

**Prophetic chiliasm: A clarion call for the Bride of Christ
or a call to enlist in hell's armies?
Re-evaluating the political significance of prophetic chiliasm in
Pentecostal thinking**

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Abstract

Most Pentecostals of the early 20th century accepted Darbyist dispensationalism and pre-millennial chiliasm.

GR Wessels was the first Pentecostal to link dispensationalism to pro-apartheid ideology. Kleynhans took the political agenda further. He gave the apartheid regime a messianic position. Communism hates God. Therefore they hate the Jewish state and Christian South Africa.

The Iraqi war was the catalyst for a dispensationalism in the USA that resembles the South African Pentecostal dispensationalism. After 9/11 the American people suffered a sense of loss and anger. Terrorist attacks are in a sense even more frustrating than conventional war.

During September 2006 several pre-millennial pastors encouraged the USA to invade Iran on TBN. The messages sounded very similar to that of Kleynhans: The USA and Israel are God's elect, the Muslim world is the enemy.

Suggested further research should look at the effects of conservative dispensationalism on the lives of the ordinary believer.

Introduction

Most Pentecostals and Pentecostal movements of the early 20th century accepted Darbyist dispensationalism and pre-millennial chiliasm without much ado. Since many of the early leaders of the movement came from holiness churches, where dispensationalism was the main eschatological line of thinking, both were regarded as solid Pentecostal doctrine.²

Some leaders, notably Charles Fox Parham³ and English barrister RR Harris,⁴ linked their dispensationalism to British-Israelism, but these men were not in the majority.⁵ Even when the Pentecostal/charismatic movement

branched out into a number of theological streams in the 1980s and 1990s, the vast majority remained faithful to pre-millennial, pre-tribulation dispensationalism.⁶

New Testament scholar George E Ladd, a non-dispensational pre-millennialist, sees two hermeneutical keys as being central to dispensationalism:

- the eternal distinction between Israel and the church and the two purposes of God for his two peoples; and
- a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy and its direct application to our time.⁷

Much has been written and said on the theological foundation of dispensationalism. Charismatic restorationists have made the point – and made it very strongly – that dispensationalism is like a stone in the stomach of Pentecostal/charismatic theology.⁸ I do not wish to engage in either of these debates. My issue is a more practical one: to analyse the political significance of the doctrine in one historical context (apartheid South Africa) and its present role in the “war on terror” in the United States.

It may well be that not all dispensationalists attach the same value to conservative politics as the examples quoted in this study. This article focuses on the works and statements of some prominent exponents of the doctrine, both in South Africa in the apartheid era, and by American pastors, authors and evangelists in the present era.

South Africa: the early years

Two figures stand out in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s: the Apostolic Faith Mission leader GR Wessels and the Full Gospel minister (later independent evangelist/teacher), the Reverend JF Nel.

Wessels was a charismatic leader and became a member of the AFM executive at the young age of 25 (in 1937). In 1943 he was elected as vice-president of the church. From the outset he had an interest in political issues. According to his own testimony, he was already pro-Nationalist Party (the only one on the executive) when he became a member.⁹

Wessels was also a well-known end-times preacher. During World War II he initially targeted Stalin as the anti-Christ (possibly following the speculation of other prophetic preachers such as JF Nel). When the atrocities of Nazi Germany came to light, he speculated that Hitler was the anti-Christ and Mussolini the false prophet.¹⁰

After a study tour abroad, Wessels started teaching on the dangers of communism.¹¹ These sermons seem to have been extremely political, so much so that the Minister of Social Services, Dr Karl Bremer, thanked

Wessels in a speech before the Workers Council in 1953 for his wonderful work warning the people of South Africa against communism.¹² In 1955 Wessels received a seat from the Nationalist Party in the Senate. He remained vice-president of the AFM until 1969.

The election of GR Wessels as a Nationalist senator in 1955 was a fatal blow for the political independence of the AFM. His election was both politically and spiritually controversial. The Nationalist Party gained power in 1948 with the election promise that it would implement “apartheid”. One of their first aims was to remove the so-called coloureds¹³ from the common voter’s roll. Their removal could only be done by changing the constitution of the Union of South Africa. To change the specific article, a two-thirds majority was needed in a joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament. After several unsuccessful attempts to change the constitution, the National Party decided to extend the senate to give them the necessary majority. GR Wessels was one of the new appointed senators.

By allowing their vice-president to become a senator in this controversial senate, the AFM actively became a partner in the process of taking away the political rights of the coloured community, many of them members of the AFM and other Pentecostal churches.

Wessels managed to link pre-millennial dispensation with his pro-Afrikaner, pro-apartheid agenda. Stalin and Crushchev were possible anti-Christians, but they were also the biggest enemies of Christian South Africa.¹⁴ South Africa closed the Soviet embassy in 1955.

Consequently, according to the dispensationalists, if the anti-Christ was against South Africa, and if the newly formed state of Israel was the fulfilment of prophecy, and Israel was also one of South Africa’s close international friends, then the apartheid government must be doing something right.¹⁵

In the oversimplified clear distinction that dispensationalists tend to draw between good and evil, the Russians were the evildoers. Which meant that South Africa must be amongst the righteous. This way of thinking explains how the South African Pentecostals could be sectarian on a personal level (denying that those members of traditional churches are saved) while, on a national level, recognising South Africa as a Christian country and the Nationalist Party government as a Christian state.

When the members of the government and Nationalist Party addressed the annual conference, they were treated as representatives of a Christian state, even if they smoked, drank, and had never “accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour”. In the local church, however, all members of society who did not have a clear testimony of salvation were considered to be sinners.

No wonder, then, that the AFM chaplain, Pastor Liebenberg, evaluated the Constantinian period very positively, which was contrary to traditional Pentecostal teaching.

Since Constantine – 313 AD – when Caesar became a Christian and the state a Christian Church, Christians accepted military service as a God given task.¹⁶

Although Pentecostals and evangelicals constantly reject the idea of a Christian state or a state church and see only those who have been born again as real Christians, Liebenberg speaks of a state that became a church! The fact that the subjects of the state were forced to become Christians is not mentioned.

Finally, Liebenberg makes no distinction between the church and the state. The task and calling of the AFM ("ons ... taak") is no longer to spread the gospel.

Our nation (volk) must preserve its own culture, language, heritage, history and monuments. We must defend our own country against permissiveness, liberalism and the spirit of communism. This damned ideology is poisoning our whole community.¹⁷

Between 1908 and 1960, the AFM went full circle. The diabolical nature of the state as viewed by the early Pentecostals had, instead, become the all-embracing Christian state.

Unlike Wessels, Reverend Nel was no politician. He was a prophetic preacher *cum* teacher *par excellence*. He was also one of the earliest South African Pentecostals to write books. A small book on the end times, *Die tekens van die tye* (*The signs of the times*), appeared in 1943.¹⁸

Nel expected to see the establishment of the nationhood of Israel, an attack by Russia and its Arabic allies on Israel (Ezekiel 38) and the final destruction of those allies. And Russia would possibly be the country from where the anti-Christ would come.¹⁹ Like Wessels, Nel saw communism as a threat to South Africa, whose nine million natives were fertile ground for communism's ideology.²⁰

The apartheid government went one step further than Reverend Nel. Blacks who rose up against apartheid were enemies of the state and were also communists. The mere fact that they opposed a legitimate government was a clear sign that they themselves were communists. In the Oppression of Communism Act, a communist was virtually defined as anyone who opposed the government.

During World War II, the international Pentecostal world joined the search for an anti-Christ and a false prophet. The *Pentecostal Evangel* saw prophetic significance in the non-aggression pact between Germany and Russia and predicted that Hitler would occupy Palestine.²¹ The founding of

the World Council of Churches (WCC) was another significant step towards the final consummation of all things. Now the ungodly religious system of the anti-Christ was identified.²²

In South Africa, the identification of the WCC as a structure of the false prophet was, politically, extremely useful. White Pentecostals did not oppose apartheid in the 1950s and 1960s and even black Pentecostals silently accepted their fate.²³ Furthermore, the international Pentecostal movement maintained ties with white South African Pentecostals long after the Reformed traditions suspended the white Reformed churches' membership of the WCC for their participation in South Africa's apartheid structures.²⁴

The AFM never experienced these international pressures. On the contrary, in 1955, GR Weasels, vice-president of the AFM of SEA, was one of the key speakers at the International Pentecostal Conference in Stockholm. In the same year Pastor Wessels was also elected as a National Party member of the extended senate on the South African Parliament with the blessing of the AFM.

The international Pentecostal community, however, remained silent. According to Hollenweger there were some delegates in Stockholm who were disturbed by Wessels's involvement in politics, but the issue was never raised in the open sessions because "we did not want to quench the Spirit"²⁵

At the height of the State of Security, during the last few months of the PW Botha government in 1988, while the international community were fighting apartheid, the prominent American charismatic leader from the CBN network, Pat Robertson, visited South Africa and told the nation on the TV that he was impressed by the South African government's reform programme.²⁶

When the World Council of Churches visited Cottesloe, Johannesburg, in 1960, and annoyed the then Prime Minister John Vorster with their condemnation of apartheid, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) had a difficult time dealing with their representatives at the consultation. Indeed, it eventually led to the alienation of Dr Beyers Naude (moderator of the Transvaal Synod) and his Christian Institute from the DRC. The Pentecostals, on the other hand, rejected everything the World Council was doing as the work of the devil and the influence of communism.

The vocal years: the end times and apartheid

Bennie Kleynhans was never an international figure. He was never recognised as one of the top leaders in the AFM, although he served on the executive for many years. His biggest influence was in his eschatological preaching and later, his books.

Kleynhans mixed pre-millennial chiliiasm and apartheid politics as no one else had ever done. He did not carry the political baggage of GR Wessels

and was much more articulate than Nel. His influence stretched much further than the AFM or even the Pentecostal movement. Many of his books were published by a pre-millennial evangelical reformed church. He also received a PhD for his published works from the Commonwealth University (although he was not an academic in any sense of the word).

His first book, *Die Koning kom (The King is coming)*²⁷ is a 376 page exposition of the end times. The book is not different from similar books that were published in the USA and the United Kingdom during that time. However, neatly tucked in between a biblical rejection of the United Nations, communism, the international monetary system, the position of Israel and the coming anti-Christ, is a twenty-page exposure of the diabolic conspiracy against South Africa and an eschatological defence of apartheid.²⁸

The book was published in 1980. The Carter administration was the first western government to consider sanctions against the apartheid government. The book starts with a long conspiracy theory, beginning with the discredited story of certain *Illuminati* ruling the world. The *Illuminati* not only created Nazi Germany, they were also responsible for the formation of the United Nations. Their main objective was a world government, in other words, the sanctioning of the anti-Christ.²⁹ And the American administration was infiltrated by the *Illuminati* and, worse still, was subservient to this body.

Kleynhans claimed that the ecumenical movement was deeply involved in this creation of a one-world religion.³⁰ One of the objectives of this one-world religion, he said, was racial integration (rasse-integrasie)! Even the civil rights movement in the USA was the creation of the *Illuminati* and the communists.³¹

In Kleynhans' second book, *Die Koning kom II (The King is coming II)* Kleynhans identified the powers of darkness and deception: the "terrorist" Nelson Mandela, Dr Allan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Frank Chikane, suspended AFM pastor, and Dr Beyers Naude (amongst others).³²

He claimed that the lukewarm church of Laodicea was not a liberal or backslidden church, but a human rights church.³³ Humanism is like Marxism, in that it promotes the worship of human beings. The South African Council of Churches had replaced preaching of salvation and holiness with themes such as apartheid, human rights abuses, oppression and the restructuring of South Africa (including the release of the terrorist Nelson Mandela).³⁴

The *Illuminati* remained a central theme in Kleynhans' books. In ± 1990 he published *Diaboliese sameswering (Diabolic conspiracy)*.³⁵ The book identified the *Illuminati* and the New Age movement as the enemies of God and the powers behind the one-world church. But this diabolic conspiracy also includes Islam, the charismatic Kingdom Now-theology and, once again, the ecumenical movement.

In *Die laaste uur en die merk van die dier* (*The last hour and the mark of the beast*)³⁶ and *In die laaste sewe jaar* (*In the last seven years*)³⁷ Kleynhans discusses the popular texts Ezekiel 38 and 39. Both books appeared shortly before the fall of communism and the main theme of his interpretation was Russia's assault on Israel. This is not a new interpretation, but links to pre-millennial teachings of its time, including Pentecostals and evangelicals such as Hal Lindsey, Jack van Impe,³⁸ Derek Prince,³⁹ Salem Kirban,⁴⁰ MR de Hahn⁴¹ and Dwight Pentecost.⁴² The list goes on. While Kleynhans sees a role for the West in opposing the diabolical conspiracy against Israel, he believes that only God can stop them or save His church by taking them out of the earth.⁴³

However, what makes Kleynhans unique is the messianic position of the apartheid regime in his writings. Russia and communism in general hate God. They therefore hate the religious Jewish state and the Christian state in South Africa. The diabolical attack will not be directed at Israel alone, but will also include South Africa.

Kleynhans used the same winning recipe in all his books over and over again: the international conspiracy under the *Illuminati*, the international work of the devil, the communists, the New Age and even the USA, against the Christian white apartheid regime in South Africa, the demonic nature of the UN, the ecumenical movement, etc.

Kleynhans worked with a hermeneutic of fear. His books never start with biblical exposition, or even social analysis. Instead, they start by expounding all his conspiracy theories and myths, beginning with the *Illuminati* myth (the only source for this being the long-discredited *Protocols of Zion*). He then moves to the international arena, the UN, and the liberal, New Age communist-infiltrated USA administration. These myths and theories lay the foundation for his exegesis, but not before he uses the myths and theories to interpret the threats against the present-day church: communism, humanism, and liberalism (all of which being different manifestations of the same deception). Scriptures are used sparsely here and there just to identify the deceptions with prophetic warnings. And good, committed Christians who serve Jesus and seek holiness (e.g. South African whites) are being persecuted by the world.

Finally Kleynhans offers a solution: the rapture of the Church. While we wait for Jesus to return, our task is to resist the enemies of God. We can do nothing to make this world better. Our only solution is Jesus. And then not as a catalyst for changing society, but as the King who will take the Church away from this wretched earth.

One can argue that not all the end-time preachers of the apartheid era preached such a blatant politically conservative message. Many of them did not work with the myths of the *Illuminati* and the theories of the New World Order. That said, none of them ever challenged Kleynhans's opinions. He

was a sought-after conference and revival speaker and he wrote more books (and sold them to Pentecostal people) than any other South African Pentecostal. And, as I have said, he received a PhD in recognition of his prophetic writings.

One can also ask why Kleynhans was so popular with the Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal pre-millennialists. If his writings were on the extreme periphery of pre-millennialism, surely the more middle of the road exegetes and pastors should have been much more prominent in countering his views?

In the South African context the enthusiasm for Kleynhans is understandable. Whites feared both communism and Black Nationalism. Rationally, of course, there was very little hope that whites would continue to rule. After the political unrest of 1976, international analysts and political observers agreed that it was just a matter of time before the apartheid regime would be replaced by majority rule. For white Christians who believed that they had a God-given calling to lead the black nations of southern Africa to nationhood and protect their own identity with political power, majority rule was not an option.

Solution: get God on our side. If He can (or will) not give us political power, the Rapture is the solution.

Evangelical reaction in Africa to the invasion of Iraq

The Iraqi war unified the Pentecostal/charismatic world, not only in the USA, but all over the world. While the international community was deeply divided about the invasion, the Namibian and South African Pentecostals stood behind the Bush/Blair coalition.⁴⁴

One can ask why so many evangelicals in the West (not only the USA) supported the invasion despite the fact that it did not constitute a just war. Nor was it only Republicans who supported George Bush. Some Christians (both Catholics and evangelicals) may have voted for the Democrats, but they, too, fully supported the war.⁴⁵

Human rights activists, on the other hand, predicted the outcome of the invasion correctly. They knew that the removal of a dictator without a strong government to replace him inevitably leads to chaos. They were angry because the coalition ignored the principles of international law (no human rights activist or academician believed that the first UN resolution was wide enough to allow an invasion). Without being blessed with the gift of prophecy, they predicted that the coalition would not find a smoking gun, and laughed at the idea that Al Quaeda had links with Saddam. Ironically, the USA supported Saddam against Iran because it preferred a secular state to a fundamentalist Islamic state. There was no necessity for a pre-emptive strike. The list goes on.

Pentecostals, charismatics and evangelicals are often accused of being too heavenly-minded and of not being sufficiently involved in the daily earthly problems like war, hunger and human suffering. Not so this time around. The Namibian born-again movement was extremely active in the Iraqi war issue. The question, however, is: just how "biblical" and "Christ-centred" were these responses?

Namibian prayer partners of the Namibian Prayer Network received several requests for prayer. But, interesting enough, not one to pray for the Iraqi civilians who would suffer in this conflict, neither did anyone request prayer that Bush and Blair reconsider their plans for war. Nor did any born-again Christian try to determine if this was indeed a just war.

Namibian evangelicals and Pentecostals, so it seems, were from the outset 100% in the Bush corner. The following requests for prayer all came from born-again Christians:

- 1 A request to pray that Saddam will voluntary abandon power. The request was based on a vision of an American pastor that God said if enough people pray for Saddam to leave Baghdad, there will be no war. Only two days after I received the request and the revelation, defence secretary Rumsfeld shared the same idea with the world. If enough people would put pressure on Saddam, there might be a slight chance that force will not be necessary. The International world criticised the USA severely for changing the goal posts of the intended attack. The aim was no longer to disarm Saddam, but regime change. While the whole world - especially human rights activists and international law lawyers pointed to the illegality of the United States' approach, charismatics rejoiced in the pastor's revelation that closely conforms to USA foreign policy. Saddam Hussein, like all other tyrants before him, refused to abandon power.⁴⁶

There are two major problems with this revelation:

- (a) Why did these prayers not work? The pastor would probably respond that not enough Christians prayed. However, does this mean that God added up the number of the prayer warriors and found that there were two or three fewer than the target he revealed to the pastor?
- (b) Why did the revelation promote US foreign policy? And if the international community is correct in its interpretation of international law, does this mean that, spiritually, God is taking sides with the USA against the international world? This, of course, is exactly what President Bush claimed in his speech to the nation. He

called the planned war and the liberation of Iraq God's gift to the nations and assured the Americans that they did not stand alone (a reference to the opposition they encountered from their European allies). Like an Old Testament prophet, he then victoriously proclaims that God is on their side!

- 2 The revelation does not differ from the messages that Pat Robertson and his evangelical and Pentecostal/charismatic brothers broadcast for the last three months over satellite television. They also encouraged us to pray: Pray for Pres. Bush to fulfil his God-given task of toppling Saddam, pray for the allied forces, pray for Ariel Sharon, pray for the fulfilment of prophecy.

We were entertained on Channel 77 with one message after the other telling us that the conflict is indeed the making of God Almighty. Gone is the evangelical message calling unbelievers to repentance. The gospel of Jesus Christ must take the backseat while the evangelicals preach the gospel of mighty military power. Some linked the conflict with the future of the state of Israel.

The prophecies of Ezekiel 38 and 39 would be fulfilled. The territory of God's people will be extended right to the borders of Iraq and their enemies (the Palestinians?) will be destroyed. Conclusion? God is not only on the side of Israel, He organised this war to fulfil His plans with Israel. Is this the God of love revealed in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world?

- 3 In the middle of February Namibian Prayer Network sent fresh revelation from God to their e-mail prayer partners. This time God spoke to Benny Hinn (the same man of God who received a message from the Lord in 1999 that the Y2K millennium bug will bring catastrophe to the world and only those who gave generously to God's ministry – read Benny Hinn's ministry – will escape the consequences). God told his humble servant 3 March will be a day of great significance. Hinn's revelation was soon confirmed by other evangelical and charismatic preachers. Several prayer partners requested me to fast and pray on 3 March. The prayer requests included prayer that Saddam be removed and Bush be blessed.

- 4 More or less the same time the White House suggested that the beginning of March may be the time to strike out against Iraq. What a coincidence! God's timetable was again a mirror image of USA war planning. Unfortunately for Hinn and the other men of God, Tony Blair wanted a second Security Council resolution and the war was postponed for two weeks. The prayer warriors never explained what the eventual significance of 3 March was.

5 Namibians and South Africans received a prayer request from southern African supporters of the war to pray for *our boys in the Gulf*. No explanation as to why and when the American and British troops have become *our boys*, just a simple confirmation of solidarity. While the traditional western allies were deeply divided and while America and France were competing for the hearts and minds of Africa, at least the evangelical Christians knew who is right and who is wrong. No need to take cognisance of the German/French position, no need to listen to the American coalition against war, no need to weigh the speeches of Blair and Bush against those of Chirac and Schreuder. With God on our side why do we need to test the spirits?

It seems as if the spiritualisation of the war (Bush's belief that he had a command from God to invade Iraq and his notion that the invasion was God's gift to the nations) went off well with Pentecostals in Africa (and off course in the United States). For the Americans the devastating effects of 9/11 were still fresh in their minds. And it was possibly comforting for white African Pentecostals to feel that, this time, they really were on the winning side. But for the pre-millennial evangelists in the USA, it is a somewhat different ball game from the pre-millennial preaching of the likes of Bennie Kleynhans.

The post-Iraqi invasion period: new interpretations of Ezekiel 38 and 39

Unlike the audience of Kleynhans there is little chance that rightwing American Christians will lose political power or even smaller that they will ever lose a conventional war against the enemies of the USA. Yet, after 9/11 the American people suffered a sense of loss and anger. Terrorist attacks are even more frustrating than conventional war: in the case of 9/11, the mightiest country in the world learnt it cannot protect its citizens from urban terror.

By September 2006 the atmosphere around the Iraqi invasion did not help to lift the spirits of the American people. The opposition to the US presence in Iraq was growing, the Iraqi government failed to take control of the security situation, secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld resigned and President Bush called in James Baker and his Iraq Study Group and Secretary of Defense to advise him on strategies to deal with the Iraqi problem.

At the time, two Americans with almost diametrically opposed positions on USA foreign policy visited Namibia.

The first was Jeff Krilla, deputy assistant secretary of state for Africa. Krilla is also responsible for human rights issues in Africa. The second was Barbara Olshansky, human rights lawyer of New York City. Olshansky was awarded Human Rights Lawyer of 2005 for her work with the Guantanamo

Bay prisoners, especially their right to challenge their detention (the so-called *habeas corpus* procedures). Olshansky assisted the University of Namibia in a training programme for magistrates (junior judges) and was also the speaker at the Annual Anton Lubowski Memorial Lecture (Lubowski was a human rights lawyer and activist killed by the South African army shortly before independence).

While these two Americans had very little in common when it came to US foreign policy, the war in Iraq, the detentions in GB, etc, they shared one belief: a military invasion of Iran was not on the table. At the same time, the US Foreign Secretary, Condoleezza Rice, stated on several occasions that the USA was committed to negotiations and other peaceful means to stop Iran's uranium enrichment programme.⁴⁷

Indications in American polls were that increasing number of Americans were questioning the decision to invade Iraq in the first place. The new sceptics included conservatives and people usually sympathetic to the Republican Party in general and the Bush administration in particular. Well-known corporate lawyers became involved in the Guatanamo Bay issue.

Apart from CNN, the biggest source of information on the USA in Africa is Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). In Namibia all TV owners can watch TBN 24 hours a day. If you do not have satellite and you live in Windhoek, you have access to CNN through the national broadcaster for two hours a day and to BBC World for ± six hours. TBN is highly influential in informing and influencing the African "TV church".

During September 2006, several pre-millennial pastors encouraged the USA to invade Iran on TBN. The first of these pastors was John Hagee of the Cornerstone Church, San Antonio, Texas, and the second Rod Parsley of World Harvest Church, Columbus, Ohio. Both gave a detailed exegesis of Ezekiel 38 and 39 to prove that the Arab states and Russia would invade Israel and be crushed by God. Benny Hinn and Jack van Impe soon followed suit. Ever-present Pat Robertson, broadcasting live from Haifa with Hezbollah rockets flying over his head, was very vocal in his news bulletins and Middle East commentary about his beliefs in God's preference for the state of Israel.

The messages sounded very similar to that of Kleynhans, of the young Von Impe, and of Hal Lindsay's books (e.g. *The late great planet earth*): look at what is happening to Israel and you will know the second coming of Christ is imminent. Pack your bags, Jesus is coming. But before His return the communists, in coalition with a few Arab states, will invade Israel and be crushed by God.

However, when one look at the big churches these men are building, and their extravagant lifestyles, then the expectation that this world will soon come to an end seems somewhat puzzling. Back in the early 1970s a book such as Salem Kirban's *20 reasons why the present earth may not last another 20 years*⁴⁸ was a popular book amongst Pentecostals. And my uncle

preached an Old Years Eve sermon in 1967 entitled: *We are entering our last seven years on earth.*⁴⁹ Kirban and Uncle Hennie de Bruin also expected the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38.

However, reading the small print of Hagee and Parsley's sermons, there seems to be a difference between the *Late great planet earth*⁵⁰ and the young Jack van Impe. Germany, or more correctly the GDR (German Democratic Republic or East Germany), and other east block countries no longer appear on the list. Were they removed from the Bible? No, Gomer (Germany) is still there, but according to the latest revelation this word does not refer to Germany. And Togarma no longer represents the Soviet republics. How can they? The international scene changed dramatically in 1989. Many of these republics are now either a member of the European Union or on their way to becoming members. And most of them are moving more towards the old western liberal democracies and away from Mother Russia. The same applies to the eastern bloc. The Czech Republic is a close ally of the USA, and even the countries still governed by so-called socialists are in the western economy (Poland, Romania, Slovakia, etc).

So the "prophets" were correct that communism would be crushed. But it happened in a much more profane manner. It actually started when the East Germans were allowed to go to West Berlin to do some shopping! And to encourage them, the Bundes Republic gave them a few Deutch Marks to spend. Someone wrote the following description of the 1989 revolution on the remains of the Wall: *We came, we saw, we did a little shopping.*

So capitalism, as is now well known, won the ideological battle against communism without God intervening and crushing the mighty red army in Israel. But 9/11 gave us a new enemy: Islam. And note, in the sermons of these new interpreters the nations listed in Ezekiel are all Arab nations (except Russia). But there is another piece of the puzzle missing here: Iraq, a favorite of the 1970s, no longer poses a threat to the West and surely cannot participate in an attack on Israel while the USA and British troops are in control of the military operations in the country. Solution: just drop them and do not mention them.

Consider the uncritical evaluation of a man such as John Hagee. He refers to the Iraq/Iran war as an expression of the evil of the two nations, but ignores the highly controversial involvement of the USA and its support of Iraq. In the same way, he no longer refers to the fact that he backed the invasion of Iraq.

If the situation in the Middle East was not so serious, one could laugh about the chameleon colours given to interpretations of Ezekiel 38 and 39. Conservative evangelicalism and Catholicism have both become political powers to be reckoned with. When Jerry Fallwell spoke, Capitol Hill listened. And after the catastrophic developments in Iraq, no peace-loving Christian wants another war.

Public opinion in the USA and the rest of the world is swaying against a prolonged USA presence in Iraq and even more so against the invasion of two old USA arch enemies, Syria and Iran. Yet John Hagee's latest book, *Jerusalem countdown*,⁵¹ encourages the United States to pre-emptively strike Iran.

Hagee, like Kleynhans, does not begin with Scripture. The first part of *Jerusalem countdown* is dedicated to the nuclear abilities of Iran, the treat to Israel, the history of anti-Semitism.⁵² Only on page 93 does he start referring to scripture: another exposition of Ezekiel. However, Hagee predicts that the next Administration will be Democrats and will stay clear of any involvement in the Middle East.⁵³ This will lead to a situation where Russia and its Arab allies will be in complete command.⁵⁴

Eventually, when the diabolically inspired invasion of Israel takes place, God will not be able to rely on the West. They will opt for diplomacy, which Hagee sees as a ridiculous response.⁵⁵ And God will have no choice but to intervene with an earthquake, rainstorm and fire and brimstone from heaven.

Like Kleynhans, Hagee is a pessimist. The world will eventually come to naught. America will lose its moral fiber as soon as the newly elected Democrat moves into the White House. The rest is history (or will become history). The Church will be raptured, the antchrist will appear, hell will break loose on earth for seven years before the consummation of all things.

Some conclusions and observations.

A short glimpse of the role of pre-millenial chiliiasm in interpreting prophecy and a comparison between the present interpreters in the USA and a pastor in apartheid South Africa, raise several questions:

- Why are Pentecostals and charismatics so attracted to a hermeneutical key that does not begin with Scripture? And why do so few people within the Pentecostal/charismatic fold question the role of unhistorical myths like the Illuminati myth?
- Why do Pentecostals and charismatics opt for escapism rather than a restorative model when they find themselves in difficult situations?
- What are the long-term effects of this type of theology when the prophecies are not fulfilled in our lifetime? How do white South Africans cope with the new situation if they expect Jesus to return rather than helping them to be the salt of the earth?

Without any empirical research to prove my hypothesis, it is possible that many of the white South Africans who are now leaving the country are doing so because they see no future for them in Africa. Disillusioned by the end of apartheid, the rejection of the international world and the loss of power, they feel that God and the church have also let them down.

Future research both in South Africa and the USA will also have to address the issue of Biblical exegesis. Pentecostals and charismatics are no longer deprived individuals who are only living for one day in the sweet bye and bye. They are to be found in all strata of society. The old time religion which sees only hope in a rapture no longer fits the restorative thinking of a modern Pentecostal church.

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• *Additional resources*

Interview with the late Bryn Jones, Windhoek, April 2000.
Oral tradition conveyed to me by my late mother, BFH Horn, d. May 2007 and my late uncle, JHF de Bruin, an AFM pastor and confidant of Wessels.,d. May 1996. Both were members of his congregation during World War II.

• *Sermons by G R Wessels*

Want Sion het haar weë gekry, 1950. Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 9 April.
Die tyd is nou, 1952. Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 6 April. Published in *Trooster*, Johannesburg; July, 4, 5, 18, 19.

Die Heilige Gees, 1952. Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 31 March.

Sermon at the memorial service of A Schoeman, Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 31 March 1956.

Jesus alleen, 1956. General Conference of the AFM, Maranatha Park, 1 April.

Ek is bang Here, maar U het gesê: Die vier perde van openbaring. 1957 General Conference of the AFM, Maranatha Park, 7 April.

Die kommunistiese aanslag en die moord op Dr. Verwoerd. Pinksteroord Assembly, Johannesburg, September.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Co-Researcher for the Pentecostal Project at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.
- 1 Burgess, S & Van der Maas, E. (2002, 2003). *International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements (revised and expanded edition)*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 584ff.
- 2 Ibid., p. 585.
- 3 (1908) reprinted in 2007. *The lost tribes of Israel*, Muskogee, OK 74402, Artisan Press.
- 4 It is interesting to note that the ten lost tribes of Israel has remained an important theme in conservative dispensationalist thinking. See a video representation by Lindsey, H (August 31, 2007), on *The Hal Lindsay Report*, published on <http://hallindsay.org/index.php?fontstyle=f-larger>. Accessed on 9 September 2007, 23h33. Lindsey believes that the recognition by the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem as Judaists of groups scattered in India and Africa are evidence of the existence of the twelve tribes and fulfilment of end-time prophecy.
- 5 The so-called faith movement with its triumphalist and in many ways realised eschatology remained close to the old-time expectation of the rapture and the eventual catastrophic tribulation. restorationist groups like Vineyard and Covenant ministries in the UK (Bryn Jones) broke away from pre-millennial dispensationalism, but they are still by far a minority.
- 6 Historic Pre-millennialism (1977), in Clouse, R, *The Meaning of the Millennium*, Downer's Grove, Ill., pp. 19 and 27.
- 7 Interview with the late Bryn Jones, Windhoek, April 2000.
- 8 Interview with Burger, I, quoted in Burger, I., 1989. *Geloofsgeskiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloofssending van Suid-Afrika*, Johannesburg, Evangelie-uitgewers, p.325.
- 9 Oral tradition conveyed to me by my late mother, BFH Horn, d. May 2007 and my late uncle, JHF de Bruin, an AFM pastor and confidant of Wessels. D. May 1996. Both were members of his congregation during World War II.
- 10 Van der Spuy, M.(1985). *Die Spanning tussen Vryheid en Formalisering ten opsigte van die liturgiese verskuiwinge in die AGS van Suid-Afrika*, unpublished MTh dissertation. Pretoria, UNISA.
- 11 Wessels, G.R. (1953), Die Staat en die Regering waardeer ten seerste die groot werk, Johannesburg: *Trooster*, June 1953, pp. 4, 5 and 22.
- 12 Coloured, a word for many years despised by South Africans, meant people of mixed descent.
- 13 The Constitution implemented by the apartheid regime recognised the sovereignty of God over the State. Apartheid as a policy was developed by the Reformed Churches and the first Nationalist prime minister after World War II was a former Dutch Reformed minister.
- 14 Sermons of Wessels have been distributed in written form and on audio tape. Many of these sermons are in the possession of the author. Unfortunately most of them are not dated and the place where it was preached not mentioned. Some have been dated :
- *Want Sion het haar weē gekry*. (1950). Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 9 April 1950;
 - *Die tyd is nou*, Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 6 April 1952 published in *Trooster*, Johannesburg; July 1952pp. 4, 5, 18 and 19.
 - *Die Heilige Gees*, Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 31 March 1952;
 - Sermon at the memorial service of A Schoeman, Maranatha Park, General conference of the AFM, 31 March 1956;
 - *Jesus alleen*, (1956), General conference of the AFM, Maranatha Park, 1 April 1956.
 - *Ek is bang Here, maar U het gesé: Die vier perde van openbaring*. (1957) General Conference of the AFM, Maranatha Park, 7 April 1957;
 - *Die kommunistiese aanslag en die moord op Dr. Verwoerd*, Pinksteroord assembly, Johannesburg, September 1966.
- 15 Liebenberg, JJ., *Ons Eie Seuns in die Weermag. 'n Nadere Kennismaking met die SA Weermag*, in Comforter, June, 1962, p. 7 f.
- 16 Ibid. (translation JNH)
- 17 Johannesburg, Maranatha Publishers.
- 18 Ibid., p.54 ff.
- 19 Ibid., p.56.
- 20 Hollenweger, W., 1977. *The Pentecostals*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, p. 416. Translated from the German *Enthusiastisches Christentum: Die Pfingstbewegung in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Zurich, Zwingli Verlag.
- 21 Ibid.

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- 22 GR Wessels became a senator as part of the so-called extended senate. The Nationalist Party extend the Senate to enable them to remove the coloureds from the voters roll. The coloured vote was entrenched in the Constitution and required a two/third majority in a joint session of both houses of Parliament. The Nationalists initially changed the article without a two/third majority, then created a special court of Parliament. When both these actions were rejected by the courts, they opted for an enlarged Senate. Yet, the coloured section of the AFM expressed their support for Wessels since his participation in politics will help the church.
- 23 The other so-called white South African denominations came under fierce attacks from their related international denominations for their support of apartheid. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) is a good example of continued isolation over the last fifty years. In 1941 the DRC left the Christian Council of South Africa and in 1960, after the Cottesloe conference, the DRC left the World Council of Churches. In 1978 the relationship between the DRC and the Reformed Church of the Netherlands was terminated, in 1982 both the Schweiz Reformierte Kirche and the Reformierten Bund of Germany cut their ties with the DRC. The biggest blow to their international ecumenical relations came when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared a status confessionis on apartheid and suspended the membership of DRC in 1982. Two years later the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), followed in the footsteps of the WARC by declaring a status confessionis on apartheid and gave the DRC two years to get its house in order.
- 24 Sarcastic comment of Walter Holleneweger at the European Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Conference, Utrecht, 1989.
- 24 Sarcastic comment of Walter Holleneweger at the European Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Conference, Utrecht, 1989.
- 25 Cf. his quotation in 1992:
 Again, I think one man, one vote,
 just unrestricted democracy would not be wise. There needs
 to be some kind of protection for the minority which the white
 people represent now, a minority, and they need to have a right
 to demand a protection of their rights.
 (700 Club, 3/18/92 as quoted in People for the American Way
 Report).
- 26 1980. Pretoria. Private publication by Kleynhans.
- 27 Ibid., pp. 48-69.
- 28 Ibid., p. 1-50.
- 29 Ibid. p. 55
- 30 Ibid., p. 50.
- 31 (date unknown 1981?). Brakpan, VG Publishers, pp. 85-89.
- 32 Ibid., p. 81
- 33 Ibid., p. 84
- 34 Date unknown 1990?), Brakpan, VG Publishers.
- 35 (1990), Brakpan, VG Publishers.
- 36 (1989), Brakpan, VG Publishers.
- 37 (1982). *Revelation Revealed*.
- 38 See Prince, D. (1982).
- 39 (1968). Guide to Survival. See also footnote 46.
- 40 See his Signs of the Time, Daniel the Prophet, Studies in Revelation and Second Coming of Jesus, Grand Rapids, RBC Ministries., now published on CD-Rom under the title MR de Haan Classic Library, with other books by the same author.
- 41 See Pentecost, D. (date unknown). J Dwight Pentecost Collection, for some of his books eschatology.
- 42 The identification of the list of enemies of Israel has always depended on the international scene in the time of the interpretation.
- 43 Several churches in Windhoek conducted prayer meetings in support of the coalition. And a local email-based prayer network, Namibia Prayer Network forwarded requests for prayer to its members on a daily basis.
- 44 Even Hillary Clinton, who came close to be the Democratic presidential candidate, supported the war.
- 45 Van Zyl, N. 2003. Weekly e-mail prayer letter, Windhoek: Namibia Prayer Network., February 2003.

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- 46 See Smith, S (2006). Iranian Uranium Enrichment Poses Proliferation Risk, Rice Says.
- 47 (1973). 20 Reasons why the present earth may not last another 20 years.
- 48 De Bruin, H. (1967).
- 49 Lindsey, H and Carlson, C. (1970).
- 50 (2006) Lake Mary, Fl, Front Line.
- 51 Ibid., p. 1 ff.
- 52 Ibid., p. 108.
- 53 Ibid., p. 109.
- 54 Ibid., p. 108.