

An Attack on the Pre-Trib Rapture

Dr. David R. Reagan

In October of this year, a pastor in California issued a video album titled, “Left Behind or Led Astray?”

The people pictured on the cover are actors in the video who portray
from left to right

C. I. Scofield
Margaret MacDonald
John Darby, and
Edward Irving

It is a very hard-hitting documentary film that is designed to debunk the concept of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

The album contains two DVD discs that run a total of 4 hours and 22 minutes. The presentation is very tedious and highly repetitious, to the point of quickly becoming downright boring. It was tiresome, to say the least. I wanted to shout “Hallelujah!” when it finally ended — and in order to prepare this review, I had to sit through it three times!

The video was produced by Joe Schimmel, the pastor of Blessed Hope Chapel in Simi Valley, California.

He also serves as president of an apologetics ministry called Good Fight Ministries (www.GoodFight.org). It is this ministry that actually produced the video.

Pastor Schimmel is a Premillennialist who believes in a Post-Tribulation Rapture. In other words, he believes that the Rapture and the Second Coming are all one event that will happen at the end of the Tribulation.

The purpose of his video documentary is to disparage the doctrine of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

An Exercise in Character Assassination

The program begins with a very irenic spirit, emphasizing that differences in opinion about the nature and timing of the Rapture should not divide Christians. In the process, Pastor Schimmel assures us that he loves us.

[**Video insert** of Pastor Schimmel speaking]

The video ends with the same spirit as the host,

[**Video insert** of Schimmel hugging Le Noury]

Pastor Schimmel, gives a big bear hug to Colin Le Noury.

Colin Le Noury is the director of the oldest Pre-Trib Rapture ministry in the world — namely, The Prophetic Witness Movement International in England.

This ministry was founded in December 1917 by F. B. Meyer in response to the Balfour Declaration and the liberation of Jerusalem.

The fundamental problem with the video is that between those irenic bookends there is an all-out effort to besmirch the reputations of every major person that Schimmel considers to have played a role in the development of the Pre-Trib doctrine.

In short, the video is one long, unrelenting and painful exercise in character assassination.

A Brief Note

Incidentally, that big bear hug at the end of the video was very deceptive. Colin Le Noury was never told the true purpose of the video. He was led to believe that Pastor Schimmel just wanted to interview him about the establishment and history of his ministry.

When Colin discovered the true purpose, he sent four separate messages demanding that the footage shot with him not be included in the video. His request were ignored.

Schimmel's Distorted History

Pastor Schimmel begins his review of the history of the development of the Pre-Trib rapture concept with a “sinister” 16th Century Spanish priest named

Francisco Ribera who proposed a Rapture 45 days before the end of the Tribulation. Nothing good, of course, could come from such a person, first because he was a Catholic priest, and second because he was a Jesuit.

He was followed by an 18th Century Baptist pastor from Wales by the name of

Morgan Edwards who proposed a Rapture in the middle of Daniel's 70th Week. This was a Pre-Trib Rapture because Morgan considered only the last half of Daniel's 70th Week to be the Tribulation.

But Edwards is written off as having no influence on anyone, and furthermore, he was defrocked for immorality.

That brings us to another Jesuit priest, a Latin American named

Manuel de Lacunza, who wrote in the late 18th Century. He also proposed a Rapture 45 days before the end of the Tribulation. He is dismissed as being “devious” because he hid his true identity by using a pen name.

Pastor Schimmel then ties that priest to

Edward Irving, who he describes as a “flamboyant and eccentric” English prophecy teacher who translated Lacunza’s book into English, but who also ends up being defrocked for heresy.

To make matters worse, Schimmel spends most of the four hours of the program trying to prove that the real turning point in the development of the Pre-Trib doctrine came in 1830

[**Video insert** of Margaret MacDonald]

when a 15 year old Scottish girl named Margaret McDonald got caught up in Charismania and began to experience emotional seizures and visions that were demonic in nature.

The concept of a Pre-Trib Rapture was supposed to have emerged from all these warped people, only to be picked up by another Englishman,

John Darby, who systematized the doctrine and then falsely claimed he had originated it. Darby then supposedly became a dogmatic and tyrannical cult leader.

When the doctrine spread to the United States, it was popularized by

C. I. Scofield in his popular study Bible. The only problem being that Scofield was a drunk, a crook, a jail bird, a shyster and a ruffian, among other nefarious things!

And then there is **Clarence Larkin**, the great illustrator of prophetic truths who turned out to be involved in pyramidology.

And if that is not enough to turn your stomach against the Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine, then consider some of the doctrine’s modern day proponents like

Chuck Missler and J. R. Church who are portrayed as dabblers in astrology.

Whew! By the time you get to the end of the video you feel like you have been watching an episode from some slimy modern-day TV reality program.

And then there is their treatment of our eminent leader — namely, **Tommy Ice**. He is derisively written off as

“Tim LaHaye’s bulldog.”

I found that label particularly interesting in view of the fact that two of the leading experts featured in the video are

Jacob Prasch and Dave MacPherson, both of whom come across as sarcastic, mocking, vilifying pit bulls who make Tommy Ice look tame in comparison.

Let me show you what am talking about.

Here’s Jacob Prasch talking about John Darby.

[**Video insert** of Prasch talking about Darby]

Or consider Dave MacPherson talking about C. I. Scofield. Notice how he drips with sarcasm.

[**Video insert** of MacPherson talking about Scofield]

An Irrelevant Focus

Personally, I found all this mud-slinging and character assassination totally irrelevant to the question of the validity of the Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine. After all, the only people God has to work through here on this earth are sinners.

Take **Morgan Edwards**, for example. Yes, he was defrocked when he experienced what appeared to be an emotional breakdown and stopped attending church and started drinking.

But no mention was made of his many years of faithful service to the Church in Wales, Ireland and here in the United States after he emigrated to this country in 1761.

Nor was there any mention of the fact that he co-founded the first Baptist university in the American colonies, known today as Brown University.

Oh, and also, no mention was made of the fact that he was completely restored to the church and thereafter lived an exemplary life.

And then there are the two **Jesuit priests** who believed the Rapture would occur 45 days before the end of the Tribulation and the return of Jesus.

Over and over we are reminded that they were Catholics who were members of the sinister Jesuit Order — as if nothing good could ever come from a Catholic priest.

On that basis, I guess we will have to fault the revival of the true Gospel by Martin **Luther** in the 16th Century since he was also a Catholic priest.

In fact, based on the reasoning of this video presentation, we will have to throw out all of Martin Luther's reforms since he ended up becoming the worst anti-Semite in the history of Christendom.

Keep in mind that he wrote a pamphlet near the end of his life in which he provided the blueprint for the Holocaust.

This was acknowledged by Hitler in his book, *Mein Kampf*, when he described Luther as “great warrior, a true statesman, and a great reformer.”

Margaret MacDonald

And then there is Margaret MacDonald, the hyper-Charismatic 15 year old Scottish girl who supposedly affirmed the Pre-Trib Rapture in her emotional trances in 1830 which are portrayed as demon-induced. They have an actor portraying her in the video,

[**Insert video**] and she is shown over and over and over again throughout the tedious four hours of the program sitting in the corner of a room rocking back and forth and looking terribly distressed.

I grew up in an Amillennial church where I never once ever heard the word, Rapture. After attending that church for 30 years, if you had asked me to define the Rapture, I probably would have said,

“It is a sensation you feel when your girlfriend kisses you.”

I came to a belief in a Pre-Trib-Rapture through my study of the Scriptures, and it was years later before I ever even heard of Margaret MacDonald.

Todd Strandberg, the founder of the Rapture Ready website, has written,

“I cannot recall ever hearing any Pre-Trib speaker say, ‘I believe in the Rapture because Margaret MacDonald told me so.’”

He goes on to say that he searched all the prophecy books in his library written by those with a Pre-Trib viewpoint, and he could never find even one reference to

Margaret MacDonald. He concluded,

“It was like looking for the cartoon character, ‘Where’s Waldo.’ Only in this case, no Waldo was to be found.”

I first heard of Margaret MacDonald when a Pre-Trib critic told me that the Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine had to be false because it originated with a teen age Scottish girl who experienced a demonic seizure.

That perked my curiosity, so I went searching for this girl, and I found her in a book written by Dave MacPherson in 1973 entitled,

The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin. Since that time, MacPherson has written at least six subsequent books on the topic, several of which come across as being nothing but the original book with a new title.

As Tommy Ice put it in one of his articles, “MacPherson has dedicated his life to full-time Rapture hating . . .”

I will never forget how amazed I was when I finished reading MacPherson’s book. That’s because the book had an appendix that contained Margaret MacDonald’s prophetic vision, and I could not find even so much as a hint of a Pre-Trib Rapture in what she supposedly said. Here was a whole book dedicated to the proposition that this girl was the originator of the a doctrine and not one trace of that doctrine could be found in the vision that MacPherson presents as proof!

And what is really amazing is that Pastor Schimmel admits this in his video program when he says:

Our personal position at Good Fight Ministries is that Margaret MacDonald’s end time Rapture vision is convoluted, and we can’t say for sure that Margaret Mac-Donald had a partial Pre-Trib Rapture in mind . . .

The fact of the matter is that this young woman’s vision was about the **Second Coming**, and the only novel things about it were, first, her unbiblical concept that it would be “secret and invisible” rather than an event that “every eye will see” (Revelation 1:7), and second, that it would consist of a partial rapture of Spirit-filled saints. By “secret and invisible” she meant the Lord’s Second Coming would be seen only by believers and not by the world.

The claims concerning the importance of Margaret MacDonald in the development of the Pre-Trib concept of the Rapture are so silly that Todd Strandberg was motivated to write:

From reading the writings of anti-Rapture authors, one would think we Pre-Tribbers would be reverencing MacDonald as Catholics do Mary. But clearly we don't. Pre-Tribbers don't go around reciting, "Hail Margaret full of grace, blessed art thou among visionaries, pray for us sinners at the time of the Rapture."

Summary

So, the first and most fundamental argument of the whole video is that the Pre-Trib Rapture concept cannot be true because it was developed by people who were theologically unorthodox, or morally deficient, or mentally unbalanced.

The second argument presented is that the Pre-Trib concept is too new to be true.

Dr. Andy Woods has responded decisively to both of these arguments in the series of 31 articles he has written to date about the Rapture.

His point is that a biblical doctrine is not to be judged by who developed it or when it appeared.

Rather, he states, "The standard of truth is 'does the concept harmonize with biblical revelation regardless of the person who originated it or the chronological era when the idea arose?'"

Conclusion

There is much, much more I could say about this despicable video, but I promised Tommy Ice I would keep my review of it very brief.

So, let me just conclude by saying that a remarkable new book has just been published about the historical development of the Pre-Trib Rapture concept.

It was written by **Dr. William Watson** and it is titled, "Dispensationalism before Darby."

Dr. Watson used more than 350 primary sources from the 17th and 18th Centuries in compiling his new book.

He points out that most of the sources that he quotes in the book have not been previously cited in the debate about the origin of the Pre-Trib Rapture — "most likely because they have not been read for centuries."

Concerning the concept of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, he concludes that

“very little of what John Nelson Darby taught in the mid-nineteenth century was new.”

The Results of the Research

His research clearly shows that by the end of the 17th Century, the concept of a Rapture that is separate and apart from the Second Coming had become a commonplace concept.

He names seven authors who held a “pre-conflagration” view of a rapture that would take the saints out of the world before it was consumed by fire.

He identifies six other authors who were “clearly Pre-Trib.”

And he names four who were not Pre-Trib but who refer in their writings to the existence of others who were.

He notes that the use of the word, Rapture, was also widespread, with some even referring to those who would be “left behind.” [Sorry, Tim!]

This interpretation of a Rapture separate and apart from the Second Coming continued to be espoused by Bible prophecy experts throughout the 18th Century. Their timing of the Rapture varied,

but by the end of the 18th century, “more than a generation before Darby, belief in a Rapture of the church before a great tribulation was commonplace in Britain.”

In fact, Dr. Watson demonstrates that “the belief was held not only by Baptists . . . but also by leading Anglicans . . . and even by Scottish Presbyterians . . .”

Without all of Dr. Watson’s detailed evidence, secular historian **Dr. Paul Boyer** had already come to this conclusion in his book, *When Time Shall Be No More; Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* which was published by Harvard University Press, in 1994. He wrote:

In a sense, Darby’s system contained nothing new. His focus on the future fulfillment of prophecy followed the eschatology of the early Christians. Premillennialism had been an option for Protestant evangelicals since Joseph Mede’s day (1586-1639), while rudimentary forms of “Dispensationalism” go back at least as far as Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202).

Even Rapture doctrine . . . can be found in the writings of early interpreters, including Increase Mather (1639-1723). But Darby wove these diverse strands into a tight and cohesive system that he buttressed at

every point by copious biblical proof texts, then tirelessly promoted through his writings and preaching tours.

The point is that the concept of a Pre-Trib Rapture did not simply drop from the sky into John Darby's lap in the 1830s. It was a concept that had been slowly developing over a several hundred years in the writings of Bible prophecy scholars from a variety of Christian traditions.

And the idea that the concept of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture originated with a couple of Jesuit priests, that it was reinforced by the ravings of a 15 year old demon possessed girl, and that it was put in its final form by a defrocked Presbyterian minister is, to put it mildly, absurd.

And in the process, the scholars who did develop the concept were not developing anything new. Rather, they were restoring a lost truth — just as did Martin Luther.

In fact, at the Diet of Worms in 1521, John Eck accused Luther of teaching a concept of salvation that was “too new to be true.” He said Luther's teachings could not be found in the writings of the Popes and Church Fathers.

Luther responded by noting that his doctrines could be found in the writings of a Church Father who was far more significant than Eck's sources —

namely, the Apostle Paul! The same is true of the Pre-Trib Rapture.