

Chapter 3

Introduction

Based on the exegetical study conducted in chapter 2, a review of the Patristic, Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers' writings will now be conducted. There is no need to prove that the early Church Fathers were premillennialists (millenarians, chiliasts), since that is a presupposition of the author and the conclusion of many modern theologians also, including: Norman Geisler,¹ Paul L. King,² J. Charles August Hauser, Jr.,³ J. Dwight Pentecost,⁴ Le Roy Edwin Froom,⁵ Jesse Forest Silver,⁶ and George E. Ladd. This is best summed up by Ladd, "with one exception [Caius] there is no Church Father before Origen who opposed the millenarian interpretation, and there is no one before Augustine whose extant writings offer a different interpretation of Revelation 20 than that of a future earthly kingdom consonant with the natural interpretation of the language."⁷ There is also quite a case to be made that the Fathers believed in

¹Geisler, 567-71.

²King, 1, 8-10.

³Hauser, 232.

⁴J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Dunham Publishing Co., 1958, reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 373-78.

⁵Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers, The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), 207.

⁶Jesse Forest Silver, *The Lord's Return: Seen in History and in Scripture as Pre-millennial and Imminent*, rev. ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 49-69.

⁷George E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 23.

the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is discussed by: Norman Geisler,⁸ James F. Stitzinger,⁹ John F. Walvoord,¹⁰ and J. Dwight Pentecost.¹¹ This may best be summed up by a quote from Larry Crutchfield in Geisler's book, "The student of patristic literature quickly discovers that the position of the early fathers on the Tribulation and its relation to the saints and Christ's return is impossible to decipher and synthesize completely. Many of them, especially in the first century, make explicit statements which indicate a belief in the imminent return of Christ. The doctrine of imminence is especially prominent in the writings of the apostolic fathers."¹² This is further amplified by another Crutchfield quote from Stitzinger's article, "This view of the fathers on imminency, and, in some, references to escaping the time of Tribulation, constitute what may be termed, to quote Erickson, 'seeds from which the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture could be developed . . .' Had it not been for the drought in sound exegesis, brought on by Alexandrian allegorism and later by Augustine, one wonders what kind of crop those seeds may have yielded—long before J. N. Darby and the nineteenth century."¹³

With this foundation being laid, the purpose of this review is to see if the Fathers specifically understood the Second Coming as involving two separate and distinct events as part of Daniel's 70th Week in the same way as Paul taught it, and whether they recorded it in their writings as such (and thereby passed it on to the Early Church as a belief or doctrine). Then,

⁸Geisler, 655-57.

⁹James F. Stitzinger, "The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation" *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (2002): 153-56.

¹⁰Walvoord, 50-54.

¹¹Pentecost, 168-9, 202-3.

¹²Larry Crutchfield; quoted in Geisler, 657.

further review of subsequent orthodox writings of the Church (including the Creeds of the Church) will be explored, up to the year 1750, to see if this belief in the Rapture of the Church continued to be passed down through Church History as an accepted orthodox belief.

First, a review of all the writings will be conducted to see if the Greek word Paul used for Rapture, *harpazo*, (and related words) was used by the Fathers, and if so, in what context. Then, a comparison of the two primary Greek words used for the Second Coming (*erchomai* and *parousia*) will be made to see if there is a purposeful difference in usage as there was in Paul's writings (*parousia* in relation to the imminent Rapture of the Church and *erchomai* in relation to the Second Coming to judge the world). Next, the writings will be reviewed to see if there are any direct references to the Rapture of the Church; using Bell's four criteria outlined in chapter 1:

- (1) Any mention that Christ's second coming was to consist of more than one phase, separated by an interval of years.
- (2) Any mention that Christ was to remove the church from the earth before the tribulation period.
- (3) Any reference to the resurrection of the just as being in two stages.
- (4) Any indication that Israel and the church were to be clearly distinguished, thus providing some rationale for a removal of Christians before God "again deals with Israel."¹⁴

Next, a review will be made to check for inferences to the Rapture, using any of the criteria above, references to Rapture passages, or symbolic inferences or allusions to the event as separate and distinct from the Second Coming itself. All these investigations into the writings will be done in the order outlined above, starting with the earliest, the Apostolic Fathers (closest

¹³Larry Crutchfield, "The Blessed Hope," 77; quoted in Stitzinger, 156.

¹⁴Bell, 26-27.

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to the Apostles in both time and teaching) and going to the Post-Nicene Fathers. Finally, the review will continue from that point chronologically up to the year 1750.