ESCHATOLOGY AND PNEUMATIC PREACHING
WITH A CASE OF DAVID YONGGI CHO

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1. The Pentecostal Preacher in God’s Eschatological Kingdom

The anastatic strand defines the Pentecostal preacher as an empowered witness not just in a particular historical era, but more significantly, in God’s eschatological kingdom. Eschatology as a resource for Pentecostal preaching has fueled the dynamism of the movement and to a certain degree has given a distinctive quality to its preaching.

1.1 Theories of Eschatology and Eschatological Preaching

Liberalism and the Social Gospel movement in the nineteenth century and current secular humanism tend to ignore eschatology. Systematic and biblical theology often produces a “de-historicized eschatology and de-eschatologized history.” ¹ This has led to an unhealthy dualism, a form of “two realms” thinking which denies any continuity between eschatological hope and historical existence.

There has been a rise of eschatology as a dominant motif in Christian ethics and theology in recent years. Moral theologians like Pannenberg, Moltmann, Braaten, and Ogletree have made important contributions in relating eschatology and ethics in their works. They have directed attention to eschatology as a key to the foundations of Christian ethic. Moltmann’s

famous claim is "from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope."5

There are four distinct schools of interpretation in the millennial approach (one thousand years rule of Jesus Christ on earth) to eschatology: postmillennialism, premillennialism, amillennialism, and dispensationalism. Most Pentecostals are of the futurists premillennial school that holds to the belief that the personal return of Jesus would be before the "tribulation" and the millennial reign of Christ. Premillennial eschatology emphasizes evangelism while faithfully awaiting the end.

Eschatology as a resource for ethical decision-making has found various expressions.6 Schweitzer's consistent eschatology is totally future—Jesus' death introduced an "interim ethic."4 In contrast, C. H. Dodd's realized eschatology is totally present—the "eschaton" was fully realized in the coming of Christ.7 Rudolf Bultmann maintains an existential approach to eschatology that sees eschatology as "the existential encounter with the realized now."8 Jürgen Moltmann's promissory eschatology views the "parousia" as a future event that informs the present—eschatology is happening now as we live in the knowledge of the future of God. The inaugurated ("Heilsgeschichte") eschatology of Jeremias, Kummel, and Cullmann combines present and future with an existing tension between the already and the not-yet. Dialectical eschatology as held by Barth,


6 This section on eschatological ethics is adapted from the following sources: Max Lynn Stackhouse, "Eschatology and Ethical Method: A Structural Analysis of Contemporary Christian Social Ethics in America with Primary Reference to Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1964; Richard Lane Holcombe, "A Correlated Preaching and Teaching Program on Current Positions in Biblical Eschatology" (D.Min. field project report, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 1984); Paul Sirmon, "Eschatology as Resource of Ethical Decision (Class notes, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, Spring 1989). See also Millard J. Erickson, Contemporary Options in Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977).


Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr and Althauser maintain a dialectical tension between time and eternity; it negates or demythologizes the future in favor of "realism" for action in the world. Scofield and Hal Lindsey have popularized dispensationalist eschatology where history is divided into seven dispensations with chronological schemes of events leading to the return of Jesus and an apocalyptic expectation of the end of the world and in-break of the transcendent Kingdom of God upon earth. The reconstructionist eschatology of Rushdoony and Gary North is triumphalist and postmillennial; it seeks the "Christianization of America" and the establishment of a theocratic nation before Christ's return.

Among contemporary ethicists, Thomas Ogeltree offers a phenomenological account of human action which is related to community life and eschatological existence that is future-oriented or anticipatory.9 Paul Ramsey holds that the eschatological-apocalyptic is presumed to be an aspect of Jesus' thought that is unacceptable to the modern mind.9 James Gustafson, as a representative of the historical-eschatological method, is one who is highly sensitive to present and past history and the provisional functions of society, but opposes building ethics on eschatological statements.10

What has eschatology to do with preaching? McClure maintains that the preaching in the postmodern church is suffering under the implicit resignation of liberal and neo-orthodox eschatologies.11 He notes that preachers of the early nineteenth century were basically postmillenialists. However, in the late nineteenth century under the influence of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, and others, liberal preaching and its optimistic historical and social progressivism replaced postmillenial preaching. Liberal and social gospel preachers stressed the continuity between history and the eschatological future. Most of these, by the 1920s, interpreted the Kingdom of God as an achievable ethical reality rather than a future eschatological event.

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“Christian realism,” neoorthodox preaching in the mid-twentieth century stressed the qualitative difference between history and the eschatological future. It bears an undercurrent message of historical resignation. The social and psychological preaching of the 1960s and 1970s revived elements of the liberal ethical hope for the future. Liberationist preaching, especially in the third world, nurtures a neo-Marxist utopian hope of achieving liberation in the eschatological future for the world’s poor and socially marginalized people—through the “poor of God.”  

Eschatology has also changed the definition of preaching. Rejecting the popular version of “preaching as event,” Holmes suggests that end-time preaching involves a process—a dynamic onraveling rooted in revelation and continuing in life. In its continuity it relates to something that is happening, not something that has happened. As such, the preacher of the Second Advent is always reaching out for the next sermon; no sermon can be viewed as finished when the formal proclamation has ceased.

Eschatological preaching gives meaning to the facts of ordinary life. Lischer writes, 

Eschatological proclamation continually reappropriates and reappplies the promise.... Our aim is to create sermons, the form of whose content enthrills bearers to the presence and the future of Jesus Christ. The rhetoric of the gospel maintains a balance between the promise that has been fulfilled and which is now sacramentally celebrated in the church, and the promise of further participation in God’s future.

The eschatological dimension of Christian ethics finds expression in at least two different approaches: a “this-worldly” orientation and an “other-worldly” orientation. The eschatological also influences the ethical in several ways: by judging, by insisting upon hope, by providing a lure or drawing power, by mystic participation in the here and now, and by the

13 Holmes, The Last Word, pp. 31-41, 49. The author listed the following attributes which should characterize end-time preaching. Eschatological preaching of hope is: revelational, cosmical, evangelical, celebrational, confessional, individual, corporal, situational, relational, dialogical, holistical, universal, and ecumenical (pp. 55-65).

beauty of the eschaton or consummation as portrayed. Eschatology is therefore far too important for the Christian faith to be marginalized or ignored in preaching. As a prime symbol of hope it may function in Pentecostal preaching as a model for discipleship.

1.2 The Place of Eschatology in Pentecostalism

Theologian Paul Tillich once noted that the best way to study a religion is to examine its conception of the end times. Indeed, eschatology is the foundation of Pentecostal ethics. The key to understanding the transformative ethics of Pentecostalism is located in their notion of eschatological hope.

The view that the second coming of Christ is at hand has been an important component of Pentecostalism. Eschatology belongs to the essence of Pentecostalism and initially Pentecostals are eschatologically excited Christians. In the beginning the message of Pentecostalism was the Second Advent. “[They] sing songs proclaiming that ‘Jesus is coming soon’...prophecies call out that ‘My time is near.’” The reality of the soon return of Jesus affects daily living, to the extent that a common expression used by Pentecostals in making any future plans is “the Lord tarrying.”

Early Pentecostal eschatology is a result of the Holiness movement’s intense prayer, fasting, and heart-searching to ascertain God’s thought for the closing of the Church Age. Modern Pentecostal eschatology to a great extent echoes the imminent apocalyptic predictions that proved so popular in Hal Lindsey’s The Late Great Planet Earth, and Tim LaHaye’s

18 Neitz, Charisma, pp. 56, 204, 205. Anderson suggests that at first the doctrine of tongues was subordinate to the millennium message. Tongues was a means by which the message was confirmed, legitimated, and propagated (p. 90). When Jesus did not come immediately, the emphasis shifted and tongues became the more important doctrine. Later, other “signs” of Pentecost were cultivated, for example casting out demons and healing of the sick (Roger M. Anderson, Vision of the Disinherited [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979], p. 90).
The Beginning of the End.20 Lindsey’s and LaHaye’s reasoning are deductive in nature and are based on premillennial notions of the rapture, the great tribulation, the marriage supper of the Lamb, etc.21 Pentecostal preachers therefore, by and large, take an interest in the signs of the parousia. Contemporary social and political events have been interpreted as sure signs of the imminent coming of Jesus Christ. They are, however, wary of any attempt to calculate the time of the parousia.

Pentecostalism, with its premillennial view of the future (at least at the beginning of the movement), along with other Fundamentalist groups, held a sectarian ethical stance against the values of the world.22 There was unrelenting criticism of this present evil world. The focus then was on evangelism and the spiritual needs of the people. As it experienced upward social mobility and gained social acceptance, the movement has more or less adopted an accommodative posture. There has been more involvement in social activism to alleviate social ills. In sum, the eschatological vision of current Pentecostalism is one of both judgment and promise for historical existence.23

The anastatic strand of Pentecostal ethics consists of the twofold significance of the pneumatic and the eschatological. How then does the pneumatic affect the eschatological in Pentecostal doctrine and preaching? Gary Burge, in his study of the Fourth Gospel maintains that the Spirit is the eschatological continuum in which the work of Christ, initiated in his ministry and awaiting its termination at his return, is wrought out.24 John’s futurist eschatology, then, is maintained by making the Spirit an interim figure present in lieu of Jesus until the consummation of the age.

It is the function of the Spirit to prepare the Church or the Bridegroom. This eschatological presence of Christ in the Paraclete manifests itself in the ministry of the church. The eschatological impact is clearly evident in the ministry of preaching.

1.3 The Role of Eschatology in Pentecostal Preaching

Premillennial expectations and eschatological urgency formed an important part of the message of early Pentecostalism. The early Pentecostal preachers believed that they were preaching the end-time message, and the “latter rain” revival with its frequent charismatic manifestations is the eschatological sign of the cataclysm. Gee says, “their hearts glowed with the expectation and conviction that there was destined to be a last revival before the coming of the Lord, and that, for them, all earthly history would soon be consummated by the ‘Rapture’.”25 The impact of apocalyptic movies like “A Thief in the Night,” and “Distant Thunder,” and popular messages based on the books of Daniel and Revelation added to the urgency apparent in Pentecostal sermons.

Although Bloch-Hoell disagrees with Gunnarson that Pentecostal preaching is first of all eschatological, he observes that the eschatological thousand years during which is the Millennium, when the marvs are raised in the first resurrection and reign with Christ at Jerusalem. See Lyford Paterson Edwards, “The Transformation of Early Christianity from an Eschatologized to a Socialized Movement” (Ph.D. dissertation, The Graduate Divinity School, The University of Chicago, 1919), p. 4.


24 Burge, The Anointed Community, pp. 34, 35.

element is more dominant in Pentecostal preaching than in the majority of Christian churches.\textsuperscript{20} Pentecostal eschatology expressed in preaching is vivid and inspiring faith and not just inherited dogma. Bloch-Hoell believes that eschatology is a consequence of the biblicism of the Movement, and it is also in accordance with the fancy for the extraordinary and perturbing. It may also be that the eschatological element in Pentecostal preaching was strongly motivated towards missionary activity. The imminence of Christ’s return was emphasized in order to intensify the appeal to conversion or to home and foreign mission work.\textsuperscript{21}

Even today, Pentecostal preachers easily tap springs of millennialist sentiment with an insistence on the imminent return of Christ in prophetic messages on the “last things.” The language of premillennialism remains appropriate for a people who see not the betterment but the degradation of society everywhere. The Pentecostal minister who preaches energetically on sin and grace, salvation and perdition, utilizing the dramatic idea of the \textit{parousia} for emotional stimuli, will get an enthusiastic response from the people. Thus, eschatology is easily, powerfully, and sometimes dramatically put to rhetorical use. However, although “the menace of the last Judgment is powerfully evoked... the frightening element does not dominate Pentecostal eschatology any more than eschatology dominates the entire Pentecostal message.”\textsuperscript{22}

The Pentecostal message with its premillennialist, pretribulationist, and antinomian tendencies was proclaimed with urgency and fervency from Pentecostal pulpits all over the world—in some instances, to the point of succumbing to the temptation of an eschatological irresponsibility which has not given enough importance and value to the reality of the present. Fulfillment of prophecy is usually tempered with warnings against false hopes, such as world peace, world government, military settlements, and other human utopian

ventures.\textsuperscript{23} Pentecostal preachers hold to the view that the resolution of human and other ethical problems is to be found only in the \textit{eschaton}.\textsuperscript{20} Holmes puts it succinctly,

> We preach hope, not for the development of man’s abilities to achieve a better world, or for the development of his morals and ethics as the ultimate solution to his ills, but for the final intervention of God in human affairs.\textsuperscript{31}

Pentecostal messages on the imminent return of Christ are often confirmed by spontaneous prophecies by certain members of the congregation.\textsuperscript{32} Brunner almost could have been writing of such prophecies when he said, “one seemingly possessed by the Spirit will speak biblically reminiscent sentences or phrases in the vernacular, usually of exhortation and most often with eschatological and sometimes visual context and content.”\textsuperscript{33}

In Pentecostal eschatological preaching the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are interpreted by the preacher eschatologically, although the existential dimension is never totally absent. Several eschatological themes for preaching then begin to emerge in this kind of homiletical venture. Provisionality and hope for the new future in Christ begins to control how Pentecostals believe, think, and act in the historical present. This results in an emphasis on strict ethical behavior.\textsuperscript{34} Certain eschatological images generate hope and are a real force for Christians as


\textsuperscript{21} Stackhouse suggests that this is not unusual: “Eschatology is a necessary ingredient of every religiosity, for it deals with ultimate realities and values in contrast to the plethora of ‘relative realities and values’ qualified by religious attitudes and thought.” Stackhouse, “Eschatology and Ethical Method.”

\textsuperscript{22} Holmes, \textit{The Last Word}, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{23} Prophecy here refers to the general Pentecostal practice of spontaneous exhortation for edification of the members of the congregation, but it may sometimes go beyond these mild exhortations to include the foretelling of future events such as the imminence of revival and other millennial events (Hollenweger, \textit{Pentecostals}, p. 345).


\textsuperscript{25} According to Burgess, \textit{The Spirit and the Church}, p. 53, such reforming zeal based upon a conviction that the rapid approach of the end demands greater strictness than ever, was found among the desert fathers, the Novations, the
they locate the Christian life in a larger framework. The images effectively link the eschatological present to that which is not-yet.35 The preacher of the Second Advent must therefore develop a sensitivity to the contemporary human situation and at the same time cultivate the languages of hope and judgment in addressing those situations and human needs according to the biblical message.36

With all the difficulties that attend a discussion of Pentecostal eschatology, there are several features that are identifiable: 1) the eschatological model provides the necessary categories to understand Pentecostal ethics and preaching; 2) it issues forth a statement of the ultimate goal in Pentecostal sermons with a view of the Christian life as an orientation toward the future and the sermon as never an end in itself; 3) it impacts the task of sermon preparation itself as the preacher gives himself or herself in diligent study and genuine fervor “till Jesus comes,” and 4) it imbues the church with eschatological possibilities.37

2. A Model of Pneumatic Preaching: David Yonggi Cho

David Yonggi Cho was born in Korea on February 14, 1936. Raised as a Buddhist, he turned to Christianity when Jesus appeared to him and healed him of his tuberculosis. Growing up in very hard times during the Japanese occupation of Korea limited his potential for formal education; however, he graduated from Full Gospel Bible Institute (Assemblies of God) in 1958 and was ordained to the ministry in 1960. He received his law degree from the National College of Korea in 1968. Cho married Grace Sung-Hae Kim, daughter of Jashil Choi, in 1965. The couple have three children—Hi-Jae, Samuel, and Sung-Jae.38

Donatists, the Waldensians, the radicals of the Reformation, the Wesleyan revivalists, as well as modern Holiness Pentecostal/Charismatic churches.


Cho founded Yoido Full Gospel Central Church (FGCC) in May 1958 as a tent church with five members. The church joined the Korean Assemblies of God in 1962.39 Unlike many of the dynamic larger churches that are built on the strong personal preaching ministry of an anointed person of God, the unrelenting growth at FGCC is based on a multiplication of home cells led by thousands of lay leaders, mostly women, thus making it “the smallest church in the world, as well as the biggest.”40

Divine healings and miracles stimulate the phenomenal growth of the church. It had 300 members in 1961; 100,000 members in 1979; 250,000 members in 1983; and by 1987, over half a million. Last year, Peter Wagner listed it as having 700,000 members. Central Church is the hub of a multifaceted missions program, a Church Growth International ministry organized to teach its growth possibilities to others, television ministry, and Prayer Mountain.

The Korean people, steeped in shamanism, emphasize health, wealth, fertility and success in their life ventures. Cho’s preaching philosophy is “Find a void and fill it!”41 His messages confront human problems and meet human needs. His preaching formula, based on the threefold blessings in 3


John 1:2 is salvation, health, and prosperity. The three goals of preaching for Cho, include conversion to Christ, building faith for a successful life, and motivation to serve God and fellow human beings.

Cho’s ministry also emphasizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, physical healing, and casting out demons and evil spirits in the name of Jesus. In his preaching, he usually begins with the goodness of God; for him, that is the most important theology. His favorite subject on which to preach is faith, which is a “mystic reality” and can only be known and possessed by a person through the power of the Holy Spirit. Cho’s other preaching themes are the redemption and the blood of Jesus Christ, and foundations of a successful life. His definition of a successful and prosperous life departs from connotations of western materialism and emphasizes the Oriental concept of fulfilling one’s goal in life.

Cho’s preaching style basically follows the traditional deductive method. He preaches topical sermons on Sunday and expository sermons at Wednesday’s Bible Study and Friday’s all-night prayer meeting at FGCC. Like Fosdick, Cho believes that preaching is counseling on a large scale. Because he has turned his pulpit into a counseling place, he denies any attempt to become eloquent and actually repudiates any intention of ever becoming eloquent. The method of preaching, then, is to counsel the people to help them meet their needs.

The most distinctive characteristic of Cho’s preaching is his total dependence upon the Holy Spirit. He is truly “the pneumatic man.” Through

his intimate fellowship with the Holy Spirit, he is able to consistently experience the anointing when he preaches. Typical of a Pentecostal, he recognizes that without the anointing of the Spirit, all sermon preparation, human eloquence, and communication skills will not bring results. For Cho the Holy Spirit is more than an uncertain power, an impersonal force, or an unknown symbol, and the anointing of the Spirit is more than conversion or baptism in the Spirit. Rather, the Holy Spirit is a Person who desires to have intimate fellowship and communication with God’s people. He is a living reality, to be loved and worshipped like the Father and the Son. The “communion with the Holy Spirit” is a central concept in Cho’s preaching and spiritual effectiveness. Such communion means three things: fellowship, partnership, and distribution. The partnership metaphor, with the Holy Spirit as the Senior Partner and the believers as junior partners, is Cho’s favorite way of describing his relationship with the Spirit. Cho writes of his preaching practice,

Every time before I go to preach, I always say, “Dear Holy Spirit, I welcome you, I recognize you and I love you. I depend upon you. Dear Holy Spirit, let’s go! Let’s bring the glory of God to the people!” When I start to preach, I say in my heart, “Dear Holy Spirit, now I’m starting. Let’s go! Supply all the knowledge and wisdom and discernment, and I’m going to give it out to the people.” After finishing the sermon, I will sit down and say, “Dear Holy Spirit, we did a wonderful job together, didn’t we? Praise God!”

When the Holy Spirit has been given his rightful place in one’s life and ministry, the anointing will follow. Anointed preaching will then result in conversions, healings, and miracles. Ultimately, the fruit of the Holy Spirit in a person is a morally upright life.

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42 See Cho, Salvation, Healing, and Prosperity.
43 Cho, Successful Home Cell Groups, p. 149.
45 These are reflected in the titles of the books that Cho has written.
47 Cho reveals much of his personal style and practices in preaching in chapter 14, “Preaching to a Growing Church,” in Successful Home Cell Groups.
49 Cho, Successful Home Cell Group, p. 156. This does not mean that he opposes any attempt to better oneself in communication skills. He says, “if the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is important enough to speak, it is important enough to speak it well.”

40 Cho, Successful Home Cell Group, pp. 145, 146.
52 Cho, Successful Home Cell Group, p. 122.
The Holy Spirit is the most important person for Cho, both in the
pulpit, and more so in his daily life. According to Cho, his walk with the
Spirit is so close that “now I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit so intimately
that, when the Spirit speaks, I understand.” Such intimacy is cultivated
through much prayer and fasting. Cho spends at least one hour with the
Holy Spirit the first thing every morning. Personal prayer is a dialogue
where one should expect to hear, not just speak. Through this inner
dialogue with the Spirit, God reveals his plan to his people, both general
and specific. Cho’s Spirit-consciousness is also developed through his
regular personal practice of speaking in tongues.

Knowing the excesses that exist in his Pentecostal background, Cho
urges for a balance of reason and spirituality. He based this on the New
Testament models where John represents the experiential and the emotional
while Paul represents the theological and rational aspects of faith. Both are
Spirit causes ‘stagnatism.’ A proper balance of both will cause dynamic
church growth.”

Cho’s eschatology reflects basic premillennialism: “The Kingdom of God
is future, but it is present. It is not of this world, but it affects this world. It can
be entered into at the present time, but there is a future fulfillment.” He
believes that the time is coming when the Anti-Christ will be manifested and
the world will experience great tribulation. Yet the Church, as God’s last hope
for the world will be empowered to preach the gospel to all nations before the
end of the age.

3. Summary

Pneumatic preaching and ethics are carried out in the context of
empowerment. It involves a “reason-revelation” dialectic in the preparation
and sermon delivery processes, the anointing of the Spirit, and the results
of Pentecostal preaching. Eschatological preaching and ethics are
accomplished within a “present-future” dialectical tension. A positive look
at Cho’s ministry highlights the vital role of the “communion of the Holy
Spirit” in pneumatic and eschatological preaching.

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27-145 describes Cho’s ministry as an encounter between God’s transcendence
and immanence.

54 Cho, Successfull Home Cell Group, p. 129.
56 Cho, Successfull Home Cell Group, pp. 131-134.
57 Cho, More Than Numbers, p. 139.
58 Cho, More Than Numbers, pp. 79, 80.
59 Cho, More Than Numbers, pp. 124, 126.