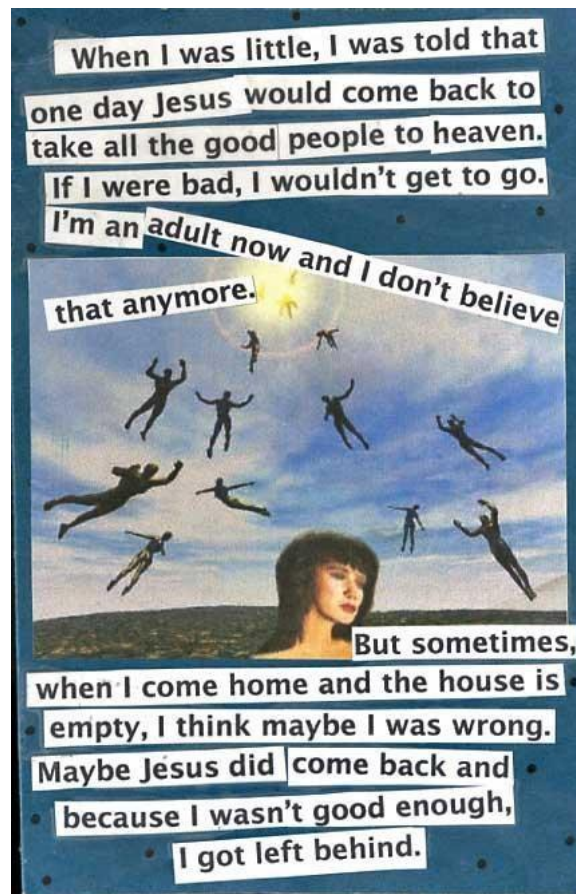


'It was the worst of times; it was the worst of times'
Popular Prophecy, Rapture Fiction, and the imminent Apocalypse in
Contemporary American Evangelism



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This thesis explores how the Rapture fiction and popular prophecy of modern American premillennial dispensationalism shapes the eschatological beliefs of its readership. This will be accomplished through a text-based critical analysis of the anxiety narratives of the Bible study and exegetical guides of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, and its counterpart, the *Left Behind* fiction series. This thesis represents the first scholarly analysis of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, and the first situation of *Left Behind* fiction within its theological context. It will be proposed that these two sets of texts shape the eschatological beliefs of their readers through a discursive 'streamlining' that is performed in several ways. Firstly, the historical development of the movement will be examined, exploring the evolution of a specific premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic and its 'channelling' through particular cultural institutions. Secondly, an analysis of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* fiction will demonstrate that this premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic is almost exclusively communicated through anxiety narratives, which focus on expressions of horror, isolation, powerlessness and paranoia. It will be argued that these narratives serve to explore 'abjective' elements of premillennial dispensationalist belief, re-integrating them into the fabric of the faith. Particular attention will be paid to these abjective elements, which include the role of the eschatological body, the nature of individual salvation, and the perpetual deferment of the Rapture. As such, the popular media of premillennial dispensationalism serves as a further channel for the discursive streamlining of the movement's prophetic scheme. Finally, this thesis proposes that the 'deprivation' theory of millennial appeal does not adequately explain the appeal and success of premillennial dispensationalism. As such, the following analysis will suggest that an alternate critical analysis of the movement, concentrating on its tropes of anxiety, serves to better explain the continued appeal of this ideology.

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Introduction:

The popular premillennial dispensationalist media examined in this study comprises the 'Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library' produced by American pastor Tim LaHaye, and LaHaye's *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic fiction novels, written in collaboration with author Jerry B. Jenkins. The thesis argues that the purpose of this popular media is to encourage belief in Rapture theology, and to shape the eschatological beliefs of its reading community. This thesis will explore how this is managed, through a historical exploration of the movement, and a close critical analysis of the primary source materials. The popular premillennial dispensationalist media is understood as characterised by two components: exegetical guidance, and a reliance on anxiety as a means of narrating this guidance. The thesis argues that premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutics depend on narratives rooted in isolation, abjection, abhorrence, powerlessness, paranoia and 'horror' of the present age. The introduction will provide a review of previous scholarship on modern prophecy, and on *Left Behind* fiction, including the work of Paul Boyer, Amy Johnson Frykholm, Crawford Gribben and Jason Bivins. The introduction will serve to discuss the definition of terms used for the wider critical analysis, and overview the concepts of anxiety, abhorrence and abject which inform the methodological framework for the thesis.

Chapter Two: History

First, the premillennial dispensationalist account of its own historical development will be outlined, demonstrating the ways in which the movement characterises itself as inhabiting a historical moment of theological decline, following a 'golden age' of prophecy. A historical account of the development of contemporary premillennial dispensationalism as a blend of theologies will then be discussed. This includes the belief in divided eras of prophetic history (dispensationalism) that culminate in a period of worsening earthly conditions before the end of the world (futurist premillennialism). Rapture theology dictates that believers will be 'lifted' to heaven to escape the worst period of judgment (the Tribulation). This chapter will concentrate on the development of Rapture theology in the 1840s, and follow the legacy of Darbyite dispensationalism in the United States. It will be discussed how the movement has deliberately sought increased separation from wider Evangelicalism, resulting in the creation of a specific premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic, pedagogical institutions and media.

Chapter Three: Prophecy

Premillennial dispensationalism draws a distinction between prophecy, as the process of interpreting biblical predictions about the future, and apocalyptic, which comprises the events that constitute the end of the world. This chapter will offer a revised working definition of the term 'prophecy' as it is used by premillennial dispensationalism to include both the 'word' of God as recorded in the Bible, and the process of interpreting the constantly shifting signifiers of prophetic study. The eleven books of the 'Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library' examined in this thesis are a collection of non-fiction popular prophecy and Bible study guides. The books in the 'library' were written between 1975 and 2006, and exemplify the development of a discrete discourse of prophecy established in Chapter Two.

The 'Prophecy Library' is designed to develop readers' understanding of biblical prophecy, and to aid their identification of prophetic signifiers of the coming end of the world. The chapter will discuss how, according to premillennial dispensationalism, prophecy should be read, and the hermeneutical guidelines established in popular prophecy for the 'correct' reading of biblical text. The guides of the 'Prophecy Library' will be considered for the way in which they serve to establish codified meanings at the centre of the discourse. This in turn disseminates the illusion of a 'common sense' approach to reading the Bible, and the surrounding world, as a text full of prophetic signifiers. In this way, the texts are comprised of exegetical 'tramlines', designed to control the way readers understand Scripture. A detailed outline of the premillennial dispensationalist interpretation of the 'horrors' of the Tribulation will be offered. The prophetic media of the 'Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library' will then be examined for the way in which its texts exploit themes of horror, isolation, separation, powerlessness and paranoia as ways of sketching a specific eschatological landscape shaped by fears of judgment and repentance that can only be redressed through Rapture theology. In particular, the theological and imaginative constructions of the 'Church Age' dispensation will be examined for the ways in which they invest considerable energy in elucidating the horrors of the age as a form of 'positive degeneration' preceding the occurrence of the Rapture.

Chapter Four: Apocalyptic

Since 1995, the *Left Behind* books have sold 60 million copies, and cover the 'end of days' from the Rapture, to the end of the millennial kingdom. The sixteen books in the *Left Behind* fiction series narrate the prophetic interpretations established in Chapters Two and Three. An overview of the history of the genre of 'rapture fiction' will be offered. The *Left Behind* novels will then be analysed according to the way in which they use the medium of anxiety to draw attention to specific eschatological concerns. The novels will be examined according to their use of horror, isolation and separation, and powerlessness. In particular, fears over death, and the corruptibility of the human body are explored in the fiction through a thematic preoccupation with the 'category' of the corpse, and with bodily violence and mutilation. These anxieties are then 'contained' through dispensational premillennialist theology, and Rapture theology in particular. The preoccupation in *Left Behind* fiction with the degradation of the human body is juxtaposed against the 'glorified body' of the Rapture saint, highlighting the function of salvation through the 'born again' experience for maintaining codes of spiritually acceptable 'lived realities' for participants of premillennial dispensationalist belief.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Conclusion

This chapter draws together previous analyses to concentrate on thematic strains that have emerged in the preceding chapters. As explored in Chapter Two, the movement draws on a literal understanding of the Bible, and the belief in a future apocalypse, to create a self-understanding as participators in a revelatory process of prophetic divination of the future. The movement understands those at the centre of premillennial dispensationalist discourse to act as go-betweens, intercepting the Word of God and 'fixing' specific indicators of God's Word in the surrounding world. This fluid and adaptive process is contained through mechanisms of discursive control discussed in Chapter Two. These include separate channels of pedagogy, and the use of marginalia or functional exegetical guidelines to shape

Scriptural interpretation. These create a particular theological culture, and consumer market to channel a 'common sense' understanding of Biblical text.

This chapter will explore the specific 'way' of reading the Bible, and the popular media, which is encouraged by premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutics. As has been demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, the prophetic media provides a means of streamlining exegetic interpretation to encourage a unified interpretation of Scripture. Furthermore, premillennial dispensationalist eschatological beliefs are primarily narrated through anxiety. This chapter provides further detailed discussion on the use of horror for the expression of a model for the performativity of 'born again' salvation, as well as a specific 'end-times' theology. This chapter will include a discussion of the role of horror in the precipitation of 'critical action', and the role of horror in the shaping of group identity. The themes of powerlessness, paranoia, and anxiety that have emerged in the close-reading of the primary source material will be examined further for a more comprehensive understanding of how these themes are utilised to narrate premillennial dispensationalist eschatology.

Conclusion:

The chapter challenges the binarisms of 'deprived' and 'depraved' that emerge in analyses of premillennial dispensationalist writing. The understanding of dispensational premillennialism as characterized by either, or both, of these formulations fails to take the movement seriously as a theological or intellectual 'reality' for participants in its belief system. This chapter will challenge characterizations of premillennial dispensationalism as a 'marginal' movement that must maintain its self-perception of marginality in order to maintain a coherent 'end-times' theology. It will problematize the understanding of millennialism as reactionary against a modern state of 'crisis'. Rather, it will suggest an understanding of crisis as a state of 'being in time' for millennial movements. This chapter will argue that the reductive categorisation of the premillennial dispensationalist movement as somewhat 'depraved', often allows critics and commentators to dismiss the movement as not much more than a lunatic fringe, thereby failing to recognise its legitimate discursive processes.

Similarly, this chapter will challenge the framing of discussions of premillennial dispensationalism within the context of 'passive' and 'active' millennialism, which has enabled a discussion of the movement as one that either 'rejects' active political participation or 'actively' pursues the destruction of earth. The chapter concludes with a final exploration of the role of anxiety in the theology of premillennial dispensationalism. Anxiety is understood as means of channelling readers' fears, which are then resolved through recourse to belief in the imminent Rapture. The anxiety over the imminent deferment of Rapture is contained through the 'controlled' linking of prophetic interpretation to the contemporary world as indications of the approaching 'end of days'. Anxiety, paranoia, and bodily violence are central to the imaginative and theological landscape of the books. They form a central mechanism through which the movement conceptualises Rapture theology as a bridge between the physical 'present' world, and the 'soon to be' eschatological world.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Judith Corrente and Wim Kooyer, without whose support this project would have been impossible. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Charlotte Methuen, Johannes Zachhuber and Chris Rowland for their patient guidance, encouragement, and thoughtful critiques.

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Chapter One

Introduction

‘It was the worst of times; it was the worst of times’¹

After picking up the first *Left Behind* novel in 2003, I have been reading and re-reading these books for ten years, during which time my attitude towards them has transformed. Initially, I found the *Left Behind* novels both silly and abrasively conservative. They were offensive, brash, and utterly alien. Anne Lammot describes the novels as, ‘hard-core right-wing paranoid anti-Semitic homophobic misogynistic propaganda’.² Furthermore, the books are not particularly well written. The prose is clunky, the dialogue awkward, and the sermonising often tedious and repetitive. This initially made the novels easy to dismiss as not much more than 1960s-inspired, rather bad science fiction with a didactic agenda. Amy Johnson Frykholm noted of her own reaction to the *Left Behind* books;

‘I found the books narrow, socially and theologically ill conceived, sometimes enraging and sometimes dull [...] I read them with a pencil in my hand, making notes in the margins, able to sustain my interest only for a few minutes at a time. I found them painful to read and even more painful to write about’.³

It is not difficult to sympathise with both Lammot and Frykholm’s reactions to the novels; their displeasure with the books is easily justifiable.

The *Left Behind* novels feature many distasteful and disturbing elements. The novels’ Antichrist character, for example, is genetically engineered from the sperm of two gay men, and controls the world from his position as Secretary General of the United Nations. The novels depict a universe where only a small pocket of American militias can oppose the

Cover image from: ‘Postsecret’, 1 October 2005, accessed 10 June 2013, <http://web.archive.org/web/20051001164808/http://www.postsecret.blogspot.com/>

¹ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Nicolae, The Rise of Antichrist* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1997), p.1.

² Anne Lammot, ‘*Knocking on Heaven’s Door*’, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (New York, 1999), p. 60.

³ Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York/ Oxford, 2004), pp. 7-8.

global power of the United Nations, and assassination is a divinely-prescribed legitimate model for political resistance. In *Left Behind's* framework of moral justice, one character's mere contemplation of an abortion justifies her years of torment and suffering in a windowless basement. Gratuitous bloodshed, gruesome mutilations and dismemberments litter the prose of *Left Behind* fiction; barely a few chapters pass without at least one decapitation or flaying. Of course, these are fictions, and yet the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* represents the way in which these fictions are suspended in a much wider theological and political framework.

The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is itself far from a straightforward systematic theology. The books of the 'library' argue that the Illuminati have been responsible for a centuries-old global conspiracy designed to suppress 'true' Christianity, that homosexuality is an abomination, and argue that political pacifism is a mark of the Antichrist. And yet, despite these, and many more indicators of what can seem a bizarre and extreme belief system, over the course of researching the texts, meeting believers, and immersing myself into the world of apocalyptic belief, I have developed empathy for prophecy believers. To paraphrase Randal Balmer's ambivalence about modern American Evangelism: on the one hand, I have found it difficult to set aside some of the stranger, and even somewhat sinister elements of the religious practices described in this project. On the other hand, I have found myself compelled to defend the 'legitimacy' of premillennial dispensationalism against those critics and commentators who have dismissed it as too strange, or too peripheral to take very seriously as a theological system.⁴

⁴ Randal Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory, A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York/Oxford, 1993), p. 6.

Like Frykholm, I have found that writing about *Left Behind* and the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* has been a difficult process. The production of this thesis has lent itself to countless nightmares, some in which I found myself left behind after the Rapture, disbelieving and confused, still unwilling to convert. To some extent, the books have performed their 'work' on me. Although I am not remotely religious, it is difficult to remain unaffected by the hysterical pitch of anxiety, horror and paranoia that is sustained throughout all of LaHaye's literature examined in this thesis, fiction and non-fiction. The material is, in effect, designed to destabilise a reader, to grate at the edges of their fear of mortality, of isolation or disempowerment, and to imaginatively enter them into a cognitive mode where the stuff of nightmares becomes the everyday.

The narrative mode of anxiety disseminates, shapes and regulates the content of both the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* fiction. This thesis argues that this mode is deliberately engaged for several reasons. Firstly, the anxiety narratives of *Left Behind* and the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* serve to expose problematic theological concerns, such as the loneliness of the eschatological journey, and the corruption of the Christian body. These anxieties are then explored through the popular media, shaped according to the movement's hermeneutic, and re-integrated into the theology. Secondly, these anxiety narratives, and the task of discursive streamlining that they perform, are intended to academically 'patrol' the borders of the faith, keeping believers 'inside' the world of premillennial dispensationalism. Finally, the anxiety and horror portrayed in the popular media are considered a means of 'witnessing' to unbelievers, and thus a way of encouraging conversions.

Throughout this study, I describe modern American dispensational premillennialism as a movement. It is, however, problematic to discuss the characteristic set of beliefs outlined in this study as those of a self-identified, homogenous 'movement'. Premillennial dispensationalism is not a sect, a cult, or a self-defined political body. Rather, it is a fiercely non-denominational ideology, and as such, is difficult to address as a comprehensive entity. Furthermore, premillennial dispensationalism is characterised by a highly individualistic approach to the relationship between the sacred and the self, making an assessment of participation in networks of belief even more difficult to ascertain. This individualistic approach is, however, fundamentally negotiated through text. The literalist approach to Scripture forms the lynchpin of the premillennial dispensationalist belief system, but participation in a wider Evangelical textual culture is also highly emphasised. This includes the use of Bible Study and prophecy guides, as well as 'appropriate' lifestyle and entertainment material. It is therefore more helpful to consider premillennial dispensationalism as a connective tissue between an aesthetic and a lifestyle. The literature examined in this study does have its own social body, without creating a distinct social formation.⁵ In this sense, its conceptualisation as a 'movement' is perhaps closer to that of the Romantic or even 'New Age' movement.

The popular prophecy and Rapture fiction of premillennial dispensationalism serves to articulate its eschatological scheme, its hermeneutical methods, and its core doctrines. More than this, however, an understanding of the way in which premillennial dispensationalism is expressed in its popular media, paints a picture of the movement as a dynamic cultural phenomenon. As Martyn Percy has explored with regards to wider Fundamentalism, premillennial dispensationalism can be understood as a specific cultural-linguistic system,

⁵ Frykholm has explored these formations in her examination of social networks of *Left Behind* readership in *Rapture Culture*.

'It comprises a vocabulary of discursive and non-discursive symbols, together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be deployed. It is a form of life, with cognitive and behavioural dimensions'.⁶

This study will examine the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* and the *Left Behind* fiction series as two parallel 'arms' of LaHaye's theological agenda. Beyond this agenda, the two sets of texts discussed in this thesis represent channels of communication for a diverse belief system, establishing codes of conduct and patrolling the boundaries of the discourse within a particular vocabulary of meaning. I have, therefore attributed the term 'movement' to those beliefs defined in the particular manifestation of premillennial dispensationalism exhibited in the literature, and I have defined the believing community as a constituent of those who participate in that discursive process by engaging in the network of consumption of this popular literature.

⁶ Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power, Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London, 1996), p. 12.

What is Premillennial Dispensationalism?

Premillennial dispensationalism, as a theological system, has grown from a particular blending of traditions that will be more fully explored in Chapter Two. By means of an extended definition of the movement, I will here explain the fundamental ‘building blocks’ that characterise the specific components of premillennial dispensationalist theology. Firstly, as suggested by the title of this study, premillennial dispensationalism falls under the umbrella of ‘Evangelicalism’. The term, ‘Evangelical’ is wide-ranging, flexible, and covers a broad range of Protestant denominations, which includes Pentecostal, Baptist, and Methodist. Throughout this thesis, I have, wherever possible, attempted to provide definitions, discussions, and accounts of premillennial dispensationalism drawing from the terminology used in the media examined in this study. Interestingly, however, neither the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, nor *Left Behind* fiction offers any discussion of what ‘Evangelicalism’ really comprises, or even who can be considered an ‘Evangelical’. I therefore offer here George Marsden’s definition, as it is most compatible with those beliefs outlined in the movement’s media. Marsden defines Evangelicals as ascribing to the following beliefs;

‘ (1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, (2) the real historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture, (3) salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, (4) the importance of evangelicalism and mission, and (5) the importance of the spiritually transformed life’.⁷

For premillennial dispensationalism, Evangelicalism involves those core features listed above and also includes several other fundamental principles. These include, most prominently, a conversion experience drawn from a conscious choice, undertaken through the process of accepting Jesus as a personal Saviour, also known as a ‘born again’

⁷ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991), p. 5.

experience. Premillennial dispensationalism Evangelical belief also expresses faith in the literal inerrancy of the Bible, as well as the necessity of encouraging the ‘witnessing’ the faith to the unconverted, or ‘evangelising’, and involvement in missionary outreach. The term ‘evangelical’ is used unproblematically throughout the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, and LaHaye suggests that, amongst other attributes, ‘evangelical Christians have always taken prophecy seriously’.⁸ LaHaye furthermore suggests that, ‘Most evangelical Christians hold to the dispensationalist premillennial view of eschatology’, and that

‘Evangelical Christians take seriously the Bible’s prophecies about such topics as the rapture, the Tribulation, Armageddon, and the return of Christ’.⁹

According to the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, therefore, the definition of an ‘Evangelical’ Christian is closely linked not only to core beliefs in the literal inerrancy of the Bible, salvation through the Grace of God, and the importance of evangelism, but also to a belief in the Rapture, a dispensationalist understanding of human history, and a premillennialist understanding of the end times.

This understanding of what it means to be an Evangelical implies that the particular blend of Christianity discussed in this study could accurately be described as ‘fundamentalist’. Indeed, the movement’s adherence to a ‘fundamentalist approach’ to biblical exegesis is occasionally used by premillennial dispensationalists as a means of expressing their commitment to the ‘fundamentalist’ hermeneutical method,

‘Many seminary professors educated in secular graduate schools were often humiliated by their humanist professors for believing “the fundamentalist approach” to Scripture’.¹⁰

I have, however, chosen not to explicitly use this term in this study, except in reference to the formative years of the ‘Fundamentalist’ movement as a self-described theological and

⁸ Tim LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy For Yourself* (Oregon, 2006), p. 28.

⁹ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?: Current Events Foretold in Scripture...And What They Mean* (Eugene, Oregon, 2000), p. 4.

political entity. The term 'fundamentalist', while an entirely accurate designator for literalist premillennial dispensationalism, is largely regarded by the movement as implying an unhelpful stereotype, as George Marsden has written, 'a Fundamentalist is an Evangelical who is angry about something'.¹¹ As such, *Left Behind* and the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* articulate a subtle distinction between advocating a 'fundamentalist' hermeneutic, while largely rejecting the use of the term 'fundamentalist' as a means of self-description. When Rayford, the main character of *Left Behind*, refers to his recently 'born again' wife as a 'fundamentalist', she rebukes him,

'It's not fair to use inflammatory language, Rafe. Fundamentalists have come to be known as people who kill those they disagree with. When was the last time you heard of a Christian doing that?'¹²

The specific blend of theology discussed in this project thus contains several discrete elements, including that of Evangelical fundamentalism, premillennialism, pre-Tribulationism, futurism, dispensationalism and prophecy belief.

'Millennialism' can be roughly divided into three designations: amillenennialism, premillennialism and postmillennialism. The tradition of amillenennialism reads the book of Revelation as essentially allegorical or symbolic in nature. Heavily influenced by Augustine's *City of God* in the early 5th Century, an amillenennialist reading of the book of Revelation holds that the 'thousand years' of Revelation 20:3 is not to be understood as a literal period of time, nor the Apocalypse of St. John's vision to be read as a blueprint for the end of time. Highly influential throughout the medieval period, the amillenennial approach formed the eschatological backbone for the Protestant Reformation, as both Luther and Calvin adopted an amillenennial approach to the 'end times'. Many Protestant movements, including the

¹¹ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, p. 1.

¹² Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Rapture, in the Twinkling of an Eye, Countdown to the Earth's Last Days* (Eugene, Oregon, 2006), p. 77.

Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran Churches, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, still ascribe to amillennial eschatology. Throughout the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, LaHaye cautions against the metaphorical hermeneutical process of amillennialism as the product of a 'preconceived bias of taking prophecy allegory or symbolically'.¹³ LaHaye lays the responsibility for this bias squarely at the feet of Augustine, who is charged with Catholic pollution of the Bible's true message,

'Augustine laid the foundation for destroying doctrinal integrity by introducing Catholic doctrines that have lasted until this day in a form of Christianized paganism'.¹⁴

Premillennialist belief essentially stems from a tradition of pre-Nicene exegesis which holds that Jesus' kingdom on Earth as described in the book of Revelation 20: 1-6 is to be understood as a literal reign of one thousand years. Contemporary American premillennial dispensationalism owes much of its interpretive framework to the resurgence of premillennialism in Early Modern Europe, and has developed as part of a tradition of American premillennialist theologians such as Increase and Cotton Mather in the 17th century. premillennialist dispensationalism holds that before the establishment of the millennial kingdom, humanity is preordained to experience a downward spiral of increasing evil and worsening conditions until Jesus' second coming. As a futurist movement, premillennial dispensationalism understands this to be in the process of unfolding, and Jesus' return to be imminent. The postmillennialist, or 'progressive millennialist' form of belief, by contrast, insists upon a process of gradual, teleological improvement and moral progress until the earth has evolved into a place of harmony over which Jesus will preside. This approach was largely characterised by the efforts of the Social Reform movement in America in the 19th and 20th century, efforts that included under their umbrella the Temperance and Abolitionist movements.

¹³ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 103.

¹⁴ Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture, Who Will Face The Tribulation?* (Oregon, 2002), p. 232.

The 'dispensationalist' element of premillennial dispensationalism stems from a long-standing tradition that can be traced back to at least Joachim of Fiore (1135- 1202). Dispensationalism conceptualises the history of Christianity as divided into several distinct epochs of time, or 'dispensations', during which different plans of salvation are 'dispensed' by God to different groups.¹⁵ Dispensationalist belief usually allocates a division of either three or seven separate dispensations. In the tripartite model of dispensationalism, the first dispensation was the Age of Jesus, the time during which Jesus lived and preached. Following the Crucifixion, there was no longer a manifest presence of God on earth, and thus the 'Church Age' began. In this age, the ministry of the Church performs a substitute for the teaching of Jesus. The final dispensation will be initiated once Jesus has returned to Earth to establish his millennial kingdom.

Elmer Towns and Thomas Ice, writing in the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Oregon, 2004), characterise dispensationalism slightly differently, according its core tenets to be more closely aligned with its particular manifestation in premillennial dispensationalism. A 'dispensationalist' is described as one who identifies with the *Scofield Reference Bible*, 'and [who will] generally interpret the Scriptures according to its notes and outlines'.¹⁶ A 'dispensation' is defined as period of time that contains several essential elements. These include: promises from God, commandments from God that are designed to test humanity's obedience, God's judgment, and the manifestation of the progressive revelation of God's plan for human history.¹⁷ In, *Charting The End Times, Prophecy Study*

¹⁵ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, p. 40.

¹⁶ Elmer Towns and Thomas Ice, 'Dispensationalism' in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 81.

¹⁷ Elmer Towns and Thomas Ice, 'Dispensations' in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 84.

Guide (Eugene, Oregon, 2002), LaHaye characterises belief in dispensationalism according to three summarised principles,

- '1. Consistently interpreting the Bible in a plain, literal sense
2. Recognizing that God has a plan for national Israel that is distinct from the Church
3. Acknowledging that the ultimate goal of history is the glorification of God'.¹⁸

Premillennial dispensationalism adheres to a seven-tiered model of earthly time. The first dispensation is understood to have ended with the Fall of man, and the present 'Church Age' is the sixth dispensation. The final dispensation will be triggered following the occurrence of the Rapture, when the Antichrist will sign a pact with Israel.

These seven dispensations are defined through their relationship to particular biblical covenants, 'A dispensation is a temporary period of time based on a conditional test to determine if humanity will be faithful to the conditions of God'.¹⁹ The seven dispensations and their corresponding covenants are listed as:

1. The Edenic Covenant and the dispensation of Innocence
2. The Adamic Covenant and the dispensation of Conscience
3. The Noahic Covenant and the dispensation of Human Government
4. The Abrahamic Covenant and the dispensation of Promise
5. The Mosaic Covenant and the dispensation of Law
6. The New Covenant and the dispensation of Grace
7. The Davidic Covenant and the dispensation of the Kingdom²⁰

Humankind is judged to have 'failed' all of the 'testing' undertaken by God within these dispensations, and accordingly, each dispensation ends in judgment.²¹ The judgment undertaken at the end of the current dispensation will be that of the Rapture, when those who have been redeemed through submission to God's Grace will be selected for deliverance from God's punishment during the Tribulation.

¹⁸ Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *Charting The End Times, Prophecy Study Guide*, (Eugene, Oregon, 2002), p. 99.

¹⁹ Towns and Ice, 'Dispensationalism', p. 82.

²⁰ Towns and Ice, 'Dispensations', pp. 84 - 89.

²¹ Towns and Ice, 'Dispensationalism', p. 83.

The American, premillennialist manifestation of dispensationalism is, understandably therefore, heavily invested in the concept of the 'Rapture'. The Rapture is understood to be the moment at which Jesus will return to collect his 'true' Church: those who have accepted God's Grace, and experienced the 'born again' conversion. These believers, both those who are still living, and the bodies of all those who have died since the day of Pentecost, will then be physically lifted into the air or 'Raptured' up to heaven, where they will be given 'new, living, immortal, resurrected bodies'.²² According to premillennial dispensationalism, the moment of Rapture will be sudden, without warning, and is expected to occur imminently. The Rapture forms the first 'stage' of Jesus' return, which is described as 'a two-act play [...] with a seven year intermission (the Tribulation)'.²³

The biblical framework for the Rapture is located in a combination of several verses. In particular, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17,

'For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord'.

This verse, in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 15: 51-57, Matthew 24: 39-42, Luke 17: 34-35, and John 14 1-2 serve to create a detailed image of an imminent, and selective event. The word 'Rapture' is derived from the Latin translation of the word *harpazo*, which according to the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, 'the basic idea of the word is "to suddenly remove or snatch away"'.²⁴ Although the verb is used several times in the New Testament, the meaning of the premillennial dispensationalist use of 'Rapture' is associated most

²² Tim LaHaye and Richard Mayhue, 'Rapture', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 309.

²³ LaHaye and Mayhue, 'Rapture', p. 311.

²⁴ LaHaye and Mayhue, 'Rapture', p. 311.

strongly with Paul's 'third heaven' experience' in 2 Corinthians 12: 2,4, and in Revelation 12:5 with regards to Jesus' ascension to heaven.²⁵

It is hard to overestimate the phenomenal psychological, symbolic and theological significance of the Rapture in premillennial dispensationalism. For premillennial dispensationalists, the Rapture closes the current dispensation and heralds beginning of the 'Tribulation', the seven-year series of trials, judgments and plagues catalogued in the book of Revelation. Interestingly, however, the Tribulation will not begin immediately following the Rapture. Instead, the trigger for the Rapture is understood as the confirmation of a peace treaty between the Antichrist and the nation of Israel. In the *Left Behind* books, the period between the occurrence of the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation is a few months.²⁶ It is not addressed in the literature what significance this 'time lapse' holds, as its inhabitants are, according to the dispensationalist scheme, entirely 'outside of history' during this gap. As the closing event of the current dispensation, the Rapture is understood as the next event on the prophetic timetable. Predictions of the imminent occurrence of the Rapture occupy a great deal of the thematic content of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, and are manifested in a 'cataloguing' of the indications that the moment of the Rapture is at hand. This preoccupation with the 'signs' of the end times does not fall strictly within boundaries of traditional Evangelicalism or dispensationalism, and rather is falls under the category of 'prophecy belief'.

Historically, dispensationalism has had a complex relationship with prophecy. Darbyite dispensationalism states that the current 'Church' or 'Gentile' dispensation is part of the 'Great Parenthesis'. As such, it is devoid of prophecies, and prophetic fulfilment. The

²⁵ LaHaye and Mayhue, 'Rapture', p. 311.

²⁶ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind, A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1995), p. 426.

Rapture will signal the beginning of the next dispensation, when prophetic fulfilment will begin to occur. Prophecy, to this extent, cannot be fulfilled before the Rapture, and is not applicable to our age. Premillennial dispensationalism has, however, to some degree, integrated a prophetic discourse into its theology, as its adherents are instead encouraged to look for 'signs of the times'. These signs indicate that the 'season' of the Rapture is at hand, and include a range of indications that conditions on earth are worsening in accordance with a premillennial hermeneutic. These include an increase in natural disasters, or a rise in crime rates, for example. Similarly, these signs could also be specific precursors of the framework that will support the Antichrist's regime during the Tribulation. These include steps towards globalised government, or new technology that could enable the worldwide 'marking' of the Antichrist's followers with his seal.

Prophecy Belief

Richard Landes has suggested that the distinction drawn between prophetic and apocalyptic has limited value, 'They are kissing cousins, and spend so much time together that they share the same wardrobe and address the same audiences'.²⁷ J.J. Collins has offered perhaps the best-known definition of apocalyptic, one that could arguably also refer to prophecy;

'Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendental reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world'.²⁸

²⁷ Richard Landes, 'Millenarianism and the Dynamics of Apocalyptic Time', in *Expecting the End, Millennialism in Social and Historical Context*, eds. Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben (Texas, 2006), p. 20.

²⁸ John Joseph Collins, 'Towards the Morphology of a Genre: An Introduction', *Semeia*, 14 (1979), p. 9.

The difference drawn between biblical apocalyptic and prophecy by premillennial dispensationalism is, however, a matter of exegesis rather than content, as 'apocalyptic' is used as a descriptor for prophecy, but never as an interchangeable genre.²⁹ Thus, while their 'imaginative' modes essentially overlap, the discursive modes of prophecy and apocalyptic are understood to vary considerably. Christopher Rowland and Judith Kovacs have suggested two forms of apocalyptic exegesis, one which emphasises the importance of 'decoding' the text, and one which seeks to 'actualize' the text. Rowland and Kovacs describe 'decoding' as that which establishes

'precise equivalence between every image in the book and figure and events in history [...] An image is seen to have one particular meaning, and the interpreter assumes that if the code is understood in its entirety, the whole Apocalypse can be rendered in another form, and its inner meaning laid bare'.³⁰

Premillennial dispensationalism regards the book of Revelation to be within the genre of prophecy, and the hermeneutical approach adopted is one that allows for a 'decoding' of its apocalyptic content to access a full picture of its prophetic message. This very process of 'decoding' of biblical prophecy therefore contributes to the generation of prophecy belief as a distinct discourse.

During the course of research, it has been difficult to find a definition of prophecy that is directly applicable to the way in which the term is used by premillennial dispensationalism. The vast majority of scholarly work conducted on Judeo-Christian prophetic concentrates mainly on the Old Testament biblical genre, and as such, the definitions used are not entirely appropriate for a discussion of contemporary prophecy belief. Indeed, most studies of the Christian prophetic tradition do not recognize the continued existence of prophecy as

²⁹ Andy Woods, 'Apocalypticism', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), pp. 28- 29.

³⁰ Christopher Rowland, Judith Kovacs and Rebekah Callow, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Malden, MA, 2004), p. 8.

a discourse. What I mean by this, is that although those at the centre of contemporary premillennial dispensationalist prophetic studies do not in any way, regard themselves as 'prophets', premillennial dispensationalism considers prophecy to be a fluid, and continuously unfolding process of interaction between Scripture and man. For premillennial dispensationalists, prophecy is a two-fold process that involves the literal word of God as recorded in the Bible, and an ongoing divine revelation of prophetic content in the surrounding world. The interpretation, as well as the 'Word' of prophecy is, for premillennial dispensationalism, part of the process of revelation of prophetic meaning.

For the purpose of this study, therefore, the definition of prophecy will be two-fold. Biblical prophecy includes the books and passages of the Bible that contain the declarations of prophets, individuals to whom information about the future has been revealed by God. A prophet is defined by LaHaye's *Popular Encyclopedia Of Bible Prophecy*, as one whose ministry includes 'declaring God's message and foretelling God's actions'.³¹ In the Old Testament, there are seventeen prophetic books. The five major prophetic books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel. There are twelve 'minor' prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. In the New Testament, premillennial dispensationalism highlights several passages that are considered to have particularly heightened prophetic significance. These include, for example, Paul's writing to the Thessalonians, or Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25, also Mark 13, Luke 21, and Luke 17:20-37. Premillennial dispensationalism considers the book of Revelation the only fully prophetic book of the New Testament.³²

³¹ Ed Hindson, 'Prophets', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 305.

³² Woods, 'Apocalypticism', p. 29.

Biblical prophecy can be difficult to interpret, as it is rich in symbolism and imagery. The book of Revelation for example, is notorious even amongst premillennial dispensationalist circles for being difficult to understand. As LaHaye and Hindson observe,

‘It looks like a hopeless maze of confusion about the future, so [readers] just throw up their hands in defeat. “I just can’t make any sense out of this!” they exclaim in frustration’.³³

A tight framework of interpretation of the symbolism and imagery of these prophetic books and passages of the Bible has developed, as particular imagery within the prophetic texts are interpreted as representative of specific ‘real world’ referents. For example, the ‘ten horned’ alliance of Daniel 7:24 is commonly accepted as a reference to the United Nations.³⁴ This network of biblical signifiers and ‘real world’ referents has become an integral part of the discourse of contemporary prophecy belief.

The second ‘layer’ of the definition of prophecy, includes the way in which these texts are interpreted to apply to the contemporary, or future earth. Thus, a second layer of ‘prophesying’ is overlaid on top of the biblical text in the premillennial definition of what constitutes prophecy,

‘The full picture of prophecy, then, is that it encompasses both a forthtelling of God’s messages and a foretelling of God’s actions’.³⁵

In short, therefore, for premillennial dispensationalism, prophecy is both the prophetic canon of the Bible, but prophecy is also the way in which these texts are interpreted and applied to human present and future. As such, while the meaning of the Word of God remains static, the process of striving to attach the correct referents to the esoteric words of the prophets is a flexible and constantly shifting part of the process of ‘prophecy’.

³³ Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook* (Eugene, Oregon, 2006), p 15.

³⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 169.

³⁵ Hindson, ‘Prophets’, p. 305.

Introduction to *Left Behind* and The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*

For those unfamiliar with premillennial dispensationalism, it may not be immediately apparent why the work of Tim LaHaye (1926-) examined in this thesis should be considered representative of the wider belief system. LaHaye's long theological and indeed political career has established him as one of the patriarchs of modern American premillennial dispensationalism, and his importance within the believing community rivals that of figures such as J. Dwight Pentecost or Jerry Falwell. LaHaye's popularity, the commercial success of his publications, the *Left Behind* series in particular, as well as his influential role as a theological and political figurehead, make him a figure of singular and exceptional interest. Furthermore, LaHaye is unusual in his creation of non-fiction prophecy guides, as well as a rich fictional landscape for the extended development of these beliefs, which while certainly not unprecedented, marks him as an exceptional and fascinating modern theologian. However, the hermeneutical schema, the biblical exegesis, and indeed the political commentary depicted in the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* fiction, represents a belief system that extends far beyond LaHaye's personal viewpoint. Firstly, as this thesis will demonstrate, LaHaye's work represents a manifestation of a historically developed and tightly-controlled discourse, which has harnessed the potential to reach millions, if not tens of millions of readers. Secondly, many of the texts examined in this thesis are not written by LaHaye alone. Rather, they are collaborative works, produced with the author Jerry Jenkins, and eminent premillennial dispensationalists including Thomas Ice and Ed Hindson. Several works of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, including *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* and *The Popular Bible Commentary* (Eugene, Oregon, 2006), are composite works, featuring compilations of research by tens of renowned and influential premillennial dispensationalists, including John F. Walvoord and J. Dwight

Pentecost. Furthermore, the premillennial dispensationalism of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* reflects the hermeneutical consensus of the 200 'core members' of academics, preachers and pedagogues which constitute the Pre-Tribulational Research Centre, a think-tank founded by LaHaye and Thomas Ice in 1992.

The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is a collection of 'popular prophecy' books written by Tim LaHaye, occasionally in association with other prominent premillennial dispensationalists, such as Thomas Ice or Ed Hindson. While LaHaye has been a prolific writer of popular prophecy throughout his career, several of his books have been collated into the *Prophecy Library*. There is no obviously apparent reasoning for the make-up of this collection, as some of LaHaye's 'popular prophecy' books, for example, *The Popular Handbook On The Rapture* (Eugene, Oregon, 2012), have been excluded from the 'library', despite their obvious thematic relevance.³⁶ Nevertheless, the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* contains a collection of Bible study guides, reference works and introductions to Bible prophecy, many of which are self-consciously entitled as 'popular'. For example, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, or, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary*. What exactly is meant by 'popular prophecy' is more difficult to define. Simply put, 'popular prophecy' refers to a 'user-friendly' account of biblical prophecy. As such, the popular prophecy texts are written for, and marketed to, a wide, non-specialist audience. The books do not require any advanced theological training in order to understand them, and they are not intended for those in pedagogical roles. Rather, they are for individual study, and are addressed to a broadly Christian readership.

³⁶ See for example: 'Products', Tim LaHaye Ministries, accessed 02 November 2012, <https://timlahaye.com/shopdisplayproducts.asp?page=2&id=17>

The popular prophecy media examined in this chapter will comprise the nine books of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*. The eleven titles that make up the series are:

1. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?: Current Events Foretold in Scripture...And What They Mean* (Eugene, Oregon, 2000).
2. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *Charting the End Times Prophecy Study Guide* (Eugene, Oregon, 2002).
3. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (eds.), *The Essential Guide To Bible Prophecy: 13 Keys to Understanding the End Times* (Eugene, Oregon, 2012).
4. LaHaye, Tim and Thomas Ice. *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming Under Attack* (Eugene, Oregon, 2011).
5. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (eds.), *Exploring Bible Prophecy from Genesis to Revelation* (Eugene, Oregon, 2011).
6. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (eds.), *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Oregon, 2004).
7. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (eds.), *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, Oregon, 2006).
8. Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture, Who Will Face the Tribulation?* (Eugene, Oregon, 2002).
9. Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999).
10. Tim LaHaye (ed.), *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible, New King James Version* (Eugene, Oregon, 2001).
11. Tim LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy for Yourself* (Eugene, Oregon, 2006).

The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is a collection of prophecy and Bible study guides that are designed to guide readers through the prophetic and apocalyptic passages of the Bible. They are intended to simplify the content of these passages in order to make their dense symbolic material more easily accessible for those seeking to improve their understanding of the Bible at home,

'Some details of prophecy are admittedly hard to understand, but the essentials are not. And that is why this book is written- to help you see through your own study that such

subjects as the return of our Lord, the resurrection of the dead, the future activities of the dead [...] the millennial kingdom, heaven, and the glorious appearing of Christ to rule and reign over this earth are just not that hard to understand'.³⁷

The texts generally assume little more than a basic understanding of Christian theology, and a familiarity with the concept of Rapture. On the whole, the guides are addressed to readers beginning in their Christian faith, those who have newly re-committed to their faith, or perhaps doubtful and non-attendant Protestant Christian readership.³⁸ Consequently, the books contain only the occasional exhortation to pray 'the sinners prayer' and become born-again.³⁹

As such, the guides assume that the reader is already familiar with the basic concepts of premillennial dispensationalism, even if they would not categorize themselves as such, if they have ever come across such a term at all. From the very existence of these texts, it may be possible to infer that the books are intended for those who are eager to develop their relationship with these theologies outside of their regularly attended church. Otherwise, one might infer that an eager student would access Bible study guides through a local pastor. The guides are similarly not targeted at those in pedagogical roles, they are not teaching or preaching guides for those with a congregation or even in Bible study groups. Instead, they are for individual and solitary contemplation and scholarship,

'Although we don't know what method [Dwight L.] Moody used to study the Bible, we do know that he was not given much formal education, and that most of his Bible study he did on his own. The methods outlined in this book are probably similar to the ones he used. You too can be an effective servant of Christ- but only if you are willing to study the Bible for yourself'.⁴⁰

³⁷ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 13.

³⁸ See for example: Tim LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible For Yourself* (Oregon, 2006), pp. 7-8.

³⁹ See for example: Tim LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 8.

Overall, the books of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* are written in an easily accessible and sympathetic style intended to encourage a tentative reader, ‘the Bible wasn’t written for theologians but for people just like you!’⁴¹ LaHaye’s authorial voice is empathetic, pedagogical and rather firm,

‘Very simply, the vow is: *no Bible, no breakfast* [...] One young athlete who attended our Chargers Bible study wasn’t buying my challenge and said, “That wouldn’t work for me, since I never eat breakfast anyway.” So I replied, “No problem; make your vow *no Bible, no lunch!*”’⁴²

The books are narrated through a mixture of exegesis, personal anecdote and pseudo-academic references to other premillennial dispensationalist scholarship. The texts do not over-simplify material or patronize their readers; neither do they over-sensationalize their prophetic content with the glib alliteration or awkward puns that characterised their bestselling precursor, Hal Lindsay’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Aylesbury, Bucks, 1970).

The nine books in the series address similar concerns, but are by no means identical to each other. *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, for example, edited by LaHaye and Ed Hindson, is a veritable archive of premillennial dispensationalist prophetic discourse. It contains over a hundred meticulously footnoted articles, written by ‘a team of prophecy experts’ of around forty men.⁴³ These contributors are highly educated, all except one hold at least one post-graduate degree, and many have several post-graduate degrees as well as PhDs. They mainly hold Professorships in Christian universities in America, or lead their own established ministries.⁴⁴ It is clear that *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* epitomizes the way in which premillennial dispensationalism has adopted a framework

⁴¹ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 9.

⁴² LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 43. Original italics.

⁴³ Tim LaHaye, ‘Introduction’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 1.

⁴⁴ See: ‘Editors and Contributors’, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. ix.

borrowed from 'mainstream' academic scholarship to establish an intricate prophetic discourse.

Are We Living in the End Times??: Current Events Foretold in Scripture...And What They Mean, on the other hand, written by LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, the co-authorship team that produced the *Left Behind* series, is quite different in tone and format. This book was produced as a response to the popularity of the *Left Behind* fiction novels, and includes excerpts from *Left Behind* fiction novels, biblical text and premillennial dispensationalist exegesis on the same pages. *How To Study the Bible for Yourself*, and *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, are formatted in a similar way to *Are We Living in the End-Times?* The main events of the 'end-times' are broken down chronologically and thematically, from the Rapture to the Great White Throne Judgment. Readers are guided through Scripture by a series of prompt questions, with space provided so that readers can write their own answers or responses into the books. Then a lesson 'overview' is given, encouraging readers to summarize their understanding of the prophetic events according to the guided explanations.⁴⁵

The *Left Behind* series

Melani McAlister has observed that,

'Despite extraordinary newspaper and television coverage [...] each account of the *Left Behind* phenomenon finds it necessary to introduce the books to an audience who presumably finds their very existence to be news'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 13. Original italics.

⁴⁶ Melani McAlister, 'Prophecy, Politics and the Popular: The *Left Behind* Series and Christian Fundamentalism's New World Order', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2003, Vol 102, Issue 4, p. 774.

For many non-U.S. citizens, however, the *Left Behind* phenomenon is still relatively unfamiliar, and thus merits an extended introduction in this thesis. The *Left Behind* series encompasses a set of sixteen novels which recount a fictionalised version of the biblical Apocalypse. They draw heavily from a premillennial dispensationalist interpretation of the prophetic texts of the Bible, and from the book of Revelation in particular. The books are published by Tyndale House, and were co-written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. LaHaye created the concept of the novels, and held control of the series' spiritual message and the theological content of the books. Jenkins (1949-), a prolific Christian fiction writer, effectively 'ghost-wrote' the actual content of the novels.

The first book, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1995), opens with the occurrence of the Rapture. The story arc of the final book in the series, *Kingdom Come, The Final Victory* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2007), ends with the Great White Throne Judgement at the conclusion of the millennial kingdom. The novels follow the adventures of several characters in their transformation from sceptics and non-believers into 'born again' Christians, and their consequent struggles to survive during the Tribulation⁴⁷. The novels are fast-paced, filled with tense action scenes, dramatic, last-minute escapes and high-tech electronic espionage. They are deliberately set in an ambiguous near future, and although there are occasional, dated references, the novels strive for a loosely modern-day setting.

The books in the series are listed below according to their date of publication:

1. *Left Behind, A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, (Wheaton, Illinois, 1995).
2. *Tribulation Force, The Continuing Drama of Those Left Behind* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1996).

⁴⁷ A list of the main characters of *Left Behind* fiction is included in Appendix 1.

3. *Nicolae, The Rise of Antichrist*, (Wheaton, Illinois, 1997).
4. *Soul Harvest, The World Takes Sides* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1998).
5. *Apollyon, The Destroyer is Unleashed* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1999).
6. *Assassins, Assignment: Jerusalem, Target: Antichrist* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1999).
7. *The Indwelling, The Beast Takes Possession* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2000).
8. *The Mark, The Beast Rules the World* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2000).
9. *Desecration, Antichrist Takes the Throne* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2001).
10. *The Remnant, On the Brink of Armageddon* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2002).
11. *Armageddon, The Cosmic Battle of the Age* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2003).
12. *Glorious Appearing, The End of Days* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004).
- 3. *The Rising, Antichrist is Born* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004), prequel
- 2. *The Regime, The Rise of the Antichrist* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004), prequel
- 1. *The Rapture, In the Twinkling of an Eye* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2005), prequel
13. *Kingdom Come, The Final Victory*, (Wheaton Illinois, 2007).

The first *Left Behind* book opens as protagonist Rayford Steele flies a 747 across the Atlantic, contemplating the idea of making a move on his senior flight attendant, the 'drop-dead gorgeous' Hattie Durham.⁴⁸ At this precise moment, 'the Rapture' occurs. The 'true' Christians are physically 'lifted' up to heaven, and the events of the book of Revelation begin to unfold. In the novel, passengers disappear from their seats, leaving their clothes, glasses, jewellery and even hearing aides on the seat behind them.⁴⁹ The world descends into chaos as believers vanish, causing mass car accidents, plane crashes and general confusion. Rayford, as the long-suffering husband of Irene, a 'fanatic' Christian, immediately suspects that the Rapture has occurred. He returns home to find the discarded pyjamas of Irene and

⁴⁸LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 22.

his son, Raymie Jr, as they have been Raptured while he is, appropriately, 'left behind'. Rayford is joined in his grief by his 'sceptical' oldest daughter Chloe, a Stanford student. Rayford searches Irene's abandoned church for spiritual guidance, and discovers a pre-recorded videotape produced by the former pastor, aimed at explaining the Rapture to anyone 'left behind'. Rayford prays along with the tape, and becomes 'born again'. Chloe initially struggles with her father's newfound faith, but by the end of the first book, has also converted. Meanwhile, a passenger on the same 747 flight, the journalist Cameron 'Buck' Williams, strikes up a friendship with the flight attendant Hattie Durham, who then introduces Buck to Rayford. This leads to an instant friendship between the two men, and the beginning of a romantic relationship between Buck and Chloe. Under the tutelage of lapsed pastor Bruce Barnes, the three main characters form a neo-survivalist group, the 'Tribulation Force', whose main objective is to study the prophetic texts of the Bible, and to endure and to witness during the Tribulation.

Simultaneously, the books follow the rise and establishment of the Antichrist, a Romanian called Nicolae Carpathia. Capitalising on the post-Rapture chaos, Carpathia ascends to political prominence, using the United Nations as a puppet government to control the world under his 'Global Community'. Carpathia introduces a one-world government, currency and religion. Over the course of the series, a vast array of characters and tangential plot lines are introduced that make it extremely difficult to synthesise for an audience unfamiliar with the texts. In essence, the members of 'Tribulation Force' work 'undercover' for Carpathia, sabotaging his evil regime with high-tech weaponry and electronic subterfuge whenever they are able. Eventually, they are forced to go into hiding as Carpathia introduces 'the mark' – the sign of the 'Beast' that excludes believers from the global economy, and once and for all separates the believers from the eternally damned.

The 'Tribulation Force' grows to include several messianic Jews, including a Rabbi, Tsion Ben-Judah, and a botanist, Chaim Rosenweig, who, through a series of visions and angelic visitations, become identified as pseudo-prophetic figures in their own right. These messianic Jews lead the 'Remnant' of newly-converted Jews and believers to a safe enclave in Edom, identified as modern-day Petra. Throughout the series, the underground collective of believers' cells grow, and a huge variety of international characters are introduced, such as the Chinese teenage computer prodigy, Chang Wong; the Arabs, 'Albie' and Abdullah Smith; the Greek, Laslos Mikos, and the native American Hannah Palemoon, to name just a few. From the book *The Mark, The Beast Rules the World* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2000), there appears in the novels a 'Salvation scorecard'⁵⁰ inside the front cover where the characters are divided into lists of 'The Believers' and 'The Enemies' as the only two possible categories of any form of belief during the period of the Tribulation.

After the publication of the book, *Glorious Appearing, The End of Days* in 2004, three prequels were published before the release of the final book, *Kingdom Come, The Final Victory*, in 2007. The three prequel novels retroactively describe the 'origin' stories of the *Left Behind* series' main protagonists. In particular, the novels feature detailed exposition of Rayford, his wife Irene, and Nicolae Carpathia, as well as the conversion narratives of secondary characters such as Abdullah Smith. Rayford's childhood, adolescence, and the early years of his and Irene's marriage are recounted; and the novel, *The Rapture, In the Twinkling of an Eye*, pays particular attention to the difficulties arising in their relationship as a result of Irene's newfound faith. *The Rapture* also depicts Irene and Raymie's experiences during the Rapture in vivid detail. Nicolae Carpathia's back-story is similarly

⁵⁰ Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast, The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity* (New York, 2005), p. 158.

provided, with a particular focus on his mother, Marilena Titi, and the circumstances surrounding his conception. The series' story arc culminates in the millennial kingdom, and the final book, *Kingdom Come*, concentrates its narrative on spiritual divisions within the kingdom as Lucifer amasses an army, 'The Other Light', to challenge God's authority. The book concludes as the 'Great White Throne Judgment' is conducted, unbelievers are bound eternally to hell, and the New Jerusalem is created.

The Texts and their Readers

It is difficult to evaluate the popularity of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*. There is, to date, no secondary scholarship on the texts whatsoever, and thus there is no way to provide an accurate analysis of the readership of the texts. *How To Study The Bible For Yourself* claims on the cover that it has sold over one million copies worldwide, while, as of May 2013, Tim LaHaye's website declares the sales of *Understanding Bible Prophecy for Yourself* to have reached one million, ten thousand copies.⁵¹ In 2003, Harvest House publishers cited the sales of *Charting The End Times Prophecy Study Guide* as having reached over seventy five thousand copies in under a year.⁵² The updated and repacked, *Are We Living In The End Times?* on the other hand, is quoted to have sold at roughly fifty thousand copies in the period between 1999 and 2011, a figure which seems surprisingly low given its explicit tie-in with *Left Behind* fiction.⁵³

⁵¹ 'Understanding Bible Prophecy For Yourself', Tim LaHaye Ministries, accessed 14 May 2013, <https://timlahaye.com/shopexd.asp?id=260>

⁵² 'Charting The End Times Prophecy Study Guide', Harvest House Publishers, accessed 14 May 2013, <http://harvesthousepublishers.com/book/charting-the-end-times-prophecy-study-guide-2002/>

⁵³ Lori Henshley, 'Left Behind: are we living in the end times?', Examiner, accessed 16 May 2013, <http://www.examiner.com/article/left-behind-are-we-living-the-end-times>

The *Left Behind* fiction series, however, has proved an absolute phenomenon. To the present date, the books have, in total, sold approaching seventy million copies, and have been translated into at least twenty-eight languages.⁵⁴ Since 1998, every new instalment in the series has topped the New York Times bestseller list; a feat that is made even more remarkable considering that the list does not include sales figures from Christian bookshops.⁵⁵ Bruce Forbes has estimated that ‘almost one in every ten American adults has read at least one of the series’.⁵⁶ A wide array of subsidiary products related to the original series have also been produced since the first novel in the series, *Left Behind, A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days*, was published in 1995. This includes ten graphic novels, and complete audio productions of the series. Three *Left Behind* films were by Cloud Ten pictures between 2000 and 2005, *Left Behind: The Movie*, *Left Behind II: Tribulation Force* and *Left Behind: World at War*. Cloud Ten Pictures are reportedly in the process of producing a high budget remake of the first *Left Behind* film for release in 2013.⁵⁷ Three video games, *Left Behind: Eternal Forces*, *Left Behind: Tribulation Forces* and *Left Behind 3: Rise of the Antichrist*, were also produced between 2006 and 2010. The popularity of *Left Behind* has spawned a variety of ‘blockbuster’ Christian novels thematically linked to the events of *Left Behind*, including the immensely popular, forty-part series, *Left Behind: the Kids*, which follows the fate of several children as they discover their parents have been Raptured.⁵⁸ The *Left Behind* website displays links to two other fiction series which take place in the *Left Behind*

⁵⁴ ‘International Publishing #1- Overview’, Left Behind website, accessed 16 May 2013, <http://www.leftbehind.com/channelnews.asp?channelID=17&pageid=542>

⁵⁵ Bruce Forbes, ‘How Popular are the *Left Behind* Books...and Why? A Discussion of Popular Culture’, in *Rapture, Revelation and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*, eds. Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde (New York, 2004), p. 6.

⁵⁶ Forbes, ‘How Popular’, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Josephine Vivaldo, ‘Cloud Ten Plans for Bigger, Better ‘Left Behind’ Remake’, Christian Post Entertainment, accessed 16 May 2013, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/cloud-ten-plans-for-bigger-better-left-behind-remake-47779/>

⁵⁸ *Left Behind: The Kids* has sold over 10 million in series: Mervyn F. Bendle, ‘The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture’, in *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 11 (September, 2005), accessed 24 May 2013, via: <http://vlex.com/vid/apocalyptic-imagination-popular-culture-56736286>

'universe'. These include the four-part military series, *Left Behind: Apocalypse* by Mel Odom and the three-part political series, *Left Behind: End of State* by Neesa Hart.

Since the premillennial dispensationalist media examined in this thesis has demonstrated a perhaps surprising commercial viability, it is useful to consider what light these sales can shed on the identity of its adherents and its readers. In his study on popular prophecy belief, *When Time Shall Be No More* (Harvard, 1999), Paul Boyer has suggested a means of conceptualising prophecy believers that will be referenced throughout this thesis. As such, the following section will quote at length from Boyer's original formulation. Boyer writes,

'I have found it helpful to visualize the world of prophecy belief as a series of concentric circles, at the centre of which is a core group of devotees who spend much time thinking about the Bible's apocalyptic passages and trying to organize them into a coherent scenario. These are the men and woman who attend prophecy conferences; raise the topic in Sunday school classes and Bible study groups; and avidly devour the prophecy paperbacks, cassette tapes, and study aids that annuals pour into the market'.⁵⁹

To Boyer's innermost circle, I would furthermore add those at the centre of premillennial dispensationalist discourse, including of course LaHaye, and the many contributors to the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*. It is this, central circle of prophecy believers that actively shapes contemporary discourse through their participation in pedagogy, publishing, and conferences. This innermost circle is clearly exemplified by LaHaye and Thomas Ice's think-tank, the Pre-Tribulation Research Centre (PTRC). The purpose of the PTRC is described on its website as,

'encouraging the research, teaching, propagation, and defense of the pretribulational rapture and related Bible prophecy doctrine'.⁶⁰

The 200 core members of the PTRC publish research papers, organise discussions, and defend the tenets of their prophetic scheme in an annual conference held in Texas. In

⁵⁹ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More, Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Harvard, 1999), p. 2.

⁶⁰ 'What the Pre-Trib Research Center is About?', Pre-Trib Research Centre website, accessed 24 February 2013, <http://www.pre-trib.org/about>

particular, the PTRC stresses its role in enabling 'veteran prophecy experts' to disseminate their expertise to a younger generation of students.

Boyer continues,

'Next in this concentric series one finds those believers who may be hazy about the details of biblical eschatology, but who nevertheless believe that the Bible provides clues to future events [...] This group, comprising many millions of Americans, is susceptible to popularizers who confidently weave Bible passages into highly imaginative end-time scenarios, or who promulgate particular schemes of prophetic interpretation'.⁶¹

In this circle, one might most likely find the bulk of the readership for popular prophecy and Bible study guides. Indeed, it is exactly this demographic that the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* seeks to address. Similarly, fiction such as *Left Behind* are marketed at this 'bracket' of consumers; Christians who may already have vague knowledge of prophetic events, and seek an accessible way of educating themselves.

In the outermost circle, Boyer suggests we can find,

'those superficially secular individuals who exhibit little overt prophecy interest but whose worldview is nevertheless shaped to some degree by residual or latent concepts of eschatology, the theology of last things. One may hypothesize that in times of crisis, or when confronted by particularly troubling world trends, members of this group may listen with more than passing attentiveness to those who offer the Bible as a guide to events'.⁶²

Boyer's description here loosely describes what Michael Barkun has termed, 'improvisational millennialism', a composite belief system that draws from elements including

'Eastern and Western religion, New Age ideas and esotericism and radical politics, without any sense that the resulting *mélange* contains incompatible elements'.⁶³

⁶¹ Boyer, *When Time*, pp. 2-3.

⁶² Boyer, *When Time*, p. 3.

⁶³ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy, Apocalyptic Visions in America* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), p. 11.

Members of this group are difficult to assess, as some aspects of prophecy belief may be diffusely understood, but it is unlikely that those on the outer rim of prophecy belief would actively participate in the consumption of exegetical or Bible study guides. More likely, those on the outermost circle of prophecy belief may have had contact with prophecy or Rapture fiction, such as *Left Behind*. Indeed, LaHaye and Jenkins' aim while producing *Left Behind* fiction was to appeal to those who might already be curious about prophecy, and thus providing a platform for 'witnessing' via the medium of fiction.

Stephan O Leary has commented,

'Before we can find out how and why [apocalyptic] discourse wins adherents, we must first discover who its adherents actually are. Virtually all scholars of apocalypse have attempted to define the audience in terms of factors that predispose converts to accept apocalyptic claims.'⁶⁴

Indeed many of the scholarly attempts to identify the readership of premillennial dispensationalist media, usually broadly overviews a range of contributing factors which might indicate a reader's predisposition to apocalyptic views, by virtue of seemingly compatible allegiances. These might include, for example, political conservatism, church attendance, or educational background. This study has identified the consumption of premillennial dispensationalist media as the primary indicator of participation in the faith network. This is, however, problematic for several reasons. Firstly, readership of the media does not imply sympathy towards the ideas expressed therein. Secondly, as Frykholm's study has discussed, *Left Behind* fiction tends to be read within communities, and as such, the texts 'travel' well beyond their original consumer,

'purchasing *Left Behind* is also done in networks. One reader is often responsible for buying several copies of *Left Behind* and distributing them to family and friends. Similarly, one copy of *Left Behind* makes rounds through a circle of friends, through a church choir or a Sunday school class'.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Stephen D. O'Leary, *Arguing The Apocalypse, a theory of millennial rhetoric* (New York/Oxford, 2004), p. 8.

⁶⁵ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 40.

It is helpful, therefore, to attempt to draw some conclusions about the identity of premillennial dispensationalist believers. Statistics that claim to monitor religious beliefs are notoriously slippery, and tremendously variable depending on the nature of the survey offered to the interviewee. One potential resource for interested scholars is to allow subjects to declare their own self-identification. Throughout the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, LaHaye repeatedly refers to the outcome of a Gallup poll, the result of which indicated that

‘more than 62 percent of the American people believe that Jesus Christ will return literally to this earth [...] What makes this statistic so amazing is that the same survey indicated that 40 percent of Americans profess to have had a born-again experience with Jesus Christ. In other words, 22 percent more American believe in our Lord’s second coming than are ready to meet Him when He does come!’⁶⁶

LaHaye here is identifying that the central marker of a ‘true’ believer of premillennial dispensationalism is first and foremost, the ‘born again’ experience. As such, for the purpose of this study, the ‘typical’ believer of premillennial dispensationalism will most markedly identify as a ‘born again’ Christian, as this experience represents the central moment in premillennial dispensationalist faith narratives. The American Religious Identification Survey, conducted in 2008, declared that 76 percent of contemporary Americans identify as Christians. These respondents were specifically asked, “Do you identify as a Born Again or Evangelical Christian?” No definition was offered of the terms. As a result of this survey, the ARIS have declared that 45 percent of all American Christians self-identify as ‘born again’ or Evangelical, accounting for 34 percent of American adults.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008) Summary Report* (2009), accessed 16 October 2012, via: <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/publications/aris-2008-summary-report/> (August 1 12)

More problematic to ascertain, is identification with specific attributes of premillennial dispensationalism, which may allow for a measure of differentiation between ‘born again’ Evangelicals who may otherwise identify as Pentecostal, or Baptist, for example. A Time/CNN poll which was administered in 2002 revealed that 59 percent of Americans believe that the events described in the book of Revelation will literally come to pass⁶⁸, while a *Newsweek* poll in 2004 demonstrated that of those Christians questioned,

‘36% believe that the Book of Revelation contains “true prophecy”, 55% think that the faithful will be taken up to heaven in the Rapture, 17% believe that the end of the world will occur in their lifetime’.⁶⁹

It is, however, difficult to know exactly how much of *Left Behind* and the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*’s readership can be traced to the self-identified believers suggested above. Tyndale House, for example, has estimated that ‘eleven percent of the [*Left Behind*] series’ readers are Roman Catholics’.⁷⁰

Indeed, the book, *These Will Not Be Left Behind* (Oregon, 2003), as well as a large section of the *Left Behind* website is dedicated to the testimonials of those who have become believers, and devoted fans of the series as a direct consequence of reading the books, but would not have previously self-identified as ‘born again’, Evangelical, or even Christian.⁷¹ Daryl Jones’ research demonstrates that,

‘Seventy-one percent of *Left Behind*’s readers are from the American South and Midwest, compared to just 6 percent from the traditionally liberal Northeast’.⁷²

Thus, the ‘core buyer’, of *Left Behind* has been described as ‘a 44 year-old born-again Christian woman, married with kids, living in the South’.⁷³ As Amy Johnson Frykholm’s

⁶⁸ Nancy Gibbs, ‘Apocalypse Now’, *Time*, 01 July (2002), p. 2.

⁶⁹ David Gates, David J. Jefferson and Anne Underwood, ‘The Pop Prophets’, *Newsweek*, 143.21, May 24, (2004), p. 50.

⁷⁰ Crawford Gribben, *Writing The Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America* (New York, 2009), p. 138.

⁷¹ See: Tim LaHaye, Jerry B. Jenkins and Norman B. Rohrer, *These Will Not Be Left Behind: True Stories of Changed Lives* (Oregon, 2003). See also: ‘*Left Behind* Testimonials’, *Left Behind* website, accessed 5 December 2012, http://leftbehind.com/03_authors_testimonials/testimonials_archives.asp

⁷² Darryl Jones, ‘The Liberal Antichrist- *Left Behind* in America’, in *Expecting the End, Millennialism in Social and Historical Context*, eds. Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben (Texas, 2006), p. 98.

research has suggested, however, this 'core buyer' is almost certainly the lynchpin in an extended readership network,

'Left Behind is often read in these extensive social networks of family, friends, church, and work. The books are passed along from parent to child, brother to sister, within a church Bible study group or in other similar social settings. Readers become the books' evangelizers, passing them out to family and friends. One reader might buy several books at once or pick up one copy, lend it out, and never see it again. Books are given to friends and relatives "saved" and "unsaved," borrowed, read, and reloaned'.⁷⁴

Thus, one important aspect of premillennial dispensational readership worth highlighting here, is that the readers and the purchasers of the media may come from overlapping 'spheres' of consumers. As such, the target reader of the media extends beyond the typical 'core buyer' to their peripheral and as yet undeveloped audience.

⁷³ Gates, Jefferson and Underwood, 'The Pop Prophets', p. 45.

⁷⁴ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 45-46.

Previous Scholarship

Paul Boyer, in his study of prophecy belief, *When Time Shall Be No More*, has written that,

‘despite a vague awareness that prophecy belief is rampant “out there” -in the dark beyond the campfire, so to speak- academics have given these beliefs little systematic attention’.⁷⁵

While the commercial success of the *Left Behind* series has contributed to an increased academic attention to popular Evangelical literary culture, very few studies have been written on premillennial dispensationalist theology, and fewer still on modern American prophecy belief. Similarly, while there are many eminent historians who have produced excellent historical accounts of American Evangelical apocalypticism, Boyer’s work on modern American prophecy belief still comprises the only comprehensive study of its kind. Boyer’s work traces the origins of apocalyptic theology and the development of popular prophecy belief in the United States of America. In particular, Boyer concentrates his analysis on themes in prophecy belief since 1945. Boyer explores the identifications of the ‘signs of the times’, including, for example, the significance of the Atomic Bomb and the role of the United States in contemporary prophecy narratives. His work does not explicitly reference the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, or *Left Behind*, but his historical and ideological contextualisation has proved an invaluable resource for this thesis. To date no scholarship has been produced on the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*.

The first major scholarly analysis of *Left Behind* fiction, *Marks of the Beast, The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity*, was written by Glen Shuck and published in 2002. Shuck’s initial exploration of the series provided a solid foundation of the major literary and rhetorical themes of *Left Behind*, although at the time of publication, only eight

⁷⁵ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 15.

of the sixteen books had been published, and a great deal of material was therefore left unexplored. The two most significant tropes that Shuck identified in the series were the depiction of technology, and the concept of marginality. Shuck's analysis of the use of technology in *Left Behind* draws attention to the contradictions inherent in the use of ostensibly 'evil' technology for spreading the word of God,

'although the Trib-Force believes they are fighting the Anti-Christ using his tools, for example, they are tragically unaware that they are already inside the Beast, co participants in his infernal system'.⁷⁶

Indeed, while the characters of *Left Behind* fiction are oppressed by the technological omnipresence of the Antichrist, they often co-opt the mechanisms of the Beast, using the technological marvels of the Antichrist's own regime to subvert his power. For example, Rayford uses an untraceable bugging device installed on Air Force One by a fellow believer in order to eavesdrop on the Antichrist's private meetings.⁷⁷ Shuck suggests that this paradox reflects the conflicted relationship which modern Evangelicalism has established with modern technology,

'contemporary Evangelism is[...] a highly adaptive religious impulse that feeds upon modernity, even while railing against it, using, ironically, its own tools to transmit the evangelical message'.⁷⁸

The wider relationship between Evangelicalism and technology, particularly with regards to the use of mass-consumer technology and popular culture, has been explored in works such as in Carl Douglas Abrams' book, *Selling the Old-Time Religion, American Fundamentalists and Mass Culture, 1920-1940* (Athens/London, 2001), and Heather Hendershot's study, *Shaking the World for Jesus, Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (Chicago/London, 2004). Jan Blodgett's work on the Evangelical publishing industry, *Protestant Evangelical Literary*

⁷⁶Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 202.

⁷⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 48.

⁷⁸Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 2.

Culture (Westport, Connecticut, 1997), provides a comprehensive overview of wider textual culture of contemporary Evangelicalism. Given the breadth of already existing scholarship in this area, this thesis will not concentrate on an extended analysis of the role of technology in *Left Behind* fiction. Not only have many excellent studies deconstructed the relationship between Evangelicalism and technology, but this project considers technology to be, in moral terms, largely 'neutral' in premillennial dispensationalist ideology. Consequently, I would argue that the movement's use of such technology for the purposes of witnessing is not as ironic as Shuck has inferred.

Amy Johnson Frykholm's work, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York/Oxford, 2004), was a groundbreaking piece of scholarship on *Left Behind* fiction. Frykholm's interdisciplinary analysis focuses on the readership networks of the fiction, using sociological models of network analysis to explore the readership, and more in-depth literary criticism to discuss the texts themselves. Frykholm noted the difficulties of approaching a 'generic hybrid' such as *Left Behind*, which has extremely flexible boundaries that have allowed for a 'multidirectional flow' of cultural influence, both to and from secular mainstream and biblical apocalyptic.⁷⁹ In *Rapture Culture*, Frykholm explores the dialectic between *Left Behind's* readers and their wider reading community, establishing the importance of networks in distribution of meaning for the readers of what she terms 'Rapture fiction'. Frykholm also asserts the subtleties that exist in the actual practices of reading that differentiate between *Left Behind* fiction and other exegetical material,

'readers link *Left Behind* and the prophetic texts to which it refers. This is not the same thing as saying that *Left Behind* becomes scripture for readers, or takes the place of scripture'.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 185.

⁸⁰Frykholm *Rapture Culture*, p. 110.

Frykholm's study is sensitive, empathetic and thorough, and it explores the way in which readers negotiate *Left Behind* fiction from the positions of their individual faith narratives. As a primarily literary and broadly sociological study, Frykholm's study does not engage with a theological overview of premillennial dispensationalism. This project will therefore complement Frykholm's work through a thorough contextualisation of the fiction within its wider theological landscape.

Crawford Gribben has published several studies of *Left Behind* fiction, including the work *Writing the Rapture* (New York, 2009), a comprehensive and detailed survey of the antecedents and subsidiary products of *Left Behind*. In *Writing the Rapture*, Gribben contextualises the series within popular Evangelical fiction, and specifically apocalyptic fiction published since the early 1900s. Gribben attempts to resolve the difficulties of identifying the genre of *Left Behind*, noting around that there are only a hundred or so examples of the genre, and 'the novels do not themselves constitute a genre in the strictest sense of the word. They do not exist in a straightforward canon'.⁸¹ Gribben terms this genre of writing as 'prophecy fiction', as it may not include specific mention of the Rapture while still containing content derived from Christian prophetic narratives. I would agree that 'prophecy fiction' is perhaps the closest term to describe the diffuse genre in to which *Left Behind* fits, although the use of this term is not entirely unproblematic. Prophecy, as a genre, is understood as not only 'true' but already preordained, and as such, Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye have been meticulously careful to distance themselves from any prophetic claims, insisting instead on merely 'imagining' a story.⁸² 'Prophecy fiction' as a term, therefore, is something of an oxymoron. In *Writing the Rapture*, Gribben identifies that *Left Behind* has inherited its primary tropes from a legacy of Evangelical apocalyptic literature,

⁸¹Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 20.

⁸²Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Kingdom Come, The Final Victory* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2007), pp. 355- 56.

and has borrowed from, but also, significantly deviated from that legacy. In *Writing the Rapture*, Gribben offers an extensive analysis of the history of prophecy fiction, and includes an analysis of Jenkins and LaHaye's fiction work since the publication of *Left Behind*, and in particular, Jenkins' most recent science fiction series, *Soon*.

In his 2006 work, *Rapture Fiction and the Evangelical Crisis*, Gribben produced one of the few theological analyses of *Left Behind* fiction. Gribben expresses significant misgivings about *Left Behind*, arguing that the series represents a grotesque alteration of 'real' Christianity, '*Left Behind* contains a serious misrepresentation of the Christian faith'.⁸³ Including chapters such as 'Where Left Behind Goes Badly Wrong'⁸⁴, Gribben's personal dislike of the texts, and their representation of contemporary dispensationalism, is clearly evident. Gribben claims that

'the faith [*Left Behind*] represents cannot be identified with the historic orthodoxy of evangelical Protestantism [...] The novels' combination of theological inadequacy and massive popularity is evidence that evangelicalism is in serious crisis'.⁸⁵

In this extract, Gribben's concerns about the 'theological inadequacy' of the novels is ambiguous, as it either suggests that there is not *enough* theology in the novels or the theology of the novels is itself inadequate. The latter would infer that there is an 'adequate' form of theology against which he is measuring *Left Behind*, presumably that of 'historic orthodox' evangelical Protestantism. This may be the case, as Gribben's central thesis in *Rapture Fiction*, is that, 'dispensationalism has changed- changed for the worse'.⁸⁶ The movement is here being measured against the yardstick of 'classical' dispensationalism, and Gribben claims: 'the *Left Behind* novels are un-doing Darby's work'.⁸⁷ This comparison assumes that the premillennial dispensationalism of *Left Behind* has somehow fallen off the

⁸³ Crawford Gribben, *Rapture Fiction and the Evangelical Crisis* (Darlington, England, 2006), p. 65.

⁸⁴ Gribben, *Rapture Fiction*, p. 78.

⁸⁵ Gribben, *Rapture Fiction*, p. 10.

⁸⁶ Gribben, *Rapture Fiction*, p. 39.

⁸⁷ Gribben, *Rapture Fiction*, p. 42.

wagon of 'true' dispensationalism, and left unchecked, has grown into something wild and illegitimate.

Gribben is certainly not alone in this analysis of *Left Behind's* depiction of premillennial dispensationalism. Mark Sweetnam, for example, refers to *Left Behind's* dispensationalism in distinctively pejorative terms, as 'a mutation'⁸⁸, and 'an aberration'.⁸⁹ Sweetnam continues to describe *Left Behind* as 'a serious misrepresentation of the Christian faith'.⁹⁰ Similar sentiments have been expressed by Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence.⁹¹ However, the process of 'measuring' contemporary premillennial dispensationalism as exemplified by *Left Behind* against earlier forms of dispensationalism is of limited use to the aims of this project. Rather, as McAlister suggests, the movement must be understood as neither 'a Christian fascination that is entirely new [...] nor a return of the repressed- a dusted off Moral Majority'.⁹² Instead, it presents an intricate and elastic belief system that draws on a range of differing theological and cultural frameworks to produce 'a melding of traditional views with mass-culture'.⁹³ Similarly, analyses that evaluate *Left Behind's* value by seeking to judge the validity of its truth claims, pointing out, for example, where *Left Behind* expresses 'inadequate' or 'wrong' theology, are contrary to the aims of my project.

⁸⁸ Mark S. Sweetnam, 'Tensions in Dispensational Eschatology', in *Expecting the End, Millennialism in Social and Historical Context*, eds. Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben (Waco, Texas, 2006), p. 180.

⁸⁹ Sweetnam, 'Tensions', p. 192.

⁹⁰ Gribben, *Rapture Fiction*, p. 65.

⁹¹ Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, 'Eschatology in Pop Culture', in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York, 2008), p. 667.

⁹² McAlister, 'Prophecy, Politics', p. 778.

⁹³ McAlister, 'Prophecy, Politics', p. 777.

Sweetnam has argued that modern premillennial dispensationalism represented by *Left Behind* 'threw both its principles of interpretation and its eschewal of sensationalism to the winds'.⁹⁴ Sweetnam continues,

'these new proponents of prophetic theory continued to be identified as dispensationalists. They aggregated the title to themselves, and classical dispensationalism, has, perhaps, been slow to reject the publicity thus obtained'.⁹⁵

Thus, Sweetnam suggests that the belief system represented in *Left Behind* fiction should not be associated with 'classical' dispensationalism, and instead, he proposes the use of the term 'dispensationalists'. Although Sweetnam's reference to the 'sensationalism' of *Left Behind* and its associated literature certainly rings true, it does not automatically deny the movement the right to the title of 'dispensationalist'. Indeed, LaHaye and Jenkins have taken pains to distance themselves from any form of date-setting, and the Bible study and popular prophetic guides are grounded in a historical legacy of traditional Evangelical hermeneutics and careful exegesis.⁹⁶ A refusal to engage with the belief system represented in *Left Behind* fiction on the grounds of its 'sensational' nature is neither informative nor constructive. As such, an analysis of popular premillennial dispensationalist media must engage with the 'sensationalism' of the theological expression in the media, and not simply dismiss it as a frivolous deviation from 'classical' dispensationalism.

One of the most recent academic works produced on *Left Behind* is Jason Bivins' *The Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York, 2008). Bivins' study overlaps with the aim of this project in many ways, as his analysis concentrates on the way in which fear narratives work in the articulation of modern American Evangelicalism,

⁹⁴ Sweetnam, 'Tensions', p. 180.

⁹⁵ Sweetnam, 'Tensions', p. 181.

⁹⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 23.

'From a clear sense that American culture has fallen into a morass of moral decay, sexuality, and demonic traps, the religion of fear constructs a salvation narrative'.⁹⁷

Bivins contextualises *Left Behind* within two other forms of popular Evangelical entertainment products, 'hell houses' and Jack Chick comics. Bivins' study is explicitly political, and as such concentrates on the rhetoric of political conservatism in *Left Behind* fiction. Bivins analyses the way in which its fear narratives construct specific political arguments within the fiction,

'of all the religion of fear's creations, these novels-while they certainly are not reducible to their politics-represent the clearest and most enduring link to figures, organizations, and ideas with tangible influences in the political sphere'.⁹⁸

In particular, Bivins unpacks the depiction of militarism, law, government, Judaism and the family, and their articulation through the specifically conservative rhetoric that permeates *Left Behind* fiction.⁹⁹

As Bivins has explored in *The Religion of Fear*, it is undoubtedly true that *Left Behind* fiction, and indeed, the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* represent a clear articulation of political conservatism. However, I have chosen not to read the media as explicitly 'political' texts. Partly, this is because this work has been so successfully accomplished by Bivins. However, this is also because, to define the texts examined in this thesis as purely political would, I feel, misunderstand the subtlety of their multi-tiered agenda, and prove reductive to the texts' communicative process. If the authors so wished, there is no reason why more even more explicit political commentary could not feature in the pages of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*. Indeed, as will be later discussed, LaHaye emphasizes the importance of believers' participation in the political realm according to specific, theologically-aligned aims.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Jason Bivins, *The Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York, 2008), p. 17.

⁹⁸ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 170.

⁹⁹ See: Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, Chapter 6, pp. 169-212.

¹⁰⁰ See: pp. 306-07.

However, neither *Left Behind* nor the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* are identified by their authors as ‘texts about politics’. Nowhere, for example, in either set of texts, are ‘real world’ political parties or political candidates mentioned in any capacity. Rather, the texts were created with the purpose of communicating a theological framework, which at times, assumes a politicized expression. My project will therefore build on Bivins’ research, examining the ways in which fear narratives work as a means of theological, rather than strictly political expression.

As this brief survey has demonstrated, the scholarly works previously published on *Left Behind* have focused on sociological, literary and political critiques of the texts, and have provided analyses of the specifically American manifestation of the belief system. These have proved invaluable resources for the contextualisation of *Left Behind* within wider American Evangelical culture. However, the popular prophecy and Bible study guides have been completely excluded from any scholarly analysis of their theological and hermeneutical content; or, indeed, their relationship with the fictional texts. Furthermore, whilst existing studies have negotiated some of the thematic scope of *Left Behind* fiction, the boundaries should be extended beyond the problematic categories of representing a movement grappling with its own ‘marginality’, its state of ‘crisis’, or the well-documented relationship between Evangelicalism and technology. Several of the projects mentioned above, and specifically the work of Frykholm, Bivins, and Boyer, represent areas of complementary overlap with the aims of this thesis. In the examination of premillennial dispensationalist media as contextualised within its larger religious and historical framework, the following project will provide a further dimension to the scholarship produced on premillennial dispensational prophecy belief. This thesis will furthermore offer a detailed analytic means

of challenging the wider categorisation that has sought to classify the movement as the recourse of those who are either 'deprived or depraved'.

As a result, the conceptual framework used throughout this thesis has proved complex, and has required a blending and borrowing of conceptual frameworks and methodologies. This thesis considers premillennial dispensationalism first and foremost as a religious movement, not a socio-political entity or a literary phenomenon. Furthermore, excellent critical studies of premillennial dispensationalism have been undertaken, from literary, sociological, and political perspectives, by Frykholm and Bivins respectively. There is little need to repeat research that has already been successfully undertaken elsewhere. I have therefore opted not to deconstruct the texts solely using literary critiques, or to regard the project as a purely anthropological or sociological enquiry. Modern premillennial dispensationalist prophecy belief is, however, more than a purely theological topic; a study of it requires a contextualisation of the movement within its history, and its ideological 'territory'. The following thesis does not offer a systematic theology of the movement, but has rather taken the form of an extended deconstructive essay of an interdisciplinary nature, what I might tentatively term as a 'discursive study'.

One of the main difficulties when approaching texts such as the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* is that no secondary material has been published on the subject. Similarly, there are very few studies on modern prophecy belief. Consequently, the following project has required an in-depth analysis of the content of the primary source material. Furthermore, the sparse nature of previous analyses of premillennial dispensationalist media, specifically its popular prophecy, has dictated that this study provide an initial and fairly wide deconstruction based on the texts' most significant tropes. This thesis cannot, therefore, offer a comparative

study with comparable modern millennial movements, although such a project would certainly prove of value. Instead, I have concentrated my analysis on the deconstruction of the anxiety narratives of the primary source material. Upon reading the texts, it becomes apparent that these narratives are the primary mode through which the discourse is expressed, the theology conducted, and the eschatological landscape of the believers shaped. Indeed, as O'Leary has observed of the literature treating the Apocalypse in general, these anxiety narratives are arguably the fundamental architecture on which premillennial dispensationalism is based,

'The omnipresence of such emotions as anxiety, apprehension, and dissatisfaction present an inherent difficulty to those who attempt to account for the appeal of apocalypse by linking fluctuations in its historical popularity to intangible societal moods'.¹⁰¹

In order to understand the ways in which these anxiety narratives operate, I have utilised several methodological apparatuses. These have included anthropological theories of myth, ritual and pollution, and literary theory on the nature of horror.

Approaching this belief system as an 'outsider' has presented several methodological difficulties as to how best to approach the subject matter. The methodological approach which considers that of the 'insider' has been described as an 'emic' perspective; that which tries to 'reproduce as faithfully as possible the experiences of the "insiders"'.¹⁰² This can be seen particularly reflected in the school of Phenomenology, which proposes a methodologically 'empathetic approach', as the student of a phenomenon attempts to share the feelings of the participants. Frykholm's study, *Writing The Rapture*, presents one excellent example of this kind of study of premillennial dispensationalism. Alasdair MacIntyre has, however, questioned the plausibility of this 'essentialist' empathetic

¹⁰¹ O'Leary, *Arguing*, p. 10.

¹⁰² Kenneth Pike, 'Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behaviour', in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion, A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London/ New York, 1999), p. 29.

experience. MacIntyre uses the analogy of language to consider that when using 'cross-cultural', empathetic, comparative methodology, it is difficult to know whether we are in fact sharing the same experience of a concept such as 'death' or 'religion'. This, while certainly true for a cross-cultural divide, is also true in the ideological 'gap' between believers and non-believers, or insiders/outside¹⁰³ 'Essential' concepts in this way, can be observed to have different interpretations across any kind of discursive boundaries. Rosalind Shaw has also pointed out that the danger of absorbing grand 'universal' experiences into a meta-discourse, is that often these generalisations fail to take into account the differing 'lived religious experiences' of different groups of 'insiders'.¹⁰⁴ This project is somewhat unusual, in that *Left Behind* fiction is actually written in order to specifically accommodate non-believers. Although it is important not to reduce the many varied experiences of reading *Left Behind* fiction, the theological discussions conducted in the text, and the emotional journey presented to the reader, are specifically intended for an 'outsider' audience. Even an 'essentialised' response of the 'outsider' reader, is still, therefore, a valid reader response, indeed, a response which has been deliberately accounted for by the authors themselves.

The texts exist, therefore, as invitations for 'outsiders' to 'step inside' the world of believers. Thus, even an extremely negative readerly reaction is still a 'legitimate' response to the texts' agenda. As LaHaye and Jenkins have written, 'The Bible says that the Cross offends. If you are offended, I am doing my job'.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, as Raymond Firth has suggested with regards to social anthropology,

¹⁰³ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Is Understanding Religion Compatible With Believing?', in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion, A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London/ New York, 1999), p. 49.

¹⁰⁴ Rosalind Shaw, 'Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies', in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion, A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London/ New York, 1999), p. 105.

¹⁰⁵ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Tribulation Force, The Continuing Drama of Those Left Behind* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1996), p. 63.

‘when it comes to a more general interpretation of religious matters, the personal assumptions of the anthropologist may be highly significant’.¹⁰⁶

Firth argues that it may be possible to observe and describe, and evaluate ‘etic’ religious phenomena without resorting to ‘fantasy’, but interpretation of any kind must, by nature, involve a personal reaction. Truly ‘agnostic’ or ‘neutral’ methodology, in this way, is not possible without an entirely ‘agnostic’ or ‘neutral’ ideology, one that is entirely disassociated from any socio-cultural or political context. Clearly, this task is not possible. Despite these obvious complexities, therefore, the deconstruction undertaken in this thesis has attempted, as far as possible, to perform ‘methodological agnosticism’, whilst maintaining an awareness of my own positioning, as well as an appreciation for the articulation of the religious belief expressed in premillennial dispensationalist media as a ‘lived experience’,

‘the human world of religious meaning [...] cannot be supposed to float free of the material circumstances of human life’.¹⁰⁷

The issue of cognitive dissonance has been a further conceptual hurdle in the preparation of this thesis, specifically with regards to the concerns addressed above about the possibility of ‘accessing’ accurate information about a religious movement from the ‘outside’. Indeed, one of the trickier aspects of this project has been the unpicking of premillennial dispensationalist’s theological and discursive tropes from its explicitly political expressions. These expressions of political and social conservatism include explicit homophobia and thinly veiled, or indeed, overt racism. Similarly, there is a wider framework of cultural and supernatural beliefs into which Rapture belief and literal apocalypticism can be suspended.

¹⁰⁶ Raymond Firth, ‘An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Religion’, in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion, A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London/ New York, 1999), p. 118.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Byrne, ‘The Study of Religion: Neutral, Scientific, or Neither?’, in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion, A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London/ New York, 1999), p. 225.

This includes, for example, faith in an overlapping supernatural world populated by demons and angels. In the *Left Behind* novels, for example, angels are ‘real’ enough to fly helicopters and make jokes.¹⁰⁸ A lengthy and extended exposure to these wider belief systems has certainly contributed to diminishing their otherness, allowing for a better understanding of the cognitive dissonance that exists within movements that occupy several simultaneous ideological frameworks. Nevertheless, meeting with prophecy believers reveals their unnerving ability to flit within these cognitive spheres, discussing in one minute, the value of a particular shopping centre, and in the next, decrying environmentalists as the ideological descendents of Nazism.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, one of the most clarifying moments of research which belied my own cognitive prejudices, occurred in relation to none of the conservative signifiers listed above. Instead I was caught totally off-guard when a prophecy conference attendee joked about the absurdity of evolution, pointing at a picture of a Platypus and laughing, “As if anything that ridiculous could have resulted by chance, am I right?”

Anxiety and the Abject

One of the ways in which I argue that premillennial dispensationalist media has shaped the eschatological beliefs of its readership is through its negotiation with the ‘abject’. I have suggested that one of the most significant ways by which this negotiation is managed is through the establishment of anxiety narratives that resolve the ‘abject’ concerns through recourse to premillennial dispensationalist theology. I will now briefly outline my conceptual framework for my understanding of the way in which this operates. Julia

¹⁰⁸ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Remnant, On the Brink of Armageddon* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2002), p. 214.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example: Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc and Thomas Zeller, *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Ohio, 2005).

Kristeva's theory of horror proposes the 'abject' as a particular categorization of experience that involves a rejection of abhorrent selfhood, 'The abject has only one quality of the object- that of being opposed to 'I'.¹¹⁰ In particular, the abject is defined in relation to those encounters that recall an individual's mortality. Thus, according to Kristeva, death, and the uncanny, are 'abjective' as their power to disturb draws from their relation to the self, while yet remaining outside the cultural or epistemological range of 'acceptable' or 'knowable' experiences.

For Kristeva, therefore, the power of the abject is derived from a transgressive hybridity that rejects easy categorisation,

'It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'¹¹¹

Kristeva argues that abjective liminality simultaneously threatens and defines the boundaries of discursive classification,

'Thus, fear, having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject'.¹¹²

Kristeva here is drawing heavily on Mary Douglas' work, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York/London, 2003), in which Douglas explores how objects or experiences that fall outside of direct categorization are allocated as 'taboo' within contained religious systems. Kristeva, meanwhile, argues that the exclusion of the abject results in the establishment of the category of the sacred.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay On Abjection* (New York, 1982), p. 1.

¹¹¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 10.

¹¹² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 6.

¹¹³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.

In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas conducts an exploration of pollution rhetoric within religious ritual, paying particular attention to the way in which 'dirt' operates as a symbolic token within a social system,

'dirt is never a unique isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements'.¹¹⁴

This 'systematic ordering' leads to Douglas' central thesis on the function of pollution rituals. Douglas examines 'pollution' as primarily occupying liminal or ambiguous states that lie between codified and authorised categories of cultural phenomena. She states that as culture provides categories for ordering of phenomena,

'in any culture worthy of the name, various provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events' can be found in the enactment of 'pollution' rituals.¹¹⁵

Douglas argues that pollution rituals have a 'framing function' as 'markers to draw attention to meanings'.¹¹⁶ Those cultural markers serve to highlight liminal experiences that can then be re-categorized back into the 'pattern' of culturally codified categories. Catherine Bell has criticized the way in which Douglas regards the 'framing mechanism' of ritual as free-floating agent, un-tethered to any discursive intention. Bell notes that the 'framing mechanisms' of pollution rituals are irrevocably tied to a process of ideological streamlining,

'ritualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations'.¹¹⁷

Bell proposes that ritual is an ideological extension of authority that stretches across 'ambiguous' states in order to create an illusion of control over 'liminal' ground. She notes,

'ritualization both implies and demonstrates a relatively unified corporate body, often leading participants to assume that there is more consensus than there actually is'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York/London, 2003), p. 44.

¹¹⁵ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 48.

¹¹⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 49.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York/Oxford, 2009), p. 197.

¹¹⁸ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 210.

These theories can helpfully inform a discussion of premillennial dispensationalist anxiety narratives in several ways. Firstly, *Left Behind* fiction and the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* can be understood as methods of extending discursive control over premillennial dispensationalist theology. In particular, these texts address 'abjective' constituents of premillennial dispensationalist theology, and seek to 'order' them in to a more streamlined prophetic narrative. These 'abject' constituents can be defined as elements of premillennial dispensationalist theology that are problematic for the integrity of the prophetic scheme. These include: the continually deferred hope of the imminent Rapture, the degradation and corruption of the Christian body, and the loneliness of the eschatological journey. Anxiety narratives are used as a 'framing mechanism' for highlighting these abjective components, addressing them through premillennial dispensationalist theology, and allowing these topics to be re-integrated into the prophetic discourse. The process of re-integration of the dispensationalist abject thus draw attention to those experiences that have been deliberately re-aligned into the dispensationalist discursive 'pattern'.

This framework has been explored by Adela Yarbro Collins with regard to the book of Revelation in her work, *Crisis And Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, 1984). Collins discusses the Aristotelian use of the term 'catharsis', and its relation to the genre of tragedy. She states:

'Fear and pity in daily life can be disquieting for at least two reasons. Such feelings are often inarticulate, vague, and thus difficult to deal with. Also, they relate to people and events that are very close to home and thus especially threatening.'¹¹⁹

Collins argues that the tragic horror of the book of Revelation allows for a cathartic release,

¹¹⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis And Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 153.

'The emotions of the audience are purged in the sense that their feelings of fear and pity are intensified and given objective expression. The feelings are thus brought to consciousness and become less threatening [...] Fearful feelings are vented by the very act expressing them, especially in this larger-than-life and exaggerated way'.¹²⁰

In premillennial dispensationalist media, apocalyptic horror serves to both exclude disordered components and shape the order of 'included' components in an 'acceptable' representation of dispensationalist theology. As such, the process represents a means of policing discursive boundaries, and thus codifying the enactment of the theology in the spiritual lives of the believers. The extreme violence in *Left Behind* fiction, for example, clearly serves to shape archetypes of individual and group behaviour, providing commentary on the characters' beliefs, sexuality, and self-expression,

'The moral order then is comprised of *symbolic boundaries*. These act as rules and guidelines by which ordinary people make sense out of their private lives'.¹²¹

As Douglas and Bell have suggested, this process of purgative catharsis, of ideological re-classification, and de-naturing of the abject is managed through pollution rituals. To this extent, the anxiety narratives of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, and *Left Behind* in particular, can be understood as a form of discursive pollution ritual conducted within the 'safe' confines of apocalyptic collapse. In particular, the apocalyptic fiction of *Left Behind* is used as arena in which those liminal experiences can both be enacted and contained in a 'fantastical' manner. The post-Rapture setting of the fiction, ultimately allows these abjective components to be grappled with without the necessity of challenging, or even implicating the contemporary Church. *Left Behind* fiction primarily uses horror, and particularly bodily horror, to narrate those abjective experiences, and reclassify them according to dispensationalist and prophetic discourse. As Gribben has commented, the *Left*

¹²⁰ Collins, *Crisis*, p. 153.

¹²¹ James Davidson Hunter, *Evangelicalism, The Coming Generation* (Chicago, London, 1987), p. 157.

Behind novels 'make a complex world knowable'.¹²² This re-iteration is conducted more extensively in the imaginative, apocalyptic literary mode rather than in popular prophetic, because *Left Behind's* apocalyptic universe is allowed more license to imaginatively explore these issues within the 'safe' arena of horror,

'because it hence decks itself out in the sacred power of horror, literature may also involve not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the abject: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word'.¹²³

In *Left Behind* fiction, dispensationalist 'crisis of the Word' is enacted in a self-contained theatre of abjection; the horror of the Tribulation. As Kristeva comments, the abject appears most commonly at the time of 'collapse', at the dissolution of socio-cultural or discursive boundaries. Horror narratives, and in particular, apocalyptic horror narratives, recount the time of ultimate collapse, not just of socio-political stability, but eschatological certainty.

'Horror' is, however, rather a diffuse topic, and while attempting to analyse the way in which horror 'works', in the prophetic non-fiction and *Left Behind* fiction of premillennial dispensationalism, it has been useful to explore what constitutes true 'horror' as opposed to many of its constituent elements. Horror is naturally a deeply subjective experience, what one person finds 'abjective' or horrific may be merely ridiculous to the next. To this extent, I have found it helpful to reflect on a complex 'horror-provoking' experience in my own life. In 2008, I spent almost a year living with an apocalyptic cultic community in a small village in the rainforest, on a very remote island in Melanesia. Each night without fail, the cult leader would direct twelve or fifteen teenage girls into the chapel at bottom of a hill next to my hut, in order to perform elaborate exorcism rituals over their persons. Every night I lay awake listening to the shuffling of rats and cockroaches, and the prolonged, and as it seemed to me, agonised screaming and feral growls of the girls' demonic possession.

¹²² Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 4.

¹²³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 208.

Towards morning the screams developed into the cries and sobbing which accompanied their eventual redemption through exorcism. These episodes took place in total darkness, as the island was several hundred miles away from electricity and we were often without candles for many weeks.

The horror that this experience provoked in my own sensibility was linked to several aspects of the nature of my situation. Certainly, my own isolation was a factor, as well as my vulnerability to this particular ritual as a young woman myself. On several occasions, I had been forcibly exorcised, and on others, woken in the night by the sound of exorcism of my hut or ritualistic 'cleansing' rituals performed across my doorstep. The demarcation of my 'otherness' through the implicit threat of these acts, and my ignorance about the exact nature of the nightly exorcism rituals, for example, the unknown acts associated with the screaming, was particularly unsettling. Perhaps most of all, the alien nature of my situation, the inability to share it with another person, and its 'abjective' qualities, as falling outside of the categories of any previous experience, left me unable to categorise the horror into a more manageable anxiety.

Reflecting upon this experience has been helpful in drawing some observations that have informed the way horror narratives are considered in this thesis. Firstly, horror can certainly play a part in the enactment of religious ritual in way that can affect those 'inside' the community as well as the terrified external visitors listening from their beds. This particular cult, for example, referenced their own practises as 'Dark Praying', not because of the nightly nature of these activities, but their demonic association. Similarly, the demon possession of the girls was an important pre-requisite of the cleansing of 'sin' as the exorcisms themselves. In short, it may be helpful to consider that the 'horrific' or fear-

provoking effect of religious rituals may deliberately form part of the cathartic performativity of the ritual itself. Jason Bivins has highlighted the tension between 'revulsion and attraction, darkness and redemption' in Evangelical fear narratives, and notes that 'the religion of fear appears drawn to precisely what it seeks to drive away'.¹²⁴ Bivins has termed this dynamic the 'erotics of fear',

'Across the range of these cultural productions, the greatest energy and detail are found in representations of what is damned, demonic, illicit, carnal, and generally outside the bounds of orthodox belief and practice. In fear's handiwork, we see not only regular portrayals of "lewd" or "foul" acts but extraordinarily detailed ones, which promise documentary realism or even, significantly, the possibility of a surrogate experience [...] What does this fascination reveal if not an abiding preoccupation with, even attraction to, the darkness?'¹²⁵

Furthermore, the emotions that I described elicited in myself above overlap considerably with the horror of *Left Behind* and the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*. The texts of premillennial dispensationalism deliberately provoke the emotions, not just of fear, but a complex range of anxieties that work together to provide a comprehensive spectrum of unmanageable experiences. These include the powerlessness, isolation, paranoia, and physical violence that will be discussed in this thesis. They also include more recognizable literary motifs of horror, which include the uncanny, the doppelganger, the monstrous, and the punchy narrative urgency that characterises most mainstream 'thriller' or action narratives. One of the central arguments of this thesis concentrates on the way in which these texts work to reaffirm their own theological framework is by the 'making manageable' of the unmanageable spectrum of anxieties we have touched on.

'Horror' as a genre, encompasses a wide variety of associated tropes, that range anywhere from genocide to itchiness. The horror universe of *Left Behind* fiction and the *LaHaye*

¹²⁴ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p.17.

¹²⁵ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p.18.

Prophecy Library, reference specific horror motifs that reflect wider discursive concerns. Premillennial dispensational horror narratives are not, for example, overtly influenced by Victoriana or Gothic horror. Rather, *Left Behind* fiction displays strong associations to 1950s science fiction and post-Cold War horror. The novels also display a self-consciously dynamic relationship with ostensibly secular modern horror. The prequel, *The Rising*, for example, describes the childhood of the Antichrist, and depicts so many images of the uncanny boy-Antichrist as he manipulates and murders his way into adolescence, that it could easily be a pastiche of the 1976 film, *The Omen*. As will be argued in Chapter Four, the horror of *Left Behind* is also heavily influenced by 'bodys shock' grotesquery, with extreme physical violence, gore and mutilation informing much of its action.

Left Behind's heavy reliance on both Cold War horror narratives and bodily horror is far from accidental. The influence of post-Cold War horror is easily detected in *Left Behind*, most particularly in the figure of the Antichrist, the Romanian Nicolae Carpathia, and his Russian Satanist mentor, Viv Ivins. This formulation is not limited to *Left Behind* fiction, Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, for example describes the 'hordes' of Gomer' as encompassing the 'vast area of modern Eastern Europe which is totally behind the Iron Curtain'.¹²⁶ Similarly, the fictional establishment of polarities between Russia and the well meaning American president, fit extremely well into a premillennial dispensationalist prophetic end-time narrative that puts Russia at the head of an attack on Israel, only to be destroyed for its hubris.¹²⁷ The narrative reliance on physical horror, meanwhile, can be understood as symptomatic of the physicality of the movement as a whole. When one considers, for example, the extreme materiality of the Rapture experience, the physicality of

¹²⁶ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Aylesbury, Bucks, 1970), p. 70.

¹²⁷ See also: Cyndy Hendershot, *Anti-communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (North Carolina, 2003).

the horror can be understood as far more than a fictional act of *schadenfreude* on the part of the readers. Rather, in the context of an understanding of salvation as a psycho-somatic transformation, the extreme physical horror of *Left Behind* fiction represents the problematic nature of the degradation of the body. Thus, the physicality or the Rapture can be understood as representative of the physicality of the movement as a whole. This can be seen reflected in the emphasis placed on the consummation of God's promises in the land of Israel as an act of foreshadowing for the promise of the imminent Rapture. Similarly, the overwhelming paranoia that runs throughout the horror narratives of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* reflects the 'revelation' of God's promises 'made real' in the enactment of horror in the surrounding world.

In his phenomenological study of disgust, William Ian Miller suggests that horror can be conceptualized as 'fear-imbued disgust'.¹²⁸ He continues,

'What makes horror so *horrifying* is that unlike fear, which presents a viable strategy (run!), horror denies flight as an option'.¹²⁹

This observation certainly adheres, at least on a superficial level, to the discussion of the horrific nature of powerlessness that is explored later in this thesis. However, I am hesitant to discuss horror as Miller describes, as a mixed experience of revulsion and fear. When I refer to 'horror' as a means of exploiting and engendering anxiety, I refer not just to the emotion of disgust, or a sense of uncanny supernaturalism. While the 'disgust' aspect of horror forms an important feature of the bodily violence of *Left Behind*, it is a constituent part of what I would argue is a larger theme of 'threat'. This pervasive sense of threat characterises much of the anxiety narratives of premillennial dispensationalist media. Threats are identified as lurking in the secular world, or hidden within the wider scope of

¹²⁸ William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA/ London, 1997), p. 26.

¹²⁹ Miller, *Disgust*, p.26.

Christendom, and are largely expressed through paranoia. This nebulous sense of threat thus becomes a 'manageable' anxiety by its absorption into prophetic discourse, as the anxiety of threat itself becomes pre-ordained through prophecy. This therefore represents a means of streamlining those anxieties that fall outside the framework of discursive control, and back into a controlled narrative of eschatological agency. The fact that paranoia thus forms an integral part of premillennial dispensationalist prophetic discourse will help to illuminate how the movement understands itself as a product of perpetual, rather than reactionary, crisis. This understanding will inform the final discussion of this paper, which offers a challenge to scholarly analyses that seek to account for modern apocalypticism as a response to the crisis of modernity.

This thesis therefore seeks to explain how popular premillennial dispensationalist media shapes the eschatological beliefs of its readers. The answer to this question will be sought through a text-based critical analysis of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* and its fictional counterpart, the *Left Behind* series. It will be proposed that these two sets of texts shape the eschatological beliefs of their readers through a discursive streamlining that is performed in several ways. Firstly, premillennial dispensationalism has constructed a specific prophetic hermeneutic over the course of its historical development, an examination of which will take place in the next chapter. Chapter Three will concentrate on an analysis of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, and Chapter Four will offer an analysis of the *Left Behind* series. These two chapters will demonstrate that the premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic is almost exclusively communicated through anxiety narratives. These narratives serve to explore 'abjective' elements of premillennial dispensationalist belief, re-integrating them into the fabric of the faith. Particular attention will be paid to these abjective elements, which include the role of the eschatological body, and the nature of individual salvation.

Finally, this thesis proposes that the 'deprivation' theory of millennial appeal does not adequately explain the continued appeal of premillennial dispensationalist apocalypticism. As such, Chapter Five will draw from the preceding analyses, and suggest that an alternate critical analysis of the movement, concentrating on its tropes of anxiety, serves to better explain the enduring appeal of this ideology.

Chapter Two

Historical Contextualisation

‘God has given us in the Bible an accurate history of the world, much of it written in advance. It is the only truly accurate history ever written.’¹

The purpose of the following examination is to provide an overview of the development of contemporary premillennial dispensationalism in North America. Many excellent studies have been written on the history of Evangelicalism in the United States, and this chapter does not intend to simply repeat material that is more extensively discussed elsewhere. Rather, the function of the following chapter is two-fold. Firstly, the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* fiction create a picture of premillennial dispensationalist’s self-understanding of its own historical narrative. I will first here outline that narrative, which offers an insight into the way in which the movement sees its own development. Secondly, this chapter will provide an alternate historical contextualisation of contemporary premillennial dispensationalism that will allow for a framing of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* and the *Left Behind* texts within the intellectual history of the movement. In particular, this chapter seeks to examine how the historical evolution of the movement illuminates the development of a specific premillennial dispensationalist discourse.

The Premillennial Dispensationalist Account

Throughout the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* and the *Left Behind* novels, the movement retains a careful ‘guard’ of its own historical narrative. One of the most fascinating examples of this occurs in the *Left Behind* prequel, *Rapture, In the Twinkling of An Eye*. This novel follows the

¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 228.

journey of Irene, Rayford's Raptured wife, as she ascends to heaven. Immediately following her arrival in heaven, Irene and her son Raymie witness a procession of epic proportions, where the historical 'heroes of the faith', including Bible figures and 'unknown saints' participate in a parade. The processional of these characters serves to outline the history of the movement, 'God seemed to have a theme going that was giving him a crash course in church history'², and as a result of their significance, the figures are awarded by personal congratulations from Jesus,

'As wonderful as it had been to hear "Well done" from the only perfect man to have ever lived and to be welcomed into God's house and to receive crowns of reward, none of that hit them as some cheap imitation as it might have been on Earth'.³

The following discussion will consider the historical narrative of premillennial dispensationalism as represented in the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* fiction, as a means of allowing an insight into the self-perception of the movement.

LaHaye states that the first three centuries of the Church Age dispensation were characterized by a zeal for 'soul winning' and missionary work. However, he writes that this 'zeal' faded as the 'second coming teachings' were abandoned by the Roman Catholic Church.⁴ Even before the crystallisation of premillennial dispensationalism as a distinct belief system, LaHaye identifies 'enemies' of its core tenets in the early Church. Origen, and in particular, Augustine, are pinpointed as responsible for introducing allegorising or 'spiritualizing' into the true Church,

'[Augustine] came along with his brand of Greek humanism and introduced "man's wisdom" along with "God's wisdom," further paving the way for more pagan thought and practice. Although he did not intend it, his spiritualizing of Scripture eventually removed the Bible as the sole source of authority for correct doctrine. At the same time, the Scriptures were kept locked up in monasteries and museums, leaving Christians

² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 271-272.

³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 313.

⁴ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 73.

defenseless against the invasion of pagan and humanistic thought and practice. Consequently, the Dark Ages prevailed'.⁵

LaHaye suggests that it was entirely due to the toil of specific individuals that Christianity was not destroyed as a result of these 'humanistic' practices,

'Had it not been for Wycliffe, Tyndale, and other valiant pre-Protestant heroes of the faith, Christianity would have been destroyed, and Satan's Babylonian mysticism would have prevailed, effectively destroying true Christianity'.⁶

John Wycliffe (1330-1384) is identified as a particularly important figure in the development of a 'correct' hermeneutical practice, and described as 'one of the greatest Christian leaders of all time'.⁷ In *Rapture, in the Twinkling*, LaHaye further explains that Wycliffe's significance was due to his evangelical spirit, and his Scripture-centred approach to preaching,

'Wycliffe had been widely thought the best preacher of his day. He centred his sermons around the meaning of the Bible passage and then the application of the text to the lives of the hearers. Jesus presented him the crowns of Glory and Rejoicing'.⁸

Similarly, John Hus is singled out for mention, as a proponent of Wycliffe's work. In *Rapture, in the Twinkling*, Jesus awards Hus the crowns of 'Glory and Life'.⁹

LaHaye writes that as a result of the Roman Catholic 'spiritualising' of the Bible, the practice of prophetic study was lost to history. Consequently, it was only

'after the Reformation's renewed emphasis on accepting the bible literally revived interest in prophecy and the return of Christ, belief in His imminent return again produced holy living in an unholy world'.¹⁰

The literalist heroes of the Reformation era are credited with three ways in which they contributed to the revival of 'holy living'. Firstly, the Reformers 'went back to the Bible and

⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 174.

⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 174.

⁷ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 19.

⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 270.

⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 273.

¹⁰ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 73.

apostolic fathers' exposing them to an 'orthodox premillennialism'.¹¹ Secondly, they 'repudiated much of the allegorization that dominated medieval hermeneutics', and third, 'many of the Protestants came into contact with Jews and learned Hebrew'.¹² As a result of these efforts, the 'explosion of Bible reading by the general public [meant that] it took just a few decades for people to start thinking about Israel and its future'.¹³ In the shadow of the Reformers, several significant contributors to premillennial dispensationalism are mentioned. In particular, these include Joseph Mede (1586-1638), who is described as 'the father of English premillennialism', and Increase Mather (1639- 1723), referred to as 'a significant American Puritan' who advocated a form of pre-Tribulational Rapture belief.¹⁴ The significance of both of these men will be examined in fuller detail in the following chapter.

LaHaye describes the nineteenth century as the most important historical moment for prophetic studies, when the premillennialist hermeneutic saw a revival in England and America,

'In the nineteenth century came the rediscovery of the study of prophecy, or the study of last things. It was during this period that the greatest missionary and evangelistic emphasis of the modern church era was born'.¹⁵

In particular, LaHaye identifies that the premillennial dispensational scheme owes much to the theology of the Anglo-Irish preacher, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). In this extract, LaHaye ranks Darby's reputation as a spiritual leader as on the same level as that of St. Paul,

'Darby did not invent the pre-Tribulation rapture, the separation of Israel and the church, dispensationalism, types and symbols and other distinctives which have made him the most quoted prophecy teacher since the apostle Paul. Many bible scholars had mentioned

¹¹ Thomas Ice and James Stitzinger, 'Rapture, History of', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 318.

¹² Ice and Stitzinger 'Rapture, History of', p. 318.

¹³ Ice and Stitzinger 'Rapture, History of', p. 319.

¹⁴ Ice and Stitzinger 'Rapture, History of', p. 319.

¹⁵ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 19.

one or more of these concepts before Darby. He did, however, pull them together into a cohesive body of thought'.¹⁶

While LaHaye acknowledges that Darby did not create the idea of the Rapture, he defends Darby's theological method against alternate claims that trace the source of Rapture theology to other theologians. In *Rapture, Who Will Face The Tribulation*, LaHaye writes,

'Some, as we have seen, accuse [Darby] of getting [the idea of the Rapture] from the vision of a Scottish girl. The more vicious say it was demon-inspired or that he received the teaching from a defrocked minister named Irving, or even a renegade Jesuit Catholic named Lacunza'.¹⁷

The three 'rival' originators of the Rapture listed here: the 'Scottish girl', the 'defrocked minister' Irving and the 'renegade' Lacunza will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

LaHaye describes as Darby traveled to popularize his theology, winning converts to his premillennial dispensationalist scheme as a result of his adherence to the Word, rather than reliance on 'powers of persuasion'¹⁸. In the rejection of the 'charismatic' style, reliance on Scripture, and multi-faceted blending of theologies, LaHaye establishes himself as a direct descendent of Darby's pedagogical style,

'In a sense, I followed [Darby's] precedent with the centuries-old four-temperament theory that I have been privileged to popularize in this country. I didn't invent it, but I borrowed it from thinkers before me, added two concepts [...] and popularized it by writing and speaking on the subject'.¹⁹

Similarly, LaHaye's particular form of premillennial dispensationalism is established as part of the heritage of the early prophecy conferences held in England throughout the 19th century,

'Dr. LaHaye was impressed with the gatherings of the Albury Park and Powerscourt Conference in Britain during the late 1820s and early 1830s where leaders gathered to

¹⁶ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 146.

¹⁷ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 145.

¹⁸ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 146.

¹⁹ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 146.

discuss issues relating to Bible prophecy. Dr. LaHaye contacted Dr. Thomas Ice and discussed the possibility of calling a similar meeting for December 1992'.²⁰

The product of this inspiration became LaHaye and Ice's Pre-Tribulation Research Centre, which runs annual prophecy conferences, drawing together its key academics and pedagogues for summary debate and discussion.

LaHaye suggests that throughout the nineteenth century, adherence to the 'Fundamentalist' hermeneutic created a strong theological unity in America,

'In the middle of the nineteenth century, almost all U.S. denominations had one branch, all of which were basically fundamental. Little changed by the turn of the century. The church was still basking in the afterglow of the Charles A. Finney evangelistic crusades, followed by those of D.L. Moody and others'.²¹

In *Rapture, In the Twinkling*, Moody is described as 'one of history's most dynamic pioneering servants of Christ [whom many considered] the greatest evangelist since the apostle Paul'.²² In particular, LaHaye and Jenkins note Moody's popularity and wide-ranging appeal, 'some said he was as well known as the president of the United States'.²³ It is not difficult, therefore, to see why LaHaye seeks to establish premillennial dispensationalism as a direct descendent of this nineteenth-century 'Fundamentalist' hermeneutic. LaHaye and Jenkins establish that following the turn of the twentieth century, the 'golden age' of unadulterated American Evangelicalism was rapidly dismantled by Satanic corruption,

'At that time certain individuals educated in Europe and influenced by German rationalism began teaching in denomination seminaries. The devil knew the best way to inject his apostate doctrine into the churches was to infiltrate the seminaries, indoctrinate young ministers and send them in to the church to spread his false concepts across the land. The degree of faithfulness to the Word of God found in these denominations today directly reflects the success of denominational leaders in keeping heretics out of their seminaries two generations ago. It is a constant fight!'²⁴

²⁰ 'What the Pre-Trib Research Center is About?', Pre-Trib Research Centre website, accessed 24 February 2013, <http://www.pre-trib.org/about>

²¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 74.

²² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 287-288

²³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 288.

²⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 74.

Here, adherence to the literalist hermeneutic marks the only significant means of 'fighting' the Satanic apostasy planted in the mainstream Church through European philosophy,

'It has been well established that many of the false religions and cults of history have grown out of deceptions of "apostate" branches of Christianity'.²⁵

This apostate corruption is understood to have spread through large swathes of American religion, 'Apostasy ruins whole denominations. The Methodist church could be seen as an illustration'.²⁶ The difficulty of detecting these apostates as deceivers is accredited as a further Satanically inspired 'sign' that the end times are approaching.

'Satan, the master deceiver, does not want us to get excited about the fact that there are more signs of Christ's return today than at any time in church history. Consequently, we can expect him to send all kinds of deceivers into the church to rob us of the keen consciousness of living every day in the light of Christ's possible coming'.²⁷

As a result of the widespread apostasy in the Church, LaHaye advocates a particular kind of hermeneutical 'paranoia'; a constant wariness against enemies of literalism hidden within Christendom itself. The effects of this discursive paranoia will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

The historical development of premillennial dispensationalism narrated in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* reveals a particular concentration on its literary heritage. The 1909 *Scofield Reference Bible*, for example is emphasised as a significant contribution to the 'defence' of the literalist hermeneutic against its apostate detractors. Indeed, in *The Rapture, in the Twinkling*, Scofield is singled out for personal recognition by Jesus,

'[Scofield] designed the Scofield Correspondence Course, which was later licensed to Moody Bible Institute and taken by more than 1,000 students. And he created a reference

²⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, pp. 73-74.

²⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 77.

²⁷ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 25.

Bible to aid those just beginning to read the Bible which became an authoritative guide to millions for more than a century'.²⁸

In one of the stranger rebuttals of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, LaHaye directly addresses an accusation on the origins of Rapture theology that would implicate Scofield in a complex conspiracy theory, designed to further discredit the literalist hermeneutic,

'Of all the attacks on the Rapture, easily the most ridiculous is the one which finds it an instrument of the Illuminati (the Master Conspirators) to put the evangelical community to sleep politically so that the secularizers of the Western world are free to dominate the government, education, communications industry, and other agencies of influence. The proponents of this attack would even have us believe that Dr. C.I. Scofield, author of the study Bible with notes and references that has blessed millions of Christians, was part of that plot'.²⁹

In the modern period, the figures highlighted include that of William Franklin [Billy] Graham. Graham is lauded not just for his personal struggles or evangelistic campaigns, but for his flexibility of medium, 'In whatever media situation he found himself, whether on a TV talk show or even a variety show, Mr. Graham found a way to share the gospel'.³⁰ Similarly, Bill Bright, the founder of the 'Campus Crusade for Christ' in 1951 is highlighted in *Rapture, in the Twinkling*, for particular mention, as 'the world's largest Christian ministry'.³¹ Most significantly, Bright is praised for his ability to reach audiences through his use of popular media, and his production of the film 'JESUS' receives particular commendation,

'Irene and Raymie rose with the rest as Jesus pronounced Bill Bright's well-done and embraced him, crafting for him the residue of the flame the Crown of Rejoicing, the soul winner's crown. The loudest cheers came from the hundreds of millions who were in heaven due to the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ'.³²

²⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 257.

²⁹ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 207.

³⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 295.

³¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 276.

³² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 277.

A space is allowed, furthermore, for more 'popular' espousal of premillennial dispensationalist theology. Thomas Ice and James Stitzinger, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* suggest that, 'nothing has done more to promote the pretribulational rapture position' than Hal Lindsay's popular prophecy work, *Late Great Planet Earth* and *the Left Behind Series*'.³³ Indeed, in *Rapture, The Twinkling*, Ken Taylor, the founder of Tyndale House which published *Left Behind* fiction, is identified for particular glorification by Jesus as a result of his contributions to the literary heritage of premillennial dispensationalism. His major contributions are identified as his work *The Living Bible* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1971), a paraphrase of St Paul's Epistles,

'[Taylor,] a twentieth-century saint who had made the Scriptures even more understandable to the masses by crafting them to be understood by his children [...] He too suffered for the work, virtually losing his voice for the second half of his life. Ken Taylor was presented with crowns rewarding his enduring trials, feeding the flock and winning souls'.³⁴

As can be seen from this brief overview, the history of premillennial dispensationalism is represented in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, and in *Left Behind*, as a direct descendent of the 'golden age' of prophecy study. An emphasis is placed on the continuation of the ideals of early nineteenth-century theologians, and in particular, their interest in prophecy, evangelism, and 'holy living'. The emphasis on the protection of a literalist hermeneutic demonstrates the means by which the movement has sought to retain the 'purity' of its religious expression from the apostate and corrupting influences, identified not merely in the secular world, but also within wider Christendom. It is, I suspect, no accident that those characters highlighted in the heavenly processional are figures widely celebrated for their perseverance in the face of extreme opposition. For example, many figures celebrated

³³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 320.

³⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 274.

personally by Jesus in *Rapture, in the Twinkling*, while not ‘theologians’, are highlighted as a result of their struggles in the midst of a hostile climate. These include the story of five missionaries killed by tribesmen whilst on a mission in Ecuador in the 1950s, whose families later persevered to convert their murderers.³⁵ Furthermore, the history outlined above not only highlights the importance of specific hermeneutical contributors considered to be integral to premillennial dispensationalism, but also celebrates several institutions that continue to carry on these traditions. These are listed as including the Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary, Liberty University and Tyndale Publishing House. The development of premillennial dispensationalism from varied theological strands, its ‘channeling’ into specific institutions, and its expression in popular media will now be contextualized within a wider intellectual history of the movement.

A History of Premillennial Dispensationalism

As has been discussed in Chapter One, premillennial dispensationalism is composed of varied discrete ‘strands’ of theology, which will be here examined in turn. They include futurist premillennialism, dispensationalism, Rapture theology and what can be termed as ‘prophecy belief’. This chapter will offer the historical development of these variant strands of theology to outline the ways in which premillennial dispensationalism owes its interpretative scheme to a wide and varied historical legacy. This chapter will offer particular focus on the conception of Rapture theology, in order to develop a more nuanced overview of the significance of this theology for the wider movement. Finally, the historical situating of these key component theologies in the intellectual history of the movement will

³⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 299-301.

serve to distinguish the ways in which the contemporary movement has both borrowed, and deviated from Orthodox dispensationalism.

Futurism

Futurism is an important component of modern dispensational premillennialism. Futurist premillennialism essentially holds that much of biblical prophecy, and in particular, the events of the book of Revelation and the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel are literal, global, and yet to occur. As such, futurism clearly contributes to contemporary premillennial dispensationalist prophecy discourse, as it allows for all prophecies to be read as indicative of future, rather than consummated events. Futurism can be traced to the early 16th century when it emerged as part of the Counter-Reformation movement. Early Protestant readings of the book of Revelation had identified the 'Beast' of Revelation as the Papal institution, a useful method of both religious and political critique which aided the division with Rome. The 19th Ecumenical Council was held at Trent between 1545 and 1563, and as part of the proceedings, the Papacy authorized a re-evaluation of the book of Revelation. In particular, an alternative solution was to be sought for the Protestant identification of the Papacy as the Antichrist of the 'end-time' prophecies.

One of the most important figures in this reassessment was the Spanish monk, Francisco Ribera (1537- 1591). Ribera joined the Jesuit order in 1570, and in 1575 began work on a series of apocalyptic commentaries that were written over the course of the following 16 years. These commentaries were to become profoundly influential, and were adopted by the Papacy as helpful theological 'wedge', separating the Papal institution from the contemporary Protestant reading of biblical apocalyptic. Ribera's interpretation was split

into two parts. The first read chapters 1-11 of the book of Revelation as historical commentary. For example, Ribera attributed the White Horse of Revelation 6: 1-2 to the Apostolic era, read the Black Horse of Revelation 6: 5-6 as 'heresies' and the Pale Horse of Revelation 6: 7-8 as 'persecution'.³⁶ Ribera then continued to interpret the figure of Antichrist as a single individual, whose reign would be condensed into a future period of three and a half years of earthly time.³⁷

Between the historical reading of Revelation 1-11, and the future three and a half years of the Antichrist's reign, Ribera proposed that there would be a prophetic pause, 'the great gap of the spreading centuries with which prophecy had nought to do'.³⁸ This 'gap' is particularly significant, as it demonstrates Ribera's conviction that his own era could not be 'combed' for unfolding prophecies. In this, there are clear resonances between Ribera's 'gap theory' and the 'prophetic parenthesis' so essential to the dispensationalism developed in England in the 1830s. Ribera suggested that the first six trumpets of the book of Revelation were to come before the death of Antichrist, and the seventh would only sound afterwards³⁹ He also noted that while the number of the Beast will be 666⁴⁰, the name and nature of the Antichrist will remain secret until his appearance.⁴¹ Although Ribera does not explicitly mention the Rapture, he does make reference to those who will be 'discovered living' at the day of Judgement who will rule with Christ on earth for 1000 years.⁴² LeRoy Froom, one of the few historians of prophecy development, comments,

³⁶ E.B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae: Or, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, critical and historical; including also an examination of the chief prophecies of Daniel* (4 vols., London, 1851), vol. iv, p. 466.

³⁷ See: Francisci Riberae, *In Sacram Beati Ioannis Apostoli & Evangelistae Apocalypsin Commentarii* (Rome, 1593), chap. x, p. 211.

³⁸ LeRoy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (4 vols., Washington D.C., 1948), vol. ii, pp. 488- 489.

³⁹ Riberae, *In Sacram*, chap. x, p. 211, paragraph 22.

⁴⁰ See: Riberae, *In Sacram*, chap. x, p. 263.

⁴¹ Riberae, *In Sacram*, chap. x, p. 264.

⁴² Riberae, *In Sacram*, chap. xx, p. 381, paragraph 22.

'in Ribera's commentary was laid the foundation for that great structure of Futurism, built upon and enlarged by those who followed, until it became the common Catholic position'.⁴³

One of the significant figures to expand upon Ribera's work was Cardinal Roberto Bellarmine (1542-1621). Bellarmine joined the Jesuit order in 1560, and was made a Cardinal in 1599 under Pope Clement VIII. Bellarmine solidified Ribera's theories by asserting the singular personhood of the Antichrist. He did this by refuting the 'year-day' principle of interpretation that enabled the Protestant reading of 1260 years of tyranny under the Antichrist. This lengthy span of time allowed an interpretation of the Antichrist as an institution, capable of spanning several hundreds of years under successive Papal leadership. Re-iterating Ribera's three-and-a-half year time gap, Bellarmine emphasised that that this period would fit within the lifespan of the figure of the single individual as Antichrist.⁴⁴ Other prominent Jesuit scholars who supported these ideas included Blasius Viegas (1554-1599) and Cornelius of Lapide (1567-1637). Tomas Malvenda (1566-1628) produced a commentary, *De Antichristo* (Rome, 1647), that emphasised that Antichrist would only appear near the end of the age.⁴⁵ Similarly, the English Jesuit, Michael Walpole's (1570-1624) defence of Bellarmine's work, *A Treatise of Antichrist, Containing the defence of Cardinal Bellarmine's Arguments which invincible demonstrate, that the Pope is not Antichrist* (Saint Omer, France, 1613), dedicated a chapter to proving that the Antichrist had not yet come.⁴⁶

⁴³ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith*, Vol. II, p. 493.

⁴⁴ See: Roberto Bellarmine, *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus huius temporis Haereticos* (3 vols., Ingolstadt, 1581), tome 1, vol. 1, chap.2, pp. 184-185.

⁴⁵ See: Tomas Malvenda, *De Antichristo* (4 vols., Rome, 1647), vol.1, book 2, p. 122.

⁴⁶ Michael Walpole, *A Treatise of Antichrist, Containing the defence of Cardinal Bellarmine's Arguments which invincible demonstrate, that the Pope is not Antichrist* (Saint Omer, France, 1613), vol. 1, pp. 65-77. Accessed 9 May 2012, via: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V15294

These early Jesuit texts serve to indicate several crucial features of the hermeneutical framework essential to modern premillennial dispensationalism. These include the assumption that there will be a future and single Antichrist who will take the form of a man, which implies the separation of the Roman Catholic Church from the figure of Antichrist. Indeed, the modern dispensationalism of *Left Behind* proposes an end-of-times scenario in which the Pope himself is Raptured, as the individual 'covenant of salvation' with God supersedes even denominational boundaries.⁴⁷ LeRoy Froom has suggested that following these early Jesuit expositors, the futurist view 'was confined to Romanists, and was refuted by several masterly Protestant works' until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when there was a revival in futurism amongst the Plymouth Brethren, but also in the High-Church Oxford Movement (1833-1845).⁴⁸ The most significant point of direct overlap evident between the Jesuit futurist position and the dispensational premillennialist position seems to occur in the Catholic Apostolic movement of the early 1830s. This overlap will be discussed later with reference to the work of Manuel Lacunza and Edward Irving. In general, however, as Froom has suggested, therefore, until the early decades of the 19th century, the futurist view was largely confined to Catholic apocalyptic commentary. Interestingly, however, one of the most prevalent parallel forms of Protestant, and later Puritan hermeneutical interpretation of the Antichrist prophecies also has its roots in the early Jesuit scholarship of the Counter-Reformation. This opposing, historical school of prophetic belief, was later synthesized into the earliest expressions of American Puritan eschatology in the late 17th century, and will be considered below.

The Historical School of Apocalypticism

⁴⁷ See: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith*, Vol. II, p. 511.

This opposing strain of interpretation ‘contained’ the prophecies related to Antichrist to the first century after Jesus, allowing for a different method of disassociation between biblical Antichrist and the institution of the Papacy. As will be discussed later, this historical school of interpretation became absorbed into Protestant hermeneutical frameworks in Europe, and in 1642 was effectively institutionalized in the Puritan eschatological schema of the English government. It was this English Puritan government which in turn formed the template for the religious orthodoxy of the non-separatist Puritan colonies flourishing in America. This is a complex and interesting tangent in the historical inquiry of Rapture belief, as some of the earliest references to the Rapture in English language theology first occur in the work of proponents of the historical school of prophetic interpretation, including Joseph Mede and Increase Mather.⁴⁹

Towards the end of his life, Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613), a Spanish Jesuit from Seville, wrote a commentary entitled, *Vestigiato Arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi*; (Investigation of the Hidden Sense of the Apocalypse), which was published posthumously in 1614. Alcazar became one of the earliest champions of Preterism, an interpretation of the Scriptures that reads the biblical prophecies as having already been fulfilled in the first century after the birth of Jesus. As an eschatological scheme, Preterism was in direct contradiction to the futurism of Ribera and Bellarmine, and swiftly rose in prominence. Indeed, Preterism became the method of apocalyptic interpretation most often adopted by Protestant scholars, such as Thomas Brightman (1562- 1607) and Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). The historical ‘containment’ of biblical Antichrist prophecy was adopted by perhaps the most influential apocalyptic scholar of this period; Joseph Mede, a premillennialist, but crucially, not a futurist.

⁴⁹ See, for example: p. 76

Mede's apocalyptic commentary, *Clavis Apocalyptica*, first published in 1627, was translated into English in 1643, with a preface written by Dr. William Twiss (d.1647). Although *Clavis* does not make reference to the Rapture, Mede does, however, consider it elsewhere, when he tackles a question from a correspondent on the Rapture that Twiss had previously declined to answer.⁵⁰ Mede argues that a Rapture of the living will occur, but not until the second coming of Jesus, 'it is not needful that the Resurrection of those which slept in Christ and the Rapture of those which shall be left alive together with them into the Air should be at one and the same time'.⁵¹ Mede explains that dead Martyrs will rise first, then the rest of the dead, and finally those which are alive last, to escape the worst destruction before the establishment of the new millennium.⁵² Mede is clearly aware of Rapture theology, and uses the term unproblematically, although he did not advocate a pre-Tribulational Rapture in the dispensationalist sense of the word.⁵³

Twiss was to later head the Westminster Assembly of 121 divines which drew up the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which, as Froom points out, was heavily influenced by the historical and premillennial theology of figures like Mede,

'woven into the Westminster Confession of Faith, which may be regarded as the strongest premillennialist symbol of Protestantism, are the Historical interpretation of the Antichrist [...] and the premillennial expectation of the Advent'.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Sam Meddus, 'Dr. Meddus his Letter to Mr. Mede, touching Dr. Twisse's Answers to nine Quaere's about Regnum Sanctorum', *The Works of Joseph Mede B.D.*, 4th edn (London, 1667), epistle xxi, pp. 773-775.

⁵¹ Joseph Mede, 'Mr. Mede's Answer to the Tenth Quaere, about the 1000 years Regnum Sanctorum', epistle xxii, pp. 775. N.B. This use is clearly predates the 1768 date recorded for the earliest mention of 'Rapture' in this sense by OED. See: 'rapture, n.', meaning 4b, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed 31 May 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158234?rskey=uOhMVr&result=1#eid>.

⁵² Mede, 'Mr. Mede's Answer', pp. 775-776.

⁵³ See, for example: Thomas Ice, 'A History of the Pre-Confagration Rapture', Barndollar, accessed 21 May 2012, http://www.bbc.edu/barndollar/barndollar_history_rapture.pdf

⁵⁴ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith*, Vol. II, p. 553.

Moreover, the printing and sale of Mede's *Clavis* was authorized by the British Parliament in 1642, since the document had been 'accepted as orthodox'.⁵⁵ The picture of accepted hermeneutical interpretation during this period therefore becomes increasingly clear. The English Puritan government had definitively rejected futurist theology, instead endorsing the historical school of interpretation, integrating it into their expression of core beliefs. This development becomes especially significant in the shaping of the new colonies being established in North America during this period. During the reign of Charles I (1625-1649), thousands of Puritans and pilgrims from England and the Netherlands emigrated to New England, where several colonies were founded under distinctly Presbyterian auspices. These were mainly concentrated in the areas which would become Boston, Connecticut, Massachusetts Bay, in New Haven and later in Providence, Rhode Island. Among the first generations of settlers, the most influential figures, both politically and spiritually, were the members of the Mather family. These were principally Richard Mather (1569-1669), Increase Mather (1639-1723), John Cotton (1585-1652) and Cotton Mather (1663-1728).

This family resembled something of a theological dynastic succession in the New World, presiding over the Second Church in Boston. The Mathers, in particular, Increase and Cotton Mather, represented definitive Puritan religious authority over the Massachusetts community. James Adams notes that such was their control over the censorship of printed material that Benjamin Colman was forced to send his rebuttal of Increase Mather to Mather himself for publication in 1700.⁵⁶ Similarly when William Brattle sent a book to England to be printed against the wishes of Cotton Mather, it was publicly burned in the courtyard of Harvard College.⁵⁷ Increase Mather presided over Boston's Second Church from 1664 until

⁵⁵ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith*, Vol. II, p. 544.

⁵⁶ James Adams, *Provincial Society, 1690-1763* (New York, 1938), p. 129.

⁵⁷ Adams, *Provincial Society*, p. 129.

his death, as well as holding office as president of Harvard College between 1685-1701, Froom suggests that,

‘[with Increase Mather] we reach the high water-mark in [...] seventeenth-century prophetic interpretation [... Increase] Mather is the connecting link binding the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries together’.⁵⁸

Increase Mather oversaw the Reforming Synod of 1679-1680, in which an Assembly of Church Elders was drawn together in order to create a single coherent statement of belief. The 1680 *Confession of Faith* was based upon the *Westminster Confession* which had been ratified by the British Parliament in 1642, and therefore accorded with Mede’s *Clavis Apocalyptica*. It was a clear rejection of futurist theology, and explicitly stated an understanding of the Papacy as Antichrist and ‘man of sin’.⁵⁹

This stalwart of Puritan orthodoxy also demonstrates a familiarity with an early form of Rapture theology. With no introduction or exposition, Mather writes,

‘The Living Saints at Christ’s coming shall be caught up into the Air, that so they may escape that Deluge of Fire, which will be the Perdition of ungodly Men [...] But before this Rapture of the living, the dead Saints shall be raised’.⁶⁰

As Mason Lowrance and David Walters have observed, Mather argues that ‘nothing [...] can evolve from the contemporary scene to fulfil this prophecy. Rather, the millennial state, like salvation, must come down from heaven in a divine dispensation’.⁶¹ This suggests an understanding of an era of prophetic ‘silence’ that can only be concluded at the beginning of the next dispensation. Increase Mather furthermore preached a duality of Scripture in its teachings on the Jewish people and the Church that required the separation of the Church

⁵⁸ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith*, Vol. III, p. 127.

⁵⁹ Increase Mather, *A Confession of Faith owned and consented unto by the elders and messengers of the church assembled at Boston in New-England, May 12 168, being the second session of that synod* (Boston, 1680), Preface, p. IV, p. 55.

⁶⁰ Increase Mather, *A dissertation concerning the future conversion of the Jewish nation. Answering the objections of the Reverend and learned Mr. Baxter, Dr. Lightfoot and others. With an enquiry into the first resurrection* (London, 1709), Chapter V, p. 18.

⁶¹ Mason I. Lowrance Jr. and David Walters, ‘Increase Mather’s ‘New Jerusalem’: Millennialism in late Seventeenth-Century New England’, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 87:2 (1978), p. 352.

from the earth before the 'Deluge of Fire'.⁶² This indication demonstrates that a rudimentary form of Rapture theology was in circulation as early as the late seventeenth century.

Both Mede and Mather's early allusions to the Rapture demonstrates that the theology was developing within a dispensationalist and premillennialist framework well before the integration of futurism in England in the 1840s. In particular, Puritan eschatology amalgamated this rudimentary Rapture theology with the concept of the 'covenant of Grace' which taught that through a binding, personal contract between God and the individual, penitent soul, salvation was ensured in 'exchange' for the repentance of one's past sins and an expression in belief in the substitutional atonement of Jesus' earthly death. This covenant of Grace is an extremely important concept in premillennial dispensationalism, and the current dispensation is often characterised as 'the dispensation of Grace', as the only means to salvation in our age is through God's Grace, not by means of 'works' or 'actions'.⁶³ This understanding has been particularly influential on the concept of the 'sinner's prayer' as the central ritualistic moment of 'born again' salvation.

Darbyite Dispensationalism

By far the single most important figure in the development of premillennial dispensationalism is that of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Darby was initially ordained in the Protestant Church of Ireland in 1825. Although he never formally severed his membership with the Church of Ireland, Darby began to distance himself from the Church in

⁶² See: Increase Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation Explained and Applied* (London, 1669), p. 25. Accessed 2 June 2012, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V59375

⁶³ Towns and Ice, 'Dispensations', p. 89.

around 1828, disillusioned with its hierarchal nature.⁶⁴ Darby moved to Plymouth, where he founded the Plymouth Brethren, a group that began with small meetings and Bible study groups, developing into a larger congregation, which met at a chapel in Ebrington Street. Its early members included Benjamin Wills Newton and George Vicesimus Wigram.⁶⁵ During the 1830s, Darby began to develop an interpretation of biblical scriptures which, although it shared much with other contemporary prophetic schemes, created an innovatively cohesive interpretation of biblical prophecy, 'that enhanced its viability and grassroots appeal'.⁶⁶

Darby ascribed to the theory that the history of mankind was divided into several distinct epochs or 'dispensations'. He taught that these dispensations dealt separately with God's plans for Gentiles and for the Jews. In essence, Darby proposed that God had made a covenant with Israel, and when the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah, Christ postponed his return and instead concentrated on the salvation of the Gentiles, and thus the Church was established.⁶⁷ As Paul Boyer as observed, 'this meant that the Christian Church had no prophecies of its own. It occupied a mysterious, prophetic time warp, a 'Great Parenthesis''.⁶⁸ Darby taught that the first dispensation of prophetic activity concluded at the Crucifixion of Jesus, and the current dispensation, the Church Age, began at the feast of Pentecost. The present age or 'Great Parenthesis' would be devoid of fulfilled prophecies until the occurrence of the secret Rapture heralded the beginning of the next dispensation.⁶⁹ As such, the Church exists in this, the final dispensation, as theologically symbolic of God's

⁶⁴ Marion Field, *John Nelson Darby, Prophetic Pioneer* (Godalming, Surrey, 2008), p.48.

⁶⁵ Field, *John Nelson Darby*, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁶ Paul Boyer, 'The Growth of Fundamentalist Apocalyptic in the United States', in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, eds. Bernard McGinn and John J. Collins (London, 2003), p. 535.

⁶⁷ John Nelson Darby, *Notes on the Book of Revelations; To Assist Inquirers In Searching Into That Book* (London, 1839), pp. 7-8. Accessed 30 May 2012, <http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/590284539.pdf>

⁶⁸ Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow Of the Second Coming, American Premillennialism 1875-1925* (Oxford, 1979), p. 20.

⁶⁹ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 88.

absence from earth, and the scriptural 'silence' which covers the era of time between the ascension of Jesus, and the ascension of his 'sealed' at the Rapture.

Darby's conceptualisation of the Rapture was one of the most influential formations of his particular theology. While Darby did not create the concept of the Rapture, it is due to the legacy of his teaching that the Rapture has persevered in its particular form. Clarence Bass has suggested that Darby's idea of the Rapture originated less from Darby's scriptural exegesis than his understanding of the earthly church.⁷⁰ In Darby's view,

'Those who believe in the rapture of the church before the appearing of Christ hold that the church has a special and peculiar character and connection with Christ, in virtue of its being formed into one body by the descent of the Holy Ghost from heaven'.⁷¹

In this way, for redemption to occur, the church must be removed from the earth, and it is this removal process that enables the Tribulation. Bass notes that the Rapture is therefore 'rooted in the principle of interpretation which separates the church from the total redemptive plan of God'.⁷²

The first complete presentation of Darby's interpretation was given in a series of prophecy lectures in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1840.⁷³ The lectures were initially delivered in French, and rapidly translated into Dutch, German and English.⁷⁴ Field notes, however, that although Darby provided a detailed outlined of his observations, he did not systematise his theology, and it was left to later theologians to synthesise Darbyite dispensationalism.⁷⁵ Indeed, one of the consequences of the difficulty which surrounds tracing the direct origin

⁷⁰ Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1960), p. 39.

⁷¹ John Nelson Darby, 'The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of The Jewish Remnants', in *The Collected Writings of J.N. Darby*, ed. William Kelly (34 vols., London, 1956), no.4, v.11, p. 119.

⁷² Bass, *Backgrounds*, p. 40.

⁷³ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 523.

⁷⁴ Field, *John Nelson Darby*, p. 95.

⁷⁵ Field, *John Nelson Darby*, p. 95.

of Rapture theology, is that that the formulation of the dispensationalist Rapture is often attributed to another of Darby's contemporaries, Edward Irving.

Edward Irving (1792 -1834), a contemporary of John Nelson Darby, was a charismatic Scottish preacher within the Catholic Apostolic tradition, whose florid sermons on Bible prophecy enjoyed a brief spell of notoriety in the 1820s, and drew large audiences to his sermons at the Caledonian Chapel in Hatton Garden, London.⁷⁶ An outbreak of tongues was reported in Irving's congregation in Port Glasgow in April of 1830, said to be manifested in fifteen-year old Margaret McDonald and her two brothers. A delegation from London was sent to investigate the claims of these sudden gifts, and were impressed by the movements of the Spirit that they witnessed.⁷⁷ Upon their return from Scotland, Irving and John Cardale, a member of this delegation, began to hold private prayer meetings at which members would be visited by the Spirit, and would also speak in tongues.⁷⁸

These episodes of spontaneous glossolalia continued in Irving's congregations for several months, and Irving's congregation swiftly became disreputable. He was called before the Elders of the Scotch Church who charged him

'[on] the account that "tongues" were allowed to interrupt the services, and what was worse, at least two of those permitted such liberty had been women. Worst of all, services were arranged with time set aside for these dubious interruptions'.⁷⁹

The case was turned over to the London presbytery in May 1832, and Irving was excommunicated for heresy.⁸⁰ As a result, as Ernest Sandeen writes, 'Irving came to the end

⁷⁶ Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism, British & American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago/London, 1970), p. 14.

⁷⁷ See: John Cardale's account of the events in a letter to the editor: John. B. Cardale, *The Morning Watch; or Quarterly Journal on Prophecy, and Theological Review* (London, 1830), vol ii, pp. 869- 873.

⁷⁸ Barbara Waddington, *The Rev. Edward Irving & The Catholic Apostolic Church in Camden and beyond. Occasional Paper No.7 of the Camden Historical Society* (London, 2007), p. 31.

⁷⁹ Waddington, *The Rev. Edward Irving*, p. 33.

⁸⁰ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 87

of his life [...] as an outcast among the millenarian party, his very name transformed into a term of reproach among evangelicals and decent citizens'.⁸¹ The most infamous incident to occur in the Irvingite Church was the highly controversial case of Margaret MacDonald, one of the first affected by 'tongues'. During an ecstatic episode, MacDonald experienced a vision of the future second coming,

'Only those who have the light of God within will see his appearance [...] only those that are alive in him that will be caught up to meet him in the air'.⁸²

The accounts of MacDonald's vision also include reference to the suffering endured by those left behind in a premillennial Rapture, 'It will be for the purging and purifying of the real members of the body of Jesus; but Oh it will be a fiery trial'.⁸³ It is frequently suggested that MacDonald's vision provided the direct inspiration for Darby's Rapture ideology, and these assertions often eclipse any other potential parallel between Irvingite theology and Rapture theology. There is, however, little evidence to support these claims of inspiration. Darby was certainly aware of the episode, writing in 1853 that, 'Two brothers [...] of the name M'D and their sister were the chief persons who spoke [...] in the tongues'.⁸⁴ However, Darby appears unconvinced about the authenticity of their gifts, 'At Pentecost the languages were universally understood by those who spoke them; the Irvingite tongues never by any one'.⁸⁵

Ernest Sandeen has noted that the claim that Darby's Rapture theology was drawn from an Irvingite outbreak of glossolalia was, and remains, an efficient means of discrediting Darby's teachings.⁸⁶ In particular, this claim implies in Darby's theology an emphasis on the charismatic gifts which undermines the scholarship which led to Darby's detailed

⁸¹ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 14.

⁸² Robert Norton and James MacDonald, *Memoirs of James and George Macdonald, of Port-Glasgow* (London, 1840), p. 25.

⁸³ Norton and MacDonald, *Memoirs*, p. 29.

⁸⁴ John Nelson Darby, *The Irrationalism of Infidelity: A Reply to Mr F.N. Newman's "Phases of Faith"* (London, 1853), p. 283.

⁸⁵ Darby, *The Irrationalism of Infidelity*, p. 283.

⁸⁶ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 64.

hermeneutical method. However, many of the accounts which explicitly link Darby's ideology to Irvingite churches, for example, Thomas Croskery's critique of Plymouth Brethren in 1872, draw exclusively on the account of Samuel Prideaux Tregelles.⁸⁷ In his pamphlet, *Hope of Christ's Second Coming* (London, 1886), Tregelles dates the origin of Rapture eschatology to 1832,

'I am not aware that there was any definite teaching that there would be a secret rapture of the Church at a secret coming, until this was given forth as an "utterance" in Mr. Irving's Church'.⁸⁸

However, Tregelles was a friend and associate of Benjamin Wills Newton, who had assumed leadership of the Plymouth Brethren during Darby's tour in Switzerland. Following Darby's return from the continent in 1845, a bitter power struggle had ensued between the two men for the leadership of the Brethren. As such, Tregelles' confident assertions that Darby's hermeneutical inspiration lay in the ecstatic oratory of a teenage visionary should be treated with caution.

When attempting to assess the relationship between Irvingite theology and Rapture theology, therefore, many scholars have dismissed claims of direct inspiration as 'groundless'.⁸⁹ Sandeen comments that, 'neither Irving nor any member of the Albury group advocated any doctrine resembling the secret rapture'.⁹⁰ While Darby was certainly the formulator of a 'secret' dispensationalist Rapture, he was nonetheless an active participant in a premillennialist hermeneutical discourse in which comparable Rapture frameworks had been under discussion since at least 1826.⁹¹ Whether Irving provided a direct influence on Darby is unclear, and Sandeen has suggested the possibility that the doctrine of the

⁸⁷ See: Thomas Croskery 'The Plymouth Brethren', *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* (1872), p. 48.

⁸⁸ Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Hope of Christ's Second Coming, How is Taught in Scripture?* 2nd edn (London, 1886), p. 35.

⁸⁹ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 64.

⁹⁰ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 64

⁹¹ See the transcripts of the Albury Conference: Henry Drummond ed., *Dialogues on Prophecy* (3 vols., London 1828), vol. ii, pp. 26-29.

secret rapture and parenthesis church might have been taught simultaneously by multiple prophetic students.⁹² Any direct relationship between the two scholars is difficult to assert conclusively, particularly as Darby, like many premillennarians who shared his beliefs, continually offered scriptural text as the only source of his ideas.⁹³ As has been seen earlier, LaHaye has defended Darby's method as anchored within the literalist tradition,

'John Darby gained his views primarily from his study of the Word of God, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the influence of emerging premillennial biblical literalists, who were moving from the Historical school of interpreting prophecy to the Futurist position. But even if he didn't, that doesn't change anything. The pre-Trib position is supported by Scripture. Surely that is enough!'⁹⁴

LaHaye's horror at the attribution of the Rapture to Irving discussed earlier, therefore, can be understood in the light of Irving's reputation as 'Spirit-inspired', rather than as a result of the scholarly 'decoding' of Scripture practised by Darby and the inheritors of his prophetic scheme.

The difficulties in assessing the relationship between Darby and Irving's work, does not, however, negate the significance of Irving's simultaneous conceptualisation of a comparable Rapture theology; drawing as he did from Darby's same cultural and hermeneutical discursive climate. The following exploration of Irving's response to the apocalyptic commentary of Manuel de Lacunza, *Venida del Mesias en Glory y Magestad* (The coming of the Lord in Glory and Majesty), will demonstrate not only that Irving clearly conceptualised a form of 'secret Rapture', but that he also championed the teaching of this theology in the hope of providing practical spiritual motivation for his contemporary believers. These ideas were not absorbed without a trace into the narrow confines of Irving's disreputable clique, but were faithfully developed for the benefit of his fellow prophetic students both through

⁹² Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 90.

⁹³ See for example: *Prophetic Times*, 1 (London, 1863), pp. 13-14.

⁹⁴ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 187.

the publication of the translation of *Venida* and through his participation in later prophetic conferences. Indeed, LeRoy Froom has suggested that the teachings of Lacunza exerted a 'profound' influence on the Albury Park conference of 1826, as a direct result of Irving's research on *Venida*.⁹⁵

Whilst living in London during the summer of 1826, Irving produced an English translation of a ponderous⁹⁶ 900-page Spanish prophetic treatise that had been delivered to him in manuscript form. Its author, Manuel de Lacunza (1713-1801). Lacunza had entered the Jesuit order in 1747, and was subsequently expelled from Chile in 1767, moving initially to Cadiz in Spain, before settling in Imola, Italy. Lacunza became a recluse after 1772, immersing himself in prophetic study, concentrating on a re-reading of the work of the Church fathers on the biblical prophecies.⁹⁷ In 1791, he produced *Venida*, a vast and enigmatic apocalyptic commentary. Although there were no printed editions of his treatise before his death, many manuscript copies of the document were in circulation, including translations into Latin and Italian.⁹⁸ The dissemination of his treatise in manuscript form incited interest from the Tribunal of the Inquisition based in Rio de la Plata⁹⁹ before the work was ever published, and while the manuscript was finally published posthumously in 1816, the book was condemned for its millenarianism, and placed on the *Index of Prohibited Books* in 1822.¹⁰⁰

Alfred-Felix Vaucher notes that the 1816 edition of *Venida* printed in London for missionary purposes had passed through England almost unnoticed, and it was not until one of the

⁹⁵ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith*, vol. ii, p. 306

⁹⁶ Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, p.17

⁹⁷ Alfred-Felix Vaucher, *Une célébrité oubliée, Le P. Manuel De Lacunza y Diaz (1731-1801) de la Société de Jésus auteur de "La Venue du Messie en gloire et majestée"* (Haute-Savoie, 1941), p. 30.

⁹⁸ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith*, vol. ii, p. 310.

⁹⁹ Vaucher, *Une célébrité oubliée*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁰ 'Lacunza, Padre Manuel', *The Oxford Companion To Spanish Literature*, ed. Philip Ward (Oxford, 1978), p. 313.

1812 editions of the work produced around Cadiz was delivered to Irving that it began to excite any attention in England.¹⁰¹ The manuscript had been passed to Irving under Lacunza's pseudonym, Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, a converted Jew in exile. Initially believing the manuscript to be a product of messianic Judaism, Irving took an interest in the theological content of the work. Later, on discovering the real identity of the author, Irving, himself a member of the Catholic Apostolic movement, overlooked its Roman Catholic authorship for the sake of Lacunza's inspired prophetic message, 'I was so pleased with the light of Holy Scripture which he cast into my mind in almost every page, that I was in no humour to be angry with the Romish fashion in which some of his opinions were cut'.¹⁰²

Venida is a complex and dense two-volume work. The scope of the treatise is so extensive that it is impossible to discuss the work in any great detail here. Instead, it is more helpful to concentrate on the message that Irving, in his translation, deemed to be of central importance. In the dedication to *Venida*, Irving declares,

'I have thought it my duty to translate the same into the English tongue for your sake, that you may be able to disabuse yourselves of that great error [...] almost universally entertained amongst us, that He is not to come till the end of the millennium'.¹⁰³

Irving's principal interest in *Venida* lies in Lacunza's statements on the imminent nature of the moment of Jesus' return, a topic that Irving discusses with some detail in an impassioned Preface. A close examination of Lacunza's pronouncements on the moment of return demonstrates that they are only somewhat tenuously related to the conclusions that Irving drew from the text. However, Lacunza's commentary on the moment of return evidently appeared to Irving a proof of his own conceptualisation of the moment. Irving

¹⁰¹ Vaucher, *Une célébrité oubliée*, p. 94.

¹⁰² Edward Irving, 'Preliminary Discourse', in Manuel De Lacunza, *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty by Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, A converted Jew. Translated from the Spanish, with a Preliminary Discourse, by the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M* (London, 1827), vol.i., p. 16.

¹⁰³ Irving, 'Dedication', *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.i, p.1.

describes with evident joy 'the wonderful coincidence of the doctrine, which I had taught in ignorance as it was taught by another, with the doctrine contained in this book'.¹⁰⁴

In his Preface, Irving emphasises theology as a 'lived' practice, re-iterating the importance of a theology that can practically help a believer to achieve personal spiritual fulfilment. Irving repeatedly suggests that the main obstacle to spiritual joy and enlightenment for the Christian believer is the fear of death itself.¹⁰⁵ Irving emphasised that if the second coming of Jesus is considered as an ever-imminent possibility, it is able to provide a specific, practical function in cheering both the individual soul, and strengthening the earthly Church,

'You may make the Christian soldier quake, and tremble, and misgive, by presenting him the frequent aspect of bare and ghastly death, but you will never make him cheerful and bold but by preaching to him the victory over death, which is [...] the coming of the Lord'.¹⁰⁶

By 'drawing forward' a personal believer's moment of heavenly consummation from occurring at the end of the millennium, to an imminent moment of 'change', the focal moment of union with the divine is shifted from the gloomy spectre of death to an ever-possible 'translation' into heaven. Irving address his readership,

'I ask you, is the idea of death before your soul continually, darkening the brightness of worldly joys, unmasking worldly pleasures, encouraging you to nobler acts of self-denial, and service in the cause of Christ, comforting you under the oppressions of the world, strengthening you against the might of your spiritual enemies, and recompensing you for your worldly losses; the balm of the wounds of this life [...] Doth the knowledge of your certain death work such a constant and blessed effect upon your life? Doth it? [...] No, it doth not so'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, *Preliminary Discourse*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, *Preliminary Discourse*, part II, p. 48.

¹⁰⁶ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, *Preliminary Discourse*, part II, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, *Preliminary Discourse*, part II, p. 40.

Instead, Irving argues that the principle solace for earthly suffering is the promise of spiritual and bodily resurrection. By delaying the possibility of resurrection to after the millennium, the individual believer is denied the hope of immediate recompense for earthly sufferings,

‘The resurrection being so far postponed [...] therewith is lost the continual use that is made of the resurrection as the special and high reward of them which believe’.¹⁰⁸

In this way, Irving continues, the promise of resurrection provides a ‘use’, in its liberation of a believer from a fear of death.¹⁰⁹

Irving indicates that this ever-imminent moment of translation should instil watchfulness in believers ‘[Christ] is promised to come without sin to those only who look for him’¹¹⁰. It is to the group of those who ‘look’ for the second coming that Irving dedicates his translation, advising that

‘we should be kept in continual watchfulness every hour [...] that we might have ourselves and all our charges ready’.¹¹¹

In advance of the moment of translation, Irving asserts that there are, and will come to pass, signs of the end of days,

‘And what more natural, what more true, what more excellent way of proceeding, than[...]that we should be kept in continual watchfulness every hour, and then mercifully to give us signs, that we might have our selves and all our charges ready?’¹¹²

These signs include the worsening of conditions on the earth preceding Christ’s return,

‘we are filled with active expectation, and have abiding upon our souls an awful impression of the fearful times in which we live [...] we see the gathering of the clouds, and the curling of the waves, and a rebellious mutinous crew, and a fearful shipwreck from which a few, a very few, of the wise and prudent will escape’.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 37.

¹¹⁰ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 44.

¹¹¹ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part I, p. 3.

¹¹² Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 36.

¹¹³ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 36.

In this way, the accumulation of earthly evils, 'the deliberations of councils...the progress of opinions', are to be considered portents, signals that the imminent 'change' is drawing closer, and that these evils are therefore to be welcomed instead of feared.

Irving visualises this ever-imminent moment of 'translation' as the striving point for believers. He describes the moment as that 'which [St Paul] presents every where as the steady pole-star of their hopes, the immediate, diligent, and constant object of their outlook and watchfulness'.¹¹⁴ The 'pole-star' metaphor used here by Irving is telling, as it suggests an entity by which one might navigate, not only a point of reference but one that is static, constant and unchanging, and yet also transcendent and eternally elusive. However, in order for the moment of 'translation' to remain a feasible 'pole-star', Irving emphasises that the believer must expect it to occur within their own lifetime, 'lest they [...] postpone the day of the Lord beyond their lifetime, and so lose the fruitfulness of it'.¹¹⁵ For Irving therefore, the key to securing the strength of the earthly Church is that this moment of change should be expected in an individual's lifetime, so as to eclipse the certainty of death as the locus for eschatological transformation.¹¹⁶

As discussed above, the direct relationship of influence between the work of Irving and Darby is impossible to determine conclusively. Nevertheless, Irving's insight into the function of a form of Rapture theology illuminates the significance that Rapture offered for his contemporary culture, and helps to offer an understanding of why Darbyite Rapture theology gained so much ideological ground, and has prevailed so powerfully. For Edward Irving, the primary role of the moment of 'translation' is its function as spiritual motivation

¹¹⁴ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 36.

¹¹⁵ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 36.

¹¹⁶ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, part II, p. 36.

for the individual believer, as liberation from early suffering is drawn forward from the moment of death to the moment of ascension. In this way, the narrative teleology of an individual life is altered; the focal point of a believer's spiritual journey becomes an ever-imminent possibility. Each moment is therefore arguably saturated with eschatological significance, as it could be the hinge of an ever-imminent escape, without a fear of death. This displacement of eschatological focus for Rapture believers allows for a re-negotiation of the existential certainty of death, it enables a belief in an immortality that becomes an expression of bodily 'translation' rather than earthly death and re-birth into heaven.

Across the Atlantic, another significant contemporary movement that paved the way for the success of the Darbyite interpretative framework was the Millerite movement of the 1830s and 1840s, led by William Miller (1782-1849). From a reading of Daniel 8.14, Miller endorsed a prophecy that predicted the date of the return of Jesus, the salvation of the redeemed, and the destruction of the wicked, as March 21, 1844, and then again on October 22, 1844.¹¹⁷ Boyer suggests that,

'In a democratic and generally well-schooled society proud of its skills of literacy and numerology, Miller's complex and ingenious reading of the biblical texts, the product of his own unaided study, exerted a powerful effect'.¹¹⁸

Indeed, the Millerite movement gained a large following that suffered a powerful blow when the appointed day arrived and the Apocalypse did not materialise. As J.I. Little has noted, the 'great disappointment' of the failed Apocalypse 'marked the end of the Millerite movement as such, but also the start of its institutionalization'.¹¹⁹ The movement fragmented, and later developed into Seventh Day Adventism. As O'Leary has suggested, the collapse of the

¹¹⁷ J.I. Little, 'Millennial Invasion: Millerism in the East Townships of Lower Canada', in *Anglo-American Millennialism, From Milton to the Millerites*, eds. Richard Connors and Andrew Colin Gow (Brill/Leiden/Boston, 2004), p. 192.

¹¹⁸ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 520.

¹¹⁹ Little, 'Millennial Invasion', p. 193.

Millerite movement and the disrepute of its failed hermeneutical method allowed premillennial dispensationalism to clarify its hermeneutical scheme and gain adherents,

‘Responding to the need to disassociate themselves from Miller’s disgraced followers, the new generation of premillennialists produced a theory of prophetic interpretation that excluded any attempts at falsifiable prediction [...] Thus purged of its dangerous error, premillennialism became [...] a mechanism of ethical purification’.¹²⁰

The Darbyite Legacy

Following the delivery of Darby’s theology in Switzerland in the 1840s, Darby conducted seven tours of the United States and Canada between 1859 and 1877, mainly confining his visits to the area between Detroit to Chicago in the Midwest and between Boston and New York on the east coast, where he was invited to witness to congregations and meet with influential preachers.¹²¹ Indeed, between 1862 and his death in 1882, Darby constantly travelled the globe, spreading the message of his interpretations in an absolutely astonishing series of journeys that took him as far as Samoa and New Zealand.¹²² Although Darby concentrated a great deal of his tireless evangelistic intentions upon America and Canada, he often cited frustration with his inability to convince his audiences to join the Plymouth Brethren.¹²³ Darby’s premillennialism taught that the corrupt world was sinking towards its inevitable end, and as a consequence, his followers should practise separation from the world in preparation for the imminent Rapture.¹²⁴ Marion Field writes that ‘[Darby’s] followers did not vote, eschewed ‘worldly pastimes’ and even resigned from positions regarded as ‘worldly’.¹²⁵ It is perhaps not surprising therefore, that American

¹²⁰ O’Leary, *Arguing*, pp. 141.

¹²¹ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 72.

¹²² See: Field, *John Nelson Darby*, pp.151- 168.

¹²³ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 89.

¹²⁴ See: John Nelson Darby, *Letters of J.N.D.* (3 vols., London, 1886) Vol. II, pp. 69-72.

¹²⁵ Field, *John Nelson Darby*, p. 59.

audiences were unwilling to abandon their denominations for the rigours of the Plymouth Brethren. Nevertheless, it was precisely Darby's failure to recruit members of the Plymouth Brethren that allowed his ideologies to become so diversely influential, as Sandeen suggests, 'although Darby thought them inconsistent, many American ministers and laymen accepted his theology without feeling obligated to join his sect'.¹²⁶

Paul Boyer has further suggested that the influence of Darby's premillennial theories in America during this period may be partially attributed to a series of social disruptions that occurred during the 1840s-1860s. These include a rise in Irish Catholic immigration to urban centres, which contributed to Catholic-Protestant tensions, the vacuum left by the failure of the Millerite predictions in 1844, and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.¹²⁷ Frykholm notes that between 1865 and 1900, 13.5 million people immigrated to the United States, a vast proportion of whom were either Jewish or Roman Catholic, which for many Protestant believers contributed to their sense that the country was deeply socially and culturally destabilised.¹²⁸ It is possible to trace Darby's influence in premillennial theology of the late 1800s; as Sandeen has commented, 'Americans raided Darby's treasuries and carried off his teachings as their own'.¹²⁹ For example, the monthly periodical *The Prophetic Times*, first published in 1863, included a list of their core beliefs in the beginning of the original editions. These included a form of Rapture belief,

'That the saints shall rise first, and together with such of the living as shall be accounted [...] be received up in the glorified state[...] only those who are properly awake to these truths and watchful, and waiting, and looking for the Lord's speedy return[...] shall escape the dreadful tribulations'.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 79-80.

¹²⁷ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 524.

¹²⁸ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 19.

¹²⁹ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 102.

¹³⁰ *Prophetic Times*, 1 (1863), pp. 13-14.

Similarly, in the monthly journal *Waymarks in the Wilderness*, a statement by James Inglis acknowledges the influence of Darby in his shared expectation of an imminent return, 'the hope of our calling', whilst simultaneously denouncing the Plymouth Brethren movement.¹³¹

Several prominent millenarians associated with *Waymarks*, including James Inglis, founded a Bible conference that met at Niagara-on-the-Lake annually between 1883 and 1897. The Niagara conference was a seminal moment in the creation of a dispensational theology, and as Sandeen observes, 'virtually everyone of any significance in the history of the American millenarian movement during this period attended the Niagara conference'.¹³² Moreover, as Sandeen notes,

'although not every Niagara participant can automatically be assumed to have accepted the Darbyite views, most of the speakers and leaders of the conference do seem to have accepted the Darbyite view of the second coming'.¹³³

Boyer observes that as a consequence of this conference, leading premillennialists carried Darby's theories back with them, transmitting these ideas to believers in their home states in the Northeast and Midwest.¹³⁴ The tradition of prophecy and Bible conferences such as those at Powerscourt, the American Bible and Prophetic Conference (1878-1914) and Niagara functioned as powerful avenues for the dissemination for Darbyite theology. Indeed, as has been discussed, LaHaye's organisation, the Pre-Tribulation Research centre, was established in order to deliberately mimic the efficacy of these early premillennial prophecy conferences.¹³⁵

¹³¹ James Inglis, *Waymarks in the Wilderness*, 10 (New York, 1872), p. 187.

¹³² Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 134.

¹³³ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 139-140.

¹³⁴ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 525.

¹³⁵ See: 'What the Pre-Trib Research Center is About?', Pre-Trib Research Centre website, accessed 24 February 2013, <http://www.pre-trib.org/about>

One particularly important attendee of the American Bible and Prophetic Conference was the preacher Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899). Moody had been profoundly influenced by Brethren views through the preaching of the English evangelist, Harry Moorhouse. Despite Darby's intense personal misgivings about Moody's beliefs, Moody became a popular evangelist for a generalised form of both dispensationalism and Rapture belief.¹³⁶ Furthermore, Moody established the Moody Bible Institute in 1886, the course catalogue of which included classes in 'dispensational study'.¹³⁷ In 1894, the Moody Bible Institute's publishing arm, and the oldest of the Bible College presses, was established as the 'Bible Institute Colportage Association', known from 1941 as Moody Press. Originally, this in-house publisher was intended to provide literature for the use of the college, but it also produced inexpensive paperbacks, pamphlets and tracts for missionary use.¹³⁸ Moody is singled out for explicit praise in *Rapture, in the Twinkling*,

'Many considered him the greatest evangelist since the apostle Paul and the forerunner of such preaching giants and Billy Graham [...] D.L. Moody's works radiated from the heat, and he was awarded the crowns of Glory, for feeding the flock, Righteousness, for "loving His appearing," and Rejoicing, the soul-winner's crown'.¹³⁹

George Marsden argues that by establishing sympathetic 'footholds' in establishments such as the Moody Bible Institute, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1907), and the Philadelphia College of the Bible (1914), the premillennial dispensational movement attained a greater degree of 'institutional permanence'.¹⁴⁰ These institutional footholds importantly had the result that many future generations of pastors, preachers and students of biblical prophecy were exposed to dispensational theology. Nancy Ammerman suggests that the efforts of Evangelists of this period, particularly Moody, but also Charles G Finney, and Billy Sunday,

¹³⁶ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 525.

¹³⁷ Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Connecticut/ London, 1963), p. 44.

¹³⁸ Jan Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical Literary Culture and Contemporary Society* (Westport, Connecticut, 1997), p. 46.

¹³⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 288.

¹⁴⁰ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, p. 40.

foreshadowed the modern Evangelical franchises that operate today on an almost industrial scale,

‘[Moody, Finney and Sunday] developed the organizational system of revivalism in the direction of business-like structures [...] The kind of systematic, large scale efforts they became was part and parcel of the urban, industrialised world’.¹⁴¹

Paul Boyer asserts that partly as a result of these efforts, ‘by 1900, dispensationalism had become a bedrock doctrine for vast numbers of conservative Protestants’.¹⁴²

Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921), a lawyer, and allegedly, a reformed convict who experienced religious conversion in prison, was another influential figure on the development of premillennial dispensationalist belief, described by Boyer as ‘a towering figure in twentieth-century premillennialism’.¹⁴³ A self-proclaimed ‘Darbyite’, Scofield had been a pastor of Dallas’ First Congressional Church before becoming a faculty member of Dwight L. Moody’s Massachusetts Northfield Bible School in 1895.¹⁴⁴ Scofield produced a Reference Bible, first published by Oxford University Press in 1909 which, according to Boyer, ‘more than any other single work solidified the premillennial movement’.¹⁴⁵ Scofield believed that the Bible should be read as one complete work and that,

‘the varying historical circumstances in which different parts of the Bible were written did not affect the collection’s overall status as one profoundly interconnected book’.¹⁴⁶

Scofield’s Bible ‘skilfully wove through his commentary the Darbyite dispensational scenario’¹⁴⁷ by combining biblical text with his premillennial personal glossary as marginalia and detailed footnotes. Scofield felt that this ‘intertextual’ method of reading the

¹⁴¹ Nancy Ammerman, ‘North American Protestant Fundamentalism’, in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, eds. M.E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, Vol.1 (Chicago, 1991), p. 19.

¹⁴² Boyer, *When Time*, p. 92.

¹⁴³ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁴ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁵ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁶ Joel F. Harrington, ‘Introduction to *The Scofield Reference Bible*’, in *A Cloud of Witnesses, Readings in the History of Western Christianity*, ed. Joel F. Harrington (Boston, 2001), pp. 435-436.

¹⁴⁷ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 98.

Bible drew greater attention to prophetic 'themes' which allowed readers a more accessible way of understanding the messages of Scripture so that 'by a new system of connected topical references, all the greater truths of the divine revelation are so traced through the entire Bible'.¹⁴⁸ Marsden suggests that Scofield's marginalia and commentary greatly altered the way in which the Bible was read,

'for many readers of Scofield's Bible, Darbyite interpretation became indistinguishable from the biblical text; it became part of fundamentalists' assertion of a "common sense" understanding of biblical prophecy'.¹⁴⁹

Scofield's Bible can be seen as representative of a distinctly specialised religious media intended for an Evangelical readership, and is an important step in the development of a canon of prophetic, premillennial dispensationalist media. In 1925, for example, a '*Busy People's Bible Course*' was published. A clear generic precursor to the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, this book was specifically based on the *Scofield Reference Bible*, designed to cover a year's worth of personal Bible study for interested non-professionals studying at home.¹⁵⁰ In 1849, the first *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* was published. In 1855, John Cumming, not himself a dispensationalist, had helped to popularise the term the 'signs of the times', in his work, *The Signs of the Times; or Present, Past and Future*.¹⁵¹

In the years preceding the First World War, dispensational premillennialism continued to attract adherents, alongside other Christian movements that 'espoused variant forms of literalistic interpretations of the apocalyptic scriptures'.¹⁵² These included, among others, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventist Church which had formed as a result of

¹⁴⁸ Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York, 1967), p.iii.

¹⁴⁹ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ See: Rev. Charles H. Morgan, *Busy People's Bible Course, Based on the Scofield Reference Bible* (New York, 1925).

¹⁵¹ John Cumming, *The Signs of the Times; or Present, Past and Future* (Philadelphia, 1855)

¹⁵² Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 529.

the defragmentation of the Millerite Church, as well as the emergence of modern Pentecostalism in Los Angeles in around 1906.¹⁵³ The Churches of God in Christ, the leading denomination of Pentecostalism, shared premillennial dispensationalist concerns with prophecy and the imminent return of Jesus, and functioned as 'major channels for disseminating the fundamentalist apocalyptic message'.¹⁵⁴ Paul Boyer notes that, 'the highly diffuse American Pentecostal movement would spawn more than three hundred separate denominational bodies, all committed to belief in Christ's premillennial return'.¹⁵⁵ Boyer also observes that Pentecostalism proved of particular importance in spreading the influence of literalist apocalypticism in the Southern and Western American states, where premillennial dispensationalism had gained less of a foothold than in the Midwest and in the Northeast.¹⁵⁶

Evangelical literalism suffered considerable opposition in the face of growing recognition and integration of Darwin's evolutionary theories, and the new forms of literary and historical biblical scholarship arising in universities. This inimical environment crystallised the first steps towards development of a specific premillennial prophetic discourse, as 'evangelicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to 'systematize and protect' their beliefs against this 'Modernist' onslaught.¹⁵⁷ This environment contributed to the development and publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth*, a series of 12 paperback manifestoes, which were financed by Lyman Stewart and Milton Stewart between 1910-1915.¹⁵⁸ These books laid out the 'fundamental' tenets of the Protestant faith,

¹⁵³ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 529.

¹⁵⁴ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 530.

¹⁵⁵ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 530.

¹⁵⁶ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 530.

¹⁵⁷ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 530.

¹⁵⁸ Ammerman, 'North American', p. 21.

which included the literal inerrancy of the Bible and the virgin birth of Jesus.¹⁵⁹ These 'Fundamentals' were intended to provide a blueprint for the streamlining of a more 'pure' Protestant faith, and became the central principles for the 'Fundamentalist' movement.

Paul Boyer suggests that the outbreak of World War I in 1914 'represented a high water mark for fundamentalist apocalypticism'.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, to many it appeared as if there was an unprecedented correlation between the events of the modern world and the premillennial model for the 'end of days' which had been predicted by prophecy believers. Weber suggests that 'No event in the fifty years after 1875 did more for the morale of American premillennialists than World War I'.¹⁶¹ During the First World War, publication of prophetic and premillennial pamphlets flourished as the devastation of Europe appeared imminent.¹⁶² The co-current collapse of the Ottoman empire and the Russian Revolutions of 1917, solidified the prophetic interpretation of Russia as the Northern Power of 'Gog' from Ezekiel 38-39, a role which Russia continues to play in *Left Behind* and the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*.¹⁶³ Boyer notes that premillennialism of the years between 1865-1920 did not 'appeal solely to the poor and disaffected; it also found support among the middle classes, the well-to-do, and even the elite'.¹⁶⁴ He cites, as an example, the many prominent supporters of an 1891 premillennialist plea for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, including J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller.

¹⁵⁹ See: *The Fundamentals, A Testimony to the Truth*, eds. A.C. Dixon, L. Meyer and R.A. Torrey (Chicago, 1909), accessed 23 March 2013, http://archive.org/stream/MN40295ucmf_2#page/n5/mode/2up

¹⁶⁰ Boyer, 'The Growth', p. 531.

¹⁶¹ Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, p. 105.

¹⁶² See Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, pp. 105-127.

¹⁶³ See: Mark Hitchcock, 'Gog and Magog', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), , p. 119

¹⁶⁴ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 100.

In the years following World War I, the power of the 'Fundamentalist' lobby on the American politics arena began a slow decline.¹⁶⁵ The 1925 Scopes 'Monkey' Trial in Dayton, Tennessee is often indicated as a significant event in the public withdrawal of the 'Fundamentalist' movement.¹⁶⁶ The Scopes Trial centred around a claimed infringement of Tennessee's 'Butler Act', a state law that outlawed the teaching of evolution in public schools. During the trial, the biblical literalist position, defended by William Jennings Bryan, was publicly ridiculed by the Chicago based attorney, Clarence Darrow. The extremely high-profile nature of the case illuminated a rift that had arisen between the beliefs of the 'Fundamentalist' premillennial movement and that of mainstream American culture. Marsden observes that following the Scopes Trial, 'Fundamentalists' became 'a laughingstock, ideological strangers in their own land'.¹⁶⁷ At the least, the Scopes Trial can be understood as part of a process that widened the ideological gap between Evangelical beliefs and the secular American state. From the mid 1920s, and until its resurgence in the public sphere in the 1970s, the 'Fundamentalist' lobby became a somewhat muted political power in the USA.

However, during this period of political dormancy, the Evangelical and prophecy movement did not remain ideologically static. World War II and the events of the late 1940s and 1950s appeared to offer copious proof of the veracity of the scriptural prophecies, and the 'signs of the times' were detected in abundance. The creation of the Atomic Bomb, and its use on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 stirred an upsurge in predictions of the apocalyptic end prophesied in the book of Revelation,

¹⁶⁵ The World's Christian Fundamentals Association was founded in 1919.

¹⁶⁶N.B. The official name for this trial was, 'The State of Tennessee V. John Thomas Scopes'

¹⁶⁷ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford, 1982), p. 147.

‘Claims that had seemed clearly incredible after the failure of Millerism in 1844 were suddenly entertained again by millions of Americans who were forced to ponder anew [...] the very real possibility of [humanity’s] extinction in a ghastly day of judgement’.¹⁶⁸

In particular, descriptions of the destruction of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39 were explicitly correlated to the consequences of nuclear fallout, and the symptoms of Radiation poisoning. The concern with the apocalyptic potential of nuclear weapons continued into the 1950s and 1960s as the Cuban Missile Crisis exacerbated popular fears of a global nuclear holocaust. During the post World War II period, Cold War rhetoric exerted a clear influence prophecy belief, as contemporary prophesiers established direct comparisons between the Nazi threat of the pre-War period and the Communist spectre of the Cold War. The figures of Nazis, Socialists and Communists became absorbed into prophetic discourse as symbolic, and sometimes literal precursors of the biblical Antichrist.¹⁶⁹

This identification of the ‘enemy’ drew upon a long-standing tradition of interpretation of biblical apocalyptic to aid its newly-politicised cause. The land of Gog, identified in Daniel as ‘the king of the North’¹⁷⁰, had become identified as Russia in the traditional prophetic framework devised in the 1860s. This association had been further strengthened by the revolutions of 1917, and during the Cold War, the link became even more attractive. As Boyer observes:

‘the Gog = Russia theory long antedated the Cold War [...] But as this interpretation evolved after 1945, it took on an intense political coloration and a highly contemporary aura, as popularizers wove current events into their scenarios’.¹⁷¹

Gog’s attack on Israel, and Gog’s subsequent destruction are described in the passages of Ezekiel 38 and 39, ‘When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused,

¹⁶⁸ O’Leary, *Arguing*, pp. 141. See also: Paul Boyer, *By The Bomb’s Early Light, American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ See for example: Cyndy Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (North Carolina, 2003).

¹⁷⁰ Daniel, 11:15.

¹⁷¹ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 159.

declares the Sovereign Lord'. This description was particularly significant to an American Cold-War readership. Gog's apocalyptic ally, Gomer, was identified as Germany, an alliance which became particularly applicable during the Second World War, and following the post-war division of Germany.

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 was one of the most significant events in the development of modern prophetic discourse. For many prophecy believers, the creation of the state of Israel provided an indication that the Jews could return to their homeland and therefore be 'in place' to catalyse the chain of events that would lead to the attack by the forces of Gog, and thus the deliverance of the 'saved'. The premillennial movement, and indeed the wider Evangelical movement of which it is a part- has a paradoxical relationship with the Jewish community. Evangelical support, financial, ideological and spiritual, for the state of Israel is largely related to motives which would hasten the precipitation of the Christian Apocalypse, in which the Jews play a crucial role, in the rebuilding of the Temple, and in mass conversion to belief in Christ.¹⁷² It is telling that LaHaye and Jenkins suggest that 'Israel is just "a breath away" from turning to her Messiah'.¹⁷³

The changes to the American socio-political fabric which occurred during the 1960s, with the 1963 Supreme Court ruling which banned prescribed prayers in public schools, the legalisation of abortion in the Roe vs. Wade case of 1973, and support for the legalisation of homosexuality, were unwelcome developments for many conservative Evangelicals.¹⁷⁴ The social liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s met staunch opposition from the rebirth of politicised Evangelicalism. For example, in 1971, Pat Robertson founded the Christian

¹⁷² See for example: Yaakov Ariel, 'Doomsday in Jerusalem? Christian Messianic Groups and the Rebuilding of the Temple' in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13:1 (2001), pp. 1-14.

¹⁷³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 56.

¹⁷⁴ Ammerman, 'North American', p. 40.

Broadcasting Network, which became a home for the Evangelism of preachers such as Jerry Falwell's 'Old-Time Gospel Hour' and Billy Graham who had formed World Wide Pictures in 1952.¹⁷⁵ Rex Humbard, and later, Oral Roberts, pioneered televised sermons, creating 'Televangelism'.¹⁷⁶

1971 also saw the establishment of Tyndale House publishers, the future home of the *Left Behind* series. Tyndale was established when Ken Taylor, an employee of Moody Press, unsuccessfully attempted to find a publisher for his book *Living Letters*, a paraphrase of St Paul's Epistles. Eventually, Ken and his wife Margaret financed the first 2,000 copies of the book, before a Billy Graham endorsement drove sales up to 20 million copies of the book by 1976.¹⁷⁷ Tyndale House is one of several evangelical family-directed publishers, in 1984, Mark Taylor, one of Ken and Margaret's children, took over the presidency of the company.¹⁷⁸ Tyndale House originally relied on Christian Romance novels as their primary income-earning fictional outlet, as Blodgett observes, 'religious romances were instrumental in launching and sustaining an explosive growth of Christian fiction'.¹⁷⁹ As a representative of Tyndale has acknowledged, the romances were designed to appeal to Christian readers for light entertainment value, without resorting to immoral depictions of sinful behaviour, 'Recognizing the prevalence and danger of the sin of lust in the church today, we [Tyndale House] want to avoid contributing to the problem by titillating our readers'.¹⁸⁰ Thus, Tyndale's first move into fiction publishing was the acquisition of the 'wholesome' and prolific romance novelist, Grace Livingston. Harvest House, a subsidiary of

¹⁷⁵ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 138, and, Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus, Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (Chicago/ London, 2004), p. 180.

¹⁷⁶ R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God, American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York/ Oxford, 1994), p. 247.

¹⁷⁷ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁸ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁹ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 77.

¹⁸⁰ Lynn S. Neal, *Romancing God, Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction* (North Carolina, 2006), p. 82.

Tyndale House, was established in 1974 by Bob Hawkins, Sr., and is still run by Bob Hawkins, Jr. Initially, Harvest House also published historical romantic fiction, before expanding into 'thrillers' and fantasy novels after the success of James Byron Huggins', *A Wolf Story* in 1993.¹⁸¹ Harvest House is the current publisher of several prominent premillennial dispensationalists, including Ed Hindson and Thomas Ice, and it also produces the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*.

In 1970, Hal Lindsey's non-fiction, prophetic blockbuster, *Late Great Planet Earth* was published by Zondervan. This book represented a landmark in the genre of popular prophecy, and was certainly the first 'blockbuster'; it has sold 28 million copies since its first publication, and in 1979 was also developed into a film.¹⁸² In the book, Lindsey guides the reader through a brief history of biblical apocalyptic before proceeding on to a prophetic examination of current events. In his discussion of the 'signs of the times', Lindsey narrates a range of age-old prophetic clichés; Russia is identified as Gog, and Germany is identified as Gomer, and Lindsey issues many stark warnings against the evils of communism.¹⁸³ The book is written in a chatty, conversational style designed to catch the attention of a young, cynical, irreligious person¹⁸⁴: for example, the 'great whore' of Revelation, is described as 'Scarlet O' Harlot'.¹⁸⁵ Lindsey's work is interspersed with glibness and racism; China is described as 'The Yellow Peril'¹⁸⁶ while the Jewish people are said to have 'rejected the Messiah out of indifference [...] They couldn't be bothered. They

¹⁸¹ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 46.

¹⁸² Jennie Chapman, 'Selling Faith without Selling Out: Reading the Left Behind Novels in the Context of Popular Culture,' in John Wallis and Kenneth G. C. Newport, eds., *Apocalyptic Texts and Popular Culture* (London, 2008), p. 163.

¹⁸³ Lindsey, *The Late Great*, p. 160.

¹⁸⁴ O' Leary, *Arguing*, p. 143.

¹⁸⁵ Lindsey, *The Late Great*, p. 23.

¹⁸⁶ Lindsey, *The Late Great*, p. 84.

had a chariot race or a party to attend'.¹⁸⁷ Boyer points out that *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 'contributed nothing new to an already well-established framework of premillennialist nuclear-war interpretation'.¹⁸⁸ It nevertheless pioneered a genre of prophetic interpretation with a cross-over appeal that afforded it staggering commercial success,

'Previously, books on prophecy could be found only in Christian (i.e. evangelical) or Bible bookstores. But *'The Late Great Planet Earth'* began showing up in drugstores, supermarkets, and 'secular' bookstores, right alongside gothic romances, cheap westerns, and books on the latest fads'.¹⁸⁹

The publication of *Late Great Planet Earth* was something of a watermark in the history of popular prophecy, and it set the standard for many decades. Crawford Gribben calculates that that in the decade between 1965 and 1975, the number of American Christian bookshops more than doubled, and that between 1972 and 1977, religious book sales rose by over 112 percent. Gribben also notes that between 1975 and 1979, average sales in American Christian bookshops grew at 16 percent per annum a rate well above the national retail average.¹⁹⁰

In this development, Tim LaHaye is perhaps the most influential, and certainly one of the most publicly visible premillennial dispensationalists worldwide. LaHaye was born in 1926, attended Bob Jones University, and has a doctorate in divinity from Western Theological Seminary and a doctorate in literature from Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.¹⁹¹ LaHaye has been politically active since the mid 1960s, when his despair over the 'secular humanism' he observed creeping into schools led him to establish a Christian High School in the San Diego area.¹⁹² LaHaye founded Family Life Seminars in 1971, with the hope that it could train families to defend themselves from liberalism and secularism by adopting 'biblical

¹⁸⁷ Lindsey, *The Late Great*, p. 31.

¹⁸⁸ Boyer, *When Time*, p. 126.

¹⁸⁹ Weber, *Living In The Shadow*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹⁰ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 90.

¹⁹¹ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 179.

¹⁹² Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 179.

principles for family living as a means of counteracting the harmful influence of humanistic education'.¹⁹³ LaHaye and his wife Beverly also co-founded the group, Concerned Women for America, (CWA) in 1979¹⁹⁴. Beverly continues to be active within the CWA, and to advocate for a restoration of 'the family to its traditional purpose'.¹⁹⁵ LaHaye and Beverly have continued to collaborate on projects, including several books on the establishment of happy marriage, such as *I Love You, But Why Are We So Different?* (Eugene, Oregon, 1991) and, *The Act of Marriage, The Beauty Of Sexual Love* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998). LaHaye officially resigned his work as a pastor in 1981 in order to concentrate on more political endeavours such as the 'Moral Majority', a political lobby group founded together with Jerry Falwell in 1979. The 'Moral Majority' was a pressure group, which, concerned with the moral decay of contemporary society, campaigned for institutionalised school prayers and campaigned against pornography and abortion. The 'Moral Majority' formed support networks with groups such as 'Mormons against the Equal Rights Amendment', which, by 1978 had been widely ratified, and supporting Jewish Zionist groups. Ammerman suggests that in this way the Moral Majority represented 'the symbol of a revitalized, politically potent fundamentalist movement'.¹⁹⁶

LaHaye co-founded the Council for National Policy in 1981, an umbrella lobbying group which included Falwell, Pat Robertson, James C. Dobson and Paul Weyrich.¹⁹⁷ In 1983, he also established the American Coalition for traditional Values, which 'pledged to mobilize "Christian" voters to elect ultra-conservative candidates to public office'¹⁹⁸. LaHaye's 'Pre-

¹⁹³ Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Public Schools* (Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1983), p.10.

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.cwfa.org/history.asp>

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.cwfa.org/content.asp?ID=18226>

¹⁹⁶ Ammerman, 'North American', pp. 43-44.

¹⁹⁷ Rob Boston, 'Left behind: if best-selling end-times author Tim LaHaye has his way, church-state separation will be...', *Church and State*, 55, (2 February 2002), accessed 6 April 2013, <http://vlex.com/vid/left-selling-author-tim-lahaye-separation-54417614>

¹⁹⁸ Boston, 'Left behind'.

Tribulation Research Centre' was founded in conjunction with Thomas Ice in 1992. The PTRC is based in Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia, and endorses a vast array of prophecy research, produced by the scholars and 'prophecy experts' that make up its core members.¹⁹⁹ The PTRC also runs an annual prophecy conference and study group, which functions to bring members of the PTRC together each year in Texas to discuss research on pre-Tribulational Rapture theology, such as, theories on the identity of the Antichrist, or criticism of scholars working within alternate hermeneutical fields.²⁰⁰ A prolific author on the theme of prophecy, LaHaye has produced tens of Bible study and exegetical guides, several of which were later to be collated into the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*.

Two prominent premillennial dispensationalists, and contributing authors of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* worth a brief mention here are the vastly influential Thomas Ice and Ed Hindson. Ice is an Associate Professor of Theology at Liberty University²⁰¹, a university that maintains strong links with LaHaye. In 2006, for example, LaHaye and his wife Beverly donated funds to Liberty University, building an ice-rink and a student union centre.²⁰² Although in the course of my research, I found many references to the establishment of a 'LaHaye School of Prophecy' at Liberty University as a result of a grant in 2006, there appears to be no record that the course ever came to fruition.²⁰³ Ice is the current executive director of the Pre-Tribulational Research Centre, and the co-author of many of the books of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, including *Charting the End Times Prophecy Study Guide*, and *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary*. Ed Hindson is the president of World

¹⁹⁹ See for example: 'Articles by Author', Pre-Trib Research Center, accessed 7 February 2013, <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles>

²⁰⁰ I attended the 19th Annual Pre-Trib Study Group Conference in Irving, Texas in 2010.

²⁰¹ 'Thomas D. Ice', Liberty University, accessed 2 August 2012, <http://www.liberty.edu/academics/religion/?PID=12360> (Accessed 2 August 2012)

²⁰² 'LaHaye Ice Center', Liberty University, accessed 9 July 2012, <http://www.liberty.edu/icecenter/?PID=17132>

²⁰³ See, for example: 'The Who's Who of Prophecy', Rapture Ready, accessed 9 July 2012, http://www.raptureready.com/who/Tim_LaHaye.html

Prophetic Ministry, and was co-editor of LaHaye's *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* and the *Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary*.²⁰⁴

LaHaye purportedly conceived of the idea for the *Left Behind* series on an airplane, while watching a pilot flirting with a flight attendant, and later approached Jerry Jenkins for his partnership in the authoring of the novels.²⁰⁵ Jenkins holds honorary doctorates from Bethel College, Trinity International University, Colorado Christian University, Huntington University and Tennessee Temple University.²⁰⁶ Jenkins is the author of 180 books, many of them ghost-written autobiographical works for sports celebrities such as Hank Aaron²⁰⁷. Jenkins also produced Billy Graham's autobiography, *Just As I Am* (New York, 1997). The *Left Behind* website notes that

'twenty of his books have reached the *New York Times* best-seller list (seven in the number-one spot) and have also appeared on the *USA Today*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Wall Street Journal* best-seller lists'.²⁰⁸

Initially, Jenkins was reluctant to join the *Left Behind* project, "On the way to meet him," Jenkins recalls, "I was thinking, 'I don't know if I want to do this'".²⁰⁹ Frykholm suggests that, 'Jenkins is less invested than LaHaye in the meanings of traditional dispensationalism and is more moderate in his approach'.²¹⁰ During the creative process of *Left Behind*, Jenkins was given artistic license to 'flesh out' the scenarios provided by LaHaye's outlines of the books and biblically-inspired chronologies.²¹¹ Jenkins is currently the chairman of the board of

²⁰⁴'The Who's Who of Prophecy', Rapture Ready, accessed 9 July 2012, http://www.raptureready.com/who/Ed_Hindson.html

²⁰⁵ Craig Unger, 'American Rapture', *Vanity Fair*, 1 December 2005, accessed 13 April 2013, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2005/12/rapture200512#>

²⁰⁶ 'About', Jerry B. Jenkins, accessed 11 July 2012, <http://jerry-jenkins.com/about/>

²⁰⁷ 'About', Jerry B. Jenkins, accessed 11 July 2012, <http://jerry-jenkins.com/about/>

²⁰⁸ 'Jerry B. Jenkins bio', *Left Behind*, accessed 4 June 2013, http://www.leftbehind.com/03_authors_testimonials/bio_jenkins.asp

²⁰⁹ Gates, Jefferson and Underwood, 'The Pop Prophets', p. 50.

²¹⁰ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 30.

²¹¹ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 137.

trustees for the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago²¹², and in addition to *Left Behind*, Jenkins has produced another series of fiction novels, *Soon*, in 2003.²¹³ Jenkins and LaHaye published the first novel of the *Left Behind* series in 1995.

In conclusion, it has been possible to distinguish the varied different theological strands that have contributed to the development of the modern premillennial dispensationalist movement, and which have found expression in particular political and pedagogical traditions. In particular, the contemporary movement owes the foundation of its hermeneutical scheme to the fusion of futurist, premillennialist and dispensational theologies characterised by the dispensationalism of John Nelson Darby. This framework has been blended with a specific rhetoric of prophetic interpretation. Initially, this drew many of its signifiers from a revitalised nineteenth-century interest in prophecy, and in particular, through the many prophecy conferences which sought to establish a solidified discourse. Prophecy belief, has, however, continued to adapt to the changing socio-political climate, and continues to draw a series of constantly updated signifiers into its vocabulary of apocalyptic decline. Following the challenges to the 'Fundamentalist' hermeneutic following World War I, the premillennial dispensationalist scheme began to be channelled into particular pedagogical and literary institutions, a manoeuvre which was understood as both a defensive retreat from the 'modernist onslaught', and a base for wider Evangelical offensive against an apostate world. This channelling into specific universities, seminaries, political lobby groups, and publishers served to further concentrate and streamline premillennial dispensationalist discourse. The following two chapters will concentrate on

²¹² 'About', Jerry B. Jenkins, accessed 11 July 2012, <http://jerry-jenkins.com/about/>

²¹³ For an excellent extended analysis of *Soon*, see: Chapter 7: 'Prophecy Fiction Since *Left Behind*' in: Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, pp. 146-166.

an analysis of the way in which this discursive streamlining is performed in premillennial dispensationalist popular media.

Chapter Three

The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*

‘Study the prophecies. Study the prophecies’.¹

What is Prophecy?

As discussed, it has been difficult to source a definition of prophecy that adequately addresses the way in which premillennial dispensationalism regards prophecy. Modern prophecy belief has remained a relatively unexplored area of research, and to date, there has been no scholarly analysis of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* whatsoever. Rather, contemporary prophetic belief is often relegated to

‘the happy-hunting-ground of fundamentalist Christian sects [...which] has had a peculiar fascination for cranks and charlatans, with their charts of aeons and dispensations into which history is believed to be divided as a prelude to ‘the End’, who speak excitedly of ‘the Rapture’.²

Paul Boyer, in *When Time Shall Be No More*, has suggested that the widespread scholarly reluctance to address modern prophecy belief may have something to do with the fact that prophecy is frankly, a bit odd. He asks, ‘was my study akin to devoting years of research and hundreds of pages of scholarly prose to the supermarket tabloids whose headlines endlessly scream of UFOs?’³ Prophecy belief is often caricatured as the bizarre and marginal recourse of slack-jawed illiterati spying portents of Elvis Presley in their French toast. Not only is this a grave underestimation of the importance of prophetic discourse as a belief system; this type of ridicule of ‘cranks and charlatans’ undermines the precise methods by which these ‘charts of aeons and dispensations’ are drawn up. My examination will focus on

¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 162.

² D.S. Russell, *Divine Disclosure, An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic* (London, 1992), p. xiii.

³ Boyer, *When Time*, p. x.

the ways in which premillennial dispensationalism defines and addresses prophecy, and allow the texts themselves to offer the definition of the borders of its own discourse.

Premillennial dispensationalism offers several overlapping definitions of prophecy. In the very simplest terms, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook* declares the study of prophecy to be ‘what the Bible says about the future’.⁴ The process of divining ‘what the Bible says about the future’ is linked to a tradition associated with the Old Testament prophets,

‘The revelation of God to the prophet is a process by which God reveals his secrets to the prophet (Amos 3:7). The term “reveal” (Hebrew, *galah*) means to “uncover,” as in “uncovering the ear” (I Samuel 9:15). Thus, when God “uncovers” the prophet’s ear, He reveals what has been previously hidden [...] It is obvious, therefore, that the Spirit of God is necessary for prophetic interpretation. Thus, it was by the Spirit that the Word of the Lord was communicated to the prophet and by the Spirit that the Word was mediated to the people’.⁵

This definition of the process of revelation of prophecy is presented in this extract as a sort of ‘apocalypse’ of its own. It is defined here not as a system of divination of omens and portents that characterizes so much of popular prophecy, but as a process of ‘unveiling’ that which has been hidden, through communication with God through the Holy Spirit.

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⁴ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 6.

⁵ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, pp. 8-9.

⁶ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 6.

Lord was communicated to the prophet and by the Spirit that the Word was mediated to the people'.⁷

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LaHaye emphasises the significance of the Word of God in the process of mediation of divine truth about the future. As such, the student of the Word, through the mediation of the Spirit, forms part of the chain of revelation of the prophetic declaration of God. As with the definition of apocalyptic offered by Rowland and Kovacs, the process of understanding prophecy is here reflected as a form of 'decoding', where the student, in their role as the decoder, plays an essential role in the expression of the Spirit. The above definition should be considered carefully, however. Although the Spirit plays a crucial mediatory role in the understanding of the Word, according to the dispensationalist hermeneutic, the Spirit does not have authority over the text. The way in which spiritual inspiration and the authority of the text are balanced within the dispensationalist hermeneutic will be discussed in the next sub-section. In *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, Ed Hindson writes that 'the full picture of prophecy [...] is that it encompasses both a forthtelling of God's messages and a foretelling of God's actions'.⁸ Hindson depicts prophecy as predictive of God's will as it shall be enacted, and a declaration of the 'messages' of God. The prophet, in this understanding, is both a mouthpiece and a herald. Hindson argues for prophecy as an unbroken chain of revelation that continues from the Old Testament, to the present day. This allows the

⁷ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, pp. 8-9.

⁸ Hindson, 'Prophets', p. 305.

current generation of prophetic students to assume the two-fold role of the prophet as defined above,

‘Prophecy has its roots in history, but it also extends into the future. In other words, the nature of predictive prophecy arises out of the prophet’s historical context as the revelation of God points him toward the future as well as the present. Thus, the prophets speak both to their own generation and to future generations as preachers and predictors’.⁹

This understanding of prophecy can be contextualized against the dispensationalist account of human history. As discussed in Chapter One, dispensationalism views earthly history as divided into separate eras, which represent stages in the continual process of revelation of God’s will,

‘God’s plan includes different dispensations, ages, or epochs of history through which He tests His creatures (people and angels) God is instructing His creatures through history as His creation progresses from the Garden of Eden to the heavenly city’.¹⁰

Charles Ryrie writes that dispensationalists should view the earth as a household, where

‘God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the process of time’.¹¹

Similarly, Elmer Towns and Thomas Ice define the concept of a dispensation as characterized by a ‘progressive revelation of God’s plan for history’.¹² In the dispensationalist framework of human history, only pre-determined prophetic signifiers can be ‘revealed’ during each dispensation, forming a grand meta-narrative of salvation that reaches completion at the end of time.

The definitions above have indicated the following. Firstly, that premillennial dispensationalism views both direct prophetic inspiration from God, and the process of

⁹ Hindson, ‘Prophets’, p. 305.

¹⁰ Towns and Ice, ‘Dispensationalism’, p. 82.

¹¹ Quoted in: Towns and Ice, ‘Dispensationalism’, p. 82.

¹² Towns and Ice, ‘Dispensationalism’, p. 84.

understanding prophecy, as revelatory. Furthermore, this revelation to man has been mediated through the Word by the Holy Spirit. Thus, by studying the Word of God, as written in the Bible, one can achieve understanding of the prophetic message, as well as participating in the process of the interpretation of God's plan for mankind. This endeavour is framed within the fulfilment of specific prophetic signifiers within each earthly dispensation. As such, although no prophecy may be fulfilled within the current dispensation, participation in the interpretation of prophecy can still persist, as it is a continual process of revelation that leads from the past into the future. These observations lead to two further questions. Firstly, since no prophecy will be fulfilled within this dispensation, it is possible to wonder: what is the purpose of interpreting prophecy? Secondly, once a reader has decided to study prophecy, the question remains as to how a curious individual should approach the reading of prophecy, so as to share in the interpretation of God's will.

Why Study Prophecy?

Given that dispensationalism effectively denies the fulfilment of prophecy until the occurrence of the Rapture, it is easy to wonder what the purpose of studying prophecy may be for its readers. Prophecy has been described as 'what the Bible says about the future'.¹³ Thus, on the simplest level, its function can be described in these terms: 'Bible prophecy helps us to better understand the future'.¹⁴ However, given that the intended audience of the prophetic media examined here are already Rapture believers, a negligible amount of Bible prophecy may actually apply to their futures; they will have already been 'translated' into heaven at the beginning of the next dispensation. What, therefore, is the point of

¹³ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 6.

¹⁴ LaHaye, *Charting the End Times*, p. 17.

learning about a future in which a reader will not share? The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* emphasizes various benefits that a reader will enjoy as a result of the study of prophecy. One of the most important benefits of prophetic study is presented as its power to motivate the spiritual life of the individual believer,

‘One minister wrote to say that he felt convicted for never having preached a sermon on the second coming of our Lord. He said, “I have now dedicated myself to God and to study and preach more prophecy.” If he does, his church will come to life, his attendance will pick up, and his church will be more spiritually vitalized. There is no more challenging and motivating subject in the Bible than the study of prophecy’.¹⁵

LaHaye also emphasises the personal benefits of prophetic teaching as a comforting assurance while believers await the Rapture, ‘*Prophecy offers confident hope in a hopeless age*’.¹⁶ Moreover, the eschatological future of prophecy is represented on a more individual scale as a means of relieving anxiety over one’s personal future,

‘The God who is totally sovereign over the future is the same God who cares about you and knows your personal future. Is there anything in your future that you are worried about? Give your concerns to Him in prayer... right now. Why hold your problems in your hands when you can place them in His hands?’¹⁷

Prophecy foretells a terrifying earthly future for those who have not prayed the sinner’s prayer and been ‘born again’,

‘This world only *thinks* it has seen tribulation. The day is coming when the worst traumas in history will be eclipsed by a seven-year period that will be far more terrifying than anything man can imagine’.¹⁸

However, for believers in premillennial dispensationalism, prophecy is represented as a foil for current anxiety and distress,

‘The purpose of Bible prophecy is not to frighten us, but to assure us that God is in control. In times of human uncertainty, we can rest assured that we have “a sure word of prophecy” that shines like a beacon of light into the darkness of our times’.¹⁹

¹⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 6.

¹⁶ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 20. Original italics.

¹⁷ LaHaye, *Charting the End Times*, p. 68.

¹⁸ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 57.

¹⁹ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 5-6.

It is telling that prophecy provides relief from the anxieties of ‘our times’, and not just times to come. Despite the traditional understanding of prophecy as unrelated to the time of the Gentiles, LaHaye nonetheless represents it as a means of self-understanding which situates the present in a pre-ordained historical narrative, and locates current anxieties within a progressive, diachronic understanding of Christianity.

The imminence of the Rapture is highlighted as the most important prophetic event for encouraging Christians in their times of personal struggle: ‘Remember: Rapture teaching was given to those who comfort those who mourn!’²⁰ Imminent Rapture belief is represented as a comforting and ever-possible means of escape for those who are experiencing difficulties in their earthly life:

‘Are you weary from living in this world filled with injustice, pain, and sorrow? Do you tire of struggling with temptation, dealing with difficult people, and enduring society’s incessant assaults on that which is godly or biblical? Have you experienced moments when you wish Jesus would hasten His return and make all things right?’²¹

For those who are eagerly waiting for Jesus’ return to correct the ills of the contemporary world, prophecy ‘proves’ the imminence of the Rapture through a systematic reading of portents in those very ills themselves, as will be explored further in the following sub-chapters.

Another important function of the study of prophecy is that it is presented as a means of defending a believer from the dangerous temptations of heresy,

“This is not the time in history to avoid “the study of future things.” If we avoid teaching Christians the basics about prophecy, they will be “tossed to and fro” (Ephesians 4:14) by false teachers who come to them with cunningly devised fables and interpretations that will deceive them [...] Christians need to know *more* about prophecy, not less, so that they

²⁰ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 137.

²¹ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 88.

can be armed with the truth and defend themselves against erroneous teachings'.²²

This depiction of premillennial dispensationalism as a lone beacon of truth bobbing in a sea of heresy strengthens the discursive importance of a 'correct' interpretation of prophecy. The function of reading prophecy in this intimation is that it reassures a reader that they have adopted the only true interpretation of prophecy, one that they must defend against the false doctrines of their end-times environment, '*A proper understanding of prophecy arms the believer against cults and false prophets*'.²³

Finally, the most important reason given for the study of prophecy is that it holds the key to understanding the Christian faith itself, '*Prophecy reveals our Lord as He really is*'.²⁴ LaHaye writes that 'within the Bible we have a whole body of truth that testifies to the divine authorship of Scripture, and that body of truth is *fulfilled prophecy*'.²⁵ As such, it is the fulfilment of prophecy that verifies the promises of the Christian faith:

'The New Testament based its entire apologetic on the fact that Jesus was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament, and that these predictions were conclusively filled in Jesus' life. The New Testament recognizes the value of using predictive prophecy and its fulfilment as apologetical evidence to prove the supernaturalness and credibility of Christianity'.²⁶

Christianity therefore, is legitimized by the historical consummation of its own prophetic content. It is by the past of prophetic that the future of prophetic can be known.

'While there is every reason to believe in the trustworthiness of the Bible's prophecies about the future, they can be accepted only by faith until the time of their fulfilment. And our faith in these prophecies is not based on some misplaced, pious hope. Rather it is based on the literal fulfilment of prophecies from the past. This alone gives us great confidence that the prophecies not yet fulfilled will indeed come to pass'.²⁷

²² LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, pp. 11-12.

²³ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 17. Original italics.

²⁴ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 17. Original italics.

²⁵ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 16. Original italics.

²⁶ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 9.

²⁷ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 12.

LaHaye attaches the veracity of the entire Christian revelation on the prophecy of Christ's return,

'If Jesus Christ does not return physically and literally to this earth to set up His kingdom, Christianity will turn out to be the greatest hoax in history. His return is so intimately tied to the most central of doctrines of the Bible and the church that the validity of Christianity totally depends upon it'.²⁸

How Should Prophecy be Read?

As has been shown, prophecy forms a central means of understanding the present, the future and even provides the framework through which the Christian faith is legitimized. Given the centrality of prophecy in premillennial dispensationalism, particular significance is given to the way in which it should be read. As has been discussed, the interpretation of prophecy is regarded as a two-fold, continually revelatory process. This process, however, is by no means understood as a direct communicative channel between God and the individual, or indeed, between the Holy Spirit and the individual. The way in which the meaning of prophecy is revealed to a reader of the Bible is instead, strictly regulated by those who shape the exegesis of the believing community. In other words, although the meaning of the prophetic Word is continually being revealed by the Holy Spirit, the 'unveiling' of these meanings is provided by those at the centre of prophetic discourse. The Bible study and prophecy guides that comprise *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* issue many cautions to those who might attempt exegesis outside of the 'certified' channels of premillennial dispensationalist interpretation, 'we must guard against the great temptation

²⁸ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 87.

to read prophecy through the eyes of the present'.²⁹ As the literal inerrancy of the Bible remains one of the underpinning tenets of premillennial dispensationalism, no diffuse interpretation of God's will can be admitted. Indeed, one of the cornerstones of the premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic is the concept of 'single meaning'.

In *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, Robert Thomas writes that 'single meaning' ensures that 'there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study'.³⁰ This comment is exceedingly important, and highly representative of wider premillennial dispensationalist exegesis. The 'single meaning' of Scripture as understood by its readers is by no means a coincidental consensus. Rather, those at the centre of prophetic discourse; Paul Boyer's inner circle of prophecy believers, provide the academic 'careful study' that provides those meanings. Furthermore, a centralized set of 'rules' for reading Scripture, including prophecy, ensure that 'single meanings' of passages are as cohesive as possible. These readings are streamlined through rules, guidelines, and academically structured ontologies of meaning that are channelled to readers through media such as *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*. As such, prophecy, as a discourse, operates by drawing from a historical canon of specific interpretations of biblical Scripture that are then maintained by an academic circle of authoritative figureheads, such as the contributors to the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*.

Thomas continues to extol the virtues of the 'single meaning' as a hermeneutical principle as it

²⁹ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Study Workbook*, p. 15.

³⁰ Robert Thomas, 'Hermeneutics', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 140.

‘safeguards against deconstructionism and post-modernism [which] allow for multiple interpretations of a single passage’.³¹

The hermeneutics of ‘single reading’ establishes the prophetic discourse against its inimical boundaries. The process of reading itself is juxtaposed against its abjective threat; the diffuse interpretation of meaning. Such a multiplicity of meaning acts as a corrosive on the authority of the Word, and I would suggest, also on the authority of the discursive structures that uphold these ‘single meanings’. Therefore, the basic hermeneutical principle of premillennial dispensationalism is offered as the ‘grammatical-historical, or literal interpretation’.³² This approach “‘freezes” the meaning of a text’³³ and, it is claimed, ‘does not import new ideas into the text of Scripture’.³⁴

Multiplicity of meaning is thus considered dangerous because it can act as a destabilizing force on the historical constancy of the Word, as well as on the authority of prophetic discourse. Furthermore, multiple meanings could allow fissures to develop in the understanding and teaching of the ‘single meaning’, leaving premillennial dispensationalism vulnerable to corrupting forces within Church,

‘It is impossible to expect Christ to come at any time and still accept literally the 31 events expected to take place during the Tribulation [...] One way out of that dilemma is to spiritualize or allegorize the book of Revelation, thus reducing the significance of its judgments. But this is a very dangerous position, for historically, when one passage of Scripture is spiritualized, then others end up being spiritualized, making it easy to introduce falsehoods and even heresy into the church’.³⁵

Here too, deviation from ‘single meaning’ and ‘grammatical-historical’ exegesis is set within a paranoid landscape of constant threat, but this time the threat is from within. In order to safeguard the boundaries of prophetic discourse, as well as its internal purity, the meaning

³¹ Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, p. 140.

³² Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, p. 138.

³³ Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, p. 140.

³⁴ Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, p. 140.

³⁵ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 126.

of prophecy must be contained to a unified literal interpretation and to 'find a sense fuller than the grammatical-historical meaning of a passage clearly enters the realm of allegorical interpretation'.³⁶

Across premillennial dispensationalist media, the dangers of allegorical interpretation are categorized under the umbrella term of 'spiritualizing', or 'spiritualizing away' the meaning of the Word; which essentially equates to a symbolic, or non-literal reading of biblical text where a literal reading is possible,

'Anyone can understand the major events of Bible prophecy if they spend a little time comparing Scripture with Scripture and if they avoid the temptation to spiritualize anything that at first seems complex'.³⁷

If the book of Revelation, for example, were to be read allegorically, it could result in an amillennialist, or post-millennialist view of end-times. Similarly, if the prophetic passages of the Bible are 'spiritualized' or not read literally when an otherwise literal hermeneutic is employed, premillennial dispensationalism could potentially embrace a mid-Tribulation Rapture. The theological difficulties of a mid-Tribulation Rapture will be examined in further detail later, but it would essentially disturb the self-understanding of premillennial dispensationalist Christians as 'not appointed to wrath' during the Tribulation,

'As a general rule, those who believe the pre-Tribulation rapture accept the tribulation teachings in Revelation, 2 Thessalonians, Matthew 24, and Daniel 9 more literally than do mid- and post-Tribbers, who tend to spiritualize prophecy teachings even though they do not spiritualize other scriptures. This could be the Achilles' heel of their whole system'.³⁸

Another common 'incorrect' way of reading Scripture is categorized as reading 'laterally' into Scripture that which readers wish to see. This form of reading is problematic because it

³⁶ Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, p. 140.

³⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 5.

³⁸ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 59.

seeks over-energetically to correlate teachings of prophecy with events in the contemporary world,

‘we must guard against the great temptation to read prophecy through the eyes of the present [...] Unfortunately, unguarded speculation has often prevailed as the most popular approach to biblical prophecy. Some of the wildest possible scenarios have received the most incredible popular support’.³⁹

This form of ‘newspaper exegesis’ violates one of the basic principles of premillennial dispensationalist prophecy belief. Namely, that no prophetic fulfilment is possible during this dispensation, instead there are only ‘signs of the times’. As such, direct correlation between prophetic text and incorrect identification of their ‘real-world’ signifiers is regarded as a dangerous and often fruitless endeavour. *How To Study the Bible For Yourself* provides readers with five rules of hermeneutics that prevent against ‘unguarded speculation’. These rules are not intended to be exhaustive but rather are explained as ‘the ones you are most likely to confront’.⁴⁰

- ‘1. Take The Bible Literally
2. Keep it in context
3. Watch for idioms
4. Be alert to the figurative use of language
5. Treat Parables differently’⁴¹

In these five rules, we see a preoccupation with identifying linguistic structures in the Bible. Readers are cautioned that while they must always take the Bible literally, they must also use a ‘common sense’ approach to detect where simile, metaphor, and idiomatic expressions are being used. A particular concern of this thesis is that this ‘common sense’ approach to prophecy is provided by those at the centre of prophetic discourse. For example, whilst readers are exhorted to ‘always take the Bible literally’, they are also

³⁹LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 137.

⁴¹ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, pp. 133- 134.

advised to 'Treat Parables differently'. In this way, the literal hermeneutic is applicable to every biblical genre apart from parables. This sort of 'common sense' approach is created and contained within pedagogical media such as the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*. Arguably, therefore, one of the central functions of guides such as the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* is to shape the 'common sense' that dictates how prophetic material is to be understood by its adherents.

Function of the Guides: Creating a 'Common Sense' Approach

The primary function of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is to guide believers through a specifically premillennial dispensational interpretation of biblical prophecy. Although the guides vary in format, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, for example, is formatted in such a way that readers are led through a step-by-step exegesis of prophetic passages. In *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, and *Charting The End Times Study Guide* the key 'events' of the end-times are arranged thematically, and in a rough chronological order, from the Rapture to the Great White Throne Judgment. Other eschatological events in this timeline include the rise of the Antichrist, the Tribulation, and the Glorious Appearing. In each chapter, the thematic end-time event is outlined using appropriate prophetic passages, which are then explained.

In *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, for example, the chapters are concluded by a summary 'Lesson', where readers are asked guide questions to assess their understanding of the exegesis of the preceding chapter. For example:

‘On pages 50-51 are 11 different titles the Bible uses to speak of the Antichrist. With reference to these titles, what are some general conclusions you can make about the character of this person?’⁴²

Upon turning to pages 50-51, we can see that there is indeed a list of biblical verses with titles for the Antichrist. What is interesting about this kind of ‘guided’ study; is that according to the ‘single meaning’ hermeneutic, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook* offers no justification as to why these titles signify the Antichrist. Instead, the list is presented below the statement,

‘The person we commonly refer to as the Antichrist is known by several names and titles throughout the Bible’.⁴³

Thus a ‘single meaning’ has been given to the 11 different titles, without explanation or consideration of alternative interpretation.

Readers are then encouraged to write their ‘guided’ interpretations into the books, with prompt questions and blank spaces provided for the answers. Through the use of these question and blank answer spaces, the guides give the impression that the reader’s process of developing a hermeneutical understanding of prophecy is objective and personal. Although the template is provided for reader, the impression is left that it is an individual act of study and engagement that provides a divinely inspired interpretation.

‘The purpose of this book is to help you analyze the prophetic passages of the New Testament (and those from the Old Testament that have a bearing on them) in such a way that you can come to your own conclusions. Scripture texts will be given with space available for you to write your understanding of the passages. Questions will be asked to help you reach your own conclusions. In this way, God can speak to you directly on the subject’.⁴⁴

This again elevates the individual interpretation to the same status of authority as the scriptural commentary. It provides the illusion of a self-determined interpretation of

⁴² LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 58. Lesson 6, question 1.

⁴³ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 13.

prophecy whilst maintaining the structure of dispensational premillennialist exegesis. Thus, we can see in action the ripples of effect in Boyer's concentric circles of believers, as prophecy guides such as the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* demonstrate the way in which those in the central circle of prophecy discourse communicate with, and maintain, the boundaries of their outer circles of believers.

A second process by which readers are guided through Scripture relies on the way in which prophecy is narrated. Throughout the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, readers are continually warned that they are now living in the end-times. This, according to prophecy, is an undoubtedly frightening and unstable period, and the way in which the end-times are narrated is through constant recourse to their instability and their turbulence. As will be argued below, the guides are largely reliant on a tone of anxiety in order to recount both the current conditions on the earth, and the events that are yet to come. While reading the books of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, it becomes clear that the content of the books are almost entirely informed by anxiety. This is expressed through the modes of horror and of paranoia. The examination that follows will consider the various ways in which anxiety is used to create this 'common sense' approach to Scripture, by communicating the hermeneutical framework of premillennial dispensational prophecy belief to readers through the prophecy and Bible study guides.

Horror in Prophecy

In the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, horror plays a central role in the narration of prophetic discourse. While it is recognised that prophecy can act as a consolation for personal suffering, 'Remember: Rapture teaching was given to those who comfort those who

mourn!’⁴⁵, the books of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* focus less on the temporal struggles of the individual, and instead concentrate on grand narratives of eschatological horror. Within the prophetic media, horror, anxiety and fear are understood as a medium through which God’s salvation and judgment is simultaneously enacted,

‘We believe with all our hearts that the Tribulation judgments of God serve a dual purpose: to punish hardened sinners *and* to move others to repentance and faith’.⁴⁶

Horror, in the prophecy media, has a theological function in accordance with the dispensationalist understanding of the division of earthly time. Horror signifies the countdown to the Rapture, which is the earthly Church’s prophetic destiny, and horror characterizes the final dispensation in order to fulfil the prophetic destiny of Israel,

‘One of God’s primary purposes for the Tribulation is to break the stubborn hearts of His covenant people. The horrors of the Tribulation and the testimony of a host of faithful witness will spark a spiritual awakening in Israel’.⁴⁷

As such, the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* concentrates on the ways in which the prophetic passages of the Bible articulate the horror of the degenerating conditions of the ‘latter days’ preceding the Rapture, and the subsequent horror of the seven-year period of Tribulation.

According to a premillennialist hermeneutic, conditions on earth are prophesied to worsen as time gradually slides towards the occurrence of the Rapture. As discussed, while there can be no strict fulfilment of prophecy until the Rapture occurs, it is possible to detect indications that the ‘Gentile’ or ‘Church Age’ is drawing to a close. In *Are We Living in the End Times*, LaHaye and Jenkins cite a range of ‘signs’ or indications that conditions on earth are worsening.⁴⁸ Significant among these are historical events such as World War I, or the Holocaust. Catastrophic natural disasters are also given as indications of the approaching

⁴⁵ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 137.

⁴⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 156. Original italics.

⁴⁷ W.H. Marty, ‘World Empire’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 406. See also: Thomas Ice, ‘Church Age’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 54.

⁴⁸ See: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, pp. 325- 354.

end times, 'Earthquakes have always been God's way of getting man's attention'.⁴⁹ The horror of social degradation, and civic violence in particular, is also emphasized as a signal that we are living in the last season of the earth,

'The current violent crime rate-almost twenty five thousand murders each year in America- is making this once-Christian nation the murder capital of the world [...] The rise in drive-by shootings, rapes, muggings, and murders are horrible enough. But the greatest evidence that Tribulation-like living has already gripped our society is the government's attitude toward murdering the most innocent and weakest among us, the unborn'.⁵⁰

It is important to note at this point that while there is often a clear attribution of end-times horror to a 'secular' world of violent crime and moral decrepitude, it is not entirely appropriate to draw a simple chiliastic boundary between pre-Tribulational horror rhetoric and its perception of its surrounding secular milieu. Although many of the signs of the end are depicted as lurking 'out there' in the murky secular world of deception and Satanism, human nature is also depicted as significantly responsible for these evils. This assumption will be examined in greater detail later in the discussion of powerlessness in the prophetic media, however it is notable at this point that LaHaye also references the authority of the 'secular' world to create a compelling horror narrative of urgent decline,

'In recent years, more and more of the secular community has come to agree that we seem to be approaching the end of the world. Nobel laureates and reputable scientists have warned that the earth's time clock is running out. Air and water pollution, the evaporation of the protective ozone layer, the elimination of oxygen-producing rain forests, and the general instability of the earth's crust have all been cited as serious problems that could hinder the future of life on this planet. The current proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is almost beyond belief, and many of those weapons are suspected to be in the hands of unscrupulous terrorists'.⁵¹

⁴⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 300.

⁵¹ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, pp. 18-19.

The horrors that are identified as lurking in contemporary society are depicted as indicative of a 'positive' degeneration, as conditions must get worse in order for the time of Jesus' return to draw near. For example, those who believe that a Satanically-inspired globalized network of control would be established on earth by the year 2000 (as opposed to 2025), are referred to as 'one-world optimists'.⁵² As Jesus will pluck his believers from the earth in the Rapture at the 'worst' point of the Church Age, the greater the frequency and severity of these identified horrors in the surrounding socio-religious fabric, the greater possibility of an imminent Rapture,

'There is no doubt in our minds that we are fast approaching the final chapter of human history. The hoofbeats of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse can now be heard in the distance. The stage is set for the final act of human drama. The clock is ticking away the last seconds of any hope for a reprieve. We are being swept down the corridor of time to an inevitable date with destiny'.⁵³

It should be noted, therefore, that horrific events are not loaded with purely pessimistic significance. Rather, the increase in natural disasters, crime, or war is understood as symptomatic of the approaching climactic moment of the Church's prophetic fulfillment. This proliferation of horror is thus part of the warped fabric of the Church Age dispensation, and helps to illuminate the way in which dispensational theology views the role of the Church.

The earthly Church, according to a premillennial dispensationalist understanding, is divided into two components with different prophetic destinies. The 'true' Church began with the embodiment of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and will continue until the Rapture. The 'true' Church 'is made up of Jews and Gentiles who genuinely know Christ as their Savior and have their sins forgiven'.⁵⁴ It is this core of believers who will be 'translated' into

⁵² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 170. N.B. This edition was published in 1999.

⁵³ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Ice, 'Church Age', p. 53.

heaven at the secret Rapture. However, 'the realm of the professing church' is identified as 'Christendom', and is constituted of

'everything associated with the visible church, including all of its branches. Christendom includes true believers and mere professors, the wheat and the tares'.⁵⁵

For the purpose of clarity, when referring to the 'true' earthly Church, I am referencing the group of believers that premillennial dispensationalism understands as being 'saved', and destined for the Rapture. The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* indicates that the true earthly Church possesses a very limited prophetic role. The sole function of the 'true' Church is to act as a vehicle of the Holy Spirit to '[bring] new people to Christ and enabling faithful believers to grown maturity'.⁵⁶ As a by-product of its very existence in the Church Age as the emissary of the Holy Spirit, the true Church has no prophetic role. Christendom, however, must enact its prophetic destiny by becoming infected with apostasy, 'As Christendom expands to fill the whole world, it will gradually become increasingly apostate'.⁵⁷ As such, 'the church has no earthly prophetic destiny beyond the rapture'.⁵⁸ This is important because the doctrine of pre-Tribulational Rapture relies on increasing horror to encourage individual spiritual fortitude and energized witnessing, thereby fulfilling the role of the true Church. The pre-Tribulational Rapture also represents the entire prophetic function of the true Church. Following the Rapture, the remaining unbelievers of both Christendom and in the secular world, must complete their prophetic destiny in the truly horrific arena of the Tribulation.

⁵⁵ Ice, 'Church Age', p. 53.

⁵⁶ Ice, 'Church Age', p. 53.

⁵⁷ Ice, 'Church Age', p. 52.

⁵⁸ Ice, 'Church Age', p. 54.

The Tribulation itself is characterized as ‘the greatest period of suffering the world has ever known’.⁵⁹ It is described as ‘far worse than the Spanish Inquisition of the sixteenth century or even the Holocaust of Adolph Hitler in the twentieth century’.⁶⁰ No attempt is made to reduce the extent of its impact,

‘In the first half of the Tribulation, vicious plagues sweep the earth, flaming meteorites poison a third of its water, warring armies kill millions, demonic beings torture the unredeemed, darkness swallows a third of the sun, and half the world’s post-Rapture population dies horribly. And then it gets worse’.⁶¹

The future horror of the Tribulation is recounted by drawing on readers’ understanding of contemporary disasters and emphasizing that the human imagination has difficulty grasping its worst elements,

‘This world only *thinks* it has seen tribulation. The day is coming when the worst traumas in history will be eclipsed by a seven-year period that will be far more terrifying than anything man can imagine [...] Take the horror of every war since time began, throw in every natural disaster in recorded history, and cast off all restraints so that the unspeakable cruelty and hatred and injustice of man toward his fellow men can fully mature- then compress it all into a period of seven years. Even if you could imagine such a thing, it wouldn’t approach the mind-boggling terror and turmoil of the Tribulation’.⁶²

Indeed, the incapacity of human imagination to grasp the horror of the Tribulation is highlighted as a justification for the study of prophetic media even beyond the fictional rendering of the Tribulation in the *Left Behind* novels, ‘we cannot cover it all, even in the twelve books of the *Left Behind* series. There is no end of astonishing events from this awful period’.⁶³

The premillennial dispensationalist account of the horror of the Tribulation is drawn from a series of Bible passages, and it is understood that the concept of the Tribulation originates in the Old Testament. Particular referents are given as indicative of the Tribulation,

⁵⁹ Thomas Ice and Randall Price, ‘Tribulation’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 385.

⁶⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 146.

⁶¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 193.

⁶² LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, pp. 57-8.

⁶³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 151.

including the mention of the 'great and terrible time of the Lord' in Malachi 4:5, and the reference to the 'last days' of Israel in Deuteronomy 4:30-31 and 32:35-43.⁶⁴ A particularly significant Tribulation passage in the Old Testament is located in Daniel 9:24-27, which outlines the length of the Tribulation. The '70 weeks' prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 is described as 'the indispensable chronological key to Bible prophecy'.⁶⁵ It is explained that,

"The 70 "weeks" are actually 70 weeks of years, or 490 years. They are divided into seven weeks (49 years), 62 weeks (434 years), and one week (7 years)".⁶⁶

It is argued that these allocations represent the coming and death of Jesus, the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the Tribulation respectively, "These events took place after the 7 weeks and the 62 weeks or 283 years (according to the Jewish lunar calendar)".⁶⁷ In the futurist, premillennial interpretation of the Tribulation, the final, 70th prophetic week is understood as starting a great deal of time after the end of the prophetic 69th week. The 70th, final week, or the Tribulation,

'accomplishes Israel's restoration in the end time (Daniel 12: 4, 9, see also 8:17), so it follows (and is distinct from) the church age (which is consummated by the rapture)'.⁶⁸

According to a futurist premillennial hermeneutic, the 70 weeks prophecy can only be fulfilled when its six restoration goals are met. These restoration goals are met through a 'progressive fulfilment' of the seventy weeks prophecy. They include events that are recognized as having already been fulfilled, such as the death of Jesus, and those yet unfulfilled, such as the desecration of the Temple by the Antichrist.⁶⁹

Further extended reference to the Tribulation is identified in the New Testament. For example, it is argued that the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25 contains the first extended

⁶⁴ Ice and Price, 'Tribulation', p. 386.

⁶⁵ Thomas Ice and Randall Price, 'Seventy Weeks of Daniel', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 356.

⁶⁶ Ice and Price, 'Seventy Weeks of Daniel', p. 357.

⁶⁷ Ice and Price, 'Seventy Weeks of Daniel', p. 357.

⁶⁸ Ice and Price, 'Seventy Weeks of Daniel', p. 357.

⁶⁹ Ice and Price, 'Seventy Weeks of Daniel', pp. 358- 340.

reference to the Tribulation as a time of ‘trauma and suffering’⁷⁰, during which the earth will suffer ‘Birth Pangs’ as God’s punishment falls on unbelieving Jews and Gentiles.⁷¹ LaHaye describes Matthew 24-25 as so significant in its description of the Tribulation that it should be considered ‘like a clothesline from which all other prophecy should be hung’.⁷² I Thessalonians 1:10 is also indicated as an important Tribulation passage as it references a future time of wrath. The most complete and extensive description of the Tribulation is, however, located in the book of Revelation 6-9, more particular details of which will be outlined in the following subchapter. The period of the Tribulation itself is allocated to a seven-year period in accordance with an understanding of the 70th prophetic week. The Tribulation is also sub-divided, and the last three and a half years are referred to as the ‘Great Tribulation’. This period of even more intense horror will begin following the fulfilment of one of the 70 weeks’ restoration goals, the defilement of the temple by the Antichrist, otherwise known as the ‘abomination of desolation’. This event is located in Matthew 24:15, and it is believed that following this desecration of the Temple, the events of the Tribulation will become even more horrific for the final three and a half years of the earth.

What Happens During the Tribulation?

The seven-year period of the Tribulation is understood as a literal series of judgments and punishments that are enacted on the earth, either by God or at the permission of God through his heavenly, or demonic agents. The purpose of these judgments is to encourage, through the medium of horror and suffering, those undecided, the Jews in particular, to

⁷⁰ Ice and Price, ‘Tribulation’, p. 386.

⁷¹ Mal Couch, ‘Birth Pangs’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 46.

⁷² LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 29.

accept salvation through Christ, and also to demarcate the lines of opposition to God's authority, punishing those who will not comply. The narrative of these horrific events is largely taken from the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is of unparalleled importance in the premillennial dispensationalist prophetic understanding of horror, and the horror of the Tribulation in particular. Revelation is understood as the account of God's final attempt to reach the unsaved, to fulfil the prophetic destiny of the nation of Israel, to wreak vengeance on those who have turned away from salvation, and to triumph over Satan, 'its message is a summary of the entire Word of God'.⁷³ As discussed above, the literal hermeneutic is applied to the book of Revelation, on the assumption that 'many elements in the book can be understood only by *literal interpretation*'⁷⁴, and as such its events and its judgment are interpreted as literally as possible. In order to understand the extent of the horror and devastation outlined for those left behind after the Rapture, I will now briefly outline the premillennial dispensationalist understanding of the events of the Tribulation below.

In Revelation 6:1-17 and 8:1, it is described as a set of seven seal judgments are opened. The first four seals of Revelation 6:18 are also known as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, as God's judgments are personified as individual men. The first rider is on a white horse, most commonly interpreted as the conquering Antichrist.⁷⁵ According to premillennial dispensationalism, the Tribulation does not begin until a seven-year covenant of peace is signed between the first rider, the Antichrist, and the nation of Israel (Daniel 9:26-27).⁷⁶ The second seal is a rider on a red horse who signifies war. The third seal a rider on a black horse is understood to indicate famine, and the fourth horseman rides a pale or 'ashen

⁷³ Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, 'Revelation', in *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 505.

⁷⁴ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 504. Original italics.

⁷⁵ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 514.

⁷⁶ Ice and Price, 'Tribulation', p. 388.

horse' which represents death.⁷⁷ The work of these horsemen will be disastrous for the earth, as on their appearance, 'a fourth of the earth's population dies from pestilence, war, and famine'.⁷⁸ Following the breaking of the fifth seal, those believers killed during the opening of the first four seals beg for retribution for their deaths.⁷⁹ The breaking of the sixth seal institutes a global earthquake, the darkening of the sun, and the appearance of a bloody moon.⁸⁰ The stars fall to earth, and the sky is 'split apart'. At the breaking of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1), there will be a silence in heaven, broken by the sound of the following trumpet judgments.⁸¹ During this period on earth the Antichrist will rise to power as the head of a ten-nation confederacy and will rule the world during the Tribulation (Daniel 2:42, 44 also Daniel 7:7, 24).⁸² Despite this, according to Revelation 7, a spiritual awakening of 144,000 Jewish evangelists will occur.⁸³

The breaking of the seven seals leads to the seven trumpet judgments, recounted in Revelation 8:2-9:21 and Revelation 11:15-19. The first trumpet judgment brings hail and fire mixed with blood, which burns up a third of all grass, trees and earth.⁸⁴ The second trumpet signifies a great burning mountain that falls into the sea, turning a third of the sea into blood, killing a third of all ships and all creatures of the sea. At the third trumpet, a meteorite named Wormwood falls to earth, polluting the rivers and springs, killing many people as a result of these polluted waters. The fourth trumpet reduces the light from the

⁷⁷ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 516.

⁷⁸ Mal Couch, 'Seal Judgments', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 348.

⁷⁹ Robert L. Thomas, 'Revelation, Book of', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 334.

⁸⁰ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 516.

⁸¹ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 517.

⁸² Ice and Price, 'Tribulation', p. 388.

⁸³ Ice and Price, 'Tribulation', p. 388.

⁸⁴ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 518.

moon, sun and stars.⁸⁵ The fifth trumpet signifies an angel falling to earth, who brings a key to unlock a plague of locust-like creatures from the depths of the bottomless pit, in order to torment non-believers for five months.⁸⁶ At the sixth trumpet, four fallen angels, or 'demonic creatures' are unbound. 200 million demonic horsemen, who breathe fire, smoke and brimstone, kill a third of people on earth with plagues, and the fire and brimstone that come out of their mouths.⁸⁷ With the seventh trumpet, there is lighting, thunder, earthquakes and a great hailstorm. The seventh trumpet leads into the bowl judgments.⁸⁸ Revelation 11:2-3 and 11:13 also tell of two witnesses, normally identified as Moses and Elijah, who will preach in Jerusalem, prompting a spiritual revival before they are martyred and resurrected.⁸⁹ The Antichrist is slain (Revelation 13:3) and then resurrected by Satan (Revelation 13: 3-4). A beast, described as rising from the earth, supports the Antichrist (Revelation 13: 11-18). This second beast is known as the 'false prophet', who acts as the head of the Antichrist's religious empire.⁹⁰ The Antichrist is worshiped and marks his adherents with the mark '666' on their forehead or hand (Revelation 13:8). The Antichrist breaks the seven-year covenant with Israel (Daniel 11.41) and enters the Temple in the act known as the 'abomination of desolation'.⁹¹

The bowl judgments, or the seven bowls of wrath, described in the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* as 'the most intense of the sequences of judgment that fall on the world'⁹², are then unleashed by seven angels. These are outlined in Revelation 16:1–31. The first

⁸⁵ Mal Couch, 'Trumpet Judgments', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 395.

⁸⁶ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 519.

⁸⁷ Couch, 'Trumpet Judgments', p. 394.

⁸⁸ Couch, 'Trumpet Judgments', p. 394.

⁸⁹ Thomas, 'Revelation, Book of', p. 335.

⁹⁰ Thomas, 'Revelation, Book of', p. 335.

⁹¹ Ice and Price, 'Tribulation', p. 389.

⁹² Mal Couch, 'Bowl Judgments', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 49.

bowl judgment causes 'putrefied sexual sores to break out on those who have the mark of the beast'.⁹³ The second bowl turns the sea into blood, 'a coagulated vile and terrible soup'⁹⁴ and all life within dies. With the third bowl of wrath, the water of rivers and springs become blood. The forth bowl judgment is caused by 'what would be called to today a solar flare that bombards the earth with intense radiation'.⁹⁵ This plague scorches unbelievers with fire. The fifth bowl plunges the Antichrist's kingdom into perpetual darkness causing those who experience it to gnaw their tongues with pain.⁹⁶ The sixth bowl judgment dries the Euphrates, and demons are sent forth from Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet.⁹⁷ The seventh bowl produces lighting, thunder and an earthquake so great that the mountains are levelled and 'great changes in the topography of the entire world'.⁹⁸ The Jewish remnant, as a product of the great spiritual awakening, will accept the Messiahship of Jesus (Zechariah 12:10).⁹⁹

The battle of Armageddon is understood as the last major event on the prophetic timeline before the establishment of the millennial kingdom. At this battle, 'the satanically inspired human purpose is to once and for all liquidate worldwide Jewry'.¹⁰⁰ The indwelt Antichrist and his army will battle against Christ (Psalm 2: 1-3).¹⁰¹ Christ will come to earth in the second part of the two-stage Second Coming, and defeat the Antichrist's army at Bozrah. Jude 14-15 and Revelation 19:11-16 describe as Jesus returns with an angelic army and the Church saints, 'These verses describe Him as treading the winepress of the wrath of God

⁹³ Couch, 'Bowl Judgments', p. 50.

⁹⁴ Couch, 'Bowl Judgments', p. 50

⁹⁵ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 530

⁹⁶ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 531.

⁹⁷ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 531.

⁹⁸ Couch, 'Bowl Judgments', p. 50

⁹⁹ Ice and Price, 'Tribulation', p. 390.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Ice, 'Armageddon', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 37.

¹⁰¹ LaHaye and Hindson, 'Revelation', p. 538.

and ruling with a rod of iron'.¹⁰² Jesus will slay the Antichrist (Habakkuk 3:13b and 2 Thessalonians 2:8) and the rest of the Antichrist's forces (Joel 3:12-13, Zechariah 14:12-15 and Revelation 14:19-20)¹⁰³, the Antichrist and the False Prophet are thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur (Revelation 19:20-21). Finally, Jesus ascends the Mount of Olives, as described in Zechariah 14: 3-4. An Earthquake will split the city of Jerusalem into three areas, and the Mount of Olives into two parts (Revelation 16:17 and Zechariah 14:4b-5).¹⁰⁴

Thomas Ice observes that the conflict will have many casualties,

'Armageddon is not an event that any person should desire or anticipate with joy, for it will bring death and destruction to many people'.¹⁰⁵

The blood of those who oppose the Jewish people will reach 'up to the horses' bridles, for the distance of two hundred miles' (Revelation 14:20). Following Armageddon, the millennial kingdom is established on earth, and the dispensation of the Tribulation comes to a close. The battle of Armageddon occurs as the fulfilment of the dispensationalist prophecy for Israel. It is understood that 'Israel will confess its national sin (Leviticus 26:40-42; Jeremiah 3:11-18; Hosea 5:15), and plead for the Messiah to return (Isaiah 64:1-12; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 23: 37-39)'.¹⁰⁶ The prayers of Israel for the return of the Messiah will be granted after three days, when Jesus returns in the second part of his Second Coming,

'God, having heard their prayers, will answer them, fulfilling biblical prophecy and the hope of the ages'.¹⁰⁷

The events of the Tribulation listed above clearly outline a period of almost relentless horror and suffering for those remaining on earth. Readers are reminded to interpret the

¹⁰² Ice, 'Armageddon', p. 41.

¹⁰³ Ice, 'Armageddon', p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ Ice, 'Armageddon', p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ Ice, 'Armageddon', p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Ice, 'Armageddon', p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Ice, 'Armageddon', p. 40.

passages of Revelation literally, and are warned against any allegorical reading of these passages that may lessen the extent of the suffering,

‘No one wants to think of a future period- even a short one of seven year-that will be greatest time of suffering and terror in all of human history [...] It is unrealistic to spiritualize away the devastations God is going to unleash on the world during the Tribulation’.¹⁰⁸

Emphasis is placed on a literal understanding of the horror of Tribulation partly as a means of solidifying the pre-Tribulational Rapture interpretation. In LaHaye’s reading, according to I Thessalonians 5:9, the church is ‘not appointed to His wrath’¹⁰⁹, and thus must be Raptured before the period of Tribulation begins. As such, a literal interpretation of the manifestation of this wrath supports the concept that the church will be Raptured beforehand. As LaHaye comments,

‘As a general rule, those who believe the pre-Tribulation rapture accept the tribulation teachings in Revelation, 2 Thessalonians, Matthew 24, and Daniel 9 more literally than do mid- and post-Tribbers, who tend to spiritualize prophecy teachings even though they do not spiritualize other scriptures. This could be the Achilles’ heel of their whole system’.¹¹⁰

The ‘spiritualizing away’ or reading of these horrors allegorically thus draws power away from the significance of the imminent Rapture for the true Church. Any attempt to lessen the sufferings of the Tribulation through an allegorical reading also undermines the importance of salvation before the Rapture, as it would otherwise suggest that even those who have achieved salvation will be subject to God’s judgment and punishments,

‘I have noticed that mid-Trib and post-Trib writings seldom take the Tribulation period literally. If they did, they might be more reluctant to conclude that Christians must endure it’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁹ LaHaye and Mayhue, ‘Rapture’, p. 314.

¹¹⁰ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 59.

¹¹¹ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 58.

As we have seen, horror serves a theological purpose in the dispensationalist understanding of prophetic fulfilment. The horror of the contemporary surrounding world indicates the 'last days' of earth, signalling that the Rapture, the prophetic climax of the earthly church, indeed its sole prophetic function, is drawing near. This tragic piling of contemporary horrors creates a narrative of urgency as it emphasizes the imminence of the pre-Tribulational Rapture. The horror of the next dispensation, the Tribulation, is the mode by which God the father, through his mediatory agents, enacts the dual functions of judgment and punishment on those who have so far rejected salvation. The extreme horror of the battle of Armageddon, furthermore, as the last stage of the Tribulation, is the moment at which Israel fulfils its prophetic fate, and accepts Jesus as Messiah. As shown, it is only in response to the prayers of repentant Israel that Christ fulfils his Second Coming, defeats the Antichrist, and establishes the millennial kingdom on earth. Israel's recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus is understood as occurring only in response to the horrific events of the Tribulation, and its final bloody culmination in the slaughter at Armageddon. In this narrative, it is only through horror that Israel is able to fulfil its prophetic role, not just for the salvation of the Jewish people, but by simultaneously consummating the prophetic destiny of the 'true' church and the Old Testament saints as adjuncts of the millennial kingdom.

It is apparent from this analysis that the reliance on extensive horror narratives in the prophetic media fulfils several functions. The doctrine of the imminent, and pre-Tribulational Rapture is central to an understanding of premillennial dispensationalism. The imminent secret Rapture reinforces the role of premillennial dispensationalists as the embodiment of the Holy Spirit on earth, those who are not appointed to experience the wrath of God's judgments. The horror of the last days is indicative that the moment of the

Church's prophetic destiny is at hand. Contemporary horrors are thus successfully negotiated by the suggestion that they characterize a 'positive' degenerative period, indicating that escape is imminent for the despairing believer. Those who are 'left behind' after the Rapture will be subject to the true horror of the Tribulation, which is the means by which God punishes those as yet unrepentant of their sins,

'Sometimes we think God gets a "bad rap" when people focus exclusively on the judgments and terrors to come. They see the Lord as some kind of angry monster, heaping up catastrophes and pouring them on the heads of defenceless, innocent men and women [...] But this is all wrong! First, those who suffer the judgments of God in the Tribulation are *not* "innocent men and women". As we will see [...] the rebels alive at that time will not only reject God and His offer of salvation but will run greedily toward every vile sin known to man'.¹¹²

In this way, the apocalyptic horror of the Tribulation is 'contained' within a prophetic narrative. It is restricted to unbelievers, those worthy of its judgment, and to the nation of Israel, who must be subject to horror in order to repent, bringing about the Second Coming of Jesus. The horror of the Tribulation is further abrogated through its restriction to the 70th prophetic week, demonstrating God's mercy for those who have accepted salvation,

'Jesus predicted that, due to its appalling nature, the Tribulation will be shortened. It will be a terrible holocaust because it combines the wrath of God, the fury of Satan, and the evil nature of man run wild'.¹¹³

Moreover, the extensive detailing of the horror of the Tribulation serves as a form of 'witnessing', and highlights the urgency of repentance and achieving salvation, which will be discussed further with reference to the use of prophetic horror narratives in *Left Behind* fiction. Here it suffices to remark that horror in the contemporary world, and even in the Tribulation, can be seen as a necessary means of encouraging individuals to accept salvation in order to escape the eternal horror that awaits those cast into the lake of fire.

¹¹² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 155-56.

¹¹³ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 58.

Isolation and Separation in Prophecy

Separation in the prophetic media largely manifests itself as concerns over the divisive properties of death and the Rapture. On several occasions, LaHaye speaks frankly of his own personal experience of death,

‘The most traumatic even in my life was my father’s death. He died three weeks before my tenth birthday. Until a person has gone through the tragedy of the loss of a close loved one, he rarely thinks about death. We tend to assume that life goes on forever, but the death of a loved one destroys those illusions and raises questions that were never before contemplated’.¹¹⁴

LaHaye states that his own reaction to these existential questions proves his own inherent belief in the endurance of the human spirit after bodily death,

‘Looking back, I detect something interesting about my childhood reaction to my father’s death that is common to many people. At no time did I consider the possibility that he had ceased to exist, for my question [“Where is Dad now?”] indicated my assurance that he, the real person, was still alive somewhere’.¹¹⁵

The prospect of an eternal human spirit or soul is discussed as such an intuitive concept that LaHaye suggests that it is inbuilt into human self-understanding,

‘Belief in life after death is not unique to Christianity. It is so ingrained into human intuition that nearly every religion in the world is built on that expectation- as though the Creator wanted man to know that once born, human beings are eternal’.¹¹⁶

LaHaye states that the comprehension or desire for eternal life is so inherent to human beings, that an eschatological consciousness is built into every faith,

‘The concept of life after death is not unique to Christianity and is, in fact, the universal dream of mankind. It is so integrated into the human psyche that nearly every religion has been built upon this expectation [...] Why do most people hold to this belief in life after death? Could it be intuitive? Did God place this thought within us?’¹¹⁷

For LaHaye, this inherent understanding of the eternal human spirit, the ‘universal dream of

¹¹⁴ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 209.

¹¹⁵ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 209.

¹¹⁶ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 151.

¹¹⁷ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 115.

mankind', is particularly linked to existence after death in a transformed, alternate state of being,

'Life is so precious to human beings that the desire to live on in some future state is almost universal'.¹¹⁸

Despite this, the premillennial dispensationalist literalist understanding of the Bible is emphasised as the only means of providing this universal desire for eternal existence,

'Christianity tells without doubt the most beautiful story of life in the afterlife- for believers. Our Bible gives far more interesting and believable details about the next life than any other religion. That should not be surprising, since only Christianity has a Bible that came from God Himself'.¹¹⁹

As demonstrated by LaHaye's personal reflection, the trauma of isolation and separation from loved ones at the moment of their natural death is lessened by the command to trust in the premillennial dispensationalist account of salvation. This alone ensures that those believers who have died will persist in an altered but extant state in the afterlife, 'The death of a believer is blessed'.¹²⁰ Indeed, it is established in the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, that the scriptural account of 'true' death does not include the concept of bodily death, 'In Scripture, however, death never refers to the cessation of life, but rather to the separation of something to which it belongs'.¹²¹ This understanding is drawn from James 2:26, and Elmer Towns comments that 'The Scriptures [only] identify a body without the spirit and faith without its evident works as dead'.¹²² This conceptualization of death lays more emphasis on the preservative nature of salvation for both the eternal soul and the glorified body, which will be discussed in further detail later. The final, Great White Throne Judgment, is identified as the moment of true, eternal separation, where a 'second death'

¹¹⁸ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 209.

¹¹⁹ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 151.

¹²⁰ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 320.

¹²¹ Elmer Towns, 'Hell', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 137.

¹²² Towns, 'Hell', p. 137.

occurs, as individuals are eternally separated from God. Those who are cast into hell are 'dead' according to an understanding of death as a 'separation of something to which it belongs'.¹²³ The 'second death', or final separation is far from a state of non-existence or annihilation. Rather, 'The consciousness of man is emphasized in the description of the second death at the final judgment'.¹²⁴ Thus, as the afterlife in the glorified body is a state of altered yet eternal 'living' for the believer, an unbelieving individual persists in a cognizant and sentient state through which they fully experience the torment of hell.

Given this understanding of death as a process of separation, the loss of loved ones at bodily death may only be temporary, provided that they have been 'born again',

'Are you able to sit by the deathbed of a believing loved one and cling to the hope that before your own life has ended [...] you may meet again in the clouds?'¹²⁵

If the deceased have accepted salvation through the literal truth of the premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic, then they will be reunited with loved ones at the moment of Rapture.

'We commit loved ones to the ground with the confident hope that we will see each other against the Rapture and then join our Lord in the Father's house. Death for a Christian is but a temporary time of separation from friends. That is the hope of our faith'.¹²⁶

The 'hope' that is referred to in this extract is loaded with signification of the Rapture. 'Hope', in the premillennial dispensationalist lexicon, rarely alludes to the emotion of anticipation alone. Rather, the word 'hope' carries a metonymic association with the imminent Rapture, according to its occurrence in Titus 2.13 as the 'blessed hope'. This extract therefore, rather than expressing the hope of the Christian faith that death is temporary, is rather expressing that the 'blessed hope' of the Rapture is a cornerstone of the

¹²³ Towns, 'Hell', p. 137.

¹²⁴ Towns, 'Hell', p. 137.

¹²⁵ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 18.

¹²⁶ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 71.

promises of the Christian faith. Furthermore, its appearance in this extract is indicative of the anxiety over isolation from loved ones not just in this life, but in the next. As will be seen when considering *Left Behind* fiction, anxieties surrounding the salvation of loved ones concern not just their redemption, but also the re-creation of an earthly community in heaven.¹²⁷ In the premillennial dispensationalist, explicitly tangible account of heaven, there is also a deep sense of anxiety that one may spend eternity in isolation, separated from those whom one had loved in the earthly realm.

The Rapture is discussed as a potentially anguished moment of separation for those who may be 'left behind', because they have lost, or never encountered the 'blessed hope' towards which premillennial dispensationalist theology has been propelled. The literature uses examples that focus on interpersonal ties of love to narrate the grief surrounding separation from loved ones who are 'left behind' in other contexts,

'Watching a jet airliner take off is one thing. It's no big deal, really [...] Unless [...] someone you love with all your heart is on that plane, leaving you, vanishing into the distance. A child leaving for college. A husband and father leaving on a long business trip. A fiancée leaving for an extended stay with an ailing relative. A son leaving for dangerous military duty. That's different. For then that disappearing plane feels attached to the flesh of your heart with a barbed hook- and the farther it flies away, the more it pulls on your chest and tears at the fabric of who you are. That's what love does at an airport. That's what leaves folks standing on the tarmac shading their eyes and looking and looking into the depth of the heavens. And that's where the angels found the disciples on the day when Jesus ascended to His Father'.¹²⁸

In this extract, the emphasis is placed on isolation as a dissolution of self, a separation that 'tears at the fabric of who you are'. LaHaye draws an analogy between Jesus' disciples and the temporary travails of the modern family. The isolation of the Apostles by Jesus' ascension is narrated as temporary, despite the prophetic 'time lag' of the Church Age and Tribulation that intercedes between Pentecost and the Second Coming. Clearly implied in

¹²⁷ See: for example, the 're-writing' of Rayford's parents' deathbed salvation into the *Left Behind* prequels.

¹²⁸ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 93.

this extract is the anxiety of being 'left behind' following the Rapture of a loved one, which is addressed through the command to achieve salvation and trust in the return of Jesus at the Second Coming,

'[The apostles] needn't be torn by grief and uncertainty. "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven" is going to come again. In the sky. The same way He left. On a return flight already booked in the counsels of the Godhead [...] This wasn't a one-way flight; it was the first leg of a round trip'.¹²⁹

The importance of achieving salvation before the Rapture cannot be over-emphasized, it is the only way to ensure that you, or those you care about will not be 'left behind'. Indeed, the potential for eternal separation from loved ones at the Rapture is contextualized against the horrors that are to come for those 'appointed to His wrath'¹³⁰, during the Tribulation.

'Are you able to look at your children playing in the sunlight and believe firmly in your heart that they will not have to endure the monstrous horrors of the Tribulation?'¹³¹

The separation and isolation from loved ones and their suffering during the Tribulation, or in the lake of fire are, however, presented as 'manageable' anxieties, since the reader has some degree of agency over the eternal fate of those around them,

'It's very sobering to think that the consequences of rejecting Christ will last forever. Those who refuse Christ as their Savior will experience eternal separation from God, eternal darkness, eternal punishment. The torment described in the Bible is very real (see Luke 16:24) and permanent (see Luke 16:26). Have you thought about your unsaved family members, friends, and coworkers in this light? Do you feel a greater compassion for them when you consider their eventual destiny? What actions can you take in the days ahead to make a difference?'¹³²

In this way, witnessing is presented as a way of coping with the anxiety of eternal separation,

'What thoughts go through your mind as you consider family members, friends, or coworkers who are unsaved and thus destined for eternal separation from God? Are you

¹²⁹ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 94.

¹³⁰ LaHaye and Mayhue, 'Rapture', p. 314.

¹³¹ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 18.

¹³² LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, p. 92.

praying for opportunities to let your light shine to these people? What are some ways that you can make that happen?’¹³³

As we have seen, both temporary and eternal separation from one’s earthly community of loved ones is narrated with great anxiety in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*. The prophetic media addresses the highly individual, solitary nature of salvation, and the loneliness of the eschatological journey, to create a narrative of extreme uncertainty. The question that is prompted through the media is to ask how it is possible to be sure that one’s wife, children, or your own soul, has indeed been saved, and will be reunited in heaven, spared from the horrors of the Tribulation? This question is addressed in several ways. Primarily, belief in premillennial dispensationalist theology assures the believer that a bodily resurrection will occur in heaven, and meaningful relationships in this life will continue in an altered, yet recognisable state after death. This will be discussed further in the chapter on the body in prophecy. Furthermore, the significance of bodily death itself is greatly reduced. Rather, the only form of ‘death’ is the separation that occurs from God and other believers as a result of rejecting salvation. Thus, achieving salvation for yourself, and witnessing to others is presented as the most effective means of coping with the anxiety of potentially eternal separation from loved ones. Through witnessing, one can ensure the eternal life of those who are saved, and one’s earthly community can be transposed into heaven, as will clearly be demonstrated later in discussions of the *Left Behind* fiction novels.

¹³³ LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, p. 126.

Powerlessness in Prophecy

An important conceptualization of powerlessness in the prophetic media can be traced to the understanding of the essentially corrupted nature of man. Much of end-times horror is not attributed to the supernatural power of Satan, but is presented as a result of human instinct,

'[The Tribulation] will be a terrible holocaust because it combines the wrath of God, the fury of Satan, and the evil nature of man run wild'.¹³⁴

Many of the horrors of the Tribulation are in fact derived from the removal of the 'restraining' function of the Holy Spirit at the Rapture,

'The Spirit is the Restrainer, and He does His work of restraining through the church. When the church is removed from the earth at the rapture, the presence of the Spirit in church-age believers will also be removed. He will leave earth even as He came to the earth'.¹³⁵

This conceptualisation of the Church is drawn from 2 Thessalonians 2:6-9, and its 'restraining' function refers to the way in which the true church is understood to hold back the evil powers of Satan, and in particular the rise of the Antichrist. During the Tribulation, however, with all 'restraining' function of the Holy Spirit completed, man's evil nature will be left unchecked, resulting in the immorality of the Tribulation,

'Take the horror of every war since time began, throw in every natural disaster in recorded history, and cast off all restraints so that the unspeakable cruelty and hatred and injustice of man toward his fellow men can fully mature- then compress it all into a period of seven years'.¹³⁶

It is particularly notable that those born during the millennial kingdom are also understood to be capable of rebellion against God, despite being born under the 1000 years of Jesus' political and spiritual reign. During the millennium, it is understood that,

¹³⁴ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 58.

¹³⁵ Robert Gromacki, 'Holy Spirit and Eschatology', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 141.

¹³⁶ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, pp. 57-8.

‘no one will be influenced by satanic or demonic activity, corrupt government, war, sickness or bad weather. Still, people will rebel. All rebellion during the millennium will find its cause not in man’s external circumstances but in his own internal corrupt nature’.¹³⁷

Indeed, according to the premillennial dispensationalist prophetic schema, the rebellion of the citizens of the millennial kingdom is a foretold component of the eschatological narrative of the end times, and is a necessary precursor to God’s eventual final triumph over Satan.¹³⁸ During the millennial kingdom, ‘millions’ of unbelievers born during the kingdom will participate in the final revolt against God.¹³⁹ It is understood that it is not the power of Satan or Satan’s agents that cause humans to turn from salvation, rather it is a personal decision based on a human instinct toward evil,

‘Because Satan will be incarcerated throughout the millennium, whatever evil emanates from any human being will spring from his or her own fallen nature, not from outside influences, such as the voice of the devil. This extremely important truth emphatically illustrates once and for all, that every person born on this plant- except one, the Lord Jesus- is born with a sinful nature, inherited through Adam’.¹⁴⁰

Joe Jordan writes that it is thus the battle with one’s own heart that comprises the greatest obstacle to redemption,

‘The loosing of Satan will demonstrate that no type of social order or environment in the world can possibly change the sinfulness of man’s degenerate heart. Only by a personal relationship with Messiah through redemption can one resist not only his own evil human heart but also Satan himself’.¹⁴¹

In this understanding of human nature and of personal agency, the power of the individual to resist evil lies entirely in one’s own hands,

¹³⁷ Joe Jordan, ‘Millennium’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 237.

¹³⁸ Jordan, ‘Millennium’, p. 237.

¹³⁹ Elwood McQuaid, ‘The Final Revolt’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 110.

¹⁴⁰ McQuaid, ‘The Final Revolt’, p. 110.

¹⁴¹ Jordan, ‘Millennium’, p. 237.

‘no-one can say that under the right conditions, mankind’s goodness, like cream in a bottle, will rise to the top. No- God was right. Mankind is totally and wholly depraved’.¹⁴²

This conception of personal agency is an important aspect of premillennial prophecy belief, because it underlies the way in which salvation is understood. Achieving salvation is an act of personal will, as only an individual decision to turn against one’s evil human nature can provide redemption. It is understood that although salvation occurs through the Holy Spirit, the individual must wilfully accept the ‘gift’ of Salvation. For premillennial dispensationalism, the central moment of self-empowerment for believers therefore occurs at this moment of ‘born again’ conversion and the praying of the ‘sinner’s prayer’. This moment of salvation is the point at which the individual makes an active choice to accept the redemptive power of Jesus’ sacrifice, and ensures that an individual has a place in the Rapture host.

‘Christ is not coming for the churches, implying church members, or merely for good people [...] if you have not committed yourself to Christ, may I urge you to prayerfully invite Him into your life? Then you will be certain that the Rapture will include you’.¹⁴³

This moment of salvation is described almost as a transaction, through which the inherently sinful part of human nature is internally baptised by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the essentially sinful human, born with the inherited sin of Adam, is now ‘born again’ as a redeemed believer in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus’ blood.

‘At salvation, God’s Spirit comes into our heart so that at the time of death our soul (the eternal part of our being) and our “new nature” or “spirit” departs to be with Christ, where it remains until the resurrection-rapture’.¹⁴⁴

Praying the ‘sinner’s prayer’ ensures that the believer will join the secret and select group of saved individuals who will comprise the Rapture host. Furthermore, salvation empowers an

¹⁴² McQuaid, ‘The Final Revolt’, p. 111.

¹⁴³ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 45.

¹⁴⁴ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 160.

individual in their earthly life by equipping them with the spiritual tools to defend themselves against their corrupt natures and the evil powers of Satan through the strengthening of their faith,

‘Christians need to know *more* about prophecy, not less, so that they can be armed with the truth and defend themselves against erroneous teachings’.¹⁴⁵

It is also suggested that through an understanding of prophecy, the individual will be empowered by insight into forthcoming events that may otherwise seem troubling,

‘If, as many prophecy scholars believe, we begin to see world governments merge into one federated government over which one leader will rule, Christians need not become unduly worried, for that would be just one more sign that the coming of the Lord is near. The same is true in regard to the other signs predicted for the end of the age, such as an increase in earthquakes, famines, pestilences, a spirit of lawlessness, and the disintegration of the family’.¹⁴⁶

These ‘signs of the times’ are to be considered as part of a pre-ordained pattern of prophetic events, and the inspired believer is in this way empowered to dismiss their abjective properties.

Premillennial dispensationalist popular media frequently urges against the temptation to delay the moment of salvation in case it becomes ‘too late’ to redeem one’s soul.¹⁴⁷ This delay does not refer to being left behind on earth following the Rapture, as it is understood that it is still possible to achieve salvation even after the Rapture of the true Church. Following the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will

‘have a ministry similar to that in the age before the church began- He will continue to convict and regenerate sinners’.¹⁴⁸

Rather, it is understood that during the Tribulation, there will come a point after which many Gentiles will ‘turn away’ from God even though they know that to accept Him would provide

¹⁴⁵ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 12. Original italics.

¹⁴⁶ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁷ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Armageddon, The Cosmic Battle of the Age* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2003), p. 278.

¹⁴⁸ Gromacki, ‘Holy Spirit and Eschatology’, p. 141.

salvation. At this point in the Tribulation, these individuals have left it 'too late' to convert, and even though they may wish to do so, they are unable.¹⁴⁹ There exists, therefore, a 'time limit' on the ability of Gentiles to accept salvation. Individuals must act while they still have the power over themselves to make that decision and before they become trapped by prophetic templates of action. Furthermore, whilst salvation will be possible for Gentiles for a limited time after the Rapture, those that do convert will however continue to be powerless against the horrors of the Tribulation. While it is speculated that those who achieve salvation after the Rapture may receive 'lessened' forms of the judgments for unbelievers, they will nevertheless be subject to the same risks of suffering, trauma and death.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, this is the principle that underlies most of the plotlines of the *Left Behind* fiction novels.

Through achieving salvation, the believer is empowered through the guarantee that the selective imminent Rapture will ensure that they join the elite few who will forego natural death. Salvation is described as providing believers with an explicitly eschatological 'hope' that empowers the believer, bypassing those who are not saved,

'What a vast gulf stretches between that "blessed hope" of Christians and "no hope" of non-Christians! And the gulf can be bridged only by a true salvation experience. This "no hope" lifestyle is unnecessary to anyone reading this book [...] And what is it that all must do to have this blessed hope? Believe in the death of Christ for our sins and His resurrection!'¹⁵¹

As seen above, the 'blessed hope' juxtaposed in the extract to the 'no hope' lifestyle of non-Christians is a direct reference to the Rapture, as drawn from Titus 2:13,

'Rapture, The Blessed Hope. We prefer to call this miraculous event "the blessed hope," the term Paul uses in Titus 2.13[...] That is exactly what the Rapture is, a blessed hope'.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ See for example: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁰ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 97.

¹⁵¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 119.

¹⁵² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 98.

This definition of the word 'hope' is contextualized within a divine covenant that ensures the imminent and eternal bodily salvation of those who have been 'born again'. Thus, living a life characterized by this 'hope' is defined as a transformatively empowering experience that should inspire the believer with confidence for the future,

'When the Bible uses the word "hope" [...it means] a certified fact of the future, promised by God's unfailing Word. In this case, "hope" means a present, confident expectation of a certain event. It is this hope that has characterized believers in Christ for two thousand years'.¹⁵³

A sort of eschatological algebraic equation is established in the extracts shown above; belief in the imminent Rapture is described as synonymous with hope, but this hope is not an unfounded hope, but rather a certainty, according to the infallibility of the Word. The certainty of the imminent Rapture is thus equal to the infallibility of the literal truth of the Word. Through formations such as these, LaHaye is able to re-establish authority in the prophetic and Bible study guides. The empowerment granted by this hope, whilst initially an act of personal agency, is re-affirmed by the way in which the prophetic media guides a believer through the hermeneutical method that establishes the one true and certain meaning of the biblical Word. It is worthy of note, however, that LaHaye apparently sees no difficulty in expressing his conviction that the hope for the imminent Rapture is definitive of the current generation, whilst recognising that the deferment of this same hope has defined the Christian community since Paul penned his letters to the Thessalonians.

Thus, the fact that the 'true' Church community has been suspended in a sort of substrate of hope since its formation does not negate the fact that the Rapture may still be held to be imminent. Indeed, the sustained immanency of the Rapture is understood as part of God's prophetic plan to encourage conversions,

¹⁵³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 98.

'Prophecy emphasizes the "imminent" return of Christ- that He could come at any moment. This has proven to be one of the most spiritually motivating forces in church history [...] prophecy has had three effects on the church: It has challenged believers to holy living in an unholy age. It has given Christians a greater challenge to evangelize; and it has caused the church to be more missionary minded as the church has realized it must fulfill the great commission before Christ returns'.¹⁵⁴

The final two effects of prophecy on the earthly Church are represented as forms of witnessing. This, therefore, provides a prophetic justification for the continual deferment of hope. Indeed, LaHaye gives several arguments why the generation of people alive in 1948 is the most likely to experience the imminent Rapture,

*'This generation does indeed have more solid reason to believe that Christ could come in our lifetime than any before us. Yes, we could indeed be living in the end times!'*¹⁵⁵

The emphasis placed on 'this generation' as those most likely to inhabit the axis of prophetic fulfilment, further amplifies the urgency of seeking instant salvation before it becomes 'too late'.

The nature of personal salvation, as demonstrated above, impacts more widely on the way in which individuals are encouraged to read and understand the Bible. As has been discussed, premillennial dispensationalism does not consider the community of Christendom, as representative of the 'Church'. Instead, it is understood that only select and scattered individuals within Christendom, those who have prayed the sinner's prayer, constitute the true earthly Church that will be redeemed on the day of Rapture. Thus, it is possible, and indeed in this view extremely likely, that a 'saved' individual will worship and live within a wider community of the unsaved. This re-enforces, and is re-enforced by the way in which prophetic media such as the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* works, since the works encourage solitary biblical study. Although readers are encouraged to seek out a

¹⁵⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁵⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 363. Original italics. See also: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, pp. 57-60.

‘Bible believing Church’, they are even more often encouraged to simply pick up the text and ‘mature’ their own spirituality with the help of a few guidelines provided by the premillennialist hermeneutic, and the missives of the text itself,

‘Whether you use this book alone or in a small group, I pray that you will develop study habits that will make God’s Word come alive in you. May you hide God’s Word in your heart’.¹⁵⁶

As can be seen from this analysis, and in the discussion of ‘Isolation and Separation’, the understanding of man’s nature as inherently sinful, combined with the emphasis on the individualised nature of salvation, destabilises the certainty of others’ salvation. Those who are as yet ‘unsaved’ are attributed with possessing a barely-repressed sinful nature, capable of abominable wrongdoing. Only during the Tribulation will this natural state manifest at its full capacity for evil, but the implication is that even at the present time, believers live amidst a majority of evil individuals.¹⁵⁷ Empowerment, can therefore only come from the connections made between ‘real’ believers, and not just within the wider scope of Christendom, or even the Millennial Kingdom. It is understood, for example, that even if the natural earthly body is redeemed, restored, and granted extended life throughout the Millennial Kingdom, as long as the body is able to produce human life, it is still essentially capable of producing sin. The community of the saved on earth can therefore be depicted as potentially disparate and isolated; its members may not even be able to communicate with each other until the Rapture. Empowerment through the spiritual community can therefore only ‘safely’ be channelled through discursively authorised portals, such as the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*. Furthermore, the emphasis on a personal decision to accept Jesus as the only basis for conquering the evil nature of man undermines the role that other socio-

¹⁵⁶ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 58.

cultural or governmental institutions could possibly have in the regulation of the moral individual,

‘From the standpoint of sinful practice, the world is ready to live under the Antichrist. The only thing lacking is Rapture of the church, which is the only sin-restraining influence on today’s society’.¹⁵⁸

This representation of the strange dichotomy of the empowered yet powerless earthly Christian life goes some way to explaining why Bivins’ excellent analysis of *Left Behind* in *The Religion of Fear*, does not quite go far enough. For a full understanding of the movement, it is not sufficient to explain that premillennial dispensationalism is politicised, and to show how this politicisation has been expressed. Rather, it is helpful to understand *why* wider premillennial dispensationalism selects its particular methods of political expression. From the preceding analysis, it is possible to understand that the conceptualisation of the evil nature of man and the disparate nature of the Christian community establishes a fragile dynamic between being ‘in’ the world, but not ‘of’ the world. As such, distinctive cultural symbols of the ‘saved’ status acquire enhanced significance. These markers are those that establish an individual or institution as living according to the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. Since apostasy and paranoia are so rife, premillennial dispensationalists rely heavily on these methods of demarcation that distinguish between practices that are ‘this’ worldly, and those that are of the ‘true’ church.

According to the teachings of premillennial dispensationalism, an unsaved individual is essentially powerless against their own human nature. Empowerment can, however, be achieved through salvation, and through the spiritual community of the ‘true’ Church on earth. Both of these objectives can be fulfilled through the authority of popular prophetic and

¹⁵⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 333.

Bible study guides, which support the otherwise solitary process of redemption and worship. Knowledge of prophecy is also presented as a significant tool for self-empowerment, as it allows believers to negotiate the difficulties of the end-times with elite insight into the about 'signs of the times'. Prophecy similarly allows believers to guard against attacks on their faith that come from the external world of those yet unredeemed, '*A proper understanding of prophecy arms the believer against cults and false prophets*'.¹⁵⁹ Thus, anxiety surrounding the nature of salvation is engendered through recourse to the eschatological narrative of imminent Rapture and eternal separation. Should one be 'left behind', the possibility of achieving salvation itself is even restricted to a certain period following the Rapture. The means of coping with this anxiety is to seek salvation, and to witness to others. The individual is encouraged to draw from premillennial dispensationalist media, which, in its supporting and instructing function, helps to reassure the believer of their spiritual empowerment even whilst they live or worship in the midst of the unredeemed.

The Body in Prophecy

In premillennial dispensationalist prophecy belief, the importance of the human body is paramount. Indeed, the way in which premillennial dispensationalism conceptualises the role of the eschatological human body is highly indicative of its wider theology. As discussed earlier, the conceptualization of death in the prophetic media concentrates on 'true' death as a form of eternal separation rather than physical death, which 'does not end human existence'.¹⁶⁰ Prophetic discourse reduces the significance of bodily death in several ways.

¹⁵⁹ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 17. Original italics.

¹⁶⁰ Gary Frazier and Timothy J. Demy, 'Resurrections', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 331.

Bodily resurrection is at the heart of premillennial dispensationalist theology, and is represented as an integral part of Evangelical self-understanding,

‘Christianity is a religion of resurrection [...] Christ taught on several occasions that the graves of believers would open and the believers would come forth to “everlasting life” (see John 5:21,24 as just one example). In John 11, just prior to raising Lazarus from the dead (the third person Jesus raised), Christ distinctly tied Himself to the fact of resurrection with these words: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11” 25-26) [...] Without question, it is impossible to remove Jesus Christ from resurrection, It is a doctrinal necessity in that if there is no resurrection, Christianity is a fraud’.¹⁶¹

Premillennial dispensational prophecy belief insists upon a series of resurrections, for both those who have been ‘saved’ and those who have not achieved salvation. It is understood that resurrections of the ‘saved’ dead occur at several points over the prophetic timeline. The first was the resurrection of Jesus, and some Old Testament Saints as described in Matthew 27: 50-53.¹⁶² Those who have been ‘saved’ but have died during the period between Jesus’ death and the present day, will also be resurrected at moment of the Rapture. During the Tribulation, the two witnesses of Revelation 11: 3-6 will be killed and then will be resurrected after three days.¹⁶³ Those who have achieved salvation after the Rapture but have died during the Tribulation, the Tribulation Saints, will be resurrected at the second coming of Christ in order to reside in the millennial kingdom.¹⁶⁴ The Old Testament Saints will also be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ in order to reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom.¹⁶⁵ Those who have not received salvation will also be resurrected, as according to John 5:29, the unredeemed will be resurrected for a judgment

¹⁶¹ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, pp. 144- 155.

¹⁶² Frazier and Demy, ‘Resurrections’, p. 331.

¹⁶³ Timothy J. Demy and John C. Whitcomb, “Two Witnesses”, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 403.

¹⁶⁴ Frazier and Demy, ‘Resurrections’, p. 332.

¹⁶⁵ Frazier and Demy, ‘Resurrections’, p. 332.

and subsequent eternal damnation at the Great White Throne Judgment at the conclusion of the millennial kingdom,

'The lost of all ages will be collected from the place of the dead (hades) and brought before the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15), where they will be condemned to spend eternity in the lake of fire'.¹⁶⁶

One of the most emphasized ways in which the significance of bodily death is downgraded is the doctrine of imminent Rapture. Much importance is placed on the suggestion that contemporary believers should not anticipate bodily death, but instead a 'translation' of themselves, as a psychosomatic unity, into heaven at the moment of Rapture. Thus, the way in which death would ordinarily cause a final end to the functioning, physical human body, is replaced by a physical translation into heaven at the moment of Rapture.

'Ever since our Lord promised the early Christians that He was returning to His Father's house to prepare a place for them and that He would "come again to receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3), believers have looked forward to being translated rather than seeing death'.¹⁶⁷

The experience of Rapture is always articulated in terms of an explicit physicality, rather than just an intangible spirituality. This physicality does not only apply to those living at the Rapture, but those who are 'asleep in Jesus'; individuals who have achieved salvation but died before the Rapture, will have their bodies rehabilitated at the Rapture before they are 're-attached' to their eternal spirit,

"This is what will happen when the rapture takes place: Without warning, the bodies of all believers who have died since the day of Pentecost will suddenly be transformed into new, living, immortal, resurrected bodies. Even those whose bodies have long since decayed or whose ashes have been scattered out over the oceans will receive a new body. This new body will be joined together with the person's spirit, which Jesus will bring with Him. Then the bodies of those who have likewise accepted Christ as their Savior and are alive at that moment will also be instantly translated into new immortal bodies'.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶Frazier and Demy, 'Resurrections', p. 332.

¹⁶⁷ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁸ LaHaye and Mayhue, 'Rapture', p. 309.

Here and elsewhere, the individual is described as being comprised of a duality of body and spirit. While a distinction is made between the body and the spirit, both are fully integrated into the premillennial dispensationalist account of an individual's salvation, and eternal life,

'The redemption of the body is part of God's complete plan of salvation (Romans 8:23). At death, we are absent from the body but consciously present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8)'.¹⁶⁹

It is understood that at the moment of death, the individual spirit is 'held' until it can be reintegrated with the regenerated 'Glorified' body of the believer. Similarly, a parallel is made between the way in which at the moment of 'born again' epiphany, the spirit of the individual is 'held' by Jesus until the moment of Rapture or resurrection,

'At salvation, God's Spirit comes into our heart so that at the time of death our soul (the eternal part of our being) and our "new nature" or "spirit" departs to be with Christ, where it remains until the resurrection-rapture'.¹⁷⁰

Salvation, therefore, results in the indwelling of the individual by the Holy Spirit, which, in a number of individuals then constitutes the 'true' earthly Church. The guardianship of Holy Spirit at salvation provides a form of 'replacement' of the individual spirit in the earthly body that ensures an individual's safe 'continuation' in a state outside of the earthly body following death.

The body that believers are awarded are known as 'Glorified' or 'Heavenly' bodies. These are composed from elements of the believers' formerly earthly body,

"Those believers who happen to be alive on earth when Christ comes in the air will also be "changed" in the rapture. Our bodies, like those of fellow believers before us who "are asleep in Jesus," are unfit for heaven and must be changed like Christ's body was at His resurrection. That future heavenly body will be made from the elements of our present bodies, or our former bodies, in the case of dead believers. (Wherever these bodies are- in the ocean, the grave, etc. -they will be resurrected.) Elements are never lost; God can

¹⁶⁹ Tim LaHaye, 'Eternal Life', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 97.

¹⁷⁰ LaHaye *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 160.

gather each body's elements from any place in the universe no matter where they are on resurrection day, and He can unite them with the soul and spirit forever'.¹⁷¹

It is with this body that believers are able to inhabit the spiritual realm. This conceptualization of the believer's body after death demonstrates that the soul does not shed the body, rather, the Glorified body is more like a heavenly mosaic of the former body. If the individual has died before the moment of Rapture, Jesus will return trailing the eternal spirit of the individual like a kite, which is then attached to this part-heavenly, part-corporeal structure to complete the Glorified body. Although it is understood there must presumably be a form of 'intermediate state of some kind between the death of our bodies and their ultimate resurrection'¹⁷², the nature of this state is nowhere fully addressed. In *Understanding Bible Prophecy For Yourself*, LaHaye briefly describes the intermediary state of the current dead as that of the 'soulish state', a status that is granted to a believer immediately after death. LaHaye describes,

'in this state we are conscious and recognizable, and we can converse and be comforted or tormented. We will remember earthly events, and those who go to torment may not pass over into comfort'.¹⁷³

Only in *Left Behind* fiction, however, is the moment of transfer from the earthly body of the Rapture host, to the Glorified body imagined, where it proposed that there will be no 'lag' in perceived consciousness between the two states.¹⁷⁴

The *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* lists the following characteristics of the Glorified body,

'1. Physical and material (1 John 1:1-2), 2. transformed (Philippians 3:21), 3. recognizable (Luke 16:19-31), 4. imperishable (1 Corinthians 15: 42), 5. immortal (1 Corinthians 15: 53-57), 6. supernatural abilities (Luke 24:31, 36), 7. sinless (Revelation 21:27), 8. glorified (Philippians 3:21), 9. unfailing (1 Corinthians 15: 42-43), 10. spiritual (1

¹⁷¹ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 160.

¹⁷² LaHaye, 'Eternal Life', p. 97.

¹⁷³ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 219.

¹⁷⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 181-182.

Corinthians 15: 44), 11. heavenly (1 Corinthians 15: 49-57), 12. radiant (Daniel 12:3), 13. unmarried (Matthew 22:30), 14. fully mature (1 John 3:2), 15. no negative effects (Isaiah 65:17)'.¹⁷⁵

These attributes demonstrate quite clearly that the Glorified body is far from a nebulous quintessence of spirit. Rather, the Glorified body is a distinctly physical and tangible body. Not only is it composed from parts of the earthly body, but it is recognizable as such. The eternal, Glorified body is conceptualised as impenetrable, resilient and invincible. Later, when considering the *Left Behind* fiction, it will be possible to see how the description of Irene's Rapture experience in *The Rapture* clearly demonstrates this understanding, as her body is corporeally regenerated to its prime in heaven.¹⁷⁶

The attributes of the believer's Glorified body given above are furthermore explicitly tied to an understanding of Jesus' resurrection body, 'Jesus' resurrection body is the pattern for the future resurrection of the dead'.¹⁷⁷ Whilst Rapture and resurrection are not by any means the same, it is understood that Jesus returned to earth following his resurrection in a Glorified body. Jesus' Glorified body is defended as a distinctly physical one. The *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* gives eight reasons for why 'Jesus' resurrection body was literal and physical'.¹⁷⁸ These include Jesus' missing corpse from the empty tomb, and Jesus offering himself for physical inspection following his resurrection in Luke 24:39-40 and John 20:20, 25-27.¹⁷⁹ The premillennial dispensational understanding of the Rapture body is that it will mimic the Glorified resurrected body of Jesus,

'Christians will have resurrection bodies like Jesus' glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21). It is our mortal bodies that will be enlivened (Romans 8:11)'.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ LaHaye, 'Eternal Life', pp. 97-98.

¹⁷⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 177.

¹⁷⁷ Gary R. Habermas, 'Resurrection', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 330.

¹⁷⁸ Habermas, 'Resurrection', p. 328.

¹⁷⁹ Habermas, 'Resurrection', p. 328.

¹⁸⁰ Habermas, 'Resurrection', p. 328.

Thus, the post-Rapture body of the believer should therefore be capable of enacting all of the activities that Jesus' body was able to perform following his resurrection,

'This new, resurrected body made from the elements of our former body, will be recognizable, will be able to communicate with other saints, and will even be able to eat, for our Lord ate fish with His disciples after His resurrection. Yet His resurrected body was not subject to time or space; He could walk through walls and travel great distances at the speed of thought. In this state, we will be with the Lord forever. It is in this immortal body that we will rule with Christ throughout the millennium, and after that go into heaven for the eternity to come'.¹⁸¹

Here too, as will be seen later in the discussion of the body in *Left Behind* fiction, these attributes are precisely in the account of Irene's post-Rapture acclimatisation to her Glorified body in heaven.¹⁸²

As has been discussed above, premillennial dispensationalism predicts a pre-Tribulational Rapture, but argues that it will be possible to receive spiritual redemption after the Rapture,

'[The Holy Spirit] will continue carrying out His other ministries, such as filling and sealing believers. These ministries will result in worldwide revival during the Tribulation'.¹⁸³

However, the prophetic media lays a heavy emphasis on the importance of swift conversion, in order to ensure that believers will not be 'appointed to His wrath'¹⁸⁴ and will thus escape not only a natural death, but also and in particular, the explicitly horrific and grisly deaths predicted for those who experience the Tribulation. Throughout the prophetic media, the Glorified Body of the believer is constantly juxtaposed with its unredeemed counterpart; the apocalyptic body of those who must suffer through the Tribulation.

'Contrasting sharply with the glorious future that awaits each and every believer, the fate of the unbeliever is simply too horrifying to even imagine'.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, pp. 160-61.

¹⁸² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 189.

¹⁸³ Timothy J. Demy, 'Tribulation Saints and Martyrs', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 391.

¹⁸⁴ LaHaye and Mayhue, 'Rapture', p. 314.

¹⁸⁵ LaHaye, 'Eternal Life', p. 96.

In the discussion of *Left Behind* fiction, we will see how violence and the degradation of the body through God's judgements represent the antithesis to salvation, since the violence enacted on the individual human body and the collective body of humankind during the Tribulation manifests their rejection of the Holy Spirit. Prior to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, Christ will perform another judgement on all those who have survived the bodily horrors of Tribulation.¹⁸⁶ This 'Judgement of the Nations' is taken from a reading of Matthew 25: 31-46, and it is understood that during the judgement, the righteous 'sheep' are divided from the unrighteous 'goats' who are respectively sent to the kingdom, or the everlasting fire. LaHaye uses the example of this judgment to defend the pre-Tribulational Rapture,

'Given that everyone will be sent to one of these two destinations, if we adhere to a post-Trib rapture view, we are left with no one to populate the Millennial kingdom. This is a significant problem that renders the post-Trib view impossible, or at least seriously suspect'.¹⁸⁷

In this understanding, should the Rapture occur after the Tribulation, all those who have been saved will be Raptured, and therefore granted Glorified bodies. This poses a problem for the prophetic role of the millennial kingdom, since if there are no earthly or natural bodies at the end of the Tribulation then there will be no means of propagating the millennial kingdom,

'By contrast, the pre-Trib view says that those who become Christians *during* the Tribulation will not be raptured at the end of the Tribulation and thus will still have their natural bodies when they enter the Millennium. The pre-Trib view which as the Rapture *before* the Tribulation, states that the believers who are raptured will already be taken up to the Father's house and given their glorified bodies, but those who receive Christ *during* the Tribulation and survive to the time of Christ's glorious appearing at the end of the Tribulation will not receive glorified bodies. Because they still have their natural bodies, they will be able to populate the Millennial kingdom'.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Paul Benware 'Judgment of the Nations', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 174.

¹⁸⁷ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 131.

¹⁸⁸ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 131.

Those who are saved, and live until the millennial kingdom, will not be part of the Rapture Church and thus will not possess Glorified bodies until they enter heaven. Rather they will be “made perfect” like all the redeemed’.¹⁸⁹ In this state, they will be able to propagate the millennial kingdom. As discussed in the chapter on Powerlessness, those who are born during the millennial kingdom will have to ‘opt in’ to their own salvation, while the salvation of all other members of the millennial kingdom is already assured.¹⁹⁰ This propagation is necessary, because it is the children born in the millennial kingdom who will join the final rebellion against God. This represents one of the few occasions on which natural earthly bodies are attributed greater prophetic significance than Glorified bodies.

The millennial kingdom is identified as an explicitly physical kingdom inhabited by a mixture of redeemed, post-Tribulation bodies ‘made perfect’, and Glorified bodies. The millennial kingdom will be established on the site of Jerusalem, ‘the camp of saints’.¹⁹¹ Its citizens are understood to include the Glorified bodies of Old Testament saints, members of the Raptured church, and ‘Tribulation Saints’; those who have been martyred during the Tribulation. The kingdom will also contain the redeemed, restored earthly bodies of those who survived until the end of the Tribulation and their children. These earthly bodies will be excused from sorrow, suffering or death.¹⁹² They will be granted an extended life span, as well as freedom from corruption of the body, such as illness or injury.¹⁹³ Those members of the nation of Israel alive at the Second Coming will become the priests of the millennial kingdom, and will minister through the millennial Temple. Thus, it will be the role of the nation of Israel, rather than that of the Holy Spirit, to mediate between God and the

¹⁸⁹ John C. Whitcomb, ‘Millennial Temple’, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 231.

¹⁹⁰ Jordan, ‘Millennium’, p. 235.

¹⁹¹ Whitcomb, ‘Millennial Temple’, p. 230.

¹⁹² LaHaye, ‘Eternal Life’, p. 97.

¹⁹³ Jordan, ‘Millennium’, p. 236.

individual soul for the purpose of achieving salvation.¹⁹⁴ At the end of the millennial kingdom, all those unredeemed will also be physically resurrected. Although they will be corporeally resurrected for their judgment and subsequent damnation at the Great White Throne Judgment, they will not receive glorified bodies, 'but rather, a body suited for eternal punishment'.¹⁹⁵ Both the unsaved and the saved will therefore persist in an 'eternal state' at the conclusion of the millennial kingdom, regardless of whether the individual is in heaven or in hell.

What we have seen is that the Glorified body awarded believers at death is not metaphysical. Rather, it is an explicitly tangible and corporeal body which is expressive of the literalist and deeply physical way that premillennialism conceptualises the promises of its faith. The Glorified body is linked to the definition of prophecy as a biblical extrapolation that is determined in the real world. The Glorified body is conceptualised as an immutable, indestructible, sensory body, one that is restored, that can run, and can eat. In other words, it is a recognisable continuation of the individuality of the earthly human personality, in all its uniqueness. Furthermore, as we will see in the examples of the *Left Behind* fiction, the blessings awarded to the believer are distinctly physical,

'[Heaven] is a real place where people with physical bodies will dwell in God's presence for all eternity'.¹⁹⁶

The Glorified body stands in direct opposition to the remarkable horror and corruption, the mutilation, and suffering that characterises the apocalyptic body of the Tribulation. An individual can only be saved from this by being 'indwelt' by the Holy Spirit, as it is only this guardianship of the Holy Spirit that safeguards the human spirit from both eternal

¹⁹⁴ Jordan, 'Millennium', p. 237.

¹⁹⁵ Frazier and Demy, 'Resurrections', p. 332.

¹⁹⁶ John MacArthur, 'Heaven', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 129.

damnation and physical torture. Those who wait until after the Rapture to convert will still have to suffer through those horrors, regardless of their redemption. If these individuals survive until the end of the Tribulation, and enter the millennial kingdom, their natural bodies are still capable of producing sin.

As discussed above, sin, in this context, is tied to natural human instinct. This underlines the powerlessness of human beings to exercise agency over their own inherently evil nature unless they allow themselves to be 'indwelt' by the Holy Spirit. Only then can Jesus perform the 'immortal photocopy' of the spirit and body that is provided for believers in heaven as their Glorified bodies. The Glorified body in premillennial prophecy belief represents in many ways, the promises of the Christian faith itself. It represents a very real hope for 'translation' into heaven at the Rapture, and escape from the starkest physical horrors of both the Tribulation, and eternal damnation. The immutability of the corporeal Glorified body is thus juxtaposed to the degradation of death, the corruption of the grave and the mutilation of the body once subject to God's wrath. As a body that can communicate, is recognisable, and is a patchwork of our former selves, the Glorified Body similarly stands in opposition to the annihilation of self at death, as the individual will persist, ourselves, but 'translated' into the spiritual realm.

Finally, we have seen how the Glorified Body is explicitly linked to the post-resurrection body of Jesus, 'What a blessed proclamation! Because Jesus was raised, believers will be, too'.¹⁹⁷ In this way, the Glorified body represents a means of understanding Christianity as a transformative psychosomatic transaction, both at the moment of being salvation, and at the moment of death,

¹⁹⁷ Habermas, 'Resurrection', p. 330.

‘The New Testament hope moves from the resurrected Jesus, alive in His immortal body, to the resurrection and immortality of believers. To be sure of the former is to have faith in the latter [...] our resurrection constitutes our future, one that is confirmed. For the earliest Christians, this truth was life-transforming. Similarly, the reality of heaven should be woven into our lives’.¹⁹⁸

For premillennial prophecy belief, this understanding of the transformative properties of salvation is so fundamental that without it, the Christian message is robbed of its entire validity,

‘Christianity is a religion of resurrection [...] Christ taught on several occasions that the graves of believers would open and the believers would come forth to “everlasting life” [...] Without question, it is impossible to remove Jesus Christ from resurrection, It is a doctrinal necessity in that if there is no resurrection, Christianity is a fraud’.¹⁹⁹

Paranoia in Prophecy

Paranoia, as it will be referred to in this chapter, is not meant in the strictly clinical or psychiatric use of the term, rather the term is used in a sense closer to that of Richard Hofstadter in his essay ‘The Paranoid Style in American politics’, in that the paranoid ‘style’ of premillennial dispensationalism finds a hostile and conspiratorial world directed against its every cultural and theological expression.²⁰⁰ The paranoia that suffuses the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is delivered in urgent and anxious narrative tone of intense suspicion, characterised by distrust of the ‘true motives’ of members of unbelievers, but also those of the wider Church community. The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* insists on the existence of concerted efforts of elusive yet powerful institutions and individuals to persecute true believers, and systematic conspiracies that work at every level of society to deceive the true believer and subvert the true message of God. Evidence to support these hypotheses of

¹⁹⁸ Habermas, ‘Resurrection’, p. 330.

¹⁹⁹ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, pp. 144- 155.

²⁰⁰ See: Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, (New York, 1965, 2008), p. 4.

deception, persecution and conspiracy is drawn from a variety of sources, including biblical prophecy, the scholarship of other premillennial dispensationalists, and some mainstream and popular media, such as *Time* magazine or *USA Today*.²⁰¹

The system of prophetic referents which anticipate the end times is also a rich source of paranoid speculation, for its inherent instability provides a shifting network of omens which must be constantly scrutinised. As discussed above, the current dispensation, the 'Church Age' is understood to be devoid of prophetic fulfilment until the Rapture. The legitimization of these end-time portents, therefore, takes on particular significance, since they are the only indication that the time of the Rapture may be approaching. LaHaye argues that although the Rapture will be signless, anticipation of the period of the end of days should be encouraged,

'Christians have asked the \$64, 000 question: "When will you return, and what will be the sign of your coming?" The fact that Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for asking those two questions indicates that He approves of our watching for signs of His return'.²⁰²

The way in which the return of Jesus can be anticipated is through a decoding of those prophetic signs or portents,

'It's legitimate for us to study the signs of Christ's coming or the end of the age (see Matthew 24:3) so that we can discern the approximate time (or season) of His return [...] The signs predicted for the end of this age, which terminated in the glorious appearing, will cast long shadows before them and serve as a general warning to Christians who prepare for His coming [...] it is possible for diligent students of prophecy to anticipate the season of the Rapture'.²⁰³

The process by which these portents of the apocalyptic 'season' have been established is the product of a rich and complex historical discourse. Paul Boyer, in his work, *When Time Shall Be No More*, has explored in detail the way in which specific 'signs' have been established as

²⁰¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 34, p. 329.

²⁰² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 25.

²⁰³ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 75.

part of a standardized and authorised premillennial lexicon of prophetic omens. One of the primary functions of prophetic media such as the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is its ability to control the identification of the sliding signifiers of the end times by 'referencing out' into the historical and contemporary world. This encourages a 'paranoid' reading of the surrounding environment as full of constantly changing, lurking evils and deceptive forms. Readers of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* and, to some extent, of the *Left Behind* novels, are encouraged to be constantly alert to these indications, despite the warnings against 'newspaper exegesis'; i.e. the forcing of current events to fit prophetic predictions, 'we must guard against the great temptation to read prophecy through the eyes of the present'.²⁰⁴

The prophetic signs of the end-times are varied and extremely numerous. Some of these 'signs' are set as prophetic canon, and include natural phenomena such as earthquakes, 'Earthquakes have always been God's way of getting man's attention'.²⁰⁵ LaHaye argues that 'The only known multiple earthquakes in history have been recorded since World War I'.²⁰⁶ He notes that

'In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John forewarned that worst earthquakes ever to hit the planet will occur during the Tribulation [...] who can doubt that we are seeing the earth being prepared for the coming judgements of God as foretold for the Tribulation?'²⁰⁷

LaHaye states that the US Geological Department

'has reported that our globe experienced a record number of killer earthquakes during the last decade. From 1950 through 1989, each decade exceeded the decade before in the total number and intensity of catastrophic earthquakes [...] Only a fool would deny that the earth is twisting and moving in anticipation of the *big one*'.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Study Workbook*, p. 15.

²⁰⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 41.

²⁰⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 41.

²⁰⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 42.

²⁰⁸ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, pp. 241-242.

Indeed, the categorisation of natural disasters often receives particular significance in premillennial prophetic discourse. The 'Rapture Index' website that chronicles the likelihood of imminent Rapture has five separate listings for natural disasters.²⁰⁹

Other, less self-evident signs require more flexible interpretation. These include a host of indications that moral or social conditions on earth are degenerating. LaHaye and Jenkins suggest that the top seven sins that are said to characterise the Tribulation are already proliferating on earth. These include: rebellion against God, the worship of demons, idolatry, murders, drugs, sexual immorality and thefts.²¹⁰ Similarly, LaHaye quotes 2 Timothy 3:1-7, and lists the way in which the

'eighteen characteristics of a society in free fall [...] have been a consistent part of Western culture since the First World War'.²¹¹

These characteristics include: selfishness, covetousness, boasting, blasphemy, disobedience to parents, rebellion, unthankfulness, unholiness, the lack of natural affection, truce-breaking, incontinence, ferocity, despising, treachery, recklessness, high-mindedness, the loving of pleasure, and the lack of power with God.²¹² These signs are interpreted to include a range of specific politically conservative concerns. For example, the indication that 'selfishness' is on the rise is that 'the divorce rate in our country is about 51 percent'.²¹³

Under the sub-heading concerning 'Without Natural Affection', LaHaye states that,

"Today homosexuality and lesbianism are accepted by many in officialdom as "normal". Promiscuity before and after marriage is assumed'.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ 'The Rapture Index', Rapture Ready, accessed 5 December 2012, <http://www.raptureready.com/rap2.html>

²¹⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 327.

²¹¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 334.

²¹² See: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, pp. 334- 342.

²¹³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 334.

²¹⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 335.

Similarly, LaHaye argues that legalised abortion is the 'the greatest evidence that Tribulation-like living has already gripped our society'²¹⁵ and constitutes one of the most evident signs of the end-times,

'Our own nation has murdered so many unborn children that we have not only incurred the wrath of God but damaged the nation's social security system [...] It is time in these evil days for Christian leaders to lead their members into the voting booth and work to put a halt to the killing of innocent blood!'²¹⁶

The horrors of social degradation and in particular of civic violence, are also emphasized as a signal that we are living in the last season of the earth,

'The current violent crime rate-almost twenty five thousand murders each year in America- is making this once-Christian nation the murder capital of the world [...] The rise in drive-by shootings, rapes, muggings, and murders are horrible'.²¹⁷

LaHaye creates a compelling horror narrative of routine brutal slaughter that awaits the believer,

'We have reached a scary time when women are known to drown their own children. Children have been known to kill their parents and then demand leniency from society'.²¹⁸

Indeed, LaHaye suggests that, 'One police officer told me that youth murder crime (8-15) is escalating faster than any other category'²¹⁹. LaHaye also quotes 'road rage' as one example of the prevalence of homicidal instincts, 'angry drivers have taken guns and shot other drivers, just so they won't lose their place in traffic'.²²⁰

Perhaps the most highly emphasised indications that the Rapture is approaching are taken from a reading of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and I Timothy 4:1 and are described as two

²¹⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 300.

²¹⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 342.

²¹⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 300.

²¹⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 337.

²¹⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 335.

²²⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 338.

interlinked signs of deception and apostasy. Apostasy is defined as a form of 'falling away' or 'departure' from the true earthly Church. In the end-times it is also understood that apostasy, in the form of deception, will also infect the Christendom,

'Blindness will overtake the professing church [...] many who confess biblical truth and profess a relationship with God will simply be acting, living a lie, walking as religious charlatans'.²²¹

Heresy is defined as a denial of 'some aspect of the Christian faith while continuing to profess to be a Christian'.²²² An apostate, however, is defined as one who 'has abandoned and denounced any Christian profession at all'.²²³ Apostasy is further described as including those who promote any form of rebellion against the true earthly Church, and the 'wilful leaving of previously known truth and embracing error'.²²⁴ The qualities of an apostate echo those characteristics ascribed to the sinners of the Tribulation, and are listed as 'revilers, boastful, arrogant, disobedient to parents, ungrateful unholy, lovers of pleasure'.²²⁵

By far the most significant characteristic of the apostasy of the last days is described as the work of 'deceivers' or 'false teachers', who may reside either in the secular world, or be hidden within Christendom itself. In *Are We Living In The End Times?*, this kind of deception is listed as the primary sign that the end-times are upon us.²²⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins note that this deception is nothing new, 'Of course, there have always been false teachers, for that is Satan's way of distorting the truths of God'.²²⁷ These false teachers are identified as resoundingly secular whilst making pretences of Christian foundations, 'we have so many

²²¹ Mal Couch and Ed Hindson, 'Apostasy', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 32.

²²² Couch and Hindson, 'Apostasy', p. 32.

²²³ Couch and Hindson, 'Apostasy', p. 32.

²²⁴ Couch and Hindson, 'Apostasy', p. 32.

²²⁵ Couch and Hindson, 'Apostasy', p. 32.

²²⁶ See: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 32.

²²⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 33.

cults, religions, and other *-isms* that claim a Christian basis for their beliefs'.²²⁸ Such 'deceiving' cults and false teachers are described as

'tragic stories of several extremists whose bizarre and false teachings ended up costing the lives of hundreds of people: Jim Jones's followers in Guyana, 1978; David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Texas, 1993; the Heaven's Gate group in southern California, 1997'.²²⁹

Alongside these groups, false teachers are also blamed for 'the cultic UFO groups that are proliferating today'.²³⁰ Comments such as these highlight the way in which parallels drawn between believers of Rapture theology and other 'marginal' supernatural beliefs, such as UFO beliefs or American sects with an apocalyptic rhetoric, stand in direct opposition to the way in which premillennial dispensationalist prophecy discourse views itself. Not only are these other forms of alternate, or marginal apocalyptic, spiritual or otherworldly American cultures considered to be directly satanically inspired, but their mere existence is heralded as proof that the Rapture will be fast approaching.²³¹

The corrupting power of Satan is also credited with a number of secular and non-Christian threats to the Christian faith. Direct Satanic worship is depicted as a widespread practice,

'Twenty years ago Satan worship was scarcely heard of; today it is rampant. Satan worshipers are frequently on the evening news because of some satanic ritual that killed or maimed someone. Witchcraft, too, is becoming rampant, even respectable. A recent photo in *USA Today* pictured seven hundred witches dressed in black and wielding brooms, sweeping down the Matterhorn in Switzerland'.²³²

A number of satanically inspired occult and supernatural activities are also illustrated to be on the rise,

'Add to that astrology, psychic readings, and other occult practices that seek information from satanic sources. Although mankind has a keen interest in the future, he refuses to go

²²⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 33.

²²⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 33.

²³⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 34.

²³¹ It is, however, possible to observe considerable overlap between the paranoid modes of American 'conspiracy belief' and Prophecy belief. See, for example: Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy, Apocalyptic Visions in America* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), pp. 3-4.

²³² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 329.

to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, but instead often resorts to necromancy, tarot-card readings, voodoo, and other demonic practices'.²³³

In addition to the demonic practices of supernatural Satan worship, apostasy is also strongly linked to secular intellectualism,

'One final trait typical of the moral climate during the end times ought to be considered: the emergence of scoffers. Modern scepticism has its roots in the empiricism of Descartes and has taken over the graduate schools of the world'.²³⁴

One particular theory, named 'uniformitarianism' is blamed for this. Uniformitarianism is described as

'the theory that the current processes of life are sufficient to account for the origin and development of all the earth's physical and biological phenomena'.²³⁵

It is suggested that

'uniformitarianism [...] fostered many of the evils that beset our society today and is propagated by the most intellectually trained members of our society'.²³⁶

In this way, the explicitly evolutionary ideologies of the secular world are blamed for a moral and social degradation,

'the present moral holocaust- based as it is on an evolutionary philosophy that rejects God, creation, and moral absolutes exactly fulfils this sign of end-times moral conditions'.²³⁷

'Uniformitarianism' is described as a systematic attempt to discredit the truth of the biblical Word. Secular pedagogical institutions are particularly vulnerable to this kind of apostasy, and it is generally considered to affect those with a degree from a non-Christian university,

'high-minded people, usually those with advanced degrees, dogmatically oppose moral teachings and prefer the immoral practices of humanism'.²³⁸

²³³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 329.

²³⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 347.

²³⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, pp. 347- 348.

²³⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 348.

²³⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 353.

²³⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 340.

In the above example, universities are depicted as hotbeds of morally corrupt, humanistic apostasy. LaHaye claims that there are many powerful covert and overt institutions that he believes represent a genuine threat against the 'true' Church. These organizations are credited with an interlinked network of members, who work to control the world according to a globalized, one-world religion and economy,

'What is important about these organizations is that whenever their membership comes to light, it includes those who control government, banking, education, and media. Few Christians are ever found in such groups [...] no doubt when Satan does prepare the world for uniting under one master controller he will use a system of interlocking, secret organizations that seek to control the economy, the religion and the media of the world'.²³⁹

LaHaye explicitly names several of these organizations or institutions. We will first briefly consider the institution of the United Nations, before turning to the more esoteric humanistic organizations blamed for the moral decrepitude of the end-times.

Almost since its inception, the United Nations has been a regular contender for the sign of the Antichrist's ten-nation confederacy of Daniel 2:42, 44 and Daniel 7:7, 24, 'it is only a matter of time until the UN is capable of controlling the world'.²⁴⁰ *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* suggests specific reasons for why the UN is particularly capable of becoming the seat of the Antichrist:

'One idea from the Club of Rome suggested that a stepping stone to world government might be to divide the world in ten regions with a "head" appointed to lead each area, with representation at the UN. The Security Council could be expanded to ten; consequently, the world would be governed by what one major U.S. newspaper described as "ten wise men"'.²⁴¹

Furthermore, any secular organization that promotes global unity, and peace, in particular, should be considered extremely suspect. It is emphasized that true peace on earth can

²³⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, pp. 169 –170.

²⁴⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 169.

²⁴¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 169.

exclusively be brought about by Jesus the Messiah, and not by any earthly individual or organization.

‘Unsaved Gentiles should also anticipate that time when the new world order or one-world government will come on the scene with the cry, “Let’s give world peace a chance.” A charismatic world figure who has no place for God or His moral values will bring this about through the United Nations or some other major international organization’.²⁴²

The figure of the Antichrist himself is of course a crucially important sign of the end-times. It is understood that the Antichrist cannot reveal himself until after the Rapture, and the ‘restraining’ function of the Holy Spirit has been removed. As such, it would be incorrect to suggest that the Antichrist is personally active in the contemporary world,

‘Only after the Rapture of the church will the identity of the Antichrist be revealed. In other words, you don’t want to know who he is. If you ever do figure out who he is and you’re still here on Earth, then you have been left behind!’²⁴³

Instead, the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* proposes that there are many ‘sleepers’ agents of Satan in every generation, all potential Antichrists, who will be ‘activated’ at the moment of Rapture.

‘Satan himself is left guessing when the rapture might occur. This means he must have a man in mind to indwell as the Antichrist in every generation. In other words, any one of a number of people could have been the Antichrist but only one will be. Satan must keep selecting candidates and waiting for God’s timing’.²⁴⁴

The reader is alerted to the fact that there are many potential Antichrists concealed in the unsaved population, and that new candidates are constantly being selected. As such, any ambitious junior political official has the potential to become the future Antichrist,

‘Satan waits for his opportunity to destroy the whole world and the ultimate plan of God. He may be a defeated foe, but he has every intention of keeping up the fight to the very end. Even now he is moving about restlessly, searching for the right man to be the Antichrist’.²⁴⁵

²⁴² LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 169.

²⁴³ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 55.

²⁴⁴ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 55.

²⁴⁵ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 56.

Alongside the United Nations, LaHaye suggests another that organization particularly dangerous to the Christian message is the society of Illuminati. In *The Rapture, Who Will Face the Tribulation*, LaHaye directly addresses a theory that it was the Illuminati who proposed the pre-Tribulational Rapture as a ploy to politically neutralize Evangelical Christianity. LaHaye first reassures the reader that the attempts of the Illuminati to destroy Christianity is a well-known phenomena, and one with which he is well acquainted,

‘I myself have been a 50-year student of the satanically inspired, centuries-old conspiracy to use government, education, and media to destroy every vestige of Christianity within our society and establish a new world order. Having read at least 50 books on the Illuminati, I am convinced that it exists and can be blamed for many of man’s inhumane actions against his fellow man over the past 200 years. For 30 years my wife and I have worked tirelessly to halt the effect so this conspiracy on the church, our government, media and the public schools; so obviously I am not hostile to the conspiracy theory. An enormous amount of evidence proves that the secularization of our once Judeo-Christian society has not been an accident but is the result of the devilishly clever scheming carried on by this secret order’.²⁴⁶

However, despite the prevalence and power of the order, LaHaye rejects the idea that the Illuminati have somehow been responsible for pre-Tribulational theology.

‘Of all the attacks on the Rapture, easily the most ridiculous is the one which finds it an instrument of the Illuminati (the Master Conspirators) to put the evangelical community to sleep politically so that the secularizers of the Western world are free to dominate the government, education, communications industry, and other agencies of influence’.²⁴⁷

In this discussion of some of the ‘signs’ of the end times, a clear narrative of conspiracy, persecution and deception can be identified. The *LaHaye Prophecy Library* suggests that the spirit of evil is suffused throughout the earthly world. As seen in the consideration of

²⁴⁶ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 208.

²⁴⁷ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 207.

Powerlessness, its conceptualisation of human nature emphasises a distrust of all unbelievers,

‘People are not naturally good. They are inherently inclined toward evil. When given a choice, the majority [...] choose to do evil rather than good’.²⁴⁸

The signs of apostasy and deception described above further encourage distrust in the wider Church, as the ‘infiltration’ of Christendom by Satan is a necessary precursor to the occurrence of the Rapture. For example, the Methodist denomination is dismissed in its entirety as essentially polluted by the agents of Satan.²⁴⁹ LaHaye polarizes this institutional infiltration with the literalist hermeneutic, which is depicted as fulfilling its ‘restraining’ function as the embodiment of the Holy Spirit. The literalist hermeneutic is represented as the sole buffer against a total secularization of the United States,

‘Were it not for the moving of the Holy Spirit and the obedience of millions of Christians to the plain teaching of Scripture, America would today be a totally secularized nation, thus destroying the greatest source of world missions in history’.²⁵⁰

This juxtaposition illuminates several distinctions. While the apostate churches ‘are dying by the thousands’ as a result of their lack of adherence to the Word, those Christians motivated by literalist hermeneutic are the last bastion of true Christianity in the United States, a centre for mission work all over the world.²⁵¹ It is these Bible-believing Christians that LaHaye conceptualizes as the central hub of a worldwide evangelistic mission. The certainty that apostate Christianity has infiltrated prestigious individuals, seminaries, and even entire denominations, like Methodism, underlines the unreliability of their institutions of scholarship. Retraction from these ‘tainted’ pedagogical institutions is therefore perfectly justified, and dispensational isolationism the only way of ensuring that this apostate

²⁴⁸ McQuaid, ‘Final Revolt’, p. 111.

²⁴⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 77.

²⁵⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p.78.

²⁵¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p.78.

infection cannot spread into their own institutions. This separation of institutional channels even from other Christian denominations streamlines premillennial dispensationalist discursive interpretation, creating a self-contained funnel, isolating for those churches that 'depend upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit'²⁵² against the hostile apostate world of Satan-infected Christendom.

The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* teaches that the only way to protect oneself against the onslaught of Satan's deceiving power is to trust in the Paranoid narrative of premillennial dispensationalism. It is suggested that only knowledge of prophecy will allow readers to correctly identify, and therefore avoid, those deceptive forms, 'A proper understanding of prophecy arms the believer against cults and false prophets'.²⁵³ This knowledge of prophecy therefore empowers the individual with the ability to detect the 'true' meaning of those signs of the times, to detect deception, and to witness the truth to others. This 'proper understanding' can be achieved by consulting the materials of *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* in particular,

'[This book] will equip you to answer the false teachers who are popping up everywhere. Even more important, it will help to you straighten out the thinking of the many people you meet who are being deceived by these false teachers'.²⁵⁴

Throughout the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, the tone of paranoia is heightened by a narrative of urgency. Indeed, the first chapter of *Understanding Bible Prophecy For Yourself* is entitled, 'The Urgency'.²⁵⁵ The *LaHaye Prophecy Library* is punctuated by continual references to the rapid pace of social moral degeneration in the surrounding world,

'We are living in incredible times. Things are changing so fast we can hardly keep up with them. Before we can catch our breath, we are hurried on to the next significant event on the horizon. Tensions in the Middle East, the development of weapons of mass

²⁵² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p.78.

²⁵³ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 17. Original Italics.

²⁵⁴ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p.8.

²⁵⁵ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p.7.

destruction, and threats to global peace fill the newspaper headlines. We all sense that the world is moving toward some great climax'.²⁵⁶

Allusions to a countdown of the prophetic clock are frequent, 'Signs are Like Time Clocks'.²⁵⁷

In *Are We Living In the End Times?*, the visual symbol of a clock is shown at each stage between eleven and twelve o' clock alongside a significant prophetic extrapolation. For example, an image of a clock with its hands at eleven o' clock is captioned, 'Israel 1948, Ezekiel 37', and further down the same page, another image of a clock at five past eleven is shown, captioned, 'Increase in Travel and Knowledge, Daniel 12:4'.²⁵⁸ In the concluding chapter of *Are We Living In the End Times?*, LaHaye issues a final warning that conversion must be undertaken in the moment, as time itself is running out, 'prophetically- it is later than it has ever been'.²⁵⁹

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that the anxiety narratives of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* work to reinforce and to 'police' the boundaries of premillennial dispensationalist prophetic discourse. The texts operate as a means of communication between the central circle of prophecy discourse and the peripheral spheres of readership. The texts convey a hermeneutic which 'fixes' meanings of Scripture at the discursive heart of the movement, establishing exegetical 'tramlines' which convey a 'common sense' understanding of the biblical Word. In this expression of the premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic, the texts of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* establish a particular dynamic between the reader, Scripture, and the surrounding world. The 'common sense' understanding of Scripture allocates specific signifiers of the end times, encouraging readers to read the contemporary world as a prophetic text, discerning 'signs of the times'

²⁵⁶ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 5.

²⁵⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 27.

²⁵⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 28.

²⁵⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 365.

in the socio-political fabric of the age. In this paranoid scanning of the world for manifestations of evil, of apostasy and the 'signs of the times', the anxiety narratives of the *LaHaye Prophecy Library* seek to perform a 'stabilising' function for the inherently problematic dynamic that occurs in the conjunction of a particularly physical theology with a prophetic scheme that denies physical signification until the next dispensation.

Chapter Four

Left Behind fiction

‘Horror was not a good enough word for it’.¹

This chapter will explore the anxiety narratives of *Left Behind* fiction, and serve to highlight the ways in which the process of theological ‘streamlining’ which takes place in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is extended in *Left Behind* fiction. This chapter will outline the themes of anxiety explored in Chapter Two. In addition to addressing theological issues such as the importance of the imminent Rapture and the eschatological timeline for the next dispensation, *Left Behind* fiction uses its narrative mode to establish models of ‘lived behaviour’ for believers. This includes the way in which the transformative power of the ‘born again’ experience should dictate individual and group behaviour, ‘right’ action, and the balance between believers’ status ‘in’, but not ‘of’ the world. While considering *Left Behind* fiction, it will become clear that a pre-occupation with physical horror forms a central meme in *Left Behind* fiction. In particular, it will be argued in this chapter that the negotiation with the category of the violated, mutilated or dead body carried out in *Left Behind* fiction, is representative of the physicality at the theological core of the movement, and of a literalism and tangibility which is integral to a dispensationalist understanding of Rapture theology and prophetic discourse.

Left Behind in Context

Left Behind is part of a small genre of what Crawford Gribben has termed, ‘prophecy fiction’.² In his extended study of the genre, *Writing The Rapture*, Gribben suggests that in

¹ LaHaye Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 405.

the last century, there have been perhaps only a hundred examples of this genre, of which 'around half [...] have been published in the aftermath of *Left Behind*'.³ Gribben argues that the small number of examples of this genre does not reflect its true significance, and that in reality, fiction has surpassed non-fiction 'as the most successful cultural conduit of dispensational faith'.⁴ In *Writing The Rapture*, Gribben traces the origins of prophecy fiction to *Titan, Son of Saturn*, a novel by Joseph Birkbeck Burroughs, first published in 1905, and follows the development of prophecy fiction until the publication of *Writing The Rapture* in 2009. Gribben shows that *Left Behind* fiction has inherited a great deal of both its thematic and its prophetic content from its generic forerunners. These include Ernest W. Angley's novel, *Raptured* (Akron, Ohio 1950), or *666* by Salem Kirban (Wheaton, Illinois, 1974). In particular, Gary Cohen's *The Horsemen are Coming* (Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1979), features the occurrence of the Rapture on board an airplane, whilst Dan Betzer's *Beast* (Los Angeles, 1985), and Larry Burkett's *Illuminati* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1992), both describe the rise of the Antichrist following the Rapture. Other popular Evangelical prophecy fiction novels include Frank Peretti's novels, *This Present Darkness* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1986), *Piercing The Darkness* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1988), and Pat Robertson's 1992 novel, *The End of the Age*. Although these novels preceded the *Left Behind* series, they have directly benefited from the popularity of *Left Behind*. Peretti's 'Darkness' series, for example, was updated and remarketed again in 2001- 2002 to capitalize on a revitalized readership for prophecy fiction.

Before addressing the content of the *Left Behind* books, the texts will be considered as commercial objects, particularly relevant is the way in which these novels are marketed and

² Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 5.

³ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 23.

⁴ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 16.

sold. The novels are produced with bold, embossed titles underlined by snappy subtitles, for example: '*Soul Harvest: The World Takes Sides*'. In their first incarnation, the novels were produced in uniformly dark colours, accompanied by hazy, dystopic images that Melani McAlister has described as 'perfect apocalyptic cliché'.⁵ Visually, the books most clearly resembled well-produced science fiction or horror novels⁶. A reading of the content of the novels from a strictly secular perspective, with their chanting locusts from hell, demons, three-headed beasts, talking statues, and angels harvesting the earth with sickles, certainly seem not far removed from horror or science-fiction.

Much has been written on the difficulties of establishing the genre of *Left Behind* fiction, not least because the series borrows so heavily from secular dystopian imagery. Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence suggest that '[*Left Behind* is] a small museum of blended genres, both religious and secular'.⁷ Crawford Gribben reflects that this difficulty is not particular to *Left Behind* fiction, and rather is indicative of its wider genre,

'Many of the prophecy novels that are discussed in this book could also be considered as science fiction or dystopian fiction, as thrillers, or romantic fiction'.⁸

In particular, however, Gribben believes that *Left Behind* offers a successful blend of scriptural content with the science fiction genre,

'LaHaye and Jenkins have constructed fast-paced and plot-driven stories that are also generic hybrids, combining traditional evangelical homily with science-fiction-like threats and action-adventure thrills'.⁹

A *Newsweek* interview with LaHaye and Jenkins in 2004 similarly describes the *Left Behind* series as, 'old-time religion with a sci-fi sensibility'.¹⁰ Indeed, my very first encounter with the novels was for precisely this reason; they were recommended to me as "Science-fiction,

⁵ McAlister, 'Prophecy, Politics', p. 785.

⁶ See: Appendix 2, p. 328.

⁷ Jewett and Lawrence, 'Eschatology in Pop Culture', p. 666.

⁸ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 22.

⁹ McAlister, 'Prophecy, Politics', p. 774.

¹⁰ Gates, Jefferson and Underwood, 'Pop Prophets', p. 44.

if you ignore all the Christian stuff". Apocalyptic and science fiction share much in terms of narrative positioning, tropes and imaginative modes, and Frederick Kreuziger has written two very useful studies of the dynamic between the two genres, analysing how, in the simplest terms, science fiction can be understood as 'a secularized transformation of biblical apocalyptic'.¹¹ While it is not possible to fully develop these similarities in this study, Frederick Kreuziger's works, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction* (Wisconsin, 1982), and *The Religion of Science Fiction* (Wisconsin, 1986), have offered a useful framework for my own analysis of the conceptual apparatus of *Left Behind's* apocalyptic collapse

Since their first incarnation as quasi- science fiction 'airport' novels, the *Left Behind* series has been re-produced with new covers, so that their outward appearance more closely resembles that of a hard-boiled military memoir¹². In either of these reproductions, the novels are not immediately distinguishable as religious fiction. Their update, which took place in 2011, has resulted in full-page cover images which now display airplanes, men in desert-camouflage combat uniforms against a non-specified middle-eastern backdrop, and army helicopters flying against a scene of fire and explosions. Cheryl Kirwin, Tyndale's senior marketing editor has commented,

'The new designs for the *Left Behind Series* imagine how TV networks would cover the end times as the sequence of events takes place [...] We approached the imagery and composition with an eye for photojournalism rather than pure fictional drama. The result is a collection of covers as arresting as a breaking news bulletin'.¹³

This re-branding of the novels thus also accords with the premillennial dispensationalist prophetic scheme; even the novels are updated in order to reflect the changing signifiers of the 'end times'.

¹¹ Frederick Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction, A Dialectic of Religious and Secular Soteriologies* (Wisconsin, 1982), p. 133.

¹² See: Appendix 2, p. 329.

¹³ <http://www.examiner.com/article/left-behind-are-we-living-the-end-times>

The *Left Behind* series has proved an astonishing success for Tyndale House, and its impressive sales reflect a carefully meditated marketing strategy. Writing about wider Evangelical publishing, Jan Blodgett has noted that

‘the acts of publication and marketing carry their own cultural signals and implications, often reshaping messages in unintended ways’.¹⁴

Certainly, through a process of cultural codification, the act of publication defines and reshapes messages into a specific discursive ‘image’. However, it seems unlikely that the marketing and production of the *Left Behind* series has been ‘unintentional’ in any sense. Indeed, I suspect that the marketing of the *Left Behind* books, whether as science-fiction or as military fiction, reflects the original purpose of the novel: to witness to readers who might not otherwise find Christian fiction particularly appealing. The paperback version of *Left Behind* issued in September 2000, for example, was a smaller, cheaper version of the novel, promoted to churches in large batch sales for use in conversion.¹⁵ A great deal of *Left Behind*’s commercial success has been attributable to its cross-over appeal,

‘a critical factor in Tyndale’s growth is their successful marketing [of *Left Behind*] to secular outlets, especially the chain stores such as Kmart and Wal-Mart. The company has also established separate divisions to accommodated Tyndale’s expansion into magazines, audiotapes, and CD-ROM products’.¹⁶

Similarly, *Left Behind*’s ‘spiritual success’ in the winning of souls, has granted the series a canonical status in the circles of Evangelical publishing, eliciting a great deal of mimetic marketing.¹⁷

Donna Tartt has described the novel as a ‘rather godless’ literary form, which, in its history and genesis is an emphatically secular art form, ‘a product of secular society, addressing

¹⁴ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 154-55.

¹⁶ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 45.

¹⁷ See: Appendix 2.

primarily secular concerns'.¹⁸ *Left Behind*, however, appropriates the form of the novel for theological discussions in several ways. In part, this is due to the legacy of prophecy fiction that paved the way for *Left Behind*. However, the story arc of the *Left Behind* novels also mirrors not just the content, but the teleological progression and narrative closure of biblical apocalyptic. The volumes which comprise the *Left Behind* series work as novels by requiring readers to invest some degree of 'faith' in the narrative, a 'willing suspension of disbelief' that encourages an engagement with the story, and thus the theological structure of the text. At the beginning of each *Left Behind* novel, for example, there is a prologue that repeats the final chapter of the previous novel, enabling an unbroken stream of narrative progression to run through the series. Moreover, the process of reading itself holds an elevated position in the premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic. In the *Left Behind* novels, the reading of Scripture is depicted as act of almost gluttonous consumption,

'I felt a deep hunger and thirsting [...] for the Bible, [...] I read and read and read and read and read. I cannot tell you how it filled me'.¹⁹

The characters attest to their ability to devour Scripture, "I read that Bible the way a starving man eats bread"²⁰, and regularly report staying up all night 'feasting on the word'.²¹ The characters' religious experience is not just accessed through text, but is the enactment of text, '[heaven] was akin to reading a book so engrossing that you never wanted it to end'.²²

The characters of *Left Behind* fiction are highly literate, and at all times able to access Scripture and exegesis through their personal study Bibles, filled with hand-written notes and observations, by reading their pastor, Bruce Barnes' prophetic commentary, or through

¹⁸ Donna Tartt, 'The spirit and writing in a secular world', in *The Novel, Spirituality and Modern Culture, Eight Novelists Write about their Craft and their Context*, ed. Paul Fiddes (Cardiff, 2000), p. 25.

¹⁹ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Mark, The Beast Rules the World* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2000), p.115.

²⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 262.

²¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 25, p. 46.

²² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 282.

the messianic Rabbi Tsion Ben Judah's daily teachings online. While the characters are all portrayed as reading extensively for the purposes of faith, there is little mention of reading for pleasure or purely 'frivolous' entertainment purposes.²³ Following Rayford's conversion, he describes his shock that he had ever spent his time reading anything other than the Bible for pleasure,

'how many hours had he wasted during idle moments like this, poring over newspapers and magazines that had nothing to say? After all that had happened, only one book could hold his interest'.²⁴

Similarly, following Irene's Rapture, her 'works' on earth are tested in a heavenly fire. In this process, any recreation activities that she undertook to 'refresh herself' for acts of service of God or care of her family are lauded. Any time spent not 'educating or inspiring herself' is, however, deemed wasteful. This includes any television show 'that quickly proved other than educational or even uplifting' and 'Books that proved titillating but pointless'.²⁵ Indeed, only the biological parents of the Antichrist are described as reading literature for pleasure.²⁶ In the face of this rhetoric, Tyndale's branding of *Left Behind* as a blend of homily and action has nonetheless enabled it to embrace and promote to its Evangelical audience the manufacture of a leisure product that is simultaneously 'entertaining' as well as 'educating'.²⁷ The following analysis will concentrate on unpicking the reasons why anxiety and horror are used as the means of transmitting the 'moral yet entertaining' fables of *Left Behind* fiction.

²³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 227.

²⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 1.

²⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 227.

²⁶ See: Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Rising, Antichrist is Born* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004), p. 27.

²⁷ Chapman, 'Selling Faith', pp. 157-8.

Horror in *Left Behind*

The novels of the *Left Behind* series are saturated with horror. The novels successfully create a textured dystopic universe whose inhabitants endure seven years of relentless and extreme suffering. In this universe, worldwide earthquakes level mountains, and rivers turn to blood. The population is afflicted by plagues of boils and blindness, pursued by supernatural monsters, slain by invisible horsemen, tormented by stinging locusts from hell, and a corpse indwelt by Satan rules the Earth, persecuting all that do not comply with his regime in an industrialized global holocaust. In the *Left Behind* universe, no character is insulated from horror, and no character is safe from pain, mutilation, or torture, regardless of their beliefs. In this imagined universe, even the believing Christians are a persecuted minority living on the fringes of society, in a bombed-out shell of a building in a nuclear radiation zone, or in claustrophobic underground bunkers, starving, mutilated, and afraid even to trust their fellow believers.

Primarily, the main horror narrative of *Left Behind* fiction is a direct consequence of its function. The books are self-consciously designed for the purposes of pedagogy, witnessing, and entertainment. While the novels are intended to be an imaginative rendering of the Tribulation, they nevertheless adhere to the premillennial dispensationalist interpretation of biblical prophetic that we have seen documented in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*. They are therefore intended to narrativise and clarify the Tribulation, and to help a reader develop a fuller understanding of biblical prophecy. As such, the narrative events of *Left Behind* fiction draws many of its most horrific elements, and as literally as possible, from the book of Revelation, but also from the book of Daniel, Isaiah, Zechariah, Ezekiel and Micah. In their reliance on a literalist interpretation, the books can be used as a means of ‘witnessing’,

to encourage those unconverted to seek salvation in order to avoid the trauma of the end times.

Horrific and violent episodes in *Left Behind* fiction also often function as a dystopian backdrop, setting the scene of a chaotic and condemned society experiencing utter disintegration. As McAlister points out,

‘the web-site images that are designed to accompany each book [...] draw on the look and feel of popular action and sci-fi movies: weapons, anxious people fleeing a scene, or images of nightmarish post-nuclear-war style devastation’.²⁸

While the horror and violence motifs of *Left Behind* are drawn heavily from the book of Revelation, and from the ‘signs of the times’ documented in the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, they also serve, on the most superficial level, as dystopic window-dressing. The novels’ backdrop of social disintegration draws from a shared cultural vocabulary of popular apocalypticism, horror clichés, science-fiction and disaster films. These include, for example, the uncanny boy-Antichrist, or the hardy ‘action-men’ cowboys of the Tribulation Force.²⁹

In particular, the apocalyptic backdrop of chaos and social breakdown established in *Left Behind* is used as a medium for socio-political critique. *Left Behind* uses the themes of horror and violence to draw particular attention to aspects of apocalyptic breakdown which cohere to the issues significant to a politicized dispensational premillennialism. These include topics such as homosexuality, participation in violence, and gender roles. One example of the way in which horror is used to articulate models for behaviour is through Hattie Durham’s abortion narrative. Hattie’s suffering in *Left Behind* fiction exceeds that of almost any other character. In the opening few books of the *Left Behind* series, Hattie is

²⁸ McAlister, ‘Prophecy, Politics’, pp. 785-786.

²⁹ See, for example: pp. 228-229.

presented as a 'drop-dead gorgeous' blonde air stewardess.³⁰ Described as the 'object' of Rayford's lust, Hattie is presented as glamorous, stupid, flighty and capricious.³¹ Despite her ongoing friendship with the Tribulation Force, for the first seven books, Hattie remains fundamentally resistant to conversion.³² Hattie secures a job in the United Nations, a role that her friends find ludicrous 'I don't think [Carpathia] hired her for her brain'.³³ Hattie embarks on a love affair with the Antichrist, and they are briefly engaged.³⁴ Hattie later becomes pregnant, although she is swiftly abandoned by Carpathia. She contemplates an abortion, but is rescued from an abortion clinic by the Tribulation Force, who argue that it is never morally acceptable to terminate a pregnancy, even when the child is the offspring of the Antichrist himself.³⁵

Hattie decides to carry the pregnancy to term, but she later miscarries in agony,

'Hattie emitted a piercing scream. She flopped onto her back, cradled her abdomen with both hands, and rolled to her side, gasping and groaning [...] She squirmed and cried and screamed.

"I'm afraid she's going to spontaneously abort."

"No! Hattie screeched. "I'm only staying alive for my baby" '³⁶

The 'underdeveloped' baby is delivered stillborn, 'a very premature, very deformed fetus' so mutated that it is impossible to even determine its sex, 'It does not look like a baby'.³⁷ The foetus is incinerated, and it is later discovered that Hattie's miscarriage was the result of poisoning by Carpathia. Hattie moves to the Tribulation Force headquarters where she is bitten by a demonic locust. Hattie endures five months of endless pain, which becomes unbearable for her housemates,

³⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 2.

³¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 154.

³² Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Apollyon, The Destroyer is Unleashed* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1999), pp. 36-38.

³³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 75.

³⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 429.

³⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, pp. 295-6, and Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Soul Harvest, The World Takes Sides* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1998), pp. 346-349.

³⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 71-2

³⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 78.

‘Despite [Hattie’s] anguished screams at all hours of the day and night, she stubbornly maintained that she was getting what she deserved and no less. Listening to her around the clock became so stressful to the Force that Rayford made an executive decision and moved her to the basement [...] As weeks passed she became a shell of even the unhealthy frame she had been’.³⁸

By the end of her life, Hattie becomes little more than a terrifying ghoul living a shadowy half-life in an abandoned basement. She is robbed of her femininity, her humanity, and is described in terms of her liminal, monstrous status, living in the world of the ‘saved’, but not belonging to it, a ‘living corpse’³⁹, who looked ‘like a ghost, or worse, a zombie’.⁴⁰ Her ‘skeletal’⁴¹ frame is so repulsive that Rayford is too frightened to visit her alone, ‘Rayford had to visit Hattie with one of the others, and even then he didn’t sleep well afterward’.⁴² Hattie stops accepting food, ‘she ate much less that should have been required to keep her alive, but as the Bible predicted, she did not die’.⁴³ She is unable even to talk and is essentially unresponsive,

‘Eventually she could not speak, but communicated by a series of grunts and gestures. Finally she refused to even turn when someone came down’.⁴⁴

Despite her initial hesitation about the pregnancy, Hattie is devastated by her miscarriage, ‘She grieved the loss of her child so deeply that Rayford was haunted by her stifled wails in the night’.⁴⁵ Hattie resolves to murder Carpathia in revenge for her lost maternal status, and begins to rehabilitate in order to carry out this murder.⁴⁶ After resisting conversion for seven novels, whilst on her mission to assassinate Carpathia, Hattie confesses her sins and becomes ‘born again’. Following her conversion, she is immediately burnt to ash by the

³⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, pp. 327-8.

³⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 328.

⁴⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 371.

⁴¹ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 328.

⁴² LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 328.

⁴³ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 328.

⁴⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 328.

⁴⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 255.

⁴⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 371.

hand of the 'false prophet' Leon Fortunato, 'she stood burning, mighty tongues of fire licking at her clothes, her hair, enveloping her body [...] she was quickly reduced to ash, her silhouette branded on the ground'.⁴⁷ Hattie's journey from object of unconsummated lust, to mother, to monster, to a burnt silhouette in the dust, narrates the 'containment' of Hattie's abjective qualities. The horror of Hattie's 'alien pregnancy', her birthing of a monster so deformed that it must be incinerated, the loss of all humanity, even speech and ability to eat, form part of Hattie's didactic function, and are framed through Hattie's status as an unbeliever who engages in pre-marital sex, and contemplates an abortion; and thus, is deserving of her punishment. Furthermore, with its emphasis on Hattie's physical suffering and deterioration, this punishment is explicitly enacted on her body. Frykholm's research suggests that Hattie's identity as a deservedly suffering non-believer is the primary role she is attributed by readers of *Left Behind*, who frequently have expressed their frustration with Hattie's unwillingness to convert,

'A feeling of disgust for Hattie arises much more often among female readers than male readers [...] Perhaps this dislike, even disgust, indicates an identification in reverse. Female readers feel a persistent need to define themselves against Hattie, to say, "I am not like her". Hattie's rebellion raises a desire to articulate their alignment with orthodoxy and their rejection of her alternative'.⁴⁸

As discussed above, the horror depicted in the *Left Behind* novels is fundamentally coherent with the way in which premillennial dispensationalism understands the function of the last prophetic dispensation. The Tribulation represents the outpouring of God's simultaneous wrath and judgment after the removal of his 'true' Church. The horror of the Tribulation is therefore understood as a means of 'getting the attention' of those yet undecided, and a way of punishing those who have 'chosen the wrong side'. The ways in which the horror is

⁴⁷ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Desecration, Antichrist Takes the Throne* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2001), p. 55.

⁴⁸ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 95.

manifested in *Left Behind* fiction furthermore explore particular concerns that relate to temporal, political and social anxieties of the dispensational premillennialist movement, serving to model and 'contain' them within a theological framework. The horror of God's 'punishment' during the Tribulation is allocated to specific deserving individuals, as well as hapless bystanders, in order to emphasise the vulnerability of those who have been 'left behind' following the Rapture. As in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, this vulnerability is narrated through several different anxiety narratives, which will be considered in the following discussion.

Isolation and Separation in *Left Behind*

The experience of isolation underpins much of *Left Behind* fiction. The characters of *Left Behind* are defined through their isolation: they have missed the Rapture, and have been abandoned on Earth to undergo the Tribulation. As has been demonstrated in the analysis of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, the Rapture inevitably functions to sever sceptical individuals from their believing families and friends. Those 'left behind' are thus abandoned not only by God but isolated from their social communities. One of the most powerfully horrific properties of the Rapture is its divisive nature, and its mimesis of the 'eternal separation' from loved ones that is brought about by a rejection of salvation. *Left Behind* successfully exploits this anxiety of separation from loved ones at the Rapture, which informs much of the content of the first novel, *Left Behind, A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, and is encapsulated in the series' iconic opening scene of unexplained disappearances aboard an airborne Boeing 747,

'Hattie was starring in the horror film of a lifetime. A young woman on the other side of the aisle frantically patted the empty seats beside her, calling out, "Bill! Where are the kids?" '49

The divisive nature of the Rapture in this opening scene is highlighted by the use of a contained commercial space. Rapture narratives regularly emphasise the horrific nature of this invisible selection by setting the Rapture within 'safe' domestic environments. For example, the 1999 Rapture film *The Moment After* opens onto the scene of an empty family home. A phone hangs off the hook and a pot boils over on the stove in a metonymic visual display of absent familial norms.⁵⁰ In *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, Rayford Steele returns home following the Rapture to find that his wife, Irene, and son, Raymie, have been Raptured. The house is transformed into a hostile space by its emptiness, the coffeepot set to a timer has been brewing for seven hours, and the curtains are still closed.⁵¹ Rayford is disturbed by uncanny nature of this disorder, as 'Irene was a fastidious housekeeper'.⁵²

Amy Johnson Frykholm has noted that this use of domestic space in Rapture fiction is often used as a commentary on familial and gender roles.

'Traditional rapture narratives nearly always begin with the rapture of a woman [...]The husbands face their wives' disappearance with disbelief and then despair, sometimes committing suicide or simply falling deeper into disgrace and sin. In other cases, rapture provides the context for an unbelieving husband to come to Christ'.⁵³

Left Behind fiction certainly reflects this gender demarcation. Irene, Rayford's long suffering wife, and his 'mama's boy' son are both Raptured while they sleep.⁵⁴ Irene's disappearance leaves only metonymic symbols of her chaste Christianity, her wedding ring, a flannel

⁴⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 273.

⁵⁰ *The Moment After*, dir. Wes Llewellyn, ChristianCinema, 4 July, 1999.

⁵¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, pp. 66- 67.

⁵² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 66.

⁵³ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 103.

nightgown and a locket containing a photo of her husband.⁵⁵ These artefacts serve to show Rayford his own unworthiness, 'He did not deserve her. He deserved this, he knew, to be mocked by his own self-centeredness'.⁵⁶ Frykholm argues that these gender demarcated Rapture scenarios create spiritual roles for the female characters that are only actualised once they are absent from the narrative,

'The narrative punishes the man who is left behind, perhaps for desiring the woman's disappearance. Her powerlessness and submission to the men who dominate and abuse her in this life become a kind of justification and power in the world beyond. This power has effect, however, only when she disappears, only when she is no longer on earth to receive or act on it'.⁵⁷

The Rapture of Irene undoubtedly serves as a form of mute justification for her Christian fidelity, and a corresponding retribution on her undeserving husband. Frykholm notes that it is only through Irene's absence that her character 'takes on mythological status as the archetypal mother and wife'.⁵⁸

Elsewhere in *Left Behind* fiction, the Rapture isolates other 'undeserving' individuals from their families according to gender. For example, Abdullah Smith's wife and two children are Raptured, as are Buck's sister-in-law, Sharon, and her three children.⁵⁹ Alongside gender, a character's age is a significant factor in the isolation of individuals by the Rapture. *Left Behind* cautiously explores the boundaries of an 'age of accountability'.⁶⁰ Thus for instance, all babies, including those still in the womb, are Raptured,

'CNN reran the footage in superslow motion, showing the woman going from very pregnant to nearly flat stomach, as if she had instantaneously delivered'.⁶¹

⁵⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 75.

⁵⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 75.

⁵⁷ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 30.

⁵⁸ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 31.

⁵⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, pp. 105-106, and LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 217.

⁶⁰ Gribben, *Rapture Fiction*, p. 69.

⁶¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 47.

Elsewhere, the books refer to the disappearance of 'all children under twelve'.⁶² However, the forty-part children's series, *Left Behind: The Kids*, is based on the premise of some children who have been isolated from their families by the Rapture, and are left to fend for themselves during the horrors of the Tribulation.⁶³ While the series never fully engages with the exact specifications of the 'age of accountability', it does suggest that there is an age or level of maturity after which a child is not automatically judged 'saved' by virtue of their innocence. Instead, like an adult, the child must choose to accept Evangelical Christianity and pray the 'sinners prayer' to ensure their place in the Rapture host.

Throughout *Left Behind* fiction, its characters provide monologues detailing how and why they were divided from their loved ones by the Rapture. These narratives emphasize the way in which these individuals are separated from their families and their communities, and find themselves totally isolated, robbed of their wider social meaning. Loretta Moore, for example, an 'elderly southern belle', is described by pastor Bruce Barnes as,

'the only person in her whole clan who is still here. She had six living brothers and sisters, I don't know how many aunts and uncles and cousins and nieces and nephews. They had a wedding last year and she must have had a hundred relatives alone. They're all gone, every one of them'.⁶⁴

Loretta's vulnerability is highlighted by the way in which she is divorced from the environment that produced her. Loretta's isolation from both her family and her larger social meaning is underscored by her status as a member of a Rapture-believing church. The isolation of Loretta and of Bruce Barnes serves a dual function for readers in providing a didactic example whilst at the same time serving to destabilize the very category of Rapture believer that seeks to include potential readers. As in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, *Left*

⁶² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 119.

⁶³ The forty-part series of children's books: *Left Behind: The Kids*, were written by Tim LaHaye, Jerry B. Jenkins and Chris Fabry, and published between 1998 and 2004

⁶⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 191.

Behind fiction continually re-asserts that it is not possible to know who has 'Jesus in their heart', so that even those who profess to be, or even believe themselves to be, believers, are not necessarily trustworthy.

As a response to their sudden social and theological isolation, the prophecy believers of the *Left Behind* universe find solidarity in their newly-forged faith communities. The characters form the 'Tribulation Force', a small nucleus of prophecy believers; Chloe, Rayford, Buck and Bruce, which grows to include other self-contained groups of believers around the world. These disparate communities of neo-survivalist prophecy believers are so isolated by the predominant global culture that they are often unaware of each other's existence until chance meetings force them together.⁶⁵ Eventually the 'cyber preaching' of the Rabbi Tsion Ben Judah, and Chloe Steele's alternative economic system, the co-op, become means of forming networks between these smaller communities. Neo-survivalist communities are thus presented as forming in direct response to the crisis of isolation. These disparate communities are depicted as focussing an intense amount of energy on securing their ideological and physical boundaries, this is partly as a response to, and partly a result of the Antichrist's worldwide ideological dominion. Even the living spaces of the 'Tribulation Force' are characterized by the vocabulary of post-apocalyptic breakdown, and are highly representative of their retractive response to their isolation in a hostile cultural milieu. Over the course of the novels, the Tribulation Force inhabits several headquarters. In the first novel, *Left Behind*, Barnes builds a claustrophobic underground bunker,

“‘[Barnes] I think we need a shelter.”

“A shelter?” Chloe said.

“Underground,” Bruce said. “During the period of peace we can build it without suspicion [...] if we don't plan ahead, if we don't have a place to retreat to, to regroup, to evade radiation and disease, we'll die trying to prove we're brave”.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See for example: LaHaye & Jenkins, *Armageddon*, pp. 44-46.

⁶⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 32.

The bunker is fitted with a periscope and CCTV cameras so that its borders can be constantly under surveillance.⁶⁷ This depiction of a vaguely paranoid 'retraction' from a larger inimical environment into the believing community in concentrated kinship groups may be intended to mirror, or model, the way in which groups of Rapture believers worship in contemporary America.

The horrors of apocalyptic isolation illustrated in the fiction are countered through recourse to dispensationalist Rapture theology. Firstly, conversion to Rapture theology is urged throughout the *Left Behind* books as a way of circumventing the horror of separation from the Rapture host. Conversion to Rapture theology ensures that a reader will be joining an extant 'believing' community, but also creates tension between those who are saved and those yet undecided. The fear of abandoning sceptical loved ones to the horrors of the Tribulation is established; an anxiety that can only be alleviated through witnessing and evangelising. Frykholm has concentrated at length on the way in which this fear has translated into a successful marketing strategy for the *Left Behind* novels, as they are often used as witnessing tools within pre-established social networks,

'Reading of *Left Behind* is often undertaken in order to please someone else and in order to share in someone else's understanding of truth'.⁶⁸

However, in *Left Behind* fiction, LaHaye and Jenkins represent the possibility of conversion after the Rapture. Within a traditional dispensational hermeneutic, this is a highly controversial idea, as Darbyite dispensationalism teaches that at the Rapture both the 'true' Church and the Holy Spirit are removed from Earth, arguably rendering salvation after the

⁶⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁸ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 40.

Rapture impossible. In contrast, LaHaye and Jenkins' depiction of post-Rapture salvation helps to inform a depiction of salvation as an individual 'contract' into which a believer could enter through a process completely disassociated from the earthly Church. Thus, Rayford comes to his faith through a message left by the Christian Church, when he is given a videotape made by Pastor Billings specifically for a confused post-Rapture audience.⁶⁹ Similarly, characters such as Amanda and Abdullah Smith are convinced of dispensationalist faith through pre-Rapture contact with a believing Christian.⁷⁰ However, by far the most potent witness, achieving 'more than a billion' conversions in *Left Behind* is Rabbi Tsion Ben Judah, a man who had never been a member of the earthly Christian Church in any form.⁷¹ Salvation in the *Left Behind* novels can only be achieved through recourse to a believing community, reinforcing the importance of the spiritual kernel of the 'true' Church amidst wider Christendom. While the decision itself is an individual and often a 'disassociated' action, it is re-enforced by instant access to the 'secret' believing community.

Powerlessness

The believing characters of *Left Behind* have an ambivalent status in their apocalyptic universe. Over the course of the series, the believing characters flit between positions of conspicuous wealth and importance and marginal neo-survivalism. Their tenuous positions within their own society serves to underline the impermanence of their safety, and *Left Behind* regularly exploits the vulnerability of the characters in their dystopic environment to create compelling horror narratives. Their surrounding hostile world, governed by the Antichrist, imposes particularly claustrophobic temporal limitations on the characters'

⁶⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, pp. 209- 216.

⁷⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 44- 48, and 158-160

⁷¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 124.

agency. The believing characters are also represented as inherently powerless to intervene in some of the most horrific and punitive aspects of the Tribulation. In response to both these expressions of powerlessness, *Left Behind* indicates that spiritual identity can be used to re-align the process of experiencing trauma. In *Left Behind* fiction, networks of believing communities enable solidarity in an ideologically hostile environment, and these networks are used to streamline prophetic understanding of the horror of the Tribulation. This theological understanding of both the function and timeline of the Tribulation serves to negate- at least in part- the horror of its retributive function.

One of the most significant limitations on the agency of the post-Rapture believers is the omnipotence of the Antichrist's regime, which grows gradually over the course of the series, until almost every aspect of daily life is controlled by Carpathia. This includes the implementation of a global government, global currency, religion and media,

'This same control we have over the media, we also need over industry and commerce [...] Ownership is not the issue. Control is. Within the next few months we shall all announce unanimous decisions allowing us to control business, education, healthcare, and even the way your individual kingdoms chose their leaders'.⁷²

Within this unified global regime, the power of the believers is severely limited, and they are eventually forced to inhabit a marginalized space 'outside' the mainstream global society. Interestingly, however, in the earlier novels, the characters are often willing participants in the Antichrist's own regime. Hattie, for example, is Carpathia's Personal Assistant, and Chaim Rosenweig joins Carpathia's senior staff as one of his advisers.⁷³

Rayford and Buck also both work for Carpathia at considerable financial recompense, they are told, 'You will work for me, and you will enjoy privileges and opportunities beyond your

⁷² Carpathia, in LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 129.

⁷³ See for example: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 91, and LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 102.

imagination'.⁷⁴ Both characters try vehemently to reject the roles but are unable to do so, as Carpathia insists, 'I am not going to take no for an answer'.⁷⁵ Rayford is offered the position as pilot of Air Force One, 'Rayford didn't know how much longer he could take being the devil's own pilot'.⁷⁶ Similarly, Buck is forced to violate his journalistic principles as editor of *Global Weekly*,

'Buck just hated the idea that he himself was being used to spread propaganda and lies that people were eating like ice cream'.⁷⁷

In both of these instances, Buck and Rayford's agency is so greatly reduced that they are not even able to refuse these roles; the novels have not yet activated an alternate 'space' into which the characters can opt, and in order to 'opt out' of their pseudo-secular mainstream identities. There is, as yet, no alternate Evangelical culture in the series, other than the small Bible study group held in their suburban church, New Hope. Instead, Buck and Rayford rationalise their powerlessness by framing it within a prophetic narrative,

'[Carpathia:] "So you want to be the pilot of *Air Force One*." [...] *not for that reason*, Rayford thought. *Only if it's what God wants*'.⁷⁸

Nonetheless, the members of the Tribulation Force are eventually able to exploit their positions inside the Antichrist's structure to pre-empt and to destabilise the Carpathian regime. This is principally managed through the vehicle of technology, and the highly complex digital minutiae of science-fiction features heavily in the series' presentation of the Godly undermining of the Antichrist's power. Throughout *Left Behind*, the fetishisation of technological gadgets is a continual and exhaustive conceit. The Tribulation Force are aided by three computer hacking prodigies, Chang, David Hassim, and Naomi who are regularly able to hack into the mainframe of Carpathia's empire and to re-write military logistics in

⁷⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 129.

⁷⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 122.

⁷⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 95.

⁷⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 87.

⁷⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, pp. 296- 97. Original italics.

real-time.⁷⁹ The members of the Tribulation Force use the wealth generated from their positions in the Carpathian empire to purchase expensive high-tech equipment, including 'deluxe universal cell phones'⁸⁰, globally networked computers and helicopters, and cars equipped with improbably intricate technological features. Rayford's Air Force One aeroplane, for example, is improbably constructed by a fellow believer so that Rayford can spy on Carpathia, and built with an undetectable one-way listening device so powerful he can hear even whispers in the cabin of the plane.⁸¹

Evangelicalism's paradoxical relationship with technology is well documented, and *Left Behind* is no exception. Paul Boyer has written at length on the way in which modern prophecy popularisers have railed against technology as a tool of the Antichrist even whilst adopting the newest technological developments to support the mass-production of prophetic media. In the *Left Behind* series, the technological advances of Carpathia's system are represented as a mimetic evil, since he uses technology to simulate the omniscient powers of God.⁸² Yet, at the same time, the Tribulation Force exploits almost identical technological means to combat Carpathia's evil empire. Glenn Shuck notes this contradiction, and concludes,

'Although the Trib-Force believes they are fighting the Anti-Christ using his tools, for example, they are tragically unaware that they are already inside the Beast, co-participants in his infernal system'.⁸³

However, I would argue that in *Left Behind*, the technology ultimately has no moral signification; rather it represents a powerful vehicle for the dissemination of ideology. As well as forming the means by which Carpathia is able to control his global empire,

⁷⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 76.

⁸⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 112.

⁸¹ See, for example: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 53.

⁸² Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Assassins, Assignment: Jerusalem, Target: Antichrist* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1999), p. 379.

⁸³ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 202.

technology forms the discursive heart of self-identification for *Left Behind*'s believers, as the believing community in *Left Behind* is established, propagated, developed, sustained and controlled by technological means. Indeed, the way in which prophetic discourse is shaped and defined in *Left Behind* fiction arguably closely mirrors the way in which dispensationalist networks operate in contemporary culture. In *Left Behind*, although the communities of believers are self-contained, disparate, isolated from their wider hostile cultural environment, their support is drawn from technological networks, and their shared hermeneutical understanding of unfolding events are controlled through centrally authorised exegetical notes and centralized internet resources.

For example, in the first two novels, *Left Behind*, and *Tribulation Force*, the spiritual leader of the Tribulation Force is Bruce Barnes, the pastor of New Hope church. Upon his death, Buck discovers five thousand pages of Bruce's Bible commentaries and devotional notes,

'people need access to what Bruce has written [...] I think Loretta ought to take all those pages to a quick-print shop and get them started. We need a thousand copies of all that stuff, printed on two sides'.⁸⁴

Following Barnes' death, the messianic Rabbi, Tsion Ben-Judah, replaces Barnes as the spiritual patriarch of the Tribulation Force. Ben Judah is the principal mouthpiece for *Left Behind*'s spiritual message, to the extent that the prophecy believers of *Left Behind* fiction come to define themselves as 'Judah-ites'.⁸⁵ Ben Judah provides daily 'cyberteaching'⁸⁶ about the Tribulation through his website that attracts improbable numbers of instant converts,

'Rayford had not been prepared for what he found on the Internet. Tsion had outdone himself. As David Hassid had said, thousands upon thousands had already responded. Many put messages on the bulletin board identifying themselves as members of the 144,000. Rayford scrolled through the messages for more than an hour, still not coming

⁸⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 33.

⁸⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 193.

⁸⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 52.

to an end. Hundreds testified that they had received Christ after reading Tsion's message'.⁸⁷

Ben Judah is depicted as a cult hero of his own pedagogical community,

'Tsion made himself so understandable and personable that it did not surprise Rayford that thousands considered themselves his protégés, though they had never met him. From the looks of the bulletin board, however, that would have to change. They clamoured for him to come where they could meet him and sit under his tutelage'.⁸⁸

As the narrative develops, Ben Judah preaches in colossal stadiums to hundreds and thousands of adoring fans. His power is explicitly drawn from his interpretive ability, and his particular receptive nature to divine intention. While Ben Judah's power is bestowed upon him by God, it is also drawn from the possibilities of technology to ensure a streamlined and cohesive interpretation of prophetic schema amongst his millions of online devotees, for, as he remarks,

'Technology has allowed me a congregation, if the figures can be believe, of more than a billion via the Internet'.⁸⁹

Buck Williams similarly uses the internet to disseminate theological interpretation. His 'cyberzine', *The Truth*, rather than an explicitly exegetical text, is a newspaper that re-interprets contemporary news events according to their scriptural significance. *The Truth* is downloaded daily by its global readership,

'A team of computer experts from Israel said that they had the technology to project *The Truth* onto a giant screen [...] Thousands gathered to read the stories [...] All over the world the believers' underground and Co-op personnel translated it and printed it and distributed it'.⁹⁰

This magazine is explicitly used for witnessing as well as shaping the Judah-ite discursive boundaries,

⁸⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, pp. 243-44.

⁸⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 244.

⁸⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 124.

⁹⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 222.

‘Rayford loved the idea that it was not just believers, not just the so-called Judah-ites, who read *The Truth*. Many undecided and even some who had taken the mark of Antichrist risked their lives by downloading Buck’s magazine from the Tribulation Force site’.⁹¹

In this way, technology enables the creation of a self-contained belief system. The propagation of Ben Judah’s message online empowers not only the message itself, but Judah’s pedagogical status as the patriarch of prophetic discourse. The technology empowers those at its centre, re-emphasising their roles as infallible architects of prophetic interpretation. This is seen both in a theological expression on Ben Judah’s website, and in a ‘real-world’ exegesis as Buck’s newspaper re-translates current events through a prophetic template. The members of the believing community are thus empowering themselves, via technology, and through these channels, dispelling one of the most significant aspects of horror, the vulnerability that comes from ignorance in the face of chaos.

The technological feats of the Tribulation Force discussed above, and their function in the subversion of the Antichrist’s hegemony can furthermore be understood as part of a specific success narrative modelled for the believing characters of *Left Behind* fiction. In particular, the characters of Rayford and Buck represent an American capitalism that is nevertheless aligned with an Evangelical purpose. In the *Left Behind* prequels, Rayford is unapologetically ambitious and driven towards material success,

‘Ray would do whatever he had to do to realize one of his dreams, because either one of them could bring him what he really wanted. Money’.⁹²

Frykholm has observed that following his conversion, Rayford uses his wealth to advance his faith, extravagantly tipping the waiter at an exclusive restaurant so that he and Hattie can linger undisturbed while he ‘witnesses’ to her⁹³. Similarly, Buck’s position in Carpathia’s newspaper affords him a luxurious and wealthy lifestyle, complete with a penthouse

⁹¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 222.

⁹² LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Rising*, p. 18.

⁹³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 382.

apartment on Fifth Avenue.⁹⁴ The characters' wealth is used to equip the Tribulation Force in their struggle against the Antichrist,

'Most of the cards Carpathia issues like this have a quarter-of-a-million-dollar limit" Buck said. "But those of us at senior levels have a special code built into our. They're unlimited [...] Didn't you see the eyes of that sales manager?"⁹⁵

Carpathia is similarly conspicuously materially wealthy, described as though 'he had come of a Fortune 500 edition of GQ'.⁹⁶ Carpathia is funded by a secret Satan-worshipping cabal of international financiers, and although he is obscenely wealthy, unlike Rayford, Carpathia is not motivated by money, "I do not need money. I have a sea of money".⁹⁷ When the Tribulation Force lose their wealth and status, however, they are able to find success, even fame, through spreading the message of God.

In later novels, only those with Carpathia's mark of loyalty are able to buy and sell on the global market. The believers are thus excluded from the global market by virtue of denying the mark that signifies eternal damnation. To circumvent this exclusion, Chloe sets up the co-op, an alternative economic network that also spans the globe, connecting the pockets of resisting believers with each other,

'I envision thousands of technological experts creating a network for believers, informing them of safe havens, putting them in touch with each other'.⁹⁸

The co-op exemplifies the way in which the believers are able to find temporal agency through their spirituality,

'The evil one will grow angrier, more determined, more vicious, and many will die at his hand. What better, nobler task could the million strong her undertake than to aid your daughter's Commodity Co-op and equip the saints to thwart Antichrist?'⁹⁹

⁹⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 405.

⁹⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Nicolae*, p. 25.

⁹⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 110.

⁹⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 127.

⁹⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 119.

⁹⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 119.

These networks are explicitly marginal in that their 'unmarked' status denies the believers access to the mainstream global culture. At the same time, however, they are also a complex alternate culture that mirrors that of the mainstream, utilising its mechanisms in order to sustain itself, as Bruce Barnes states,

'I believe [God] expects us to manage ourselves otherwise. We must organize and build-admittedly only for the short term'.¹⁰⁰

While the believers are afforded the protection of the believing community, they are also recipients of supernatural protection from the horrors of the Tribulation. For example, the 'sealed' believers are immune from the sting of the demonic locusts of Revelation,

'they will not harm any foliage like locusts usually do, but only those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads'.¹⁰¹

While the non-believers around them suffer from excruciating boils, plagues of blindness and heat, the believers are insulated from those judgments. In novels such as *The Remnant*, the believers are directly delivered from moments of high-tension vulnerability by divine agents. In one such scene, the angel Michael appears dressed in 'Bedouin-type robes'¹⁰² to pilot a helicopter containing several members of the Tribulation Force,

'George jumped and saw the reflection of the man in the windshield. But when he looked to his right, the copilot's chair was still empty. "Quit that!" George said, his pulse racing.
"Sorry."
"Michael, I suppose."
"Roger."' ¹⁰³

The believers' power in these scenarios is a result of their 'saved' status. They have prayed the 'sinners prayer', and have become members of God's sealed. This seal provides not only

¹⁰⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 118.

¹⁰¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Apollyon*, p. 305.

¹⁰² LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 213.

¹⁰³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 214.

supernatural protection from the judgments of the Tribulation, but an intricately networked, self-contained, 'sealed' community. This action in itself therefore clearly represents the surest way of self-empowerment in *Left Behind's* apocalyptic universe. Even this option, however, is conditional according to the salvific scheme of the Tribulation. Individuals of the post-Rapture world only have limited agency to accept their own salvation. While the Tribulation Force is able to extend the protection of its prophetic community to non-believers through witnessing and conversion, even this process has boundaries. It is continually emphasized in the novels, that it is 'too late' for many non-believers to repent and convert, their souls are unsalvageable. In the following extended extract, Rayford comes across a woman blinded by the fifth bowl judgment of Revelation 16:10-11:

"Their muffled conversation had caused a lull in the cacophony of agony. Now someone called out [...] "Oh, God, save me. Now I lay me down to sleep-" [...] "God is great; God is good. Now I thank him-"¹⁰⁴

Rayford kneels to the woman, who is in too much pain to bear his touch,

"You prayed to God?"

"Yes!"

"But you bear Carpathia's mark."

"I despise that mark! I know the truth. I always have. I just didn't want to have anything to do with it"

"God loved you"

"I know, but it's too late" [...] Rayford didn't know what to say. She had herself said it was too late.

"In the beginning," she said. "For God so loved the world. The Lord is my shepherd. Oh, God..."¹⁰⁵

Rayford searches the abandoned building for food for the woman, but is unable to find anything. When he returns the woman is crying,

"I'm back, ma'am," he said quietly. "No food. I'm sorry."

"Oh, God, oh God and Jesus, help me!"

¹⁰⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 17. Her allusions are to Genesis 1:1 or John 1:1, or both; John 3:16; and Psalm 23:1.

“Ma’am,” he said, reaching for her. She shrieked when he touched her, but he pulled at the sides of her head until he could see her hollow, unseeing terrified eyes.

“I knew before everybody disappeared,” she said pitifully [...] “I shook my fist in God’s face. He tried to reach me, but I had my own life. I wasn’t going to be subservient to anybody.

“But I’ve always been afraid of the dark, and my worst nightmare is starving. I’ve changed my mind, want to take it all back...”

“But you can’t.”

“I can’t! I can’t! I waited too long!”

Rayford knew the prophecy - that people would reject God enough times that God would harden their hearts and they wouldn’t be able to choose him even if they wanted to’.¹⁰⁶

This extract demonstrates clearly the horror of the woman living out her own worst nightmare; starving to death, alone in the dark. Rayford’s own powerlessness is highlighted by his inability to help the woman, both physically and spiritually. The woman here represents those who have left it ‘too late’ to convert and are unable to repent, even though they recognise the path to their salvation. In this extract, the woman’s spiritual powerlessness is highlighted by her meagre spiritual toolkit. Although she has been aware of her true religious orientation for some time, she has no spiritual self-determination. She resorts to stock phrases from an infantile Christianity, a half-remembered Psalm, the first line of Genesis, or of John’s gospel, part of the so-called comfort words, and is unable to complete even these attempts towards spiritual expression. Unlike the Tribulation Force’s articulate faith, their rigorous exposure to biblical and exegetical teaching, the woman here can only demonstrate her willingness to grasp any remaining shards of her religious education, nothing else remains. She has no weaponry in her spiritual arsenal, no salvific recourse, and as a result Rayford is forced to abandon her to the horror of her predicament; crying, starving, blind and eternally damned.

¹⁰⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, pp. 17-18.

It can be seen, therefore, that the community of the 'sealed' is also a sealed community; it is inaccessible even to other potential believers who have left it 'too late' to convert.¹⁰⁷ The 'sealed' boundaries of the believing community contain isolated and small pockets of individuals, isolated from their wider inimical environment. Their power to develop and sustain themselves is tightly associated with their private, post-apocalyptic contained spaces. As has been seen above, in the earliest two novels, the Tribulation Force has no alternate space in which its members can express their spiritual identification. At Bruce's suggestion, an underground bunker is constructed, the first explicitly 'safe' believers' space.¹⁰⁸ Later, the Tribulation Force moves to the 'Strong Building', an abandoned skyscraper in central Chicago, which lies deserted after a colossal bomb was dropped on the city. Later, the Tribulation Force spread rumours that the bomb had been nuclear, and the Tribulation Force's computer experts planted false Geiger-counter readings in Carpathia's records. Eventually this discrepancy is discovered, and the believers are forced to abandon the compound,

'The Strong Building had been safe for only so long. And now it would disgorge a few of them at a time into a hostile world that belonged to Antichrist and the False Prophet, the Global Community, and millions of searching eyes that demanded a sign of loyalty none of those had'.¹⁰⁹

The 'disgorged' vulnerability of the Tribulation Force in a world populated by disembodied watching eyes is later redressed by the founding of a spiritual home in Edom, modern day Petra. Here, the 'Remnant' lives in a community protected by God. They survive the face-melting heat of the Antichrist's weaponry, and are showered by daily gifts of Manna. When a group of dissidents within Edom leave the safety of the divinely-protected zone, they are

¹⁰⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 278.

¹⁰⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 252.

warned in biblical language of the dangers of straying from safe confines of the believers' territory,

'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour'.¹¹⁰

The threat of the internal fractures is resolved by the fact that any dissidents leaving the discursively-protected boundaries are physically contained in horrific ways,

'the ground under the hundreds of rebels opened and swallowed them. They went down into the pit, screaming and wailing as the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation'.¹¹¹

Those who continue to stray are 'contained' by gruesome mutilation and death,

'You will not outrun the vipers. You will not reach Petra in time to save yourselves. Your bodies will lie bloated and baking in the sun until the birds have their way with your flesh [...] The people burst from the scene, screaming and staggering madly in the sand toward Petra [...] Mac looked down to see nothing but a long stretch of undisturbed sand, dotted only by the dead who had dropped at the site [...] stretched for a quarter of a mile were the rest of the people, still and flat and grotesque on the desert floor, limbs splayed'.¹¹²

The powerlessness of the believers is a constant refrain in the *Left Behind* series. Disenfranchised and marginalised by the Antichrist's regime, they are denied access to the Global Community by their inability to travel, to worship or to participate in the global economy. As a consequence, the believers derive their agency from a re-orientation of their identities. The alternate cultural network is established primarily through technology, and provides a self-contained means of empowerment. This alternate community of the 'sealed', is also as we have seen, a sealed community. Its boundaries are controlled by a centralized discursive policing, provided by the spiritual patriarchs of the Tribulation Force, Bruce Barnes, Tsion Ben Judah and Chaim Rosenweig. The primary means of gaining agency in the post-Rapture dispensation is therefore through a re-alignment of a certain kind of 'success

¹¹⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 324. N.B. The text is from 1 Peter 5:8

¹¹¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 316.

¹¹² LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 338.

narrative' that allows the 'born again' believers specific temporal power in accordance with God's eschatological plan for the final dispensation.

***Left Behind* and the Body**

The Corpse

Death is a constant refrain of the Tribulation of *Left Behind* novels, and its believing characters are in no way protected against the horrors of grisly, premature deaths. Characters are regularly exposed to the dead, and often the only means by which characters learn of the death of their friends is by directly viewing their corpse.¹¹³ Dead bodies frequently populate the narrative of *Left Behind* fiction, and indeed, two of the main characters, Nicolae Carpathia the Antichrist, and his 'False Prophet', Leon Fortunato, are re-animated dead bodies. In the following section, I shall argue that although dead bodies are a constant feature of the Tribulation, the portrayal of the Rapture deliberately serves to exorcise the bodies of 'true' Christians from the narrative of the *Left Behind* series. This exorcism dispels the abjective power of decaying Christian bodies to disturb the eternal, physical salvation offered by the imminent Rapture theology of premillennial dispensationalism. Furthermore, the way in which *Left Behind* fiction juxtaposes the physicality of bodily salvation against the corruption of the body during the Tribulation, is highly indicative of the way in which tangibility is interconnected with faith in wider dispensationalist Rapture theology.

¹¹³ See for example: LaHaye & Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 114.

The earliest novel of the *Left Behind* series opens onto an uncanny scene as the bodies of believing Christians are Raptured, 'carried away' to heaven. Their bodies are physically lifted into the clouds, to meet with Jesus in the air. Their disappearance occurs instantaneously, 'in the twinkling of an eye'. No trace of these bodies remain but for externals, clothes, jewellery and contact lenses. In the *Left Behind* narrative, only the pastor of New Hope Church leaves behind him a significant relic, a pre-recorded Rapture message on videotape, provided for those who have been 'left behind' to discover. Not only do the living Christians vanish, but even the corpses of those Christians who have died before the Rapture are 'translated' into heaven,

'A funeral home in Australia reported that nearly every mourner disappeared from one memorial service, including the corpse, while at another service at the same time, only a few disappeared and the corpse remained. Morgues also reported corpse disappearances. At a burial, three of the six pallbearers stumbled and dropped a casket when the other three disappeared. When they picked up the casket, it too was empty'.¹¹⁴

In the third prequel, *The Rapture*, a scene at a crematorium describes the monotonous industry of a worker, Liem, as he disposes of dead bodies in gruesome detail,

'During the process, the heavier bones and calcium deposits would fall through the openings to the lower chamber. When what was left had cooled, Liem would use a magnet to separate surgical pins, nails, screws, or other artificial elements. He would then grind the final residue into a fine powder'.¹¹⁵

As Liem is working, he is astounded to discover that bodies of those marked 'Christian' on their paperwork have vanished, their coffins are empty, filled only with meticulously buttoned suits, 'This is the stuff of horror movies'.¹¹⁶ In this example, the physicality of corporeal death, the burning and grinding of the flesh of those unsaved is explicitly juxtaposed with the silent vanishing of the bodies of the Christians. The contrast between

¹¹⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, pp. 47-8.

¹¹⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 172.

¹¹⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 174.

the physicality of the corpse of the non-believer, with the physicality of the post-Rapture body is particularly emphasized in *The Rapture*, the third *Left Behind* prequel.

An important feature of the three prequels, and of *The Rapture* in particular, is that they serve to 're-animate' the character of Irene, who, as Frykholm has suggested, had been 'disembodied' by the post-Rapture narrative of the original fiction series. In *The Rapture*, Irene's Rapture is detailed as an explicitly physical and sensory experience,

'As Irene's new, glorified body was transported through Earth's atmosphere above the clouds, she let her head fall back and spread her arms wide, closing her eyes tight. When the light of glory flooded her being, she had to peek. High above her was Jesus, His gleaming incandescence brighter than a million suns. With arms outstretched He welcomed His beloved [...] Irene was aware only of blinking, and in the next instant she had been transported into outer space and then into what Pastor Billings had called the third heaven, into the presence of a vast a beautiful crystal city so overwhelming she could hardly take it in'.¹¹⁷

Irene's Rapture transforms her earthly body into a glorified body. Her body is restored to its prime,

'Her face felt smoother, her skin taut. And while she bore nicks and scars from various minor injuries over the years- even Jesus' scars would still be visible, she knew- her body and tone reminded her of several years before, when she had been in her early thirties'.¹¹⁸

Her experience of heaven is explicitly tangible; she is able to run thousands of miles without fatigue¹¹⁹, and even to eat without becoming full.

'Because Irene didn't need food, did that mean she would not want it? With that mere thought came a cornucopia of delights that dwarfed anything she had ever hungered for- sizzling meats, fruit, vegetables, crystal glasses full of nectar [...] She found herself able to consume more food in a split second that she had ever eaten in one sitting. Yet there was not an iota of discomfort'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 181-182.

¹¹⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 177.

¹¹⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 186.

¹²⁰LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 188-89.

The spiritual rewards of the Raptured Christians are explicitly linked to corporeal regeneration,

‘A Chinese woman announced for all to hear, pointing at another woman, “My daughter was in a wheelchair twenty years! Look at her now!”[...] “I have both arms!” a man shouted waving. “I’m whole!” came from somewhere else’.¹²¹

The Rapture saints are initially gathered in a giant ‘first-floor assembly hall’ in ‘God’s house’.¹²² Here they receive individual crowns as a reward, according to their Christian works and deeds,

‘This gold and silver amalgam was unlike anything Irene had ever seen. And the jewels embedded in it were so exquisite and dazzling that even her new eyes had to adjust to light reflected not from the sun or artificial sources but from God Himself’.¹²³

These Rapture saints have their life’s achievements praised in a colossal parade, where each attendee is judged personally by Jesus and even rewarded with a congratulatory hug, ‘Jesus gathered [Irene] into His arms and said, “Well done, good and faithful servant”’.¹²⁴

The interpretation of a physical Rapture experience is firmly established in *The Rapture* to contextualize Irene’s tangible experience,

‘[Pastor Billings] asked people to turn to 1 Corinthians 15: 50-58:
Now I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...
“In other words, we cannot live with God the way we are. Something has to change [...] Our bodies will be changed and glorified to be like Jesus’ body.” [...] and we shall be changed. For all this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. “In other words, our sinful, fallen, mortal bodies must be changed by God into incorruptible, immortal bodies”’.¹²⁵

In a strong echo of the teachings of LaHaye in the *LaHaye Prophecy Library*, Pastor Billings goes on to proclaim,

“Paul is saying here that while our works will not save us, the hope of the resurrection makes them all worth it. Nothing done in Jesus’ name is wasted [...] The dead in Christ shall rise first. Can you imagine, Bodies in graves and crematoria, lost at sea, buried by

¹²¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 179.

¹²² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 281.

¹²³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 314.

¹²⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 292.

¹²⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 128-29.

natural disasters, entombed in sunken ships, obliterated by bombs, consumed in fires, aborted [...] all rising before those who remain alive in Christ'.¹²⁶

In this sermon, Pastor Billings' also recalls 1 Corinthians 2.9 reminding his congregation that

'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for him'.¹²⁷

Nonetheless, it is clear from the earlier passages that LaHaye and Jenkins have chosen to represent the kingdom of heaven as a tangible and recognizable experience which can explicitly be described by eye and ear. Irene can even smell and taste, 'Inexpressible splendor filled her senses'.¹²⁸

The opposition between the Glorified body and earthly corpse becomes particularly apparent in *Left Behind* fiction when we consider the alternate narrative treatment of the two believers, Irene and Amanda, both of whom are married to Rayford Steele during the course of the series. The bodily death of Amanda is successfully and horrifically opposed to the peaceful elliptical 'translation' of Irene into heaven. Following a plane crash, Rayford Steele and Mac McCullum decide to Scuba Dive through the wreck of a Boeing 747 that has crashed into the Tigris in order to search for Amanda's body. Although he is convinced she has died, Rayford has decided that he wants to examine Amanda's corpse for evidence of the 'mark' of the saved. The two men dive by night, navigating the wreck by torchlight. They carefully manoeuvre around the airplane cabin, which is filled with hundreds of corpses, pushing free-floating bodies out the way,

'Rayford expected to feel awful searching corpses, but deep foreboding overwhelmed him. What a macabre business! Victims were bloated, horribly disfigured, hands in fists,

¹²⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, pp. 129-130.

¹²⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 130.

¹²⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 187.

arms floating. Their hair waved with the motion of the water. Most eyes and mouths were open, faces black, red, or purple'.¹²⁹

Eventually Rayford manages to identify Amanda's body,

'Rayford shined his flickering light into the panic-stricken face of an elderly man in a three-piece suit. The man's bloated hands floated before Rayford's face. He nudged them aside and directed his beam to the next passenger. She was salt-and-pepper-haired. Her eyes were open, her expression blank. The neck and face were discolored and swollen, but her arms did not rise as the others [...] Rayford recognized the earrings, the necklace, the jacket. He wanted to die. He could not take his eyes from hers. The irises had lost all color'.¹³⁰

Rayford begins to run out of oxygen, and swims to the surface of the Tigris,

'When they broke the surface [...] He cried a fierce, primal wail that pierced the night and reflected the agonizing loneliness of his soul'.¹³¹

He is at first so stricken by grief that he thoughtlessly throws himself back in the river, willing himself to sink. Mac rescues Rayford, and while they recover on the riverbank, it begins to rain blood.

Rayford's reaction to Amanda's corpse, his expressions of grief and suffering are almost instantly negated by recourse to prophetic fulfilment.

'What is that Ray? It's raining, but it's red! Look at that! All over the snow!"
"It's blood," Rayford said, a peace flooding his soul [...] this show, this shower of fire and ice and blood, reminded him yet again that God is faithful. He keeps his promises'.¹³²

In the above extract, Amanda's body has momentarily threatened Rayford's faith. The painful grief that her corpse engenders is, however, neutralised by its deliverance within a prophetic framework as Rayford recognises the fulfilment of bible prophecy of Revelation 8: 6-7. The narrative is thus redrawn to accommodate Amanda's corpse and in this way its abject properties have been contained within discursive boundaries, its power to horrify effectively de-natured. Despite this relativising process however, *Left Behind* fiction, still

¹²⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 402.

¹³⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, pp. 402-03.

¹³¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 403.

¹³² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 410.

uses the corpse as an effective literary trope, exploited for its horrific effect. Corpses regularly populate the pages of the series, as hapless nonbelievers fall victim to the judgments of the Tribulation. In the following extract, Rayford contemplates the result of the earthquake of Revelation 8: 5,

'The result was piles of lifeless bodies. He couldn't imagine the force of a collision that would kill so many [...] a line of survivors clawed their way to the surface from another swallowed aircraft [...] Rayford knew if he was close enough he could hear the screams of survivors not strong enough to climb out [...] Hundreds of bodies lay in various states of repose. Rayford felt as if he were in hell'.¹³³

At the same time, the prolific numbers of dead bodies populating the horror universe of *Left Behind* always fall within the narrative intention of drawing events together under a prophetic umbrella. Even the 'nonsensical' deaths are to serve a didactic purpose, 'don't leave it too late to convert'.

In a similar way, the horrific corpse-characters of *Left Behind* are firmly established within a prophetic framework. The most important of these is the Antichrist, Nicolae Carpathia. Following Carpathia's assassination, his dead body is reanimated, now indwelt by the spirit of Satan¹³⁴. Carpathia's reanimated corpse is endowed with an eerie perfection which parodies the resurrected 'glorified body' of post Rapture believers,

'Nicolae looked as if he had just stepped out of his closet where a valet had helped him into a crisp suit. Shoes gleaming, laces taut, socks smooth, suit unwrinkled, tie hanging just so, he stood broad-shouldered, fresh-faced, shaven, hair in place, no pallor'.¹³⁵

However, at the 'Glorious Appearing' of Jesus, Carpathia's body begins to wear and decay. Its horrible uncanniness is brought once more in line with God's prophetic framework, as Jesus' presence provokes Carpathia's awful corporeal decay,

¹³³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, pp. 21-22.

¹³⁴ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Indwelling, The Beast Takes Possession* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2000), p. 365 - 66.

¹³⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Indwelling*, p. 366.

‘Nicolae’s hair was sparse and nearly colourless, and dark veins appeared on his exposed skin. He was pale and pasty, as if his skin could easily be rubbed away. Again Mac had the feeling that this is what the body of Carpathia would have looked like, had it been moldering in the grave’.¹³⁶

Carpathia’s body’s degeneration emphasises the impermanence of his temporal power, as his Satanic immortality proves useless when confronted with Jesus’ power, and his perfection disintegrates.

Left Behind’s juxtaposition of the displaced Glorified body of the Raptured Christian against the horror of the post-Rapture corpse serves to highlight the abjective power of the Christian corpse within dispensational theology. The decaying bodies true believers would threaten to undermine the suspended fulfilment of God’s promise of imminent Rapture. However, the Rapture acts as a purgative, removing these abjective reminders of the crisis of dispensationalist Rapture hope from the narrative of apocalyptic breakdown. Although the corpses featured in *Left Behind*’s horror universe serve as a horrific ornamentation of this apocalyptic disorder, their abjective quality is contained as the corpses are re-interpreted according to God’s prophetic template. They are shown to be victims of divine justice, or, like Carpathia, a stage prop for pre-determined eschatological theatrics.

In *Left Behind* fiction, the glorified body of the Rapture saint stands in direct juxtaposition to the threat of the corpse. The promise that Jesus will return, and the Rapture will occur imminently negates the corpse as an abjective category, since imminent Rapture would effectively re-categorize all Christian bodies, alive or dead, as heavenly objects. The corpse is therefore counter-balanced by the fulfilment of the promise to transform the physical earthly body into the physical heavenly body. In *Left Behind* fiction, the post-Rapture Tribulation is continually established as God’s territory, an arena in which a grand

¹³⁶ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing, The End of Days* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004), p. 308.

eschatological battle is being waged, 'an end-of-the-world chess game'.¹³⁷ The final dispensation represents the re-animation of the prophetic parenthesis that was paused at the crucifixion. The power of the Antichrist's regime therefore, is established as specifically transitory. In the fiction, no act of global geo-politics, or individual sickness and suffering, lies outside of God's prophetic template.

In the series, in accordance with a specific dispensationalist self-understanding, neither the corpses, nor the inanimate bodies of Raptured Christians are admitted into God's prophetic territory. The threat of these phantom Christian bodies to terrify readers with reminders of mortality are therefore purged from the story. The way that Rapture believers' bodies are explicitly removed from the narrative of *Left Behind* fiction might at first glance, seem a self-explanatory function of Rapture. However, within the admittedly small canon of Rapture fiction, there exist alternate Rapture theologies where the bodies of believers are simply abandoned as the believers ascend to join with Christ at the moment of the trumpet.¹³⁸ In *Left Behind* fiction, as we have explored in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, glorified bodies are imagined as continuations of the earthly bodies of believers made from 'elements' of believers' former selves only. However, LaHaye and Jenkins's imagining of a universe completely devoid of the bodies of Christians represents a very specific theological aesthetic in which the whole psycho-somatic unity of the believing body is consummated with the divine.

¹³⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 156.

¹³⁸ James BeauSeigneur, *In His Image* (New York, 2003), pp. 127-9.

Bodily Violence

Violence in the *Left Behind* series is responsible for many of the most horrific scenes in the fiction, and accounts for much of the most uncomfortable reading. It stretches far beyond the imaginative rendering of the odd action scene, but is so pervasive that it could be said to operate within the fiction as a separate mode. The mode of violence in *Left Behind* functions as a means of shaping premillennial dispensationalist discourse, and is used to engage with particular aspects of the dispensationalist abject. Violence enacted on human bodies is a particular thematic preoccupation, and grisly scenes of violence, mutilation, dismemberment, blood and gore permeate the pages of the novels. Mutilation images are particularly common, and those which include the perforation or puncturing of the skin have particular symbolic relevance as the 'inside' blends with the 'outside', boundaries of skin become redundant or meaningless. The disorder of bodily mutilation is in this way used as a metaphor for the chaos of the Tribulation and to narrate the re-establishment of divine order.

The pages of *Left Behind* are strewn with punctured and bloodied victims of horror. Often, these casualties are framed as the result of as chance encounters with strangers, involving helpless victims, and setting the background of the apocalyptic social breakdown. These broken individuals, bleeding out of their boundaried selfhood, epitomize the way in which *Left Behind* uses mutilation as an expression of the collapse of the category of the social individual,

'A woman crawled out from the wreckage of her home, a bloody stump at her shoulder where her arm had been. She screamed at Buck, "Kill me! Kill me!" He shouted, "No!" and leaped from the Rover as she bent and grabbed a chunk of glass from a broken window and dragged it across her neck [...] Buck was within a few feet of her when she stared, startled. The glass broke and tinkled to the ground. She stepped back and tripped, her head smacking loudly on a chunk of concrete. Immediately the blood stopped pumping

from her exposed arteries. Her eyes were lifeless as Buck forced her jaw open and covered her mouth with his. Buck blew air into her throat, making her chest rise and her blood trickle, but it was futile [...] Everywhere he looked he saw devastation, fire, water and blood'.¹³⁹

The main characters are also subjected to this dystopian collapse, in the form of mutilation, scarification and slaughter, and many meet grisly and unpleasant deaths which are recounted in explicit detail. David Hassid's fiancé, Annie, is fried by a lightning strike, which leaves 'a silver dollar-sized hole that exposed her brain'.¹⁴⁰ Loretta Moore is crushed by her car, her 'Raggedy-Ann-like body' is left 'curled in a frail ball atop the wreckage'.¹⁴¹ Sandy Moore is 'compressed to inches' by a falling oak tree so quickly that 'the dead girl's finger was still curled around the cup handle'.¹⁴² The characters who survive are routinely subjected to mutilation and torture. Ken Ritz has a flap of his scalp sliced off by the wing of an aeroplane.¹⁴³ Buck suffers wounds that

'left [him] in a deep pool of black blood so sticky that it had barely begun to run down the wall when it coagulated. His whole right side had been torn open, and wounds also disfigured his face and neck'.¹⁴⁴

Stefan's wife and mother are gagged, bound to chairs and have their throats slit, the blood is so prevalent that Buck both smells and hears it dripping before he discovers the bodies.¹⁴⁵

Stefan himself is murdered and then his four limbs are dismembered. Buck wonders

'What kind of weapon would it have taken and how long must the enemy have worked to saw through the tissue of a dead man until he was dismembered?'¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark*, p. 132.

¹⁴¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 7.

¹⁴² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 76.

¹⁴³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 202.

¹⁴⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Indwelling*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Indwelling*, p. 53.

Chloe Steele suffers a particularly horrific litany of catastrophic injuries,

‘the right side of her body had apparently been slammed full force by a section of roofing. Her normally smooth, pale skin was now blotched red and yellow and invaded by pitch, tar, and bits of shingling. Worse, her right foot looked as if someone had tried to fold it. A bone protruded from her shin. Bruising began on the outside of her knee and ran to the kneecap, which looked severely damaged. From the position of her body, it appeared her right hip had been knocked out of joint. Bruises and bumps in her midsection evidenced broken ribs. Her elbow had been laid open, and her right shoulder appeared dislocated. Her right collarbone pressed against the skin. The right side of her face appeared flatter, and there was damage to her jaw, teeth, cheekbone and eye. Her face was so misshapen that Buck could hardly bear to look. The eye was swollen huge and shut. She suffered several fractures, including three in her foot, one in her ankle, her kneecap, her elbow, and two ribs. She had dislocated both hip and shoulder. She had also sustained fractures of the jaw, cheekbone and cranium’.¹⁴⁷

Chloe is later tortured with starvation and truth serum before being decapitated on live television by a rusty guillotine.¹⁴⁸ These injuries seem to provide a didactic function, in that they are representative of the horrors of the Tribulation that a Rapture believer will not have to endure. They therefore serve as a reminder that swift conversion at the moment of reading will provide an escape from the dystopic world of violence that non-believers should expect to occur within their lifetimes,

‘We’ve already missed the Rapture, and now we live in what will soon become the most perilous period of history. Evangelists used to warn parishioners that they could be struck by a car or caught in a fire, and thus they should not put off coming to Christ. I’m telling you that should you be struck by a car or caught in a fire, it may be the most merciful way you can die’.¹⁴⁹

At the same time, some of the most horrific violence enacted on bodies is presented as a consequence of direct interaction with God, or with the agents of God. Jason Bivins has argued that these episodes of divine violence adhere to the rules of justice established in an Evangelical universe,

‘This violence is not simply inverted glory; it is also itself a divine vehicle. Divine judgment pours out into the world with violent intensity [...] The authors’ enumeration of

¹⁴⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, pp. 241-242.

¹⁴⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 214.

¹⁴⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 63.

the bowl and trumpet judgments allows them to convey a sense of God's righteousness and retributive justice written in gore'.¹⁵⁰

Bivins is certainly correct that there are many occasions where the violence of divine agents in the *Left Behind* series does enact justice in accordance with the Evangelical framework. This is particularly evident in the novel, *Glorious Appearing*, where the violence of the final battle has a specific theological and narrative function. However, I feel that it is perhaps an oversimplification to explain the extreme violence of *Left Behind* as simply a product of theological function. Certainly, the retributive justice of divine agents is intended to be enacted through violence, but it is the performativity of this function that is particularly significant. It is not the violence of the divine agents' retributive justice that is remarkable in these passages, but it is the extremity of the violence. Their divine power to dissolve corporeal form is more than just the performance of a pre-ordained prophetic struggle. For example, when the two 'witnesses', Eli and Moishe, encounter a terrorist, their violence stretches far beyond a simple disarmament,

'And as he finished, the other breathed from his mouth a column of fire that incinerated the man's clothes, consumed his flesh and organs, and in seconds left a charred skeleton smoking on the ground. The weapon melted and was fused to the cement, and the man's molten necklace dripped gold through the cavity in his chest'.¹⁵¹

The 'Glorious Appearing' of Jesus at the battle of Armageddon results in some of the most graphic violence of the entire series. The battle itself is described as,

'worse than any war zone. Hundreds of horses and even more men and women lay dead in hideous repose, broken, trampled, torn to pieces. The stench of stables was nothing compared to the hideous entrails of human and beast'.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 207.

¹⁵¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 324.

¹⁵² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 93-4.

Christ speaks, and his words alone cause violence to the unbelievers, 'With every word, more and more enemies of God dropped dead, torn to pieces'.¹⁵³ The force of these words is enough to cause mass slaughter,

'tens of thousands of [the Antichrist's soldiers] fell dead, simply dropping where they stood, their bodies ripped open, blood pooling in great masses'.¹⁵⁴

Jesus' voice alone flays the carcasses¹⁵⁵, ripping them in half and creating miles and miles of carnage,

'splayed and filleted bodies of men and women and horses [...] the very words of the Lord had superheated their blood, causing it to burst through their veins and skin [...] Tens of thousands of foot soldiers [...] fell to their knees, and writhed as they were invisibly sliced asunder. Their innards and entrails gushed to the desert floor, and as around them turned to run, they too were slain, their blood pooling and rising in the unforgiving brightness of the glory of Christ [...] "Their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust saturated with fatness"'.¹⁵⁶

The cumulative effect of reading this tragic piling is quite nauseating, as Jason Bivins observes, for almost 100 pages, God's enemies have 'their flesh dissolved in their sockets, and their tongues dissolved in their mouths'.¹⁵⁷ The Antichrist's soldiers try to flee from the scene,

'screaming in terror and pain and dying [... as] blood poured from them in great waves, combining to make a river that quickly became a swamp'.¹⁵⁸

This swamp eventually grows to a river of blood that rises to five feet¹⁵⁹, and Jesus dips his white gown into it.¹⁶⁰

'The riders not thrown leaped from their horses and tried to control them with the reigns, but even as they struggled, their own flesh dissolved, their eyes melted, and their tongues disintegrated. As Rayford watched, the soldiers stood briefly as skeletons in now

¹⁵³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 208.

¹⁵⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 204.

¹⁵⁷ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 209. LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 276.

¹⁵⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 249.

¹⁵⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 258.

¹⁶⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 228.

uniforms, then dropped in heaps of bones as the blinded horses continued to fume and rant and rave'.¹⁶¹

In these battle scenes, a template of correct action is being erected, as the role of the warrior Christ is tantamount in the re-establishment of eschatological justice. An 'active' form of apocalyptic righteousness is performed in these scenes, drawing attention to divine power that is drawn from retribution and destruction, rather than compassion.

This template for Christian action is echoed in the gender roles established in the fiction, with particular regard towards the 'manly Christianity' of the series' male protagonists. *Left Behind* fiction presents a particular masculine ideal as a composite figure of neo-survivalist action-man and sensitive spiritual hero. The male characters of *Left Behind* advocate action, physical strength, confidence, worldly success and entrepreneurship. Examples of this archetype in the fiction include Rayford, Buck, Mac McCullum, Ken Ritz, Ren Woo, George Sebastian, Albie and Abdullah Smith. These men are fighter pilots, ex-military men, smugglers and hard-nosed journalists. They are street-smart, athletic, pack light, plan ahead and have hot tempers. Their monosyllabic dialogue is punctuated by terse, jargon-filled sentences and acronyms,

'His ATV. Now there was a solution. Not his, of course. It lay in ruins. But there was more where that came from. They called Sebastian.

"Camel Jockey to Big Dog," Smitty said.

"This's Dog, Jockey, Go."

"Can you get us an ATV to transport Captain Steele to Petra?"

"If I can drive it."

"Affirmative, but should you leave your troops?"

"Kidding, Smitty. I'll send Razor" '.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 273.

¹⁶² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 95.

The male characters are depicted as having a quick temper that can be channelled into violence and aggression,

“‘That’s it!’ Ritz hollered. ‘I’ve been shot at for the last time!’”

To Buck’s horror, Ritz swung the car around and raced toward the guard. Buck peeked over the dashboard as Ritz pulled his 9mm automatic from an ankle holster, braced his left wrist between the outside mirror and the chassis, and fired [...] Ritz fired off three more shots and one hit the guard in the foot, sending his leg shooting up in front of him and flipping him backwards. “I’ll kill you, you-”.¹⁶³

The propensity to violence is specifically framed within the model of divine purpose,

‘Mac stole a glance behind him. He was bringing up the rear. “Lord, forgive me,” he breathed, spraying his Uzi and dropping at least a dozen GC from behind. He felt no remorse. *All’s fair...* It was only fitting, he decided, that the devil’s crew were dressed in black. *Live by the sword, die by the sword*’.¹⁶⁴

This dynamic creates some ambiguity in the matter of agency and individual violence. In *Assassins*, for example, Rayford expends most of his energy plotting to assassinate the Antichrist, Nicolae Carpathia. This assassination must be completed in order to fulfil prophecy, as the Antichrist must arise from the dead, indwelt by Satan. As such, Rayford is able to exegetically justify his murderous leanings.¹⁶⁵ Their determination and courage to carry out these violent acts can be understood as a form of constructive aggression, and just like the ‘warrior Christ’; their violence is depicted as undertaken for the function of the re-establishment of divine justice.

The over-performativity of violence in *Left Behind* does more, however, than simply serve as a marker of re-established eschatological justice. Rather, I would argue that these extreme violent scenes serve two additional functions. Firstly, as Bivins has suggested, the violence demonstrates the dynamic that Bivins has named ‘the erotics of fear’. In their zealous, detailed elucidation of such gruesome ‘bodyshock’ horror, the novels seek to explore one of its most abjective elements, the corruption of the body. As Bivins suggests, ‘the religion of

¹⁶³ LaHaye and Jenkins *Soul Harvest*, p. 351.

¹⁶⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Assassins*, p. 65.

fear appears drawn to precisely what it seeks to drive away', and as a consequence of this interplay between fascination and repugnance, it is possible to read this violence as a commentary on the role of the body within wider premillennial dispensationalist theology.¹⁶⁶

In these examples, we can see how the particular horror of violence and gore, and the repugnance elicited by mutilation are framed within a divine order. The taboo of abjection is negated and almost 'sterilized' through its association with divine agency. God's tangible punishment on non-believers in these extracts represents a re-stabilization of personal identity according to faith. This re-orientation of identity establishes order in an apocalyptic society where all other mechanisms that 'maintain' the boundaries of the individual, such as the government, the economy, the police, the legal system, have collapsed. The violence is codified and de-natured through this role. The violence performed on apocalyptic bodies is set into a 'safe' structure of narrative expectation, and becomes transformative; the extreme violence of the Tribulation serves a cathartic and cleansing function that precedes the utopia of the New Jerusalem. At the same time, the repeated emphasis on bodily violence, on the abject, the corpse, blood, the literal 'filleting' of the human body illuminates one of the most fundamental doctrinal reassurances provided by premillennial dispensationalism, that of bodily salvation. As has been discussed above, dispensationalism places an integral emphasis on the psycho-somatic unity of the resurrected body. The Rapture itself is a uniquely tangible interaction with eschatological salvation. Premillennial dispensationalist Rapture theology is not concentrated just on a metaphysical, or eschatological hope, a transcendent narrative of salvation, but is a deeply physical, tangible experience. In *Left Behind* fiction, the abjective mutilation and corruption of the mortal body is ultimately

¹⁶⁶ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p.17.

contained by the divine promise of bodily ascension, and thus of eschatological wholeness in the Rapture.

Chapter Five

Analysis and Conclusion

‘My friends and I, we consider ourselves fulfilments of prophecy’.¹

This final chapter will draw together earlier analyses to consider the ways in which the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* fiction shape the eschatological beliefs of their reading community. In this chapter, the historical development of the movement, the movement’s relationship with text, and the anxiety narratives of premillennial dispensationalism popular media will be explored. Finally, the analysis conducted in this thesis will be used to reflect upon some of the most common critical understandings of millenarian movements. In particular, the findings of this thesis will be used to challenge traditional ‘deprivation theory’ models of analysis of millennial appeal. Similarly, the examination of anxiety narratives will also help to challenge ‘passive or disengaged’ theories of millennial appeal, or those which consider millennialism the final recourse of a ‘lunatic fringe’.

The History of the Movement

In the discussion of the history of premillennial dispensationalism in Chapter Two, it was possible to briefly outline the development of the movement in the United States. Premillennial dispensationalism was shown to be shaped by a blend of several theologies, dispensationalism, futurism, premillennialism, Rapture theology and prophecy belief. These forms of belief all have their basis in longstanding historical traditions, and the contemporary form of the movement represents a combination of these various exegetical

¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 49.

frameworks. It was also noted that popular media, including both popular prophecy and 'Rapture fiction' has historically been used as a means of shaping and controlling premillennial dispensationalist discourse, and thus its contemporary incarnation in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* and *Left Behind* fiction do not represent an entirely new means of expression of premillennial dispensationalist theology.

Premillennial dispensationalist discourse has historically been shaped in several ways. One is by means of the perpetuation of the discourse itself, through publishing, academic and pedagogical institutions, which serve to promote particular interpretive schemes while excluding others. The development of Bible study and exegetical guides are an important contribution to this discourse, since they establish a particular relationship with text that lies at the heart of the movement's hermeneutical framework. Rapture fiction represents another dimension of the controlling function served by these exegetical guides, for it characterises another means of 'packaging' Scripture inside a particular hermeneutical framework.

In particular, pedagogy and publishing have proved to be two important channels through which dispensational premillennialism has streamlined its discursive material. Pedagogical institutions, particularly universities, have played an instrumental role in the shaping of the discourse. Throughout *Left Behind* fiction, and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, LaHaye emphasises the dangers of the 'humanism' that he believes to be present in the secular education system,

'high-minded people, usually those with advanced degrees, dogmatically oppose moral teachings and prefer the immoral practices of humanism'.²

² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 340.

In *Left Behind*, for example, the only three secular academics of the series are the three biological parents of the Antichrist. Sorin and Baduna, the gay lovers whose sperm is used to genetically engineer Carpathia are Professors in the Classical Literature department, while his biological mother, Marilena, 'was an existentialist, a humanist, a woman of letters, a student, a scholar, a professor'.³ LaHaye's concern with of the evils of a secular education, is of course, far from a new concern of 'Fundamentalist' Evangelical Christianity. For instance, in Frank Peretti's novel *Piercing the Darkness*, children are possessed by demon ponies as a consequence of attending the public secular school system.⁴ This suspicion of the secular education system has contributed to a specialised, and separatist 'channelling' of Evangelical pedagogy, which serves to widen the division between Evangelical 'alternative' culture and 'mainstream' education. The institutional aspect of this separation also creates pathways of validation for particular forms of hermeneutical interpretation. Prominent institutions in this regard have included the Moody Bible Institute and currently, Liberty University, which has strong ties with LaHaye, Ice, and Hindson.

The dissemination of pedagogical material in the form of Study Bibles and exegetical guides has also played a crucial role in the shaping of premillennial dispensationalist beliefs. The publication of textual material that emphasises the importance of individual engagement with Scripture reflects the movement's emphasis on literal inerrancy, and serves an initial function of re-enforcing the spiritual authority of the 'Word' over the 'Spirit'. Furthermore, as Gribben observes, the commercial power of publishers themselves serve to ratify particular hermeneutical interpretations,

³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Rising*, p. 59. Nicolae is the biological product of genetic engineering.

⁴ Frank Peretti, *Piercing The Darkness*, (Wheaton, Illinois, 2003) p. 392.

'In their role as 'cultural gatekeepers', evangelical publishers grant 'access' and 'legitimacy' to the ideas they introduce to the market'.⁵

Jan Blodgett notes that the same can be said of the role of booksellers, an aspect which must not be overlooked given the importance of secular retail outlets in establishing the cross-over popularity of the *Left Behind* texts.⁶

The growth of the Christian retail industry has also played a formative role in the way in which popular texts such as *Left Behind* are released into an established market of Christian consumers,

'Using the label 'Christian' for bookstores, publishers and novels is not merely a convenience or a conceit. Rather, it is a powerful unifying force, visible evidence of a community strength and awareness'.⁷

The *Left Behind* novels, perhaps more than any other Christian fiction series, has developed a particular rubric that strikes a balance between spiritual edification and 'entertainment' in a way that has been designed to tap in to that consumer market. Blodgett notes that the role of these publishers extends beyond the marketing and sale of the books as consumer products, and also serves the purpose of discursive structuring,

'the gatekeeping activities of the publishers and authors are [...] directly related to maintaining and alerting the symbolic boundaries of the evangelical community'.⁸

To this extent, publishing companies such as Moody Press, Tyndale House, and Harvest House, also form part of the central circle of prophecy belief. The products created by authors and produced at these institutions are disseminated 'out' into the surrounding circles of believers, communicating the discursive messages of the central ideological apparatus as they go.

⁵ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 16. N.B. The 'cultural accreditation' provided by publishing houses is remarkable outside of specifically Christian industries. Gribben has noted that the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* by Oxford University Press greatly impacted upon its perceived authority. See: Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 7.

⁶ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 2.

⁷ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 2.

⁸ Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 6.

Exegetical guides offer one example of this communicative process. Indeed, study Bibles and exegetical guides comprised some of the earliest examples of a specialised Evangelical media, for example, the Stewart brothers' *Fundamentals*. Exegetical guides of this kind organise the way in which Scripture is read, by providing a hermeneutical filter that draws attention to particular theological or ideological concerns. This is accomplished largely by organising Scripture along thematic lines according to a prescribed hermeneutical framework. Study Bibles operate in a similar manner, offering 'textually internalised' hermeneutical structuring that frames the way in which Scripture is read. This is clearly demonstrated in the marginalia and explanatory notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, a process that we can see mirrored in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*. 'Popular prophecy', as a genre, can certainly be considered alongside these exegetical guides. Of particular relevance is Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*, whose success paved the way for not only works like *Are We Living in the End Times?* but the pulp paperback format of *Left Behind* fiction.

As Frykholm notes, Rapture or prophecy fiction can also be considered part of this tradition of offering a 'common sense', interpretation of Scripture,

'Left Behind needs to be understood as a part of a long-established tradition [...] that has used mass publishing and mass culture to its advantage from a very early day'.⁹

Gribben has written extensively on the development of the small genre of Rapture fiction in his work, *Writing The Rapture*. Gribben traces its origin to the early twentieth century, and the genre continues to grow. The *Left Behind* series owes a debt to forerunners such as Gary Cohen's *The Horsemen Are Coming* and Frank Peretti's novels, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*. Furthermore, the volume of prophetic fiction books published has

⁹ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 21.

rapidly increased since the publication of *Left Behind*, and continues to draw interested readers. Tyndale House has published Jenkins' *Underground Zealot* series, and LaHaye's continuing series, *Babylon Rising*, has been bought by Bantam Dell, a member of Random House Publishing Group.

In *Rapture Fiction*, Amy Johnston Frykholm has carried out extensive research on the ways in which the readership of prophecy or Rapture fiction shapes how readers engage with theological material.¹⁰ It is certainly difficult to state conclusively how far Christian fiction actively shapes the belief systems of its readership, or if the idea of 'Christian fiction' can even be fully realised in a reader's imagination. The Evangelical pastor and author A.W. Tozer (1897- 1963) is reported to have remarked, 'If it's Christian, it's true; if it's fiction, it's false. So there can't be Christian fiction'.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is helpful to conceptualise Christian fiction like *Left Behind* as an imaginative mode, in which the 'willing suspension of disbelief' enables negotiation of tricky theological material within particular hermeneutical tramlines. This ranges from the narrativising of the book of Revelation in order to make its dense symbolic content more comprehensible; to more detailed in-story discussions about the nature of Christian salvation.

The brief discussion of popular premillennial dispensationalist media discussed in Chapter Two has demonstrated a considerable and enduring 'pool' of shared prophetic referents. These include, for example, the personhood of the Antichrist, the function of the Rapture, and a suspicion of globalised industry. From this pool, contemporary prophecy narratives have clearly inherited a set of prophetic signifiers. The land of Gog, and its long-standing

¹⁰ See for example: Chapter 6, 'Making Prophecy Live': Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 132-152.

¹¹ Quoted in: Blogett, *Protestant Evangelical*, p. 1. From: Joe Bayly, 'Biblical Novels: Popular Fiction for Today's Christians' *European Christian Bookstore Journal*, 14 (November 1981), p. 83.

identification as Russia is one such example. To this extent, the prophetic content of *Left Behind* and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* only occasionally offers innovative prophetic interpretations. The tropes inherited from earlier prophecy guides and work of a similar genre similarly reflect a long-standing use of anxiety narratives. The identification of Gog as Russia, for example, gained such purchase in prophetic discourse particularly because it has reflected wider political anxieties. However, even more ostensibly 'modern' concerns can be attributed to the influences of inherited anxiety frameworks. For example, the suspicion of computerized technology is easily identifiable in Mary Stewart Relfe's, *When Your Money Fails* (1981) and *The New Money System* (1982), works that obsessively catalogue the means by which the Antichrist's empire will dominate and subjugate believers through a cashless economy via implanted microchips and barcoding.

Finally, anxiety narratives have played an important role in the way in which premillennial dispensationalist discourse has been shaped. For example, anxiety about the threat of 'infection' by secular humanism has contributed to the defensive retreat of premillennial dispensationalist pedagogy to particular institutional 'safehouses'. Furthermore, the development of prophecy conferences has allowed for flexible and immediate responses to the ongoing anxiety narrative inherent in the uncertain divination of the 'signs of the times'. Conferences address 'real-time' prophetic foreshadowing, and can update, increase or reduce emphasis placed on any potential signifier as is perceived to be necessary. In this way, prophecy conferences inhabit and shape an overarching anxiety narrative that permits the necessary discursive alterations that shape the categorisation of 'crises'.

The Texts

Ways of Reading

The process of reading premillennial dispensationalist media is an important means by which a dynamic is established, not only between the reader and the text, but also between the reader and their own faith. It is therefore possible to associate the process of reading premillennial dispensationalist media with the way in which the movement controls the eschatological belief of its readers. For both the *Left Behind* fiction and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, we can break down the process of reading into levels of interaction which are combined in one act of 'reading'. Firstly, biblical Scripture is read and interpreted by the authors, and the words of the Bible and the authors' interpretations are published in the books of the *Left Behind* series or the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*. These books are then read by consumers, who are thus exposed to both parts of the first 'reading': the words of the Bible and the premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic.

As has been discussed, reliance on 'grammatical-historical' literalism is used in these works as an effective means of controlling the eschatological landscape of believers.¹² The emphasis on a hermeneutics of single meaning 'fixes' the interpretations offered by those at the centre of the movement. The rejection of alternative prophetic signifiers is intended to defend canonized interpretations against the 'hollowing out' of meaning by the dangerous

¹² Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, p. 138.

fractures of post-modernism.¹³ These fixed interpretations, set at the academic centre of the movement, are then distributed to those in its wider circle of influence through popular media. This process is itself reflected in the *Left Behind* novels, as readers of Tsion Ben Judah's website and Buck's 'cyberzine' *The Truth*, log on to access the authoritative interpretations of the Word formalized at the heart of the believers' academic community. Indeed, as can be seen with the effect of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, this process of reading formalized hermeneutical marginalia alongside the scriptural text can result in a synonymisation of Scripture with hermeneutics. Marsden remarks,

'for many readers of Scofield's Bible, Darbyite interpretation became indistinguishable from the biblical text; it became part of fundamentalists' assertion of a "common sense" understanding of biblical prophecy'.¹⁴

In this process of reading, consumption of hermeneutical frameworks sits alongside Scripture, insidiously referring back to itself and thus to those at the centre of the discourse.

Premillennial dispensationalism is an explicitly literalist movement. The word of the Bible is regarded as the fundamental building block of the faith. While the Holy Spirit retains a function as the vehicle by which the will of God is communicated to humankind, the 'Word' itself is the primary means of that communication,

'it was by the Spirit that the Word of the Lord was communicated to the prophet and by the Spirit that the Word was mediated to the people'.¹⁵

Text-based worship is consistently emphasized as the means to the most insightful understanding of the Christian faith. It is no coincidence that the *Left Behind* series and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* were primarily, and most successfully produced as books- as opposed to say, a line of instructional videos or radio serials. In his work, *Have A Nice*

¹³ Thomas, 'Hermeneutics', p. 140.

¹⁴ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, p. 18.

¹⁵ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, pp. 8-9.

Doomsday, Why Millions of Americans Are Looking Forward to the End of the World (London, 2007), Nicholas Guyatt quotes LaHaye,

“‘The best way to reach the minds of people is the printed page. God chose the printed page to communicate with mankind. So how can you improve on that?’”¹⁶

Throughout both the fiction series, and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, the value of the word of God is emphasized above all other forms of spiritual inspiration, ‘What a privilege to hear the Word *from* the Word!’¹⁷

However, Frykholm’s study of the readership of the *Left Behind* series notes a difference in the reading practices through which this spiritual inspiration is achieved. Frykholm observes that the *Left Behind* series is often consumed in large quantities over an extended period of time, while the Bible is meticulously broken down into smaller passages, to be read slowly and carefully.¹⁸ Thus, texts such as *How To Study The Bible For Yourself* advise readers to break down the Bible into smaller portions, in order to best to acquire the discipline for daily Bible study.¹⁹ Frykholm’s readers of the novels, in contrast, cite an intense degree of immersion in the fictional universe of *Left Behind*,

‘Readers describe long, absorbed hours of reading, where dishes go undone and social responsibilities are left unattended while the book entirely controls the reader’s attention. In contrast to the discipline of daily devotions, this reading is undisciplined, all-consuming, and even produces guilt’.²⁰

In the *Left Behind* series, however, the characters are portrayed as engrossing themselves in the Bible with total abandon, spending many nights awake ‘feasting on the word’.²¹ The act

¹⁶ Nicholas Guyatt, *Have A Nice Doomsday, Why Millions of Americans Are Looking Forward to the End of the World* (London, 2007), p. 275.

¹⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 232. Original italics.

¹⁸ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 110.

¹⁹ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 10.

²⁰ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 110.

²¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 25, p. 46.

of reading the Bible in the *Left Behind* series is linked with an explicit, almost gluttonous consumption, “I read that Bible the way a starving man eats bread”.²²

The characters of *Left Behind* engage in prolonged and absorbed reading of the Bible for pleasure, enacting a way of reading the Bible that is perhaps foreign to many contemporary readers of the fiction. The believers of the *Left Behind* universe often stumble at the beginning of their faith narrative, unsure exactly *how* to read the Bible, they flick through the pages at random, searching for answers. In Rayford’s first adult encounter with a Bible, he has no idea how to focus his reading

‘Would there be some guide? An index? [...] If not, maybe he’d start at the end. If *genesis* meant “beginning,” maybe *revelation* had something to do with the end [...] He hoped that there’d be some corresponding verse at the end of the Bible that said something like, “In the end God took all his people to heaven and gave everybody else one more chance”’.²³

Often the absorbed reading of the Bible is triggered by a deep faith event, and it is undertaken through serious study in groups, supervised by patriarchal authority figures such as Bruce Barnes and Tsion Ben Judah.²⁴

In the *Left Behind* series, the Bible is the only reading material appropriate for reading for pleasure. Reading non-scriptural material for pleasure is dismissed as a ‘frivolous’²⁵ pastime,

‘how many hours had he wasted during idle moments like this, poring over newspapers and magazines that had nothing to say? After all that had happened, only one book could hold his interest’.²⁶

Indeed, only the biological mother and father of the Antichrist, both professional academics, indulge in reading for pleasure.²⁷ Non-scriptural scholarship is also dismissed as largely

²² LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 262.

²³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 122.

²⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Indwelling*, p. 85.

²⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 227.

²⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 1.

pointless. When Chloe Steele considers returning to Stanford she decides against it, as she 'can go to college right here, [in their local church] every night at eight'.²⁸ Chloe's intense Bible study under Bruce Barnes, provides her with immediate intellectual rewards, and she declares that, "I learned more today than I learned in college last year".²⁹

In the *Left Behind* novels, text-based worship is established as the primary means by which God communicates with man. The characters use the prophetic texts of the Bible as a roadmap to navigate the events that unfold around them, repeatedly consulting Scripture for the 'next step' in God's cosmic plan.³⁰ In *Left Behind* fiction, God also communicates to those in the fiction through agents such as angels, and through visions. In *The Indwelling*, for example, Tsion Ben Judah experiences a vision of the events of the book of Revelation.³¹ However, visions of this kind occur rarely, and only to the truly enlightened. Tsion, in his role as a pseudo-prophet, is a particularly elite member of the 'Tribulation Force', and even then, his vision is reflective of a pre-known eschatological framework. In other words, the visions of *Left Behind* can only inspire or encourage, they do not impart knowledge to their participants that is not already contained in the Bible. Visions are therefore not a significant method of 'communication' between man and God. The only truly 'active' method of communication with mankind in the end-times is through the actions of God in the unfolding process of prophecy.

Frykholm has examined the ways in which *Left Behind* novels are consumed within their believing communities. She cites the work of Eve Sedgwick, and discusses the processes of 'paranoid' and 'reparative' reading. Frykholm suggests that a 'paranoid' reading of a text re-

²⁷ See: LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Rising*, p. 27.

²⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 31.

²⁹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 233.

³⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 424.

³¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Indwelling*, p. 301.

affirms what a reader already knows to be true, upholding pre-existing prejudices or frameworks,

'If the knowledge produced in a paranoid reading of *Left Behind* merely leads us to a smug sense of superiority over evangelical men and women, and opens up a wider chasm between the secular academy and those who embrace traditional religion, then I would argue that we have accomplished very little'.³²

Frykholm goes on to cite Sedgwick's insistence upon the importance of 'reparative' reading practices, and suggests that analysts of media such as *Left Behind*, should negotiate the text without reference to their presuppositions, and with a preparedness to be surprised. This is a very important point. Indeed, as I have argued in Chapter One, any critic extogenous to these worldviews needs to be very careful not to overlay a reading of these texts with pre-existing prejudices.

In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, 2003), Sedgwick argues that 'paranoid' reading practices,

'have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller'.³³

If, as Sedgwick suggests, 'paranoid' reading practices re-assert frameworks and knowledge with which readers are already familiar, it is, conversely, possible to understand *Left Behind* fiction and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* as texts which deliberately evoke 'paranoid' reading in many senses of the world. Premillennial dispensationalist prophecy guides are specifically designed in order to re-affirm a world-view, and a theology, with which the reader is already presumed to be familiar.³⁴ These texts are not designed to be read 'reparatively', in order to provoke surprise. Indeed, I would argue that a 'reparative' reading of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* might actually make it more difficult 'to unpack the

³² Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 89.

³³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, 2003), p. 124.

³⁴ See: Chapter Five, 'Ways of Reading', pp. 239-247.

local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller'³⁵ which Sedgwick seems to suggest is the aim of critical reading. The readers of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* in particular, are not – and are not intended to be – ‘reparative’ readers; they are ‘paranoid’ readers, participators in a pre-established framework that itself rewards a formalised and specific tradition of ‘reading’ paranoid signifiers back into the contemporary world. We must therefore be careful not to ascribe critical meta-analyses of the texts that would overlook their function entirely.

Frykholm further suggests that reading the *Left Behind* texts ‘reparatively’ would allow for an analysis that accesses a diverse range of emotional responses to the texts,

‘Readers use the act of reading to serve their own purposes and often reinvent the text to make this possible. We cannot recreate individual moments of reading’.³⁶

This may be true about prophecy fiction, where the framing mechanism of a fictional narrative allows for a flexibility of engagement with the text. Readers of *Left Behind* fiction may be able to re-interpret particular characters or subplots according to their individual responses to the texts. For the prophetic guides, however, the ‘act of reading’ is closely controlled to serve a deliberate function, and there is little room for individual ‘reinvention’ of the text. It is therefore difficult to analyse the act of reading prophetic fiction as a Barthesian dissolution of meaning into diffuse reader receptions. ‘Individual moments of reading’, in prophecy, are rather constantly mimetically reproduced and recreated, as the reader is actively guided through the act of reading the Bible. Frykholm’s assertion that

³⁵ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 124.

³⁶ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, pp. 103-104.

‘reading is a process that allows for relative freedom of interaction’³⁷, therefore, is the very practice that the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* seeks to prevent or correct.

For this reason, the ‘hermeneutics of recovery of meaning’ that Sedgwick and Frykholm suggest accompanies ‘reparative’ readings, is not necessarily applicable as a reading practice, either for the reader of the premillennial dispensational media, or for the critical analyses of these texts. At the heart of Sedgwick’s enquiry, she posits the question,

‘How, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?’³⁸

In order to ask this question of premillennial dispensationalist media, the ‘reparative’ practice of analysing these texts must be realigned to accommodate the function of the texts themselves. For the *Left Behind* series and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, the performativity of knowledge lies precisely in its ‘paranoid’ power. The texts function by repeating and re-establishing frameworks that have been established by a long-standing hermeneutical tradition of ‘fixing’ meanings at the centre of the discourse. For premillennial dispensationalist non-fiction, these frameworks of meaning are largely already familiar to the reader, and the texts operate precisely by encouraging their readers to treat with suspicion all worldviews that would challenge their explicit paranoia. The texts instead offer ‘reparative’ readings of scriptural prophecy only in the sense of a very specific performativity. The ‘reparative’ function is conducted within their prescribed ideological framework, as the texts work to re-integrate abject components back into the fabric of dispensationalist theology through reiterated attribution of their meaning.

³⁷ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 104.

³⁸ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 124.

Left Behind fiction, in contrast, invites a different, and more flexible way of interacting with its text. As an explicit work of fiction, *Left Behind* is not intended to be read literally, even if it the theological skeleton that underpins the series is meant to be understood literally. As the following discussion will show, *Left Behind* fiction nevertheless also undertakes a 'reparative' reading of premillennial dispensationalist theology in order to integrate and redress anxieties that lie at the core of its eschatological landscape, such as powerlessness, or corruption of the body. *Left Behind* fiction itself is a unique creation, it is the product of a blend of theologies and genres, and borrows from several recognisable narrative and cultural frameworks, including science fiction, thrillers, and secular apocalyptic. Frykholm notes that its composite character is particularly useful for the 'reparative' purpose of this fiction,

'A formula fiction takes cultural myths and weaves them into familiar story patterns so that readers can engage the familiar as they read. By presenting deeply rooted cultural myth in a formula story, formula fiction works to confirm readers' worldviews and resolve tensions and ambiguities in the culture. At the same time, it provides a means of fantasy that readers can use to explore the realm of the forbidden within very safe boundaries'.³⁹

Thus, as Frykholm has argued, it is in its strangely re-iterative cultural process that *Left Behind's* power lies, 'It moves in a dynamic relation with both religious faith and a seemingly secular broader culture'.⁴⁰

Horror and Crisis

As has been argued above, horror is a crucial feature of premillennial dispensationalist media, and serves a 'reparative' theological function which is performed in several ways. Firstly, horror is itself a component of premillennial dispensationalist theology, serving a

³⁹ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 121.

⁴⁰ Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, p. 30.

theological function during the final dispensation, and characterising the nature of God's communication with man during the end-times. Secondly, the wider thematic mode of horror used to narrate premillennial dispensationalist theology in the popular media, is used as a medium to negotiate both the theological and socio-political 'abject'. In this way, its role can be linked to a process of discursive streamlining. Finally, horror can be understood to play a performative role in both of the functions listed above. The nature of the horror enacted in the media reveals the importance of reader participation in the cathartic and purgative power of horror narratives. In this way, horror and crisis narratives provide a further dimension of engagement with both story and theology.

A Theology of Horror

Within premillennial dispensationalist theology, horror characterizes the premillennial dispensationalist understanding of the end-times. On the most fundamental level, it is understood that conditions on earth must deteriorate before the Rapture, and then deteriorate again at the close of the final dispensation before the establishment of the millennial kingdom. Bernard McGinn has suggested that apocalyptic eschatology as a whole is best 'viewed in a triple pattern of crisis-judgement-reward'.⁴¹ In this understanding, crisis plays a role as a necessary precursor to the final judgement, and thus the eternal reward of the millennial kingdom. Certainly, in dispensationalist prophetic media, the end-times, and specifically the Tribulation, is repeatedly referred to as characterized by the 'birth pangs' described in Matthew 24:8.⁴² The final moments of the earth are thus understood as an era of suffering that precedes rebirth, or restoration. Crisis and horror, in this way, are associated with the 'ending' of a gestation period, which will herald the beginning of a new

⁴¹ Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York, 1994), p.13.

⁴² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Armageddon*, p. 311.

moment of human history. In the premillennial dispensationalist prophetic schema, it is however, possible to understand McGinn's triptych of 'crisis-judgment-reward' as somewhat synchronized. Rather than occurring in strict teleological order, crisis and judgment occur simultaneously during the last dispensation, when God's judgment is conducted through apocalyptic crisis. The function of the horror of the last dispensation is as a medium through which judgement is performed, in order to promote salvation. The horror of the end-times cannot, therefore, be separated from its eschatological environment. Horror is understood as a specific means for catalysing conversions, a 'prompt' we see in action many times during *Left Behind* fiction.⁴³ Indeed, the prophetic earthly fulfilment of the Jewish remnant is only accomplished in response to the extraordinary horror of the battle of Armageddon.⁴⁴

Furthermore, the proliferation of end-times horror acts as a means of solidifying the main function of the true Church- that of witnessing. During the 'Church Age' dispensation, the only active role that the earthly Church commands is that of witnessing, and thus witnessing is the only prophetic agency available to individual believers destined for the Rapture host. As has been discussed above, one of the most frequent arguments given for the study of prophecy is that it encourages witnessing, and makes the church more spiritually 'vitalized', 'There is no more challenging and motivating subject in the Bible than the study of prophecy'.⁴⁵ In particular, the culmination of horrors in the imminent Rapture is cited as the motivation for increased productivity of witnessing,

'Whenever believers have anticipated the return of the Lord in their lifetime, the result has been a higher level of consecration, a greater zeal for soul-winning, and a heightened desire to send out missionaries'.⁴⁶

⁴³ See: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ See: Ice, 'Armageddon', p. 40.

⁴⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 73.

The reason that the Church is 'vitalised' during the end-times is therefore as a direct response to the urgent horror narrative signposted in the surrounding world. Thus, it is both the sensitivity to current crises (the 'signs of the times') and the anticipation of future crisis (the Rapture) that breeds the urgent nature required to promote witnessing. Horror and crisis thus validate the salvific role of the earthly Church.

Critical Action

Within *Left Behind* fiction, horror and crisis operate as an arena in which the characters are inspired to action. The characters of *Left Behind* are constantly acting and re-acting to a series of critical and urgent events that require immediate attention. The 'action' of the characters, and indeed, even their occasional roles as 'action figures' is reflective of the scope of their agency within the final dispensation. This agency is not just a spiritual event; rather it involves participation and even interference in their immediate surroundings. For example, the assassination of the Antichrist is an act independently attempted by Hattie, Rayford, and Chaim Rosenweig, as a direct attempt to intertwine their own lives in the fabric of prophetic pre-determination.⁴⁷ The characters in *Left Behind* are described as consistently dissatisfied with inaction, and they are depicted as using the apocalyptic arena of *Left Behind's* dystopian universe as an opportunity to demonstrate the moral mettle of the Christian individual,

"“Are you sure you want to [join] a Tribulation Force operation?” Rayford said.

“Are you kiddin’ me? I’ve been itchin’ for some action ever since I got saved”.”⁴⁸

The characters are frustrated by their incarceration, and although somewhat forced into a physical 'withdrawal', they used their demarcated space as a base for widespread cultural

⁴⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Indwelling*, pp. 183-185, LaHaye and Jenkins, *Apollyon*, pp. 256, 329.

⁴⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Assassins*, p. 272.

participation through publishing, pedagogy and entrepreneurship. This participatory role is particularly significant in the light of critical distinctions often made between 'passive' and 'active' millenarian movements.

The unfolding crises of prophecy as portrayed in the *Left Behind* novels, therefore, inspire the characters to dramatic and heroic action. Similarly, the unfolding process of prophecy in the 'signs of the times' is depicted as an encouragement to the reader to seize opportunities for action. The 'signs of the times', despite their horrific nature, are rendered as symbolic of the critical nature of the age, and are understood as a form of 'positive degeneration', simultaneously proving the infallibility of prophecy and the rewards promised to believers. As discussed above, the 'signs of the times' are drawn from biblical precedent, but they also represent issues dear to a politically conservative Evangelicalism, and include topics such as homosexuality, genetic modification and abortion. These topics are particularly clearly rendered in *Left Behind* fiction, and the novels' engagement with gay characters, or Hattie's abortion, for example, demonstrate formulaic models of behaviour for the ideal evangelical engagement in such issues. This sustains Bivins' assertion that:

'The primary aim of apocalyptic fiction, as in the religion of fear generally, is to generate interpretive frames for readers: the narratives, often simple in construction and symbolism, convey to sympathetic consumers ideal, typical evangelical understandings of nationalism, gender, economics, sexuality, and politics more broadly'.⁴⁹

It is, however, a bit reductive to see the showcasing of such concerns as merely a platform for expressing a political agenda. Indeed, the more pertinent question might be that if the Rapture is indeed imminent, and the proliferation of such indications of moral and social breakdown *prove* its imminence, why promote political action at all? In other words, why

⁴⁹ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 178.

bother to criticise this degenerate culture, or indeed, why not even promote 'sinful' behaviour in order to precipitate the Rapture? As has been previously stated, the premillennial dispensationalist conceptualization of the earthly accords it only a very limited function. One such function is witnessing, and another important role of the true Church is to act as the 'restrainer' of the powers of Satan and the Antichrist,

'The Spirit is the Restrainer, and He does His work of restraining through the church. When the church is removed from the earth at the rapture, the presence of the Spirit in church-age believers will also be removed'.⁵⁰

For this reason, the mounting horrors *must* be addressed, and cannot just be left unfettered, to act without the restraint of the Church and its members. It is therefore prophetically pre-ascertained that the Church will act in this 'restraining' capacity, to engage with the degenerate culture of the end-times until the occurrence of the Rapture. Indeed, 'lack of restraint' is one of the defining characterizing elements of the Tribulation, and so cannot occur during this dispensation. Thus, if the Church were to promote inaction, it would render the prophetic role of the Church redundant, thereby challenging the doctrine of the pre-Tribulational Rapture.

Wider Considerations of Horror

We will now turn to examine the way in which horror is used more widely as a narrative mode for shaping eschatological beliefs. This thesis has considered horror as a medium for the task of 'reparative' discursive streamlining. This has been accomplished by using horror to draw attention to 'abjective' categories of premillennial dispensationalist eschatology, and thus to re-integrate them within the theology as a whole. Mary Douglas and Catherine Bell have explored the process of purgative catharsis and ideological re-classification within

⁵⁰ Gromacki, 'Holy Spirit and Eschatology', p. 141.

culturally specific pollution rituals. To some extent, this understanding can also be helpful for an understanding of the horror narratives of *Left Behind* and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*. The re-integration of dispensationalist abject operates as a 'framing mechanism' that focuses attention on those experiences that have been deliberately re-aligned into the dispensationalist discursive 'pattern'. These concerns have been explored above; they include the solitary nature of the eschatological experience, fear of bodily corruption and the paranoid milieu of prophetic interpretation.

Throughout the premillennial dispensationalist media examined in this study, it has been possible to observe that horror is used as a destabilizing mechanism. It serves to disarm the reader by evoking fear, tension and anxiety. The deliberately hyperbolic nature of the horror in *Left Behind* fiction serves to realize those tensions fully, to engage and integrate a reader imaginatively into the disrupted pattern of apocalyptic deterioration. The tension is resolved using narrative closure, allowing for a resolution of those fears through premillennial dispensationalist theology. In this way, the horror narratives of *Left Behind* may serve a function in encouraging conversion as well as retaining those who already share in the belief system. The horror, violence, anxiety and paranoia that permeate the fiction novels deliberately pick at the defences of a reader, in order to allow the solutions contained within dispensationalist theology to act as an eschatological salve.

Mark Jancovich writes on the nature of horror,

'The narrative closure of horror texts is not only claimed to repress and contain elements which are disturbing to the dominant ideological order, but [...] it gives the members of the audience a sense of themselves as individuals (or subjectivities) by suppressing psychological conflicts or contradictions which might threaten their sense of themselves as unitary or coherent identities [...] In positioning the subject within ideology, this sense

of identity is made to appear natural and inherent. It makes what is social, constructed and historical appear to be individual and natural'.⁵¹

Indeed, apocalyptic horror narratives have themselves become such a 'naturalised' part of contemporary culture, that it is easy to overlook the ways in which the premillennial dispensationalist movement has deliberately exploited this framework to its fullest extent as a vehicle for its theology. Due to its multi-dimensional portrayal of Evangelical life, the *Left Behind* series, in particular, can be understood as a means of asserting a specific identity in the face of apocalyptic collapse. The 'right' templates of behaviour, of hermeneutical understanding, and worship are constructed through the narrative of horror and violence.

The horror genre is specifically suited to the process of ritualized ideological streamlining described above, because the chaotic nature of apocalyptic collapse is the ideal playground for tackling abjective categories. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of this disintegration within a theological teleology, sealed by narrative closure, is particularly well adapted to the purposes of *Left Behind* fiction. Commenting on *Left Behind*, Gribben has suggested,

'Dystopia and disaster always sell, and the reason they sell to evangelicals is because these kinds of fictions emerge from their culture when the movement they address is in or anticipates being in periods of acute crisis'.⁵²

However, I would contest this understanding of *Left Behind* fiction, because according to the dispensationalist schema, the moment of 'acute crisis' has been a constant feature of Christian faith. The premillennial crisis is an existential state of being for the true Church; as LaHaye explains, it has constantly posed itself at the brink of the imminent end,

'It is this hope [of the imminent Rapture] that has characterized believers in Christ for two thousand years'.⁵³

⁵¹ Mark Jancovich, *Horror* (London, 1992), pp. 9- 10.

⁵² Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 144.

⁵³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 98.

Rather, understanding the power of the narrative closure to produce a reiteration of community and individual identity perhaps more helpfully explains why so many believing Christians bother to read such fiction in the first place, given that they surely already know how it will end. An understanding of the 'streamlining' purpose of the horror narrative incorporates a readers' foreknowledge of the ending in to the function of the novels.

'The structure of horror narratives is said to set out from a situation of order, move through a period of disorder caused by the eruption of horrifying or monstrous forces, and finally reach a point of closure and completion in which disruptive, monstrous elements are contained or destroyed and the original order is re-established. The audience's pleasure is supposed to be based upon the expectation that the narrative will reach this particular type of conclusion, and that the eventual fulfilment of this expectation'.⁵⁴

Thus, it is the re-establishment of utopian order at the conclusion of the horror that fully allows the enactment of the 'correcting' forces of dispensationalist theology. As McGinn's schema suggests, without a narrative closure to the apocalyptic mayhem, the purgative scheme carried out by *Left Behind* and *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* would not have been fully developed. Given this, it seems unsurprising that LaHaye and Jenkins added a final 'postscript' novel to the *Left Behind* canon three years after its conclusion, setting the action in the millennial Kingdom, *Kingdom Come, The Final Victory*.

Horror and Group Identity

In many ways, horror serves a didactic purpose in dispensational premillennialist media. In conjunction with its theological purpose, horror acts to highlight the 'wrong' spiritual path. As discussed above, horror is both the punishment of the Jews for rejecting Messiah, and the catalyst that precipitates their conversion, and thus the second coming of Jesus. In *Left*

⁵⁴ Jancovich, *Horror*, p. 9.

Behind fiction, horror is used more specifically to punish characters for their scepticism, such as Chaim Rosenweig, or their 'aberrant' socio-political choices, such as Hattie or Marilena Titi, the biological mother of the Antichrist. Indeed, the only characters immune to horror over the course of the series are those who have been Raptured, Irene and Raymie Jr. In the neo-survivalist rendering of the believers' of *Left Behind*, horror also shapes group identity. The 'Tribulation Force', for example, retreats, militarises and strategizes, remodelling itself from a suburban prayer group into an armed group of international saboteurs and action heroes.

Horror used in this capacity is not just characteristic of *Left Behind*, but is a recurrent feature in many aspects of Evangelical popular culture and entertainment. In his work, *The Religion of Fear*, Jason Bivins has explored the use of fear for the didactic purposes of 'Hell Houses' and in Jack Chick tracts as well as *Left Behind* fiction, arguing that this is part of a wider contextualisation of the performativity of horror in the expression of political narratives. Bivins observes,

'The naming and narration of fears helps to control or displace them, to police the fraught boundary between self and feared Others. Each complex engagement with a fallen world promises a symbolic resolution to conflict, accomplished by warning audiences of dangers lurking within and without. In issuing such promises, fear's architects emerge not as mere Bible-carrying thunderers but as technicians of identity who suggest that their recipes for engaging the fearful can help to establish or solidify a particular kind of religious identity or being in the world. These entertainments depict the frights of the sinning body and polis in order to commend to audiences a specific vision of American political culture and proper conduct therein'.⁵⁵

In this role as 'technicians of identity', the religion of fear shapes therefore not just individual conduct, but constructs the boundaries of specific group identity suspended in wider cultural contexts.

⁵⁵ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 16.

In this context, it is useful to consider the work of anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse, who has suggests that 'imagistic' forms of ritual behaviour, those which involve, 'extreme forms of deprivation, bodily mutilation and flagellation, and psychological trauma based around participation in shocking acts'⁵⁶ increase a sense of group-identity, allowing individuals to project a collective unity on to their social body. Whitehouse relates these acts as initiation rites which are then repeated throughout ritual enactment as a reminder of these formative bonds. In *Left Behind* fiction, the deliberate provocation of trauma through the portrayal of group mutilation, scarification and slaughter in a narrative form serves to enter readers into a cognitive 'partnership' with the traumatic events of the Tribulation experienced by the Tribulation Force.

It has been argued above, therefore, that horror, as an expression of eschatological anxiety, is used as a means of exploring those experiences that lie on the boundaries of the discourse of dispensationalist Rapture belief. Horror is used as a medium through which dispensationalism negotiates with both the theological and socio-political 'abject'. Horror narratives act in this controlling capacity, by provoking fear and anxiety in the reader and then assuaging it through theological means. In particular, *Left Behind* fiction transforms the violence and chaos of the Tribulation into an arena where the anxieties of the dispensationalist movement can be explored, quarantined and sterilized. The tension of these anxieties is resolved by negating their horror with solutions drawn from a dispensationalist and prophetic hermeneutic, thereby strengthening the discursive boundaries threatened by the abjective categories.

⁵⁶ William B. Swann Jr., Jolanda Jetten, Ángel Gómez and Harvey Whitehouse, 'When Group Membership Gets Personal', in *Psychological Review*, 2002, Vol. 119, no. 3, p. 449. (pp. 441- 456)

Isolation and Separation

Isolation and separation have been recurrent themes throughout the analysis of premillennial dispensationalist media. As has been shown, these themes largely shape readers' belief systems through reference to the fear of division from loved ones, in order to promote witnessing and encourage conversions. These themes have also been used to exemplify a specific kind of believing community, which operate in small cells of worshippers connected to other believers through flexible cultural networks. The conceptualisation of the isolated nature of believers also offers a challenge to the rhetoric of marginalisation that is often applied to believers. This can most successfully be demonstrated by examining the Rapture, the moment at which the 'secret' true Church is finally visible.

Premillennial dispensationalist media clearly expresses the fear of being abandoned, 'left behind', by the Rapture. The media uses this fear of isolation from one's wider community to encourage conversion, 'I was scared. If [the Bible] was all true, then I was an outsider'.⁵⁷ In *Left Behind* fiction, characters such as Loretta are stripped of all family as they are divided from their social environment by the Rapture,

'They had a wedding last year and [Loretta] must have had a hundred relatives alone. They're all gone, every one of them'.⁵⁸

This anxiety is directed towards conversion narratives that invite the reader to join in, confessing their sins and ensuring themselves a place in the Rapture host. As LaHaye urges in, *Charting The End Times Study Guide*,

'If you have not yet trusted Jesus to forgive your sin and provide you with eternal life, then we invite you to express your trust in Him right now, with the following prayer:

⁵⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark*, p. 114.

⁵⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 191.

Dear God,

Thank you for sending Your Son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins. I confess I am a sinner and I ask You for Your forgiveness. Today I want to trust Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I give my life and future to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen'.⁵⁹

Once the 'sinner's prayer' has been prayed, different obstacles of isolation and separation face a believer. *Left Behind* fiction addresses the difficulty of feeling isolated from one's earthly spiritual community as a result of the adoption of premillennial beliefs. One of the central themes of *The Regime*, *The Rise of the Antichrist*, is Irene's alienation from her family following her salvation. In particular, her husband fiercely opposes her wish to leave their 'regular' church to attend 'New Hope', a 'bible-believing' church,

'[Rayford] simply told her how it was going to be [...] and he really didn't want her to go to New Hope'.⁶⁰

Similarly, Buck's only believing relative, Sharon, is a social pariah in her extended family network,

'everybody in this family has me pigeonholed as the devout lunatic [...] now you know why the family sees me the way they do, and you've got your own story you can tell behind my back'.⁶¹

The very act of reading the fiction and the prophecy guides is presented as a means to redress anxiety over this form of isolation. The reading of the guides is to enter into 'contact' with the believing community. This includes those at the centre of the discourse itself, for example, the list of academic experts on the panel of the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*. The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* also references a range of other believers, from football players to housewives, who comprise this invisible fellowship.⁶² In *The*

⁵⁹ LaHaye, *Charting the End Times*, p. 136.

⁶⁰ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Regime, The Rise of the Antichrist* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004), p. 94.

⁶¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Regime*, p. 204.

⁶² See for example: LaHaye, *How to Study the Bible*, p. 42.

Rapture, In A Twinkling, the celebrated Christians who are singled out for mention in the 'parade' of exemplary believers include a carefully selected range of individuals.

'For as God praised the saints, He began with the behind-the-scenes people, the lesser knowns, those unrecognized outside their own small orbits'.⁶³

These spiritual heroes are described as 'quiet, unassuming giants'⁶⁴, and include a housewife from Indiana, whose alcoholic abusive husband did not cause her to stray from her faith. Such a believer is given as an example of

'a behind-the-scenes saint, unknown outside their tiny church or town, who had represented Christ every day for decades'.⁶⁵

The reading of the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* is intended to be a solitary experience. Yet, the guides links believers with a history of determined solitary learners, providing a bridge between the individual and the history of the movement,

'Although we don't know what method [Dwight L.] Moody used to study the Bible, we do know that he was not given much formal education, and that most of his Bible study he did on his own. The methods outlined in this book are probably similar to the ones he used. You too can be an effective servant of Christ- but only if you are willing to study the Bible for yourself'.⁶⁶

The reliability of this historically sustained discourse is located in the confidence in the literalism of the faith, and in the work of those at the centre of safeguarding the hermeneutical framework. This continuation of a hermeneutical lineage is vividly illustrated in *Left Behind* fiction, as the great procession of premillennial dispensationalist heroes includes Irene, the reader's stand-in.⁶⁷

In *Left Behind* fiction, isolated characters find solace in believing communities amidst dystopian social collapse. Their isolation is resolved through their 'new families' in their

⁶³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 204.

⁶⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 205.

⁶⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 236.

⁶⁶ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ See: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 292.

faith communities. The social networks connecting believers are constructed through physical churches, and through reading communities; Tsion Ben Judah's prophecy website, for example, or the distribution of Bruce Barnes' exegetical notes. The connective networks in *Left Behind* fiction are also technological and economic, such as the international co-op. Isolation is thus solved through a multi-dimensional participation in the believing community,

'the 'escape' often seen as the appeal of Apocalyptic is not an escape from the harsh realities of life; it is an escape into a believing community'.⁶⁸

As discussed, the isolation of salvation is a subtle, yet recurrent feature of premillennial dispensationalist media. Even once an individual has been 'saved' or 'born again', the media addresses anxiety felt over the fate of loved ones, and the essentially solitary nature of the eschatological journey,

'Are you able to look at your children playing in the sunlight and believe firmly in your heart that they will not have to endure the monstrous horrors of the Tribulation?'⁶⁹

This anxiety is expressed as remediable through recourse to witnessing. In the *Left Behind* novels, the three prequels provide an example as the narrative retroactively accommodates the salvation of Rayford's parents in a death-bed conversion, brought about by the evangelical efforts of Irene.⁷⁰

This particular means of negotiating the isolation of the eschatological journey is successful because of the emphasis placed on the physicality of the promises of the faith. Post-Rapture salvation is expressed as an explicitly physical experience, where individuals are able to communicate with others, even share meals with their families. Thus, the solitary nature of

⁶⁸ Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, p. 196.

⁶⁹ LaHaye, *Rapture, Who Will Face*, p. 18.

⁷⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Rising*, p. 136.

salvation is allayed through recourse to the establishment of a mimetic earthly community in heaven,

‘the novel [*Glorious Appearing*] ends in heaven- with all the “good guys” reassembled, realising they can now hang out together for all eternity’.⁷¹

Life in the millennial kingdom similarly expresses this dynamic. While some children born into the millennial kingdom still choose rebellion, the thousand years of peace is also depicted as a family-orientated pastoral idyll,

‘Tsion Ben Judah taught that [the sun’s] light was somehow enhanced by the ever-present glory of Jesus. A simple contraption out in the open allowed Rayford to concentrate the light through a magnifier and heat vegetables he and Irene and Raymie had gathered for a special feast. Irene had made butter from milk she had collected from a cow, so when everyone had assembled, they were met with steaming piles of fresh produce’.⁷²

Community is a clearly a powerful aspect of premillennial dispensationalist media. The ‘true’ Church of premillennial dispensational, as a ‘hidden’ community, is particularly susceptible to intense insecurity about what it means to be part of that spiritual community. The nature of the ‘born again’ experience is deeply individual, and the nature of the dispensationalist Church is ‘secret’ and invisible. Indeed, part of the allure of reading *Left Behind* fiction may be the imaginative participation in the ‘making visible’ of the secret community. However, before the occurrence of the Rapture, it is difficult to know if you, or indeed, others around you are truly ‘saved’, ‘You *will* stand in one place or the other. Hell or heaven. Make sure it’s the latter!’⁷³ It is particularly difficult to ‘make sure’ of salvation, when the only act required is one of faith. Indeed, premillennial dispensationalism requires very little actual participation in any ritualistic aspects, ‘you can go to heaven knowing little

⁷¹ Douglas Kennedy, ‘Selling Rapture’, *The Guardian* (9 July, 2005), p. 6. *

⁷² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Kingdom Come*, p. 2.

⁷³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 253.

more than John 3:16 and Romans 10:9-10'.⁷⁴ Witnessing, therefore, offers a performative means of enacting that 'saved' status, as an act of proclamation, it reasserts individual salvific identity as well as reiterating the message to others.⁷⁵ The only time when an individual can be absolutely sure of their status in the Rapture host is at the moment of Rapture itself, which is why the Rapture itself remains the focus of so many isolation narratives.

Premillennial dispensationalist media uses the anxiety of isolation and separation to control the eschatological beliefs of its readership through negotiation of the conflict between the extreme physicality of the faith, and the disperse nature of the spectral earthly Church. The physical punishments and torments in store for those who are not in the 'book of life' are detailed through strong themes of alienation and abandonment. The physical rewards of the faith, which include community in the afterlife, are juxtaposed to this anxiety, and the tension is deflected on to the reassurance of conversion. However, this conversion identity is still unstable. It requires reassurance of the spiritual community, and is still susceptible to other anxieties of separation from loved ones. This can then be channelled into witnessing. This act both allows an individual agency to control their immediate social environment and to enact the role of a truly 'saved' individual, a state that can never be proven until the Rapture itself, a moment that is also constantly deflected and yet perpetually imminent,

'The tension between dealing with today and anticipating tomorrow is one of the difficult realities of living the Christian life. We often find ourselves caught between the here and the now and the hereafter'.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 8.

⁷⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 63.

⁷⁶ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 125.

Powerlessness

Premillennial dispensationalist media uses the theme of powerlessness to promote particular methods of self-empowerment. These channels to empowerment help to shape the way in which a reader self-identifies, and engages with eschatology. Powerlessness is addressed in the following ways. Firstly, as human nature is inherently sinful, self-empowerment can only come from conversion and salvation. Subsequent prophecy belief equips individuals with an enlightened understanding of the contemporary and future world. Conversion also offers a further opportunity for a re-evaluated spiritual identity. The spiritual community is one of the most crucial means of empowerment for premillennial dispensational believers, partly as a means of redressing the isolation discussed above, but also for the reaffirmation of these new spiritually-aligned identities. Finally, the self-understanding of premillennial dispensational as 'powerless' will be discussed. Common critical analyses of millenarian beliefs often view imminent apocalypticism as a fantastical projection of a marginalised and disenfranchised subculture. *Left Behind* fiction depicts Evangelicals at the very centre of spiritual authority following the Rapture, a representation that certainly demonstrates some elements of wish-fulfilment. However, it will be suggested that these projections are more hyperbolic than fantastic, and reflect the power that premillennial dispensationalism claim that they already wield in this current age.

As has been discussed above, the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* describes humans as fundamentally powerless against their own inherently evil and corrupt nature. The only means by which an individual can reject their evil nature is to seek redemption through salvation. The 'indwelling' of the Holy Spirit that occurs at the moment of salvation ensures that an individual is protected against his or her own sinful nature. To some extent,

therefore, agency over one's corrupt human nature is possible by the empowerment of salvation. This redemptive experience reassures a believer that they have been spiritually transformed, have taken responsibility for their eternal fate, and have now entered the Rapture host,

'each individual determines where he will spend eternity- with God or without Him. Those are the only two choices'.⁷⁷

Furthermore, salvation empowers an individual by equipping them with the spiritual tools to defend themselves against the powers of Satan, '*A proper understanding of prophecy arms the believer against cults and false prophets*'.⁷⁸ The believer, therefore, joins the 'restraining' function that the Church performs during the 'Gentile Age' dispensation, restricting the activities of Satan, and the acts of other, inherently sinful members of mankind,

'no type of social order or environment in the world can possibly change the sinfulness of man's degenerate heart'.⁷⁹

The 'indwelling' of the Holy Spirit, however, offers opportunity for personal empowerment that radically alters an individual's psychosocial persona. Glenn Shuck has commented that readers of *Left Behind* are encouraged 'to construct their identities by determining what they are not'.⁸⁰ As has been discussed on the chapter on Powerlessness in *Left Behind* fiction, the characters are indeed powerless as a result of their exclusion from the mainstream economy, religion and government. However, the empowerment of these characters is more flexible than their marginalised status. The construction of 'believing' identity does not stop after exclusion from, and opposition to, the Antichrist's evil empire. *Left Behind* fiction demonstrates this flexibility by demarcating space after the salvation

⁷⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 13.

⁷⁸ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 17. Original italics.

⁷⁹ Jordan, 'Millennium', p. 237.

⁸⁰ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p.2.

experience as a 'safe zone' for exploring a new, evangelical identity. It allows its characters to simultaneously become members of the believing community, and allow them to rebel, to lash out, to consider temptation, and to doubt their faith. The characters use their apocalyptic environment as an opportunity for personal as well as spiritual growth, with willing admissions of sin, doubt, and weakness. Through these admissions, the characters declare their vulnerability before God, and their community. Thus 'exposed', the characters are empowered through the support of the believing community and the reassurance of Scripture. The characters are then able to overcome their personal obstacles, and augment their new spiritual identities closer to an evangelical ideal. As Wuthnow and Lawson have observed,

'Fundamentalism perpetuates itself by molding the lived experience of the believer to the point that this experience is the same as that idealized in the language of the community itself'.⁸¹

Following salvation, the characters of *Left Behind* make significant changes to their public as well as moral practices. Rayford is a particularly interesting example. He stops drinking, and abandons with his former romance with Hattie. He makes an effort to become a better father and role-model, 'What a failure he had been as a husband and father!'⁸² However, Rayford still slips; he makes mistakes in judgments, obsesses over his desire to murder Nicolae, and demonstrates patchy leadership skills.⁸³ In *Desecration, Antichrist Takes the Throne*, an underground community of reformed 'pimps, whores, crackheads, drunks, players, hustlers'⁸⁴ affirm how their beliefs have helped them to live reformed lives. Of

⁸¹ Robert Wuthnow and Matthew P. Lawson, 'Sources of Christian Fundamentalism in the United States', in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms, The Dynamic Character of Movements*, eds. Marty, Martin E. and Scott Appleby (Chicago, 1994), p.21.

⁸² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 22.

⁸³ LaHaye and Jenkins *Assassins*, pp. 64-71.

⁸⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Desecration*, p. 307.

course these fictional characters serve a function as archetypes for 'ideal' evangelical practice, but this surely renders their flaws even more significant. This transformation is not confined to purely fictional characters; Cyrus Scofield is given as an example of the power of a spiritually transformed life,

'Jesus embraced [Scofield] and said, "You of all men should know that the sins and omissions of the old life are not counted against you at this judgment. Our sins were covered and forgotten, and all that remains is what you did for Me after you were regenerated"''.⁸⁵

In *How To Study The Bible For Yourself*, LaHaye even describes how the discipline supplied by his faith supported his own life-changing dieting regimen.⁸⁶ These constructed spiritual identities, however idealized, serve as a reminder that faith is a 'lived' experience. Thus the 'born again' identity is a continually re-iterated means of self-empowerment that allows individuals to re-construct their identity in a positive way. In short, the characters are not simply defined by 'what they are not' but also by what they could be.

In *Left Behind* fiction, the characters are most significantly empowered through their roles as key players in a grand eschatological drama,

'the task of the Tribulation Force was clear and their goal nothing less than to stand and fight the enemies of God'.⁸⁷

As Glenn Shuck has observed,

'the novels turn on the assumption that members of a suburban Chicago Bible church will rise to a prominence of cosmic significance'.⁸⁸

The characters lose much of their individual appeal as they become more and more idealised. The Israeli botanist Chaim Rosenweig, for example, is re-cast as pseudo-prophet,

⁸⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 256.

⁸⁶ LaHaye, *How To Study The Bible*, p. 44.

⁸⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 468.

⁸⁸ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 15.

'Micah', and leads the Jews into exile in Petra. Chloe Steele-Williams dies by guillotine as an exemplary martyr to her faith. Shuck comments,

'*Left Behind* protagonists[...] become mere actors on the apocalyptic stage. They lose their dynamic, individual characteristics, becoming temporary players of eternal roles, ironically condemning themselves to follow slavishly their own interpretations of ancient texts'.⁸⁹

However, I struggle to see the irony that Shuck observes, as I would interpret this re-treading of biblical types is a deliberate hermeneutical manoeuvre. The characters in *Left Behind* do not 'slavishly follow' an interpretation, rather, the understanding of prophecy as pre-ordained, determines that these eternal roles were already foretold,

'Buck would be in the line of fire when the battle of the ages between good and evil for the very souls of men and women would burst from the heavens'.⁹⁰

This biblical 'role-play' can be seen as a hyperbolic extension of the role that believers play in their own lifetimes, as constituents of the 'true' Church, which is after all, solely a collection of indwelt individuals.

Shuck, therefore, argues that premillennial dispensationalism is a 'marginal' subculture, which has dealt with its feelings of powerlessness through the prophetic forecasting conducted in its media. *Left Behind* fiction certainly grants believers a spiritual centrality that does not accurately reflect the contemporary world. Indeed, themes of marginalisation are traceable in contemporary premillennial dispensationalist discourse, often laced with paranoia. LaHaye, for example describes the 'true' earthly church as 'the most consistently hated group on earth'.⁹¹ However, following the Rapture, *Left Behind's* believers operate in much the same way that the Church is encouraged to do at the moment, the believers act in a 'restraining' capacity as much as they are able, by subverting the power of Satan and the

⁸⁹ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 170.

⁹⁰ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark*, p. 380.

⁹¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 11.

Antichrist. The believers witness to sceptics, work to strengthen the earthly faith community, and focus their energies on the Jewish remnant. Thus, analyses that dismiss prophecy belief as a fantastical projection of a powerless subculture, display a deep misunderstanding of the promises of the faith. According to premillennial dispensationalism, prophecy is 'history written in advance', thus, Jesus' eschatological victory, and the ultimate redemption of believers, has in some senses, *already happened*. Apocalyptic fantasy, therefore, cannot be read as simply a 'wishing of what could be', but an exaggeration of the tasks the 'true' Church is already undertaking, and merely an imaginative foreshadowing of a pre-ordained accomplishment.

The Body

The conceptualization of the body is an extremely important component of premillennial dispensationalist theology. This section will first consider the concept of 'indwelling', and the way in which it illuminates the importance of the body in the narrative of unfolding prophecy. This thesis has previously explored the role of bodily horror and violence against the body as representative of the problematic nature of the corruption of the Christian body. Here, the wider symbolic significance of the glorified and redeemed body as opposed to the corrupted and degraded body, will be considered in the context of the movement as a whole. In particular, the role of the body in Rapture theology will be discussed. Finally, the Rapture will be explored in the context of the intense physicality of the faith, the eschatological promises of the movement, and the way that premillennial dispensationalism operates as a 'lived reality' overall.

As has been explored above, the empowerment of a believer is located in the ‘invitation’ that occurs at salvation which enables an individual’s body to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit,

‘At salvation, God’s Spirit comes into our heart so that at the time of death our soul (the eternal part of our being) and our “new nature” or “spirit” departs to be with Christ’.⁹²

The body is understood as inherently sinful, but once indwelt, it takes on attributes of the Holy Spirit, and allows for an entirely new role to be cast for the individual. Firstly, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that occurs at salvation ‘activates’ the prophetic role of the individual in the grand eschatological meta-narrative. The believer becomes a member of the ‘true’ Church, and once indwelt, his or her body becomes an instrument of sacred use. As a member of the true Church, the individual’s power to evangelise, and to ‘restrain’ Satan, is linked to this indwelling. The presence of the ‘indwelt’ Gentiles on earth, as members of the Church, act as a form of ‘moral preservative’ in their role as the ‘salt of the earth’.⁹³ Not only due to their evangelizing power, ‘by their presence bringing out the flavor of the truth of God’⁹⁴, but by preventing total moral corruption.

Furthermore, the indwelling allows the realigned forms of religious identity that have been discussed in the previous section. This secondary aspect is of no lesser importance in the lives of believers. Indeed, the ‘born again’ experience is overwhelmingly associated with a positive change as a result of the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit. This is linked to a psychological as well as spiritual and bodily ‘reformation’,

‘Spiritually, we have been raised with Him [...] identified with Him in newness of life. This present spiritual resurrection will result in the future physical resurrection’.⁹⁵

⁹² LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 160.

⁹³ See: Matthew 5:13

⁹⁴ LaHaye, *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, commentary on Mark 9:50, p.1066. * first time book is mentioned

⁹⁵ LaHaye, *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, commentary to Romans 6:8, p. 1210.

The indwelling of believer at the moment of 'born again' salvation thus effectively means that the believer's body has taken one step closer to the total transformation that occurs at the Rapture,

'Unless a person is born again (born anew from above) and has their sins erased, he or she will not be prepared for the spiritual delights of heaven. What's more, heaven cannot be contaminated by sin. Heaven would cease to be heaven if sin were to enter it. A Christian is fit for heaven not because he is good or because he deserves it, but because he chose to accept God's pardon for his sins and the cleansing power of Christ's death on the cross. And those who do not make this choice will not be fit for heaven'.⁹⁶

It is clear, therefore, that the 'indwelling' of the body by the Holy Spirit plays an important part in a personal transformation, in the preparation of an individual for their eschatological journey, and the assumption of a prophetic role as members of the 'true' Church.

The current dispensation itself is understood to have begun on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is recognised within premillennial dispensationalism as 'the birthday of the church'⁹⁷, when the 'gift of the Spirit to Jesus' followers'⁹⁸ was given by Christ. For premillennial dispensationalists, it was the action of the Holy Spirit entering the bodies of believers that began the 'Church Age' dispensation, allowing individuals to be saved through 'faith in the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ', instead of through the law.⁹⁹ Whilst on Earth, the true Church is understood as comprising 'Christ's body', 'all believers are part of Christ's body, the church'.¹⁰⁰ The end of 'Church Age' dispensation will occur when all believing bodies are 'caught up' in the Rapture as the Holy Spirit leaves the earth. Following the Rapture, it is understood that even though the Church is no longer earthbound, redemption is still possible. The evangelizing role that was formerly solely that of the Spirit,

⁹⁶ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p.112.

⁹⁷ W.H. Marty, and Thomas Ice, 'Pentecost', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 268.

⁹⁸ Marty and Ice, 'Pentecost', p. 267.

⁹⁹ Marty and Ice, 'Pentecost', p. 268.

¹⁰⁰ Ice, 'Church Age', p. 53.

through the true Church, is now given to the Jewish people.¹⁰¹ Thus, the collective body of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists becomes analogous to that of the true Church during the 'Gentile Age'. It is through the agency of 'indwelt' bodies, therefore, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit performs its role, during this dispensation, and during the Tribulation.

An alternate indicator of the significance of 'indwelling' is seen in the demonology of the movement. There are three classifications of demons: 'fallen angels', the offspring of fallen angels and human wives, which are referred to as 'Nephilim' or just 'demons' more generally, and thirdly, those demons that are confined in the abyss, which are to be released during the Tribulation.¹⁰² Demons are considered capable of indwelling a human body, and demon possession is recognised as extremely dangerous, 'the power that indwelling demons exert over the human body is vast'.¹⁰³ The qualities of a human indwelt or possessed by a demon include,

'incredible physical strength [...] blindness [...] loss of speech [...] epilepsy [and] various mental and physical disorders'.¹⁰⁴

While fallen angels are capable of physical manifestation, 'Demons [...] appear to be desperate for embodiment'.¹⁰⁵ It is this 'drive' for embodiment that leads in part to the indwelling of individuals by demons. Interestingly, the 'sanctified' nature of a believer's body throws doubt on the possibility of believers becoming possessed by demons,

'The strongest arguments against the possible demon possession of a believer are these: Believers' bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit at salvation (1 Corinthians 3:16), they are "in Christ" and Christ is in them, and the epistles include no warnings about possible demon possession and no instructions about casting out demons'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Tim LaHaye, 'One Hundred Forty-Four Thousand', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 257.

¹⁰² See: Robert Dean, 'Demons and Unclean Spirits', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), pp.78- 81. See also: Chuck Missler, 'Fallen Angels', in *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, ed. Tim LaHaye (Eugene, Oregon, 2001), p. 323.

¹⁰³ Dean, 'Demons and Unclean Spirits', p. 80.

¹⁰⁴ Dean, 'Demons and Unclean Spirits', p. 80. See also, LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 357.

¹⁰⁵ Missler, 'Fallen Angels', p. 323.

¹⁰⁶ Dean, 'Demons and Unclean Spirits', p. 80.

The conceptualisation of believers' bodies as 'temples of the Holy Spirit' therefore negates the possibility of demon possession. This spiritual significance of believer's bodies in premillennial dispensationalism is reflected in the persistent anxieties over physical invasion of the body by evil. This is most significantly apparent with regards to the 'mark of the Beast'. As has been discussed, this anxiety is largely negotiated through the portrayal of a separate believers' seal that ensures that believers are unaffected by the 'mark of the Beast'. When Chang is forcibly issued with the 'mark of the Beast', his pre-existing 'believers' mark' negates the significance of this physical expression of damnation, as his body has already been sanctified by his faith, 'He was a believer first, and thus, always'.¹⁰⁷ Gribben has noted that prophecy fictions often express anxieties over physical invasions by evil, for example in the implantation of biochips.¹⁰⁸ Marilena Titi and Hattie Durham's bodies provide similar examples of this anxiety, as they are physically invaded by evil through the conception of the Antichrist and of the Antichrist's baby respectively. In these instances, the bodies of unbelievers are invaded and desecrated as a reflection of their unredeemed natures.

The figure of the Antichrist, is perhaps the most pertinent example of 'evil' indwelling, and is most luridly portrayed in *Left Behind* fiction. The Antichrist is understood as one member of an "unholy trinity", which consists of 'Satan (vs. the Father), the Antichrist (vs. the Son), and the False Prophet (vs. the Holy Spirit)'.¹⁰⁹ At the moment of the assassination of the 'human' Antichrist, Satan is understood to have been simultaneously expelled from heaven.

¹⁰⁷ Jenkins, in 'F.A.Q.' section on the *Left Behind* website, http://www.leftbehind.com/06_help_and_info/faq_general.asp

¹⁰⁸ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁹ Ed Hindson, 'Antichrist', in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, Oregon, 2004), p. 23.

It is at this point that the human Antichrist becomes indwelt by Satan, and resurrected from the dead,

‘after the devil is defeated by the angelic forces and forcibly ejected from heaven at the mid-point of the Tribulation, he enters the body of the Antichrist’.¹¹⁰

The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* clearly expresses the way in which the Antichrist is directly juxtaposed against Jesus, a chart lists them as ‘mirror opposites’.¹¹¹ In *Left Behind* fiction, this juxtaposition is paralleled in the physical transformations that apply to Nicolae’s body following his resurrection.

The resurrection of the Antichrist by Satan directly mimics the regenerative properties of Jesus’ Glorified body. In the following example from *Left Behind* fiction, Nicolae’s physical perfection following his resurrection is intended to be sinister and uncanny, rather than restorative,

‘Nicolae looked as if he had just stepped out of his closet [...] Shoes gleaming, laces taut, socks smooth, suit unwrinkled, tie hanging just so, he stood broad-shouldered, fresh-faced, shaven, hair in place, no pallor’.¹¹²

As he rises from his coffin, ‘David noticed makeup, putty, surgical staples, and stitches in the box where Nicolae’s head had lain’.¹¹³ These tokens from Nicolae’s corpse are a symbolic juxtaposition of the objects discarded by believers at the Rapture. The prequels extend the metaphor between Jesus and the Antichrist, including an episode where Nicolae embarks on a 40-day famine whilst lost in the wilderness, a parody of Jesus’ journey as depicted in Luke 4.1-13 and Matthew 4.1-11.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 273.

¹¹¹Hindson, ‘Antichrist’, p. 25.

¹¹²LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Indwelling*, p. 366.

¹¹³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Indwelling*, p. 366.

¹¹⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Rising*, pp. 370- 78.

These parallels are intended to draw attention to the powerful physical restoration of believers to their complete or whole earthly selves following the Rapture. As has been discussed, the transformation which is depicted as taking place in heaven is explicitly physical, and restores the bodies of believers to their prime, even granting limbs to those who had been disabled in their earthly lives, ‘ “I have both arms!” a man shouted waving. “I’m whole!” came from somewhere else’.¹¹⁵ These glorified bodies are distinctly new, but resolutely whole, and demonstrate a level of continuation from the believers’ earthly selves despite their altered state of consciousness,

‘Irene shrugged. “We have new mind and bodies, but we have memories. Maybe in a million or so years we’ll be completely free of our humanness.”
Raymie laughed. “We already are.”
“I know.”’¹¹⁶

In her work on the resurrection of the body in Medieval Christianity, Caroline Bynum asks,

‘Why is the return of the body, which is a locus of pain (as well as pleasure,) desirable? What makes it morally or religiously significant? Why is the constitution of my toe or fingernail a reward for virtue? Material continuity cannot *account for* self; it cannot *be* salvation. Neither philosophically nor soteriologically does it seem enough to argue that a person survives and is redeemed if his or her physical particles survive’.¹¹⁷

However, what Bynum fails to account for, is that for many Evangelical practices with a ‘born again’ constituent, the ‘indwelling’ of the Spirit sanctifies a believer’s body. It is the indwelling that allows an individual to live a spiritually transformed life, and that allows an individual to participate in the prophetic role of the Church. It is for this reason that the survival of a person’s physical particles are religiously significant. For example, the bodies of the unrepentant are punished during the Tribulation, where they act as a stand-in for the

¹¹⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 179.

¹¹⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 316.

¹¹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the body in Western Christianity 200-1336* (New York, 1995), p.9.

soul of the believer. Similarly, the corruption and disintegration the body, the 'temple of the Holy Spirit' is so problematic in premillennial dispensationalism for precisely this reason.

The return of the body in an 'immaculate' state is thus desirable because the indwelling elevates the importance of the body to that of an instrument of sacred use. This use of the individual as an 'agent' for God is seen repeatedly in *Left Behind* fiction,

'if [Rayford] really *had* been chosen of God to have a part in a centuries-old assassination plot, he was someone special after all'.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the salvation experience is so powerful because it eradicates all sin, not just from an individual's soul or spirit, but also from their body.¹¹⁹ The bodily manifestation of salvation is so powerful because it transforms an individual, and renders a human body pure enough to be 'translated' into heaven upon their death, as Irving puts it, 'this body of sin and death shall be exchanged for the likeness of Christ's glorified body'.¹²⁰ In her analysis of this theology, Bynum suggests,

'The idea of person, bequeathed by the Middle Ages to the modern world, was not a concept of soul escaping the body or soul using body; it was a concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity- and therefore finally to whatever one means by salvation'.¹²¹

This observation is also relevant when considering the importance of salvation in the shaping of evangelical identity. As has been discussed, the 'born again' salvation experience is described as deeply somatic, and redeemed selfhood is experienced as a transformation of spirit, reason and emotional sensitivity,

'Before his wife and son had disappeared, [Rayford] had not wept in years. He had always considered emotion weak and unmanly'.¹²²

¹¹⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Assassins*, p. 65.

¹¹⁹ This also accounts for the 're-virginity' arguments for example.

¹²⁰ Irving, *The Coming of the Messiah*, vol.1, Preliminary Discourse, p. 36*.

¹²¹ Bynum, *Resurrection of the body*, p. 11.

¹²² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 22.

Premillennial dispensationalist conceptualisation of the survival of the body may reflect a particularly American mythologizing of the importance of the individual. Bynum argues that there are a multitude of examples of this from not only Christian theology, but contemporary secular American apocalyptic narratives,

“‘I’ am not ‘I’ unless my body, with all it implies (sex and sexual orientation, race, temperament, etc.) survives’.¹²³

While the community plays a crucial role in the development and persistence of the faith, the role of the individual is allotted a particular significance in premillennial dispensationalism. The salvation experience, for example, is a deeply personal contract with God. Similarly, the literalist hermeneutic of the movement elevates the importance of a personal relationship with Scripture as a means of developing that individual relationship with God. Moreover, the true Church is not conceptualised as an ‘institution’, rather it is a collective of individuals serving as parts of a larger will. As depicted in *Left Behind* fiction, even following the Rapture, the Holy Spirit continues to carry out its ministry through the prophetic ‘activation’ of individual agents.¹²⁴

The individualism of premillennial dispensationalism can be understood as a significant component of the hermeneutic of the movement, which is reflected in the importance placed on the human body. The body is the arena for the transformative psychosomatic experience of salvation. This is articulated as a reformation of soul, identity and even emotion, as the Holy Spirit physically indwells the individual. As such, the destruction and corruption of the body becomes particularly problematic. The extraordinary violence enacted on the body in *Left Behind* fiction highlights discursive attempts to explore these anxieties, and to express this violence as part of the process of God’s judgment. The

¹²³ Bynum, *Resurrection of the body*, p. 15.

¹²⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark*, p. 111.

individualism of premillennial dispensationalism is also apparent in its particular rendering of the Glorified body. It is significant, for example, that the Glorified body is composed of a 'heavenly mosaic' of the former body and is thus a distinctly individual entity, not an entirely new body. The emphasis on individualism has, however, provided a source of great anxiety. It highlights the solitary nature of salvation, and leads to further fractures from a person's earthly community that can only be solved through witnessing. To this extent, premillennial dispensational individualism relies heavily on the emphasis on the faith community as a means to resolve these tensions.

The premillennial dispensationalist preoccupation with the body can furthermore be understood as symptomatic of the physicality of the whole faith. Premillennial dispensationalism lays specific importance on 'tangibility'. This is expressed in the literal hermeneutic of the movement, its rejection of symbolic and abstract readings of Scripture, and its insistence upon the 'real' and physical expression of biblical signifiers. The promises of God are furthermore articulated as tangible. These include the expression of unfolding prophecy in the contemporary world, the future literal Kingdom of Jerusalem and the physical experiences of heaven. In *Left Behind* fiction the explicit tangibility of premillennial dispensational eschatology is so fully developed that it lends itself to easy parody, for example, Rayford's contraption which enables him to capture the amplified light given off by Jesus in order to cook his home-grown produce.¹²⁵ The promises of the faith are often explicitly tied to the body, indeed, the promise of the imminent Rapture is that of an escape from suffering, death, physical restoration and tangible pleasures in heaven.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Kingdom Come*, p.2.

¹²⁶ For example, the depiction of Irene's pleasure at the feast: LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 189.

The promises of the faith are also tied to physical land, and the land of Israel in particular. It is not possible to develop any extended overview of Christian Evangelical Zionism in this thesis, however, the promises of the premillennial dispensationalist faith and the physical land of Israel remain the strongest articulation of the physicality of the movement. It is worth noting, for example, that the creation of the state of Israel was considered such a significant sign of prophetic pre-determination, that a new edition of the Scofield Reference Bible, printed in 1967, inserted this event into the prophetic narrative.¹²⁷ LaHaye's Pre-Tribulation Research Centre demonstrates many pertinent examples of the central role that Israel plays in modern prophecy discourse, with scores of articles published on the subject each year, as well as guided tours provided by the organisation.¹²⁸ Of particular note is the premillennial dispensationalist involvement with the Temple Institute, an organisation that prepares the building materials, and oversees the training of future Rabbis ready for the reconstruction of the Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock.¹²⁹ In this way, many of the ongoing projects invested in by premillennial dispensationalism, both financially and emotionally, enact the 'making real' of prophecy in Israel, including the establishment of a physical tableau, setting the scenery in place for prophecy to unfold.

The Rapture remains a powerful expression of the centrality of the body in premillennial dispensationalism. The Rapture affirms the sanctified nature of not just the physical body, but the individuality of the believer. It demonstrates the consummation of the physical promises of God. Indeed, is precisely because the promises of the faith are articulated as so manifestly physical that they are entirely compatible with a 'lived reality'. The development

¹²⁷ See for example the amended notes to Genesis 12:1-3, *The New Scofield Study Bible*, ed. C.I. Scofield and E. Schuyler English (Oxford, 1967, 1998), pp. 23-24.

¹²⁸ See for example: <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles>

¹²⁹ See for example, Thomas Ice, 'Is it Time for the Temple?', accessible via: <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Ice-IsItTimeforTheTemple.pdf>

of perceptible signifiers in the surrounding world, and the tangible nature of the promises of the faith are similarly compatible with the imaginative mode of this theology, contributing to the success of such fictions as *Left Behind*. In many ways, the Rapture lies at the heart of premillennial dispensationalism, as the moment of escape from one of the most primal anxieties, death. Furthermore, the Rapture represents a crystallisation the promises of God 'made real'. Thus, the Rapture is encouraged as the focal moment of a believer's life, the point at which eschatological 'time' cuts into the narrative of the everyday believer. As such, the point of eschatological consummation in a believer's life is transferred from death on to the Rapture. The end point is thus re-classified, and life is to be lead 'in the hope of His coming'.

Paranoia

Prophecy belief is a 'living mode' that brings with it a degree of cognitive dissonance that is clearly observed in the manifestation of paranoia. Believers are encouraged to overlay their 'reading' of their surrounding contemporary world with a framework of 'signs of the times'. Paranoia is largely contained within two broad yet overlapping categories. The first is the danger posed by the works or agents of Satan. The second is the 'signs of the times'. These signs are largely comprised of threats that impede upon the world as a whole, such as earthquakes or global warming, or those that endanger an aspect of the earth, such as the moral or social integrity of the secular community. Many of these threats also specifically endanger the true Church. The 'signs of the times' are mostly already catalogued, but many have not yet been identified. Consequently, the deciphering of the signs of the times manifests itself in a peculiarly paranoid tension that demands the identification of these

signs, even whilst understanding that many of them are not meant to be 'revealed' to human understanding. As Eve Sedgwick observes,

'paranoia is characterized by placing, in practice, an extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge per se- knowledge in the form of exposure'.¹³⁰

The paranoid mode of the *Left Behind* novels and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* depicts an understanding of the contemporary world in which the movement is under constant threat. Moreover, the shifting system of 'end time' referents creates uncertainty as to exactly where these 'threats' will arise. The apostate secular world is one obvious location, and a spectrum of institutions ranging from the United Nations, to secular graduate schools are identified as hotbeds of anti-Church sentiment. Portents of corruption are also identified within Christendom, as apostasy, deception and false teachers are said to lead entire denominations astray. Believers are shown to be powerless against some of the signs of the times, for example, the proliferation of earthquakes or natural disasters. However, believers are encouraged to actively engage with many of the latent threats posed by social degradation of the end times. For example, the corruption of reliable pedagogy creates the necessity of creating 'alternate' Evangelical pedagogical institutions. Furthermore, in fiction, as in 'real life', only certain forms of print, and especially specific hermeneutical schemes, and particular 'insights' into contemporary events are considered trustworthy. In *Left Behind* fiction, television, entertainment, and global newspapers are infiltrated by the Antichrist's regime, thus necessitating the 'free' forums of Tsion's website and Buck's 'cyberzine'.

¹³⁰ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 138.

Premillennial dispensationalism's paranoia about the contemporary world has several effects. Firstly, anxiety over deception in the surrounding world, is used to ring-fence 'correct' interpretations and to define the inimical 'other',

'under assault from secularist culture, fundamentalist Christian groups are forced to demarcate the boundaries separating them from their modernist adversaries [...] To this extent, fundamentalism requires believing in a treacherous enemy whose existence gives their boundary-setting behaviour a sense of urgency'.¹³¹

Furthermore, this process acts a means of streamlining belief systems by discrediting ideological discourse or scholarship that does not fit the model of premillennial dispensationalism, whether it is scriptural, historical or scientific. This act of streamlining is 'curated' by those who exercise control over which elements are admitted into the 'certified' fabric of trustworthy sources, and those that are excluded. As such, paranoia is a means of re-integrating the abject, the 'other', back into a prophetic framework.

Paranoia is, however, also a complete mode in which these conflicts operate, and becomes a medium of prophetic time. Richard Landes suggests that, 'In apocalyptic time, believers become semiotically aroused- everything has meaning, patterns'.¹³² Landes here identifies the way that in a 'paranoid' understanding of time, every event has semiotic potential to indicate the fulfilment of the most fundamental promises of the faith. Indeed, LaHaye has written that, 'Bible prophecy is [...] "history written in advance"'.¹³³ As such, the deciphering of the signs of the times manifests itself in a peculiarly paranoid relationship to time, as believers seek to identify events that are pre-ordained as having 'already happened', but have yet to occur,

¹³¹ Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist, the History of an American Obsession* (Oxford, 1995), p. 8

¹³² Landes, 'Millenarianism', p. 4.

¹³³ LaHaye, *Charting the End Times*, p. 139.

‘The unidirectionally future-orientated vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows both back and forward [...] paranoia requires that bad news be always already known’.¹³⁴

Eve Sedgwick reads this particular aspect of paranoia as a Freudian imperative to protect against surprise, since she claims,

‘the anxious paranoid imperative [is] the supposed necessity of forestalling pain and surprise, as “reality”- as the only and inevitable mode, motive, content, and proof of true knowledge’.¹³⁵

The rhetoric of paranoia is explicitly encouraged to ‘forestall pain and surprise’. The role, however, is transferred to accord with the purpose of premillennial degradation. In essence, the tensions of paranoia are discursively dissolved through reminders that the lurking horrors narrated by the rhetoric of prophetic paranoia, are nothing more than a demonstration of God’s control over human history. God’s will is fulfilled, therefore, in the ‘unsurprising’ confirmation of paranoid horrors, reassuring believers of their ultimate salvation. Sedgwick argues,

‘to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates’.¹³⁶

Here, we return to the argument about a ‘paranoid’, rather than ‘reparative’ readership. Sedgwick argues that as only a ‘reparative’ reader is able to experience surprise, only a reparative reader is capable of the fracturing experience of hope. However, it is precisely in the ‘paranoid’ readership practices of premillennial dispensationalism that enables its doctrine of eschatological hope. Rather, it is only in the forestalling of surprise, and the

¹³⁴ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 130.

¹³⁵ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 137.

¹³⁶ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 146.

fulfilment of 'paranoid' anticipation, that the movement can expect a fulfilment of the 'blessed hope' of Titus 2.13.

This understanding of the 'signs of the times' as a fulfilment of an eschatological promise, is closely related to the understanding of prophecy as a process of 'progressive revelation'. Prophetic referents are revealed continuously and enacted continuously upon the earth. These referents are therefore 'era-specific' and will alter as history unfolds. This is not to say that the prophetic signifiers change dramatically from their literal hermeneutic, but to suggest that they are revealed as continuously different 'signified' referents. For example, the ten-nation confederacy of the Antichrist was popularly associated with the Common Market in the 1980s, with the European Union in the mid 1990s and is now associated with the United Nations.¹³⁷ Since the 'signs of the times' are specific to each era of human history, the lexicon of 'signs of the times' must be updated as God's plan unfolds. Changing geopolitical circumstances must, therefore, be monitored, and new developments kept under observation. Paranoia is thus a natural extension of this monitoring of the progressive revelation of prophecy in 'real life'. The fulfilments of prophecy that prove Christianity's legitimacy, are not just found in Scripture, they are also found in time. prophecy is the Bible, 'live'; it is the word of God 'made real', continuing the narrative of the biblical account in the modern day. Paranoia is a narrative mode that allows Scripture to become tangible, and thus the only way to allow the literalist hermeneutic to 'live on' outside the word of the Bible. Prophecy, through its activation in paranoia, can be seen to be a 'living mode' as well as a textual genre.

Richard Landes has suggested that paranoia represents a form of 'semiotic arousal',

¹³⁷ See: Boyer, *When Time*, pp. 276- 278.

'Vocational arousal becomes megalomania, in which one stands not merely near or on the stage, but the very center of the entire drama [...] And megalomania often leads to paranoia'.¹³⁸

In its paranoid aspect, prophecy acts as an eschatological highlighter, emphasising the importance of the players acting within its scope. Modern prophecy allows its participators not only to validate the words of the Bible, but to feel that they are part of its message, actors in its story. The *Left Behind* novels imaginatively describe this role, entering its characters to the very epicentre of prophetic development. Importantly, however, given a full contextualisation of *Left Behind* within its larger theological framework, it is possible to argue that the novels are merely an imaginative development of the role that prophecy believers are already encouraged to feel they are playing. In this sense, *Left Behind* fiction is less projection and more hyperbole, extending the role of prophecy believers beyond the constraints of the current Church Age. In *Left Behind* as well as in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library* therefore, we see the power of apocalyptic anticipation in prophetic paranoia.

Landes also comments that the premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic leads to an over-signification of prophetic meaning,

'semiotic arousal becomes semiotic promiscuity- anything means something, and free association becomes an impeccable and convincing system of meaning'.¹³⁹

This process of 'ascribing meaning', however, in the paranoid scheme of prophetic interpretation, does not necessarily represent desire for 'significance'. Rather, it emphasises a significance that has already been established. Jewett and Lawrence have commented, for example, that the *Left Behind* series 'offers numerous proof-text-style sermons that map developing events against the Bible's prophecies'.¹⁴⁰ Not all signifiers are created equal, however, and a distinction is drawn between significance and potential significance. The

¹³⁸ Landes, 'Millenarianism', p. 19.

¹³⁹ Landes, 'Millenarianism', p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ Jewett and Lawrence, 'Eschatology in Pop Culture', p. 666.

Left Behind novels actively dissociate themselves from ‘proof-texting’, and, as has been discussed earlier, LaHaye repeatedly warns against the dangers of ‘newspaper exegesis’, ‘we must guard against the great temptation to read prophecy through the eyes of the present’.¹⁴¹ At the same time, believers are urged to be consistently ‘on their guard’ for prophetic fulfilment. The prophetic paranoia of premillennial dispensationalism, is therefore, contagiously circular. In seeking to address a paranoid tension of theological fulfilment, it engenders an inexhaustible supply of paranoid rhetoric. As D. A. Miller has written,

‘Surprise [...] is precisely what the paranoid seeks to eliminate, but it is also what, in the event, he survives by reading as a frightening incentive: he can never be paranoid enough’.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Study Workbook*, p. 15.

¹⁴² D.A. Miller, *The Novel And The Police* (Berkeley, California/London, 1988), p.164.

Conclusion

Critical analyses of the appeal of contemporary millennial movements often come down to a categorisation of these movements as either, 'deprived or depraved'. In these approaches, the continued appeal of millennialism is presented as resulting from the 'marginalised' or disempowered status of those who opt in to these ideologies. Less sympathetic analyses attribute their appeal to a sadly mistaken lunatic fringe, a fact that *Left Behind* fiction reluctantly acknowledges. One of the main characters, Chloe, declares after her conversion,

'I'm supposed to be an intellectual. I have critical friends to answer to [...] who's going to think I haven't lost my mind?'¹⁴³

However, in the light of the success of *Left Behind* fiction, this thesis has suggested that traditional deprivation theories of millennial ideologies do not satisfactorily explain the continued appeal of contemporary premillennial dispensationalism. The preceding evaluation of premillennial dispensationalism has instead proposed that the use of anxiety narratives as an analytical tool for deconstructing the popular media reveals more significant explanations for the continued appeal of such beliefs. In the following conclusion, I will offer several ways in which my examination of premillennial dispensationalism challenges the more common critical analyses of popular millennial movements.

'Deprived'

In its broadest sense, deprivation theory suggests that millennial appeal is largely the recourse of those on the borders of 'conventional' society, those who are alienated from mainstream socio-economic or political identities. Eugene Weber has observed that this

¹⁴³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 404.

categorisation became particularly fashionable amongst post-WWII historians, who argued that millennialism

‘has appeared most often among certain kinds of people: the poor, the alienated, the disinherited, and the despairing. Relying heavily on theories of ‘relative deprivation’ and ‘status anxiety’, historians have tried to show that many ordinary people turn to visions of a glorious, millennial future’.¹⁴⁴

For the most part, deprivation theory has now given way to a more nuanced approach of ‘relative deprivation’, however, the ‘marginalised’ benchmark for millenarian adherents persists.¹⁴⁵ Deprivation theory analyses present several obstacles when attempting to unpick the continued appeal of contemporary apocalypticism. Firstly, as Weber has observed, these analyses dismiss belief in millenarianism, particularly in its premillennial dispensationalist manifestation, as acts of spiritual faith,

‘American premillennialism was and is primarily a *religious* movement. Although it has had some social and political consequences, premillennialism’s paramount appeal is to personal and religious sentiments’.¹⁴⁶

Secondly, given the widespread nature of American Evangelicalism, it is difficult resolutely to ascribe ‘marginal’ cultural status to integral components of contemporary millenarianism, such the imminent Rapture. Thus, premillennial dispensationalist belief cannot be collapsed into a subcultural coping mechanism. In order to accommodate this, one approach from the perspective of relative deprivation theory instead offers a reading of premillennial dispensationalism as a self-perceived marginal subculture.

Marginality

In one of the earliest critical analyses of *Left Behind* fiction, *Marks of the Beast*, Glenn Shuck suggests that the texts represent an imaginative rendering of dispensationalist wish-

¹⁴⁴ Weber, *Living In the Shadow*, p. 228.

¹⁴⁵ See for example: Collins, *Crisis*, pp. 105-06.

¹⁴⁶ Weber, *Living In the Shadow*, p. 229.

fulfilment. Shuck argues that the way in which the characters of *Left Behind* exploit technology to resist the Antichrist represents a 'fantasy' scenario, in which the real-life marginal status of Evangelical dispensationalism is reversed. Shuck comments that perhaps the most improbable aspect of *Left Behind* fiction was the way in which 'members of a suburban Chicago Bible church rise to a prominence of cosmic significance'.¹⁴⁷ Certainly, imbued as they are with disproportionate epistemological importance, the plot lines of many of the *Left Behind* novels test the limits of a reader's ability to suspend disbelief. Shuck argues that in stark contrast to the reality of modern American culture, in *Left Behind*, evangelical dispensationalists are attributed with quasi-divine significance, playing crucial roles in the eschatological fate of the world,

'The task of the Tribulation Force was clear and their goal nothing less than to stand and fight the enemies of God'.¹⁴⁸

Shuck thus interprets *Left Behind* as the fantastic projection of dispensationalism 'out' of marginality and into 'cosmic significance'. However, the underlying concept of premillennial dispensationalism as 'marginal' is an increasingly problematic categorization, for, as Hendershot notes, 'Christian apocalyptic belief is in no way a marginal phenomenon'.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, as Crawford Gribben has observed, the success of *Left Behind* fiction has marked a significant turning point in the academic understanding of the dynamic between millennial and 'mainstream' American beliefs,

'Scholars have been compelled to propose new formulations of the relationship between evangelical and mainstream cultures. Before *Left Behind*, evangelical and mainstream cultures had often been considered to be dichotomous'.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁸LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 468.

¹⁴⁹Hendershot, *Shaking the World*, p.177.

¹⁵⁰Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p.143.

The commercial success of *Left Behind* has thus prompted a review of the ways in which millennial ideology is considered as part of the fabric of wider American culture. Melanie McAlister goes one step further, and argues that the Evangelical beliefs exemplified by *Left Behind* fiction have not just edged into the mainstream from the dusty outliers, but ‘might be the mainstream of American life’.¹⁵¹

In his article, ‘After *Left Behind*- The Paradox of Evangelical Pessimism’, Crawford Gribben argues that the success of *Left Behind* may ironically prove problematic for premillennial dispensationalism. His reason for this belief is that,

‘dispensationalism thrives on the social margins, and its credibility depends on the increasing marginalization of evangelical faith’.¹⁵²

Gribben argues that ‘Rapture novels [...] resonate with this expectation of victimhood’¹⁵³, and that this provides the reason for their commercial success in the first place. In contrast, Jewett and Lawrence have suggested that *Left Behind*’s success is at least partially attributable to its status as a deliberately ‘composite’ product.¹⁵⁴ Melani McAlister suggests, moreover, that this cultural positioning is part of a deliberate manoeuvre to escape from the designation of ‘victimhood’ that may have become attached to the ideology during its post-war political withdrawal,

‘the [*Left Behind*] novels do their cultural work as a part of larger project of evangelical mapping [...] they aim to place evangelicals on the U.S. political map, as a modernized and mainstreamed political force who have moved far beyond the subcultural status that marginalized them even in the heyday of the Moral Majority’.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ McAlister, ‘Prophecy, Politics’, p. 792. Original italics.

¹⁵² Crawford Gribben, ‘After *Left Behind*- The Paradox of Evangelical Pessimism’, in *Expecting the End, Millennialism in Social and Historical Context*, eds. Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben (Texas, 2006), p. 115.

¹⁵³ Gribben, ‘After *Left Behind*’, p. 115.

¹⁵⁴ Jewett and Lawrence, ‘Eschatology in Pop Culture’, p. 666.

¹⁵⁵ McAlister, ‘Prophecy, Politics’, p. 776.

Gribben, however, maintains that the self-perception of premillennial dispensationalism as marginal is critical to its ideology. Gribben derives this argument largely from Rapture theology, noting that since the Rapture represents the reclaiming of a selective and 'secret' Church, this body of people must therefore be in a minority of the Earth's population. The success of *Left Behind*, Gribben argues, ironically denies precisely the perception of marginalization that premillennial dispensationalism needs to retain in order to legitimise the significance of the selective Rapture,

'*Left Behind's* success represented the sudden mainstreaming of a system of a belief that must retain its essence of marginality if it is to coherently survive'.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, Gribben observes that in *Left Behind* fiction, the Rapture is depicted as occurring on such a large scale that it causes problems of a global magnitude,

'People everywhere have disappeared [...] Some planes have lost flight crews. Where it's daylight there are car pileups, chaos everywhere. Planes down all over and at every major airport'.¹⁵⁷

Gribben argues, therefore, that this depiction of a considerable worldwide diaspora of believers in *Left Behind* fiction appeals to the sense of marginalisation that the movement upkeeps in order to maintain the significance of Rapture theology,

'these disasters also provided Christian readers with a fantasy of their importance [...] for, it explained, whatever their feelings of marginalization, Christian believers were an essential constituency that the world could not live without [...] it was the Christians who held together the crucial infrastructure of society'.¹⁵⁸

Gribben suggests that by repropagating these categorisations of premillennial dispensationalism, scholars risk confirming the marginalisation that the movement requires in order to retain the legitimacy of 'selective' Rapture theology. He suggests that,

¹⁵⁶ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 165.

¹⁵⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵⁸ Gribben, *Writing the Rapture*, p. 79.

‘mainstreaming’ of premillennial dispensationalism is the most successful means of diffusing the movement’s potentiality towards violent action,

‘by pushing evangelicals to the cultural margins, it risks confirming their fears and constructing them as potentially violent underground cult’.¹⁵⁹

This statement is vague at best, unclear about who is ‘pushing’ and how, or what the ‘cultural margins’ consist of. Gribben links the categorisation of premillennial dispensationalism as marginal to a process of mobilising an ‘active’ apocalyptic movement,

‘That unsparing criticism that represents the novels as marginal and extreme is in danger of constructing the apocalyptic scenarios it describes with such distaste. Critical hostility runs the risk of turning Jenkins’s sympathetically ironic reading community into a fully-fledged apocalyptic movement. It risks becoming the agent of mismanagement that millennial scholars identify as the catalyst that turns passive movements active’.¹⁶⁰

I disagree with Gribben’s thesis here for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is important to differentiate between the two attributions of ‘marginal’ and ‘extreme’ which are not necessarily correlative in the *Left Behind* universe. Certainly, ‘extreme’ is not a qualifier from which premillennial dispensationalist media shies away. As Rayford states, ‘The Bible says that the Cross offends. If you are offended, I am doing my job’.¹⁶¹ Jenkins links the potentially ‘offensive’ nature of the premillennial dispensationalist message to the revelation of uncomfortable truths about the nature of its existence, arguing that the subsequent humiliation and ridicule is a price that modern prophecy believers, are willing to pay for the benefit of reaching out to the unconverted,

‘We believe these are true events that will happen someday, and we want people to be ready. Now, we realize in an age of pluralism, in an age of tolerance, that this can be a very offensive message and, you know, that a lot of people will laugh at it, a lot of people will scoff, many will disagree. And, you know, what they do with the message is really up to them’.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Gribben, ‘After *Left Behind*’, p. 130.

¹⁶⁰ Gribben, ‘After *Left Behind*’, p. 130.

¹⁶¹ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Tribulation Force*, p. 63.

¹⁶² Jenkins, <http://www.onthemediamedia.org/2007/apr/06/kingdom-come/transcript/>

Darryl Jones, albeit hyperbolically, points out the difference between 'extreme' and 'marginal' while critiquing LaHaye's article in *Esquire*,

'[If LaHaye's article] sounds like the unhinged right-wing ranting of a crazy old coot, that is because it is. But we should never forget that this crazy old coot is the biggest-selling author in the most powerful nation in the history of the world'.¹⁶³

Secondly, there is no anecdotal, statistical or indeed economic evidence that 'critical' attention matters at all to the readers of popular dispensationalist media. Indeed, given the representation of secular academic scholarship in the *Left Behind* novels and the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*, it is far more likely that any 'distaste' expressed by secular media would be accepted as an example of the perversity and corrupted nature of secular scholarship. It is, therefore, unlikely that a snub from the canon is likely to spark an apocalyptic fervour. Gribben later argues that,

'by totalizing audiences and ignoring readerly negotiation, liberal commentators confirm the marginal status of dispensational believers'.¹⁶⁴

However, sweeping statements such as those quoted above with regards to the potentially violent nature of Christian fiction readership, does exactly that- totalizes an audience and ignores all readerly negotiation. It is an extremely difficult task to prove that 'sympathetically ironic' readers of any alternative genre fiction, popular prophecy, apocalyptic, science fiction, have an inherent predilection towards violence, or that reading violent literature leads directly to violent action. Finally, as will be discussed in greater detail below, the formulations of premillennial dispensationalism as a temporarily 'passive' movement waiting for a 'trigger' to become 'active' is also deeply problematic, revealing

¹⁶³ Quoted in: Jones, 'The Liberal Antichrist', p. 104. This quote refers to: Tim LaHaye, 'The Collosal Battle' in *Esquire* (1 September, 2004).

¹⁶⁴ Gribben, 'After *Left Behind*', p. 117.

another dimension of the idea that the prophecy believers' true conceptual space lies on the 'lunatic fringe'.

Crisis

One of the theories of relative deprivation theory posits an association between the appeal of millennial ideology and a real, or presumed state of crisis for its adherents, as Frederick Kreuziger has written, 'Apocalyptic literature is a literature of hope, in a time of crisis'.¹⁶⁵ This 'crisis' is usually attributed as a response to premillennial dispensationalism's actual or perceived marginality, or to the challenges expressed by the evolution of modern society. Thus, Crawford Gribben has suggested,

'the faith [*Left Behind* fiction] represents cannot be identified with the historic orthodoxy of evangelical Protestantism [...] The novels' combination of theological inadequacy and massive popularity is evidence that evangelicalism is in serious crisis'.¹⁶⁶

In a similar vein, John R. May points to the importance of the historical transformation of the movement, as it struggled to adapt to the 'crisis' of modernity,

'Apocalypse is a response to cultural crisis. It grows out of that sense of loss that results from the passing of an old world-view'.¹⁶⁷

Certainly, in the paranoid fabric of modern prophecy belief, crises are detected everywhere in the contemporary world. Crises also assume a theological role in the premillennial dispensationalist end-times scheme. Moreover, crises characterise the period of the Tribulation itself, and represent a heightened state of threat to 'get man's attention', catalysing decisions about salvation.

¹⁶⁵ Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, p. 6. See also: Collins, *Crisis*, pp. 165-66.

¹⁶⁶ Gribben, *Rapture Fiction*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ John R. May, *Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1972), p. 19.

However, premillennial dispensationalist crisis narratives need to be understood as more than a direct response to the various threats of modernity. Rather, crisis narratives form a constituent part of the theology as a whole. premillennial dispensationalism reads the nature of crisis in the enactment of God's will, and while some dispensations are characterised by heightened level of crises, crises themselves are not necessarily attributed with a negative association. Rather, time itself is understood as intertwined with crises as part of the progressive revelation of the will of God. Kreuziger observes that apocalyptic,

'is not only occasioned by a crisis, it is also, in its own way, occasions crisis by acting as a critical counter to a shallow reading of the present moment and the present world and its structures. It is in this latter reading of apocalyptic that we must search for the appeal and meaning it has in the time of no apparent crisis'.¹⁶⁸

In premillennial dispensationalism, it is the understanding of the 'Church Age' as an extended period of increasingly saturated crisis that brings definition to the Church's mission, and engenders the hope of escape in the Rapture. Despite the frequent allusions to clocks ticking towards a prophetic midnight, the prophetic narrative of the earth is essentially 'timeless' until the occurrence of the Rapture, which is the moment at which prophetic time can actually be 'mapped'. Only through proliferation of crises can adherents begin to orient themselves in time, positioning the current age closer to the edge of eschatological breakthrough according to the nature and number of apparent crises. Crisis is thus a state of being in time, as much as is it of being of *this* time. As Landes has asserted, 'In apocalyptic time, believers become semiotically aroused- everything has meaning, patterns'.¹⁶⁹ However, I would amend this assertion to instead suggest that in prophetic time, 'semiotic arousal', is the means by which believers can reassure themselves of the

¹⁶⁸ Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, p. 147.

¹⁶⁹ Landes, 'Millenarianism', p. 4.

physical promises of their faith. Crisis is a thus an essential component of prophetic faith, for it reveals the 'hand' of God in the temporal unfolding of human history,

'The religious experience is at once a total crisis of existence and the exemplary solution of that crisis [...] because it unveils a world which is [...] significant and sacred, being the world of the Gods'.¹⁷⁰

Kreuziger writes that,

'in the biblical imagination, a crisis of history is always also a crisis of faith. The crisis, more precisely, is one of disillusionment, but not with the reality of the world and all its evil. It is a questioning ultimately of the "promise" of God to remain with his people'.¹⁷¹

I would argue, therefore, that part of the reason that the Rapture is such an important signifier of premillennial dispensationalism is that it 'breaks' the time of crisis for believers; and represents the consummation of all the promises of the faith. The Rapture thus remains symbolic of the ultimate existential but also eschatological hope that the time of 'experienced' crisis for believers is perpetually near its conclusion. May, however, would disagree with this interpretation,

'I suggest that the import of apocalypse as it developed in the Hebrew and Christian canons had nothing to do with holding the carrot of eternity before the believer's nose'.¹⁷²

Instead, May suggests,

'the precise *raison d'être* for apocalypse is to deny imminence of easy victory. To force Jews and Christians alike to accept the agony of history'.¹⁷³

May suggests that the inherent pessimism of the book of Revelation 'continually shatters the mood of expectation'.¹⁷⁴ This could be said to be true; but only if we disregard the understanding of time as conceptualised by premillennial dispensationalism. As discussed above, one of the reason why the pre-Tribulational point of view is so important, and

¹⁷⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Myths, dreams and mysteries: the encounter between contemporary faiths and archaic reality* (London, 1968), p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, p. 6.

¹⁷² May, *Toward a New Earth*, p.18.

¹⁷³ May, *Toward a New Earth*, p.18.

¹⁷⁴ May, *Toward a New Earth*, p.18

indeed, has merited its own research centre, it that it represents the moment when believers are taken 'out of time' so that their mood of expectation can be perpetually suspended.

Through a complex understanding of premillennial dispensationalist relationship with time, therefore, it is possible to dispense with the idea of political crises that serve to 'radicalise' premillennial movements. Certainly, there are contemporary political 'hot button' issues have prompted a rallying cry to mobilise,

'[T]he greatest evidence that Tribulation-like living has already gripped our society is the government's attitude toward murdering the most innocent and weakest among us, the unborn'.¹⁷⁵

However, it is not quite as simple as asserting that a crisis of modernity has produced a radicalized apocalyptic fervour. This is for two reasons. Firstly, as discussed above, crises enact the 'Birth Pangs' that indicate that believers' salvation is at hand. As such, premillennial dispensationalists could not feel sufficiently threatened by a modernity that heralds the Rapture that it would justify an Evangelical identity crisis. As Jason Bivins has observed,

'From a clear sense that American culture has fallen into a morass of moral decay, sexuality, and demonic traps, the religion of fear constructs a salvation narrative'.¹⁷⁶

Secondly, as has been demonstrated above, through its sophisticated use of the tools of 'modernity', premillennial dispensationalism can hardly be said to have advocated a withdrawal from the modern world. Of course, proficient handling of the accessories of modernity do not prove a comfort with some ostensibly modern developments in socio-political discourse, for example, same-sex marriage or genetic engineering. However, the

¹⁷⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 330.

¹⁷⁶ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p. 17.

widespread use of television, graphic novels, internet portals, even PayPal, can hardly be described as the actions of a movement terrified by the inimically evil march of technological progress. As Bivins has commented,

'I have no stake in, and indeed I find distasteful, the idea that evangelicals are reflexive antediluvians or panicky antimodernists'.¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, LaHaye warns against an understanding that the 'evil' present in the world around a believer could be considered strong enough to actually threaten the eventual eschatological narrative. After all, he reminds his readers that prophecy is 'history written in advance', and any 'crisis' that could be expressed as a product of modernity is understood as a temporary 'win' for a doomed world before the balance of power in God's favour is revealed,

'our adversary [Satan] is a brutally strong, immensely intelligent spirit being who every moment is consumed by intense hatred for God and all that belongs to Him. And yet He is not God's rival! The Bible has no place for the eastern idea of two opposite but equal forces in the world, one good and one bad'.¹⁷⁸

All this means that, as Kreuziger asserts,

'The crisis, this body of literature says, is not political; nor has it ever been political- in the narrow sense of partisan politics. The crisis was, is now, and always will be a crisis of vision, of hope in a radically new future which will transcend any possibility now entertained by the individual and collective will'.¹⁷⁹

'Depraved'

As an outsider to the forms of belief discussed in this thesis, it is not difficult to appreciate the more bizarre elements of prophecy belief. As Nicholas Guyatt has commented, 'It's easy to imagine Bible prophecy as a playpen for lunatics'.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, many bemused observers of the *Left Behind* phenomenon have concluded as much, relegating the series' enthusiasts to

¹⁷⁷ Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, p.11

¹⁷⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living*, p. 266.

¹⁷⁹ Frederick Kreuziger, *The Religion of Science Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1986), p. 151.

¹⁸⁰ Guyatt, *Have a Nice Doomsday*, p. 69.

the status of eccentric occultists. In an article in *Newsweek* in 2004 by David Gates, David Jefferson and Anne Underwood, Jerry Jenkins was asked who is the typical purchaser of a *Left Behind* book,

'Jenkins recalls a puzzled Chris Matthews asking a "Hardball" guest the same question. [Jenkins replied,] "I'm sure I don't have the quote exact, but it was something like "Certainly not the people in the cities and the suburbs." And I'm thinking, "What does that leave? Barefoot people in the hollers handling snakes?"' ¹⁸¹

Left Behind fiction displays a deliberate self-consciousness of this stereotyping of prophecy believers. Its characters allude to the way in which the wider world perceives their born again faith, defending themselves as reasonable, educated individuals, rather than "fanatics"¹⁸², 'Holy Rollers'¹⁸³, 'zealots'¹⁸⁴ or involved in 'lunacy'.¹⁸⁵

Another characterisation of prophecy believers is as particularly naïve individuals, seduced into the fold of premillennial dispensationalism through the misleading packaging of Scripture as an entertainment product, Rob Boston suggests that,

'[LaHaye's] millions of readers probably don't know they're buying into the paranoid worldview of a fundamentalist extremist who hates church-state separation, seeks a government-enforced "Christian nation" and who has a long track record of attacking other religions and promoting bizarre conspiracy theories'.¹⁸⁶

Eve Sedgwick furthermore suggests that efficacy of paranoid 'revelations' of previously hidden truths is reliant on a particularly guileless readership,

'The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends, in addition, on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings. What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent?'¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Gates, Jefferson and Underwood, 'The Pop Prophets', p. 44.

¹⁸² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*, p. 169.

¹⁸³ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Rising*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark*, p. 143.

¹⁸⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Remnant*, p. 275.

¹⁸⁶ Boston, 'Left behind', *Church and State*, Vol. 55. February 2, 2002

¹⁸⁷ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 141.

However, is difficult to give these theories of prophecy believers as a 'lunatic fringe' of gullible dupes much credibility. Indeed, these arguments may result partially from the difficulty that comes from attempting to explain millennial appeal through overtired deprivation theory models. For example, when classifications of 'marginality' become problematic, it may be tempting to attribute the remaining cognitive territory a more diffuse deficiency that might predispose an individual towards prophecy belief. Stephen O'Leary comments,

'I do not intend to argue that no predispositions exist among converts to apocalypticism, or that concepts such as calamity, anomie, deprivation or oppression (whether economic or psychological) are utterly useless in the analysis of apocalyptic rhetoric; rather, I intend to argue that previous analyses have ignored the specifically rhetorical nature of these concepts'.¹⁸⁸

O'Leary makes the point that a critical aspect of prophecy belief almost invariably overlooked by scholars of millenarianism, is that the adherents of premillennial dispensationalism may simply find these arguments credible,

'it is curious, however, that even those rhetorical scholars who attempt to account for the appeal of apocalyptic never seriously entertain the hypothesis that people are actually persuaded by apocalyptic arguments; that is, that the nature of apocalyptic's appeal should be sought in transactions of texts and audiences'.¹⁸⁹

An extension of the characterisation of prophecy believers as somewhat unhinged can be traced in the expressions of distaste voiced by analysts of *Left Behind*. As discussed in the introduction, Sweetnam, for example, describes premillennial dispensationalism as 'an aberration'¹⁹⁰, and as

¹⁸⁸ O' Leary, *Arguing*, p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ O' Leary, *Arguing*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁰ Sweetnam, 'Tensions', p. 192.

‘a ‘mutation’ of dispensationalism [which] threw both its principles of interpretation and its eschewal of sensationalism to the winds’.¹⁹¹

Sweetnam proposes the use of Gary North’s term, ‘dispensationalists’ when discussing contemporary premillennial dispensationalism, in order to differentiate its modern manifestation from its historical roots.¹⁹² Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence write,

‘the popularity of these materials [*Left Behind*] is likely to have problematic consequences. The flirtations with nuclear warfare so well documented by Paul Boyer, the passive escapism identified by Craig C. Hill, the demonizing stereotypes steadily propagated in the superheroic narratives described here- such patterns of belief hardly nourish human imaginations challenged to live on in faith, hope and charity’.¹⁹³

The imaginative mode of premillennial dispensationalism certainly contains many dark and violent expressions. However, I struggle to see how such beliefs serve to negate faith, hope, or charity. It seems to me sloppy and reductive to juxtapose popular dispensational premillennialist eschatology against faith, hope and charity, without empirical evidence, or commentary.

One further aspect of the ‘lunatic fringe’ formulations refers to the movement’s latent capacity for violence. Adela Yarbro Collins has suggested that the book of Revelation itself enables a transference of readers’ aggression, as vengeance against the ‘oppressive class’ is transposed onto the future¹⁹⁴,

‘Revelation produces a catharsis not only by means of individual symbolic narratives but by the structure of the book as a whole. Feelings of fear and resentment are released by the books repeated presentations of the destruction of the hearers’ enemies. The element of persecution represents the present, conflict-ridden, and threatened situation in which the author invites the hearers to see themselves. The second two elements in the repeated plot, judgment and salvation, represent the resolution of that situation: the persecutors are destroyed by divine wrath and the persecuted are exalted to a new, glorious mode of existence’.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Sweetnam, ‘Tensions’, p. 180.

¹⁹² Sweetnam, ‘Tensions’, p. 181. From: Gary North, ‘Publisher’s Preface’, in *Armageddon Now! The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel Since 1917*, ed. Dwight Wilson (Tyler, Texas, 1991), p. x.

¹⁹³ Jewett and Lawrence, ‘Eschatology in Pop Culture’, p. 667.

¹⁹⁴ Collins, *Crisis*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁹⁵ Collins, *Crisis*, p. 154.

Bernard McGinn suggests that an apocalyptic worldview denies ambiguity, which divides the world into binary opposites of 'good' vs. 'evil', forcing 'a final decision'.¹⁹⁶ Certainly, *Left Behind* imagines a world of stark moral contrasts, in which many of the 'undeserving' receive divine punishment. For example, beginning with the book, *The Mark, The Beast Rules the World*, a 'Salvation scorecard' is printed inside the front cover of each novel, where the characters are divided into lists of 'The Believers', 'The Enemies' and 'The Undecided'.¹⁹⁷ McGinn also suggests that these kinds of divisions represent the bipolar viewpoint that characterises millennial belief,

'the apocalyptic worldview has no room for moral ambiguity, for any shades of gray. By viewing opponents as adherents of absolute evil, Apocalypticism allows for [...] a thirst for complete defeat of and dire vengeance on the wicked'.¹⁹⁸

Glenn Shuck proposes that the 'naming' of the inimical other is a response to premillennial dispensationalist socio-political marginality,

'with the uncertainty surrounding the identity of potential enemies and the sense of powerlessness this has wrought, Americans have struggled to put a face on the enemy'.¹⁹⁹

Glenn Shuck has similarly suggested that part of the appeal of fictions such as *Left Behind* may be in their performance of eschatological 'revenge' upon those enemies,

'Not only do evangelical readers get a foretaste of the delights that await them, but they also get the pleasure of imagining the suffering of those who sneer at their religious ideas'.²⁰⁰

Brian Aldiss has described the whole literary mode of apocalyptic as one that imagines man as 'an organ of conquest in a knocking-shop of wish-fulfilment'.²⁰¹ In this reading, *Left*

¹⁹⁶ McGinn, *Antichrist*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁷ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 158.

¹⁹⁸ McGinn, *Antichrist*, p.16.

¹⁹⁹ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 21.

²⁰⁰ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 19.

²⁰¹ Cited in: Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, p. 39.

Behind certainly demonstrates many elements of *schadenfreude*, and those who are punished during the Tribulation, are considered to have ‘earned’ their punishment,

‘It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest. I have taken vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey My gospel. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction’.²⁰²

However, the understanding of *Left Behind* as a representation of cathartic destruction of Evangelicalism’s enemies is problematic. Firstly, in *Left Behind* fiction, all the characters are subject to God’s judgment, and the believers as well as the ‘enemies’ experience fear, suffering, physical pain and death. Furthermore, in its moral juxtaposition between believers and unbelievers, the narrative catharsis of *Left Behind* also occurs in relation to the construction of a communal group identity. Its cathartic power is therefore ‘positive’ rather than explicitly ‘negative’; power is established, vengeance is achieved and tension is relieved through the forging of communities in the face of horror, not solely in the destruction of naysayers. Furthermore, witnessing remains one of the central creeds of premillennial dispensationalism, and it would be irresponsibly cynical to misinterpret the movement’s Evangelical zeal for witnessing as anything other than a genuine attempt to protect others against eternal punishment. As Gates, Jefferson, and Underwood comment,

‘Jenkins is nearly as troubled as his critics by the apparently vengeful elements in the books, such as that episode in “Glorious Appearing” in which too-late penitents are sent to hell vainly bleating, “Jesus is Lord.” [Jenkins responds] “One of the toughest things I deal with is that there are some evangelicals, with familiar faces, who seem to like that part of it. You know, ‘We’re right, you’re wrong, that’s what the Bible says, someday you’re going to kneel and admit it’. That should break our hearts.’”²⁰³

The moral dualism of premillennial dispensationalism also, however, influences the paranoid rhetoric that accompanies the demarcating of the ‘other’. The conceptually problematic nature of moral ambiguity leaches into *Left Behind* fiction, giving rise to

²⁰² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing*, p. 289.

²⁰³ Gates, Jefferson and Underwood, ‘The Pop Prophets’, p. 49.

extended episodes of extreme paranoia. Rayford's second wife, Amanda, for example, is posthumously suspected of being a mole for the Antichrist, 'If the woman who had shared his life had fooled him, whom could he trust?'²⁰⁴ The email evidence that linked Amanda to this deception eventually turns out to have been planted by the Antichrist himself, and Rayford scuba-dives into the wreckage of Amanda's airplane crash to view her corpse in order to ascertain her innocence.²⁰⁵ Similarly, the Muslim convert, Albie, is listed in his own category of 'Professed Believer', in the 'Salvation scorecard' in order to throw doubt on his Christianity, 'Rayford had to know whether Albie was "with him or agin him"' [sic].²⁰⁶ Albie is also revealed to be a genuine believer, and the paranoia surrounding his allegiance proves to be unfounded.²⁰⁷ Perhaps the most significant exploration of the paranoid space between 'believer' and 'other' is the allocation of Chang's double mark. Marked with both the seal of the Antichrist and the believer, Chang is a social outcast amongst believers, and his liminal status provokes confusion and self-hatred,

"[when] choosing between the seal of God and the mark of the beast, I chose, and I got both. Now what?"²⁰⁸

This thesis has proposed that anxiety narratives of premillennial dispensationalist media are the primary means by which believers' faith is reinforced, and the means by which an appeal is made to those who are as yet unconvinced. One of the reasons why anxiety narratives are able to perform a 'reparative' task within premillennial dispensationalism, is precisely because the literature is not read, or indeed even intended, for the a 'lunatic fringe'. As we have seen, the narratives of 'born again' salvation encourage a spiritually transformed life, not a descent into morbid rabidity. Indeed, anxiety's expression in

²⁰⁴ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 422.

²⁰⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins *Apollyon*, p. 36.

²⁰⁶ LaHaye and Jenkins, *Soul Harvest*, p. 10.

²⁰⁷ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark*, p. 93.

²⁰⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Mark*, p. 353.

paranoia can work on even the most unaffected and disbelieving individuals, as many of the critics of *Left Behind* literature, such as Frykholm and Bivins, have observed.²⁰⁹ The carefully structured academic discourse of premillennial dispensationalism, is, therefore, perhaps the most significant feature of the movement's appeal, 'LaHaye and Jenkins play more than an unwieldy and uninformed game of "pin the tail on the Antichrist" '.²¹⁰

'Passive' and 'Active' Millennialism

One of the most common polarisations of millennialism is the division between 'active' movements and 'passive' movements.²¹¹ This formulation is cited as a means of differentiating between movements that propose different levels of social and political activism. On one side of the spectrum are those movements that 'actively' pursue the desired end. On the other hand, there are those that are content to leave prophetic development in the hands of God,

'The most passive [apocalyptic] scenarios are eschatological (because redemption is not in time, there is nothing to change on earth) [...] Such scenarios relegate human behaviour to a passive role; they must wait for God's "appointed" time, and their task calls for repentance, not for social transformation'.²¹²

To this extent, premillennial dispensationalist prophecy belief is often described as a 'passive' movement,

'the vast majority [of believers] hold to a more passive view that of the end times, believing that their task is simply to observe the signs and omens and passively wait for the inevitable'.²¹³

Unlike its more outspoken cousins, premillennial dispensationalism is understood as relatively 'disengaged' from its socio-political milieu,

²⁰⁹ See: Bivins, *Religion of Fear*, pp. 24-40.

²¹⁰ Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*, p. 2.

²¹¹ See for example: Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (New York, 1992), p. 257.

²¹² Landes, 'Millenarianism', p. 11.

²¹³ John Walliss, 'Millenarianism and Violence in the Contemporary World', in *Expecting the End, Millennialism in Social and Historical Context*, eds. Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben (Texas, 2006), p. 26.

‘Historically, prophecy believers have been politically marginal, content to withdraw from the public arena while awaiting Christ’s return, and conditioned to believe that terrible times are a prerequisite for the Second Coming’.²¹⁴

As previously discussed, Crawford Gribben has suggested that the ‘passivity’ of contemporary premillennial dispensationalism is a temporary stop-gap before the movement’s transformation into violence,

‘by pushing evangelicals to the cultural margins, it risks confirming their fears and constructing them as potentially violent underground cult’.²¹⁵

Moreover, Gribben suggests that the secular community carries responsibility for the transformation,

‘Critical hostility [...] risks becoming the agent of mismanagement that millennial scholars identify as the catalyst that turns passive movements active’.²¹⁶

However, I would suggest that the characterisation of *Left Behind* is not quite as simple as a juxtaposition between a ‘passive’ and politically disengaged movement versus a violent and ‘active’ millennial movement. Rather, as O’Leary has suggested,

‘a dramatistic and argumentative analysis is necessary to understand how and why mythic texts support apocalyptic beliefs and are interpreted by rhetors and audiences to justify a range of active and passive stances in the social realm’.²¹⁷

This ‘passive’ stance of premillennial dispensationalism has been linked to several contributory factors. Firstly, passivity has been associated with the assumed naïveté of prophecy believers. Northcott suggests,

‘Dispensationalism is a classic instance of religion as the ‘opiate of the people’. It acts as an ideology, a smoke screen, which mystifies and shrouds the roots of the extreme social division and growing violence on the streets of America’.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Guyatt, *Have A Nice Doomsday*, p. 154.

²¹⁵ Gribben, ‘After *Left Behind*’, p. 130.

²¹⁶ Gribben, ‘After *Left Behind*’, p. 130.

²¹⁷ O’Leary, *Arguing*, p. 12.

²¹⁸ Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm, Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (New York, 2004), p. 72.

Secondly, passivity is associated with a political disengagement from issues promoting social progression, or disinterest in global concerns such as environmentalism,

‘For centuries, conservative Christians have argued against social change on the grounds that this world is inevitably imperfect’.²¹⁹

This understanding has some undeniable grounding in truth. As J. Vernon McGee reportedly stated, “You don’t polish the brass on a sinking ship”.²²⁰ Certainly, the premillennial ‘reading’ of the surrounding world is one of positive degeneration. As such, crises that adhere to the rubric of the ‘signs of the times’, such as global warming, do not need to be urgently addressed, and to attempt to halt them permanently would be futile. This expression of the ‘pessimism’ of premillennarianism is often contrasted with postmillennial ideology, which proposes a gradual improvement in the conditions on earth,

‘the more optimistic postmillennial interpretation has encouraged social activism and eventually been subsumed into progressivism and American civil religion’.²²¹

While Richard Landes is certainly correct that the redemption of the Church is not ‘in time’, this is not to say that the Church has no role to play during the ‘Great Parenthesis’ of the current dispensation. The limited role of the earthly Church does operate in time, and believers are explicitly encouraged to enact their ‘timely’ role to their fullest abilities,

‘the biggest mistake a Christian- especially those who loved the idea of the return of Christ- could make was to give up on the world as they knew it. “Just because you may be rescued someday before the Tribulation hits doesn’t mean it’s time to sell all you own and sit on a mountaintop waiting for a chariot to haul you away. If you truly believe Jesus is coming and that He should be coming soon, you ought to be about His work”’.²²²

Similarly, membership of the earthly Church empowers an individual by equipping them with the spiritual tools to defend themselves against the powers of Satan, ‘A proper

²¹⁹ Guyatt, *Have A Nice Doomsday*, p. 178.

²²⁰ Quoted in: Dr. Kenneth Gentry, in forward to Joseph R. Balyeat’s *Babylon*, p.8*.

²²¹ O’Leary, *Arguing*, p. 12.

²²² LaHaye and Jenkins, *Rapture, Twinkling*, p. 286.

understanding of prophecy arms the believer against cults and false prophets'.²²³ Thus, the believer has no option but to participate in the 'restraining' function that the Church performs during the 'Church Age' dispensation. Church members are therefore explicitly encouraged to work to restrict the activities of Satan, as part of their prophetic destiny,

'The task of the church today [...] is to advance the spiritual kingdom by preaching the gospel [...] Christians are to be salt in that they are a morally savouring influence on society, by participating as good citizens in voting, running for office, and serving God and their country as good stewards [...] All responsible "salty citizens" will be careful to vote on election day to keep anti-Christians from ruling over us and limiting our freedom to fulfill our primary task'.²²⁴

Anxiety

In conclusion, this thesis has proposed that the eschatological beliefs of the premillennial dispensationalist reading community have been shaped through several processes of 'discursive streamlining'. This argument has been developed through a discussion of the historical development of premillennial dispensationalism, and an analysis of its non-fiction and fictional popular media. It has been proposed that anxiety narratives perform an extended function of this eschatological 'landscaping', as they allow the exploration of particular theological and socio-political anxieties, which are then re-integrated back into the hermeneutical framework. It has been shown that premillennial dispensationalist eschatology is itself narrated through the medium of anxiety, in the uncertainty surrounding one's own salvation, the paranoid scanning of the 'signs of the times', and the imminence of the Rapture. The popular media of premillennial dispensationalism is therefore used as an arena to both explore and dissolve these anxieties,

²²³ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 17. Original italics.

²²⁴ LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, p. 199.

‘[God] uses Bible prophecy not to frighten us, but for at least three other purposes: to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that he exists; to warn us of the real dangers that lay ahead; and to encourage us into accepting his gracious offer of life, happiness, and ultimate satisfaction- forever’.²²⁵

The preceding analysis has revealed that premillennial dispensationalism is a deeply physical movement. The importance of ‘tangibility’, of physicality, and ‘immutability’, have been reflected in several aspects of the theology, including the literalist hermeneutic, the importance of the spiritually transformed life, and the corporeality of the Glorified body. This physicality coincides with a particular conceptualisation of time that dictates our current age to be effectively prophetically ‘timeless’; thereby robbing the movement of the physical manifestations of its own theology. The concurrence of these two ontologies has led to a dynamic tension between the physical and the eschatological, the promise and fulfilment,

‘Time, in disjunctive [imminent] expectation, cannot simply be appropriated according to the configurations of before/after, cause/effect. It is caught up also in configurations of the already/not yet’.²²⁶

This tension is once more expressed through anxiety, discernible, for example, in the paranoid signification of the ‘signs of the times’. In particular, this tension is manifested in the centrality of the Rapture, which breaks the disjunction between earthly and ‘heavenly’ time, forming a union between the physical and the eschatological. The conflict between promise and fulfilment, therefore, finds its release in anxiety narratives, which focus predominately on the Rapture, allowing the ‘already/not yet’ dialectic to be entered imaginatively through fiction, and discussed academically in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library*,

²²⁵ Tim LaHaye, *The Merciful God of Prophecy: His Loving Plan for You in the End Times* (New York, 2002), p. 10.

²²⁶ Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, p. 197.

'The tension between dealing with today and anticipating tomorrow is one of the difficult realities of living the Christian life. We often find ourselves caught between the here and the now and the hereafter'.²²⁷

It has been argued, therefore, that the 'reparative' task performed by the anxiety narratives of popular premillennial dispensationalist media is to confront these theological fractures, and reframe them within a theology of hope,

'When one reflects upon the symbols of the Apocalypse in the light of its historical situation, one sees that its task is to overcome the intolerable tension between reality and hopeful faith'.²²⁸

The ongoing crisis narratives that define the theology, as well as the conceptualisation of time as constantly on the brink of possible conclusion, are recast expressions of eschatological hope of imminent deliverance,

'Utopia also needs to be in dialectic with apocalyptic for another reason: so that the relationship between the model world and the present existing social order can be seen not merely as the relationship between the actual and the possible, the descriptive and the normative, but also as that between the promise and the fulfilment'.²²⁹

Thus, the anxiety narratives that dictate and control the shape of the movement's ideological and theological landscape seek to accommodate for the persistence of hope. To scratch below the surface of the grisly horror narratives of premillennial dispensationalist media reveals an appropriation of the eschatological drama of the Tribulation for the management of temporal struggles,

'Anyone coming 'cold' to the Book of Revelation, without context of any kind, would probably regard it as simply an insane rhapsody. It has been described as a book that either finds a man mad, or else leaves him so. And yet, if we were to explore below the repressions in our own minds that keep us "normal," we might find very similar nightmares of anxiety and triumph'.²³⁰

²²⁷ LaHaye and Hindson, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Workbook*, p. 125.

²²⁸ Collins, *Crisis*, p. 141.

²²⁹ Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, pp. 112-113.

²³⁰ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York/London, 1983), p.137.

The reparative task preformed by the anxiety narratives of premillennial dispensationalism seek, therefore, to establish a 'positive' faith; in that they argue for construction of communities, participation in the 'restraining' function of the Church, a re-fashioning of individual spiritual identity and thereby, the mechanisms of self-empowerment. In order to overcome the fractured time of the current dispensation, the paranoid power of these anxiety narratives detect associations between Scripture and the surrounding world, and echoes of communication from God in the everyday. In this sense, therefore, these narratives allow for a re-orientation of the 'Great Parenthesis' of the current age, and of the tension between the promises of premillennial dispensationalist faith, and their eschatological fulfilment.

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Internet Resources

Christian Post Entertainment <<http://www.christianpost.com/entertainment/>>

'Jerry B. Jenkins', <<http://jerry-jenkins.com/>>

'*Left Behind*', <<http://www.leftbehind.com>>

'The Pre-Tribulation Research Centre', <<http://www.pre-trib.org/>>

'The Rapture Index', <<http://www.raptureready.com/rap2.html>>

'Tim LaHaye Ministries', <<https://timlahaye.com/>>

Appendix 1

Characters of *Left Behind* fiction

Abdullah Smith: Jordanian fighter pilot. Abdullah was formerly a Muslim, whose wife and two children converted to Christianity and were Raptured. Member of the Tribulation Force.

Albie: Kuwaiti former black-market arms dealer turned believer, member of the Tribulation Force.

Amanda White: Rayford's second wife, member of Tribulation Force. Amanda is killed in an aeroplane crash in *Nicolae*. Following her death, Amanda is briefly suspected of collaboration with Carpathia after a string of incriminating emails are found on her computer. It is later revealed that this was false information, planted by Carpathia in order to destabilise her standing in the Tribulation Force.

Baduna Modil: Romanian Professor of Classical Literature, Sorin's lover and biological father of Nicolae.

'Buck' (Cameron) Williams: Journalist. Buck is a passenger on Rayford's 747 when the Rapture occurs. He befriends Hattie onboard, who later introduces him to Rayford and Chloe Steele. Buck later marries Chloe Steele and briefly works for Carpathia as a journalist for *Global Community Weekly*. He and Chloe have one son, Kenny Bruce Williams. Buck establishes the 'cyberzine', *The Truth*. Buck is a founding member of the Tribulation Force and dies at the end of *Armageddon* shortly before the Glorious Appearing.

Bruce Barnes: Pastor at New Hope church, founder and spiritual leader of the Tribulation Force. Bruce dies during an earthquake in *Tribulation Force*.

Chaim Rosenzweig: Israeli botanist, friend of Buck and early mentor to Carpathia. Chaim kills Carpathia in *Assassins* by stabbing Carpathia in the head. Chaim later converts, and becomes the self-styled prophet 'Micah' who leads the Jewish remnant to safety in Edom.

Chang Wong: Chinese-American computer prodigy. Although he is a believer, Chang works for Carpathia. He is drugged, and the 'mark of the Beast' is forced upon him, but since this was not his choice, he also receives a 'believer's mark' allowing him as a mole for the Tribulation Force.

Chloe Steele: Former Stanford student, Chloe drops out when her mother, Irene Steele, and brother Raymie, are Raptured, and becomes a founding member of the Tribulation Force. Chloe later marries Buck Williams and has one son, Kenny Bruce Williams. Chloe establishes the International Commodity Co-op. Chloe is captured, tortured and beheaded by Carpathian forces in *Armageddon*.

Carpathia, Nicolae: The Antichrist. Nicolae was genetically engineered from the sperm of two gay men, Sorin Carpathia, and his lover Baduna Modil, and his biological mother was Marliena Titi. Through his powers of rhetoric and his financial backing by a secret cabal of international financiers, Carpathia rose from president of Romania to become Secretary-General of the UN. Carpathia then converts the UN into the 'Global Community', and appoints himself leader. From this platform he is able to institute a global dictatorship. Carpathia is killed by Chaim

Rosenzweig three and half years in to the Tribulation, and is resurrected, now indwelt by Satan. Carpathia is defeated by Jesus at the Battle of Armageddon.

David Hassid: Jewish Israeli computer genius, member of Tribulation Force. David is briefly engaged to Annie Christopher before she is killed by a lightning strike at Carpathia's resurrection. Hassid is killed in *Desecration* while securing Edom for the arrival of the Jewish remnant.

Hattie Durham: Air stewardess at Pan-Continental Airlines. Rayford's colleague and object of desire, Hattie meets Buck on board an aeroplane when the Rapture occurs mid-flight. Buck introduces Hattie to Carpathia. Hattie leaves Pan-Con to work as Carpathia's secretary, they are involved in a love affair, Hattie becomes pregnant, and they are briefly engaged. Following the end of their relationship, Hattie is rescued from a detention centre by the Tribulation Force, Hattie is poisoned by Carpathia and miscarries a deformed fetus. Hattie eventually becomes 'born again', and in *Desecration*, she is killed by the False Prophet while trying to assassinate the Antichrist.

Irene Steele: Rayford's first wife. In the three prequels, Irene discovers New Hope, a 'Bible-believing' church, and her and her son, Raymie become 'born again'. She is taken to heaven in the Rapture.

Loretta: An elderly 'southern-belle' who, despite being from a family of devoted Christians, is not truly 'born again'. Loretta misses the Rapture and joins New Hope church. She is killed by an earthquake in *Soul Harvest*.

Leon Fortunato: Italian-American 'False Prophet' of Carpathia.

Marilena Titi: Romanian Professor in an asexual marriage with Sorin Carpathia. Marilena meets Viv Ivins through her university, and Viv mentors Marilena in Satanistic practices. Marilena is subject to a complex conspiracy, and is unknowingly impregnated with the Antichrist. Marilena dies shortly after seeing the error of her ways and converting.

Raymie Steele: Raptured son of Rayford and Irene Steele.

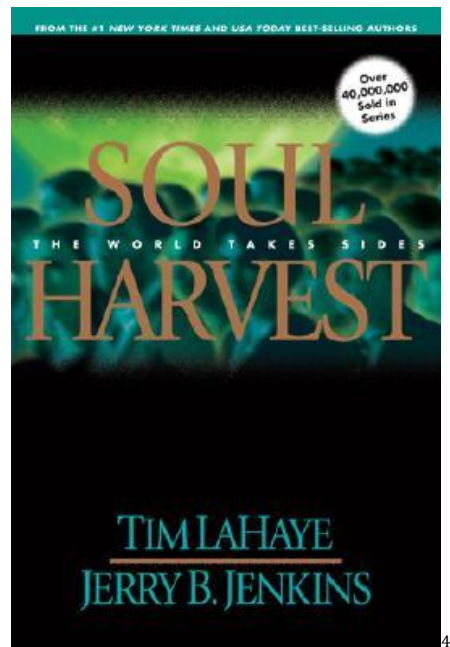
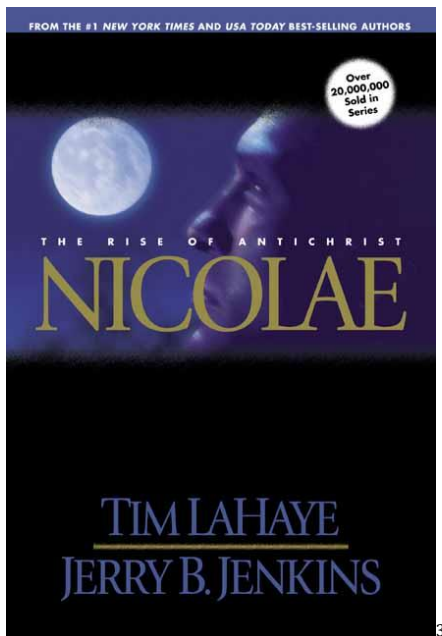
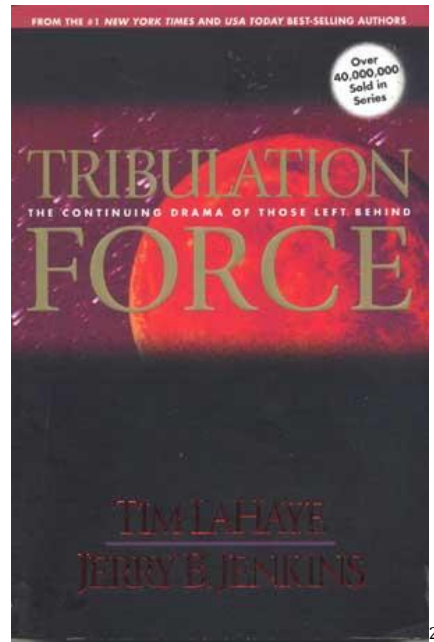
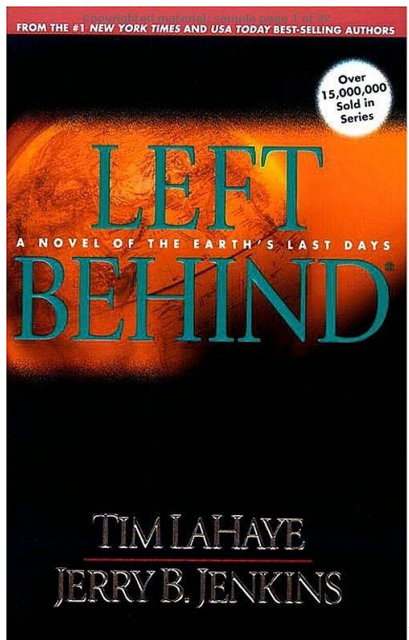
Rayford Steele: Former pilot for Pan-Can Airlines. Lost his first wife, Irene Steele, and son, Raymie, in the Rapture. Following the Rapture, Rayford briefly works for Carpathia as pilot of Air Force One. His second wife, Amanda White, was killed in an aeroplane crash in *Nicolae*. Rayford was one of the founding members of the Tribulation Force.

Sorin Carpathia: Romanian Professor of Classical Literature, biological father of Nicolae, married to Marilena Titi, lover of Baduna Modil, and co-conspirator with Viv Ivins.

Tsion Ben Judah- Israeli Rabbi turned believer, spiritual head of the Tribulation Force, and the global community of believers. Following a television account of his conversion, Tsion's wife and two teenage children were murdered, and Tsion was rescued by the Tribulation Force. Through 'cyberpreaching', Tsion secures billions of converts, and ministers to them online. Tsion is killed by Carpathian forces in *Armageddon*.

Viv Ivins: Russian spiritual mentor and friend to Carpathia. Viv Ivins recruits Carpathia's mother, Marilena Titi as the 'vessel' for the future Antichrist.

Appendix 2

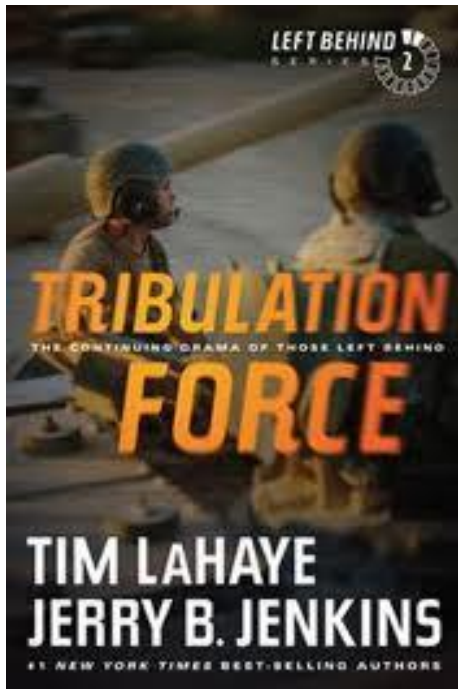


¹ 'Left Behind', accessed 1 October 2010, www.leftbehind.com/images/leftbehind_lg.jpg.

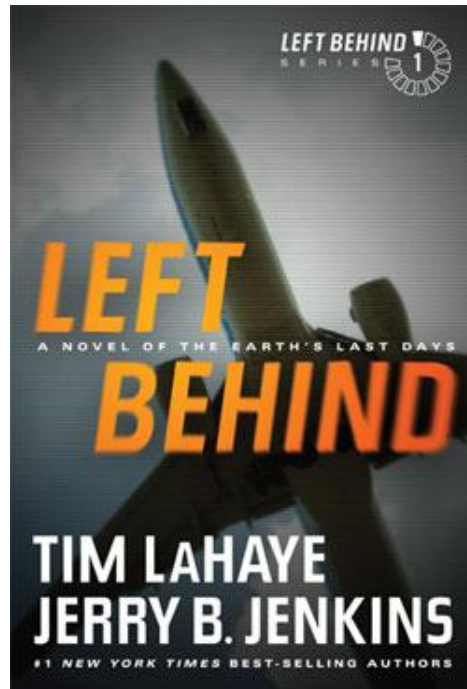
² 'Left Behind', accessed 1 October 2010, www.leftbehind.com/images/tribulationforce_lg.jpg.

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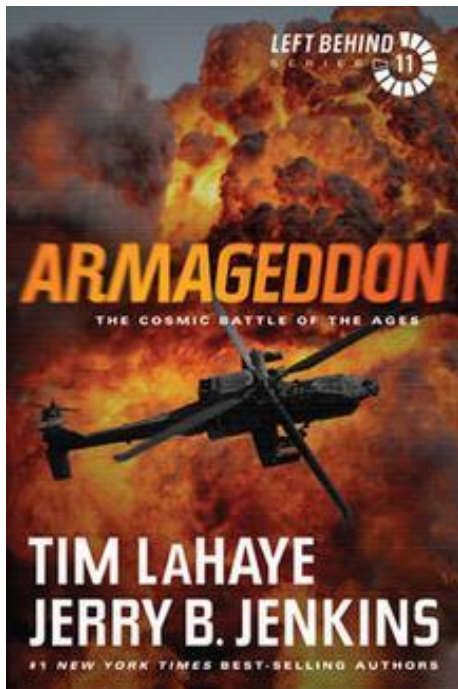
⁴ 'Left Behind', accessed 1 October 2010, www.leftbehind.com/images/soulharvest_lg.jpg.



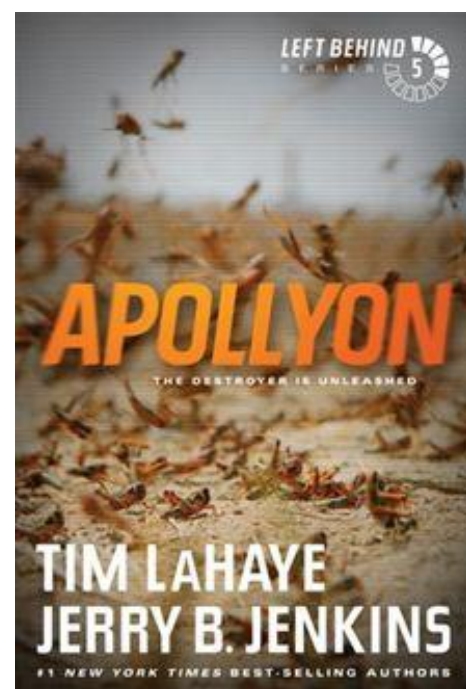
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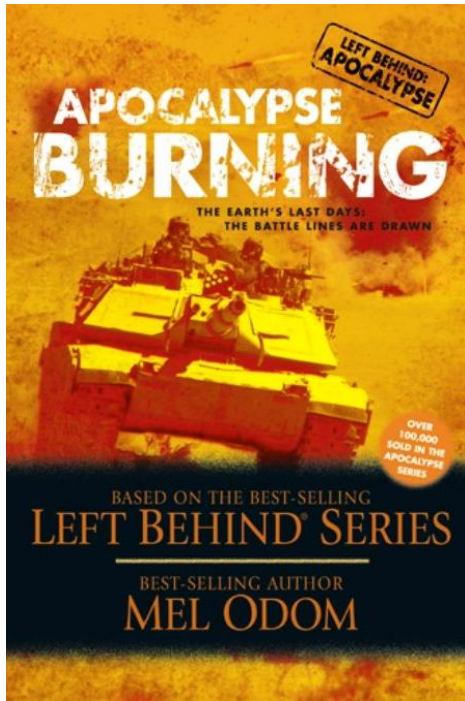
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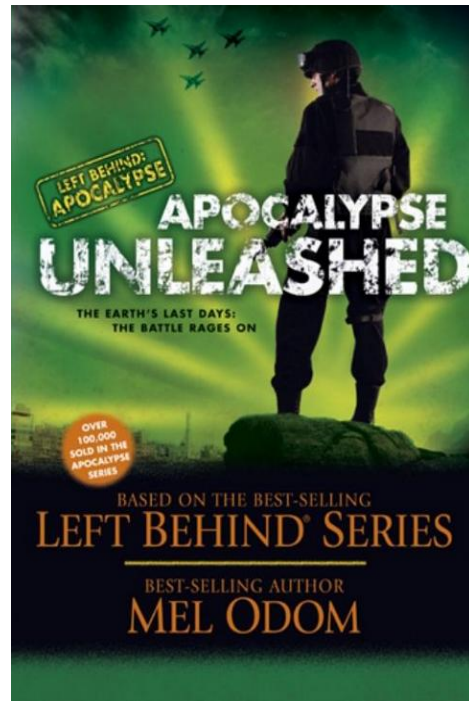
2. 'Left Behind', accessed 5th December 2013, http://www.leftbehind.com/01_products/browse.asp?section=Books

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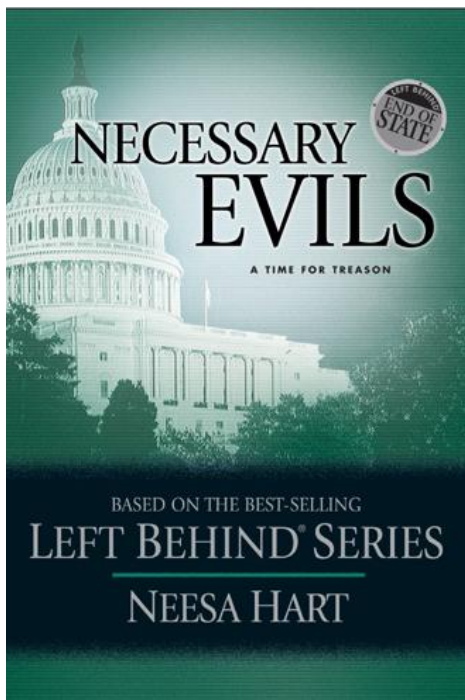
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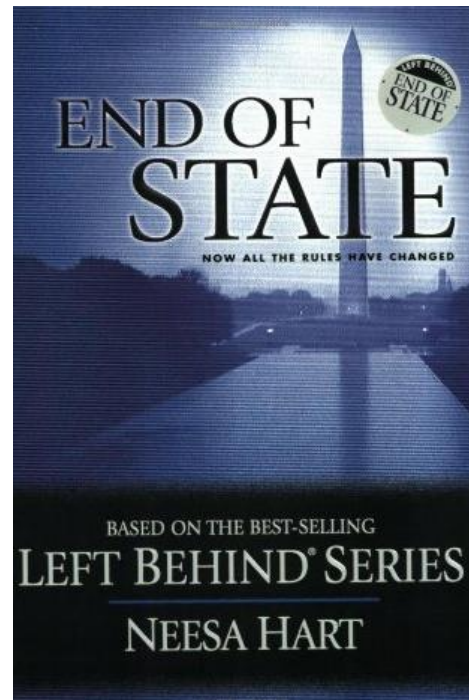
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1. 'Left Behind Military Series, accessed 21 October 2012, http://www.leftbehind.com/01_products/browse.asp?section=Military

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