

JOHN NELSON DARBY AND THE RAPTURE

by Thomas Ice

Supporters of pretribulationism generally believe that John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) revived this lost New Testament teaching through intense Bible study during convalescence from a riding accident in December 1827 and January 1828. Evangelical opponents of pretribulationism often put forth theories that cast Darby in a bad light. For example, some say Darby got it from Edward Irving (1792–1834), while others say it originated from the prophetic utterance of a fifteen-year old Scottish lassie Margaret Macdonald (1815–1840). Both sources are understood to be tainted since Irving was considered exocentric and heretical and Macdonald's prophetic utterance is thought to be demonic. What is the evidence that Darby developed his view from his own personal study?

EARLY LIFE OF JOHN NELSON DARBY

John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) was born in his parent's London house in Westminster, November 18, 1800. "He was the youngest son of John Darby, of Markley, Sussex, and of Leap Castle, King's County, Ireland,"¹ the eighth of nine children, six boys and three girls.² Darby's father was a wealthy merchant who had married the daughter of an even wealthier merchant, Anne Vaughan in 1784.³ In Darby's lineage there is a mixture of service to the Crown, landed aristocracy, and business. Thus, Stunt correctly observes, "Darby was descended from gentry."⁴

Fifteen weeks after his birth, J. N. Darby was baptized on March 3, 1801, at St. Margaret's Anglican Church. His godfather was Lord Nelson, who was not present at the event. J. N. Darby clearly received his first name from his father and his middle name from his godfather, Lord Nelson.

On February 17, 1812, J. N. Darby entered The Royal College of St. Peter in Westminster, more commonly known as Westminster School in London. Even though young John lived only a few blocks from the school, he was a boarder there. All of J. N. Darby's brothers had attended this school since it was considered one of the finest public schools in London. It was a school attended mainly sons of the wealthy since its fees were too high for the poor. "The instruction was given by clergymen, and the subject matter consisted almost exclusively of Latin and Greek, with some English composition."⁵ Records do not show Darby's academic status, but in 1815 he graduated from Westminster and was sent by his father to Ireland for the first time in his life to attend Trinity College, where he commenced studies on July 3, 1815.⁶

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

¹ W. G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* (London: C. A. Hammond, 1926), 14.

² Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), 199.

Weremchuk has written the most comprehensive biography on Darby and has been relied greatly in the subsequent section.

³ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 19.

⁴ Timothy C. F. Stunt, "Influences in the Early Development of J. N. Darby" in Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt, eds., *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* (Carlisle, UK: 2004), 49.

⁵ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 29.

⁶ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 30.

Trinity College Dublin was an Anglican college founded in 1592 as a divinity school. Trinity was the leading academic institution in Ireland and on par with England's premier universities, Oxford and Cambridge.⁷ Darby took many classes in science and classics and graduated on July 10, 1819 as a gold medal winner in classics.⁸ At that time, such an award at Trinity meant that a student was the top student in his class in that academic field.

Darby did not take courses in theology, but was required to study Bible. In 1808, "Richard Graves (1763–1829) moved the college to include instruction in Bible for all students as part of the academic education." Bible lectures were held on Saturdays, often given by Graves.⁹ Further, Graves was a popular tutor in classics and Darby studied under his oversight. Elmore argues that Graves likely influenced Darby in the realm of interpretation as a futuristic postmillennialist, who "expected a future literal kingdom of Christ universally extended over the earth."¹⁰ Darby also adopted Graves' philo-Semitic view of the Jews, their future conversion and reestablishment in their homeland.¹¹ However, Darby did not adopt Graves' Arminianism, even though Darby may have been a postmillennialist while in college. Elmore observes: "The atmosphere of millennial expectancy in which he was trained certainly had its effect on his eschatology. The postmillennialism of Graves dealt very literally with unfulfilled prophecy, and spawned an attitude of anticipation for an imminent change in dispensation."¹² The influence of Graves upon Darby was significant and inculcated in him ideas and subject that would later become central in Darby's thought and writings. Nebeker notes: "A key element of Graves's eschatology was the literal interpretation of prophetic Scripture."¹³

"Graduates of Trinity College, Dublin," notes Ernest Sandeen, "were among the earliest and most able defenders of futurism."¹⁴ This appears to be the case because of a more literal hermeneutic taught by the faculty of the college. The more literal one's interpretation of Scripture, the more likely they would be to arrive at futurist conclusions in the area of biblical prophecy. "The theological grist for Darby's later synthesis was certainly present at Trinity College in his student days."¹⁵

DARBY'S CONVERSION AND CALL INTO MINISTRY

Upon graduation from Trinity College, Darby began the study of law and was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, Dublin, on November 9, 1819.¹⁶ Upon completion of the eight terms in preparation for a legal career, Darby, a newly-minted barrister "was called to the Irish bar on January 21, 1822."¹⁷ It was sometime during his law studies that Darby

⁷ Floyd Sanders Elmore, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby," (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 52–4.

⁸ Elmore provides a copy of Darby's academic record broken down by semester in Appendix A, "Two Peoples of God," 318.

⁹ Elmore, "Two Peoples of God," 53.

¹⁰ Elmore, "Two Peoples of God," 66.

¹¹ Elmore, "Two Peoples of God," 57–8.

¹² Elmore, "Two Peoples of God," 74–5.

¹³ Gary L. Nebeker, "John Nelson Darby and Trinity College, Dublin: A Study in Eschatological Contrasts," *Fides et Historia* (vol. 34, no. 2; Summer 2002), 96.

¹⁴ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 38.

¹⁵ Elmore, "Two Peoples of God," 73.

¹⁶ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 32.

¹⁷ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 32.

experienced personal conversion to Christ, around 1820 or 1821. Darby said, “I loved Christ, I have no doubt, sincerely and growingly since June or July 1820, or 21, I forgot which.”¹⁸

Becoming a believer in Christ as his Saviour about age twenty, having finished college and well into law studies, would certainly have been the result of significant intellectual contemplation, as well as spiritual influences. Stunt sees Darby’s conversion as a possible result of the “unconscious rejection” of his family’s Enlightenment bent. “The attraction of the ‘vital’ and spiritual Christianity he had encountered at Trinity outweighed the self-confident and manifestly ‘human’ good works of his family.”¹⁹ Shortly after his conversion, while training for the law, Darby sensed a call to the ministry.

On January 21, 1822 Darby was called to the Irish bar. There is however no indication that he ever practiced law. Stunt argues that Darby likely engaged in a great deal of theological reading before his ordinations, which would have prepared and qualified him for a rapid ordination within the established church.²⁰ The career shift greatly displeased his father, who disinherited him at that point. However, Darby was given a considerable fortune by his uncle,²¹ as well as some financial resources upon his father’s death in 1834.²²

DARBY’S EARLY PARISH AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

Darby’s career in the Church of Ireland began on August 7, 1825 when Bishop William Bissett ordained him as an Anglican deacon in Raphoe Cathedral. The Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee (1766–1831) ordained Darby as a priest on February 19, 1826 and appointed him curate over a large rural parish of Calary in County Wicklow, “one of the most impoverished regions in the Dublin diocese.”²³ Of this assignment, Darby said, “As soon as I was ordained, I went amongst the poor Irish mountaineers, in a wild and uncultivated district, where I remained two years and three months, working as best I could.”²⁴

Darby was looked upon with great reverence, not unlike that of a saint, by many of the Catholic poor. Archbishop Magee was working hard to generate an “Irish Reformation” to the greater Dublin area and Darby was seen as a key component in achieving this goal.

During Darby’s ministry in 1826–27, it is estimated that about 600 to 800 people a week “were converting to Protestantism through the vigorous efforts of the evangelical clergy.”²⁵ However, the conversion rate would soon drop to almost zero, as a result of Archbishop Magee’s issuance of a petition by “imposing the oaths of allegiance [to the British Crown] and supremacy [acknowledging the King as the Supreme Head of the

¹⁸ “Darby’s Marginal Notes, Next to 2 Timothy 3 in His Greek New Testament” in Weremchuk, *Darby*, Appendix C, 204.

¹⁹ Stunt, “Influences,” 52.

²⁰ Stunt, “Influences,” 52.

²¹ Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2007), 68.

²² Weremchuk, *Darby*, 38.

²³ Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake*, 68.

²⁴ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. Darby* (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1971), III, 297.

²⁵ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 45. Stunt notes that this conversion rate was documented in the monthly issues of the *Christian Examiner* from November 1826 to August 1827 in Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–35* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 167.

Church] on all converts from Romanism within his diocese.”²⁶ This act by Magee retarded the evangelistic momentum and deeply discouraged Darby. It seemed to reinforce all of the negative aspects of the state church that Darby had already developed, and now they were driven home hard by the archbishop’s actions.

Darby had been on a search both doctrinally and experientially for the true church, that he believed was not to be found in either Roman Catholicism or in the Church of Ireland. He believed neither could be the true church because their head was not Christ, but, either the state or the Bishop of Rome who, he saw as beholden to the state. “Recalling Jesus’ words to Pilate, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36), Darby was convinced that Magee’s actions compromised the divine calling of the church in a manner not dissimilar to those of Henry VIII, when he asserted civil authority over Rome,” observes Paul Wilkinson. “Since spiritual supremacy belonged to Christ, whose dominion was of a *heavenly* rather than earthly nature, Darby argued that Christ’s ministers should not concern themselves with civil affairs.”²⁷ This view of non-involvement in political affairs became a strong social and civil position of Darby’s followers and the Brethren movement.

Grayson Carter notes that two events throughout 1826 and early 1827 led to the “rapid development of Darby’s anti-Erastianism” shortly after his ordination.²⁸ The first was Archbishop Magee’s staunch words and deeds in defense of a state church under the jurisdiction of the state, including a “petition to the House of Commons for protection against the ‘hostility and calumny with which they and their religion have been, for a length of time, systematically assailed.’”²⁹ The second event was Darby’s response and strong objection to “Magee’s decision in 1826, to require all new converts from Roman Catholicism to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy to the English sovereign.”³⁰

A PROVIDENTIAL ACCIDENT

At this time, Darby was experiencing a disappointment from a failed spiritual and physical austerity phase in his life, the reality of an Erastian³¹ church that he believed was in ruins and differed little from the unbelieving world, and his search for an assurance of salvation in his conscience. “Darby’s Christian understanding and experience were about to change radically,”³² notes Brethren historian Tim Grass. As one who began his ministry as a high churchman, Darby was on the verge of becoming an evangelical dissenter when he experienced a riding accident. Darby describes it as follows:

²⁶ Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 169.

²⁷ Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake*, 75.

²⁸ Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions From The Via Media, c. 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 211.

²⁹ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 211.

³⁰ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 212. On Magee and his alienation of clergy within the Church of Ireland due to his views and policies, see, Peter Nockles, “Church or Protestant Sect? The Church of Ireland, High Churchmanship, and the Oxford Movement, 1822-1869” *The Historical Journal* (vol. 41, no. 2; June 1998): 457–93. For information on the Church of Ireland in Darby’s era, see, Alan Acheson, *A History of the Church of Ireland, 1691-2001*. 2nd ed. (Dublin: Columbia Press, 2003).

³¹ Erastian refers to a proponent of the views of the Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), who argued that the sins of Christians should be punished by the state and not the Church in the withholding of the sacraments.

³² Tim Grass, *Gathering to his Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain & Ireland* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006), 17.

As soon as I was ordained, I went amongst the poor Irish mountaineers, in a wild and uncultivated district, where I remained two years and three months, working as best I could. I felt, however, that the style of work was not in agreement with what I read in the Bible concerning the church and Christianity; nor did it correspond with the effects of the action of the Spirit of God. These considerations pressed upon me from a scriptural and practical point of view; while seeking assiduously to fulfil the duties of the ministry confided to me, working day and night amongst the people, who were almost as wild as the mountains they inhabited. An accident happened which laid me aside for a time; my horse was frightened and had thrown me against a door-post.³³

This period of Darby's life is known among Darby scholars as "The Convalescence" during which he experienced "The Deliverance."³⁴ After the accident, Darby was taken to the home of Susannah Pennefather (1785–1862), his older sister, in Dublin in order to recover. Darby's convalescence was a time when "the questions in his mind began to resolve themselves."³⁵ He wrote: "I was troubled in the same way when a clergyman, but never had the smallest shadow of it since." He declared: "I judge it as Satan: but going from cabin to cabin to speak of Christ, and with souls, these thoughts sprang up, and if I sought to quote a text to myself it seemed a shadow and not real. I ought never to have been there, but do not think that this was the cause, but simply that I was not set free according to Romans viii. As I have said, I have never had it at all since."³⁶

The three or more months Darby spent recuperating from his accident were undoubtedly the most formative period in his life and remarked upon it. In one account he states:

I am daily more struck with the connection of the great principles on which my mind was exercised by and with God, when I found salvation and peace, and the questions agitated and agitating the world at the present day: the absolute, divine authority and certainty of the Word, as a divine link between us and God, if everything (church and world) went; personal assurance of salvation in a new condition by being in Christ; the church as

³³ Darby, *Letters*, III, 297–8.

³⁴ R. A. Huebner argues that Darby's convalescence took place December 1826–January 1827, while Timothy Stunt claims it was December 1827–January 1828. Huebner cites a date on a letter between the Bellett brothers as his dating source. Huebner, *John Nelson Darby: Precious Truths Revived and Defended, Volume One, Revival of Truth 1826–1845*, 2nd ed., augmented (Jackson, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 2004), 8–9. However, Stunt's position appears more feasible because of the letter from Darby's friend John Bellett to his brother George at the end of January 1828 in which John said, "I hope on Friday to see John Darby. You will be grieved to hear that he has been laid up for nearly two months from a hurt in his knee. His poor people in Calary miss him sadly." *Recollections of the late J. G. Bellett*, (1895), 27. Stunt says, "The letter was apparently received when George was at Bandon. It is dated 31 Jan. 1827, but Bellett had probably written the previous year's date, as one does, at the end of January. The year must be 1828 for several reasons. First, George moved to Bandon in 1827 and probably after 31 January (D. Bellett), *Memoir of G. Bellett*, 64). Secondly, the evidence for Darby's 1827–8 convalescence is overwhelming. His references to 'two years and three months' after his ordination (*Letters*, iii: 297) and '1827–8' (*Letters*, i: 185) are explicit. Lastly, F. W. Newman saw him on crutches in late 1827 (see below, ch. 8. p. 206)." Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 169.

³⁵ Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 171.

³⁶ Darby, *Letters*, III, 453–4.

His body; Christ coming to receive us to Himself; and collaterally with that, the setting up of a new earthly dispensation, from Isaiah xxxii. (more particularly the end); all this was when laid aside at E. P.'s in 1827; the house character of the assembly on earth (not the fact of the presence of the Spirit) was subsequently. It was a vague fact which received form in my mind long after, that there must be a wholly new order of things, if God was to have His way, and the craving of the heart after it I had felt long before; but the church and redemption I did not know till the time I have spoken of; but eight years before, universal sorrow and sin pressed upon my spirit. I did not think to say so much of myself; but it is all well. The truth remains the truth, and it is on that we have to go; but the Lord's dealings with the soul, connected with the use of truth, have to be noted.³⁷

Further identification of the date and what Darby believed happened to him spiritually during that time is seen in another statement by Darby in a letter in which he wrote, "I believe at my deliverance from bondage in 1827–8, God opened up certain truths needed for the church."³⁸ What did Darby claim he realized during his convalescence during December 1827 and January 1828? He enumerates five things.

First, Darby says that he realized "the absolute, divine authority and certainty of the Word, as a divine link between us and God,"³⁹ which caused "the scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me."⁴⁰ Darby confirms an evangelical view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

Second, he states: "I came to understand that I was united to Christ in heaven, and that consequently, my place before God was represented by His own."⁴¹ Again he wrote, "personal assurance of salvation in a new condition by being in Christ; the church as His body."⁴²

Third, Darby understood more fully his present standing with Christ in heaven. Such a heavenly standing becomes the basis for much of Darby's theology that sees the believer already positioned with Christ in heaven. "I was in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, and sitting in heavenly places in Him. This led me directly to the apprehension of what the true church of God was, those that were united to Christ in heaven."⁴³

Fourth, he says that he realized that he should daily expect the Lord's return. "At the same time, I saw that the Christian, having his place in Christ in heaven, *has nothing to wait for save the coming of the Saviour*, in order to be set, in fact, in the glory which is already his portion 'in Christ'."⁴⁴ Further he says, "I saw in that word the coming of Christ to take the church to Himself in glory."⁴⁵ Darby speaks of "being in Christ; the church as His body; *Christ coming to receive us to Himself*; . . . all this was when laid aside at E. P.'s in 1827."⁴⁶ Again Darby says of his convalescence discovery: "The coming of

³⁷ Darby, *Letters*, I, 344–5.

³⁸ Darby, *Letters*, I, 185.

³⁹ Darby, *Letters*, I, 344.

⁴⁰ Darby, *Letters*, III, 298.

⁴¹ Darby, *Letters*, III, 298.

⁴² Darby, *Letters*, I, 344.

⁴³ Darby, *Letters*, I, 515.

⁴⁴ (Italics added) Darby, *Letters*, III, 298.

⁴⁵ Darby, *Letters*, III, 299.

⁴⁶ (Italics added) Darby, *Letters*, I, 344.

the Lord was the other truth which was brought to my mind from the word, as that which, if sitting in heavenly places *in Christ*, was alone to be waited for, that I might sit in heavenly places *with Him*.⁴⁷ Such a cluster of beliefs that were formulated at this time provides the rationale for a pretribulational rapture. Darby had seen the importance of an imminent return of Christ for His bride.

Fifth, Darby saw a change in dispensation. This could mean that it was at this time that shifted in his eschatology from postmillennialism to premillennialism. “Christ coming to receive us to Himself; and collaterally with that, the setting up of a new earthly dispensation, from Isaiah xxxii. (more particularly the end); all this was when laid aside at E. P.’s in 1827.”⁴⁸ He writes of his studies in Isaiah: “Isaiah xxxii. brought me to the earthly consequences of the same truth, though other passages might seem perhaps more striking to me now; but I saw an evident change of dispensation in that chapter, when the Spirit would be poured out on the Jewish nation, and a king reign in righteousness.”⁴⁹ Isaiah was a very influential part of his studies and change of views during this time. He notes:

In my retreat, the 32nd chapter of Isaiah taught me clearly, on God's behalf, that there was still an economy to come, of His ordering; a state of things in no way established as yet. The consciousness of my union with Christ had given me the present heavenly portion of the glory, whereas this chapter clearly sets forth the corresponding earthly part. I was not able to put these things in their respective places or arrange them in order, as I can now; but the truths themselves were then revealed of God, through the action of His Spirit, by reading His word.⁵⁰

Darby summarized his views that he discovered during his convalescence retreat in Dublin in an issue of *The Bible Treasury* writing:

Isaiah xxxii. it was that taught me about the new dispensation. I saw there would be a David reign, and did not know whether the church might not be removed before forty years' time. At that time I was ill with my knee. It gave me peace to see what the church was. I saw that I, poor, wretched, and sinful J. N. D., knowing too much yet not enough about myself, was left behind, and let go, but I was united to Christ in heaven. Then what was I waiting for? J. G. B. came up and said they were teaching some new thing in England. “I have it!” I said.⁵¹

Francis Newman, who served as a tutor for the Pennefather children for fifteen months during 1827 and 1828, confirms the timing of Darby’s textual and doctrinal discoveries. As a tutor in the household daily, he would have been at the Pennefather residence during Darby’s convalescence.⁵² Newman speaks of Darby’s influence upon

⁴⁷ Darby, *Letters*, I, 516.

⁴⁸ Darby, *Letters*, I, 344.

⁴⁹ Darby, *Letters*, I, 516.

⁵⁰ Darby, *Letters*, III, 298–9.

⁵¹ J. N. Darby, “Thoughts on Revelation XIV., XV., XVI,” *The Bible Treasury* (vol. 12, no. 281; October 1879), 352.

⁵² “. . . in 1827 I went to Ireland . . . In the Autumn of 1828 I returned to Oxford. . . .” F. W. Newman, *Contributions Chiefly to the Early History of the Late Cardinal Newman*, pp. 21 and 24. “In Dublin (1827–8) . . .

him while at the Pennefathers, during Darby's three-month convalescence. "Darby's realization in 1827–28 that earthly Jewish promises should not be appropriated by the Christian church is circumstantially corroborated in Frank Newman's letter to B. W. Newton (17 April 1828)," notes Stunt, "written after Darby's deliverance experience, where he makes a similar distinction between the promises made to Israel and those made to the Church."⁵³

It is helpful to have a witness by another party that basically supports the information provided by Darby during such a formative moment in his life. Such a testimony supports Darby's overall credibility in addition to bolstering these specific claims.

Benjamin Wills Newton (1807–99), writes of his Oxford tutor and friend Frank Newman, "While I was at Oxford and we were friends, F. Newman went to Ireland (1827) and there made the acquaintance of John Darby."⁵⁴ Thus, Newton says that Newman returned from his stay in Ireland, having been influenced by Darby in relation to prophecy, and that Newman wanted Darby to share this prophetic information with his friends at Oxford. This is a second source that confirms Darby's doctrinal discoveries occurred during his convalescence during December, 1827 and January, 1828.

A third source, John Gifford Bellett (1795–1864), also had interaction with Darby during his convalescence. He wrote the following about Darby:

In the beginning of 1828 I had occasion to go to London, and then I met in private and heard in public those who were warm and alive on prophetic truth, having had their minds freshly illumined by it.

In my letters to J. N. D. at this time, I told him I had been hearing things that he and I had never yet talked of, and I further told him on my return to Dublin what they were. Full of this subject as I then was, I found him quite prepared for it also, and his mind and soul had traveled rapidly in the direction which had thus been given to it.⁵⁵

Bellett stated that he discussed "prophetic truth" with Darby. It was noted earlier in a footnote that in addition to a letter J. G. Bellett wrote to Darby, he also penned one to his brother George and spoke of his impending visit with Darby. The Bellett letter was dated January 31, 1828. John wrote to George saying, "I hope on Friday to see John Darby. You will be grieved to hear that he has been laid up for nearly two months from

.," ibid, p. 62. Cited from Huebner, *John Nelson Darby*, 12, f.n. 60. In *Phases of Faith*, Newman says the following: "After taking my degree, I became a Fellow of Balliol College; and the next year I accepted an invitation to Ireland, and there became private tutor for fifteen months in the house of one now deceased" (p. 17).

⁵³ Stunt, "Influences," 59, f.n. 56.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Wills Newton, *The Fry Collection*, 61. Newton makes a similar statement about Newman visiting Darby in 1827 on page 235. Timothy Stunt describes *The Fry Collection* as the collection of handwritten "expositions, recollections and conversations" of Newton by one "who greatly valued his teaching," Frederick W. Wyatt. "On Wyatt's death the collection came into the possession of Alfred C. Fry" who assembled the various collections into a single volume and in 1982 Fry "presented his collection to the Christian Brethren Archive (CBA) in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester." Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 313–4. This writer has a photocopy of the manuscript which contains a total of 444 pages. See also *Fry Collection*, 240–1.

⁵⁵ John Gifford Bellett, *Interesting Reminiscences of the Early History of "Brethren:" With Letter from J. G. Bellett to J. N. Darby* (London: Alfred Holness, n.d.), 4.

a hurt in his knee. His poor people in Calary miss him sadly.”⁵⁶ Bellett’s statement that Darby was “quite prepared for it also” is a reference to prophetic discussions during his visit with Darby while Darby was recuperating from his injury. Very likely the phrase, “his mind and soul had traveled rapidly in the direction which had thus been given to it” is a reference to the discoveries that Darby learned through his personal Bible study.

DARBY’S NEW THEOLOGICAL PARADIGM

These five biblical discoveries noted above are the basis upon which Darby builds his new theological paradigm that includes dispensationalism and pretribulationalism. From the beginning of Darby’s dissent from the established church, these items were core essentials upon which he began to build his unique theology. Stunt concludes, “it was in these months that finally the questions in his mind began to resolve themselves. Central to his faith from now on was the belief that he and all Christians were ‘united to Christ in heaven’, and delivered ‘by the power of His resurrection.’”⁵⁷ Carter sees “its radical distinction between the Jewish and Gentile dispensations—‘the hinge’, as Darby referred to it, . . . the distinction between these two dispensations forms the basis for Darby’s understanding of both ecclesiology and eschatology.”⁵⁸ These items are important since pretribulationism is built upon first one’s view of ecclesiology that is set within a certain eschatological framework. Darby perceives a clear distinction between Israel and the church. “It is important to notice here that Darby came to the realization of these points alone, without the influence of other men,”⁵⁹ surmised Weremchuk. “Darby’s views, when fully developed later, would prove to be in many points contrary to the ones normally accepted by the church at large.”⁶⁰ It was during Darby’s convalescence that the original spark of his ideas burst forth from his personal Bible study and fanned into the flames of his theology during the next decade and beyond.

It has been long recognized that pretribulationism is built upon one’s view of ecclesiology as much or more than one’s eschatology. The greatest pretribulationist scholar of the twentieth century was the late John F. Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary, who recognized the central place of ecclesiology in support of pretribulationism. Walvoord writes:

What is essential to premillennialism becomes an indispensable foundation in the study of pretribulationism. It is safe to say that pretribulationism depends on a particular definition of the church, and any consideration of pretribulationism that does not take this major factor into consideration will be largely beside the point.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Bellett, *Recollections*, 27.

⁵⁷ Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 171.

⁵⁸ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 224.

⁵⁹ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 63.

⁶⁰ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 63. Weremchuk continues to explain: “Darby, as we noted had been greatly occupied with the early church as described in Acts. What he saw around him he did not like. His views which then developed were ‘new’—that is, different from those of his contemporaries. He defended his views as being the ‘original’ ones that the church very early in her history had lost sight of.” Weremchuk, *Darby*, 63-4.

⁶¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question, Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 37.

The point that should not be missed regarding Darby's convalescence discoveries is that they centered on ecclesiology. Darby was concerned about what was happening to the church in which he was involved in Ireland and searched the Bible for answers to his concerns. Stunt notes that one of the assurances Darby received "was the assurance that he (together with all Christians as opposed to Christendom) was risen and spiritually united with Christ in heaven."⁶² This ecclesiastical realization forms the heart of Darby's theology and spiritual hope that extended throughout the rest of his life.

The first two essays written by Darby were both about ecclesiastical issues, which further demonstrates his focus upon understanding the Church. The first, though not published until much later, was the one expressing his disagreement with Archbishop Magee's petition and the second, from Dublin in 1828, was "Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ."⁶³

Darby did not just develop an ecclesiology that was isolated from interaction with other areas of theology. Rather, he clearly set it against God's plan for Israel. In one of his convalescence statements he said:

Isaiah xxxii. it was that taught me about the new dispensation. I saw there would be a Davidic reign, and did not know whether the church might not be removed before forty years' time. At that time I was ill with my knee. It gave me peace to see what the church was. I saw that I, poor, wretched, and sinful J. N. D., knowing too much yet not enough about myself, was left behind, and let go, but I was united to Christ in heaven.⁶⁴

Thus, Darby sees the church as distinct from Israel, since there would be a Davidic reign for Israel in the millennium, God's earthly people. On the other hand, Darby saw that he was positionally united with Christ in heaven, a heavenly destiny. Dispensationalists today see such a distinction as their *sine qua non*. Leading dispensational spokesman Charles Ryrie says, "A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct." Ryrie explains:

This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive. The one who fails to distinguish Israel and the church consistently will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will.⁶⁵

Non-dispensational, covenant theologians recognize this essential about dispensationalists as noted by Michael Williams.

The Darbyist church/Israel distinction constitutes the one great organizing principle of classical dispensationalism. The metaphysical and historical distinction between the church and Israel is the axle upon which the theology of Darby, Scofield, and Chafer rides. It is the one great absolutely necessary

⁶² Stunt, "Influences," 58.

⁶³ Darby, "Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy Who signed the Petition to The House of Commons for Protection," *Collected Writings*, I, 1-19 and "Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ," *Collected Writings*, I, 20-35.

⁶⁴ Darby, "Thoughts on Revelation," 352.

⁶⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 46.

or essential element of the system. The Darbyist metaphysical distinction between Israel and the church is the *sine qua non* of classical dispensational theology.⁶⁶

Whether dispensationalists or non-dispensationalists, all recognize for dispensationalism the importance of the distinction between God's rule for Israel and His rule for the church.

From the time of his convalescence, Darby developed a theology that taught and supported a dispensational, premillennial, pretribulationism. Essentially Darby came to understand that his place or position was the same as Christ, which is in heaven. Thus, the church is a heavenly people, not an earthly people like the established church, in which he was a clergyman. Juxtaposed to the heavenly and spiritual church was Israel, who are composed of a spiritual, ethnic, and national people on earth who have a future in God's plan after the church age.

Darby came to understand that the church could be taken to heaven at any moment without signs preceding that event, in what would later be known as the pretribulational rapture of the church. Darby's realization of a change in dispensations laid the groundwork for the development of dispensationalism, since he saw a distinction between God's plan for the church and His plan for Israel. By this time, Darby also developed a pessimistic view of the visible church, Christendom, and came to believe that it was in utter ruins.

By January 1828, February at the latest, John Nelson Darby had not only come to an understanding of the idea of pretribulationism, but, he had also come to see other components, along with a rationale to support this view. This does not mean that his ideas relating to pretribulationism came out of the womb fully developed along with no internal contradictions.⁶⁷ There was still developmental work to be done. Stunt surmises: "In fact for some years after his experience of deliverance there was something decidedly ambivalent about some of the positions adopted by Darby."⁶⁸ It would take at least another decade for Darby to develop full confidence in his new views and their implications. The basics were in place by early 1828. This was too early to have received seminal influence from others regarding things Darby strongly contends he came to understand from personal Bible study alone during his Dublin convalescence.

CONCLUSION

J. N. Darby's pretribulationism appeared as a seminal idea from his own Bible study during a convalescence period of December 1827 through January 1828 while staying at

⁶⁶ Michael Williams, *This World is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 90.

⁶⁷ Darby's first published article on eschatology (1829) has some items that do contradict a fully systematized view of pretribulationism. Darby, "Reflections Upon The Prophetic Inquiry and the Views Advanced in it," *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, 34 vols. (n.d.; repr., Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, 1971), II, 1–31. Darby appears to still harbor elements of historicism, but at the same time he displays elements of his new discoveries. He speaks of "two comings" and "to be caught up into the air" (16). He spends a couple of pages describing the rapture and key rapture passages like 1 Thess. 4 and 1 Cor. 15 (16–8). He criticizes his opponent for "a confusion of the Jewish and Gentile dispensations" (18). He speaks of how the church is "to look to the coming of Christ as the prominent object of faith" (26). Even though it will take some time to work out the implications of his new views and to gain full confidence in their implications, they are clearly evident in his earliest writings.

⁶⁸ Stunt, "Influences," 59.

his sister's house in Dublin. Darby was in distress about issues relating to the true nature and purpose of the Church during his convalescence, which led to his ideas of the rapture of the Church, an ecclesiastical and eschatological issue. Stunt concludes: "we must emphasize that Darby was a very complex person whose understanding of scripture and theology was continually evolving."⁶⁹ Darby possessed the intellect, education, and capability needed for original thinking, and the discipline to develop ideas into a system. There is nothing in the record that indicates that this is not what he in fact did do. Through Darby's own personal testimony on multiple occasions, he provided the theological rationale to support pretribulationism, something that would be unlikely if it was just an idea stolen from another source.

APPENDIX

A REFUTATION OF FALSE ORIGIN OF THE RAPTURE THEORIES

Exactly from whom, when, and where did Darby's pretribulationism arise? Such questions are often debated within the world of American Evangelicalism. There have been a number of theories about the genesis of Darby's pretribulationism put forth over the years. This article is an attempt to identify the various proposals, sift through the evidence, and attempt to discern fact from fiction concerning this matter.

THE VIEWS

There are currently a number of theories that attempt to explain the sudden rise of Darby's pretribulationism. Most current advocates of pretribulationism believe that Plymouth Brethren J. N. Darby generated his views as a result of personal Bible study, most likely during his convalescence from a riding accident.⁷⁰ They do not deny that, in part, Darby was influenced by some aspects of the theological climate of his day.

⁶⁹ Stunt, "Influences," 67.

⁷⁰ Probably all pretribulationists who deal with this issue take this view. For example, Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know About The Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 75–82; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From The Hour: Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Return of Christ*, 4th ed. (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1991), 326–31; John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 150–58; Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 168–74; *Vanished Into Thin Air: The Hope of Every Believer* (Beverly Hills, CA: Western Front, 1999), 112–35; Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of The Storm: Why Christians Will Escape All The Tribulation* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1992), 95–184; *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 145–87, 245–8; Thomas D. Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulational Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, no. 586 (April–June 1990): 155–68; Kenneth Alan Daughters, "review of *The Rapture Plot*, by Dave MacPherson," *Emmaus Journal* 5, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 90–8. This is also the main view of those within the scholarly world, whether pro or anti-pretribulational. Timothy C. F. Stunt, "The Tribulation on Controversy: A Review Article," *Brethren Archivists & Historians Network Review* 2, no. 2 (Autumn 2003): 91–8; Paul Richard Wilkinson, "John Nelson Darby and the Origins of Christian Zionism" (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2006), 172–97, 291–331, 436–8; *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2007), 119–32, 177–201, 262–3; Max. S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), 111–35; Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 188–92; Daniel Payton Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism" (ThD diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957), 36–54; George L. Murray, *Millennial Studies: A Search for Truth*, 2nd ed. (Swengel PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1951), 132; Ian S. Rennie, "Nineteenth-Century Roots" in Carl E. Armerding and W. Ward Gasque, editors, *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy: A Balanced and Biblical Assessment of the Nature of Prophecy in the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 49–54; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From*

There are several theories, almost entirely by pre-trib opponents, which argue that Darby was primarily influenced by other sources. First, Edward Irving (1792–1834) and the Irvingite movement first developed pretribulationism and Darby got his main ideas from them.⁷¹ Second, it is put forth that Darby's pretribulationism was taken from the writings of the Jesuit Priest Manual de Lacunza (1731–1801), who wrote under the pseudonym of Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, a converted Jew.⁷² Third, pretribulationism was

The Hour: A Systematic Study of the Rapture in Bible Prophecy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 217–26; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 59–80; William Everett Bell, Jr., "A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology," (PhD thesis, New York University, 1967), 56–65; Crawford Gribben, *Rapture Fiction and The Evangelical Crisis* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 27–42; Mark Sweetnam and Crawford Gribben, "J. N. Darby and the Irish Origins of Dispensationalism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 3 (September 2009), 569–77; Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1982* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 21–2; "Dispensational and Historic Premillennialism as Popular Millennialist Movements," in Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to 'Left Behind' Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 8–11; Columba Graham Flegg, 'Gathered Under Apostles' *A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 423–41; Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions From The Via Media, c. 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 222–8; Floyd Saunders Elmore, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby," (ThD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 26–76; Gary Lynn Nebeker, "The Hope of Heavenly Glory in John Nelson Darby (1800–1882)," (PhD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1997), 19–21, 25–26, 88–91; Napoleon Noel, *The History of the Brethren*, 2 vol., ed. William F. Knapp (Denver: W. F. Knapp, 1936), 1:73–5; Jonathan David Burnham, "The Controversial Relationship Between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby," (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1999), 128–33; A. C. Gaebeltein, "The Attempted Revival of an Unscriptural Theory," *Our Hope* 41, no. 1 (July 1934), 18–25; Robert H. Krapohl, "A Search for Purity: The Controversial Life of John Nelson Darby," (PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 1988), 103–8; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 242–8. The most voluminous defender of this view has been the American Brethren researcher Roy A. Huebner in *The Truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Recovered* (Millington, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1976); *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby, Volume One, Revival of Truth 1826–1845* (Millington, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1991); *Elements of Dispensational Truth, Volume 1* (Morganville, NJ: Present truth Publishers, 1996); *John Nelson Darby: Precious Truths Revived and Defended, Volume One, Revival of Truth 1826–1845*, 2nd ed., augmented (Jackson, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 2004).

⁷¹ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1947), 168–69; Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 146–49; Ralph Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible* (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow, 1989), 35–40; Ian Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 185–206; Arthur Katterjohn with Mark Fackler, *The Tribulation People* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1975), 106–15; Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 185–8; Mark Patterson and Andrew Walker, "'Our Unspeakable Comfort' Irving, Albury, and the Origins of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture," in Stephen Hunt, ed., *Christian Millenarianism: From the Early Church to Waco* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 98–115; Mark Rayburn Patterson, "Designing the Last Days: Edward Irving, The Albury Circle, and the Theology of The Morning Watch," (Ph. D. thesis, King's College, London, 2001); P. Allan Carlsson, "A Historical Approach to the Doctrine of the Rapture," (M.A. thesis, Wheaton College, 1956), 75–86; Thomas Croskery, *Plymouth-Brethrenism: A Refutation of its Principles and Doctrines* (London: William Mullan & Son, 1879), 138–43; Ovid E. Need, Jr., *Death of the Church Victorious: Tracing the Roots and Implications of Modern Otherworldliness* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2002), 1–234; Harry Ramey, *The Rapture: Another Look* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2007), 7; Jon Zens, *Dispensationalism: A Reformed Inquiry Into Its Leading Figures and Features* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980), 18.

⁷² John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, Fl.: John L. Bray Ministry, n.d.), 1–34; LeRoy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretations*, IV vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), III, 655–63; Duncan McDougall, *The*

the product of a prophecy from a woman in Irving's church in London.⁷³ Fourth, the pre-trib rapture came forth from a prophetic utterance by a fifteen-year old Scottish lassie named Margaret Macdonald (1815–@1840) in Port Glasgow, Scotland in April 1830.⁷⁴ The evidence for each view will be sifted and weighed.

In this article I will only have space to deal with the two most widely held views, which are the Edward Irving or Irvingite view and the Margaret Macdonald view. The Manual de Lacunza and "a woman in Irving's London church" view are not widely held and will be skipped in favor of a more extensive interaction with the two most popular views. However, the Manual de Lacunza view is nothing more than a pre-conflagration view, while the "woman in Irving's London church" view does not speak of a two-staged coming, instead it speaks of a single second advent.

THE EDWARD IRVING VIEW

This view argues that Darby was influenced by either Edward Irving or someone within the Irvingite movement. A recent scholarly attempt to advance this view is made by American Mark Patterson.⁷⁵ He sees Irvingite eschatology as an antecedent source to Darby and pretribulationism. "Irving's writing in *The Morning Watch* reveal that he was, above and before anything else, a pretribulational-premillennial theologian," declares Patterson. "This cannot be overstated. From his meeting with Hately Frere in 1825 until his death in December 1834, Irving's every thought and writing was shaped under the aegis of his imminent Adventism and premillennial convictions."⁷⁶ Even though Patterson says:

Rapture of the Saints (Petersburg, OH: Pilgrim Brethren Press, 1970), 4–52; F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement: Its Origins, its Worldwide Development and its Significance for the Present Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 128–37.

⁷³ S. P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming: How is it Taught in Scripture? and Why?*, 2nd ed. (Chelmsford, England: The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1886), 34–36; John J. Scruby, *The Great Tribulation: The Church's Supreme Test*, 3rd. ed. (Dayton, OH: John J. Scruby, 1933), 76–78; George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 40–1; Jeanette Sears, "The Interpretation of Prophecy and expectations of the End in Britain, 1845–1883," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 1984), 142–44; George H. Fromow, *B. W. Newton and Dr. S. P. Tregelles*, 2nd. ed. (London: The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1969), 41–3; Robert Cameron, *Scriptural Truth About The Lord's Return* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), 16; J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 32–33; Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 132. Interestingly, B. W. Newton does not comment upon the origins of the pretribulational rapture in a book written against it. *The Second Advent of Our Lord: Not Secret But In Manifested Glory*, 6th. ed. (London: Wightman & Co., 1936).

⁷⁴ Dave MacPherson, *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* (Kansas City: Heart of America Bible Society, 1973); *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* (Kansas City: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974); *The Incredible Cover Up* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 1975); *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983); *Rapture?* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1987); *The Three R's: Rapture, Revisionism, Robbery, Pretribulation Rapturism from 1830 to Hal Lindsey* (Simpsonville, SC: P.O.S.T., Inc., 1998); *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III Publishers, 1994); *The Rapture Plot*, 2nd. ed. (Muskogee, OK: Artisan Publishers, 2008); Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "How Did Left Behind's Particular Vision of the End Times Develop? A Historical Look at Millenarian Thought," in Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Rapture, Revelation and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 50–5; Robert L. Pierce, *The Rapture Cult: Religious Zeal and Political Conspiracy* (Signal Mountain, TN: Signal Point Press, n.d.), 30–4; George L. Rose, *Tribulation Till Translation* (Glendale, CA: Rose Publishing Company, 1943; Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2004), 22–25.

⁷⁵ Patterson, "Designing the Last Days".

⁷⁶ Patterson, "Designing," pp. 228–29.

It is not my purpose here to correlate or equate Albury's premillennialism with contemporary dispensationalism or to prove the source of the latter is to be found in the former. My intention is simply to demonstrate that Albury's hermeneutic led to a specific systematic theology that I believe is best described as "nascent dispensationalism." The precise relationship between Albury's theology and that which will follow in John Nelson Darby, the Plymouth Brethren, and especially 20th century dispensationalism, while remarkable, lie beyond the purview of this thesis.⁷⁷

Patterson says in a co-authored article, "In the end, and at the very least, Irving must be considered the paladin of pre-tribulational pre-millennialism and the chief architect of its cardinal formulas."⁷⁸ He adds the following:

In addition to the *a priori* dismissal of Irving, there exist two fundamental errors common among those who uncritically assume Darby to be the source of the pre-tribulation Rapture. First, few acknowledge the degree to which Darby's theology reflects the very millenarian tradition in which he was immersed. The core principles of his theology—literalistic hermeneutic, apostasy in the Church, the restoration of the Jews to their homeland, details of Christ's coming, and his belief that biblical prophecy spoke uniquely to his day—were concepts held, discussed and propagated by a large body of prophecy students. Second, the development of Darby's own theology, in spite of how he remembers it, was from 1827 to even as late as 1843 in a largely formative stage.⁷⁹

There are a number of problems created when one sees too great of a similarity between Irvingite historicism and Brethren futurism. Patterson appears to make such errors.

The "core principles" of Darby's theology, as expressed by Patterson are too broad and general. Look at this list compared to Irving and his followers: First, "literalistic hermeneutic." Patterson himself describes Irving and the Albury hermeneutics as not just literal since that "tells only half the story," but ones who follow the "literal-typological methodology."⁸⁰ This is typical of the quasi-literalism of historicism. While Darby is said to be a consistent literalist, who did not attempt to make days into years or find historical fulfillment of seal, trumpet or bowl judgments in the church's past history. These events were all literal, as the text said and were future events. Also, Irving and Albury believed that many of the passages that spoke of events in a future Jewish tribulation were unfolding before their eyes, for example, Babylon referred to the apostate Church of their own day. David Bebbington distinguishes between a historicist hermeneutic and a futurist form of literalism:

⁷⁷ Patterson, "Designing," 136.

⁷⁸ Mark A. Patterson and Andrew Walker, "'Our Unspeakable Comfort,'" 115. Walker says, "The hunch that Irving, rather than Darby, has a greater claim to be the father of modern Dispensationalism stems from my research on Irving . . . The credit for finding the evidence that at the very least Irving and the Albury circle predate Darby's mature view on the pre-tribulation Rapture belongs entirely to Mark Patterson," f.n. 1, 98.

⁷⁹ Patterson and Walker, "'Our Unspeakable Comfort,'" 114–15.

⁸⁰ Patterson, "Designing," 76. See also, 62.

Historicists found it hard to be thoroughgoing advocates of literal interpretation. There was too great a gulf between the detail of biblical images and their alleged historical fulfillment to make any such claim possible. Futurists did not suffer from this handicap. Consequently, they shouted louder for literalism—and, among the futurists, the dispensationalists shouted loudest of all. J. N. Darby was contending as early as 1829 that prophecy relating to the Jews would be fulfilled literally. As his thought developed during the 1830s, this principle of interpretation became the lynchpin of his system. Because Darby's opinions were most wedded to literalism, his distinctive scheme enjoyed the advantage of taking what seemed the most rigorist view of scripture.⁸¹

Thus, Irving and Albury do not have a common hermeneutic with Darby as Patterson contends. Irving and Albury were basically in the historicist camp, while Darby was a clear futurist.

No doubt both held to the apostasy of the church, but even this similarity reflects a great chasm of differences between the Albury historicist view and that of the futurist. The Albury view of apostasy was because the church had just finished the 1260 days, which are really 1260 years that ended with the defeat of Antichrist (i.e., Roman Catholicism) in 1789 via the French Revolution. These events forewarned the soon rise of the whore of Babylon (Rev. 17—18), which is the apostate church.⁸² On the other hand, Darby and his futurism held that the apostasy of the church was predicted primarily in the New Testament Epistles⁸³ and would increasingly characterize the end of the current church age, which is totally different than what will take place after the rapture during the tribulation. Albury historicism saw apostasy as a harbinger of the second coming of Christ to the earth, while Darby saw the ruin of the church as a characteristic that precedes an imminent rapture of the church followed by the events of the seven-year tribulation.

Both approaches do see a restoration of the Jews to their homeland, but as with the previous two issues, there are significant differences. Darby believed that the Jews would return to their land in unbelief and then converted during the seven-year tribulation, yet future to the church age. He says, "At the end of the age the same fact will be reproduced: the Jews—returned to their own land, though without being converted—will find themselves in connection with the fourth beast."⁸⁴ However, Irving believed that current with this present age, "when the Lord shall have finished the taking of witness against the Gentiles, . . . will turn his Holy Spirit unto his ancient people the Jews."⁸⁵ Shortly after that time, Christ will return.⁸⁶

⁸¹ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 89.

⁸² See Edward Irving, "Preliminary Discourse by the Translator" in Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* (London: L. B. Seeley and son, 1827), xxxiii.

⁸³ See the following passages relating to church age apostasy: Romans 1:18-32; 10; 16:17-18; 2 Corinthians 11:1-15; 13:5; Galatians 1:6-9; 5:1-12; Philippians 3:2, 18-19; Colossians 2:4-23; I Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:11-26; 3:1-9; 4:15; Titus 1:10-16; Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:12-6:12; 10:26-31; 12:14-17; 1 Peter 3:19-20; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 3:3-10; I John 2:18-23; 3:4-12; 4:1-6; 2 John 9; Jude 3-23.

⁸⁴ John Nelson Darby, *The Hopes of the Church of God, in Connection with the Destiny of the Jews and the Nations as Revealed in Prophecy* (1840), Collected Writings, vol. 2 (Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, reprint 1971), 324.

⁸⁵ Irving, "Preliminary Discourse," v.

The last two items mentioned by Patterson are “details of Christ’s coming, and his belief that biblical prophecy spoke uniquely to his day.” These are so broad that they could be said to characterize just about any Evangelical view of eschatology, whether amillennial, premillennial or postmillennial; whether preterist, historicist, futurist or idealist. Every approach has details of Christ’s coming and certainly every system believes that their view speaks uniquely to his day. More importantly are the differences concerning the details of Christ coming as seen by the different systems and also many difference would arise in relation to how each prophetic view spoke uniquely to his day. Thus, it is less than compelling to see how Irving and Albury’s eschatology is the forerunner to Darby, pretribulationism and dispensationalism. Instead, it is Irving and Albury that Darby was reacting against.

Concerning Patterson’s second point, I agree that it was a process of about fifteen years in which Darby developed a mature system, however, the initial idea of something like a pre-trib rapture would come in an instant, even though it might take a decade and a half to work out the implications and settle one’s conscience. Just such a scenario appears to fit what we know of Darby. Further, I don’t think anyone who has studied these issues would argue that Darby was incapable of producing a unique theology.

An extensive critical analysis of Irvingite doctrine declared that they were still overwhelmingly historicist,⁸⁷ while Darby and the Brethren had become futurist. Flegg, an Irvingite scholar who grew up within the church, notes that the differences between the two movements are far-reaching:

The later Powerscourt Conferences were dominated by the new sect. The Brethren took a futurist view of the Apocalypse, attacking particularly the interpretation of prophetic ‘days’ as ‘years’, so important for all historicists, including the Catholic Apostolics. . . . It was the adoption of this futurist eschatology by a *body* of Christians which gave it the strength to become a serious rival to the alternative historicist eschatology of the Catholic Apostolics and others. Darby introduced the concept of a *secret* rapture to take place ‘at any moment’, a belief which subsequently became one of the chief hallmarks of Brethren eschatology. He also taught that the ‘true’ Church was invisible and spiritual. Both these ideas were in sharp contrast to Catholic Apostolic teaching, and were eventually to lead to schism among the Brethren. There were thus very significant differences between the two eschatologies, and attempts to see any direct influence of one upon the other seem unlikely to succeed—they had a number of common *roots*, but are much more notable for their points of disagreement. Several writers have attempted to trace Darby’s secret rapture theory to a prophetic statement associated with Irving, but their arguments do not stand up to serious criticism.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Irving, “Preliminary Discourse,” vi.

⁸⁷ For an excellent overview and relatively brief presentation of Irving’s eschatology see his “Preliminary Discourse,” i–xciv.

⁸⁸ (emphasis original) Flegg, ‘Gathered Under Apostles,’ 436. Flegg’s chapter on Catholic Apostolic eschatology is extensive, (249 pages), more than half the volume of the book.

When reading the full message of Irvingite eschatology it is clear that they were still very much locked into the historicist system which views the entire church age as the tribulation. After all, the major point in Irving's eschatology was that Babylon (false Christianity) was about to be destroyed and then the second coming would occur. Classic historicism! He also taught that the second coming was synonymous with the rapture.⁸⁹ Irving believed that it was the single return of the Lord that was getting near. This is hardly pretrib since Irving believed that the tribulation began at least 1,500 years earlier and he did not teach a separate rapture, followed by the tribulation, culminating in the second coming. Ernest Sandeen tells us:

Darby's view of the premillennial advent contrasted with that held by the historicist millenarian school in two ways. First, Darby taught that the second advent would be secret, an event sensible only to those who participated in it. . . . There were, in effect, two "second coming" in Darby's eschatology. The church is first taken from the earth secretly and then, at a later time, Christ returns in a public second advent as described in Matthew 24. . . .

Second, Darby taught that the secret rapture could occur at any moment. In fact, the secret rapture is also often referred to as the doctrine of the any-moment coming. Unlike the historicist millenarians, Darby taught that the prophetic timetable had been interrupted at the founding of the church and that the unfulfilled biblical prophecies must all wait upon the rapture of the church. . . . Darby avoided the pitfalls both of attempting to predict a time for Christ's second advent and of trying to make sense out of the contemporary alarms of European politics with the Revelation as the guidebook.⁹⁰

Even though Irving and his Albury disciples spoke often about the translation of saints to heaven, they clearly did not hold to pre-trib rapture views. Flegg's definitive and fairly recent work on the Catholic Apostolic Church makes it clear "that the translation may not be simply a single event at the time of the first resurrection, but spread over a short period of time prior to it."⁹¹ Doesn't this sound like pretribulationism? Flegg further explains what is meant:

This period of great tribulation was inevitable, but would be escaped by an elect body (those referred to by St. Paul in I Thess. 4:16–17) who would be resurrected by Christ or translated (caught up in the clouds) through the operation of the Holy Spirit at the beginning (morning) of the Second Advent. This was the *first resurrection*—the gathering of the "first-fruits", the resurrection from/out of the dead of which the New Testament spoke and which was indicated by the woman in travail (Apoc. 12:1–2). The Old Testament "saints" would participate in it, and both the resurrected and the translated would receive their resurrection bodies and remain standing with Christ upon Mount Zion.⁹²

⁸⁹ Edward Irving, "Signs of the Times in the Church," *The Morning Watch*, Vol. 2 (1830), 156.

⁹⁰ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 62–64.

⁹¹ Flegg, 'Gathered Under Apostles,' 434.

⁹² Flegg, 'Gathered Under Apostles,' 425.

We see from the above notation that the Irvingite rapture is part of the second coming. Thus, their doctrine teaches a brief interval between the rapture and the second advent, not a rapture followed by a multi-year tribulation and then a new event, the second coming. Patterson cites 74 examples of what he calls a “pretribulational rapture,”⁹³ however, after looking up each reference, it is better to view them as references to the second coming, as described above, that includes a translations of believers. This is not pretribulationism as taught by Darby, the Brethren or modern dispensationalist.

THE MARGARET MACDONALD VIEW

This notion contends “that the popular Pre-Trib Rapture teaching of today was really instigated by a teenager in Scotland who lived in the early 1800’s,”⁹⁴ who was connected with the broader Irvingite movement. “If Christians had known [this] all along,” bemoans MacPherson concerning the historical beginnings of the pretribulational rapture, “the state of Christianity could have been vastly different today.”⁹⁵ He thinks this ignorance has been due not merely to a historical oversight, but rather to a well-orchestrated “cover-up” carefully managed by clever pretribulational leaders each step of the way.⁹⁶ MacPherson opines: “during the first 18 centuries of the Christian era, believers were never ‘Rapture separators’ [sic]; they never separated the minor Rapture aspect of the Second Coming of Christ from the Second Coming itself.”⁹⁷

In 1983 MacPherson declared, “Fifteen years ago I knew nothing about Pre-Trib beginnings.”⁹⁸ He began his quest by writing to his father and received an answer that indicated a lack of consensus among scholars, “so I decided to do some research on my own.”⁹⁹ MacPherson’s investigation gathered steam when he found a rare book in 1971 by Robert Norton, *The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets; In the Catholic Apostolic Church* (1861). “The important part in Norton’s book,” claimed MacPherson, “is a personal revelation that Margaret Macdonald had in the spring of 1830.”¹⁰⁰ MacPherson uses this finding to project the notion that the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture is of demonic origin through a 15-year-old Scottish lassie.

Since the 1970s in America, it has become commonplace for writers of articles and books against pretribulationism to bring up some form of the argument that Darby commandeered key elements of his view from an Irvingite source. Marvin Rosenthal is typical of this approach, who wrote that the pre-trib rapture was of Satanic origin and unheard of before 1830. “To thwart the Lord’s warning to His children, in 1830,” contends Rosenthal, “Satan, the ‘father of lies,’ gave to a fifteen-year-old girl named Margaret McDonald a lengthy vision.”¹⁰¹ Many similar examples could be multiplied.

⁹³ Patterson, “Designing,” f.n. 87, 165.

⁹⁴ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 7.

⁹⁵ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 180.

⁹⁶ The cover-up emphasis is greatly stressed in MacPherson’s *The Incredible Cover Up* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 1975). Jim McKeever’s forward compares the pretribulation cover-up to the Watergate cover-up that dominated political news in America in the 1970s. MacPherson even alleges that Dallas Seminary groomed and commissioned Hal Lindsey for the purpose of popularizing the pretribulation rapture for the Jesus Movement in the early 1970s (pp. 131-32).

⁹⁷ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 15.

⁹⁸ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 47.

⁹⁹ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 47.

¹⁰⁰ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 47.

¹⁰¹ Marvin J. Rosenthal, “Is the Church in Matthew Chapter 24?” *Zion’s Fire* (Nov-Dec 1994), 10.

MACPHERSON'S CLAIMS

Irvingite Robert Norton included a handwritten account of Margaret Macdonald's "prophecy,"¹⁰² which MacPherson says was the fountainhead for Darby's development of the pretribulational rapture doctrine.¹⁰³ MacPherson does not say that Macdonald included a clear statement of the pretribulational rapture, but that she "separated the Rapture from the Second Coming before anyone else did."¹⁰⁴ According to MacPherson, Darby pilfered this two-stage teaching from Macdonald and then developed it systematically, skillfully passing it off as the fruit of his personal Bible study.

Macdonald's so-called revelation that MacPherson cites to make his case revolves around two key phrases. "Margaret dramatically separated the *sign* of the Son of man from the *coming* of the Son of man,"¹⁰⁵ declares MacPherson, based on her phrase, "now look out for the sign of the Son of man."¹⁰⁶ MacPherson argues that "she equated the *sign* with the Rapture—a Rapture that would occur *before* the revealing of Antichrist."¹⁰⁷ He bases this on her statement, "I saw it was just the Lord himself descending from Heaven with a shout, just the glorified man, even Jesus."¹⁰⁸

MACPHERSON'S ERRORS

MacPherson makes two major errors in his attempt to argue that Macdonald originated the basis for the pretribulation rapture. First, it is highly doubtful that the Macdonald "prophecy" refers to a two-stage coming of Christ, as MacPherson advocates. Therefore it would be impossible for this source to be the basis for a new idea if it did not contain those elements. Timothy Stunt tells us "that the text of Margaret Macdonald's prophecy (published by Robert Norton, in 1840) is so very confused that it hardly provides a basis for constructing a coherent eschatology and there is no evidence that this particular prophecy was characteristic of all her utterances."¹⁰⁹ MacPherson has misinterpreted Macdonald's words by equating her use of "sign" with a rapture. Rather, she is saying that only those who are spiritual will see the secret *sign* of the Son of Man that will precede the single, posttribulational second coming of Christ. In other words only those who have the light of the Holy Spirit within them will know when the Second Coming will take place because this spiritual enlightenment will enable them to have the spiritual perception to see the secret sign (not the secret rapture). These are her own words as recorded by Norton:

¹⁰² Macdonald's revelation was first published in a book by physician Robert Norton, who later married Margaret, *Memoirs of James & George Macdonald, of Port Glasgow*, (London: John F. Shaw, 1840), 171–76. Norton published the account again in *The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets; In the Catholic Apostolic Church* (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1861), 15–18. The two versions have some significant differences. Norton's *Memoirs* version is longer than the later *Restoration* version. The earlier version has at least 19 instances where the account adds a significant amount of words not found in the more economical later edition of Margaret Macdonald's utterance. Dave MacPherson records a compilation of both versions in *The Rapture Plot*, 249–52.

¹⁰³ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 50–57.

¹⁰⁴ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 121.

¹⁰⁵ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 128.

¹⁰⁶ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 125.

¹⁰⁷ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 126.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy C. F. Stunt, "The Tribulation of Controversy: A Review Article," *Brethren Archivists & Historians Network Review* (Vol.2, No. 2; Autumn 2003), 93.

... all must, as Stephen was, be filled with the Holy Ghost, that they might look up, and see the brightness of the Father's glory. I saw the error to be, that men think that it will be something seen by the natural eye; but 'tis spiritual discernment that is needed, the eye of God in his people. . . . Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of his Appearance. No need to follow them who say, see here, or see there, for his day shall be as the lightning to those in whom the living Christ is. 'Tis Christ in us that will lift us up—he is the light—'tis only those that are alive in him that will be caught up to meet him in the air. I saw that we must be in the Spirit, that we might see spiritual things. John was in the Spirit, when he saw a throne set in Heaven. . . . it is not knowledge *about* God that it contains, but it is in entering into God—. . . I felt that those who were filled with the Spirit could see spiritual things, and feel walking in the midst of them, while those who had not the Spirit could see nothing.¹¹⁰

Macdonald is clearly concerned with spiritual insight for several reasons: (1) Stephen *saw* into heaven; he was not raptured or taken to heaven. (2) The sign will be seen only by the spiritually enlightened. It will not be a natural or physical sign, but one perceived by "spiritual discernment." (3) She is discussing "the sign of his appearance," not His actual appearance. (4) Once a person has been so enlightened, he will not need direction from others. He will be guided directly by "the living Christ." (5) The emphasis is on seeing: "John was in the Spirit, when he *saw*," "those who were filled with the Spirit could *see*." D. H. Kromminga observes that Macdonald's "prophecies made it plain that the return of the Lord depended upon the proper spiritual preparation of His Church."¹¹¹

John Bray agrees that Macdonald was teaching a single coming, not a two-staged event. "The only thing new in her revelation itself seems to be that of just Spirit-filled Christians being caught up at the second coming of Christ following heavy trials and tribulation by the Antichrist."¹¹² In other words Macdonald seems to have been teaching a *posttribulational, partial rapture*. Bray further explains:

It seems to me that Margaret MacDonald was saying that Christians WILL face the temptation of the false Christ (antichrist) and be in "*an awfully dangerous situation*," and that only the Spirit IN US will enable us to be kept from being deceived; and that as the Spirit works, so will the antichrist; but the pouring out of the Spirit will "*fit us to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb*," and those filled with the Spirit would be taken while the others would be left. . . . Margaret MacDonald did teach a partial rapture, of course, but this did not necessarily mean that the teaching included a tribulation period FOLLOWING THAT for the other Christians. . . . It would not be right to take for granted that Margaret MacDonald believed in a tribulation period following the appearing of Christ unless she had definitely said so.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ (emphasis original) Norton, *Memoirs*, 172–7

¹¹¹ D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church: Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1945), 250.

¹¹² John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, Fl.: John L. Bray Ministry, n.d.), 21–22.

¹¹³ (emphasis original) Bray, *Origin*, 20–21.

Another point MacPherson makes to support his opinion is that “Macdonald was the first person to teach a coming of Christ that would precede the days of Antichrist.”¹¹⁴ This would mean, according to MacPherson, that Macdonald had to be teaching a two-stage coming. However, it is highly questionable, as already noted, that Macdonald was referring to the rapture, as MacPherson insists. Also Macdonald was still a historicist; she believed the church was already in the tribulation and had been for hundreds of years. Therefore the Antichrist was to be soon revealed, but before the second coming. She said believers need spiritual sight so they will not be deceived. Otherwise, why would believers, including herself, need to be filled with the Spirit to escape the deception that will accompany “the fiery trial which is to try us,” associated with the Antichrist’s arrival? Further, she certainly includes herself as one who needs this special ministry of the Holy Spirit, as can be seen from this passage from her “revelation.”

... now shall the awful sight of a false Christ be seen on this earth, and nothing but the living Christ in us can detect this awful attempt of the enemy to deceive. . . . The Spirit must and will be purged out on the church, that she may be purified and filled with God. . . . There will be outward trial too, but ‘tis principally temptation. It is brought on by the outpouring of the Spirit, and will just increase in proportion as the Spirit is poured out. The trial of the Church is from the Antichrist. It is by being filled with the Spirit that we shall be kept. I frequently said, Oh be filled with the Spirit—have the light of God in you, that you may detect satan—be full of eyes within—be clay in the hands of the potter—submit to be filled, filled with God. . . . This is what we are at present made to pray much for, that speedily we may all be made ready to meet our Lord in the air—and it will be. Jesus wants his bride. His desire is toward us.¹¹⁵

Charles Ryrie also notes a further misunderstanding of Macdonald’s prophecy”:

She saw the church (“us”) being purged by Antichrist. MacPherson reads this as meaning the church will be raptured before Antichrist, ignoring the “us”. In reality, she saw the church enduring Antichrist’s persecution of the Tribulation days.¹¹⁶

Macdonald, then, was a posttribulationist. She believed the church would go through the Tribulation. This is hardly the beginnings of pretribulationism! John Walvoord observes,

Readers of MacPherson’s *Incredible Cover-Up* will undoubtedly be impressed by the many long quotations, most of which are only window dressing for what he is trying to prove. When it gets down to the point of proving that

¹¹⁴ MacPherson, *Cover-Up*, 155–56.

¹¹⁵ Norton, *Memoirs*, 174–76.

¹¹⁶ Charles Ryrie, *What You Should Know about the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 71.

either MacDonald or Irving was pretribulationist, the evidence gets very muddy. The quotations MacPherson cites do not support his conclusions.¹¹⁷

Stunt also notes,

that none of the contemporary witnesses of the Clydeside utterance made any mention of Margaret Macdonald proclaiming a new doctrine. In fact it is only with some difficulty that one can identify what MacPherson calls her “pretribulationist” teaching in the transcript of 1840, and when in 1861 Norton quoted from her prophecy he omitted the passage which referred to “the fiery trial” which “will be for the purging and purifying of the real members of the body of Jesus”—a passage which clearly assumes that Christians will go through the tribulation.¹¹⁸

Second, in spite of MacPherson’s great amount of research and writing he has yet to produce hard evidence that Darby was influenced by Macdonald’s utterances, regardless of what they meant. MacPherson only assumes the connection. Throughout MacPherson’s writings, he keeps presenting information about issues, developments, and beliefs from Great Britain during the early 1800s, apparently thinking that he is adding proof for his thesis that “the popular Pre-Trib Rapture teaching of today was really instigated by a teenager in Scotland who lived in the early 1800’s.”¹¹⁹ Much of the information is helpful and interesting, but does not provide actual evidence for his thesis. Even if Darby developed the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture after Macdonald’s utterance, specific proof would be needed to make a link between Macdonald and Darby. Instead MacPherson only offers speculative guesses about how Darby used his training for the law profession to manipulate Christians by hiding the supposed true origins of his teaching on the rapture.

CONCLUSION

While Irving and the Albury group had a few eschatological ideas that were unique, a belief in the pretrib rapture was not one of those aspects. It is impossible for one to follow the historicist approach and also believe that the rapture will occur before the tribulation, since historicists believe that the tribulation began hundreds of years ago. It is also true that Irvingites spoke of a soon coming of Christ to translate believers to heaven, but this view was part of their second coming belief that they could have derived from Manuel Lacunza’s writings,¹²⁰ which were not the product of futurism at that point. Such a view has similar elements as seen in Robert Gundry’s version of posttribulationism. Gundry holds that there will be a rapture or catching up to meet the Lord in the air “to form a welcoming party that will escort the Lord on the last leg of his descent to earth.”¹²¹

On the other hand, Darby most likely thought of and then developed the idea of pretribulationism in the process of shifting to futurism. Paul Wilkinson notes, “that

¹¹⁷ John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 44.

¹¹⁸ Stunt, “Controversy,” 93.

¹¹⁹ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 7.

¹²⁰ Manuel Lacunza, also known as Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, *The Coming of Messiah*, 99–101; 214–17; 248–51; 266–67.

¹²¹ Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 109.

Darby found an exegetical basis in Scripture for his doctrine of a pretribulation Rapture. As a careful student of the Bible, Darby had no need to appeal to an oracle for his doctrines. The unfounded and scurrilous accusations of MacPherson and his sympathizers contravene the whole ethos of John Nelson Darby, a man of integrity to whom the Word of God was paramount.¹²² Tim LaHaye believes that whether Darby was influenced by the Bible or not, nevertheless, pretribulationism is found within the pages of Scripture.

John Darby gained his views primarily from his study of the Word of God, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the influence of emerging premillennial biblical literalists, who were moving from the Historical school of interpreting prophecy to the Futurist position. But even if he didn't, that doesn't change anything. The pre-Trib position is supported by Scripture. Surely that is enough!¹²³

¹²² Paul Richard Wilkinson, "John Nelson Darby and the Origins of Christian Zionism," (Ph. D. Thesis, University of Manchester, 2006), 322.

¹²³ Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 187.