Reformation or Retrogression?
An Examination of the International Preterist Association’s Claims and Methodology

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Introduction

In the last several years an emerging eschatological movement has made itself well known and highly visible at the annual and regional meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Christian Booksellers Convention and other significant venues. The International Preterist Association\(^1\) (hereafter IPA) has become something of the umbrella organization for a group advocating the theological/eschatological position commonly known as Hyper-Preterism (hereafter HP).

\(^1\) John Noē is president of another group called, Prophecy Reformation Institute ([www.prphcycyrefi.org](http://www.prphcycyrefi.org)). Max King is the leader of an organization called Living Presence Ministries ([www.livingpresence.org](http://www.livingpresence.org)). There are other smaller websites but these three are the leading groups.
This novel position initially began to form within some Church of Christ assemblies in Ohio through the ministry’s of “C. D. Beagle and his son-in-law, Max King.” HP is the view that all Biblical prophecy saw its fulfillment at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It differs from the normal form of Preterism in terms of extent. They teach that, among other things: (1) Christ returned and established His kingdom; (2) The resurrection of the just and unjust has occurred; (3) the final judgments have been pronounced at the Great White Throne; (4) Satan and his cohorts among men and the angelic realm have been cast into the lake of Fire; (5) We are now enjoying the New Heavens and New earth.

This view has spread beyond the confines of the Church of Christ denomination through several writers and speakers, notably Edward E. Stevens (who is no longer with the Church of Christ), John Noē, and Randall E. Otto. For some time the HP phenomena seemed to be simply an internecine debate within the larger Preterist sphere. This was the case to the point that outside of those circles very few have even been aware of the issue. Of the large number of HP publications in the last ten years or so, only three reviews of their books have appeared in non-preterist orientated publications.

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2 Here we are speaking of the organization and systematization of the HP scheme. J. Stuart Russell’s book, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming*. This work was originally published anonymously and then with Russell’s name (London: Dalby, Isbiter & Co., 1878) and (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887). Besides influencing Milton Terry and his work, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Russell’s work made little impact and was out of print for nearly 100 years, until Walter Hibbard (himself also a HP) arranged with Baker Book House to reprint the work in 1983. *The Parousia* is available through Baker Books and other smaller single-issue publishers. However, it should be noted that even Russell was not entirely within the HP position as it is currently formulated. Russell viewed the millennial kingdom as “still future and unfulfilled” (p. 523).

3 Bob L. Ross. *The Historical background of Modern Preterism or AD 70ism*. (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publishing, n.d.), p. 2. This is one of a series of short articles by Ross on the subject of Preterism. All are available on his web page at [http://members.aol.com/pilgrimpub/pretrist.htm](http://members.aol.com/pilgrimpub/pretrist.htm)

4 We do not mean by this that extent is the only difference between what we would call Traditional Preterism and HP. The theological and practical differences are severe and are noted in this paper. The Traditional Preterist writers themselves have been the most vocal critics of the HP position to date.

However, in the last few years more and more interest has been demonstrated in the HP position, caused in no small part by the aggressive marketing by the IPA and the ubiquitous nature of the Internet. Anecdotally, this author has been recently involved with matters of church discipline, serving as interim pastor of IFCA and GARBC churches (both of whom have definitive premillennial doctrinal statements) when schisms developed within those assemblies after HP teaching was introduced. The growth of the HP position and claims of the IPA and related groups make an examination what many have called the resurgence of the error of “Hymenaeus and Philetus” (2 Tim 2:18) a needed study.

This paper will briefly examine the HP position in four areas: (1) Motivation; (2) Methodology; (3) Claims; and (4) Consequences. It should be noted that our purpose is not to enter into a dispute with Preterists; although approaching the subject from a futuristic premillennial perspective, we are bound to make statements that our Preterist friends will disagree with. Our focus is on the HP position and their claims.

IPA’s Motivation: Flawed

In reading the material from HP authors, especially those associated with the IPA it becomes immediately clear what their motivation.\(^6\) A recent book by John Noé makes the motivation clear in its title: *Dead in Their Tracks: Stopping the Liberal/Skeptic Attack on the Bible*.\(^7\) Following the lead of R. C. Sproul in his book, *The Last Days According to...* [December 2000], pp. 743-44; and by this author (*The Master’s Seminary Journal* 12:1 [Spring 2001], pp. 119-21. While Walvoord’s review could be best characterized as “dismissive” and not extremely detailed, the reviews by Luter and this author were more thorough, although both have been characterized as “scathing” in evaluating Noé’s work.

\(^6\) In fact the HP writers make a concerted effort to convey that their singular motivation is the protection of the inerrancy of the Bible.

Jesus, he introduces the objections to Christianity of the near nihilistic philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970).⁸

One of Russell’s objections to Christianity (and they were certainly not limited to the singular selection quoted by Sproul and Noē) was that Christ claimed that he would return within the lifetime of His hearers and, in fact, He did not.⁹ Noē also cites the “Father of the Historical Jesus” movement and noted liberal theologian, Albert Schweitzer, along with several Jewish and Islamic writers who object to Christianity on the same basis. Noē then also cites the famous Christian apologist C. S. Lewis as one who concluded that Jesus was wrong about His second coming. Part of Noē’s citation is where Lewis is voicing the objections of his created critic of Christianity as follows,

It is clear that they [the disciples] expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And, worse still, they had a reason, and one which you will find very embarrassing. Their Master had told them so. He shared, and indeed created their delusion. He said in so many words, ‘this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.’ And He was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else.¹⁰

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⁹ It should be noted, as Sproul does, that Russell was entirely skeptical as to whether or not Jesus ever even existed! “Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him, so I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one.” Cited in Sproul, *Last Days*, p. 12.

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis. *The World’s last Night and Other Essays*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), p. 98. In his citation, Noē actually references this essay as it appeared in *The Essential C. S. Lewis*. Lyle W. Dorsett, ed. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996). This serves to make a critical observation about IPA publications in general and Noē’s works in particular. There is a great deal of secondary and even tertiary sources used as references. Sources are often poorly cited and even more poorly checked. In this case, Noē indicates that this essay was written in 1960, when in fact, it was first written in 1952 and appeared with a different title in the periodical *Religion in Life*. See the author’s review of Noē’s *Beyond the End Times* (*The Master’s Seminary Journal* 12:1 [Spring 2001], pp. 119-21 for several other examples. One work published by the IPA, Daniel E. Harden, *Overcoming Sproul’s Resurrection Obstacles*. (Bradford, Pennsylvania: International Preterist Association, 1999), is perhaps the most egregious case to date. In this book there are no footnotes, even though there are extensive quotations (apparently) from various other writers. There are occasionally page numbers listed, apparently referring to a short bibliography at the end of the book, but no other real information. The formatting makes it difficult to know where a quotation ends and the author’s words begin. This is certainly not the paradigm for what purports to be informative or scholarly publications.
To his credit, Noë takes these criticisms of the veracity of Christ and the inerrancy of the Bible seriously. He states,

Do you hear what these critics and even C. S. Lewis are saying? They are saying that Jesus was literally wrong when He made numerous time-restrictive predictions and statements regarding his coming, his return. As we shall see, the embarrassment belongs to C. S. Lewis et al. But this perceived weakness was, and still is, the crack that let the liberals in the door to begin their systematic criticism and dismantling of Scripture with its inevitable bankrupting of the faith.  

From this Noë asserts, “Regrettably, this ‘nonoccurrence’ problem cannot be lightly brushed aside without undermining the integrity and divinity of Christ and placing the inerrancy of the Bible in question. It’s that simple. It’s that profound. And it calls for another reformation of Christianity around a more conservative and biblical view of eschatology.”

His view then is that only the HP position, which sees fulfillment of all prophecy in the A. D. 70 time-frame, can answer these critics of the Bible and apparently force them to see its truthfulness.

Despite the apparently noble intentions and zeal that is exhibited here, the motivation of the IPA and HP writers is clearly misplaced and apologetically flawed. A brief examination of the examples cited will suffice to demonstrate this. In the example of Russell, his objections regarding the *parousia* are a fraud at their very foundation. Russell was an atheist and as already noted, he doubted that Jesus even existed! The idea that answering his objection about the supposed “nonoccurrence” of the Second Coming would sway him is naive at best. The writer of the Book of Hebrews, stated, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb 11:6 italics ours).


12 Ibid., p. 10.
The Jewish skeptics that Noē cites are of another category. From the beginning Judaism has sought to deny the reality of Christ as Messiah. Despite the overwhelming evidence of His deity and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and even in light of the indisputable evidence of the resurrection, the Jewish leaders created an illusionary explanation as noted in Matthew 28:11-15. Their writing today are simply a continuation of that practice. The idea that the HP viewpoint will defeat 2,000 years of entrenched opposition is unrealistic and ignores the fact that the real opposition to Christianity from this quarter has nothing to do with the timing of the Second Coming and everything to do with “suppressing the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18).

The Islamic skeptics simply don’t believe that Jesus ever claimed to be God or that He would ever return, as Noē himself notes. Islam teaches that these are simply lies that were added to the Bible. Attempting to prove that Jesus returned in A. D. 70 is an utterly useless exercise in witnessing to Muslims. It fails to strike at the core issues related to their unbelief namely idolatry; or more simply, they worship a false god.

Regarding C. S. Lewis, the issue is a little more difficult. As significant an apologist for Christianity he was, Lewis rejected the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture. He was not a theologian and he affirmed several non-evangelical theological positions. For Lewis the seeming contradiction (between Jesus at one point saying that no one knows the day or

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13 Ibid., p. 4.
14 However, some groups and individuals within Islam have held to an idea of Christ’s return to assist in the overthrow of evil and the establishment of an Islamic world.
15 See Michael J. Christensen. C. S. Lewis on Scripture. (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979). Lewis’ ground for objecting to inspiration and inerrancy where on literary, not theological basis’. Lewis was convinced of the Bible’s “salvational reliability” but did not see the necessity of holding to a plenary inspiration view to support the claims of the gospel. Lewis’ apologetic was typically philosophical not exegetical.
hour and then seemingly giving an exact time reference with “this generation”) was actually a mark of the “historical reliability” of the Bible. However, Lewis does get the issue correct when he states, “The doctrine of the Second Coming teaches us that we do not and cannot know when the world drama will end. The curtain may be rung at any moment: say, before you have finished reading this paragraph.” In this Lewis correctly understands that the doctrine of imminence is not so concerned with “soon” but rather with “at any time.”

But the motivation of the IPA and HP’s is flawed at a deeper level. In 2 Peter 3:4 Peter declares that there will always be mockers, liberals and skeptics decrying the Christian faith asking, “where is the promise of His coming?” As Hiebert notes, “’Where is the promise of his coming?’ embodies their taunting reaction to the orthodox teaching concerning the return of Christ.” This is the same type of mocking that Isaiah dismissed in Isaiah 5:19 and the Lord through Ezekiel did the same in Ezekiel 12:21-25.

Richard L. Mayhue, addressing Sproul’s work particularly, also summarizes this issue clearly for the HP position, as he states,

These preterist brothers appear to have missed, or at least undervalued, Peter’s reminder that in the days prior to A. D. 70 there also were scoffers similar to Russell and Schweitzer. Instead of foretelling the events of A.D. 70, just a few short years away, Peter writes to wait in faith, all will eventually happen in God’s timing which is not like man’s time (2 Pet. 3:3-4, 8-9). No particular eschatological system is to validated or elevated because it necessarily attempts to answer one line of objections from the skeptics regarding NT time-reference indicators.

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18 Ibid., p. 105.
21 Richard. L. Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or Futurist?” a Paper Presented at the annual meeting of the *Evangelical Theological Society.* Danvers, Massachusetts, November 1999. A revision of this paper is
IPA’s Methodology: “Spin Control”

The IPA has clearly attempted to position their unique views within the mainstream of evangelicalism and evangelical theology. This has been necessitated by the fact that their theological conclusions have been labeled as heretical; by both preterists and those who hold a futurist position. The noted preterist scholar, Kenneth L. Gentry calls the position, “heterodox,” stating, “It is outside of the creedal orthodoxy of Christianity.” Thomas Ice, Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center, wrote that, “Both Dr. [Kenneth] Gentry and I believe that such a position is heretical, for it denies a bodily resurrection of believers and a future second coming of Christ.”

MacArthur forcefully declares:

The hyper-preterist error is exactly like that of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who “strayed from the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past . . . they overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:18). The apostle Paul was not reluctant to speak plainly about the seriousness of such soul-destroying error. Nor should we be hesitant to point out the dangers posted by such a serious departure from biblical truth. It is, after all, heresy of the worst stripe to deny the bodily return of Christ, and this particular brand of that heresy is currently overthrowing the faith of many.

Without using the term “heresy” R. C. Sproul states, “I share Gentry’s concerns about full preterism, particularly on such issues as the consummation of the kingdom and the resurrection of the dead.” West, however, does not mince words, calling HP a “damnable heresy.”

scheduled for publication in *The Master’s Seminary Journal* in Spring 2003 (14:1).


In view of these widely shared conclusions, the IPA’s strategy has been to engage in what has been referred to in the political arena as “spin control.” That is, attempting to place itself in a favorable light by deflecting criticism away from the main issues. To that end they have taken up two main deceptions: (1) an attempt to redefine terminology; and (2) to present the illusion of evangelical acceptance and by extension, orthodoxy.

1. Redefining Terminology

Those associated with the IPA have strenuously objected to characterizing their position as “hyper-preterism.” They wish to be called “Full” or “Consistent” preterists. In doing this they wish to redefine the terms of the debate granting to themselves the high ground as “consistent” and give their opponents within the traditional Preterist camp labels such as “partial” or “inconsistent” preterists. In fact in all of the IPA’s published material they always refer to their own position as “preterist” and all others as either futurist or partial preterists. As Edward Stevens, the current president of the IPA, notes:

Actually the term “preterist” is all that is needed to describe our view. “Preterist” means past fulfillment. Only those who take a past fulfillment of all the eschatological events (e.g. the return of Christ, resurrection, judgment) can rightly be called “preterist.”

However, it seems that the prefix “hyper” is entirely justified. Hyper connotes the taking of a position to perhaps a logical, but unwarranted and unbiblical continuation. Two other

27 If a distinction in terminology is required I would use the descriptor “Traditional” to describe the standard preterist view.

28 As Luter noted in his review of Noë’s Beyond the End Times, Preterists like Gentry must be “dumbfounded” to note that the HP label them as “futurists.” This is simply more of the HP “spin” to not only redefine the terminology to suit their needs, but to redefine the position of their opponents.

examples in the theological world suffice to illustrate this: (1) Hyper-Calvinism and (2) Hyper- Dispensationalism

The attempt to “spin” the terminology has not gone unnoticed and to a certain degree has been a successful tactic. R. C. Sproul attempts to forge some kind of peace in the use of terminology and in so doing grants to the IPA a victory in “spin.” Sproul states,

Maybe the terms that best describe the two positions are full preterism and partial preterism. Both are preterist with respect to some eschatological events, but both are not preterist with respect to all eschatological events. The terms full and partial can then be safely applied to these two positions.

However, this concession ignores the fact that the Preteristic method of interpretation has a long history; a history that never included the novelties that the IPA their associates have introduced since the early 1970’s. To take the long-established theological construct of Preterism and then grant to usurpers the high ground that the terms “full” or “consistent” denotation, while relegating the established position to that of “partial” or some other weaker label is to yield ground without reason. One preterist writer has seen this clearly and stated,

We must not let them get away with calling themselves “preterists” or “consistent preterists,” or believers in “fulfilled eschatology.” The word “preterist” is a good word, the disciples of Hymenaeus are not preterists; their “dispensable eschatology” makes them heretics.

The HP movement is simply another group seeking a name that is not their birthright.

2. The Illusion of Evangelical Acceptance

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30 Hyper-Dispensationalists also wish to be rid of the “hyper” label and so often they call themselves “Pauline Dispensationalists” or “Consistent Dispensationalists.” Hyper-Calvinists also often follow the same pattern referring to themselves as “Consistent Calvinists.”

31 Sproul, Last Days, p. 155-56 (italics in original).

32 Ross, Historical Background, p. 2.

33 West, “Hymenaen Preterism,” p. 22.
The IPA has been notable in its presence at both regional and national meetings of the 
*Evangelical Theological Society*. At the annual meetings for the last several years they have had a large and prominent display in the exhibitor’s area. Two of their leading spokesmen, John Noē and Randall E. Otto, have regularly presented papers at regional and national meetings. Noē’s books in particular, with few exceptions, regularly make mention that the material was originally presented at one ETS meeting or another.

On Noē’s web page ([www.prophecyrefi.org](http://www.prophecyrefi.org)) he notes that the flyer “9.5 Theses for the Next Reformation,” a sort of credo for the Hyper-Preterist movement, was released at the 2001 National ETS meeting. The press release for this document begins, “A new era in church history began last week with the "posting on the Church door"-i.e., presenting and distributing-of the 9.5 Theses for the Next Reformation document at the 53rd Annual Meeting of Evangelical Theological Society.”34 The press release goes on to talk about how many ETS participants “took” their material. All of this presents the illusion that they are an accepted group within the larger Evangelical sphere, when that is clearly not the case.

Their literature often contains anecdotal stories of “conversions” to their position, such as a “Christian college instructor” who was “convinced” of the position by reading Noē’s paper read at the 45th Annual Mid-Western Regional meeting of ETS.35 Of course, the “instructor” is not identified nor is his field of instruction divulged.

The IPA makes a great deal out of the fact that the noted Theonomist writer, David Chilton, “converted” to the HP position shortly before his death. However, Vern Crisler, his publisher and long time associate, noted that before this conversion he had suffered his first

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35 John Noē. *Dead in their Tracks: Stopping the Liberal/Skeptic Attack on the Bible.* (Bradford, PA: International Preterist Association, 2001), p. vi & viii. It should be noted that the page numbers of this book are incorrect as the preface moves from page “v” to an unnumbered page (which we have listed as page “vi” and then to page “viii.”
heart attack and his friends noted that, “the resulting neurological trauma probably affected
his judgment more than he realized.”\textsuperscript{36} Crisler also predicted the “spin” of the IPA as he
stated,

Chilton’s last minute conversion to heresy will be exploited by the remaining full-
preterists, but they will only be exploiting a debilitated man’s eccentricities, not his
healthy and mature judgments.\textsuperscript{37}

Other attempts at “spin” can be noted in the material from IPA and their associates.
In his work, \textit{What Happened in A.D. 70?} Edward E. Stevens, the President of the IPA,
compiles an impressive bibliography. It is lengthy and seemingly impressive.\textsuperscript{38} He breaks
down the categories with two interesting headings. The first section he titles, “Books Which
Teach a Similar View.”\textsuperscript{39} However, after looking at the listing of 76 works, it is obvious that
“similar” is used in the most expansive manner possible. The next category entitled, “First-
Century Fulfillment of Revelation”\textsuperscript{40} is equally misleading. This unqualified statement
attempts to give the impression that the listed writers agree with Stevens’ HP interpretations,
when, in fact, several of those listed have been amongst the most vocal critics of HP.

Occasionally their “spin” borders on incredulity. One example is the aforementioned
book by John Noē, \textit{Beyond the End Times}. On the back cover in his biographical sketch, Noē
is referred to as “conservative, evangelical scholar, and an active member of the \textit{Evangelical
Theological Society}.”\textsuperscript{41} However, in his preface for this book Stevens, while calling him a
“scholar” makes the strange admission that, “John is not a professional theologian. He has

\textsuperscript{36} Vern Crisler. \textit{“The Eschatological A Priori of the New Testament: A Critique of Hyper-

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 227.

\textsuperscript{38} Although even here it does not follow standard bibliographic guidelines.

\textsuperscript{39} Edward E. Stevens. \textit{What Happened in A.D. 70?} (Bradford, Pennsylvania: Kingdom Publications,
1997), p. 35.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 38.

\textsuperscript{41} Noē, \textit{Beyond the End Times}, back cover.
had no formal seminary training, but that may be an advantage—it might have handicapped his communication style.” Whatever information this non sequitur may be intended to convey, it is certainly a strange manner in which one affirms his scholarly bona fides.

In the face of condemnation of their position from both the futurist and preterist camps, the concept of “spin-control” is an excellent public relations tactic, but it is certainly less than forthright in many instances.

IPA’s Claims: Heterodox

The IPA’s claims have already been noted. In short, they claim that all Biblical prophecy has been fulfilled, although Stevens attempts to deflect this slightly by stating that HP does not “teach that all prophecy has been totally fulfilled with absolutely no continuing implications, applications, or ongoing fulfillment.” By this he means that the present “Kingdom Age” continues to grow and expand,

The church only had the “earnest” and the “seal” of their kingdom inheritance during that transitional generation (AD 30-70). If anything, we in the post-70 period have a more relevant and applicable revelation [by which he means the Scripture]. We are now ion the kingdom. The full inheritance is here. All the things Jesus, Paul and the other apostles taught about the kingdom now apply fully to us. Several prophetic passages have ongoing fulfillment in the kingdom (i.e. Ezek 47:1-12 and Rev. 21:24-22:5)

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42 Ibid., p. x. It should also be noted that according to the by-laws of the Evangelical Theological Society, Noē cannot be a “full member” as he lacks the necessary academic credentials. He can only be an associate member.

43 Whether a deliberate part of their “spin” or not, it is also interesting the IPA has used several different names for their publishing arm. They have mostly used International Preterist Association. However, they have also used Kingdom Publications, and Preterist Resources.

44 Edward E. Stevens. Stevens Response to Gentry: Detailed response to Dr. Ken Gentry’s critique of the Preterist view entitled, “A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism.” (Bradford, Pennsylvania: International Preterist Association, 1999. This is perhaps the most detailed response to criticisms faced by the HP’s to date. However, it is a rambling 114 pages (as compared to Gentry’s original articles of little over 2 pages) of largely fallacious reasoning in which the tu quoque (commonly called the “you too”) fallacy is rampant as well as majoring on Gentry’s minor points and giving little attention to the major ones.

45 Ibid., p. 46. It is beyond our scope and space would fail in evaluating how these two passages can possibly be viewed as having “ongoing fulfillment” today. In short the passage in Revelation speaks of (1) no longer any night or darkness, (2) no longer any curse [that is the complete reversal of Gen 3:14-17], (3) the glory and honor of the nations are brought into the New Jerusalem, (4) believers see Christ’s face to face.
The HP’s, particularly Stevens, chaff at any mention or reference to the great doctrinal statements or creeds in the history of the church in evaluating their orthodoxy, especially as it relates to the resurrection of Christ and that of believers.

Creeds can be wrong since they embody more than just biblical material. They contain uninspired interpretations and applications of Scripture, which must always be subject to some suspicion of error. Only inspired Scripture in infallible and beyond question. And on the Biblical content of the creeds is above suspicion, error and correction.\(^46\)

While this statement is true, it is a two-edged sword for the HP’s. Stevens wants to believe that while the creeds can be in error (which also is true) somehow there is a material difference between a creedal statement and his own documentation of “properly exegeted Scripture.”\(^47\) But what is a creedal or doctrinal statement other than a systematic presentation of the exegesis and interpretation of Scripture as it relates to different areas of doctrine? That such a statement is developed by a particular group or given the title “creed” or “confession” is of no consequence to the material or exegetical nature of the document. Stevens would like to somehow posit a supposed superiority of his interpretations of the Bible over against those that have been formulated throughout the last 2,000 years.

This is the overwhelming historical problem that the HP adherents simply cannot wish away. As Gentry notes, “No creed allows for any second Advent in A. D. 70. No creed allows any other type of resurrection than a bodily one. Historic creeds speak of the universal, personal judgment of all men, not a representative judgment in A. D. 70.”\(^48\) From a futurist position, A. Boyd Luter states, “I know of no denomination or academic institution,

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How one can claim that these things have begun to occur now, much less are currently having “ongoing fulfillment” staggers the imagination.


\(^47\) Ibid.

\(^48\) Gentry, “Theological Analysis,” p. 23.
of whatever evangelical stripe, with an eschatological plank of consequence in its doctrinal position that Noē [or anyone of the HP position] could affirm.”

It is an indisputable fact that outside their own small group, they can point to not a single denominational statement of faith, not a single one of the great creedal statements in the history of Christianity, not a single seminary or academic theological institution presently or in the past, that will affirm the totality of the HP view in relation to the return of Christ, the resurrection, the judgments, and affirming that the New Heavens and New Earth has been enjoyed by believers since A.D. 70. The HP’s find bits and pieces here and there from this person or that, but nowhere in the history of doctrine can they cite anything remotely resembling their unique theological construct.

The issue is not the creeds per se (which Stevens really just uses as a red herring); it is the absolute negation of the HP view in the history of the church. Stevens states, “Only the canon of Scripture can be used to determine true Biblical orthodoxy.”

But this is little more than obfuscation on his part. While honesty forces one to admit that it is possible that the HP position is correct and all of Christendom for 2,000 years has been incorrect, that possibility is so remote so as to be impossible.

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50 Stevens, Response to Gentry, p. 17.
There are several other claims\(^{51}\) that the HP position makes which space does not allow does not allow for a full examination.\(^{52}\) Three of these are noted here:

- **Rejection of the Millennial Kingdom.** The HP position rejects the notion of a 1,000 year millennial kingdom, whether the 1,000 years is taken literally or figuratively. The only place where they can fit a millennium is in the 40 years\(^{53}\) or so between the Cross and their Second Advent. Max King has developed something that he calls “transmillennialism.”\(^{54}\) In this scenario the time before the Cross is called “This Age” the period between the Cross and the Second Advent is the “Last Days” and the post-A.D. 70 era is the “Age to Come.” Stevens is hopeful about this approach, stating, “I hope Max King’s suggestion (that the millennium was the period from 30 to 70 AD) is the correct one (it certainly sounds good).”\(^{55}\)

- **Rejection of the Physical Return of Christ.** The HP position states that when Christ returned in A.D. 70 it was “in clouds of judgment.”\(^{56}\) This return was invisible to the physical eye and He not “come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11 our italics).

- **Rejection of any Post- A.D. 70 Fulfillment of Prophecy.** Stevens claims that, “Jesus said that all OT prophecy would be fulfilled by the time Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70.”\(^ {57}\) One passage, among many in the OT, then requires explaining. In the passage dealing with the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, the chapter ends with a prophecy related to the city of Jerusalem (31:38-40). In that prophecy physical

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\(^{51}\) The dating of the Book of Revelation is key to both the Preterist and HP position. If the traditional dating as affirmed by Eusebius and others, in the 90’s is correct then the position as it now construed fails. The HP more exactly claims that the entire NT was written before A.D. 70. From a futurist premillennial viewpoint, the early dating poses no issue that would overturn that position, but the converse is not true for the Preterist and especially HP position. The HP also affirm that along with directly inspired revelation, all spiritual gifts ceased after A.D. 70.


\(^{53}\) The literature from IPA seems to uniformly accept an A.D. 30 Crucifixion.


\(^{55}\) Stevens, “Questions and Answers.”

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Stevens, *What Happened?* p. 32.
Jerusalem is said to be (1) rebuilt and enlarged, (2) sanctified, and (3) immune from future destruction. The boundaries of the city are given with exacting geographic detail. This prophecy in the HP view apparently failed, in that the city was never rebuilt and enlarged to the border of the prophecy, and even if it were, the prophecy failed because Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{IPA's Consequences: A Hopeless and Helpless Church}

Beyond the theological implications of Hyper-Preterism, the practical life of the church must also be considered. Of course, the IPA does not like to refer to the church as the assembly of believers today, Stevens states,

\begin{quote}
I’m not totally comfortable using the word “church” in reference to the Kingdom of God today. The word “church” just might refer to the “calling-out” process of the transitional period from 30-70 AD when Christ was building His Kingdom.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

In the preface for the book, \textit{Beyond the End Times}, Stevens also notes that the author (John Noē) is “working on a sequel that will explore more implications for Christians living after A.D. 70.\textsuperscript{60} Such a work is certainly necessary to explain the absolute havoc their theology has on the life of believers in the present age, however it may be defined. Even a cursory examination of the New Testament will demonstrate that the HP position leaves the church in a confused muddle of hopelessness and helplessness.

The overarching problem presented by the HP position for believers today is that the totality of the New Testament is relegated to a past era, not really applicable in terms of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[58] For further see this author’s paper, “The Expansion of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38-40: Never, Already or Not Yet?” A paper presented at the annual meeting of the \textit{Evangelical Theological Society}, Nashville, Tennessee, 2000. Additionally, it seems that Jeremiah 31:35-37 requires explanation from the HP view. Here God affirms the perpetuity of the “offspring of Israel” stating that they will never cease to be a “nation before Me.”\textsuperscript{59}


\item[60] Noē, \textit{Beyond the End Times}, p. xii.
\end{footnotes}
imperatival commands.\textsuperscript{61} As Gentry has noted their position leaves the church without a
revelation from God by which to guide their lives in this current age.

If all prophecy was fulfilled prior to A. D. 70 and if the entire New Testament spoke to
issues in the pre-A. D. 70 time frame, we do not have any direct relevant passages for us.
The entire New Testament must be transposed before we can use it.\textsuperscript{62}

Beyond this, there are five specific passages of Scripture dealing with everyday life in the
church that are rendered useless by the Hyper-Preterist position.

1. \textit{The Church is Left without a Remembrance and Message}

In 1 Corinthians 11:26 the purpose of communion is given to the church by Paul. In
the celebration of communion the assembly “proclaims the Lord’s death until He comes.”
The phrase, “proclaiming the Lord’s death” can only have reference to the totality of the
Gospel message. As Mare notes, communion was to be celebrated until “the second
advent.”\textsuperscript{63} Erickson states that communion is “also a proclamation of a future fact; it looks
forward to the Lord’s second coming.”\textsuperscript{64} Thiselton makes the point quite clear:

\textit{Just as the sun outshines any source of illumination otherwise provided in everyday life, so when he (the Lord) comes, this reality [as pictured in communion] will eclipse and outshine the pledges and promises that have been hitherto pointed to it. In this sense the fellowship gathered around the table of the Lord (10:21) provisionally and in partial measure constitutes the pledge and first preliminary imperfect foretaste of the “Supper of the Lamb” of the final consummation to which the Lord’s Supper points in promise. . . The story does not reach its culmination until he comes, and only then will the full meaning of all present moments be disclosed, beyond the need for partial significations.}\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{61} In this they are also similar to hyper-dispensationalists who relegate large portions of the New Testament (basically all of the non-Pauline writings) to a previous dispensation and reject the idea that those portions contain objection truth and imperatival commands for believers today.

\textsuperscript{62} Gentry, “Theological Analysis,” p. 23.


One of the clearest connections in the New Testament between evangelism and eschatology is in Acts 17 and Paul’s presentation to the Areopagus. In vs. 30-31 Paul brings his address to conclusion with the call to repentance. The reason for repentance is \textit{kaqo/ti} ("because", or "in view of the fact") that is, God “has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness” (vs. 31) and the proof of that is the resurrection from the dead. But for the HP that day is past, Christ has returned and judgment has occurred. If he were preaching to a group of philosophic skeptics today, Paul would need an entirely different conclusion, according to the HP’s.

2. \textit{The Church is Left Without an Ethical Imperative}

In Titus 2:11-15 Paul tells Titus to instruct those in Crete to live a godly life in light of their salvation. Particularly they are commanded to be “looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God, even our savior, Christ Jesus” (v. 13). Godly living is directly tied to the anticipation of Christ’s return. If that has already happened, the imperative is gone. Knight comments, “We live from the vantage point of ‘expectedly waiting’ and “looking forward to Christ’s appearing.”\textsuperscript{66} He further adds that, “Paul joins to the instructions given by grace about living the Christian life (vv. 11-12) this


\textsuperscript{66} George W. Knight III. \textit{Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles}. New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), p. 321. See also I. Howard Marshall. \textit{Commentary on Titus}. International Critical Commentary. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Publishers, 1999). He adds that this text, “shows that balance of realized and future divine action and salvation which is characteristic of the NT generally” (p. 272). The Puritan divine, Thomas Taylor demonstrates that this is an interpretation that has stood the test of time, “From this our apostle includes a very strong argument [the second coming of Christ] to enforce all the former duties, of which we have spoken in the verse going before, and an effectual means to contain believers in those duties.” Thomas Taylor. \textit{Exposition of Titus}. (Cambridge, 1619; reprint, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock and Klock, 1980), p. 348.
note of looking forward to Christ’s appearing, so that the two give perspective to each other.”  

Christian ethics and the outworking of the Christian life are always bound up in the anticipation of the return of Christ (see also Phil 3:15-21; 1 Tim 6:13-16). As Quinn summarizes,

The “sensible, honest, godly way” of Christian life does not derive itself from Greek ethical demonstrations; it does not hope for that knowledge (phronesis) of the good which the philosophers promised. The consolation and release that believers expect are bound up with the coming of the risen Lord and their own resurrection, literally, “the blessed hope and manifestation (epiphaneian) of the glory of the great God and our savior, Jesus Christ.” “Hope” in the PE [pastoral epistles] means the person hoped for (see 1:2), Jesus, hidden for the time being but certain to appear.  

Additionally, in verse 14 Paul states that Christ will “redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works.”

Since, according to the HP position, everything related to the Second Coming has already occurred, we are driven to the conclusion that Christ has already purified a people. In Romans 13:1-10 Christians are enjoined to be in subject to the governing authorities. But that set of imperatives is also enforced by anticipation of the Second Coming (vs. 11). Far from giving a chronological time frame Paul simply states, “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (vs. 11). Harrison, citing Leenhard, makes a point that the HP need to note well,

The time of the appearing is subordinate to the fact of the appearing. “If primitive Christianity could note, without its faith being shaken thereby, that the ‘end’ did not come within the calculated times, that is just because the chronological framework of its hope was a secondary matter” (Leenhardt, in loc). The believer is not like a child looking for a clock to strike the hour because something is due to happen then. He is

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67 Ibid.

content to know that with every passing moment the end is that much closer to realization. 69

3. The Church is Left Without Hope and Reason for Patience

In James 5:8 the assembly is instructed by James to be patient in the light of oppression because “the coming of the Lord is at hand.” “The readers know that the lord is coming back in the capacity of Judge. They ought to exercise patience toward their adversaries and demonstrate patience in respect to the coming of the Lord. He will avenge his people when he returns (II Thess 1:5-6).”70 Obviously if the Lord has already come neither the Church nor individual believers have anything from which to derive comfort it in the light of oppression and persecution.

Without the promise of the second coming the church today is alone and without hope in the world. There is no coming Christ, there is no promise of the intervention of God for His people in this age. The HP position teaches that this present world will never end71 there is no promise that the condition if this world will ever be anything beyond what it is; a place where the truth is suppressed by ungodly men, where Christians are persecuted and in places martyred and false religions, cults and others error-laden philosophies spring up almost daily capturing men’s souls. 72 In the midst of this the only hope for the believer, according to the


71 Noē, Beyond the End Times, pp. 41-57.

72 In times and places there may be an increase or even dominance of Christian ideals and morality, but in a world without end, the HP can point to no passage of Scripture to for assurance that this will ever be the case in the whole world or even last wherever it may be established. The world, in their view, seems to be eternally destined for a waxing and waning of good and evil with not future hope of decisive victory.
HP is death, escape from this present, and never-ending, world. All of this, it seems, would ultimately see a return to the “gloomy amillennialism” of Francis Turretin.73

4. **The Church is Left Without Rewards for Faithfulness:**

In 1 Peter 5:4 the apostle instructs elders to exercise wise servant leadership over the flock commending to them the reward that will be theirs “when the Chief Shepherd appears.” This may seem like a minor issue, yet the thought of reward is extremely important. At the end of his life Paul stated, “in the future there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). Paul speaks of this “day” as future and distant, certainly not in keeping with the relatively short time between his death in February-March A.D. 68 and the HP notion of an A.D. 70 culmination.

5. **The Church is Left Without a Purpose and With Useless Equipment:**

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) is limited by the phrase, “even to the end of the age” (vs. 20). But since the HP’s teach that we are now living in “the age to come” it becomes clear that the age of the Great Commission, in their view, must be over and fulfilled. Even the ministry of the Holy Spirit towards unbelievers is severely weakened. In John 16:8 we are told that the Spirit will, “convict of sin, righteousness and judgment.” But if the final judgment has already occurred, what does the Spirit convict men of?

One of the more startling problems with the HP position is noted when the Christian arrives at Ephesians 6:10-20. The entire imperative of Paul to “put on the full armor of God”

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is predicated on the need for such armor to “stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (6:11). Paul continues by warning believers that their battles are not against “flesh and blood” but against Satan and his demonic hosts. But according to the HP position Satan and his demons are no more, they have been cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10) they are no longer able to wage war against the saints. The “shield of faith” (Eph 6:16) need to combat the “flaming missiles of the evil one” is needed no more. All of the armor of God (which includes the Word of God) is rendered as obsolete and useless equipment for the believer as the enemy for which it was designed is no longer a threat (see also Eph 4:27; 1 Tim 4:1ff; 2 Tim 2:26). In the same immediate context one wonders what the HP view of prayer (vs. 18) might become?

One of the most dramatic charges to pastoral fidelity and responsibility is found in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 where Timothy is told to “preach the Word.” However, Paul prefaces the charge with the concept that it is to be done to serve God and Christ Jesus, who will “judge the living and the dead by His appearing and His kingdom” (vs. 1). If appearing has already happened and the judgment has fallen, the entire motivation for faithful gospel preaching is severely weakened.

It is an important question, that the HP position has no answer for, why is there no instruction from the NT writers about the Christian life for the post A.D. 70 believers? Every affirmation for the message of the church, the ethical conduct of the church, the hope for the church in light of persecution, the rewards for faithfulness and the purpose and equipping of the church are all bound up in passages that teach believers to “look forward” to a future appearing of Christ, a future resurrection of the saints, a future judgment of the wicked, the temporal battle for believers is with the evil world system, organized and controlled by Satan.
Conclusion

The IPA trumpets the claim that their view of Preterism may be the “spark that ignites the next Reformation of Christianity.” Strangely, no where in their numerous writings do they ever detail what this “reformation” would entail or what they expect to see happen.

In his review of Noē’s book, Beyond the End Times, A. Boyd Luter stated, “No doubt, much of his overall theological position is within the evangelical pale. However, I know of no denomination or academic institution, of whatever evangelical stripe, with an eschatological plank of consequence in its doctrinal position that Noē could affirm.” In this assessment Luter is far too kind. The particular eschatological position of the IPA of HP and its resulting conclusions cannot possibly be categorized as evangelical, even in the broadest sense.

The HP position, as currently construed, is “comprehensive” in that they (whether they realize it or not) have developed a theological construct that affects every aspect of theology and Biblical interpretation. So pervasive are the implications of this system and so pernicious are the outcomes that it does not seem too much to call this movement “proto-cultic,” that is, a potential cult in the making.

The implications of HP in terms of both theology and practical Christian living will not lead to the “reformation” envisioned by its adherents; it can only lead to “retrogression,” a movement backwards to the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, an error Paul roundly condemned as “overthrowing the faith of many” (2 Tim 2:18).

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76 See Gentry, ‘Theological Analysis” for a listing of the implications of the HP position.