

John Humphrey Noyes and Hyper-Preterism

by

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The position which we think the evidence already presented abundantly sustains, is, that as Christ predicted, so the primitive church expected, his second coming within the lifetime of their own generation.

—John Humphrey Noyes¹

Throughout the following pages the author is under the deepest obligations to Dr. Stuart Russell's "The Parousia." He also owes much to "The Berean" by John Humphrey Noyes, and to the works of Henry Dunn, the author of "The Destiny of the Human Race."

—Ernest Hampden-Cook²

Introduction

In February, 2004, a book that I edited, entitled *When Shall These Things Be?: A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism*, was published.³ For those unfamiliar with the debate, hyper-preterism is a doctrine that has been gaining some ground in certain circles. While differing among themselves on numerous details, proponents of this doctrine are united in teaching the most basic thesis of hyper-preterism, namely that the Second Coming of Christ and the events associated with it (e.g. the general resurrection and the final judgment) occurred during the first century.⁴

In my Introduction to *When Shall These Things Be?*, I briefly discussed several topics, including the origins of the doctrine. I mentioned that the origins of the doctrine of hyper-preterism are somewhat difficult to trace because there have been men throughout church history who have argued that one New Testament prophecy or another

¹ From the "Hand-book of the Oneida Community," p. 39. The document has been scanned and placed online at the Syracuse University Library website. The original page numbers are included in the scanned document. See <http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/h/Hand-bookOfTheOneidaCommunity/>

² From the "Preface to the First Edition" of *The Christ Has Come*. Ernest Hampden-Cook was another nineteenth century proponent of hyper-preterism whose works are still influential among hyper-preterists today.

³ Keith A. Mathison, ed. *When Shall These Things Be?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2004).

⁴ There are differences among hyper-preterists regarding how such things as the general resurrection was fulfilled, and whether there is any ongoing fulfillment in any sense, but since these differences are part of the problem addressed in this paper, they will be discussed in more detail below.

was fulfilled in the first century.⁵ These men, however, believed that the Second Coming of Jesus was still future. I noted that systematic and total preterism is difficult to find any earlier than the nineteenth century.⁶ I then stated, “Although the view may have been held at an earlier date by some obscure individual or group, one of the first open proponents of hyper-preterism was John Humphrey Noyes (1811–86), the founder of the Oneida Community.”⁷ After briefly describing Noyes’ conclusions concerning the doctrine of the Second Coming, I mentioned a few other nineteenth century writers such as James Stuart Russell, Ernest Hampden-Cook, and Milton Terry whose works have been influential in the hyper-preterist movement.⁸

Not long after the publication of *When Shall These Things Be?*, I was contacted by Jason Bradfield, an associate of the hyper-preterist author Samuel Frost at the Preterist Theological Institute.⁹ He indicated to me that he believed my labeling of John Humphrey Noyes as a hyper-preterist was inaccurate and possibly slanderous. He posted comments along the same lines on a popular preterist website. After quoting the passage from my Introduction and explaining some of his objections, he writes:

What Mathison does here just three pages into the book is absolutely disgusting and twisted and, I believe, a deliberate attempt to prejudice the reader into thinking “you better watch these hyper-preterists - one of their first proponents swapped wives.”¹⁰

In a second email to me, Mr. Bradfield also included a quote written by Noyes that he included in order to demonstrate that Noyes cannot accurately be categorized as an early proponent of hyper-preterism.¹¹ A section of this quote has been posted alongside the comments I made in my Introduction on at least one very popular preterist website.¹²

These are serious charges. If Mr. Bradfield is correct, then at best, I would be guilty of being less than careful with the sources I used in the writing of my Introduction

⁵ Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?*, xv.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. Noyes was also notorious for advocating, among other things, perfectionism and a doctrine he referred to as “complex marriage,” in which every man was said to be married to every woman and every woman to every man.

⁸ Ibid., xvi.

⁹ In a personal email dated April 15, 2004.

¹⁰ Posted on The Planet Preterist website. Registration is required to read the materials on this particular site.

¹¹ Personal email also dated April 15, 2004. The quotation by Noyes will be discussed in detail below.

¹² The Preterist Archive website.

and at worst I would be guilty of deliberate falsehood. If he is wrong, then he would be guilty of maligning my name. Because of the seriousness of the charges, I went back and carefully re-examined the sources I used in writing the Introduction. I informed Mr. Bradfield that if I discovered that my comments about Noyes were in error, I would publicly recant. I informed him that if I believed my comments to be correct, I would write a public response to his charges.

The question, then, is simply this: Is it accurate to classify John Humphrey Noyes as an early proponent of hyper-preterism? After re-examining the evidence, I believe that the answer is yes, and I will seek to defend that answer in what follows. I will begin by examining the evidence from the writings of Noyes himself as well as the evidence from the comments of several other authors and scholars. I will then examine the counter-evidence provided by Mr. Bradfield and explain why it does not support his charges.

The Evidence

John Humphrey Noyes

The hyper-preterist doctrine of John Humphrey Noyes is abundantly evident throughout his writings. I provided only one quote by him in my brief Introduction to *When Shall These Things Be?* That indicates what he taught on the subject, but there are many. Noyes himself wrote:

I first advanced into actual heresy in the early part of the summer of 1833 while still a student at New Haven Seminary. In the course of my Bible studies my attention was arrested by Christ's expression in John 21:22: "If I will that he [John] tarry till I come, what is that to thee." This seemed to imply that Jesus expected his disciple John to live until his second coming, and the disciples so construed it. The church on the contrary taught that Christ's second coming was still far in the future. I had long been in the belief that the Bible was not a book of inexplicable riddles, and I determined to solve this mystery. Accordingly, I read the New Testament ten times with an eye on the question as to the time of Christ's second coming, and my heart struggling in prayer for full access to the truth.¹³

What was Noyes' conclusion? He continues:

¹³ George Wallingford Noyes, ed. *The Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1923), 69. The entirety of chapter 8 of this volume is devoted to Noyes' doctrine of the Second Coming. The entire book is available online at <http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/r/ReligiousExperienceOfJohnHumphreyNoyes/>

I soon perceived that every allusion to the second coming in which there was a clue as to its time pointed in the same direction; and when my investigation was ended, my mind was clear: I no longer conjectured, I *knew* that the time appointed for the second coming of Christ was within one generation from the time of his personal ministry.¹⁴

Noyes described his conclusion as “actual heresy,” but as George Wallingford Noyes observes, “It is indeed unthinkable, that Noyes with his fiery zeal and independence of mind should for long continue within the rock-bound limits of the traditional creeds.”¹⁵

The *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community* contains portions of a brief biography of Noyes and a description of the community that was compiled by a “special correspondent” of the *New York Tribune* for its May 1, 1867 issue.¹⁶ The *Hand-Book* also contains two articles by Noyes – one on the doctrine of regeneration and the other on the doctrine of the Second Coming.¹⁷ The article on the Second Coming is a detailed argument for the hyper-preterist view. This doctrine was key to Noyes’ thinking. As the correspondent from the *New York Tribune* noted, one of the two cornerstones of doctrine for Noyes and the Oneida Community was the idea that “the Second Coming of Christ, and the founding of his heavenly kingdom, took place 1800 years ago.”¹⁸

The basic outline of Noyes’ article on the Second Coming of Christ will be familiar to anyone who has read much hyper-preterist literature. He commences his argument with the following statement:

The glorious event which thus animated the faith of primitive believers, as marking the period of the perfection of their faith, and their entrance upon the possession of the fullness of the gift of God’s grace, though seemingly nigh at hand at that time, is at this day generally thrown forward, in the faith of the churches, into the shadows of a distant and indefinite futurity. Our object in the present article, is to call the attention of those who love the word of God more than creeds, to the testimony of that word concerning the *time* of the second coming of the Son of man.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid. It is worth noting that George Noyes refers readers to J.S. Russell’s book *The Parousia* for a fuller treatment of the preterist view expounded by John Humphrey Noyes (See *The Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes*, p. 78).

¹⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁶ *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community with a Sketch of its Founder and an Outline of its Constitution and Doctrines* (Wallingford, Conn: Office of the Circular, Wallingford Community, 1867). This book is available online at <http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/h/Hand-bookOfTheOneidaCommunity/>

¹⁷ The article on the Second Coming is found on pages 31–53 of the *Hand-Book*.

¹⁸ *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community*, 22.

¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

Like other hyper-preterist authors, Noyes begins by framing the debate as a debate between Scripture and the creeds.

The first section of Noyes' article is entitled "Definition of the Second Coming." It is in this section that Mr. Bradfield finds evidence that Noyes cannot be classified as a hyper-preterist. According to Noyes, the judgment of mankind is "divided into *two* acts, occupying *two* periods of time, separated from each other by an interval of more than a thousand years."²⁰ Noyes adds:

With this explanation, we shall be understood when we say, that in speaking of the second coming of Christ we refer to the first and not to the final judgment. It is not our object in this article to discuss the subject of the second or final judgment.²¹

As we will observe below, this kind of thinking was not unusual even in the writings of acknowledged hyper-preterist authors of the nineteenth century such as James Stuart Russell and Ernest Hampden-Cook.

In short, Noyes believed that the Second Coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70 and that at that time there was a primary resurrection and judgment. According to Noyes, however, there is also a future aspect of the resurrection and judgment, but Noyes is much less clear about its timing and nature. In one document, for example, he seems to imply that the arrival of the second aspect of the resurrection and judgment "will be established here not in a formal, dramatic way, but by a process like that which brings the seasonal spring."²² The central point of his teaching, however, is clear: the Second Coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70.

The second section of Noyes' article is titled "Christ's Designation of the Time of His Second Coming." He begins, like many hyper-preterists, with a discussion of Matthew 24. He examines the Olivet Discourse and concludes that Christ said that his Second Coming would definitely occur within the first century. He then asks, "Does he [Christ] *mean* what he says?"²³

Noyes adds several detailed arguments from the subsequent context of Matthew 24, and then concludes this section with the following statement:

²⁰ Ibid., 32.

²¹ Ibid., 34.

²² Noyes, George Wallingford, ed. *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community* (New York, 1931), 236.

²³ *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community*, 34.

We may sum up and concentrate the testimony we have examined in this section, thus: Christ designated the time of his second coming in six different ways. 1. He placed it immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem. 2. He instructed his disciples to expect it when they should see the fearful signs that should precede and accompany the destruction of Jerusalem, as they would look for summer after the budding of the fig-tree. 3. He most solemnly declared it would take place before the generation contemporary with himself would pass away. 4. He assured his disciples that it would happen before their ministry to the Jews would be finished. 5. He said there were some standing with him who should live till the event. 6. He plainly intimated that John should tarry till his coming.²⁴

Granting potential differences over certain details, this is a common hyper-preterist approach to the general message of Matthew 24.

The third section of Noyes' article on the Second Coming is titled, "The Expectations of the Primitive Church." In this section, Noyes sets forth the same basic argument that has been presented by every hyper-preterist author from the nineteenth century onward. After citing several passages from the New Testament, Noyes writes,

Such language as this is perfectly natural on the supposition that they understood Christ's predictions as setting the period of the second coming nigh at hand; and perfectly unnatural on any other supposition, as is proved by the fact that such language at the present day, when the churches generally believe the second coming to be afar off, is altogether obsolete; except among those whose theory, like that of Miller, places the second advent very near the present time. Men do not *wait* and *look* for a far distant event. Such language implies that the event expected is supposed to be *impending*.²⁵

Noyes argues the same concerning those passages that deal with the resurrection, and then concludes:

We will not further multiply citations showing the expectations of primitive believers, but refer the reader, if he needs further evidence on the subject, to an examination of the whole New Testament. The position which we think the evidence already presented abundantly sustains, is, that as Christ predicted, so the primitive church expected, his second coming within the lifetime of their own generation.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 37.

²⁵ Ibid., 37–38.

²⁶ Ibid., 39.

In the fourth section of his article, entitled “The Fulfillment of the Signs Predicted,” Noyes argues that several signs had to be fulfilled before Christ’s Second Coming in A.D. 70. He then argues that all of them were fulfilled.

It is not generally supposed that those tokens-especially the appearance of antichrist, and the universal publication of the gospel-did actually come to pass in that age; so that it is the more necessary that we should present our proof in relation to them. We find proof in the New Testament, *that antichrist was revealed, and that the gospel was published to all nations, before the destruction of Jerusalem.*²⁷

He then provides a chart comparing the predicted signs with their fulfillment prior to A.D. 70.²⁸

The fifth section of Noyes’ paper is entitled, “The Nature of the Second Coming.” After pointing out that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophesied coming of Elijah, Noyes writes:

It would not therefore be a strange thing, if it should be found that the second coming was an event very different from the conceptions of it, whether popular or learned, which men have gained by private interpretations of prophecy. -- Christ may have come at the time appointed, though the scribes “knew him not.” Taking the caution of past examples, we will not assume that he did not come, because popular anticipations were not fulfilled; but rather that those anticipations were false, and wholly unworthy to be placed in the balance against the credit of those plain predictions which, as we have seen, appointed the time. At the outset of our inquiry concerning the nature of the second coming, we are bound to take for granted that it was an event which, though it may not have been recognized by external historians, was not inconsistent with the true history of the external events which followed the destruction of Jerusalem. This assumption leads us at once to the general conclusion, that the second coming was an event *in the spiritual, and not in the natural world.*²⁹

Assuming that some critics would object to this understanding of the Second Coming on the basis of texts such as Rev. 1:7: “Every eye shall see him,” Noyes presents an argument that is common in the writings of many hyper-preterists. He argues that “the meaning of the apostle must be, ‘every *spiritual* eye shall see him.’”³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 41.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 44.

³⁰ Ibid., 45. In this section, Noyes also presents a view of Christ’s resurrection body and resurrection appearances that is very similar to the view of the hyper-preterist author Randall Otto. See Otto, *Coming in the Clouds: An Evangelical Case for the Invisibility of Christ at His Second Coming* (New York: University Press of America, 1994). For a good critique of Otto’s view, see Vern Crisler, “The

The final section of Noyes' article is titled, "Practical Bearings of the Preceding Views." In this section, Noyes describes the impact of his hyper-preterist view on other issues. He argues, for example, that the hyper-preterist understanding of the Second Coming will modify our views toward our duties and our hopes.

Now if we believe that the second coming of Christ is yet future, in our minds the last enemy is not destroyed – death is yet an unconquered antagonist of the Son of God. But if we believe the second coming is past, we see Jesus a perfect conqueror, with death under his feet; and our faith and hope, according to the grace given us, lay hold on his perfect victory. This last example may be taken as a specimen of a general revolution of mind, producing great enlargement of hope, which will take place in any one who intelligently exchanges the common views of the second coming, for those which we have presented. The progress of God's general war with Satan, is not to be measured by the progress of that war in individuals. Victories may have been won, which we as individuals have not entered into. A spiritual and vigorous believer will look for encouragement and strength more to the general victories that are already won in Christ, than to any particular victories that are won in himself. Hence, when he finds that the second coming of Christ, with all its train of promised triumphs, instead of being yet far in the future, is eighteen hundred years in the past, he will lift up his head with joyful hope, and gird himself for the battle that is yet before him as an individual, with the exulting faith of one who is fighting on the distant wing of an army which has already routed the enemy at the center.³¹

According to Noyes, the hyper-preterist understanding of the Second Coming also helps us understand better the relationship between the present church and the primitive church. He explains, "...believing the second coming past, we see that church advanced eighteen hundred years beyond the resurrection and the judgment."³² He adds, "Paul's gospel was that which Christ preached before him, and one main item of its tidings was, "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand; this generation shall see the second coming of the Son of man, in the power and glory of eternal judgment.*"³³

In language reminiscent of many modern hyper-preterists, Noyes expresses his opinion of the church's reaction to his doctrine of the Second Coming. As he puts it: "The protectors of the orthodoxy of the church will surely spend their strength for nought, in their labors to repel and quench heresies on the subject of the second coming,

Eschatological *A Priori* of the New Testament: A Critique of Hyper-Preterism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 15 (1998): 225–56.

³¹ *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community*, 48–49.

³² *Ibid.*, 50.

³³ *Ibid.*

so long as they shrink from a manly and thorough investigation of that subject, and a bold confession of the truth to which such an investigation leads.”³⁴ Noyes believed the hyper-preterist doctrine of the Second Coming was clearly the teaching of the Bible. In an 1840 letter he wrote, “[If] an angel from heaven, bearing the seal of ten thousand miracles, should establish a religion, which should fail to recognize the truth which blazes on the whole front of the New Testament, that Jesus Christ came the second time at the destruction of Jerusalem, I would call him an imposter.”³⁵ In terms of today’s debate, it appears to be beyond any reasonable shadow of a doubt that John Humphrey Noyes was an early proponent of the basic hyper-preterist thesis.

Ernest Hampden-Cook

In my Introduction to *When Shall These Things Be?*, I mentioned in addition to John Humphrey Noyes, the names of two other nineteenth century hyper-preterist authors: James Stuart Russell and Ernest Hampden-Cook. James Stuart Russell was the author of *The Parousia*, while Hampden-Cook was the author of *The Christ Has Come*.³⁶ These two men are readily acknowledged by modern hyper-preterists and others as early proponents of the hyper-preterist thesis. Their books have been highly influential among modern hyper-preterist authors and are regularly cited in their works. We already noted above that George Wallingford Noyes, the editor of *The Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes*, refers his readers to James Stuart Russell’s *The Parousia* for a fuller treatment of the preterist view. Evidently he considered Russell to be teaching essentially the same eschatological view that John H. Noyes taught.³⁷

Even more telling is the link between the views of Ernest Hampden-Cook and John Humphrey Noyes. In the Preface to the first edition of *The Christ Has Come*, which is a classic presentation of the hyper-preterist view, Hampden-Cook makes the following statement,

³⁴ Ibid., 51.

³⁵ Cited in Michael Barkun, “John Humphrey Noyes and Millennialism,” *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 28 (Fall 1993), 11-22. This article is also available online at <http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/c/Courier/01.htm>

³⁶ Russell’s *The Parousia* was first published anonymously in 1878. A second edition was published under his name in 1887. The first edition of Hampden-Cook’s *The Christ Has Come* was published in 1891, the second in 1895, and the third in 1904.

³⁷ See *The Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes*, p. 78.

The belief that the second coming of the Son of man is still future cannot be reconciled with any reasonable interpretation of the New Testament as a divinely-inspired message and record. The error is none the less in error because for centuries it has remained undetected. The truth which must sooner or later supersede it formed part of the most ancient, faith of the Christian church. The most ancient faith of the Christian church associated together the destruction of Jerusalem, the winding up of the Jewish dispensation, and a personal return of Christ to the earth, as events which were certain to happen at one and the same time. Jesus and His apostles believed and taught that the Second Advent would take place in the lifetime of some who had been His earthly contemporaries. Confident that the founders of Christianity were neither deceived nor mistaken we joyfully accept on their authority the fact that the Christ has already come the second time.

He then makes the following acknowledgement.

Throughout the following pages the author is under the deepest obligations to Dr. Stuart Russell's "The Parousia." *He also owes much to "The Berean" by John Humphrey Noyes*, and to the works of Henry Dunn, the author of "The Destiny of the Human Race."³⁸

Hampden-Cook clearly indicates here that the views he presents in his book *The Christ Has Come*, were especially influenced by J.S. Russell, John Humphrey Noyes, and Henry Dunn. He also lists Noyes in his bibliography as one who teaches the view that the Second Coming is a past event.

This is significant because it means that not only was John Humphrey Noyes an early proponent of hyper-preterism, but that his hyper-preterist doctrine also influenced the eschatological writings of another hyper-preterist author (Hampden-Cook) whose book continues to influence hyper-preterist authors to this day. Modern hyper-preterists do not seem to have any difficulty acknowledging Russell or Hampden-Cook as early proponents of hyper-preterism. The fact of the matter is that Noyes was another early proponent of hyper-preterism, and an influential one at that.

The Counter-Evidence

Noyes' Doctrine of the Final Judgment

As mentioned above, Mr. Bradfield has argued that Noyes cannot accurately be categorized as a hyper-preterist. He cites a lengthy quote from the *Hand-Book of the*

³⁸ Emphasis mine. See the online edition at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Books/1891_cook_christ-come/cook_tchc_00.html#1

Oneida Community as evidence. Because of its significance, this quote is provided here in full.

We do not mean by the second coming of Christ, the final and general judgment. The popular notion concerning the judgment of mankind is, that it is to be a single transaction, occupying a single period of time. Joining this notion to the discovery, which every reader of the New Testament must ultimately make, that the judgment of the second coming is clearly predicted in the New Testament as immediately to follow the destruction of Jerusalem, many have believed and taught that the judgment (meaning the whole, or final judgment) *is past*. These views, whether held by Universalists or Perfectionists, we disclaim, and instead of them, insist that the judgment of mankind, according to scripture, is divided into *two* acts, occupying *two* periods of time, separated from each other by an interval of more than a thousand years. In the twentieth chapter of Revelations this division of the judgment is unequivocally described. John saw, when Satan was first bound and cast into the pit, thrones and *judgment* given to the martyrs of Christ, and they lived and reigned with him a thousand years, but the rest of the dead lived not. "This," says the apostle, "is the first resurrection;" and we may properly add, this is the *first judgment*. Rev. 20: 5. Afterward Satan is loosed again, gathers Gog and Magog to the great battle, is defeated and cast into the lake of fire forever. Then again appears a throne, a *second* resurrection and a *second* judgment. Rev. 20: 12.

The same division of the judgment into two acts, separated by a long interval, is very conspicuous in the vision of the seals and trumpets. Rev. 6: 7, &c. When the sixth seal opens, the Lamb appears on the throne of judgment and the tribes of the earth wail because of him, saying, "*the great day of his wrath is come.*" Afterward the seventh seal is opened, and seven angels with trumpets are introduced. As they sound their trumpets successively, a variety of events transpire, necessarily occupying a long period of time. At length, after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, Christ is proclaimed sovereign of the world, and a second and final day of judgment is announced. Rev. 11: 15-18. Unless the sixth seal covers the same period with the seventh trumpet (which cannot be maintained with any show of reason), it is manifest to mere inspection that there are two acts of judgment—two periods of wrath and recompense.

As God divided mankind into two great families—the Jews and the Gentiles—so he has appointed a separate judgment for each. The harvest of the Jews came first, because they were ripened first. God separated them from the rest of the nations, and for two thousand years poured upon them the sunshine and the rain of religious discipline. When Christ came, he said the fields were white. By the preaching of Christ and his apostles, the process necessary to make way for the judgment was complete. At the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews as a nation were judged. Then the kingdom of heaven passed from the Jews to the Gentiles. Matt. 21:43. God commenced a process of preparation for a second judgment.

The Gentiles came under the sunshine and rain, which had before been sent upon the Jews. For nearly two thousand years the Gentile crop has been maturing, and we may reasonably look for the Gentile harvest as near.

That we may therefore speak of the judgment scripturally and intelligently, we will distinctly recognize the division of it which is made in scripture, by calling one of the acts the first judgment, and the other the final judgment. With this explanation, we shall be understood when we say, that in speaking of the second coming of Christ we refer to the first and not to the final judgment. It is not our object in this article to discuss the subject of the second or final judgment. The simple confession here that we believe it to be future, will sufficiently preclude any honest inference from the doctrine we are about to present, that we believe, or wish to believe that the day of our judgment is past.³⁹

Noyes, in other words, believed that a future aspect to the judgment and resurrection remains to be fulfilled even though the Second Coming, and the primary resurrection and judgment had already occurred in A.D. 70. Mr. Bradfield argues that this means he cannot be accurately categorized as a hyper-preterist. He writes:

John Noyes, though calling the coming in ad70 the ‘second coming’, still believed in a future, final judgment. He believed the millennial reign started in ad 70 and will be consummated in the future. He was more in line with some of the ‘partial’ preterists I have read, then any thing by Sam Frost, Max King, etc.⁴⁰

He explains further, “My point is simply that if John Noyes believed in a future and final judgment, then he’s partial. 2 out of 3 does not equal all.”⁴¹

Response to Counter-Evidence

According to Mr. Bradfield, it would be more accurate to classify John Humphrey Noyes as a “partial-preterist” since he believed that the Second Coming in A.D. 70 inaugurated the millennium and since he believed that there remained a future aspect of the resurrection and judgment to be fulfilled. According to Mr. Bradfield, no one who believes this can be classified as a true hyper-preterist. There are several problems, however, with Mr. Bradfield’s argument.

³⁹ *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community*, 32–34.

⁴⁰ In a personal email dated April 15, 2004.

⁴¹ In a personal email dated April 23, 2004.

Hyper-Preterism and Partial-Preterism

In the first place, no “partial-preterist” believes what Noyes believed; namely, that what is commonly referred to in theology as the “Second Coming of Christ” occurred in A.D. 70.⁴² Nor do any “partial-preterists” believe that the resurrection or final judgment occurred in A.D. 70. Hyper-preterists of all varieties could read Noyes’ works on the Second Coming, and despite the fact that they might have differences with certain exegetical details, they could generally affirm the overall arguments that he makes. This is why Ernest Hampden-Cook was so appreciative of the works of Noyes. No futurist and no “partial-preterist” could read and affirm the basic argument that Noyes makes. Noyes affirms the most basic doctrine of hyper-preterism; namely, that the Second Coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70.

Hyper-Preterism in Other Nineteenth Century Authors

It must also be pointed out that Noyes’ version of hyper-preterism was not that unusual when compared to the versions of hyper-preterism espoused by other acknowledged nineteenth century hyper-preterist authors. James Stuart Russell, for example, taught that the events described in Revelation 20:7–10 had yet to be fulfilled. Russell explains:

It is evident that the prediction of what is to take place at the close of a thousand years does not come within what we have ventured to call ‘apocalyptic limits.’ These limits, as we are again and again warned in the book itself, are rigidly confined within a very narrow compass; the things shown are ‘*shortly* to come to pass.’ It would have been an abuse of language to say that the events at the distance of a thousand years were to come to pass *shortly*; we are therefore compelled to regard this prediction as lying outside the apocalyptic limits altogether.

We must consequently regard this prediction of the loosing of Satan, and the events that follow, as still future, and therefore unfulfilled. We know of nothing recorded in history which can be adduced as in any way a probably fulfillment of this prophecy. Wetstein has hazarded the hypothesis that possibly it may symbolise the Jewish revolt under Barcochebas, in the reign of Hadrian; but the suggestion is too extravagant to be entertained for a moment.⁴³

⁴² See, for example, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. “The Historical Problem with Hyper-Preterism,” in *When Shall These Things Be?*, 53.

⁴³ James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (Bradford, PA: International Preterist Association, Inc., 2003), 522.

Russell adds, “This we believe to be the sole instance in the whole book of an excursion into distant futurity; and we are disposed to regard the whole parenthesis as relating to matters still future and unfulfilled.”⁴⁴ Yet, in spite of this, Russell is widely recognized as one of the early proponents of hyper-preterism.

Ernest Hampden-Cook taught a version of hyper-preterism very similar to that of Noyes. Hampden-Cook taught that the Second Coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70, and like Noyes, he taught that the “Millennium” was inaugurated in A.D. 70. In the Preface to the Second Edition of *The Christ Has Come*, he explains:

It is commonly supposed that the “Millennium” or Kingdom of God is still entirely future, and will be visible and earthly in character. The belief contended for in the following pages that it is an unseen and (as the name “Kingdom of heaven” implies) heavenly sovereignty which has been in existence ever since 70 A.D. is repugnant to many Christians.⁴⁵

According to Hampden-Cook, the Millennium “stands for an exceedingly long period which began at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (i.e., soon after the book of the Revelation was written), and has not yet terminated.”⁴⁶

Hampden-Cook goes even further than Noyes, however, in suggesting the possibility of a “Third Advent” of Christ at the end of the current “Millennium.” He writes:

The term Millennium itself is derived exclusively from the “thousand years” of Rev. xx. There is absolutely no scriptural foundation for the popular fancy which identifies it with a time of perfect earthly peace, innocence and bliss. Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that when the Christ should become King all sin and sorrow would immediately cease. On the contrary, the very purpose for which His Kingdom exists is the gradual diminution and extinction of evil. He must reign until God has put all His enemies under His feet. And as soon as this is accomplished the *raison d’être* of His Kingdom ceases, and He surrenders the sovereignty to God – even the Father. (I Cor. xv. 24, 25). Why should it be deemed incredible or absurd that the “Millennium” or “thousand years” of Rev. xx denotes a constantly-improving condition of things, rather than a state of realised earthly perfection? All Christians believe in the good time that is yet to be. Most speak of this good time as the Millennium, and expect it to be inaugurated by the Lord’s Second Advent. But with far better scriptural warrant,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 523.

⁴⁵ Available online at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Books/1891_cook_christ-come/cook_tchc_00.html#2

⁴⁶ *The Christ Has Come*, chapter XIV. Available online at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Books/1891_cook_christ-come/cook_tchc_14.html

we may call it “the new heaven and the new earth” (Rev. xxi. 1), and may believe that it will be inaugurated by Christ’s Third Advent, when, all His foes being at last under His feet, He will surrender the now-existing Kingdom to God – even the Father; that God may be all in all. If this view be correct, human history is simply a step further advanced than is commonly supposed.⁴⁷

In the Introduction to *The Christ Has Come*, Hampden-Cook reveals even more clearly how similar his version of hyper-preterism is to that of Noyes. He indicates that the “first resurrection” occurred at the Second Coming of Christ in A.D. 70. He then adds the following:

In the New Testament, there are also clear and definite announcements of a world-wide resurrection and a world-wide judgment still future. “When the thousand years are finished...I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat upon it...And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne and books were opened and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev.xx. 7. 11-13). “The hour cometh when all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have practised ill unto the resurrection of judgment.” (John v. 29). The personal presence of the Lord Jesus is implied by the fact, that He will be seen sitting on the great white throne; and that it is in response to His voice that all who are then dead will rise from their graves. But in any case belief in a Third Advent is not in any way inconsistent with the fact that the Second Advent took place, 1800 years ago. Yet truth forbids us to apply to the first-named event details which belonged only to the last-named; and which have therefore, been realised once for all.⁴⁸

The point of all this is simply to demonstrate that the hyper-preterism of Noyes is not at all unlike the understanding of hyper-preterism as presented by acknowledged hyper-preterists such as Russell and Hampden-Cook. If Noyes cannot be accurately classified as a hyper-preterist, neither can they.⁴⁹

Defining Hyper-Preterism

Part of the difficulty involved in this discussion is the inherent difficulty of finding a definition of “hyper-preterism” that all modern hyper-preterists would accept. This difficulty is inherent to the discussion of hyper-preterism because hyper-preterism is a non-confessional movement. It has no “hyper-preterist confession of faith,” and it has

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Available online at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Books/1891_cook_christ-come/cook_tchc_01.html

⁴⁹ The same could be said of those modern hyper-preterists who believe in an ongoing aspect of the resurrection or those who advocate the versions of hyper-preterism taught by Russell or Hampden-Cook.

no universally acknowledged spokesman whose views are accepted by all or even a majority as the standard expression of hyper-preterist theology. One of the most popular hyper-preterist websites, “The Preterist Archive,” lists, for example, several subgroups of hyper-preterists (e.g. Transmillennialism, Redirectionism, and Bimillennial Preterism). This website also provides a section covering some of the many issues currently being debated among the proponents of hyper-preterism. These are listed under the following headings:

- Annihilationism vs. Eternal Punishment⁵⁰
- The Rapture⁵¹
- Heaven Upon Spiritual Birth or Upon Physical Death
- Nature of the Resurrection⁵²
- Celebration of the Lord’s Supper⁵³
- Nature and Perpetuity of the Bride of Christ
- Will Sin Continue Forever?

Although not listed, the meaning of the “Millennium” is also a debated topic. The hyper-preterist author Kurt M. Simmons, for example, argues that only a “bimillennial” view is consistent with hyper-preterism. A single millennium, in his opinion, entails some element of futurism.⁵⁴

The debate over the doctrine of the resurrection is also interesting. The two most commonly held views among hyper-preterists appear to be the corporate body view of Max King and the “Immortal Body at Death” view of men such as Edward Stevens and John Noe.⁵⁵ However, there is deep disagreement about which of these views is most

⁵⁰ The hyper-preterist author John Bray, for example, advocates annihilationism. See his “The Fate of the Wicked at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Preterism/bray-john_p_03_01.html Other hyper-preterist authors denounce annihilationism.

⁵¹ This debate has largely been the result of Edward E. Stevens’ recent book *Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture*, Rev. ed. (Bradford, PA: International Preterist Association, 2003).

⁵² The hyper-preterist author Kenneth Perkins describes the three primary views held by most hyper-preterists in his article, “Preterist Views of the Resurrection.” He labels these views the “Corporate” view, the “Regeneration” view, and the “Post-Mortem” view. The article is available online at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Preterism/perkins-kenneth_03_p_02.html

⁵³ The debate concerns whether the Lord’s Supper should continue to be observed at all after the A.D. 70 Second Coming of Christ.

⁵⁴ See Kurt M. Simmons, “Why the Single Millennium Model Forces a Futurist Eschatology.” Available online at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Preterism/simmons-kurt_04_p_04.html

⁵⁵ For a thorough critical examination of these doctrines, see Robert B. Strimple, “Hyper-Preterism on the Resurrection of the Body” in *When Shall These Things Be?*, pp. 287–352.

compatible with the hyper-preterist thesis. Samuel Frost, for example, has recently written a critique of the doctrine of the resurrection taught in Tom and Steve Kloske's book *The Second Coming: Mission Accomplished*.⁵⁶ He writes:

When I finally came to the section of the Kloskes' book on this chapter [1 Cor. 15], I was a bit taken aback by what is, in my opinion, an untenable position. That is, if Preterism must argue for the A.D. 70 resurrection of the dead along these lines, then it is no wonder that it is having a hard sell to the Evangelical public at large and to scholarship in particular. I applaud the massive effort of the Kloskes', and their book is highly recommended as a sort of primer for Preterism 101. However, I must take issue with their interpretation of this passage, and in general, issue with others that support it like Dr. Kelly Birks, Ed Stevens, Walt Hibbard, and John Noe, just to name a few (all of these men I consider dear brothers, and some of them close friends and mentors).⁵⁷

Regarding the doctrine of the resurrection taught by the Kloske's (and Birks, Stevens, Hibbard, and Noe), Frost is highly critical saying, "if the KK [Tom and Steve Kloske] view is what we have to defend an [sic.] A.D. 70 resurrection, then Preterism, as our antagonists proclaim, is false as false can be."⁵⁸

The point of all of this is simply to demonstrate that there is a wide range of competing views held by those who consider themselves to be hyper-preterists. Some of these views are considered by other hyper-preterists to be inconsistent with hyper-preterism, but which hyper-preterist has the final say regarding what constitutes true hyper-preterism? Mr. Bradfield, for example, writes, "I agree that Noyes would be more in line with Russell, but I find their view odd and inconsistent."⁵⁹ Mr. Bradfield may consider the hyper-preterism of Russell (and Noyes) odd, but is Mr. Bradfield's judgment normative for all hyper-preterists? The fact of the matter is that a large number of hyper-preterists consider Russell (rightly so) to be an early proponent of hyper-preterism. When Mr. Bradfield says that Noyes' doctrine is "more in line" with Russell's view than with his own version of hyper-preterism, he is essentially granting my point; namely, that Noyes can also rightly be considered an early proponent of hyper-preterism.

⁵⁶ See Samuel Frost, "A Critical Response to the Kloske's Exegesis of I Corinthians 15." The article is available online at http://www.preteristarchive.com/Preterism/frost-samuel_04_p_01.html

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ In a personal email dated April 23, 2004.

Hyper-preterism is not a confessional movement. There is no “hyper-preterist creed.” There is no standard hyper-preterist systematic theology text.⁶⁰ And even if there were, would all hyper-preterists consider themselves bound to agree with it? No, because such would be tantamount to accepting the necessity of some form of creed or confession, and this is something hyper-preterists typically reject as being contrary to the spirit of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.⁶¹

The Problem With Noyes

Mr. Bradfield objects to my classification of John Humphrey Noyes as a hyper-preterist primarily because of Noyes’ other objectionable doctrines. But these other doctrines do not alter the fact that his eschatology is hyper-preterist in nature. In fact, he considered many of his more unusual doctrines as being necessary implications of the hyper-preterist view. In his discussion of his views of marriage, for example, Noyes writes:

We come now to ascertain more definitely the precise position of Christ and Paul with respect to all social relations, that of marriage included. It is plain that the constitutional principle on which they stood, toward which they were leading the church, and which they expected would expand and occupy the whole field of the future, was declared in the saying of Christ, “*In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage.*” Now, whatever may be the exact meaning of the state designated by the term “resurrection,” it was undeniably the condition towards which Paul was urging his course, the condition towards which he ever pointed the church as the goal immediately before them.⁶²

His views of the Second Coming were also what led him to found the Oneida Community itself. The *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community* contains an “Introduction to the Outline of Doctrines.” The author of this Introduction writes:

...if the final Kingdom of Heaven has been established by Christ's second coming, all progress among men, must consist in an approximation to its standard of manners and social life. The highest civilization must rule, and a final coalescence of the institutions of visible and invisible society must take place, on the platform of resurrection refinement and unity. Those who accept the promises

⁶⁰ Although Samuel Frost’s website indicates that he is in the process of writing one.

⁶¹ See, for example, Edward E. Stevens, “Creeds and Preterist Orthodoxy.” Available online at http://www.preterist.org/articles/Creeds_Preterist.asp

⁶² *Hand-Book of the Oneida Community*, 57–58.

here given, are compelled by a clear line of argument to adopt a new social standard.⁶³

Yes, these are strange doctrines, but even today, many acknowledged hyper-preterists advocate doctrines that some other hyper-preterists find strange or odd. It is apparent from reading the numerous intra-mural debates among hyper-preterists that some of these other doctrines are considered not only strange but dangerous as well.

I am not suggesting that hyper-preterism does, in fact, necessitate these other strange doctrines. Many futurists have also taught strange doctrines. But that is all entirely beside the point. I am simply pointing out the fact that the existence of such strange doctrines does not change the fact that Noyes was an early proponent of hyper-preterism. It is easy to understand why modern hyper-preterists would not want to consider Noyes an early proponent of their doctrine, but I am not suggesting he was the founder of the hyper-preterist movement or doctrine. I am simply asserting that he was in fact one of the first open proponents of the doctrine.

Conclusion

I believe that a careful examination of the writings of John Humphrey Noyes indicates that he was an early proponent of what is today referred to as “hyper-preterism,” or “full-preterism,” or sometimes “consistent preterism.” A hyper-preterist could read Noyes’ teaching on the Second Coming and largely agree with what is said. No futurist and no “partial-preterist” could affirm it. Noyes believed the Second Coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70. He also believed that the millennium was inaugurated in A.D. 70 and that there was a secondary element of the resurrection and judgment yet to be fulfilled, but these same doctrines were held by other acknowledged nineteenth century hyper-preterist authors such as Russell and Hampden-Cook. In conclusion, then, I stand by the original remarks in my Introduction to *When Shall These Things Be?*

⁶³ Ibid., 22.