

Before Darby: Expanding the
Historical Boundaries of Pretribulationism
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Is the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture, held by many evangelicals today, a nineteenth century invention of J.N. Darby or his contemporaries? The purpose of this session is to introduce and discuss a portion of a fourteenth-century text, entitled The History of Brother Dolcino, as it relates to this contemporary question about the history of the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture.

TWO COMMON EVANGELICAL THEORIES ON THE HISTORY OF THE
PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE

Before introducing the medieval text, I would like to briefly summarize two common evangelical theories about the history of the pretribulation rapture, with which you may or may not be familiar.

The first evangelical history of the pretribulation rapture is what one writer has called The Great Rapture Hoax.¹ Very common among evangelicals who reject the pretribulation rapture as an unScriptural doctrine, these evangelicals say that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture is not in the Bible, and was unheard of in the history of Christianity until the early nineteenth century. The concept, they say, 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 1820's.³ Irving, who started a proto-charismatic group called the Catholic Apostolic Church, and who was eventually defrocked for allegedly teaching that our Lord Jesus had sinful flesh, used to have prayer meetings in different homes.⁴ In one of these house meetings, a thirteen-year old girl named Margaret Macdonald gave a prophecy about the rapture being pretribulation. And according to this view, J.N. Darby, an early leader of the Plymouth Brethren, picked it up from Margaret Macdonald, and spread it to evangelicalism.⁵

A second theory of the history of the pretribulation rapture is more common among advocates of pretribulationism. This theory is what I call the Lost and Found theory. Evangelicals who hold to this view believe that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture is in the Bible, but that it was lost in history soon after the writing of the New Testament. Then in the early nineteenth century J.N. Darby (1800-1882) came along, and in his private study of the Bible, the Holy Spirit illuminee his mind to the correct doctrine about the rapture.⁶ And from him it was spread to the rest of evangelicalism.

Time does not permit me here to give a thorough evaluation of the merits and demerits of these views of the history of pretribulationism. But one shortcoming that

both share is their narrow historical focus. They are only looking at the articulation of the pretribulation rapture in an early nineteenth century context. Both theories have a seventeen or eighteen hundred-year gap between the writing of the New Testament and the nineteenth century. This leaves the broad picture of the history of pretribulationism fragmented and incomplete.

Theological barriers, language barriers, and a faulty interpretation of our valued principle of Sola Scriptura, have often kept us evangelicals from taking a thorough look at the full history of a particular doctrine. Perhaps aware that a more comprehensive history is needed, a growing number of evangelicals are focusing their research on the history of pretribulationism during that eighteen-hundred year gap between the writing of the New Testament and the nineteenth-century. And in that period they are finding examples of pretribulation rapture teaching. I am referring to discoveries within the last decade of pretribulationism in a sermon by pseudo-Ephraem before the seventh century, and in a treatise by Morgan Edwards in the 1700's.⁷

In light of these finds, a new history of pretribulationism is beginning to emerge, one that is expanding the doctrine's traditional historical boundary of the nineteenth century. A text entitled The History of Brother Dolcino from the fourteenth century is yet another example of the existence of pretribulationism in church history before Darby.

A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE REFERENCE

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 1307.⁸ 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.⁹ And it was most recently edited in 1907 with the reprint of this multi-volume set, where it contains fourteen pages of Volume Nine.

The paragraph from The History of Brother Dolcino relevant to the history of pretribulationism is translated 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 transferrentur in paradysum, 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.”¹⁰

“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,¹¹ 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.”¹²

BROTHER DOLCINO & THE APOSTOLIC BRETHERN

Before looking at the specifics of this paragraph, a little information about Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren seems fitting. 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 (I circled Novara on the map in your handout.). 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 TEXT’S SIMILARITY WITH MODERN PRETRIBULATIONISM

Moving on to the text which you have before you, 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, orders such as the Franciscans, the Spirituals, and the Beguines. To all of these groups, including the Apostolic Brethren, the political and ecclesiastical affairs in Italy seemed to have the “signs of the end” written all over them.¹⁷ Let us examine some of the specifics of their eschatology in dialogue with modern pretribulationism.

The text says that Dolcino believed that the Antichrist would arrive within three years or so, and that once he had come, Dolcino and his followers would be transferred to Paradise. The Latin verb is “transferrentur,” (imperfect, passive, subjunctive) meaning “they would be transferred” or “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 4:17.¹⁸ The past participle of “transferre” is “translatum.” From this word we get our common English synonym for the rapture, the “translation.” My point is, Dolcino was preaching a **translation** of the saints, or a **rapture**, of the saints.¹⁹

Dolcino and the Apostolic Brethren believed that the Roman Church, through avarice and luxury, had become the whore of Babylon, and that they themselves were the true remnant Church, established by God in the last days.²⁰ Despite the fact that they were wrong in thinking that they were the end-time remnant, in preaching a rapture of Dolcino and his followers, their concept was in essence a rapture **of the Church** (as opposed to a partial rapture theory).

The text also spells out the purpose of the rapture. The rapture was the means by which God would preserve His people and keep them unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist. In a manner of speaking, it was a **pre-tribulational** rapture.

The Church is translated to Paradise when Antichrist first makes his appearance on the world scene. But then once Antichrist is killed, or **after the tribulation**, the Church **descends** back down to earth. Then it participates in a type of millennial kingdom in which the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

Notice that the translated saints are in heaven for some length of time. While the saints are in heaven, various end-time events are taking place on earth. Enoch and Elijah come down from heaven and preach against Antichrist. Then Antichrist kills these two witnesses, and after that, Antichrist reigns “**for a long time**.”²¹ The duration here is not specific, but other medieval Christians believed that Antichrist would reign for three and a half years after the death of the witnesses.²² What is clear is that there is a **significant gap of time** between the Church’s translation to Paradise, and its subsequent descent to earth. The account of the rapture given here does not resemble the quick up-down rapture of post-tribulationism.

DOLCINO’S EXEGESIS

A few questions about Dolcino’s exegesis. Where did the anonymous historian learn of Dolcino’s theology of the rapture? The author of this text may have had a specific writing of Dolcino before him. He may have heard him teach this doctrine. Or he may have learned of it through other members of the Apostolic Brethren.

What Scripture passage or passages was Dolcino’s rapture theology founded upon? To me, the passage seems to be a report based on Dolcino’s exegesis of

Revelation 11.²³ I infer this from the following facts. The coming of the Antichrist in the passage corresponds to the beast in Revelation 11, verse 7. Enoch and Elijah and their conflict with Antichrist match other medieval descriptions of the two witnesses in Rev. 11: 3 and following.²⁴ The death of Antichrist in the passage corresponds to medieval interpretations of the great earthquake of Rev. 11: 13.²⁵ And the conversion of the whole world to the true faith of Christ matches medieval interpretations of Rev. 11: 15, where “the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.”²⁶ It seems logical then, that Dolcino’s rapture teaching in this passage was also exegetically based in or around Revelation 11.

For Dolcino, the rapture may have been symbolized in the sounding of the trumpet in Rev. 10:7, as it was for a contemporary interpreter, Arnold of Villanova.²⁷ Or, it may have been symbolized in the ascension of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:12. This is in keeping with many medieval commentaries on Revelation, in which 1 Thess 4:17, a passage about the church being caught up in the clouds, is cited as an interpretive cross-reference to the passage about the ascension of the two witnesses.²⁸ (I have included in your handout an illustration of the two witnesses being caught up in a cloud, from a thirteenth-century Apocalypse commentary.)

The rapture teaching of Dolcino may have been based on an ecclesiastical interpretation of the rapture of the child in Revelation 12:5. Or the rapture teaching of Dolcino could have been exegetically based on the passage about the woman in the wilderness in Revelation 12. The woman, interpreted as God’s end-time people, are persecuted by a dragon, interpreted as the Antichrist. The woman is then given two wings, by which she might fly away from her persecutor into the desert, and there be protected. Since many medieval exegetes interpreted the desert in the passage as Paradise or heaven, it would not be much of a stretch if Dolcino saw the rapture of the saints in the flight of the woman.²⁹ (And I have provided several other illustrations in your handout from medieval Apocalypse commentaries, which show the woman flying into heaven away from the dragon. In the last illustration, once the woman had been given the wings and had flown away, she is placed safely in a tower. Interestingly, a tower is a very common feature in medieval iconography of Paradise.

Which ever of these verses near Revelation chapter 11, that Dolcino’s rapture teaching was founded upon, I would emphasize that his interpretation of the rapture of the saints as a means of protection from Antichrist was not far removed from other medieval exegetical traditions associated with the Book of Revelation. And there is evidence that other apocalyptic-minded believers in the fourteenth century expected to be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ, and to later descend back to the earth and live for a thousand years.³⁰

CONCLUSION

I am not suggesting that pretribulationism was the dominant view of the rapture in the fourteenth century. But the text of The History of Brother Dolcino seems to indicate that in the fourteenth century a teaching very similar to what we call a pretribulation

rapture was an available theological option, and one that was especially appealing to those who were engaged in more detailed speculations about eschatology. This text also bears witness to the fact that some Christians in the fourteenth century were asking the question of how God will protect His people from the persecution of Antichrist. And as an answer, a translation of the saints to heaven, as the divine means by which God will do that, seems to have been clearly articulated.

Relevant to our conference theme--expanding the boundaries of evangelicalism--, this discovery of a teaching similar to pretribulationism in the fourteenth century challenges us evangelicals to re-evaluate our history of the pretribulation rapture. 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. 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.

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 Ass., 1962, reprinted in Blackwood, NJ, 1970); John L. Bray, The Great Tribulation? (PO Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804: John L. Bray Ministry, Inc., May 1982), 4-5; Bray, The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching (PO Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804: John L. Bray Ministry, Inc., August 1982), 18-20; Bray, The Second Coming and Related Events (PO Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804: John L. Bray Ministry, Inc., 1985), 18-24.

Back in the nineteenth century a critic of the Plymouth Brethren wrote that Darby's rapture teaching was akin to that of a Jesuit named Pierre Lambert. See Thomas Croskery, Plymouth Brethrenism: A Refutation of its Principles and Doctrines (London: William Mullan and Sons, 1879), viii. I am aware of no studies investigating Lambert's rapture teaching. I am assuming he meant Pierre Lambert de la Motte (1624-1679) in which case Henri de Frondeville, Pierre Lambert de la Motte, eveque de Beryte (Paris, 1925) may be helpful. I was unable to locate a copy in the U.S. If he meant Pierre-Thomas Lambert (1751-1802) then that author's Mémoires de famille (Paris, 1822, 1894), available in many libraries in the U.S., may prove helpful. See Worldcat computer database. Or he may have had in mind Pierre Lambert (1480-1543) whose Mémoires are published in Monumenta historiae patriae, Scriptorum (Turin, 1840) I, 839-930. There are several others by the name of Pierre Lambert who also may qualify. In addition there is a Franz Lambert (1486-1530) who wrote a commentary In Apocalypsin (Marbourg, 1528), which is on microfiche at the Center for Res Libr (Illinois).

³ Immanuel Lacunza's book, The Coming of Messiah in Majesty and Glory, which contains his pretribulation rapture theory, is available in reprint from Good Books, 2456 Devonshire Rd., Springfield, IL 62703.

⁴ For information on the theology of Edward Irving, see D.D. Bundy, "Irving, Edward" in Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 470-471; Gordon Strachen, The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, reprinted 1988); Arnold Dallimore, The Life of Edward Irving: The Forerunner of the Charismatic Movement (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983) especially chapter 12 entitled "Accused of Heresy—'Christ's Sinful Flesh'", 77-82. An extensive treatment of the rapture teaching of Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church is Mark Patterson and Andrew Walker, "Our Unspeakable Comfort: Irving, Albury, and the Origins of the Pretribulation Rapture" Fides et Historia 21:1 (Winter/Spring 1999):68-81, and reviewed by J. Lanier Burns in Bibliotheca Sacra 157 (July-Sept 2000):363-365. Very helpful also for their theology of the rapture is Columba G. Flegg, 'Gathered Under Apostles': A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); and Rowland A.

Davenport, Albury Apostles: The Story of the Body Known as The Catholic Apostolic Church (Sometimes Called "The Irvingites") (UK: United Writers, 1970).

⁵ Other books by McPherson, which claim that the pretribulation 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 Publications, 1980); The Rapture Plot (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III Publishers, 1995); and The Three R's Rapture, Revisionism, Robbery: Pretribulation Rapturism from 1830 to Hal Lindsey (Simpsonville, SC: P.O.S.T, Inc., 1998). For an opposing viewpoint, see Thomas Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald" Bibliotheca Sacra 147 (April-June 1990):155-168.

⁶ A portrait of Darby as a restorer or reviver of lost truth is in Roy A. Huebner, Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J.N.Darby, Vol 1 (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1991). A heading in the preface reads "The State of the Church When the Reviving of the Truth Began" (viii). Part 1 is entitled "The Revival of Truth 1826-1845" (p. 1), and section 1 "The 'First Germinating' of the Revived Truth in the Soul of J.N. Darby" (p. 3). Some pretribulationists explain the eighteen-hundred year gap between the New Testament and Darby with a theory about the historical progression of dogma, which says that there has been a systematic progression of theological deliberation in particular doctrinal areas throughout church history. The early church focused their discussions on apologetics, theology proper, anthropology, and Christology. The Reformers focused their discussions on the doctrine of salvation and Scripture. Eschatology, they say, was not thoroughly examined in church history until the last few hundred years. Therefore, they say, it should not be surprising that the Biblical distinctiveness of the pretribulation rapture has come to light only recently. See for example, Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 77-78; and Thomas Ice, "Historical overview of the Pre-Trib Rapture" Baptist Bible Tribune (August 1994), 10-11. The main problem with the historical progression of dogma theory is that it ignores the very elaborate discussions of eschatology in the middle ages.

⁷ Regarding pretribulationism in a sermon of pseudo-Ephraem, dated before the seventh century, see Grant R. Jeffrey, "Pseudo-Ephraem's Fourth Century Pre-Trib Rapture Statement" audiotope of Pre-Trib Study Group, December 12, 1994 (Arlington, TX: Pre-Trib Research Center); Jeffrey, "A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church" in When the Trumpet Sounds, Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, eds. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 105-125; Ice, "Examining an Ancient Pre-Trib Rapture Statement" Pre-Trib Perspectives, a publication of the Pre-Trib Research Center (April 1995); Demy and Ice, "The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation" Bibliotheca Sacra 152 (July-Sept 1995):306-317; Ice, "Update on Pre-Darby Rapture Statements" audiotope (Arlington, TX: Pre-Trib Research Center, December 1995); Jeffrey, Triumphant Return (Toronto, Ontario: Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 2001), 174-178. Opposition to the idea that the sermon of pseudo-Ephraem teaches pretribulationism has been expressed in the newsletter of John L. Bray, May 25, 1995; MacPherson, Rapture Plot, 268-273; Bob Gundry, First the Antichrist (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 161-188; Huebner, Elements of Dispensational Truth, Vol. 1, 333-334; and T.L. Frazier, A Second Look at the Second Coming (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1999), 180-186. For information on the pretribulation rapture in a treatise written in the 1700's by Baptist theologian, Morgan Edwards, founder of Brown University, see Frank Marotta, Morgan Edwards: An Eighteenth Century Pretribulationist (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1995), Reprinted as Appendix 3 in Roy A. Huebner, Elements of Dispensational Truth, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1998), 335-342; and Bray, Morgan Edwards and the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching (1788) (PO Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804: John L. Bray Ministries, Inc., 1995).

⁸ 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.Kestenbergladstein, "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), 1.

⁹ L.A. Muratori, ed., Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, Old Series, Vol. 9 (Italy, 1723-1751), 436. The University of Colorado at Boulder holds a copy. Speer Library at Princeton Theological Seminary also holds a copy in their rare book room.

¹⁰ Anonymous Historia Fratris Dulcini, 8-9. Arnaldo Segarizzi, ed. In Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, Tomo IX-Parte V. L.A. Muratori, ed. (Italy: Citta di Castello, 1907). Pius Memorial Library at St. Louis University holds a copy.

¹¹ 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 evangelical poverty and would unite and reform Christianity. Prefigured in Revelation 3 as the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia and Revelation 18:1, his ministry would also fulfill the prophecy of John 10:16—“and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” See Bernard McGinn, “Angel Pope and Papal Antichrist” Church History 47:2 (June 1978):155-173 at 167. Being an opponent of Dolcino, the author of The History of Brother Doclino mentions several times in the treatise that Dolcino thought that he might be that holy pope, in an apparent effort to portray him as audacious and perhaps a megalomaniac.

¹² A slightly different translation of this passage is in Francis X. Gumerlock, The Day and the Hour (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000), 91-92. I am indebted to Marjorie Reeves, in whose books I first discovered references to the rapture theology of Dolcino. See Marjorie Reeves, The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969, 1993), 246; Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), 49.

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 “Penitentia-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 Some of the Apostolic Brethren fled to distant lands. Others joined Franciscan monasteries.

¹⁷ These include a vacancy in the papal office between 1292 and 1294, the resignation and mysterious death of the holy Pope Celestine, and the reign of his successor, Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303), who to many seemed to have all the marks of the Antichrist. The ongoing war between the papal states and Sicily (which had led to the excommunication of the whole kingdom of Sicily) also seemed to have apocalyptic ramifications to it.

¹⁸ The Vulgate translation of Hebrews 11:5 was Fide Henoah 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 passage, see the commentary on Hebrews 11:5 of Herveus Burgidolensis (c. 1130) in PL 181:1645. The incipit of a treatise by Aegidius Romanus (d. 1316) reads Henoah placuit Deo et translatus est in paradisum. See Fridericus Stegmüller, Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi, Tomus II (Matriti, 1950), 22. For use of the word “transferre” in commentary on 1 Thess 4:17, see Dionysius the Carthusian (1402-1471), who writes obviam Christo in aera: quia et nos in aera transferemur sive levabimur, et Christus descendet in aera 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. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia, Vol. 13 (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S. M. De Pratis, 1901), 388.

¹⁹ Marjorie Reeves seems to understand this passage in The History of Brother Dolcino as I do, saying, “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. Another scholar, Eugenio Anagnine, actually uses the Italian word for “rapture” in his description of this passage, writing that according to the anonymous historian during the reign of Antichrist

Dolcino and his followers would be “**miraculosamente rapiti in Paradiso,**” that is, “miraculously raptured into Paradise.” Anagnine, Dolcino, 219 no.2.

²⁰ The anonymous historian (p. 9) says that they believed that homines eorum secte erant missi a deo ad reformandam ecclesiam, quae 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.” Indication of this ecclesiology also comes from the Dominican Inquisitor who tried members of the Apostolic Brethren, Bernard Gui. He wrote a formula of abjuration used for repentant members. One of the phrases that former members of the Apostolic Brethren had to say upon their return to the Roman Church 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 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, G. Moffat, ed. (Paris: Librairie ancienne honoré champion, 1926), 40.

²¹ The Latin is “per plurima tempora,” literally “through many times.” A better English translation might be “for a long time,” or “for many days.”

²² For example, Richard of Rolle of Hampole (d. 1349), who wrote, “The greatest opposition to Antichrist will come from the preaching of Enoch 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 Books and Publishers, 1974), 137.

²³ There is evidence in Gui’s treatise, On the Sect of Those Who Call Themselves Apostles, also written in 1316, that Dolcino may have used Rev 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 by God and not by cardinals, was symbolized in Revelation 3:7 as the angel of the Church of Philadelphia. See 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 the rapture takes place during the reign of the holy pope, as The History of Brother Dolcino says, and the holy pope’s reign is described in Rev 3:7-13, which of these seven verses would point to the rapture? Verse 10—“I will keep you from the hour of testing coming upon the whole earth” seems like the most likely candidate. Interestingly, this is the same passage used by modern 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. For an account of another preacher in the early fourteenth century who believed that he was the angel of the Church of Philadelphia, see Lerner, “An ‘Angel of Philadelphia’ in the Reign of Philip the Fair: The Case of Guiard of Cressonessart” in Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer, William C. Jordan, Bruce McNab, and Teofilio F. Ruiz, eds. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 343-364.

²⁴ Many examples of the identification of Enoch and Elijah with the two witnesses from early medieval commentaries on Revelation are cited and translated into English in Thomas W. Mackay, “Early Christian Millenarist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John’s Apocalypse 11:3-13” in By Study and Also By Faith, Vol. 1. John M. Lundquist, Stephen D. Ricks, eds. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1990), 222-331.

²⁵ Ubertino di Casale, in 1304, wrote his Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus, of which Book V is a commentary on Revelation. He interprets the earthquake of Rev 11:13 as the death of Antichrist. See Ubertinus de Casali, Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1961), 492. Arnold of Villanova, in his commentary on Revelation of 1306, wrote that the death of Antichrist was signified in the great earthquake of Rev. 11:13. See Arnaldi de Villanova, Expositio Super Apocalypsi (Barcelona: Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 1971), 150.

²⁶ For example, Dionysius the Carthusian (1402-1471), says 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 Cartusiani Opera Omnia 14: 304. A rich treatment of the medieval concept of the conversion of the world after the death of Antichrist is Lerner, “Refreshment of the Saints: The Time After Antichrist as a Station for Earthly Progress in Medieval Thought” Traditio 32 (1976):97-144. Dolcino said that the time of renewal was prophesied in Isaiah 54-57. Gui, Manuel de l’inquisiteur, 84, 88, 100.

²⁷ Villanova, Expositio Super Apocalypsi, 143.

²⁸ Bede in PL 93:164; pseudo-Alcuin in PL 100:1150; Ambrose Autpert in CCCM 27:431; Haimo in PL 117:1076; Rupert of Deutz in PL 169:1033; and Peter of Tarantaise in B. Alberti Magni Opera Omnia, Vol. 38 (Paris, 1899), 644. The tradition can be traced back to the early church where it exists in Tyconius' commentary on Revelation in PLS 1:647; and the fifth-century Acts of Pilate, chapter 25, in Edgar Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 475.

²⁹ See for example, Ambrose Autpert's commentary on Revelation 12:14: Potest autem deserti nomine illa regio designari quam apostata Angelus et homo deseruit. "Moreover, that region from which the apostate Angel and man deserted can be designated by the name of 'desert'." CCCM 27A:472. See also pseudo-Jerome, PLS IV:1859; pseudo-Alcuin, PL 100:1154; Berengaudus, PL 17:880. Peter of Tarantaise describes the flight of the woman in Rev 12:14 as the liberation of the Church, and says that she is sent into heaven so that she might escape the trials. B. Alberti Magni Opera Omnia 38:661. Most of these commentators qualify their comments and say that the Church flies to heaven only spiritually through contemplation. But, the Jewish apocalyptic book of 1 Enoch (60:8), which Christianity inherited, describes the place to which Enoch was translated, as the "desert" or "wilderness." on the east of the garden where the elect and righteous dwell." In the early church, Epiphanius alluded to Rev 12:14, where there was given to the woman "wings of an eagle, and she was translated into the desert, lest she be overtaken by the dragon," as indicative of a bodily ascension of Mary to heaven. PG 42:715. Regardless of one's view of the assumption of Mary, this early church father associated a bodily rapture to heaven with the passage. I also find it interesting that the Irvingites saw a pretribulation translation of the saints in Rev 12:14. See Flegg, 'Gathered Under Apostles', 358.

³⁰ Frederick of Brunswick, for example, later in the century. See Lerner, Feast of Saint Abraham, 98, 163 no. 25 & 33, 165 no. 54. The Fraticelli and Beguines in the early fourteenth century may have held something similar. They believed that in the days of the fiercest persecution of 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. See 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, 170-172.