

Preterism and the Question of Heresy

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"Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: 'So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge'"

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In a recent article in Quodlibet Online Journal, I concurred with [R. C. Sproul's](#) thesis that Jesus was a preterist. Sproul suggests in his book *The Last Days According to Jesus* (1998) that, while Jesus believed the parousia of which he spoke in the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in the Jewish war of 66-70 A.D., there remains another parousia yet future which is described by Paul. However, the question for partial preterists like Sproul remains: "if the eschatological scenario and parousia Jesus predicted in the Olivet discourse was fulfilled in AD 70, where did the apostles get the notion of another, yet future, coming? Are we back to the old liberal portrayal of Paul as the real founder of Christianity, and the perennial pitting of Jesus over against Paul (and the rest of the apostles)?" [1] I concluded that article by contending, "If 'the last days according to Jesus' were fulfilled in the judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70, then the Church must be reformed and always reforming according to the Word of its Lord so that its eschatology fits Jesus' teaching." [2]

Full preterism views the parousia singly spoken of in the NT as fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in the Jewish war of 66-70 A.D. This eschatological viewpoint has been rapidly spreading throughout Reformed Christianity. A contributor to the Reformed Reconstructionist Chalcedon Report (September, 1997) said, "It is my understanding that this heresy is spreading like weeds [sic, weeds] in Reformed churches." [3] This quote not only describes the rapid spread of preterism; it also denounces preterism as heresy. The charge of heresy has become more prominent as preterism has gained adherents. At least one conservative Reformed denomination has even officially condemned preterism as heresy. On March 13, 1997, the Western Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) approved an "[Action to Condemn Hyper-Preterism as Heresy](#)," an overture which the Synod of the RCUS adopted at its annual meeting in May, 1997. In addition, a May 1, 1999 "Committee Paper Investigating Full Preterism" by the Heartland Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) describes its "key heretical teachings." A website, "The Things Which Are To Come: Defending Our Hope For The Future" has been established expressly to counter the preterist "challenge to biblical orthodoxy" and contains articles (included with additional critiques in "The Preterist Archive") that speak of preterism with reference to Hymenaeus who, with Philetus, is said to "have wandered away from the truth" by contending that "the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim. 2:17-18).

Heresy is a serious charge, for if it be true, preterists are outside of Christ and in peril of eternal condemnation. Is heresy a justifiable charge against preterists? This article will examine the nature of heresy and the validity of the primary charges issued against preterism, particularly as enumerated in the ecclesiastical documents cited above. While there is precedent in church

history for charging preterists with heresy on the basis of their view of the resurrection body, the charge would also hold against many other Christian theologians who are not preterists and widely considered orthodox. Preterism is not a monolithic movement, so that variations advocated by some preterists may perhaps fall outside the acceptable norms for faith. However, the preterist movement in general cannot be justifiably categorized as heretical, but instead as fundamentally orthodox. [4] Moreover, if Jesus was a preterist, then a church that is truly reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God must reform its understanding of eschatology to agree with the teachings of its Lord and admit the validity of preterism.

The Question of Heresy

Heresy is a rather difficult concept to define. The Greek word *haireisis* derives from *harein*, which means in the active voice "to take, win, seize," and in the middle voice "to select, choose." In classical literature, it is used to indicate the taking of a town in battle or the choice of a magistrate, for example. From this there develops in Hellenism the predominant objective use of the term to denote "doctrine" and especially a "school" of thought. Certain schools of thought are associated with a particular, or even a peculiar, doctrine which sets them distinctively apart from others. The use of the word to denote a school, or sect, is the one generally found in the NT, where the word is used of the "sect of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17) and the "sect of the Pharisees" (Acts 15:5), "the strictest sect" of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5). The early church was referred to by this word, as "the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5), as "the Way, which they call a sect" (Acts 24:14), and "this sect" everywhere spoken against (Acts 28:22). In fact, according to the standard Greek lexicon, the uses of the word for the Christian church "incline toward" the subsequent development of the word denoting a sect holding unacceptable views, i.e., a "heretical sect." [5] As a school of thought with particular doctrines not acceptable to the larger Jewish body, the church was initially viewed as a heresy. Clearly, the characterization of heresy hinges on who or what is considered authoritative. For the early church, the Lord Jesus and his designated apostles were authoritative, with the result that a charge of heresy by Jewish leaders meant little.

According to H. Schlier, the invocation of *haireisis* by the church "does not owe its meaning to the development of an orthodoxy. The basis of the Christian concept of *haireisis* is to be found in the new situation created by the introduction of the Christian *ekklesia*." [6] This is because *haireisis* "cannot accept" *ekklesia* and *ekklesia* "excludes" *haireisis*. While factions may be a demonstration of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20), factions also have positive value; "there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine" (1 Cor. 11:19). Historically, it is clear that the church has come to a greater refinement of its own doctrine through wrestling with divergent opinions. It is only when "false teachers . . . secretly bring in destructive opinions," whereby "they even deny the Master who bought them" and bring "swift destruction on themselves" (2 Pet. 2:1), that the heresy threatens the foundation of the church and must be excised. "After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions (*hairetikon anthropon*, Tit. 3:10).

While Schlier may be technically and chronologically correct in contending that heresy was defined ecclesiologically rather than doxologically, there having been as yet no conciliar determinations of what constituted correct doctrine, it is nonetheless clear that there existed early

in the church basic formulations of doctrine which served as standard confessions of faith, such as the hymns and baptismal formulas found in the NT (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3-7; Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16). [7] For the present discussion it should be noted that none of these confessions contains any statement of the resurrection of the flesh or a physical second advent of Christ. These traditional doctrines are instead based on subsequent biblical interpretation and, with all human endeavors, are "subject to limitation by man's finiteness and sinfulness." [8] Assertions by critics of preterism of "what is universally defined in the New Testament as a resurrection of the flesh" and that, "in eternity, to have affirmed the physical second Advent will be essential," [9] presume divine infallibility for their potentially fallible interpretations. There is no unequivocal biblical assertion for either statement and both are variously attested in subsequent statements of faith. In the ante-Nicene church fathers reference is made to a "rule of faith" (*regulae fidei*). Ignatius of Antioch (*Epistle to the Trallians*, ch 9 [ANF 1:70]) sets forth circa 107 the essence of the faith:

Be deaf, therefore, when any would speak to you apart from (at variance with) Jesus Christ [the Son of God], who was descended from the family of David, born of Mary, who was truly born [both of God and of the Virgin . . . truly took a body; for the Word became flesh and dwelt among us without sin . . .], ate and drank [truly], truly suffered persecution under Pontius Pilate, was truly [and not in appearance] crucified and died . . . who was also truly raised from the dead [and rose after three days], his Father raising him up . . . [and after having spent forty days with the Apostles, was received up to the Father, and sits on his right hand, waiting till his enemies are put under his feet]. [10]

Writing about 180, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, enlarges upon Ignatius' rule with statements which presage the Apostles' Creed (*Against Heresies* bk 1, ch 10, sec 1 [ANF 1:330-332]). Notable for the present discussion are his statements on "the resurrection of the dead, and the bodily assumption [*ensarkon*] into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father, to comprehend all things under one head, and to raise up all flesh of all mankind." [11] While there is no temporal element attached to the appearing, there is a stronger emphasis on the resurrection of the flesh. In the Latin recension (*Against Heresies* bk 3, ch 4, secs 1-2), Irenaeus' use of *venturus*, the future active participle of the Latin *venir*, "to come," linguistically denotes nothing more than the time after the principal verb, so that "shall come in glory," while surely understood by Irenaeus to mean a future coming, does not require the speaker as the point of time reference, but simply denotes an occurrence following Christ's suffering and rising again. The same may be said of subsequent uses of *venturus* by Tertullian and subsequent Latin writers.

At the beginning of the third century Tertullian introduced the phrase "resurrection of the flesh" (*De Virginitate Velandis*, ch 1), [12] though this does not appear in all his statements (not in *Against Praxeus*, e.g.). The statement of Lucian of Antioch around 300, says nothing concerning the resurrection of the dead (or flesh), but simply speaks of the representative nature of Christ's resurrection ("he rose for us") and accents his coming again (*palin*) in judgment. With the received form of the Apostles' Creed, "the resurrection of the flesh" (*carnis resurrectionem*) becomes more normative, in accord with its earlier as well as subsequent versions as a Roman baptismal symbol (c. 341). Notwithstanding, Schaff translates *carnis* with "body," leaving "flesh" in brackets, with a note that, while "older English translations of the Creed had the literal rendering *flesh* (*caro, sarx*), by which the ancient Church protested against spiritualistic

conceptions of the Gnostics," this may be misunderstood in a grossly materialistic sense, while the resurrection of the body is unobjectionable; comp. 1 Cor. xv. 50." [13] "Resurrection of the body" remains the standard English translation of this statement in the Apostles' Creed.

The original Nicene symbol of 325 speaks more simply yet of Christ "raised the third day" and "coming to judge the living and dead," with no reference whatsoever to individual resurrection. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, which is what is regularly referred to as the Nicene Creed, speaks in the same simplicity, with the addition of the expected "resurrection of the dead" (*resurrectionem mortuorum*). Sandlin's confident assertion that "all orthodox Christians in all sectors of the church echo Tertullian" in insisting on the "restoration of the flesh" cannot be sustained. [14] Contrary to his virulent assertions, a materialistic resurrection and a physical second advent are not even mentioned, let alone "a prime tenet [of] Nicene orthodoxy." [15]

In the early church fathers, then, *haeresis* became a technical term for a view hostile to the church. Initially, it is viewed as any adherence to a philosophy that does not accord with the established teachings of the church as maintained by the bishop (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, ch 6 [ANF 1:52]). It involves mixing Jesus Christ with "their own poisonous teachings," such as the denial of his virgin birth, his passion on the cross, his resurrection, his divinity, or his distinction from the Father and Spirit in the one God (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Trallians*, ch 6 [ANF 1:68]). Any corruption of Christian teaching due to either Greek or Judaizing influences must be repudiated (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, ch 6 [ANF 1:82-83]).

Beginning with Ignatius, the first century bishop of Antioch, and continuing on in the other early church apologists, pagan philosophy is viewed as the origin of heresy. Heresy denotes a sect hostile to Christianity because of "an inner relationship between heretics and the secular philosophical schools or Jewish sects," particularly Gnosticism. [16] "Indeed heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy," says Tertullian (*Prescription Against Heretics*, ch 7 [ANF 3:246]). Hippolytus (*Refutation of all Heresies*, introduction [ANF 5:9]) believes heretical doctrines "derived their origin from the wisdom of the Greeks, from the conclusions of those who have formed systems of philosophy, and from would-be mysteries, and the vagaries of astrologers." In similar fashion, the accusation of heresy against preterists is sometimes made on the basis of a supposed "low view of the body," being "the old error of Platonism." [17]

It must be noted, however, that the attempt to condemn a view by association with a particular philosophy has occasionally fallen prey to arbitrariness, as, for example, in the case of Hippolytus' assertion that Marcion obtained his system from Empedocles. [18] Furthermore, while Hippolytus and other apologists condemned certain views because of their purported derivation from Plato or Aristotle, outstanding theologians within church history have oft depended heavily on these philosophers, Augustine on Plato and Thomas Aquinas on Aristotle, to cite but two obvious examples. Moreover, when it is recognized that a standard modern criticism of early theology is that the fathers themselves depended too much on Greek lines of thought, it seems evident that derivation from pagan philosophy is a two-edged sword that cuts against orthodoxy as well as heresy and may depend largely on the one wielding the sword. [19] Indeed, it has even been suggested that the very idea of orthodoxy evinces a Greek mind set, with "Greece the source of the true *damnosa hereditas*." [20] It must suffice to say that, where

philosophy serves as an aid (but not a presupposition) to understanding and systematizing theology in a way coherent with Scripture, it is to be admitted. Those theologians who claim to eschew philosophy are sometimes the ones most shaped by it, as perhaps most notably in the case of Karl Barth. Heresy has also been defined on the basis of its etymology as a choice against the rule of faith. A heretic is condemned for false doctrines, Tertullian says, "because he has himself chosen that for which he is condemned," having made a "choice of that which another has introduced of his private fancy" (Prescription Against Heretics, ch 6 [ANF 3:245-246]). Heresy is thus a private opinion contrary to received knowledge and based on ambiguous passages in Scripture. Irenaeus, for example, mocks the Gnostic attempt to posit a god above the Creator by reference to "ambiguous passages of Scripture. . . . For no question can be solved by means of another which itself awaits solution; nor, in the opinion of those possessed of sense, can an ambiguity be explained by means of another ambiguity, or enigmas by means of another greater enigma, but things of such character receive their solution from those which are manifest and consistent, and clear" (Against Heresies, bk 2, ch 10, sec 2 (ANF 1:370)). Tertullian appears exasperated in arguing against the heretics of his day because of their propensity to use ambiguous texts:

They rely on those which they have falsely put together, and which they have selected, because of their ambiguity. Though most skilled in the Scriptures, you will make no progress, when everything which you maintain is denied by the other side, and whatever you deny is (by them) maintained. As for yourself, indeed, you will lose nothing but your breath, and gain nothing but vexation from their blasphemy (Prescription Against Heretics ch 1 [ANF 3:251]).

Because "a controversy over the Scriptures can, clearly, produce no other effect than help to upset either the stomach or the brain," Tertullian would "oppose to them this step above all others, of not admitting them to any discussion of the Scriptures" (Ibid., ch 15 [ANF 3:250-51]). "Our appeal, therefore, must not be made to the Scriptures," Tertullian says, but rather to "the true Christian rule and faith," since "there will likewise be the true Scriptures and expositions thereof, and all the Christian traditions" (Ibid., 19 [ANF 3:251-252]). Christ delivered the faith to the apostles, who deposited it in the churches, with the result that all opinion which has no such divine origin and apostolic tradition is ipso facto false. [21] Truth is thus distinguished from falsehood not only by reference to apostolic authority and tradition, but by chronology, for there is "the priority of truth, and the comparative lateness of falsehood" (Ibid., ch 31 [ANF 3:258]).

This tack continues to be employed by those who denounce preterism, despite the preterist appeal not to ambiguous passages but rather to clear time references indicating the coming (parousia) of Christ within his generation. Rather than reconvene this exegetical discussion, however, Sandlin acerbically asks:

You criticize the Hymenaeans' confessional critics for insufficient exegesis. Whose exegesis would you prefer? I could proffer exegesis of orthodox Christians for the last 1800 years. It is not a question of a void of exegesis but of pitting a peculiarly modern and heterodox exegesis against the exegesis of the last 1800 years. Mark it down: every assault on Christian orthodoxy (like Hymenaeism) by an appeal to a supposedly unconditioned modern exegesis does not pit the Bible against the creeds, but a warped,

modern understanding of the Bible against an understanding of the Bible over the last 1800 on a points [sic] critical to the Faith." [22]

Lateness of doctrinal formulation, however, has never satisfied to settle biblical debate. Both the Reconstructionists' postmillennialism and the dispensational premillennialism against which they also inveigh are modern eschatologies, the former in its modern form owing much to Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) and the latter to J. N. Darby (1800-1882). On the other hand, the prevalent chiliasm of the early church fathers has not rendered it more credible. It is fundamental to the Reformed approach "not [to] despise the interpretations of the holy Greek and Latin fathers, nor reject their disputations and treatises concerning sacred matters as far as they agree with the Scriptures; but we modestly dissent from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to, the Scriptures. . . . And in the same order also we place the decrees and canons of councils. Wherefore we do not permit ourselves, in controversies about religion or matters of faith, to urge our case with only the opinions of the fathers or decrees of councils; much less by received opinions, or by the large number of those who share the same opinion, or by the prescription of a long time" (2nd Helvetic Confession, ch 2). Rather, assent depends on "the judgments of men which are drawn from the Word of God."

The idea of an accepted interpretation of Scripture, which constitutes the tradition of faith, was memorably formulated by Vincent of Lerins in the fifth century. "On account of the number and variety of errors, there is a need for someone to lay down a rule for the interpretation of the prophets and the apostles in such a way that is directed by the rule of the Catholic church. Now in the Catholic church itself the greatest care is taken that we hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all people." [23] This consensus fidelium, "the consensus of the faithful," became a highly influential way of interpreting the Bible as well as an essential antidote to heresy, though the aforementioned early statements of faith show aspects of apparently acceptable diversity, particularly concerning the nature of the resurrection body. This "fencing of Scripture" with a rule of faith embodied in a particular tradition, coupled with the authoritarianism exemplified in Tertullian, eventuated in the Roman Catholic Church's rife condemnation of peoples who questioned its authority and held ideas which fell outside accepted norms, particularly during the Inquisition. In the twelfth century, Peter Waldo and his followers, called Waldensians, were condemned simply for making the Scriptures available in the common tongue and preaching the gospel apart from papal authorization. The Beguines, groups of women in twelfth-century France who lived together for the purposes of economic self-sufficiency and a religious vocation, dedicated to chastity and charity, were condemned simply for existing without men, making them suspect to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The followers of Francis of Assisi were condemned for embracing voluntary, absolute poverty. Each of these groups were condemned largely for socio-political reasons, not doctrinal ones.

In the fourteenth century, John Wycliffe's insistence that the sole criterion of Christian doctrine is Scripture, his translation of the NT into the common English tongue in 1382, and his attack on the papacy and transubstantiation as unbiblical, resulted in his condemnation at the London Blackfriars Council in 1382 and forced retirement from teaching. The Lollards, lay preachers who continued to proclaim his ideas throughout England, were condemned by the statute De Haeretico Comburendo ("On the Burning of Heretics") forced through Parliament in 1401, which made the proclamation of Lollard ideas a capital offense.

The Bohemian reformer John Huss propagated Wycliffe's views. Huss and those who followed him, called Hussites, were charged as heretics, though they saw themselves as devoutly orthodox Christians. Huss was executed in 1415 for promoting the lay reading of the Bible in the common language, believing lay people had the ability to interpret the scriptures for themselves. He had also condemned the immorality of the priesthood and had wanted to raise clerical ethical standards in order to address the financial abuses and sexual immorality which continued to plague the church. He had supported giving all Christians full communion at a time when only priests were allowed to receive the cup. He had opposed the papal selling of indulgences. This all stemmed from his insistence that the Bible took precedence over Church leaders and councils. Though he questioned the Church's authority, he stated at his trial that he would obey the Church completely if it could prove his statements erroneous. This statement condemned him in itself because he trusted his own ability to reason rather than the Church's authority. [24]

Although Huss was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake, he was a champion of reform and prefigured the Reformation. It is hardly unexpected, then, that a century later Martin Luther was perceived as an adherent of Hussite heresy. At the Leipzig disputation in 1519, Luther was asked by Johannes Eck about Huss and, while Luther did not go as far in stating his agreement with Huss at that point as he would later, he did acknowledge the "most christian" nature of the Hussite faith, despite its departure from Christian unity. [25] Less than a year later, the pope demanded that Luther recant and his books be burned, the papal bull *Exsurge domine* specifying forty-one heresies in his writings. A similar kind of bull is issued by Reconstructionists against preterists today, evidenced in West's injunction that, "if a church unwittingly carries Hymenaen books," they "should be torched or removed immediately." [26] How different is this kind of bull from the open-mindedness of C. H. Spurgeon, who said of *The Parousia* written by preterist J. Stuart Russell, it "has so much of truth in it, and throws so much new light upon obscure portions of the Scriptures, and is accompanied with so much critical research and close reasoning, that it can be injurious to none and may be profitable to all." [27]

The arrogant authoritarianism of the pope did not dissuade Luther, for on December 10, 1520, he threw the bull into a fire outside the Elster gate in Wittenburg with the words, "Because you have destroyed God's truth, may the Lord destroy you today in this fire." [28] On January 3, 1521, the pope issued the bull of excommunication *Decet romanum pontificem*, declaring Luther a heretic outside the law and subject to death. Luther was summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms where, on the evening of April 18, 1521, he made his famous stand:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen. [29]

Many other allusions could be made to Catholic charges of heresy, such as the silencing of Galileo following his trial for heresy in 1633, with a tentative conclusion being that, save for the great christological and trinitarian formulations of the ecumenical councils, the concept of heresy has generally been in the eye of the beholder, particularly the tyrannical Roman Catholic Church

of the Middle Ages, and often has shown itself in an authoritarian recalcitrance against biblical faith. [30] Catholic retrenchment following the Reformation, summarized in the slogan *semper eadem* ("always the same"), became a key element in the polemic against Protestantism. In the eyes of the Catholic Church up till Vatican II, Protestants in toto had departed from the purported unity of teaching throughout the ages and thus "had forfeited their right to be considered orthodox"; as "an innovation," it was "heterodox for that very reason." [31] That, of course, has never affected Protestants unduly, since Reformation confessional statements regularly reprise the *sola scriptura* principle and consider all conciliar formulations to stand under that unique divine authority.

While Reformation confessions continue to repudiate ancient trinitarian and christological heresies, such as "the damnable and pestilent heresies of Arius, Marcion, Eutyches, Nestorius, and such others as did either deny the eternity of his [Christ's] Godhead, or the truth of his humanity, or confounded them, or else divided them" (Scots Confession, ch 6), conciliar pronouncements are placed under the absolute authority of Holy Scripture. "The reason why the general councils met was not to make any permanent law which God had not made before, nor yet to form new articles for our belief, nor to give the Word of God authority; much less to make that to be his Word, or even the true interpretation of it, which was not expressed previously by his holy will in his Word; but the reason for councils, at least of those that deserve the name, was partly to refute heresies, and to give public confession of their faith to the generations following" (Scots Confession, ch 20).

In the Protestant system, the authority of symbols, as of all human compositions, is relative and limited. It is not co-ordinate with, but always subordinate to, the Bible, as the only infallible rule of the Christian faith and practice. The value of creeds depends upon the measure of their agreement with the Scriptures. In the best case a human creed is only an approximate and relatively correct exposition of revealed truth, and may be improved by the progressive knowledge of the Church, while the Bible remains perfect and infallible. . . . Any higher view of the authority of symbols is unprotestant and essentially Romanizing. Symbololatry is a species of idolatry, and substitutes the tyranny of a printed book for that of a living pope. [32]

Critics of preterism, oft beginning their condemnation with allusion to the creeds, [33] would thus do well to rethink their commitment to Reformation principles. *Sola scriptura* meant that everything believed must have a sufficient basis in Scripture alone. While "the idea of a 'traditional interpretation of Scripture' . . . was perfectly acceptable to the magisterial reformers," their stipulation was "that this traditional interpretation could be justified" on the basis of Scripture. [34] This is what Luther's "stand" made clear: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason," "I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God." [35]

The Reformers did not, as critics of preterism imply, approach their faith and work with a facile repristination of catholic orthodoxy. When they upheld the Apostles' Creed as the core of Christian belief, for example, they did so by way of some reinterpretations of traditional dogma, as is particularly evident in their divergent teachings on the "descent into hell," for which there were given at least three distinct meanings, and their views of "the holy catholic Church," for which Luther even substituted "Christian" for "catholic." [36] If it is insisted that each article of

the creeds is essential to salvation, what is to be made of the Eastern Church's failure to include "the descent into hell" and "communion of saints" in its versions of the Apostles' Creed, or its failure to hold to the filioque added by the West to the Nicene Creed?

Whose version of these creeds and whose interpretation of their respective statements (including also the difference in them on the resurrection of the body or of the dead) must be held in order to be saved? If a creed is a universally recognized statement of faith, it seems clear there must be some latitude for difference of interpretation as to what certain statements mean and, in some cases (e.g., the descent into hell), whether they are even to be included. Preterists maintain that this also holds true for the eschatological aspects of the creeds. Inasmuch as heresy has primarily to do with a denial of the principle that God has provided redemption in Christ, [37] it may be maintained that preterism stands fully within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy as seeing that redemption fully accomplished by Christ.

Are Preterists Guilty of Hymenaeus' Heresy?

Probably the most common characterization of full-preterism is an association with Hymenaeus, one of two spoken of in 1 Tim 1:20 for having "made shipwreck of their faith," and so "delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." In 2 Tim. 2:17-18, Hymenaeus and Philetus, are condemned for having "swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already" and "upsetting the faith of some." The Christian Reconstructionist camp has been particularly vociferous in castigating preterism as "Hymenaeism." [38] If Hymenaeus and Philetus believed "the resurrection is past" and preterists believe the parousia occurred in A.D. 70 with the coterminous resurrection of the dead, there might appear to be sufficient similarity to validate the characterization of preterists among those spoken of in the NT who believe "the resurrection is past." Some preterists have responded to this by noting that Hymenaeus and Philetus were speaking of something as "past" which was still future, namely the decisive events surrounding A.D. 70 and were therefore rightly condemned for leading others astray, whereas preterists are arguing that the parousia and resurrection viewed as having occurred in A.D. 70 are only "past" from a standpoint after that date, the completion of the biblical canon, and the completion of redemption in the release of the church/kingdom/temple of Christ from the cultic encumbrances associated with the temple in Jerusalem. True as this is, such a response fails to understand the basis of the condemnation of Hymenaeus and Philetus as proto-Gnostics. Thus, a closer examination of the biblical historical milieu will make it clear that such a characterization or association of preterists with Hymenaeus is based on a superficial reading of the text and is, if anything, an indictment of the interpretive methodology utilized in such criticism.

There can be little doubt that Hymenaeus and Philetus were part of the Christian community who had embraced proto-Gnostic tendencies and were therefore removed from the community for fear that they would wrongly influence the church. Gnosticism was a widely varied movement, but its essential features included: (1) a radical cosmic dualism that rejects this world and sees the body as a prison from which the soul longs to escape; (2) a distinction between an unknown transcendent true God and the creator Demiurge usually identified with the OT God; (3) belief that the human race is essentially divine, a spark of heavenly light imprisoned in a material body; (4) a myth, often of a premundane fall, accounting for present human suffering; and (5) the saving knowledge (gnosis) by which deliverance is accomplished in the release of the

enlightened to their heavenly origin. [39] Gnostic anthropology, which contrasted the Christian view of humanity as a psychosomatic union with a dualism involving a pre-existent spark of divine light imprisoned in evil flesh, correspondingly entails, as Bultmann notes, "a contrast in eschatology" wherein the true divine self, nurtured by gnosis and the sacraments, is released at death from the bodily prison to journey through the angelic aeons back to the Light. This stands in stark contrast to the Christian conception of the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment. Finally, "these differences entail a contrast in christology, since Gnosticism cannot acknowledge the real humanity of Jesus. Apparent humanity to a pre-existent heavenly being is only a disguise; if it does not insist upon declaring Jesus' flesh and blood to be only seemingly a body, it has to make a distinction between the Redeemer and the historical person Jesus and assert some such thing as that the former was only transiently united with the latter (in the baptism) and left him before the passion." [40]

It has been noted by commentators that there are points of contact with Paul in some of the Gnostic tenets. According to Paul, the entrance into the Christian life in baptism is a dying and rising again with Christ (Col. 2:12; 3:1-3), with the result "that you have been set free from sin" (Rom. 6:18, 22) which leads to death. While this was only a portion of Paul's teaching, it was congenial to those whose basic mind set was contoured by Greek dualism to think of the body as evil and undeserving of a resurrection.

Hymenaeus, Philetus, and their companions, then, we may suppose, were teaching a form of Christianity which was essentially Greek rather than Jewish in its eschatology, which accepted only half of Paul's doctrine, rejecting belief in a general resurrection and insisting that the only valid meaning which the word 'resurrection' could have would relate to the baptismal experience when the Christian mystically emerged from the waters of regeneration, having been buried with Christ and raised to newness of life. This supernatural endowment with the Spirit meant that the Christian had already achieved victory over death. [41]

Irenaeus appears to have such a heresy in mind in speaking of Menander, who declared that "the primary Power" was upon him, making him "a saviour, for the deliverance of men," that "the world was made by angels," and that, "by means of that magic which he teaches, knowledge to this effect, that one may overcome those very angels that made the world; for his disciples obtain the resurrection by being baptized into him, and can die no more, but remain in the possession of immortal youth" (Against Heresies, bk 1, ch 23, sec 5 [ANF 1:348]). This idea is apparently also attested in the late second-century apocryphal book The Acts of Paul (and Thecla, 3:11), where Demas and Hermogenes say, "we shall teach thee concerning the resurrection which he says is to come, that it has already taken place in the children whom we have, and that we are risen again in that we have come to know the true God." [42] Finally, there are also clear attestations of the Hymenaeian heresy in the Gnostic books unearthed since World War II at Nag Hammadi. The Treatise on Resurrection (late second-century) advises, "do not think in part, O Rheginos, nor live in conformity with this flesh for the sake of unanimity, but flee from the divisions and the fetters, and already you have the resurrection" (I, 4, 49, 10-15). [43] The Exegesis on the Soul (c. 200 A.D.) aligns regeneration with baptism, when the soul "received the divine nature from the Father for her rejuvenation, so that she might be restored to the place where originally she had been. This is the resurrection that is from the dead" (II, 6, 134, 5-15). [44] Finally, The Gospel of Philip (mid third-century) appears to link the resurrection not simply with baptism, but with

chrism, a special anointing with light: "Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing. So also when speaking about baptism they say, 'Baptism is a great thing,' because if people receive it they will live. . . . However, it is from the olive tree that we get the chrism, and from the chrism, the resurrection" (II, 3, 73, 1-20). [45] As Berkouwer says, "The heresy referred to in 2 Timothy 2:18 should be understood as a form of spiritualism, which believed that the transition from death to life and to the resurrection from the dead had already been completed through regeneration," [46] particularly by way of association with baptism.

It should already be clear that there is no convergence between preterism and this Gnosticism. To my knowledge, preterists all believe in the goodness of God's original creation (including the body), in the unity of God as revealed in Scripture, in the fall of humanity in Adam, and the need for Jesus Christ, God incarnate in hypostatic union, to redeem sinners by his substitutionary atoning death upon the cross. Moreover, preterists in general uphold the resurrection of Christ and of humanity in a transformed body, their primary divergence with traditionalists being over the nature of the resurrection body. This is well brought out by Ed Stevens who, in responding to the characterization of preterists as embracing the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, asks how this early church could have surmised that the resurrection had already taken place, if it held to the resurrection as the resuscitation of the dead body? Paul could easily have undercut such a supposition by appeal to bodies still in their tombs, but "Paul doesn't challenge their concept of the nature of the resurrection, but rather their timing of it." [47]

Are Preterists Guilty of Heresy on the Nature of the Resurrection Body?

There is little disputing the fact that most of the early church fathers held to the resurrection of the very flesh in which one died. As early as 140, the pseudonymous 2 Clement 9:1-4 insists that "this flesh" will be raised. [48] This is also seen in Irenaeus and Tertullian, as was mentioned above, both emphasizing the intermediate descent into hades of believers. It would also seem to have been made an ultimatum in the Athanasian Creed, which asserts that at the coming of Christ "all men shall rise again with their bodies," a statement which, with all the others (including the descent into hell), constitutes "the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully [truly and firmly], he can not be saved." [49]

Adumbrations of an alternative position not requiring the reassembling of all prior fleshly components may perhaps be seen in Justin Martyr already in the early second century. In his First Apology (ch 19 [ANF 1:169]), he notes, "if we were not in the body," it would appear incredible "that from a small drop of human seed bones and sinews and flesh be formed into a shape such as we see. . . . But as at first you would not have believed it possible that such persons could be produced from the small drop, and yet now you see them thus produced, so also judge ye that it is not impossible that the bodies of men, after they have been dissolved, and like seeds resolved into earth, should in God's appointed time rise again and put on incorruption." While Kelly cites this as an example of the reassembling of all components, it may be more in keeping with subsequent thinking, now perhaps even predominant, which sees the resurrection not as the reassembling of all previous components in the same flesh, but as a transformation of the material body based on the slightest continuity with the previous body. [50]

Since my previous article "Jesus the Preterist" dealt at some length with the problems associated with the reassembling of the material corpse, these will not be restated here. What bears repeating, however, is that recourse to divine omnipotence as a resolution of these problems is a sacrificium intellectum and ultimately fideistic, for by making demands of faith which cannot be rationally explained or defended any religious claim can stand beyond analysis and yet be required by some magisterium. Contrariwise, Christian theology has always insisted on the reasonableness of faith, on the importance and indeed necessity of rationally defensible demonstrations of what is to be believed. [51] Christianity's philosophical, theological, and apologetic aims at systematic coherence require more in terms of rational explanation than mere recourse to divine omnipotence and a God of the gaps (*deus ex machina*). Moreover, inasmuch as there are two books of revelation, one in creation and the other in Scripture, which must be coherently explained, any procedure which neglects consensual scientific understanding in dogmatic insistence upon a particular view of the resurrection body, for instance, hardly merits serious attention, let alone a claim to authority.

For example, one of the questions which seems particularly problematic for the material continuity notion is the stage of human being that is to be resurrected and preserved for all eternity. Will it be the stage of the body at death with all its wrinkles and decay, or the stage after a terribly disfiguring accident? Generally some more pristine point of life is the stage that is purported to be preserved, but when is that? How will those who have had no such state be resurrected, like the aborted fetus? These are not trivial matters. Tertullian responded by saying, "any loss sustained by our bodies is an accident to them, but their entirety is their natural property. In this condition we are born. Even if we become injured in the womb, this is loss suffered by what is already a human being. Natural condition is prior to injury. As life is bestowed by God, so is it restored by Him" (On the Resurrection of the Flesh, ch 57 [ANF 3:589-90]). Contemporary understanding of genetic disorders, however, would seem to militate against the easy notion that all disorder is "injury" to some naturally good condition--some disorders are congenital, transmitted from the parents and present from the moment of conception in the DNA. Tertullian's response also does not cohere with his own insistence on material continuity, for the resurrection of Christ would indicate that the resurrected have the very same bodies they had at the moment of death and that, however enhanced, those bodies will retain the disfiguring characteristics received prior to death, as in the case of Jesus' pierced hands, feet, and side which he showed to the disciples (Luke 24:39; John 20:20, 25-27). [52] Thus, questions raised against the reassembling of the material corpse must be answered more satisfactorily than they have been if this view is to be insisted upon, as it is so acerbically by the Reconstructionists, for example.

The third-century theologian Origen recognized the inadequacy of appeal to divine omnipotence in the ridicule it received from his protagonist, Celsus: "what kind of body is that which, after being completely corrupted, can return to its original nature, and to that self-same first condition out of which it fell into dissolution? Being unable to return any answer, they betake themselves to a most absurd refuge, viz., that all things are possible to God" (Against Celsus bk 5, ch 14 [ANF 4:549]).

In his effort to defend the resurrection of the body in a more rationally satisfying way, Origen suggested the existence of a form of the body which underlay all the various changes throughout life and gives to the individual his personal identity:

Because each body is held together by [virtue of] a nature that assimilates into itself from without certain things for nourishment and, corresponding to the things added, excretes other things . . . , the material substratum is never the same. For this reason, river is not a bad name for the body since, strictly speaking, the initial substratum in our bodies is perhaps not the same for even two days.

Yet the real Paul or Peter, so to speak, is always the same -- [and] not merely in [the] soul, whose substance neither flows through us nor has anything ever added [to it]--even if the nature of the body is in a state of flux, because the form [eidos] characterizing the body is same, just as the features constituting the corporeal quality of Peter and Paul remain the same. According to this quality, not only scars from childhood remain on the bodies but also certain other peculiarities, [like] skin blemishes and similar things. [53]

Origen here accepts the concept of the body as flux, expressed in his day in the Galenic version of humoral theory. He maintains that the body's constantly changing mass of matter cannot rise, since it is not even the same from day to day. He sees identity as preserved in the corporeal form (eidos), not in the material body. Bynum says, "This eidos is a combination of Platonic form, or plan, with Stoic seminal reason (an internal principle of growth or development). A pattern that organizes the flux of matter and yet has its own inherent capacity for growth, it is (although I introduce the modern analogy with extreme hesitation), a bit like a genetic code." [54]

Origen's task having been "the twofold one of expounding the truth against (a) the crude literalism which pictured the body as being reconstituted, with all its physical functions, at the last day, and (b) the perverse spiritualism of the Gnostics and Manichees, who proposed to exclude the body from salvation," it is in Kelly's judgment "from this point of view the resurrection becomes comprehensible:"

The bodies with which the saints will rise will be strictly identical with the bodies they bore on earth, since they will have the same 'form', or eidos. On the other hand, the qualities of their material substrata will be different, for instead of being fleshly qualities appropriate to terrestrial existence, they will be spiritual ones suitable for the kingdom of heaven. The soul 'needs a better garment for the purer, ethereal and celestial regions'; and the famous Pauline text, 1 Cor. 15, 42-4, shows that this transformation is possible without the identity being impaired. [55]

"Origen thus solved the problem of identity more successfully than any other thinker of Christian antiquity." [56]

Theology subsequent to Origen tended along two lines, either in reaffirmation of the traditional dogma of the reassembling of the material body, defended chiefly by appeal to divine omnipotence, or in response to Origen, both negatively or positively. Positively, "Origen's heady sense of the potency and dynamism of body remained enormously attractive, particularly to

Eastern theologians, over the next 150 years." [57] Among "those constructive thinkers who strove, some of them along cautiously Origenistic lines but omitting what was most characteristic of Origen's teaching, to understand the mystery at a deeper level than the crude popular faith allowed," as Kelly puts it, were Gregory of Nyssa (albeit inconsistently), Evagrius, Aphrahat, and Cyril of Jerusalem. [58]

Negatively, those who opposed Origen did so largely on the basis of the critique delivered by Methodius of Olympus, who died circa 311. Methodius argued that Origen's *eidos* had to do only with the resurrection of a bodily form, not the body as such. He viewed Origen's "form" as analogous to a mold, external to the body, which must inevitably perish with its fleshly contents, thus requiring a material reassembling in the resurrection. Methodius's argument against Origen was based, however, on a misinterpretation of Origen's *eidos* as external, and his own insistence "that both material continuity and complete bodily integrity are necessary for resurrection" led him to a view of identity that denied the reality of change and process. "Thus Methodius takes identity to lie in material continuity, aware that he does so by simply denying empirical evidence of organic change," [59] even going so far as to deny that digestion occurs! Whatever the deficiencies of Methodius' argumentation, his view of material reconstitution, buttressed further by the latter Jerome and Augustine, appears to have prevailed. In 553, at the fifth ecumenical council, the Second Council of Constantinople, fifteen anathemas were issued against Origen, the tenth of which states: "If anyone shall say that after the resurrection the body of the Lord was ethereal, having the form of a sphere, and that such shall be the bodies of all after the resurrection; and that after the Lord himself shall have rejected his true body and after the others who rise shall have rejected theirs, the nature of their bodies shall be annihilated: let him be anathema." The eleventh anathema further states: "If anyone shall say that the future judgment signifies the destruction of the body and that the end of the story will be an immaterial *psysis* [sic], and that thereafter there will no longer be any matter, but only spirit (*nous*): let him be anathema." [60]

On the basis of the fifth ecumenical council at Constantinople, there is, therefore, clear historical precedent for condemning the preterist view of the resurrection body and apparently any other than a material reconstitution. Notwithstanding, it seems equally clear that any such condemnation would disingenuously disinherit many who have been considered stalwarts of biblical faith and orthodoxy, for it is evident that at least by the mid-nineteenth century an Origenist view of the resurrection body, with identity based on an organizing principle and not material continuity, came to have as much plausibility or more than the ancient insistence on material reconstitution. In what Stephen Davis calls "the modern view," a person can be given a whole new body at the resurrection and still be the same person who died. While similarity is generally stressed, this may be maintained through the pattern God remembers as he "gives [to each] a body just as he wished" (1 Cor 15:38). Although this is not the traditional view, "it does seem at least a possible answer to standard anti-resurrection arguments that ask how a body dead for, say, a thousand years can possibly be reconstituted" [61] and certainly seems to satisfy the issues involved better than those who argue so vigorously for material continuity.

In his *Systematic Theology* (1871-1873), Charles Hodge allows the validity of several possible theories of identity, saying the Bible teaches no specific doctrine. Thus, (1) there may be a complete restoration of all bodily substance in the resurrection body, so that as many hairs as

have been shaved off, or nails cut, shall return into that substance from which they grew (Augustine), a view which, if true, must be submitted to despite its manifold difficulties in the confidence of God's omnipotence; or the new resurrection body may be formed out of even a ten thousandth portion of the particles of the earthly body; (2) the soul may inform the body which, if this be true, "we should not stop to inquire or to care how many particles of the one enter into the composition of the other"; (3) there may be "an identity independent of sameness of substance," so that "our future bodies, therefore, may be the same as those we now have, although not a particle that was in the one should be in the other." [62] A. A. Hodge, rightly believing "all truth is one, and of God, and necessarily consistent, whether revealed by means of the phenomena of nature or of the words of inspiration," viewed the scientific knowledge of that day as proving "that neither the identity of the body of the same man from youth to age, nor the identity of our present with our resurrection bodies consist in sameness of particles." [63]

James Orr maintained that the doctrine of the resurrection does not involve any such belief in the reassembling of decayed material particles.

The solution lies, I think, in a right conception of what it is which constitutes identity. Wherein, let us ask, does the identity even of our present bodies consist? Not, certainly, in the mere identity of the particles of matter of which our bodies are composed, for this is continually changing, is in constant process of flux. The principle of identity lies rather in that which holds the particles together, which vitally organises and [sic] constructs them, which impresses on them their form and shape, and maintains them in unity with the soul to serve as its instrument and medium of expression. It lies, if we may so say, in the organic, constructive principle, which in its own nature is spiritual and immaterial, and adheres to the side of the soul. At death, the body perishes. It is resolved into its elements; but this vital, immaterial principle endures, prepared, when God wills, to give form to a new and grander, because more spiritual, corporeity. [64]

After quotation of 1 Cor. 15:36-38 and allusion to Origen, Orr thus considers it clear, "first, that identity consists only in a very minute degree, if at all-and then only accidentally-in identity of material particles; and, second, that the real bond lies in the active, vital principle which connects the two bodies" of soul and body. [65]

Similarly, in his Systematic Theology A. H. Strong said, "the Scripture not only does not compel us to hold, but it distinctly denies, that all the particles which exist in the body at death are present in the resurrection-body. . . . So long as the physical connection is maintained, it is not necessary to suppose that even a germ or particle that belonged to the old body exists in the new." [66] In his estimation, "Bodily identity does not consist in absolute sameness of particles during the whole history of the body, but in the organizing force, which, even in the flux and displacement of physical particles, makes the old the basis of the new, and binds both together in the unity of a single consciousness." [67]

Again, no less a stalwart of Reformed orthodoxy than Louis Berkhof seems to prefer the concept of a pattern:

We are told that even now every particle in our bodies changes every seven years, but through it all the body retains its identity. There will be a certain physical connection between the old body and the new, but the nature of this connection is not revealed. Some theologians speak of a remaining germ from which the new body develops; others say that the organizing principle of the body remains. Origen had something of that kind in mind; so did Kuyper and Milligan. If we bear all this in mind, the old objection against the doctrine of the resurrection, namely, that it is impossible that a body could be raised up, consisting of the same particles that constituted it at death, since these particles pass into other forms of existence and perhaps into hundreds of other bodies, loses its force completely. [68]

These testimonies from widely recognized conservative and evangelical theologians over the past two centuries as to the legitimacy and even preferability of an Origenist view of identity would seem to emasculate the significance of the sixth century anathemas against Origen on this point as they are applied against preterists.

Modern science has abandoned any notion of permanence in the world as a whole. Although Einstein's relativity theory did nothing to undermine the heritage of scientific determinism, the dawn of the twentieth century heralded its end with the formulation of quantum mechanics through the work of Max Planck, Werner Heisenberg, and others. Quantum theory "predicted no specific observable events, but rather a number or range of possible results along with formulae for predicting statistically the chances of obtaining each possible result in any given instance." [69] Probability, not permanence, has become the new paradigm for understanding the physical universe, which includes the present and future conditions of the human body. Any theological statement on creation's past, present, or future that wants to be taken seriously (and not dismissed as fideistic) must interact with contemporary scientific analysis in the common attempt to understand the other book of divine revelation, what Francis Bacon called "the book of Nature." [70] Those who have so interacted have a common understanding of the resurrection body as transformed, based on an organizing principle. This is surely the reason why the Origenist concept has gained ground in the last two centuries and why appeal to the church fathers is simply not sufficient. Acknowledging that there are "very few atoms left from among those that were there a few years ago," physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne says, "The real me is the immensely complicated 'pattern' in which these ever-changing atoms are organized. It seems to me to be an intelligible and coherent hope that God will remember the pattern that is me and recreate it in a new environment of his choosing, by his great act of final resurrection." [71]

While some conservatives insist on repriming the traditionalist view of the reassembling of the material components, they do so against trends in scientific as well as biblical understanding and reveal a motivation not based so much on truth, understanding and validation as on pugnacity, invective, and demagoguery. As to the question of the resurrection body and the "tension between physical and spiritual approaches," a more evenhanded statement by a renowned evangelical asserts, "the debate is widely regarded as speculative and pointless." [72] Although preterists cannot so easily dismiss the issue, since an Origenist concept is pivotal to their view that the resurrection indeed began with the parousia in A.D. 70, there is ample biblical attestation for their view among theologians and biblical scholars not aligned with their general eschatology to repudiate any purported heresy. [73] Indeed, the view advocated by preterists that

the resurrection occurs at death has received confessional validation: "The Dutch catechism of 1966 says: 'Life after death, therefore, is something like the raising of the new body. This resurrection body is not the same as the molecules and atoms that have entered the earth. We awake-or are woken-as new human beings.' The 'New Book of Belief' (Das Neue Glaubensbuch) of 1973 puts it more precisely: 'The individual resurrection from the dead takes place with, and at, death.'" [74] As long as some aspect of identity with the person laid in the grave is admitted, therefore, no preterist may justifiably be charged with denying the resurrection of the body.

Are Preterists Guilty of Heresy on the Final Judgment of Humanity?

It was during the Tannaitic period, commencing with the Christian era and culminating in the death of Patriarch Judah in the early third century, that the body of traditional Jewish law (Mishnah) was redacted and promulgated under his authority. [75] The messianic expectation of this period was threefold, consisting of this world (olam hazzeh), the days of the messiah, and the future world (olam habba). This traditional Jewish perspective was altered, however, by the apocalypticism stemming from the latter second century B.C. This led to some fluidity in Jewish eschatological hopes for the occurrence of the resurrection. The books of Daniel and [Enoch](#) seem to place the resurrection at the beginning of the messianic kingdom, while the apocalypses of Baruch (30:1-4) and 4 Ezra (7:26-33) place it at the end and conceive it as the event which serves as a transition from the days of the messiah to the future world (olam habba). The question posed in 4 Ezra 6:7, "what will be the dividing of the times? Or when will the end of the first age and the beginning of the age that follows?" was commonly asked. This is also evinced in the disciples' question to Jesus at the beginning of the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:3; Mark 13:3-4; Luke 21:7), which Sproul rightly admits was fulfilled in Christ's parousia at the destruction of Jerusalem, an event which culminated the messianic age and ushered in the kingdom/church in all its fulness. This coming is to bring judgment upon the generation that crucified Jesus, as Jesus himself predicts: "so that upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation" (Matt 23:35-36), a summary of all the innocent blood of God's faithful shed from the beginning of the OT canon to its conclusion, 2 Chronicles (wherein Zechariah, son of Jehoida, is murdered in 24:20-22) being the last book in the Hebrew Bible.

Thus, a collective judgment is being imposed on Jesus' generation in the destruction of Jerusalem, in addition to a declaration on those that preceded, as is attested in Jesus' comparisons of the severity of judgment of previous peoples with that of the generation on which he will come (Matt 11:16-24 [comparison to Sodom, destroyed in Gen 19:24-25, early second millennium B.C.]; 12:39-42 [comparison to Nineveh, to whom Jonah preached, spared in eighth or seventh century B.C., and Queen of Sheba, 1 Kings 10:1, from tenth century B.C.]). Particularly interesting are the last two statements in Matthew concerning the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South (Sheba), both of whom are said to "rise at the judgment with [meta, "in the company of, alongside"] this generation and condemn it." This emphasis on the gathering of ancient peoples in judgment culminates in the gathering of the nations before Christ at his parousia: "when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:31-32).

Again, if the Olivet Discourse has to do with the destruction of Jerusalem and that is the time "when the Son of Man comes in his glory," then it follows ineluctably that Christ's judging of the nations occurred then, as well.

H. J. Schoeps observes that Paul's eschatology is also founded on this idea of that he was living at a turning point, "the fulfillment of the ages" (1 Cor 10:11), save that he saw in the resurrection of Jesus the commencement of the eschaton.

In this transitional epoch in which Paul and his churches are living—we are now accustomed to call these decades of his activity the 'apostolic age'—the *olam hazzeh* and the *olam habba* are already intermingled, thus indicating that the Messianic age of salvation has dawned. This mingling of the two ages constitutes the distinctive eschatological standpoint of Pauline theology. Thus it becomes clear that Paul could only link up with that form of eschatology which transferred the resurrection of the dead to the end of the Messianic age (cf. Baruch ch. 20-30; 40:3; IV Ezra 7:26-44). The Messianic age itself, the age of the apostle, then becomes an interim stage, a transition to the *olam habba*. [76]

While this interim period of the messianic age was placed at four hundred years in 4 Ezra 7:28 and Apocalypse of Baruch 29-30, "older traditions concerning the days of the Messiah fix a very short interval for the interim period, namely, forty years (R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus; Bar. In Sanh. 99a; R. Aqiba: Midr. The. On Ps. 90:15; Tanch. Ekeb 7b, Pes. Rabb. 4a)." [77] Similarly, the Qumran materials indicate such a period, as, for instance, the Damascus Document: "from the day of the gathering in of the unique teacher, until the destruction of all the men of war who turned back with the man of lies, there shall be about forty years" (CD xx, 14-15), and a Commentary on Ps 37:10: "I will stare at his place and he will no longer be there. Its interpretation concerns all the evil at the end of the forty years, for they shall be devoured and upon the earth no wicked person will be found" (4QPsalms Peshar [4Q17, ii, 6-8]). [78] While space does not allow further attention to the exegetical and systematic development of Pauline eschatology, the aforementioned texts, coupled with the eschatological thrust of the Olivet Discourse on which Pauline thought here must be based, provide sufficient attestation for Schoeps' assertion that "Paul probably held the widespread notion that the interim stage of the Messianic kingdom would be only of short duration" and that, like Aqiba and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, "he will have reckoned with forty years at most." [79] Thus Paul's insistence on the imminence of Christ's coming judgment on unbelievers and deliverance of his people (1 Thess 1:10; 5:1-9; 2 Thess 1:4-10, e.g.), an idea echoed by the other NT writers (Rom 13:11-12; 2 Tim 4:8; Heb 10:23-39; Jas 5:8-9, e.g.). The NT accent on the imminence of God's judgment on the disobedient and his deliverance in Christ of his elect compels the exegetical conclusion that the judgment commenced with the destruction of Jerusalem after the forty year messianic reign and henceforth continues upon all who die: "just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb 9:27; cf. also 2 Cor 5:1-10, where Paul is viewed by some interpreters as hoping for "the heavenly body at death," with the judgment of Christ apparently immediately thereafter [80]). Clearly, Jesus, Paul, and the apostles all viewed the judgment as imminent. The issue is simply whether they were mistaken in this expectation.

Preterists thus affirm that, following upon his coming in glory in the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ exercises judgment after death upon all. While they generally regard the Great White Throne Judgment depicted in Rev 20:11-15 as the same depicted in Matt 25:31-46,⁸¹ they maintain that all will be judged at death when they are resurrected.

Conclusion

"Orthodox faith and orthodox doctrines are those that honor God rightly," whereas "heresy" refers to the false doctrine of those who "have abandoned the faith" and move others to do the same. [82] If heresy has to do with a denial of the principle that God has provided redemption in Christ, as McGrath says, it is hard to understand how preterism can be viewed as a heresy, for it affirms "the orthodox faith and orthodox doctrines" in all points as expressed in the great creeds and confessions while endeavoring to "honor God rightly" by insisting that the consummation of God's redemptive purpose in Christ's parousia has not been frustrated or postponed, but rather accomplished according to the clear chronology set forth in the NT. Preterists believe this evidence is so compelling that they are willing to suffer the accusations and condemnations of others in their effort to affirm the words of the apostle Paul: "let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: 'So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge'" (Rom 3:4). They invite others seriously interested in investigating these matters to do so from within the great tradition for the furtherance of the reformation, recognizing the need of the church to be "reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God."

Endnotes

[1] "Jesus the Preterist: A Review of R. C. Sproul's *The Last Days According to Jesus*," Quidlibet On-Line Journal of Christian Theology and Philosophy 1:6 (September, 1999), <http://www.quodlibet.net/otto-sproul.shtml>.

[2] Ibid.

[3] <http://www.chalcedon.edu/report/97sep/s16.htm>. This critique, together with other views of preterism favorable or critical, can be found in what can be called the clearinghouse of information on the subject, "The Preterist Archive" (<http://preteristarchive.com/>).

[4] In his "Introduction to Preterism" (http://preteristarchive.com/Preterism/fp-dennis_01.html), Todd Dennis, a proponent of preterism, makes the unfortunate statement, "Preterist theology is unorthodox." Though he takes orthodox to mean "generally accepted, conventional," the word derives from the Greek *orthos*, "correct," and *doxa*, "opinion," and has to do with what is correct, not merely conventional, though the two are typically conjoined, as, e.g., "conforming to the usual beliefs or established doctrines, especially in religion; proper, correct, or conventional; as, orthodox ideas, opposed to heterodox" (Webster's 20th Century Dictionary). Such misstatement is too common among preterists, which feeds the frenzy against them. Surely if, as Dennis says, preterism is "a Biblical theology," then it must not be characterized or caricatured as unorthodox or heterodox.

[5] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2nd ed.; William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979]) s.v., "haireisis" (a, b [23-24]). The corresponding term in rabbinic Judaism, *min*, first denoted "trends and parties within Judaism," but soon came to be applied to those groups which separated from rabbinic Judaism. "At the end of the 2nd century the term acquired a new meaning, being applied not so much to the members of a sect within Judaism as to the adherents of other faiths, and esp. Christians and Gnostics" (H. Schlier, "haireisis," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [ed. Gerhard Kittel; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964] 1:182).

[6] H. Schlier, "haireisis," TDNT, 1:182-183. So Harold O. J. Brown who, after describing the church as an ark, says: "Heresy not merely undermines one's intellectual understanding of Christian doctrine, but threatens to sink the ark, and thus to make salvation impossible for everyone, not merely for the individual heretic" (*Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984] 2).

[7] Philip Schaff notes all of what he calls "Scripture confessions" in *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990 rep.) 2:3-8; so also John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches* (rev. ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1973) 12-16.

[8] Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 11; cf. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:4-9

[9] Jim West, "The Allurement of Hymenaen Preterism: The Rise of 'Dispensable Eschatology'," (<http://www.chalcedon.edu/report/97/jul/s09.htm>) and Andrew Sandlin, "Hymenaeus Resurrected," http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article_hy_preterist.html, respectively.

[10] This translation is taken from Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:11-12, where the Greek text is included, the brackets signifying the longer Greek recension.

[11] Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:13-14.

[12] *Ibid.*, 2:17.

[13] *Ibid.*, 2:46n.

[14] Sandlin, "Hymenaeus Resurrected," http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article_hy_preterist.html.

[15] Sandlin, "Against Hymenaeism: The Charity of Intolerance," http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article_hy_Hymenaen.html. Moreover, "the corporeal aspect" of Christ's resurrection is not even mentioned "in Nicene Trinitarianism and Chalcedonian Christology" (http://www.chalcedon.edu/article_hy_Hibbard.html). See Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 57-65.

[16] Schlier, "haireisis," TDNT, 1:183.

[17] West, "The Allurement of Hymenaen Preterism."

[18] E. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: SPCK, 1948) 67; although the attempt has been made since the early apologists to find the source of Marcion's dualism in Iranian speculation, Jewish cosmology, Gnosticism, and philosophers as diverse as Plato, Empedocles, and Epicurus, R. Joseph Hoffmann says that the effort to find "philosophical analogues for marcionite doctrines is characterized by contradiction and inconsistency" (*Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984] 11). There is little doubt that Marcion's views were largely derived from his peculiar reading of the Pauline epistles; cf. also Randall E. Otto, "The Problem with Marcion: A Second-Century Heresy Continues to Infect the Church", *Theology Matters* 4 (1998):1-8.

[19] "The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a growing conviction that philosophy could be an invaluable asset to Christian theology," in demonstration of the reasonableness of faith and in systematizing doctrine. By about 1270, Aristotle was established as "the Philosopher," whose ideas furnished the presuppositions for theology, particularly through the influence of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. "This development came to be viewed with concern by some later medieval writers, such as Hugolino of Orvieto. A number of central Christian insights seems to have been lost, as a result of a growing reliance upon the ideas and methods of a pagan philosopher," in particular the nature of justification (Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998] 119).

[20] Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (1895; rep. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995) xiv, 137-138.

[21] The appeal to apostolic tradition as the precedent for true faith is also found in Tertullian's contemporary, Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* ch 17 [ANF 2:554-555]).

[22] Sandlin, "Against Hymenaeanism."

[23] McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 44.

[24] <http://topaz.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/heresy.htm> is a good on-line source for material on medieval heresies, including the Beguines, the Cathars, the Hussites, the Joachimites, the Lollards, and the Waldensians. Brown's *Heresies* is probably still the unsurpassed compilation.

[25] J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (1846; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976 rep) 173.

[26] West, "Allurement of Hymenaen Preterism," 10.

[27] J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (1887; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983 rep.) back cover.

[28] I have on the wall of my study a copy of an 1834 print by H. Schile, based on an original by H. Brückner, entitled "Das Leben Martin Luther's und die Helden der Reformation!," the central

focus of which is a portrayal of Luther defiantly casting this bull into the fire, surrounded by banners featuring the words of his famous "battle hymn," "Eine feste Burg ist unsere Gott!" and "Das Wort Gottes bleibt in Ewigkeit. Amen."

[29] Cited from Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971) 2:329.

[30] Thus, the closest Brown comes to giving his "definition of heresy" is the practical significance "involved in the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Christ" (*Heresies*, 2-3).

[31] McGrath, *History of Theology*, 173.

[32] Schaff, *Creeds*, 1:7.

[33] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism," (<http://www.chalcedon.edu/report/97/jul/s09/htm>), for example, begins by saying, "First, hyper-preterism is heterodox. It is outside of the creedal orthodoxy of Christianity. No creed allows any Second Advent in A.D. 70. No creed allows any other type of resurrection than a bodily one."

[34] McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 182.

[35] The radicality of Luther's thrust is seen in his reevaluation of the basis of authority itself, relegating four books of the NT (Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation) to a subordinate status because they did not "put forth Christ" (*treibet Christum*). Though the other Reformers did not follow Luther here, they did all relegate the apocryphal books to a non-canonical, as opposed to a deuterocanonical, status, striking against its recognized status of over twelve centuries

[36] On the various interpretations of "the descent into hell," see Randall E. Otto, "Descendit in inferna: A Reformed Review of a Creedal Conundrum," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990):143-150 where, because of the dubious intention behind its insertion and "the fact that no consensus has been or apparently can be reached on its meaning," the recommendation is made to omit it from liturgical use; cited with approval by Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 594. For the Reformers' reinterpretation of the nature of the communion of the saints and holy catholic church, see, e.g., McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 200-207.

[37] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)175-176.

[38] E.g., the series "Articles by Andrew Sandlin concerning the Hymenææn Heresy" at http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article_hy.html. Also, Jim West, "The Allurement of Hymenaen Preterism." The condemnation by the RCUS also uses this terminology.

[39] Robert McL. Wilson, "Gnosticism," *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (ed. Bruce M. Metzger; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 255-256.

[40] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) 1:168.

[41] Fred D. Gealy, "II Timothy," *Interpreter's Bible* (ed. George A. Buttrick; New York: Abingdon, 1955) 11:491; so also A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (New Century Commentary; ed. Matthew Black; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982) 136; A. J. B. Higgins, "The Pastoral Epistles," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (ed. Matthew Black; Nashville: Nelson, 1962) 1005, et al.

[42] Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 2:356-357. In the Letter of the Corinthians to Paul 2:11-15, a question is raised about two men named Simon and Cleobius who say "that God is not almighty, and that there is no resurrection of the flesh, and that the creation of man is not God's (work), and that the Lord is not come in the flesh, nor was he born of Mary, and that the world is not of God, but of the angels." The Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 3:33 follows with assurance that "you also who have been cast upon the body and bones and Spirit of the Lord shall rise up on that day with your flesh whole."

[43] James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977) 53. In his Introduction, 4-5, Robinson specifically mentions the texts here cited as standing in line with the persons and views mentioned in 2 Tim. 2:16-18.

[44] *Ibid.*, 185.

[45] *Ibid.*, 140-141, 144.

[46] G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972)184.

[47] Stevens, Stevens [sic] *Response to Gentry* (Bradford, PA: Kingdom Publications, 1997) 34-35.

[48] The additional citations found in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 463, from *The Epistle of Barnabas*, ch 21 and 1 Clement 24:6 do not yield the evidence he cites for "rising again in the self-same flesh."

[49] Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:69-70. This creed is generally acknowledged to be later than Athanasius on the basis of the doctrinal formulations; J. N. D. Kelly dates it sometime after 428. The creed was never officially recognized by the Eastern Church, and its condemnatory language has been a source of controversy. See "Athanasian Creed," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2nd ed.; ed by F. L. Cross, E. A. Livingstone; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983)100-101.

[50] Origen makes much of the seed analogy in *Against Celsus*, bk 5, chs 18-19 (ANF 4:550-551). After asserting that "the resurrection of the flesh, which has been preached in the Churches," is "more clearly understood by the more intelligent believer," he states, "neither we, then, nor the holy Scriptures, assert that with the same bodies, without a change to a higher

condition, 'shall those who were long dead arise from the earth and live again'," as Celsus supposed. Origen then refers to Paul's seed analogy in 1 Cor. 15:42-44.

[51] See, e.g., Diogenes Allen, *The Reasonableness of Faith* (Washington: Corpus, 1968) and his chapter by the same name in *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989) 128-148.

[52] In his *Sentences*, Peter Lombard used Eph 4:13 to contend that each would rise with "the stature he had (or would have had) in youth," i.e., about the age of thirty, since that is when Christ died! (C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1995] 122).

[53] Origen, *Fragment on Psalm 1:5*, in Methodius, *De resurrectione*, bk 1, chaps 22-23, cited in Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 64.

[54] Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 66.

[55] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 471.

[56] Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 66.

[57] *Ibid.*, 68.

[58] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 475-479; Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 71-86.

[59] Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 71.

[60] "The Anathemas Against Origen," II. Constantinople. A.D. 553," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 14:319. While Origen may have taught the resurrection body was spherical, "there is no explicit mention of this notion in any of Origen's known writings" (McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 559).

[61] Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993) 113.

[62] Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981 rep.) 3:775-780.

[63] A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1875) 442-444.

[64] James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation: Being the First Series of Kerr Lectures* [1891] (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907) 331-332.

[65] *Ibid.*, 332.

[66] Augustus. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1907)1019.

[67] Ibid., 1020.

[68] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941)723.

[69] Mark W. Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 27.

[70] The lack of engagement with consensual science on matters related to cosmology is abundantly evident in the "Committee Paper Investigating Full Preterism" of Heartland Presbytery (PCA), which claims preterism has a "defective view of Adam and Eve's pre-fall bodies" and of cosmology in general for its contention that death and decay in the physical realm do not derive from Adam's fall. The issues here devolve into a PCA requirement for a young earth, since Adam's fall is required as the basis of all death. This not only stands against their own conservative Reformed tradition as expressed in Warfield and Machen, both of whom believed in an old earth and the "day-age" theory (cf. David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987]), it also stands obscurely against the entire current of contemporary science, which can be well harmonized with the old-earth view (cf., e.g., Don Stoner, *A New Look at an Old Earth: What the Creation Institutes are Not Telling You About Genesis* [Paramount, CA: Schroeder, 1992]).

[71] John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos, & Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 92-93.

[72] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 560.

[73] E.g., Murray J. Harris, *From Grave to Glory: Resurrection in the New Testament, Including a Response to Norman L. Geisler* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 74-88.

[74] Cited by Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 103.

[75] The standard work on Judaism in this period remains the three volume work by George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

[76] Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 99.

[77] Ibid., 100.

[78] Citations are from Florentino G. Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994) 46, 203, respectively. Schoeps also says the idea is portrayed in "the final war against the sons of darkness," presumably the War Scroll, but I have not been able to verify that citation.

[79] Schoeps, Paul, 101.

[80] C. S. C. Williams, Peake's Commentary, 970; cf. also Harris, From Grave to Glory, 205-214.

[81] Thus, e.g., Russell, The Parousia, 523-525.

[82] Brown, Heresies, 1.