

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).

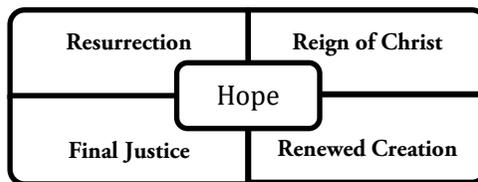
⁴⁶ *GC Minutes* (October 1–7, 1916), 11. The inclusion of specific sins that will result in judgment is also a confirmation the AG's position of entire sanctification "without which no man shall see the Lord."

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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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



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.⁵⁰ In addition several sections were also reorganized and moved in order to reflect the AG *ordo salutis*, or the order of salvation.⁵¹ 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 compiled into a formal constitution.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.

⁵³ See “Final Report of Revision Committee on Essential Resolutions,” *GC Minutes* (September 16–22, 1927); *PE*, October 8, 1927, 1–7.

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.⁵⁵ 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.”⁵⁶ 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)⁵⁷

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)⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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.

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.⁶⁰ 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 IMMIDENT 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.⁶³ 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

⁶⁰ Sheppard, “Pentecostals and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism,” 10; Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days*, 41; Althouse, “The Landscape of Pentecostal and Charismatic Eschatology,” 15.

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

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 post-tribulationist 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.

⁶⁸ Craig L. Bloomberg and Sung Wook Chung, eds., *The Case for Historic Premillennialism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Historic premillennialists do not divide the return of Christ into two comings.

*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)⁷³

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-dispensational premillennialists.

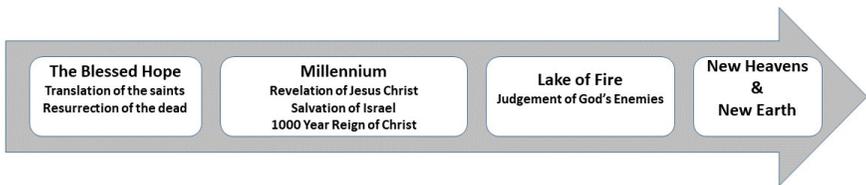


FIGURE 2: 1927- CHRONOLOGICAL EMPHASIS

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

⁷³ *GC Minutes* (September 16–22, 1927), 8.

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).⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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.”⁷⁶ After meeting for a year, the committee recommended to the Presbytery what they deemed as “minor changes” in wording for several of the tenets.⁷⁷ 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 “evangelicalize” 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.

⁷⁶ *GC Minutes* (August 26–September 1, 1959), 45–46. See also, “Committee Appointed to Study The Statement of Fundamental Truths,” *PE*, February 7, 1960, 8. *GG Minutes* (August 23–29, 1961), 19–21. Members of the committee were E. S. Williams, Ralph Riggs, J. R. Flower, Stanley Horton, G. Raymond Carlson, Milton T. Wells, and D. H. McLaughlin.

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.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹

The Millennial Reign

14. THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST (1927)⁸⁰

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)⁸¹

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.

⁸¹ *GC Minutes* (August 23–29, 1961), 23.

term “Second Coming” to describe both of the phases.⁸² 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.⁸³ This was an important clarification as proponents of amillennialism were accused of spiritualizing the millennium and applying it to the church.⁸⁴ 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)⁸⁵

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)⁸⁶

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

⁸² William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Biblical Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1993), 216; Menzies, *Understanding Our Doctrine*, 65.

⁸³ Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 238, says, “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.

⁸⁶ *GC Minutes* (August 23–29, 1961), 23.

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.

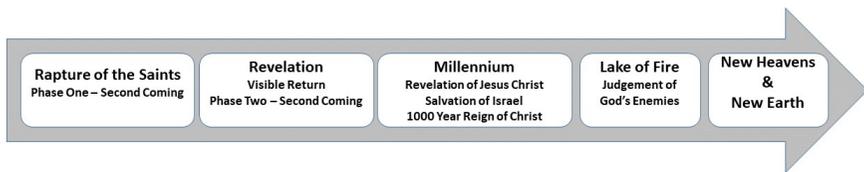


FIGURE 3 - 1961 CHRONOLOGICAL EMPHASIS

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*).⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁷ “Assemblies of God Fundamental Truths condensed” http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_short.cfm (accessed 11 January 2017). The origin of this statement is unknown and there is no record in the General Secretary office of its origin. It appears to have been created sometime in the 2000s by the Office of Public Relations for a pamphlet called “Our 16 Doctrines,” Springfield MO: Office of Public Relations, 2004. It will be referred to as *FTC*.

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 Blessed Hope

13. The Blessed Hope (2015)⁸⁹

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

14. The Millennial Reign of Christ (2015)

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.

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

15. The Final Judgment (2015)

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

16. The New Heavens and the New Earth (2015)

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 eternity 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.⁹² 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.⁹³

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.⁹⁴ 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

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

⁹⁵ William Molenaar, “The World Assemblies of God Fellowship: United in the Missionary Spirit,” *AG Heritage* 31 (2011): 43.

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).

⁹⁸ William Kay, *Pentecostals in Britain* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002).

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.