

WARNING From Voices of the Past

by
Jim Sayles

We cannot escape the importance of the writings of the early church fathers, especially those prior to the First Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, heavily influenced by the oral tradition of the apostolic teachings. It is, therefore, important to recognize that these men all held to a historic pre-millennial view, in which the concept of a pre-tribulation resurrection-“rapture” of church only saints was inconceivable to them.

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century when a Triad of elitist Plymouth Brethren members, John Nelson Darby, Cyrus Scofield, and Sir Robert Anderson, invented, introduced, and promoted the doctrine of Dispensationalism, which is the source of the pre-tribulation resurrection-“rapture” of church only saints.

But one thing is certain; if the dispensational doctrine of a pre-tribulation resurrection-“rapture” of church only saints had surfaced in earlier days, it would have been universally exposed as heresy.

Are we, therefore, really going to accept this new theory without a thorough, Spirit-guided exegesis when ALL of the church fathers prior to this time, including John the Apostle, taught that the church would be persecuted by the Antichrist and that there would only be one resurrection of the righteous, which would take place on the "last day"?

Pre-Nicene Council

Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-168):

“Two advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonored, and crucified; but the other, in which He shall come from heaven with glory, when the man of apostasy, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth **against us the Christians.**” (*First Apology of Justine*, Chapter 110)

Irenaeus (A.D. 140-202), student of Polycarp taught by the apostle, John:

“And then he”...(Daniel)...“points out the time that his tyranny shall last, during which **the saints shall be put to flight.**” (*Against Heresies V, XXVL, 1*)
“And they shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and shall give their kingdom to the beast, and **put the church to flight.**” (*Against Heresies V, XXVI*)

Tertulian (A.D. 160-220):

“That the beast Antichrist, with his false prophet, may **wage war on the Church of God.**” (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 25)

Cyprian (A.D. 200-258):

“The Lord hath foretold that these things would come. With the exhortation of His foreseeing word, instructing, and teaching, and preparing, and strengthening the people of His Church for all endurance of things to come. **He previously warned us** that the adversary would increase more and more in the last times.” (Treatise 7)

“For you ought to know and to believe, and hold it for certain, that the day of affliction has begun to hang over our heads, and the end of the world and the time of Antichrist to draw near, so that **we must all stand prepared for the battle**...The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service...Nor let any one wonder that we are harassed with increasing afflictions, when the Lord before predicted that these things would happen in the last times.” (*Epistles of Cyprian, LV*, 1,2)

“Nor let any one of you, beloved brethren, be so terrified by the fear of future persecution, or the coming of the threatening Antichrist, as not to be found armed for all things by the evangelical exhortations and precepts, and by the heavenly warnings.” (*Cyprian, LIII*, p.722)

Hippolytus (A.D. 160-240):

“...the one thousand two hundred and three score days (the half of the week) during which the tyrant is to reign and **persecute the Church**...” (*Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 61)

Victorinus of Poetovia (? -303)

“The little season signifies three years and six months, in which with all his power the devil will avenge himself under Antichrist **against the Church.**” (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 20:1-3)

Post-Nicene Council

Augustine (A.D. 354-430):

“...the kingdom of Antichrist shall fiercely, though for a short time, **assail the Church...**” (*The City of God*, XX, 23)

Roger Bacon (A.D. 1214-1274):

“...future perils [**for the Church**] in the times of Antichrist...” (*Opus Majus II*, page 634)

Martin Luther (A.D. 1483-1546):

[The book of Revelation] “...is intended as a revelation of things that are to happen in the future, and especially of **tribulations and disasters for the Church...**” (*Works of Martin Luther*, VI, p. 481)

John Knox (A.D. 1515-1572):

“[T]he great love of God towards his Church, whom he pleased to forewarn of dangers to come...to wit, The man of sin, The Antichrist...” (*The Historie of the Reformation etc.*, I, p.76)

Roger Williams (A.D. 1603-1683):

“Antichrist...hath his prisons, to keep Christ Jesus and his members fast.” (*The Bloody Tenent etc*, p. 153)

Charles Hodge (A.D. 1797-1878):

“...the fate of his Church here on earth...is the burden of the Apocalypse.” (*Systematic Theology*, III, p. 827)

Carl F. Keil (A.D. 1807-1888):

“...the persecution of the last enemy Antichrist **against the Church of the Lord...**” (*Biblical Commentary*, YXMV, p. 503)

There is no suggestion here that we should assume that the unified view of these early church fathers is correct. But we cannot escape the importance of the

fact that they **all** believed that the followers of Christ will face the Antichrist during the “**great tribulation**”, and that this teaching **IS** what the apostles taught.

Nor can we ignore the fact that there are no legitimate writings during this entire time that present a different view...until John N. Darby’s presentation of the theory of a pre-tribulation resurrection-“rapture” of church only saints at the Powerscourt Prophecy Conference in 1832.

As children tossed to and fro by winds of doctrine, are we really going to ignore that which the apostles universally taught in favor of the feel-good, ear tickling teaching of a pre-trib “rapture” as it is promoted by deceived men with HUGE investments of reputation in “prophecy” ministries? Or is it time to re-examine this issue thoroughly with the guidance of the Spirit of truth?

Here are a few others, past and present, you may recognize who are in agreement with the apostolic tradition of the early church fathers:

Jay Adams, Randy Alcorn, Henry Alford, Richard Ames, Matthew Arnold, J. Sidlow Baxter, Allistair Begg, Jonas Clark, Corrie Ten Bloom, David Brainerd, F. F. Bruce, John Bunyan, John Calvin, B. H. Carroll, William Cowper, John Gill, Robert Gundry, Hank Hanegraaff, Carl F. H. Henry, William Hendriksen, Matthew Henry, Herschell Hobbs, Adoniram Judson, D. James Kennedy, John Knox, George Eldon Ladd, Hugh Latimer, C. S. Lewis, J. B. Lightfoot, Harold Lindsell, C. S. Lovett, Martin Luther, Walter Martin, Dave McPherson, Jack McAlister, James McKeever, Alexander McLaren, Albert Mohler, Russell Moore, John Warwick Montgomery, Doug Moo, Dale Moody, G. Campbell Morgan, H. C. G. Moule, George Mueller, Andrew Murray, Watchman Nee, Sir Isaac Newton, John Newton, Harold J. Ockenga, J. Edwin Orr, Ian Paisley, Wilfred Pink, John Piper, Bernard Ramm, Paul Rees, A.T. Robertson, Marv Rosenthal, Oswald J. Smith, R. C. Sproul, Charles Spurgeon, John R. W. Stott, A. H. Strong, Merrell Tenny, J. H. Thayer, B. B. Warfield, Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, John Wesley, George Whitefield, William Wilberforce, Andrew Wommack, Ulrich Zwingli.

PAY ATTENTION, the groomsman’s announcement, “**Behold! The bridegroom is coming;**” will soon awaken the entire body of Christ from its slumber, and those who are deceived by the heretical doctrines of Dispensationalism, including the pre-tribulation resurrection-“rapture” of the church, Historicism, Preterism, and numerous other “isms” are not ready for the things soon to come.

But we are warned:

“See, I have warned you in advance...” Matthew 24:25

Post Script: A recent discovery of a Byzantine text by Ephraem, the Syrian, from Nisibis, reveals two sentences in the text seemingly indicating that the church will be removed before tribulation. Dispensationalists Chuck Missler and Grant Jeffery were tremendously excited about this text, because, before this discovery, there were **none** to be found. Yet, this view did not persist, and is not found in any writings of the church fathers until the reformation movement.

Likewise, Grant Jeffrey confessed proudly that he had searched out ALL the early writings for more than ten years to find this one passage by Ephraem, the Syrian.

Why was he not moved to reconsider his dual covenant, and heretical, Jewish supremacist bias by the vast number of early church fathers whose writings totally denied the possibility of a pre-tribulation resurrection-“rapture” of the church?

Hopefully the reader will have the spiritually “noble Berean” attitude of examining scripture for himself/herself as the Spirit of truth “guides” just as the early church fathers did.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. 16:13 KJV