

DID EDWARD IRVING INVENT THE PRE-TRIB RAPTURE VIEW?

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Some have argued that J. N. Darby got his idea for the pre-trib rapture from either Edward Irving or another Irvingite source. Such a view is not possible since Edward Irving and the Irvingites never held to a pre-trib rapture. The Irvingites did hold to a version of a two-stage second coming where the rapture occurs days before the second coming. The Irvingite view is far different than the pretribulation understanding of Darby and the Brethren.

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Introduction

John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) was no doubt the modern developer of dispensational (pretribulation) premillennialism. However, did key elements of the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture originate with either Edward Irving (1792–1834) or the broader Irvingite movement¹ and were they then conveyed to Darby and the Brethren?² This is the general thesis put forth in dozens of books and articles for many

¹ Most of the followers of Edward Irving were part of the newly formed Catholic Apostolic Church that continued until the late 1990s when the last remnant of the church ceased to exist in London.

² 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 Books, 1960), 146–49; Ralph Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible* (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow, 1989), 35–40; Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 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 Publishing, 1973), 185–88; 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:

years. However, I do not believe there is merit to such a position since Irving and his movement never taught pretribulation theology and because Irving and Darby came from very different eschatological systems.³

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. This is not a full list of advocates; many more could be cited.

³ Probably, all pretribulationists who deal with this issue take a similar 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 Pretribulation 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 Publishing, 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 Pretribulation 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-pretribulationist. Timothy C. F. Stunt, “The Tribulation of 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, 436–38; *For Zion’s Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Milton Keynes, England: Pater-noster, 2007), 119–32, 177–201, 262–63; 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 The Hour: A Systematic Study of the Rapture in Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1956), 217–26; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), 59–80; William Everett Bell, Jr., “A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology,” (Ph.D. 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 Publishing, 1983), 21–22; “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; Columbia 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), 222–28; 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), 1:73–75; Jonathan David Burnham, “The Controversial Relationship Between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby,” (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1999), 128–33; A. C. Gaebelein, “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), 242–48. The most voluminous defender of this view has been

Some Claims

American Dave MacPherson is convinced “that the popular Pre-Trib Rapture teaching of today was really instigated by a teenager in Scotland who lived in the early 1800’s”, who was connected with the broader Irvingite movement.⁴ “If Christians had known [this] all along,” bemoans MacPherson, “the state of Christianity could have been vastly different today.”⁵ He thinks this ignorance has been due not merely to historical oversight, but rather to a well-orchestrated “cover-up” carefully managed by clever pre-tribulation leaders.⁶ MacPherson complains: “during the first 18 centuries of the Christian era, believers were never ‘Rapture separators’; they never separated the minor Rapture aspect of the Second Coming of Christ from the Second Coming itself.”⁷

In 1983, MacPherson declared, “fifteen years ago I knew nothing about Pre-Trib beginnings.”⁸ 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.”⁹ MacPherson’s investigation gathered steam when he found a rare book

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).

³ 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 Books, 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: Banner of Truth, 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 Publishing, 1973), 185–88; 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.

⁴ Dave MacPherson, *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983), 7.

⁵ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 180.

⁶ The cover-up emphasis is greatly stressed in MacPherson’s *The Incredible Cover Up* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 1975). Jim McKeever’s foreword 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 conspired, groomed, and commissioned Hal Lindsey for the purpose of popularizing the pretribulation rapture for the Jesus Movement in the early 1970s (131–32).

⁷ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*

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.”¹⁰ MacPherson uses this finding to project the notion that the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture is of demonic origin.

Since the 1970s in America it has become commonplace for writers of articles and books against pre-tribulationism to bring up some form of the argument that Darby got key elements of his view from an Irvingite source. Marvin Rosenthal is typical of this approach, writing that the pre-tribulation 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 Macdonald a lengthy vision.”¹¹ Similar examples could be multiplied.

In a more scholarly vein, Mark Patterson claims Irvingite eschatology is an antecedent source to Darby and pretribulationism.¹² “Irving’s writing in *The Morning Watch* reveal that he was, above and before anything else, a pretribulation-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.”¹³ Initially, Patterson denies any intention to connect dispensationalism with Irving’s teaching:

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.¹⁴

Later, however, he makes the broad claim: “In the end, and at the very least, Irving must be considered the paladin of pre-tribulation pre-millennialism and the chief architect of its cardinal formulas.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Marvin J. Rosenthal, ‘Is the Church in Matthew Chapter 24?’ *Zion’s Fire* (November-December 1994), 10.

¹² Mark Rayburn Patterson, ‘Designing the Last Days: Edward Irving, The Albury Circle, and the Theology of *The Morning Watch*’ (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, King’s College, London, 2001).

¹³ Ibid., 228–29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 136.

¹⁵ Mark A. Patterson and Andrew Walker, “‘Our Unspeakable Comfort’: Irving, Albury, and the Origins of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture”, in Stephen Hunt, editor, *Christian Millenarianism: From the Early Church to Waco* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 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

MacPherson's Claims

Irvingite Robert Norton included a handwritten account of Margaret Macdonald's 'prophecy,'¹⁶ which MacPherson says was the fountainhead for Darby's development of the pretribulation rapture doctrine.¹⁷ MacPherson does not say that Macdonald included a clear statement of the pretribulation rapture, but that she "separated the Rapture from the Second Coming before anyone else did."¹⁸ 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,"¹⁹ declares MacPherson, based on her phrase, "now look out for the sign of the Son of man."²⁰ MacPherson argues that, "she equated the *sign* with the Rapture—a Rapture that would occur *before* the revealing of Antichrist."²¹ 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."²²

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 contends. Therefore, it would be impossible for this source to be the basis for a new idea if it did not contain those elements. The scriptural references she cites are considered to be second coming statements by pretribulationists. 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."²³ MacPherson has misinterpreted Macdonald's words by equating her use of "sign" with a rapture. (Pretribulationists teach that the rapture is sign-less.) Rather, she is saying that only those who are spiritual will see the secret *sign* of the Son of

circle predate Darby's mature view on the pre-tribulation Rapture belongs entirely to Mark Patterson," 98, n. 1.

¹⁶ 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* (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III Publishers, 1994), 249–52.

¹⁷ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 50–57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

²² *Ibid.*, 126.

²³ Timothy C. F. Stunt, "The Tribulation of Controversy: A Review Article", *Brethren Archivists & Historians Network Review* 2:2 (2003), 93.

Man that will precede the single, post-tribulation 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:

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.²⁴

Macdonald is clearly concerned with spiritual insight for several reasons. First, Stephen *saw* into heaven; he was not raptured or taken to heaven. Second, 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.” Third, she is discussing “the sign of his appearance,” not His actual appearance. Fourth, once a person has been so enlightened, he will not need direction from others. He will be guided directly by “the living Christ.” Finally, 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.”²⁵

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.”²⁶ In other words, Macdonald seems to have been teaching a post-tribulation and partial rapture. Bray further explains:

²⁴ Norton, *Memoirs*, 172–77 (emphasis original).

²⁵ D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church: Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1945), 250.

²⁶ John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, n.d.), 21–22. Interestingly Bray argues that Emmanuel Lacunza, a Jesuit priest from Chile, writing under the assumed name of Rabbi Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra as a converted Jew, came up with a two-staged coming in the 1790s. However, such a view was taught a few hundred years earlier by Joseph Mede, *A Paraphrase and Exposition of the Prophecies of Saint Peter, Concerning the day of Christ's second Coming, Described in the third Chapter of his second Epistle. As Also, How the Conflagration, or Destruction of the World by fire, (whereof Saint Peter speaks) and especially of the Heavens, is to be*

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.²⁷

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.”²⁸ 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 poured 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.²⁹

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

understood. (London: R. Bishop, 1642). This essay is included in *The Works of Joseph Mede*, 609–19. Mede’s view was widely held during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

²⁷ Bray, *Origin*, 20–21 (emphasis original).

²⁸ MacPherson, *Cover-Up*, 155–56.

²⁹ Norton, *Memoirs*, 174–76.

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.³⁰

Macdonald, then, was a post-tribulationist. She believed the church would go through the tribulation. This is hardly the beginning of pre-tribulation theology! 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 either MacDonald or Irving was pretribulationist, the evidence gets very muddy. The quotations MacPherson cites do not support his conclusions.³¹

Timothy 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.³²

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 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.”³³ 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 pre-tribulation rapture after Macdonald’s utterance, which he did not, specific proof would be needed to make a link between Macdonald and Darby. Instead MacPherson offers only 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.

³⁰ Charles Ryrie, *What You Should Know about the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 71.

³¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 44.

³² Stunt, ‘Controversy’, 93.

³³ MacPherson, *Hoax*, 7.

F. F. Bruce says, "Where did he [Darby] get it? The reviewer's answer would be that it was in the air in the 1820s and 1830s among eager students of unfulfilled prophecy . . . direct dependence by Darby on Margaret Macdonald is unlikely."³⁴ Stunt draws a similar conclusion when he says,

When considering the new eschatological framework which was taking shape around 1830, my own suspicion is that a significant element in its origin is to be found in the profound anxiety and bewilderment induced by a series of what seemed to be cataclysmic or even apocalyptic events. Catholic emancipation, revolutions on the continent of Europe, the death of George IV and two general elections in close succession, rural and urban violence (in which, for example, the Bishop of Bristol's palace was burnt down), the ongoing agitation for reform, as well as the scourge of cholera—these are some of the more obvious factors which we have to consider when asking why many people felt that they had reached a watershed in prophetic development and why the possibility of deliverance from tribulation seemed so attractive.³⁵

Roy Huebner considers MacPherson's charges as "using slander that J. N. Darby took the [truth of the] pretribulation rapture from those very opposing, demon-inspired utterances."³⁶ He concludes that MacPherson:

did not profit by reading the utterances allegedly by Miss M. M. Instead of apprehending the plain import of her statements, as given by R. Norton, which has some affinity to the post-tribulation scheme and no real resemblance to the pretribulation rapture and dispensational truth, he has read into it what he appears so anxious to find.³⁷

Columba Flegg notes that the Brethren teaching on the rapture and the present invisible and spiritual nature of the church "were in sharp contrast to Catholic Apostolic teaching . . . attempts to see any direct influence of one upon the other seem unlikely to succeed . . . Several writers [referring specifically to MacPherson] 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."³⁸

It seems, then, most likely that Margaret Macdonald did not teach *any* of the features of a pre-tribulation rapture theology as MacPherson suggests, and therefore she could not have been a source for the origin of that doctrine. The most likely origin

³⁴ F. F. Bruce, review of *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* in *Evangelical Quarterly* 47 (1975), 58.

³⁵ Stunt, 'Controversy', 96–97. He adds, "This inquiry into the emotional and spiritual mind-set of men and women who lived 160 years ago requires sympathetic understanding rather than the polemics of judgment. In this respect, the help given by Mr. MacPherson's book is minimal" (97).

³⁶ R. A. Huebner, *The Truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Recovered* (Millington, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1976), 13.

³⁷ Huebner, *Truth*, 67.

³⁸ Columba Graham Flegg, *'Gathered Under Apostles': A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 436.

of modern pre-tribulationism is Darby's study of the Bible and meditation. Walvoord concludes,

Any careful student of Darby soon discovers that he did not get his eschatological views from men, but rather from his doctrine of the church as the body of Christ, a concept no one claims was revealed supernaturally to Irving or Macdonald. Darby's views undoubtedly were gradually formed, but they were theologically and biblically based rather than derived from Irving's pre-Pentecostal group.³⁹

Huebner's Likely Suggestion

Roy Huebner argues that Darby first began to believe in the pre-tribulation rapture and develop his dispensational thinking while convalescing from a riding accident during December 1826 and January 1827 (more likely December 1827 and January 1828).⁴⁰ If true, Darby would have had a head start on any who would have supposedly influenced his thought, making it chronologically impossible for any of the "influence" theories to have credibility. Huebner demonstrates that Darby's understanding of the pre-tribulation rapture was the product of the development of his personal interactive thought with the text of Scripture as he and his associates have long contended.

Darby's pre-tribulation and dispensational thinking, says Huebner, was developed from the following factors. First, "he saw from Isaiah 32 that there was a different dispensation coming . . . that *Israel and the Church were distinct*."⁴¹ Second, "during his convalescence JND learned that *he ought daily to expect his Lord's return*."⁴² Third, "in 1827 JND understood the fall of the church . . . 'the ruin of the Church.'"⁴³ Fourth, Darby also was beginning to see a gap of time between the rapture and the second coming by 1827.⁴⁴ Fifth, Darby himself said in 1857 that he first started understanding things relating to the pre-tribulation rapture "thirty years ago." And "with that fixed point of reference, Jan. 31, 1827 [1828 TDI]," Huebner argues, we can see that Darby "had already understood those truths upon which the pre-tribulation rapture, i.e., the pre-Revelation 4 rapture, hinges."⁴⁵ Therefore, when reading

³⁹ Walvoord, *Blessed Hope*, 47.

⁴⁰ R. A. Huebner, *John Nelson Darby: Precious Truths Revived and Defended, Vol. 1: Revival of Truth 1826–1845*, 2nd edition (Jackson, N. J.: Present Truth Publishers, 2004), 7–18. Stunt's research supports an adjusted date for Darby's convalescence, more likely December 1827 till January 1828. See Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–35* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 171.

⁴¹ Huebner, *John Nelson Darby*, 10 (emphasis original). It could have been at this time that Darby shifted from postmillennialism to premillennialism.

⁴² Huebner, *John Nelson Darby*, 12 (emphasis original).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* For a more extended presentation of the evidence for when Darby first discovered pretribulationism see Thomas Ice, "John Nelson Darby and the Rapture," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology*, 17, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 106–14.

Darby's earliest published essay on biblical prophecy (1829), it is clear that while it still has elements of historicism, it also reflects the fact that for Darby, the rapture was to be the church's focus and hope.⁴⁶ Even in this earliest of essays, Darby expounds upon the rapture as the church's hope.⁴⁷ It is not unusual for inconsistencies to arise in one's thought when transitioning from one system (historicism) to another (futurism).

The timing of Darby's rapture discovery can be attested by a couple of sources. Francis Newman served as a tutor for the Pennefather children for fifteen months during 1827 and 1828 and 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.⁴⁸ Newman speaks of Darby's influence upon 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."⁴⁹

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."⁵⁰ 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 also confirms Darby's doctrinal discoveries occurred during his convalescence during December 1827 and January 1828.

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

⁴⁶ J. N. Darby, 'Reflections upon the Prophetic Inquiry and the Views Advanced in it', *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 2 (Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, reprint 1971), 1–31.

⁴⁷ Darby, 'Reflections,' 16–18, 25, 30.

⁴⁸ "... 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) . . .," *ibid.*, p. 62. Cited from Huebner, *John Nelson Darby*, 12, fn. 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).

⁴⁹ 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), 59, fn. 56.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Wills Newton, *The Fry Collection*, 61. Newton makes a similar statement about Newman visiting Darby in 1827 on page 235. See also *Fry Collection*, 240–41.

also, and his mind and soul had traveled rapidly in the direction which had thus been given to it.⁵¹

Bellett said 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 a hurt in his knee. His poor people in Calary miss him sadly.”⁵² 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.

Irvingite Influences?

Mark Patterson claims that, “Irving must be considered the paladin of pre-tribulation pre-millennialism and the chief architect of its cardinal formulas.”⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

There are a number of problems created when one sees too great 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 of Darby’s core principles, and compare them to those of Irving and his followers. First, consider the “literalistic hermeneutic.” Patterson himself describes Irving and the Albury hermeneutic as not just literal since

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² Bellett, *Recollections*, 27.

⁵³ Mark A. 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), 115.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 114–15.

that “tells only half the story.” Instead, he argues, Irving is best understood as following a “literal-typological methodology.”⁵⁵ This is typical of the quasi-literalism of historicism. By contrast, Darby was a consistent literalist, and did not attempt to make days into years or find historical fulfillment of seal, trumpet or bowl judgments in the church's past history, instead seeing these judgments as future literal events. Also, Irving and Albury believed many of the passages that spoke of events in a future Jewish tribulation were unfolding before their eyes. For example, Babylon was seen as a symbol of the apostate Church in their own day. David Bebbington distinguishes between the historicist hermeneutic and a futurist form of literalism:

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.⁵⁶

Thus, Irving and Albury do not have a common hermeneutic with Darby as Patterson contends.

No doubt both held 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 is tied to their historicist view of Revelation. They taught that the church had just finished the 1,260 days, which are really 1,260 years that ended with the defeat of Antichrist (i.e., Roman Catholicism) in 1789 in the French Revolution. These events forewarned the impending rise of the whore of Babylon (Revelation 17–18), which is also a symbol of the apostate church.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Darby, as a futurist, held that the apostasy of the church was predicted primarily in the New Testament epistles and would increasingly characterize the end of the current church age.⁵⁸ His view is very different than the historicist notion,

⁵⁵ Patterson, “Designing the Last Days,” 76. See also page 62.

⁵⁶ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 89.

⁵⁷ 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.

⁵⁸ 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; 1 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; 1 John 2:18–23; 3:4–12; 4:1–6; 2 John 9; Jude 3–23. On Darby's view of the ruin of the church see *Letters of J. N. Darby*, vol. 3, 297–305 for his explanation of how he came to his view. See the following essays for expositions of his view: *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 1, 117–23, 138–55, 169, 198, 250; vol. 4, 10–36; vol. 14, 88–90, 272–300; vol. 16, 384; vol. 20, 189, 192; vol. 21, 209.

which has a completely different role for the apostasy. 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 literal 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 the Jews would return to their land in unbelief and then be converted during the seven-year tribulation. 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.”⁵⁹ However, Irving believed that concurrent 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.”⁶⁰ Shortly after that time Christ will return.⁶¹

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 important are the differences concerning the details of Christ coming as seen by the different systems and also many differences 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, pre-tribulationism and dispensationalism. Instead, it is Irving and Albury that Darby and the new school of futurism was set 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-tribulation 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, there is little in Darby’s intellectual legacy that would suggest he was incapable of producing a unique theology.

Irvingite Historicism

If one conducts an extensive examination of Irving and Irvingite doctrine, one will see they were still overwhelmingly historicist, while Darby and the Brethren had become clear futurists.⁶² Columba Graham Flegg, an Irvingite scholar who grew up within that church, claims the differences between the two movements are far-reaching:

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ Irving, “Preliminary Discourse,” v.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁶² For an excellent overview and relatively brief presentation of Irving’s eschatology by Irving himself, see his “Preliminary Discourse,” i–cxciv.

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.⁶³

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. This was a classic historicist outlook. He also taught that the second coming was synonymous with the rapture.⁶⁴ Irving believed that it was the single return of the Lord that was getting near. This is hardly pre-tribulation 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 comings" 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. . .

⁶³ Flegg, *Gathered Under Apostles*, 436 (emphasis original). Flegg's chapter on Catholic Apostolic eschatology is extensive (249 pages), more than half the volume of the book.

⁶⁴ Edward Irving, "Signs of the Times in the Church," *The Morning Watch* 2 (1830), 156.

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.⁶⁵

The Irvingite View of the Rapture

Even though Irving and his Albury disciples spoke often about the translation of saints to heaven, they clearly did not hold to any form of a pre-tribulation rapture. Flegg's definitive 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."⁶⁶ Such a view does not sound like pre-tribulationism! 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.⁶⁷

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 seventy-four examples of what he calls a "pretribulation rapture" in Irvingite literature.⁶⁸ After examining everyone, it is clear these references are better viewed as references to the second coming, as described above, including a translation of believers. This is not pre-tribulation theology as taught by Darby, the Brethren or any form of contemporary dispensationalism.

Conclusion

While Irving and the Albury group had a few eschatological ideas that were unique, a belief in the pre-tribulation rapture was not one of them. It is impossible for one to follow the historicist approach and also believe the rapture will occur before the tribulation, since historicists believe that the tribulation began hundreds of years ago and runs the course of most of the current church age. It is also true that Irvingites spoke of a soon coming of Christ to translate believers to heaven, but this view was

⁶⁵ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 62–64.

⁶⁶ Flegg, 'Gathered Under Apostles', 434.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 425.

⁶⁸ Robert Patterson, 'Designing,' n. 87, 165.

part of their second coming belief that they could have derived from Manuel Lacunza's writings, which were not the product of futurism at that point.⁶⁹ Such a view has similar elements as seen in Robert Gundry's version of post-tribulationism. Gundry holds 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."⁷⁰

On the other hand, Darby most likely thought of and then developed the idea of pre-tribulationism in the process of shifting to futurism. Paul Wilkinson notes that "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."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Manuel Lacunza, also known as Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, *The Coming of Messiah*, 99–101; 214–17; 248–51; 266–67.

⁷⁰ Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 109.

⁷¹ Paul Richard Wilkinson, 'John Nelson Darby and the Origins of Christian Zionism' (University of Manchester, 2006), 322.