

The Historic Hope of the Church

By Dr. George E. Ladd, Professor of New Testament History and Biblical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary

The question of the relationship of the Rapture to that of the Tribulation may be set in proper perspective if we first survey the history of prophetic interpretation. The hope of the Church throughout the early centuries was the second coming of Christ, not a pretribulation rapture. If the Blessed Hope is in fact a pretribulation rapture, then the Church has never known that hope through most of its history, for the idea of a pretribulation rapture did not appear in prophetic interpretation until the nineteenth century.

Pretribulationists are reluctant to admit this. Books which defend this pattern of prophetic teaching frequently try to show that it is an ancient teaching extending all the way back to apostolic times. They usually seek proof in the assertion that the early fathers believed in the imminence of Christ's return. If the return of Christ was an event for which men were looking - so the argument runs - then the coming of Christ was expected to occur at any moment, i.e., before the Tribulation and before Antichrist appeared. In this chapter, we shall trace the broad outlines of the history of prophetic interpretation with reference to the Church and the Tribulation to discover whether a pretribulation rapture was an element in the hope of the Church.

Let it be at once emphasized that we are not turning to the church fathers to find authority for either pre- or posttribulationism. The one authority is the Word of God, and we are not confined in the strait-jacket of tradition. Our purpose is to place this question in a proper historical perspective, inasmuch as some teachers claim that pre-tribulationism is an ancient and honorable doctrine and one which is necessary for Christian faith. While tradition does not provide authority, it would nevertheless be difficult to suppose that God had left His people in ignorance of an essential truth for nineteen centuries.

The early church lived in expectation of Christ's return. "Ye perceive how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes to maturity. Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, 'Speedily will He come and will not tarry,' and 'The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look' " (I Clement 23). To deduce from this attitude of expectancy a belief in a pretribulation rapture and an any-moment coming of Christ, as has often been done, is not sound. The expectation of the coming of Christ included the events which would attend and precede His coming. The early fathers who emphasized an attitude of expectancy believed that this entire complex of events - Antichrist, tribulation, return of Christ - would soon occur. This is not the same as an any-moment coming of Christ.

The Didache

This is proven by the teaching of one of the earliest pieces of Christian literature after the New Testament, the so-called Didache, a piece of Christian instruction dating from the first quarter of the second century. The last chapter is devoted to exhortations in view of the woes expected at the end of the world. The author urges an attitude of watching in view of the uncertainty of the time of the end. "Watch over your life; let your lamps be not quenched and your loins be not ungirded, but be ready, for you know not the hour in which your Lord cometh" (16.1). This language, however, cannot be taken to mean an "any-moment rapture," for the author proceeds to sketch the consummation of the age in which he warns the Church against the peril of falling away from the faith when Antichrist appears. There "shall appear the deceiver of the world as a Son of God, and

shall do signs and wonders and the earth shall be given over into his hands and he shall commit iniquities which have never been since the world began. Then shall the creation of mankind come to the fiery trial and many shall be offended and be lost, but they who endure in their faith shall be saved by the curse itself. And then shall appear the signs of the truth. First the sign spread out in Heaven, then the sign of the trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead: but not of all the dead, but as it was said, The Lord shall come and all his saints with him. Then shall the world see the Lord coming on the clouds of Heaven."



The Didachist looks forward to the appearance of Antichrist who will rule the world and inflict men with severe persecution. The many who are to be offended and be lost are professing Christians who do not stand true; for only those who endure in their faith shall be saved. (The meaning of the phrase "by the curse itself" is unknown.) After the Tribulation will appear signs of the end, the final sign being the resurrection of the righteous. Then at last the Lord will come, bringing with Him the saints who have died. The purpose of the Didachist in writing this exhortation was to prepare the Church for the Great Tribulation and the sufferings to be inflicted by the Antichrist, and to urge steadfastness; "for the whole time of your faith shall not profit you except ye be found perfect at the last time."

While the author of the Didache emphasized the spirit of expectancy and watchfulness in view of the uncertainty of the time of the coming of Christ, he expects the Church to suffer at the hands of Antichrist during the Great Tribulation, and he expects the coming of Christ to occur only at the end of this time of woe.

Barnabas

A second piece of Christian literature which is really anonymous bears the title "The Epistle of Barnabas." It stems from about the same period as the Didache. The author of this little tract is looking not only for the second coming of Christ but also for the last time of trouble. He warns believers to seek out earnestly those things which are able to save them, and to flee from all the works of lawlessness and to hate the era of this present time that they might be loved in that which is to come. They are to shun fellowship with sinners and wicked men, for "the final stumblingblock is at hand of which it was written, as Enoch says, 'For to this end the Lord has cut short the times and the days, that his beloved should make haste and come to his inheritance' " (4.3). This means that the Antichrist is at hand, but the Lord will cut short the time of the Tribulation that His Beloved - the Lord Jesus - might make haste and return to His people. According to this, Barnabas expected the Church to go through the Tribulation and Christ to return only at its termination. This is again asserted in 15.5: "When his Son comes, he will destroy the time of the wicked one and will judge the godless, and will change the sun and moon and the stars, and then he will truly rest on the seventh day." The second coming of Christ will destroy the wicked one, the Antichrist; and if so, the appearance of Antichrist is expected to precede the Lord's return.

That Barnabas could not have looked for an any-moment return of Christ is proven by his expectation that the end would not come until the Roman empire should fall. "Ten kingdoms shall reign upon the earth and there shall rise up after them a little king, who shall subdue three of the kings under one" (4.4). Antichrist would arise after the Roman empire had broken'down into ten kingdoms. This obviously could not occur at once, for in the first century Rome's might and stability was at its apex.

The Shepherd of Hermas

An expression appears in the Shepherd of Hermas (cir. 150 A.D.) which has been claimed by

pretribulationists to teach a pretribulation rapture. The words are, "If then you are prepared beforehand, and repent with all your hearts toward the Lord, you will be able to escape it, if your heart be made pure and blameless, and you serve the Lord blamelessly for the rest of the days of your life. Go then and tell the Lord's elect ones of His great deeds, and tell them that this beast is the type of the great persecution which is to come" (Vision 4,2,5). When this phrase is lifted out of its context, it might be understood to teach some such idea as that of a rapture from tribulation. However, when one reads the entire passage, he finds that the exact opposite is taught, for the author is referring to preservation in and through tribulation.

Hermas was walking down the road and met a fearful monster like a leviathan with fiery locusts going out of its mouth, about a hundred feet in size, with four colors on its head: black, blood red, gold, and white. Hermas began to pray to the Lord to rescue him from the beast, but instead he was reminded of his faith in the Lord and the great things he had been taught. Then boldly he faced the beast head-on, and after the beast rushed at him as though it would destroy a city, it came near and stretched itself out on the ground and put forth nothing except its tongue, and did not move at all until Hermas passed it by.

The beast was a symbol of the Great Tribulation to come. The escape promised was not deliverance from the presence of tribulation, but preservation in the presence of tribulation. This is proven by the interpretation of the four colors. Black means the world, fiery red means the destruction of the world, gold represents the Church purified by fire, and white means the world to come. Here we have a teaching common in the early church that tribulation effects purity. "The golden part is you, who have fled from this world, for even as gold is 'tried in the fire' and becomes valuable, so also you who live among them [that is, the fire and blood of tribulation] are being tried. Those then who remain and pass through the flames shall be purified by them." "Therefore do not cease to speak to the ears of the saints. You have also the type of the great persecution to come, but if you will [warn them] it shall be nothing." Hermas is admonished to prepare the Church for the Tribulation, to warn that it is God's purpose to purify the Church by the fiery trial of persecution. If the Church is prepared, it need not fear the sufferings to come; they will be as nothing to those whose faith is fixed in the Lord.

Justin Martyr

One of the earliest fathers (cir. 150) who was an avowed premillennialist was Justin Martyr. He makes only passing reference to Antichrist, but this reference proves that Justin expected the Church to go through the Tribulation and to be persecuted by Antichrist. Speaking of Christ's second advent, he says: "He shall come from heaven with glory, when the man of apostasy, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us Christians, who, having learned the true worship of God from the law, and the word which went forth from Jerusalem by means of the apostles of Jesus, have fled for safety to the God of Jacob and the God of Israel." Justin has no fear of this coming Tribulation, for he says, "Now it is evident that no one can terrify or subdue us who have believed in Jesus over all the world. For it is plain that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus" (Dialogue with Trypho, 110). Justin, who himself became a martyr, feels that the sufferings to be inflicted by the "man of apostasy," the Antichrist, will be little worse than what Christians were already gladly and fearlessly suffering for Christ.

Irenaeus

The first of the church fathers who devotes an extensive discussion to the coming of Antichrist and

the Great Tribulation is Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the late second century A. D. Irenaeus was a thoroughgoing premillenarian, the first, in fact, to give us a premillennial system of interpretation; but he did not believe in an any-moment coming of Christ and a rapture of the Church before the Tribulation and coming of Antichrist. On the contrary, he looked forward to a series of significant historical events within the Roman empire before Antichrist could arise and Christ return. "In a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord's disciples what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned. He teaches us what the ten horns shall be which were seen by Daniel, telling us that thus it had been said to him [see Rev. 17:12]. It is manifest, therefore, that of these [potentates], he who is to come shall slay three, and subject the remainder to his power, and that he shall be himself the eighth among them. And they shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and shall give their kingdom to the beast, and put the church to flight. After that they shall be destroyed by the coming of our Lord" (Against Heresies, 5,26,1).

Three important points are to be noted in Irenaeus' expectation of the future. First, he does not believe that the end is immediately at hand. A little further on he warns the Church against teachers who are propagating false views about the identity of the Antichrist. Like Barnabas, he urges them rather to await the division of the kingdom into ten parts which must occur before Antichrist can arise. Rather than expecting an immediate end, men are to await the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Second, Antichrist, when he appears, will put the Church to flight. Speaking of this tribulation which will befall the Church at the hands of Antichrist, Irenaeus says, "And for this cause tribulation is necessary for those who are saved, that having been after a manner broken up, and rendered fine, and sprinkled over by the patience of the Word of God, and set on fire [for purification], they may be fitted for the royal banquet" (27,4). Again, as in Hermas, God is expected to use the Great Tribulation to accomplish the purification of the Church.

Third, the second coming of Christ will take place at the end of the Tribulation to destroy the Antichrist and to deliver His Church. "But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man [Antichrist] and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous [the Church] the times of the kingdom" (30,4). At this time the resurrection of the saints and the rapture of the living saints will take place. "For all those, and other words, were unquestionably spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of the Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule; in (the times of) which (resurrection) the righteous shall reign on the earth, waxing stronger by the sight of the Lord: and through Him they shall become accustomed to partake in the glory of God the Father, and shall enjoy in the kingdom intercourse and communion with the holy angels, and union with spiritual beings; and (with respect to) those whom the Lord shall find in the flesh, awaiting Him from heaven, and who have suffered tribulation, as well as escaped the hands of the Wicked one" (35,1).

In this first detailed outline of prophetic events after the New Testament, Irenaeus looks for the overthrow of Rome and the division of the Empire among ten kings. Then Antichrist will appear and will kill three of the ten and rule over the other seven. Antichrist will direct his wrath particularly against the Church and put her to flight, but God will use the Tribulation to purify the Church. After three and a half years, Christ will return in glory to punish Antichrist, raise the dead saints, and bring the living saints, both those who have suffered persecution by Antichrist and those who have escaped his anger, into the millennial kingdom.

Tertullian

Along with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, another avowed premillennialist was Tertullian of North Africa of the late second and third centuries. "But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely built city of Jerusalem" (Adv. Marcion 3,25). In one passage, Tertullian writes as though he believed in an any-moment coming of Christ. "But what a spectacle is that fast approaching advent of our Lord, now owned by all, now highly exalted, now a triumphant one!" (The Shows, 30).

However, Tertullian cannot be designated a pretribulation rapturist. He did not look for a restoration of the Jews to their land and a time of tribulation which would primarily concern the restored Israel. "As for the restoration of Judea, however, which even the Jews themselves, induced by the names of the places and countries, hope for just as it is described, it would be tedious to state at length how the figurative interpretation is spiritually applicable to Christ and His church, and to the character and fruits thereof" (Adv. Marcion, 3,25). Furthermore, Tertullian believed that the end could not come at any moment but would be heralded by signs of warning. In his tractate "On the Resurrection of the Flesh" (22), Tertullian speaks of directing his prayers "toward the end of this world, to the passing away thereof at the great day of the Lord - of His wrath and vengeance - the last day, which is hidden (from all), and known to none but the Father, although announced before hand by signs and wonders, and the dissolution of the elements, and the conflict of nations." After describing some of the heavenly signs which would announce the coming of the end, Tertullian quotes the Biblical exhortation, " 'Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things, and to stand before the Son of man'; that is, no doubt, at the resurrection, after all these things have been previously transacted." The object of Tertullian's hope and prayers is not a secret any-moment coming of the Lord to rapture the Church; it is the hope of standing before the Son of man after a series of cosmic signs have appeared and "all of these things have taken place." He places this event at the day of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead at the end of a series of preceding signs and events.

Lactantius

Lactantius was a Latin father of the late third and early fourth centuries who devoted considerable attention in his "Divine Institutes" to the coming of Antichrist and the consummation of the age. There is one quotation which, if taken out of context, might suggest the expectation of an any-moment rapture. "It is permitted us to know respecting the signs, which are spoken by the prophets, for they foretold signs by which the consummation of the times is to be expected by us from day to day, and to be feared" (7,25). However, it is not the coming of Christ which was daily expected but the appearance of a series of signs which would precede the end. Lactantius believed that human history was to run a six thousand year course and to be followed by a millennium. Of the six thousand years, there remained in his day some two hundred years before the end would come (25).

During this period, profound rearrangements of the political situation must take place. The Roman empire must be taken away from the earth and the government returned to Asia, for the East must again bear rule and the West be reduced to servitude (7,15). Rome was doomed to perish and from the ruins would arise ten kings who would divide the world among them. Only then would appear the Antichrist to reign over the whole world. Before these final events, a severe deterioration must occur in human society, and Lactantius devotes considerable space to the description of these evil times. So terrible will they be that nine-tenths of the human race will be destroyed. The Church, along with the world, is destined to suffer the evils of the end-times. "Of the worshippers of God also, two parts will perish; and the third part, which shall have been proved, will remain" (7,16). Finally, Antichrist will appear and will terribly afflict the righteous and will rule the earth forty-two months. The righteous will flee from the ravages of Antichrist but will be pursued and surrounded. Then they will call upon God and God will hear them and send a Great King to rescue them and to

destroy the wicked with the fire and sword (7,17). This coming of Christ will be preceded by a special sign: "There shall suddenly fall from heaven a sword, that the righteous may know that the leader of the sacred warfare is about to descend" (19). After this, the dead will rise and the world be renewed for the millennial kingdom.

Such an expectation is far removed from that of an any-moment coming of Christ and a deliverance of the Church from the tribulations of the end-times.

Hippolytus

One of the first Christians to give us a treatise on the Antichrist is Hippolytus, a Bishop of Rome during the first decades of the third century A. D. Hippolytus applies the fourth beast of Daniel to the Roman empire then ruling the world, and interprets the ten toes of the image in Daniel 2 of ten kings who would arise out of the Roman empire. This is also symbolized by the ten horns of the fourth beast. The horn which will root up three horns is Antichrist. He is to destroy the kings of Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia, after which he will rule the world and persecute the saints. Hippolytus tentatively suggests that the mark of the Beast, 666, may mean Latinus, but he is uncertain.

"Wherefore we ought neither to give it out as if this were certainly his name, nor again ignore the fact that he may not be otherwise designated. But having the mystery of God in our heart, we ought in fear to keep faithfully what has been told us by the blessed prophets, in order that when these things come to pass, we may be prepared for them, and not be deceived" (50).

Hippolytus interprets Revelation 12 of "the tribulation of the persecution which is to fall upon the Church from the adversary" (60). There the "saints" are identified as the Christian Church. The time and times and half a time refer "to the one thousand two hundred and three score days (the half of the week) during which the tyrant is to reign and persecute the Church, which flees from city to city, and seeks concealment in the wilderness among the mountains" (61). After the Abomination of Desolation and all of the attendant events, "what remains but the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from heaven, for whom we have looked and hoped? who shall bring the conflagration and just judgment upon all who have refused to believe on Him. For the Lord says, 'And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.' 'And there shall not a hair of your head perish.' 'For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be' " (64). After the return of Christ will take place the resurrection and the kingdom of the saints as announced in Revelation 20, and I Thessalonians 4.

In this survey of the early centuries we have found that the Church interpreted the book of Revelation along futurist lines; i.e., they understood the book to predict the eschatological events which would attend the end of the world. The Antichrist was understood to be an evil ruler of the end-times who would persecute the Church, afflicting her with great tribulation. Every church father who deals with the subject expects the Church to suffer at the hands of Antichrist. God would purify the Church through suffering, and Christ would save her by His return at the end of the Tribulation when He would destroy Antichrist, deliver His Church, and bring the world to an end and inaugurate His millennial kingdom. The prevailing view is a posttribulation premillennialism. We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early church; and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century.

The Middle Ages

After the first centuries, the expectation of an Antichrist as an evil world ruler to appear just before the return of Christ gradually disappeared. Revelation came to be interpreted along spiritual lines,

and after the time of Augustine, his "amillennial" view that the thousand years began with Christ's earthly life and would continue to the end of the church age became the predominant interpretation.

During the Middle Ages, the "historical" interpretation of Revelation arose in which the book was thought to give in symbolic form an outline of the history of the Church. Antichrist was frequently interpreted to mean the Saracens, and the false prophet to mean Mohammed. Pope Innocent III made effective use of the Revelation to stir up support for his crusade.

The "Protestant" Interpretation

The Reformers took over this type of historical interpretation of prophetic truth and found in the Antichrist a prophecy of the Papacy. Luther at first felt that Revelation was defective in everything which could be called apostolic or prophetic and was offended by the visions and symbols of the book; but he came to feel that the prophecy was an outline of the whole course of church history and that the Papacy was predicted both in chapters 11 and 12 and in the second beast of chapter 13. The number 666 represented the period of papal domination.

This "historical" type of interpretation with its application of the Antichrist to papal Rome so dominated Protestant study of prophetic truth for three centuries that it has frequently been called "the Protestant" interpretation. Some historical interpreters were premillennialists. They found the history of the Church symbolized in the seals, vials, and trumpets, with the second coming of Christ in chapter 19. After the return of Christ, there would be a millennial reign before the final consummation. We would emphasize that there have been many students of the Word who have been thorough-going premillennialists who shared very little of the outline of prophetic truth which today is called premillennialism. Such were Joseph Mede, Isaac Newton, William Whiston, J. A. Bengel and Henry Alford. These men, and many others, taught the premillennial return of Christ, but they did not believe in a personal Antichrist who would appear at the end of the age to persecute the saints during a three and a half year period of tribulation. Neither did they believe in what we call "the Great Tribulation." They believed that the Tribulation extended throughout the history of the Church, and the three and a half years or twelve hundred and sixty days were frequently interpreted to mean twelve hundred and sixty years of church history before the end times could arrive. A new and different interpretation was created by Daniel Whitby (1706) who thought that the world was to be completely evangelized and the Church to rule the world. Vitranga (d. 1722) applied this view to the interpretation of the Revelation producing postmillennialism. He followed the historical interpretation for the first nineteen chapters and interpreted the first part of chapter twenty as a future era when the Church would reign over the world after the destruction of anti-Christian Rome. The millennium was thus placed in the future but before the return of Christ; and the meaning of "postmillennialism" is that Christ's return would occur only after the millennial period. One of the most famous exponents of this view was David Brown (1891), one of the co-editors of the widely used Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's Commentary on the Bible.

It is obvious that so long as the Roman church and the Papacy were identified with the Antichrist, no idea of a pretribulation rapture could be possible, for in this interpretation the period of tribulation was not 1260 days but 1260 years. Such a view lent itself to date-setting. Whiston predicted that the millennium would begin in 1715. When it failed to occur, he deferred the date to 1734. When he survived both dates, he projected the time to 1766 but did not live to see his prediction fail a third time. Bengel expected the end to come on June 18, 1836.

Many of the great Christians of Reformation and post-Reformation times shared this view of prophetic truth and identified Antichrist with the Roman Papacy. This is a fact which should be well pondered by modern students who insist that a pretribulation eschatology is essential to an orthodox theology. Among adherents of this interpretation were the Waldenses, the Hussites, Wyclif, Luther,

Calvin, Zwingli, Melancton, the Baptist theologian John Gill, the martyrs Cranmer, Tyndale, Latimer and Ridley. John Wesley, following Bengel, thought that the papal Antichrist would be overthrown in 1836 and would be succeeded not only by a millennium but by two millenniums, the first on earth and the second in Heaven. Jonathan Edwards held that the fulfillment of the Revelation in the history of the Church was an unanswerable argument for the inspiration of the Scriptures. He held that the 1260 years of Revelation began in 606 A. D. and that he was therefore living in the last days.

Some of these men were premillennialists, but Edwards adopted the Whitbyan postmillennialism. However, they all shared the historical view: none of them was a futurist, looking for a short tribulation with a personal Antichrist just before the return of Christ. Therefore, the idea of a pretribulation rapture had no place in their interpretation of prophecy.

THE RISE AND SPREAD OF PRETRIBULATIONISM

IN THE preceding chapter, we traced the broad outlines of the history of prophetic interpretation and found no trace of pretribulationism. The first three centuries were characterized by a futurist, premillennial interpretation but not of the pretribulation type. The Middle Ages forsook this primitive interpretation for either a spiritual interpretation or the historical view. The latter was so widely accepted in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that it has been called the "Protestant" view.

The Return to Futurism

With the dawn of the nineteenth century, there occurred a movement which brought about a return to the primitive view and which also gave rise to pretribulationism.

Whitby's new postmillennial view exercised great influence in Europe in the eighteenth century and resulted in a minimizing of the importance of the doctrine of the Lord's return. At the turn of the century, a strong reaction arose, which reasserted the importance of the personal coming of Christ and often emphasized the place of the earthly kingdom after the Lord's return. Outstanding among the leaders of this prophetic revival were William Cuninghame, Joshua W. Brooks, Edward Bickersteth, T. R. Birks, and E. B. Elliott - all of whom proclaimed the personal, premillennial coming of Christ but continued to follow the historical method of applying the prophecies of Antichrist to the Papacy and interpreting the 1260 days as years.

Many periodicals appeared which were devoted to the exposition of prophecy and to heralding the imminent return of Christ. Most of them experienced only a short life but exercised great influence for a few years. One of these periodicals was *The Investigator* (1831-36), edited by J. W. Brooks, the last volume of which contained a *Dictionary of Writers on the Prophecies* in which Brooks compiled over 2,100 titles of books on prophetic subjects, together with 500 commentaries on books of the Bible. Numerous anonymous tracts appeared bearing such titles as "The End of All Things is at Hand."

Prophetic conferences began to spring up. A wealthy banker, Henry Drummond, sponsored a series of prophetic conferences at his villa at Albury Park from 1826-1830. Drummond's own interpretation was of the historical, pre-millennial type. To this conference came Edward Irving, an eloquent preacher who expounded prophetic themes to a London congregation of over a thousand drawn from the most brilliant circles of society. Irving later toured Scotland to proclaim the imminence of Christ's coming and there won the Bonar brothers to a millennial view, preaching sometimes to out-door crowds of ten to twelve thousand. It is a tragedy that a young man of such great gifts and promise experienced so sad an end. In 1830, he wrote a tract in which he asserted

that Jesus possessed a fallen human nature. Shortly after this, tongues broke out in his congregation. Heresy proceedings were initiated and he was deposed in 1833 and died, broken-hearted, the next year.

Just before Irving attended the Albury meeting, he had come upon a copy of the work on the Coming of the Messiah by the Spanish Jesuit, Lacunza (Ben-Ezra). Lacunza had rediscovered the truth of the second advent of Christ to establish His millennial kingdom which had been lost in Catholicism. Even though he was a Catholic, he applied the prophecy of the second beast in Revelation thirteen to a corrupted Roman priesthood. In 1827, this book and the millennial question became the main objects of study at the Albury conference. Lady Powerscourt attended these meetings and became so interested that she established similar meetings at Powerscourt House. It was in these Powerscourt meetings that some of the characteristic doctrines of "Darbyism" can be discovered for the first time.

Out of this revival of interest in prophetic truth came two new interpretations: futurism and "Darbyism." The futuristic interpretation was essentially a return to the method of prophetic truth found in the early fathers, essential to which is the teaching that the Antichrist will be a satanically inspired world-ruler at the end of the age who would inflict severe persecution upon the Church during the Great Tribulation. At the end of the Tribulation, Christ would return to deliver the Church, punish Antichrist, raise the righteous dead, and establish His millennial kingdom. Darbyism modified this outline of truth by teaching a coming of Christ to rapture the Church before the Tribulation and before His coming in glory to establish the millennial kingdom.

The rediscovery of futurism is associated with the names of S. R. Maitland, James Todd, and William Burgh. Before we turn to these men, we should note that a futurist interpretation of prophecy had earlier been recovered within the Roman Catholic Church. It will probably come as a shock to many modern futurists to be told that the first scholar in relatively modern times who returned to the patristic futuristic interpretation was a Spanish Jesuit named Ribera. In 1590 Ribera published a commentary on the Revelation as a counter-interpretation to the prevailing view among Protestants which identified the Papacy with the Antichrist. Ribera applied all of Revelation but the earliest chapters to the end time rather than to the history of the Church. Antichrist would be a single evil person who would be received by the Jews and would rebuild Jerusalem, abolish Christianity, deny Christ, persecute the Church and rule the world for three and a half years. On one subject, Ribera was not a futurist: he followed the Augustinian interpretation of the millennium in making the entire period between the cross and Antichrist. He differed from Augustine in making the "first resurrection" to refer to the heavenly life of the martyrs when they would reign in heaven with Christ throughout the millennium, i.e., the church age. A number of Catholic scholars espoused this futuristic interpretation of Antichrist, among them Bellarmine, the most notable of the Jesuit controversialists and the greatest adversary of the Protestant churches.

This futurist interpretation with its personal Antichrist and three and a half year period of tribulation did not take root in the Protestant church until the early nineteenth century. The first Protestant to adopt it was S.R. Maitland. He received a legal training but abandoned the profession in 1823 to become a curate. In 1826 he published a pamphlet whose title is self-explanatory: An Enquiry into the Ground on which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John Has Been Supposed to Consist of 1260 Years. This small pamphlet was an attack on the year day theory of the historical interpreters, insisting upon a period of 1260 literal days of tribulation before the return of Christ. The pamphlet resulted in a "paper-war" with the historicists which lasted many years.

James H. Todd, professor of Hebrew at Dublin, met Maitland and became his follower. In 1838 he gave the Donnellan lectures using the subject, Discourses on the Prophecies Relating to Antichrist in the Writings of Daniel and St. Paul, dedicating the published lectures to Maitland. This is a

detailed study of over five hundred pages on these prophecies. Todd repeatedly refers to Antichrist as "the head and leader of a formidable persecution of the Christian Church," "the great enemy and persecutor of the Church," and the like. In 1840, he published a second series of studies on Antichrist in the Apocalypse.

William Burgh has given us the first systematic treatment of prophetic events following the new futurist interpretation in *Lectures on the Second Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (1835). In 1820, Burgh had published a tract in which he followed the historical premillennial view, but he became converted to the new futurist interpretation.

Burgh knows of only one coming of Christ, at the end of the Tribulation when the dead in Christ will be raised and the living believers raptured. He believed that Israel was to be restored at the end of the age when the seventieth week of Daniel 9 would occur. Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel only to break it in the midst of the week and to turn in wrath against Israel. The second coming of Christ will bring destruction to Antichrist and a great outpouring of the Spirit upon Israel who will then become the center of the millennial kingdom to preach the Gospel of grace and to be the agency in the salvation of the Gentile nations. Christianity will then be extended without hindrance throughout the earth and the Gentiles will be brought en masse into the Church. The first resurrection at the beginning of the millennium will not include all the Church, for the greater part of the Church will come to salvation during the millennium. The first resurrection of saints to reign with Christ will be a blessing granted to those who have been willing to share Christ's sufferings and humiliation during this present evil age and especially in the time of Tribulation at the hands of Antichrist.

These early futurists followed a pattern of prophetic events similar to that found in the early fathers, with the necessary exception that Rome was not the final kingdom. In fact they appeal to the fathers against the popular historical interpretation for support of their basic view. A pretribulation rapture is utterly unknown by these men, and while Israel is to be restored, the Gospel which Israel will preach in the millennium is the Gospel of grace, and those who are saved are included in the Church. The Tribulation concerns both Israel and the Church; in fact, it will be the time of testing an apostate Christianity.

The Rise of Pretribulationism

A second out-growth of the prophetic awakening of the early nineteenth century was Darbyism, or Dispensationalism, which had its birth within the Plymouth Brethren movement. A pretribulation rapture is an essential element of this system. The Brethren movement had its beginnings in Dublin in 1825 when a small group of earnest men, dissatisfied with the spiritual condition of the Protestant church in Ireland, met for prayer and fellowship. Soon others joined the fellowship and other similar groups sprang up. In 1827, J. N. Darby entered the fellowship. Although there was an interest from the start in prophetic truth, the center of emphasis was "The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ" (the title of Darby's first tract) in reaction to the deadness and formalism of the organized church and the ordained ministry. Outstanding among the new groups which arose in Ireland and England was the fellowship in Plymouth, from which the movement derived its name. Leader of the Plymouth fellowship for many years was B. W. Newton, a man of considerable learning and scholarship. Two other outstanding Brethren were S. P. Tregelles, recognized by the entire world of Biblical scholarship for his contribution to the study of the history of the Greek text of the New Testament, and George Muller, the great man of prayer.

We have already mentioned the Albury Park conference and the Powerscourt meetings. Darby and other leaders of the new movement attended the meetings at Powerscourt, and Darby's leadership in the area of prophetic interpretation here became evident. It was at Powerscourt that the teaching of a

pretribulation rapture of the Church took shape. Tregelles, a member of the Brethren in these early days, tells us that the idea of a secret rapture at a secret coming of Christ had its origin in an "utterance" in Edward Irving's church, and that this was taken to be the voice of the Spirit. Tregelles says, "it was from that supposed revelation that the mortem doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose. It came not from Holy Scripture, but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God." [S.P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, first published in 1864...] This doctrine together with other important modifications of the traditional futuristic view were vigorously promoted by Darby, and they have been popularized by the writings of William Kelly.

Not all of the Brethren accepted the teaching of a pretribulation rapture. In 1842, B. W. Newton of Plymouth published a book entitled *Thoughts on the Apocalypse* in which he taught the traditional view that the Church would go through the Tribulation. There arose a sharp contention over the issue of pretribulationism between the two men. Newton "considered Mr. Darby's dispensational teaching as the height of speculative nonsense" (H. A. Ironside). He was supported in his posttribulation views by Tregelles. A rift followed which was never healed. This was the first of a series of many contentions which marred the history of the Brethren movement.

Within early Brethrenism, we find two types of prophetic interpretation: the traditional futurism, and Darbyism or Dispensationalism. The influence which has extended to prophetic study in America has been the latter. Doubtless Newton's views on the Church and the Tribulation were discredited because he was accused of holding unsound views on the person of Christ.

Pretribulationism in America

In the early nineteenth century, postmillennialism was the prevailing interpretation of prophecy in America. Jonathan Edwards had accepted Whitbyan postmillennialism, and the publication of several popular commentaries widely disseminated the doctrine. Matthew Henry's famous commentary was published in America in 1828-29, and we are told that more than two hundred thousand volumes circulated by 1840. Henry applied the prophecies on Antichrist to the Papacy, and interpreted the first resurrection and the millennium to mean political restoration of those who had suffered at the hands of papal Rome. He understood the second resurrection to be the revival of political power of wicked men.

Thomas Scott's commentary, the most popular and widely quoted of the early nineteenth century works of its sort, spread the Whitbyan theory. Adam Clarke's commentary was first published in America in 1811-25. Clarke saw in Daniel's vision of the stone crushing the image a prophecy of the victory of the Church over the Roman empire, a victory which would extend until the Church filled the earth. Two of the most effective agencies in accomplishing this end were the British and Foreign Bible Society and the contemporary missionary enterprise. Clarke interpreted the second coming of Christ in Matthew 24 of the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, and he understood the "end of the age" in Matthew 24:3, 14 to refer to the end of the Jewish age accomplished at that time.

A reaction to postmillennialism arose in America as it had in England. This may be illustrated by two prophetic magazines. The *Literalist* was published in Philadelphia between 1840-1842 advocating, as its name indicates, a literal view of prophetic interpretation in opposition to the spiritualizing method of the predominant Whitbyism. The *American Millenarian and Prophetic Review* appeared in New York in the years 1842-44 with a similar objective. Both journals drew heavily upon writers of the English prophetic awakening such as Bickersteth, Brooks, and Cuninghame. In fact, the *Literalist* consisted largely of English reprints. Both journals followed the path marked out by their English exemplars of the historical "Protestant" interpretation with its 1260 years and papal Antichrist. Thus although thoroughly millenarian, they were not futurist in their understanding of the Tribulation and the Antichrist.

Against this background of prevailing postmillennialism and a groping search for a more satisfying interpretation of prophecy, it is easy to see how Darbyan futurism possessed such attraction and impelling power. It came with a freshness and vitality which quite captured American Christians. Darby visited America six times between 1859 and 1874 and was warmly welcomed. His system of prophetic interpretation was eagerly adopted, not because of the attractiveness of the details of his system, but because its basic futurism seemed to be a recovery of a sound Biblical prophetic interpretation - which in fact it was - and to give to the doctrine of the Lord's return the importance it deserved. In other words, Darbyism to many Christians meant the rediscovery of the precious Biblical truth of Christ's glorious second coming, even though the basic truth was accompanied by some important details which were not essential to the premillennial return of Christ and which many later came to feel were not in the Word of God. Once more, as in the early church, the return of Christ became a living and vital expectation in the lives of Christian people and in the pulpit ministry of many a preacher. Little wonder that the view has been cherished and defended with such deep emotional overtones. Darbyism in fact restored something precious which had long been lost.

This new prophetic emphasis at once found expression in the prophetic and Bible conference movement. A. C. Gaebelien, telling the story of the Scofield Reference Bible, finds its background within this movement. Interest in premillennialism grew to a point where a great prophetic conference was suggested by Nathaniel West. A call was issued by a committee of eight men, among whom were James H. Brookes and A. J. Gordon, with the indorsement of one hundred and fourteen "Bishops, Professors, Ministers and Brethren." The conference was called to meet in the church of the Holy Trinity (Episcopal) in 1878. A second prophetic conference was held in Chicago in 1886. Prominent in these conferences were such men as Stephen Tyng, W. R. Nicholson, Nathaniel West, S. H. Kellogg, A. J. Gordon, James H. Brookes, W. J. Erdman, W. G. Moorehead and A. T. Pierson.

Another series of meetings of even greater importance was that which met at Niagara on Lake Ontario from 1883-1897. This conference was the outgrowth of a small Bible study fellowship initiated in 1875 by a handful of men among whom were Nathaniel West, J. H. Brookes and W. J. Erdman. They were joined the next year by A. J. Gordon. This group met from place to place until the conference at Ontario was undertaken. Among the leading teachers of the Ontario conferences, according to A. C. Gaebelien, were James H. Brookes, A. J. Gordon, W. J. Erdman, Albert Erdman, George C. Needham, A. C. Dickson, L. W. Mundhall, H. M. Parsons, Canon Howitt, E. P. Marvin, Hudson Taylor, J. M. Stifler, Robert Cameron, W. G. Moorehead and A. T. Pierson. After this pioneer of American Bible conferences was discontinued, a new conference at Seacliff, Long Island, was opened in 1901, and it was here that the plan for the Reference Bible embodying the dispensational system of interpretation occurred to Dr. C. I. Scofield.

In view of the modern notion that pretribulationism has been one of the foundational tenets of a sound presentation of prophetic truth, it is important to note that many of the leaders of this early prophetic, Bible conference movement either were or became posttribulationists. Many of the teachers at the Niagara Conference accepted J. N. Darby's pretribulation rapture along with the doctrine of Christ's return. Of the men named above, James H. Brookes, A. T. Pierson, and C. I. Scofield have been among the most influential supporters of this view. However, other teachers did not accept it, and still others accepted it at first only to give it up after more mature study of the Word of God. Since it is often thought that all good and godly premillennialists must be pretribulationists, we shall note the views of several of these leaders who did not adhere to the pretribulation teaching.

Nathaniel West suggested and arranged the first prophetic conference in 1878 and was one of the leading teachers. His book, *The Thousand Years in Both Testaments* (1880), has been called the most important defense of premillennialism which has been written. However, West had no patience

with pretribulationism. He taught that the 144,000 who are sealed in Revelation 7 are the fulfillment of the promise in Romans 11 - the salvation of literal Israel. Their salvation will occur at the beginning of the seventieth week as a result of the ministry of the two witnesses (Rev. 11), and they are sealed that they might take the place of the Church which is seen in the great multitude in Revelation 7 - a multitude which is to suffer near extinction at the hands of Antichrist in the Great Tribulation. "They (these two groups) assure us also that the Christian Church will not be removed from the earth, or become extinct under persecution, but, reduced and suffering, will also live to see the Advent" (p. 245). "They (the 144,000) are ... the Israelitish Church of the Future It is not that Gentile believers have utterly perished in the apostasy, for Paul teaches the contrary. I Thess. iv:16,17; nor that no Jewish believers become martyrs, for John teaches otherwise, Rev. vii:9 But it is that, in the height of the apostasy, when the true Church is almost gone, God will restore Israel, and preserve of Israel an election, undestroyed by the tribulation, who shall live to see the Advent" (p. 249). West believed not that the Church would be removed by rapture and its place taken by a Jewish remnant, but that the Church would be removed by persecution and martyrdom.

These views were published in 1880 when emphasis upon pretribulationism had not yet become strong. In a later book (Daniel's Great Prophecy, 1898) when the issue had become more important and pretribulationism had won many supporters, West expressed himself in far more vigorous terms. Speaking of the 70th week, he said, "All the devices of interpretation which torture the Word of God to support a vain theory of exemption of the church from the tribulation are forever shattered" (p. 128). "It is needless to say that the apostles followed their Master's teaching and it took his Olivet discourse as the textbook of their eschatology. It ruled the whole faith of the early church. It settled every heresy as to the time of the advent. It corrected the Thessalonian error as to the 'any moment view.' Paul appeals to it to decide the question" (p. 130). "When the Antichrist and the Jews are in covenant, at the beginning of the 70th week, and clearer still, when the breach occurs between them at the middle of the week, then the determination of the year, perhaps the month, but never the day or hour will be certain, i.e., to all believers" (p. 131). Is pretribulationism a device which tortures the Word of God? a vain theory? a heresy? an error? So West believed.

A. J. Gordon

Another great man of God and student of the prophetic Word was A. J. Gordon, famed pastor of Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston, where he experienced many movings of the Spirit of God in revival. Gordon joined the Bible study fellowship in its second year and was a constant speaker at the Niagara conference. Yet if he were alive today, many zealous brethren would be ready to pronounce him dangerous.

In his book on the Lord's coming (Ecce Venit. 1889). Gordon parts company with the whole Darby system of interpretation. Although he constantly emphasized the importance of the truth of the Lord's return and often sounds like one who holds the "any-moment" view, Gordon did not look for a personal Antichrist and a three and a half year Tribulation. In its stead, he embraced the historical interpretation believing it is "more scriptural, and rests upon the more obvious and simple interpretation of the Word" (p. vi). Antichrist was the Papacy; the temple of God in which Antichrist sits in II Thessalonians 2 was the Church. "Where a Judaizing interpretation would lead us from this phrase of the apostle, to imagine a future temple rebuilt in Jerusalem, enthroning an infidel Antichrist, we have only to collate the passages in which the expression occurs to find how invariably it stands for Christ's mystical body, the church" (pp. 110f).

What then of the three and a half years of Antichrist's reign? Adopting the usual day-year theory of the historical school, Gordon believed that by the use of the 1260 years, "If the rise of the papacy could be fixed as to the exact day and year, we might not err in seeking by computation for the day and year of its fall, and so approximate closely the date of the coming of the Lord" (p. 205). Where

does this leave the usual "any-moment" theory which holds that Christ could have returned at any moment after His ascension? How could the coming of Christ have been "imminent" to anyone living before the 1260 years had elapsed?

As to the details of Christ's return, Gordon said, "Will He be visible to His Church alone at His Parousia, manifesting Himself unto them, but not to the world until a later epiphany, when, He shall appear in glory with His saints? Already there has been too much dogmatizing on these points; therefore we prefer to leave them for the day to reveal" (p. 211). On the secret rapture, he said, "upon the whole question of a secret rapture, we would speak with reserve, knowing that there are scriptures which give a different impression" (p. 246). There is no hint in Gordon's book of anything but a single, glorious, visible coming of Christ.

W . J. Erdman

One of the key men in the movement was W. J. Erdman, who served as secretary and leader of the Niagara Bible Conference for more than twenty years, and who also was one of the consulting editors of the Scofield Reference Bible. In his story of the Scofield Bible, A. C. Gaebelien describes Erdman as "an able, logical, and spiritual teacher of the Word." Dr. Erdman was pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago when Darby visited that city and at first he accepted Darby's pretribulation, any-moment view of Christ's return. Upon further searching of the Scriptures, Erdman decided that this view was not taught in the Word, and he felt he could no longer support a view for which he could not find Scriptural warrant. He thereupon wrote a tract entitled, "A Theory Reviewed" in which he questioned the any-moment theory, concluding with these words: "Should any deplore the adoption of the belief that the Lord will not come any moment, as if it would take away all joy and comfort, it is enough to answer in the words of another, 'Better the disappointment of truth than the fair but false promises of error.' " Erdman continued to believe in Christ's premillennial coming and that His return might take place within his own generation. However, he believed that the Church must pass through the Tribulation. In his Notes on the Revelation, Erdman said of the saints who are to be persecuted by Antichrist, "unless the contrary can be proved, it is a fair inference from many facts that by the 'saints' seen as future by Daniel and by John are meant 'the Church' which consists of Jews and Gentiles" (p. 47).

Robert Cameron

Another teacher, coming into the fellowship in 1878, was Robert Cameron. He like Erdman at first accepted the Darby teaching but later turned from it. In 1922, he wrote Scriptural Truth About the Lord's Return in which he set forth his mature conclusions. "The Coming for and the Coming with, the saints, still persists, although it involves a manifest contradiction, viz., two Second Comings which is an absurdity" (p. 16). "Everywhere in the New Testament it is taught that to suffer for Christ is one of the highest honors Christians can have bestowed upon them. A desire to shirk suffering for Christ is a sign of degeneracy. At the close of this dispensation, it will still be counted an honor to suffer shame for our adorable Lord" (p. 18). The entire book is devoted to a refutation of the any-moment theory of Christ's coming.

Henry W. Frost

In 1885, Henry W. Frost attended the Niagara Conference for the first time and there received his first impulse toward missionary service, an impulse which blossomed in a ministry of thirty-six years of service for the China Inland Mission as Home Director. Frost also served as recording secretary for the Niagara conference.

In 1924, Frost wrote Matthew Twenty-four and the Revelation, and from it we would extract one

passage. Frost discusses interpretations of Matthew 24 which he believes to be unscriptural. One such view is that "Christ taught that the saints, dead and living, would be caught up to meet Him in the air at His coming, that this coming would occur before the seven-year-rule of the Antichrist, that during the tribulation of the following seven years many persecuted ones would be converted, that these would form a last band of Christians, and then, that these too, dead and living, would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air as He descends to the earth with those saints who were previously resurrected and translated." This view, says Frost, "might be held as truth if there were any scripture to confirm it, but (it) may not be held in view of the fact that no scripture even suggests such a process of events and many scriptures positively contradict it Nowhere do the Epistles state that the coming will take place before the tribulation, most passages being silent as to the time and some passages strongly teaching a post-tribulation advent." Frost's conclusion is that "living Christians will go into and through the tribulation" (p. 69).

W. G. Moorehead

The name of W. G. Moorehead of Xenia Theological Seminary from 1873 to 1914, appears in the call for the first prophetic conference in 1878. He was active in the Niagara movement from 1882; and his name will be found in the Scofield Reference Bible as a consulting editor. Yet he has written, "What becomes of (the saints) and of the Lord whom they encounter in the air (at the Rapture)? Do they abide there? No their stay in the air is but - momentary. There are only two other places in the New Testament where the phrase 'to meet' occurs . . . and in both of them the party met continues to advance still in the direction in which he was moving previously. Augustine perceived this : 'It is as He is coming, not abiding, that we shall go to meet Him.' Christ does not return to heaven with His saints; He comes on with them to the earth. As an ancient writer expresses it, - We shall be caught away to meet Christ, that all may come with the Lord to battle.' " Here is a clear rejection by an editor of the Scofield Bible of the pretribulation rapture of the Church with the two comings of Christ which is found in the Scofield Bible.

Charles R. Erdman

Among the scholars who contributed to the formation of the Scofield Reference Bible was Dr. C. R. Erdman of Princeton. In the Introduction of the Reference Bible, Scofield includes him among those "learned and spiritual brethren in Europe and America to whose labours he is indebted for suggestions of inestimable value."

Yet Erdman did not follow the prophetic outline taught by Scofield. Referring to the idea of a secret, any-moment rapture before the Tribulation with its two comings of Christ, Erdman says, "The doctrine appears to be founded upon a false interpretation of the translation, in the King James Version of the opening verse of the second chapter of Second Thessalonians. . . . The Revised Version, however, directly contradicts this mistaken view . . . He (Paul) clearly stated that the day in which believers were to be delivered from their tribulations, the day of Christ's coming and of their 'gathering together unto him,' would not dawn 'except the falling away' came first and 'the Man of Sin' was revealed" (The Return of Christ, pp. 54f).

How are we to account for the fact that a view which was at first quite widely accepted was later given up by so many of the outstanding leaders of the prophetic and Bible conference movement? Was it because of pernicious influences which turned them away from the pure teaching of the Word of God? Was it due to enemies of pretribulationism who prevailed upon these leaders to abandon the truth? Was it due to inroads of liberalism? None of these suggestions gives us the correct answer, which appears to rest in a simple historical fact. At the beginnings of the movement, the premillennialism which was so warmly received and taught was the Darby type of premillennialism with its pretribulation rapture. The two doctrines were thought by most of the

teachers to be synonymous; but the emphasis was placed on the Lord's return, not on such details as the relationship of the Rapture to the Tribulation. Pretribulationism was accepted "uncritically" along with a sound premillennialism. The thrust of James H. Brookes' influential book *Maranatha* (1878) shows that the enemy of that day was postmillennialism. Pretribulationism or posttribulationism were not issues. The Darby view of a pretribulation rapture was accepted without much question or careful study.

However, some of the outstanding teachers were unable to go along with the pretribulation theory, among them Nathaniel West and A. J. Gordon. Later in the movement, when greater emphasis began to be laid upon the details, the teachers began to study the Word more carefully, and many of them came to realize that along with sound Biblical premillennialism, they had accepted a teaching which upon mature reflection and study they decided was not Biblical. They had the courage publicly to reverse themselves at this point without in any way giving up the essentials of a Biblical doctrine of the Lord's premillennial return.

Throughout the entire movement as we have traced it, pretribulationism was never a teaching which was considered essential to a sound, Biblical view of The Blessed Hope. Men who differed at these points were not accused of betraying the Bible. In more recent times, due to the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible, the Bible school movement, etc., pretribulationism has been more widely accepted than ever before with the result that many Christians have never heard any sound Bible teachers who held a different position and therefore have naturally concluded that pretribulationism is essential to premillennialism. This is not true historically, and it is not true theologically or Biblically.

The teachers of the Word whose views we have discussed were all associated with the prophetic and Bible conference movement of a half century ago when pretribulationism was taking root in American Christian thought. We must add the views of others of more recent date who are outstanding men of God and defenders of the faith, who have found themselves compelled to abandon pretribulationism.

Philip Mauro was a patent lawyer who, after conversion, gave himself vigorously to the defense of the faith. He is included among the writers of the *Fundamentals* and produced some twenty-five books.

Mauro at first espoused dispensationalism. In 1913 he wrote *Looking For the Saviour* in which he defended the usual pretribulation rapture of the Church. In *The Kingdom of Heaven* (1918) he departed from the dispensational view of the postponed kingdom but was still a premillenarian. In *The Patmos Visions, A Study of the Apocalypse* (1925) he forsook the usual futurist interpretation of the Revelation, seeing in the two beasts the Roman empire and the Papacy. Finally, in *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (1928), Mauro broke completely with dispensationalism. Among the reasons was the sudden realization that the Scofield Bible "has usurped the place of authority that belongs to God's Bible alone." He says further, "It is mortifying to remember that I not only held and taught these novelties myself, but that I even enjoyed a complacent sense of superiority because thereof, and regarded with feelings of pity and contempt those who had not received the 'new light' and were unacquainted with this up-to-date method of 'rightly dividing the word of truth.' . . . The time came . . . when the inconsistencies and self-contradictions of the system itself, and above all, the impossibility of reconciling its main positions with the plain statement of the Word of God, became so glaringly evident that I could not do otherwise than to renounce it." [Mauro later became a ardent Preterist]

Rowland V. Bingham was General Director of the Sudan Interior Mission, President of Canadian Keswick Conference, and Editor of *The Evangelical Christian*. In 1937, Bingham published a little

book under the title, *Matthew The Publican and His Gospel* in which he set forth his changed views. In the Introduction, he tells us that during the first period of his Christian life he accepted the Gospel of Matthew at face value and revelled in its truth. But later he came in contact with dispensational writings which for the first time presented to his mind the reality of the second coming of Christ. "Never having listened to a single address on the Second Coming of Christ, I at once became infatuated with prophetic study." The second period of his life thus was dominated by a dispensational interpretation. "The reiteration of these (dispensational) propositions by such great and godly men whose names are known and beloved by the whole Church, many of them personally known and loved by me, had made their impression upon me."

There came a day, however, when his wife asked him, "Rowland, where do you get the 'Secret Rapture' idea in the Bible?" Bingham had no satisfactory answer; and he was driven to study the Word of God afresh but in deep confusion. Finally, faced with a week's Bible conference but with no message, "in sheer desperation I took out my Bible and threw myself helplessly on the Lord. And I know the blessed Illuminator, the Holy Spirit, responded. I commenced to read in Matthew, and all day long I read and reread, with such an unveiling that my soul was filled to ... overflowing. . . My old theories were being dispelled like mists before the sunshine. It means a great deal to have the cherished teaching of years upset in a day, and that without argument or human instrument." After outlining the interpretation to which he was driven, he adds, "As time has gone by, all my future study has confirmed me in the changed views of that day. In the study of this book I cannot expect to carry with me all those whose cherished teaching of years it upsets. I simply in the whole prophetic sphere plead for that liberty of interpretation which I gladly accord to others."

G. Campbell Morgan was one of the most gifted Bible teachers and expositors of the Word of God of the preceding generation. It is difficult indeed to discover Dr. Morgan's position in matters of prophetic interpretation, for different writings suggest different viewpoints. Sometimes he writes as though he were a thorough-going dispensationalist. In an early book (*God's Methods with Man*, 1898) Morgan distinguished between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Gospel of Paul and offered the usual dispensational outline of prophetic events (p. 172). In *The Teaching of Christ* (1913), he devoted a third of the book to our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom of God, but no dispensationalism is to be found. Almost no reference is made to Israel's relation to the Kingdom. Rather, the Kingdom is primarily the rule of God, then the sphere in which the rule is realized, and finally the results of that rule. The Kingdom is to be established by processes leading to, and culminating in a crisis - the second coming of Christ. Speaking of the Olivet Discourse, he says that the Church is the instrument of the Kingdom in the economy of God. In this book, Morgan sounds more like an amillennialist than a dispensationalist.

How can we account for these two points of view? We can only conclude that Morgan changed his interpretation of prophetic truth. Perhaps Philip Mauro's writings contributed to the change. We quoted at some length from Mauro's *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Of the argument of this book, Morgan wrote, "It is unanswerable." Furthermore, Morgan reviewed Mauro's *Study of the Apocalypse* which departs radically from the usual futurist interpretation and wrote, "(My) reading results in a conviction that the general thesis is completely established. It is the most lucid and satisfying work on the Apocalypse that I have ever read."

Nor is this all. When Rowland Bingham's *Matthew the Publican* appeared, Morgan wrote to Bingham in the following words: "I suppose I may say that across the years I have passed through very much of your own experience with regard to these prophetic matters. At any rate, at the moment I accept without any qualification the philosophy of your interpretation I think the view that makes Matthew Jewish is utterly false. The phrase 'secret Rapture' has to me for a long time been a very objectionable one, and utterly unwarranted in its wording, and in what it is made to stand for by the teaching of Scripture."

Bishop Frank Houghton, General Director of the China Inland Mission since 1940, has written, "While our primary emphasis must surely be upon the fact of our Lord's personal coming, and the obligation upon us who have this hope to 'purify ourselves, even as He is pure,' and to bear witness to His Gospel in all lands, I cannot but say that, as the years go by, I am more and more amazed that any one should claim to have found in the Scriptures justification for the view that the coming is to be in two stages (one secret and the other public), and that the Church will escape the Tribulation.

"We are on unsafe ground as soon as we begin to conjecture, apart from the clear statements of Scripture, what God is, or is not, likely to do."

Oswald J. Smith is known around the world because of his great zeal for world evangelization. We are compelled to conclude that Dr. Smith experienced a change of view about the Rapture and the Tribulation. In his book, *Is the Antichrist at Hand?* (1926) he wrote, "I have always held the view that the rapture precedes the revelation by some seven years, and that the Church therefore will not go through the Tribulation." He admits that he cannot be dogmatic and that his mind is open toward the other view.

Apparently his mind was shortly changed, for a year later appeared *When Antichrist Reigns in* which he sees the Church in the Tribulation. He holds that Matthew 24 is the seventieth week of Daniel. Verses 1-14 describe the first half of the week, and verses 15-51 the second half of the week. Of verses 9-10 which fall in the first half of the final seven year period, Smith says, "So the church will again be bitterly persecuted even to the point of martyrdom." Of the Great Tribulation and the appearance of Antichrist, he says, "For when the Antichrist emerges from the temple it will be to exterminate both Jews and Christians alike." False prophets will tell "the fleeing Christians and Jews that the Messiah has come and is at Jerusalem." Applying these truths, he writes, "Surely the hour is at hand. The great tribulation must be almost upon us, the fearful reign of the Antichrist about to commence. And then the battle of Armageddon, and then - the glorious revelation of our blessed Lord. And then, ah, then, at last, at last, the Golden Age, the Millennium. Hasten, glad Day! Hasten, judgment and tribulation! Hasten, oh hasten, Thou Christ of God, Thou mighty Prince of Peace!" He then describes the return of Christ which he finds in verse 31: "As He descends the trumpet sounds, and the angels are dispatched to gather the elect and to bear them in the twinkling of an eye to their Lord and Master." This apparently is the Rapture of the Church.

That this represents Dr. Smith's present views may be seen from the fact that this chapter was reprinted, with only minor verbal changes, in *Prophecy - What Lies Ahead?* (1952). In this book, Christ's return is placed after the Tribulation. If the question of the Rapture and Tribulation, Dr. Smith says, "But, you ask, is the Church to go through the Tribulation? That is not the question. It is this: Is the Church ready? Are you ready, ready either for Tribulation or Rapture? If you are, that is all that matters. What difference does it make so long as you are ready? ... If you are to be in it, you cannot escape, and, if you are to escape, you will not be in it." This is hardly the language of pretribulationism.

Dr. Harold John Ockenga, Pastor of Park Street Church, Boston, has been raised up by the Lord to be one of the giants of our day in defending the faith, in the winning of souls through the promotion of evangelism in New England and through evangelistic campaigns, and in the prosecution of worldwide evangelization. When he came to his present church, the missionary budget was less than \$2500. After nineteen years this has been raised to \$220,000.

Writing in *Christian Life* (February, 1955), Dr. Ockenga tells us how he came to give up his pretribulation eschatology and to believe that the Church would enter into the Great Tribulation. The article is very brief and is more a personal testimony than a defense of posttribulationism. Insurmountable difficulties were recognized in pretribulationism. "Is it conceivable that the Jews

without the Pentecostal presence and power of the Holy Spirit will do during the tribulation what the church in Holy Spirit power could not do in 2,000 years?" "No amount of explaining can make (I Thess. 4:16,17) a secret rapture. It is the visible accompaniment of the glorious advent of the Lord. No exegetical justification exists for the arbitrary separation of the 'coming of Christ' and the 'day of the Lord.' It is one 'day of the Lord Jesus Christ.' " "Another shattering blow to my dispensational eschatology came when I realized that the church age is not a parenthesis in the divine redemptive plan but is the great era of redemption, of salvation, and of revival."

These men, like those of the earlier generation, passed through the experience of accepting dispensational teaching but of being driven to conclude that it did not coincide with the teachings of the Word of God. But who is to say that Mauro, Bingham, Morgan, Houghton, Smith and Ockenga are any less men of God and true to the Word? The author is personally acquainted with other Christian leaders who have given up pretribulationism; but they have not gone on record and so cannot be quoted.

Pretribulationism has not been and never ought to be a test of a sound view of prophetic truth. Pretribulationism is a recent view which was formulated 125 years ago by one wing of the Plymouth Brethren and accepted in America by a circle of devout and godly men but rejected by others who were equally devout and godly and equally devoted to the propagation of the truth of the Lord's return.

There ought to be today liberty in the interpretation of the Word at this point. It is a reversal of history and Scripturally indefensible to label any deviation from a pretribulation eschatology a step toward liberalism, and it is holding up a human interpretation as though it had the authority of Scripture itself.

One of America's outstanding pretribulationists was H. A. Ironside; we would do well to imitate his words of charity toward those who differed with him. Speaking of Baptist theologian A. H. Strong's accusation of heresy in Brethren doctrine, Ironside replied, "It passes our comprehension how any man, or set of men, with an atom of genuine love for the Lord and His people, can deliberately brand as heretics fellow-believers whose lives are generally fragrant with Christian graces, who stand unflinchingly for the inspiration of the entire Bible, simply because they hold different views on prophecy. Dr. Strong evidently does not believe in the secret rapture of the saints, but in the coming of the Lord in judgment at the end of the world. 'Brethren' would not brand him as a heretic for this, though they feel he has lost much by his defective views." Let us distinguish if we will between adequate and defective views of prophetic interpretation, but let us not be guilty of accusing another of heresy or liberalism because he does not agree with our pattern of prophetic truth.

Those who "love His appearing" should close ranks and stand together on the great fundamentals of the Word of God. A monument to American Fundamentalism is the series of twelve small volumes, published in 1909-11, financed by two laymen and sent to every Protestant minister in America. The purpose of The Fundamentals was to unite those who stood squarely on the fundamentals of the faith and to make a powerful statement in face of the inroads of liberalism. Included in the circle of defenders of the faith were not only dispensationalists like R. A. Torrey, A. T. Pierson, J. M. Gray, C. I. Scofield and A. C. Gaebelien, but non-dispensationalists like W. G. Moorehead, W. J. Erdman, H. W. Frost and C. R. Erdman, and even postmillennialists James Orr, B. B. Warfield, and E. Y. Mullins. Why can such unity not be demonstrated today?

Ten years later, the Fundamentalist movement within the Northern Baptist Convention was organized. Describing the first Fundamentalist convention held in Buffalo in 1920, Curtis Lee Laws wrote, "The movement . . . was in no sense a premillennialist movement, but in every sense a

conservative movement. Premillennialists were much in evidence because premillennialists are always sound on the fundamentals, but eschatological questions did not enter into any of the Buffalo controversies. Standing solidly together in the battle for the re-enthronement of the fundamentals of our holy faith were premillennialists, postmillennialists, promillennialists and nomillennialists. Fortunately the conservative group contains no one who repudiates the blessed doctrine of the second coming of our Lord, but the group does contain those who differ radically with one another concerning the whole millennial question." If those who are "set for the defense of the faith" can stand together in the same spirit of basic unity in spite of differences in details, they will win far more ground than they will if they squander their energies in controversy.

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