in which dispensational eschatology was often used by fundamentalists to reject contemporary usage of the spiritual gifts, along with a prioritisation to the role of Israel in fulfilling the purposes of God that contrasted with pentecostal interpretations of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the rigid dispensationalism of Darby however, early pentecostals are better understood as seeing the outpouring of the Spirit as the "latter rain;" the Spirit was radically and uniquely pouring out on the church in preparation for the return of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Given some of these valid criticisms of the assumed prevalence of dispensational eschatology among early pentecostals, it is also important to recognise the ways in which contemporary pentecostals are moving away from dispensational and premillennial distinctives, especially when looking beyond the confines of North American Classical Pentecostalism. The influence of the wider Charismatic movement, as well as the more recent emergence of neo-pentecostal churches have contributed to a changing emphasis among contemporary pentecostals. The Charismatic movement, often occurring within already existing denominations and networks, has had less emphasis on urgent premillennialism as it emerged among churches with already established theological and ecclesial traditions.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, neo-pentecostalism has de-emphasised premillennial eschatology in favour of growth, influence and prosperity. In contrast to the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century pentecostals who sought to bring about an end-times revival before the imminent end of the world, contemporary neo-pentecostals are more positive about their role in the world, hoping to move away from the negativity of end-times premillennialism. Sometimes this shift leads to a more holistic view of church mission, seeing the world as redeemable rather than doomed, and leading to more interest in issues of social and environmental concern.<sup>28</sup> At other times,

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<sup>23</sup> See Gerald T. Sheppard, "Pentecostals and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: The Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 6, no. 1 (1984). Along with Peter Althouse, "'Left Behind' - Fact of Fiction: Ecumenical Dilemmas of the Fundamentalist Millenarian Tensions Within Pentecostalism," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 2 (2005); Coulter, "Pentecostal Visions of the End"; and Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*.

<sup>24</sup> As Matthew Thompson states that "When the second generation of Pentecostal believers arrived, shocked still to be in the current creation, it was time to settle in for the long haul, which, in North America, meant making a bid for cultural and religious respectability if the movement was going to survive." Matthew K. Thompson, *Kingdom Come: Revisioning Pentecostal Eschatology* (Dorchester: Deo Publishing, 2010), 50.

<sup>25</sup> Sheppard, "Pentecostals and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism," 8-10.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Castelo, "Patience as a Theological Virtue: A Challenge to Pentecostal Eschatology," in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End*, ed. Peter Althouse, and Robby Waddell (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 234.

<sup>27</sup> Wonsuk Ma, "Pentecostal Eschatology: What Happened When the Waves Hit the West End of the Ocean," in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, ed. Harold D. Hunter, and Cecil M. Robeck Jr (Cleveland: Pathway Press, 2006), 232.

<sup>28</sup> Donald E. Miller, and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 66.

we see something approaching a kind of charismatic postmillennialism, in which the church will become triumphant, influential, and capable of altering the course of history.<sup>29</sup> Rather than being a genuine theological re-evaluation, however, this move away from dispensational premillennialism is typically pragmatic, seeking to adjust to a changing context and avoiding the potential embarrassment of end-times speculation so as to enjoy the lure of growing respectability, wealth and influence.

In each of these cases, the critical and constructive theological work is often left to the side; the dissonance with dispensationalism goes unaddressed in any explicit manner, and alternatives go largely unexplored. As Murray Dempster has noted, if this unresolved paradox continues it will result in a new generation of pentecostals who will inherit “a tradition marked by a sense of theological ambivalence towards its own ministry programs.”<sup>30</sup> In addition, the lack of re-evaluation in neo-pentecostal theology has often resulted in a shift from “escapism” to “exploitation.”<sup>31</sup> The emphasis may no longer be on a desire to escape the earth for a better one elsewhere (while this one ultimately burns); instead it is to utilise the resources of this earth for our own enjoyment and prosperity in the present because the world will still end up in God’s cosmic garbage bin in the future. Neither of these options, it must be said, are satisfactory.

Thus, the revisioning of pentecostal eschatology is a vital task. This is not only the case due to hermeneutical and theological reasons but because eschatology, sitting as it is under the surface of pentecostal thinking, has the potential to serve as either a roadblock or as a stimulus for pentecostal environmental concern. Rather than serving as an impediment, my hope is that a revised pentecostal eschatology could reshape significant aspects of the church’s self-understanding, scope of mission and overall response to the looming ecological crisis. With that purpose in mind, my aim in this article is to suggest three ways in which a revisioning of pentecostal eschatology could both create more coherence with pentecostal spirituality, and cultivate a theological seedbed for real and transformative change in pentecostal approaches to creation care; namely, a materialist pneumatology, pentecostal renewal as both personal and cosmic, and a prophetic millenarianism.

## 2. A Materialist Pneumatology

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<sup>29</sup> For example, see David Moore, “‘Discerning the Times’: The Victorious Eschatology of the Shepherding Movement,” in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End*, ed. Peter Althouse, and Robby Waddell (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010). in which he examines the triumphalist theology of leaders in the ‘Shepherding Movement’, such as Bob Mumford, Derek Prince and others.

<sup>30</sup> Murray W. Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective: Reformulating Pentecostal Eschatology,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993), 53.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick L. Ware, “On the Compatibility/Incompatibility of Pentecostal Premillennialism With Black Liberation Theology,” in *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*, ed. Amos Yong, and Estrelida Y. Alexander (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 200-01.

Although the pentecostal worldview has often been characterised as otherworldly, the reality of pentecostal spirituality on the ground is far from escapist immaterialism. Central to pentecostal pneumatology is a belief that the Spirit is present and at work in the here and now, in the embodied lives of empowered believers.<sup>32</sup> Michael Wilkinson has highlighted the embodied nature of the experience of Spirit baptism, as well as the embodied phenomenology often associated with charismatic practices like words of knowledge, healing, and so on.<sup>33</sup> Wolfgang Vondey has explored how the pentecostal fivefold gospel, rather than being an abstract doctrinal prescription, is instead a “descriptive mechanism” that both emerges from and yields embodied practices.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Miroslav Volf highlights the pentecostal belief that divine healing is “in the atonement,” a facet of pentecostal theology that upholds the Spirit’s work in bringing about a “materiality to salvation.”<sup>35</sup> In fact it is often the healing work of the Spirit, rather than Spirit baptism or *glossolalia*, that has been central to the spread of pentecostalism, especially in the Majority World.<sup>36</sup>

To further extend this way of understanding pentecostal experience, it is not only the embodied experience in and of itself that needs our attention, but the impact of that experience on one’s wider material life in social, economic, and political terms.<sup>37</sup> Pentecostals often speak of empowerment; an empowerment that is not limited to tongues and spiritual gifts, but extends to the transformation of one’s life in a multitude of dimensions.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, forms of prosperity thinking are themselves intuitive extensions of the logic of divine healing. If God can heal one’s physical body, why would God not also be interested in the other material dimensions of human life, including one’s socio-economic reality? This is not a justification of prosperity theology, but rather to see that the connection between God’s

<sup>32</sup> Frost, *The Spirit, Indigenous Peoples and Social Change*, 109-10.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Wilkinson, “Pentecostalism, the Body, and Embodiment,” in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Volume 8: Pentecostals and the Body*, ed. Michael Wilkinson, and Peter Althouse (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 24-27.

<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, “Embodied Gospel: The Materiality of Pentecostal Theology,” in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Volume 8: Pentecostals and the Body*, ed. Michael Wilkinson, and Peter Althouse (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 103.

<sup>35</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 3 (1989), 448.

<sup>36</sup> For example, see Cephas N. Omenyo, “African Pentecostalism,” in *the Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck Jr, and Amos Yong (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), in which Cephas N. Omenyo argues that healing is at the core of pentecostal ministry in Africa. Similarly, Candy Gunther Brown identifies healing as the most distinctive feature of pentecostalism in a study exploring pentecostalism in ten countries. Candy Gunther Brown, “Introduction: Pentecostalism and the Globalisation of Illness and Healing,” in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3. Brett Knowles also argues that healing was instrumental in the growth of pentecostalism in New Zealand. Brett Knowles, *Transforming Pentecostalism: The Changing Face of New Zealand Pentecostalism, 1920-2010* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2014), 98, 115.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Petersen, *Not By Might, Nor By Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 95. In his study of Latin American pentecostalism, Petersen insists we must pay attention not only to the phenomenology of pentecostal experience, but to the impact of this experience on the lives of the poor who experience. For Petersen, we are then able to see the impact of Spirit baptism on “one’s self-esteem, motivation and moral strength.”

<sup>38</sup> Frost, *The Spirit, Indigenous Peoples and Social Change*, 113.

presence among us by God's Spirit, and the transformation of social, political and even economic circumstances, are intuitive to the pentecostal impulse. The question that becomes pertinent in this context, is how the materiality in pentecostal pneumatology might help to reform pentecostal eschatology in such a way that it can be brought to bear on attitudes toward climate change and creation care?

Rather than seeing eschatology as about the ultimate end of things, Christian eschatology is better understood through the motif of the coming kingdom of God.<sup>39</sup> The now-not yet dimension of the eschatological kingdom reminds us that God's ultimate redeeming work does not solely belong to the future, but that this future wholeness comes to us in part, in the present and by the Spirit, remaking us and the world we inhabit. This is the power of the resurrection of Christ, the future life of God made known to us proleptically in this present age.<sup>40</sup> Pneumatologically speaking, it is the presence of the Spirit that becomes the agent of eschatological transformation, raising Christ from the dead and becoming the very presence of resurrection life in the bodies of believers.<sup>41</sup> At the heart of both Christian pneumatology and eschatology is Christ's embodied resurrection. It is the very materiality of life, filled with the life-giving and renewing presence of the Spirit of God.

What this means for pentecostal eschatology and creation care is at the intersection of two threads of thought. First, the Spirit and the kingdom both relate to the materiality of our lives, as exemplified in the programmatic statement of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19. As Gordon Fee argues, when Jesus, therefore, announced good news to the poor, his proclamation was for those who were needy in every sense of this term ... Mission simply cannot be divided between 'spiritual' and 'physical'. To do one is to do the other, and both constitute the global mission of the church.<sup>42</sup>

Second, this life-giving presence of the Spirit is an eschatological reality; a foretaste of the coming kingdom. If the coming kingdom, Spirit-filled and empowered as it may be, is an embodied and holistic (or in our terms here, material) one, then the Spirit is interested in the full materiality of our existence, the implications of which suggest the inclusion of the ecosystem of which we are a part. As Macchia states, the Spirit "...eschatologically facilitates the transformation of creation into the dwelling place of God."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 95.

<sup>40</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 90.

<sup>41</sup> Steven M. Studebaker, "The Spirit in Creation: A Unified Theology of Grace and Creation Care," *Zygon* 43, no. 4 (2008), 952-53.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon Fee, "The Kingdom of God and the Church's Global Mission," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 17.

<sup>43</sup> Frank D. Macchia, *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 96.



Human beings do not exist in our ecosystem as independent entities, observing our environment as an external object; rather, we are unavoidably embedded as dependent subjects within it.<sup>44</sup> Thus, creation is not something best understood as “other” to human creatures. Our very bodies, minds and hearts are made of the earth and sustained by it (and God’s presence within it).<sup>45</sup> What is our embodied reality as human without the world of which we are a part? Perhaps this is a question too complex to answer here, but my suggestion is that if the Spirit is at work in the eschatological transformation of our embodied and material life in the coming kingdom of God, then the Spirit will also be at work in the eschatological transformation of the embodied and material world. I argue that this way of understanding our own embodied-ness, the materiality of the Spirit’s work, the presence of healing, and the extension of the Spirit’s work in the coming Kingdom to this material world is much more congruent with pentecostal intuitions. James K. A. Smith argues similarly when he states that,

...even though pentecostals have often accepted such dualistic rejections of ‘the world,’ a core element of a pentecostal worldview—the affirmation of bodily healing—actually deconstructs such dualism. One of the concomitant effects of this should be a broader affirmation of the goodness of embodiment and materiality, and therefore an affirmation of the fundamental goodness of spheres of culture related to embodiment.<sup>46</sup>

In this sense, Western pentecostals may do well to listen to the indigenous traditions that have so widely embraced pentecostal spirituality. Given the rapid and extensive uptake of the movement beyond the borders of white Western Christianity, perspectives from non-Western, indigenous and other subaltern peoples are vital to the ongoing project of pentecostal theology. The dualism that easily captivates the Western worldview is not such an obstacle in many indigenous theologies.<sup>47</sup> We see this in the example of the *Māori* (indigenous people of Aotearoa-New Zealand) proverb among the people of *Te Ati Haunui-a-Pāpārangī* which expresses a deep and abiding connection to creation in stating, “*Ko au te awa, Ko te awa ko au*” (I am the river, and the river is me).<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Māori theologian Henare Tate argues that “there is no such entity as an isolated individual.”<sup>49</sup> He suggests instead that human identity is only understood through relationship to *Atua* (God) and to *whenua* (land).<sup>50</sup> The land is not primarily something to own, but rather is from whom we come and to whom we belong. Similarly, Māori Marsden states,

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<sup>44</sup> Yong, *The Spirit of Creation*, 161-62.

<sup>45</sup> Studebaker, “The Spirit in Creation: A Unified Theology of Grace and Creation Care,” 953.

<sup>46</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 42; Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 41.

<sup>47</sup> Frost, *The Spirit, Indigenous Peoples and Social Change*, 105-07.

<sup>48</sup> This saying relates to their relationship with the Whanganui River. See Henare Arekatera Tate, “Towards Some Foundations of a Systematic Māori Theology: *He Tirohanga Anganui Ki Ētahi Kaupapa Hōhono Mō Te Whakapono Māori*,” diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2010), 78.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*.

Whenua is the term for the natural earth and placenta. We are of the earth and therefore earthy, and born out of the placenta and therefore human. As the human mother nourishes her child in the womb and then upon her breast after the child's birth, so does Mother Earth. Not only does she nourish humankind upon her breast but all life, animals, birds, trees, and plants. Man is part of this network and the other forms of life are his siblings. They share with each other the nourishment provided by Mother Earth...<sup>51</sup>

This shift away from dualistic thinking has the potential to help Western-minded pentecostals see that the ecosystem we inhabit is not something "other" to us but rather is something of which we are but a part. As Paul himself states in Romans 8:22, all of creation groans as if in the pains of childbirth as it awaits liberation. Paul directly connects our own embodied redemption to the redemption of creation itself.<sup>52</sup> The materiality of the coming kingdom is not only for us (human beings) but for the world we inhabit. If this is truly the case, then the Spirit who ushers in the coming kingdom, with all of its material implications, can be understood to lie at the heart of actions to care for the environment/ecosystem to which we belong.

### 3. Pentecostal renewal as personal and cosmic

This brings us to the question of eschatology, pneumatology, and the activity of God within creation itself. Macchia argues for a thoroughly pneumatological understanding of eschatology. He claims that,

Recognizing that eschatology is richly pneumatological opens the door to seeing the flames that ignite eschatological passion as the flame of divine love through the rich and diverse presence of Christ among us and the future culmination of that redemptive love at Christ's coming. Participation in God is participation in the eschatological freedom of the divine life in history to move all things toward new creation.<sup>53</sup>

This suggestion that the eschatological work of the Spirit is directly brought to bear on our embodied lives *and* the creation of which we are a part, asks us to see a connection between personal renewal, the coming kingdom, and the renewal of the cosmos.<sup>54</sup> The pentecostal experience of the Spirit by Christian believers is not all that the Spirit is doing, but rather becomes a particular instance of the Spirit's wider work of renewal. As Clark Pinnock claims, the telos of the Spirit's work is "not a one-dimensional union of spirits but a multidimensional

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<sup>51</sup> Māori Marsden, and Te Aroha Henare, *Kaitiakitanga: A Definitive Introduction to the Holistic World View of the Maori* (Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, 1992), 23.

<sup>52</sup> Studebaker, "The Spirit in Creation: A Unified Theology of Grace and Creation Care," 952.

<sup>53</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 48.

<sup>54</sup> See: Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), in which Jürgen Moltmann structures his eschatological work into three interrelated categories: personal eschatology, historical eschatology and cosmic eschatology. Personal eschatology has to do with notions of life, death and resurrection, historical eschatology relates to the coming kingdom, millenarianism and the end of history, while cosmic eschatology has to do with the new heavens and the new earth.

consummation of creaturely existence in God.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the trajectory of the Spirit’s work is toward a transfigured universe and a renewed creation of which humankind is but a part.

We can see this kind of theology at work in the way that Frank Macchia understands the pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism. Rather than seeing Spirit baptism as defined by (and confined to) the particular experience of a pentecostal believer, Macchia suggests that such an experience is a particular instance of a wider “Spirit baptism” motif that is at work in creation.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the individual experience of Spirit baptism is not all that Spirit baptism is, but rather is an experience *of* Spirit baptism, as eschatological gift in the present. He states that “Spirit baptism is a baptism into the love of God that sanctifies, renews, and empowers until Spirit baptism turns all of creation into the final dwelling place of God.”<sup>57</sup> In this sense then, the pneumatological renewal of the human life is but a microcosm of the pneumatological renewal at work in creation. We might even say that the connections between a personal and cosmic Pentecost find their origins in the creation story itself. As Moltmann states, “What the first Christians experienced as ‘Pentecost’ in Acts 2 also occurred in the first days of the new creation of the world: the outpouring of creative power and of the divine Spirit who gives eternal life—the stormy wind and flaming tongues of the divine breath.”<sup>58</sup>

This continuity between personal and cosmic renewal offers significant resources to pentecostal theologies of creation care. A.J. Swoboda argues that “To conceptualize the entire creation as Spirit baptized, along with the believer as Spirit baptized, creates a sense of eschatological expectation in partnering with God’s creation for the culmination of God’s eschaton.”<sup>59</sup> The dynamic and empowering experience of the Spirit at work in the pentecostal believer, so often understood to be the impetus behind much of pentecostal mission, has the potential to propel believers not only into evangelism and social engagement, but also into environmental care and ecological action. If the experience of the Spirit who fills and empowers believers in pentecostal encounter is a microcosm of the greater “Spirit baptism” unfolding in God’s good creation, then personal renewal cannot be conceived of apart from cosmic renewal. Eschatologically speaking, the experience of the Spirit as divine gift in the present is but the first-fruits of a new creation. In light of this, the Spirit-empowered followers of Christ should be the most opposed to ongoing environmental abuse, exploitation and plundering of the earth’s resources, for such actions stand in direct contrast to the coming kingdom and the renewing work of the Spirit. Instead, pentecostals, as those filled with the Spirit who is renewing the face of the earth, could (and should) find themselves increasingly

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<sup>55</sup> Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 155.

<sup>56</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 93-94.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>58</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “A Pentecostal Theology of Life,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 (1996), 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> A.J. Swoboda, “Eco-Glossolalia: Emerging Twenty-First Century Pentecostal and Charismatic Ecotheology,” *Rural Theology* 9, no. 2 (2011), 113.

at the frontlines of those with a deep and abiding passion for the wellbeing of the planet we call home. As Steven Studebaker argues, “Creation care is a pneumatological participation in the eschaton because the scope of redemption extends to all of creation, and the Holy Spirit is the intrinsic divine presence that leads all of creation to its redemptive consummation.”<sup>60</sup> He goes on to say that “when Christians engage in creation care the work of the Spirit in them meets the work of the Spirit in creation.”<sup>61</sup>

#### 4. A Prophetic Millenarianism

Alongside a growing awareness of the materiality of the Spirit’s work in the coming kingdom and the cosmic telos of pentecostal renewal, pentecostal eschatology would benefit from a constructive alternative to the negative premillennialism made so popular in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A lack of eschatological scrutiny can be seen in the transition from “escapism” to “exploitation” at play in contemporary neo-pentecostalism as it pragmatically shifts from urgent premillennialism toward a vague optimism, various forms of prosperity thinking, or in some cases a more fully-fledged postmillennialism. The prosperity gospel, for instance, often goes hand-in-hand with an unfettered and consumer oriented form of free-market capitalism. While capitalism is a complex and contested term, consumer capitalism in particular is driven by the forces of desire, greed and self-interest. As Ben Langford notes, “The mechanism of consumer capitalism, which initially intended to protect and serve individual self-interest over producer interest, has created a climate in which producers shape consumer desire towards their own ends. Human desire is infinite and insatiable because producers do not intend to satiate it but to evoke and shape it through production and marketing.”<sup>62</sup> The prosperity gospel, itself an idea that includes a range of theologies in a variety of contexts, typically includes an embrace of consumer capitalism into the church, seeing success, influence and opulence as signs of faith in a God who desires wealth, health and blessing for believers.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, as Swoboda notes, the anthropocentric paradigm of the prosperity gospel does little to further interest in creation care.<sup>64</sup> Rather, in the absence of critical reflection the fundamental stances of neglect and abuse toward creation can remain unchanged at best, or exacerbated at worst.

While prosperity theology has its problems, the inherent inadequacies are not due to the connections made between the spiritual and material, but rather the lacking prophetic

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<sup>60</sup> Studebaker, “The Spirit in Creation: A Unified Theology of Grace and Creation Care,” 954.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ben Langford, “Shaping Desire: Consumer Capitalism and the Eucharist,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 17 (2014), 39.

<sup>63</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the Prosperity Gospel, see Catherine Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Bowler differentiates between “hard” and “soft” prosperity theologies. The former are associated primarily with faith, positive confession and so on, whereas the latter combine faith and confession with the ethics of hard work, good financial management etc. What is common to both is the belief that God desires believers and the church to be wealthy and prosperous.

<sup>64</sup> A.J. Swoboda, “Posterity Or Prosperity? Critiquing and Refiguring Prosperity Theologies in an Ecological Age,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 37 (2015), 401.

critique of *materialism* that should follow an embracing of Jesus' vision of the coming kingdom of God. If the anointing of the Spirit, as claimed by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19, is truly good news to the poor, then the suggestion that this good news might relate not only to one's eternal destination but also to one's real life circumstances does not seem out of character with the prophetic claims of Christ and his pronouncement of the coming kingdom. As Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes however, there is a tendency among pentecostals to move too easily from a holistic gospel for the marginalised, to the excesses and abuses of a gross materialism for the powerful and rich.<sup>65</sup> This has direct ecological implications and as Swoboda points out, "the uncritical reception and embodiment of prosperity teachings—though they speak pointedly to real, felt human needs—ultimately arouse an *unecological*, if not *anti-ecological*, epistemology and practice among its adherents."<sup>66</sup> Any holistic message must avoid a focus on individualised "economic" wealth and opulence and instead orient us toward the flourishing of persons, communities and creation, while maintaining a prophetic distance from the allure of power. Rather than a Spirit-baptising of consumer capitalism into the church, what is needed is a theological framework that is capable of embracing the materiality of the Spirit's work, while resisting the temptation toward materialism. It is here that the prophetic potential of eschatology becomes critically important.

Peter Althouse suggests that resources for a more robust, biblical and ethical pentecostal eschatology may be found within the work of Jürgen Moltmann.<sup>67</sup> Moltmann argues for a Christian millenarianism that resists both postmillennial eschatology (as it often validates powerful, oppressive and exploitative structures under the guise of "kingdom rule") and dispensational premillennialism (with its negative and escapist tendencies). Moltmann's millenarianism seeks to uphold a "necessary picture of hope in resistance, in suffering, and in the exiles of this world," defining it as "an expectation of the future in the eschatological context of the end, and the new creation of the world."<sup>68</sup> His eschatology emphasises an apocalyptic critique of the powers of this present age in light of the coming kingdom. Yet this critique of the powers does not lead to rapture and escape; rather it inspires the church to act in the present as an alternative community that seeks to anticipate and embody the coming kingdom of God.<sup>69</sup> For Moltmann, thinking of eschatology in these terms allows for a healthy tension between prophetic critique of the powers in light of what God's future holds, and inspiration for embodied action in the present in anticipation of that very same future.

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<sup>65</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "The Pentecostal Understanding of Mission," in *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, ed. Wonsuk Ma, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 36.

<sup>66</sup> Swoboda, "Posterity Or Prosperity? Critiquing and Refiguring Prosperity Theologies in an Ecological Age," 397.

<sup>67</sup> Althouse's doctoral thesis was centered around a dialogue between the eschatology of pentecostalism and Jürgen Moltmann. See Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology in Conversation With Jürgen Moltmann* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, 192.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 200-02.

So what might be meant by a prophetic and pentecostal critique of the powers, especially as they relate to issues of ecological concern? Rather than conceiving of the principalities and powers as ontologically independent spiritual beings, the work of Walter Wink and Amos Yong (among others) challenge us to see the powers as the “...inner *and* outer manifestations of political, economic, religious, and cultural institutions.”<sup>70</sup> Moreover, as Yong notes, it is the perversion of these powers that leads to a reality in which “governments become tyrannical, nations become anarchic, economic systems become unjust, and social systems foster death instead of life.”<sup>71</sup> In the domain of environmental abuse it is the powers of our present age that foster death, not only for human life but for the life of creation itself. This understanding of the “powers” helps us to see that climate change is not simply due to the actions of individuals but rather incorporate the wider systemic powers within which much of contemporary Western life is subsumed.

In particular, pentecostal movements should pay particular attention to the manner in which greed has perverted the social, economic and institutional powers of our time. As Swoboda states, “Our world is ruled by greed, overconsumption, and boundless selfishness, and God’s creation is paying the price for it.”<sup>72</sup> Our need to consume so that we might (unsuccessfully) satiate our own desire at the expense of the environment, the poor, and future generations is causing untold damage. As a movement flourishing among the marginalised, and as a movement most tempted by the excesses of the prosperity gospel, it is precisely in relation to greed that pentecostals could offer profound alternatives. It is true, of course, that the coming kingdom involves flourishing of life, but the salvific trajectory of the gospel does not glory in anthropocentric and individualised economic prosperity; rather, true Christian prosperity is of a different quality. It involves relationships made right, the presence of peace, the end of suffering so that “every tear” may be wiped away, and the healing of creation. If this the case, then the prophetic task of the church in the present may be to critique both the anthropocentric and greed-shaped systems of our economic way of life, and to act in ways consonant with a pneumatologically and eschatologically inspired alternative.

To the extent that pentecostalism is captured by the materialism of (rather than by the materiality of) prosperity theology, present as it is to varying degrees within many pentecostal and charismatic movements, is the extent to which pentecostalism will struggle to embrace a prophetic stance toward the greed-corrupted powers of this present age. As Amos Yong and Samuel Zalanga claim, “Pentecostals naively assume that they can create a genuine ‘Christian community’ while simply subsuming their vision within the broader framework of global capitalism. In doing so, they have also come to define Pentecostal spirituality by the criterion

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<sup>70</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 78.

<sup>71</sup> Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 163

<sup>72</sup> Swoboda, “Posterity Or Prosperity? Critiquing and Refiguring Prosperity Theologies in an Ecological Age,” 395.

of material success.”<sup>73</sup> Rather than a prophetic critique of the powers, this is a taking up of those powers into the church and baptising them in the name of Christ. But instead of transposing consumerism into the church, pentecostalism has the potential to become the seedbed of radical alternatives to the kind of anthropocentric and individualistic economic vision that is so profoundly wounding the planet.

Taken together, these three interrelated facets of a revised pentecostal eschatology have the potential to inform and transform pentecostal responses to the climate crisis. First, the coming kingdom of God, inaugurated by the Spirit, is not otherworldly and escapist but instead is embodied and material; a materiality that includes not only human bodies but also that of the earth. This has ecological and ethical implications for how pentecostals act as partners with the work of the Spirit in the now and the not yet of the kingdom. Secondly, the breadth of the Spirit’s presence and work should inspire pentecostals toward a widening view of renewal; one that includes the poor, the marginalised, and all of creation itself. The renewal of human persons, so central to pentecostal spirituality, is oriented toward the “making new” of all things in God’s eschatological future and so is inseparable from the renewal of the cosmos. In this sense, pentecostal experience of the Spirit is continuous with, rather than distinct from, the cosmic dimensions of the Spirit’s renewal. Thirdly, a Christian millenarianism should compel pentecostals to prophetically challenge unbridled consumer capitalism (with its consequent implications for our ecosystem) both outside and inside the church. Given the connections between greed, consumer capitalism and environmental crisis, the prosperity gospel is an impediment to ecological responsibility. Instead, pentecostal prosperity thinking would be better oriented toward holistic (material), communal and cosmic flourishing, seeking to anticipate and embody the coming kingdom including the ecological implications therein. Thus, ecological action needs to be seen as a vital and integrated component of the mission of the church in the power of the Spirit; not only for the future of the human race, but to be faithful participants in God’s mission to renew all things.

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<sup>73</sup> Amos Yong, and Samuel Zalanga, “What Empire, Which Multitude? Pentecostalism and Social Liberation in North America and Sub-Saharan Africa,” in *Evangelicals and Empire: Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo*, ed. Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri (Grand Rapids: Brazo Press, 2008), 248.

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