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IMAGINING THE FUTURE

The Origin, Development, and Future of Assemblies of God Eschatology

By

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THE STATEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

The theology of the Assemblies of God is best summarized by the four cardinal doctrines: Salvation, Spirit-baptism, Healing, and Second Coming of Christ. These four core beliefs are more than doctrines or religious experiences; they reflect a Christological orientation in that Jesus is proclaimed as the Savior, Healer, Baptizer in the Spirit, and the soon coming King. Rivaled only by the doctrine of Spirit-baptism and initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues, the doctrine of the return of Jesus has been one of the most important emphases in the history of the local AG church. Although the popularity of end times teaching has waned in recent years, it still remains an important subject in AG churches.

This chapter will explore the official eschatological positions as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Truths (SFT). Since 1916, this doctrinal statement has served as the theological foundation of the fellowship. As important as spirituality was to early Pentecostals, proper understanding of biblical doctrine was equally important to the unity and integrity of the movement. Written in 1916, the SFT is one of the earliest formal statements of faith within the

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1 The General Council reemphasized the four core doctrinal beliefs in 2009. Each of the four doctrines were presented and discussed by the Executive Presbytery in a special emphasis called “iVALUE” on the “‘Four Core Beliefs’ of the Assemblies of God: Salvation, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Divine Healing and the Second Coming of Christ.”


3 Poloma and Green, The Assemblies of God, 82.

4 The Statement of Fundamental Truths will be referred to as SFT.

5 Two of the five rationales for organizing the first General Council in 1914 had to do with Pentecostal ministers uniting in sound doctrine. “General Convention of Pentecostal Churches of God in Christ,” WW, December 20, 1913, 1. See also, GC Minutes (April 2, 1914), 4. The five purposes were unity in doctrine, cooperation in ministry, organization of missions efforts, legitimacy in legal matters and the need for a Bible school for training ministers and a literature department for publishing endeavors.
Pentecostal movement. 6 J. R. Flower describes the SFT as the “skeleton structure” of AG doctrine, being representative of those beliefs “held in common by many other prominent evangelical groups, and therefore is fundamental and orthodox.” 7 The SFT provides positions on the Trinity, salvation, sanctification, baptism in the Spirit, healing, ordinances, ministry, and eschatology. 8

The story behind the formation of the SFT has been well documented. 9 However, few studies have made a significant effort to look at the changes made to the statement beyond the first few years, particularly with regard to the eschatological truths. Although the specific doctrines addressed by this document have remained the same, revisions to the titles, wording, and content took place in 1917, 1920, 1921, 1927, 1961, and 1969. 10 Ministers are required to affirm on a yearly basis their support for the doctrine contained in this statement. 11

This chapter will take a fresh look at the story from an eschatological perspective. It will survey of the various changes made to the eschatological fundamental truths (EFT) in order to understand the way in which AG eschatology has been modified or developed. This survey will also include some

6 For example, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) had a statement of “teachings” as early as 1910, but the Statement of Faith was not codified until 1948. See, “The Church of God,” Church of God Evangel, August 15, 1910, 3. The Pentecostal Holiness Church predated the Pentecostal movement and had adopted a statement of faith but modified it to reflect Pentecostal doctrine.


8 At the same time, this statement is missing key elements of the pillars of Fundamentalism such as the virgin birth, miracles of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus. The exclusion of these pillars of fundamentalist doctrine suggests that the “fundamentals” were not necessarily the blueprint for the SFT.

9 Menzies, Anointed to Serve, 106–21; Brumback, Suddenly… From Heaven, 204–10; Blumhofer, The Assemblies of God vol. 1, 205–39. Most of these histories discuss the origin of the Statement of Fundamental Truths but do not discuss the changes made throughout its history. Glenn W. Gohr, “Historical Development of the Statement of Fundamental Truths,” AG Heritage 32 (2012): 61–66, is the only article that charts the changes made over the last century, though it does not concern itself with the specific changes to eschatological doctrine.


11 GC Minutes (October 1–7, 1916), 13–14, states, “In as much as unity among ministers is dependent upon their speaking the same thing on all fundamental matters (1 Cor. 1:10), the Credential Committee is hereby instructed to ask each applicant of the ministry for credentials or for a Certificate of Fellowship whether he recognizes and accepts the truth in the Statement of Fundamentals to the extent that he will endeavor with all lowliness and meekness and loving forbearance, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

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additional declarations of faith that have surfaced in recent years in order to see how these expressions may differ.

**Early Doctrinal Statements**

The *SFT* was not the first doctrinal statement that AG leaders promoted to the members of the fellowship. Immediately following the first General Council, E. N. Bell expressed the doctrinal identity of the new fellowship with a list of nine doctrinal commitments: salvation from sin, baptism with the Holy Ghost, no “holy rolling,” spiritual gifts, the local Church, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper, the soon coming of Jesus, missions, and divine healing. Although not an official statement passed by the members of the General Council, Bell believed he was speaking authoritatively for the new fellowship. Bell’s statement about the Second Coming contains the basic framework for what would eventually become the *SFT*. He says, “We believe in the pre-millennial coming of the Lord Jesus to reign with the saints 1000 years, Rev. chapters 19 and 20. In the new heaven and new earth as here promised.”

A second early doctrinal statement came from A. P. Collins in August of 1915. Collins and Bell were fellow Baptist pastors and close friends who served together on the committee that called the first General Council. Collins was elected the second chairman of the General Council in 1914. Because of the “various issues” facing the fellowship, Collins felt compelled to write a personal declaration of faith to share with the *Pentecostal Evangel* readers in anticipation of the October 1915 Council. It reads:

**A DECLARATION OF FAITH**

I hereby affirm, declare and avow my belief in God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and these three are one. That the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the only rule of faith and practice. That men are saved from sin upon repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ whose blood cleanses from all sin. That baptism in water according to Matthew 28:19, and the Lord’s Supper

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12 “For Strangers. Who Are We?,” *WW*, May 20, 1914, 1–2. Bell expressed some of the early AG attitudes toward the holiness movement, commenting, “We have never been in any way associated with the real Unholy Rollers wrongly called holy, nor do we practice or believe in such shame and folly as rolling from one side of the house to the other. This is nonsense and dishonoring to God.”

13 “For Strangers. Who Are We?,” 1. This is the first mention of the new heaven and new earth prior to the *SFT*.

are to be observed by all believers. That the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the
privilege of the believer who obeys Jesus. That Jesus is coming to earth again
with the saints to reign a thousand years. We love God and all His children. –
Arch. P. Collins.¹⁵

With this brief statement, Collins set the stage for the AG to clarify its position on
the Trinity, since debate over the baptismal formula was already causing division.
Collins’s statement differs from that of Bell in that he begins with more traditional
evangelical concerns such as the Trinity and inspiration, but does not include
healing, sanctification, or the church. Both affirm basic premillennial doctrine but
make no mention of a two-phase coming, tribulation, or rapture.

Following the October 1915 General Council, Collins again took to the
Pentecostal Evangel to provide readers with a list of eight core doctrines that he
believed defined the Pentecostal movement: the Bible, salvation for all, the
church, baptism in the Holy Spirit, healing for the body, ordinances of the
Church, and the end times.¹⁶ Instead of emphasizing that Jesus is coming soon,
Collins declares, “we are nearing the close of the dispensation” and warns of
coming judgment. This list of doctrines was “compiled for distribution,” but just
a few months later it was determined that the SFT was needed and the tract never
made it into print. Although Collins was not a member of the committee that
proposed the SFT, his role in the leadership makes this document very likely to
be the foundation of the statement that developed.

The core doctrinal commitments expressed by Bell and Collins provided
fourteen of the seventeen foundational elements that would be included in the
SFT less than a year later. The only doctrines not found in these early lists—
remarkably—are speaking in tongues, entire sanctification, and eternal
punishment. But the similarities point to these two early statements being at least
the starting point for the SFT.

The Origin of the Statement of Fundamental Truths

When the AG began in 1914, they intended for the fellowship to provide a way
for Pentecostal ministers to cooperate together to accomplish the great
commission and to conserve foreign missions efforts.¹⁷ The preamble of the AG
Constitution made it clear that they did not believe in establishing themselves as

¹⁷ WW, December 1913, 1.
a new sect or creating laws that would establish “unscriptural lines of fellowship and which separates itself from other members of the Assembly.” A. P. Collins argued, “It would be better to dissolve the council and the Presbytery” than to give in to any sort of organizational centralization. D. W. Kerr believed the General Council model would only work if each individual assembly maintained the ability to be sovereign and self-determined, as long as people managed themselves well under Scripture’s authority. However, the grand experiment of cooperation and unity without a doctrinal basis was short lived, lasting only 1914–1916. As controversy over the “New Issue” of baptismal formula arose, they recognized that cooperation demanded some sense of unity on basic Bible truths. J. R. Flower commented, “We are fully determined that centralization will not be allowed to present itself in any form. . . . At the same time, we are determined to get back to Apostolic standards of order, both in doctrine and in ministry.”

The need for unity in sound doctrine motivated the council to give itself jurisdiction to “disapprove of all unscriptural methods, doctrines and conduct” which might hinder the unity of faith.

On the opening day of the 1916 General Council, E. N. Bell, S. A. Jamieson, T. K. Leonard, D. W. Kerr, and Stanley Frodsham were appointed to a committee charged with crafting resolutions for the Council. The resolution committee recommended to the Council a list of seventeen “Fundamental Truths” that they believed set forth a “clear statement of the things most surely believed among us” considered essential to unity. The preamble captures the spirit in which they crafted this list of doctrines.

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18 GC Minutes (April 2–12, 1914), 4.
21 Blumhofer, Restoring the Faith, 127–35; E. N. Bell, “The “Acts” on Baptism in Christ’s Name Only,” PE, June 12, 1915, 1–3; “Preliminary Statement Concerning the Principles Involved in the New Issue by the Presbytery,” WW, June 1915, 1. Since baptizing in “Jesus’ Name” was considered to be a “Bible method” of baptism and since several AG leaders had accepted the teaching, the early position was to allow the differences to remain in order to promote unity. However, others within the AG were expressing concerns that it undermined the orthodox understanding of the Trinity. The Presbytery was more concerned with claims of “new revelations” than they were with the theological implications of baptizing in Jesus’ name only.
23 GC Minutes (April 2–12, 1914), 4.
24 GC Minutes (October 1916), 4.
This Statement of Fundamental Truths is not intended as a creed for the Church, nor as a basis of fellowship among Christians, but only as a basis of unity for the ministry alone (i.e., that we all speak the same thing, 1 Cor. 1:10; Acts 2:42). The human phraseology employed in such statement is not inspired nor contended for, but the truth set forth in such phraseology is held to be essential to a Full Gospel ministry. No claim is made that it contains all truth in the Bible, only that it covers our present needs as to these fundamental matters.  

Over the next three days, the Council of ministers discussed, revised, and passed each of the seventeen statements separately. The statement that emerged contained a core list of evangelical doctrines (Bible, God, Trinity, Deity of Christ, Fall of Man, Salvation, Ordinances), Pentecostal distinctives (Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Tongues as Evidence, Sanctification, Church, Ministry, Divine Healing), and premillennial doctrine (The Blessed Hope, Millennial Reign, Final Judgment, New Heavens and New Earth).

In many of the histories of the AG, Daniel W. Kerr is credited with being the architect of the SFT. D. W. Kerr was a respected minister and associate of A. B. Simpson in the Christian & Missionary Alliance before joining the Pentecostal movement. He was a staunch defender of the Trinity, evidential tongues, and was highly involved in the doctrinal controversy that led to the creation of the SFT. Kerr’s role in the creation of the SFT has led most historians to assume that AG eschatology is also reflective of Kerr’s eschatology. What makes this assumption significant is that Kerr wrote an article in the Latter Rain Evangel in 1919 that argues for a three-fold rapture. Glen Menzies and Gordon Anderson present Kerr’s eschatology as a case study to argue that the SFT was created to be intentionally ambiguous on rapture positions, which should demonstrate that

26 GC Minutes (October 1916), 10.
27 GC Minutes (October 1916), 7; Frodsham, “Notes From an Eyewitness Account,” 4. The details concerning the discussion or revision of each item was not recorded in the minutes so it is unknown what debates may have taken place considering the wording.
28 GC Minutes (October 1916), 10–13.
29 S.H. Frodsham, “Notes From an Eyewitness Account,” PE, October 21, 1916, 4; “With Christ Which is Far Better,” PE, April 16, 1927, 4; Menzies, Anointed to Serve, 119; Brumback, Like a River, 55; Blumhofer, The Assemblies of God, 236.
31 D. W. Kerr, “The Two Fold Aspect of Church Life: Will the Church Go Through The Tribulation,” LRE, October 1919, 2–6. This was part one of two articles that Kerr was supposed to write. Part two was never published.
eschatological diversity was widely tolerated early in the fellowship. They comment, “While there is significant diversity of opinion regarding eschatology in the Assemblies of God today, a review of the Movement’s history shows that this has always been the case.” Menzies and Anderson convincingly argue that because the author of the SFT had a different position on the rapture than is found in the official position, then there should be room for eschatological diversity within the fellowship today.

Although I agree with their conclusion, a weakness in their argument comes from the fact that the SFT was not the creation of one man, as is commonly thought. It was the result of a five-member committee that included E. N. Bell, Stanley Frodsham, S. A. Jamieson, and T. K. Leonard. It is certain that Kerr’s largest contribution to the SFT was the doctrines of God and the Trinity, but how important was he to the eschatological truths? As Menzies and Anderson point out, Kerr held to a view of multiple raptures that was more diverse than what ended up in the statement. However, it is interesting to note that Kerr only wrote one significant article on eschatology, which was not in the Pentecostal Evangel, rather it was published in the regional paper The Latter Rain Evangel more than three years after the creation of the SFT. Furthermore, the follow up article that was advertised, which would likely have further clarified his position, never made it to print. It is very possible that the second article was in fact censured because Kerr was a presbyter and the first article was considered to be a deviation from accepted AG positions. Perhaps more telling is Kerr’s Central Bible College correspondence course called “Fundamentals of the Faith ‘Plus,’” which contains no lesson on eschatological doctrine at all. It seems that Kerr was censured in his eschatology.

32 Menzies and Anderson, “D. W. Kerr and Eschatological Diversity,” 12. Menzies and Anderson, “D. W. Kerr and Eschatological Diversity,” 12. The argument that there was “significant diversity of opinion” in the early years of the AG is exaggerated. Outside of Kerr and Sisson, there are very few leaders who have documented positions that do not follow the basic script. Menzies and Anderson, “D. W. Kerr and Eschatological Diversity,” 12. The view that there will be multiples raptures was not uncommon in the early days of the Pentecostal movement, but the AG rejected this position and avoided taking a position on who is included in the rapture. Kerr, “The Two Fold Aspect of Church Life: Will the Church Go Through The Tribulation,” LRE, October 1919, 2–6. D. W. Kerr, “Fundamentals of the Faith ‘Plus,’” CBI Correspondence Course 8, 1926, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, Missouri. Furthermore, in D. W. Kerr and Willard C. Pierce, “Outline Studies in the Chart of the Ages,” (Central Bible College, 1924), 16–18, contains a chart
Therefore, I contend his controversial positions on eschatology likely restricted his ability to influence the “official” statements on eschatological truth for the AG. This suggests to me that Bell, Jamieson, and Frodsham were more likely to have provided the bulk of the eschatological statements that made the final document that was approved by the General Council. As was pointed out earlier, Bell’s early doctrinal statement, which included statements on the premillennial coming and new heavens and new earth, likely became the template for creating the SFT. Bell was a prophecy enthusiast who regularly fielded questions on end-times subjects in his column “Questions and Answers” in the Pentecostal Evangel. Stanley Frodsham wrote one of the first AG books on eschatology and regularly commented on eschatological topics and current events because of his role as editor of the Pentecostal Evangel. Similarly, S. A. Jamieson wrote one of the first AG books on doctrine, which included a chapter on eschatology and authored the only article in the Pentecostal Evangel specifically on the new heavens and new earth.

Regardless of who wrote the statement, the case of Kerr’s eschatology does reveal one of the reasons that AG eschatology perhaps was not crafted in more distinctively “Pentecostal” terms. Many early Pentecostals were debating about who would be included in the bride and thus qualified for the rapture. This is precisely the sort of categorization of believers reflected in Kerr’s concept of the three raptures. Because of this debate, the AG chose to adopt a more widely accepted premillennial position with no initial statement about bridal or rapture theology. The AG was not so much interested in arguing about who would be included in the rapture as they were in simply affirm the basics of the Second Coming and millennial reign. Furthermore, they understood that they did not want to alienate themselves from the evangelical community by claiming Spirit-filled exclusivity for inclusion in the rapture. For the sake of unity and ecumenical appeal, the AG chose to mute eschatological positions that were distinctly Pentecostal. This sort of inclusivity within accepted premillennial boundaries was necessary because of the ecclesiastical structure of the fellowship.

that is credited to Kerr that includes a pretribulation rapture and a post-tribulation rapture similar to his article.

37 T. K. Leonard was also on the committee, but he contributed very little to AG doctrine, failing to contribute even a single doctrinal article to the Pentecostal Evangel. Leonard was most notable for his leadership in promoting the name “assembly of God” for the fellowship and lending his facilities in Findlay, OH as the first home for the Gospel Publishing House.

1916 Eschatological Fundamental Truths

Of the original seventeen statements in the *SFT*, four were focused on eschatology. This means more attention was given to eschatology than other “distinctive” doctrines, such as baptism in the Spirit. Although it might seem disproportionate that eschatology would occupy a fourth of the statements, it is reflective of the foundational eschatological emphasis in the introduction to the 1914 constitution and bylaws:

Almost every country on the globe has heard the message and also the prophecy which has been predominant in this great outpouring, which is “Jesus is coming soon” to this old world in the same manner as he left it to set up His millennial kingdom and to reign over the earth in righteous and peace for a thousand years.\(^\text{39}\)

Considering the premillennial and latter rain language was present two years before the *SFT* and the stance on initial evidence, it could be argued that eschatology was the AG’s original “distinctive doctrine.”

One common narrative in AG literature is that the *SFT* has endured with only “minor” changes throughout its existence.\(^\text{40}\) While it is true that no additional doctrines have been added in the past century, there have been significant changes to the wording and emphasis of the doctrines, particularly the Eschatological Fundamental Truths.\(^\text{41}\) The original 1916 *SFT* contained a list of seventeen statements.

The four original 1916 statements articulating the AG positions passed by the General Council contain the basics of premillennial eschatology including the rapture of the church, literal thousand-year reign of Christ, eternal punishment, and the new heavens and new earth. They were written as follows:

14. THE BLESSED HOPE: The Resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ, the rapture of believers which are alive and remain, and the translation

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\(^{39}\) *GC Minutes* (April 1914), 1.

\(^{40}\) For example, Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 317, states that “no changes whatsoever were made until the General Council in 1961” and the changes were only a “minor rewording.”

\(^{41}\) I am grateful to Glenn Gohr, Archivist at the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, for sharing with me a list of changes he compiled for the General Secretary’s office. Glenn Gohr, “The Statement of Fundamental Truths: Chronological History compiled by Glenn Gohr,” 2000, IFPHC, Springfield, MO.
of the true church, this is the blessed hope set before all believers. 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rom. 8:23; Tit. 2:13.

15. THE IMMINENT COMING AND MILLENIAL REIGN OF JESUS: The premillennial and imminent coming of the Lord to gather His people unto Himself, and to judge the world in righteousness while reigning on earth for a thousand years is the expectation of the true Church of Christ.

16. LAKE OF FIRE: The devil and his angels, the Beast and the false prophet, and whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters and all liars shall be consigned to everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

17. THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH: We look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21 and 22.

The title of the first truth, “The Blessed Hope,” represents a biblical title for the Second Coming doctrine found in Tit. 2:3. But, perhaps more importantly, it was written in a way that pushes against the negative connotations of Christ’s coming by appealing to the affective dimension in the concept of “hope.” Note that it says that when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will be “resurrected” and the living will be “raptured.” What makes this event “blessed” is the promise of the resurrection of the body, which inspires a sense of hope and anticipation for the future. It is interesting that there is no stated tributional position, although it does use the term “rapture.” While it is likely that a pretribulation position was in their minds, that position was not made explicit. Second, it says together believers will be “translated” but there is no mention of the destination of the believers after they are “translated.” It was common for Pentecostals to emphasize the rapture as the invitation to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, but this statement leaves the ultimate destination ambiguous. It is clear that the main emphasis of this doctrine is the hope that is engendered from the promise of Christ’s return and the resurrection of believers.

The second statement, “Imminent and Premillennial Coming of Christ,” was written as a summary of premillennial eschatology. Because it contains both the

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42 From 1916–1925, “millennial reign” was misspelled “millenial.” It was corrected in the 1927 revision.

43 GC Minutes (October 1–7, 1916), 13.

44 This agrees with Sheppard, “Pentecostals and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism,” 8, that the writers may have “implied” a pretribulation rapture, but the statement was left ambiguous.
Second Coming of Christ and the millennial reign, it is likely it may have been the original statement proposed by the committee and the other three truths were later additions during the deliberation process. Nevertheless, this statement emphasizes two aspects of Christ’s Second Coming: his imminent coming to gather his people and the establishment of a literal millennial kingdom on earth. Like the “Blessed Hope,” this statement lacks any reference to tribulation or the two-phases (rapture and revelation) as part of this vision of the future, though perhaps it is implied. Menzies and Anderson note that although a pretribulation position is likely, both pretribulation and post-tribulation adherents could conceivably affirm the somewhat general premillennial statement.\(^{45}\) There is a “this worldly” orientation to the way the millennium is crafted considering the strong sense of hope welcoming Christ’s kingdom to earth rather than hope that believers will escape the earth.

In the same way the first two statements frame Christ’s return in terms of hopeful anticipation, the final judgment is also seen as an event that inspires hope. The title, “The Lake of Fire,” focuses on the final destination of God’s ancient foes: the Devil, the Beast, and the False Prophet. It assures that there will be a day in which justice will be done, God’s enemies will finally be defeated, and evil will finally be removed from the creation. It also includes a warning that those who align with these ancient foes by committing the sins mentioned in Revelation 20 will share their fate.\(^ {46}\) Since many AG ministers came from Charles Parham’s network, it was important to include a strong statement that this judgment will be “everlasting” so as to warn against those who might hold his doctrine of annihilationism.\(^ {47}\)

The final statement, “The New Heavens and New Earth,” is a partial quotation of 2 Pet. 3:13 and lacks any commentary or explanation. Its inclusion, beyond just a literalist approach to Revelation, was likely because it was already present in Bell’s early doctrinal statement, which mentions the new heavens and

\(^{45}\) Menzies and Anderson, “D. W. Kerr and Eschatological Diversity,” 15. They also note that the ambiguity in the statement likely led to the 1937 resolution to disapprove post-millennialism and to instruct AG ministers to refrain from preaching it (12).

\(^{46}\) GC Minutes (October 1–7, 1916), 11. The inclusion of specific sins that will result in judgment is also a confirmation the AG’s position of entire sanctification “without which no man shall see the Lord.”

\(^{47}\) Charles F. Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel*, (Baxter Springs, KS: n.p., 1911), 112, rejected the notion of the immortality of the damned. He argued that the love of God will spare the wicked from an everlasting hell by “utterly destroying” the wicked in a hell that is “hotter than orthodoxy teaches.”
new earth. However, it also shows that for early AG ministers there is a cosmological orientation to the AG vision of the future. Once Christ has reigned in righteousness and evil is purged through the final judgment, they expected a new heavens and earth where righteousness will “dwell.” It is unclear from this statement if there is an expectation of a completely new earth or a renewed earth.

What do we make of these early statements? It is clear that these statements affirm a premillennial eschatology. With that, we also see that although there are certainly dispensational elements in these statements, it should not be assumed that it is their primary orientation. The term “rapture,” which is employed in the first statement, is used as a synonym for resurrection rather than seeking to identify its relation to the tribulation. In fact, there is a lack of a stated position on the tribulation at all, which suggests that escape from tribulation was not their primary concern. Furthermore, the way these are written certainly demonstrates that these doctrines are more than just a list of the events to come; they thematically encapsulate what AG ministers look forward to. Being expressed as somewhat fluid concepts, each of the four statements affirm a vision of the future based on the hope of the resurrection, the coming reign of Christ on earth, a future judgment for God’s enemies, and a coming renewal of creation. Or put another way, they communicate the hopeful expectation of the renewal of all things in the resurrection, the millennium, the judgment, and the renewed creation. In this way, I see the “Blessed Hope” as an overarching theme for the other three tenets (See Figure 1). This hopeful and thematic orientation was their fundamental starting point for expressing their Pentecostal hope for the future.

**Figure 1: 1916 Thematic Emphasis on Hope**

![Thematic Emphasis on Hope Diagram]

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48 Bell, “For Strangers. Who Are We?,” *WW*, May 20, 1914, 1–2, says “We believe in the premillennial coming of the Lord Jesus to reign with the saints 1000 years, Rev. chapters 19 and 20. In the new heaven and new earth as here promised.”

49 I am grateful to William K. Kay, “Premillennial Tensions: What Pentecostal Ministers Look Forward To,” *Journal for Contemporary Religion* 14, no. 3 (1999): 361–73, for this concept from the subtitle of his article.
1927 Revision to the Eschatological Truths

Although the preamble of the AG constitution was adopted in 1914, the actual constitution was not fully written until 1925. But first, in 1920, the SFT was revised and the number of statements was shortened from seventeen to sixteen when the “Essentials of the Godhead” was moved to the end as an addendum. In addition several sections were also reorganized and moved in order to reflect the AG ordo salutis, or the order of salvation. The only change made to the eschatological truths was the addition of support verses for the “Lake of Fire” (Rev 19:20; 20:10–15).

The 1920 version continued until 1925 when the General Council commissioned a full review and revision of the SFT. Chairman J. W. Welch and J. R. Flower proposed to the Council that the various resolutions from the previous decade be complied into a formal constitution. The Presbytery appointed a committee for this task consisting of J. Narver Gortner, E. S. Williams, A. G. Ward, S. A. Jamieson, and Frank Boyd. In conjunction with the work on the constitution, Welch asked D. W. Kerr to draft a revision of the SFT; only, the committee decided to propose its own revisions instead. Many in the Council were uncomfortable with moving toward being formally organized. The resistance was so great that when the Constitution was introduced at the 1925 Council, Welch and Flower were voted out of office and the Council

50 GC Combined Minutes (1914–1920), 15. There is no record of GC action to revise the statement in 1920. However, there is a resolution for the Executive Presbytery to revise minutes as needed.

51 It is interesting to note that although the baptism in the Holy Spirit sections were moved in these early revisions, the section on “ Entire Sanctification ” always followed. This suggests that the reordering in 1920 was intended to follow a non-Wesleyan pattern of sin, salvation, ordinances, baptism in the Spirit, and then sanctification.

52 Menzies, Anointed to Serve, 143.


54 D. W. Kerr to J. W. Welch,” July 22, 1925, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield MO. (Transcription by Daniel D. Isgrigg, October 2015). Kerr reported to Welch, “I have at last succeeded in completing the recasting of the Fundamentals herewith enclosed. Look it over and make such changes as will be necessary for clearness of expression, and correctness of doctrinal statements.” Kerr became ill in early 1927 and died in April. In the meantime, J. W. Welch was replaced by W. T. Gaston as general superintendent at the 1927 Council and none of Kerr’s suggested revisions were included in the new version. This draft is mistaken by some as a draft of Kerr’s 1916 original version.
was now in the hands of a new generation of leaders. Two years later, much of the tension had diminished and the leadership revisited the proposed constitution and revision of the SFT, where it passed without opposition.

The version of the SFT contained several significant changes, including changing the title of “Full Consummation of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost” in the 1927 revision to “The Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost.” But the committee’s most significant changes were in the wording of the four eschatological fundamental truths.

The Blessed Hope

13. THE BLESSED HOPE (1916–1925)

The Resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ, the rapture of believers which are alive and remain, and the translation of the true church, this is the blessed hope set before all believers. 1 Thess. 4:16; Rom. 8:23; Tit 2:13.

13. THE BLESSED HOPE (1927)

The resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ the rapture of believers which are alive and remain and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the Church. (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rom. 8:23; Titus 2:13; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52).

The 1927 revision of “The Blessed Hope” contains several significant changes from the 1916 version. In 1916, the wording stated that deceased believers will be “resurrected” and living believers will be “raptured.” The 1927 version removed the term “rapture” and reworded the language to indicate that the living and the dead will be “translated” together. This surprising development was likely due to the fact that different rapture positions were held among the

55 By 1927, Bell, Collins, and Kerr had passed away, Welch and Flower were pastoring in other states, and W. T. Gaston, J. R. Evans, David McDowell, and E. S. Williams assumed the leadership. Menzies, Anointed to Serve, 149–50.
56 GC Minutes (September 16–22, 1927), 5–8.
57 GC Combined Minutes (1914–1925), 13.
58 GC Minutes (September 16–22, 1927), 8. The words that have been omitted from the earlier version have been stricken and the words in bold were added from the earlier version.
59 The term “rapture” did not reappear until it was added to the article “The Millennial Reign of Christ” in 1961.

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leadership and they preferred to use the biblical term “translation” rather than “rapture.” This move would seem to contradict the conclusions made by Sheppard and others, that during the 1920s, the AG had moved to fully adopt fundamentalist dispensationalism. On the contrary, the revised statement and removal of the distinctive dispensational term “rapture” further supported an ambiguous tribulational position and wording that both historic and dispensational premillennialists could conceivably affirm. They also added the word “imminent” to the phrase “blessed hope”, which they moved from the “Millennial Reign,” and strengthened the importance on the resurrection of the body by adding the supporting verse (1 Cor. 15:51, 52).

The Millennial Reign

14. THE IMMINENT COMING AND MILLENNIAL REIGN OF JESUS (1916–1925) 61

The premillennial and imminent coming of the Lord to gather His people unto Himself, and to judge the world in righteousness while reigning on the earth for a thousand years is the expectation of the true Church of Christ.

14. THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST (1927) 62

The revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, the salvation of national Israel, and the millennial reign of Christ on the earth is the Scriptural promise and the world’s hope. (2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 19:11–14; Rom. 11:26, 27; Rev. 20:1–7).

Unlike the Blessed Hope, which became more inclusive in this revision, the rewrite of Millennial Reign in 1927 took a somewhat dispensational turn. Whereas the 1916 version was a summary of several concepts of premillennial eschatology, the 1927 version focused on key elements of the millennium. They removed the word “imminent” because the second phase of Christ’s return is not imminent and can only take place after the tribulation. Also, the phrase “revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven” was added to identify this coming with Christ’s return to earth

61 GC Combined Minutes (1914–1925), 13.
62 GC Minutes (September 16–22, 1927), 8.
63 The turn toward a clearer dispensational formula is likely the influence of Frank Boyd and J. Narver Gortner

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to initiate the millennium (Rev. 19:11–14). However, it is also interesting to note that the 1927 version omits the literal thousand-year that is explicit in the 1925 version.

The most controversial change to some was the insertion of the clause “the salvation of national Israel.” What was originally a vague concept of the church-centered millennium shifted to an Israel-centered millennium.\(^64\) The biggest factor that contributed to this shift toward Israel instead of the church was the increasing support for a Jewish State in Palestine following the Balfour Declaration in 1917.\(^65\) This monumental development captured the AG’s eschatological imagination and fueled apocalyptic rhetoric.\(^66\) They believed it was necessary for Israel to become a political state in order for the spiritual restoration to take place during the millennium (Rom. 11:26–27).\(^67\) For the AG, the addition of salvation of national Israel is a theological statement about the messianic nature of the millennium. While the differentiation between the church and Israel features prominently in dispensational theology, it should be noted that it is not exclusive to dispensationalism and was held by many posttribulational historic premillennialists.\(^68\)

\(^64\) David H. McDowell, “The Purpose of the Second Coming,” *PE*, May 2, 1925, 2–3, argues that the return of the Jews and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom is not part of the program, “It is THE PROGRAM ITSELF.” In his mind, the whole purpose of the outpouring of Spirit is to “fill out the details that are necessary to make possible the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

\(^65\) “Preparations for the Return to Palestine,” *WW*, August 1915, 2, comments, “One of the reasons that we as Pentecostal people are interested in the present war, raging in Europe and Asia, is that it is closely connected with the return of the Jews to their beloved land, Palestine.” See also, “A Prophetic Creed,” *WE*, March 11, 1916, 9; Newberg, *The Pentecostal Mission in Palestine*, 74.

\(^66\) Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 18–19, notes, “The most intense era of spiritual excitement probably came in late 1917, when apocalyptic hopes ran high. As signs of the times accumulated—the crescendo of slaughter on the western front.”

\(^67\) Raymond L. Gannon, *The Shifting Romance with Israel* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2012), 169, comments, “Since the Assemblies of God could not ignore the literal interpretation of Scripture, they felt obliged to take it at face value that the promises of Israel’s ultimate restoration and salvation.” An example of this is John Goben, “Millennial Reign of Christ,” *PE*, February 21, 1925, 2, in which he outlines all of the verses in the OT about the future millennium.

The Lake of Fire

15. THE LAKE OF FIRE. (1916–1925).\(^{69}\)

The devil and his angels, the Beast and the false prophet, and whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, and the fearful and unbelieving, and abominable and murderers and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters and all liars shall be consigned to the everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

15. THE LAKE OF FIRE. (1927).\(^{70}\)

The devil and his angels, the Beast and the false prophet, and whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, and the fearful and unbelieving, and abominable and murderers and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters and all liars shall be consigned to the everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Rev. 19:20; Rev 20:10–15).

The 1927 version of the Lake of Fire saw only a few minor revisions. The most significant is the list of sins from Revelation 20 was removed. This change meant that, rather than focusing on the sinful acts of humanity, this statement narrows the qualifications for judgment only to include whether one’s name is recorded in the book of life. It also clarified that that main importance of this doctrine was that judgment was “everlasting” and not temporal.\(^{71}\) The only other change was the addition of support texts (Rev. 19:20, Rev. 20:10–15).

The New Heavens and New Earth

16. THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH. (1916–1925)\(^{72}\)

We look for the new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.
2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21 and 22.

\(^{69}\) GC Combined Minutes (1914–1925), 13.
\(^{70}\) GC Minutes (September 16–22, 1927), 8.
\(^{71}\) E. N. Bell, “Questions and Answers,” WE, August 23, 1919, 5, says, “The Council does not fuss over whether the lake of fire now exists or will start up after the final judgment. It does not teach that the wicked at death will be at once cast into the lake of fire. But it does hold they will be cast into such lake of fire at the Great White Throne judgment and shall be punished for ever and ever—not annihilated.”
\(^{72}\) GC Combined Minutes (1914–1925), 13.
16. THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH. (1927)

We, “according to His promise, look for the new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.” 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21, 22.

The 1927 revision of the New Heavens and New Earth was the only revision in the statement’s history. Since the 1916 version was a partial quote of 2 Pet. 3:13, this version added an additional phrase “according to the promise” from the verse and set it off in quotation marks. It is unclear what motivated the addition of the phrase other than reflecting that it is a quote. This somewhat insignificant revision signaled the pattern of lack of attention and development of this doctrine.

1927 Summary

The original 1916 EFT made four general and somewhat overlapping statements about premillennial eschatology, which were thematically oriented. The 1927 version shifted the emphasis from thematic and general statements toward chronological statements (see Figure 2). The committee who revised the EFT, consisting of J. N. Gortner, A. G. Ward, and Frank Boyd, were prophecy enthusiasts and who wrote prophecy books. However, the changes made in 1927 actually resulted in a less dispensational Blessed Hope by removing the term “rapture”, but a more dispensational Millennial Reign in regards to the role of Israel. However, both statements remained ambiguous on the subject of the tribulation and could be affirmed by dispensational and non-dispersional premillennialists.

![Figure 2: 1927 Chronological Emphasis](image)

What is clear is that the image orientation of 1916 statement turned chronological in the 1927 revision. The “Blessed Hope” is the first event, in which the dead in Christ will be resurrected and the living translated to be with the Lord. The “Millennial Reign” is the next event, in which Jesus will be “revealed” to Israel when he returns with the saints. As a result, Israel will be saved and the Kingdom will be established on earth for a thousand years. At the end of

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**GC Minutes** (September 16–22, 1927), 8.

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the millennium, the Devil, beast, and false prophet will be judged and placed in the “Lake of Fire.” This final judgment will usher in a new era in which the “New Heaven and New Earth” will be established as the eternal state. The attempt to clarify the events of their premillennial script in some ways detracted from the thematic expression of the original version. Most of the elements are still present, but the focus shifted from a sense of hopeful expectation to a sense of chronological specificity in the script.

1961 Revision to the Eschatological Fundamental Truths

The next major revision to the SFT came in 1961 during a time when the AG was rising to a level of prominence in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Although this may have played a role in shaping how the statements were expressed, the revision was initiated over concerns about the AG’s eschatology. In 1959, a resolution by Ralph Salzman of Southern California was sent to all the District Councils, which contended that the SFT failed to include some “vital doctrinal terms and beliefs” that specifically pertained to the eschatological truths. In response, the Executive Presbytery appointed a “Tenets of Faith Revision Committee” charged with preparing a “thorough and inclusive Statement of Fundamental Truths which shall include some truths surely believed among us but which are not recorded in the present Statement of Fundamental Truths.” After meeting for a year, the committee recommended to the Presbytery what they deemed as “minor changes” in wording for several of the tenets. In reality, what

74 Blumhofer, Restoring the Faith, 243 and C. M. Robeck, “An Emerging Magisterium,” Pneuma 25, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 198, both contend that the 1961 revision was the result of a desire to conform to that of the NAE in an effort to further “evangelize” the denomination. The committee who proposed the revision did not indicate that such motivation existed. If there is any similarity to the NAE statement, it is what Gary B. McGee, “Historical Background,” in Stanley M. Horton, ed., Systematic Theology (Springfield MO: Logion Press, 1995), 30, pertains to the language of sanctification and biblical inspiration.

75 “Resolution 9: Statement of Fundamental Truths,” presented to the 28th General Council (August 26–September 1, 1959); GG Minutes (August 26–September 1, 1959), 45–46.


77 AG Minister Letter, November 6, 1961, 2, records Thomas Zimmerman’s comments. “Nothing short of a miracle occurred in the adoption of the report of the Committee on Tenets of Faith. The six-man committee presented its report with the result that after only slight editing it was adopted unanimously by the convention. It does appear that a miracle of God’s Holy Spirit was wrought when
they proposed were substantial changes to the Millennial Reign and minor changes to the Lake of Fire. Although the Millennial Reign had already received a full revision in 1927, the committee wanted to correct the “missing elements” by “outlining the order of the events of the end-time” that were considered “vital” to their premillennial position.

The Millennial Reign

14. THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST (1927)

The revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, the salvation of national Israel, and the millennial reign of Christ on the earth is the Scriptural promise and the world’s hope. (2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 19:11–14; Rom. 11:26, 27; Rev. 20:1–7).

14. THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST (1961)

The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years (Zech. 14:5; Matt. 24:27, 30; Revelation 1:7; 19:11–14; 20:1–6). This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel (Ezekiel 37:21, 22; Zephaniah 3:19–20; Romans 11:26, 27) and the establishment of universal peace (Isaiah 11:6–9; Psalm 72:3–8; Micah 4:3, 4).

First, there was a concern that the statement contained no clear position on the rapture, which left a sense of ambiguity. By restoring the term “rapture” to the EFT in the Millennial Reign, they were able to differentiate the first coming for the saints from the “visible return” of Christ when he comes with his saints, while using the so many people from varied locations could so quickly agree on its most important piece of business. By this action the General Council of the Assemblies of God has told the world that its faith in the Full Gospel as declared forty-five years ago is still unchanged and unwavering.

78 GC Minutes (August 23–29, 1961), 23. The only notable change to the New Heavens and New Earth article is an error in the Scripture support verse. The committee changed (Rev 21, 22), meaning all the full chapters, to (Rev 21:22), which is a verse about the Lamb and the Temple. That error was corrected in during the 1973 council. GC Minutes (August 16–21, 1972), 122.

79 “Introductory Comments of Committee On Tenets of Faith Revision,” Proposed Revised Statement of Fundamental Truths Article V. at General Council, June 14, 1961, comments, “Because of the intrusion of A-Millennial doctrine into our midst, we have outlined the events of the end-time that lead up to the millennium along with firming up of our belief in the one thousand year reign of Christ on this earth.”

80 GC Minutes (September 16–22, 1927), 8.

term “Second Coming” to describe both of the phases. Even with this clarification, the committee did not take a position on the tribulation. The result is a version that is similar to the 1916 version, which integrates the elements of the Blessed Hope and the millennial reign but focuses on outlining the future events. The second major change included the further clarification of the 1927 affirmation of the salvation of national Israel by adding OT verses that predicted a messianic kingdom of universal peace. This was an important clarification as proponents of amillennialism were accused of spiritualizing the millennium and applying it to the church. It is clear that they believed the future universal reign of peace on earth was a source of hope for the Church and Israel.

The Lake of Fire

15. THE LAKE OF FIRE (1927)

The devil and his angels, the Beast and the false prophet, and whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, shall be consigned to the everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Rev 19:20; Rev 20:10–15).

15. THE FINAL JUDGMENT (1961)

There will be a final judgment in which the wicked dead will be raised and judged according to their works. Whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, together with the devil and his angels, the beast and the false prophet, will be consigned to everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Matt 25:46; Mark 9:43–48; Revelation 19:20; 20:11–15; 21:8).

The 1961 version changed the title “The Lake of Fire” to “The Final Judgment,” which was consistent with the chronological emphasis, considering the “final judgment” is an event and “the lake of fire” is a place (Figure 3). The


83 Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 238, say, “The premillennial view is the only one that has a place for the restoration of Israel and for the literal fulfillment of the prophecies of peace and blessing.”

84 Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 233, contend that the greatest problem with the amillennial position is that there is “no room in their theological system for any restoration of an earthly Israel.”

85 *GC Minutes* (September 16–22, 1927), 8.

rearrangement of the wording and additional sentence helped to clarify that the resurrection of the wicked dead will take place at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:12). This version also reemphasizes the judgment of the wicked based on works that was deemphasized in 1927. Whereas, in the 1916 version the lake of fire is the place for God’s enemies, the 1927 version reverses that emphasis and places the judgment primarily on the wicked and the judgment of God’s enemies secondary. By reversing the order, they reversed the emphasis on the final judgment from God’s cosmic enemies to sinful humanity.

**Figure 3 - 1961 Chronological Emphasis**

**Condensed Statement of Fundamental Truths**

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the AG began using a “condensed” statement of truths on their website and as a pamphlet for distribution in the local church called “Assemblies of God Fundamental Truths Condensed” (*FTC*). This version added the phrase “We Believe” to the statements but did not give supporting verses. Rather than being simply statements of Bible truths like the *SFT*, this edition suggests this statement is intended to be a more dogmatic declaration of denominational beliefs. Whereas most of the articles are drastically reduced in size, the eschatological truths remain full statements, but deviate in language and emphasis from the current full statements.

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88 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 319, says, “Doctrines are not just doctrines. They are constitutive of both the individual Christian and of the Christian community.” Heyduck, *The Recovery of Doctrine*, 51–96, argues that dogma is the speech act of the community and gives form to the community. It is contextual in that it applies to the specific context in which the doctrine is being declared.
The Landscape 63

The Blessed Hope


The resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; Romans 8:23; Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51,52).

13. WE BELIEVE ... in The Blessed Hope—When Jesus Raptures His Church Prior to His Return to Earth (the second coming). At this future moment in time all believers who have died will rise from their graves and will meet the Lord in the air, and Christians who are alive will be caught up with them, to be with the Lord forever. [1 of 4 cardinal doctrines of the AG]

Although intended to be a shortened statement, the Blessed Hope is actually longer and more detailed. The language of this “condensed” statement departs in that the FTC replaces the word “resurrection” with the term “rapture” in the Blessed Hope making the rapture the Blessed Hope rather than the resurrection. This change gives a different feeling to the formula when it is coupled with the phrase “caught up” later in the statement. It is also interesting that this coming is not imminent, but it is a “future moment.” While interpreted as the same thing, it lessens the longstanding importance of the immediacy of Christ’s return.

The Millennial Reign


The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years (Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 24:27, 30; Revelation 1:7; 19:11–14; 20:1–6). This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel (Ezekiel 37:21, 22; Zephaniah 3:19, 20; Romans 11:26, 27) and the establishment of universal peace (Isaiah 11:6–9; Psalm 72:3–8; Micah 4:3, 4).

14. WE BELIEVE ... in The Millennial Reign of Christ when Jesus returns with His saints at His second coming and begins His benevolent rule over earth for 1,000 years. This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel and the establishment of universal peace.

89 GC Minutes (August 3–7, 2015), 99–100.

Pre-publication promotional chapter.
The reworded millennium article changes the meaning of the term “second coming” from how it is defined in the SFT, which uses the term to describe both phases of the return of Christ. The FTC uses “second coming” to denote only the visible return at the beginning of the millennium. The other details about the millennium are similar in nature and tone.

The Final Judgment


There will be a final judgment in which the wicked dead will be raised and judged according to their works. Whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, together with the devil and his angels, the beast and the false prophet, will be consigned to everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:43–48; Revelation 19:20; 20:11–15; 21:8).

15. WE BELIEVE ... A Final Judgment Will Take Place for those who have rejected Christ. They will be judged for their sin and consigned to eternal punishment in a punishing lake of fire.

The article on the final judgment also differs markedly from the SFT, especially when compared to the 1916 version. In the FTC, the shift in emphasis from judgment of God’s enemies to the judgment of humanity is complete. The final judgment is no longer a source of hope for humanity in which cosmic justice is finally executed on the Devil and his agents. Instead, God’s justice is aimed solely at humanity with the promise of wrath and the lake of fire. The only justice done in this version is the eternal punishment of those who have rejected Christ. ⁹⁰

The New Heavens and New Earth


⁹⁰ An example of this move was demonstrated by a recent Ph.D. dissertation by Alicia R. Jackson, “Ezekiel’s Two Sticks and Eschatological Violence in the Pentecostal Tradition: An Intertextual Literary Analysis,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2018, which examines the role of eschatological violence in Pentecostal literature. Jackson argues that dispensational interpretations of Ezekiel had the effect of justifying the dehumanization of nations that are interpreted as eschatological enemies of God. Jackson’s dissertation was not available to the author until the completion of this study.
"We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21, 22).

16. WE BELIEVE ... and look forward to the perfect New Heavens and a New Earth that Christ is preparing for all people, of all time, who have accepted Him. We will live and dwell with Him there forever following His millennial reign on Earth. "And so shall we forever be with the Lord!"

Nearly a century after it was written, the "New Heavens and New Earth" finally received some attention in the FTC. This surprisingly hopeful revision is twice as long as the original and is helpful in giving insight into the purpose of this doctrine. Note that the new creation is being "prepared" by Christ as a future home for Christ to live and dwell with believers for eternity following the millennium. Although not explicit, this language implies an awareness of the eternality of the creation and the earth itself as the future home for resurrected believers.

While the eschatological statements found in the condensed statement are similar to the SFT, they do not necessarily portray the AG’s position. These revisions were not approved by the General Council and based on the rules of polity should not be considered to be authoritative. The fact that the FTC has been used for the credentialing of ministers is potentially problematic and could lead to reasons for objections by the ministers who are asked to affirm their belief in these tenets.

Statement of Faith in the Pentecostal Evangel

In addition to the SFT, a short "We Believe" statement of faith was published weekly in the Pentecostal Evangel beginning in 1956, adapted from the National Association of Evangelicals magazine.91 The modification of the NAE statement demonstrates that the AG had continuity with the NAE but also wanted it to

91 Robert Cunningham, “We Believe: Robert C. Cunningham Recalls the Origin of the Doctrinal Statement that Appears Regularly in the Pentecostal Evangel,” AG Heritage 15, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 15, explains where the statement came from. “I noticed there was a statement titled, ‘This We Believe,’ in each issue of the United Evangelical Action, the official magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals, of which the Assemblies of God has been a member from the beginning. It occurred to me that a statement of this kind was needed in the Pentecostal Evangel so that anyone picking up the magazine for the first time might be assured that our doctrine is biblically sound. So I offered this suggestion to Brother Flower. He favored the idea and suggested we should pattern our statement on that of the N.A.E. magazine. This we did, using the same phraseology in most of the sentences, but we added two sentences.”
conform to the standards of AG Pentecostal positions. The eschatological statements are as follows:

*We believe* in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal future return to this earth in power and glory to rule a thousand years. *We believe* in the blessed hope, which is the Rapture of the Church at Christ’s coming. . . . *We believe* in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost, the one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting damnation.

It is noteworthy that the sentence, “[We believe] in the blessed hope— the rapture of the Church at Christ’s coming” was not in the NAE statement; it was added in 1963 at the request of the readers who felt the eschatological tenets were incomplete. This suggests that the eschatological revisions directly a result of closer ties to the NAE and evangelical identity. The statement takes a general premillennial position, which does not differentiate between the rapture and the revelation. It is also missing any mention of the restoration of Israel or the new heavens and new earth. Like the SFT, there is no position on the tribulation. This statement is probably more similar to the original SFT than when Cunningham decided to put the NAE statement in the *Pentecostal Evangel*. The fact that he was able to publish a statement that so inadequately expressed AG positions is surprising considering it was not formally approved by any official AG body.

**World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith**

In 1988, J. Phillip Hogan gathered together general superintendents from forty of the world’s AG national fellowships for the purpose of promoting greater cooperation in missions and fellowship. In August of 1989, delegates met to form the World Pentecostal Assemblies of God Fellowship (WAGF) and drafted a constitution and bylaws. For a statement of faith, they decided to adopt the

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92 The assertion made by Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 243, that the SFT was modified in 1961 to reflect the NAE was most likely mistakenly attributed to this origin of the *Pentecostal Evangel* statement. As was demonstrated earlier, the 1961 revision was initiated because of questions over eschatological clarity.

93 “This We Believe,” *PE*, September 15, 1963, 7.

94 Cunningham, “We Believe,” 15.
statement found in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, not the *SFT*.\(^95\) The WAGF statement was expanded in 2000 to the current formulation.

Whereas the *SFT* has four articles on eschatology, the WAGF has only one article with two statements:

11. The End of Time.\(^96\)

We believe in the premillennial, imminent, and personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ to gather His people unto Himself. Having this blessed hope and earnest expectation, we purify ourselves, even as He is pure, so that we may be ready to meet Him when He comes (John 14:1–3; Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; 1 John 3:2–3; Revelation 20:1–6).

We believe in the bodily resurrection of all humanity, the everlasting conscious bliss of all who truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that everlasting conscious punishment is the portion of all whose names are not written in the Book of Life (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:22–24; Revelation 20:10–15).

The WAGF statement concisely combined the Blessed Hope, millennial reign, and final judgment into one article. The first statement is similar to *SFT* millennial reign doctrine but without the emphasis on the restoration of Israel. The second statement closely mirrors the British AoG statement with slightly modified language.\(^97\) The inclusive and general wording of this statement was for cultivating universal agreement by the various national fellowships, many of which do not take firm stances on eschatology.\(^98\) Like the *SFT*, there is no position on the tribulation. In the WAGF, the reference to resurrection is part of the final judgment in which righteous believers receive “everlasting bliss” and the wicked receive “everlasting punishment.” This wording could imply a simultaneous resurrection of the righteous and the wicked as described by Jesus in Jn 5:28–29, which does not suggest a two-phase coming.\(^99\) This statement also contains the admonition to

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\(^{96}\) World Assemblies of God Fellowship Constitution and Bylaws, August 2014, 6.

\(^{97}\) The British Assemblies of God Statement of Faith has only one eschatological tenet, which reads, “We believe in the bodily resurrection of all men, the everlasting conscious bliss of all who truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and the everlasting conscious punishment of all whose names are not written in the Book of Life.” www.aog.org.uk/about-us/what-we-believe (accessed 17 March 2018).


\(^{99}\) “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (Jn 5:28–29).
prepare for His coming through sanctification, which is something that is not present in any of the AG statements.