

Preface

I have been invited by Terry Smith and others in Alliance Leadership, and encouraged by my D.S., Wayne Spriggs, to write this White Paper making a case why the premillennial view of the Alliance should not be changed.

I have been asked to limit my paper to 5,000 words.

Therefore, I respectfully present this paper to the Alliance Board of Directors and to our Alliance family of faith at large.

Bill Giovannetti

Senior Pastor

Pathway Church, Redding, CA

(formerly Neighborhood Church)

bg@pathwaychurch.life

I. Millennialism

A. The Alliance has been historically premillennial, and has enshrined premillennialism in its statement of faith.

1. “The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent and will be personal, visible, and premillennial. This is the believer’s blessed hope and is a vital truth which is an incentive to holy living and faithful service.” [Our Statement of Faith]

B. The Fourfold Gospel, which is one of our distinctives, is therefore interpreted from a premillennial perspective.

1. Jesus Christ Our Coming King: “God’s righteous reign will be established on the earth for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:-6). [John F. Soper, Alliance website.]

C. Nothing in this paper should be construed as anything but a loving disagreement with postmillennial, preterist, and amillennial believers. There are wonderful believers in all camps, and we can and should be on the same side in the great spiritual battle of our time. This is not a call to separate from them, nor is it a call to arms. It is simply a call to uphold our own standards within our own denomination, and to do so with all due affection and grace toward

our sisters and brothers in other denominations and groups.

D. It is not my goal in this paper to construct the premillennial position. It is my goal to make a case as to why this position should not be abandoned.

II. Reasons Against Changing the Alliance Doctrinal Statement on Premillennialism

A. REASON ONE: The Hermeneutical Problem

1. Groups that adopt a premillennial position demonstrate a commitment to a particular approach to biblical interpretation. This approach is often called the *grammatical-historical* hermeneutic.
 - a) It is often called a *literal* interpretation of Scripture, though we make proper allowances for symbolic and metaphorical language. The main idea is that we take the Scriptures at face value and let God's Word speak for itself, even as we account for symbolic and metaphorical language.
 - b) It is this grammatical-historical hermeneutic that has historically typified our theologically conservative movement.
2. Respected scholars who hold to amillennial and postmillennial views admit that the literal interpretation of Scripture leads to a premillennial position.
 - a) O.T. Allis (a respected amillennialist)
 - (1) "The Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or being capable of fulfillment in the present age." O.T. Allis
 - b) Floyd Hamilton (a respected amillennialist)
 - (1) "Now we must frankly admit the literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures."
 - c) Loraine Boettner (a respected postmillennialist)
 - (1) "It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel

- in the land of Palestine, with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations.”
3. Theologian John Walvoord writes, “The debate between premillennarians and other millennarians hangs to a large extent upon the principles of interpretation of Scripture which each group employs. This is commonly recognized by all parties.”
 - a) (John Walvoord) (<https://bible.org/article/theological-context-premillennialism>)
 4. In building his case for amillennialism, Old Testament scholar E.J. Young has contended, “We must therefore abandon once and for all the erroneous and non-Scriptural rule of ‘literal if possible’ [hermeneutics.]” (cited in Payne, see below)
 5. Any view aside from premillennialism forces us to spiritualize texts and to take metaphorically what should be taken literally. This flies in the face of grammatical-historical hermeneutics.
 - a) These other views require what is called Replacement Theology (Supersessionism), which says that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God, and that there is no future for Israel in the divine plan.
 - b) These alternatives re-interpret the promises of God into something that would have been unintelligible to their original recipients, including:
 - (1) The promises of a land and territory for the Jews — the Jews have only occupied about 1/30th of the land that was promised them in Scripture.
 - (2) The promises of an earthly Davidic king ruling from Jerusalem.
 - (3) The promises of a worldwide kingdom.
 - (4) The promises of peace and absence of war, including promises to other nations beside Israel (e.g., Isa. 2:4)
 - (5) The promises of a thousand year reign of Christ.
 - (a) All of these divine promises are converted into something their original hearers would have never contemplated if we fail to hold fast to our premillennial position.

- c) Under the preterist viewpoint, there is no second coming, because all the so-called end times prophecies were fulfilled in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. Preterism, which I suspect is the most common alternative viewpoint in the Alliance today, generally holds there is no clear end-times scenario offered in Scripture.
6. Here, therefore, is the first argument in a case against changing our viewpoint on premillennial theology.
- a) *We cannot change our eschatology without changing the hermeneutics that got us there.*
 - b) The day the Alliance admits postmillennial, preterist, and amillennial viewpoints into its leadership is the day we make a mess of our historic *hermeneutical* position.
 - c) We would, by definition, break away from a literal view of Scripture.
 - d) We change our whole attitude toward the inerrant Word of God. I am not saying that amillennialists, preterists, or postmillennialists deny inerrancy. *I am saying that they approach the Word differently.* They are ready to allegorize and spiritualize statements of Scripture that should be taken at face value, and were taken at face value by A.B. Simpson and our forebears.
 - e) The unintended consequence of a changed hermeneutic is to crack open the door to other viewpoints on other doctrines, and ultimately to theological liberalism — a point I will expand upon later.
 - f) Therefore, in the absence of a solidly reasoned theological case, it is dangerous to change our doctrine on premillennialism. No such case has been put forward to date. This precious doctrine should therefore not be tampered with.

B. REASON TWO: The Theological Problem

1. Scriptures and the theological positions derived from them are tightly interconnected. Like the engine under the hood of your car, our theological positions are bolted to each other.

2. You cannot simply pull out a part of your engine without unbolting it from its connected parts.
3. Premillennialism is tightly bolted to all other parts of the evangelical engine. We can't pull it out without disrupting virtually everything else "under the hood."
 - a) *Theology Proper*: you change the doctrine of God by making us wonder how he keeps his promises and whether or not he can be implicitly trusted.
 - b) *Ecclesiology*: the continuity/discontinuity between Israel and the Church is disrupted. To erase the millennium is to redefine the nature of the church itself in relation to the nation of Israel.
 - c) *Eschatology*: the whole end-time scenario envisioned by Simpson and our founders is thrown into disarray, *with no coherent doctrinal formulation put in its place*.
 - (1) Notice: the proposal before the Council is to *remove* a doctrine, but not to replace it or clarify it. In other words, in the place of a clear statement of a theological position, we are given a vacuum, into which will flow a multitude of unintended consequences over the generations.
 - d) *Creation and Christology*: Simpson himself argued that to spiritualize the millennium — as do the amillennial and post-millennial views — is to open the door to spiritualizing other doctrines such as a literal creation or even the historical existence of Jesus Christ. Simpson writes, "Such a rejection takes out of God's Book all reality and makes everything merely a dream as vague as the fooleries of Christian Science. Thank God He is real and we are real and Christ is real and the coming glory is real." In other words, Simpson argues, once you start spiritualizing the statements of Scripture and promises of God, where do you stop? The same logic that erases premillennialism will eventually erase a literal creation and a literal Savior.
 - e) *Hell*: the same argument that would erase premillennialism can equally be used to erase hell. What if our LOCC committees had licensed hundreds of workers who don't agree with our

position on everlasting conscious torment (ECT) in hell for those outside of Christ? What if they are already occupying our pulpits? The issues are intimately related and cannot be separated.

4. My point here is not to trace out all the theological ramifications of erasing premillennialism. *It is simply to point out that this work has not been done... and to argue that the burden to do this work rests on the shoulders of those who would change our doctrine.*
5. These theological ramifications are real, they are enormous, and they have not been explored sufficiently. How does it not border on recklessness, therefore, for us to make this change? Until and when a patient theological examination of the implications of this change have been written, discussed, prayerfully debated in depth — not the superficial discussions held in three minute snippets across the nation — but really pounding out doctrine in hours-long conversations, we have no business even considering such a change.
6. Any official worker in the Alliance who has not participated in such theological discussions and who cannot defend their conclusions from Scripture *has a moral obligation to vote against this doctrinal change.* Before you vote for such a consequential change, you owe it to your forbears, your present-day colleagues, and your spiritual descendants to *show your work.*

C. REASON THREE: The Social Gospel Problem

1. The Social Gospel is a movement to Christianize society without saving souls. It reframes the Christian message from a gospel of personal salvation to a gospel of societal transformation.
2. Every major departure from biblical authority justifies itself by means of the Social Gospel. They argue, “We are preaching true compassion and grace for hurting people here and now.” “We aren’t about heaven in the future — we’re bringing heaven to earth now.”
3. It may surprise you to know that the founder of the Social Gospel Movement, Walter Rauschenbusch, was a contemporary and a

theological foe of A.B. Simpson. (See paper by Daniel J. Ewearitt linked below)

4. Under the social gospel, the kingdom of God is here and now, not at some future time when Jesus returns. The Church ushers in the kingdom through deeds of love and kindness.
5. Writing in 1907, Rauschenbusch asserts,
 - a) [The old message of salvation] has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it. It has not evoked faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent institutions of human society from the inherited guilt of oppression and extortion. . . . The social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience. It calls on us for the faith of the old prophets who believed in the salvation of nations. [Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 45.]
6. This false gospel is the essence of both preterism and postmillennialism. It does not require the return of the Lord to usher in the kingdom. It only requires the work of the church to fix the world.
7. Simpson and our forebears were so fervently premillennial because they knew first hand the dangers of the postmillennial social gospel.
8. Rauschenbusch taught that the world would be improved through concerted human effort. He taught that the church would usher in the kingdom of God — a utopia on earth — through social action, which had by then replaced the old fashioned, blood-bought gospel of Jesus Christ. He sought to use the coercive force of government to bring about what he viewed as needed social change. And above all else, the Social Gospel Movement made the church's primary mission a crusade to usher in the utopian promises of the millennium, apart from the personal return of Christ, and in place of saving souls.
9. Under the Social Gospel, social action displaces evangelism in almost every case.

10. This perversion of Scripture, and this tragic redefinition of the gospel of Christ our Savior and Coming King, is always and forever rooted in a defective eschatology, which is itself rooted in a defective hermeneutic and a liberal theology.
11. We are stuck in Groundhog Day, fighting again the fundamentalist/modernist battles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The kingdom of God is not future, but present, or so we are told. It is not so much the rule and reign of Jesus Christ in bodily form at his second advent, but his spiritual reign in our hearts and society today. It is not a dramatic interruption in history, but a gradual infiltration of society, bringing love to the world and to its institutions.
12. It is the false teaching of Dominionism as practiced by some ultra-charismatic groups today.
13. Why look forward to a future heaven when you can bring heaven to earth now?
14. Preterism in particular is the fruit of what was once called the Emerging Church movement. It is based on a cynical approach to all things eschatological, which in turn springs from doubts about the clarity of Scripture overall. Preterism is the offspring of the likes of Rob Bell, Spencer Burke, Brian MacLaren, and Chuck Smith Jr., whose books did their damage before their authors faded away.
15. In any case the radical disjunction between heaven and earth is lost, and with it, the heartfelt longing for something far better than this worn out planet can offer. D.A. Carson saw it coming decades ago:
 - a) My impression, however, is that in many churches Christian assurance is not a major topic for sermons or discussion groups, largely because popular eschatology has become so realized that there is very little futurist element left, except at the merely creedal level. If we do not long for the consummation of our salvation in the new heaven and the new earth, for the *visio Dei* that is the believer's inheritance, then there is little point in talking about our assurance of gaining it.

[D.A. Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance” WTJ 54 (1992) 1-29]

16. Who needs heaven if we can bring heaven to earth now? Who needs the future millennium if we can create our own millennium before Christ ever returns to earth? Who needs a Second Coming if eschatology has already been “realized,” as the preterists tell us.
17. Thankfully, the historic Alliance position has stood firmly for a literal kingdom of God ruled by a literal King Jesus on earth.
18. Why on earth would we depart from this? For the sake of expedience? For a false unity? Why?
19. This world is, was, and always will be *cosmos diabolicus*, the devil’s world. That dark lord owns the world-system, and all we can do is tinker at the fringes.
 - a) Satan is the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4).
 - b) He is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).
 - c) The whole world-system lies under his sway (1 John 5:19).
20. We are easy prey for the Angel of Darkness masquerading as the Angel of Light (2 Corinthians 11:14). All too often, the reforms advocated by well-meaning people, Christians included, create more harm than good. The devil has his fork stuck in all the systems of the world, and no amount of social justice or signs and wonders will pry it out.
21. We simply can’t bring in the Kingdom till the King comes back in glory.
22. Simpson said, “The kingdom of God is not an evolution from the forces of civilization but a revolution bursting upon an astonished world, not a blending with man’s selfish and imperfect achievements, but superseding all earthly sovereignties with His own supreme everlasting domain.”
 - a) [<http://www.kneillfoster.com/aar/1997/AAR1997-3.php>]
23. Premillennialism is PESSIMISTIC about society without the literal return of Christ. Postmillennialism and preterism are OPTIMISTIC.
24. Premillennialism is about the church saving people out from the world. Postmillennialism and preterism are about saving the world, through the social gospel. It is exactly what Paul Rader, our

second president, meant by Civilizing Schemes, and preached against in his 1913 presidential address to the Alliance:

- a) At every open door in the mission field soon will be found great so-called Christian powers and programs of education and reformation to substitute for evangelization and salvation.
 - b) The enemy [the devil and his allies] will advance and is advancing their civilization propaganda [i.e., postmillennialism] to laugh out of the trenches the truth of salvation. Hospitals, splendid as they are and benevolent as are their open doors of human kindly service, will be used by the enemy as a substitute for holiness. This camouflage hospital ship, loaded with needed salve, will be anchored in great mission center harbors as a forerunner of salvation along with school buildings. Then like a tape worm these two enterprises will take all the time, strength and money of the missionaries and mission boards.
 - c) The enemy slips salvation on a side seat, softly saying, “Sit still, sweet Gospel Story, we’re opening the way so you can sing your song very soon.”
 - d) The “preparation” for the Gospel propaganda is being very successfully used by the enemy everywhere even now. It is high time we recognized this deviating of our men and money by the enemy and believe afresh that the Gospel preached in any tongue, under any circumstance, to any people has within itself its own dynamite to open its own way.
 - e) The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not have to play second fiddle to any hospital, school or civilizing scheme. The Gospel is God’s great pioneer. It opens the path, it plows the furrows, it plants the seed. Then the hospitals, schools and civilizing, uplifting schemes come on behind.
- (1) (Paul Rader in “The President’s Report” to the General Council of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (1912-1913).
25. This is Rader’s direct salvo against the postmillennial and social gospel doctrinal system. This is exactly what we open the door to

by removing the word “premillennial” from our doctrinal statement.

26. In 1965 when the Alliance last refreshed our doctrinal statement, some in the room suggested we remove the word “immanent” from our statement about the Lord’s return. According to people in the room at the time, this small detachment was defeated soundly.
27. Joel Van Hoogen notes, “A few also voiced opposition to the term ‘premillennial.’ They were, according to Dr. Keith Bailey, a witness to the debate, ‘stomped’ by the affirmative voters.”
28. Stomped.
29. The attempt to remove the word *premillennial* was “stomped” by our forebears. I would argue this was not due to theological ignorance, but quite the contrary. It was due to the theological sophistication and personal biblical studies of those in the room. It was due to their sophisticated hermeneutic and deep study of God’s Word.
30. May God enable us, as we relive Groundhog Day in the twenty-first century, to “stomp” this development out of the room once again. The old truths require constant vigilance. Pastors and official workers, fulfill your duty and shepherd your sheep according to God’s perfect Word.

D. REASON FOUR: The Liberal Problem

1. I would like to quote the late Norman Geisler, who makes an important observation.
 - a) Our spiritual forefathers did not put premillennialism in our doctrinal statement because they thought it was unimportant. To the contrary, premillennialism is based on a hermeneutical (interpretation) fundamental. The literal historical/grammatical fundamental on which it is based underlies all the salvation fundamentals of the Faith. Giving it up belies to serious problems for the future of the church.
 - b)*One final thought. It is of more than passing significance to note that few, if any, evangelical groups ever move from premillennialism to liberalism. However, this is not true of*

amillennial and postmillennial views. So, it is not without good reason that premillennialism is a safeguard against liberalism.

(1) [<https://normangeisler.com/the-importance-of-premillennialism/> emphasis added.]

2. Charles Ryrie expressed the same sentiment:
 - a) "Allegorical interpretation fosters modernism. As has often been pointed out, it is almost impossible to find a premillennial liberal or modernist. On the other hand, the great body of modernistic Protestantism is avowedly amillennial. Thus the allegorical method of amillennialism is a step toward modernism."
(1) (Ryrie, p. 46 Basis of the Premillennial Faith, 1981)
3. If we wish to safeguard our Alliance from theological drift, if we wish to stand upon our own distinctives for generations to come, if we wish to honor the plain reading of Scripture, if we long to honor the legacy of Simpson, Rader, and Tozer, then let's remain as we are — unapologetically premillennial.
4. Future generations will no doubt face the same struggles. They may wonder why the Alliance has not fallen in step with other denominations who have widened their tents. After all, there are many faithful evangelicals who hold to amillennial and postmillennial positions.
5. No doubt.
6. But we are not them. We are looking forward and hastening unto the return of our Lord. May God grant us a pastoral core and an official worker cadre who can make the case for our own statement of belief, and do so with courage, conviction, biblical accuracy, and grace.
7. May we never be found sacrificing truth on the altar of either unity or expediency.
8. The burden is on anyone who would advocate for a change. Make your case. Make it compelling. Make it above all else biblical. Don't tell us it is loving or kind or broad minded. Those things all take a back seat to the question that matters most: "Is it biblical?"
9. The wisdom of God tells us, "do not remove the ancient landmark, which your fathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28).

10. Let a biblically informed generation say Amen.

E. REASON FIVE: The Polity Problem

1. We have been told that one of the reasons for bringing forward this proposed doctrinal change is because of a reality we are confronted with: many LOCC committees have licensed and ordained a number of pastors and official workers who do not subscribe to premillennial doctrine.
2. Since the door has already been opened, the argument goes, we might as well change our doctrine to accommodate the reality at hand.
3. If this is really the solution we pursue, then we have introduced fractures into our denomination which are increasingly difficult, and will one day be impossible, to bear.
4. The manual of the Central Pacific District requires:
 - a) “When District workers cease to believe the doctrines of the Bible as accepted and taught by the Christian and Missionary Alliance, they shall, upon their honor, withdraw themselves from its fellowship and surrender the credentials given them without the necessity of argument and trial. If they fail to do so, the matter shall be referred to DEXCOM.”
(1) [Central Pacific District Bylaws, February 2019, 10.]
5. This is not happening, rendering both our statement of faith and our concept of “constituted authority” as little more than words on paper.
6. Our President has posed the question this way:
 - a) While it is clear from our history that premillennialism was the conviction of our founder, Dr. Simpson, and while it remains the preferred teaching of the C&MA, is a premillennial position of enough significance in our theology that we would limit credentials solely based on this issue?
(1) [“John Stumbo Video Blog - A Season of Change, Part One,” 7 minutes 11 seconds.]
7. He has also stated his preference during the Encounter District Conference in Hawaii, March 2020, and in his video blog:

- a) “I’m not trying to hide my personal view. I lean toward making a change and opening our licensing to these candidates.”
 - (1)[“John Stumbo Video Blog, Part One,” 7 minutes 42 seconds.]
8. One might ask whether deviation from *any* of our doctrinal positions would be of enough significance “that we would limit credentials solely based on this issue.”
9. Yes. By definition. Nothing in our Statement of Faith has ever been optional for credentialing. Isn’t this our covenant with one another?
10. How about the Trinity? What about the inerrancy of Scriptures or verbal inspiration? Or the resurrection to judgment?
11. Each of these is enshrined in our statement of faith.
12. The precise reason we have a statement of faith is to “limit credentials based solely on” each and every one of these issues. This is where we have taken our stand. This is our collective covenant of faith with one another. This doctrinal statement is where we have each other’s backs, and where we know we can trust one another.
13. Along with our Fourfold Gospel, our Statement of Faith is our “Here we stand” moment.
14. To be told that a large number of pastors have signed this statement without fully endorsing it represents an emergency. Where is their integrity? Where is their maturity? How can we trust them? How can we send people to their churches, not knowing exactly where these pastors stand on truths that we have agreed matter most?
15. The same applies to DEXCOMs across the nation. By what right do *they* decide which statements within our corporate covenant are optional?
16. We introduce our statement of faith with these words:
 - a) What The Alliance believes about God, how He relates to us, and how we relate to Him is foundational in its teachings. The Alliance wholeheartedly serves God and the people of His world, based soundly on the Bible. We live and die by these

words and believe they bring the only life worth living—one wholly committed to the King Jesus.

(1) [Alliance website]

17. Our actions call into question our words.

18. The irony is that in this current debate over premillennialism, the very same individuals who stand in violation of our polity and doctrine are permitted a voice, and even a vote, in the debate. Might I suggest they recuse themselves?

19. We are Christians. Words matter.

20. Our foundation is fractured. Our polity is imperiled. It now remains for us to decide what to do about it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Bill Giovannetti
Pathway Church

For Additional Study

A. Joel Van Hoogen. “Premillennialism and the Alliance Distinctives. Alliance Academic Review.” 1998.

1. <http://www.kneillfoster.com/aar/1998/AAR1998-4Hoogen.php>
(Note the excellent summary of premillennial doctrine going back to the earliest days of the church.)

B. Daniel J. Ewearitt. “The Social Gospel vs. Personal Salvation: A Late Nineteenth-Century Case Study— Walter Rauschenbusch and A.B. Simpson.” Alliance Academic Review. 1998.

1. <http://www.kneillfoster.com/aar/1997/AAR1997-3.php>

C. David E. Fessenden. “Present Truths: The Historical and Contemporary Distinctives of The Christian and Missionary Alliance.” Alliance Academic Review. 1998.

1. <http://www.kneillfoster.com/aar/1999/AAR1999-2.php> (Note especially the section on Christ our Coming King.)

D. Norman Geisler. “The Importance of Premillennialism.”

1. [<https://normangeisler.com/the-importance-of-premillennialism/>]
- E. John E. Walvoord. “The Theological Context of Premillennialism.” From bible.org.
 - a) (<https://bible.org/article/theological-context-premillennialism>)
- F. J. Barton Payne. *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Zondervan, 1962) citing Young on p. 417 and making the same case, loc. cit.
- G. The Social Gospel vs Personal Salvation: A Late Nineteenth-Century Case Study- Walter Rauschenbusch and A.B. Simpson. Daniel J. Evesitt here: <http://awf.world/consult/the-social-gospel-vs-personal-salvation-a-late-nineteenth-century-case-study-walter-rauschenbusch-and-a-b-simpson/>
- H. Joel Van Hoogen. “Premillennialism and Alliance Distinctives.” From Alliance World Fellowship.
 1. <http://awf.world/consult/premillennialism-and-the-alliance-distinctives/>
- I. Thomas Ice. Has Bible Prophecy Already Been Fulfilled? A critique of preterism.
 1. <https://www.pre-trib.org/articles/all-articles/message/has-bible-prophecy-already-been-fulfilled/read>