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YET, ANOTHER PRE-DARBY RAPTURE STATEMENT

by Thomas Ice

In the eight years that I have been working as Executive Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center, there have been three major discoveries of writings teaching some form of a pretribulation rapture. The most recent find has been brought forth from an unexpected source that I will reveal to you in this article.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Since many non-pretribulationists often formulate a historical argument against those teaching the pre-trib rapture, it is important to know that some did teach a rapture before the tribulation and distinct from the second coming. Rapture critic Gary DeMar says, “All attempts to find a pretrib Rapture any earlier than around 1830 do not stand up to historical scrutiny.”¹ Of course, J. N. Darby himself first discovered pretribulationism from his own biblical studies during December 1826 and January 1827.² But there are those who preceded Darby, as I have written about in the past. Critics of the rapture, like DeMar ask, “why didn’t anyone see this prior to the nineteenth century if the pretrib Rapture ‘is taught clearly?’”³ The belief by DeMar is that since pretribulationism, he believes, is not found earlier throughout church history, then that means its not found in the Bible. I disagree. Whether something is in the Bible depends upon whether it is in the Bible. It has nothing to do with how many people did or did not observe it in the Bible. Nevertheless, I will look at the historical evidence.

PRE-DARBY RAPTURE OCCURRENCES

As I noted earlier, I think that at least three instances of pre-Darby pretribulationism have surfaced in the last eight years. The first is the statement by Pseudo-Ephraem, as brought to our attention by Grant Jeffrey. This rapture statement is as follows:

Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms all the world? . . . For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.⁴

This sermon was written between A.D. 374—627, well before the nineteenth century. Dr. Robert Gundry of Westmont College, a leading posttribulationist, wrote a critique of our Pseudo-Ephraem findings.⁵ I answered his objections in our book *The Return*,⁶ thus, demonstrating further why a pretrib understanding of Pseudo-Ephraem stands.

Next came the discovery of Morgan Edwards who wrote about his pretrib beliefs in 1744 and later published them in 1788.⁷ Edwards taught the following:

II. *The distance between the first and second resurrection will be somewhat more than a thousand years.*

I say, *somewhat more*—, because the dead saints will be raised, and the living changed at Christ's "appearing in the air" (I Thes. iv. 17); and **this will be about three years and a half before the *millennium***, as we shall see hereafter: but will he and they abide in the air all that time? No: they will ascend to paradise, or to some one of those many "mansions in the father's house" (John xiv. 2), and **disappear during the foresaid period of time.** The design of this retreat and disappearing will be to judge the risen and changed saints; for "now the time is come that judgment must begin," and that will be "at the house of God" (I Pet. iv. 17) . . . (p. 7; The spelling of all Edwards quotes have been modernized.)

What has Edwards said? Edwards clearly separates the rapture from the second coming by three and a half years. He uses modern pretrib rapture verses (1 Thess. 4:17 and John 14:2) to describe the rapture. He, like modern pretribulationists, links the time in heaven, during the tribulation, with the "bema" judgment of believers.

The only difference, at least as far as the above statements go, between current pretribulationism and Edwards is the time interval of three and a half years instead of seven. This does not mean that he is a midtribulationist, since it appears that he thought the totality of the tribulation was three and a half, not seven years.

BROTHER DOLCINO AND THE RAPTURE

At the recent meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on November 14-16, 2001 in Colorado Springs, Francis X. Gumerlock presented a paper entitled "Before Darby: Expanding the Historical Boundaries of Pretribulationism." Gumerlock argues that someone named Brother Dolcino and his sect called the Apostolic Brethren taught a pretrib rapture around A.D. 1304.⁸ Gumerlock found this material in a text called *The History of Brother Dolcino*.⁹ Gumerlock explains:

The History of Brother Dolcino was composed in 1316 by an anonymous notary of the diocese of Vercelli in northern Italy. This short Latin treatise gives a firsthand account of the deeds and beliefs of a religious order called the Apostolic Brethren. Under the leadership of Brother Dolcino, the Apostolic Brethren flourished in the author's diocese between the years 1300 and 1307.¹⁰ The text was recopied in 1551, and in the 1600's was used as source material for two other ecclesiastical histories of the area. The treatise was later printed in the 1740's in the 25-volume *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*.¹¹ And it was most recently edited in 1907 with the reprint of this multi-volume set, where it contains fourteen pages of Volume Nine.¹²

Gumerlock provides the following history of Brother Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren movement:

In 1260, Gerard Sagarello founded the Apostolic Brethren after his application for membership with the Franciscans was rejected.¹³ Like the Franciscans, the Apostolic Brethren were committed to radical poverty and itinerant preaching of the Gospel.¹⁴ However, at that time the founding of new religious orders was strictly forbidden by the pope and several church councils. Consequently, the Apostolic Brethren were objects of persecution, and in 1300 their leader, Gerard, was burned at the stake. Brother Dolcino, who had been a member of the Apostolic Brethren for a number of years, took over leadership of the order in that year. At one point under his leadership, the Apostolic Brethren had grown to about 4,000 members.¹⁵

The persecuted order under Dolcino's leadership withdrew to the mountainous areas of northern Italy, near Novara and Vercelli. But the size of the order and their need for daily sustenance, resulted in clashes with local authorities. In 1306, a bull was drawn up by Pope Clement V, and a crusade was launched against them. In 1307, over 400 members of the Apostolic Brethren were slaughtered by papal forces. Dolcino was captured, mutilated, and burned at the stake.¹⁶

The reason Gumerlock believes that Brother Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren taught pretribulationism is found the following statement:

“Again, [Dolcino believed and preached and taught] that within those three years Dolcino himself and his followers will preach the coming of the Antichrist. And that the Antichrist was coming into this world within the bounds of the said three and a half years; and after he had come, then he [Dolcino] and his followers would be **transferred into Paradise**, in which are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way they will be **preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist**. And that then Enoch and Elijah themselves would descend on the earth for the purpose of preaching [against] Antichrist. Then they would be killed by him or by his servants, and thus **Antichrist would reign for a long time**. But when the Antichrist is dead, Dolcino himself, who then would be the holy pope, and his preserved followers, **will descend on the earth**, and will preach the right faith of Christ to all, and will convert those who will be living then to the true faith of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

Gumerlock clearly believes that this is a pretrib rapture statement as he concludes:

For this fourteenth-century text, *The History of Brother Dolcino*, shows us that some Christians in the middle ages held a view of the rapture that had basic elements of what we call today a pretribulation rapture. These include a significant gap of time between the rapture of the saints and their subsequent descent to earth, and the purpose of the rapture related to escaping end-time tribulation. And on this basis, I submit my case for expanding the historical boundaries of pretribulationism.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Even more amazing than Gumerlock's discover itself is the fact that Gumerlock is very much opposed to pretribulationism and most likely even premillennialism.¹⁹ Further, the entity that published Gumerlock's book *The Day and the Hour* is American Vision, which is directed by rapture opponent Gary DeMar. I noted above that DeMar said, "All attempts to find a pretrib Rapture any earlier than around 1830 do not stand up to historical scrutiny."²⁰ In fact DeMar not only published Gumerlock's book, he wrote a glowing foreword to it. Yet Gumerlock says about Brother Dolcino in *The Day and the Hour* that, "The Dolcinites held to a pre-tribulation rapture theory similar to that in modern dispensationalism."²¹ Either DeMar doesn't really believe the research of Gumerlock in *The Day and the Hour*, or he doesn't know much about the true history of the rapture. Either way, DeMar's statement about 1830 has been weighed and found wanting by one of his own colleagues. Gumerlock hits the nail on the head when he says, "Especially in need of rethinking are those views which place the origin of the teaching, or its initial recovery, within the last two hundred years."²² I couldn't have said it better myself. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 19.

² Thomas Ice, "Is The Pre-Trib Rapture A Satanic Deception?" *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, (Vol. II, No. 1; March 1995), p. 2. Single copies of back issues of *Pre-Trib Perspectives* can be obtained by writing The Pre-Trib Research Center, P O Box 14111, Arlington, Texas 76094.

³ DeMar, *End Times Fiction*, p. 23.

⁴ Pseudo-Ephraem, *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*, section 2, translated by Cameron Rhoades, produced by The Pre-Trib Research Center. See Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, "The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (Vol. 152, No. 607; July-September 1995), pp. 306-17. Reprinted in Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Demy, *The Return: Understanding Christ's Second Coming and the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), pp. 55-66.

⁵ Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist: Why Christ Won't Come Before The Antichrist Does* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), pp. 161-88.

⁶ Ice and Demy, *The Return*, pp. 67-73.

⁷ Morgan Edwards, *Two Academical Exercised on Subjects Bearing the following Titles; Millennium, Last-Novelties* (Philadelphia: self-published, 1788). See Thomas Ice, "Morgan Edwards: Another Pre-Darby Rapturist," *Pre-Trib Perspectives* (Vol. II, No. 4; Sept/Oct 1995), pp. 1-3.

⁸ Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour: A Chronicle of Christianity's Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000), p. 80.

⁹ Anonymous, *Historia Fratris Dulcini*, 1316.

¹⁰ Dolcino wrote three circular letters, but these are no longer extant. *Historia Fratris Dulcini* is in Codice Ambrosiano-H. 80. It was edited in 1551, and was utilized in the 1600's in several other ecclesiastical histories of the area of Vercelli and Novara. The date of 1316 is confirmed in R. Kestenberg-Gladstein, "The Third Reich: A Fifteenth-Century Polemic Against Joachimism, and Its Background" in Delno West, ed., *Joachim of Fiore in Christian Thought*, Vol 2 (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1975), 599, no. 49. Eugenio Anagnine describes the *Historia* as a "opera stesa probabilmente da un contemporaneo di Biella (1304-7)." See Eugenio Anagnine, *Dolcino* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1964), p. 1.

¹¹ L.A. Muratori, ed., *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Old Series, Vol. 9 (Italy, 1723-1751), p. 436.

¹² Francis X. Gumerlock, "Before Darby: Expanding the Historical Boundaries of Pretribulationism," A paper presented at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, November 14-16, 2001, p. 2.

¹³ Many followers of the eschatology of Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202) expected a last-days reform of the Church to occur in 1260, a year that corresponds with the 1260 days mentioned in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5.

¹⁴ A contemporary of the Apostolic Brethren, Salimbene, in his *Chronicle*, gives an account of the order under the leadership of Gerard Sagarello. See *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, Joseph L. Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi, and John Robert Kane, eds. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 40 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986). Members of the order wore woolen mantels and sandals and went about northern Italy and other countries preaching “Penitenz-agite,” a colloquialism for “Paenitentiam agite!,” the Gospel injunction to repent.

¹⁵ There are quite a number of books and articles in Italian on Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren, but very few in English. Comprehensive treatments in English include Antonio Gallenga, *A Historical Memoir of Fra Dolcino and His Times* (London: Longman, Green, and Longman, 1853); and John William Siedzik, *Fra Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren*, Master’s thesis (University of California, 1952), which is available from that university on microfilm.

¹⁶ Gumerlock, “Before Darby,” p. 3.

¹⁷ Gumerlock’s translation of the Latin text in Gumerlock, “Before Darby,” p. 3.

¹⁸ Gumerlock, “Before Darby,” p. 6.

¹⁹ See Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour*, pp. 1-3, where he describes his journey away from dispensationalism.

²⁰ DeMar, *End Times Fiction*, p. 19.

²¹ Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour*, p. 80.

²² Gumerlock, “Before Darby,” p. 6.