

A RAPTURE CITATION IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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IS THE DOCTRINE OF THE PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE a nineteenth-century theological invention, as is sometimes alleged? The purpose of this article is to introduce and discuss a portion of a fourteenth-century text, *The History of Brother Dolcino*, as it relates to this contemporary question about the history of the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture.

Two theories regarding the history of the pretribulational rapture are popular but inadequate. The first is what one writer has called “the great rapture hoax.”¹ Proponents of this theory say that the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture is not in the Bible and was unheard of in the history of Christianity until the early nineteenth century. They say this idea originated with an 1812 Spanish publication of Immanuel Lacunza, a Roman Catholic Jesuit.² It was then picked up in England by Edward Irving, who translated Lacunza’s book into English in the 1820s.³ In an Irvingite meeting

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¹ Dave MacPherson, *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983)

² Duncan McDougall, *The Rapture of the Saints* (Vancouver, BC: British Israel Association, 1962), John L. Bray, *The Great Tribulation?* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, 1982), 4–5, idem, *The Origin of the Pre Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, 1982), 18–20, and idem, *The Second Coming and Related Events* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, 1985), 18–24

³ Immanuel Lacunza, *The Coming of Messiah in Majesty and Glory*, trans. Edward Irving, 2 vols. (1827, reprints available from Good Books, 2456 Devonshire Rd., Springfield, IL 62703) The teaching of Irving and his denomination, the Catholic Apostolic Church, on the rapture is discussed in Rowland A. Davenport, *Albany Apostles: The Story of the Body Known as the Catholic Apostolic Church (Sometimes Called “The Irvingites”)* (Birdlip, UK: United Writers, 1970), Columba G. Flegg, *Gathered under Apostles: A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), and Mark Patterson and Andrew Walker, “Our Unspeakable Comfort: Irving, Albany, and the Origins of the Pretribulational Rapture,” *Fides et Historia* 21 (winter/spring 1999): 68–81 (reviewed by J. Lanier Burns in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 [July–September 2000]: 363–65)

thirteen-year-old Margaret Macdonald uttered a prophecy about the rapture being pretribulational. From her, it is alleged, John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), one of the founders of the Plymouth Brethren in England, learned of the pretribulational rapture. In other words this view of the rapture originated in Roman Catholicism or in the demonic utterance of a heretical Irvingite female. Passing it off as the fruit of his own study, Darby spread the pretribulational rapture “hoax” to the rest of evangelicalism.⁴ The main problems with this history of the pretribulational rapture are its conspiracy-type sensationalism and the questionable accuracy of some of its chain-link historical claims.⁵

Some advocates of pretribulationalism hold a different theory of the history of the rapture, a “lost-and-found” model that is equally unsatisfactory. They believe that the teaching of the pretribulational rapture is in the Bible, but that this doctrine was lost in history soon after the writing of the New Testament. Then in the early nineteenth century Darby was enlightened by the Holy Spirit to the correct doctrine about the rapture. Uniquely graced by God, Darby, through his private study of the Bible, restored the lost teaching of the rapture as a pretribulational event.⁶ Then from him

⁴ Other books by Dave McPherson that claim that the pretribulational rapture originated with the prophetic utterance of Margaret Macdonald include *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* (Kansas City, MO: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974); *The Incredible Cover-Up* (Medford, OR: Omega, 1980); *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III, 1995); and *The Three R's Rapture, Revisionism, Robbery: Pretribulation Rapture from 1830 to Hal Lindsey* (Simpsonville, SC: P.O.S.T, 1998). For the historical model of the origin of pretribulationalism in Margaret Macdonald, constructed largely with the purpose of vilifying the teaching, see Samuel P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1864), 26; John Scruby, *The Great Tribulation: The Church's Supreme Test* (Dayton, OH: John Scruby, 1933), 78; George Rose, *Tribulation until Translation* (Glendale, CA: Rose, 1943), 245; Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren 1825–1850* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1967), 16; and Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 185.

⁵ The “rapture hoax” narrative has been challenged within the past decade by Roy A. Huebner, *Precious Truths Revived and Defended through J. N. Darby*, vol. 1 (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth, 1991), 153–66; Thomas D. Ice, “Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulational Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (April–June 1990): 155–68; Frank Marotta, *Morgan Edwards: An Eighteenth Century Pretribulationist* (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth, 1995), 15–21; Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know about the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1996), 73–82; and Tim LaHaye, *Rapture under Attack* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1998), 119–36.

⁶ One such portrait of Darby as a restorer or reviver of lost truth is given by Huebner, *Precious Truths Revived and Defended through J. N. Darby*, vol 1. For example a heading in the preface reads “The State of the Church When the Reviving of the Truth Began” (p. viii); part 1 is entitled “The Revival of Truth 1826–1845” (p. 1); and section 1 is entitled “The ‘First Germinating’ of the Revived Truth in the Soul of

pretribulationism spread to the rest of evangelicalism.⁷ This view of the history of pretribulationism is inadequate because recent scholarship has brought to light examples of the teaching of pretribulationism in church history between the writing of the New Testament and Darby.⁸

In addition to the inaccuracies of these claims, both theories also share the shortcoming of an extremely narrow historical focus. Both have their historical gaze almost exclusively on articulations of the rapture in the early nineteenth century, leaving an enormous historical gap of nearly eighteen hundred years, from the writing of the New Testament to the nineteenth century. This chasm has resulted in fragmentary and incomplete presentations of the history of the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture.

A NEW HISTORY OF PRETRIBULATIONISM EMERGING

Aware that a more comprehensive history of the pretribulation rapture is needed—one that stretches across various Christian traditions and all time periods of Christian history—a growing number of evangelicals are focusing their research on historical articulations of the pretribulation rapture during that eighteen-hundred-year gap between the apostles and the nineteenth century. And in that period they are finding examples of teaching that is strikingly similar to modern pretribulationism.

Recently Grant Jeffrey brought to the attention of evangelicals the pretribulationism in a sermon by pseudo-Ephraem, entitled *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*. Dated before the seventh century, the author of the sermon wrote, “All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the

J N Darby” (p 3)

⁷ The spread of pretribulationism from Darby to the present is discussed by Thomas Ice, “Rapture, History of the,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed Mal Couch (Grand Rapids Kregel, 1996), 344–47, and Richard R Reiter, “A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions,” in *The Rapture Pre , Mid , or Post Tribulation?* ed Richard R Reiter, Paul D Feinberg, Gleason L Archer, and Douglas Moo (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1984), 10–44

⁸ Some proponents of the “lost-and-found” view have unsuccessfully resorted to the “progression of dogma” to explain the reason for the loss and discovery of the teaching. But when portrayed as restorer, Darby still bears too much similarity with other so-called “restorers of ancient Christianity” that sprang up in the nineteenth century, including Alexander Campbell, Ellen G White, and Joseph Smith

world because of our sins.”⁹

In 1995 Frank Marotta and John Bray brought to light the pretribulational rapture teaching of Morgan Edwards, a Baptist theologian of the 1700s and founder of Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁰ In a treatise written in the 1740s Edwards taught that three and a half years before the Antichrist will kill the two witnesses of Revelation 11, the Son of Man will appear in the clouds to raise the dead, change the living, and catch them up to be with Himself.¹¹

Neither of these findings mirrors the modern teaching of pretribulationalism in every detail. For example both pseudo-Ephraem and Morgan Edwards wrote that the rapture of the saints would take place three and a half years, not seven years, before the saints’ subsequent descent to earth. But the fact that these ancient authors taught that the church will be caught up to heaven for the purpose of escaping the end-time tribulation, and that the saints will be in heaven while some events of the end-time tribulation will occur on earth, as described in Revelation, has led many evangelicals to include these authors in their discussions of the overall history of pretribulationalism.

Consequently a new history of pretribulationalism is beginning to emerge, one that is breaking through the narrow confines of

⁹ Grant R. Jeffrey, “Pseudo-Ephraem’s Fourth Century Pre-Trib Rapture Statement,” audiotape (Arlington, TX: Pre-Trib Research Center, 1994); idem, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1995), 105–25; Thomas Ice, “Examining an Ancient Pre-Trib Rapture Statement,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 11 (April 1995): 1–3; Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, “The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (July–September 1995): 306–17; Thomas D. Ice, “Update on Pre-Darby Rapture Statements,” audiotape (Arlington, TX: Pre-Trib Research Center, 1995); and Grant R. Jeffrey, *Triumphant Return* (Toronto: Frontier Research, 2001), 174–78.

John L. Bray opposes the idea that the sermon of pseudo-Ephraem teaches pretribulationalism (“Grant Jeffrey and Thomas Ice,” *Newsletter of John L. Bray*, May 25, 1995). See also MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot*, 268–73; Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist: Why Christ Won’t Come before the Antichrist Does* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 161–88; Roy A. Huebner, *Elements of Dispensational Truth*, 2d ed. (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth, 1998), 1:333–34; and T. L. Frazier, *A Second Look at the Second Coming* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar, 1999), 180–86.

¹⁰ Marotta, *Morgan Edwards: An Eighteenth Century Pretribulationist*, reprinted as Appendix 3 in Huebner, *Elements of Dispensational Truth*, 1:335–42; John L. Bray, *Morgan Edwards and the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching (1788)* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministries, 1995). MacPherson objects to the claim that Morgan Edwards was a pretribulationist (*The Rapture Plot*, 264–68).

¹¹ Morgan Edwards, *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the Following Titles; Millennium, Last-Novelties* (Philadelphia: Dobson and Lang, 1788). Although written between 1742 and 1744, this book was not published until 1788.

nineteenth-century English eschatology. But this broader history of pretribulationism is still in its early stages. As theologians and other researchers gradually sift through the church's massive treasury of biblical commentaries, eschatological literature, and theological texts from the early, medieval, and Reformation periods—many of them only available in languages other than English—more examples of pretribulationism are sure to be uncovered.¹²

A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY REFERENCE TO A PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE

One such text containing a concept bearing striking similarity to modern pretribulationism is a fourteenth-century text, *The History of Brother Dolcino*. 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 of Novara (d. 1307), the Apostolic Brethren flourished in the author's diocese between the years 1300 and 1307.¹³ The

¹² Investigation of the eschatology of Scotland's Elspeth Buchan (1738–1791) may yield interesting results. One writer said that Buchan expected to “meet Him [Christ] in the clouds with her followers, and to take them direct to heaven without tasting death,” and that she believed “the whole body of believers would be raised by supernatural power to heaven, where they would dwell with the angels and all redeemed saints.” But whether her concept was pretribulationist needs further investigation (J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979], 34).

One nineteenth-century critic of the Plymouth Brethren wrote that Darby's teaching on the rapture was similar to that of a Jesuit named Pierre Lambert (Thomas Croskery, *Plymouth Brethrenism: A Refutation of Its Principles and Doctrines* [London: William Mullan and Sons, 1879], viii). But no studies investigating Lambert's views on the rapture have come to the attention of the present author. Several authors bore the name Pierre Lambert. If Croskery meant Pierre Lambert de la Motte (1624–1679), then Henri de Frondeville's book, *Pierre Lambert de la Motte, eveque de Beryte* (Paris, 1925), may be helpful although difficult to locate. If Croskery meant Pierre-Thomas Lambert (1751–1802), then that author's *Memoires de famille* (Paris, 1822, 1894) may prove helpful. Or Croskery may have had in mind Pierre Lambert (1480–1543), whose *Memoires* are published in *Monumenta historiae patriae, Scriptores*, vol. 1 (Turin, Italy: Augustae Taurinorum, 1840), 839–930. In addition Franz Lambert (1486–1530) wrote a commentary on Revelation (*In Apocalypsin* [Marbourg, 1528]). The avoidance on the part of some pretribulationists of acknowledging similarities between the Jesuit teaching on the rapture and pretribulationism is understandable but regrettable, as the body of Jesuit literature may offer valuable pieces in the construction of a history of pretribulationism that embraces all periods and traditions within Christendom. Such investigation will not necessarily lead to a conclusion that Darby was influenced by Jesuit ideas.

¹³ *Historia Fratris Dulcini (The History of Brother Dolcino)* is in manuscript Codice

handwritten treatise was recopied in 1551, and in the 1600s it was used as source material for two other ecclesiastical histories of the area. It was printed in the 1740s in the 25-volume *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*.¹⁴

The History of Brother Dolcino, most recently edited in 1907 with the reprint of *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, occupies fourteen pages in volume 9. The paragraph relevant to the history of pre-tribulationism is as follows:

Item [credidit et predicavit et docuit] quod intra illos tres annos ipse Dulcinus et sui sequaces predicabunt adventum Antichristi et quod ipse Antichristus veniret in hunc mundum finitis dictis annis tribus cum dimidio et postquam venisset, ipse tunc et sui sequaces transferentur in paradisum, in quo sunt Enoc et Elias et sic conservarentur illesi a persecutione Antichristi, et quod tunc ipsi Enoc et Elias descenderent in terram ad predicandum Antichristum, deinde interficerentur ab eo vel eius ministris et sic regnaret Antichristus per plura tempora. Eo vero Antichristo mortuo, ipse Dulcinus, qui tunc esset papa sanctus, et sui sequaces reservati descendent in terram et predicabunt fidem Christi rectam omnibus et convertent eos, qui tunc erunt vivi, ad veram fidem Iesu Christi.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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

Ambrosiano-H. 80. The date of 1316 is confirmed in R. Kestenberg-Gladstein, "The Third Reich: A Fifteenth-Century Polemic against Joachimism, and Its Background," in *Joachim of Fiore in Christian Thought*, ed. Delno West (New York: Burt Franklin, 1975), 2:599, no. 49. An Italian scholar of the Apostolic Brethren also held that the history was written in the early fourteenth century, describing *The History of Brother Dolcino* as an "opera stesa probabilmente da un contemporaneo di Biella (1304–7)" ("a work drawn up probably by a contemporary of Biella [1304–7]"; Eugenio Anagnine, *Dolcino* [Firenze, Italy: La Nuova Italia, 1964], 1).

¹⁴ L. A. Muratori, ed., *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, old series, vol. 9 (Italy, 1723–1751), 436. The University of Colorado at Boulder has a copy. Speer Library at Princeton Theological Seminary also has a copy in its rare book room.

¹⁵ *Historia Fratris Dulcini*, Arnaldo Segarizzi, 8–9, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Tomo IX-Parte V, ed. L. A. Muratori (Città di Castello, Italy: Coi Tipi Della Casa Editrice S. Lapi, 1907). Pius Memorial Library at Saint Louis University has a copy.

¹⁶ As in the pseudo-Ephraem sermon and Morgan Edwards's treatise, the Antichrist will already be on the world scene when the rapture occurs. This view seems to have been common among pretribulationists before the nineteenth century.

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,¹⁷ and his perserved 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.¹⁸

BROTHER DOLCINO AND THE APOSTOLIC BRETHERN

Before the specifics of this paragraph are examined, some information about Brother Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren will help place the paragraph in context. Gerard Sagarello founded the Apostolic Brethren in 1260 after the Franciscans rejected his application for membership with them.¹⁹ Like the Franciscans, the Apostolic Brethren were committed to radical poverty and itinerant preaching of the gospel.²⁰ However, at that time, the founding of new religious orders was strictly forbidden by the pope and several church councils. So 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. Under Dolcino's leadership the persecuted order grew, and at one point it numbered in the thousands. To escape persecution the

¹⁷ In the midst of widespread belief in the high Middle Ages that the papal office had been corrupted, many medieval Christians believed that in the last days God would raise up an "angelic pastor" or "holy pope." He would be committed to poverty and would unite and reform Christianity. Prefigured in Revelation 3 as the angel of the church in Philadelphia and in Revelation 18:1, his ministry would also fulfill the prophecy of John 10:16, "And they will become one flock with one shepherd." See Bernard McGinn, "Angel Pope and Papal Antichrist," *Church History* 47 (June 1978): 167. As an opponent of Dolcino, the author of *The History of Brother Dolcino* mentioned several times in the treatise that Dolcino thought that he might be that holy pope. This was apparently an effort to portray him as audacious or perhaps a megalomaniac.

¹⁸ The present writer is indebted to Marjorie Reeves, in whose books he first discovered descriptions of the rapture theology of Dolcino (Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993], 246; and idem, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976], 49).

¹⁹ 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 1,260 days mentioned in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5.

²⁰ Salimbene, a contemporary of the Apostolic Brethren, gives an account of the order under the leadership of Gerard Sagarello (Joseph L. Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi, and John Robert Kane, eds., *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam* [Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986]). Members of the order wore sandals and woolen mantles and went about northern Italy and other countries preaching "Penitenz-agite," a colloquialism for "Paenitentiam agite!" the gospel injunction to repent.

Apostolic Brethren 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 Pope Clement V drew up a bull opposing the group, and a crusade was launched against them. In 1307 over four hundred members of the Apostolic Brethren were slaughtered by papal forces. Dolcino was captured, mutilated, and burned at the stake. Some of the remaining Apostolic Brethren fled to distant lands, while others joined Franciscan monasteries.²¹

Eschatology seems to have held an important place in the theology of the Apostolic Brethren, as it did in other medieval religious orders in the fourteenth century, including the Franciscans, the Spirituals, and the Beguines. To all these groups, including the Apostolic Brethren, the political and ecclesiastical affairs in Italy seemed to indicate that the end of the world was near.²² Dolcino is known to have written several letters outlining his eschatological teachings, but none are extant. However, *The History of Brother Dolcino* reveals that the eschatology of the Apostolic Brethren included an expectation of the imminent rapture of the church.

SIMILARITIES TO MODERN PRETRIBULATIONALISM

The paragraph quoted earlier from *The History of Brother Dolcino* states that Dolcino believed that the Antichrist would arrive within three or three and a half years, and that once he had come, Dolcino and his followers would be transferred to paradise. The Latin word is *transferrentur* (an imperfect passive subjunctive verb), meaning “they would be transferred” or “they would be transported.” Interestingly this same verb was used by medieval Christians to describe the translation of Enoch to paradise, mentioned in Hebrews 11:5, and the rapture of Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.²³ The

²¹ For a comprehensive treatment of the Apostolic Brethren see John William Siedzik, “Fra Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren” (M.A. thesis, University of California, 1952). This thesis is available from that university on microfilm. A much older treatment, which portrays Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren as reformers before the Reformation, is Antonio Gallenga, *A Historical Memoir of Fra Dolcino and His Times* (London: Longman, Green, and Longman, 1853).

²² These include a vacancy in the papal office between 1292 and 1294, the resignation and mysterious death of the Pope Celestine, and the reign of his successor, Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303), who seemed to many people to have all the marks of the Antichrist. The ongoing war between the papal states and Sicily (which at one point led to the excommunication of the whole kingdom of Sicily) also seemed to have apocalyptic ramifications to it.

²³ In the Vulgate, used widely throughout medieval Europe, Hebrews 11:5 read

past participle of *transferre* is *translatum*, from which is derived a common English synonym for the rapture, the “translation.” The point is that Dolcino was preaching the *translation* or rapture of the saints.²⁴

The History of Brother Dolcino states that the subjects of the translation would be “Dolcino and his followers,” probably because the anonymous author, who was an opponent of the Apostolic Brethren, wanted to portray the Apostolic Brethren as a sect. Closer examination of the ecclesiology of the Apostolic Brethren, however, reveals that their view of the rapture was not a partial rapture theory, but a rapture of the entire church. For the Apostolic Brethren had distinguished themselves as the true church in contrast with the Roman Church, which they believed had become the whore of Babylon through avarice and luxury.²⁵

Fide Henoch translatus est, ne videret mortem, “By faith Enoch was translated, so that he should not see death” For repeated use of the word *transferre* in comments on this biblical passage, see the commentary on Hebrews 11 5 by Herveus Burgidolensis (ca 1130) in J P Migne, *Patrologia, Series Latina* (Paris, 1844–1864), 181, col 1645 The incipit, or first line, of a treatise by Aegidius Romanus (d 1316) read, *Henoch placuit Deo et translatus est in paradysum*, “Enoch pleased God and was translated into paradise” (Fridericus Stegmuller, *Repertorium Biblicum Medu Aevi*, Tomus II [Madrid Instituto Francisco Suarez, 1950], 22) For use of the word *trans ferre* in a commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4 17, Dionysius the Carthusian (1402–1471), wrote, *Obviam Christo in aera quia et nos in aerem transferemur sive levabimur, et Christus descendet in aerem super vallem Josophat*, “To meet Christ in the air Since also we will be transported or lifted in the air, and Christ will descend into the air above the valley of Jehoshaphat” (*D Dionysu Cartusiani Opera Omnia*, vol 13 [Monstrolh, Italy Typis Cartusiae S M de Pratis, 1901], 388)

²⁴ Marjorie Reeves seems to understand this passage in *The History of Brother Dolcino* similarly “When Antichrist appeared Dolcino and his followers would be removed to Paradise, while Enoch and Elijah descended to dispose of him After the death of Antichrist, they would descend again to convert all nations, while Frederick of Sicily ruled over the last world empire” (*Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future*, 49) Anagnine actually used the Italian word for “rapture” in his description of this passage He wrote that according to the anonymous historian, Dolcino and his followers believed they would be *miraculosamente rapiti in Paradiso*, “miraculously raptured into Paradise,” during the reign of Antichrist (*The History of Brother Dolcino*, 219, n 2)

²⁵ *The History of Brother Dolcino* states that the Apostolic Brethren believed that *homines eorum secte erant missi a deo ad reformandam ecclesiam, que perierat per superbiam avaritiam luxuriam et multa alia vitia*, “the sect of those men had been sent by God for reforming the church, which had perished through pride, avarice, luxury and many other vices” (*ibid* , 9) Another indication of the belief of the Apostolic Brethren that the Roman communion did not represent the church comes from the Dominican inquisitor, Bernard Gui He wrote a formula of abjuration used for members of the Apostolic Brethren who returned to the Roman fold One of the statements was *Item, revoco id quod dixeram de ecclesia carnali, quod ipsa erat quam Johannes in Apocalypsi vocat Babilonem, meretricem magnam, item, bestiam illam que habebat septem capita et decem cornua, item, mulierem illam que habebat calicem aureum in manu sua et plenum abominationibus*, “Again, I revoke that

The passage also states that by means of the rapture God's people would be "preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist." A few lines after that statement the author spoke of the Apostolic Brethren as "preserved" in paradise until the death of the Antichrist, after which they would descend to the earth. The purpose of the rapture of these living saints was not merely to translate them so that they may appear in their resurrected bodies for the Last Judgment (as in some posttributational views of the rapture). Rather, the purpose is clearly said to be for preserving the saints from the tribulation of Antichrist, so that they will be privileged to participate in the earthly kingdom after the tribulation. And in this kingdom the raptured ones, having returned to earth from paradise, will play a leading role in seeing that the whole earth becomes filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

Also the text shows that the rapture of the saints will occur quite a length of time before their subsequent descent from heaven. The translated saints are portrayed as residing in paradise while various end-time events will take place on earth. After the rapture Enoch and Elijah will come down from heaven and preach against the Antichrist. Then the Antichrist will kill these two witnesses. And after their martyrdom he will reign "for a long time."²⁶ The duration here is not specified, but the account of the rapture here surely does not resemble the quick up-down rapture of posttributationalism. Other medieval Christians believed that the Antichrist would reign for three and a half years after the death of the witnesses, and it is likely that the Apostolic Brethren believed the same.²⁷ What is clear is that there is a significant gap of time be-

which I had said about the carnal Church, that it was that which John in the Apocalypse calls Babylon, the great whore; again, that beast which had seven heads and ten horns; again, that woman who had a golden chalice in her hand and full of abominations" (Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, ed. G. Moffat [Paris: Librairie ancienne honoré champion, 1926], 40).

²⁶ The Latin is *per plurima tempora*, literally "through many times." A better English translation might be "for a long time," or "for many days."

²⁷ For example Richard of Rolle of Hampole (d. 1349) wrote, "The greatest opposition to Antichrist will come from the preaching of Henoch and Elias whom he will destroy after 1260 days. They will rise again after three and one half days and ascend into heaven. Antichrist will then reign for three and one half years" (quoted in R. Gerald Culleton, *The Reign of Antichrist* [Rockford, IL: Tan, 1974], 137). Interestingly the author of *The History of Brother Dolcino* did not seem to object to the contents of Dolcino's eschatology here as much as to his claim that the events would occur within three or three and a half years. The author, an opponent of Dolcino, was probably trying to portray Dolcino as a false prophet. Writing in 1316, the author was saying in effect, "Dolcino, in his letters written in the years 1300 and 1303, said that these things would occur within three or three and a half years. Over ten years have past, and they still have not occurred. So we were justified in

tween the church's translation to paradise and its subsequent descent to earth.

DOLCINO'S EXEGESIS

Based on this report of Dolcino's belief in the rapture, on what Scripture passage was this rapture teaching founded? From every indication the aforementioned paragraph in *The History of Brother Dolcino* seems to be a report of Dolcino's exegesis of Revelation 11.²⁸ Several facts support this theory. First, the coming of the Antichrist in the passage corresponds to the beast in Revelation 11:7. Second, Enoch and Elijah and their conflict with the Antichrist match other medieval descriptions of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3–11.²⁹ Third, the death of the Antichrist in the passage corresponds to medieval interpretations of the great earthquake of Revelation 11:13.³⁰ Fourth, the conversion of the multitudes of people to faith in Christ matches medieval interpretations of Revelation 11:15, "The kingdoms of this world have become the

putting him to death."

²⁸ There is evidence in Bernard Gui's treatise, *On the Sect of Those Who Call Themselves Apostles*, also written in 1316, that Dolcino may have used Revelation 3:10 in support of his pretribulation rapture theology. Like others in the Middle Ages Dolcino believed that the holy pope, who would be chosen directly by God and not through the agency of cardinals, was symbolized by the angel of the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7 (Gui, *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, 90; and Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001], 114). If Dolcino believed that the rapture would take place in the reign of the holy pope, as the paragraph from *The History of Brother Dolcino* implies, and the holy pope's reign is described in Revelation 3:7–13, which of these seven verses would point to the rapture? Verse 10, "I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world," is consistent with the purpose of the rapture, as stated in *The History of Brother Dolcino*. Interestingly this is the same passage used by modern-day pretribulationists in support of the view that the church in the last days will escape the tribulation of Antichrist by means of a translation to heaven.

²⁹ Thomas W. Mackay has translated into English many examples of the identification of Enoch and Elijah with the two witnesses from early medieval commentaries on Revelation ("Early Christian Millenarist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John's Apocalypse 11:3–13," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, vol. 1 [Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1990], 222–31).

³⁰ In 1304 Ubertino di Casale wrote *Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus*, of which book 5 is a commentary on Revelation. He interpreted the earthquake of Revelation 11:13 as a reference to the death of the Antichrist (*Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu* [reprint, Torino, Italy: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1961], 492). Arnold of Villanova, in his commentary on Revelation written in 1306, stated that the death of the Antichrist was signified in the great earthquake of Revelation 11:13 (*Expositio Super Apocalypsi* [Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1971], 150).

kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ” (NKJV).³¹

It seems logical, then, that Dolcino’s rapture teaching, as reported in *The History of Brother Dolcino*, was based in Revelation 11. Dolcino probably saw the rapture of the saints symbolically portrayed in the ascension of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:12. This is in keeping with many medieval commentaries on Revelation, in which 1 Thessalonians 4:17—which gives an important statement on the rapture of the saints—is cited as an interpretive cross reference to the passage about the ascension of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.³²

Unfortunately the aforementioned paragraph is the only explicit literary reference to Dolcino’s belief in the rapture, leaving the reader to reconstruct his thoughts on the subject from only a few lines of text. One question that may be raised is why there is no reference in the paragraph to a coming of Christ associated with the rapture. However, it is helpful to note that the author did not intend in this paragraph to give Dolcino’s theology of the rapture as such; instead he intended to present Dolcino’s apocalyptic interpretation of Revelation 11. For not only is the descent of the Lord not mentioned; other details in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 are not mentioned either (the loud command, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet, and the resurrection of dead saints). And the reason is that the focus of the paragraph was not the rapture, but Dolcino’s interpretation of Revelation 11, of which the rapture was merely a

³¹ For example Dionysius the Carthusian wrote in his commentary on this passage, *Nunc Antichristo oppresso . . . tunc enim totus pene mundus ad Christum converteretur, secundum doctores*, “Now once Antichrist is beaten down, then almost the whole world will be converted to Christ, according to the doctors” (*D. Dionysii Carthusiani Opera Omnia*, 14:304). An extensive treatment of the medieval concept of the conversion of the world after the death of Antichrist is Robert E. Lerner, “Refreshment of the Saints: The Time after Antichrist as a Station for Earthly Progress in Medieval Thought,” *Traditio* 32 (1976): 97–144. Dolcino believed that the time of renewal was also prophesied in Isaiah 54–57 (Gui, *Manuel de l’inquisiteur*, 84, 88, 100).

³² Bede, in *Patrologia, Series Latina*, 93:164; pseudo-Alcuin, in *Patrologia, Series Latina*, 100:1150; Ambrose Autpert, in *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis*, vol. 27 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1975), 431; Haimo, in *Patrologia, Series Latina*, 117:1076; Rupert of Deutz, in *Patrologia, Series Latina*, 169:1033; and Peter of Tarantaise (pseudo-Albert the Great) in *B. Alberti Magni Opera Omnia*, vol. 38 (Paris: Ludovicum Vives, 1899), 644. This tradition can be traced back to the early church. See the commentary on Revelation by Tyconius of the fourth century, in *Patrologiae Latinae, Supplementum*, ed. A. Hamman, vol. 1 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1958), 647; and the fifth-century *Acts of Pilate*, chap. 25, in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 475. It is also possible that Dolcino could have followed his contemporary, Arnold of Villanova, who saw the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 symbolized in the trumpet of Revelation 10:7 (Villanova, *Expositio Super Apocalypsi*, 143).

part. However, enough information was written in those few short lines to draw several conclusions.

CONCLUSION

This paragraph from *The History of Brother Dolcino* indicates that in northern Italy in the early fourteenth century a teaching very similar to modern pretribulationism was being preached. Responding to distressing political and ecclesiastical conditions, Dolcino engaged in detailed speculations about eschatology and believed that the coming of the Antichrist was imminent. He also believed that the means by which God would protect His people from the persecution of the Antichrist would be through a translation of the saints to paradise.

While not suggesting that pretribulationism was the dominant view of the rapture in the Middle Ages, it is likely that such teaching did not occur in a vacuum and that others besides Dolcino were aware of it. It can reasonably be assumed that most of the Apostolic Brethren (who numbered in the thousands) believed, as did their leader, that when the Antichrist would arrive, they would be transferred to paradise and be preserved there from his persecution in the tribulation. Obviously the anonymous author of *The History of Brother Dolcino*, an opponent of the Apostolic Brethren, also knew of Dolcino's teaching on the rapture. Perhaps he had read of it in Dolcino's lost letters or had heard the doctrine preached by Dolcino or by members of the Apostolic Brethren.

More research is needed to ascertain what extrabiblical sources were instrumental in the formation of Dolcino's eschatology. He was clearly influenced by the teachings of Joachim of Fiore (although Dolcino held to four dispensations, not three, as Joachim did) and by medieval prophecies about the papacy.³³ But the literature he may have read or to which he may have had access remains a question for further study.³⁴ Investigation of the eschatology of

³³ These prophecies about the last popes are recorded in the *Vaticinia de summis pontificibus*. See Marjorie Reeves, "Some Popular Prophecies from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," *Studies in Church History*, vol 4 (Birmingham, UK Ecclesiastical Historical Society, 1971), 107-34, and idem, "The *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus* A Question of Authorship," in *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages Essays Presented to Margaret Gilson*, ed L. Smith and B. Ward (Rio Grande, OH Hambleton, 1992), 145-56. Both of these articles are reprinted in Marjorie Reeves, *The Prophetic Sense of History in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Brookfield, VT Ashgate, 1999).

³⁴ The present writer strongly suspects that Dolcino had access to commentaries on Revelation, literature on the Antichrist, and possibly traditions linked with the

other apocalyptic-minded writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries may also provide insight for ascertaining whether belief in the rapture similar to that of the Apostolic Brethren had broader circulation at that time.³⁵

Two things are fairly certain from *The History of Brother Dolcino*. First, Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren believed that the purpose of the rapture was related to the escape of the saints from the end-time tribulation and persecution of the Antichrist. Second, Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren believed that there would be a significant gap of time between the rapture of the saints to paradise and their subsequent descent to earth. Because of this *The History of Brother Dolcino* stands as yet another literary witness for the existence of pretribulationism before the nineteenth century. As such, it challenges evangelicals to reevaluate their thinking about the history of the pretribulation rapture, especially those views that place the origin of the teaching or its initial recovery within the last two hundred years. For this fourteenth-century text demonstrates that there were some in the Middle Ages who held a theology of the rapture that includes basic elements in pretribulationism.

content of the third-century Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah*.

³⁵ In the early fourteenth century the Fraticelli and Beguines believed that in the days of the fiercest persecution of the imminent Antichrist, St. Francis would rise bodily from the dead, and that Francis and his evangelical band of followers would descend and convert the world to the true faith (Decima L. Douie, *The Nature and the Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli* [Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1932], 115, 250; and Gui, *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, 170–72). The apocalyptic-minded Frederick of Brunswick, of the later fourteenth century, expected to be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ and then later to descend back to earth and live for a thousand years. But what he believed about the corporate rapture of the church is uncertain (Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 98, n. 25; 163, n. 33; 165, n. 54). Investigations into the eschatology of Peter John Olivi, Ubertino da Casale, Angelo Clareno, and John of Rupescissa may yield interesting results.