

References to the Posttribulation Rapture by the Fathers

As seen above, the majority of the citations directly or indirectly referring to the Rapture of the Church allude to its timing as being pretribulation. However, in searching the Fathers' writings for Rapture citations, the author came across the following two citations which mention the Rapture in a posttribulation light. The first was written by Hippolytus (170-236), disciple of Irenaeus, in the late second to early third century; the second was written in the mid to late fourth century by Cyril (318-387).

Hippolytus in his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, in sections 60, 61, 64, and 66 states that the Woman seen by John in Revelation 12 is the Church and she will go through the Great Tribulation. She "flees from city to city, and seeks concealment in the wilderness among the mountains" during the Great Tribulation. After all the judgments and wrath in Revelation are completed, and with "the whole world finally approaching the consummation, what remains but the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" And with that, the "resurrection of the righteous, Paul also speaks thus in writing Thessalonians" (the Rapture) occurs at the end of the Tribulation, in conjunction with the Second Coming of Jesus.¹

Cyril, in Lecture XV of his *Catechetical Lectures* (Lectures VI-XVIII cover the Apostles' Creed), addresses the two comings of Christ in sections 1 and 2. He then focuses on the Second Coming and the signs leading up to it in sections 3-8. In section 9, he speaks of the "hatred of the brethren" as being the "falling away" mentioned by Paul; thus, making room for the Antichrist. In section 19, the Rapture is mentioned as coincidental with the Second Coming, "But let us wait and look for the Lord's coming upon the clouds of heaven. Then shall Angelic trumpets sound;

¹Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 60, 61, 64, 66 (ANF 5:217-219).

the dead in Christ shall rise first—the godly persons who are alive shall be caught up in the clouds . . .”²

From these two isolated citations, occurring later in the Early Church Period than most of the other citations outlining a pretribulation Rapture, it may be concluded that although a premillennial, imminent Return of Christ was still being taught, that some of the Fathers were beginning to be affected by Origen’s (185-254) neo-Platonic, allegorical, interpretative philosophy. This philosophical way of thinking spawned speculative teachings on his part (for example: pre-existence of the human soul, *apokatastais* [restoration of all things], and subordinationism). These teachings later led to the heretical beliefs of Universalism (the belief that all of creation will ultimately be saved, possibly even including Satan himself) and Arianism (that Jesus was not co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, but was created as a “second God,” subordinate to the Father).³ Origen was also the first to teach Amillennialism as a belief. As mentioned above, Amillennialism became the prevailing eschatological doctrine of the Church during the time of Augustine (354-430). So, with Origen’s influence on both these Fathers, it is reasonable to assume that they would begin the shift to a posttribulation Rapture in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ. This leads into the next section, which addresses the question of whether the belief of the Fathers in the pretribulation Rapture of the Church was passed on to subsequent Church Ages? If so, one would expect to find at least isolated references to the subject throughout these periods.

²Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril* 15.19 (NPNF 7:110).

³David W. Dorries, *Our Christian Roots*, vol. 1 (Coweta, OK: Kairos Ministries International, 2002), 26.